

# International Day of Sport for Development and Peace

## Let the ping be heard



**A**MID a Cold War with no end in sight and another war still raging in Vietnam, on April 12, 1972, a Pan Am flight landed in Detroit, Michigan, with China's world

champion table tennis team onboard for a series of matches around the country. It had all started a year earlier when the US team got a surprise invitation to visit the People's Republic of China. *Time* magazine called it "The ping heard round the world." Within a year of China's goodwill gesture, later popularly known as "ping-pong diplomacy," US President Nixon made a historic trip to the country, ending two decades of frosty relations between the two giants.

In 2009, China and Japan came up with their own version of sport-turned-into-statecraft when Chinese President Hu Jintao played against a Japanese teenager during the first visit of a Chinese president to Japan in 10 years - a visit Hu called "a warm spring."

Sports have thus long been idealised as a way to heal wounds, mend fences, and rise above differences among cultures and nations. In light of this potential, April 6 has been declared as the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace by the UN General Assembly.

Take for instance, the FIFA World Cup where even nations usually at each other's throat, come together for a few weeks to support their national team, putting aside politics and differences. It



PHOTO: WWW.GLOBALCONVERSATION.ORG

seems to have worked for Ivory Coast, a country embroiled in civil war. The country's star striker Didier Drogba made public statements before, during, and after the 2006 World Cup about the mending power of the tournament. It's difficult to measure how much soccer actually contributed to ending the conflict, but a peace agreement was reached within a year.

Two years later, the presidents of Armenia and Turkey used it to reopen diplomatic dialogue. The two countries had severed relations and sealed their common border more than a decade earlier, but a World Cup qualifying match between their national teams

engendered the Armenian president to extend an invitation to his Turkish counterpart. It was the first-ever visit to Armenia by a Turkish head of state, prompting *Time* magazine to wonder, "Can Soccer Heal Turkey-Armenia Rift?" In a way it did, eventually resulting in an agreement to reestablish relations and reopen the border.

It's not just soccer. After being elected the first post-apartheid president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela used the rugby World Cup to further his country's healing process and prevent a civil war that was seemingly inevitable. All that was beautifully captured in a great movie

called *Invictus*. Research shows that sport programmes have the potential to help underprivileged youth to overcome problems associated with poverty and crime. When values such as discipline, confidence, teamwork and perseverance are built into the programme, participants from conflicting groups learn to respect that our common humanity is stronger than our differences. The Complexo de Maré neighbourhood of Rio de Janeiro - divided into territories controlled by rival gangs - offers a compelling example of this approach. The Luta

Pela Paz (Fight for Peace) programme was established to offer youngsters an alternative to drugs, gangs and violence turning the community around. Can similar programmes be introduced in this country at the grassroots level?

But despite these feel-good stories, can sport really bring peace? In the subcontinent, can cricket bring the two nuclear-armed arch rivals together? The short answer is yes and no. During the 2003-04 Indian tour of Pakistan, for the first time in 50 years, Islamabad allowed thousands of Indians to cross the border on "cricket visas". They were greeted effusively by the common men and women of Pakistan - to be an Indian in Lahore or Karachi those days meant free rides, discounted meals and purchases, and overwhelming hospitality.

Then in 2008 came the Mumbai attacks and many ruling party MPs and the Hindu hardliner Shiv Sena started opposing any sporting relations with Pakistan. Since then, the two countries have hardly toured each other and Pakistani players have not participated in the Indian Premier League (IPL).

And yet, there is a good argument to be made for the healing power of sport. Peace-building is tricky business and to be effective, it must be undertaken in participation with all key stakeholders, not by sport organisations alone. Sport for peace initiatives, if strategically designed and implemented, can play an important role in helping to prevent conflict and build peace around the world - a prerequisite for all development.

The writer is a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*.

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## Confusing war with liberation

MOYUKH MAHTAB

**E**NGAGEMENT with history through video games is a relatively recent phenomenon. Although historical settings have been used as backdrops of video games, most memorably in war games of course, the accuracy and depiction of the conditions of war, the historical dimensions of the events that are being portrayed have never been considered to be accurate. At most, it's the jingoism of USA portraying the valour of US troops against the 'backward, commie' Vietnamese. It was with *Assassin's Creed* that we could start seeing a shift in the way history is portrayed.

An article on the American Historical Association analyses *Assassin's Creed* in its magazine *Perspectives of History*. Although the game too uses the history at the time of the Crusades as a backdrop for the missions of one assassin, and despite historical inaccuracies in the narrative itself, it is the portrayal of the Nizāris—or assassins—that is important. The assassins "were a minor Shi'i sect that became a significant political player in the Middle East around the time of the Crusades. They inspired the first of a very successful series of video games, ... (the) Nizāris are also the subject of a historiographical tradition that is marked by highly negative depictions in primary sources (written by Sunni opponents and perplexed European travellers), orientalist tropes (Bernard Lewis, the nemesis of theorist Edward Said, wrote what remains the best-selling book on the subject)."

It seems to be a good idea to use video games and other new media for engagement with history, especially since it appeals to the younger audience, who otherwise, might not be interested. Even if complete historical accuracy cannot be - or is not - maintained, video games can be used to raise important questions regarding the historical contexts of particular events. Or, they could be used to simplify, and in the process reduce, something to a single narrative of gun-slinging violence devoid of any context. I am not sure what I was expecting when I heard that a Bangladeshi company with the support of the government was developing a game on the Liberation War. Its stated intent was to educate the new generation on the Liberation War.

'Heroes of 71: Retaliation' was released on March 26 on the Android smartphone platform. A sequel to a previous game based on 1971, it takes off from where the first ended. With over thousands of downloads, the game is very well-made. Working with limited resources, the developers have done a laudable job. The game is smooth, the controls are responsive and easy to understand, the graphics is excellent, and most of all, as good mobile games are, it is very addictive.

But what I am more interested in is what the game portrays. Over the week of its release, various personalities have claimed the game would promote the spirit of the Liberation War,

When the Shamsu Bahini wins the battle, only silhouettes of the women in a dark room is shown. A horrific picture of course, but the women are still nameless, faceless, kept in the background. They are then assured by the freedom fighters that they are now safe. That's it. Like the conventional narrative of the Liberation War, the issue of rape is given a cursory glance.

Another narrative of the game, the inclusion of a female protagonist, to show that women too fought in the war, was something the media focussed on a lot after the release of the game. Women fought in 1971, and that is obviously not something that is talked about in the

prequel is a good indication: it is riddled with obscenities and curses about the barbaric Pakistanis, the joy of killing by people playing at war or about how new features and weapons can be added to the game. Rhetoric or bloodshed - that's about it. Sure, it is important to realise the courage and bravery of those who fought in 1971. But, this teaching of history is reminiscent of what little seeps through the national curriculum textbooks. Pakistanis attacked, brave Bangladeshis fought, they won. There is no reason to assume someone is going to learn about 1971 or understand why a nation goes to war despite all odds, or the principles that were fought for. Limiting the history to gunfights does the same thing as when USA glorifies their war in Vietnam - sure the bravery of soldiers makes us feel all warm inside in patriotic zeal, but the broader issues involved are all glossed over. This history is skin deep. It seems all those gushing about the game, when thinking about the Liberation War, focus on the 'war' and forget the 'liberation'—liberation from the communalism, colonialism and the repression by West Pakistan. We get too easily swayed by nationalistic pride of having won in 1971 to look at the issues of endemic rape, murder, repression and corruption that still plague the country. If anything, the longed for 'spirit of liberation' should spur us to stand up against these.

There is of course a limitation as to what can be portrayed in a mobile game. And it's not so much the game or its developers that I criticise as much as the rhetoric surrounding it. A war game set to the backdrop of 1971, sure. A game to teach the young generation about 1971? Yes, if teaching about 1971 means simulating a gunfight. One would assume the war was a series of overwhelming victories by the brave Bangalee, all of whom have Muslim names in the game, with an added afterthought - there were some women involved too. Learning the history of Bangladesh is important, but all the game does is show how Bangladeshis overwhelmed the Pakistanis in battle. I can't say if the developers could have done any better with the resources they had, but let us not get carried away by nationalistic pride into portraying a game very well-made as a game that teaches us history.

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PHOTO: STAR

teach the new generation about the sacrifice of the Mukti Bahini, and so on. Does it? Or more specifically, what kind of historiography does the game serve?

The game follows a simple narrative: Shamsu Bahini is going to attack a Pakistani army camp where women have been confined, presumably tortured and raped. There are multiple gunfights from which the freedom fighters emerge victorious. I was particularly looking forward to the issue of women in the game - the systematic use of rape and torture as a weapon of war by the Pakistani soldiers in 1971 is often clouded in rhetoric, the raped almost always have no say.

conventional narrative of the war. Anila, who had been caught alongside the other women in the camp, when freed, joins the Shamsu Bahini in their mission to blow up a bridge. The developers deserve kudos for not over-sexualising the character, even though looking at Anila's hair, one would assume that she just stepped out of a parlour, while the men are all gritty. There's more gunfight, killing of Razakars, and lots of slogans shouted by the freedom fighters that would please political parties.

As far as the game's trying to represent and teach is concerned, how does it fare? The reviews on the Android Play Store of this game and its

**QUOTABLE Quote**



**ZAHA HADID**  
(Renowned architect; first woman and Muslim to receive the Pritzker Architecture Prize)

*I am sure that as a woman I can do a very good skyscraper.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- Starting point
- One and the other
- Skirt
- First Lady before Michelle
- Playwright Edward
- Door sign
- May honorees
- "My thoughts entirely"
- Eden name
- Army address
- Snaky shape
- Indicating
- Ill-mannered
- New York area
- Taking a stripe from
- Representative: Abbr.
- Field worker
- Kickoff aid
- Robin's love
- Stubborn one
- In the middle of
- Bolivian city
- Alarm trigger
- Unescorted
- Easy targets

**42 Comfy eatery**

**DOWN**

- Smiled broadly
- Widespread
- Secondary list on a PC
- Midmonth time
- Glimpse
- Firecracker sound
- Strange
- Kilmer poem
- Fast runners
- Hears about
- Clock numeral
- Liner's cheapest section
- Strange
- Procured
- Discover
- Like some country roads
- Chess pieces
- Old fellow
- Stockpile
- Scout after beta
- Letter unit
- Print supplies
- Niger neighbour
- Young fellow

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

S	I	L	O	S	L	I	M	O	S
A	D	U	L	T	A	D	O	P	T
B	E	N	D	I	N	G	O	V	E
L	A	G	L	E	E	R	A		
E	L	E	C	T	O	R	D	A	
			H	O	N		B	I	T
A	L	I	E	N		D	I	N	E
C	E	N	T		S	O	L		
R	O	T		S	K	I	L	L	E
O	N	E		P	I	N	I	V	
B	I	N	D	I	N	G	O	V	E
A	N	T	O	N		I	R	E	N
T	E	S	T		N	E	S	T	S

**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

WHAT ARE YOU DOING, ZERO?

BEEBLE'S TELLING ME A LONG JOKE AND HE SAYS IT'S REALLY FUNNY

GREG MORT WALKER

**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott

HANNIE, HAVE YOU BEEN MESSING WITH MY TOOLS?

WHY DO YOU WANT TO KNOW?

DIDN'T I TELL YOU NOT TO DO THAT?

IS THAT WHAT YOU REMEMBER?

IS THAT A DENIAL?

WOULD YOU LIKE IT TO BE?

DO YOU KNOW HOW ANNOYING IT IS WHEN YOU ANSWER EVERY QUESTION WITH A QUESTION?

ARE YOU ASKING ME TO READ YOUR MIND?