

# Rising Asia

January – March 2017 Issue 8

## Bangladesh and Russia: 45 Years of Diplomatic Relations







## Amazing Russia





# Rising Asia

A Quarterly Magazine of CEAF

Issue - 8  
January-March, 2017

*Striving for Asian Solidarity*

Centre for East Asia Foundation (CEAF)  
Dhaka, Bangladesh

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# Rising Asia

## A Quarterly Magazine of CEAF

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## Editor's Note



The year 2017 marks the 45th anniversary of the establishment of Bangladesh-Russia diplomatic relations. The former Soviet Union had been a strong supporter of the Bengali freedom fighters during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 and provided extensive aid to the new nation. The Soviet Union supported our reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts and the development of the economy. Some even died while clearing mines in Chittagong Port. We have not forgotten those precious supporters' sacrifices. We expect Russia and Bangladesh government will stress their commitment to develop mutually beneficial and comprehensive cooperation, focusing on the long-term, diversified of bilateral trade, increasing investment and establishing joint high-tech companies.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang expressed China's 'serious concern' over the US President Trump's remarks on Taiwan issue. Geng Shuang said, "I want to stress that the Taiwan issue concerns China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and involves China's core interests." He also said, "Upholding the One China policy is the political basis for developing China-US ties." One China policy is the political foundation of bilateral ties and "is nonnegotiable." It must be pointed out that there is but one China in the World, and that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China.

China is not an ordinary loitering folk in a crowded bazaar, and Mr. Trump's illogical assertions have consequences for regional and global peace and prosperity. Bilateral trade between the US and China was over \$558 billion in 2015 while China remains the world's largest holder of U.S. Treasury bonds- worth about \$2 trillion. Taiwan's reliance on China is even more profound, over two-fifth of all Taiwanese exports, worth about \$130 billion per year, heads towards the Chinese mainland.

We do believe the China-US relationship has global and strategic significance. This not only concerns the happiness of their people but also involves the peace, stability, development and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region and the rest of the world.

In ASEAN vision, the community will be based on three pillars, namely a security community, an economic community and a socio-cultural community. In spite of all odds and expectations, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has managed to survive 50 years and going to celebrate its golden anniversary in 2017.

Bangladesh's growing economy coupled with its geographical proximity makes it a natural candidate for a partnership with ASEAN. The need has been clearly identified, and to add further, Bangladesh's greater engagement with ASEAN would provide a valuable hub to improve our existing regional connectivity with South and South-East Asia.

"Have an enriching and pleasant Chinese Lunar New Year of the Rooster. Happy New Year-2017."

Warm Regards

**Nasim Mahmud**

Chief Editor

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# Russia and Bangladesh: 45 Years of Diplomatic Relations

Alexander Ignatov



This year Russia and Bangladesh celebrate the 45th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations. Russia was among the first countries to recognize Bangladesh as an independent state. The exchange of the relevant notes verbal took place on January 25, 1972.

Separated by thousands of miles, Russia and Bangladesh have different cultures and modes of life. However, our countries established cordial relations based on strong friendship and mutual respect, which goes back to 1971 when our country actively supported the struggle of Bangladeshi people for independence, including in the UN. After the Liberation War of Bangladesh, the former

USSR also assisted Bangladesh in joining the United Nations Organization.

In 1972-74, the Soviet Union helped Bangladesh in reviving its economy. At that time, the first highest and high-level contacts took place between Russia and Bangladesh. In March 1972, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman visited the USSR where intergovernmental agreements were signed on economic and technical cooperation, trade and trade representation, cultural and scientific cooperation, on providing free assistance to Bangladesh for restoring navigation in its seaports, as well as on air connection between our countries. During the first years of Bangladesh's existence, Russia conducted a minesweeping operation in the port of Chittagong and provided financial and technical assistance to build power plants "Ghorashal" and "Siddhirganj", electrical equipment factory in Chittagong and other objects. All of this constitute a solid basis of our bilateral relations.



*President Vladimir Putin shakes hands with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.*



Nowadays, cooperation between Russia and Bangladesh is developing in many spheres. Moscow and Dhaka share common stance on the majority of international issues and maintain regular political contacts. Economic collaboration between our countries is on the rise.

Bilateral trade volume in 2015 has reached an impressive US\$ 1.64 billion. According to the latest data of the Russian Federal Customs Service, the bilateral trade in January-August of 2016 has exceeded US\$ 750.5 million, which is higher than at the same period last year.

Bangladesh is in the process of solving its power deficit problem to ensure smooth economic development as well as well-being of its people. That is why the most important field of Russian-Bangladeshi cooperation is energy. Suffice it to mention that Russian State Corporation Rosatom is constructing the first nuclear power plant in Bangladesh - Rooppur NPP in Pabna. Meanwhile such Russian giants as Gazprom International and Inter RAO-Engineering are also actively working with Bangladesh. They are engaged in gas extraction projects and modernization of power plants ("Ghorashal" and "Siddirganj") respectively. We have a number of joint economic projects in other sectors as well.

An important field of our bilateral cooperation is educa-

tion. It provides a direct contribution to the development of Bangladesh human resources. Since the 1970s, over five thousand students from Bangladesh have graduated from Russian institutions of higher education. In 2016, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation allocated 50 full-paid scholarships, 20 of them – for nuclear science.

It is inspiring to see the successes of Bangladesh in social and economic spheres. It has achieved impressive growth rates, reduced poverty level and now has a real prospect of becoming a middle-income country in the near future. I believe that further development of trade and economic ties between Russia and Bangladesh will both contribute to economic progress of Bangladesh and make a positive impact on Russian economy.

There is no doubt that the potential of Russia-Bangladesh economic, technological, scientific and cultural interaction is inexhaustible. I believe that in the years ahead our countries will open up new horizons of cooperation and convinced that the warm relations between Russia and Bangladesh will become even stronger.

**H.E. Alexander Ignatov**, Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

## QUOTABLE QUOTE



The mosques are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets and the faithful our soldiers...

— Recep Tayyip Erdogan —





## Vibrant Bangladesh is in the offing – War Veterans of 1971 echo

Veterans of India and Russia, who fought for liberating Bangladesh in 1971, have expressed high hopes regarding Bangladesh's 'bright future'.

While addressing a reception accorded to their honour by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her Gonobhaban residence, the war veterans spoke highly of the 'massive transformation' of Bangladesh in the areas of socio-economic development, and wished every success of the country and its people.

A total of 29 war veterans of India and five from Russia and their spouses arrived Dhaka to join the celebration of 46th Victory Day of Bangladesh.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina thanked the war veterans of India and Russia for coming to Bangladesh on the eve of 46th Victory Day. She said, "We'll always remember the contributions that you made 45 years back." Leader of the Indian delegation Lt. General (ret'd) Gurbaksh Singh Sihota and leader of Russian delegation Victor Kozhurin, war veterans of India Brig (ret'd) Bhanot Madan Mohan, Air Commodore (ret'd) Chandra Mohan Singla and Vice Admiral (ret'd) Raman Prem Suthan spoke on the occasion.

Recalling the war in Bangladesh, Indian delegation head Lt Gen (ret'd) GS Sihota said that, "as they landed in Bangladesh, they saw a nation that has transformed beyond words."

Extending his heartfelt thanks to the Prime Minister for inviting them to join the victory day celebration, Lt. Gen. Sihota said that they brought greetings from everybody in India and also from the Defense Forces of India. "We want to wish prosperity to the nation," he added.

Victor Kozhurin, Captain 2<sup>nd</sup> rank, who served as a Senior Engineer of the Special Expedition-12 Engineering Service, led the delegation of Russian officers shared his experience as a marine officer and mentioned how he swept mines in the Chittagong Port after the liberation war. He presented a book to the Prime Minister written in Russian language on mine sweeping operation, titled **"The Fairway is Clean Again"**. He wished to translate the book in Bangla and donated the proceedings of the book for the welfare activities of the people of Bangladesh.

The Prime Minister said that after assassination of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in



*Russian delegation leader Captain Victor Kozhurin meets with Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina.*

1975, the country's people could not talk about the true history of war of liberation as it was totally distorted. After coming to power in 1996, her government started the process of remembering the foreign friends who made immense contributions and sacrifices during the war of independence. She also said, "Once upon a time, it was all banned. But now people especially the younger generation is very much enthusiastic and they want to know the real history." PM Hasina recalled the contributions of India and Russia in rebuilding Bangladesh.

Recalling her memory in captivity during the war of liberation after Bangabandhu was arrested by the Pakistani forces, Sheikh Hasina said usually they did not have the opportunity to come out of the room of the house where she along with other members of her family were held captive. But, the premier recalled that when there were air strikes, they could hear the sounds and could see a little bit coming out of their rooms staying in their house in Dhanmondi.

The Prime Minister said that in the early morning on December 17, an Indian Army team led by Major Ashok Tara came in that house and forced the Pakistani forces

to surrender and they were released.

Former Foreign Minister Dr Dipu Moni and Mahjabeen Khaled, MP, also spoke on the occasion. Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Harsh Vardhan Shringla, PM's advisor on international affairs Dr Gowher Rizvi and four serving military officers of India and officials of the India and Russian embassies and senior officials of Prime Minister's Office (PMO) were present.

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Desk Report: CEAF





## Strategic partnership of China-Russia to open new horizons

Prof. Sarwar Md. Saifullah Khaled



The year 2016 marked the 15th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation between China and Russia and the 20th anniversary of the establishment of strategic cooperative partnership between the two countries.

Relations between China and Russia have entered a new historical period of all-round, accelerated and healthy development with in-depth cooperation in various fields. The active cooperation between China and Russia has been built on a solid foundation, which enables the two nations to go forward with confidence and open new horizons in the development of friendly relations.

During his visit to Moscow in May 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin signed joint declarations on deepening the two sides' comprehensive partnership and cooperation within the framework of the initiative on the con-

struction of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). This development marks a new historic start in the development of bilateral relations, which has pointed out the direction for not only further deepening of bilateral cooperation, but also development and prosperity across the Eurasia region.

After more than a year since the signing of the declarations, China and the EAEU have established close contacts and initiated a large-scale research. The Supreme Eurasian Economic Council (SEEC) has adopted at its recent meeting a resolution on the initiation of formal negotiations with China, which was a significant step toward the alignment of the Belt and Road Initiative with the EAEU. It can be expected that the start of constructive cooperation and rapid elaboration of a systemic trade and investment plan will give a new impetus to the development of economic and trade ties of China with Russia as well as with the EAEU at large.

If China and Russia can successfully align their national development initiatives with each other, they will be able to fully reveal the enormous hidden potential of mutual complementarity of their economies. That will not only be in the interest of developing China's western





regions and Russia's Far East, but will also contribute to the economic recovery of Russia and economic transformation of China. The quality of economic and trade cooperation between China and Russia has been constantly improving in recent years. China has become the biggest trading partner to Russia and an important source of foreign investment in the country. And Russia is one of China's main sources of imports of energy and high technology.

Despite the impact of certain external factors and a reduction in overall trade volume in recent years, the scope and quality of bilateral trade between the two countries have not decreased in any way, but rather increased. In the year 2015, China imported over 40 million tons of crude oil from Russia, a 28 percent increase from the previous year 2014. China's imports of Russian industrial equipment and high-tech products grew by 32.1 percent and 34.2 percent, respectively. New areas of cooperation, like cross-border electronic trade, are also gaining traction with Russia becoming the second largest player in cross-border e-commerce with China. This gives a significant boost to the development of trade and economy of both sides, and enriches the livelihood of the peoples of both nations.

In addition, major strategic projects between China and Russia, including the Eastern Route pipeline, cooperation in satellite navigation systems and joint development and production of long-haul wide-body aircraft, have greatly promoted the development of high technology,

bringing tangible benefits to the two peoples. Along with the deepening cooperation, the social foundation for China-Russia relations has been further strengthened. Successful activities have been held such as reciprocal years of languages, tourism, friendly youth and media exchanges, mutual visits of diplomats, journalists, students and so on, as well as jointly-conducted art festivals, film weeks and media forums, with the aim of further strengthening mutual understanding and

friendship between the two people.

The development of China-Russia relations is inseparably linked with the strategic aspirations of the leaders of both countries. For 21 years, the two sides have effectively implemented a mechanism of regular meetings between their government heads and numerous committees, sub-committees and working groups, which have covered almost all areas of bilateral cooperation. The 21st regular meeting of the Chinese and Russian heads of government was held on November 07, 2016, in St. Petersburg, Russia.

The official visit to Russia by Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China Li Keqiang came at the invitation of Russian Premier Dmitry Medvedev. The visit by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang to Russia for the 21st regular meeting of Chinese and Russian government heads was an opportunity for bilateral strategic cooperation at a higher level to bring about even more substantial results. The Premier Li Keqiang and Premier Dmitry Medvedev had detailed discussions of the key issues of China-Russia trade, economic, investment, energy, humanitarian, interregional and cross-border cooperation. The prime ministers issued a joint communique summarising the talks. A package of intergovernmental, interdepartmental and corporate documents had been prepared for signing.

**Sarwar Md. Saifullah Khaled** is a retired Professor of Economics, Bangladesh Civil Service (General Education) Cadre.



*Inauguration through a Video Conference  
between Bangladesh & India*

*Inauguration through a Video Conference between Bangladesh,  
India and Tripura (a state of India)*

## Cross Border Trade on Electricity (CBTE):

*A pathway for achieving economic development and energy security*

**Engr. Sheikh Faezul Amin**



Energy is one of the key inputs to socio-economic development of any country. The South Asian region comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka is a home of 1.3 billion people close to a quarter of the World's population. The region is currently experiencing a rapid

growth in energy demand, along with economic growth and industrialization. Despite the rapid growth in energy demand, the average per capita energy consumption, is slightly more than 300 kWh in the region is far below the World average of more than 2500 kWh. Also, the region is far behind their counterparts in terms of access to clean, reliable, and affordable energy, especially electricity. Power shortages and the rising import of fossil fuels impose a heavy cost on energy security.

The energy endowments of South Asia (SA) are limited and dispersed across the region, with large, unexploited hydro-electric potential of about 150 GW (Giga Watt) in some parts and growing dependence on fossil fuels in others. There is a need to plug the increasing gap between demand and supply through the development of additional resources. This is possible by utilizing the available energy resources efficiently, creating a level playing field, assuring returns to investors, and providing

affordable electricity to consumers. This will make the region well developed and energy secured as well as self-sustainable. In view of that, the concept of Cross Border Trade on Electricity (CBTE) has come into focus and is well practiced across the different region of the world.

Cross-border trade in electricity is not quite like international trade in other commodities. It has some unique characteristics: it is constrained to an integrated wide-area transmission grid. Electricity is traded mostly over relatively short distances with nearby jurisdictions within an integrated electrical transmission grid. Electricity trade across borders is also two-way in many instances. A jurisdiction may import and export electricity over the course of a year, a single day or even at the same time if there are multiple transmission lines across a border.

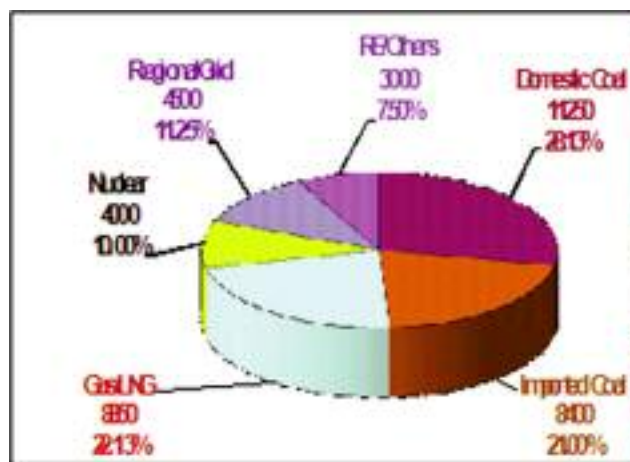
The Government of Bangladesh has outlined the Vision with a target to make Bangladesh as a middle income country by 2021 and developed country by 2041. Economic development and demand for electricity are directly proportional to each other. Consequently huge multi-dimensional development activities has been taken up for Power Sector. According to the revised Power System Master Plan-2016(PSMP-2016), 24,000 MW will be generated by 2021, 40,000 MW will be generated by 2030 and 60,000 MW will be generated by 2041. Due to the depletion of natural gas reserves, the proposition of primary fuel-mix have been revised giving more importance on Cross Border Trade on Electricity. Accordingly, 4500 MW power should have to be imported from neighboring countries by 2030.



Under the dynamic and charismatic leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, power sector made new history on importation of 500 MW electricity from Baharampur, India through Bheramara, Kustia 400 kV back to back HVDC link on 5 October 2013.

effort is going on to expedite the multilateral cooperation on trade in electricity among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal.

But, countries have been traditionally reluctant to trade electricity across borders. Global exports of electricity are



*Revised PSMP 2016: Proposition of Primary Fuel-Mix*



*HVDC opening ceremony held at Bheramara station of PGCB on 5 October 2013*

The historic event was inaugurated through a Video Conference between Bangladesh and India where Hon'ble Prime Ministers of both the countries were present as chief guests. Further work on Transmission Network up-gradation in both India and Bangladesh are in progress for enhancing exchange capacity to 1000 MW.

Besides, 2nd Grid interconnection on 400 KV AC radial mode for importation of 100 MW was installed between Palatona, Tripura of India and Comilla, Bangladesh on 23 March 2016. The event was inaugurated through a Video Conference among Bangladesh, India and Tripura, where Hon'ble Prime Ministers of both the countries and Chief Minister of Tripura were present as chief guests.

On the other hand, Cross Border Power exchange between Bhutan and India is going on. During winter months Bhutan draws power from India and in balance period India draws power from Bhutan through its Hydro based Power Projects. It is a win-win situation for both the countries. Moreover, Cross Border Power exchange of approximately 330 MW between India and Nepal is operational. Though bilateral cooperation on trade in electricity among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal are operational, but simultaneously, huge

currently around 3 percent of total production. This is an anomaly in the energy sector. In case of oil, roughly 64 percent of all oil produced is traded between countries.

In conclusion, increasing cross-border trade in electricity can play a major role in helping overcome these challenges. Trade in electricity in this region can help bring down energy prices, mitigate against power shocks, relieve shortages, facilitate decarbonization, increase quality of life, ensure energy security and provide incentives for market extension and integration. It could also help promote regional trade among neighboring countries that are now going to extra-regional countries.

**Engr. Sheikh Faezul Amin**, Joint Secretary (Development), Power Division, Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.



# ASEAN and Bangladesh

Shahriar Feroze



Covering a land area of approximately 4.4 million square kilometres – ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) – Asia's first regional organisation comprising ten Southeast Asian states for promoting intergovernmental cooperation and facilitates for economic integration has gradually

appeared as a strong potential regional body. Ranging from tourism, monetary union, free trade agreements to free flow of skilled labour and many – the coalition has indeed achieved many feats from which we must draw lessons. In many ways the organisation is a success story of how a regional alliance can collectively thrive regardless of the principle of non-interference in domestic matters of neighbouring states.

It is ASEAN's guiding principle of “non-interference” which has often appeared captivating that comes with a multifaceted meaning. As per the clarity of its connotation, many scholars are of the opinion – While the principle of non-interference is adopted by many organizations throughout the world and is enshrined in the UN charter, what appears to be unique to ASEAN's conduct of regional relations is therefore not merely the adoption of non-interference as a behavioural norm, but rather its particular understanding and subsequent practices of this norm. Moreover, despite the fact that the Association has made no attempt to define what it means by ‘interference’. Though, as many speculate regional practice prior to the mid 1990s imply that it was construed as a continuum of involvement in the domestic affairs of states that ranged from the mildest of political commentary through to coercive military intervention.

May appear rather complex, but the principal seems to have altered with the changes taking within the political landscapes of the member states. Nevertheless, rather amazingly this often changeable attribute has allowed the member-states to concentrate on nation-building while maintaining cooperative ties with other states –some-

thing greatly missed within other Asian regional bodies like the SAARC for instance.

Economically, a little over a year ago the organisation's combined nominal GDP had grown to more than US\$2.8 trillion. To make a comparison, If ASEAN were a single entity, it would rank as the sixth largest economy in the world, falling little behind the USA, China, Japan, Germany and the UK

However, in recent years common interests have come to play a more important role in the association's conduct of regional affairs. Sadly, Bangladesh may not be a member state of ASEAN yet, but many important lessons can be drawn by the SAARC countries regarding regional cooperation. In an increasingly interconnected world following expanded memberships, we believe, Bangladesh too has immense possibilities with a series of common interests with the ASEAN countries to become an effective member state in the future.

Physically ASEAN shares land borders with India, China, Bangladesh, East Timor, and Papua New Guinea, and maritime borders with India, China, and Australia. Both East Timor and Papua New Guinea are backed by certain ASEAN members for their membership in the organization. In fact, for its strategic geographical location and to link our sub-continent, Bangladesh could well be the bridge for an expanded ASEAN body. Additionally, it is felt by many, instead of a more region-





al binding the organisation can focus towards a more interconnected Asia for addressing common challenges.

The rays of optimism shine bright with “ASEAN plus Three” goal to improve existing ties with the People's Republic of China, Japan, and South Korea. This was followed by the even larger East Asia Summit (EAS), which included India, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Russia. This new group acted as a prerequisite for the planned East Asia Community which was supposedly patterned after the now-defunct European Community. Bangladesh can however - both contribute as well as yield benefits in terms of enhancing its existing trade, tourism and security ties with many of the ASEAN nations.

Regarding trade and commerce, Like India & Pakistan,

Bangladesh too needs to come with its own trade agreement with the ASEAN.

At a smaller scale, the Asean Dhaka Committee (ADC) at the Indonesian embassy in Dhaka was established in 2013 with the aim to strengthen ties between ASEAN and Bangladesh. Also as an indirect involvement with ASEAN, Bangladesh is a member of ASEAN regional forum, with Laos supporting Bangladesh for its observer status.

The scheme to deepen our ties with the ASEAN has begun at a diplomatic level too, when our foreign minister stressed on the need for Bangladesh to intensify its political, economic and cultural connectivity with the regional body during the 3rd ASEAN Flag Raising Ceremony last

year. Describing ASEAN as the most successful regional grouping in the developing world, our minister said Bangladesh's growing economy coupled with its geographical proximity makes it a natural candidate for a partnership with it.

The need has been clearly identified, and to add further, Bangladesh's greater engagement with ASEAN would provide a valuable hub to improve our existing regional connectivity with South and South East Asia.

Given all of the above facts a boost, we believe Bangladesh will pursue to get even closer with ASEAN.

*Shahriar Feroze is the deputy editor for the Daily New Nation, Bangladesh.*



## Anandi's quest for Bangla

AKM Moinuddin



One may hardly find a Bangla-speaking person in China, the world's most populous country. But you will surely get surprised once you visit the China Radio International's (CRI's) headquarters in Beijing.

One will find a vibrant team there who are spread-

ing Bangla language beyond the boundary through news, views and other programmes in Bangla.

These Chinese nationals speak Bangla so nicely that any native speaker will be surprised with their choice of all common Bangla words and also the less used difficult ones. Though they have Chinese names, each of them uses Bangla names, too so that they can communicate with each other smoothly.

I met the 20-member team, including its leader Yu Guangyue alias Anandi during my recent visit to China. They shared their immense affection for Bangla during conversations with the visiting Bangladesh delegation comprising members of think tanks and media.

Sharing stories about her deep affair with Bangla, Anandi said she studied at the Institute of Modern Languages under Dhaka University for three years a couple of decades back.

"I joined the CRI in 1995 and became Director of its Bangla Department in 2003," Anandi said.

She said it is rare to find Bangla-speaking people in China

and most of them work in Bangla Department of the CRI.

Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Bangladesh in October, 2016 and he wrote an article for Bangladeshi media marking his historic visit. Anandi translated the article into Bangla which was published in a leading Bangla daily.

"I'm delighted to be part of it. Through this translation I think Bangladeshi people could easily understand China's top leader's messages," Anandi said.

She said they are aware of rapid changes in the media landscape and laid emphasis on mobile journalism. "It's not only important for you, but also for us. I think it will be good for us to have similar workshop on mobile journalism."

Referring to CRI Vice President Xia Jixuan's visit to Bangladesh with the Chinese President, Anandi said, "He came from Bangladesh with high hopes. We see scopes for greater collaboration with Bangladeshi media outlets in the coming days."

Earlier, the Bangladesh delegation, led by former Bangladesh high commissioner to the Maldives Prof Selina Mohsin met CRI Vice President in Beijing and discussed various issues of mutual interests.

Xia Jixuan laid emphasis on strengthening cultural and people-to-people contact between the two countries, including collaboration among media outlets from the two countries.

CRI started its journey on December 3, 1941 and now it runs programmes across the world in 65 languages, including Bangla. It started its Bangla programmes on January 1, 1969 and Bangladeshi listeners in Dhaka,





Chittagong and other parts of the country can hear the programmes.

On November 1, 2004, CRI launched its Bangla website. Currently, CRI Bangla Department has 14 Bangla-speaking Chinese nationals and four Bangladesh nationals.

### **Year of Friendship and Exchanges:**

As developing countries, Bangladesh and China share the same desire for a better future for people of the two countries. "If two people are of the same mind, their strength can cut through metal." This old Chinese saying shows the power of cooperation and concerted efforts.

China, today, is leading the world in many areas. Bangladesh and China are time-tested friends and the relations between the two countries are developing on all fronts. There is no problem between the two countries but have deep friendship, cooperation and mutual trust. Two countries achieved a lot in last decades.

At the invitation of Md. Abdul Hamid, President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, paid a state visit to Bangladesh on 14-15 October 2016. The visit has ushered the traditional friendship between China and Bangladesh into a new era and bears significant historical importance to the bilateral relationship.

Bangladesh and China, after official talks between Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina last year, signed over two dozens of MoUs and agreements in Dhaka. Of the signed documents, 15 were government-to-government MoUs and deals, while 12 loans and mutual deals.

The two countries signed documents of cooperation in areas such as: cooperation in the Belt and Road Initiative, industrial capacity building, power and energy, information and communication technology, investment, maritime cooperation, disaster management and cultural and people-to-people contacts.

The two sides agreed to maintain military cooperation and exchanges at various levels and deepen cooperation in areas such as personnel training, equipment and technology and UN peacekeeping missions.

More interestingly, Bangladesh and China have dedicated 2017 as the 'Year of Friendship and Exchanges' between the two countries as they are now heading towards a 'promising future'. This is a positive sign of the growing engagement between our two countries.

During his stay in Dhaka, Chinese President Xi Jinping

said many colorful events will be held in the year to carry forward to friendship between Bangladesh and China.

The two sides agreed to strengthen cultural and people-to-people exchanges, and carry forward the traditional friendship between the two countries.

Both sides agreed to expand exchanges and cooperation in cul-

ture, education, tourism and other fields, and to promote interactions between the media, think tanks, youths, women organisations, non-governmental groups and local authorities of the two countries. Bangladesh and China agreed to implement the annual action plan under the framework of the Executive Programme of the Cultural Agreement between the two countries.

China will train 500 Chinese-language teachers for Bangladesh, train 100 Bangladeshi cultural professionals, and invite 600 Bangladeshi students to visit China during 2016 to 2020.

The two countries are now happy over the traditional friendship and fast development of bilateral cooperation. It is true that the cooperation between China and Bangladesh, two developing countries with large populations, and their common development and prosperity are conducive to the improvement of the welfare of the two peoples. The cooperation will also promote the development of the region and the self-relied growth of developing countries.

The historic visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping has opened doors for further cooperation between the two countries. We hope Bangladesh-China relationship will grow further in the coming days.



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## Russian Operation in Syria: One Year On

*What aims did Russia pursue? What has it achieved so far? And what was it that surprised the international community the most? Find the answers to these questions in this special feature by TASS*



The start of Russia's military campaign in Syria a year ago came as a total surprise to the international community. Except for the 1999 incident in Kosovo, in which a peace-keeping force of Russian paratroops outpaced NATO to gain control of Pristina Airport, Moscow has not participated in military operations outside its national territory ever since the last Soviet soldier left Afghanistan in 1989. Even though it agreed to throw its

weight behind the campaign against Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, which the United States launched in 2001, Russia confined itself to political and logistics support for the Western coalition. Small wonder, therefore, the Russian leadership's announcement it was beginning a military campaign in Syria and the rapid redeployment of an air group to that country left foreign audiences dumbfounded.



## Facts and figures about the Russian Aerospace Force's operation in Syria

On September 30, 2015 Russia's Federation Council (the upper house of the two-chamber parliament) voted in support of President Vladimir Putin's request for permission to use the national armed forces in Syria against the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra (terrorist groups outlawed in Russia)

- ❑ The Russian Aerospace group dealt the first strikes against the militants' positions later in the day.
- ❑ Initially, the group consisted of 50 combat planes and helicopters. In November 2015 Russia's long-range bombers started flowing sorties to Syria.
- ❑ With time Russia's Navy was involved in the operation as well. Combat ships in the land-locked Caspian Sea and in the Mediterranean Sea launched cruise missiles.
- ❑ On March 15, the main contingent of the Russian Aerospace group began to be pulled out of Syria on President Putin's orders, while the Russian support facilities in Tartus and at the air base Hmeymim have maintained routine operation ever since. The remaining Russian planes continued to provide combat support for Syrian troops.
- ❑ According to May 2016 statistics more than 10,000 sorties had been carried out and 30,000 targets, including 200 oil extraction and refining facilities, were wiped out.
- ❑ The Pentagon estimates that by that time the Islamic State militants lost 45% of the territory they had controlled in Iraq and 20% of the territory in Syria. The Syrian army regained Palmyra to turn the tide of the campaign. The Russian military participated in the operation.
- ❑ Russia has airlifted to Syria 1,000 tonnes of foods, medical supplies and essentials.

### Why did Russia launch the military operation in Syria?

Syria's never-ending chaos posed a direct threat to Russia. According to statistics disclosed by secret services, up to 2,500 Russian citizens and some 3,000 citizens from the other CIS member-states had been involved in Islamic State operations in Iraq and Syria by the autumn of 2015. The flow of recruits continued unabated. The risk they might start returning to their home countries someday was high.

Back in June 2015 President Putin declared it was essential to create an international coalition against the Islamic State on the following principles.

- ◆ It should incorporate all countries of the region, first and foremost, those who fight the Islamic State on the ground (Syrian and Iraqi armies and the Kurdish militias).
- ◆ The coalition was to have the approval of the UN Security Council and/or legitimate governments of the countries where the operations would be conducted.

By that time the US-led coalition had been conducting military operations in the territory of Iraq and Syria for twelve months already without having either the UN

Security Council's consent or the approval of Damascus. But the Islamic State remained on the offensive. As a matter of fact, after losing some ground in Iraq the terrorists put the emphasis on Syria. By May 2015 the Islamic State had gained control of 50% of Syria's territory and of the main road leading to Damascus. With a high degree of probability the Syrian capital's hypothetical fall would entail the loss of the whole of Syria and eventually Lebanon. Christians, Alawites and other minorities would face the risk of utter annihilation, while the Islamic State would have gained access to vast economic resources. The terrorists' ambitions as they are, their clash with Russia would be imminent in any case, with Russia's starting positions being far worse than they looked just recently.

For several months Russia was trying to persuade the West to clinch a deal with the Syrian authorities, because without their support fighting the Islamic State on the ground would make no sense. Nothing came of it, though. In the end, the Syrian government turned to Russia with a request for help. Moscow agreed to start a military operation.

The Russian authorities repeatedly emphasized the idea their paramount goal was to preserve the basics of Syria's



statehood, and not keep President Bashar Assad in power at any cost.

### Western criticism

Public opinion in the West was generally negative about Russia's military operation. Western media criticism was confined to two arguments.

- ◆ Russia is allegedly fighting not against Islamic terrorists but against the moderate political opposition.
- ◆ Moscow decided to meddle for the sake of saving Assad.

A year later the Western establishment's stance shows no fundamental change. But the Syrian president's future is no longer an issue of paramount importance in discussions over the crisis in that country. As for the question who fights whom in Syria, there still remains great confusion who should be branded terrorist and who belongs to the armed opposition.

Local groups keep changing disguises like chameleons to vow allegiance to anyone who may come their way, while Washington keeps arguing with Russia.

### Russian Armed Forces turn out effective

Whatever criticism Russia has faced so far and may still hear in the future, most leading Western media did not hesitate to put its operation in Syria on the list of last year's top events.

Regardless of their attitude to the air campaign Western politicians, pundits and journalists agree the Russian military has changed beyond recognition. In particular, they pointed to smooth coordination, advanced hardware and effective strikes against the terrorists. All that was unani-



mously interpreted as evidence the military reform has borne fruit.

In Syria, many Russian air pilots have gained combat experience. Long-range strategic aircraft and submarine- and surface ship-launched missiles were used in real combat for the first time. The fire power of Russian weaponry impressed potential customers. Until just recently it had been maintained that Russia was unable to conduct any major military operations far away from its borders. In March 2016, the overall value of weapons export contracts soared to \$56 billion - a record-high since 1992.

### Russia avoids another Afghanistan



In February 2016, US President Barack Obama claimed that Russia would get bogged down in Syria precisely the way the Soviet Union in its day was stalled in Afghanistan. A large-scale operation on the ground and such adverse side effects as soaring costs and casualties and undesirable political developments at home were said to be more than guaranteed. A month later, though, the Russian president ordered the withdrawal of the bulk of the Russian contingent from Syria. Gloom prophecies the involvement of a ground contingent would ensue turned out wrong. Russia had derived proper lessons from the Soviet Union's Afghan experience and also the experience of the United States and its allies in Afghanistan and Iraq. It confined itself to air support, while the presence and role of special operations forces and military advisers remained limited. The task of the commando units was to conduct reconnaissance of potential targets for air strikes and to direct planes to targets in remote areas, while the Syrian army was fighting on the ground. With Russian air support it managed to launch a counteroffensive. In the meantime, the United



States has failed to identify any reliable allies on the ground in Syria. The armed opposition it supports is patchy and uncontrollable.

With Russia's involvement in the military operation in Syria the diplomatic process went into high gear. In February 2016, a ceasefire agreement was concluded but the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra were identified as parties that remaining outside its framework. The United States and Russia pledged to monitor the situation. Two weeks later Moscow made a decision to remove its main forces from Syria.

The Russian operation lasted five months and fourteen days to have cost an estimated \$2.8 million a day. In contrast the United States is spending about \$11.9 million a day to fight against the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.

Putin has restored Russia to the position of a key actor in the region and he did so at a very moderate cost, analysts say.

### Russia's Rambo

The name of Russian officer Alexander Prokhorenko featured in Western media headlines last spring probably more often than in Russian ones. Senior lieutenant of the special operations force died a hero near Palmyra on March 24, 2016 while directing strikes by Russian aircraft against terrorist targets. When he realized he had been spotted and surrounded, Prokhorenko called in an airstrike on himself as the enemy was about to seize him.

A real hero, Russia's Rambo, as many media said.



Career military around the world did not hesitate to pay their last respects to Prokhorenko and his courage. In a Facebook community for US military there appeared a transcript of Prokhorenko's last conversation with his commander seconds before the surrounded officer urged an air strike on the position he was taking. The transcript appeared in the world web through unofficial channels.

### Praying for Palmyra



Three days after Prokhorenko's death the Syrian Army's command said the Syrian military and people's militias had regained full control of Palmyra. Russian planes flew about 500 sorties during the battle for that city.

On the same day President Putin told UNESCO's Director-General Irina Bokova by telephone the Russian contingent would participate in a mine-clearing operation in the city featuring on UNESCO's world heritage list. By the end of April the road to Palmyra reopened to UNESCO's researchers and specialists, who had for more than a year been watching Palmyra's horrible plight.

On May 5, in the ancient outdoor theater the IS terrorists had been using as a site for mass executions, the Mariinsky Theater's orchestra under conductor Valery Gergiyev gave a unique performance titled Praying for Palmyra.

Although many Western media reported the concert with a great deal of skepticism, few doubted that Palmyra's liberation was Russia's major military and image-bolstering victory. Some watched the performance with tears in their eyes. Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi said the concert demonstrated that Russia and Europe shared common values, such as the greatness of human dignity.



### Russia casts a protective veil over Syria's Christians

Russia's efforts to protect the Christian population of Syria drew the European media's special interest. While the Russian operation was still in the early phase, Western media made attempts to lend a negative flavor to Russia's role in the Middle East, prompting allusions to the era of crusades. In due course, though, Moscow began to be referred to as the sole force in the whole world that threw the spotlight on the need for taking care of Syria's Christians.

Local residents – Christians, experts and Western and Syrian priests – unanimously express this opinion to the media.

The rendezvous Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill and Pope Francis had in Cuba played an important role to draw worldwide attention to this issue.

### What has Russia achieved?



Has the situation in Syria changed to any significant extent over the twelve months since the military operation began?

On the one hand, the Islamic State's onslaught has been thwarted. The process of local reconciliations is proceeding. Armed opposition members achieve more negotiated solutions with the authorities on leaving the zone of combat operations and laying down part of their armaments. On the other hand, the fundamental truce agreements continue to be violated.

One year after the question of concerted action by all forces involved in the war on terror in Syria is still rele-

vant. The main problem is the mediators distrust each other.

Washington has groundlessly accused Russia and the Syrian army of attacking a humanitarian UN convoy near Aleppo. It is noteworthy this happened just a couple of days after the United States erroneously hit the Syrian army's positions near Deir ez-Zor.

Both incidents caused another disruption of ceasefire. As Russia's UN envoy Vitaly Churkin has said, now it would be possible to discuss the restoration of truce only on the collective basis.

In a situation like this the chances of prompt stabilization in Syria look slim.

The Russian military has coped with its task and helped the Syrian army stop a major Islamic State offensive. But if no diplomatic backup follows and if the US-Russian agreements on coordinating the struggle with terrorists in Syria remain just a sheet of paper, the march of events may turn for the worse again. The conflict in Syria admits of no solution from the position of strength. Only joint efforts can succeed. Russia has been saying this all the time from the very first day the Syrian conflict flared up.

### QUOTABLE QUOTE

He is gentle  
and broad-minded,  
who worship  
the truth.  
By Shake Sadi



## China's Belt and Road Initiative promotes connectivity, development along ancient route

More than three years ago, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed to build the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road.

Looking back at 2016, the Belt and Road Initiative has gained fruitful early achievements, promoting connectivity and opening up possibilities and potentials for development along the ancient trade route.

### SILK ROAD ECONOMIC BELT STRINGS ROADS TOGETHER

One day in golden October in Kashgar of China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, a fleet of 50 trucks of a joint trade convoy carrying large containers started to roll along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

After passing the Pamirs, crossing the Har goolun Range, and threading Pakistan's western region, the fleet finally arrived at its destination ~ the Gwadar Port of Pakistan, concluding its 3,115-km journey in a month.

The containers carried by the fleet were shipped to the United Arab Emirates and other countries, marking the Gwadar port's first export of containers to overseas destinations, and showing that the port has restored the designed handling capacity.

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said that CPEC is destined to transform the entire country and open up a world of possibilities for not just Pakistan but also Central Asian states.

In February 2016, China Railway Tunnel Group completed building the Qamchiq Tunnel in Uzbekistan, the longest tunnel in Central Asia. It is part of the 169-km Angren-Pap railway line, a major state project. After completion of the rail line, Uzbekistan's domestic transport will no longer have to go through foreign territories.

"If we say 2013 is the year of proposal, 2014 is the year of guideline, 2015 is the year of top-level design, then 2016 is the year of implementing landmark projects of the Belt and Road Initiative," said Zhao Lei, a professor at China's Central Party School. "Many European countries have high approval rates on the Belt and Road Initiative."

Perhaps the busy-running China-Europe trains give the

best illustration to people's acceptance. Since the Belt and Road proposal, trains running between Europe and China have been burgeoning. By June 2016, trains had been running nearly 2,000 times between China and Europe, with a total of import and export value of 17 billion U.S. dollars.

Many other projects are also under way. The China-Belarus industrial park is in development, the Hungary-Serbia railroad is to be constructed by the Chinese side soon, cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European countries has been further expanded.

The Silk Road Economic Belt, with a nature of inclusiveness and openness, has become a vital link connecting regional development and China's transformation.

### 21ST CENTURY MARITIME SILK ROAD CONNECTS ROADS AND PORTS

In October 2016, the contract for the second phase of the China-Laos railway project was signed in Lao capital of Vientiane.

Kicked off in late 2015, the construction of the project is expected to be completed in five years. Upon completion of the railway, a trip from Vientiane to the Chinese border will take only four hours, turning Laos from a landlocked country into a land-linked nation.

On Jan. 21, 2016, at the ground-breaking ceremony of the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway, Indonesian President Joko Widodo launched the country's first ever high-speed railway project in Walini, West Java Province.

With a maximum design speed of 350 km per hour, the travel time between Jakarta and Bandung will be cut





from over three hours to less than one hour once the project is finished.

The Belt and Road Initiative provides opportunities not only for a new round of China's opening-up, but also for the growth of world economy.

On Aug. 10, 2016, Chinese shipping giant COSCO acquired 67 percent stake of Piraeus Port Authority through the Athens Stock Exchange, officially becoming the controlling shareholder of the Greek port. Piraeus is expected to operate as a hub in Europe for the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, and to connect the Silk Road Economic Belt with the China-Europe Land-Sea Express Line. According to Chinese ambassador to Greece Zou Xiaoli, Piraeus was not merely an economic project, but also a bridge to connect the peoples of Greece and China.

In Africa, the Chinese-built Ethiopia-Djibouti railway has officially opened service, marking a milestone in cooperation between China, Ethiopia and Djibouti.

In Cambodia, the Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone has attracted hundreds of enterprises, providing a model of China-Cambodia cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative.

In Myanmar, a consortium of six foreign companies led by China's CITIC has won two bids to build an industrial park and a deep-sea port in the Kyaukpyu Special Economic Zone in Rakhine State, which will improve the country's infrastructure, local people's employment and livelihood.

In Sri Lanka, the green light has been given to the delayed Colombo Port City. Through the Maritime Silk Road, China will support the country in becoming a shipping, logistics and even financial hub in the Indian Ocean.

#### **A CHINESE MATTER, ALSO A WORLD MATTER**

It has been nearly two years since the Chinese-owned company Southeast Asia Telecommunications entered the Cambodian market. With an investment of 150 million U.S. dollars, a fiber network extending 10,000 km, and over 1,000 base stations, the company has improved the efficiency of communications in Cambodia, and was spoken highly of by Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen. Apart from opening up a new market in Cambodia with the dedication to high-speed Internet and high-quality phone calls, the company is also shouldering social responsibility by launching the Youth Sci-Tech Education Base and the Cloud Data Center.

"Previously, people saw most 'Belt and Road' programs in areas such as energy and infrastructure. In 2016, cooperation between China and those countries along the routes have been expanded to education, culture, medical care and telecommunications," said Zhao of the Central Party School. If the "hard connection" of the Belt and Road draws countries geographically closer, then the "soft connection" brings people together. Till now, over 100 countries and international organizations have expressed willingness to actively support and join the initiative, 40 of which have signed cooperation deals with China.

In 2017, a Belt and Road summit will be held to further map out the blueprint of the initiative, explore business opportunities and deepen alignment of development strategies between China and the relevant parties. On June 22, 2016, during a speech at the Legislative Chamber of the Uzbek Supreme Assembly in Tashkent, Xi called for building a green, healthy, intelligent and peaceful Silk Road, laying out the future of the initiative.

According to Huang Rihan, Executive Director of the Belt and Road Institute at the Center for China and Globalization think tank, a green Silk Road urges environmental protection and intensive cultivation for sustained development.

A healthy Silk Road means closer cooperation in medical care and health among related countries. An intelligent Silk Road calls for people cultivation and exchanges. A peaceful Silk Road aims at implementing a common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security concept in Asia, then promoting world peace and stability, Huang added.

While addressing the Uzbek Parliament, Xi invited other countries to attend the 2017 Belt and Road summit. The summit will not only look back at the fruitful harvest made so far under the initiative, but also set up a new starting point for the future, observers said.

"The Belt and Road Initiative will not be a flash in the pan, nor will it be formalism," said Zhao, "China will go deep with the initiative and turn it into real benefits."

"The agreement reached in November, 2016 by the UN General Assembly to further promote the Belt and Road Initiative worldwide shows that its construction involves not just China, but also countries along the routes and the world at large," said Wang Yiwei, a professor at Renmin University of China.

**Source:** Xinhua



## Highlights of the Keynote Speech by the US Ambassador to India H.E. Mr. Richard Verma on “Indo-Asia Connectivity for Shared Prosperity” in Kolkata on December 15, 2016.



It's a pleasure to be here in Kolkata, the “City of Joy.” When Mark Twain visited this marvelous city in 1896, he wrote in his diary “There was plenty to see in Calcutta, but there was not plenty of time for it.” I share the feeling, which is why I'm back for the second time this month!

I first want to thank our Consul General in Kolkata, Craig Hall, and his wonderful team at the American Consulate, which as many of you know is one of the United States' oldest consulates in the world. President Washington sent the first American consul here 224 years ago, so Craig has a long line of illustrious predecessors to live up to. Craig represents the very finest of the Foreign Service and his team here has done a wonderful job. Hosting a conference with over 200 attendees is no small feat!

I also want to welcome our outstanding Ambassadors from the region: Alaina Teplitz from Nepal, and Marcia Bernicat from Bangladesh. We're very lucky to have such talented envoys in South Asia and we appreciate them taking time out of their busy schedules to join us today. I want to acknowledge the many senior government officials here from the United States, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. Thank you for joining us. I am also grateful to the Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS) and the East-West Center whose support made this conference possible.

This is my second time attending a conference on Indo-Pacific connectivity in Kolkata. Situated on the littoral of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean, Kolkata has long been a driver of regional and international trade. It is also a city which shares a unique history with the United States. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, American ships carrying ice from New England were a common sight in the city ports. In fact, Henry David Thoreau once witnessed the ice being transported while at Walden Pond, and wrote “The pure Walden water will be mingled with

the sacred waters of the Ganges.” In 1879, after leaving office, President Ulysses S. Grant visited this city on a tour around the world, becoming the first American president to visit India. And during World War II, thousands of young American service members deployed to northeastern India under General Joseph Stillwell and many received their first glimpse of the country here in Kolkata. I had the honor of visiting the Commonwealth Cemetery in Kohima-Nagaland earlier this month as a reminder of the enormous sacrifices made during that period. General Stillwell was something of a visionary when it comes to regional connectivity – the Stillwell Road, which ran from Assam all the way to China, was constructed under his leadership during World War II. So by virtue of history and geography, I think it's quite fitting we're holding a conference on regional connectivity in this wonderful city.

### A Common Vision for Connectivity

Not far from Kolkata, more than two millennia ago, the seeds that would bring this region together were planted during a teaching delivered at Sarnath. Before there were trunk roads and broadband connections, this region was first connected by ideas. The teachings of Gautama Buddha united the people of Asia, from the Swat Valley in Pakistan to Japan, in debates over how to bring peace and fulfillment to all peoples, regardless of nationality, class or origin. This philosophy was revolutionary and its power transformed Asia. This millennia long tradition of intellectual and cultural connectivity, and a region that has long been accustomed to sharing and exchanging new ideas, is the most fertile ground possible on which to build a new architecture for the 21st century.

Whether it's in trade, energy, water, or people-to-people ties, connectivity is critical to South Asia's future development. Take trade as an example. According to the World Bank, if barriers were removed and customs procedures streamlined, intra-regional trade in South Asia could increase from the current \$28 billion to over \$100 billion. Unfortunately, South Asia today is one of the least economically integrated regions in the world; intra-regional trade as a percentage of total trade in the region





has languished between four and five percent. Compare that to ASEAN where intra-regional trade stands at 25 percent.

We know from history this wasn't always the case. As I noted, this region was an integrated entity, bound by a rich tradition of dialogue, trade, and cultural exchange. The famous Grand Trunk Road, stretching more than 1500 miles from Kolkata to Kabul was, in the words of Rudyard Kipling, a "river of life". So if connectivity was a reality for this region in the past, we know it can be again in the future. What is required for it to take root once again is a common vision that takes into confidence the region's stakeholders. The Grand Trunk Road of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is as much about ideas and shared values as it is physical infrastructure. I will return to this in a moment.

Let me say a few words about India and the unique role it's playing in the region's economic integration, both through traditional infrastructure development and also through its leadership as a democratic power. Under its "Neighborhood First" policy, the Government of India has initiated a series of projects related to energy, hydropower, and transportation in Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan. India's resolution of territorial disputes with Bangladesh and Burma stands as an example of its commitment to international norms and regional stability. And through the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), the countries of the region have reenergized efforts to build linkages between South and Southeast Asia. I'd like to thank Mr. Sumith Nakandala, the Secretary General of BIMSTEC, and Mr. Prashant Agrawal, Joint Secretary for SAARC in the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, for joining us today.

### **Northeast India**

Nowhere are the challenges and potential for connectivity more real than in northeast India, a region that is home to some 45 million people and more than 200 tribes, and, more importantly, one of Asia's most strategic crossroads; bordering Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar, and Nepal. I had the privilege of traveling throughout northeast India earlier this month, covering the states of Tripura, Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Assam. I have visited 27 of India's 29 states and can attest the northeast is a region unlike any other in this diverse country with its stunning beauty, industrious population, and remarkable blend of culture, language

and tradition. And while the connectivity challenges are real, there are also important success stories and examples of what expanded connectivity can look like.

In Tripura, I toured a gas-fired power plant that is utilizing General Electric turbines to export 100 MW of power to neighboring Bangladesh. Another 100 MW in export capacity is expected to come on-line soon. I visited the Agartala-Akhaura border crossing, the second largest trading point between India and Bangladesh, with cross-border trade amounting to over \$60 million. Meghalaya is home to some of the region's finest educational institutions, nurturing bright minds not only from India's northeast but from neighboring countries as well. Nagaland has embarked on a program to nurture the next generation of entrepreneurs in the region, leveraging innovation and technology to overcome developmental challenges. And Manipur and Mizoram have the potential to become gateways between India and Myanmar once local road and rail connectivity projects are completed.

I also however witnessed the daunting challenges facing this region. With its stunning mountains and jungle topography, much of the Northeast presents real challenges in the building of traditional infrastructure. Simply moving from one state to another can be a challenge. And while air connectivity has improved dramatically, many travelers must use Kolkata or Guwahati as hubs due to limited inter-state flights. With multiple states, countries and sometimes contradictory rules for the movement of goods and people, the regulatory and legal framework can also pose a burden. And ironically, some cross-border threats like disease, human trafficking and drugs, can often flow easily across states and countries, giving rise to multiple health and security challenges. The HIV prevalence rate, for instance, in parts of the northeast can be twice as high as the national average.

But despite these challenges, I came away from my visit heartened, inspired and optimistic about the region's future. With a young and talented population, this is a region with vast potential that is already rolling out new and innovative solutions in clean energy, commerce, and education.

### **The United States – A Partner for Connectivity**

Let me also say a few words about the role the United States is playing in spurring regional connectivity. With more than \$130 billion in annual trade with South Asia, the United States has a vital interest in a region that is



prosperous and interconnected. Through the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor, or IPEC, we're helping create new energy linkages, open up trade and transport corridors, and streamline customs procedures at border crossings. USAID's work with SARI, the South Asia Regional Initiative, includes an energy integration project aimed at bolstering cross-border electricity trade and the development of a regional energy market. The United States also supported the initial feasibility study for the 500 MW energy link between India and Bangladesh, which is now operational and being expanded to 1000 MW. Through the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), a prominent Indian NGO, USAID is funding exchanges between Indian and Burmese female entrepreneurs. The second exchange took place in July and brought together dozens of women entrepreneurs. USAID also recently concluded a trade facilitation workshop in Sri Lanka which brought together regional leaders to discuss streamlining customs and border procedures. The premise behind these efforts is straightforward: the economic benefits of increased connectivity can generate the prosperity and people-to-people linkages necessary for strong partnerships based on shared values. This is an objective the United States strongly supports.

There's also a strategic element. As outlined in the January 2015 Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region, expanding U.S. engagement with India in the Asia Pacific is an important element of our bilateral partnership and is a natural complement to India's "Act East" policy. The United States believes that regional partnerships centered on strong economic ties, people-to-people linkages, and a shared commitment to democracy and human rights are a force for good, not only in this region, but around the world.

### Areas of Opportunity

Before I close, I want to mention two areas of connectivity that probably don't get enough attention. The first is virtual connectivity, by which I mean enhancing digital connections across the region. And second is strengthening the connectivity of shared values and ideas – can you have real connectivity without a common view of what is urgent, important or even objectionable?

Large-scale infrastructure projects, while important, do face many challenges, whether it is financing, land acquisition, or government red tape. Many states and citizens have been left holding the bag and the bill for large scale

international projects that promised the moon, but delivered only cement. That's why I believe building digital infrastructure cannot be ignored. We are experiencing one of the largest technology transitions in human history; the coming decades will see successive transformations in energy, bioengineering, robotics, artificial intelligence, genetics, cyber warfare – you name it. This digital transformation is expected to generate as much as \$19 trillion in economic value over the next decade. To borrow a phrase, the "internet of things" will be the infrastructure of the information society and bridging the digital divide is instrumental to ensuring our citizens can take advantage of the new digital economy.

In the United States, we have invested more than \$260 billion in broadband infrastructure since 2009, and the number of households with high-speed internet access has increased to over 75 percent. Here in South Asia, the right investments in digital infrastructure can allow communities to leapfrog developmental challenges and further breakdown barriers posed by distance, geography, and governments. John Chambers, the former CEO of CISCO Systems, once said, "There are two equalizers in life: the Internet and education." I think that holds especially true in this region, where the median age is 25. A digital surge has the potential to revolutionize the way people work, travel, and communicate.

The Government of India is making important progress in expanding broadband access through its Digital India program, which is supported by many American companies. Facebook launched an innovative "Express WiFi" solution earlier this year to bring the internet to underserved, rural populations in India. Google has partnered with Indian Railways and RailTel to provide WiFi at over 100 railway stations in India, and plans are underway to connect another 400 by the end of next year. I hope one day soon internet will be available on Indian airlines as well! Google WiFi is also working in cities across Assam and West Bengal, including here in Kolkata, to bring internet access to thousands without it. The basic premise is that communities with greater connectivity, with more broadband, will have more access to information, more opportunities for trade and education, and will be better informed and have greater control over their future. This is a vision that is within our reach.

But finally, and as I've noted, connectivity is more than constructing bridges and ports – it's also about building a common vision based upon shared values and norms, and an open network of exchange that fosters innovative ideas and solutions. It does not mean we need to have

the same political systems or political philosophies stretching across borders. We don't. What I am suggesting however, is that values matter – and especially those values that are universal in nature. Protecting vulnerable populations, standing up to terror and insurgency, resolving disputes under the rule of law, combatting child labor and human trafficking, ensuring women have an equal place in society, ending the scourge of drugs and corruption – a region that shares strongly values like these is one that will naturally be drawn together. And from a practical level, that region can develop the operating systems to support common values – that means greater coordination at border crossings, that means minimum labor and environmental protections in cross border transactions, that means greater protections for investments, and in the end greater health, prosperity and security for the region. Implementing this will be a

challenge, but clearly strong regional organizations, inter-governmental agreements, and regional events like this one can help nurture a network where shared values and common operating platforms can become the norm, not the exception. To put it another way, having the right software for connectivity is arguably more important than the hardware of connectivity.

In this endeavor, the United States stands as your partner, from the hardware to the software, we will continue to strongly support your efforts to bring this region together. Former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh once famously said he dreams of a region where one could have breakfast in Amritsar, lunch in Lahore, and dinner in Kabul. We believe the same vision is within reach for Kolkata, Kathmandu, Dhaka, Yangon, and beyond.

## QUOTABLE QUOTE

**You must be the  
change you wish  
to see in the world.**

**Mohandas Gandhi**  
(1869 - 1948)



## Iran's former president Rafsanjani's death leaves power vacuum

Carol Morello

Former Iranian president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, one of the most influential figures in Iran since the Islamic revolution and a driving force for moderation, has died at the age of 82 after suffering an apparent heart attack, state media reported on Sunday, 8 January 2017.



*Former Iranian president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, pictured in 2015, died of a suspected heart attack. Photo- AP*

Though his power had waned since serving two terms as president from 1989 to 1997, Rafsanjani retained significant clout on the Assembly of Experts that will choose a successor to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who is 77 and has been treated for prostate cancer. His absence also could have an impact on presidential elections in May, when the pragmatic President Hassan Rouhani will seek re-election.

Rouhani, a protege of Rafsanjani, reportedly rushed to the hospital in Tehran where Rafsanjani was taken on Sunday morning. He seen leaving the hospital in tears.

Rafsanjani's death leaves a huge vacuum among moderate Iranians who seek reforms in the country's political life and economic and cultural openings to the West. His funeral was held on Tuesday, 10 January and analysts will be looking for clues that signal whether marginalised reformists will be galvanised to come together or whether hardliners will consolidate their power.

"It's a loss for the pragmatist and reformist camp," said Barbara Slavin, acting director of the Future of Iran Initiative at the Atlantic Council. "How big a loss

depends on when Khamenei dies, and where Iran is. It depends on where relations stand with the United States and the international community, whether we're back to a period of hostility, or whether the nuclear deal survives and there's a kind of detente with the US. And we won't know that until our own new president takes office and puts his policies into effect."

Rafsanjani was one of the founding fathers of the Islamic Republic, and an aide to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the 1979 revolution. He was involved in the secret negotiations between Iran and the US in the 1980s that led to the Iran-Contra scandal. It was one of several Rafsanjani efforts to find a way to mend relations with Washington.

State-run television announced that he had died "after a lifetime of fighting and constant efforts in line with fulfilling the goals of Islam and the revolution".

"Although Rafsanjani has long been identified as a pragmatist, he was an integral part of the Islamic Republic's security apparatus, one which tortured dissidents and helped cover the Iranian nuclear program in a shroud of secrecy while soliciting foreign assistance and material," said Behnam Ben Taleblu, an Iran analyst with the Foundation for Defence of Democracies.

But in the eyes of many reformists, Rafsanjani redeemed himself when he supported the Green Movement after the 2009 election contested by protesters demanding the



*Hassan Khomeini, centre, grandson of Iran's late revolutionary founder Ayatollah Khomeini, mourns over the coffin of former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, as Rafsanjani's son Mehdi, second right, comforts his sister Fatemeh at the Jamaran mosque in Tehran on Sunday. Photo: AP*

removal of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad from office.

"Since 2009, he was the centre of gravity for reformist and moderate forces," said Hadi Ghaemi, head of the New York-based International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran. "Now, in a way, they have lost their godfather."

Rafsanjani played a key role in Rouhani's election, even leading Rouhani into parliament by the hand the first time he visited as president. Rouhani, whose administration negotiated the 2015 Iran nuclear deal with the US and five other world powers, is often mentioned as a successor to become supreme leader once Khamenei dies. But the assumption was that Rafsanjani would be alive to help make that happen.



*Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, right, and former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in 2013. Photo: AP*



*Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.*

"His chances of winning this power struggle without Rafsanjani pulling for him in the background is now reduced," said Trita Parsi, head of the National Iranian American Council.

Rafsanjani was born in 1934 to a family of farmers in central Iran, and studied theology in Qom with Ayatollah Khomeini. During the 1960s and 1970s, he took part in the Islamic student movement opposing the Shah, and was imprisoned several times.

**Carol Morello** is a Senior Contributor at the Sydney Morning Herald.

## QUOTABLE QUOTE



**"I've read hundreds of books about China over the decades. I know the Chinese. I've made a lot of money with the Chinese. I understand the Chinese mind." — Donald J. Trump, The Art of the Deal**



# Megathrust Earthquake in Bangladesh! Not Unlikely

Dr. Syed Humayun Akhter



Bangladesh, a densely populated country in southeast Asia, is located in the north-eastern part of Indian sub-continent at the head of Bay of Bengal. Tectonically, Bangladesh lies in the northeastern Indian plate near the edge of the Indian craton and at the junction of three tectonic plates – the India plate, the

Eurasian plate and the Burma subplate. These form two boundaries where plates converge– the India-Eurasia plate boundary to the north forming the Himalaya Arc and the India-Burma plate boundary to the east forming the Burma Arc. The Indian plate is moving  $\sim 6$  cm/yr in a northeast direction and subducting under the Eurasian (@ 45 mm/yr) and the Burmese (@ 46 mm/yr) plates in the north and east respectively. This continuous motion is taken up by active faults. However, they do so sporadically, primarily in large earthquake ruptures. An active fault in the upper crust tends to be locked so that plate motion is absorbed elastically until stress rises to the breaking point and the fault ruptures. Thus the probability of an earthquake from a given fault depends on the rate of motion and on the time since the last rupture.

In broad terms, Bangladesh is an earthquake-prone country; its northern and eastern regions in particular are known to be subjected to earthquakes of magnitudes greater than 5 on the Richter scale. The geotectonic setup of the country and the strain buildup at the converging plate boundaries suggests high probabilities of damaging future earthquakes and the possibility of rarer but extraordinarily large earthquakes that can cause damage deltaic Bangladesh far from their epicenters.

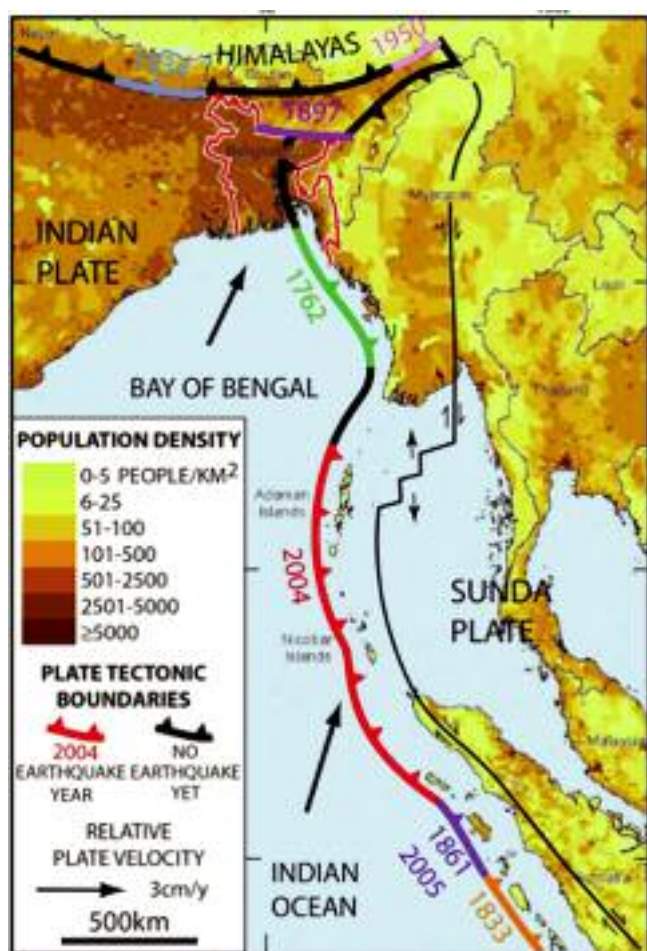
Significant damaging historical earthquakes have occurred in and around Bangladesh. The potential for magnitude 8 or greater earthquakes on the nearby Himalayan and Burmese fronts, which depends on the rate at which elastic strain is accumulated is very high. The effects of strong shaking from such an earthquake would directly affect much of the country including Dhaka. In addition, historical seismicity within Bangladesh indicates that potential for damaging moderate to strong earthquakes exist throughout much of the

country. The occurrence of earthquakes and their destructions in Bangladesh and neighbouring regions are poorly documented. Few records of them are available in published and unpublished literatures. Large earthquakes occur less frequently than serious floods, but they can affect much larger areas and can have long-lasting economic, social, and political effects.

The eastern part of Bangladesh and further to the east in northeastern India and Myanmar is characterized by 250 km wide and 1400 km long Indo-Burman fold and thrust belt resulting from the oblique convergence of India-Burma plates. It marks the subduction zone between the under-thrusting Indian plate and overriding Burma plate – a northern extension of the Sumatra-Andaman subduction zone. The Indo-Burman fold and thrust belt evolved from typical oceanic subduction in the Paleogene to the present subaerial subduction of the Ganges-Brahmaputra Delta. Subduction of the thick sedimentary pile has created the broad accretionary prism that progrades westward in Bangladesh. The deformation front i.e., the leading edge of the locked Burma plate runs near the low elevation Meghna estuary to the south and Sylhet marshes to the north. It is further demarcated by the westernmost buried anticlines of the fold and thrust belt, the Shahbazpur, Muladi, Kamta structures west of the Meghna River and Chatak structure in Sylhet. This position is reinforced by variations in the depth of the Holocene/Pleistocene boundary from shallow drilling.

Our recent study demonstrates that the Indo-Burman subduction in deltaic Bangladesh is active with plate convergence of 1.3 to 1.7 m per 100 years and the shallowly rooted detachment beneath the fold belt is locked and is buried under the deltaic plane in Bangladesh. The eastern part of Bangladesh sits atop on the locked Burma plate. A megathrust earthquake occurred along Teknaf-Arakan coast in 1762 and a great earthquake in Upper Assam in 1548 brought remarkable changes in topography of these regions. A seismic gap exists between these two regions, i.e., in Chittagong-Sylhet segment. This segment was ruptured in the past as evidenced by  $\sim 40$  km westward shifting of Titas River to its present Meghna River course. The amount of elastic energy that has been stored in this seismic gap for over 450 years (it could be even 1000 years; we have records of historical earthquakes for only 468 years in the fold belt) is likely to slip  $>6$  m of the megathrust with a potential earthquake of





**Figure-1:** The Sumatran plate boundary continues to the north into the Ganges-Brahmaputra Delta, one of the most populous regions of the world. Assam segment ruptured in 1548. That's first recorded earthquake in the history. Arakan segment last ruptured in 1762. Produced uplift of 3m on St. Martin's Island, 2.7m on Foul Island, 6.7m on Chedua Island, submergence at Chittagong and clastic dikes at Sitakund anticline.

Mw 8.2+. It is unknown whether the accumulated elastic energy will be released in a single event or in multiple events and the rupture will reach all the way to the tip of the up dip blind megathrust.

The hazard that is inferred from tectonic analysis is backed by historic evidence. Bangladesh, a country of multiple natural disaster vulnerabilities, and its capital Dhaka are under the looming threat of cataclysmic earthquakes. Records show that large earthquakes have previously ravaged the country and the neighbouring region several times over the last 450 years. Dhaka is seismically active, but with a low earthquake frequency. There are potential sources of earthquakes from multiple geologically active faults within 50 to 500 km distance from

Dhaka. The locked megathrust detachment in Chittagong fold-thrust belt of the Indo-Burman Ranges to the east and Dauki Fault to the north acts as potential earthquake threats to densely populated Bangladesh. The Dauki Fault is the forward jump of the Sikkim-Bhutan segment of the Himalayan Frontal Thrust.

Dhaka City is among the 20 major world cities that are at the greatest risk from earthquakes. This risk combines the probability of strong earthquakes, the number of people and buildings exposed to this hazard, and the earthquake protection measures in place. The risk is high in Dhaka because of its position close to the blind megathrust and the large number of people, but also because its unplanned urbanization, poorly designed and constructed structures, extremely dense population and poor preparation for the eventually necessary response to an earthquake. There has been an increasing concern about the earthquake vulnerability of the present built environment of Dhaka City. There have been several incidents of building collapses unrelated to earthquake in last 15 years in Dhaka City that have provided impetus to such concern. About 38 percent of the buildings in Dhaka metropolis, including school and hospitals, are considered vulnerable to strong earthquakes. The continuing plate motion is being absorbed within the earth's crust as strain energy that will inevitably be released by earthquake ruptures of active faults. The likelihood of a damaging earthquake from a given fault increases as the time from the previous large earthquake increases. It is possible for this energy to be released at any moment in a devastating earthquake. If the 1885 Bengal Earthquake or the 1897 Great Indian Earthquake were to recur, or if an earthquake of magnitude 6 were to occur beneath Dhaka, the situation of Dhaka City with its 12.8 million populations, widespread brick masonry, and non-engineered and poorly constructed buildings would be worst than ever in the history of Dhaka.

Awareness of the earthquake risk has been growing among the city dwellers due to recent earthquakes in the region. The scientific community is providing better understanding and monitoring of tectonics and the earthquake process in and around Bangladesh. These two elements are key to implementing risk-reduction measures and they offer Bangladesh the opportunity to catch up in earthquake preparedness and in reducing earthquake risk in Dhaka City.

**Dr. Syed Humayun Akhter** is a Professor of the Department of Geology, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh.



# The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Bangladesh's Prospects and Possibilities

Imran Choudhury



These days, it is widely said that the contemporary era is an era of cross border, regional and multi-national cooperation. This is not about covering the financial and trade aspects only, now multi-national cooperation in the field of security or even national defense is very much innate and topical.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) or Shanghai Pact has relevance in the above mentioned phenomenon. Though founded in 2001, this Eurasian political, economic, and military organization was like a dormant volcano during its first decade. Considering the situation of this planet pro tempore, this organization, however has emerged with gigantic prospects. And these prospects, still having developing and unexplored aspects, not only covers economic and political issues, but also very much security centric issues also.

## Shanghai Cooperation Organization at a Glance

This intergovernmental organization was founded in eastern port city of Shanghai, Peoples Republic of China on 15 June 2001 by six countries, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Russia. During the inception of this organization, the main objectives of the SCO are to:

- Strengthen relations among member states;
- Promote cooperation in political affairs, economics, trade and commerce, science and technology, cultural, and educational spheres as well as in energy, transportation, tourism, and environmental protection;
- Safeguard of regional peace, security, and stability; and
- Create a democratic, equitable international political and economic order, with assistance from the

Asian Development Bank and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

SCO members have also developed an intergovernmental agreement on facilitating international road transport.

Consequently, SCO has extended couple of times, containing several observer or dialogue partner states, including some such states which are not seems to be suitable with this organization. Reason behind this grotesque opinion of mine point towards countries like India or Israel, which are applied for full membership and dialogue partner status respectively. At present, it seems that the post-soviet unipolar world order is at a brink of extinction. It is indicative that, there are two political axis, that has been emerged in global context. According to current trend, China and Russia leads a new axis, which is literally against the global political aspiration of the United States of America and the West.

This warp and woof has made India a strategic ally of United States of America. On the other hand, Israel however has a deep bondage with USA from the very beginning of its inception. Whereas this is a known fact that the SCO, headquartered in Beijing, is a strategic organization that is primarily lead by China and Russia. Even some observers believe that, one of the original purposes of the SCO is to serve as a counterbalance to The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and in particular to avoid conflicts that would allow the United States of America to intervene in areas bordering both Russia and China.

Recently, India along with China's trusted ally Pakistan has signed the memorandum of accession to the SCO. This indicates that as a multi-national Eurasian strategic organization, SCO has such importance or all-embracing and general prospects, which can attract countries that are foes to China, being docile to join the organization with a full membership. The SCO as an institution and as a concept represents the greatest potential and in ways is its major paradox as its capacities and their realization to date are so far apart.



Its full members account for majority of the land mass of Eurasia, and its population is a third of the world's population. With observer states included, its affiliates account for half of the human race. In a contemplative sense, SCO is an alliance of five non-Western civilizations – Russian, Chinese, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist. If a potential global entity like BRICS can form as a potential global economic entity, especially having China and India; then SCO could also establish as a promising non-western alliance, even which can eventually replace fragile Non Allied Movement (NAM) ideologically.

### Bangladesh and SCO

Geographically Bangladesh is situated in a covetable strategic location, which has the elements of potentials as well as risks. This toss and catch situation has made us important for any bilateral or multinational cooperation and partnership in terms of national security, as Bangladesh is in a covetable strategic location. Our geo-strategic situation along with present circumstances demands that we should utilize the prospect of SCO.

Meanwhile, in 2012, along with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Nepal and Sri Lanka, Bangladesh also applied for observer status within the organization. But as I open out earlier that, to grasp the share of potentialities, Bangladesh need to have a full membership within SCO.

The Shanghai Cooperation organization (SCO) has emerged as a platform of boundless prospects for Bangladesh. We have newer and harder security challenges. To overcome these, we need a strong multinational security partner, which will act as an umbrella over our security concerns. SCO could be that kind of a platform for us, perhaps only viable option for Bangladesh.

Evermore, a country's policy must be determined by the geo-political factors looming around. With all the geo-political corporeality, opportunities are beetling around us. This is high time for Bangladesh, and it is an axiom that every accomplishment owe to a proper timing.

**Imran Choudhury** is an Online Wright, Syncretistic Political Thinker.





# Future prospects for Caspian energy

Dr. Stephen Blank



There are several signs of a possible turn for the better in the energy prospects of Caspian states, and especially Azerbaijan. The collapse of energy prices appears to have bottomed out. Even prices stagnating at US\$ 40-60 a barrel gives energy producers a certain margin to cushion the shocks they will endure. A major

aspect of the Caspian states' comparative advantage is their proximity to Turkey and Southeastern Europe. As European growth recovers, the demand for energy coming through those states will likely grow. Yet the perhaps most encouraging sign is the construction of new capacities to tie together and eventually integrate the European market.

## BACKGROUND

To be sure, we should not over-exaggerate these trends or discount forces making for instability and higher risk but we should also not simply dismiss the positive signs of future trends. The aftermath of the abortive Turkish coup of July 15 is producing great and well-deserved anxiety about Turkey's domestic and foreign policy future and the reports that Turkey will resume consideration of the Turk Stream pipeline from Russia are of particular significance. It is clear that one goal of Turk Stream, beyond isolating Ukraine and splitting the EU, is to minimize if not eliminate the role of Caspian providers, including Azerbaijan, in Turkey's gas balance. Thus there is real concern about Turkey's economic, political, and foreign policy agenda, not to mention its political stability. Likewise, reports of the renewal of the Burgas-Alexandropoulos oil pipeline portend a parallel Russian effort to undercut Caspian oil exports. Another destabilizing factor is the fact that there is still no agreement on the legal status and disposition of the Caspian Sea and continuing signs of naval buildups among the littoral states.

However, while Russia is still trying to promote either South Stream or Turk Stream, as long as the situation in Ukraine remains unresolved, the EU will likely block those alternatives as well as the Burgas-Alexandropoulos

oil pipeline. Moreover, it is unlikely that Russia itself has the capital to build either of these alternatives, and in any case dispassionate economic analysis of both South Stream and Turk Stream shows that neither of them are economically viable. This opens for not just the continuation of the Trans-Anatolian pipeline connecting to the Trans-Adriatic pipeline (TANAP-TAP) for gas, but also for the expansion of the interconnector network in Southeastern Europe.

Specifically the tripartite agreements among Ukraine, Bulgaria, and Romania, on the reversibility of interconnectors between Romania and each of the other two countries, opens up prospects for gas to go from Ukraine to Bulgaria and Greece and further into Europe through the TAP or by sea or interconnector to Italy. But given the construction of interconnectors between Turkey and Bulgaria and between Turkey and Greece as part of the TANAP-TAP pipeline, these agreements also mean that Azerbaijani and potentially other Caspian gas can now go directly to Ukraine or to countries in the Balkans other than Greece and up the Adriatic coast. Since gas flows through these interconnectors will be reversible, Azerbaijan could ship gas either to Turkey or to Ukraine and it would go from either destination to more distant markets in Europe.

In the longer term, as these projects are completed along with others further north and west that connect to these interconnectors, gas will be able to come to Europe through multiple ports of entry and go virtually anywhere on the continent. When the Lithuanian liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal at Klaipeda and the Polish terminal at winouj cie come online, they will connect to interconnectors to the south, which will link up with those in the Balkans and connect to Ukraine. Assuming rising demand, as most forecasts seem to suggest, by the middle of the next decade an integrated European market will be coming into view as a real possibility.

## IMPLICATIONS

The gradual and admittedly long-term creation of this integrated network will transform the European gas market and economy, but it will also have a substantial effect on Eurasian politics. These processes and projects, to the extent that they do materialize, will reduce Russia's and



any other power's capability to use gas as a political tool. Just as the international oil market is much less politicized because of the diversity and fungibility of oil supplies, so too the increasing multiplication of gas suppliers will foster that trend to depoliticize gas supplies. It is important to realize that this will not deprive Russia of gas revenues given the existing infrastructure already in place, Russia's gas and oil production capabilities, and its proximity to European markets. But these trends will substantially reduce if not eliminate efforts by Moscow to politicize the use of gas for its own individual benefit.

Yet all these trends will enhance the security of Caspian producers and may actually help resolve the thorny issue of the status of the Caspian Sea, which would allow for the expansion of littoral states' exports to Europe. Certainly the realization of these projects, and especially in a condition of rising demand, will further integrate all CIS producers to Europe in a more intimate and simultaneously less conflictual manner. The political heat will be removed from these relationships, which will in time become more purely commercial transactions.

Furthermore, to the degree that the integration of a single European market under EU auspices with common rules and standards takes shape, the stability of supply and of markets will benefit both producers and consumers. It is quite unlikely that we will see energy prices skyrocket to the levels of the past, especially given the advent of renewables, the limits on fossil fuels for environmental reasons and the globalization of production capabilities. However, mutually beneficial equilibrium prices will become a real possibility. In turn, this provides a greater breathing space for producers to secure their societies against the shocks of a boom and bust energy market that could lead to instability at home since these producers depend on energy prices to stay in power. And since greater economic integration implies greater political integration, we could well see a longer-term trend setting in to encourage and promote a greater diversification of capabilities within producing countries, making them less vulnerable to the vagaries of the energy market and thereby broadening the basis of their own stability.

The construction of interconnectors, the attainment of what might be the first signs of a less volatile energy market and a measure of price stability within a bounded framework, plus signs of rising European demand are all good auguries for the middle and long-term future. Yet the most important signs are the steady, if slow and unobtrusive, progress towards building a single European energy market. This process must be encouraged, not just for the security of European states who consume Eurasian energy.



In the long term, the security of the producers includes Russia, which would benefit from the depoliticization of energy and the necessity of building a more broadly based economy. This would increase the country's wealth and probably work to break down the astounding inequality of income and wealth distribution. And as liberal political theory observes, to the extent that purely commercial motives and outcomes supplant geopolitical ones, the incentives to conflict diminish over time.

Moreover, to the degree that international gas is depoliticized, producers gain not just security but also substantially increased opportunities for marketing energy abroad free of political interference. This includes East Asia, the new horizon for energy sales. Indeed, if Europe can integrate its gas market under stable rules; that will have a similar gravitational pull upon Asia, over time depoliticizing that market and allowing for new infrastructures that bind suppliers and consumers together.

## CONCLUSIONS

Admittedly, much can go wrong between today and the projected dates for the completion of current European and other projects like TANAP-TAP, resulting in more upheavals and insecurities. But the gradual accretion of trends now coming into view makes it possible to envision what long-term futures look like if creative and positive leadership is applied to current projects and developing trends. Both political leaders and scholars like to talk about win-win solutions but in fact it is gradually becoming possible to envision such solutions in the gas and oil markets of Eurasia. Now we must jointly work to realize them.

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# ‘Thailand after King Bhumibol’

Thitinan Pongsudhirak

The passing of King Bhumibol Adulyadej brings Thailand as we know it to a close. Over a seven-decade reign, the late monarch presided over Thailand’s climb from a village backwater to a modern nation. His glorious reign was enabled by conditions and circumstances that were uniquely suited for his leadership. But he has left behind a grieving and grateful population who must now chart their own path into an uncertain future.

Foreign audiences are easily bewildered by the intense affection the Thai people harbour for King Bhumibol. When he celebrated his 60th year on the throne in June 2006, hundreds of thousands of Thais lined Bangkok’s thoroughfares to catch a glimpse of their monarch and to celebrate the milestone with him. In his final twilight they flocked to the hospital where he stayed in order to pray and pay their last respects.

When the leader of Thailand’s junta, Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, publicly announced his passing on 13 October, 2016 many tears were shed. The Thai people knew the day would come but they wanted to hang on to the reign for as long as possible because it had done so well for them.

The Thai people’s treatment of their collective father figure can come across as god worship characteristic of born-again evangelicals or the manufactured adulation common in North Korea. But in the Thai kingdom, the late monarch enjoyed reverence and respect that are organic from the bottom up.

Such adoration derives from the Cold War decades, when Thailand had to go it alone as the last domino that withstood communist expansionism in Southeast Asia. In rapid succession during April–May 1975, Cambodia fell to the Maoist Khmer Rouge, Saigon to the North Vietnamese Army and Laos to communist insurgents. On Thailand’s western front, then-Burma became reclusive and autarkic from 1962.

At home, Thailand was poor, beset with regular black-outs, unreliable waterworks and unpaved roads in most places. It was in these early years of economic development that King Bhumibol exerted efforts beyond the call of duty and built an indelible bond with his people. He traversed far-flung corners of the land – at some risk as the local communist insurgency was making headway – to promote agricultural production, irrigation, infrastructure construction and a myriad of public goods.

A core component of the Thai national identity, the late King lived a modest life when it could have been lavish, and endured hardship when comfort was available. He gave Thailand a unifying, rallying symbol behind which to thwart external threats and to believe in their country’s immense potential in the wider world.



Detractors and critics will say all that was achieved came at the great cost of a long period of authoritarian rule by the military, that development was lopsided in favour of the urban elite and that democratic development was stunted by repeated coups that kept the military-monarchy symbiosis front and centre in Thai society.

These points are not invalid, but they do not discount the reality that Thailand would not be where it is today without King Bhumibol as a force of personality who led by example with unsurpassable moral authority. His achievement is self-evident in view of the harsher times that befell Thailand’s neighbours over the same period.

By virtue of his success, the late monarch has left behind a modern country that now has to come to new terms. While the military junta will play an instrumental role in the transition to a new monarch, elections and democratic rule cannot be denied forever. Popular voices have been heard time and again calling for a collective self-determined future. For this reason, the monarchy King Bhumibol rebuilt will not be the same under his successor.

The imperatives of democratic rule require a 21st century monarchy, operating within a renegotiated constitutional order. Brokering and institutionalising this compromise is Thailand’s way forward.

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# RUSSIA | Factsheet

<b>Russian Federation:</b> Russian Federation		<b>Area:</b> 17, 125, 200 sq km	
<b>Government type:</b> Federal Presidential Republic	<b>Capital:</b> Moscow	<b>Founding:</b> 25 December 1991 (from the Soviet Union)	
		Total	Urban
		146.5	74%
<b>Constitution:</b> The Constitution was adopted by national referendum on December 12, 1993		<b>Life expectancy at birth:</b> 65,9 years (M), 76,7 years (F) <sup>ii</sup>	
		<b>Literacy Rate (Total 15+ yr; 2007-2011):</b> 100% <sup>iii</sup>	
<b>Administrative Divisions:</b> Russia is made up of 85 federal entities. Some of them are called republics, others are regions and there are also autonomies and cities of federal importance.		<b>Labour Force:</b> Thousand Persons. 2015 <sup>iv</sup>	
<b>Location:</b> North Asia bordering the Arctic Ocean, extending from Europe (the portion west of the Urals) to the North Pacific Ocean.		Total	Male
		84199	43888
<b>Natural Resources:</b> Wide natural resource base including major deposits of oil, natural gas, coal, and many strategic minerals, reserves of rare earth elements, timber.		<b>GDP at Market Prices (2015):</b> 80,804 billion rouble at current prices <sup>v</sup>	
		<b>Monitory Unit:</b> 1 rouble = 100 kopecks	
<b>Geography:</b> Largest country in the world in terms of area but unfavorably located in relation to major sea lanes of the world; despite its size, much of the country lacks proper soils and climates (either too cold or too dry) for agriculture; Mount Elbrus is Europe's tallest peak; Lake Baikal, the deepest lake in the world, is estimated to hold one fifth of the world's fresh water.			
<b>Climate:</b> (Winter — -10°C Summer — 20-25°C) The Russian winter certainly guarantees plenty of snow and frost but not everywhere. And it doesn't last forever. Russia's climate varies dramatically, from the deep Arctic chill of the far north to the searing desert heat of some inland areas further south. Yet, throughout much of the country there are only two distinct seasons – winter and summer. Spring and autumn are only brief spells of change in between.			
<b>Major Religions:</b> Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism			
<b>Major Language:</b> Russian; Russian alphabet — Cyrillic			

- i. Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation
- ii. Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation
- iii. UN\_UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS)
- iv. Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation
- v. Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation

Compiled by: **Rumman Uddin Ahamed**, Associate Editor, *Rising Asia*.

# Icons of Russia



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