

# The growing Saudi isolation

FOUNDER EDITOR  
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## Procession of death on the highways

How long will it continue?

**T**ILL going to press we have reports of 64 deaths in roads crashes all over the country since the start of the Eid holidays. Delving deeper one would find that most of the crashes have occurred after the Eid on the return journeys. The obvious explanation is that since the highways are clogged on the outward journey before the day of Eid there is very little scope for the drivers to indulge in over speeding. And since the volume of traffic on the highways after Eid is relatively less, the result of the drivers' recklessness is reflected in the casualty figures.

And this validates the comment of the minister for roads and highways that the majority of the road crashes are due to the fault of the drivers. But we would like to ask what measures the relevant authorities have taken to reduce the risk of human negligence and incompetence? These are repetitive occurrences and yet there is no palpable action to deter the recklessness of the drivers. Where are the highway patrols that one hears of but seldom, if ever, sees, to check over speeding? Where is the mechanism to see that unqualified people do not get license to drive? No less guilty are some owners who make their drivers work inordinately long hours without adequate rest so that more trips and more money could be made during that brief period?

Merely putting the blame on the drivers does not absolve ones responsibility of ensuring road safety. Apart from making the system of issuing license foolproof, a system that has been corrupted, the authorities must invest in highway patrol and CCTV at nodal points to exercise constant vigilance.

## An unplanned, overcrowded Dhaka

Time to take up long-term plans

**I**T does not take much research work to tell us that Dhaka has lost its urban character. The city has become a place where every element of life - earth, water and air - has been poisoned. The land is strewn with garbage while the rivers and waterways are choked with plastic bags. The streets are buckled, the footpaths broken, the air thick and un-breathable. To look out at our capital, is to be greeted by a bleak sprawl of shoddily constructed buildings. There does not seem to be any planning behind the way the city is growing.

Dhaka is already the most densely populated city in the world. And each year about half a million people - more than the population of Maldives - come to the city to live. They provide valuable services to the city dwellers. An estimated 2 million garment workers live here. What kind of facilities have we provided to them? From time to time, authorities demolish slums and evict street vendors. But they return with nowhere else to go. Do the authorities expect a better outcome without having a plan to rehabilitate them?

It is high time policymakers thought about long-term solutions. A team of eminent urban experts have recommended that Rajuk should implement Dhaka's detailed Area Plan (DAP) which stipulates the kind of establishment that can be set up in a particular area. There should be a unified authority, as recommended by the Strategic Transport Plan 2006, to look after the planning, development and management of Dhaka's roads. Also, the Dhaka Structure Plan (2016-2035) which covers 15 important aspects of the living standards of the city should be put into action.

But most importantly, political, administrative and fiscal decentralisation should take place to ease the pressure on Dhaka.



SAEED NAQVI

**T**HE changing world order is taking its toll on Salafist preacher Zakir Naik, who was otherwise not touched for decades. The recipient of the

Saudi King Faisal International Prize for service to Islam in 2015 is fighting with his back to the wall in 2016. There is a simple explanation: the Saudi affiliation is showing negative results.

Globally, the approval rating for Riyadh is low. Why? Because the US has gradually distanced itself from Saudi actions in the recent past. Interests, patronised by Saudi Arabia, were tolerated worldwide because it was assumed that America kept a protective eye on all Saudi assets. That is no longer the case.

Just the other day, most US advisers involved in the Yemen operation, were withdrawn from Riyadh - as clear a vote of no confidence as any in the mindless Saudi war in the Arab world's poorest country.

Iran's policy towards Saudi Arabia has been much more nuanced. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 introduced a bipolarity in the Muslim world. A Riyadh-Tehran rivalry was built into the situation. But Tehran never allowed one upmanship to degenerate into a conflict.

Its presumed leadership of the Muslim Ummah under assault, Riyadh frequently lashed out. There were many verbal skirmishes. But Iran's "policy" towards Saudi Arabia remained unchanged. This "policy" was based on a very clear understanding of the Saudi establishment which consisted of two streams, one led by the king and the other by the Wahabi clergy.

To former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani must go the credit for having always insisted on one line - the government led by a pragmatic king like Abdullah was much better for Iran and the rest of the world than the fundamentalist Wahabi clergy. An internal



Deputy Crown Prince and Minister of Defense Mohammed bin Salman (2L) of Saudi Arabia and Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir (R) arrive at the White House in Washington, DC on June 17, 2016.

PHOTO: AFP

balance of power favourable to the king was the better of the evils.

Even when King Abdullah advised the Americans to "cut the head of the snake" (Iran), Tehran persisted with the line that it was better to cope with him rather than see the clergy come on top. Inherent in this policy was a vision of a possible rapprochement with Riyadh. The biggest votary of peace with Saudi Arabia in the past four years has been Iran's Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif.

His prestige was sky high after he successfully negotiated the nuclear deal with the US. He was therefore able to extract a go ahead from supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani, to explore avenues for some understanding with Saudi leaders.

A realisation has dawned in Tehran that, unlike, the late King Abdullah, the present ruling clique in Riyadh is not in control of the situation. First, King Salman bin Abdulaziz is ailing and not in control of his faculties.

Crown Prince Muhammad bin Nayef probably derives his hard line approach and proximity to the clergy from his late

father, Interior Minister, Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz, who was responsible for rolling tanks and APCs along the 37 kms causeway linking the Kingdom and Bahrain to quell the popular Shia uprising against the Sunni rulers in Manama.

Deputy Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, who is actually calling the shots in the Kingdom, possibly does not have the links with the clergy that his cousin, the Crown Prince has. In the midst of this ambiguity, the clergy is becoming powerful.

Internal turbulence is being managed by external wars, as in Yemen, or persisting with the Syrian civil war with an aim to oust President Bashar al Assad. Iranians, and others, have now given up on keeping reasonable relations with the government in Riyadh to keep down the clergy. Gloves in Tehran are off because an assessment has been made that the clergy is now in a decision making position. A shrill battle cry is on the amplifiers directly against Wahabism.

Ayatollah Khamenei has seldom used such invective. Recalling last year's Haj stampede in which 2000 pilgrims

including 472 Iranians were crushed to death, he exploded: "The heartless and murderous Saudis locked up the injured with the dead in containers - instead of providing medical treatment or at least quenching their thirst, they murdered them."

It is possible to attribute Khamenei's outburst to the Saudi Grand Mufti's statement against Shia's: "they are not Muslims."

What confirms an altered Iranian policy against Riyadh is foreign Minister Javad Zarif's very measured op-ed piece in the New York Times. He has finally thrown in the towel. Gloves are now truly off. It is building up to a showdown at a critical juncture. The offensive against the IS in Mosul is in the process of revealing many fault lines. The enthusiasm of those poised for an attack on Iraq's second biggest city, has to be seen against those who would like their "assets" holed up in Mosul to be protected. Many reputations are on the line.

The writer is a senior Indian journalist, television commentator and interviewer.

## Saving our Ship

# A global response to refugees and migrants



BAN KI-MOON

**P**ERHAPS no issue on the global agenda is more susceptible to

manipulation by grandstanding demagogues than refugees and migrants. 'Us' versus 'them' is a timeless if irresponsible unifier, used throughout history to obscure our common humanity by those with dangerously self-serving interests. The difference now is that more people are on the move than ever before, and in an era when storylines spread with viral speed, we see xenophobia rising and too often erupting into violence.

This week's United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants represents a breakthrough at a breaking point. With so many shrill voices dominating the debate, governments from around the world are responding in measured tones that can yield real results if promises are kept.

The Summit marks the first-ever gathering of top leaders to discuss refugees and migrants. It will adopt a groundbreaking consensus agreement: the New York Declaration. Fittingly, that document honours a city renowned for its vibrant diversity, symbolised by the Statue of Liberty standing tall in New York Harbour. Most importantly, the Declaration sets a principled and pragmatic approach for addressing the challenges of people on the move while upholding our most cherished values.

The stakes are high. There are 244 million migrants in the world. More than 65 million people are now forcibly displaced. Half of them are children. Refugees running for their lives too often face grave dangers on their journey to safety. When they arrive, many suffer discrimination and even detention. Facing difficulties in a mobile world, they often travel farther in search of safety and stability. But legal pathways are scarce, and unscrupulous smugglers take advantage, charging exorbitant sums for a risky chance to escape.

Wars are lasting longer and refugees are finding it harder to return home - with the length of displacement in some cases stretching across generations. Contrary to prevailing impressions, the vast majority of refugees are not in rich countries; 86 percent are in the developing world. And the poorer countries hosting refugees do not receive nearly enough help. Last year, United Nations humanitarian appeals received barely more than half the funds that were sought.

Resettlement options are also a fraction of what they should be. Nearly a million people were identified as needing resettlement in 2015, but just over 100,000 received it. The challenges are enormous - but we should not forget the benefits. With the right approach, refugees and migrants can bring benefits to both their adoptive societies and their home countries. This well-documented upside should not be lost in the debate. The New York Declaration should be seen in the wider context of new and ambitious international



PHOTO: AFP

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efforts to improve conditions where people live so they are not forced to leave. Central to this is the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, our global plan for peace and prosperity on a healthy planet. We are

also pushing to prevent and resolve conflicts - and to sustain peace once the guns fall silent.

The Summit will feature testimony from those directly affected. I am especially looking forward to meeting again with an extraordinary young woman I first encountered last month at the Olympic Games in Rio.

Yusra Mardini is Syrian - but she competed on the new refugee team established for athletes who, like millions of other people around the world, have been forced out of their homelands.

Before she swam in races, Yusra was in a race to save lives.

Last year, she left Syria on an overcrowded boat. When its engine died, she dove into the Aegean Sea and started pushing the vessel, along with a few other swimmers among the group. It took a gruelling three hours to reach the shore. They arrived exhausted - but they had proven the power of human solidarity to ferry us to safety.

Humanity is together in one boat. Stoking fear, blaming the 'other' or scapegoating minorities will only increase the dangers for all.

Wise leaders understand that we should instead endeavour to save everyone, optimise the contributions of each, and steer our common ship to our shared destination: a future of opportunity and dignity for all.

The writer is Secretary-General of the United Nations.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Sad Tale of a Dilapidated Road

The road connecting BGB Gate No.5, Hazaribagh Bazar, Monesshor Road and Beribad has been in a bad shape for a long time. The condition has worsened in the aftermath of the cattle market that was held before the Eid-ul-Azha.

Vehicles struggle to drive through the road and pedestrians have to walk barefoot to protect their footwear; and filthy water accumulated in potholes and ditches splashes onto pedestrians' clothes as vehicles pass through them. Remaining rawhide of slaughtered animals are also scattered across the road.

This road should be repaired immediately as it is the main way to go to Beribad and Jawchor from Hazaribagh Bazar.

Iqbal Khan  
Hazaribagh, Dhaka

### Increase SSC & HSC stipends

Our government has been providing stipends to meritorious students for public examinations to financially support them. Stipends for PSC and JSC examinations have increased in recent years along with the number of students. Allocated to each area based on student numbers to ensure equitable distribution, it is undoubtedly boosting child education.

However the amount given as scholarship is insufficient considering the present price level of commodities. Scholarship per month should be at least TK 1,000 for the talent pool and TK 800 for others, and the allowance for educational accessories TK 1,000 per year per head. Stipends for SSC and HSC examinations are limited compared to the total number of students. It should be increased by four times the current amount.

Md Ashraf Hossain  
On email