

# South Asian hydro-politics

DR K B SAJJADUR RASHEED

RIVERS know no boundaries. What happens at their sources and upstream reaches will reverberate all through their courses until they reach the ocean. Problems for the downstream riparian countries may be insoluble if events and developments at the upper sections of a river system take place without consideration of the former. Such spectre of alarm hangs over Bangladesh as India proceeds with its plans to form a national hydrological grid through linking the Himalayan and Peninsular rivers. This is election time in India, and hence, there are political compulsions in the government to make pledges and pronouncements on the project -- assuring the people of the country that this mega plan would solve their water problems once for all.

The rationale put forward by India for embarking on this decade old concept of river linking is based on two premises. First, there are floods in parts of India while other parts suffer from drought; hence, water from flood prone areas could be transferred to drought-prone areas. Second, surplus water from the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) system could be transferred to deficit areas within that system as well to southern India. Both the premises are ethically flawed and are a gross misrepresentation of reality. Floods in the Indian sections of the GBM system do not occur in isolation or in a closed system, rather they are hydrologically related to all the stakeholders in the system, especially Bangladesh as a downstream country. And the concept of 'surplus' water along a particular reach of the GBM system is untenable because the river is an open system, and withdrawal or diversion of so-called 'surplus' water from one section will create deficit conditions in the downstream sections. The logical and

desirable solution could be a transparent basin-wide cooperation in planning the utilisation and management of the river basins. The genuine expression of intent for cooperation in basin-wide management among all riparian countries could be the first confidence building endeavour.

It seems that, in recent days, information on the current status of the progress on the project -- even within India -- is not generally available in the public domain. However, unofficial reports indicate that pre-feasibility studies of all the 30 links and feasibility reports of at least two links have been completed, and that they are all found 'viable'. This 120

linking plan argue that it would help irrigate an additional 35 million hectares of land, thus ensuring food security and serving as a major tool in poverty reduction strategy. Along the same vein, Bangladesh should argue in international forums that this unilateral diversion of water in India would devastate the agricultural potential in Bangladesh, thus causing unimaginable food insecurity and putting our poverty reduction efforts in the reverse gear.

It is interesting that none of the political parties in India -- from extreme left to extreme right -- have voiced any concern about this gargantuan project, costing billions of

billion dollar project to transfer water from the Yangtze river to the arid north, Indian proponents of the river-linking plan are under the spell of "if China can do it, why not us" syndrome. (It should be noted here that China's water diversion is not affecting any downstream country).

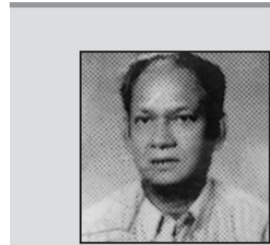
In recent months, civil society members and professionals in Bangladesh have been actively monitoring the developments related to the upstream river diversion scheme, and helping to disseminate information and sensitize the people on the probable predicament the country might face from such diversion. The government also needs to

world. But in most instances, if inter-country disputes are looked through the prism of equity, trust and mutual respect, the danger of conflict can be removed or minimised and replaced with the potential of cooperation where no riparian is a loser. The rhetoric that one often hears that the next war will be fought on water is somewhat overblown. Indeed, two US environmental researchers (Aaron Wolf and Sandra Postel) who had studied extensively transboundary water disputes, have found only one outright war over water in the past 4,500 years -- between two city states, Lagash and Umma in modern day Iraq. On the other hand, over 3,600 water treaties have been signed between states and communities during the past 12 centuries. Hence, given a cooperative ambience between the upper and lower riparians, conflicts can be avoided and even converted into cooperative management.

UNESCO has established a global programme called PC-CP -- "From Potential Conflict to Cooperation Potential" in collaboration with Green Cross International to examine "the potential for shared water resources to become a catalyst for regional peace and development through dialogue, cooperation and participative management of river basins." One such recent example of 'cooperation potential' is offered by the 10-country Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), formed in 1999 with a view to providing an all-inclusive format for basin-wide cooperation. The NBI has offered Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia as well as other seven Nile riparians a glimmer of hope in coming up with a basin-wide framework for equitable water sharing and management. Bangladesh, as the lowest riparian in the GBM system, could take lead in evolving a 5-country (Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India and Nepal) institutional framework along the lines of the NBI, with the vision for an equitable and demand-driven water utilisation among all the five GBM riparians. The first and foremost task toward achieving that goal and getting out of the river-linking induced hydro-political quagmire is to continue the process of dialogue, information exchange and transparency in negotiations.

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# Greek Cypriots' gift to Turkish Cypriots!



ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

THE UN organised referendum with the powerful blessing of Secretary General Kofi Annan has resulted in making the division of Cyprus de jure. It is a totally unexpected gift of the Greek Cypriots to their northern neighbours.

The division of Cyprus is 30 years old. Turks are often unjustly criticised as invaders and occupiers of one third of the island. The circumstances that led Turkey to send her troops is often forgotten. In 1974 there was a military coup in Greece and the Colonels were about to gobble up the whole of Cyprus and destroy the Accord of 1960 on which Turkey, Greece and Britain as guarantor powers had the right to intervene. Cyprus has remained divided ever since.

In the very recent past, the UN which has been trying all these years to find a solution to this dispute involving Turkey and Greece and their protégés Turkish Cypriots in the north and Greek Cypriots in the south, presented a peace plan known as the Annan Plan. After exhausting negotiations involving all the parties it was decided that the Turkish Cypriots and the Greek Cypriots would abide by the decision of Secretary General Annan. Kofi Annan decided to put the question to separate vote by the Turks and the Greeks.

Interestingly the Turkish government went all out in support of a Yes vote although the leader of the Turkish community in Cyprus, Rauf Denktaş opposed the affirmative vote. The government in Athens preferred to sit on the fence whereas the leader of the Greek

## THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

The Greek Cypriots have been unable to match the large hearted gesture of the Turkish Cypriots, who have been prepared to cut the umbilical cord with Turkey. By voting No the Cypriot Greeks have demonstrated their utter dependence on Greece. They have let an opportunity slip away.

community in Cyprus Tasos Papadopoulos told his countrymen to say No, although he promised before the European Union (EU) that should his country be included in the EU, he would work for a Yes vote. The result of the vote is 64.9 percent of Turks have said Yes to reunification with southern partners whereas 75.6 percent of Greeks have said No to the reunification. In other words the bid by Kofi Annan to reunify the island has failed.

Quo Vadis? Following the invasion (!) of northern Cyprus by Turkey draconian sanctions were imposed by the West on Northern Cyprus. The West is honour bound to lift those sanctions. Turkey has carried single handedly the burden of Northern Cyprus and deserves that the international community give some sympathetic consideration. Kofi Annan put the entire weight of his office behind the referendum. When he picks up the pieces it will become clear that the Greeks on the island have decided to say good-bye to a united Cyprus. They are pleased that they alone will be member of the expanded EU on 1 May next. Since 1960 South Cyprus has represented the entire island although since 1974 this position became untenable. Now by their own vote the Greeks of Cyprus have dissolved the union. It will be Kofi Annan's problem to find a solution to the question of Northern Cyprus. Do they qualify to be treated as a sovereign independent states? This question will have to be faced squarely.

What about the EU? They are merrily expanding. On 1 May they will have 10 new members and the total will rise to 25. In the latest referendum EU had put its weight behind a Yes vote and now it seems to complain that it has been tricked by the Greek Cypriots. EU will have to seriously ponder about a place for Northern Cyprus. Otherwise she runs the risk of continuing to be labeled as a Christian Club.

My first bet will be that Northern must attempt to be a full member of the Organisation of Islamic Conference. She is since many years an Observer within this largest Islamic Organisation. Here she is in congenial company. Northern Cyprus must have a solid base to operate from. That base is provided by the OIC. I have been the Assistant Secretary General of the OIC and frequently as Acting Secretary General looking after political affairs, Jerusalem and Palestine, among many burning topics. I am confident that Turkey will seriously consider to make a push in this direction. Turkey is a big state and has an important presence throughout the world. She will definitely know how to proceed from now on.

The Greek Cypriots have been unable to match the large hearted gesture of the Turkish Cypriots, who have been prepared to cut the umbilical cord with Turkey. By voting No the Cypriot Greeks have demonstrated their utter dependence on Greece. They had an opportunity to be their own people. They have let that opportunity slip away.

Globally EU is an experiment full of promise. Will it be able to fulfil that promise?

Arshad-uz Zaman is a former Ambassador.

# Character assassination of Muslim Americans

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED writes from Princeton

THE unkindest cut that can be inflicted on an individual or a group of people is by preventing the individual or the group from defining who they are. Their politically motivated enemies, who seek their destruction or damnation, should not define them. Yet, that is exactly what is happening to the Muslim American community.

Immediately after 9/11, there was an insatiable American appetite for knowledge of Islam and the Muslims. Politically and organisationally weak and media-shy fledgling Muslim American community was unable to respond. The void was eagerly filled by the politically motivated and organisationally strong, agenda-driven, Israel-loving and media-savvy rightwing Zionist Jews and rightwing Evangelical Christians. They painted Islam and the Muslims in the most unfavourable way imaginable. In short, Muslims were defined as savage-like fanatics, following a violent religion, who hate America only because of America's freedom, democracy, wealth and for no other reason than because America exists! Such caricatures and monumental distortions of Islam and the Muslim continue to this day in the American newspapers, magazines, radio and television.

For example, On Wednesday, April 21 on his drive home after 8 in the evening, accidentally the writer stumbled on to New York's radio station WOR 710 AM, which curiously was playing the Azaan. After the first line, a man named Jerry Doyle told listeners (I paraphrase): "Can you imagine that this sound is played five times a day in the suburbs of Detroit?" Then he went on to say that the five million Muslims of America have never condemned

9/11, and actually support America's enemies. According to Mr. Doyle, Muslims constitute a cancer within America's body and must be removed. He held American Muslims solely responsible for the deaths of 700 American soldiers in Iraq. Playing the first line of the Azaan once again, he then played the Star Spangled banner (America's national anthem) and very dramatically asked the listeners the rhetorical question: "Which of these two sounds do you think our dead soldiers would like to hear on their return home?" (Isn't it unkind to ask dead soldiers, who should rest in peace, for their preference?)

## LETTER FROM AMERICA

The writer asked a white Muslim American friend of his why so many Americans still believe Muslim Americans have not condemned 9/11, when they actually have, and what Muslim Americans should do about it. My white Muslim friend said that Muslim Americans should, and have condemned 9/11 as much as Christian and Jewish Americans... Perpetual Muslim American condemnation of 9/11 would imply Muslim American complicity in the act, when none exists.

Then Mr. Doyle went nationwide and asked callers the leading question: "Aren't you outraged?" (By the presence of these Muslims in America.) All the caller expressed their outrage at and condemnation of the Muslims, especially the one from New York, who said that as a citizen of Israel she knows exactly how barbaric these Muslims are! A caller from California attempted to point out that the first line of the Azaan simply means, "God is Great," and refers to the same God Christians and

Jews worship. Mr. Doyle went ballistic and cut the caller off saying, "No, no, no! It is not the same God," and "what is the matter with people like you!" Mr. Doyle advised the good Christian citizens of Detroit to smash the speakers from which "this stuff" (Azaan) was coming from! Mr. Doyle repeatedly blamed the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) for the presence of heathens like Muslims in "this Judeo-Christian nation." As far as the writer knows, such incitement to violence is punishable by at least a hefty fine and the cancellation of radio station's licence. Media's watchdog, the FCC, which now is focusing on indecency in the media (remember the

because of the atrocities committed not by America, but by Israel.

Through all his sanctimonious self-righteousness and venomous diatribes, what struck the writer most about Mr. Doyle's outburst is his absolute ignorance of Muslim Americans. He would fall off his chair to learn that Muslim American organisations had endorsed his hero, candidate George W. Bush, for the president in 2000. Does he know that more than a third, the largest plurality, of Muslim Americans are African Americans? That the next largest, about 30 percent, are from the Indian sub-continent; and only 25 percent are Arab Americans! Ignorance breeds fear and contempt. To assuage his fear of and anger at Muslim Americans, Mr. Doyle is well advised to visit a mosque and a Muslim American home. Last year, an American friend of the writer brought a group of apprehensive Jewish Americans to visit our Islamic centre. When they left they told my friend (I paraphrase): "You will never know how many minds you changed today. We were afraid to come to the mosque because we thought it was full of terrorists and arms! Instead, we found ordinary people like ourselves!"

One dearly hopes that as an antidote for his venom, Mr. Doyle will do the same - and fast! Because, broadcasts like his contribute to the harassment and discrimination against Muslim Americans in their jobs, on the streets, in the torching of Muslim American businesses and in the vandalising of mosques, all of which are rampant in today's America. Unless Mr. Doyle educates himself, even if the Muslims Americans were to condemn 9/11 every day, that would not satisfy the likes of Mr. Doyle, who are not really interested in Muslim contrition; their only interest is to consign the Muslim to perdition.

Rather alarmed by what Mr. Dole had to say, the writer asked a white Muslim American friend of his why so many Americans still believe Muslim Americans have not condemned 9/11, when they actually have, and what Muslim Americans should do about it. My white Muslim friend said that Muslim Americans should, and have condemned 9/11 as much as Christian and Jewish Americans. They should condemn no more, no less. Excessive and exclusive condemnation by the Muslim Americans would imply that somehow Islam and the Muslims are responsible for 9/11, when they are not. Since Muslim Americans are not responsible for 9/11, Muslim Americans do not own it. The perpetrators of 9/11 -- Osama bin Laden and the hijackers -- own 9/11, not Muslim Americans. These perpetrators did not act on behalf of the Muslims Americans or Muslims; they acted on behalf of themselves. Muslim Americans condemn these terrorists and mass murderers -- for that is what these criminals are, terrorists and mass murderers -- in the strongest possible terms, and as strongly as the rest of the American society. Perpetual Muslim American condemnation of 9/11 would imply Muslim American complicity in the act, when none exists. After all, everyone should remember that none of the 9/11 hijackers were Muslim American citizens.

# Can we win the race?

DR M ASHRAF ALI

IT seems that the race between population increase and economic growth in Bangladesh is in full swing and perhaps the result has already been decided. When Malthus propounded his theory that population increases at a faster rate than food production and that food production would never catch up with population growth, he was ridiculed and branded as a false prophet. His theory was proved totally unsound as the Industrial Revolution in the West revolutionised and modernised agriculture to such an extent that huge surplus of food was produced using the newer technology. As a result Malthus's theory was proved wrong for the developed countries.

But what about countries like Bangladesh? It has been proved beyond doubt that Malthus is very right. The gap between food shortage and population increase has been widening at such a great scale that it may never be possible to bridge the gap at all. At least in the case of Bangladesh, it appears that we have already lost the race and the consequences are staring at us with grave results. Poor in natural resources, Bangladesh is never going to be able to feed the 130 million people it will have by the year 2000. There is already a huge surplus of population which the country is unable to feed and yet the population increase is still in full swing.

How is that the population situation came to such a pass even with 20 years of family planning programme? After all these years, there is only a negligible fall in the rate of population increase. Huge funds have been invested in the programme throughout all these years but yet the result has been minimal.

The reasons for failure are many. However, the major reason appears to be a general lack of awareness among the people mainly due to lack of education and widespread illiteracy. The technicalities involved in birth control pre-supposes a minimum of education. In Bangladesh, this problem has been willfully neglected by the various governments that came to power since the Pakistan days. However, other reasons such as management and control, supporting services, follow-up programmes, etc., are no less important than the lack of awareness on the part of the people.

There is a feeling among the authorities that once the money is allocated, the programme will have no problem. Huge sums have been spent on family planning programme since the days of Ayub Khan, but what has been the result? If things were managed a bit better, we could have been better results. An annual increase of 2.4 percent is still very high and rate circulated by the government may be underestimated to some degree.

It goes without saying that while efforts must be made to increase food production by all means, the family planning programme has also to be geared up with all seriousness. No particular research has been done so far to find out the rates of acceptance of family planning in

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relation to educational level of the acceptors, but it is my feeling that only the educated has accepted family planning with seriousness. The unlettered couples are going on multiplying in full swing. This phenomenon also has some genetic implication for the future of the country. It is very likely that within the next few years, the quality of generation will keep becoming poorer if only the educated practice birth control and have fewer babies. This may even lead to a social disaster.

### Some suggestions

In order to gear up the family planning programme, certain measures have to be accepted without further delay. (1) The management and control system has to be improved substantially. There has been reports of abuses of all kinds in the family planning programme. This

has to be stopped. (2) Conscientisation about the need for family planning should be taken seriously and appropriate schemes should be undertaken in this regard to carry the message of family planning to every nook and corner of the country. (3) The delivery system of the family planning materials should be improved so that services and materials are available to the users with the minimum of effort. (4) Finally, the most important is the supporting services and the follow-up of acceptors who might develop medical problems as a result of family planning practice. There has been complications leading to even death after vasectomy and tubectomy. Needless to mention that such things can have strong negative motivation for the prospective acceptors and can nullify the total programme. Therefore, medi-

cal services should be made available at the doorstep of the clients and it should be provided free of cost. In this regard the experiences of BRAC who has been running family planning programmes in some areas of the country with some success may be gainfully utilised.

As has been already mentioned, we might have lost the race already and the country may be drowned by a deluge of population within foreseeable future unless substantial progress is made in population control within the shortest possible time. I do not want to heighten the pessimism that is already there and sound like a prophet of doom, but if the situation is not objectively studied and appropriate actions taken, one might find that the prospect of survival of the country is very remote.

Against such a backdrop of population situation it is imperative to make an evaluation of the existing population control programme in order to locate the most pernicious problems and take appropriate measures to solve those so that positive result in this sector is ensured.

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