

# Pakistan's unending agony

## Army must not undermine democracy

IF proof were needed of the immense damage Imran Khan has been causing to Pakistan's fragile democracy, one has only to observe the anguish with which his party colleague Javed Hashmi has noted the manner in which he let his followers loose on Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's residence in Islamabad. Three people have died and hundreds have been injured as a result of Khan's brashness. Khan now charges Sharif with murder when the fact is that it was he who encouraged his followers to create terror on the streets.

Imran Khan and the cleric Tahirul Qadri have created the perfect conditions for democracy to go through a fresh battering in Pakistan. The army has come to the forefront, suggesting that force must not be used in the current crisis. That in effect is an undermining of the country's elected government. Nothing has been said about the chaos Khan and Qadri, in clear violation of the constitution and the law, have been causing. The future, one could argue, is thus fraught with dire consequences. Sharif is now a much weakened prime minister and Pakistan is haemorrhaging yet once again. The very demand that Sharif resign despite the fair and free elections which brought him to power fifteen months ago is a harkening back to times when politicians unable to win public support have looked to the army to overturn the popular mandate.

It should now be the job of the army to uphold the constitution. A weak and battered democracy is a recipe for danger. And demagogues like Imran Khan and Tahirul Qadri can only push Pakistan over the precipice yet once again. The law must deal with these two rabble-rousers firmly and decisively.

# Repatriation of Rohingyas

## Myanmar's positive attitude welcome

THE 8th round of foreign office consultations between Bangladesh and Myanmar has yielded some good results. The Rohingya issue, particularly expatriation of Rohingya refugees, who have been bearing tremendous hardship in refugee camps, over two decades in some cases, has been the major stumbling block in the improvement of our bilateral relationship. We are happy to note that a definite progress has been made by Myanmar's fresh commitment to start the process of repatriation of the stranded Rohingya refugees after almost a decade of the process being stalled. This is very positive move towards improving the bilateral ties between Dhaka and Yangon.

We would hope that all the bureaucratic formalities and the necessary groundwork would be completed in due time for the repatriation to start as soon as possible. However, this is only a part of the refugee issue. Apart from the registered 32 000 Myanmar refugees in Bangladesh now there are several hundred thousand of unregistered refugees here whose repatriation issue should also be addressed by Myanmar.

While we would hope that a comprehensive agreement in this regard would eventuate and that all Myanmar refugees in Bangladesh would soon be able to go back to their own country, it is the root cause of their seeking succour in our territory that Myanmar should address in earnest. Marginalisation of the Rohingyas and in fact the specter of their being disenfranchised as a citizen of Myanmar looms large in the minds of the Arakanese Muslims or Rohingyas. This is as important as the many other important aspects of our bilateral relationship.

# The neglected citizens of Myanmar

## Derek Tonkin

FAKHRUDDIN Ahmed rightly draws attention to the vital need to make Rohingya Muslims full citizens of Myanmar.

It is worth recalling that, under the terms of the Indo-Burma Agreement of October 1941, which was never ratified because of the Japanese invasion of Burma two months later, all Indians of whatever religion resident in the country at the time were either accorded the right of full "domicile" if they were born and bred in Burma, or allowed to remain as "privileged immigrants" if they had been in Burma for at least seven years, or permitted to remain indefinitely unless they left Burma "for any period".

The 1931 Census (under British rule) showed that of 186,327 "Chittagonians" enumerated in Arakan, 156,833 or 84% were indeed "born in" Burma, and this didn't include other Bengalis from wider afield in Bengal who like the Chittagonians had migrated into Burma after 1870. The British enumerated separately today's "Rohingya" (a term not used by the British) as indigenous (pre-1823) "Arakan Muslims" of whom there were 51,612. Also included were 117,151 Zerbaidi Muslims of mixed race, though mostly not pre-1823. But there were as well smaller numbers of undoubtedly indigenous Muslim communities like the Kaman and Myedu.

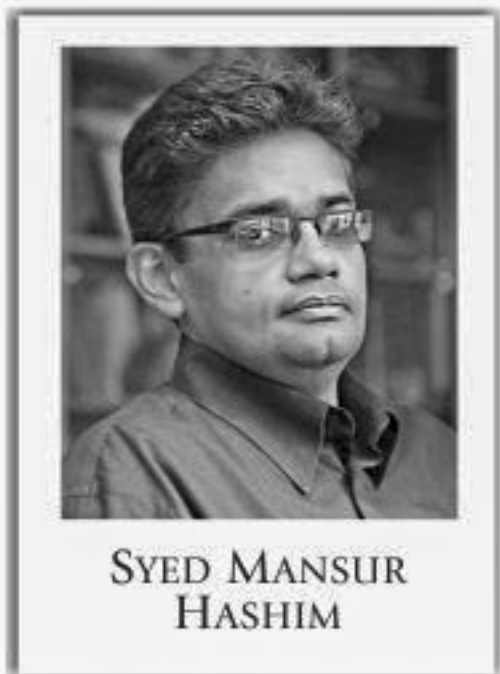
What this rich mosaic of Muslim residents of Arakan over the years shows however is that by the outbreak of the Second World War a majority were in fact migrants from Bengal after 1870. If we were to enquire as to their race, it must be that most Rohingyas today are Bengali by origin, even if they were those forcibly transported as slaves to Arakan in the 17th Century. But if we regard "race" as a static DNA-oriented concept, the dynamic ethnicity of Arakan Muslims today must be as they have identified themselves, that is, as "Rohingyas" based on their culture, dialect, environment and all those other attributes which create ethnicity.

The difficulty which the Rohingyas of today have met is that they need to deny their Bengali roots in order to qualify under the restrictive 1982 Citizenship Act. This denial leads them unfortunately to assert that they have no historical links at all with Bengal, which clearly is not the case.

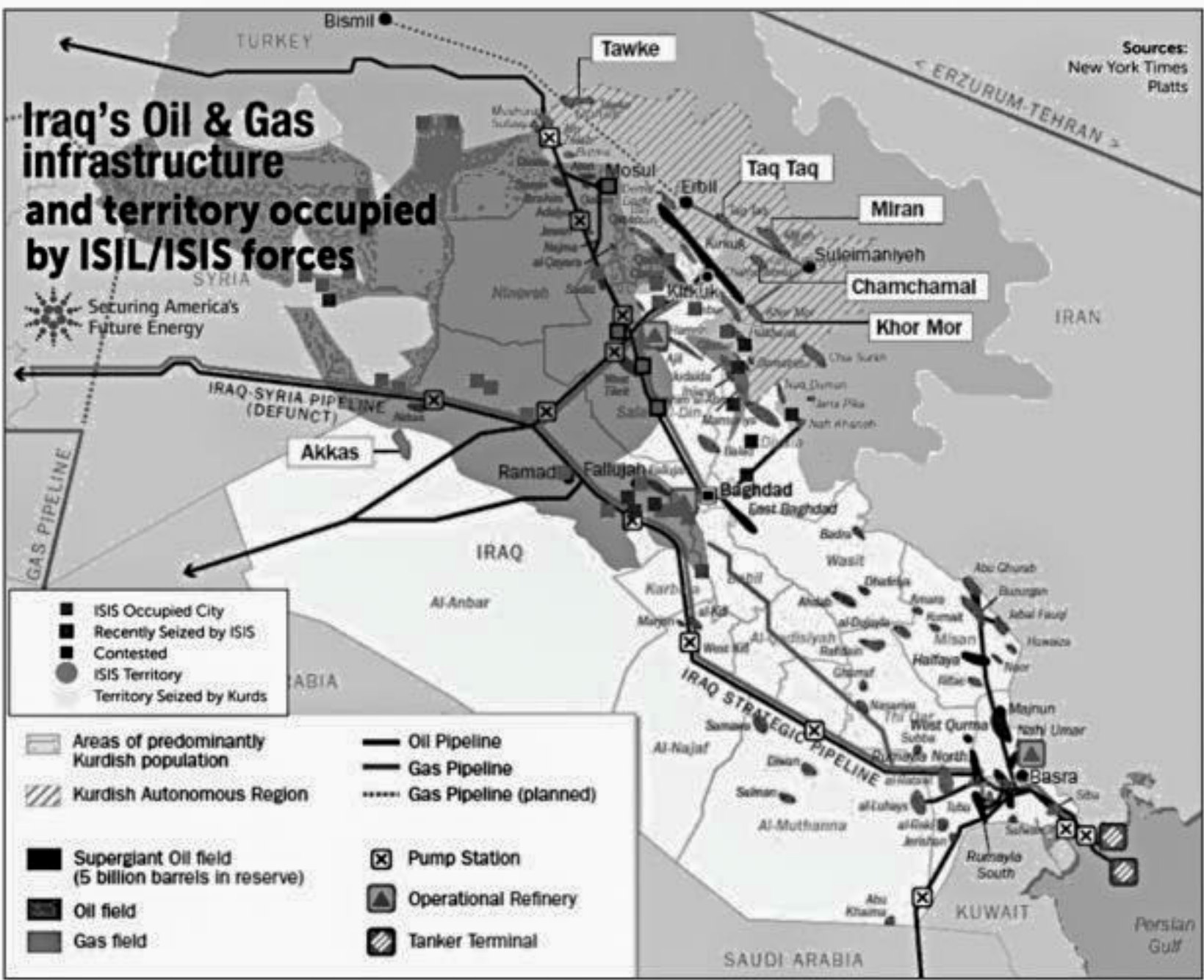
Their claim to Myanmar nationality should be based on their status when Burma achieved independence, which was as British Subjects with full rights of legal residence in the country.

The writer is Editor, Network Myanmar

# ISIL's soft economic underbelly



THE last national census in Iraq was conducted in 1987, i.e. nearly 20 years ago. However, it is estimated that anywhere up to 35% of Iraq's people now live under ISIL control which comes to around 10-13 million people. While ISIL controls up to 40% of Iraq's landmass, it control barely 11% of gas and oil reserves and since its takeover there have been no exports of oil. That is because these reserves are underexploited. It will require massive amounts of exter-



*Whilst ISIL may get requisite military aid from its international backers, the economy is in a mess. Without employment opportunities or social welfare programmes to fall back upon, today's restive civilian populace may turn resentful in the very near future.*

nal investment and time to fully develop the potential oil fields. Given the current fluid situation on the ground, it is highly unlikely that such a situation will come to pass anytime soon.

According to what has been published in Western media, dams, one in Mosul and the other on the banks of the Euphrates River are in trouble. Hydroelectricity produced by these dams is significantly reduced due to a myriad of factors. The Mosul dam was faulty in design and apparently still stands due to daily infusions of cement. The Haditha dam on the banks of the Euphrates River suffers from reduced water flow. The end result of reduced production of electricity is that refrigerators and air conditioners do not run as needed and that opens up the possibility of a looming public health crisis in a widespread area that sees the mercury hitting temperatures up to 40 degrees Celsius.

One can contend that given the fact that agriculture is a

major activity in the area controlled by ISIL, decreasing agriculture production can only ferment resentment. Again, going by what has been reported in international media, we find that unemployment in the agriculture sector in ISIL-territory ranges anywhere between 30-40% against a national average of about 18%. One cannot forget that economic hardship, particularly repeated crop failures and mismanagement of resource allocation including irrigation, was a major catalyst for rural migration to the cities in Syria just prior to the civil war. It was a pivotal factor in the Syrian civil war where city utility services and economy failed to cater to a booming population fuelling resentment against the regime.

There are other factors at play in Iraq that dictate the irrigation scenario in these areas. Control over Euphrates River lies beyond ISIL. It originates in Turkey and flows through Syria before coming to Iraq. Both these countries have actively diverted water resources for their own needs and with ISIL at odds with Turkey, it is impossible to predict how much more "diversification" or obstruction of natural water flow will take place in the future. A significant portion of the civilian populace in ISIL-controlled territory was already dependent on government food aid. It now remains to be seen whether the new rulers will be able to sustain this primarily import-based programme. While we have read and heard a lot about the huge stash of cash that ISIL has gotten its hands on from the banking system, anywhere up to US\$1billion, that is not much cash. It isn't much when one takes into account the payroll of government employees and retired persons' pensions that have to be paid. And it is not just salaries to the bureaucracy, but the fighters have to be paid too.

Fighting a war is one thing. Running an economy is quite another. Revenues are needed to meet expenditures. In a constantly changing scenario where ISIL forces are fighting on two fronts, one against government forces in Baghdad and the other against the Kurds and now with the added dimension of US air strikes, arsenals need to be constantly replenished. Despite having acquired significant military hardware from the retreating Iraqi army, these pieces of equipment will require maintenance and they will require ammunition. All these require cash. The much-vaunted \$1billion will evaporate in no time. Whilst ISIL may get military and financial aid from its international backers, the economy is in a mess.

The bulk of its existing cash roll now includes selling oil from existing oil fields to middlemen in an international "grey market", donations, hostage taking and ransom, extortion of existing business and minority communities for a "right to stay". Unfortunately, that will not be enough. Without employment opportunities or social welfare programmes to fall back upon, today's relatively restive civilian populace may turn resentful in the very near future. Unless, the new rulers can find the expertise and funds to develop the underdeveloped but substantial mineral resources including gas and oil fields to pay for the import of essentials, and manage to work out a workable water sharing treaty with its neighbours, ISIL may soon find itself between a rock and a hard place.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

# Securing Pakistan's democracy?

PETER DRYSDALE

THE two-week-old political crisis in Pakistan took a sharp new turn over the past few days as the military leader, General Raheel Sharif, positioned to mediate the stand-off between Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and opposition demonstrators on the streets of Islamabad, led by cleric Mohammed Tahir-ul-Qadri and his ally cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan. Whether Prime Minister Sharif or Tahir-ul-Qadri and Khan initiated the move to military mediation and how the military has played into the development of the crisis itself are questions that are at this stage difficult to determine. But senior politicians and constitutional experts have denounced it as a national disgrace that reflects badly on the commitment to genuine democracy across the political spectrum.

It's little more than a year since Prime Minister Sharif was swept to victory in the first democratic change of government in the country's history.

This success, despite a violent campaign by religious extremists to derail the election, saw a 60 per cent voter turnout and a result that reflected disenchantment with the ousted Pakistan People's Party and its corruption and poor economic management, within the framework of the growing strength of the courts and constitutional process.

Sharif, a self-made billionaire in the steel industry, promised a more market-oriented and less regulated economy than that of Pakistan under President Asif Ali Zardari, as well as the prospect of a pick-up in economic growth. But judged on his previous stint in power, it was unwise to expect any marked diminution in corruption or 'money politics' from Sharif, or restraint in the victor-takes-all approach to political conduct. Far from providing good governance, security of life and property and basic necessities, Prime Minister Sharif and his political and blood brother Shahbaz Sharif, chief minister of the most populous state of Punjab, have focused on high visibility projects and overseen the descent of the economy into the inflation and electricity shortages which characterised the previous Zardari regime, although capital flows have risen and inflation fallen somewhat. Broken commitments on releasing former general Pervez Musharraf and public condemnation of the former army chief by Sharif's allies have also incensed the rank and file of the army.

Two things triggered the present crisis. Imram Khan's belief that there was widespread vote-rigging in the 2013 elections, explains Sajjad Ashraf, led to him to call for an audit of four constituencies where his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party lost. Instead, Sharif offered an audit of four constituencies where PTI candidates won. Fearing a meltdown in his Muslim League, Sharif stonewalled, leading Khan to up the ante with the campaign for Sharif's resignation.

Tahir-ul-Qadri's joining the campaign, Ashraf goes on, was triggered by the 'attack on his Lahore offices by the Punjab Police killing 14 and injuring 90 on 14 June. For over two months the Pakistan Awami Tehrik's attempt to get the case

registered against the 23 accused — which includes the Sharif brothers and several of their henchmen — has been thwarted despite a court order... Qadri seeks justice for the victims among other demands for the cleansing of the political system'.

As Syed Mahmud Ali points out in this week's lead 'Pakistan's history has been marked by turbulence, as elected politicians vie with permanent bureaucracies — uniformed and civilian — for power and influence. Abysmal governance, rigged elections, violent protests, military coups and separatist insurgencies have plagued national progress. Although democracy has been a useful framework for both governance and power transfers (even by military rulers), popular consent and aspirations have shaped policy only marginally'.

Ali argues that the outpouring of frustration at the base of the present impasse is symbolic of Pakistan's political systemic dysfunction. The state remains divided along myriad fissures, and the construction of a coherent, overarching national identity is a national task that is still far from complete. Punjab's overbearing political, military, demographic and economic dominance is not mediated by political power-sharing among the stakeholders, a condition that, in 1971, saw East Pakistan's secession and the formation of the state of Bangladesh. The non-Punjabi provinces are yet to be 'tamed' within the state.

Against this backdrop, Ali argues, 'Nawaz Sharif's landslide victory in May 2013 did nothing to resolve the fundamental malaise afflicting Pakistan'.

Civilian governments have in recent times sought to weaken the army's role in critical areas of foreign policy and security. Though some say that the army is behind the current unrest, the generals do not seem intent on taking over a direct administrative role. But if the political protagonists cannot be brought to resolve their differences through processes that show respect for democratic process, the military was unlikely to watch from the sidelines.

As Ashraf says, 'democracy is not just numbers — it is about accountability, transparency, effectiveness and justice in governance, all of which are strikingly absent from Sharif's agenda'.

That is why Ali sees these protests as far more important than their forerunners. They could, he concludes, 'represent the arrival of a perfect storm', with young people comprising half the population, women increasingly engaged in political activism, rising unemployment and deep economic vulnerability.

An awesome responsibility now falls upon the Pakistani military in midwifing the birth of a non-martial, non-corrupt, democratic political culture, since that is what is critical to confidence in investing both domestic and foreign money in the nation's future and breaking with a 'tradition of violent agitation and rough justice, interrupted only by corrupt passivity'.

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## Migrant workers' safety

According to one estimate, 74 lakh people have gone outside Bangladesh in search of livelihood. They are sending remittance which is keeping the economy in good shape. They are toiling under the hot sun of the Middle East so that their near ones may live happily in Bangladesh. They face many problems in their day-to-day life. Many even lost their lives because of hostile working conditions. What is the government doing to ensure safety of the workers?

Zabed Wali  
On e-mail

## Clueless disappearance victims' families

This is horrific news that people who are being picked up by the law enforcers are never returning home again. Imagine the agony of those hapless mothers, fathers, wives, sisters and brothers who keep waiting for the news of their loved ones. When the family members ask the law enforcers the whereabouts of the missing persons, they can't give any answer. The least the law enforcers can do is to tell the



truth. Families of these unfortunate disappeared people have at least the right to know whether their loved ones are dead or alive. How intolerable it is for the families and what anguish they go through! We hope the authorities will tell us the truth. We also hope that this type of disappearance will not happen again.

Humayun Hyder  
On e-mail

## Rescuing stolen baby: Media, Rab set example

The recent baby stealing from DMCH has created much uproar among public. The media has covered the news with great enthusiasm and people were hoping for its rescue. Finally, after a week into the stealing, Rab members have rescued the baby. Along with the parents of the baby, the people of the country are relieved and happy. Expressing utter dismay over the incident at DMCH, the High Court on August 27 ordered a judicial inquiry into the entire incident relating to the stealing of the baby from the hospital on August 21. The parents of the twins expressed their gratitude to the media. The baby's father said he want one of his sons to be a journalist and another a Rab member in the future.

This incident proves that the media can play a very important role in making our society a better place. It also proves that the law enforcement agencies can be people-friendly if they are willing. Thanks to the media and the Rab members for their effort. Now we want to see stringent punishment to the perpetrators.

Hasna Begum  
Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh

## Comments on news report, "Family points finger at rival religious group," published on August 29, 2014

Sayed Rahman

Such kind of indication before the probe may hamper the investigation.

## "Three rivers too hungry" (August 29, 2014)

Sayed Rahman

If we continuously hamper the natural flow of the rivers, they will be much more cruel and hungry.

Md. Abu Sufian

The government should adopt long term plan to reduce river erosion.

## "Dhaka division home to highest number of poor" (August 28, 2014)

Sayed Rahman

Is it the real scenario? I think whatever happens in Dhaka or Chittagong, it comes to limelight very fast. Besides, the rural people are not aware of the value of the statistical report. I am from village. I know there are lots of people who are deprived of basic needs every day.

Dev Saha

Bangladesh has simply become a small boat for a huge number of people. Desperate poors are increasingly moving towards the neon lit cities for better future and life but can big cities meet their expectations and demands? I am afraid the answer is negative unless these people are mobilised to get into the working force and yield something great from their collective labour.

Zakaria Hossain

What a shocking news! 1.59 crore people are living in poverty in Dhaka!