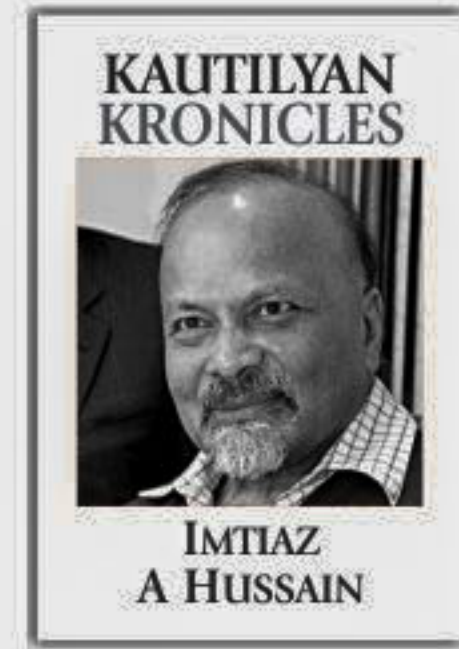


# Wuhan woos: China and India rewriting future history?



IMTIAZ A HUSSAIN

**B**EHIND the brouhaha of the recent Macron-Trump and Moon-Kim summits, the Modi-Jinping rendezvous may have made less noise, but could make more substantive global

changes. A multi-layered appraisal at the local, regional, and global levels examines the proposition.

All three meetings sought to dissolve local irritants: Emmanuel Macron to reverse his sinking domestic reputation and Donald J Trump yearning for a key foreign policy accomplishment; Moon Jae-in charting a different post-election Korean trajectory than his disgraced predecessor, Park Geun-hye, did with her *Saenuri* ("New Frontier") Party, with Kim Jong-un, gleeful from successfully testing North Korea's first intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), beginning his isolation roll-back with his southern neighbours and kinsmen; and Narendra Modi pragmatically not disrupting domestic networks thriving on Chinese trade, with Xi Jinping silencing Tibetans by cornering Dalai Lama's alleged fifth-column within India.

Plenty regional issues justified those summits too. In their respective order, not only fraying transatlantic relations, but also as Russian and Turk interests shift from diverging to opposing their Atlantic partners (to wit, NATO interests); Japan's deep concerns over North Korean missile-testing over its own air-space, that too, paralleling growing Chinese challenges; as well as three potentially explosive China-India issues demanding controls: (a) the Doklam face-off last summer alongside Bhutan; (b) the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) transgressing through India-claimed Kashmir; and (c) India's absence in China's Belt-Road Initiative before the June 2018 Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit China will host.

Yet, the meat in all three lay at the strategic level, that is, where global-level considerations and calculations drive decisions. It is here where the China-India exchange resonates relatively louder than those two summits. Without the United States remaining with the 2015 P5+1-imposed caps on Iran's nuclear development (with the P5+1 referring to the UN Security Council's five permanent members, and the one to Germany, a reference better known as 3+3 across Europe, with China, Russia, and the United States representing one side of the equation, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom the other), Iran would be freed to pursue its own nuclear programme as it alone wishes. Iran's nuclear threat upon Israel was a prior catalyst. That fear has since been overtaken by Iran dangerously joining the Russia-Syria-Turkey combination against NATO forces inside Syria, while also permitting the feud with Saudi Arabia to escalate on the side-lines.

Compounding matters, Saudi Arabia's rapprochement with Israel emboldened Benjamin Netanyahu to call Iran a "liar", with evidence so stale that only the United States would gulp (as visiting US Secretary of State Michael Richard Pompeo's Jerusalem visit indicated). It is still crude, but emergent fault-lines suggest Iran, Russia, and Turkey are lining up against Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United States.

On the Korean peninsula, "Rocket Man" Kim's ICBM exercises came close to drawing blood last year when the US Seventh Fleet sailed into the Japan Sea off Korea. China went the extra diplomatic (and economic) yard to thwart any confrontation, only magnifying the strategic value of the Moon-Kim summit. With Korean interests spilling over, how China and Japan realign will be as crucial as the US naval presence, if not more. When Shinzo Abe hosts a summit with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and

belligerent US counterpart under Trump (and infrequently by China too, as the South China Sea experiment shows), was prepared through three lower-level deliberations.

One reason why India's huge NSG advantage over Pakistan is its economic might. Even behind all the domestic problems being triggered by Modi's economic reforms, especially as these begin to limit India's growth-rate. India still boasts the world's highest growth-rate among countries that matter. That expanding list now extends far outside the OECD boundaries, with India's name now being mentioned in the same breath as before the British Empire began, when China and India boasted the largest economies.

We will, perhaps in our own life-time, see both countries return to being the world's two largest economies, but with India in the driving-seat given its higher economic and population growth-rates.

Modi's right-wing supporters could unleash a wider purification campaign across India, further threatening already cowed-down minorities, which Pakistan's evergreen *jihadists* could easily exploit. Similarly, China's phenomenal economic growth has not been followed by appropriate social adjustments, if indeed that is at all possible since culture is not an assembly-line product like trade merchandise that Chinese leaders can dictate.

Such a historical hindsight among Chinese and Indian leaders (Great Silk Route for China, *Hindustva* for India), is a luxury for rivals: the United States does not have a deep enough history to draw upon, and even if it did, its policymakers have rarely invoked it upon foreign policy; Russia cannot look back because of the bitter and barbaric experiences it holds; while France, Germany, and Great Britain possess rich and relevant such reservoirs, yet do not steer the strategic



Photograph released by India's Press Information Bureau on April 28, shows India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping looking out along the East Lake, in Wuhan.

Moon on May 9, China will be in full control of the Far East, play secondarily in the Middle East, but most potent where it is most strategic: nuclear-ridden South Asia.

Wooing each other in Wuhan, Modi and Jinping may have a rough 21st Century global road-map. In spite of Doklam, CPEC incursion into Kashmir, China's proprietorship of Hambantoto Port in Sri Lanka, and China becoming the largest foreign partner of Bangladesh, India's fervent NSG membership (Nuclear Suppliers Group), which Pakistan also seeks, cannot happen without China's acquiescence. This is a key to India's passage into great-power status that Pakistan cannot match, even as a NSG member. A deliberate day-long Wuhan "garden party" more suitable to China's benevolent foreign policy approach, as opposed to a more

To get there, India must first ride as a front-seat passenger alongside China, its largest current trading partner actually enjoying too skewed a favourable balance. It is not just that India's younger workers may eat away this disadvantage over time, chip by chip, but also that imports from China have created deep retail-level networks. To chop (rather than chip) portions of this deficit through tariffs would pit Modi against more local resentment (he is already bombarded by too many domestic challenges), irrevocably eroding his pre-election support-base, and threatening the Indian transplanting of his very successful Gujarat reforms.

No future projections here will hold if domestic turmoil intervenes; and every major country in the world today is replete with destabilising triggers for even modest future projections to hold.

global dynamics wheel anymore.

Economic performances, not military victories, have catalysed China's global leadership climb. Though the military is important to India, given its Pakistan, when India sparkles economically, the world is likely to sparkle more than under China's asymmetrically-bent economic thrusts because of more respectable rules and greater transparency. That Jinping and Modi met in Wuhan Museum underscores a historical bond both shared, but also a strategic future road-map that snap-shots scowling across the Atlantic or Korea cannot.

Ian Bremmer's term, *frenemies* (friends and enemies) aptly explains those Wuhan woos: expect both future coos and shoos in this relationship.

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## DSE gets new stewardship

*It should help check manipulation*

**A**FTER nearly a year of proposals and counter proposals, the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission has approved of the joint bid from a Chinese consortium to become a strategic partner of DSE. The deal is to be inked on May 14 after the Chinese submitted a revised bid on April 30. We welcome the entry of the Shenzhen and Shanghai Stock Exchange which are listed in the top 10 stock exchanges in the world. Their entry in the running of our premier bourse will certainly help in its development.

In the aftermath of repeated share market scams, it had become apparent that things needed to change. The need for ensuring good governance had been stressed upon in the stock market probe conducted by the government in the post-market crash of 2011. The agreement that will be signed in the middle of the month is going to open up 25 percent of the bourse to the strategic partner, which in turn should usher in foreign direct investment. The deal will put in to effect the demutualisation of the bourse, which basically transforms it from an entity owned by mostly brokerage-owning members into a for-profit company owned by shareholders.

DSE now has the opportunity to upgrade itself into an international standard stock exchange with the entry of the Chinese consortium which brings in technical support worth Tk 300 crore. It is hoped that the deal will lead to a significant technology transfer that will update the software used by the bourse that will bring about more transparency in trading and training of local human resources. We for our part should let the new management work towards re-establishing the confidence of shareholders in the bourse, which hopefully will be freed from the clutches of market manipulators.

## Baffling recurrence of gender violence

*A critical rethink of preventive measures is necessary*

**T**HE increasing frequency with which violence against women and girls is being carried out, despite a number of legal safeguards and a seeming national consensus about such violence, is mind-boggling. Two reports in this newspaper on Thursday described the killing of one girl and the rape of another, both students of class-III and nearly the same age. The incidents took place in Brahmanbaria and Pabna, when the girls went out from their homes to distribute sweetsmeats in their neighbourhoods as part of a traditional ceremony associated with the Shab-e-Barat. That such heinous crimes occurred on a holy occasion is equally upsetting but what baffles us is the futility of the preventive measures and awareness programmes undertaken by the institutions concerned, which should have delivered some results by now.

Which begs the question: how effective are those measures and programmes? Are we doing enough to ensure safety for our girls and women? And what emboldens the criminals to indulge in such crimes despite there being severe punishments for doing so? The answer to the last question is simple: absence of justice. According to a recent estimate by a Bangla daily, 97 percent of the cases of violence in five tribunals in Dhaka district, over the last 15 years, ended up with no conviction. What's happening in the rest of the country is anybody's guess. Unless the government strengthens its justice-delivery mechanism and holds those involved in the process accountable, the recurrence of such crimes cannot be prevented. Equally importantly, we also need to review the existing awareness raising measures. A lot of these neighbourhood occurrences can be prevented with proper community involvement, a practice that's known to have brought dramatic changes in the fight against gender violence in many countries.

## INTERNATIONAL MIDWIVES' DAY

# Saving lives with quality care



ASA TORKELSSON

**T**ODAY we celebrate International Day of the Midwife, this year on the theme "Midwives Leading the Way with Quality Care." It resonates with the

remarkable efforts and progress that Bangladesh has made in rolling out and accelerating the midwifery profession, thereby making a critical contribution to the health of women and newborns. In fact, in the past two decades, the maternal mortality rate has been reduced by more than 50 percent in Bangladesh.

The midwifery programme in Bangladesh—which includes midwifery education, training and employment—is rooted in the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's 2010 commitment, as part of the UN Secretary General's Every Woman, Every Child Initiative. Bangladesh's midwifery programme is a joint effort made possible by partnerships between the government, UNFPA, civil society, and the support of many development partners such as the governments of Canada, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

But still, close to 6,000 women die every year from preventable, pregnancy-related causes in Bangladesh. Midwives will be key to getting maternal deaths to zero as key actors in the country's health strategy.

Indeed, research has shown that midwives can avert around two-thirds of all maternal and newborn deaths. Still, many births (around 63 percent) occur in homes. It is important that women are encouraged and do seek midwives during their pregnancy, for their delivery, and when the baby is born.

Worldwide, well-educated, skilled and supportive midwives can provide over 87 percent of all sexual and reproductive health services, including care for mothers and babies during pregnancy and childbirth, counselling on family planning, screening for cervical cancer, managing sexually transmitted infections such as HIV, and more.

There are currently 1,880 registered diploma midwives in Bangladesh who have completed a three-year midwifery course. What's more, there are 1,600 nurse-midwives who have become Certified Midwives by completing a course to bring their capabilities up to international midwifery standards. These, along with a Master's programme are some of the higher educational opportunities now available to women and girls through the midwifery profession.

To give an example, professional midwives such as Ankhi Mandal, working at BoalmariUpazila Health Complex, are stepping into their leadership role in reducing maternal and infant deaths.

Ankhi expresses that in addition to her motivation for providing lifesaving reproductive healthcare, that becoming a certified midwife through midwifery education at Dhaka Nursing College was a dream opportunity for her. She shares, "When a new baby comes to the world by my hands, that feeling I can't express in words and often my eyes become wet with tears of happiness."

Midwives are also role models in their communities and societies at large. The midwifery profession empowers women economically, and opens new opportunities for women to enter the labour market as wage earners.

Building on its strong growth and achievements, Bangladesh is rapidly moving towards becoming a "Developing

Country." As we applaud this achievement, we also need to harness energy to solve and fill the remaining gaps, including securing maternal and newborn health now and in the future.

The greatest remaining challenges in reducing maternal and newborn mortality are low access to health facilities and skilled birth attendants, such as midwives and doctors, and women's current health-seeking behaviour. As mentioned, women, who are furthest left behind in society, have particularly low access to health services.

To address these issues, the government supported by UNFPA are working tirelessly to provide quality sexual and reproductive health care throughout the country—one of the ways being through educating and deploying midwives. With midwives, more women will have access to lifesaving care, ensuring equity in health care services for all. Innovations to enhance the quality of care are also being rolled out. One example is the recently launched e-partograph that midwives will manage, and that can further support their work.

Midwives have been deployed to remote rural health facilities as well as to humanitarian crises including floods, cyclones and influxes of refugees and displaced persons. Indeed, babies are born everyday, even in crises. Highly dedicated midwives have served with compassion in Cox's Bazar, supporting women in need.

In order for Bangladesh to achieve the best health outcomes and the Sustainable Development Goals' targets 3 and 5, related to reducing maternal mortality, promoting gender equality, and ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health services, midwives must be an integral part of the whole health care system and available

everywhere—from public to private facilities, from communities to referral hospitals. In fact, recently deployed midwives in SreemongolUpazila Health Complex send the strong message that midwives should be posted at every facility, and enabling environments need to be created at all facilities for health care service providers to work together as a team in delivering maternal health.

Bangladesh's current health care policies set a clear agenda for midwives to take the lead in providing maternal and newborn health care. In order for midwife-leaders to bring about the needed transformations, enabling environments must be assured. Midwives need to be recognised as autonomous experts when caring for women, operating in safe workspaces, and functioning as part of a team to ensure rapid emergency response for those with life-threatening complications.

Every day, midwives are bringing lifesaving health services to all women, particularly to vulnerable women and girls, promoting gender equality and ensuring no one is left behind. They are real proof and realisation of both the SDGs in action as well as UNFPA's mandate of ensuring reproductive health and rights for all.

UNFPA would like to commend the government of Bangladesh, in particular the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, for its hard work and dedication in promoting the health of girls, women, mothers, and newborns by ensuring a strong midwifery profession to safeguard good health for all. In addition, UNFPA thanks all of the midwives who have bravely stepped forward to fulfil leadership roles for women's empowerment.

Dr Asa Torkelsson is UNFPA Bangladesh Representative.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### No question leak in HSC

Finally, this year's HSC examinations have concluded without any known incident of question paper leak. This almost seemed impossible at one stage.

The government should have undertaken such serious efforts to curb the problem of question leak earlier in its rudimentary phase. However, it is better late than never.

We hope that no question paper of public examinations will ever be leaked again. To achieve that, the authorities must continue on with their efforts.

Md Zillur Rahaman, *By e-mail*

### Preventing sexual harassment in buses

Many victims of sexual harassment have recently spoken up on social media, describing the kind of harassments they have faced in public transports. According to a Brac study, about 94 percent of women using public transports have been subjected to such disgraceful harassment at least once.

This is a serious issue and requires proper attention from the government. The authorities should introduce emergency call numbers for victims to use as necessary. The overall security system across the city should also be improved.

Most importantly, there should be a mechanism for victims to report cases of sexual harassment and assault. If victims feel comfortable enough to speak up and the authorities ensure quick and proper prosecution, such menace will end.

Dr Roksana Jahan, *Dhaka*