

## Disturbing run-up to Feb 18 Pak polls

We wish the Pakistanis peaceful transition to democracy

WITH only a week to go before the parliamentary elections in Pakistan, there has been yet another suicide bombing attack in Charsadda in North West Frontier Province snuffing out 20 people and wounding 25 others. Just how haemorrhagic the wave of suicide blasts has proven since before the dastardly assassination of Benazir Bhutto can be gauged from the number of casualties claimed - around 220 so far.

Thus while political leaders are targeted and struck down as in the case of Benazir, the death toll among common people is extremely high. This public demonstration of lethal violence by religious extremists seems aimed at creating social disorder to foil the general election. The election rallies in Pakistan's factious politics are prone to danger, as it is, and the extremist elements have their own violent agenda, so that the two mix into a dangerous brew.

The Pakistani law enforcers seem to be resigned to the desperado acts of the suicide bombers saying that if one were prepared to die there could not be any stopping him anyway. Indirectly, it is an admission of intelligence failure.

The whole world looks forward to a reasonably free and fair election in Pakistan as a way of restoring democratic foundations of the country which have been systematically destroyed by general Musharraf's wily devices to cling to power. In his machinations to hold on to power, his so-called war on terror received at best secondary importance. All the political parties have a great stake in the elections because if they can through alignment get a two-thirds majority they become a power to reckon with as far as the all powerful president is concerned who has already got himself elected for the second term. The power to impeach the president then would lie with the victorious political forces. That again increases the chance of rigging the polls. In all, it is a very crucial phase that Pakistan politics is going through.

As a friendly co-traveler of Saar, we wish Pakistani people a smooth journey towards a truly representative government that has eluded the country for much of its 60-year long history.

## 15 years without trial!

Remove the inadequacies in the legal system

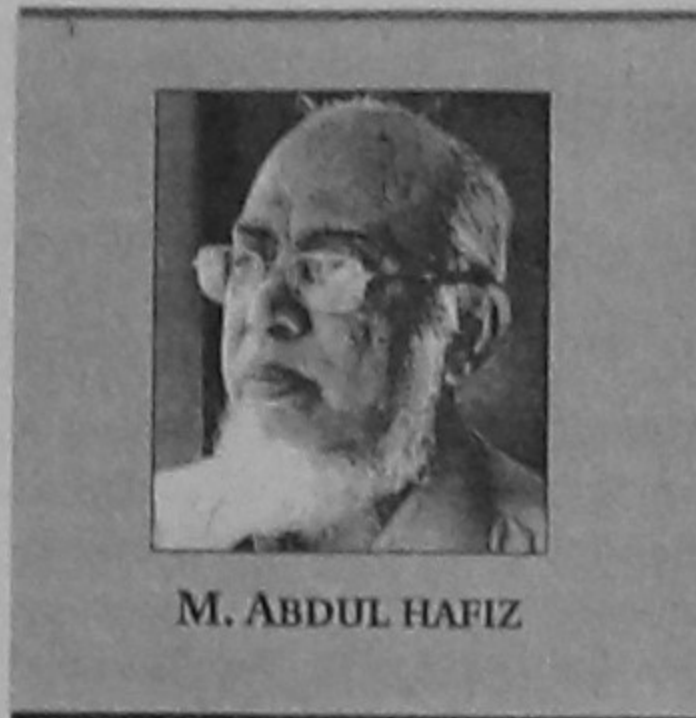
THE poignant tale of Ali Hussain, who wasted 15 painful years in a jail without facing any trial, is a shocking reminder of flaws existing in our legal system. It is but a glaring example of an accused kept in custody for one and a half decades without his guilt being proven in a court of law. The man's tryst with law began when he was picked up by the law enforcing agencies in connection with a murder case along with some other accused. But since his arrest in 1992, he did not face any trial with the case having stayed for last 12 years following a High Court order.

Everything went wrong for Ali Hussain in a system where the investigating authorities did not go deep into the case to prove his involvement in it. While the other influential accused got away long ago after obtaining bail, he was destined to languish in jail without bail, as he was too poor to pay for the legal expenses. The ill-fated man did not even have any human rights organisation by his side at such times of gloom and dejection.

Ali Hussain's case came to limelight when some released prisoners narrated his story to the local journalists of Moulvibazar, who in turn brought the case to the attention of the relevant authorities. It now rests with the higher court to resolve the case the way it deems fit. His wife wants a fair trial, but if he is proved innocent, she wants the authorities to give him back the lost 15 years. But the question is: can time wasted be retrieved?

This is one of the many cases of procrastinating complications of criminal justice system that came to light to point fingers at the inadequacies of the legal system. This must be removed so that no one has to waste valuable years in detention without trial any more. Let the guilt of an accused be proved in a court of law or else let him walk out free.

## Eulogy for a revolutionary



M. ABDUL HAFIZ

IN 1970, Jordan's infamous black September was enacted by Pakistan's Colonel Ziaul Huq (later the country's president) while on a tour of duty to the Hashemite Kingdom. He wreaked havoc with the Palestinian guerrillas at the behest of royal authority, resulting in a bloodbath -- an event that hastened the death of a mortally shocked President Nasser as he strove to stitch afresh the Arab unity in an Arab summit convened by him.

Four years later in 1974, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto hosted the Islamic countries' summit in Lahore, where there was an outpouring of praises for Yasser Arafat and his PLO from the leaders of a ragtag OIC -- another giant of which, George Habash, a secular Marxist protagonist was totally ignored. One reason may be the fact that the Palestinian struggle is looked upon as a Muslim issue, particularly in the sub-continent, although a

redoubtable Arafat also was no less secular. Yet, Dr. George Habash, considered the conscience of the Palestinian revolution, smashed those commonplace perspectives and gave the revolution a wider connotation. His death on January 26 last, from a heart attack at the age of 81, followed a long and courageous but lonely journey to keep the liberation of Palestine above religious and sectarian zealotry.

He himself had been a non-practicing Christian, and as a Marxist he never espoused hatred for Jews. He, however, fought hard against the racially constructed doctrine of Zionism. In a significant way, the perspectives of the Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), which Habash founded as a closely-knit group of Palestinian guerrillas, wasn't different from what Vanessa Redgrave or Noam Chomsky,

## PERSPECTIVES

himself a Jew, stood for. Indeed, the PFLP represented the only progressive grassroots component within the Palestinian struggle. Notwithstanding his peerless stature and secular credentials, Arafat -- also a revolutionary -- seemed to have been broken by the events following the demise of the Cold War and said goodbye to an armed struggle. Ever since, he unquestioningly submitted and agreed to whatever the Israelis and Americans told him, but Habash opposed and opted to remain in the battlefield with preference of dying, if required, with his boots on.

The presence of PFLP under the umbrella of Fatah is also proof to detractors of the struggle, who always painted the Palestinians as fanatical jihadis. The PFLP is Marxist and secular, and believes in a bi-national state for both Arabs and Jews. George Habash was the only

giant amongst all the mediocre leaders left by Arafat's tragic death, for Arafat's successors are a pack of grovellers.

Habash was, in fact, the only Palestinian leader who enjoyed moral stature equal to Arafat because of his uncompromising politics and personal integrity, and that too from the Left. Living as an exile for most of his life, Habash finally tried to settle down in Amman where he opened a people's clinic. But he was soon accused of involvement in an attempt to overthrow King Hussain, and driven underground with a 33-year prison sentence hanging over his head. He fled to Syria where he became a fawning supporter of Egypt's Nasser.

Habash's experience with the defeat of Nasserite ideology and strategy in the war of 1967 correctly led him to deduce that the only way a state armed to the teeth with American weapons

and helped by the impotency of the US' client regimes in the Arab world could be dealt with was with the established principles of armed struggles well chronicled in almost all liberation wars in the past.

In fact, Habash wanted an end to the client states in the region, and realised that the Palestinian struggle was not an end in itself but a front for the eventual liberation of the entire Arab Middle East from the yoke of the Israeli-American protectorate status imposed upon it. Such is his stature that Palestinians from as diverse sides of the political spectrum as Mahmud Abbas of Fatah and Ismail Haniye of Hamas condoned his death and praised his relentless sacrifices for the Palestinian cause.

One only needs to look at what happened after Gazans broke through the wall along the Egyptian border. The only way to halt this principled guerilla war, which will make Israel ungovernable and make the regime in Tel Aviv come to its senses.

In the aftermath Sabra and Shatilla an 1982, there gathered a gaggle of globally famous comrades in Beirut. It was embelished, among others, by George Habash and his more famous protegee Leila Khaled, who had already earned international notoriety, or fame, by hijacking planes a dozen years before.

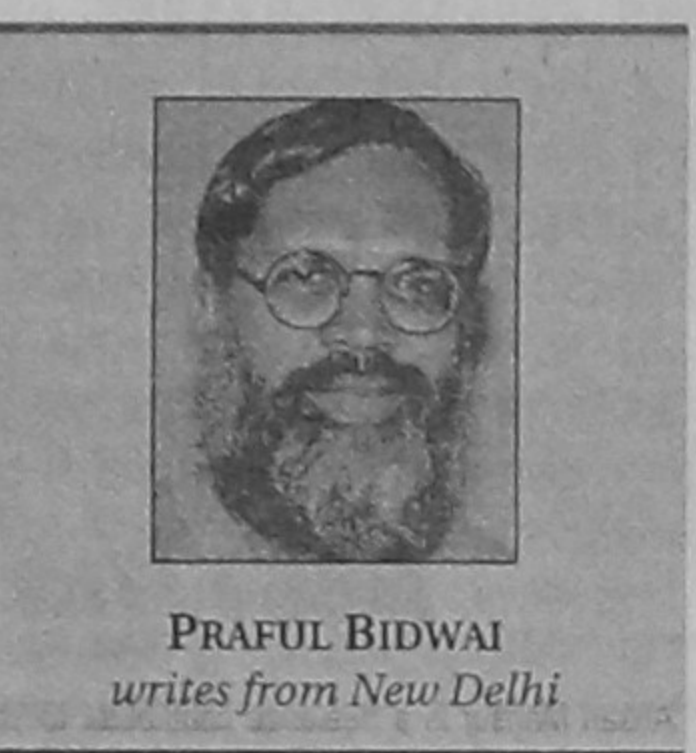
Human rights activist Vanessa Redgrave read out a moving tribute to the Palestinian victims.

Habash was then recovering from brain surgery, and was in a great form because the Camp David meeting of 1979 brought together the various quarrelling factions of the PLO, as a result of which he could be on the same platform as Arafat. Habash then prophetically uttered that charity takes over when revolutionary zeal wanes. In other words, don't count on support from anyone other than yourself. The Arab and Muslim states, he added, had their own axes to grind in the Palestine question.

Habash was a great revolutionary of the 20th century -- but how great? Some fondly liken him to Fidel Castro, Ben Bella, Ho Chi Minh and Mao Zedong. But for the moment it would be prudent to leave it for posterity after, however, disputing what the Guardian noted in its obituary to Habash: "Once converted from Nasserism to armed struggle, Habash characteristically took it to those extremes which marked him ever after as one of the great patrons of international terrorism." But, yes, for a brief heady span Habash and his newly formed PFLP held the world in thrall.

Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BIISS.

## A Nandigram near Nagpur?



PRAFUL BIDWAI  
writes from New Delhi

WHAT do you do when you receive an official notice demanding that you surrender your land at a price, which is under one-hundredth its market value? What are your options when the land is your main source of livelihood, and is being acquired for a state-of-the-art airport and Special Economic Zone, which won't remotely benefit you?

The people of Shivangaon village bordering Nagpur's airport did what any sane person would do. They made representations to the government not to apply the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 for compulsory takeover. They wrote countless petitions to the leaders of the ruling coalition and the opposition.

Then, eight months ago, they launched a daily dawn-to-dusk relay hunger strike by 20 to 50 people. This was followed by a novel protest. First, all the male adults shaved their heads. Then, all the boys. Later, so did some 90

## THE PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN

Sadly, the government is completely sold on a grandiose Rs 2,581-crore project called Mihan (Maharashtra Multi-Modal International Hub Airport at Nagpur). Mihan will acquire 4,354 hectares (10,760 acres), of which 1,278 ha will be earmarked for the airport, and 2,086 ha for an SEZ, termed "free trade paradise."

women -- an extraordinary move signifying distress.

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Mihan will acquire 4,354 hectares (10,760 acres), of which 1,278 ha will be earmarked for the airport, and 2,086 ha for an SEZ, termed "free trade paradise." This includes 500 ha for information technology parks, 955 ha for manufacturing units, 60 ha for a "health city," and 200 ha for a rail-cum-road terminal.

This new city will have numerous residential complexes, hotels and entertainment facilities, and its own power plant, water supply, sewerage, and other utilities. Why, it will even have a posh school, "international" of course!

This will create a new entity called Mihanpur, which will

"twin" Nagpur, much like Secunderabad does Hyderabad, and become "India's fastest-growing cosmopolitan city."

Shivangaon is situated in Nagpur's prosperous orange belt -- one of 13 villages affected by Mihan -- and within Nagpur's municipal limits. Most of Shivangaon's land is irrigated. It grows vegetables and produces milk for the urban market.

Shivangaon's literacy exceeds 95 percent. Its people are politically savvy. They recall that the original Nagpur airport was built on "their" land, in 1937.

"We have repeatedly surrendered land -- for the Nagpur Improvement Trust, an industrial estate, a dairy, and a base of the Air Force called 'Gajraj.' Baba Daware, a protest organizer, told me in Shivangaon: 'They acquired 270 ha for Gajraj at throwaway prices. The land was never used. But the government is planning to sell it -- and profiteer behind our backs.'"

Mihan is yet to receive environmental clearance, but land

acquisition and construction, driven by lucrative contracts, have already begun. A 22,000 square-metre Central Facility Building is awaiting completion by July. So are internal roads.

Mihan will eliminate whole villages and render people landless -- without rehabilitation. In a reply under a Right to Information Act application, the authorities have clarified there is "no notification" for rehabilitation.

On January 10, the villagers took to the streets in a novel way. They marched with 7,000 buffaloes and cows to block a highway. They have, since, also gheraoed officials and engineers who were trying to fence village lands.

The people are willing to sell land, but at market value, so they can find alternative plots not too far away.

The market rate is Rs 2 to 4 crores per acre! This is confirmed by a sale deed of April 30 last, which shows that a High Court judge and his brothers

sold land for a staggering Rs 2.55 crores an acre. MADC is offering a pathetic Rs 1 to 2 lakhs.

"With that kind of money, I won't be able to buy even one-tenth of the minimum area I need for bare survival," said Babu Ambore, an elderly man sitting among a group of 60-odd protesters at Shivangaon.

What makes the Mihan land business doubly iniquitous, indeed repugnant, is the spectacular irrationality of the project. As this column has often argued, SEZs lack economic logic, drain the exchequer, and promote distorted, enclave-style growth. Most involve "sweet-heart deals."

This criticism applies strongly to the Mihan SEZ. Because it is situated right next door to Nagpur's emerging IT and industrial centres, it will act as a parasite on them.

However, even more irrational is the "hub" airport idea. This derives from the "hub-and-spokes" model of civil aviation, in which one central base caters to a number of radial routes. The model is used by many US airlines, but has no takers in India.

If particular airlines want to practise the model with Nagpur as the hub because of its central location, they're free to do so. There's no reason why the government should spend thousands of crores to create such a hub when there is no perceived

demand for it.

Nagpur airport is puny. It records just 2 percent of India's aircraft movements and only 65,301 domestic passengers a month. By contrast, Mumbai handles 1.65 million, 27 times more. Chennai, Hyderabad and Bangalore do 8 to 12 times more.

Nagpur is only half as much traffic as Guwahati, Goa or Jaipur. It's in the same league as Coimbatore or Trivandrum. In total (international + domestic) traffic, it hardly counts.

It makes no sense to increase its passenger handling capacity 18-fold to 14 million a year and its cargo handling level, at present 910 tonnes, to 870,000 tonnes, as Mihan plans to do. Nagpur airport has been making losses adding up to Rs 85 crores over four years. The Rs 2,581 crore Mihan will send the losses spiralling into the future.

Mihan will become a monument to the folly of promoting mega-projects at the expense of the people. The people will resist. In Shivangaon, hundreds have solemnly pledged that they'll commit suicide, but won't surrender.

We must sincerely hope that they win, and that Nagpur doesn't witness another Nandigram, and Vidarbha, another suicide wave -- after thousands of cotton farmers have killed themselves.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

## Can humanity still be saved?

So can humanity still be saved? Yes, we can do so, and without preventing the human species from developing and combating poverty. We need to combine growth and sustainable development, rather than seeing them as opposites. But how can this be done? We shall need more knowledge, more restraint, less matter, more concreteness, and more -- rather than less -- ethics and politics. What this adds up to is another contract, a natural contract and an ethic of the future.

KOICHIRO MATSUURA

WE have inherited a single planet. But what have we made of it? The Earth is today an endangered heritage, and the species itself is at risk.

Unesco has just published Making Peace with the Earth (Berghahn Books/Unesco Publishing) the third anthology in the 21st Century Talks series edited by Jérôme Bindé. With the collaboration of some fifteen leading scientists and experts, such as Paul Crutzen, Nicolas Hulot, Javier Pérez de Cuellar, Michel Serres, Mostafa Tolba, Asit K. Biswas or Edward O. Wilson, we offer a future-oriented analysis of the global

ecological crisis, together with some proposals for action, which are the substance of this article.

Are we fully conscious, even after the latest assessments of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Bali Conference, of the colossal challenges that humanity will have to meet, within timeframes that have already been overrun? I shall not labour the diagnosis yet again: climate change, desertification, global water crisis, deforestation, ocean degradation, air, soil, water and sea pollution, and the increasing erosion of biodiversity -- the picture is all too familiar.

The economic and geopolitical consequences of

this situation are just starting to be quantified. The cost of our war on the planet is liable to be comparable to the cost of a world war, as the Stern Review points out. There is moreover a risk that the war on nature could lead to war in general, given the growing scarcity of fossil fuels and natural resources and the 150 to 200 million eco-refugees anticipated by futures studies.

Yet what we call problems -- starting with climate change -- are more in the nature of symptoms. The real problem, in fact, is that of material growth in a finite world, which was identified back in 1972 in the Report to the Club of Rome, Limits to Growth. But in 1972, as the report's joint author Dennis

Meadows points out, "humanity was within its limits, now it is beyond them."

This is borne out by the data on the ecological footprint of the human species calculated by the team of Mathis Wackernagel. In 1972 we had reached 85 per cent of these limits. Today human resource consumption stands at about 125 per cent of the level sustainable in the long term.

So can humanity still be saved? Yes, we can do so, and without preventing the human species from developing and combating poverty. We need to combine growth and sustainable development, rather than seeing them as opposites.

But how can this be done? We shall need more knowledge, more restraint, less matter, more concreteness, and more -- rather than less -- ethics and politics. What this adds up to is another contract, a natural contract and an ethic of the future.

More knowledge: there are many who regard technology as the enemy. Yet the

sickness contains its own cure. We shall not succeed in saving the planet and its guest, the human species, unless we build "knowledge societies" that prioritise education and research.

To address the challenges of sustainable development, we must strengthen our capacity for foresight and prospective analysis. Unesco's work of compiling a global knowledge base on the environment and sustainable development goes back several decades, to a time when there was still little awareness of the problem!

In 1949, Unesco launched the first international study on arid zones; in 1970, it created the "Man and the Biosphere" (MAB) program; and its global scientific programs on the oceans and the geosciences are recognised as unique resources. The IPCC has drawn very fully on this database, which must continue to be developed and expanded in the future.

More restraint: we need to invent new modes of consumption that are less wasteful and

more efficient. For, given the increasing spread of Western modes of development and consumption to the emerging economies of the South, what other choice do we have? Three or four planet Earths would be required if the current consumption patterns of North America were to be extended to the planet as a whole.

Less matter: we shall have to "dematerialise" the economy and growth. For it is probably impossible to halt growth. We shall therefore have to reduce the consumption of natural resources and raw materials for each unit of economic production, whether it be energy, metals, minerals, water or wood.

This shift of the economy towards the immaterial has already begun with the revolution that replaces atoms by bits, which is central to the rise of the new technologies and knowledge societies. "Dematerialisation" of the economy could even favour development in the countries of the South, if the countries of the

North were to commit themselves to dematerialising a little more than the countries of the South for a period of about 50 years.

But the greatest transformation of our societies will be in the realm of attitudes and behaviour. How can we dematerialise production if we remain materialistic? How can we reduce our consumption if the consumer within us devours the citizen? Education for sustainable development will be the key to this change.

More concreteness: concrete and realistic projects, including at the international level, will be needed to bridge the gap between utopia and the tyranny of the short-term. Take the case of biodiversity. To safeguard the 34 top priority ecological zones, which cover only 2.3 per cent of the Earth's land surface but contain 50 per cent of the known species of vascular plants and 42 per cent of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, the cost is put at some \$50 billion, or less than 0.1 per cent of global

GDP.

A natural contract: if we are to cease being the Earth's parasites, we shall have to sign a new peace treaty with nature. We had the social contract, which binds human beings together, and we must now bind ourselves with nature. The idea will seem strange to some, but it follows on logically from the growth of ecological awareness.

If in future we protect endangered species, if we preserve landscapes in natural parks, we shall gradually be recognising nature as embodying genuine rights. Foresight will be an absolute precondition of the true democracy of the future. The ethic of the future, which demands that we transmit an inhabitable world to our children, will supply the link between the economy and ecology, between growth and sustainable development.

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