

# Misframed facts, prejudiced responses

## Celebrating Eid-ul-Azha

*Uphold the essence of sacrifice*

**E**ID-UL-AZHA, the second biggest religious festival of the Muslims, will be celebrated on September 2. Prayers will be offered for world peace as well as prosperity of mankind. Divine blessings will be sought and the solemnity of the occasion maintained in a joyous mood. Eid-ul-Azha revives the memory of the Prophet Ibrahim's (Pbuh) faith in Allah and his complete readiness to sacrifice his dearest son as a token of surrendering himself to the divine will. There lies the true message of Eid-ul-Azha. The Almighty, in His infinite kindness and being satisfied with the prophet's resolve, withdrew the decree and permitted him to sacrifice an animal.

The Eid is being observed in our country at a time when hundreds of thousands of people are struggling with devastating floods. Obviously they are not in a position to celebrate Eid the way they would have liked to. It is, hence, our moral and religious obligation to share their grief and possibly refrain from doing anything that would show a lack of sensitivity to these people. If sacrifice is what this festival is all about, then the people in distress should be the prime beneficiaries of what we do on the occasion of Eid-ul-Azha. This Eid, let us resolve to break away from the temptation to show off our worldly riches, and focus on extending a helping hand to those less fortunate.

Our prayers are with all Muslims who are not able to celebrate the festival with the usual joviality because they are besieged by natural disaster, war, poverty or other difficult circumstances. We truly hope that the essence of sacrifice, both spiritually and materially, embrace us all. Eid Mubarak to our readers!

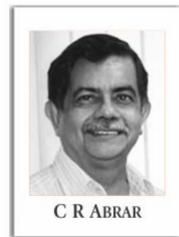
## Great job, Bangladesh!

*Tigers deserve praise for living up to our trust*

**C**RICKET fans couldn't expect a more thrilling finish to a match that proved to be intense since day one, going against Test cricket's established slow-and-steady-wins-the-race formula. A four-day test of grit and character that swung in favour of the Aussies one moment and the Tigers the next. Both teams battled doggedly, setting and chasing targets and trying to limit each other's lead with the fans kept on their toes all the while. In the end, the better team emerged victorious.

Bangladesh's maiden Test victory against the once-invincible Australia will also be remembered as a match in its own right. Australia may gain some consolation from the fact that their 20-run loss was not an accident. They were defeated by a team that had also defeated cricket's mightiest teams over the past few years, and it was only a matter of time before they clinched their first win against them. The reason it was so satisfying to watch is because victory in a Test match may sometimes come from a sudden collapse or a chance turn of events, but throughout this match, both teams challenged each other and fought with everything they had until the end.

Shakib Al Hasan, who batted superbly in Bangladesh's first innings and was a constant threat in both of Australia's innings, deserves special mention for his performance. With his list of achievements growing with every match, in all versions of cricket, Shakib has once again proved why he should be put in the same league as the legendary all-rounders of the game. In his post-match reaction, he thanked the fans for their trust in the team. We think it's Shakib and his colleagues who deserve our thanks for living up to our trust.



C R ABRAR

**R**OHINGYAS of northern Arakan are facing yet another round of armed atrocities. Not only are they at the receiving end of indiscriminate use of bullets, bayonets and firing from helicopter gunships; their homes, hearths, livestock, crops and businesses are being consumed by bellowing fire deliberately lit by the Burmese security forces and their Rakhine cohorts. Satellite images validate witness accounts and provide correlation with some reported incidents where residences have allegedly been deliberately torched. The carnage follows a series of coordinated attacks by ethnic Rohingya militants on August 25, 2017 against 25 security posts.

The attack of the Rohingya militant group has been condemned by many states (USA, France, UK and India included) as an effort to "undermine" implementation of Kofi Annan's peace and mediation initiatives. Implicit in the denunciation is that Annan Commission's report in all likelihood would contribute to addressing the Rohingya question and the militants have thwarted a golden opportunity for peace (and subsequently, prosperity) to return to the Arakan region. In addition, the militants are being portrayed as armed religious bigots bent on turning Arakan into an independent Islamic state. The recent Bangladesh proposal to Burma to conduct a joint operation has raised questions as to whether Bangladesh also subscribes to this dominant narrative.

This storyline, brilliantly crafted, presumably by the Burmese intelligence agencies, has worked as a diversionary tactic as it shifted the blame for events that are unfolding in the northern Arakan region on the militants. The facts are markedly different.

The Burmese army through its nominated military MPs along with former ruling party USDP and Rakhine nationalist Arakan National Party tried their best to scuttle the establishment of Annan Commission. They did not succeed but continued their moves to undermine the initiative. Ma Ba Tha, the virulent anti-Rohingya and anti-Muslim Buddhist monk, severely opposed the Commission and was instrumental in garnering public opinion against it. The Burmese military commander's Facebook post after his meeting with Kofi Annan in the morning of the day of the Final Report's release made it clear he did not agree with its findings. Therefore, there is every reason to believe that powerful forces within the Burmese establishment opposed the Annan Commission and it was they who prepared the blueprint to provoke Rohingya militants to act.

Again, facts speak for themselves. Weeks before Annan Commission released its final report, the Burmese high command was busy shoring up the Light Infantry Division 33, "notorious for its merciless and indiscriminate killings of civilians in any urban unrest" to the Arakan region. The military had also trained and armed anti-Rohingya Rakhine villagers in firearms and fighting, blockading the predominantly Rohingya region of north Arakan from accessing food and jobs, and spreading fears of attacks on the INGOs and UN agencies providing humanitarian support. In fact, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Burma raised the alarm as early as August 10, expressing her concerns about beefing up of security apparatus in Arakan and calling on the security forces to be restrained and respectful to human rights. There is little scope to



**"The stark reality that members of Rohingya community face in northern Arakan today obligates all countries including Bangladesh to allow those fleeing persecution to enter their territories."** PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

disregard the claims made by the leader of the Arakan Salvation Army that the attack on the police barracks was essentially an act of "self defence" as they were left with no other option.

The misframing of Rohingya militants as "Jihadists" is also a ploy to favour the Burmese perpetrators. Such framing with a religious fervour is to render Rohingya militants as the dreaded and hated ISIS fighters. There is little evidence that these militants are imbued in extremist interpretations of Islam. From their statements it is clear that they no longer wish to continue in ghetto-like conditions that they have been subjected to for generations without any identity and future, and what they simply want is "equality before the law, freedom to live in peace, freedom to move about so that they can work, earn a living and feed their children, recognition that they are citizens and they belong in Burma, not in Bangladesh". They have made it amply clear that their goals "are not creating an Islamic state in the predominant Buddhist country, nor independence from Burma". Are not those aspirations reasonable and legitimate?

Calling the militants an organised force is also a clever ploy. It provides the rationale for the Burmese army to mete out excessive use of force. The fact is "these militants are armed with most primitive machetes and farm tools, equipped with some mobile phones and use of the most primitive type of explosives". There has not been an iota of evidence furnished by quarters including the high-tech western intelligence agencies to support the claims that these militants are receiving AK-47s and Arab money. The mainstream media only cites "un-named intelligence sources"—whatever that means.

Thus for any discerning observer it is not the militants that have waged the war; it is a war that both the Burmese army and Suu Kyi's government "are waging against the Rohingyas to further demonise and criminalise them

while maintaining the ghettoised conditions on the ground for more than one million Rohingyas". As the Buddhist Burmese scholar and activist Maung Zarni, a specialist on Rohingyas, reminds us "These Rohingya men, primitively armed, are not fighting to go to heaven as martyrs, they are fighting back because they and their communities are sitting ducks awaiting the next round of slaughter".

It is naïve to view that laws of the land should always be respected as sacrosanct and violence in all forms should be shunned. When the State systematically abuses its authority, represses its own people and engages in excessive violence, the laws lose their sanctity and people are freed from such compulsion. In fact, the onus lies on the people to challenge the State and under such circumstances any form of resistance, including resorting to violence, is legitimate. Bangladesh's own armed struggle is a fitting testimony.

The stark reality that members of Rohingya community face in northern Arakan today obligates all countries including Bangladesh to allow those fleeing persecution to enter their territories. All should respect and honour international customary law and the principle of non-refoulement and thus refrain from rejecting asylum seekers from their borders. The Bangladesh government should immediately rescind the offer of joint collaboration with the Burmese government. Such a move will only amount to Bangladesh being an abettor of the acts of a State that is engaged in ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, and in all likelihood, of genocide. Surely, the people of Bangladesh, proud survivors of the 1971 genocide, champions of self-determination and freedom against oppression, do not deserve to be labelled as such.

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# Building climate-resilient health systems

*As global temperatures rise, health systems must adapt*



POONAM KHETRAPAL SINGH

**C**LIMATE change is happening. In recent years average temperatures across the globe have increased, with significant impact on humanity's most precious resource—the environment. Water systems are being stressed. Food sources are being imperilled. And areas once safe for settlement are being

threatened and erased. The implications for human health are many. Climate change increases the frequency and severity of extreme weather events such as cyclones and floods, exacerbating almost all public health risks, from food-borne disease to malnutrition and heatstroke. It impacts the spread and

the WHO South-East Asia Region is particularly vulnerable. In recent years the region's 11 member countries—all of them low- or middle-income—have faced public health challenges from diverse climate-associated events and processes, including glacial lake outburst floods, cyclones and rapidly eroding coastlines. These and other phenomena are likely to be exacerbated as global temperatures rise. Economic losses associated with climate change, meanwhile, are already affecting the development aspirations of millions of people region-wide, and with it their ability to secure health and wellbeing. As the Sustainable Development Goals emphasise, health both determines and is determined by poverty and its attendant conditions.

Though the problem of halting and reversing climate change is bigger than any one country, mitigating its health-related impact is both possible and necessary for

draft national plans accordingly. At the same time, cross-sectoral collaboration should be established with a range of key ministries, ensuring climate-associated health concerns are addressed across diverse policy areas.

Health systems' service delivery should likewise be evaluated and augmented. This could include integrating meteorological information with climate-sensitive health programmes to better anticipate shifting disease burdens. It could include enhancing disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness to better manage the threat of extreme weather events. And it could also include scaling up the technical and professional capacity of health workers to better prepare for and deal with climate change's health-related outcomes.

Climate-resilient infrastructure and technology has much to offer. All health facilities, for example, should have contingency plans to ensure essential services such as water, sanitation and electricity are maintained during extreme weather events. Similarly, new facilities should be planned, sited and built as per projected climate risks such as storm surges or cyclones. Technologies that provide early warning of extreme weather events should be integrated into emergency preparedness systems, while mobile communications that can reach appropriate audiences should be obtained and utilised.

To facilitate these investments, climate and health financing should be adequately assessed, mobilised and secured. This means looking for opportunities to integrate the principles of climate resilience into everyday health system strengthening, whether related to health personnel or basic infrastructure. It also means identifying and accessing funding that can build resilience through more targeted initiatives such as expanding surveillance or retrofitting health facilities.

Member countries across the South-East Asia Region are working to make this happen. In recent years a range of innovative measures have been implemented region-wide to protect and improve health as climate change takes effect. This must continue. It must also be scaled up. WHO South-East Asia Region is committed to facilitating this process, and ensuring member countries across the region are able to cope with one of humanity's greatest challenges.

There is, after all, no other option. Climate change is already transforming life as we know it, and will continue to do so as global warming advances. Though the risks to human health are many, the means to take action are available to all. By building climate-resilient health systems, countries across the South-East Asia Region can stay on track to achieve the SDG goal of health and wellbeing for all, and also safeguard their many public health gains. Adapting to change can be difficult; the need to do so is clear. Climate resilience is a principle all health systems must embrace.

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PHOTO: DILIP ROY

**Climate change increases the frequency and severity of extreme weather events such as cyclones and floods, exacerbating almost all public health risks, from food-borne disease to malnutrition and heatstroke.**

abundance of disease-carrying vectors such as mosquitoes, threatening the re-emergence of once-prevalent illnesses, from scrub typhus to dengue. And it can create a range of outcomes that compromise public health in one way or another: Rising sea levels or prolonged drought can displace communities; scarce resources can trigger instability and conflict; and a decline in agricultural output can aggravate and entrench poverty.

all. Across the region, health systems should be able to anticipate, respond to, cope with, recover from and adapt to climate-related shocks and stress, and do so in a way that advances health equity and ensures no one is left behind. There are several ways to do this.

Most critical is obtaining high-level awareness and resolve to take action. In each of the region's member countries, health authorities should be fully cognisant of the specific climate-associated health risks they face and

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Congratulations, Team Bangladesh!

There was a time when Bangladesh cricket team was a subject of jokes. One such joke was about a condemned prisoner about to be hanged soon. Asked what his last wish was, he replied that he wished to see Bangladesh cricket team defeat Australia in a Test match before his death, the logic being that Bangladesh could never beat Australia in a Test match and so he would not have to die. On Wednesday, Bangladesh finally won against Australia, putting an end to the joke.

The Tigers' prowess in ODI format is well recognised; now the team has proved their ability in the Test format, too. Congratulations, Team Bangladesh! We are proud of you. Sayek Ahead Sajib, Bagherhat

### Abdul Jabbar no more

Celebrated singer and music composer Abdul Jabbar died on August 30, 2017. He had been suffering from acute kidney and heart diseases, requiring prolonged, costly treatment. While his health was deteriorating, Abdul Jabbar, like many other renowned artistes before him, needed financial assistance for his treatment.

The government should form an exclusive fund to provide financial assistance to less fortunate artistes like Jabbar so that they can receive treatment without any delay or hassle.

I am an ardent admirer of Abdul Jabbar. His songs are indeed very melodious and inspiring. One feature of his singing that has always attracted me is his distinct pronunciation of words in the lyrics. I was really shocked and saddened to hear about his death. May his soul rest in peace.

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