

Castro (August 13, 1926 – November 25, 2016) The Cuban Himalayas

ERESH OMAR JAMAL

THE son of a wealthy landowner, Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz was born on August 13, 1926. A towering figure during the Cuban revolution, Castro was praised as a champion of socialism and the soldier-politician by his supporters, who had given Cuba back to the people. Having ousted the dictator Fulgencio Batista in 1959, he governed the Republic of Cuba as Prime Minister from 1959 to 1976 and then as President from 1976 to 2008. He was loved also by the people of the third world and seen as a symbol of resistance against western imperialism.

For more than 50 years, he defied the world's foremost superpower, the United States of America. During this time, his government had to face numerous challenges that may have made a weaker leader wilt to the enormous pressure that was put on Castro and Cuba in general. Financial restrictions in the form of sanctions and embargoes against Cuba, accompanied with attempts to overthrow his government through various means and the constant demonisation of its leader — Fidel Castro — meant that Cuba could only survive with a strong leader at the helm. And that is exactly what he was, a strong leader, willing to face even the most insurmountable odds possible, as long as the people were willing to stand beside him. And the Cubans did stand beside him. For as long as he lived.

The great man's resilience, as evident as it was from his lifelong defiance to the US, first attracted the limelight when he led his rebel army to an improbable victory against the dictator Batista. It was, perhaps, this victory of his, which made him believe so deeply in the underdog, as long as the cause was right.

In 1971, during his visit to Chile where President Salvador Allende had been elected head of state only a year ago, he warned the newly elected Chilean President against right-wing elements within the army that could potentially overthrow him through a military coup. Backed by his long-time rival, the US, his prophecy came true only two years later when the army did overthrow President Allende in a coup and established a brutal military junta led by Augusto Pinochet.

In September 1973, during the Fourth Summit of the Non-Alignment Movement, he publicly broke off relations with Israel for its close ties with the US and for its mistreatment of Palestinians. When the Yom Kippur War broke out in October 1973 between Israel and an Arab coalition led by Egypt and

retreat. When he later visited Somalia, Tanzania, Mozambique and Angola, he was greeted by crowds as a hero for Cuba's role in opposing apartheid South Africa.

In 1977 during the Ethio-Somali War, he sent troops under the command of General Arnaldo Ochoa to aid the overwhelmed

nise Bangladesh. He met Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Algiers during the Non-Alliance Movement Summit in 1974 and the two had a cordial relationship. In 2013, Bangladesh awarded Castro the 'Liberation War Honour' as one of the 'foreign friends' for his contributions to the country's

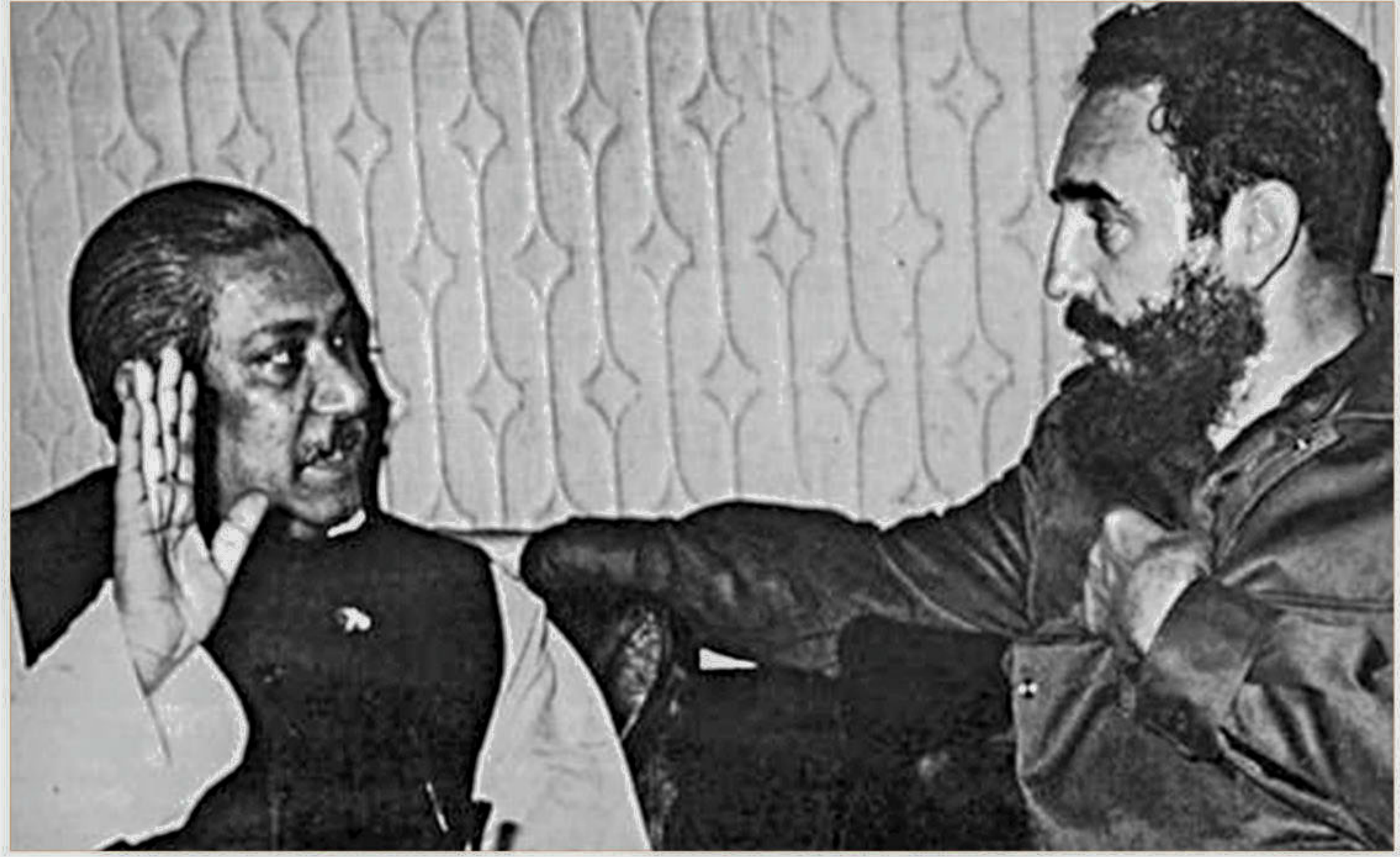
to a question about the possibility of nuclear war, Castro said, "I think nobody on Earth wishes the human species to disappear. And that is the reason why I am of the opinion that what should disappear are not just nuclear weapons, but also conventional weapons. We must provide a guarantee for peace to all peoples without distinction."

He further added "War is a crime and there is no need for any new law to describe it as such, because since Nuremberg, war has already been considered a crime, the biggest crime against humanity and peace, and the most horrible of all crimes." After many years of blockade, when the US finally opened up to Cuba, he wrote in response to some of the things that were said by US officials that "We do not need the empire to give us anything. Our efforts will be legal and peaceful, as this is our commitment to peace and fraternity among all human beings who live on this planet."

Indeed, he never needed the US to give him anything. Whatever he made of himself, he did through his own determination and effort. And his commitment to peace and fraternity among all human beings remained intact both when he condemned the Israeli government for its oppression of Palestinians and of the South African apartheid state. Even the great Nelson Mandela admitted his deep admiration for Castro and wrote, "We admire the sacrifices of the Cuban people in maintaining their independence and sovereignty in the face of a vicious, imperialist-orchestrated campaign," saying, that if it wasn't for Castro and his help, apartheid in South Africa may have never ended.

While many people strongly disliked the man, most Cubans genuinely loved him. The fact that his government survived for so long is a testament to that. As without the majority of Cubans on his side, that would undoubtedly have not been possible, especially with so many powerful enemies praying for his demise. May he find the peace he so bravely fought for and pursued, all throughout his life, in death. And may the Cuban people continue on their struggle for freedom, in remembrance of their great leader.

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



Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at a tete-a-tete with Cuban leader Fidel Castro.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Syria, he even sent 4,000 Cuban troops to defend the Syrian territory from Israeli incursions.

During the Angolan Civil War, Castro came to the aid of Angolan people by assisting its government with nearly 18,000 troops which played a major role in the South African

Ethiopian army. When his allies, however, ordered the Ethiopians to suppress the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, Castro refused to support them, showing, once again, his willingness to defy even his allies when he believed the cause to be wrong.

Castro was one of the first leaders to recog-

struggle for freedom in 1971.

Despite his revolutionary zeal and field experience as a soldier, Castro had dreamt long and hard for peace. In 2010, during an interview with Canadian economist, author and professor of Economics at the University of Ottawa, Michel Chossudovsky, in response

Pakistan's road to China



KHURRAM HUSAIN

With investment slumping and exports declining, Pakistan is increasingly banking on the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to drive future growth. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the State Bank of Pakistan have both billed the

corridor as the best bet to lift growth for Pakistan, which has picked up marginally to 4.7 percent last fiscal year but remains far short of the target of 6.5 percent needed to absorb new entrants into the labour force.

On Sunday, November 13, the first two vessels carrying goods brought from China for exports were seen off from Gwadar port amidst much ceremony and fanfare.

For many, this was the beginning of a new chapter in Pakistan's history, the herald of 'a new dawn' in the words of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, as the country went tighter into the embrace of China.

The corridor is a mix of various projects designed to promote connectivity between the landlocked Eastern province of Xinjiang in China, and Pakistan's rich and largely unspoiled coast.

It envisages a network of roads running from Kashgar all the way to Karachi and Gwadar in the south of Pakistan. Karachi is already a bustling commercial city of 20 million with two large functioning ports that serve all of Pakistan's trade requirements.

But Gwadar has lain empty in a middle of a massive barren desert for decades.

Long identified as a potential deep sea port, with a draught up to 11.5 meters which

can grow to 14 meters with a dredging programme, Gwadar has been touted by successive governments as an alternative to Dubai and Mumbai ports as a way station for shipping bound for China.

It was built under the Musharraf regime but no shipping lines were prepared to utilise it, so the four cranes installed there rusted over the years. In 2013, the government took the port out of the hands of Port of Singapore Authority which had been the operator since 2007, and gave it to China Overseas Ports Holding Company Limited. By 2015, the Chinese company was ready to announce commercial operations and in March, the government approved a sweeping package of tax exemptions for it and all of its contractors and subcontractors working in Gwadar.

The first vessels departed from the port in November, but it is unlikely that any more commercial cargoes will go through the port in the near future. The convoy of almost 150 trucks carrying Chinese goods that filled the first containers to be loaded from Gwadar for an outbound journey was organised by the Pakistani government, with strong security and incentives to use the port and the connecting roads, known as the western route.

Commercial parties are reluctant to use the port and the roads of the western route due to security fears and higher costs due to the longer distance involved compared to Karachi. In addition to Gwadar port, the corridor envisages thousands of kilometres of new roads and highways that will link the northern border of Pakistan and China with the coast on the south.

Three routes lead towards Gwadar, while existing routes to Karachi are being upgraded. From the outset, the massive land

acquisition and construction contracts involved in these projects, as well as the benefits of road links, sparked heated politics within the country over the inequitable sharing of the benefits from the project.

The Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) party, headed by the charismatic cricketer turned politician Imran Khan, which rules the northwestern Khyber Pukhtunkhwa (KP) province, passed five resolutions demanding that the western route, parts of which run



through the province, be given priority in the construction timeline, eventually taking the matter to court in November of 2016.

The ruling party from Sind, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), played along with the protests, but never escalated it to the level that the PTI did. Both argued that the central province of Punjab, the most populous and ruled by the party of Mr. Sharif was taking a disproportionate share of the investments planned under CPEC.

The protests have begun to die down, partly due to Chinese government coaxing, and partly because the ruling party moved to placate the discontented groups. But with the politics ebbing away, security fears remain.

The western route runs through the insurgency torn province of Balochistan.

A long running counter insurgency being run by the army has successfully brought down the number of attacks on military convoys, but the terrorists have moved to attacking 'soft targets', like lawyers groups or shrines, in attacks that have produced dozens of casualties.

In addition to the port and road links, CPEC also consists of a series of power projects being set up by state owned Chinese companies in collaboration with private and public counterparts in Pakistan.

Of the total USD 46 billion investment planned to enter Pakistan under various CPEC projects, USD 18 billion is investment on commercial terms for energy sector projects along the project. Another USD 9 billion is for roads, two-thirds of which is concessional loans, and the remaining as commercial loan or investment on commercial terms. Together, this USD 27 billion of investment is coming under the 'early harvest' projects which are expected to be commissioned around 2018.

The remaining is part of a longer-term vision.

The government is counting on the energy projects to overcome power shortages that have hobbled Pakistan's growth rates for almost a decade now.

Under the early harvest projects, almost 10,400MW of power generation capacity is supposed to be installed in Pakistan using Chinese resources, which will have to be

repaid on commercial terms with the price built into the power tariff at which the state will procure the electricity generated.

Some of these projects, however, have already started to fall through. And what is left is attracting growing critical comment for the price tag that comes attached with them. The IMF warned in its latest report that outflows 'could add up to a significant level', estimating that outflows on CPEC related government borrowing could reach 0.4 per cent of GDP per year over the longer run. It calls for reforms to strengthen the external sector of the economy in order to prepare for these obligations once they arrive.

But the government remains largely unfazed by the critical commentary or the political wrangling. The Prime Minister declared that 'all enemies of CPEC are enemies of Pakistan' during his remarks at the ceremony held at the port with the two cargo vessels in the backdrop on November 13 in Gwadar. Pakistan will make every effort, he went on to claim, to take its place in the One Belt One Road project being pursued by China.

The security challenges remain, and a special CPEC security force has already been created under the army specifically for the task of providing protection to Chinese investments and trade convoys.

The politics have receded into the background for now, while the costs are too far into the future for anybody to worry about. Pakistan's road to China is a bumpy one, but according to many of its supporters, it is also the only road for the country now that the Americans are preparing to leave the region for good.

The writer is Assistant Editor of Dawn, Pakistan.

QUOTABLE Quote

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

That which is done out of love is always beyond good and evil.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- Disgrace
- Fellow
- Ibis's cousin
- Sportscast feature
- Assumed name
- Open-sea catches
- Slimming plan
- "Don't move!"
- Lingerie item
- Word of accord
- Use for a garden hose
- Postmark part
- Foe of 007
- Job of some party workers
- Block up
- Young one
- "My word!"
- Come to
- Chopped down
- Less common
- Insertion symbol
- Attempts
- "The Tempest" sprite
- Whole bunch

42 Hardly seaworthy

DOWN

- Sundial feature
- Landing spot
- Short solo
- Castle surrounder
- USN rank
- Detective's find
- Baklava ingredient
- Fill with wonder
- Acts the model
- Left high and dry
- Cal. column
- Foamy waves
- List-ending abbr.
- Dog warning
- Neighbor of Chad
- Common pay period
- Malleable metal
- With tenderness
- Title for Vader
- Mindful
- Opera's Callas
- Retain
- Fast runner
- Baseball's Ripken

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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