

# Pakistan still in denial and self-deceit

**SHAMSHER M. CHOWDHURY, Bir Bikram**  
 It was a day that shall remain indelible in my memory for as long as I live. It happened in Chittagong on April 11, 1971. Having already revolted against the Pakistan government on the midnight of March 25 in the face of the murderous assault by its army on the freedom loving people of Bangladesh, I, then a lieutenant in the army, was engaged on that day in fierce defence of the strategically located Kalurghat Bridge on the Chittagong-Cox's Bazar road. The 25 Frontier Force Regiment of the Pakistan army was advancing towards the bridge, aiming to capture it. We, the freedom fighters, were vastly outnumbered and seriously ill-equipped. But we were determined to resist the advance for as long as we could. In the height of the battle, I was hit; a bullet from the advancing Pakistan army unit pierced my body as it entered through my left thigh, passed through the lower abdomen and shattered my right hip. Seriously wounded and bleeding profusely, I was taken prisoner by the Pakistanis.



PHOTO: RASHID TALUKDER/DR/IK/MAJORITY WORLD

This story is not about the battle. Nor is it about my injury. It is about genocide, about crimes against humanity. As I was placed on a Pakistani military jeep, my hands tied and my body in agonising pain, I was made to witness a spine chilling act of brutality that could have served as a script for Serbia's Milosevic's ethnic cleansing pogrom of Bosnian Muslims. Close to the scene of the battle was a cluster of mud huts whose occupants had provided us support and encouragement leading up to that fateful day. From my position as a captive, I saw members of the Pakistan army drag out the male members from the huts, tie them up with their hands behind their backs, make them sit down in a circle with their back towards each other and then proceed to shoot them in their head at close range. One by one, their heads rolled to a side in death as each bullet hit its desired target, blood sprouting from each shattered skull. What was even

crueler was that just before carrying out this act of collective execution, the Pakistani soldiers asked the women, folk, wives, mothers, sisters and daughters, to stand there and watch the whole gruesome act in silence. They were not even allowed to shed tears for their dead. From where I was in the military jeep, I witnessed the whole episode as it unfolded right before my very own eyes; the pang in my heart accentuated the pain from my battle wound. This was crime against humanity in full display, planned with precision and executed in cold blood. The victims were unarmed

civilians whose only wish was freedom from tyranny and liberation from occupation. Those were the early days of the Liberation War. During the 262 days of Pakistan's military occupation of Bangladesh in 1971, such scenes of genocidal acts were played out over and over again in towns and villages all over Bangladesh, resulting in deaths of thousands, hundreds of thousands. Many of these gruesome killings have been recorded in numerous books and publications, some even by Pakistanis themselves. And yet, more than four decades on, the present day government

of Pakistan has unabashedly and deliberately chosen to deny history. This is not just shameful; it is infinitely more immoral. By its denial of the crimes against humanity committed by its military in Bangladesh in 1971, the Islamabad government has demonstrated brazen arrogance and utter ignorance. It seems that the Pakistan Foreign Office has not even bothered to check existing records before taking such a self-defeating step. If it did, it would have seen that at the Tripartite Agreement reached between the governments of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan in New Delhi in April

1974, Pakistan's then Minister of State for Defence and Foreign Affairs Mr. Aziz Ahmed, while accepting the acts of genocide and crimes against humanity committed by the Pakistan military, said: "his government condemned and deeply regretted any crimes that may have been committed". The same agreement also states "that following recognition (of Bangladesh by Pakistan), the Prime Minister of Pakistan had declared that he would visit Bangladesh in response to the invitation of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh and appealed to the people of Bangladesh to forgive and forget the mistakes of the past. The latest act by the Government of Pakistan, therefore, is a denial of the letter and spirit of the Tripartite Agreement to which Pakistan is also a signatory. One also watched in utter disbelief as members of Pakistan's Parliament spoke in virtual defence of the crimes against humanity committed by their military in 1971. When one heard Imran Khan do the same, it was clear that his prowess in the cricket field has not accompanied him to the field of politics and has deserted him completely when it came to the killing fields of Bangladesh. It may be recalled that relations between states are fundamentally relations between the people of the states. By denying the acts of crime against humanity, the Pakistan government has shown total disregard for the sentiments of the people of Bangladesh. In the process, it has risked fundamentally disfiguring the form and substance of the ties between the two states. The one redeeming part in this whole episode is that there are those in Pakistan like Asma Jahangir, Ayesha Siddiqui, and countless others, who have not hesitated to express their disgust at the action of their government. They find Islamabad out of touch with reality. Clearly, neither Pakistan's lawmakers nor its government are in sync with the people of Pakistan. If anything, the disconnect is palpable. We all know what Islamabad did. The question that warrants a serious search for an answer is why and why now? The writer is a decorated freedom fighter and a former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh.

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## ONE YEAR AFTER THE OIL SPILL Protecting Sundarbans: How Serious Are We?

Md. Ashraf Haque

ONE year ago this day (December 9), an oil tanker, OT Southern Star 7, carrying 357,000 litres of furnace oil collided with another tanker MT Total and sank in the Shela River in the Sundarbans. It sent a chill down the spines of not only Bangladeshis, but also the people of the entire world who care about natural forests and biodiversity. There was no significant action for the first three days. Consequent media coverage prompted the government to take more serious actions. From the fourth day, the owner of the oil shipment, Padma Oil Company, a state owned company declared that it would buy back the oil that spread over the river. Thereafter, the villagers of Joymoni, an adjacent village near Chandpai range office in the Sundarbans jumped into action and with their bare hands and household utensils, collected around 60,000 litres of furnace oil, easing the situation a little. A year after the chilling event, how safe are the Sundarbans? This writer travelled to a dozen or so rivers and canals in the south, east and west wildlife sanctuaries of the Sundarbans in the last four months, spoke to hundreds of villagers and traditional resource users living around the forest and many forest officials to find the answer. NAVIGATION THROUGH THE SUNDARBANS Shipping through the Shela River in the Sundarbans started due to the siltation and loss of navigability of the Mongla-Ghoshialkhali channel that connects the Mongla port to the rest of the country. Of course the Pashur River itself, on which the Mongla port is situated, also goes through the Sundarbans. And there are other rivers like Arpangasia in Satkhira which big

ships ply on under the auspices of Indo-Bangladesh water transit protocol. This always puts the forest in danger because of the noise of engines, leakage of oil and other pollutants from the ships, littering by sailors - not to mention spillage from a sunken ship. In last one and half year alone, at least seven vessels carrying oil, fertiliser, coal and fly-ash capsized inside the forest. When this article was being written, a cargo vessel full of coal was underwater in Pashur River off the huge 250-foot high Silo in Joymoni for more than a month waiting to be rescued, while another vessel carrying fly-ash was being rescued. LAND USE NEAR THE SUNDARBANS The proposed Rampal coal-based power plant, located just 4 km away from the Sundarbans Ecologically Critical Area (ECA), is feared by environmentalists to become a big threat to the bio diversity of the Sundarbans and agro-diversity in adjacent areas. On top of that, people are wilfully selling their lands to industrialists for inflated prices. In the near future, almost one hundred industrial installations are going to be built from Digray to Joymoni along the 28 km stretch of the Pashur River. The land is being developed with the sand from Pashur. In many cases, the job is done free of cost as the Mongla port authority, who undertakes the dredging, needs a place to put that sand. In recent months, the dredging of the Mongla-Ghoshialkhali channel has facilitated such developments in the eastern part of Rampal as well. The Mongla EPZ is already located beside the channel, and there will be new industrial plots there soon. So in the near future, many of these factories will discharge their wastes into the channel and the Pashur River,

which will be carried to the forest by tides. According to a latest document by the Department of Environment, 149 installations already pose threats to the Sundarbans (New Age, December 1, 2015). RESTRICTIONS ON USE OF TRADITIONAL RESOURCES While industrial activities are on the rise around the Sundarbans, the forest department is imposing more restrictions on traditional resource users like fishermen and others who collect honey, Nypa-palm leaves, etc. From the middle of this year, no engine boats are allowed to enter the forest for fishing purpose. This measure was taken to prevent poachers from escaping the site in haste. Many fishing boat owners removed the engines from their boats and continue fishing, thereby obviously damaging the productivity. Others started to go to other places outside the forest for the same purpose. Many fishermen have expressed concern about the impending loss of livelihood. If this continues, it is feared that many of these fishers might turn into poachers and robbers. EQUIPPING FORESTERS AGAINST ROBBERIES AND POACHERS When closing the Sundarbans for traditional resource users, forest department show cause that if they are barred from the forest, there will be no robbing or kidnapping, and hunting and poaching will stop since it is evident that armed robbers are mainly responsible for these crimes. While robbers are the real concern for the forest department, it often leaves foresters with no means to fight the threat. Puspakathi is a remote forest patrol station located near the Bay of Bengal about 60 km south of

Shyamnagar, Satkhira. There is no mobile phone network, and there are only four forest guards in this station. They have no guns, as robbers can attack them and take away their guns. The wireless device has been out of order for a long time. Seeking anonymity, a forest guard told us that the robbers often spend the night at the camp quarters! Even the forest guards with guns are often helpless. A guard from Chandpai range told us a story about the time another guard pulled the trigger six times, but none of the rounds actually fired. Our guard himself was equipped with an Indian built semi-automatic rifle that was actually used during the War of Liberation in 1971. We entered a narrow canal near the Patkoshta station when we heard the chopping sound from ahead. The guards told the boatman to reverse the course, so we could avoid facing an armed group of possible robbers or loggers! Forest offices are not even supplied with necessary fuel; the officials are told to "manage" the fuel. No wonder that the forest officials "manage" the money through illicit means. With the Royal Bengal Tigers' number dwindling to a mere 106, it is clear that the government needs to remain vigilant over Sundarbans. Increasing the capacity of the forest department and engaging the people living around the forest is very important. Restricting traditional resource collectors' access to the forest may become counterproductive. A wrong policy can lead to the extinction of the most gorgeous animal left in the land. Not to mention, without the tiger, there will be no Sundarbans! The writer is a Research Associate with Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD). Email: TanimAshraf@live.com

**A WORD A DAY**

**GEOPONICS**  
[dʒi:ə(v) pɒnɪks]  
The science of agriculture

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

ACROSS  
 1 Statement of belief  
 6 Narrow cut  
 10 Turn red, maybe  
 11 Book back  
 12 Party crasher of fiction  
 13 Covets  
 14 White House power  
 15 Oasis setting  
 16 Hubbub  
 17 Lyricist Gershwin  
 18 Singer Orbison  
 19 Lock parts  
 22 Ring out  
 23 Dune makeup  
 26 Gang fighters  
 29 Deli choice  
 32 Put into words  
 33 Complete  
 34 Old fridge  
 36 Bee's home  
 37 Private teacher  
 38 Meted out  
 39 Bologna setting  
 40 "Maleficent" star  
 41 Relate

DOWN  
 1 Tie  
 2 Irritated  
 3 Perfect example  
 4 1920s art style  
 5 Undivided  
 6 Relaxing resorts  
 7 Cruise vessel  
 8 Lead-in  
 9 Irritable  
 11 Totally trusts  
 15 Rap's Dr. --  
 17 Unreal  
 20 Tavern  
 21 Mineo of movies  
 24 Singer Aaron  
 25 Outdoor theater  
 27 Upper limit  
 28 Ranked, in tennis  
 29 Words to the maestro  
 30 Cutting  
 31 Rock genre  
 35 Weevil target  
 36 Court ring  
 38 Radio VIPs

**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

Dear General Haltrack:  
I am a ten-year-old boy. I want to be in the army. How old were you when you first wanted to be a soldier?

Did you always want to be a great General and a military hero? How old were you when you knew you would never make it? Tommy

**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott

I CAN'T BELIEVE I HAD TO WORK THIS WHOLE WEEKEND.  
I KNOW.  
BUT AT LEAST IT DOESN'T HAPPEN TOO OFTEN!  
MAYBE NOT, BUT WORKING SEVEN DAYS A WEEK IS NO FUN.  
I CAN ONLY IMAGINE...

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

V	E	S	T	S	F	R	O	S	T		
E	M	C	E	E	R	A	L	P	H		
G	O	N	A	B	E	N	D	E	R		
A	T	T	M	O	M	A	O				
S	E	S	S	I	O	N	A	R	A		
					P	E	T	D	I	E	T
R	E	C	U	R		B	U	D	D	Y	
E	L	A	N		J	A	B				
P	E	R		C	O	N	S	O	L	E	
A	C	T		H	I	D		L	A	X	
S	T	O	P	O	N	A	D	I	M	E	
T	R	O	O	P		N	E	V	E	R	
S	A	N	D	S		A	L	E	R	T	