

# The Security World



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# THE SECURITY WORLD

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The Security World is being published with the primary purpose of promoting peace, security and international cooperation through analysis, policy dialogue and dissemination of information. We are also trying to focus on the contributions of our defense forces and law enforcement agencies in curbing terrorism and their role in the international arena to bring back peace and security. As there is no noteworthy publication to project these achievements, we believe the Security World will play a pivotal role in this regard.

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# THE WAR FOR ASIA

*China studies its old map of expansion as the Ukraine war weakens Russia*

**MJ Akbar**

*Author of several books, including Doolally Sahib and the Black Zamindar: Racism and Revenge in the British Raj.*



UKRAINE HAS BECOME a European war with Asian consequences.

The West, led by America, is driven by two objectives in its support for Ukraine. The first is incontrovertible. A nation state is the new building block of

global stability, and any violent transgression of borders can trigger a domino effect as it legitimises unilateral expansionism. The remedy lies in prevention.

The second objective is inspired by the NATO impulse: to weaken Russia in Europe. This is strategic fallacy. You cannot weaken Russia where it is not strong.

Russia lost Europe with the Soviet collapse in 1991. Since then, its muscular atrophy along the advancing NATO frontier has become pronounced. The Kremlin is now in the paradoxical position of being a nuclear superpower without being a regional power. Russia can still destroy the world in five minutes. Ukraine, not quite so quickly.

Russia can be weakened where it is still strong: in Russian Asia. Eight of its 10 time zones and 77 per cent of its territory are in Asia, traversing some 5,000km eastwards from the Urals and Caucasus to the Bering Strait and the Pacific Ocean.

Despite more than a decade of continual war since 1994, Moscow holds the Muslim North Caucasus in a tight grip. In Central Asia it has re-established degrees of influence through patient diplomacy and variable military presence. In Siberia and Outer Manchuria it exercises sovereignty through rights embedded in Tsarist colonialism. Vladimir Lenin killed the Romanovs in 1918 after the Bolshevik Revolution, but kept their empire.

Vladimir Putin, appointed prime minister in 1999, began to pick up the pieces of a shattered decade, saving what he could from the Soviet debris while searching for a defensive line against NATO's relentless and ruthless advance. The NATO adjectives are not pejorative. Powers which become sentimental do not remain powerful. Stalin was hardly overwhelmed by tears when he pushed the Soviet perimeter into half of Germany after 1945.

Putin, perhaps lulled by the smooth acquisition of Crimea in 2014, misread the mood during his second invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. His mistake was ►►



► overestimation of Russia’s military prowess. This is clearly not Stalin’s Red Army. Russia will in all likelihood hold on to a slice of eastern Ukraine when the firing ceases, but the reputation of the Russian army has been dented. Invincible, it is not.

The neighbourhood is doing the math.

Russia is growing vulnerable in three of its Asian regions: in the North Caucasus, where there is always the possibility of renewed conflict; in Central Asia, but with less dramatic consequences; and in its far east, across the vast Siberian steppes spread over 13.1 million sq km, or one-tenth of the Earth’s territory, but home to only one-fifth of Russia’s population, or some 37 million people at the last count.

The Caucasus range running south of Ukraine and east of Türkiye is considered the traditional boundary between Europe and Asia. The Caucasus states, a network of ethnic identities, are wedged between the Black and Caspian Seas. In 1991, three of them, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, swept to inde-

pendence on the tide of change that changed the map of Europe and Asia. But this tide stopped short of the North Caucasus. Moscow denied Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia independence. When their people elected the nationalist Major General Dzhokhar Dudayev as president of the Chechen-Ingush Republic in October 1991, President Boris Yeltsin sent troops to “re-establish order”.

The Muslim Caucasus has fought long and hard for freedom since the Tsarist advance two centuries ago. The first War of Caucasian Resistance, called a jihad by Muslims, lasted from 1817 to 1864. In 1832 the iconic Shaykh Shamil (1797-1871), third Imam of the Dagestan Imamate, took over leadership of the jihad. The memory of this legendary guerrilla commander lives on in lore. The Russians conquered Dagestan and Chechnya only in 1859, but fighting continued until Imam Shamil was captured. St Petersburg treated him well, giving him a palatial residence in, ironically, Kyiv. Two of Shamil’s sons joined the Tsar; two others served in the Ottoman army. In 1869 he was given ►►



Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, March 21, 2023. (Photo: AP)

► permission to go on hajj, and died in Medina after completing the pilgrimage. He was buried in the garden of Paradise. When, in less than 50 years, the Tsars were overthrown, Imam Shamil's grandson Said became one of the founders of the Mountainous Republic of Northern Caucasus. Freedom lasted a brief three years. In 1920 Moscow was back, this time waving a red flag. Forced into exile, Said Shamil set up the Committee for Independence in 1924.

When independence was again denied in 1991, the separatist jihad revived by the winter of 1994. Its most prominent leader, Akhmad Abdulkhamidovich Kadyrov, was appointed chief mufti of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria in 1995. The Kadyrovs had been deported to Kazakhstan by Stalin, and returned home in 1957, after Stalin's death. Born in 1951, Akhmad studied at the famous Mir-i-Arab Madrasah in Bukhara and the Islamic University in Tashkent. He summed up his theory of war in two pithy sentences: "There are a million Chechens, and 150 million Russians. If every Chechen kills 150 Russians, we will win." That bruising spirit was a hallmark of the mujahideen, who called themselves Grey Wolves, in the

Chechen conflicts of that decade.

Russian morale was in quicksand when Putin, a year younger than Khadyrov, became prime minister in August 1999, acting president on the last day of 1999, and president on May 7, 2000. In a series of attacks Chechens spread havoc in Moscow, taking a heavy toll of Russian blood and will. Putin split the Chechen resistance through a deal with Kadyrov. Kadyrov became head of Chechnya's government in the summer of 2000, and was named president of the Chechen Republic on October 5, 2003. Eight months later he was dead. On May 9, 2004, an explosion shattered the VIP enclosure during the Russian Victory Parade in Grozny, killing Kadyrov instantly. The attack had been ordered by a former colleague in the jihad, Shamil Basayev.

Putin kept his commitment to the family, appointing Akhmad's young son Ramzan as president in 2007.

Ramzan Kadyrov has been loyal to Putin, sending troops to the Ukraine battlefield. Helped by generous funds from Moscow, he has turned Grozny into a vibrant city, resplendent with mosque spires. A principal mosque is named after his father. ►

► Those tall spires, and indeed the long beards that Ramzan and his supporters wear, are a reminder that there is an older identity waiting for its moment. The spirit of independence has been subdued but not suppressed. It is not widely known that a battalion of Chechens is fighting on Ukraine's side. They are not apolitical mercenaries. They are the grey wolves now risking their lives to weaken Russia, for their hopes of independence lie in a degradation of Russia's ability to defend its protectorates.

Demographics tell the story: 94 per cent of Chechnya, 97 per cent of Ingushetia, 83 per cent of Dagestan, 70 per cent of Kabardino-Balkaria, and 64 per cent of Karachay-Cherkessia is Muslim. One in six Crimeans is a Tatar. At 20 million, there are more Muslims in the Russian Federation than in Malaysia.

Unspoken questions hover over northern Caucasus. The central one is: Can the present Russian army, which promised to seize Kyiv within days and now sits behind deep minefields, survive another Chechen war, particularly if the Chechens are allied to Ukraine?

A number of Russian 'autonomous republics' or 'federal states' hang on to Moscow by a silken thread. Strong, but not steel. One switch could electrify this volatile space seething with currents, undercurrents and crosscurrents.

What happens in Russia does not stay in Russia.

## ACROSS THE CASPIAN

Caucasian volatility will not travel from Dagestan on the west coast of the Caspian to Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan on the eastern shores because the five 'stans' took their independence in 1991 and have preserved it. The communist USSR, or Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, was very socialist and theoretically Soviet, but not much of union. The Soviet Union constituted the largest Asian territory since Genghis Khan. That age of hegemony was replaced by an informal Russian umbrella over Central Asia. This has been punctured after Ukraine. Just as its war in Iraq eroded fear of future American military intervention, Ukraine has nul-

lified dread of any Russian intervention in the 'stans'. The five heads were at the Kremlin on May 9 this year: Kazakhstan's Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Kyrgyzstan's Sadyr Japarov, Tajikistan's Emomali Rahmon, Uzbekistan's Shavkat Mirziyoyev, and Turkmenistan's Serdar Berdimuhamedow. But they went to be heard as much as to listen. The language of discourse had changed.

Tokayev reflected the difference when he distanced himself from Moscow's "special military operation" in Ukraine at the St Petersburg International Economic Forum in June 2022. In an unscripted answer to a question from the floor, he said: "There are different opinions, we have an open society. Modern international law is the UN Charter. Two UN principles, however, have come into contradiction—the territorial integrity of the state and the right of a nation to self-determination..." He had added that "if the right of a nation to self-determination is realised, more than 500 states will emerge on Earth and there will be chaos..." He could not resist taking a swipe at Russian parliamentarians who wanted to meddle in Kazakh affairs. He also praised China for investing over \$22 billion in Kazakhstan over the past 15 years and becoming his country's main economic and foreign trade partner.

Sitting calmly in the waiting room of superpowers, President Xi Jinping hosted the second China-led Central Asia Summit in May this year in Xian, capital of the Han dynasty between 206 BCE and 220 CE. He called the conference the highlight of China's diplomatic calendar in 2023. One fact is obvious. The only nation which can fill the vacuum left by Russia's retreat is China.

## THE MAP OF SHAME

Memory is everything and time is nothing in Chinese political cosmography.

In 1820, the 25th year of the reign of Jiaqing the Great, China published a map of its empire. In the south it extended to Ladakh, which reached Nepal. The province of Tibet included Arunachal Pradesh. ►►

► Nepal, Bhutan and Assam were marked as tributary states. In the west, Afghanistan, Bukhara, Kirkiz-Kazhak and swathes of Central Asia beyond the Pamirs and Xinjiang were also tributaries. The northern limits reached Altai, Mongolia, the whole of Manchuria and the Sakhalin islands. The Qings, of course, were Manchu; Manchurians ruled China from 1616.

Great as the Qing dominion was, it was less than the sum of Chinese claims. If Mongolia was part of China then so was the Mongol Khanate of Sibir, the original term for Siberia, also known as the Khanate of Turan, established by Genghis Khan's eldest son Jochi, and Jochi's fifth son Shayban. The Turco-Mongol-Tatar Sibir became the world's northernmost Muslim state after its conversion to Islam from shamanism. Russia conquered Sibir in 1598, but reached Chukotka on the Bering Strait only in 1778. Tribes like the Buryats, Yakuts, Tuvans, Altais, Khakas and Khitans still live in this vast expanse.

Qing power began to decline with the loss of Hong Kong to Britain in 1842, at the end of the First Opium War. Sixteen years later, in 1858, Russia took Outer Manchuria. The ebb made no difference to China's sense of its boundaries. Conversely, it vitalised a desire for repossession that transcended differences of polity. Sun Yat-sen, who led the movement to remove the last emperor in 1911, made the Qing map into China's national project. In 1938 the Chiang Kai-shek government published a "map of shame" showing parts of China and its tributaries seized by Russia, west Europeans, and Japan: north-east Asia, Senkaku and Nansei Islands, Taiwan, Korea, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, the Malay peninsula, Singapore, Myanmar, Nepal, Ladakh- Kashmir and, of course, Central Asia.

### **The past was never forgotten. Communist China waited till 1997**

This is not a prelude to any sudden outburst of war between Russia and China, currently basking in a diplomatic embrace as they cooperate against a common foe, America. But equations have shifted. Moscow has slipped from its perch as big brother.

And China will return to the northern map once it has played out the endgame for Taiwan.

### **THE DRAGON BUTTERFLY EFFECT**

As Xi Jinping left the Kremlin on the night of Tuesday, March 21, 2023 after a two-day state visit, he told Putin: "Change is coming that hasn't happened in 100 years and we are driving this change together." The two smiled, clasped hands.

"I agree," replied Putin.

Xi's last words before he stepped into the limousine were: "Please take care, dear friend."

One aspect of change might have suggested itself to President Putin. Xi Jinping was at the wheel, while he manned the frontlines.

The Chinese leader implied more Leaders of the Central Asian republics, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko and Putin in Moscow, May 9, 2023.

### **OPEN ESSAY**

to recover Hong Kong from the British after 155 years. China recovered the part of Manchuria taken by Japan in 1931, but Outer Manchuria is still in Russia. China claims that Russia took a million square kilometres of territory in Manchuria and another half-a-million elsewhere from the Qings.

Beijing has gone to war against Russia over Manchuria twice since 1858. In 1929 the Chinese Northeastern Army went on the offensive. Stalin deployed 156,000 troops, or one-fifth of its total forces, to hold his ground. Amity between communist regimes in Beijing and Moscow diluted border tensions but did not eliminate them. In 1964 Beijing raised Manchuria in talks, arguing that Russia had imposed an unjust frontier upon the Qings. When nothing happened, Mao Zedong ordered a troop build-up. On August 23, 1968, Premier Zhou Enlai, who could turn a phrase, castigated the Soviet Union for "fascist politics, great power chauvinism, national egoism and social imperialism" at a banquet held at the Romanian embassy in Beijing. China attacked on March 9, 1969 in Us-▶▶

►suri and Xinjiang. The war halted only in September after negotiations between Premiers Zhou Enlai and Alexei Kosygin restored the status quo.

There were two significant outcomes. Mao Zedong's détente with Richard Nixon in the 1970s was a direct consequence.

The second never made the headlines, and is still secretive. China initiated a drip-feed of emigration to the region to reset the demographic balance in the far east. It was a formidable ploy for Russia has ensured, mainly through deportations and forced transfer of populations, that 85 per cent of the region is of European descent in the Siberian expanse.

The prize is inestimable. Siberia is the mother lode of mineral wealth. The bright lights of European Russia are sustained by the resources of Asian Russia. Asia contributes 90 per cent if not more of Russia's mineral oil, gas and mineral wealth. Siberia has immense resources of oil, natural gas, hydropower, coal, copper, timber, lead, zinc, bauxite, nickel, tin, mercury, platinum, titanium, manganese, potash, uranium, cobalt, tungsten, aluminum, mica, amber, iron ore, tobacco, gold, and diamonds. The West Siberian Basin is the largest known hydrocarbon basin with reserves of 146 billion barrels of oil and 1,600 trillion cubic feet of gas. It contains— for those interested in quiz answers— 107 giant fields, and nine new ones have been discovered since 2019. The point made, we can spare ourselves further details. than he said. He might have described the relationship with Russia as a “limitless” partnership but both knew that the 20th century was finally over. America and Russia looked exhausted. The superpowers of the 20th century had become the Nervous Powers of the 21st.

America made a crucial mistake during its triumphant



Grozny destroyed in the Second Chechen War, February 2000. (Photo: AP)

mood in the 1990s. Spurred by spurious academic cheerleaders it began to believe that because Russia had diminished, America had risen. This misconception was corrected in Afghanistan and Iraq, where America misplaced its nerve. President Barack Obama spent eight becalmed years in the White House, hypnotised by the price of conflict. Donald Trump's vocal belligerence stopped short of action. It was Trump who invited the Taliban back, through talks in Qatar. America still has an estimated 800-plus bases in more than 70 countries, at an annual cost of around \$200 billion, but its boots seem frozen in the mind. (Russia, Britain, France and China together have less than 40.)

American strategic mobility seems to have been transferred from the Pentagon's tank commanders to Washington's think-tank commanders. Condoleezza Rice, George W Bush's secretary of state, was an advocate of the Creative Chaos Theory, an ornate phrase meaning that a new polity could rise only on the ashes of the system it had replaced. Change required total destruction and the resultant chaos. Someone else's eggs had to be broken to make an American omelette. George W Bush dreamt of a big omelette. At the G8 summit in 2004, he spoke of a “Greater Middle East” that included Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan living cosily in the happy fold of Pax Americana. What the ‘old’ Middle East learnt from Iraq and the Arab Spring was that Washington could not be trusted as ►

► principal guarantor of stability.

This set, albeit initially in slow motion, the stage for the “dragon butterfly effect”. The wings of this species flutter to the timbre of Chinese music. When Xi Jinping spoke of change of a kind that has not happened in a hundred years he could have had China’s diplomatic coup in West Asia in mind. For the first time since the end of World War I in 1918, a Western power was not the primary arbiter of events in the Arab world.

On March 10 this year Saudi Arabia, Iran and China issued a joint statement restoring relations between Riyadh and Tehran. The venue for the historic handshake was Beijing, not Camp David in America. President Xi Jinping and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud left America blind-sided. The implicit message was that Washington had kept the two apart at serious cost to the neighbourhood.

This pirouette might never have happened if America’s Democrats had not alienated and even humiliated the Saudi heir for reasons of domestic politics. When history recovers from media soundbites, Joe Biden will have to answer the question he currently evades: What price is America paying for his treatment of Mohammed bin Salman?

Riyadh has not suddenly turned pro-Beijing or anti-American. Bin Salman is establishing, for the first time in many centuries, strategic autonomy, weaving it out of dependence. His conference on Ukraine in August, in which China was present but Russia excluded, was one more example.

China is less concerned with cause and more with effect.

Its current focus is on an axis from Beijing to Riyadh, while a second curves from the Gulf to include the principal regional military powers, including Iran and Syria. Syria, Iran and Russia are linked by complementary interests. On March 19, UAE’s ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan received Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Abu Dhabi with full state

honours. On the same day Riyadh invited Iran’s President Ebrahim Raisi to Saudi Arabia. These are still early days, but this could be the beginning of a radical shift away from the bitter confrontation that has trapped the region since 1979.

High on the agenda is a desire to rewrite the rules of the energy market, find alternatives to the dollar, and establish partnerships in renewable energy, digital economy, artificial intelligence, cyber security, and the industrial internet. China has even proposed a plan for Palestine, which may be a quest too far. Political graveyards are full of reputations clutching a peace plan for Palestine.

The Saudi initiative on Palestine could lead to better results, not least because it seeks incremental steps rather than solutions. Riyadh has made any reevaluation of relations with Israel contingent upon Israeli concessions in Palestine. The broader framework is bilateral and regional. In June the Saudi ambassador to America, Princess Reema bint Bandar Al Saud, said that her country wanted a thriving Red Sea economy with a prosperous Palestine and a prosperous Israel as part of her leader’s Vision 2030.

Aggressive language is a measure of China’s current confidence. On July 5 this year ‘wolf warrior’ Wang Yi, the now revived foreign minister and father of wolf-warrior diplomacy, told Japan and South Korea to foster “strategic autonomy” and “revitalise Asia” as a counterpoint to the West. Speaking at a trilateral forum in Qingdao, he said: “No matter how blonde you dye your hair, how sharp you shape your nose, you can never become a European or American, you can never become which claimed to be the real China. Xi Jinping has linked his credibility and future to reunification by 2027. If he cannot deliver in his third term, a fourth becomes difficult. If he does, he will lead China through the 2030s.

One characteristic of superpower rivalry was the division of the world into ‘obedience’ clusters. NATO and Warsaw Pact countries were the most obvious instances of quasi-colonisation wrapped in economic ►►

► benevolence. Two confident powers, India and China, stayed out of any ‘obedience’ zone. China has been unwilling or unable to admit that India has an independent mind. Beijing is still in thrall of Mao Zedong’s dictum that India was a “running dog” of Western imperialism. In Xi Jinping’s calculations, India’s participation in the Quad is confirmation of the Mao canard.

China therefore has consistently viewed India as an obstacle to its rise. Mao Zedong was irritated by Jawaharlal Nehru’s patrician patronage rather than grateful. Nehru, more idealistic than realistic, told the BBC in 1953 that he saw “absolutely no danger from China”, adding “I don’t think China has any desire to expand”. He was woken up in 1962.

China attacked across the Himalayas to punch India down into a lower division. As often happens, it had the opposite effect. The defeat of 1962 set India free from the Nehru peace jinx. India tripled its defence budget in 1963 and set a course for rearmament that has made it into one of the world’s premier military powers.

Pakistan was the first country to discover the muscle of a different India when in 1965 it tried to seize Kashmir through war and instead lost Kashmir forever. Since then, Pakistan has descended into a jelly state, neither able to stay stable nor disintegrate, quivering on the rim of helplessness. China can do little to help a hapless ally.

For Xi Jinping, the Quad is a direct threat to China’s plans a Westerner... We must know where our roots lie...” He told the two American allies to free themselves from the “coercion of bullying and hegemony”.



Ali Shamkhani, Wang Yi and Musaad bin Mohammed al-Aiban in Beijing, March 11, 2023. (Photo: AP)

He has given no such lectures to Delhi. At least, not yet.

## INDIA, CHINA AND THE GIN LINES

A straight line is the shortest distance between two glasses of gin.

That is how Europeans drew the maps of their colonies in Africa and much of Asia, turning the natural geography of human habitation into one-dimensional lines. This legacy has segued with national ambitions of post-colonial states to create contested spaces that simmer with tension.

China’s priority for reunification is Taiwan, annexed by the Qings in 1683 and occupied by Japan in 1895. In 1949 it became home to the Chiang Kai-shek regime, for Taiwan, and hence it is time for the military containment of India. He has, in effect, three years left. His game of matchsticks and sulphur needs reinforcement by military heft.

A week after securing a third term, Xi Jinping pledged to turn China’s standing army of two million into a “Great Wall of Steel”. They had to be fit to fight on high roads, rough waves and perilous stormy seas. The high roads are the Himalayas, the rough waves and ►►

► perilous seas lie in the Indo-Pacific. China has therefore invested heavily in light tanks for mountain roads; sophisticated submarines; an amphibious assault arsenal; cyber-and-space capability; and a ballistic missile force.

Will Xi Jinping invade Taiwan and risk war on the Third Front of Asia? Only the Chinese leader can provide a firm answer, and he is not in the habit of giving interviews. Moreover, invasion would be akin to an assault on his own country, killing fellow Chinese citizens and destroying Chinese industrial infrastructure.

There is an option outside the conventional box that would tempt him: raise the levels of confrontation in stages till the threat is palpable, and America is forced to send its navy or seem impotent. He then orders a blockade, not as the first act of a Chinese invasion but ostensibly to prevent an “American invasion” of Chinese territory. If Taiwan is Chinese then ipso facto American troops and warships in Taiwan constitute an American invasion. That is as good a *casus belli* as he is likely to find.

Xi Jinping would then wait for the media to ratchet up the dread factor, while ensuring that Taiwan’s supply chains are cut, particularly of semi-conductors. Simultaneously, his diplomats would remind the world that it has already accepted the single-China option, which is why Beijing is in the Security Council. All that the United Nations could do was appeal for a peaceful resolution. In November 2022, British Secretary of State for Defence Ben Wallace told the House of Lords: “It is in China’s plan to reunify Taiwan to mainland China... it is not a secret. Britain wants a peaceful process towards that”. A blockade would meet the ‘peace’ requirement since China would not fire the first shot. It would be ready to return fire.

Would Washington risk a full-scale war by breaking the blockade? These are the known unknowns, and unknown unknowns, to use Donald Rumsfeld’s appropriate terminology. What we do know is that a Chinese climbdown would lead to a contagious melt-

down on a scale last seen in 1990.

Compromise would be the intelligent way out. Xi Jinping would be ready to accept a Hong Kong solution. His purpose would have been met. The red flag would fly over Taiwan.

THIS YEAR SAUDI ARABIA, IRAN AND CHINA ISSUED A JOINT STATEMENT RESTORING RELATIONS BETWEEN RIYADH AND TEHRAN. THE VENUE FOR THE HISTORIC HANDSHAKE WAS BEIJING, NOT CAMP DAVID IN AMERICA. PRESIDENT XI JINPING AND SAUDI CROWN PRINCE MOHAMMED BIN SALMAN AL SAUD LEFT AMERICA BLINDSIDED. THE IMPLICIT MESSAGE WAS THAT WASHINGTON HAD KEPT THE TWO APART AT SERIOUS COST TO THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

With Beijing getting fulsome support from Russia, its old and new friends, and indeed all those who have argued on behalf of the territorial integrity of a nation state, the odds on Taiwan becoming a second Hong Kong are higher than a Chinese meltdown or total war. America would be damaged in the process, but a relieved world would quickly get on with other business.

Lenin noted that there were decades when nothing happened, and weeks when decades happened. Ukraine has pushed us into the Lenin cycle. The decades are beginning to unfold.

As rising powers claim the attention of the 21st century, India and China will become leaders of different models of progress. India’s transition into an economic giant through the uncertainties of liberal democracy is an attractive alternative to authoritarian arguments locked in the assumption that political stability is essential for equitable economic growth. In the various struggles across a fraught globe for independence, inheritance, territorial integrity and a high place in the emerging world order, the future of freedom is also at stake. ■

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# MILITARY ANALYSIS ON PROSPECT FOR ROHINGYA REPATRIATION AND OPTIONS FOR BANGLADESH

Lt Gen (Retd) Mohammad Mahfuzur Rahman, PhD

*Former Principal Staff Officer, Armed Forces Division, Prime Minister's Office*



It has been six years since the massive exodus of Rohingyas took place in August 2017. Initially it was perceived that Myanmar cannot get away for very long with atrocities and crime against humanity of such magnitude. Despite regional power's support and some permanent members support in UN Security Council the condemnation of the act was overwhelming worldwide. Bangladesh's diplomatic initiative bilaterally as well as taking some members of ASEAN on board there was a memorandum of understanding signed in November 2017 between Bangladesh and Myanmar on Rohingya repatriation. In fact, that created hope among many about resolving the refugee issue quickly. To my appreciation the expulsion of Rohingyas from

Rakhine was a systematic, well-orchestrated military operation. With my background I understood the drama of taking back the Rohingyas was also a portrayal of military operation. In fact, it is part of a deception plan and psychological warfare. Any military operation without political objective is a nonsensical waste of resources. TATMADAW generals being a bunch of meritocratic cunning professionals would not waste resources.

Every military operation at strategic level has a political 'End State' and identification of 'Centre of Gravity'. My understanding the political 'End State' of Myanmar was 'Rakhine is free of Rohingyas' and 'Centre of Gravity' likely could be 'Political Will' of Bangladesh whether to go into military conflict with Myanmar on Rohingya issue. This was substantiated that Bangladesh will not go into military options when TATMADAW conducted the 'clearing operations' in 2016 in Rakhine. In that, about 87,000 Rohingyas were expelled from Rakhine to Bangladesh. To achieve ►►



Photo: Net

► the end, the ways and means they employed were military operations and resources at the disposal of the military. So what is happening now may be an 'Operational Pause' of Myanmar Military Operation, when dusts settle down Myanmar may push the rest of the Rohingyas from Rakhine over time. In the big picture, the activities now Junta is undertaking in regard to the Rohingya issue could be in a 'Conflict Termination Phase' of military strategic level operation. If Junta is in power and senior General Min Aung Hla is calling the shots or Myanmar elite in the polity is afflicted by Bamar (Dominant Ethnic Community) supremacy, taking back Rohingya could be a far cry. However, we might see some China led initiative for repatriation or token repatriation, this could be considered as activities of conflict termination phase of military operation on the part of TAT-MADAW. As a student of 'Structural Realism' and geopolitics I see the Chinese repatriation initiative to portray as a world peace broker, responsible stabilizing power (as they have done between Iran and KSA and proposed peace between Ukraine and Russia). This is an aspiration signa-

ture to graduate from regional to world power. The other issue China would like to avoid is volatility in and around Myanmar because of her energy security interest (Security of Gas and Oil pipelines from Sittwe Port, Myanmar to Kunming, China).

The UN, the West, the Liberals and the Democracies will express their concerns, provide humanitarian support to Rohingyas, express solidarity with Bangladesh and sporadically impose limited sanctions on Myanmar Junta (which they are immune to). However, when the question of national interest shall arise the politics of reality could be different. Even in 2020 foreign direct investment in Myanmar grew by 10%. Today major investors in Myanmar are some of the leading democracies.

So what are the options open for Bangladesh?

Bangladesh must do everything possible to keep the Rohingya repatriation issue alive and on the table. Beside, traditional bilateral and multilateral approach, a track two approach may be helpful to maintain political engagement with United ►



Photo: Net

Myanmar security force personnel stand guard while a mob (background) look on following unrest at an Internally Displaced People (IDP) camp for Muslim Rohingyas on the outskirts of Sittwe town in Rakhine State. (AFP Photo)

- ▶ League of Arakan (ULA), political wing of Arakan Army (AA) and National Unity Government (NUG).

Empowering Rohingyas through education, leadership development and media campaigns which could be a good idea to frame their own narrative and share to shape world consciousness in the plight for human rights.

Currently Junta is in back foot after the coup in 2021 that followed by atrocities against its own civilian population consequently, some of the dissident groups especially AA in Rakhine, People's Defence Force of NUG, Chin National Army, Karen National Liberation Army and many have become headache for TATMADAW. This is the time Junta may consider greater concessions in the Rohingya repatriation issue if Bangladesh is willing to utilize and manipulate all tools available to get leverage in negotiation. Nonetheless, the

legal aspect in International Court of Justice (ICJ) and International Criminal Court (ICC) against Myanmar and Junta leadership could create additional pressure, especially if Bangladesh could follow up with ICC for a quick arrest warrant against Gen Ming Aung Hla and top perpetrators of genocide, that would provide enough dividend. Yet, Dhaka needs to develop a credible military deterrence to caution Junta from taking any misadventure of pushing rest of Rohingyas from Rakhine to Bangladesh in future.

Above all the 'Rohingya Repatriation Issue' should not be taken and handled as business usual, a concerted effort is necessary where synchronization, orchestration and synergy among all organs working on the issue are of paramount importance. Hence having a 'Rohingya Commission' under the Prime Minister's Office may need serious consideration. ■



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# The World at War

## Air Vice Marshal Mahmud Hussain (Retd)

*Retired air force officer. He served as High Commissioner of Bangladesh to Brunei Darussalam from November 2016 to September 2020. He served as the Chairman, Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB). Presently, he is working as the Distinguished Expert at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Aviation and Aerospace University (BSMRAAU).*



Historians are often wont to think through the metaphors they use to draw parallels of global phenomena. Hegel was one of them. So was Francis Fukuyama. The title of the latter's book *The End of History and the Last Man* was surreal. His analysis was that the Cold War was over, and the United States was the only superpower at the fall of the Soviet Union. In this condition of historical existence, the fate of "big wars" was over. The reason for such optimistic mood lies in human aspiration for good governance and wealth. For Fukuyama, the two most inveterate elements of happiness were the liberal democracy and free market economy. Hegel, his scholarly mentor in historical dialogue, saw the convergence of conflicting wills toward a progressive development of human condition along similar lines.

However, the most scintillating event of the fury

of the end of the Cold War was not so much the death of the Soviet Union which seemed to be in the making for sometime but the fall of the Berlin Wall. The laws of Germanic peoples, broken through years of artificial separation, were bound to be reconciled through the enactment of physical manifestation of yearning for unity. It was a moment of enlightenment. But history of one great nation cannot constitute the life of peoples of whole mankind. Germany was not the woe of physical war but the angst of an ideological one artificially reproduced as scientists reproduce proofs to suit their results in laboratory tests.

Forty years before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world leaders thought it best to divide another unified nation, Korea as the consequence of a post-War peace negotiations. North Korea and South Korea are the two artificial symbols on world map that reject the thesis of theory embedded in nation's historical unity while interpreting its movement in practice. Fukuyama's intellectual project remained incomplete with such anomalies straddling the space of geo-political landscape. In ascribing an *epistemic* value to history's philosophical interpretation, Hegel even denied a place to ►►



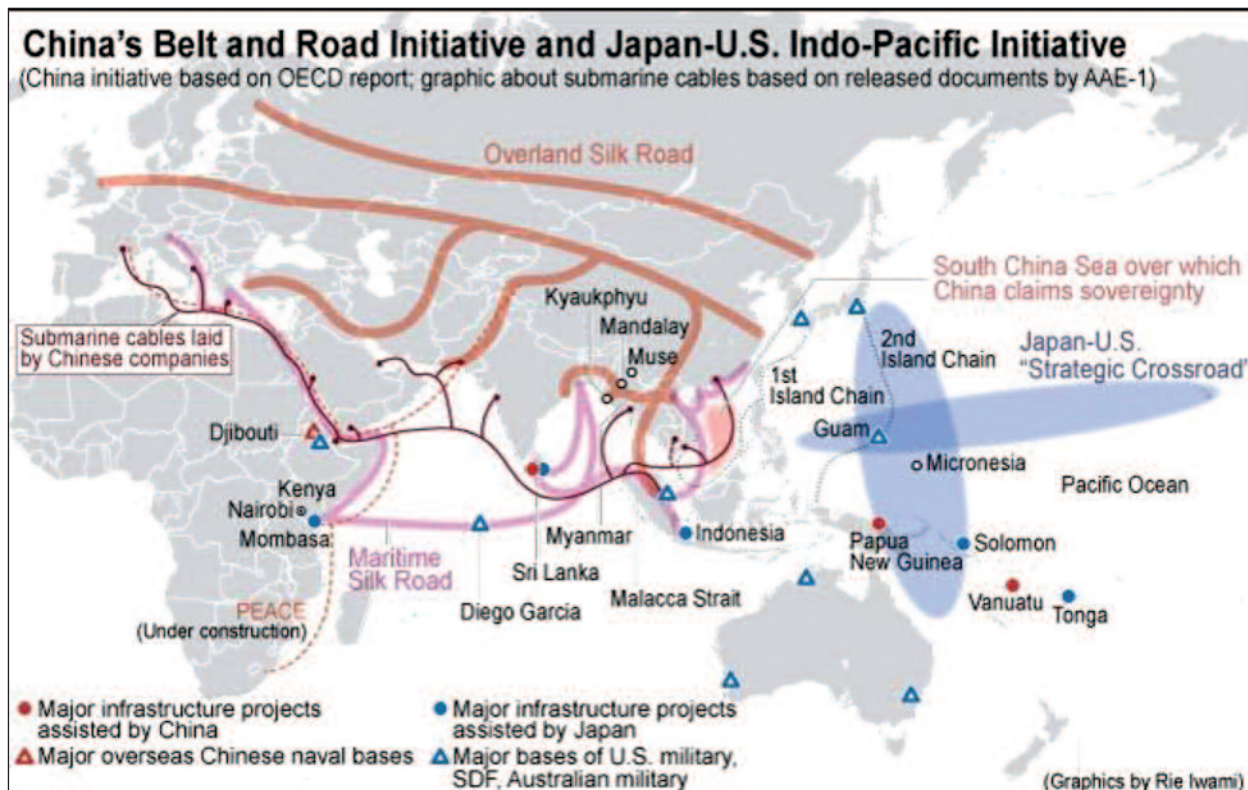
The Fall of the Berlin Wall. Photo: Internet

► India as a role model. Fukuyama, though not denying the possibility of conflicts in small scale among tribal groups, border skirmishes and internecine clashes, rejected the appearance of wars among great powers on ideological grounds. How much both seem to be at variance with the developments that have happened after the start of the post-Cold War era.

The first ideological war came with the binary lingual dexterity, “either or or”. The post-Cold War era was not even in its second decade that the world was divided into two dialectically opposite anti-theses. The first Gulf War can be seen in the light of unipolar moment’s benign attempt at creating a secure environment for state sovereignty and territorial integrity. Global war on Iraq was an invocation of US President Woodrow Wilson’s invention of the doctrine of “collective security”. The motto of ‘a war unjustly on one will constitute a war on all’ was the fundamental premise that nations with high survival instinct but weak body would unfailingly rally behind a

strong protector. But by the time the moment for the second Gulf War arrived, the United States’ liberal democratic and free market interests had obviously run out of its steam of unilateral sacrifice. Its large power also had its limits. It was at this point that US leadership required followers after all. In reality, if Hitler can be blamed for starting the second World War, then a mild parallel can be drawn pointing to George W. Bush jr. as the cause for putting the world at War in the post-Cold War period. His administration could very well have avoided risking America’s liberal and benign image. The unipolar world order that America came to represent after the end of Cold War could have been sustained with US leadership providing for the moral instinct representing History’s benevolent spirit. It is, in practice, that after the second Gulf War, the world has been no more under the aegis of unipolar world order. It is multipolar now with unpredictable consequences on History’s movement.

The Global War on Terror (GWOT) was, in fact, ►►



China's BRI versus Japan-US Indo-Pacific Strategy. Figure: Internet

► a brief but costly affair. Like the Cold War compulsion on dividing the *World* into two distinct sub-sets of worlds, GWOT shaped the rupture of the civilizations with the West forming a citadel against the putative islamophobia. It was not a small conflict as Fukuyama would have liked it to be. Its branches spread far and wide entangling both states and non-state actors. Its trans-national character rejected the view of Clausewitz that “war is an instrument of politics”. In its place, it said that “politics is an instrument of war”.

Talibans just took about twenty years to reclaim their seat of power, and proved that the future of world history cannot be judged merely through the ideas of philosophers, but also has to leave space for those who are its destroyers. Human dignity and freedom do not make for divine grace among every nation. GWOT was a historical aberration enacted at the behest of reason’s irresponsible constraint. We no longer talk about GWOT as though it has completed its mission.

The world now seems to have learnt to tolerate so many authoritarian states as part of History’s unshakeable determination.

In the beginning of the 21st Century, the rise of China was a historical phenomenon. As a great nation, its ability to create *History* is undeniable. It had two contesting turfs to deal with the United States: its economy started expanding through prodigious growth which gave it a tall order in geopolitics but its most conspicuous ambition was represented in its grand project of Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI). Was there anything by any great power of such grand scale that could compete China’s dream? “Belt” refers to the overland routes for road and rail transportation, whereas “road” refers to the sea routes. It constitutes two major programs called “Silk Road Economic Belt” and “21st Century Maritime Silk Road”.

The Silk Road Economic Belt connects three major routes like China to Europe, the Persian Gulf, the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, while the ►►

► 21st Century Maritime Silk Road is based on waterways linking coastal Chinese cities via a series of ports in Asia to Africa and the Mediterranean. BRI aims to reach 65 countries, covering 70% of the planet’s population, three-quarters of its energy resources, a quarter of goods and services, and 28% of global GDP — some \$ US 21 trillion.

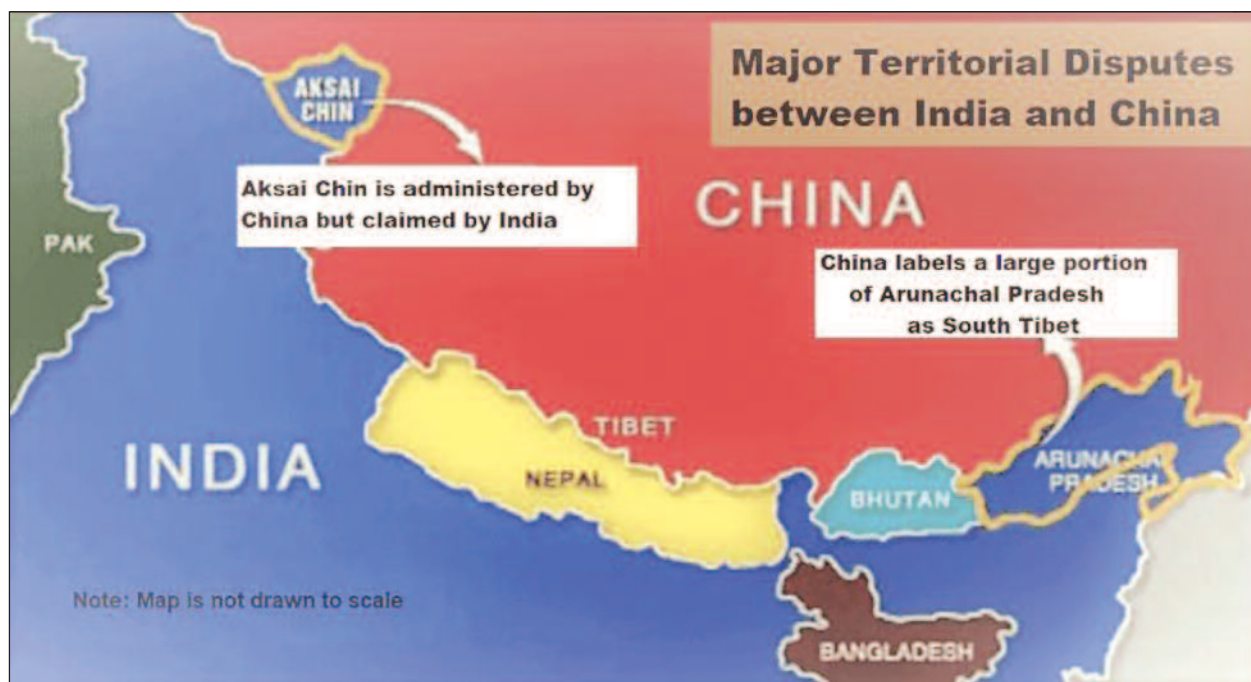
This *China* hubris is seen as *China-Model of Globalization*. Despite its grand nobility, the West started feeling nervous about China’s game plan. Hegel who thought Europe and its current mirror-image, “the West” to be the philosopher of *History* in mankind’s historical movement, would be surprised to see China rising to the lofty ideals of maker of history. China’s initial move was steady, silent and peaceful. China claimed that its rise was benevolent, and not meant to be a driver for *Realpolitik*. But it was difficult to find a metaphor that could transform China’s eminence look like an innocuous political expedition. It was not so much China that was suspect to the eyes of the west but the rise of Asia seen through Chinese landscape which was unnerving to the west.

With Xi XinPing at the helm of affairs, China

started challenging the United States upfront. It has now become an open confrontation. With sharp rise in economy, China’s attitude in the Pacific spelled fear and anxiety amongst its neighbors. South China Sea was perhaps the first geo-strategic attempt at which China displayed its military strength. Countries have disputed over territory in the South China Sea for centuries, but war-like tension has grown in recent years.

China has sweeping claims that include sovereignty claims over Spratly and Paracel islands, and their adjacent waters. This has angered competing claims from Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam.

China has gone so far as to lay its spatial rights with island-building and naval patrols. The United States says it does not take sides in territorial disputes, but has sent military ships and planes near disputed islands in what it calls “freedom of navigation” operations. Even Hollywood got caught into a controversy over a portrayal of map showing nine-dash line of South China Sea. Senators in the Philippines also criticized the map’s inclusion in the movie. One Philippine ►



China-India Territorial Dispute over Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh. Figure: Internet

- ▶ law-maker said that the movie should come with an explicit disclaimer that the nine-dash line is a figment of China's imagination.

Whether fabrication of mind or reality, the South China Sea is, no doubt, a major shipping route. It is estimated for over 21% of global trade amounting to \$3.37 trillion transiting through its waters every year. While China's legal warfare over the claims about South China Sea may not be so convincing, its military power and the threat of economic pressure to the neighbors are. Thus, while its effects may not be felt immediately, it has appropriately raised the alarm among regional states and the international community.

China's President Xi Jinping says that Taiwan's reunification with China is inevitable, and if need be, it will use force to fulfill a territorial unification mission to reclaim *History's* legal claim. China sees self-ruled Taiwan as a breakaway province. But Taiwan sees itself as distinct from the Chinese mainland, with its own constitution and democratically-elected leaders. China reiterates that Taiwan was originally a Chinese province. But the Taiwanese contend that they were never a part of the modern Chinese state that was first formed after the revolution in 1911, or the People's Republic of China that was established under Mao in 1949. China could bring about a "reunification" by non-military means such as strengthening economic ties. But in any military confrontation, China's armed forces would overwhelm those of Taiwan. China spends more than any country except the US on defence and could draw on a huge range of capabilities, from naval power to missile technology, aircraft and cyber -attacks. But the puzzle of war between China and Taiwan does not end at their mutual rivalry; it will drag the United States into the foray, thereby affecting the grand sea-routes of trade and commerce. Its picture will be far grimmer than that between Ukraine and Russia.

China's post-Cold War geo-political struggles has

left it isolated, distant and somewhat tragic. A country which seemed once to compete the West in a fashionable way providing its own model of economic prosperity and home rule is now underdone. The euphoria is fading now. Even Australia considers China a threat. In a recent dialogue of the Australian strategists, it highlighted that the United States is, no longer, the unipolar leader of the Indo-Pacific. That is also the reason for Australia to cling tightly to America to avoid being caught unawares in the event of a possible war with China. Australia must balance a fear of being lonely against a reasonable fear of entanglement. Putative threat of China has made America wanting to institutionalize cooperation with Japan and South Korea. In a recent trilateral discussion of the US, Japan and South Korea it was disclosed that the Indo-Pacific is under China's assertiveness, belligerence and aggression.

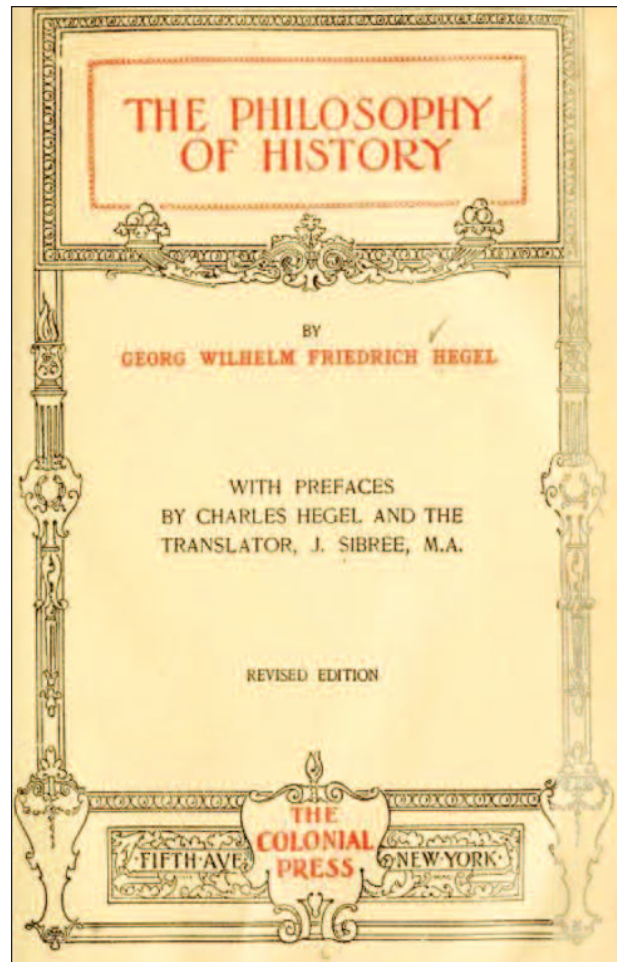
No less than 40 countries are there in the Indo-Pacific region, and 13 countries with declared Indo-Pacific strategic document. The strategic significance of the region is understood when the United States renamed its Pacific Command to a new Indo-Pacific Command. Indo-Pacific is undoubtedly the geography for America to contain China in its contemporary version of the Great Game to "containing the Soviet Union" first asayed by George C Kennan in his *The Long Telegram* at the start of the Cold War.

In the latest development amid the long-standing Sino-Indian border dispute, China, in recent times, officially released the 2023 edition of its "Standard Map" where Arunachal Pradesh, Aksai Chin region, Taiwan and the disputed South China Sea are all included within the Chinese territory. Surprisingly, the development came days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping conversed at the 15th BRICS Summit in South Africa. The two leaders agreed to intensify efforts at disengagement and de-escalation to restore normal relation-▶▶

►ship between the two warring countries. A probable Sino-Indian War is reminiscent of Hegelian interpretation of Europe's dominating role in creating and re-creating human history. India and China, being the two Asiatic giants, must come to terms with power shifts and their implications.

The coming of China and India together is a prospect that the west may not like. It pleases them to see India as a counter-weight to China. But this also makes the world's biggest continent suffer with majority of the countries trundling in poverty and chaos. No wonder, the greatest Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, in 1924, urged China to reject materialism and "free the human soul from the dungeon of machine." But *The Economist* says "it will be a more realistic path towards a sustainable, mutually beneficial relationship between Asia's titans. In the 21st Century, they will prove Hegel wrong if the world's two greatest civilizations with magnificently rich ancient past can be tasked with reshaping the future "Global Civilization" on the triptych of scientific, arts and human advancement.

The world is still at war. It is time for Russia and Ukraine to mend their ways to stop the war. But they alone cannot do it, now that Putin's grand strategic plan to wrap up Ukraine within a few days has failed miserably. The great nations of the post-Cold War era — the US, China and India — have a combined role to play. But their leaders — Biden, Modi, Xi — are unique, and it is hard to believe which one is sincerer in his rhetoric. The most important thing for them to understand is that, in order to stop the "World at War", they have a role to play. It is not by isolating this or that particular great power that the World Order can be restored, but by engaging themselves means and ways can be found to prevent them from fearing war. Once again, History becomes our repertoire to choose from. Peace of Westphalia (1648) and the Concert of Europe (1815) serve us with a model. In that sense, Francis Fukuyama was right.



We started our discourse with the thought of great philosophers. We must also rely on them for our understanding of state behavior. Their precepts are even more significant today when the world is making tremendous advancement towards science and technology. The philosophers of the yonder developed their theories based on the histories of nations. Each nation had its own unique civilization and cultural spirit. But in the 21st Century, the world has become almost unitary through the integration of scientific knowledge. Science has given us wealth in terms of material capabilities, but it has also made us bankrupt in ontological thinking. The future of this world lies not so much on rhetorical expression of state sovereignty and human rights, but on the philosophical intellect of the statesmen who will be the leaders of great powers. ■

# Singapore keen to work with Bangladesh to strengthen connectivity and infrastructure

Rabb Majumder

**B**angladesh and Singapore share a history of diplomatic relations that dates back to the time when Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan in 1971. Singapore was one of the first countries to recognize Bangladesh as a sovereign nation. The two countries established formal diplomatic relations on February 8, 1972.

Singapore is one of Bangladesh's major trading partners and a significant source of foreign direct investment. The two countries have signed several bilateral agreements to enhance economic cooperation and boost trade relations. Singapore has invested in various sectors in Bangladesh, including manufacturing, infrastructure, and information technology.

Bangladesh and Singapore maintain defense ties through bilateral visits, training exchanges, and defense cooperation agreements. Both countries have engaged in military cooperation, including personnel training and joint exercises, aimed at strengthening defense capabilities and promoting regional security.



Ms Sheela Pillai, Singapore Consul in Bangladesh.

Development Cooperation: Singapore has been supporting Bangladesh's development efforts through technical assistance, capacity building, and sharing of expertise in areas such as urban planning, public administration, and water resource management. Singapore's experiences in ►►



Consul of Singapore in Bangladesh Ms. Sheela Pillai called on President of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry (DCCI) Rizwan Rahman to discuss bilateral trade related issues at DCCI.

► urban development have been particularly valuable to Bangladesh.

Both countries have fostered educational and cultural exchanges to promote people-to-people ties. Singapore has provided scholarships and training opportunities for Bangladeshi students and professionals, while cultural events and festivals have been organized to showcase the rich heritage of both nations.

Bangladesh and Singapore have collaborated closely within regional frameworks such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). These platforms have provided avenues for dialogue and cooperation on issues of common interest, including trade, connectivity, and regional security.

Overall, the bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Singapore have grown stronger over the years, characterized by frequent high-level visits, increased trade, and cooperation in various

sectors. Both countries continue to explore new avenues of collaboration to further enhance their ties and promote shared prosperity.

Ms Sheela Pillai is a polished and seasoned diplomat serving as the Head of Mission and Consul at Singapore's Consulate in Dhaka, Bangladesh since August 2020.

The Singaporean head of mission, in an interview with Rabb Majumder, Editor and Publisher of *The Security World*, covered a wide range of topics, including Indo-Pacific policy, bilateral relations, trade and investment, and defense cooperation. The following are the interview excerpts:

**What is the current status of bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Singapore, and how would you describe the overall relationship?**

I would describe Singapore-Bangladesh relations as excellent and expanding. You would have read that from 1 October 2023 that Consulate in Dhaka will be upgraded to a High Commission. This is a significant milestone in our bilateral re-►►

▸lations and a reflection of the deepening engagement between the two countries. The warm friendship between the two countries span more than fifty decades with the establishment of diplomatic relations on 16 February 1972. There have been frequent exchanges at the political level, our foreign Ministers have met regularly at international fora. Honourable Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina made an Official Visit to Singapore in 2018 marking a high point in bilateral relations. We share a common outlook on many issues of global concern and close cooperation at international fora. Both sides held Foreign Office Consultations in August 2023 where we discussed broadening the scope of cooperation including in areas of trade and commerce, investment, power, energy, connectivity, blue economy, halal trade, tourism and culture, capacity building, education, health, security, agriculture, and ICT.

#### **What are the key areas of cooperation between Bangladesh and Singapore, and how have they evolved over the years?**

Trade and investment form the cornerstone of Singapore-Bangladesh relations. Economic ties have grown significantly since 2015 with trade increasing over 60% and Singapore's investments in Bangladesh increasing over nine-fold. Singapore is Bangladesh's third-largest import partner, while Bangladesh is Singapore second largest trading partner in South Asia. Singapore is among the top investors in Bangladesh with investments in the power, energy, logistics and marine sectors. Both countries signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on Trade and Investment (MCTI) in November 2023. The MCTI provides the framework for both sides to discuss progress on ongoing projects, identify new areas of cooperation as well as discussions on an FTA. People-to people exchanges are another important facet of bilateral relations. Many Bangladeshi businesses have set up offices in Singapore to serve as a hub into the rest of Southeast and East Asia. Singapore is also

a tourism destination of choice for many Bangladeshis, including for medical tourism as well as also one of the top destinations for Bangladeshi semi-skilled and unskilled workers who have played a very important role in Singapore's development story.

#### **How have economic ties between the two countries developed, and what are the major sectors of collaboration in trade and investment?**

As Bangladesh continues its upward growth and development trajectory, Singapore can work with Bangladesh to strengthen connectivity and infrastructure. Bangladesh is a strategically located bridge between South and Southeast Asia and by strengthening connectivity with Singapore, Bangladesh can tap on our strong linkages across Southeast Asia to enjoy even greater access to the region. Singapore can also work with Bangladesh in the implementation of digital frameworks for facilitating trade and investments, Bangladesh is a potential market for Singapore companies seeking to secure new growth overseas. DBS Bank became the first Singapore multinational bank to set up a representative office in Singapore. This underscores Bangladesh's importance as a trading partner to Singapore.

#### **What initiatives have been taken to promote people-to-people exchanges and cultural understanding between Bangladesh and Singapore?**

There is a large Bangladesh community in Singapore comprising professionals, academics, students as well as unskilled and semi-skilled workers. They form part of the larger Singapore community and have played an important role in exposing Singaporeans to the rich culture, literature, and culinary delights of Bangladesh. Highly acclaimed Bangladeshi films like 'The Salt in Our Waters', 'Live from Dhaka' have been screened at Singapore International Film Festival. We will continue to support efforts to promote cultural ►►

► exchanges between the two countries.

**How do you assess the level of security cooperation between Bangladesh and Singapore? Are there any specific areas where the two countries have collaborated successfully in addressing security challenges?**

Singapore and Bangladesh maintain channels of cooperation on security which includes sharing of information as well as training and capacity building. Bangladesh officials also regularly attend the annual Shangri-La Dialogue, the premier inter-governmental security conference for the global defence and security community organised in Singapore by the International Institute for Strategic Studies. Bangladesh and Singapore are both members of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), an important platform to foster dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of common interest and concern.

**What are the major security concerns faced by both countries in the region, and how are they working together to address these challenges?**

The global situation has become more complicated in the past few years with the world emerging from the shock of COVID-19 and at the same time grappling with high inflation, food and energy insecurity, conflict and climate change. Heightened contestation between major powers is worrying for lesser powers such as Bangladesh and Singapore. Hence both countries have stressed the importance of maintaining a peaceful, rules-based multilateral order. In addition, the Rohingya refugees crisis has emerged as one of the key security challenges, not just for Bangladesh but for the region. Singapore will continue to work closely with ASEAN in bringing a sustainable and permanent solution to the crisis in Myanmar and ensuring the return of Ro-

hingyas to their homeland.

**Could you provide an overview of the defense and military cooperation between Bangladesh and Singapore? Are there any joint exercises or training programs in place?**

Both Bangladesh and Singapore participate in a number of multilateral exercises, most recently the Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT) in Aug 2023. We have also hosted delegation from the Bangladesh National Defence College Armed Forces War College.

**What role does Singapore play in supporting Bangladesh's development efforts, particularly in areas such as infrastructure, urban planning, and technology transfer?**

Singapore is keen to work with Bangladesh to strengthen connectivity and infrastructure. This includes modalities for infrastructure financing. Singapore Government-linked companies such as Sembcorp, PSA and Surbana Jurong has invested in infrastructure development in Bangladesh. Infrastructure Asia (IA), established by Enterprise Singapore to support infrastructure financing and development in the region, including Bangladesh. In Bangladesh IA is involved in wastewater plant development. IA has worked with World Bank on capacity building programmes and Bangladesh has participated IA's course on 'Growing Infrastructure - Enabling & Structuring for Private Sector Participation in Finance and Innovation. Singapore Centre for Liveable Cities have also worked with Bangladesh in capacity building in areas such as urban planning. Bangladeshi City Corporation Mayors are also regularly invited to the World Cities Summit, an international conference series on public governance and the sustainable development of cities. In addition, through the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP), the Singapore Government's flagship platform for technical cooperation, we offer a number of training pro-►

►grammes in a multitude of areas to share Singapore's development experience with Bangladesh.

**Are there any plans to expand the scope of cooperation between Bangladesh and Singapore in other areas, such as education, healthcare, or tourism?**

In healthcare, Singapore's two major government health care service providers National University Hospital Services (NUHS) and Singhealth (which runs Singapore General Hospital) have worked with Bangladesh government hospitals in providing fellowships for Bangladeshi doctors and training opportunities. I understand that NUHS and Singhealth are working closely with major Bangladesh government health institutions to enhance their cooperation further. Looking ahead, some other new areas that Singapore of cooperation that both countries can work together include digital transformation, renewable energy, climate change and food security

**How do you envision the future of bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Singapore? Are there any specific goals or milestones that both countries are aiming to achieve?**

In July 2023, Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA) and Enterprise Singapore (ESG) a government agency that promotes outward trade renewed an MOU on expanding trade and investment in Bangladesh. The Public Private Partnership Authority has also renewed its MOU with Enterprise Singapore to facilitate Singapore companies direct access to PPPA infrastructure projects. This underscores the potential that both sides countries see in expanding economic cooperation. Bangladesh has undertaken massive infrastructure development projects, it has a young vibrant workforce and a strategic location. It is emerging as a choice location for investors from Singapore and Southeast Asia. Bangladesh is a fast-growing market with economic growth averaging 6%-7% between 2011 and 2021. It is ex-

pected to be among the 30 largest economies in the world by 2023. Both Singapore and Bangladesh have taken similar initiatives such as 'Smart Nation' and 'Digital Bangladesh' to deliver tech-enabled solutions to the citizens. They will be opportunities for both countries to foster deeper collaboration in the field of ICT, digitalisation, fintech and startup development. Bangladesh is due to graduate from LDC status by 2026 and overall Singapore remains upbeat about Bangladesh's economic potential.

**What challenges or obstacles do you foresee in further deepening and broadening the bilateral relationship between the two countries?**

We have seen how COVID-19 pandemic impacted countries around the world, we faced disruptions to our economic supply chains, connectivity networks, border management, critical health infrastructure and tourism. Now the war in Ukraine has caused major disruptions to trade and deep uncertainty about the future of multilateral institutions. We are also all grappling with the existential threat of climate change and the profound implications of AI. These challenges will affect all of us, including in the conduct of bilateral relations.

**How can the respective governments and stakeholders from both countries collaborate to overcome these challenges and further strengthen the bilateral ties?**

Challenges provide an opportunity for countries to work together in both traditional and non-traditional areas, uphold rules-based multilateral trading systems. Multilateralism and collective efforts are critical to address some of these challenges. Therefore even as we strengthen bilateral relations, it important to ensure that the multilateral system is resilient and we avoid turning competition into a zero sum game. ■



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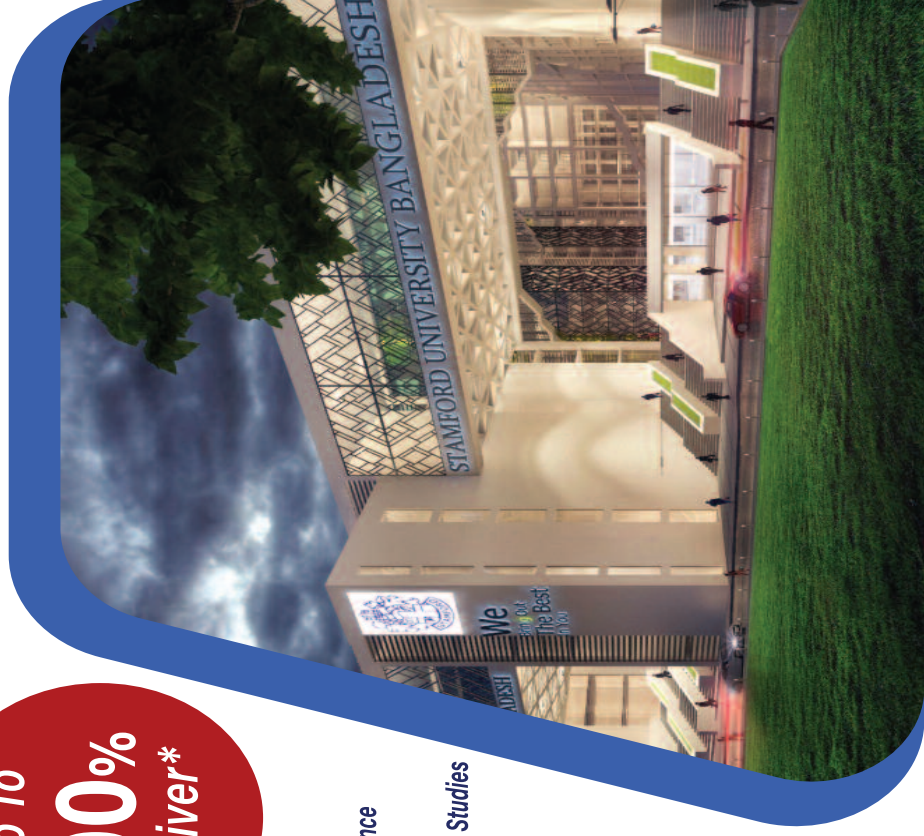
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# Security challenges in the Western Balkans and Kosovo's call for a fair approach

H.E. Güner UREYA

*The author is the outgoing Ambassador of the Republic of Kosovo to The People's Republic of Bangladesh.*



After every war, serious efforts must be made to erase the traces of the past, and for rehabilitation from the traumas. Especially by political leaders.

If this is achieved, a new page can be opened in relations

and trust can begin to be built between the parties. In addition, security issues will be minimised, and the cries of war and conflict will also gradually disappear.

Leaders' responsibilities and the impact of their words are so great. Therefore, leaders must evolve populism towards constructiveness. Populism brings parties and leaders to power, but after winning, it depends on the wisdom of smart people to direct society towards constructiveness and the right path. Otherwise, a very bad situation would be created. Unconscionable populist leadership

can bring degenerateness and hooliganazation to people.

## Serbiens' old discourse on Kosovo and the region

Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić's speech at the 78th session of the UNGA was not about reconciliation, but rather about attempting to undermine peace efforts in the Western Balkans. This speech should enter the literature as "an example of irresponsible post-conflict leadership".

In summary, the Serbian President talked about how the Serbs were the victims of the dissolution of former Yugoslavia, and how the Kosovo issue is a cause of today's global issues and crises. In short, we call this a mental eclipse.

Let me explain it simply. During the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), not Kosovo but Serbia was internal hegemonic power in the federation. Not Prishtina but Belgrade tried to dominate each federal unit of the SFRY and while doing this, misused the ►►

► mechanisms of the former country. In addition, Belgrade instrumentalized the Serbs living in other federal units and used its proxies in the neighbourhood for its hegemonic dreams. Serbia during the 90s attacked the territorial integrity and sovereignty of other federal units, applied aggression towards them, interfered in their domestic affairs, violated the principle of equality, and violated the co-existence of all of the nations in the former country. Furthermore, Serbia's aggression caused humanitarian crises in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo, and resulted in the deaths, and injuries of hundreds of thousands and displacement of more than four million people in SFRY. The Srebrenica genocide was not committed by Kosovar Albanians or Croats, but by Serbs, backed by Belgrade. The assassination of former Serbian Prime Minister, Zoran Djindjić was not carried out by Kosovars, but by the Serbian deep State and its nationalist tools, who are still seen as heroes by most of the Serbian people.

It is obvious that the new era of Balkanization began during the 90s with the Belgrade's efforts for evolution of Yugoslavism ideals into Serbian-



ization and plans for more hegemony over others' territories with the rhetoric of securing Serbs, very similar to Putin's Russia. Serbians could not get rid of their old dreams. While they ostensibly talk about European Union integration, unfortunately, they still dream of establishing their own hegemony in the region. It is of great importance for the future of the Balkans that Serbia truly embraces the values of the European Union. But unfortunately, their behaviour so far is not in line with modern European ideals. ►►

► Serbia, which has been trying to corrupt others for years, has corrupted itself the most and is still unable to explain to its own people that the racist expression known as “heavenly people” (nebeski narod) is nothing more than nonsense. On the other side, Balkan nations are tired of Serbian admiration of war criminals like Slobodan Milošević or Ratko Mladić. If the new Serbian generations bury the war criminals in the depths of history and keep alive the ideals of scientists such as Nikola Tesla and Mihajlo Pupin, who

served humanity, everything will change positively.

For reconciliation and peace, it is important to take bold and smart steps to remove the dark clouds that depress societies. Serbia needs this the most in the Balkans. If Serbia cleans up its own courtyard and directs its people to truth, law, peace, and love, then we can be happy for the region. For this, Serbians must first stop seeing their own genesis as special and belittling others, and even get rid of racism rather than arrogance.

There can be no love and reconciliation in a region where one hegemonic side constantly instills racism and enmity.

Interestingly Serbian President Vučić, in his address to the UNGA said “We do not divide people by the colour of their skin or their religious affiliation, that is why our relations with the People’s Republic of China, Republic of Korea, Japan, many Arab and other Muslim countries are at the highest historical level!” We remember that on 20 July 1995 same Vučić, as a young MP of Serbian Parliament, referring to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, said, “If one Serb is killed, we will kill a hundred Muslims!” It was the time when Serbs committed genocide against Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica, which is considered as the biggest act of genocide in Europe after World War II.

If you want to see the mind-►





► **Facts about Kosovo's liberation and independence**

In order to get over prejudices influenced by Serbia against Kosovo; it is useful to state some facts. First of all, Kosovo is a 'sui generis' case and, as such, it cannot be compared to any other situation and cannot represent a precedent for any other entity or territory in the world. If some see the case of Kosovo as a precedent for its internal issues, it would be doing itself an injustice, above all. Serbia may want to create such a perception in other countries, but this perception will harm the processes related to Kosovo and also can create confusion regarding the future of many countries. "Kosovo case is 'sui generis' and taking it as a precedent for other cases leads to confusion and does not serve to solve problems."

To understand how Kosovo achieved independence, it is essential to comprehend its history. In 1989, Belgrade abolished Kosovo's autonomy and two years later, as the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) disintegrated, Kosovo lost its status as a federal entity in the ex-country with rights similar to those of the six republics. During the 1990s Kosovo and its institutions were under the Serbian occupation. Serbian authorities consistently discriminated against Kosovars, especially Albanians, excluding them from governance and public life, along with exclusion from the health and educational system. In reaction, the Kosovo leadership under Ibrahim Rugova pursued a policy of peaceful resistance for several years before the lack of progress led to the formation of the Kosovo Liberation Army and armed struggle. This, in turn, encouraged the Serbians to exercise more pressure against the Kosovars. Following a failed attempt to negotiate a settlement at Rambouillet, France, in March 1999, NATO decided to stop humanitarian crises in Kosovo and intervened in Serbian targets. During the Serbian atrocities more than half of the Kosovars became refugees or internally displaced.

After the war, the problems were tried to be solved through negotiations. But after all the attempts, the UN special envoy, former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari, gave the green light for the status of Kosovo, as a 'sui generis' case. Although Serbia, Russia and some other countries insist on denying the truth, Kosovo's independence has become an irreversible fact.

It should be noted that, more than half of member countries of the UN have recognized the independence of the Republic of Kosovo. The majority of these countries are geographically close to Kosovo and they realized that the case is unique and cannot be used as a precedent for other cases. In addition they considered the peace and stability of the region as well as their own peace and stability. On the other side, the International Court of Justice ruled that the declaration of independence of Kosovo was not in violation of international law.

Everyone, including the birds in the air, knows that it is the Serbians, not the Kosovo Albanians, who are still trying to destabilize Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Kosovo. Serbians must give up these behaviors and accept these countries as they are, for the sake and interests of new generations. In order for the Balkans to become a more peaceful, safe and prosperous peninsula, the facts must be acknowledged, future cooperation opportunities must be explored, and every country in the region must embrace more democratic values.

**Instrumentalization of proxies by Belgrade**

The Serbian leadership is committing grave errors by endangering the lives of young people and organizing and directing them. Just like in the 90s, the wrong steps taken today will boomerang and hit Belgrade, and Serbian youth will continue to be poisoned by hate speech and feelings of hostility.

Before moving on the subject of the Serb terrorist ►►

► attack committed against Kosovar police officers on September 24, 2023, let's remember the facts of what happened in the last few months in the north of Kosovo, where the Serbian community consists of a majority:

First of all, let me emphasize that the Constitution of my country states that the People of the Republic of Kosovo are determined to build the future of Kosovo as a free, democratic, and peace-loving country that will be a homeland to all of its citizens and committed to the creation of a State of free citizens that will guarantee the rights of every citizen, civil freedoms, and equality of all citizens before the law. Let me underline again, 'equality of all citizens before the law'. Every government in office must comply with these provisions. The incumbent government is doing the same. The government rightfully decided that the rule of law and avoiding negative phenomena are among the topmost priorities for peace, harmony and social integration in the country. Indulging the criminal groups and turning a blind eye to lawlessness and the subjects and activities that destabilize certain parts of the country are phenomena that put the future of the nation in danger. The government decided that all citizens must be treated equally. For example, Kosovo Serbs living in the northernmost municipalities of the country have not paid their electricity or other utility bills for many years. In addition, they did not comply with government decisions after the additional periods given to them regarding the use of license plates.

If everything is left to fate, the law can never prevail. Following the decisiveness of the Kosovar Government to put an end to distortions and wrong practices, Belgrade increased the level of manipulation of the Kosovar Serb elements and put its proxies on the stage. Belgrade always tries to make concessions from Kosovo through its destabilization, using the elements in the north. For example, after the decisiveness of the Kosovar

Government about the license plates, the Kosovar Serb mayors of the four municipalities in northern Kosovo resigned at Serbia's direction. As a requirement of the rule of law, a new election was held within the legal period. The participation of the political subjects representing the Kosovo Serb community in this election could not be ensured due to the pressure of the criminal groups and proxies acting under the direction of the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić. Even Belgrade directly called on the Kosovo Serb community to boycott the elections. After all of this pressure, political subjects who were keen to be part of the elections were deterred from participating. In all these four municipalities, three mayoral candidates belong to the Kosovar Albanian community and one has mixed Bosniak-Albanian origin. Again, as required by law, the new mayor, after the oath taking ceremony, went to the municipal buildings to perform their duties from their offices. Meanwhile, groups under the command of Belgrade took action, and tensions arose. In addition to the Kosovo Police, which is there to relieve tension and ensure security, KFOR soldiers are also performing their duties. As a result, criminal groups under the direction of Belgrade and their stakeholders attacked KFOR soldiers as well. There were dozens of KFOR soldiers, Kosovo Police and journalists injured in the attacks.

Due to the political situation, the government of Kosovo stated that the newly elected mayors will work to ensure public services and that they will help to overcome this difficult process. When conditions permit, re-elections will be held in the most fair and democratic way. The aim of the government is to prevent the formation of a management vacuum in these municipalities. Criminal groups rule the streets of places where there is a government vacuum. Unfortunately, due to the weaknesses in the past, there have always been serious security problems in the municipalities in question, and the ordinary people have been put under pressure. ►►

► *Terrorist attack in the Kosovo's north*

The worst provocation and attack that endangered peace took place on September 24, 2023. On Sunday morning, a Serbian criminal and terrorist group consisting of dozens of individuals attacked Kosovo police officers patrolling around the village of Banjska in the municipality of Zveqan. After this incident, terrorists raided the Banjska Monastery and took hostage the people who were there to worship. The aim was to create chaos and a bad image through provocation in order to damage the reputation of Kosovo and its police, a distinguished institution of our country.

The terrorists could not achieve this. The very successful police operation confirmed that three of them were killed and some were captured. While the many countries condemned this terrorist attack, Serbia declared three days of mourning for the dead terrorists. Of course, although it may sound like an irony, the Serbian President also expressed his sorrow for our police martyr.

Approximately three months ago, Kosovo declared the so-called "Civil Defense" and the "Northern Brigade" as terrorist organizations. There is serious evidence that most of the criminals who participated in the terrorist attack in

Banjska were affiliated with these two organizations. Many of them are Serbian citizens. Among them is a criminal named Milan Radoičić, Vice President of Srpska Lista, a political organization supported by Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić. The presence of Radoičić at the crime scene was detected from the drone footages of Kosovar side.

On the other side the drone footages confiscated in the terrorists' locations by the Kosovo Police were shared with the public by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo. The footage shows terrorists carrying out preparations and simulations in Kopaonik, Serbia, close to the border with Kosovo. It has been proven that the simulations carried out with the support of the Serbian state apparatus included the scenario of the an-►



► annexation of Kosovo's north to Serbia. The professional approach of the Kosovo Police and its institutions exposed the failed Serbian plan.

Besides, Serbia, for the second time in the last three months deployed its forces close to the Kosovo border. They are mobilizing themselves under the pretext of "protecting Serbs in Kosovo". They are our citizens and we protect them. Unfortunately, they continue to act with the mindset of the 90s that led to war in different parts of the former country. The best protection they can provide to Kosovo Serbs is to allow them to respect Kosovo's democratic order and laws and to fully integrate into Kosovo society. Although the mobilization of Serbian forces is seemingly presented as a threat to the people of Kosovo, it is unrealistic. Moreover, it is truly ridiculous and hilarious that Serbia shows that it is ready to invade a part of Kosovo which is under the protection of NATO-led KFOR, and tries to cast a shadow on the prestige of NATO. The mobilization of the Serbian Army will only refresh the painful memories that our compatriots have from the 90s. This is not good even for the Kosovo Serb Community, which consists of less than 4 percent of the population. For reconciliation we need peace, not rise of tensions. This mobilization was carried out by Serbian President Vuc also to mask the dissatisfaction of the people in his country. Additionally, through this, he is trying to demonstrate readiness for the annexation of the

northern municipalities of the Republic of Kosovo to Serbia, similar to the Russian annexation of Crimea. This is such a meaningless and a catastrophic approach. Kosovo expects friendly countries and all international legal entities to call on, even to sanction Belgrade to be constructive and peace-oriented.

Worth to remind that Kosovo's Prime Minister, Albin Kurti, on June this year pointed out the need for de-escalation and mentioned that progress should be made with the full implementation of the Brussels Agreement on the path to normalization between the Republic of Kosovo ►►



► and Serbia and its Ohrid Implementation Agreement achieved under the mediation of the European Union. Unfortunately, day after the Ohrid Agreement was achieved, Serbian President Vu i publicly declared that he will not implement the agreements as a whole. The Serbian side insists only on the formation of an Association of the Municipalities with the Serbian majority, which is not more important than other topics. Finally, in the meeting held on September 14, 2023,

Prime Minister Kurti's warnings and suggestions were unfortunately not taken into consideration seriously by the EU mediators, and how right he was about his concerns came to light in the terrorist attack on September 24.

### *What's next?*

Kosovo is conducting a very serious investigation into the latest terrorist attack and carrying the process to its conclusion with the support of the international community.

The Kosovo government is determined to take every democratic step to rehabilitate this region. Together with the international community and their representatives in Kosovo, we will continue to explain to the Kosovo Serb community in the north in a good way the need for steps to be taken for a peaceful, prosperous, and integrated region. Only in this manner can we achieve a European future for our country and region. Our aim is to achieve higher standards in Kosovo, more development inside and abroad, and, of course, all region to be part of the European Union. Belgrade's best protection can provide to the Kosovar Serbs, is to allow them to respect the democratic order and laws of Kosovo and to fully integrate into Kosovar society.

The Government of the Republic of Kosovo, while implementing laws and fulfilling ►



► its commitments given to citizens for a better and just Kosovo, also works closely with its allies and partners. Kosovo has always been able to manage crises with its will and constructive attitude. The Kosovo government argues that the problems should not be thrown under the rug. Short-term lulls can lead to long-term chronic problems. We want to get rid of some phenomena that create a dark cloud over a certain part of our country. We especially want our friendly countries to understand this better and support us more. We need this for a more peaceful and prosperous Kosovo and the region.

Our main concern is the feeling of insecurity among Kosovo Serbs in the north. The biggest problem is the existence of criminal and terrorist groups, which is proven to be directed by Belgrade. They suppress the silent majority who want to be integrated into Kosovar society. Our government is working on freeing the north from the shackles and creating a pluralistic political atmosphere among Serbs as well.

The second important issue is our need to eliminate prejudices created by the historical past. Unfortunately, some people still cannot accept the realities of the country. A part of Kosovar Serbs in the northern municipalities does not fully realize that integration into society is the most crucial and brings endless advantages. While the world is changing rapidly, people still do not realize that communication and interaction are something that is very valuable. There are good examples in other parts of Kosovo. There is a lot of interaction and sharing among people. Kosovar Albanians, Bosniaks, Turks, and other communities give the best examples of living together. We see the same sentiment among many of the Serbs in the internal parts of the country. The Kosovo government is sincerely working towards the integration of all Kosovar Serbs into society. But rest assured that neither the government nor the people will indulge in elements that threaten

the integrity of Kosovo. Kosovo Serbs must realize that living together is the best option. They should claim their rights within the system like everyone else. However, the Constitution and laws of Kosovo grant them very broad rights. In any case, they are represented by their members in parliament and the government. They should approach things from a progressive perspective. If the integration becomes stronger, much more investments will be made in that region in infrastructure and other fields. Everything will be better if they focus on European ideals and cooperate with us to minimize the negative phenomena in northern municipalities.

More than current tensions in the north of Kosovo, the fact that Belgrade does not accept the reality harms our relations. First of all, mutual recognition must take place. If Serbia does this, Kosovo will also do its part. In addition, Belgrade should stop working against Kosovo's interests on international platforms. For the future of the region, they must prioritize the ideals of the European Union, more willingly and sincerely, like other Western Balkan countries. If they do so, we will all be comfortable together and develop our future relations under a common structure. If we all fail, we will leave a bad legacy for future generations.

As Kosovo, we call on the international community to be with us on issues such as the rule of law, democracy, human rights, freedoms, and development in order to resolve chronic issues in the region. We call for help in order to preserve these values in the northern part of Kosovo as well. We call on the world not to spare the support for other countries in the region to internalize and implement these values in a real sense. If we accomplish all these things, we solve the issues faster in the municipalities in the north of Kosovo or the relations between the two entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also in all other countries of the Western Balkans. ■

# Bangladesh-USA Relations: A Dynamic and Flourishing Partnership Anchored in Shared Values

Dr. A. K. Abdul Momen, MP

*The writer is a Bangladeshi economist, diplomat, politician and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh.*



Anchored in our shared values of democracy, human rights and rule of law, the relations between Bangladesh and the USA have evolved over the past 52 years into a robust partnership characterised as dynamic, multifaceted and forward-looking. Like in any matured relationship, we collaborate on areas where we have alignment in our views and agree to disagree where you don't. Peace and security have always remained as fundamental pillars of USA-Bangladesh relations. We partner with the United States, among others, in four core areas of democracy and governance, human rights, peace and security, and trade and development.

The people-to-people ties have been a cornerstone of our relationship. The freedom-loving people of the USA wholeheartedly supported Bangladesh's struggle for independence in 1971. When Senator Edward M Kennedy visited newly independent Bangladesh in 1972, he said, "I have come to Bangladesh to bring you the prayers and hopes of millions of people of the United States of America. We are brothers in liberty, and no man, no policy, no government can change that fact."

Although the then US administration had prioritised their relations with Pakistan over creation of Bangladesh, the US government has been supportive of the country ever since we won the War on 16 December 1971. They have also supported Bangladesh's bid for the membership of the United Nations. The foundation of Bangladesh-US bilateral relations got its strong footing when the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman visited the United States to at-▶▶



► tend the UN General Assembly in 1974 and subsequently met the US President Gerald R. Ford in Washington on 01 October 1974. Since then, we have converged in an expanding collaboration in the pursuit of our aspired goals of democracy, human rights rule of law, justice, women rights, religious freedom, countering terrorism and violent extremism, combatting transnational crimes and non-traditional security issues.

The diplomatic presence of the United States in Bangladesh predates our independence. United States established a consulate in Dhaka (then referred to as “Dacca”) in 1949, shortly after Pakistan emerged as a new country. The United States recognised Bangladesh on April 4, 1972, within few months of Bangladesh’s independence. The US Embassy in Dhaka was established on May 18, 1972. Bangladesh also opened its Embassy in Washington DC in following months. This demonstrates keenness from both countries to forward their relationship.

The relations between the two countries entered a new phase after Hon’ble Prime Minister Sheikh

Hasina formed the government in 2009. Formal dialogue mechanisms were established between Bangladesh and the US in various areas during the visit of the then US Secretary of State, Ms. Hilary Clinton to Bangladesh in 2012. Since then, both countries have been holding regular annual dialogues i.e. Partnership Dialogue, Security Dialogue, Defense Dialogue, and TICFA (Trade and Investment Cooperation Forum Agreement) Council Meetings (since 2013).

Economic cooperation is one of the most important dimensions in our bilateral relations. We have established an ‘Economic Partnership Consultation Mechanism’ to further consolidate the economic ties. Bilateral High-Level Economic Consultations (HLEC) are being held since 2020.

The USA has gradually emerged from a source of food and development aid of Bangladesh in the early years to the largest single-country destination of our exports, largest source of our foreign direct investment (FDI), home to over half a million expatriate Bangladeshis and the most popular destination of higher education of our students. ►►

► Our ever-expanding trade volume with the US surpassed US\$14 billion last year. Bangladesh's major exports include woven apparel, knit apparel, miscellaneous textile products, cap, headgear, footwear, tobacco, snacks foods, furniture, ceramic, toys, plastic item and artificial flowers etc. The major imports include raw cotton, chemicals, machinery and equipment, pharmaceuticals, aircraft, electrical equipment, iron, and steel etc.

Despite high import tariffs, the apparels from Bangladesh have made successful inroad in the US. However, the 10.42 billion US dollar worth of goods that we had exported to USA in 2021-22, could be more, in case we had the GSP facilities that USA extends in different areas to more than hundred countries. Though we had limited GSP facilities from USA till 2013, our biggest export item, RMG, which constitutes 84% of our export, historically remained out of the scope of the US GSP.

Besides trade and investment, as a steadfast ally, the United States stood by us during the testing times. In our combat against the COVID-19 Pandemic, the US emerged as the most important partner. We were the largest recipient of COVID-vaccine from the US. Those vaccines saved many lives in Bangladesh.

The USA is also our largest partner in the humanitarian efforts towards the temporarily sheltered Rohingyas. The United States extends nearly \$2.1 billion in humanitarian response to the protracted Rohingya Crisis. They have also been active in the accountability measures against the perpetrators of the atrocities committed to the Rohingyas. The US Government has announced the violence committed against the Rohingya by Myanmar as Genocide and crime against humanity.

Bangladesh's rapid economic development under

the passionate and visionary leadership of the Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is rewriting our relations with our international partners, including the US, as trade replaces aid and strategic partnership gains prominence. Bangladesh has emerged as a role model of development. We have been able to pull over 40 million people out of poverty since 2009. Already 35th largest economy of the world and growing, Bangladesh has rapidly transformed into a lucrative consumer market with 40 million people with significant purchasing power, which is expected to grow by some estimates to 60 million by 2030. Bangladesh has become global leader in many areas. We are the 2nd largest RMG exporter, 3rd largest producer of vegetables; 3rd largest in inland fish production, 4th largest producer of rice; and 5th largest producer of close pond cultured fish in the world.

We have achieved a remarkable growth in socio-economic sectors. Bangladesh features among the top 10 countries of the globe in political empowerment of women. The stability and continuity of the political regime, the forward-looking policies of the government, continued investment in rural economy and women empowerment – these are some of the factors that played major role in our success. Our government has been pivoting digital technology for development and poverty reduction. Mobile Financial Services (MFS), which is posting an astronomical growth, is creating incredible changes in the economy by bringing the unbanked population into the formal Banking system. Various public and private essential and non-essential services are increasingly being provided through online platforms, which is making people's life easy, businesses more efficient and ensuring transparency and accountability. Thousands of small and medium IT companies and hundreds of thousands of IT professionals and freelancers have been part of this amazing jour-►►

► ney. Buoyed by such success, we are hopeful to achieve the dream of a smart Bangladesh by 2041.

In all our development endeavours, we remained environmentally responsible. Bangladesh is one of the least emitters of greenhouse gas of the world. Our per capita carbon emission was only 0.5 tonne in 2019 as opposed to 14.7 tonne in USA and 8.5 tonne in OECD countries. Yet, Bangladesh is actively pursuing a path of green growth. We have pledged to reduce carbon emission by 22% by 2030. We have lately cancelled at least ten big coal fired power plant projects although they would have meant cheaper power for our consumers and industries. The Bangladesh Solar Home Systems (SHS) Program is the largest national program in the world for off-grid electrification. Eight out of the top ten LEED certified green garments are in Bangladesh. Doing business with Bangladesh will give the foreign companies leverage when it comes to carbon footprint. Moreover, clean tech is becoming a lucrative sector for investors to invest in Bangladesh.

I am sanguine to see that the US government and businesses have been noticing Bangladesh's transformation and coming forward to forge deeper ties in trade and investment. The 1st Bangladesh-US High Level Economic Partnership Consultations was held (virtually due to COVID) on 30 September 2020 and the 2nd round in June 2022. Recently the US-Bangladesh Business Council has been formed within the US Chamber of Commerce (launched on 6 April 2021) to further strengthen bilateral trade and investment ties. The Business Council delegation has already visited twice to Bangladesh showing signs of heightened interests of the US businesses to expand their presence in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh with its very friendly foreign investment regime, welcomes the US investors to invest in competitive sectors in Bangladesh, including

in renewable energy, shipbuilding, automobile, pharmaceuticals, heavy machineries, chemical fertilizers, ICT, marine resources exploration, medical equipment, green technology, and vaccine manufacturing. A liberal investment policy, robust investment protection regime, unrestricted exit policy, full repatriation of dividends and capital on exit, large domestic consumer pool, regional connectivity, preferential market access to OECD countries, China and India make investing in Bangladesh all the more attractive. Supply chain disruptions during the Covid-19 pandemic was a wake-up call for the countries to diversify their supply chain. Bangladesh is well poised to become a major source of supply chain diversification for the US and other large economies.

Bangladesh is setting up 100 'Special Economic Zones' (SEZs) and 38 Hi-tech Parks in the different parts of the country. Skilled and easily retrainable human resource at a competitive wage makes investment in Bangladesh even more attractive. More than six hundred thousand (600,000) freelancing IT professionals of Bangladesh testify the depth of human resource pool of Bangladesh. The ICT industry of Bangladesh is fully ready for the US businesses to collaborate and benefit from.

Although not so big, the market capitalization of the portfolio market of Bangladesh is about US\$ 40 billion and growing, with an attractive price earning (P/E) ratio of about 14.5. I call upon you to take advantage of the growing portfolio market of Bangladesh. With the economy on the march, the bond market, which has only started to grow, can be a goldmine for the US financial investors.

Apart from trade and investment, peace and security occupy significant space in Bangladesh-US relations. Security cooperation is based on four pillars i.e., 1) Peace and Development, 2) Defence Cooperation, 3) Counter Terrorism and Security ►►

► including maritime and border security, and 4) Human Security. Over the years, security cooperation has not remained merely military centric, but has gained a holistic nature. Food security, energy security and disaster management & relief constitute key strategic priorities for Bangladesh, where the US has been an important partner.

Non-traditional security challenge such as climate change poses existential threat to Bangladesh. We have been actively working together with the US, both bilaterally and multilaterally, to reverse climate degradation and to combat the adverse impacts of climate change. The USAID has been working with the Government of Bangladesh in various areas of climate change, including strengthening resilience of the communities to climate change, protecting biodiversity, promoting sustainable energy and prioritising climate-smart agriculture.

Being a littoral State of the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh considers stability, security and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region is crucial in realizing the 'Vision 2041' of becoming a developed smart Bangladesh by 2041. We believe that mutual understanding, cooperation and collaboration among the Indo-Pacific countries are essential for stability, peace, and prosperity. Our increasing focus on the Indo-Pacific region is demonstrated in our announcement of the 'Indo-Pacific Outlook' during April this year. The outlook reflects Bangladesh's vision for a free, open, peaceful, secure, and inclusive Indo-Pacific and aims to promote transparent, multilateral systems that would enable equitable and sustainable development in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond through inclusive economic growth, right to development and shared prosperity for all. Through the announcement, Bangladesh reaffirmed her commitment to freedom of navigation and overflight in the Indo-Pacific for unimpeded trade and human mobility.

The US Indo-Pacific Strategy, which reaffirms the US's growing interest in this global growth center speaks of similar values and aspiration in the region and provides a newer platform for Bangladesh and the US to work together on achieving shared goals. The Bay of Bengal is an area rich in untapped natural resources, including significant reserves of gas and other seabed minerals, and possibly rare-earth minerals. Fish population of our territorial water remains broadly unprotected and exposed to IUU fishing as our domain awareness capability remains limited. Capacity of our fishermen in deep sea fishing is also limited. We see broader scope of partnership with the US in the Bay of Bengal in terms of investment, research collaboration, technology transfer, enhancing maritime domain awareness capability and security to unleash the potential of blue economy.

Our diaspora in the USA plays a crucial role in bridging between our peoples and countries. Their efforts towards enhancing people-to-people contact and advancing economic and cultural ties of the two countries deserve due recognition. As the second-generation Bangladeshi Americans keep assuming prominent positions in the US economy and society, we expect their role to grow further to forge a deeper Bangladesh-US relationship.

The government led by the Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is committed to creating a stronger, more durable and ever-flourishing friendship with the USA. Bangladesh's fast-growing economy, strong commitment to ensure freedom and democracy, dedication to peace and security, keenness to engage in addressing global challenges, and leadership role towards enhanced connectivity with its friends and neighbours make Bangladesh an ideal partner for the US in the Indo-Pacific region. ■



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# Towards Inclusive Institutional Changes for Rural Financial Inclusion

**Dr. Atiur Rahman**

*The writer is an eminent economist, Emeritus Professor at Dhaka University, and former Governor of Bangladesh Bank.*



Though dated, reading the book 'Why Nations Fail' (2012) by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson was still fascinating. The book argues against extractive economic institutions structured to extract resources from many by the few. If this trend continues, they argue, the nations are bound to fail. Instead, the authors argue that there is a link between inclusive economic and political institutions and prosperity. The book provides several case studies on both sides of the coin. And finally, it reaches the conclusion that a virtual cycle can only be initiated with inclusive institutions for prosperity for all, leading to desired poverty reduction.

Bangladesh's economy emerging as one of Asia's most 'remarkable and unexpected success stories' during recent years, is being widely acknowledged by global experts as a role model of development despite many challenges in the areas of governance. And they attribute a significant share of this success to policies promoting inclusive finance.

The IMF's Financial Access Survey (FAS) data bears testimony to such inferences. IMF data shows that the number of bank branches per 100 thousand adults in Bangladesh started increasing by 2010. This number grew faster once the commercial banks' non-branch agent outlets started operating in earnest. Between 2010 and 2021- the number of bank branches and agent outlets per 100 thousand adults increased from 8 to 16 (doubled) (IMF, 2023). Data from IMF also shows that between 2003 and 2021 number of MFI branches per 100 thousand adults increased from 7 to 18 ▶



- ▶ (almost tripled), and the number of loan accounts with MFIs per 100 thousand adults increased from 12 thousand to 23 thousand (almost doubled) (ibid).

It should be evident from the above that Bangladesh's financial sector has undergone a significant (if not revolutionary) transformation over the last 13-14 years despite many governance limitations. Considering that over 45 percent of Bangladesh's employment is in agriculture (BBS, 2022), it is natural to wonder how this 'silent revolution of financial inclusion' has affected the lives and livelihoods of households relying on agriculture. Recalling my deep association with the task of reforming financial regulatory infrastructure as Governor of the Central Bank of Bangladesh, I can now clearly relate how minor changes in the delivery system of agricultural credit by all banks with the facilitating role of the regulator embarked on a virtual sector of more

farmers getting the access to finance and adding value to agricultural production. I am happy to see that even outsiders were keen on observing these significant changes in economic institutions.

For example, Gerald Epstein (2013) has pointed out that from the very beginning of this recent inclusive financing campaign, the central bank of Bangladesh (Bangladesh Bank) has resorted to a 'developmental approach' which has emphasized channeling finance to the real sector which includes 'support and promotion of agricultural lending' as well as 'credit program for sharecroppers.'

Given this backdrop, I intend to review the specific policy initiatives of Bangladesh Bank to improve access to finance for the farmers and then broadly identify the impact those policies have had on the lives and livelihoods of the agriculture-dependent households of the country. ▶▶



► The global financial crisis that hit economies worldwide by the end of the first decade of this century made financial sector policymakers realize once again the importance of having monetary policies in place that did not just focus on inflation targeting and duly prioritized other macroeconomic concerns. Oliver Blanchard, the former Chief Economist of the IMF, rightly pointed out, *“Before the economic crisis began in 2008, mainstream economists and policymakers had converged on a beautiful construction for monetary policy. ... we had convinced ourselves that there was one target, inflation. There was one instrument, the policy rate. ... One lesson to be drawn from this crisis is that this construct was not right: Beauty is not synonymous with truth. There are many targets and many instruments. How the instruments are mapped onto the targets and how these instruments are best used are complicated problems ....”*.

This realization gave a new rise to what is now known as ‘developmental central banking.’ This paradigm shift suggests a broad-based and more engaging role of the central bank in ensuring macroeconomic stability, maintaining growth,

and managing inflation. Here, monetary policy is expected to go beyond the then-prevailing practices focused mostly on controlling inflation and engage itself in other pressing macroeconomic concerns, including addressing inequality and adaptation to climate change.

Given this backdrop, Bangladesh Bank may be considered a pioneer of this resurfaced paradigm of developmental central banking. Bangladesh Bank initiated its dynamic and timely campaign of broad-based financial inclusion in 2009 with the commitment to ‘promote and maintain a high level of output, employment, and real income, fostering growth and development of the country’s productive resources along with preserving monetary and financial stability’.

With the intention of encouraging commercial banks to channel more finance to the agriculture sector, Bangladesh Bank induced all commercial banks to establish separate agricultural and/or rural finance departments or sub-departments. And, to ensure that credit reaches the right farmers, policies have been in place so that open ses- ►►

► sions are held to avoid mistargeting/leakage. The presence of local dignitaries (government and non-government) in these open credit disbursement sessions has also been ensured so that the processes remain transparent and participatory. Most importantly, Bangladesh Bank ensured that commercial banks create the provisions so that small and marginal farmers could open no-frill bank accounts (10-taka-accounts) with those banks.

Secondly, to reach the previously underserved/unserved with formal finance, Bangladesh Bank has taken initiatives that include earmarking a share of the agricultural and rural credit for women, especially targeting the small and marginal farmers, and initiating credit programs that specially targeted the farmers in remote areas (e.g., those in *Char* and *Haor* areas).

Thirdly, Bangladesh Bank has rightly identified the proliferation of mobile phone usage in rural communities as an opportunity to expand digital finance. The central bank made it mandatory for all commercial banks to keep records of the mobile phone numbers of all farmers so that those farmers could later be contacted to assess customer satisfaction/grievances. Bangladesh Bank has also set up a Customer's Interest Protection Center with a hotline to address customer grievances. This initiative has proven to be especially popular.

Finally, certain policy measures related to supporting the agriculture sector have focused on improving the resource efficiency of agricultural practices and macro-level resource management. For example, Bangladesh Bank has provided subsidized credit (at a 2 to 4 percent interest rate) for farmers who cultivate certain import-substitution crops. This has greatly encouraged the farmers to cultivate import-substitution crops and/or high-value crops, which in turn has benefited the national economy by saving hard-earned foreign currency. Special credit facilities have also been

made available for those opting for solar irrigation, biogas plant, solar home systems, etc., to promote climate-friendly development.

Although not solely targeting the rural communities, two other digital finance policy initiatives of Bangladesh Bank have left a significant positive impact on the lives and livelihoods of the agriculture-dependent households of Bangladesh. These are Agent Banking and Mobile Financial Service (MFS).

As the overarching goal of Bangladesh Bank's agricultural and rural credit policies and programs has been to improve the flow of finance for the agricultural sector, changes in the credit disbursement targets set over the years for this sector are perhaps the most suitable indicator to measure the outputs of the policy measures undertaken by the central bank. Data from Bangladesh Bank shows that between FY2010-11 and FY2022-23, the total agricultural and rural credit disbursement target set by the central bank has increased from BDT 126 billion to BDT 309 billion (almost tripled in just over a decade).

More importantly, it has been seen that private commercial banks are increasingly engaged in agriculture finance. In the early years, state-owned commercial banks and other specialized banks disbursed the majority share of agricultural credit during the period. But as the years progressed, private commercial banks have become more inclined toward agriculture finance. Consequently, the share of private commercial banks in the total agricultural and rural credit disbursement target has increased from 24 percent in FY2010-11 to 59 percent in FY2022-23.

A review of data available from the annual Agricultural and Rural Credit Policy and Program documents published by Bangladesh Bank has revealed the following positive outputs of the policy measures taken over the last 13-14 years:

\* Each year, between 10 to 16 thousand open-yard ►►

► agricultural credit disbursement sessions have been held to select eligible farmers. Local eminent personalities (government and non-government) were present during these sessions to ensure transparency and participation.

\* Among the agricultural and rural credit recipients yearly, between 1.7 million and 3 million have been small and marginal farmers. And among them, 500 to 9,000 have been farmers from remote areas (e.g., *Char, Haor*, etc.).

\* Almost 10 million no-frill accounts for farmers (10-taka-accounts) are operational, as per the latest data from Bangladesh Bank. Farmers are using these bank accounts to receive subsidies for purchasing diesel, receiving safety net allowances, and remittances.

During this period, on average, 46 percent of the annual loans disbursed by MFIs have gone to the agriculture sector. The contribution of developmental central banking in facilitating improved Agri-finance by MFIs becomes more obvious when partnerships between commercial banks and MFIs are looked into. While MFIs have been historically more engaged in rural finance than conventional banks, Bangladesh Bank opted to leverage the track record of MFIs in last-mile service delivery in enabling commercial banks to channel credit and other financial services to farmers in rural areas of Bangladesh. Under this initiative, commercial banks partnered MFIs with a successful track record and then used the MFIs' network at the grassroots to channel agricultural credit.

The discussion so far has presented a narrative related to policy measures taken by Bangladesh Bank with the intention of promoting and/or safeguarding agriculture, including an overview of the outputs of those initiatives in terms of increasing the supply of credit. This naturally brings forward questions about how much these outputs ultimately have contributed to the well-being of

the farmers (i.e., the longer-term outcomes of developmental central banking).

Production of cereals and agricultural GDP (including fisheries sub-sector) both appear to have increased significantly during the recent decade. According to the Bangladesh Economic Review 2023, food production increased from over 34 million metric tons to over 43 million metric tons during this period, with a commendable increase of over 26 percent. Agricultural GDP (including the fisheries sub-sector) has also increased by 33 percent (from BDT 1 trillion to BDT 1.33 trillion) during this period.

To what extent these increases in production and GDP has contributed to the well-being of the rural people can be visualized from the changes in incomes of rural households and the reduction in poverty in those areas. Key findings of the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2022 published by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) show that the average monthly income of rural households in Bangladesh has increased from BDT 9,648 in 2010 to BDT 26,163 in 2022 (a stunning increase of 171 percent). The increases in living standards of rural households (reflected through higher income) have been possible mostly due to their increased access to finance. Of course, there are other factors to which this success can be attributed.

It has been aptly established that the developmental approach of Bangladesh Bank has prudently leveraged the country's financial sector to promote and/or safeguard the agriculture sector, which in turn has contributed toward the growth and stability of the entire economy. Yet it must also be noted that agriculture will remain to be the vanguard of Bangladesh's economy for at least another couple of decades. Therefore, the country's financial system must also remain consistent with its innovations related to Agri-finance during that period. ■



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# Despite Global Indifference, Palestine Matters

Syed Badrul Ahsan

*The writer is a journalist and political analyst.*



Tor Wennesland, the UN Peace Co-ordinator for the Middle East, has expressed his disgust at the Hamas missile raids into Israel. For his part, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has made

it known that the missile attacks, which have left, as of the writing of this piece, as many as 400 Israelis dead and more than 2,000 wounded, are a declaration of war and that his country intends to win it. Israeli forces have gone for fierce retaliation in Gaza, from where the missiles came, leaving 313 Palestinians dead and over two thousand of others injured.

Wennesland has all the right in the world to feel horrified by the nature of the Hamas attacks. But in his conversation with a television anchor on Saturday morning, he seemed not to be expressing a similar sort of anguish over the manner in

which Israeli forces and armed Jewish settlers in occupied Arab territory have gone around perpetrating violence on Palestinians. This year alone 250 Palestinians, among them 40 children, have died in Israeli attacks. And Gaza, which has been under an Israeli blockade since 2007, has turned into a ghetto with Palestinians unable to exercise the freedoms that people around the world enjoy.

No one appreciates violence. Be it Hamas, be it Israel, the point is that violence in the pursuit of political goals is not the means to peace. Beyond such platitudes, however, there is the issue of a cause, the Palestinian cause, which in recent years has appeared to have been pushed under the diplomatic rug in capitals around the world. The rapprochement which has been defining Israel's ties with its Arab neighbours — and the process goes back to Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in 1977 and the subsequent Camp David agreement on a normalisation of Cairo-Tel Aviv ties — in recent times has clearly come at the expense of the Palestinians.

The frustration felt by Palestinians is thus under-▶▶



standable. In recent years, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have signed peace deals with Israel, though neither of them has ever gone to war with the Jewish state. Only weeks ago, the Saudis welcomed an Israeli minister to Riyadh for the very first time. One is not sure if the talks between the two sides covered the Palestine issue. Probably the issue did come up, but of greater importance was the need for the two countries to

come closer together in a bilateral manner. One is not surprised that in the recent past, scanty have been the responses from Arab governments on the systematic manner in which Palestinians have been treated by Israel.

Over these last few months the spectacle of hard line Israelis forcing their way into the Al-Aqsa mosque, even as Muslims were in prayer, has been ►

► a clear provocation. And yet the response from Israel's friends in the West has been muted. The murder of the reputed Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu-Akleh has not stirred the conscience of western human rights defenders, who are otherwise forever alert to the sufferings of people in countries administered by what they refer to as authoritarian governments. The Israeli army has made it clear that Abu-Akleh's murder will not be investigated by it. And the International Criminal Court remains silent on the issue.

The Hamas attacks on Ashkelon and Tel Aviv on Saturday morning, given the world's growing disinterest in Palestine, were a reminder to the world that Palestine remains an issue, that nothing in the Middle East will go right if the wrongs perpetrated by Israel are not checked and are not rolled back. Israel's far-right government, which includes ministers keen on an obliteration of Palestinians, will only be creating trouble for itself if it persists in believing that air power will silence Gaza and the rest of Palestine. With Hezbollah, based in Lebanon, and Islamic Jihad expressing solidarity with Hamas, conditions can only go from bad to worse.

All of this has had the cause of a Palestinian state resurface in these times. It defies common sense and morality that Palestine was flushed out of history through the creation of the state of Israel in May 1948. It is an outrage that Palestinians, today scattered across a number of countries in the Middle East, remain refugees and have little hope of an independent homeland for themselves.

It is a tragedy that the grandchildren of Palestinians of an earlier generation speak of villages, of homes filled with olive trees, of memories now lost under the weight of the state of Israel. Their agony has not ceased. As the political analyst Marwan Bishara points out in clear and assertive language, the slow violence exercised by Israel in the

occupied territories in the past many decades has left young Palestinians with little choice other than carrying on the struggle in their own ways.

But Hamas firing missiles into Israel and Israel destroying Palestinian homes in Gaza are not the road to a political solution. Netanyahu in his recent address before the United Nations General Assembly spoke of a new Middle East. He was clearly elated at the fact that his country was getting into the good books of Arab nations, convinced that peace as Tel Aviv saw it would be the result. Not once in his remarks did Netanyahu refer to the Palestinians, as if ignoring them would pave the path to the creation of the new Middle East he had in mind.

Hamas has now reminded Netanyahu and the wider world that Palestine matters, that there will be no new Middle East as long as the issues related to the old Middle East, dating from May 1948, fester and remain unresolved. It will be interesting to see how the Saudis and the other new friends of Israel in the region respond to the crisis as it exploded on Saturday.

For the West, it will simply not do to condemn the violence unleashed by Hamas. It will be turning itself away from current realities if it does not come down hard on the state violence perpetrated by Israel on Palestinians for years, if it does not demand that Tel Aviv pull back from the settlements it has illegally established in occupied Arab land for its people. It must demand that Israel's military occupation of Palestinian territory be brought to an end.

The Palestinians are a lonely people, abandoned by nations they had thought were their friends and fellow travellers on the road to justice. But they are a proud people. They need reassurance that justice will come to them. If that does not happen, the world can only fear that the arc of violence will stretch increasingly longer, that the Middle East will remain a tinderbox in these fraught times and beyond. **Courtesy:** *Daily Sun*

# Popular Life paid Taka 24,41,68,189 (Twenty Four Crore Forty One Lakh Sixty Eight Thousand One Hundred Eighty Nine) by 7,468 checks to the insurance claimers



At a recent meeting held in the auditorium of the Diploma Engineers Institution (IDEB) in Dhaka, Popular Life Insurance Company Limited presented checks totaling taka 24,41,68,189 to 7,468 insurance customers' claims. Mohammad Joynal Bari, chairman of the Insurance Development and Controller Authority, served as the meeting's chief guest. Sheikh Kabir Hossain, chairman of the Bangladesh Insurance Association, attended the meeting virtually as a special guest. BM Yousuf Ali, CEO and Managing Director of the Popular Life Insurance Company Limited, presided over the event. Abdullah Haroon Pasha, additional secretary for the Ministry of Finance, Moinul Islam, member for (administration) Insurance Development and Controller Authority, Kamrul Hassan, member for (life) Md. Nazrul Islam, member for (non-life) and Dr. Naznin Kawser Chowdhury, Executive Director, (Joint Secretary) were among those present at the meeting. BM Shawkat Ali, additional managing director of the company, presided over the event. The meeting was also attended by Mohammad Anis Uddin Miah, former secretary and senior consultant of the company, Mohammad Sirajul Haider NDC, former additional secretary and senior consultant of the company, Roy Debdas, former chief Insurance controller (In Charge) and senior consultant of the company, Colonel retd Ahsan Aziz PSC, senior consultant of the company, Nandan Bhattacharje and Mostafa Helal Kabir, additional managing directors, Syed Motahar Hossain, senior DMD, Mohammad Nowsher Ali Nayeem, Mohammad Abu Taher, Feroz Iftekhar, Md Habibur Rahman, Md Bashirul Islam and Emad Uddin Ahmed Prince, DMD Mohammad Kamal Hossain Mohsin, Md Khalilur Rahman Dulal, Syed Sultan Mahmud, and CFO Ershad Ali Hiru and other high officials of the company attended the program.

Photo shows guests are handing over check to the Insurance customer's claim.

It may be mentioned that the company has paid a total of 5 thousand 239 crore 6 lakh 52 thousand to 38,52,903 insurance customers till to date.



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## Part-II

# Transforming the Paper Money to Digital

*Takings from and Makings of Central Bank Digital Currency*

### Dr. Jamaluddin Ahmed FCA PhD

*Chairman of Emerging Credit Rating Limited and Tier 1 Solutions Limited, ex-President of ICAB, ex-member of the Board of Directors of Bangladesh Bank, ex-Chairman of Janata Bank Limited, and ex-General Secretary of Bangladesh Economic Association.*



remediation on ledger vs off ledgers should consider chargeback and liens, whether they are facilitated through core CBDC system functionality, mandated through an external governance process, who authorizes these actions, and what transparency is provided. The design choice benefits and drawbacks have been described for *on-ledger*, *off-ledger*, *security PKC* with ZKPs, and *secure hardware-more hardware-based* vs more software-

The *identity privacy* could be known to the central bank, intermediated, or none, depending on what aspects of identity are kept private/confidential, from whom, and under what circumstances. The

based. The transaction *execution* has been elaborated as signature-based vs no-signature vs single-signature vs multi-signature signing. The transaction *privacy* with more private vs more observable transaction vs layering has been discussed for policy decisions made by the competent authority.

The offline transaction procedure could be online only or both online and offline, and the transaction programmability could be supported or not supported. If transaction programmability is not supported, the data model-unsent transaction outputs vs account balances are described. The *ledger history* could be none, centralized, or distributed, taking into account the adjustments that can be proposed in the CBDC system to facilitate a number of *financial design choices*, such as special purpose CBDC, holding limits, fees, interest, etc. ▶▶



► The legal aspects of Central Bank Digital Currency are important to consider. To qualify as a currency, a means of payment must be recognized as such by monetary law. Can monetary law consider CBDC to be a currency. If so, what are the legal consequences of CBDC issuance. If not, what does this mean for CBDC. The answers to these questions are critical in discerning the role CBDC could play as a means of payment and extinguishing monetary obligations. These two issues are the subject of analysis in this area, including whether central bank laws authorize the creation of central bank liabilities and issuance of currency, particularly in digital form. In the absence of a clear answer, CBDC would not have a robust legal basis and its issuance should be reconsidered. The legal definitions of currency, money, and payment instruments have been explained, and economic theory is unlikely to assist lawyers to any appreciable extent. There is no universally accepted legal definition of money, but it is widely ac-

cepted that legal money is broader. The definition of legal money varies from one jurisdiction to another depending on the use of technology in the monetary and payment systems, including the level of financial system development.

This analysis draws on a very long strand of literature in monetary economics. The design features and legal implications of CBDC have been analyzed for different forms of money. The legal distinction between cash accounts and ledger accounts has been explained. The relevance of CBDC in central bank law has been revisited. Central banks and the principle of attribution of power have been analyzed, including central functions for validating the legal justifications for the inclusion of CBDC. The central bank law for token-based CBDC indirect provision pertaining to the issuance of currency, the central bank law for account-based CBDC, the need for central bank law reform, the relevance of monetary law for CBDC, and the of-►

► official monetary unit and official means of payment currency are highlighted. The *comparative* position on the *issuance* of money by the *monopoly* of the *state* is reported. CBDC, as the official means of payment, should be *covered* by the monetary law of the country *intending to enact* CBDC *before it moves* for CBDC introduction. Thus, the *monetary law* of the country needs to be *reformed* to cover CBDC as the official means of payment.

The position of countries on CBDC varies. In 2022, the IMF conducted a study titled “Towards Digital Currency in the Asia Pacific-Regional Survey on the Status of Introducing the Central Bank Digital Currency.” The study *categorized* countries into *four* groups: *advanced* economies (7), *emerging market* economies (11), *low-income* countries (7), and *Pacific Island* countries (11). The first group includes Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Macao, and New Zealand. The second group includes Brunei, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Timor-Leste. The low-income countries group includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, and Vietnam. The Pacific Island countries group includes Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. The IMF study grouped the countries into seven categories. The first group was identified as first movers, including China and Hong Kong. The second group included India and Thailand, while the third group comprised Australia, Japan, Korea, and Singapore, which were considered to have strong R&D. The *study found* that Bangladesh had *no initiative* for CBDC.

### Recommendations

Regardless of the *motivation*, any *approach* to issuing a CBDC will *naturally* be *cautious*, *incremental*, and *collaborative*. Yet, at the same time, *debates* over CBDCs have *matured*, and there is significant

*common policy* ground among central banks. To further advance understanding, a *continued* and *deepened* shift in emphasis towards *practical policy* research and applied *technical* experimentation is underway. Given the *speed* of innovation in *payments* and *financial technology*, this paper recognizes the need to *prioritize* this work *appropriately* and *proceed* quickly. As a result, we recommend that this group of central banks, together with the BIS, continue to work actively and collaboratively on CBDCs, *without prejudging* any decision *whether* or *not* to introduce CBDCs in *our jurisdictions*. We will further explore the *practical* implications of the *core features* set out in this paper while advancing our *understanding* around *other open* questions (such as the trade-offs in CBDC designs that aim to mitigate financial stability risks); practical issues and challenges for cross-border transfer of domestic CBDCs; and contribute to these international workstreams. In particular, we support the G20 roadmap on cross-border payments and subsequent work on building block 19 on CBDCs (“factor an international dimension into CBDC designs”), led by the CPMI and the BIS.

We invite the BIS to continue promoting information-sharing and collaboration between central banks on CBDC research. We also invite the BIS Innovation Hub to further explore technological experiments that could support our work, and we support their plans to investigate the technologies that could facilitate interoperability and cross-border transactions between domestic CBDCs. Furthermore, we will continue our efforts to reach out to domestic stakeholders and foster an open and informed dialogue on CBDC in our jurisdictions. We will provide opportunities for domestic stakeholders to participate in this dialogue, and we will also reach out to other central banks, including those in developing economies, as well as international organizations.

Finally, this paper recommends 11 design choices for Central Bank Digital Currency, including pol-►

► **Policy and technical considerations:**

*Benefits & Risks:* Efficiency, Broader Tax Base, Flexible Monetary Policy, Payment Backstop, Financial Inclusion, Disintermediation of Banking System, Miscalibration of Government Involvement, Financial Risk due to Lack of Regulatory Expertise and Capacity, Loss of Privacy, Technological Vulnerability or Entrenched Design Mistakes, and Charting the Roadmap.

*Looking from a Banking Perspective:* Technical justification for issuing CBDC and its implications for the international monetary system.

*Ledger Infrastructure:* Information Security Infrastructure, Distribution and Decentralization, Distributed System Decentralized System, Role Separation, Trust Disposal, Threshold Trust, State Machine Replication for Distributed Ledger, Centralized Ledger, Centralized but Verifiable Ledger, Semi-Centralized Ledger, Decentralized Ledgers with Central Bank Monetary Control, and Scalability to Large Transaction Values.

*Account Identity:* Account Identity Management, Who Manages Accounts, Accounts in Cryptocurrencies, Cryptocurrency Exchanges, Delegated Management in CBDCs, and Approaches to Digital Identity Verification such as In-Person Identity Checking, Online Identity Checking, Weak Identity Proxies, Biometric Identity, Social Trust Networks, and Self-Sovereign Identity.

*Approaches to Digital Identity Verification,* including In-Person Identity Checking, Online Identity Checking, Weak Identity Proxies, Biometric Identity, So-

cial Trust Networks, and Self-Sovereign Identity.

*Privacy and Transparency:* This section covers the following topics: identity privacy, solutions for privacy concerns, active probing attackers, transaction privacy, data privacy, program privacy, decentralization of privacy, role separation, trust disposal, threshold trust, and privacy competence challenges.

*Smart Contracts Background:* This section discusses the following topics: striking a balance between safety and extensibility, the need for program verification, support for verification analysis, expressiveness, restrictiveness and domain-specific languages, support for upgrades, reversibility, and redactions, handling contentions and concurrency in transitions, the potential of smart contracts to accelerate systemic risk, limitations of enforcing policies through restrictions at the platform level, off-chain protocols and advanced cryptography, and smart contracts as a two-layer architecture.

*Secure Hardware:* This section provides a brief introduction to secure hardware and discusses secure hardware variants, security properties, limitations of secure hardware technology, software-based side channels, physical tampering, trust concerns, problems of sample use, sample design, main problems, better ways of leveraging ►



- ▶ secure hardware, infrastructure hardening, simplified and efficient privacy, complementary privacy, compliance rules, lightweight clients, hardware wallets, and smart contracts.

*Opportunity for Novel Financial Technology:* This section discusses the potential benefits of implementing CBDC, such as the ability to implement monetary policy, transparency, non-fungible money, monetary transmission, smart contracts for other novel capabilities, privacy concerns, and micro-management. It also highlights the challenges and questions of accountability, oversight, functionality, and intervention.

*Legal Considerations:* This section covers legal considerations such as jurisdictions, compliance, privacy, designers' security, legislative changes, purpose limitations, disclosure limitations, access portability, rectification, security branch notices, fraud and mistake, disloyal agents, impersonalization, mistakes, fraud in the factum, fraud in the inducement, liens, collection, locking, notice, tracing, and taxation.

*For Bangladesh:* This section recommends the formation of a task force comprising cross-professionals to define specific terms and reference the economic justification, architectural design of CBDC with technology, operating manual, and implementation plan with a specified timeline. This will place Bangladesh in a comparable and competitive global scenario and ensure the country is equipped with an efficient CBDC. The section also highlights the need to address economic justifications, finalize the choice of technology, settle legal issues, study the comparative position of CBDC, and detail progress updates and comparative analysis between countries. Additionally, the experience of ongoing digital payment systems, countrywide electricity generation capacity, grid, and distribution system, and progress in biometric national ID are positive factors for Bangladesh to embark for CBDC.

## Issues on CBDC Benefits, Risks, and Policy Considerations for Bangladesh

1. What additional potential benefits, policy considerations, or risks of a CBDC may exist that have not been raised in this paper.
2. Could some or all of the potential benefits of a CBDC be better achieved in a different way.
3. Could a CBDC affect financial inclusion. Would the net effect be positive or negative for inclusion.
4. How might a Bangladesh CBDC affect the Central Bank's ability to effectively implement monetary policy in the pursuit of its maximum employment and price stability goals.
5. How could a CBDC affect financial stability. Would the net effect be positive or negative for stability.
6. Could a Bangladesh CBDC adversely affect the financial sector. How might a CBDC affect the financial sector differently from stablecoins or other nonbank money.
7. What tools could be considered to mitigate any adverse impact of Bangladesh CBDC on the financial sector. Would some of these tools diminish the potential benefits of a CBDC.
8. If cash usage declines, is it important to preserve the general public's access to a form of central bank money that can be used widely for payments.
9. How might domestic and cross-border digital payments evolve in the absence of a Bangladesh CBDC.
10. How should decisions by other large economy nations to issue CBDCs influence the decision whether the Bangladesh should do so
11. Are there additional ways to manage potential risks associated with Bangladesh CBDC that were not raised in this paper. ▶▶

- ▶ 12. How could a Bangladesh CBDC provide privacy to consumers without providing complete anonymity and facilitating illicit financial activity.
- 13. How could a Bangladesh CBDC be designed to foster operational and cyber resiliency. What operational or cyber risks might be unavoidable.
- 14. Should a Bangladesh CBDC be legal tender.
- 16. Should the amount of Bangladesh CBDC held by a single end user be subject to quantity limits
- 17. What types of firms should serve as intermediaries for Bangladesh CBDC. What should be the role and regulatory structure for these intermediaries
- 18. Should a Bangladesh CBDC have “offline” capabilities. If so, how might that be achieved
- 19. Should a Bangladesh CBDC be designed to maximize ease of use and acceptance at the point of sale. If so, how.
- 20. How could a Bangladesh CBDC be designed to achieve transferability across multiple payment platforms. Would new technology or technical standards be needed.
- 21. How might future technological innovations affect design and policy choices related to Bangladesh CBDC.
- 22. Are there additional design principles that should be considered. Are there trade-offs around any of the identified design principles, especially in trying to achieve the potential benefits of a Bangladesh CBDC.

Although CBDC is defined as the digital form fiat currency issued and regulated by the central bank programmable, can be used to surveil each transaction. It deters money laundering, illegal transactions, tax evasion and illicit transfer of money from one country to the others. As of

today, 114 countries are developing CBDCs. President Biden signed executive order 14067 in March 2022 laying ground work for a US-CBDC. In November 2022 developed CBDC in cross broader transactions (Richard Werner, 2022, KITCO News). BDC is the Bank Digital Currency have been conducting 90% as digital for the last century.

Settlement system was slow and expensive is central comes in for decentral, and decentral, and *centralized* system. This centralization of payment systems resulted in 10,000 banks died down. Centralized system looks like *centralized* system. Central plan decisions are done by *central authority*, and under decentralized system, *decisions* are *form groups* of people. Bank regulator takes position on decision making like the *bureaucracy* under *command* economy rather than combined decision under *democratic pluralism*. In a situation where *top authority* central bank is selected from the *civil service cadre* denying *skilled career* central bankers by doing, the *novel intention* surrounding CBDC economic benefits stated in this paper would be *doubtful* of implementation. If anyone carefully look to Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, India will get information on ineffectiveness of central banks in steering *leadership* of an *economic Nucleus* (central bank) of these countries in last 70 years. National authority takes decision allowed under *programmability* to *monitor each transaction*, intervened and followed from *central planning dept*. This considered to *control from central command* and *violating* the privacy of the transaction. Totalitarian *authority* takes over the financial system. Many argue, that currently prevailing bank digital currency can carry out the job through digitization of the system. We need to ask the *bureaucracy* how to make transactions. This indicates that *too much power* of absolute which re-establish *absolute corruption* possibilities under CBDC run and operated by the *centralized* bureaucracy and non-elected officials. ■

## BRIEF NEWS



## Israel and Gaza at War After Hamas Launches Surprise Attack

Palestinian militant group Hamas launched a large-scale surprise attack against Israel on Saturday, firing thousands of rockets from Gaza and sending fighters to kill or abduct people as Israel retaliated with devastating air strikes.

At least 70 people were reported killed in Israel, while Gaza authorities released a death toll of 198 in the conflict's bloodiest escalation in years, which also left hundreds more wounded on both sides.

"We are at war," said Israeli Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu** as the military launched a series of strikes against targets in the blockaded coastal enclave, including several residential tower blocks that were completely destroyed.

"The enemy will pay an unprecedented price," the veteran Israeli premier vowed after Hamas launched its first such combined air, sea, and ground offensive, half a century after the outbreak of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war.

Hamas has released images of several Israelis taken captive, and Israeli army spokesman **Daniel Hagari** confirmed that "there are kidnapped soldiers and civilians. I can't give figures about them at the mo-

ment. It's a war crime committed by Hamas and they will pay the price."

The Islamist group started the attack around 6:30 am (0330 GMT) with thousands of rockets aimed as far as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, some bypassing the Iron Dome defense system and hitting buildings.

Hamas fighters — traveling in vehicles, boats, and even using motorized paragliders — breached Gaza's security barrier and attacked nearby Israeli towns and military posts, opening fire on residents and passersby.

Bodies were seen lying on the streets of the town of Sderot near Gaza.

"Send help, please!" one Israeli woman sheltering with her two-year-old child pleaded as militants outside opened fire at her house and tried to break into their safe room, Israeli media reported.

*AFP* journalists witnessed armed Palestinians gathered around a burning Israeli tank and others driving a seized Israeli Humvee military vehicle back into Gaza.

## French Army to Begin Niger Pullout 'This Week'

France said Thursday that it would start withdrawing its troops from Niger this week after a falling-



out with the post-coup regime, which insists the exit be carried out in accordance with its "conditions."

The announcement by the French army follows weeks of tensions between Paris and Niger's new military rulers, who seized power on July 26.

President **Emmanuel Macron**, who had sought to make a special ally of Niger, announced on September 24 the withdrawal of 1,400 French troops from the country "by the end of the year," complying with a demand by the new regime in Niamey.

Macron said that military cooperation with Niger was "over."

France's ambassador to Niamey last week also returned home from the West African country after the regime demanded his expulsion.

"We will begin our disengagement operation this week, in good order, safely and in coordination with the Nigeriens," the military headquarters said.

The French soldiers are in Niger as part of a wider fight against jihadists across the Sahel region.

Around 1,000 soldiers and airmen are deployed at the French base in Niamey.

Another 400 are deployed alongside local troops in Ouallam and Ayorou in northwestern Niger, near the borders with Burkina Faso and Mali.

The "three borders" zone is known as a haven for the Islamic State group.

The soldiers based at Ouallam will be the first to leave, Niger's military rulers responded in a statement on social media Thursday. ▶▶

► The airbase at the capital Niamey will then be dismantled by the end of the year, they added.

### ‘Our interests, Conditions’

Soldiers withdrawing from the area will need cover to leave their exposed forward positions, the military headquarters said.

This possibly could include air support from the larger force at the airbase outside Niamey.

Niger’s military rulers said in the statement that they would be “attentive to ensure that this withdrawal takes place with respect for our interests and according to our conditions.”

The French troops have been living with uncertainty since the new regime began demanding their departure, with irregular supplies of food and repeated anti-French demonstrations outside the Niamey base.

France had reinforced its presence in Niger after another coup-born military regime in Mali demanded its forces’ departure.

Paris had added armored vehicles and helicopters to the drones and fighter jets that were already deployed.

Its troops will now have to withdraw either via Benin to the south — at odds with the Niamey regime — or Chad to the east, the site of France’s headquarters for the Sahel theatre.

For now, Niamey forbids French flights over its territory.

### Algerian Mediation?

The coup against Niger’s democratically elected president **Mohamed Bazoum** was the third such putsch in the region in as many years.

It followed similar actions in fellow former French colonies Mali and Burkina Faso in 2021 and 2022 respectively.

Nigeria on Thursday welcomed an Algerian offer to mediate talks with the military regime, which includes a proposed six-month transition period.

Nigeria holds the rotating presidency of ECOWAS, a union of 15 West African countries, which threatened armed intervention after the rebel officers toppled Bazoum.

Nigerian Foreign Minister **Yusuf Maitama Tuggar**, in an interview with France 24, said that ECOWAS welcomed all parties “seeking for a peaceful resolution to this imbroglio (including) Algeria.”

He added that diplomacy was still the favored path, but that military intervention was “not off the table.”

Algeria, which shares a border with Niger, has said it opposes any armed intervention with its neighbor, and has proposed a diplomatic solution.

## Turkey Launches New Wave of Syria Strikes

Turkey’s defense ministry said Friday it had launched a new wave of air strikes against Kurdish targets in Syria in retaliation for a bombing attack in Ankara.

The announcement came just hours after Foreign Minister **Hakan**



**Fidan** discussed the US downing of a Turkish combat drone involved in the Syria operation with Secretary of State **Antony Blinken**.

The Turkish defense ministry said it had hit 15 Kurdish targets in northern Syria on Friday evening “with the maximum amount” of ammunition.

The targets included “headquarters and shelters” used by Kurdish forces that the United States has relied on to fight the Islamic State group in Syria.

Fidan told Blinken that Ankara’s air strikes in Syria will continue “with determination” despite Thursday’s drone episode — the first of its kind between the strategic NATO allies.

Turkey stepped up cross-border air raids against Kurdish targets in northeastern Syria and northern Iraq in retaliation for a bombing in Ankara that injured two policemen last Sunday.

A branch of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) — listed as a terror group by Ankara and its Western allies — claimed responsibility for the first bombing to hit the Turkish capital since 2016.

Turkey concluded that the two assailants who died in the Ankara attack came from Syria.

Turkey’s operation in Syria has primarily been targeting oil and other energy facilities controlled by the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG).

The group comprises an integral part of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) — the Kurds’ de facto army in the area — that spearheaded the battle to dislodge Islamic State group jihadists from the region in 2019.

The SDF said Friday that eight civil-

►ians were among the 15 people confirmed killed in the first two days of Turkey's strikes.

United States support for the YPG has strained Ankara's ties with Washington since the jihadists' defeat.

Washington said an F-16 jet shot down the Turkish drone after it came close enough to US positions supporting the Kurdish fighters to be deemed a security threat.

Blinken "highlighted the need to coordinate and deconflict our activities," State Department spokesman **Matthew Miller** said after the call with Fidan.

## EU Says Can't Fill US Funding Gap Supporting Ukraine



The EU vowed steadfast support for Ukraine at a summit Thursday but warned leaders — including Ukrainian President **Volodymyr Zelensky** — it would be unable to fill any funding gap left by the United States.

Fears have been ignited by political turmoil in Washington, which have prompted President **Joe Biden** to admit that it "does worry me" that US support for Ukraine might get derailed.

"Can Europe fill the gap left by the US? Well, certainly Europe cannot replace the US," EU foreign policy chief **Josep Borrell** said on arrival at the meeting of the European Political

Community (EPC) in Spain.

Zelensky, speaking to the four dozen leaders at the EPC, expressed concern about Washington's "political storms" but said he was confident he still had US bipartisan backing.

The EU and the United States — together comprising most NATO members — are vital for Ukraine's fightback.

The European Union and its member countries have promised more than \$100 billion in multi-year support to Ukraine, including financing weapon deliveries.

The United States has committed \$43 billion in military assistance, while Congress has approved \$113 billion in aid including humanitarian help.

But fresh US funding for Ukraine has been put on hold as part of a weekend deal struck with opposition Republicans to avert a US government shutdown.

Europe stepped up its military help for Ukraine on Thursday with Zelensky saying on social media that Germany was working to provide his country with an additional Patriot system to boost its air defenses against Russian attacks.

German Chancellor **Olaf Scholz** said Berlin had already supplied one Patriot battery to Ukraine, which was "very difficult for us," and that the additional one will offer "far-reaching protection."

That announcement came the same day a Russian strike on a Ukrainian village killed at least 51 people, spurring condemnation from the EU, US, and UN chief **Antonio Guterres**.

### 'Tireless' Support

Leaders at the EPC summit said Russian President **Vladimir Putin's** calculation was that the West would become

fatigued at long-term support of Ukraine, handing him a path to victory.

"I think Russia wants us to be tired," Estonia's Prime Minister **Kaja Kallas** said, adding: "We should show them that we are not. We have to help Ukraine as long as it takes."

French President **Emmanuel Macron** reinforced that message in a meeting with Zelensky, vowing "tireless" support for Ukraine.

But within the EU there are fissures. Slovakia announced it has frozen decisions on military aid to neighboring Ukraine after populists opposed to military assistance for Kyiv won a parliamentary election.

The issue of enduring aid for Ukraine was expected to dominate an EU-US summit taking place in Washington in two weeks' time, between Biden and European Union chiefs **Ursula von der Leyen** and **Charles Michel**.

Another conflict, that over Azerbaijan's breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region, also featured large at the summit in Granada.

Most of the territory's 120,000 ethnic Armenians have fled to Armenia following a lightning offensive by Azerbaijani troops last month to capture the self-proclaimed republic and force its dissolution.

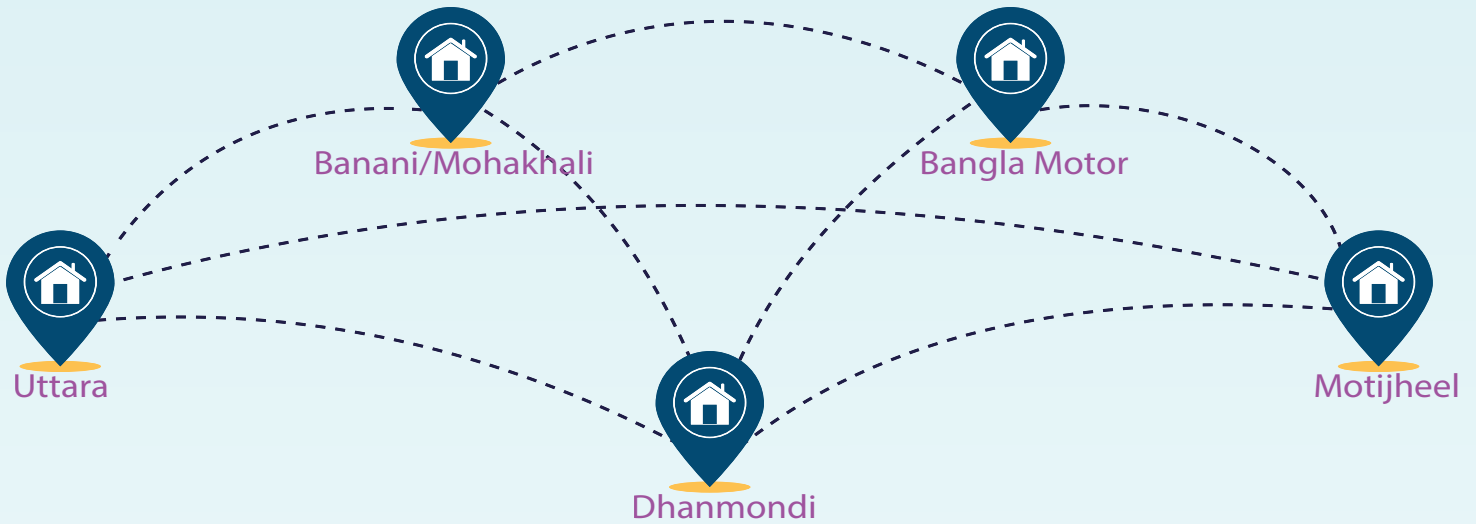
Azerbaijan's President **Ilham Aliyev** skipped the EPC gathering, because of what his office said was France's "militarisation policy" in the Caucasus and the EU attitude towards the region.

Armenian Prime Minister **Nikol Pashinyan** did attend and sat down with Michel, Scholz and Macron, with the three then issuing a joint statement stressing the "inviolability of the borders of Armenia." ■

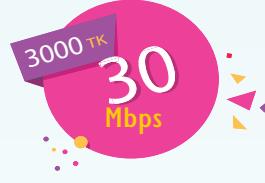
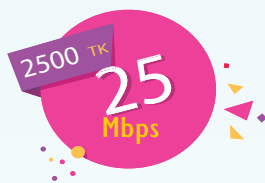
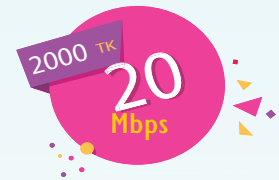
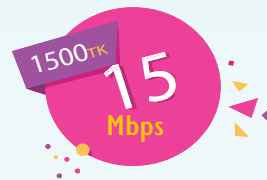
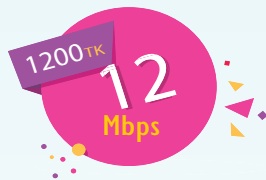
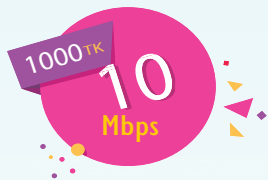
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