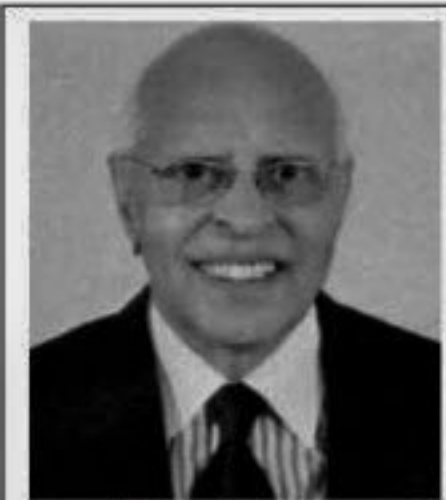


BOTTOM LINE

# India's proposed river-linking mega-project



BARRISTER  
HARUN UR RASHID

IT was reported that on February 27 that the Indian Supreme Court has ordered the government to implement the rivers-linking scheme in a "time-bound manner." The Court also directed the centre to constitute a "special committee" forthwith for inter-linking of rivers for the benefit of the entire nation.

The Bench said: "This is a matter of national benefit and progress. We see no reason to why any state should lag behind in contributing its bit to bringing the inter-linking river programme to a success, thus saving the people living in drought-prone zones from hunger and people living in flood-prone areas from the destruction caused by floods."

With the order of the apex court, the river-linking mega-project is alive again. However, chief minister of Kerala Chandy reportedly made it clear that the apex court order was not applicable to Kerala as it was "harmful" to the state's interest and it was relevant only to those states that had agreed on a river-linking scheme.

Soon after independence in 1947, Dr. K.L. Rao, an eminent engineer who was in Jawaharlal Nehru's cabinet as irrigation minister, had reportedly prepared a scheme to connect all the major rivers/lakes as part of water management.

It is noted that the river-linking project had been under discussion under successive governments, and was revived in 1980. In 2003, former Prime Minister Vajpayee constituted a task force to get the project going, and said that the scheme would "free India from the curse of floods and droughts."

Many Indian experts on water resources management expressed strong reservations on the inter-linking project on serious technical and environmental

grounds. It is reported that people in West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Assam, Karnataka and Kerala states of India came out vigorously against the project. India has three major river systems:

- The Himalayan Rivers;
- The Indus Rivers; and
- The Peninsular Rivers.

The first two are trans-boundary river systems while the peninsular river system originates in Central India.

The Indus River system consists of the Indus and five of its tributaries -- Beas, Sutlej, Chenab, Jhelum and Ravi. They pass through India and Pakistan before meeting the Arabian Sea.

The Himalayan Rivers pass through Nepal, India and Bangladesh before they meet the Bay of Bengal. In Bangladesh, the Padma/Ganges, Jamuna/Brahmaputra and Meghna are part of the Himalayan River system.

Peninsular rivers originate in Chattisgarh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh states. Out of six major peninsular rivers, four -- Mahanadi, Godavari, Krishna, and Cauvery-- flow eastwards and meet the Bay of Bengal while two -- Narmada and Tapi -- flow west and meet the Arabian Sea.

The river-linking mega project involves both the Himalayan and the Peninsular Rivers. It is a gigantic project, reportedly costing about \$1,000 billion, (about Rs.5,00,000 crore). According to the Indian Water Resources Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal, it is reported out of 30 proposed links, 16 are in the Himalayan component and 14 are in the Peninsular component.

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India officially kept Bangladesh in the dark about the river-linking scheme, and Bangladesh knew of it through the Indian media in 2003. Naturally, it caused grave concern to Bangladesh because, under the scheme of the Himalayan component, all the major sources of rivers in Bangladesh would be subject to unilateral diversion by India.

The diversion will result in severe adverse impact on Bangladesh. Water experts say the country will not get two-thirds of its dry season water from the Brahmaputra River. Agriculture and industry in the Ganges-dependant areas and parts of Meghna River will be badly hit.

The impact assessment carried out five years ago in Bangladesh presents not only a grim picture of ecological disaster in Bangladesh, including ruination of the Sundarbans, but also of damage to farmlands and inland fisheries due to saline intrusion into the country. Another media report says that at least 117 rivers in the country have died due to obstructions and withdrawal of water in their upper reaches.

It is significant to note that an Indian Professor R. Jagadiswara Rao of Sri Venkateswara University, Tripuri, of Andhra Pradesh, wrote: "Bangladesh, located in the deltaic region of the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) international river basin, is faced with multitude of water problems including extensive floods, severe water shortages and arsenic at harmful levels in ground water of Holocene formations of large spatial extent. The water problems of the country would get further aggravated if the recent attempts by the Indian govern-

ment to interlink rivers for massive transfers from north to south fructify." (Documents of the Regional Cooperation on Trans-boundary Rivers: Impact of the Indian River-Linking Project held in Dhaka on 17-19 December 2004: page 46).

When Bangladesh's serious concern was conveyed to India, the then Indian minister for water resources said on March 2005 that India would not implement river-linking projects in the Eastern Zone to avoid any disruption in relations with Bangladesh (DS, March 9, 2005).

Since then, Bangladesh-India relations have opened a new horizon of cooperative partnership and were strengthened by bilateral understandings and agreements.

The plan of linking trans-boundary Himalayan rivers (a) goes against the 2010 Bangladesh-India joint communiqué and the Framework Agreement on Cooperation and Development signed on September 6, 2011, and (b) is contrary to Article 9 of the 1996 Indo-Bangladesh Ganges Water Treaty and the 1992 UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

Furthermore, turning of the riverine country eventually into a desert constitutes an existential threat to Bangladesh and may arguably come within the extended meaning of "aggression" as described in the 1974 General Assembly Resolution 3314.

In the backdrop of the order of the Supreme Court and the Himalayan component of the scheme, what is needed is an ironclad assurance from India that the river-linking project would not involve the Himalayan Rivers.

It is argued that if India proceeds with river-linking of peninsular rivers without linking the Himalayan Rivers, the scheme will be considered as India's internal matter between the states and the centre to comply with the order of the Supreme Court.

The writer is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

## Only crippling sanctions will stop Iran

IMAGINE two men planning for years to escape from a high-security mental institution that is surrounded by 100 walls. On the night of their escape, they reach the 99th wall, and one asks the other: "Are you tired yet?" "Yes," says the second one. So they go back to their cells.

Are Iran's leaders that crazy? In the current standoff over Iran's nuclear programme, Western policy is guided by a key assumption: Iran's decision makers are rational actors, and their calculations about their nuclear programme are driven by cost-benefit analyses. By gradually increasing the costs of Iran's nuclear pursuit, Western decision-makers believe, Tehran will eventually concede.

They are only half right. Western expectations that Iran will behave rationally and agree to a compromise under the increasing pressure of sanctions ignore Iran's perspective on the costs already incurred, the price of completing the journey and the advantages of turning back. For Iran, it is far more rational at this point to accelerate the programme and reject any agreement the West would be prepared to sign.

Historical precedents demonstrate that Iran's decision-makers are not impervious to cost-benefit analysis. One such instance was the decision, by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, to agree to a cease-fire with Iraq in summer 1988.

Khomeini had previously refused to entertain such a possibility -- for him, defeating Saddam Hussein's Iraq was a religious duty. Yet he was able to reverse the religious imperative to avoid greater damage. But he could have made that calculus in 1982, when, two years into the bloody conflict, Iran had managed to re-conquer all Iranian territory that Iraq had initially captured after its surprise attack in September 1980.

Iran's leaders knew their army was woefully unprepared and under-equipped to conduct a war of conquest against a vastly superior Iraqi army. But they chose to sacrifice hundreds of thousands of young lives in pointless trench warfare reminiscent of World War I because they understood that under the cover of conflict they could consolidate the still fragile government and defeat all residual opposition to Islamic rule -- a rational choice at the time.

Khomeini ended the war when it became clear that the front was collapsing and discontent was undermining his rule. In short, letting the war go on was rational in 1982, and so was ending it in 1988; the difference was half a million dead and the fact that Iran was on its knees.

Paranoia played a part as well. The accidental downing of an Iranian commercial airliner over the Persian Gulf by an US warship convinced Iran's leaders that the United States was prepared to commit any evil

in order to guarantee Iran's defeat. That tragic episode was not intentional. Yet, in Iranian leaders' paranoid worldview, it was evidence that America was prepared to commit murder on a grand scale to defeat their country. Their paranoia was then, and remains now, integral to their cost-benefit analysis.

The Iran-Iraq war was not the only instance when Iran's leaders made the right choice after exhausting all other alternatives. In 1997, the Iranian regime realised that murdering its exiled opponents abroad was counterproductive. But Iran reversed itself only after its direct responsibility in a chain of brazen murders across Europe could no longer be denied.

After a German court indicted Iranian hit men and Iran's then intelligence minister, Ali Fallahian, for a 1992 massacre at a Berlin restaurant, European countries withdrew ambassadors from Tehran and severed diplomatic relations. Iran, again, was on its knees. Only then did a sensible decision occur.

What lessons can one learn from these precedents?

In their long and labyrinthine path to nuclear weapons, Iran's leaders have gone as far as the men who reached the 99th wall. No matter how hard, painful and difficult the last jump may be, it is but a stroll compared with the arduous journey undertaken by Iran in its nearly 30-year pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Why, then, should anyone expect Iran to renounce its aspirations now, when the goal appears within reach? And why would the prospect of some economic hardship alone persuade Iran to turn around, when the end of its journey is in sight?

As tough as the current sanctions against Iran are, they will work only if Iran is brought to its knees once again. The pain inflicted must be far greater for the country to see backtracking as preferable. Iran is a rational actor; and it cannot be dissuaded at this point, barring extreme measures.

If Western nations wish to avoid a military confrontation in the Persian Gulf and prevent a nuclear Iran, they must adopt crippling sanctions that will bring Iran's economy to the brink of collapse. That means a complete UN-imposed oil embargo enforced by a naval blockade, as well as total diplomatic isolation. And they must warn Iran that if it tries to jump the last wall, the West is willing and capable of inflicting devastating harm.

Otherwise, Iran's leaders will rationally conclude that it is better to make a run for their money rather than stop at the last wall and pull back.

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## REMEMBERING JALAL

# Look homeward, angel

A.K.H. MORSHED

I first saw Jalal on a cold November afternoon in Cambridge as he stepped out of his maroon Saab outside South Station. He was wearing a check tartan shirt and summer slacks. Just looking at him gave me the shivers. I felt that I should reprove him for braving the cold with such non-chalance. But his boyish smile which was to become so endearingly familiar disarmed me. We then went to a fish restaurant for lunch. Though the ice was broken, I did not begin even to suspect the scale and depth of the man or his brilliant record of achievements.

In the intervening years when Fazeela took leave from her job as research scientist to nurse her mother Jalal stood by her providing moral and material support. Likewise, she stood by him in his time of need. Their close understanding and mutual devotion touched our hearts. They shared the happy times together, they made each other laugh and were so good together and for each other. Theirs was a marriage truly made in heaven.

It was much much later, indeed six years down the road, that for a few precious weeks Fazeela and he stayed with us and we saw him as it were in the round. Everything about him exercised a fascination difficult to explain -- his conversation, his work habits, his comings and goings, even his food preferences, seemed to be invested with charm even glamour. His working day seemed to possess an infinite elasticity; he was seemingly able to fit in any number of appointments, errands, filial and family obligations with uncompromising stints of writing and study.

Early in the morning he would field a transcontinental conference call. At breakfast when we pressed the traditional Bangla morning meal he would remind us that his American breakfast consisted of a chocolate coated energy bar and a cup of coffee. Then he was off on his hybrid bike to University come rain or shine. He found time to clear his father's office of old papers gathering dust, redecorate the flat he and Fazeela planned to stay in, rush a sick relative to hospital, break in his research assistants and then put in "three clear hours" of writing. Not to mention fitting in an impromptu friendly soccer match in Gulshan and carefully monitoring the daily sometimes hourly progress of the Bengal Tigers, the cricket team to which he was fanatically devoted. Not too mention the appearances in talk-shows and key note speakers in international seminars. But we did not really get a measure of the man until after he no longer was with us. The wealth of his

academic associations, the list of his scholarly papers, the articles on policy and international relations, impressive as these were, set in relief and brought to vivid life by the unprecedented outpourings of grief and expressions of loss from his students, faculty and associates and a wide spectrum of civil society both in Bangladesh and in the US. His true measure is the indelible mark his life and alas his death had left on countless numbers. He changed and lit up lives.

Children gravitated mysteriously to him. If he entered a room where our grandchildren were present they would seize his hand and lead him to their play. If he was seated they would perch on his knee or clamber onto to his back. He shared their secret prattle. It was as if they were saying loud and clear you are one of us.

His monograph India's Open-Economy Policy stands as a remarkable memorial to Jalal's scholarly



Dr. Jalal Alamgir

vision, his political insight and grasp of the dynamics of South Asia. The book is memorable on several counts. First, it is firmly set in the rigorous canon of academic scholarship. It is thus free from the stereotypes and hang-ups of conventional Bangladesh discourse on India. For those of us involved in the early formative days of Indo-Bangladesh relations the book makes an important contribution to a better understanding of the vastness and complexity of India. The book's focus is also unusual in that it is political economy in a strategic perspective. It covers a period of rapid transformation and expansion of the Indian economy with gigantic changes still in progress. Jalal's outlook is fresh and catholic representative of a new generation. The book well serves the needs of policy establishments but serves equally well as text for graduate studies in International Relations. It provides a well researched context for framing policy. It is a model for Bangladesh scholars.

What will we remember Jalal for? His versatile intellect, his wide ranging scholarship, his integrity, his unfailing courage as he and Fazeela battled adversity, his wit untainted by malice, his width of sympathy and understanding, his gift of empathy, the power of clear expression, the statuesque profile like a sketch of the Florentine David, all of these and more. But above all it was a certain vulnerable innocence that marked all his actions, gestures, and thoughts. So ultimately the Citadel of Innocence claimed him as one of its own, and where he stands shining and invincible. Look homeward angel.

Dr. Jalal Alamgir Associate Professor University of Massachusetts, Boston died on December 3, 2011. His Memorial Service will be held at the University on March 7, 2012. He was married to Fazeela Morshed, the daughter of the writer, A. K. H. Morshed.