Post Hasina Bangladesh: Uncertain trajectory of India- Bangladesh Relations?

Ayanjit Sen*

Like a burning leaf on which an old poem is disappearing, the entire Bangladesh, is now in a stable disarray. The country is at crossroads. But is it so easy to wipe out the pages of history because the fight is now between Bengali nationalism and radical Islamization. When an administration wants images of the Father of the Nation removed from all government buildings, little less can be expected from that country.

It is wrong to view it as a portrayal of generation conflict because the entire planning to oust Sheikh Hasina started a few years ago and gained proper momentum a year ago. And, that too, not in South Asia. The real action plan was hatched in a Southeast Asian country by the current Bangladesh administration and a leading arms dealer of South Asia, who now stays in Qatar.

Bilateral ties chilled after the collapse of the Shiekh Hasina administration and the climate over the past few months have become heated in the last few weeks. Despite the close historical, cultural and linguistic links between the two countries, radical elements in Bangladesh have taken steps to spread hatred against India. But we need to see beyond the curtain. China has played a role of a typical merchant taking sides only where business blooms. On the other hand, Pakistan has been instrumental in spearheading this. A letter issued by the Pakistani Consulate in Dhaka on 2nd August 2024, clearly states that three student coordinators involved in the movement have sought assistance. "The Consulate has assured that they are prepared to support the students as needed," the letter states.

There is now a strategic alignment between Pakistan and Bangladesh with increased security and intelligence cooperation between these two countries. The Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) has now an open field to work from. It is imperative to mention that several Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorists are currently in Bangladesh and are in a secret location outside the capital Dhaka, sources confirm. These terrorists have plans to attack India along certain parts of the border (not to forget the sea) and the entire infiltration plans have been hatched by former Major, a once admonished officer from the Bangladesh army and he is in the process of putting together an unofficial unit comprising soldiers from two units of their army. Remember, it is an open field for Pakistan's ISI now to work from. They are all eyeing the border with India.

The role of the Bangladesh army has come up time and again in the past from a negative and positive parlance. Can they bring the country in order? The answer lies with them.

But the attention has now shifted to the Chittagong belt where the Arakan army is in the border area of the Myanmar-Bangladesh border and have led a rush-in of the Bangladeshi army towards the border. But the real story is still to unfold. Let us not read too much into it before anything concrete happens.

With the radical elements taking control of Bangladesh, and Chief Advisor Mohammed Younus, nothing more than a 'puppet' in front of 'those' who are actually calling the shots, the development inside the country needs to be looked into minutely before making any assumptions. Younus and his team has tasted the blood of power. Civil administration is a big question mark. Arms and ammunition are being openly brandished in the streets. Anti-India messages are being pasted on the walls of flyovers. It is not just the cities, but the smaller towns and villages where radicalism is assuming power,

and the minorities have been pushed to the wall. The Hindu minorities have been brutally dealt with since August with innumerable incidents of violence and other crimes reported. After a few days of the day-long visit of India's Foreign Secretary, Mr Vikram Misri, the interim government in Bangladesh came out with a list of attacks on minorities.

Also, let us understand that the initial jubilation that we noticed is slowly now turning to a pessimistic feeling among the commoners in Bangladesh. The pulse of the public is running high but there are no 'doctors' to hold fort. Remember, when you are pushed to the wall, the only place you seek is the front.

The political forces including BNP is busy mapping their road to return but it is not so easy as Jamaat still holding the fort in a subtle way. Despite their bonhomie gestures before the public and media together, the two forces are facing an underlying current of differences. India needs to be cautious with its approach as it has been. There are some foreign forces which want to test India's patience by fanning the fire. But the wind is still blowing India's way. The economy of Bangladesh is taking the heat with their clothing industry facing the brunt. Just getting supplies of rice from Myanmar is not going to help them from a long-term perspective.

The communication strategy has been built up by the radical forces within and outside their country to portray India in a bad light. This has been orchestrated in a manner where history of their country is being distorted but you can curve out an angle from historical facts. They should remember that they cannot change the history. On our part, the communication strategy (non-diplomatic) needs to be decentralized on this issue.

Despite some matters like the Teesta water-sharing agreement remain unsolved, bilateral ties had witnessed good progress with augmentation of trade and commerce, land boundary agreement, enclave exchanges, etc. India has always put forward the Neighbourhood First Policy and in this realm, we have witnessed tremendous growth in collaboration and partnership in several sectors.

But the story has hit a temporary roadblock. The best option is to wait and see with good preparedness of our military, intelligence and diplomacy. And, also to build up a plan which will pass the test of time. All credit to our government, which has handled this situation so well.

There are still two questions to answer.

Who clicked the first picture when Shiekh Hasina came to airstrip to board the helicopter fleeing the country to come to India? Was it a professional photographer, any defence personnel, any politician, any journalist? None of these are correct. Also, have you heard a person's name – Q.A.H.S.A?

The day these answers are made public, the August 2024 story of Bangladesh till now, will be as clear as the blue sky.

*__Mr. Ayanjit Sen is an international affairs expert, crisis-communication strategist, senior journalist, author and is currently working as a professor with Bennett University (Times of India Group). He has reported from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, the UK, Malaysia, Indonesia, France and Sri Lanka.__

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