

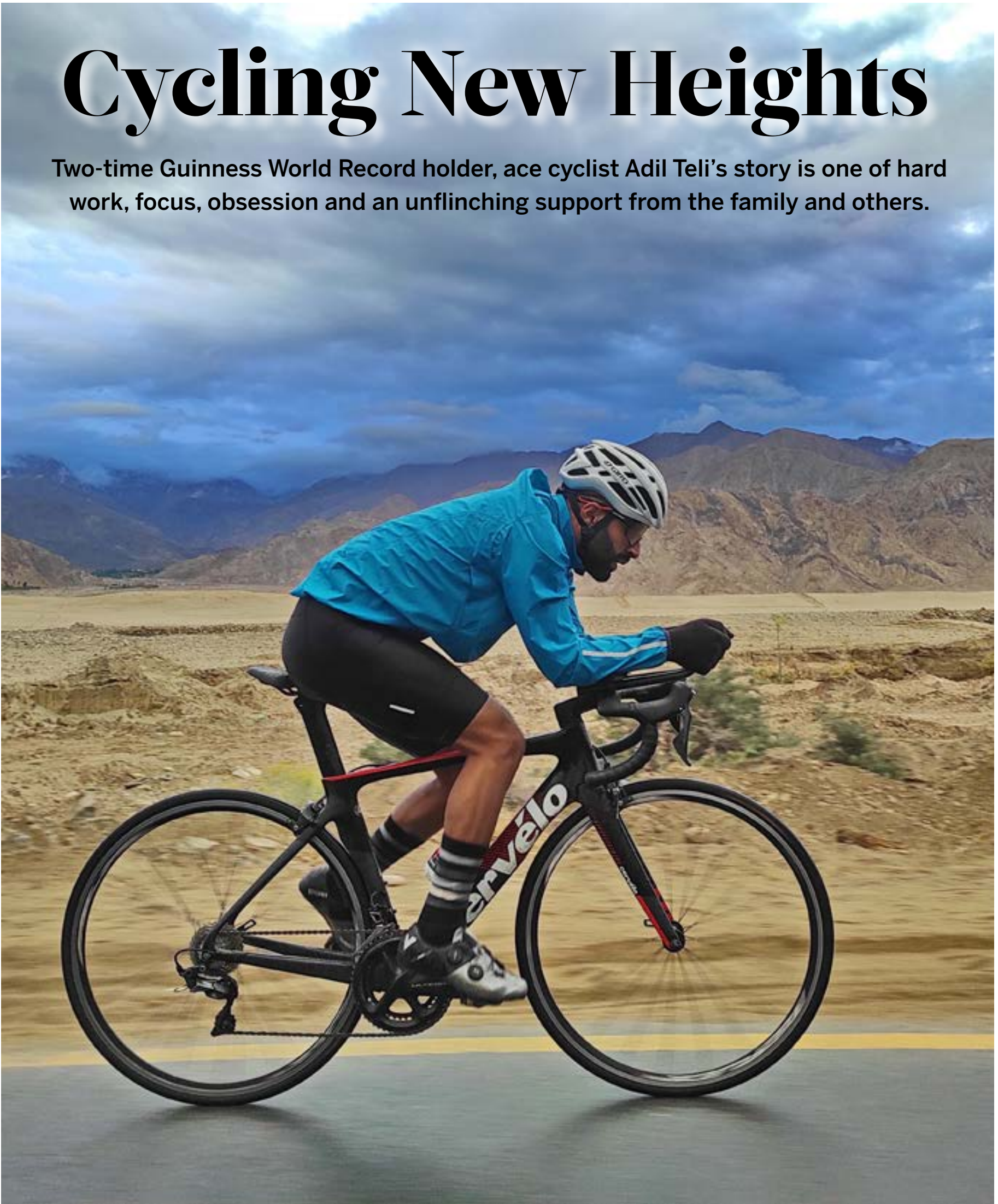
NEWSLINE

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expression unleashed

Cycling New Heights

Two-time Guinness World Record holder, ace cyclist Adil Teli's story is one of hard work, focus, obsession and an unflinching support from the family and others.



Traffic Mess: Who is to Blame?

Last week, traffic cops were spotted flagging down private vehicles near Srinagar's Zero Bridge and fining the offenders for using high beam headlights.

Citing Section 177 of the Motor Vehicles Act, the city traffic chief told a local news agency that the department has launched a campaign against those who are found using high beam lights or have LED lights or strips on their vehicles.

The traffic department has, of late, taken a stern action against 'serious' traffic violators and sent their cases to traffic courts which have pronounced strict punishments, including imprisonment.

In one such case, a transport judge sentenced an offender to six-month imprisonment for altering and upgrading his Thar vehicle.

While legal action against offenders is a welcome move, it is also reasonable to wonder why the traffic authorities have been ignoring more pressing issues that have led to a serious traffic situation not just within the city limits but also in the suburbs.

There are a host of offences that the traffic police seems to be completely ignoring. To begin with, roadside merchants and footpath vendors have choked the roads on each side, making it extremely difficult for vehicles to pass. The traffic department puts the onus on the Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) for allowing the encroachment of roads and, thus, severely burdening the traffic department. Tragically, the city's persistent traffic congestions are made worse by barricades and bunkers erected by police and paramilitary for security reasons.

A regular motorist on the road, however, suffers the brunt of this neglect and pays the price in this blame game. It takes prize-winning expertise for a person to manoeuvre through such congested routes.

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The traffic condition in Batamaloo, Qamarwari, Jahangir Chowk, Dalgate, Nowhatta and many other locations around the city is the greatest illustration of the type of bottlenecks caused by the traffic department's willful ignorance and an apathetic Srinagar Municipal Corporation. This

the next drive which may take another couple of months to initiate. From the next day, it's business as usual. Why can't the traffic department act on a daily basis and deprogram offenders by sending them a clear message that they can be taken to task every time they violate a rule? Also, once a vehicle has been seized and towed away, releasing it is a real headache.

Even while the installation of traffic lights paints a positive picture of Srinagar's traffic system, the fact that the traffic lights are only fol-

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provides an opportunity for some officers who, by indulging in bribery, compound further the already complicated situation.

Despite traffic department's digital penalty system, using cameras and other technology to punish violators, a sizable portion of drivers—including those of cars, bikes, and scooters—do not possess valid licenses.

Use of a helmet by both the motorcyclist and the pillion rider is hardly witnessed and, ironically, this too escapes the traffic department's digital net. The only way such a flagrant infraction could go unchallenged is if the on-duty police officer does not take his job seriously for whatever reason.

Additionally, it appears that the entire traffic department is concentrated between the Civil Secretariat area and the Gupkar Road, where the policemen can be at their active best, as if the traffic on other routes is not at all within their purview.

There are so many spots across Srinagar where cars are seen parked illegally on regular basis. You condition a driver to commit an offence because most of the times they get away with any action. And more often than not, it is the once-in-a-while offender who gets caught because suddenly once in two months, the traffic department swings into action and seizes such vehicles until

lowed at hardly a few locations is yet another indication of the traffic department's ineptitude.

That said, people too need to look inwards for regularly violating the traffic signal. But the major part of the responsibility still lies with the traffic department for not effectively ensuring that traffic signals are respected. Contrary to other Indian cities, the traffic department in Srinagar does not use the media to educate the public about adhering to the traffic regulations.

We don't see a vibrant media presence as far as our traffic department is concerned.

The process of obtaining a driving licence from the Regional Transport Officer's (RTO) office is flawed from the get-go. A candidate is put through a quick driving test on a set day after getting a learner's licence by responding to a few questions, rather than having their driving manners evaluated. What could be more ironic than having to drive a car in reverse for only five minutes to pass the test and be deemed fit to drive? For that matter, driving requires a skill set that characterises a driver's personality, which is unfortunately missing here.

There is also a pressing need for the traffic authorities to build a rapport with people and continue to educate them, both through mass media and through personal interaction,

How the Indo-Pak Conflict has Changed Cinema



SHOME BASU

The tumultuous relationship between India and Pakistan oftentimes serves as one of the finest content providers to the Indian cinema. The majority of the time, an Indo-Pak script is quite popular with audiences on both sides of the border.

Prior to the partition, writers like Sadat Hasan Manto played a key role in addition to actors, directors, and script-writers in shaping the Indian cinema. Bollywood, as we know it today, owes a lot to performers like Prithviraj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar, Krishna Chander, and Ismat Chughtai, to mention a few.

Several movies, including *Hena, Border, LoC Kargil, Gadar, Uri, RAW, Phantom, Refugee, Veer-Zaara, Ek Tha Tiger, Tiger Zinda Hai, Bajaranjii Bhaijaan, Total Siyaapa, Happy Bhag Jayagi* and *Veer Zara*, were made with this tenuous relationship between the two nations in mind. In India, certain films that celebrate India's dominance over Pakistan are applauded, while others with more mature themes do manage to draw in viewers in large numbers from both nations.

Ramchand Pakistani, a 2006 production, was different from the rest since it chronicled the lives of those who stray along the International Border. When *Veer Zaara*, a multi-starrer, screened in theatres in 2004, it quickly rose to the status of a smash hit, bringing actor Sharukh Khan, Preity Zinta,

and Rani Mukherjee to new heights of stardom.

The film stands out in contrast to others on the relations between India and Pakistan. Not because of the actors' romantic roles or their portrayal as lovers, but rather because of the care taken to understand the citizens of these two hostile nations, where interactions between individuals made it simple to comprehend the other nation.

Squadron Leader Veer Pratap Singh (Shah Rukh Khan), who flies rescue missions for the Indian Air Force, meets *Zaara* (Preity Zinta), a Pakistani teenager who has come to India to fulfil her surrogate mother's dying wish. She is saved by Veer, who is never the same after that. 22 years later, Saamia Siddiqui (Rani Mukerji), a Pakistani human rights attorney working on her first case, runs across an elderly Veer Pratap Singh. No one knows why he has been imprisoned in a Pakistani detention cell for 22 years without speaking to anybody. Her goal is to ascertain Veer's reality and see that justice is done. Visas were easily available for travel, and it appeared in the film that visiting each other's nation wasn't too challenging.

The political climate under Atal Behari Vajpayee and the Manmohan Singh created a favourable atmosphere for the business to thrive despite obstacles at the LoC and numerous militant attacks. These years were around 2002-2004 when the movie was being made and released in theatres.

In 2004, a 'Made in Pakistan' trade expo was held in New Delhi at the Talkatora Stadium. Businessmen from across Pakistan attended the expo to showcase their merchandise while the Indian tradesmen welcomed them with open arms.

Instead of Coca-Cola, Karachi-based *Pakola* was offered, and because of how well-liked the ice cream soda was among fairgoers, *Pakola* quickly replaced *Coco-Cola* on the menu. A ubiquitous name in India, *Shaan Masala* rose to prominence quickly.

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The pictures gave people hope, and someone who was unaware of the history of ties between India and Pakistan could only fantasise that these two nations might possibly be sworn enemies. A similar 'Made in India' expo was organised in Karachi and received a resoundingly positive reaction from the Pakistanis.

Later, India even granted permission to hold Lahore-based food stalls, and *Bundu Khan*, who had previously participated in exhibitions, gained popularity for his kebabs and biryani among numerous Indians who attended the fair in New Delhi's Pragati Maidan.

Wedding seasons in New Delhi showcased the common culture as fashion exhibitions and fashion firms from Lahore came in. For a few years, lapis lazuli and other valuable gems were available for purchase at the displays. There was some optimism even as relations weren't great as of post-2008.

With the Nehruvian beliefs, *Sharukh Khan's* films were created where fraternity, pluralism, oneness of religious fusion were portrayed. *Veer Zara* was an example of this pluralism in spite of criticism, showing how a concept may seem appealing on television but be challenging for many people to embrace in real life.

Between those times, the relationship between India and Pakistan underwent some pretty difficult times. The Mumbai attacks of 26/11 are among the most well-known events. In addition, the *fidayeen* attack on the CAPF convoy at Pulawama was the final straw that almost brought the two nations to war. India had allegedly bombed at a target believed to be a militant camp at Balakot in Pakistan's NWFP, and as a

result, both countries' jets were scrambled as dogfights broke out. India lost a MiG29-Bison plane and the pilot was taken prisoner by Pakistan.

When the Indian fighter pilot was freed, things calmed down a little. Since then, with envoys serving in each other's missions, there has been some thaw in the relationship.

After the strikes in Pulwama, India stripped Pakistan of its Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status, which drastically reduced commerce even though essential goods continued to be exchanged. In the 1960s, Pakistan stripped India of the same status.

People of India are currently facing the burden of the hostility between the two countries as everything presented on media networks comes from a biased perspective to benefit a specific party.

Bollywood will certainly face some form of threat from fanatics ruling the roost if it makes a movie that features a love story similar to *Veer Zara*. The production could be stopped, sets ransacked, cast and crew threatened, and the stars subjected to a sustained smear campaign on TV channels and social media.

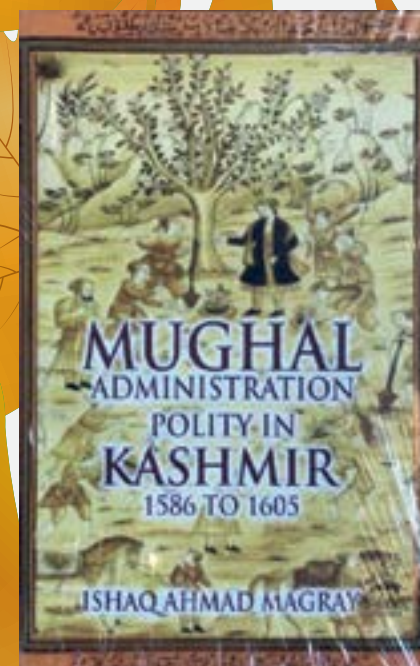
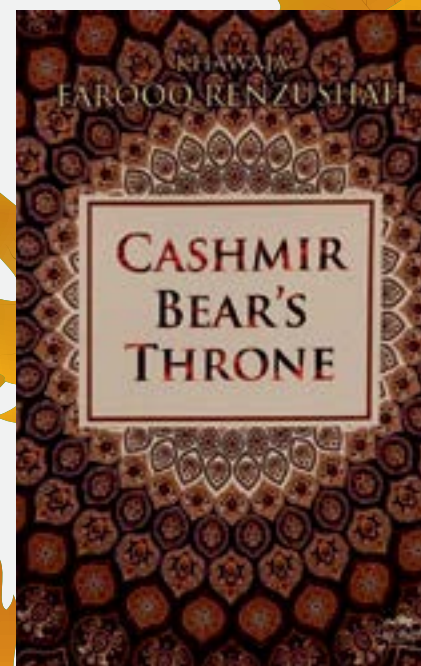
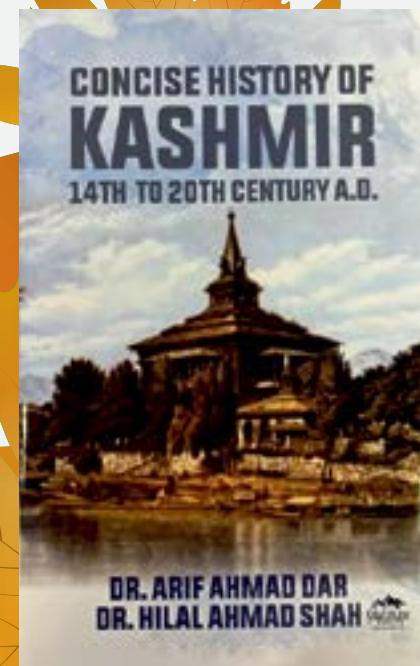
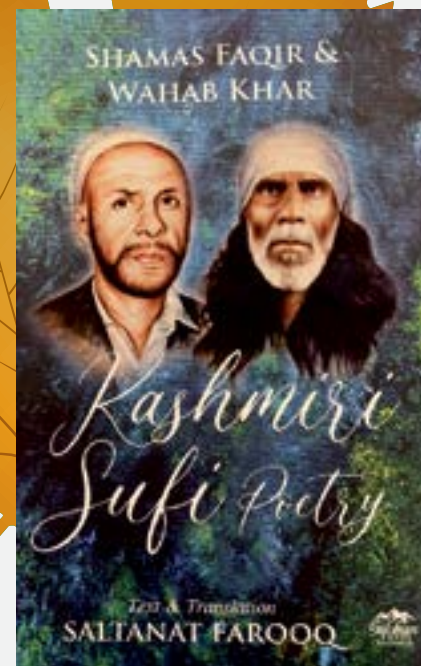
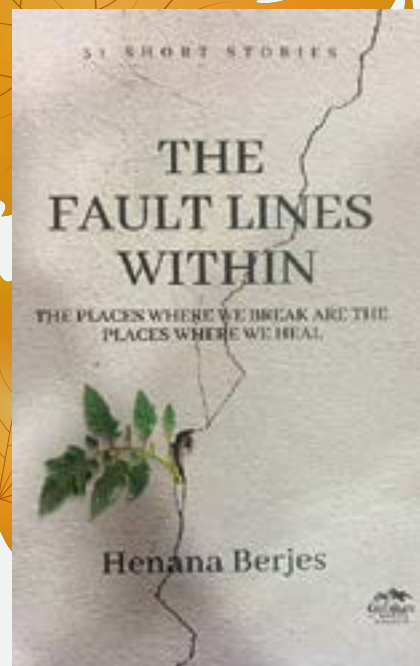
Terrorist attacks like the 26/11 have eroded trust between the two countries that have fought multiple wars already. Art, film, food festivals, and cultural shows have become the first casualties in the current dispensation's usage of phrases like "talks and terror cannot go together."

Suddenly, artists from each other's nations have been outlawed and are already considered villains. The Pakistani TV shows were a staple in many Indian homes when Indian films were regularly shown in the theatres of Lahore, Bahawalpur, Karachi and other places in Pakistan.

Those times don't seem to exist anymore and individuals who formerly praised one another's films or food are now regularly accused of being anti-national.

Shome Basu is a New Delhi-based senior journalist.

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Right on the Money

Rights of Special Bank Customers

Mentally or visually challenged customers fall under a bank's 'special types' category and they can avail all the facilities that any other customer can.



SAJJAD BAZAZ

Some time back, I found an interesting mail in my inbox. The sender, while narrating a banking issue of his visually impaired father, a government employee, had raised signature problem causing lot of inconvenience to the customers while conducting a financial transaction at a bank branch. Before deliberating upon the issues confronting visually impaired bank customers, let me tell you that, according to an estimate, more than 40 per cent bank customers either feel let down by their hands when they sign a cheque or are gripped in fear of not being able to re-produce accurately the signatures recorded with the bank.

Mismatching of signature compels a bank teller to refuse the payment against the cheque presented for cash withdrawal or deposited in the bank for transfer of money to some other account. In this digital age, re-producing signatures reasonably accurately is something that has emerged as a challenge.

Mismatch in signatures has its own implications and it's not easy to handle considering its importance in banking transactions. In the first place, inconvenience is inevitable as the bank would be refusing a financial transaction and then one can also suffer monetary loss. For example, if you have deposited post-dated cheques with a bank for paying equated monthly installments (EMIs) in a loan account, the signature mismatch in the cheques can lead to penalty to the customer.

Bouncing of a cheque because of a signature mismatch could seem like a minor issue, but for banks it becomes a regulatory issue if such cheques are allowed in a financial transaction. One can negotiate signature mismatch in his bank account by simply walking into the bank branch. The account holder has to fill up some form where he/she can submit the changed/modified signature. Here the customer has to comply with 'know your customer' norms to help the bank to ascertain the customer as the original account holder.

Now let me come to some queries about banking services to the visually impaired customers. Are visually impaired persons eligible for availing all banking facilities independently? Is it mandatory even for a literate blind person to open account jointly with a sighted person? Can't banks condone signature mismatch in such cases and allow transactions?

If one is visually impaired or a low vision person, chances are that most banks will not open his independent

bank account. They will either insist that he should open a joint bank account with a sighted person or open a bank account with no cheque book facility or both. Most of the time bankers hold even most literate blind person at par with an illiterate person, which should never happen. This attitude of the banking fraternity is in contravention to the standing instructions of the Reserve Bank of India and Indian Banks Association.

There are certain procedural guidelines advising banks that they must render the same services to a visually impaired person as it would to any other person without discrimination. Generally speaking, all banks must provide the same facilities to a visually impaired customer/prospective customer as it would to any other customer. But at the same time, the customers should be made aware of the risk involved in some of these facilities, which may be higher than that for a normal customer. There should be no hesitation on part of banks to extend additional facilities like reading and filling up of forms, slips, and cheques to such customers.

Banks cannot force a visually impaired customer to operate the bank account jointly with any person or in the presence of any person. However, on the request of visually impaired customer, banks have to allow him to appoint a person as his power of attorney or mandate holder to operate his bank account.

However, the banks have to follow the same procedure for opening the account of a visually impaired person as it does for its other customers.

Facilities for withdrawal of cash as are provided to all customers regarding cash payments must be provided to visually impaired customers. In case a visually impaired customer makes cash withdrawals at the bank, then the payment must be made in the presence of

another bank employee/officer.

The banks cannot deny cheque book facility to a visually impaired person. However, cheque book can be issued only if the blind person can sign consistently. Even credit and debit cards cannot be denied to a visually impaired customer.

As for the mentally challenged persons, they too are eligible for availing banking services. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has directed the banks to open such accounts with a guardianship certificate. Previously, the guardian in the case of a mentally retarded person was appointed under Mental Health Act. However, after repealing the Mental Health Act, the guardian for the mentally challenged persons is now to be appointed under The National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999. The Act empowers a Local Level Committee to appoint a guardian, to a person suffering from any of the conditions relating to autism, cerebral palsy, mental retardation or a combination of any two or more of such conditions and includes a person suffering from severe multiple disabilities.

The accounts can be opened and operated by the legal guardian as long as he remains the legal guardian. Banks have been strictly advised to rely upon the guardianship certificate for opening and operating bank accounts.

The rules also envisage that whenever banks learn that one of their customers is incapable of operating the account due to mental incapacity, the operation in such a customer's account would be immediately suspended. As per the law, a contract with the mentally unsound person is void ab initio. Banks, in such cases, rely upon the guardianship certificate.

Though the persons of unsound mind are disqualified from contracting,

the disqualification does not apply to contracts already entered into by them during the period of their sanity or contracts which are ratified by them during such period. Once a bank receives information that their account holder has been declared mentally incapable, it will immediately stop the operation in the customer's account.

Remarkably, the rights of disabled persons stand recognised under various legal instruments and they are to be given the services and privileges at par with other members of the society. As guaranteed in the right to equality and the right to life, enshrined in the fundamental rights in our constitution, it is an obligation to provide equal opportunities and facilities to everyone, irrespective of any disabilities they might suffer from.

It is worth mentioning that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities clearly commits to rights of persons with disability and their access to services. Article 9 of the Convention enables persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life and also gives them access to facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and rural areas.

Additionally, Article 12 states: "Parties shall take all appropriate and effective measures to ensure the equal right of persons with disabilities to own or inherit property, to control their own financial affairs and to have equal access to bank loans, mortgages and other forms of financial credit, and shall ensure that persons with disabilities are not arbitrarily deprived of their property."

Sajjad Bazaz heads Internal Communication Department of Jammu & Kashmir Bank Ltd. The views expressed are his own and not of the institution he works for.

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Cycling New Heights

Two-time Guinness World Record holder, ace cyclist Adil Teli's story is one of hard work, focus, obsession and an unflinching support from the family and others.

JASPREET KAUR

When I first met him in Delhi, Adil came across as shy, humble and quite a reserved young man. He took his time but once he started to relate his story, his eyes lit up and he was all of a champion.

25-year-old Adil Ahmad Teli is a two-time Guinness World Record holder in road cycling. The first record came when he cycled all the way from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and the second when he went from Leh to Manali. On both the occasions, he beat the previous records by a considerable margin making it almost a formidable challenge for anyone wanting to attempt it.

Born to a daily wage, Abdul Rashid Teli, Adil belongs to village Alambal-Mirgund, Nabal in North Kashmir's Baramulla district. He has three older sisters and a younger brother. After completing his higher secondary at Magam, he did his BA from Gandhi Memorial College, Srinagar and is currently pursuing his MPED (Master's in Physical Education) from GNDU, Amritsar, where he also did his BPED. He then intends to do a year's training course at the NIS, Patiala followed by a six-month course in Switzerland.

The First Machine

Adil got his first bicycle when he was in class 8 to go to school. He instantly took to it and would spend hours cycling around, even if sent for a 10-minute chore by his mother. He not only enjoyed cycling but found it therapeutic too.

His first-ever competition was in an inter-school competition in 2012 when he was in 10th class. In 2013, he began to take cycling as a sport seriously and stood seventh in the MTB Nationals (mountain bike) held in Kerala. And there has been no looking back since, although he had to take a break in 2014 for his class 12 exam.

Adil preferred the road cycling to mountain biking in which he won a silver medal in the inter-collegiate tournament in Kashmir in 2015. The same year he got selected for the All India Inter-University competition. In 2016, he represented Kashmir in the senior national championships. He was part of the 12-member team from Kashmir.

Setting Records

In 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020, he continued to represent J&K in the road races at the senior nationals. In 2019, he took upon himself the ultra-endurance cycling challenge and cycled from

Srinagar to Leh, a distance of 440kms which he covered non-stop in 26 hours and 30 minutes. This event motivated him to take more road cycling challenges.

In 2022 Adil completed the Kashmir to Kanyakumari distance of 3,600 km to enter the Guinness World Records. The previous record was held by Om Mahajan from Nashik after he cycled 3,600 kilometres from Srinagar to Kanyakumari in 8 days 7 hours and 38 minutes. This, Adil says, has been a life changing event for him.

Prior to that, the Guinness World Record for the fastest bicycle ride from Srinagar to Kanyakumari was held by Om's uncle Mahendra Mahajan, which was broken by the Indian Army's Lt Col Bharat Pannu, who cycled the distance in eight days and nine hours.

Sai Patil, a 10-year-old girl, accompanied by her father, Ashish Patil, completed the Kashmir to Kanyakumari challenge in 38 days, cycling more than 120km per day. The duo started their journey on December 16, 2021.

Application to the Guinness World Records was submitted by Adil three months prior to the event, as is the norm. He received the confirmation in first week of February 2021.

Adil started his journey on NH44, the longest highway of India, from the iconic Ghanta Ghar at Lal Chowk in Srinagar around 7:30 am on March 22, 2021 and reached Kanyakumari around 9 am on March 30, 2021. The record-setting challenge was flagged off by the Divisional Commissioner of Kashmir, P.K.Pole.

The entire Lal Chowk area was closed off and traffic diverted for this event. There was a huge gathering of people on both sides of the road to watch Adil begin his challenge. His parents and other members of the family were present too. The Smart City hoardings in Srinagar announced the event. Adil started the road trip with a traditional cup of *kehwa*.

Traffic was also stopped at the Qazigund tunnel on the Srinagar-Jammu highway, which was under construction, to allow Adil and the two cars carrying his crew members through.

The crew consisted of his physio (Murthy Ganeshan), nutritionist (Sunil), witness/ camera/ social media manager (his cousin Mohsin), log checking/payments (Imtiyaz of Abraaq Agro), cycle mechanic (Sonu Gupta of Bombay Cycle Café), two drivers and Akshay Kaul, a Delhi-based landscape architect, who has been his constant mentor and morale booster. Log keeper and witness collector is essential to monitor timing, heart rate, and constant relaying of information, as evidence, to the Guinness World Record.



The Challenges

Speaking about his struggles, Adil said, "I had been wanting to attempt this since long but was unable to since it involved huge costs as the road trip needed a physiotherapist, nutritionist, cameraman, mechanic and a log keeper. I was unable to find sponsors."

That is when his friend Naveed Yusuf, a rugby player from South Kashmir, introduced him to Abraaq Agro Fresh LLP for sponsorship. The total sponsor amount was Rs. 16 lakhs. Support came from Riaz Ahmad, Nashiet and Atif of the Kashmir-based Abraaq Agro.

The start was scheduled for 17th March, 2021 which got postponed to the 22nd due to heavy rain, though, it rained on the 22nd as well.

Due to initial hurdles, Adil could cover only 399 kms on the first day

when he reached Punjab and was behind schedule by 20km. In Punjab, it was raining incessantly.

On the 3rd day, when they entered Delhi, the weather changed for the better and Adil covered 435 kms on the fourth day, taking a much needed lead from the previous record.

He would sleep on a mat on the roadside, while the crew remained in the cars. Adil would ride for 18 continuous hours, stopping for short rests every 150 kms for a physio, or food at a highway *dhaba*. His diet consisted of protein shakes, tender coconut water, natural juices, chocolate, chicken, and rice balls with *paneer*. Many a time, he would eat or drink while riding.

On the 7th day of continuous cycling, when around 600kms were left to be covered, Adil had a painful meniscus

tear in his left knee. His knee was swollen and he had cuts and bruises from long hours of cycling. He was in so much of pain that he thought of quitting. He called his mother at 2:30 am and told her about his injury and that he was thinking of giving up. His mother asked him not to give up and bear the pain for a day more. She encouraged him to complete the event while explaining the lasting legacy versus the temporary pain in his knee. Moreover, the event was being watched by thousands back home on Facebook Live and everyone was cheering and praying for him.

Adil continued cycling and early morning of the 9th day, he reached the last point of Kanyakumari covering the entire distance in 8 days 1 hour and 39 minutes, beating the earlier record by 5

Rewards and Recognition

On his return to Srinagar, he was taken to the V.I.P lounge at the airport where he was greeted by his sponsors, parents and grandfather. Outside the airport and along the highway, people of all age groups had lined up on both sides to cheer for the champion. In his village, he was welcomed with garlands and cakes. During the trip on Friday, his name and event were announced in the village Jama Masjid where people were asked to pray for him.

He was invited to meet the Lieutenant Governor (LG), Manoj Sinha, and his advisor. Adil received the best cycling award from Kiren Rijju, the Cabinet Minister of Law and Justice, and the Young Leadership Award from the LG at SKICS. He was invited to several

Rajesh Kaushik from Haryana. He has also trained Mashooq Maqbool, the silver medalist in All India University cycling championship which was held at Punjab University, Patiala on December 9, 2021. Mashooq, son of a poor carpenter, hails from Agrikalan, Magam in north Kashmir's district Baramulla. He is a four-time state gold medallist in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 respectively and has also stood 4th among toppers in the nationals in 2018. Adil Teli has been his inspiration.

Adil's training, besides core and cardio training in the gym for one and half hours, includes 80 kms cycling daily and 120 kms on the weekends. Before his events, he cycles for 230 kms twice a week.

Scaling Heights

He took part in the 140 km track race at Kurukshetra in 2021 but at the 137 km mark there was a crash involving 25 cyclists. Adil suffered a major cut to his ear. Later in the year, he set out to break another Guinness World Record of cycling from Leh to Manali. He applied in June 2021 and received confirmation on 30th August. He arrived in Leh in July, 40 days prior to the start in order to acclimatize to the local conditions of high altitude and low oxygen levels. During his preparations, Adil rode six times up to the Khardungla Pass at the height of 18379 feet above sea level. He would practise daily on the astro-turf.

The earlier record was held by Lt Col Bharat Pannu who completed the 472 km stretch in 35 hours and 32 minutes. Preeti Maske, a 45-year-old cyclist from Pune paddled a distance of 429 kilometres to become the fastest female to cycle solo from Leh to Manali. She covered the approximately 430-km-long stretch in a record time of 55 hours and 13 minutes.

Adil began his cycling with the same crew sans the nutritionist. The official co-sponsors were: J&K Tourism, Symtec Cements, and Versalite.

Brand Ambassador

Addidas have signed him as their brand ambassador for two years. BVG India sponsored his nutrition for eight months after the Kashmir to Kanyakumari trip. Adil's sports nutrition costs him a minimum of Rs. 20-22k per month.

The Leh to Manali trip started on 11th September 2022, at 5:41 am and was flagged off by SP Leh City. This trip included five high altitude passes – Taglang La, Lachalung La, Nakee La, Baralacha La and Rohtang pass. The day temperature was around 1 degree Celsius and the night temperature was -1 degree Celsius. His hands would freeze while cycling. He took short breaks to warm his hands with the car heating system. On this trip, his physio had to put in a lot of effort as Adil suffered from backaches and leg pains due to cycling at a high altitude with less oxygen.

Adil arrived in Manali the next day at 10:59 am after cycling continuously for 29 hours without sleep. He completed the road trip in 29 hours 18 minutes and 21 seconds, beating the previous record by 6 hours and 14 minutes.

After these two trips, Adil was covered on the 'OMG Yeh Mera India' show on History TV. Krushna Abhishek, the show host named him as the 'Superhuman of India'.

The Road Ahead

Adil has decided on creating his own record year, which he doesn't want to reveal yet. Before that he's now preparing for the upcoming cycling race in

Dubai, February 2023.

His dream is to participate in international events like the American race from West to East coast. The Race Across America, or RAAM, is an ultra-distance road cycling race held across the United States that started in 1982 as the Great American Bike Race. In length, the RAAM is comparable to the Tour de France, but the races differ to a great extent. The courses of both races have varied over the years. However, in the Race Across America, the direction has always been from the west coast to the east coast of the United States, approximately 3,000 miles (4,800 km), making it a transcontinental event. More importantly, the race has no stages, i.e., it is in principle a nonstop event from start to finish, with the fastest competitors needing slightly over a week to complete the course. By contrast, the Tour de France features a different route each year (alternating between clockwise and counter clockwise circuits around France) and is about 2,300 miles long; the distance is divided into individual daily stages spread over the course of about 3 weeks and contested at much higher speeds. Having to ride continuously for days with little to no sleep puts this event in the category of ultra-distance cycling races.

"It was my parents," reiterates Adil, "who motivated and encouraged me and have always stood by me for cycling professionally."

He was also inspired by Mohammad Akbar Khan. 29-year-old Akbar belongs to Check-e-Kawoosa in the central Kashmir's Budgam district. Both he and his brother, Feroz Khan are cyclists. He won gold medals in several inter-collegiate sports events and was selected as National Technical Official (NTO) for the 41st Asian Track Cycling Championship at Indira Gandhi Stadium in New Delhi from 18 June to 22 June 2022. He completed his PhD in 'Structure of a Cyclist and Cycling in India' at Shri Venkateshwara University, Uttar Pradesh.

Looking ahead, Adil and sports persons like him need a lot of support. Training and nutrition costs are high too. For every event and for his continuous training, Adil needs sponsors.

Equipment and gear for individual events like cycling are very costly. Adil's cycle, the Cervello S3, is a Canadian make and costs him Rs.3.75 lakhs and tyre changes, which can be frequent due to wear and tear on long road trips, cost Rs.1.75 lakhs.

Adil believes that sport is an excellent option for the struggling youth of Kashmir. At the same time, he laments the lack of sports facilities, infrastructure, coaches and equipment- in Kashmir, especially for the youth residing in far-flung areas, where, he believes, there is no dearth of talent. "There are no cycling coaches in Kashmir," says Adil. For most part of his early days as a competitor, he was a self-taught cyclist.

Adil's story is of sheer grit, consistency, self-discipline and hard work. "There are no shortcuts to achieving your dreams," he says. Cycling for him is therapeutic. And he's ever-grateful to his parents for their constant encouragement and support, despite the fact there was no way for them to have helped him financially. "Abu has always been my pillar of strength," he adds.

Based in New Delhi, Jaspreet Kaur is an architect and urban designer. She is the trustee of Lyme woods and Span Foundation.

Cover pic: Akshay Kaul

Adil Teli's dream is to participate in international events like the American race from West to East Coast. Photo credit: Adil Teli

award shows later on. Adil received his Guinness World Record certificate three months after completion of the road trip.

He was wished by Kapil Dev on WhatsApp video. The former Indian cricket captain has promised Adil for help in the future. Suresh Raina, the Indian cricketer, John Cena, the professional wrestler at WWE and Guinness Book of World Records followed him on twitter.

One of the proudest moments for Adil, and his father, was when he learnt that his biography had been included in the school history book for class 6. Adil was amused when informed by a local school teacher of a 6th class boy whose answer to the exam question 'Who is Adil Teli?', was *woh hamara hamsaya hai* - he's our neighbour.

Back in Amritsar, Adil continues his training with the GNDU cycling coach,

hours and 59 minutes. He was received by the SSP of Kanyakumari and Atif and Muzaffar of Abraaq Agro, his sponsors.

After cycling for eight days at an average speed of 18.1 km, Adil had burnt more than 80,000 calories. Being exhausted and having a painful knee, he nearly collapsed and had to be put on a dextrose drip in a local hospital.

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The Pashtuns: A Contested History

The 368-page book is a compelling read.

COL. SUSHIL TANWAR

To most of us, the mere mention of the word 'Pashtun' creates an image of mystique and intrigue. Are the Pashtuns violent or are they benevolent? Are they oppressed or are they opportunists? Are the Pashtuns men of honour or masters of survival? What do they value more? Tribal traditions or religious faith?

These are complex and intricate questions with unsure answers. Tilak Devasher, one of the most prolific commentators within the Indian strategic community, has attempted to demystify these multiple layers of Pashtun identity in his latest offering, *The Pashtuns: A Contested History*.

Ever since its release a couple of months back, this book has received much praise and critical acclaim. The most striking feature of the book is that the author has skillfully combined his vast experience and knowledge with extensive research and lucid expression.

Spread over seven sections, *The Pashtuns* offers a comprehensive view into the culture of the Pashtuns and the geostrategic realities that they live within.

The past and the present of Afghanistan, and by extension that of the Pashtuns, has been subjected to various external influences. British imperialism in the 19th century, the Soviet invasion in the eighties and the American intervention post 9/11 are well known and the author has dwelled upon them in considerable detail.

Each of these military campaigns was characterized by initial tactical success and a subsequent strategic withdrawal. As Tilak points out, every cycle of war invariably brought a 3D effect on the Pashtuns: death, destruction and displacement.

The book also highlights some key insights into the traits and character of Pashtuns, the most important being their inability to stay united and a propensity to close ranks only when confronted by foreign threats.

The legality and relevance of the Durand Line, along with various strands of relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan, is also covered in the book. The idea of Pashtunistan has been discussed in detail. Although, the author concedes that even Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, the Frontier Gandhi, was ambiguous about the exact idea of Pashtunistan.

One might, therefore, differ with the author on this issue. After all, Pashtunistan, as of now, is a notional and abstract concept. What does it actually imply? Does it mean a separate province for Pashtuns in Pakistan? Does it refer to a breakaway state to be carved out of Pashtun dominated areas of Pakistan? Will it be an independent nation comprising Pashtuns

living on either side of the Durand Line? Does it indicate a greater Afghanistan which assimilates the Pakistani Pashtuns?

None of these is possible unless Afghanistan or Pakistan, or both, implode and are balkanized. And this doesn't appear realistic, at least as of now. One can however never be sure of what will happen in the future.

Pashtunistan will, therefore, remain an imagination, a leveraging tool for Afghanistan and a constant source of insecurity for Pakistan. It is precisely why this fault line between the two neighbors needs to be studied and monitored.

There have been many earlier works on the Pashtuns, most notable being 'The Pashtun Question: Unresolved Key to the Future of Afghanistan and Pakistan' by Abu Bakr Siddique, a Pashtun journalist from Waziristan. His principal argument is that the "failure and unwillingness of both Afghanistan and Pakistan to absorb Pashtuns into their state structures and assimilate them in political and economic fabric is the root cause of instability in the region."

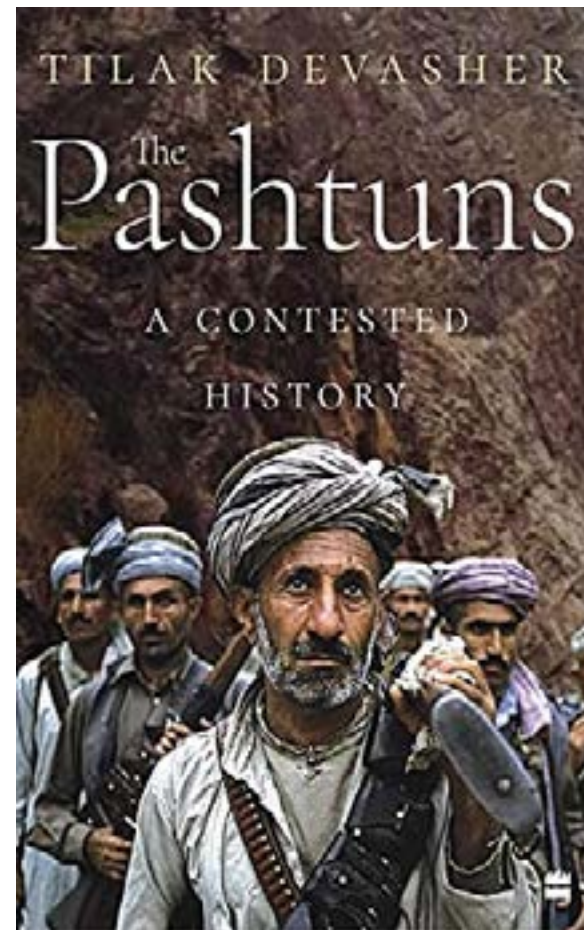
Devasher builds his case on similar lines and proposes the need for socio-economic development of Pashtuns and the strengthening of the tribal structures which have probably been diluted over the last few decades.

Pakistan, of course, has constantly tried to undermine the Pashtun nationalism internally by undertaking various measures of mainstreaming them - one of them being their representation in the armed forces. The issue, nevertheless, continues to be a constant source of tension across the Durand Line as is evident in the recent attempts of Taliban to disrupt the construction of the border fence.

The Pashtuns is a relevant and contemporary work which will certainly appeal to those who have an interest in the region. One, however, feels that the inclusion of a few maps and charts explaining various provinces, agencies, ethnicities etc would have made it easier for a layman to understand the geographical dynamics. Similarly, a consolidated timeline giving the sequence of major events would also have been helpful.

Despite these minor omissions, the 368-page informative book is, undoubtedly, a compelling read.

Colonel Sushil Tanwar is a senior fellow with Center for Air Power Studies (CAPS), New Delhi. He is an avid reader and writes regularly on issues of national security.



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West's Duplicity on Qatar

Qatar's crimes cannot even remotely come close to those that the West continues to perpetrate.



SAURABH KUMAR SHAHI

One of the most hilarious images to have come out of the ongoing FIFA World Cup in Qatar was an English fan complaining to a Western news channel about the disappointment he has faced as a fan while trying to enjoy the tournament. "Qatar must understand that it is the fans who run the game," he adds in good measure. Only if you were not focusing on his words would you have realised that the man was dressed as a Templar Crusader in what was probably his first journey to the Arab world.

This small incident is representative of all the brouhaha that has come to surround the World Cup this year. That it is going to be tumultuous was a given. After all, when has ever the collective West forgiven a country outside of its sphere for committing the crime of organising a grand sporting event? And like always, it is human rights that are used as a stick to beat. It started with the Moscow Olympics and has found its way to Qatar via Beijing Olympics and Winter Olympics. So, as much as the bleeding-heart liberals want us not to believe, there is a clear pattern here. So, let's analyse Qatar's 'crimes' one by one.

The biggest, at least for the time being, appears to be its questionable human-rights records vis-à-vis foreign workers working there. A sizeable number of workers have died in the 12 years that took Qatar to complete the infrastructure for the games. In itself, the number is large and hence worrying. However, we are missing the forest for the trees here. If you put this number in perspective, it is not any higher than the number of workers who died in the making of any megapolis—from New York to Los Angeles to whatnot. First, a

figure of 15000 was floated by Amnesty International. This is not only erroneous but sly. The figure includes the total number of non-Qataris who died in these 12 years because of various causes including illness, chronic illness, crime and accidents.

Marc Owen Jones, Associate Professor at Hamad Bin Khalifa University, burst this bubble with his back-of-the-napkin calculation.

"15000 deaths over nine years from a population of approximately 2.3 million (non-Qataris) equates to a death rate of 1 per 1000 per year (15,000/9/pop x 1000 of each year since 2010 – which ranges from 1.7 mill in 2010 to 2.9 mill in 2019). For comparison, the death rate in the EU is 12 per 1000, India is 7," he posted on Twitter.

This particularly brings the spotlight on the Indian liberals who have been raging about this issue on social media. That seven times more Indians die in India building vanity projects is of no consequence to them. What is of consequence to them is their latent Islamophobia. How dare the upstart Bedouins got this honour before us is the actual question inside their minds.

Does this mean Qatar is a model to imitate? Far from it! There's blood on Qatar's hands and it is stinking. Qatar's sectarian designs in Syria made it support and fund al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliates al-Nusra, directly responsible for the death of several hundreds of thousands of Syrians. Their officials have time and again admitted to arming the al-Qaeda-affiliated rebels. However, none in the West talks about it, why? Because the US and the UK were parties to that same criminal effort. This correspondent is a persona non grata in Qatar for trying to expose these links through his reportage from Syria.

Writer and scholar Asa Winstanley sums it up very well when he says: "How many of the people currently criticising Qatar over 'human rights' will be criticising the US for its infinitely worse record when it hosts the World Cup in 2026? Almost none, making it empty posturing, at best. Pure racism at worst."

Then come the cultural issues: the matter of banning 'LGBTQ Propagan-

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da' and liquor in the stadium. This is a very interesting topic. While LGBTQ Rights are an issue of genuine concern, it is also a very handy tool to beat those whose cultural values don't match the existing Western value system. No one cares that the West itself has reached the current standards on several issues after years of bitter and often violent struggles. Roe vs Wade has been upturned even as I write this. Abortion became fully legal in Ireland just a couple of years back. From Switzerland to France to Austria, European countries have banned Burkha because it doesn't gel with their view of the world.

What's interesting is that, in a parallel universe, if China forces local authorities in Xinjiang to serve alcohol and unfurl LGBTQ flags in their stadium, the same Westerners will be crying 'cultural genocide' of the Uyghurs. Such was the cacophony around the issue of LGBTQ that at one point one started wondering if the tournament is about the game of football or some kind of a voyeuristic peep-show. Most of the curbs were on the performative aspect of LGBTQ rights, not on the rights themselves. Qatar is not stopping any member of the community from watching the game. It is stopping you from carrying the paraphernalia that it considers in-your-face and not cognisant of its Islamic ethos. A compromise could have been easily reached, but the LGBTQ who have become so accustomed to browbeating people and institutions in the West saw this as their defeat. This is exactly what performative wokeness is.

It is not for nothing that a nauseated

Gianni Infantino, head of FIFA, had to remind the agitated whites that Europeans shall have to beg forgiveness for the next 3000 years for what they have done for the last 3000 years. Of course, he is off by a couple of thousand years there but the point remains.

However, again, in this domain, is Qatar innocent? No, it is not. Qatar has been hosting sectarian clergies for a very long time and has provided them with space and finance to export their bigoted views all around the world. Yusuf al-Qardawi, a rabid takfiri clergyman who considered Shias heretics and Alawites *wajib-ul-qatal* spent the major part of his later life in the Qatar Government's hospitality. To please the Qatari regime, Qardawi tailored his views quite often. So while he denounced extremism rooted in Wahhabism and declared Islamic State a haram entity, his Muslim Brotherhood ideology neither finds any problem with Qatar's funding of al Qaeda in Syria nor the "moderate rebels" clarification of "Sending Christians to Beirut and Alawites to the Grave." (The original bigoted lines in Arabic have Beirut rhyme with *taaboot* - coffin.) This is also the reason why a large amount of anti-Qatari propaganda is originating from Saudi Arabia and UAE, its GCC colleagues who have a running feud with Qatar over latter's support for Muslim Brotherhood who these Gulf regimes are running scared of.

For the current event, among the clergymen, Qatar has invited the fugitive Indian televangelist Zakir Naik is a prominent name. While it is true that someone like Zakir Naik will never get a fair trial from the Indian judicial system, it is also true that he is no saint. His sectarian viewpoints have made several Muslim countries also put a muzzle on his speeches.

The point is, no one is saying that Qatar is innocent. But, what yardstick are we using here? Unless performative-wokeness is your endgame, Qatar's crimes cannot even remotely come close to the list of the crimes the West continues to perpetrate.

The point is, no one is saying that Qatar is innocent. But, what yardstick are we using here? Unless performative-wokeness is your endgame, Qatar's crimes cannot even remotely come close to the list of the crimes the West continues to perpetrate.

Saurabh Kumar Shahi has covered The Greater Middle East for over 15 years and has reported from Kabul, Peshawar, Baghdad, Aleppo, Damascus, Beirut, and Jerusalem among other places.

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England Tour of Pakistan

The series is crucial for Pakistan as far as the World Test Championship is concerned.



BILAL AHSAN DAR

In continuation of the England cricket team's tour of Pakistan in September and October this year to play seven Twenty20 International (T20I) matches as a preparatory series before the 2022 ICC Men's T20 World Cup, the English team returned to Pakistan to play three Test matches. The Test matches form part of the 2021–2023 ICC World Test Championship.

The three-match series is a historic one for Pakistan, who are set to welcome England for the first time since 2005 to play Test cricket. Rawalpindi will host the first Test (Dec 01 – Dec 05) before the action moves to Karachi (Dec 09 – Dec 13) and then Multan (Dec 17 – Dec 21).

The tour was originally scheduled to take place last year but ECB withdrew unilaterally citing security reasons.

Pakistan has taken some big calls as far as announcement of the Test squad is concerned.

One of the notable omissions is Yasir Shah, the leg spinner. Shah has the fifth most Test wickets for the country, but it appears the selectors are looking for the 36-year-old's successor. The selection committee has preferred the uncapped leggie Abrar Ahmed over Shah – a move that could pay dividends judging on his ability to confuse batters with his mixture of legspin and wrong'uns. Ahmed may only have 13 firstclass matches to his name, but the 24-year-old has a total of 76 wickets at an average just north of 25 and, on recent form, he looks a

solid selection. While Mohammad Nawaz and Nauman Ali are likely to be the two main spinners, Ahmed will provide skipper Babar Azam with another option should conditions suit the slower bowlers.

Shaheen Afridi, who is nursing a knee injury, isn't a part of the 18-member squad. Haris Rauf, who has made a name for himself in white ball cricket, is all set to make his Test debut. It would be interesting to see whether Rauf can translate his white-ball form into Tests. Rauf's ability to swing the old ball could be a weapon that Babar would love to exploit.

Apart from Rauf, the likes of Faheem Ashraf, Mohammad Wasim Jr and Naseem Shah are likely to battle it out for two or possibly three pace spots in each Test.

In the batting department, Fawad Alam has been dropped – maybe for good. While many believe the south-paw is again hard done after his impressive return to the national team a couple of years back, selectors seem to be unimpressed with the 37-year-old's recent form managing just 33 runs from four innings against Australia earlier this year and want to move forward and give opportunity to someone like Shan Masood for his excellent run in the last six months or so. Masood is more likely to play in the middle order than at his specialist position of an opener. The team, in all likelihood, will open with Imam-ul-Haque and Abdullah Shafiq. Azhar Ali at number three is a confirmed spot, but would be under the scanner for the lack of runs in the last few test matches. Babar Azam at four will have to keep his great run in the red ball format going on to claim the top-most ICC rank.

While Mohammad Rizwan is an automatic selection, the inclusion of former captain Sarfaraz Ahmed is a little surprising. Sarfaraz hasn't played a Test since he featured against South Africa in Johannesburg

at the start of 2019, but the 35-year-old has been in great form with the bat recently in the domestic circuit. The right-hander is fresh from a century for Sindh in the Quaid-e-Azam Trophy and has already amassed 394 runs in that competition this year at an average of almost 44.

The series is crucial for Pakistan as they attempt to stay in touch with the leading teams and finish inside the top two and earn a place in the next year's World Test Championship final. Pakistan currently sits in fifth place on the World Test Championship table with a win percentage of 51.85 and still have six Tests remaining during this World Test Championship period – three in this series against England and then three against New Zealand over the New Year to try and earn a spot at next year's final at The Oval.

On the other hand, the England team led by Ben Stokes arrived in Pakistan early Sunday (November 27). England team played a warm-up game against England Lions in Abu Dhabi to give final touches to their preparation for the series.

Given England's success over the summer, their XI has only a few spots left open. The position of Zak Crawley's opening partner will likely be filled by Ben Duckett who looks to have edged out Keaton Jennings. In the battle for the No.8 basher/part-time spinner role, Jaks looks to have an edge over Livingstone having outperformed him in the warm-up, smashing 84 off 48 to Livingstone's 36 off 23, and taking 2-69 from 13 overs compared to Livingstone's 2-80 from eight. However, that will still be a tight call.

Notably, the English selection committee has also added an 18-year-old leg-spinner, Rehan Ahmed, to the squad for the historic series. He will also become the youngest Test cricketer for England if he gets to make his debut. Meanwhile, following the announcement of the squad, a video

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of a 13-year-old Ahmed with Shane Warne, where he is seen receiving praise from the Australian great, went viral on social media. However, England's Director of Cricket, Rob Key said, "This is the best way to aid his development. He is a serious talent, but he might be four or five years off from being the finished product. He is nowhere near the finished article at the moment."

It would be interesting to see if England would carry on with the BazBall approach and stay true to their blueprint of the last six months.

Traditionally, Pakistan offers spin friendly tracks, however numbers show that in Pakistan's recent home Test matches against Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, South Africa and Australia, the quicks have bowled almost 60 per cent of the overs and have a superior average and strike rate compared to the spinners. Reverse swing would remain a major weapon and both the teams have potent bowling attacks to exploit the conditions well.

What makes this series all the more special is that the English skipper Ben Stokes has decided to donate his match fees from the series towards flood relief work in Pakistan.

Bilal Ahsan Dar is a blogger and cricket buff.

Traditionally, Pakistan offers spin friendly tracks, however numbers show that in Pakistan's recent home Test matches against Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, South Africa and Australia, the quicks have bowled almost 60 per cent of the overs and have a superior average and strike rate compared to the spinners. Reverse swing would remain a major weapon and both the teams have potent bowling attacks to exploit the conditions well.

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