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# The Bengal CM is playing with fire

## Mamata cannot afford to ignore the Gorkha identity issue

**A**ny reasonably permanent solution to the Darjeeling problem cannot be achieved by brushing under the carpet the fact that the Gorkhas are aspiring to establish their identity. Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's hill strategy has treated it as a

**ourtake**

development question that, she thinks, is an outcome of the neglect of the hills by successive Bengal governments. Since she took over the reins of the state in May 2011, she has visited the hills "more than 100 times" in 73 months, which will be far more than the cumulative visits of the seven CMs before her in 64 years. Ms Banerjee has unleashed her style of 'development' politics that hardly recognises the Gorkha identity as a political aspiration. The Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA), the semi-autonomous body set up to run the affairs of the hills in 2012, seems to have failed. Unsurprisingly, the Trinamool Congress (TC) recently won the civic polls in Mirik — a first for a party from the plains in decades — that has encouraged leaders to think big in the hills. However, the fact remains that the TC win was attributable to its alliance with Gorkha National Liberation Front, Subhash Ghising's party built on Gorkha identity.

The Gorkha Janmukti Morcha leaders have accused the CM of wrecking the GTA by not transferring power to it on the one hand, and by forming as many as 15 development boards of hill communities such as Tamang and Lepchas, thereby trying to wean sections to the ruling party's fold. Ms Banerjee is within her rights to plan expansion of the party in the hills, but it will be impossible to be accepted as a party representing local aspirations. Though TC won the smallest municipality of Mirik, it was humbled in the three bigger ones — Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong — by a big margin.

Ms Banerjee is a charismatic leader, who can perhaps keep get the better of GJM and its leaders in the current round of confrontation. But if the bigger blueprint ignores the Gorkha identity, one cannot rule out the emergence of a more radical face and movement to continue the struggle for identity.

# A few changes in cattle trade rules won't help

## The Centre must restrain cow vigilantes from harassing innocent people

**A**fter several cold-blooded murders of cattle traders, a controversial ban on cattle slaughter and protests in some states against the beef ban, the Centre has decided to act, albeit belatedly. Environment minister Harsh Vardhan on Tuesday said the controversial rules prohibiting the sale of cows and buffaloes for slaughter will be changed to clear "doubts and misinterpretations". The minister also debunked allegations that the government was hell-bent on changing the eating habits of people, as claimed by Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan after the rules were notified on May 23. However, all these changes or improvements will not happen overnight since the government is keen to wait for the June 15 Supreme Court hearing on a batch of petitions challenging the legality of the notification. The Centre has been on the backfoot since the rules were notified, given the opposition from within and outside. Left-ruled Kerala and Congress-ruled Meghalaya assemblies have passed resolutions saying they will not implement the regulations. Other northeastern states are also unhappy with the rules. Several BJP leaders in Meghalaya resigned from the party over the new rules though the party said they were about to be thrown out for indiscipline.

The ministry has received representations from slaughter houses and allied industries, which fear the new rules can kill their business. Analysts say that the ban will not just cripple the beef market but also allied industries. At a time, when jobs are scarce, the social and economic impact of such regulations will be a huge liability for the government.

Changing the cattle trade rules may help the BJP win a few points in the perception battle but on the ground, it has to crack the whip on those who are misusing their proximity to the BJP and state governments to attack, kill and terrorise innocent people involved in cattle trade and those opposing the beef ban.

# Pakistan's back in the Great Game

## Washington's disinterest and Beijing's ascent are helping Islamabad gain ground in Afghanistan



SHAKTI SINHA

**T**he horrific suicide bomb attack in Kabul on May 31 that left 150 dead, and subsequent similar attacks at a funeral a few days later briefly brought Afghanistan back into the news. But only briefly since the British elections, the string of terrorists' attacks in that country and general consternation with Trump's antics and shenanigans meant that Afghanistan soon receded from public attention. This has meant that Pakistan's game of gaining 'strategic depth' has gained substantial traction and the constitutional framework set in motion with the ouster of the Taliban in 2001 is in real danger of unravelling.

America's failure to stabilise Afghanistan has led to a sense of fatigue about that country as reflected in the minuscule coverage of the terrible acts of terrorists' violence that has grown unabated in recent years. America has also been distracted by its domestic political wrangling that marked the presidential election campaign, and has worsened with the coming into office of Donald Trump. This has allowed Pakistan to rearrange regional power equations quite dramatically, ably supported by China who brought in the Russians onto

the same side. While the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) has made its appearance in the eastern Afghan province of Nangrahar, its influence and ability to launch terrorist strikes has been exaggerated to achieve this. American missteps and the Iranian tendency to adventurism has meant that over the past decade, Iran and the Taliban have become close tactical allies. The results that despite stepped up terrorists attacks aimed at civilians, the Taliban is being presented by these countries as a moderate player that should have a key role in any peace process.

Russia has admitted to opening up lines of communications to the Taliban and even initiated a dialogue process along with China and Pakistan. The Afghan government strongly objected and had to be brought in along with regional stakeholders, India and Iran. Neither the US, the main military and economic player in Afghanistan, nor NATO were part of these talks. Russia took the stand that while violence was unacceptable, the Taliban were very much relevant players. Expectedly, the talks went nowhere; but helped build the case that it was the Taliban alone who held the veto over any attempted peace process.

The disputed elections of 2014 led to the US-backed uneasy coalition between President Ashraf Ghani and his challenger Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, who was given a new title, chief executive; but if anything, dissonance in governance has only enlarged. Initially Ghani made bold moves to placate Pakistan in the belief that it would lead to peace. What Afghanistan saw was increased vio-



President Ashraf Ghani has failed to deliver on good governance promises

lence, especially suicide attacks on civilians in crowded places leading to hundreds of casualties. The aim of damaging the credibility of the Afghan government by showing up its inability to protect its citizens was achieved very substantially. This has allowed Pakistan to emerge as the key interlocutor on behalf of the Taliban even as it continued to deny that it had anything to do with them. Exhaustion and distraction meant that the US and other western countries were happy to buy this fiction if it allowed them to quietly exit Afghanistan.

President Ghani's failure to build a cohesive and inclusive government, or to establish working relations with parliament, whose term has incidentally expired, has meant that the Afghan government is internally hobbled

and unable to deliver on good governance. The agreement that set up the National Unity Government with Abdullah in 2014 required that within two years the constitution would be amended to provide for a prime minister, has not happened. The largely non-Pashtun Jamiat from whose ranks Abdullah, foreign minister Rabbani and many more joined the government, has started speaking up as an opposition party. They led a big anti-government demonstration two days after the May 31 terrorist attacks leading to police firing with six dead including the son of the deputy speaker of the upper house of parliament. The next day, at this funeral, attended by Abdullah, Rabbani and others, three bombs went off killing nine persons. Jamiat leaders like Governor Atta of Balkh blamed persons within the government for the complicity in the May 31 bomb blast. And for the same reason, Rabbani boycotted his own government's Kabul Peace Process presided over by President Ghani.

Trump's effectively ceding leadership to China on many fronts has meant that Pakistan is emboldened enough to try and push the Afghan government hard enough for them to acknowledge that Pakistan would have de facto control over Afghan affairs, something it tried to do after 1989 Russian withdrawal. At present, the momentum seems to be favouring them as neither is the Afghan government united nor are the security forces in a condition to take the initiative back from the Taliban. If these trends are not reversed, Afghanistan could see increased violence that could potentially spill over its borders.

Shakti Sinha is director, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi and distinguished fellow, Institute for National Security Studies Sri Lanka. The views expressed are personal

## NOWHERE PEOPLE



Even though India, Nepal, and Bangladesh are signatories to international conventions and bound by domestic laws to combat trafficking, the problem persists

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# Use technology to fight cross-border trafficking

## It is in India's best interests that a functional digital collaboration exists between India, Nepal and Bangladesh



BHAGYASHRI DINGLE

**T**he migration and trafficking of tens of thousands of children and women from Bangladesh and Nepal into India has long been a serious concern. Even though the three countries are signatories to international conventions and bound by domestic laws to combat trafficking, the problem persists. While prevention and rescue are crucial in the battle against one of the most heinous crimes against humanity with significant social and economic undertones, it is the repatriation of rescued victims that has emerged as the biggest challenge. For most of the rescued victims, relocation to their country of origin is the ultimate rehabilitation.

The current process of the repatriation from India to Bangladesh is complicated and time-consuming. It includes several state and non-state actors and a multitude of processes and approvals. Following the visit of the Indian prime minister to Bangladesh, a rescue, repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration taskforce has been set up between the two countries to oversee and coordinate the process of repatriation. However, greater attention is required to strengthen the institution's response.

The repatriation process between India and Nepal is comparatively less complicated but it does not follow a systematic approach. There is no scope of tracking a case hence it is very difficult to follow up and expedite the process. Moreover, it is not regulated by an SOP or directive and remains a subjective process whose efficiency is contingent upon the stakeholders involved.

To overcome the challenges in the implementation of existing anti-trafficking activities, countries should use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based mechanisms, but these require to be scaled up. It is imperative, first, to create a technology-based collaboration through a Repatriation Information Management System (RIMS) in order to bring all anti-trafficking stakeholders together for better coordination of efforts throughout the continuum of trafficking. Second, the 1098 helpline number should be synchronised across the three countries to become a dedicated child helpline number.

Third, a centralised online-based repatriation case management system should be developed, which can facilitate and reduce time consumed in the repatriation process.

Last, a unified system should be created to facilitate the rehabilitation and reintegration of survivors through a service provider database or directory that can coordinate the responsibility of different stakeholders, follow up on the status of trafficking survivors and maintain records of repatriated victims.

Bhagyashri Dingle is, executive director, Plan India. The views expressed are personal

# The unheard stories of Partition find a voice

## Many nations have curated their crises of conscience, now India too has a museum to document its own



KISHWAR DESAI

**P**erhaps there are no coincidences in life, because this year, when the world's first Partition Museum will be completed in Amritsar, the theme for the International Museums Day was "museums and contested histories: saying the unspeakable in museums".

A far-fetched idea perhaps in India, where museums have usually been very safe zones — meditating upon a vast heritage of art and culture. These repositories have reflected pride and endeavour — but rarely failure or defeat. They have looked at cultural triumphs 5000 years ago, and forgotten the events of just 70 years ago. Museums have been more about collections than experience. About documentation rather than memory. About history through objects, rather than story telling. And usually the collections, if donated, are from the wealthy, not from the marginalised.

Alternative histories, and 'subaltern' experiences have been left out — as have the contemporary plural narratives, because no one wanted to document, or reflect upon the dark shadows. These have been usually deemed unsuitable for a museum space. Unsurprisingly, all these years, we have not had a partition museum. But now we have changed all that to speak the unspeakable, by setting up the Partition Museum at Town Hall, Amritsar — which has a huge emotive connect — and has already received (with a small curtain raiser exhibition) over 30,000 visitors. The entire museum will be completed by August.

In this environment, a museum on the partition of India might appear like a unicorn — but the kind response and help coming from all over the world — from partition survivors and their families, and also from academicians and media alike makes one understand that this was a long felt absence. This museum is being put together because

**ONE PERSON WHO RECENTLY RECORDED FOR THE PARTITION MUSEUM IS 77 YEARS OLD, BUT HIS WIFE SAYS HE STILL CRIES IN HIS SLEEP, REMEMBERING THE MOBS THAT HAD SURROUNDED HIS HOUSE IN 1947**

people feel that we have sorely neglected this part of our country's history. They want the stories of their parents and grandparents to be part of it. It has taken us 70 long years to get to this point.

And yet other nations have successfully attempted to curate difficult experiences and ideas — and dedicated museums to their most challenging moments. Museums should not be dead spaces after all, but vibrant ones which generate debate and discussion, especially when a nation's torment lies exposed. Whether it is the most recent 9/11 Museum in New York, or the Hiroshima Memorial, or the Apartheid Museum — every nation has preserved its collective crisis of conscience. In India, thus far, we have excelled at collective amnesia. This has especially been applicable to the partition of India — a narrative which we should have carefully preserved — because in that exodus from a much loved homeland the essence of a generation's grief and resilience. This trauma was probably passed onto the next generation whilst still cocooned in silence. Even when those recording oral histories had first reached out to partition survivors and their families a few decades ago, their stories remained captured in books and archives, unavailable to the larger public.

And it is these once unspeakable memories that form the core of the Partition Museum in Amritsar, a people's museum, based on their recollections, and on the material they are providing us everyday. Most of the memories are impossible to forget. One person who recently recorded for the Partition Museum is 77 years old, but his wife says he still cries in his sleep, remembering the mobs that had surrounded his house in 1947.

The thousands who came as children during partition share a common history. A history of a displaced childhood accompanied by forced penury. A history of silence as they were vulnerable and innocent when they went through the largest and most painful migration the world had ever experienced. They lost their childhoods, their schools, their toys and playmates, forever — and yet went on to build the new India, with remarkable fortitude.

We do hope that this year August 17, will be declared as Partition Remembrance Day. This was the day when partition was actually announced. On this day, every year, we should think of the martyrs and survivors of 1947, and learn from their spirit and resilience. One way we could all acknowledge the debt we owe them is to visit the Partition Museum on August 17, and together we could remember them.

Kishwar Desai is the chairperson of The Arts and Cultural Heritage Trust. The views expressed are personal

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**A SINGLE POSITIVE THOUGHT CAN CHANGE YOUR WORLD**

Himika Chaudhuri

A friend who has just broken up with his boyfriend, put up a Facebook status last evening, that read, "No, I am not ok. But I am working towards it, and will get there." The strength of this simple sentence brought a smile to my face.

Indeed, even when we are down and out, one positive thought has the power to pull us out of the dark. But in tough situations, positivity does not come easily. That is probably because the mind space is cluttered

with many thoughts and questions, most of which plunge the mind deeper into a negative zone.

And therefore, there's a need to consciously think of positive things. An easy way to feel positive is by thinking of something that brings a smile to your face. It may be a happy memory or the thought of achieving a long-cherished goal.

Initially, the thoughts may get overpowered by what's bothering you at that time, but slowly and surely, the positivity will take over.

Practicing positivity is like going to the gym. You may find it easier to give up on it, but once you continue to go back to it, the results begin to show.

Positivity is in the little things — put on a red lipstick on a day when you are sad, Chat up a stranger on a day you've had a particularly bad day at work — and see your world brighten up.

(Inner Voice comprises contributions from our readers. The views expressed are personal.)

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