

## Back to Number 1 Problem

CERTAINLY, population control has been a major success for Bangladesh. Unfortunately, success seems to have instilled a sense of complacency in the policy-planners to the extent that they no longer deem the issue significant enough to be incorporated in the active list of the development agenda. Even worse, there were virtually no serious discussion on the matter over the last few years, not even in the parliament. The reality is far more threatening than the government's apparent indifference may suggest. The way things are the best scenario is that the country's population will be plateaued somewhere around 180 million in the next 25 years; the worst is 230 million. On the whole, the situation is still ominous, especially when we are struggling to meet the basic needs—food, shelter, clothes, healthcare and employment—of the current population, let alone the projected one.

Our policies in this regard have so far been devoted to the lone goal of fertility reduction, and quite justifiably so, for not long time back the country was faced with the threatening prospect of a population explosion. Nevertheless, our failure to address socio-economic implications of population growth has led to such disastrous consequences as rise of unemployment rate, incongruity in demographic distribution, urban migration, etc. The policy-planners should learn their lessons from the mistakes in the past. Unfortunately, it seems, they have not been able to come out of their euphoria following the country's acclaimed success in fertility reduction.

The population issue, as speakers at Sunday's CPD-sponsored dialogue on *Population, development and urbanisation: the emerging issues* have put it, is not restricted to fertility reduction; rather it involves such different aspects as "structure of demographic changes and its implications for economic restructuring needs"; "human capital accumulation factors" like education, health and nutrition, etc. Major task ahead for the planners is to formulate and thereby execute a policy that takes cognizance of the population growth and its socio-economic impact. To that end, the first step, however, is the recognition that population still remains a major problem and must be addressed accordingly.

## Flood Information Gap

FLOOD is now a distinct possibility. What we are keeping our fingers crossed for the time being on is whether it would scrape through the land as a normal monsoonal flood, or develop into an abnormal one slightly above the tolerance level. Or indeed it would end up being the catastrophic deluge we have known in 1988 and 1998. Ershad Hosain, the director of Meteorology Department thinks that the floods this time around are not going to be as severe as the last floods. In a meeting of Met experts on Sunday, who scrutinised all the data including Landsat images available at this point in time, the forecast to emerge was this: seasonal lows might cause more than average showers and eventually floods in the northern and central parts of Bangladesh.

Let's be prepared for the worst. One cannot be too sure about things these days when the behaviour of the seasonal winds and particularly the sea tides that determine the clearance of flood waters into the sea has become unpredictable due to global warming. In a context like this it is imperative for the Met office to urgently operationalise the multi-functional long range radar we have recently procured from Japan. Moreover, the latest understanding with India for transmission of flood-related information to Bangladesh on a 48-hour basis, instead of the 72-hour basis as in the past, must now come to good use.

We can see that the government has instructed some ministries and the Deputy Commissioners at the district level to be on the alert and mount preparedness against flood in good time. If we have learnt anything from the last flood it is this: we took too long a detour to believe it would be as bad as it really proved to be in the end. Some valuable lead time was lost there. Can we afford to do it again?

We are voicing here a three-fold demand before the government: First of all, we want an authentic status report on the flood situation and preparedness. Secondly, a scientific prognostication of the calamity so that none of its stages catches us napping; and finally, a daily briefing on the situation from now on.

## Show No Mercy

RASHIDA was engaged in a grim struggle for survival with her two children. She was living in a shanty at Lalbagh earning her keeps from the back breaking toil at brick chipping until she fell victim to the sexual greed of a bunch of local rogues allegedly led by Khalek on Saturday. Rashida in her sleep was attacked by the goons and as she refused to succumb to their greed Khalek beat her up mercilessly and finally poured acid on her person. As the passers-by gathered on hearing her screams the culprits fled away. She was taken to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital in a critical condition where she lost her fight against death on Sunday morning.

Shamsu Mia, Rashida's husband who works in Saudi Arabia, did not bother to look after his family. The result was the migration of Rashida to Dhaka from her village home in search of livelihood. The children have now been rendered orphans, and in the absence of near and dear ones, they seem thrown on the street. Only the other day Mayor Hanif thanked Haji Selim, the MP from Lalbagh area, for having eradicated crime in his area. Not a week has passed since and yet Rashida's life has been taken by scoundrels of the same locality.

Women like Rashida are being harassed across the country by organised gangs of mastans and terrorists. In the present case, the identification of the culprit or culprits is not in any doubt at all. We strongly feel that exemplary punishment should be meted out. Let us all hope that at least one such case has been dealt with properly.

# BJP's Flawed Kargil Strategy

Praful Bidwai writes from New Delhi

*In the long run, nothing would suit Washington more than playing midwife to a South Asian Camp David. This will place it in the very heart of Asia, next to China, just where the Great Game was played between Russia and Imperial Britain.*

IX weeks into Operation Vijay, New Delhi is wildly oscillating between pressure to cross the Line of Control, and kowtowing to Washington to push Pakistan to withdraw forces from Kargil. Both approaches have grim consequences.

The first means escalating the conflict towards full-blown war, including a nuclear exchange. The second risks inviting Washington to become South Asia's policeman.

Under vacillation, the government's strategy is falling between two stools. Meanwhile, the Kargil toll mounts: Rs. 30 crores a day in supplies, Rs. 800 crores in ordnance, above all, loss of 200 lives and displacement of 260,000....

The government is whipping up chauvinism to duck Parliamentary debate and cover up irresponsibility. Look at its Kargil record:

- It relaxed LoC surveillance, ignoring intelligence reports—until it was too late. It is guilty of strategic miscalculation, political misjudgment and breach of military command.

- It failed to use diplomacy and drafted troops into high-altitude zones without acclimation or snowshoes.

- It launched airstrikes without computing costs, or ef-

ficacy, conceded by air chief Tipnis to be unsatisfactory. A month later, it even intensified airstrikes.

The military results are indifferent. The army has pushed back intruders by three km (of the seven encroached). Its successes are largely limited to two of five sub-sectors.

In short, the government is replicating Mr George Fernandes' early errors. It cynically uses poor, sincere, jawans as fodder in its mills of chauvinism. The BJP, which has divided India as no other force, is now exhorting us to stand "united".

Its government is under two kinds of pressure. First, hawks want the army to cross the LoC. The chief of army staff on June 23 revealed as much. Inside the BJP, a vicious communalism is growing. This is expressed in full malevolence in the RSS weekly *Panchayana* (June 20), which advocates the "final solution" to "centuries-old aggression" from "Mohammed Bin Kasim to Mian Nawaz".

The editorial demands India use nuclear weapons against

Pakistan. This is because all Muslims are "barbarians" by their "very nature". Nuclear weapons will "finally" settle scores with them!

Such fascist sentiments underlie the BJP-Jana Sangh's long obsession with nuclear weapons—an obsession independent of our security environment. These sentiments represent no "lunatic fringe", but the Hindutva mainstream.

They explain why the BJP decided, at the Sangh's behest, to conduct last year's nuclear tests. Mr Vajpayee hid that decision from his Cabinet and even from the defence chiefs till May 9. A small, unaccountable, Sangh-centred cabal, not the Cabinet, has called our nuclear shots.

No wonder there have been a dozen hostile verbal nuclear exchanges between India and Pakistan. Each has threatened the other with the "ultimate" weapon, "any weapon", "pre-emptive use". For each mad mullah in Pakistan, there are ten Sangh fanatics with "thermonuclear ripostes".

Vajpayee confidante Brajesh Mishra brandished the nuclear

sword on June 20 when he said: "We have a policy of no-first-use... But if any attempt is made against us, God forbid, we will go all out." Mr Vajpayee and Mr Fernandes have since made provocative nuclear statements too.

At the opposite end, the government is under pressure from people like Mr Jaswant Singh to invite G-8 intervention in South Asia. As the *Washington Post* reveals, the G-8 Cologne statement was inspired by Mr Vajpayee's letter to Bill Clinton, in which he speaks of pressures to cross the LoC.

This letter is a mix of treaty and subtle blackmail. Like Pakistan's post-May 1998 tactic to exploit its weakness to win economic concessions, it was meant to push the U.S. to pressure Pakistan.

The Zinn-Lanpher visits fully support this assessment. A middling U.S. official doesn't turn up on a Sunday for a 45-minute meeting with India's National Security Adviser, unless there is prior Indo-U.S. agreement on "mediation" or "intervention".

All this means only one

"Judeo-Christian" forces. The BJP is playing a dangerous dual-track game. It shamelessly accuses the Opposition of "politicising" Kargil, which it itself does blatantly by claiming a patriotic monopoly. It even launched an ugly state-financed campaign on Shyama Prasad Mookerjee as Kashmir's first "martyr".

But Mookerjee died of a heart attack, years after many jawans had perished. The BJP must learn that cheap "martyrdom" never pays. Even if Kargil is resolved with U.S. help, the people won't forget that the BJP aggravated the crisis through its bungling and communalism.

Kargil holds two larger lessons. The Indian Right—divisive, externally U.S.-oriented, and espousing an aggressive, toxic nationalism—cannot defend our security. Secondly, the Kargil crisis is basically rooted in India's and Pakistan's nuclearisation, which has helped the two raise the threshold of conventional conflict.

Indian and Pakistani leaders have repeatedly crossed the limits of unacceptable in making nuclear threats—limits respected even during the Cold War. Kargil shows there won't be security in South Asia with nuclear weapons.

sion" on the outcome of the Islamabad talks. The whole "operation" shows how America is deeply concerned about the deteriorating relations between the two Sub-continent neighbours which have recently gone nuclear. Undoubtedly, the two adolescents need some sort of "supervision" and "guidance" to exercise full control on their newly acquired nuclear weapons.

In this battle-field, more soldiers from both parties die of being frozen than in fighting every year. In the current fighting in Kargil and other sectors—in the cross-border artillery firing to destroy each other's camps, hundreds of innocent poor villagers have been uprooted from their hearths and homes along the LoC, and a large number of men, women and children killed. Besides, the heavy casualties of soldiers on both sides are a daily occurrence. But that doesn't seem to matter much to the diplomats.

However, G-8 group leaders, where America is a powerful member, have issued a warning not to escalate the situation and show respect to the existing LoC, without naming Pakistan as the culprit. This has prompted former Indian Prime Minister Gajral to say that "G-8" statement is likely to open a new window to take the Kashmir issue back to India. So the Vajpayee government got more than what it wanted. Indirectly, it has "internationalised" the Kargil problem, and for that matter, Kashmir issue. The third party entered the scenario in a very subtle way.

## Pakistan Faces Hard Music

Pakistan had to face the "hard music" from one of its best allies—America. It has been pointed at as an "intruder" into the Indian side of Kashmir for having violated the LoC, accepted as the official "frontier" between the two parts of Kashmir. LoC stretches over thousands of miles, spreading over plains and high mountain

peaks, including the "highest battle field" in the world—Siachen sector, where Pakistan and Indian soldiers are on guard round the year.

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## South Asia Needs a Peace Process

by Stephen P. Cohen

*In South Africa, the Middle East and Northern Ireland, the U.S. and other countries have supported a long-term process of regional reconciliation. Like these other war-torn regions, South Asia needs its own peace process, which over time can be strengthened by the emergence of new generations in both India and Pakistan who are no longer obsessed with the struggles of their parents and grandparents.*

THE military conflict between India and Pakistan over the Kargil area in Kashmir could yet turn into a major regional crisis. Hard-liners in both countries mistakenly believe that they can exhaust their opponent by a slow-motion, low-intensity war. But given the two sides' newly developed nuclear capabilities, the conflict in Kashmir is no longer just an ugly sideshow; it is a serious threat to stability in South Asia that will require a long-term, international peace process. Like the Middle East, South Asia has become a global concern.

India and Pakistan are locked in a complex struggle. Like a Russian matraca doll, Kargil is nested within the larger Kashmir problem, which in turn is nested within a still-larger India-Pakistan problem.

Although the dispute over Kashmir began more than 50 years ago, the current crisis is the result of a bold Pakistani incursion earlier this year across the Line of Control, the post-1972 name for the old cease-fire line. The Pakistanis caught the Indians by surprise, but like Pearl Harbor real victory may be an illusion. India responded by unleashing its air power in Kashmir for the first time, representing a significant escalation of the conflict.

Despite the hope that the Line of Control would evolve into a permanent border, neither state now seems to accept this most logical of solutions. Pakistan cannot bring itself to back away from its demand for a plebiscite on independence in India-held Kashmir, where it has long provided support for local Kashmiri Muslim separatists. For its part, India refuses to accept as per national policy.

A candidate will have to pay a large amount of money for transport, to stay in Dhaka and other expenditure which will be really a burden. If the candidate is a female, she will have to face more problems and need to spend more than a male applicant.

Note that the BCS exam is also held in some centres out of Dhaka.

So I fervently request to the BRC to arrange examination centres in every division.

Abdul Hye Chowdhury  
SUST, Sylhet.

Both India and Pakistan have invested a great deal of political capital in the war over this barren terrain, and the reasons are not far to seek. Historically, Islamabad has backed Kashmiri "freedom fighters," at least some of whom are its own soldiers, as a low-cost and presumably low-risk way of maintaining a thorn in India's side. It is also quite possible that the latest incursion was launched by elements of the Pakistani establishment who wish to derail Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's policy of "bus diplomacy" and normalization with India.)

India holds on to Kashmir because to lose it, especially by force, would threaten the balkanization of India and serve as an affront to its secular identity. Yet India has been unable to offer good government to the Kashmiris, nor has it been able to muster the political will even to discuss the settlement of the dispute with Pakistan.

Sadly, both sides have come to regard this pathetic dispute as more important than the deeper problems that are corroding their societies and eroding their already-weak democratic institutions. The conflict could easily spread, as it did in 1965 when India responded to a similar provocation in Kashmir with an attack across the border thus initiating a full-scale war with Islamabad. The worst-case scenario is that this episode will lead one side to use nuclear weapons. Nuclear strategists in both countries have discussed the use of "tactical" or battlefield nuclear weapons, and barren Kargil and its environs would be an ideal place to use them.

Although the Kashmir situation looks murky at best when viewed from up close, it should serve as an object lesson in what happens when outside parties with interests and influence in the region—the U.S. in particular—allow problems to fester. Washington has been

"Camp David" for South Asia, but it is not too soon for the concerned states in the international community to bestir themselves. If not, the fighting now taking place over the Kargil Road will either be repeated in one guise or another or lead to a wider war. If ever there was reason to care about the battles taking place in Asia's hinterlands, this must certainly be it.

The author is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institute. This article appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* on June 24, 1999.

## To the Editor...

### Indo-Pak war

Sir, The Indo-Pak cross border tensions are indeed a matter of concern for all the inhabitants of the sub-continent. The situation is escalating day-by-day towards a full fledged war.

It is obvious that when one of these *nouveaux* nuclear powers is on the verge of losing in the conventional war, it would not hesitate resorting to its nuclear defences. It is thus useless to lie back complacently by just asking for the enforcement of restraint of nuclear missiles.

This grave situation immediately calls for pragmatic intervention of the G-8 to ward off the imminent disaster bound to have a detrimental influence on the minds of the peoples of the two

sheds. Begum Khaleda Zia or Sheikh Hasina has been neat, judicious, pious, corruption free and efficient?

We are in desperate need of a revolutionary change in the growth, selection and election of leadership of our different political parties.

We have two major political parties in our country. We have observed and tasted the activities and performances of both. Almost everything appears to be in a hotch-potch, disarray and confusion. We fail to see any light at the end of the tunnel.

We feel it's time for a change.

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### Change the leadership

Sir, At intervals of one year, I searched in the bazaar, as a retail consumer, for locally produced corn oil and sunflower oil (good for health), but the same are not available. I am offered imported corn and sunflower oils, which are too expensive for a middle-class family.

Today mustard oil has been replaced by imported soybean oil as the main cooking medium. There is no government publicity or efforts on easy marketing of alternative local edible oils, to reduce the huge foreign exchange spent on import of edible oils (the cycle is similar to the huge import of powder milk, which has now come down to half the value).

This huge dependence on imports for a major cooking medium must not be allowed to continue as per national policy.

Why don't these political leaders come forward telling the people their own drawbacks, corruption, inefficiency, dishonesty, abuse of power, mistakes and accumulation of wealth?

Can anyone claim and prove that any of our government headed by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin, Mansoor Ahmed, Khondkar Mosharraf, Ziaur Rahman, Justice Sayem, Justice Satter, H M Er-

shad, Begum Khaleda Zia or Sheikh Hasina has been neat, judicious, pious, corruption free and efficient?

The whole chain has to make work