



VISUAL: MONOROM POLOK

KASHMIR'S BLOODSTAINED MEADOWS

Can the SCO show a road to reconciliation?



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On April 22, 2025, the idyllic meadows of Pahalgam in Kashmir turned into a killing field. Twenty-six tourists—fathers, sons, dreamers—were gunned down by militants claiming allegiance to the Resistance Front, a shadowy group India links to Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba. India retaliated by suspending the Indus Waters Treaty, a lifeline for Pakistan's agriculture, while Pakistan closed its airspace to Indian flights and expelled diplomats. Nuclear arsenals loom; rhetoric hardens. Yet, amid this storm, a fragile olive branch emerges: Iran, reeling from its own tragedy—a port explosion in Hormozgan that killed at least 28 and injured 800—still urges dialogue, quoting 13th-century Persian poet Saadi, "Human beings are limbs of one body / Created from the same essence."

Iran's dual crucible: Grief and mediation

Even as Iran mourns its dead in Shahid Rajaei Port, its leaders insist on peace. President Masoud Pezeshkian's calls to Narendra Modi and Shehbaz Sharif were not mere diplomacy but a testament to Tehran's belief in *Tadamun* (solidarity), a philosophy rooted in Persian Sufism and the shared trauma of terrorism. Iran's offer to mediate is strategic: it shares a 909-km border with Pakistan, supplies 10 percent of India's oil, and understands the cost of isolation after decades of sanctions. This duality—grief at home, hope abroad—reveals a truth: South Asia's survival hinges on transcending the zero-sum logic of power politics.

The SCO: A stage for reluctant partners

For Bangladeshi readers unfamiliar with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), this 10-nation bloc—China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Iran, and Central Asian states—is no ordinary alliance. Born in 2001 to combat terrorism and foster economic ties, the SCO today represents 40 percent of humanity. Its "Shanghai Spirit" prioritises mutual trust, equality, and non-interference—principles starkly absent in South Asia's zero-sum rivalries. Unlike SAARC, paralysed by India-Pakistan feuds, the SCO has quietly hosted leaders from both nations at summits where dialogue persists even as bombs threaten to fall.

Among its quiet successes is the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), a Tashkent-based hub where Indian and Pakistani officials share intelligence on extremist groups,

even as their governments trade accusations. Equally significant is the SCO's role in fostering economic pragmatism. Despite bilateral trade collapsing to near zero in 2019, India and Pakistan collaborate on SCO-backed projects like the TAPI gas pipeline, a \$10 billion initiative to connect Turkmenistan's energy fields to South Asia. At the 2024 SCO summit in Islamabad, India's external affairs minister met Pakistani leaders informally—a thaw unthinkable in SAARC's gridlocked halls.

The SCO is no utopia. It lacks NATO's binding commitments or the EU's economic integration. Yet, its flexibility allows rivals to engage without losing face—a vital feature for South Asia's fractured geopolitics.

Araghchi's gambit: Iran as mediator, SCO as stage

Abbas Araghchi's offer is no diplomatic platitude. A veteran of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA), he understands the cost of isolation—having weathered Western sanctions—and champions the SCO's vision of a multipolar world free from unilateral coercion.

Culturally, Araghchi's invocation of Saadi resonates deeply in a region where Persian poetry and Sufi shrines bind Iran to both nations. This shared heritage, overshadowed by modern animosity, offers a foundation for dialogue. The SCO amplifies this outreach. At the 2024 Astana Summit, members condemned unilateral sanctions and pushed for trade in local currencies—a direct challenge to US financial hegemony. For India and Pakistan, this shared interest in strategic autonomy could incentivise compromise. Imagine SCO-led talks restoring the Indus Waters Treaty, with China and Russia guaranteeing compliance—a win for regional stability and the bloc's credibility.

Bangladesh's stake: Why peace in Kashmir matters here

Bangladesh, though not an SCO member, has a profound stake in this détente. Our rivers, remittances, and regional trade are entwined with India and Pakistan's stability. The Ganges and Brahmaputra, fed by Himalayan glaciers, bind our fate to India and Pakistan's water wars. A conflict between the two would disrupt regional supply chains, spiking inflation in Dhaka's markets. The World Bank estimates that South Asia loses \$80 billion annually due to trade barriers—funds that could uplift 500 million people from poverty. The climate crisis further binds

our fates. Himalayan glaciers feed the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Indus. Their accelerated melting—a crisis demanding joint action—is drowned out by gunfire. Bangladesh's own liberation in 1971, forged through bloodshed, compels us to champion dialogue over destruction. As *The Daily Star* editorialises, "Restraint is not weakness—it is the courage to choose humanity over hubris."

Beyond realism: A blueprint for SCO-driven peace

To escape Mearsheimer's "tragedy," South Asia must redefine security through the SCO's lens. First, reviving the Indus Waters Treaty with SCO guarantees could turn water from a weapon into a shared resource. China, as an upstream power and SCO heavyweight, could broker a new agreement monitored by RATS. Second, expanding the SCO's "Peace Mission" exercises to include joint India-Pakistan counterterrorism drills could build trust, mirroring ASEAN's maritime cooperation in the South China Sea.

Third, Bangladesh could advocate extending China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to include cross-border energy grids, easing regional disputes over resources. Fourth, amplifying Track-II diplomacy through the SCO's proposed Civil Society Forum could host Bangladeshi NGOs, artists, and peace activists, bypassing state hostility to foster grassroots dialogue. Finally, the climate crisis—a common enemy threatening 75 percent of South Asians—demands a joint adaptation fund under SCO auspices, a survival imperative transcending borders.

Writing a new destiny, together

South Asia holds the pen to rewrite its destiny. As Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz implored, "*Bol, ke lab azaad hai tere...*" ("Speak, for your lips are free"). The Kashmir attack is a tragedy, but not an inevitability. History whispers alternatives: France and Germany, once archenemies, now anchor the EU. ASEAN turned Southeast Asia from a war zone into an economic bloc. South Asia, with its youthful vigour and civilisational depth, can do the same—if we let the SCO guide us.

Bangladesh must add its voice to this chorus. Let us urge Delhi and Islamabad to embrace Araghchi's offer, to meet in SCO halls where poetry outweighs posturing. Let us demand that rivers flow not with blood, but with shared resolve.

The audacity of hope

As Iran mourned in Hormozgan, its leaders echoed Rumi, "Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I'll meet you there." South Asia stands at that field. Let Delhi and Islamabad meet there—not with tanks, but with the SCO as witness. The hour is late, but the path is clear. Peace is not a distant dream—it is a choice.

Trump's Xanadu: Power, spectacle, and the mirage of control



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In *Kubla Khan*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge crafts—and perhaps even curates with an eerie instinct—the image of a wayward ruler bent not merely on governing his empire, but on mastering the very fabric of existence itself. This act of curation, drawn from a dream and infused with the opium haze of the unconscious, epitomises the Romantic imagination as a site of sublime excess and visionary power. Coleridge's Xanadu is not merely a political domain but a projection of the inner psyche, where reason and reverie collapse. The emperor's pleasure dome, encircled by tumultuous forces, becomes a haunting image of ambition undone by the chaos it attempts to subdue. This tension finds its uncanny echo in the political spectacle fashioned by US President Donald Trump, across the first chaotic 100 days of his second term, marked by an extravagant display of control ultimately unravelled by the contradictions that sustained it.

This tension reverberates on the modern political stage—the "Theatre of the Absurd," to borrow Martin Esslin's phrase—where Trump's administration, like Kubla Khan's empire, operates as a spectacle: a performance designed to project invincibility. Yet, just as the emperor's dome was surrounded by chaotic forces beyond his command, Trump's vision of an impervious America falters when confronted with the imbroglia of a global trade war, the dismantling of the global economic order, the retreat from globalisation, and mass deportations. His imagery is less an articulation of governance than a performance of control. This fleeting illusion lays bare the vagaries of perception and the vaingloriousness of power draped in the garb of permanence.

The spectacle of power: Reality and illusion

At the heart of Coleridge's poem lies the decreed pleasure dome, a manifestation of power and wealth, designed to dominate both land and imagination. Yet, it is a world "where Alph, the sacred river, meanders with a mazy motion through caverns measureless to man," teetering with unpredictable forces that elude imperial control. This duality between vision and uncontrollable forces reveals the instability and vacuity in the assertion of absolute control. Trump's promises—of "making America great again" (for the second, discontinued term-time), bringing jobs back (insourcing), pivoting away from China, renaming the Gulf of Mexico, annexing Canada, acquiring Greenland through Machiavellian coaxing, and retaking the Panama Canal—amount to more spectacle than substance. These

assertions of control unravel not merely into fragile illusions, but into a fully fledged farce.

Take, for instance, the border wall, an enduring emblem of Trump's rhetoric. It was never merely about steel and concrete, but a declaration of will, a performance of sovereignty. Yet, it remained largely unfulfilled, thwarted by legal entanglements, logistical quagmires, and political resistance. Like a modern day pleasure dome, the wall was more mirage than monument—a spectacle that crumbled against bureaucracy, shifting public sentiment, and the inconvenient truth that the neighbouring country was neither beholden nor inclined to finance it.

Trump's illusion of control: Spectacle and strategy

Trump's foreign policy mirrors this illusory control. His relationship with Russia, framed as a triumph of negotiation, is riddled with contradictions and failures. His interactions with Putin expose the limits of his manoeuvring. Trump's transactional diplomacy mirrors his domestic policies: power as spectacle, not substance. Nowhere is this more evident than in his dealings with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. At times, Trump isn't the master but the pawn—most clearly in his failure to broker a lasting peace or a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel. Trump's acquiescence to Netanyahu's ploy highlights his inability to navigate entrenched conflicts, revealing the fragility of his posturing. Yet, many observers see him outmanoeuvring adversaries intent on undermining him, as in the renewed momentum around a potential US-Iran nuclear deal, nearly a decade after he jettisoned the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) at Netanyahu's insistence. This ambiguity underscores the challenge of discerning substance beneath the performance.

This view of politics mirrors the emperor's delusion of shaping the world through sheer will. But just as Kubla Khan's empire was surrounded by nature's "savagery place," Trump's approach ignores global complexities. His policies assert dominance but fail to grasp the cascading complexities of diplomacy. The emperor's world collapses not from ambition but from hubris, blinded by arrogance and crippled by a failure of imagination.

The power of the poet: Imagination versus assertion

In contrast to the emperor, Coleridge places the poet as one who creates not through assertion, but imagination. Having "drunk the milk of Paradise," the poet upends power's territoriality and transcends its limits. The poet does not impose a vision; he allows the world to unfold. This is true power, rooted not in control but in

the freedom of imagination.

In this lies the critical difference between *fancy* and *imagination* in Coleridge's terms. The poet's imagination is dynamic and organic, resonating deeply with the world's moral and metaphysical textures. The emperor's dome is the product of fancy, a surface-level construction mimicking power while hollow at its core. Trump, much like Kubla Khan, emerges as a ruler of fancy: his dominion is an assertion built on spectacle, lacking the coherence and transformative potential of genuine imagination. His rhetoric is loud—"more bark than bite," as Fareed Zakaria puts it—and void of the visionary substance that might engender transformative change.

It is crucial to note that Coleridge's dream fragment captures far more leaps of imagination than Trump's elusive presidency—fragmented and fanciful—could ever fathom: a phantom MAGAdu, a mirage of spectacle and delusion, cobbled from MAGA and Xanadu. In a world where poetic vision might offer transcendence, Trump's politics remained mired in reactive spectacle. Where Coleridge gestures toward sublimity, Trump settles for simulacra. His politics lacks the poetic resonance that might offer enduring meaning—it is all surface, no depth.

The collapse of the spectacle: Power and reality

Trump's administration serves as a reminder of the fragility of power when built on illusion. His narrative of strength and victory is increasingly exposed as hollow. Just as Kubla Khan's dome was surrounded by chaos, Trump's spectacle-driven empire is undermined by governance realities. His vision of America's dominance is not matched by the complexities of a changing world.

In the end, Trump's political vision, much like the emperor's, is vulnerable to collapse not from its ambition, but from ignoring deeper forces of complexity and resistance. Power rooted in fancy cannot withstand the forces it seeks to control. Both Trump's and Kubla Khan's empires embody the same truth: power, when divorced from imagination and understanding, is bound to fail.

There is a fundamental difference between Kubla Khan's decree to build a pleasure dome in Xanadu and Coleridge's imaginative vision that unfolds after "drinking the milk of Paradise," epitomising Plato's portrayal of the poet in *Ion*. Khan's "decree"—an imperial assertion—springs from fancy, grounded in reason and taste, gone haywire. His vision remains architectural and territorial, marred by ambition.

In contrast, Coleridge's visionary journey—induced by the "milk of Paradise"—belongs to imagination: not willed but received, not constructed but revealed. His dome is not a monument of dominion, but an echo of lost wholeness, a beauty glimpsed and then interrupted. The poem dramatises the contrast between imperial fantasy and poetic imagination, between power that commands and vision that transcends.

এসেনসিয়াল ড্রাগস্ কোম্পানী লিমিটেড

৩৯৫-৩৯৭, তেজগাঁও শিল্প এলাকা

ঢাকা - ১২০৮

সূত্র নং: ইউসিএল(কেইএলপি)/ক্রয়/জ্যাপ/স্থানীয় দরপত্র/২০২৫/১৭২

তাং ০৪/০৫/২০২৫

পুরাতন / অকেজো জ্যাপ মালামাল বিক্রয় ঠিকাদার নিয়োগ-এর পুন: বিজ্ঞপ্তি

খুলনা এসেনসিয়াল ল্যাটেক্স প্রাক্টের অব্যবহৃত পুরাতন/অকেজো মালামাল তালিকা অনুযায়ী বিক্রয়ের জন্য "পুরাতন/অকেজো জ্যাপ মালামাল বিক্রয়" ঠিকাদার ০২ (দুই) বছরের জন্য নিয়োগ দেয়া হবে। বিস্তারিত নিয়মাবলীসহ পুরাতন/অকেজো মালামালের তালিকা সম্বলিত দরপত্র সিডিউল হিসাব বিভাগ, ইউসিএল, ঢাকা এবং কেইএলপি, খুলনা এর ক্যাশ শাখা হতে নগদ টাকা ২,০০০.০০ (টাকা দুই হাজার) মাত্র মূল্যে আগামী ২৫.০৫.২০২৫ পর্যন্ত অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে অগ্রাধী প্রাচীনা সমূহ ক্রয় এবং ২৬.০৫.২০২৫ইউ উক্ত দরপত্র সমূহ বেলা ১২:০০ ঘটিকার মধ্যে ইউসিএল ঢাকা এবং খুলনা এসেনসিয়াল ল্যাটেক্স প্রাক্টের ক্রয় বিভাগে রক্ষিত বস্ত্রে দাখিল করতে হবে। প্রাপ্ত দরপত্র সমূহ আগামী ২৯.০৫.২০২৫ই তারিখে বেলা ৩:৩০ ঘটিকায় ক্রয় বিভাগ, প্রধান কার্যালয় ইউসিএল ঢাকায় (কেইএলপি হতে দরপত্র প্রাপ্যতা সাপেক্ষে) খোলা হবে। ইউসিএল কর্তৃপক্ষ কোন কারন দর্শনো ব্যতিরেকে যে কোন অথবা সকল সিডিউল গ্রহন অথবা বাতিল করার পূর্ণ ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন। উল্লেখ যে, দরপত্র দাখিলের দিন কোন দরপত্র /সিডিউল বিক্রয় করা হবে না।

মহাব্যবস্থাপক প্রকিউরমেন্ট (সিসি) পক্ষে ব্যবস্থাপনা পরিচালক।