

Amid Chaos in Bangladesh, Speculation Resurfaces Over US Role

By Lt Gen Prakash Katoch (Retd)

The author is an Indian Army veteran.

It is, therefore, no surprise that the same scenes of orchestrated violence and rampage in Dhaka, as was witnessed that forced Hasina to flee, has been orchestrated again. Violent mobs have besieged the presidential house of President Shahabuddin for speaking the truth that Sheikh Hasina did not resign before the military packed her out of the country.

When Bangladesh President Mohammad Shahabuddin said in an interview with Dhaka Tribune that he did not have any documentary evidence of Sheikh Hasina's resignation, he did not realize the consequences of this statement on his presidency and that it could even be life threatening. To him, Shahabuddin did mention that Hasina probably did not have the time to do so, as he recounted the chaos and mayhem on August 5 with hordes of mobs on the rampage.

According to Shahabuddin, he had a meeting with Hasina an hour before she fled, and he and the Army Chief General Waker Uz Zaman had "heard" of Hasina resigning, but there was no documentary proof. He further said, "When everything was under control, one day the cabinet secretary came to collect a copy of the resignation letter. I told him I was also looking for the same.

Does this mean Sheikh Hasina remains the de facto Prime Minister of Bangladesh? This came as a surprise even to the US, a country many feel engineered the change in Bangladesh. American economist Jeffery D Sachs has talked of very strong evidence of the US role in toppling the government of Imran Khan in Pakistan, raising the likelihood that something similar may be done in Bangladesh (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQmF2ykP9FQ>).

Orchestrated violence?

Sachs explains that Donald Lu, Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia and Central Asia in the US State Department spearheaded these regime changes, using the CIA and organizations like the CIA-funded NGO, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a non-profit organization created in 1983 with the cover job of strengthening democratic institutions around the world through its worldwide grants program. Sachs emphasizes that the US is the only country doing regime changes worldwide, and that too very frequently.

It is, therefore, no surprise that the same scenes of orchestrated violence and rampage in Dhaka, as was witnessed that forced Hasina to flee, has been orchestrated again. Violent mobs have besieged the presidential house of President Shahabuddin for speaking the truth that Sheikh Hasina did not resign before the military packed her out of the country. They are demanding the resignation of Shahabuddin and removal of the army chief, threatening that otherwise riots will spread throughout Bangladesh and that the country's borders will also witness violence. President Shahabuddin has been given a 24-hour ultimatum to resign (<https://youtu.be/PwJiaTk3MCs?si=hTLxsJlgCNn9Zlct>).

It remains to be seen whether the residence of President Shahabuddin will be “allowed” to be rampaged by the mobs if he does not resign, and will he be physically attacked like some of the members of judiciary as part of the regime change? The Army Chief is unlikely to change, considering the recent overhaul in the senior ranks.

Ominous portents

The apparent aim of the mobsters, which include Islamist students backed by sections of the military, is to overturn the constitution and impose Sharia, the Islamic canonical law, in Bangladesh. Release of terrorist leaders from prison like Muhammad Jasimuddin Rahmani, chief of Ansarullah Bangla, an Al-Qaeda affiliate, his confabulations with Lashkar-e-Toiba's Mufti Haron Izhar, who planned attacks against Indian interests in Bangladesh, and both addressing mass rallies, all point towards this. Removal of the president will usher in military rule.

Concurrent are reports coming from Bangladesh that the Interim Government of Bangladesh, with Muhammad Yunus as Chief Advisor, has imposed restrictions on locals from visiting Saint Martin Island (a small three square kilometre island forming the southern tip of Bangladesh in the Bay of Bengal); in fact, beginning February 2025 no one can visit the island. Sheikh Hasina had reportedly mentioned that not agreeing to part with this island was why she was ousted. This raises strong speculation among strategic circles whether Yunus has signed a deal to hand over the island to the US to establish a military base, and that was why he was accorded the red carpet during his visit to Washington after the regime change in Dhaka.

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Nobel Peace Prize Honors Japan's Pacifism: A Beacon in a World Threatened by Nuclear War

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The 2024 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Nihon Hidankyo, the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organization, serves as a powerful reminder of Japan's commitment to pacifism and nuclear disarmament, a legacy born out of the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It not only honours the Hibakusha, the survivors of those bombings, but also sheds light on Japan's complex relationship with its "peace constitution" and the rising tensions in East Asia, which threaten to dismantle this legacy. Japan's pacifism is enshrined in Article 9 of its post-World War II constitution, the first of its kind in the world. This article explicitly renounces war and prohibits the country from maintaining armed forces for combat purposes. The devastating toll of the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which claimed 300,000 lives and left a lingering shadow of radiation-related illnesses, led Japan to embrace this unprecedented legal commitment to peace. The Hibakusha—around 600,000 people impacted by the bombs' radiation fallout—have become symbols of Japan's pacifist stance, continuously advocating for nuclear disarmament through organizations like Nihon Hidankyo.

This year's Nobel Prize not only highlights their efforts but also underscores the growing tension between Japan's historical pacifism and the current geopolitical landscape. As of August 2024, the number of Hibakusha who have died from the aftereffects of the atomic bombings has exceeded 540,000, with 344,306 in Hiroshima and 198,785 in Nagasaki. These numbers represent not just the victims but also a larger plea for peace that has reverberated through international forums for decades. However, Japan's peace constitution,

which has been lauded by anti-war activists and often finds its way onto the Nobel Peace Prize shortlist through the NGOs that promote it, is now facing unprecedented pressure. In the face of growing regional threats, especially from China, Japan's current Prime Minister is pushing for a significant amendment to Article 9. While Japan's legislative body, the Diet, has approved a departure from its pacifist tradition, public opinion remains overwhelmingly against it. A survey conducted by Japan's official news agency, Kyodo, revealed that 80% of the public opposes the government's constitutional amendments.

China's increasing assertiveness, particularly in territorial disputes in the South China Sea, has escalated tensions in the region. The situation is precarious, with the possibility of forceful confrontations looming large. Japan, which has for seven decades adhered to peaceful coexistence, now finds itself at a crossroads. The pressure to remilitarize in the face of regional threats has led to discussions about revising the very foundation of Japan's pacifism, much to the dismay of those who believe in the enduring power of Article 9. The current political debate echoes an earlier era when former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi, faced public outrage for signing a peace and disarmament agreement with then-U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Kishi, who was eventually forced to resign, serves as a historical reminder of the tension between Japan's pacifist ideals and its strategic alliances with military powers. Now, as Japan stands on the verge of amending its pacifist constitution, the stakes are higher than ever. Japan's peace constitution was a direct result of the atomic bombings that forced the country to surrender in 1945, ending the Tojo regime and setting the stage for a new government. The horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki compelled the Japanese people and their leaders to prioritize peace in a way that no other nation had done before. But with time, the balance between maintaining this pacifist stance and addressing external threats has become increasingly difficult to maintain.

The Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Nihon Hidankyo is not only a recognition of the Hibakusha's long-standing fight for nuclear disarmament but also a poignant reminder of the fragility of peace in a world constantly on the brink of conflict. The organization's efforts have led to landmark achievements such as the Treaty on the Prohibition of nuclear weapons (TPNW), signed in 2017, which prohibits the use, research, production, and stockpiling of nuclear weapons. Yet, as the world faces renewed nuclear threats from conflicts like the Russia-Ukraine war and North Korea's nuclear tests, the Nobel Committee's decision to honour the Hibakusha underscores the urgency of remembering the lessons of the past. The memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are not just historical footnotes but warnings of what can happen when humanity unleashes the most destructive weapons ever created. Bertrand Russell, Giulio Curie, and Linus Pauling were among the scientists and thinkers who led movements like the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, advocating for nuclear disarmament. Even Robert J. Oppenheimer, the "father of the atomic bomb," reflected on the magnitude of the devastation he had helped unleash. After witnessing the first atomic bomb test, he famously quoted the Bhagavad Gita: "I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds." This haunting realization speaks to the heavy moral burden borne by those who witnessed the birth of the nuclear age.

Despite these warnings, Japan now finds itself in an arms race once again. In response to China's growing military capabilities and the ongoing territorial disputes, Japan has begun acquiring modern military equipment and defense systems. The very existence of Article 9, once a beacon of hope for a peaceful future, is now under threat. The death of this clause would mark the end of an era for Japan—a shift from a pacifist nation to one prepared for military confrontation. The Nobel Peace Prize for Nihon Hidankyo, then, is not just a tribute to the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but a rallying cry for the world to remember the catastrophic consequences of war and nuclear weapons. As Japan commemorates the 80th anniversary of the bombings in 2025, this award serves as a reminder of the need for peace and disarmament in an increasingly volatile world.

In awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Nihon Hidankyo, the Nobel Committee has recognized the Hibakusha's relentless fight for a nuclear-free world. It is a call to action for the international community to ensure that the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are never repeated. As Japan grapples with its evolving role on the world stage, this award serves as a reminder of the country's unique responsibility to uphold the principles of peace and disarmament, even in the face of mounting pressures to abandon them.

US Not Sure of Netanyahu's Word on Ending Israel-Gaza Conflict

By Vappala Balachandran

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US President hopes of a ceasefire after Yahya Sinwar's killing were dashed by a Hezbollah attack on PM Netanyahu's home.

As US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Israel on October 22 for his 11th visit, numerous problems cropped up in the Democratic Party. Perhaps his visit was needed to showcase something tangible to the US electorate by way of Gaza ceasefire and hostages' release before the November 5 Presidential election.

First, a poll on October 22 by 'The Arab News/YouGov' revealed 45 per cent Arab-Americans favour Donald Trump, with only 43 per cent supporting Kamala Harris as President. As many as 39 per cent respondents felt that Trump would end this war, while 33 per cent said that Harris could stop it. By that time the civilian death toll, according to the UN report of October 8, had exceeded 42,000, with another 12,000 people crushed under the debris.

Second, US President Joe Biden's hopes of a ceasefire after Yahya Sinwar's killing on October 17 were dashed after a Hezbollah drone attack hit Benjamin Netanyahu's home in Caesarea on the 19th. In response, Israel bombed five apartment blocks on October 21 in Beirut, near the city's main public hospital, Rafik Hariri, killing 18 people, including four children. The bombing coincided with the unsuccessful visit of US Special envoy Amos Hochstein to Lebanon to bring peace.

The UN on October 21 said that more than 8 lakh persons had been internally displaced in Lebanon. While 4.2 lakh fled to Syria, 17,000 persons escaped to Iraq. Meanwhile, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) said the next day that Israel's bombing of Gaza had created 42 million tonnes of rubble, creating serious health risks.

Third, Blinken was not able to get a promise from Netanyahu that Israel would not continue to occupy Northern Gaza even after the conclusion of the war. Although Netanyahu has been assuring Blinken privately, the Israeli PM would not say that openly, as the Times of Israel reported on October 22.

On October 21, hundreds of Jewish Right-wing 'settlement-supporting Israelis' organised a show of strength near the Gaza border to demand settlements in Gaza. This was by Nahala (heritage), a pro-settlement organisation, while coalition partners like Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich rejected protests from the Hostages and Missing Families Forum that they were sacrificing the lives of hostages for their own political goals.

Fourth, the leak by a Telegram channel called Middle East Spectator of two highly classified US documents meant for the 'Five Eyes' group, on Israel's top secret battle plans against Iran. The channel claimed that the documents were shared by its 'source' in the American intelligence community.

The channel also added that it had no connection with the source who, according to it, was ‘a whistleblower in the US State Department’.

Axios, a news website located in Arlington, Virginia, confirmed that Middle East Spectator was Iran-affiliated, with its X account profile located in Iran. This has raised grave concerns among the US intelligence community on Iranian penetration into American intelligence.

However, some intelligence experts did not discount the possibility of Israel leaking the documents to deceive Iran. A few others felt that the Biden administration may itself have orchestrated the leak to delay the Israeli attack, as Washington DC is not confident now of Netanyahu postponing the Iran war, at least until after the US Presidential election.

The Harry Truman Library documents reveal that President Truman modified America’s Israel-Palestinian policy in 1945 to favour his party in the US elections. Truman went against his predecessor’s consensus with Britain on keeping the multi-religious character of Palestine and the Jewish presence there, which in 1917 was only 18,000 Jews (3 per cent) out of its 6 lakh population.

The Balfour Declaration in 1917 that spoke of the ‘establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people’ had said that ‘nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine’.

The Arabs protested when, by 1922, Jewish migration had gone up to 83,790. Winston Churchill, the then Colonial Secretary, responded by assuring them that there was no intention of turning Palestine into a Jewish state. However, by 1939, Jewish numbers had reached 4.45 lakh, which was one-third of Palestine’s population.

The same stand was taken by US President FD Roosevelt on April 5, 1945, while writing to King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia, assuring him that no action would be taken in Palestine by America ‘which might prove hostile to the Arab people’.

Truman, according to American journalist James Reston, quoted by the Truman Library, was influenced by local political considerations to ask British Prime Minister Clement Attlee to permit a huge migration of one lakh Jews to Palestine on August 31, 1945. Two Democrat politicians vying for the Governorship and Senator’s position in New York state, had influenced the President to alter his policy on Israel. Ernest Bevin, then British Foreign Secretary, lamented that the ‘Palestine issue has become the subject of local elections in the United States.’

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With Section 6A Verdict, Supreme Court Upholds Fraternity

By Prof. (Dr.) Faizan Mustafa

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The verdict must be read in Assam's political and cultural context. It has done well not to give in to narrow idea of citizenship.

Supreme Court judgments are not just important for what “law they declare” but, at times, also for the context in which such pronouncements are made, and on what basis. The history of litigation gives us a better understanding of the true significance of the apex court’s rulings as contentious political questions routinely end up in constitutional courts and judges become final arbiters of politics when they decide such questions. The Section 6A judgment is a classic example, where context and litigation history are of great significance.

The modern idea of universal citizenship originated in France. Nationality was understood as citizenship, which conferred rights and duties on a citizen and made the latter accept the value system of the nation. One could claim citizenship because of one's affirmation of and affiliation to the core principles of the French Republic.

Territorialisation as a central tenet of citizenship came much later with citizenship becoming more of a "status" than a "belief in core values". Indeed, if citizenship signifies belonging to a political community, it must ideally be based on adherence to some principles, not birth. French citizenship was granted to outsiders, including Thomas Paine, the British-born founding father of America. The Constitution of 1793 granted citizenship to aliens living in France for over a year for work or to one who married a French woman and, more importantly, anyone who adopted a child or supported an old man or deserved humane treatment. Only subsequently, in France and elsewhere, did birth become all-important. Then, regressive countries even added the additional condition of blood ties to the grant of citizenship. Today, citizenship is often a tool for exclusion and "othering".

B R Ambedkar admitted in the Constituent Assembly that no article gave him as much headache as Article 5 which determined citizenship. It was only after a heated debate that citizenship was agreed to be given based on birth and not religion. Subsequently, our Citizenship Act, 1955, was amended and the condition of blood ties was added.

Partition involved large-scale migration and the Constitution granted citizenship to everyone who came into the country before July 19, 1948. It was less welcoming of those who had gone to Pakistan after March 1, 1947, and got stuck there due to communal violence before, during and after Partition. These people could return only under strict conditions.

On the eastern border, due to continuous migration from Bangladesh to Assam, in pursuance of the Assam Accord, 1985, a different dispensation for citizenship under Section 6A of the Citizenship Act was provided. The politics of polarisation has been prominent in this context — especially in recent times: Migrants from Bangladesh have been called "termites" and migration was called "external aggression". The National Register of Citizens (NRC) excluded just 1.9 million people or 5.77 per cent of the residents of Assam who were supposed to be issued notices so that they appear before the Foreigners Tribunals to prove their citizenship. In more than six years, not a single person whose name has been included in the NRC has been issued a citizenship card nor have those excluded received any notice.

The current Chief Minister of Assam wants to advance the 1971 cut-off date by a few decades so that more and more residents of Assam are denied citizenship. The five-judge bench judgment of the apex court is a setback for him. In fact, the central government argued in favour of the 1971 cut-off date. This probably made the Court's task easier.

The judgment has surprised many, as in three different judgments in 2005, 2006 and 2014, the Supreme Court had itself expressed its displeasure about the different dispensation on citizenship with respect to Assam. In *Sarbananda Sonowal* (2005), it showed an inclination to treat the migration of people from Bangladesh into Assam as "external aggression" under Article 355. In *Sonowal II* (2014), the Court quoted in its verdict a book that described migrants as a "vast horde of land-hungry immigrants mostly Muslims".

The 13 questions framed by the Court to refer the matter to the Constitution bench give an idea of the significance of the latest judgment. Some of these were: Is the cut-off date for Assam different from the one prescribed for the rest of the country in Article 6 of the Constitution, constitutional? Does the singling out of Assam in Section 6A violate the right to equality? Does Section 6A dilute the political rights of citizens in Assam by reducing the weight of their vote? Does "state" in Article 355 include even the "people" of the state and not merely its territory? Could people who have not lost their citizenship of East Pakistan be deemed as Indian citizens with dual citizenship?

Is there a violation of the right to culture of Assamese people due to demographic change and the presence of Bengali-speaking migrants?

The Supreme Court categorically upheld different cut-off dates for Assam due to its geography and as a political solution to migration from Bangladesh. CJI DY Chandrachud observed that the cut-off dates given in Articles 6 and 7 are for the determination of citizenship only at the commencement of the Constitution and not afterwards. Therefore, Section 6A is neither arbitrary nor does it violate the cut-off dates prescribed in the above articles.

The Court also held that mere change in demography does not mean the culture of residents cannot be conserved. Justice Surya Kant refused to interpret fraternity narrowly. The Court also refused to accept the Centre's failure in its duty to protect states from external aggression as grounds for striking down a law. It refused to treat migration as "external aggression" and held that Section 6A does provide for "controlled migration".

The solution to the Assam problem is to immediately issue citizenship cards to people whose names are included in the 2018 NRC. Notices must also be issued to those whose names could not be included in the register so that they appear before the Foreigners Tribunals. Hopefully, the tribunals will make fair decisions. Those who entered Assam after March 25, 1971, must be detected. After their names are deleted from the NRC, they must be deported. Let citizenship in Assam be universal, equal and non-hierarchical. Let it not be merely a vertical relationship between state and people but rather, a horizontal idea of solidarity between residents of Assam to effectively promote inclusion and fraternity.

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Significance of India-Maldives Recent Engagement

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Abstract: The recent engagement between India and Maldives and its significance lies in prioritising regional security along with national priorities of respective countries and in finding a convergence to work towards enhancing cooperation in various areas at the bilateral and regional level.

The neighbourhood figures prominently in India's foreign policy outreach, based on the principle of respecting 'mutual interest and reciprocal sensitivity'. In this context, the recent engagement between India and Maldives after few impediments, which started after the Presidential elections in Maldives in September 2023, assumes significance as it once again reiterated India's commitment to the Neighbourhood First Policy and Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) vision. What has helped in resetting India-Maldives relations is India's consistent support extended to various development initiatives within Maldives as part of development assistance and continuous dialogue at the highest level to address defence and maritime security related issues.

Consistent Support Generated Positive Momentum

Some of the crucial developments and bilateral exchanges since the beginning of this year that generated a positive momentum and helped in overcoming the differences in perspectives related to cooperation in various sectors are as follows: in April 2024, India approved the highest ever quotas for essential commodities for Maldives for the years 2024-25, upon the request of Maldives. On 9 May 2024, the Foreign Minister of Maldives Moosa Zameer was in India, a first high-level Ministerial visit from Maldives after the formation of the Progressive National Congress (PNC) Government in Male. The visit took place amidst the withdrawal of Indian military personnel stationed in Maldives. Nonetheless, the visit provided an opportunity to discuss bilateral relations and chart out a 'future direction and convergence of perspectives in various domains. During the visit, the Foreign Minister of Maldives emphasized that "economic cooperation with India has been an integral part of Maldives economy".

The visit of the President of Maldives to Delhi to attend the swearing-in ceremony of the Prime Minister of India in June 2024 signaled a positive shift in Maldives engagement with India. The visit of External Affairs Minister of India to Maldives on August 9-11, 2024, on a three-day visit further reaffirmed India's commitment to deepen its bilateral relations, including security and defence cooperation. The official visits also drove home a point that India-Maldives relations can go beyond the election issue of the withdrawal of Indian military personnel in the island nation and the countries are willing to work together to enhance peace and security in the Indian Ocean Region.

India's overall development cooperation in the last year has also resonated with various aspects of governance highlighted by the PNC government in Male. For example, the President of Maldives has emphasised economic sovereignty, self-determination, and defence security as three important aspects of his governance. To realise these objectives, a very conscious effort has been made by the government of Maldives to address the economic slowdown with the help of bilateral partners including India. Since the beginning of 2024, the economy has shown signs of slowing down and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in February called for urgent policy adjustments to tackle the high risk associated with external and overall debt distress. It also warned the Maldives of potentially severe economic costs due to climate change and natural disaster risks. In May and September, India extended budgetary support to Maldives by rolling over to the tune of \$ 100 million upon the request of the Government of Maldives. To boost the economy, the government in Male also identified a few measures, such as minimising the economy's dependence on tourism sector, strengthening agriculture, and the creation of a solar city to take care of the energy needs of the Greater Male' region, etc. Implementation of the FTA with China and possible FTA with Turkey, the UK and India are other possibilities the government is exploring to diversify its trade relations.

Therefore, the timely help extended by India has been much appreciated by the Government of Maldives. In July, the President sincerely thanked India, during the Maldives Independence Day ceremony, for the support in easing the country's 'debt repayment, thereby enabling the country to ensure economic sovereignty'. Other than the economic cooperation, peace and security in the Indian Ocean and the need to arrive at a common understanding in solving emerging threats and challenges in the region have also acted as a pull factor in normalising the bilateral relations. For example, to address common security challenges in the Indian Ocean Region, in August 2024, India, Maldives, Mauritius and Sri Lanka signed the Charter and a MoU for the establishment of the Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) Secretariat in Colombo. India and the Maldives along with other members of CSC seem determined in realising five pillars of cooperation under the CSC framework, which include "the maritime safety and security, countering terrorism and radicalisation, combating trafficking and transnational organised crime, cyber security and protection of critical infrastructure and technology and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Steps towards Comprehensive Partnership

The above-mentioned crucial developments at the bilateral level culminated in signing of a "Vision Document for Comprehensive Economic and Maritime Security Partnership". The document signed during the State visit of President of Maldives to India in October 6-10, 2024, can be seen as an important chapter in relations that is going to bring India and Maldives much closer in the future. The vision document, which will act as a roadmap for the future, in detail provides information about collaboration in ten areas of mutual interest which include political exchanges, development, trade and economic cooperation, digital and financial cooperation. The document further mentions the ongoing projects and possibilities for energy, health, defence and security cooperation, capacity building and training, people to people exchanges and avenues for cooperation at regional and multilateral fora. The partnership agreement has been described as 'people-centric, future oriented and as an anchor of stability in the Indian Ocean region'. India also extended support of \$400 million and INR 30 billion bilateral currency swap agreement to tackle the financial challenges faced by Maldives. Rupay card was also launched on the occasion of the visit. At the bilateral level, defence and maritime security cooperation has acquired renewed dimension in the vision document. Therefore, India as a trusted partner of the island nation, will extend support to Maldives with provisioning of defence platforms,

in enhancing surveillance and monitoring capacity of Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF), on Hydrographic matters, in the areas of disaster response and risk mitigation and in increased capacity building of the MNDF.

Both countries have agreed to set up a High-Level Core Group to implement the vision document, and the future implementation will only reinforce the strong bond both the countries historically share. The document touched upon important projects such as housing development, completion of the Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP), development of airports such as Hanimaadhoo and Gan, expansion of High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDP), sharing of expertise in digital and financial services and the implementation of renewable energy projects including solar power. By agreeing to establish a Maldives consulate in Bangalore and a consulate of India in Addu City in Maldives, a push has been given for people to people exchanges, which were affected after the formation of new government in Male at the end of 2023. Maldives tourism sector has been particularly hit due to decline of Indian tourists visiting Maldives. India ranks 6th in tourist arrivals position, in contrast to the rank in 2023, where it stood as a top tourist arrival market for Maldives.

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India is Proud of: Abdul Khadar Nadakattin Barefoot Scientist' Whose, Unique Farm Innovations Won Him the Padma Shri



He is from Dharwad in Karnataka and has 24 innovations under his belt. The niche but problem-solving machines and innovations help farmers with everyday solutions and have also increased their yield up to 25 per cent

A native of the Annigeri village of Dharwad district in Karnataka, Abdul struggled to push himself out of bed in the mornings. “A splash of water on my face was the only solution to wake me up. But I could not expect my parents to do this to me every day,” he says.

A then 14-year-old Abdul devised an innovative Water Alarm. Its functioning was simple — one end of a string was tied to the key of his alarm clock in a manner that when it rang, the thread would unwind itself and the other end was tied to a water bottle. Once the alarm key unwound, the bottle would tilt, and the water would fall on Abdul’s face.

“It helped me wake up and complete my school,” he recalls, laughing. Though he managed to pursue education until Class 10, he did not pursue higher studies.

But his water alarm talks led to him speaking of the more serious water issues his village faced. “My father owned 60-acre ancestral land and the water scarcity deterred us from earning good profits from farming. My father admitted that our family’s financial condition was poor and asked me to contribute to the farm. So, I gave up my dream to pursue graduation in agriculture,” the 75-year-old says.

This farmer has come up with unique ideas to solve everyday farmer problems. To date, Abdul has had 24 innovations under his belt, which benefit thousands of farmers in India. It was for this reason that he won the Padma Shri award in 2022.

“Thomas Alva Edison is the source of my inspiration,” says the scientist who went barefoot to receive the President’s Lifetime Achievement Award in 2015 at the hands of the then President of India, Pranab Mukherjee. “I always thought of unique ways to solve a problem. That is how I conceived the water alarm.

Soon after taking over the reins, he built a tiller machine capable of deep ploughing which needed operating by a bullock. “In 1975, I established Vishwashanthi Agricultural Research and Industrial Research Centre to sell the product. But financial constraints did not allow me to market it well, and it failed to take off,” he says.

Following this, he built a seed-cum-fertiliser drill that enabled sowing seeds of different sizes with equal spacing. To meet the demands of farmers in Maharashtra, Abdul constructed an automated sugarcane sowing machine. Slowly, his innovations became popular and saw an increase in demand.

As his father and grandfather suffered losses with erratic rains and limited groundwater reserves, Abdul decided to find an alternative. “In the early 1980s, I planted mango saplings, placed between Ber and sapota (chikoo) trees. I planted chillies as an intercrop. But the lack of water killed the plantations. So I switched to growing tamarind as I learned that it required less water and maintenance,” he says.

He sourced 600 saplings and planted them across 6 acres of land by keeping a gap of 20 feet each.

“The plants grew well, and feeling confident with its success, I planted more than 1,100 trees in a 10-acre area, making a total of 1,800 saplings,” he says.

But there was another unexpected problem Abdul faced. “I did not know how to make use of so much tamarind produced. My wife and daughter made pickles and jams to sell in the markets across the state including, neighbouring Hyderabad,” he says.

So, Abdul decided to harvest tamarind and make pickles out of them. “But the process of separating seeds from the tamarind was tedious, and labour shortage made it more difficult. The seeds had to be separated manually and were a time-consuming process,” he explains, building up the crescendo before revealing his next innovation.

After spending nearly Rs 3 lakh and over six months, Abdul conceived a machine that did the job. “The instrument involved a system where the tamarind slid on the tapered peg. This pushed the seeds out from the tamarind pod,” he says, adding that to make tamarind pickles convenient he built yet another device.

“The pickle making required tamarind to be sliced into smaller chunks which again was labour intensive. So, I designed another machine to make the slicing effective and efficient,” Abdul adds.

Over the years, Abdul produced more machines and sold them. His popularity with these niche but problem-solving innovations earned him the name ‘hunase huccha’, meaning ‘tamarind crazy’.

“It was the most difficult innovation of my life as the seeds often got stuck in the tamarind making the separation difficult. I researched and experimented for years to achieve the desired result,” he says.

Abdul has sold thousands of his various innovations to date, he claims with pride.

Shrikanth Jain, one of the farmers who purchased Nadakattin seed-cum-fertilizer drill a few years ago, says, “I used it to sow wheat pulses and other woodgrains. The machine does the job of sowing, dispersing fertiliser, covering the soil, spraying pesticides and saving fuel. It also helps to prevent excess sowing of seeds. Using the device has helped me increase my yield by 20 per cent.”

However, these innovations and his passion for helping the farming fraternity came at a heavy financial loss to Abdul who says, “I struggled with debts all my life and mortgaged part of my agricultural land to invest in research for innovations. I never sell equipment for profits and offer them at make-to-cost, which is about 25 per cent cheaper than the ones in the market. It is a seva (service) for the farmers, and I do not wish to burden them financially.”

Today, Abdul has received funding for his research from the National Innovation Foundation, University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad and Karnataka government. He adds, “I received Rs 16 lakh to develop the ploughing machine from the Karnataka government and have also invested other prize money received.”

An inquisitive mind can achieve anything and Abdul Khadar Nadakattin is example of the same.

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