

The conservation crisis

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The year 2021 arrived with a hope of change and breaking the shackles of the Covid pandemic and its associated socio-politico-economic repercussions. In India, it has brought forward a bleak picture of failing wildlife conservation efforts. Reports by Conservation Lens and Wildlife (CLaW), indicates that during the first 81 days of 2021, 39 enigmatic royal Bengal tigers lost their lives whereas official sources reported 16 tiger deaths. The causes were physical injuries, habitat loss or impact with speeding vehicles. Maharashtra heads this list followed closely by the state of Madhya Pradesh.

The alarming part of this conservation catastrophe is that 10 of these tigers died as a result of human-wildlife conflict. Four tigers were poisoned to death at Umred-Karhandla-Paoni Wildlife Sanctuary (UKPWS), Maharashtra. Others were killed when they transgressed in human settlements following territorial disputes with other tigers.

Human-wildlife conflict is the negative interaction between humans and wildlife, resulting in serious obstacles in wildlife protection efforts. Only awareness and local participation in conservation projects can manage this issue.

Forest fire cases have been reported from all corners of the nation.

Forest tracks at Kullu and Shimla in Himachal Pradesh burned for days in the pristine Western Himalayan ecosystem before they could be contained. Dzukou Valley, nestled between the North-eastern states of Nagaland and Manipur in the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot, burned for two weeks in the month of January. This region is noted across the world for its endemic biodiversity. A report focused on the fact that seven out of 11 critically endangered mammals can be traced in the untouched montane, submontane and rain forest ecosystems of North-eastern India. Fifty-four per cent of India's threatened mammals, 68 per cent of birds and 63 per cent of reptiles can be found in this region.

In the months of February-March 2021, Simlipal National Park in Odisha burned due to an uncontained forest fire for about a fortnight. It is the



abode of vulnerable and endangered mammals – the Royal Bengal tiger, leopard, Asian elephant, sambar, barking deer, gaur, four-horned antelope and about 231 bird species.

Global warming and climate change are already destabilizing the ecological services and functions in most of the biodiversity-rich regions across the globe. There has been an increasing trend of uncontrolled forest fires since the last five years. Of Forest Survey of India (FSI) has detected 2,77,758 forest fire points between 2004 and 2017. The forest fire points skyrocketed from 8,654 to 30,892 in 2009-10. According to reports, 21.4 per cent of national forest areas are under various levels of forest fire risks.

The Covid pandemic has impacted global wildlife conservation efforts. A scientific investigation has revealed that there has been a 55 per cent rise in destruction of the Amazon rain forest since the start of the pandemic.

Age-old coral reefs of the Caribbean are getting destroyed due to fungal infections without conservation efforts to manage the problem. New Zealand is seeing increased destruction of its native species due to increased rat infestation and decreased conservation efforts to eradicate them. Decreased ecotourism has put several conservation projects in the developing nations under severe financial crunch. Of course, scientific reports also indicate that there has been an increase in the rate of pregnancies in zoo animals and sightings of wildlife nearer human habitats due to the lockdown, but the loss of financial liquidity is impacting conservation efforts.

India is now focusing on rebuilding its slumping economy with various plans. But these plans are undermining the conservation needs and environmental protection schemes. The EIA draft notification is aiming to make 'environmental clear-

ances' for industrial projects 'easy'. Andaman developmental plans will seriously impact the pristine ecosystems in these islands which are part of the Sundaland biodiversity hotspot.

Forest land diversions for facilitating industrial or mining projects are a common occurrence in India. A report highlighted that 11,467.83 hectares of forest land had been diverted in 22 states between 1 January and 6 November 2019. The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Annual Report 2019-20 indicated that these diversions are to facilitate 932 non-forestry projects under the Forest (Conservation) Act (FCA), 1980.

The developmental project plans are also impacting the Western Ghats-Nilgiri ecosystem which is another biodiversity hotspot. Reports indicate that the Hubballi-Ankola Railway Project will destroy around 596 hectares of protected areas and will fell 178,325

trees. Expansion of Kaiga Atomic Power Plant and Sharavathi pumped storage hydro-electric project will also cause wildlife loss in this pristine ecosystem.

Economic growth and sustainability must not be achieved at the expense of wildlife conservation. For a healthy co-existence between humans and nature, conservation must be given precedence. Climate change impacts, increased natural disasters and the proliferation of new diseases are clearly indicating the sustainable path nations should follow to safeguard the threatened wildlife and conservation spaces. Conservation efforts need to be increased to protect India's wildlife. Policy makers must work alongside local populations to make it a success.

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100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

Municipal work in Bengal, as depicted in the official review for the year 1919-20 - which does not include Calcutta - affords a solid foundation for the progress hoped for under the reformed administration. Some of it is good; some is lax; but the general trend is forward. The observation of the Magistrate of the Twenty-four Parganas is of very general application - that the average ratepayer still prefers low rates and a correspondingly low standard of administration rather than enhanced taxation and improved modern methods. Most ratepayers, whether in India, in England, or anywhere else, show the same tendency. They do not object to improved methods, but it is not in human nature to welcome increased rates or taxes. This being recognised, there is all the more reason for satisfaction with such improvements as the history of the year records. An advance in the right direction is indicated by the statement that many municipalities, as in the preceding year, took steps to improve their sanitation, while a good example was shown at Faridpur by the opening out of a congested bustee, which represents something accomplished in the direction of town planning and improvement work. The best way of stimulating the civic spirit is by showing good results of this kind.

NEWS ITEMS

ARRESTS FOR SEIZURE OF GURDWARAS

LAHORE, APR 14
Statements have been made that in the recent arrests in connection with the occupation of gurdwaras the Government officers had unfairly conducted the arrests as though they were for dacoity in order to prevent the accused from obtaining bail. Of the nine cases of this character which are under trial at Lahore six are cases in which dacoity is the charge, and in four of these the offence charged is properly classed as dacoity as it is alleged that moveable property was carried off. In two other cases where no such property was removed the appropriateness of the charge of dacoity, though arguable, is open to possible doubt and the prosecution has been instructed not to press the charge of dacoity before the courts.

LEPER PROBLEM IN INDIA

The Rev. Frank Oldrieve, Secretary of the Mission to the Lepers of India, arrived in London yesterday, after a seventy thousand miles' tour of Indian leper stations. He paid a tribute to the great help which was afforded to the mission by the provincial Government and Lady Chelmsford. Mr. Oldrieve declared that there were at the present time two hundred thousand lepers in India, but drew attention to the remarkable advance in the medical side of the leper problem. He made special references to the magnificent work of Miss Mary Reed, missionary at Chandag, a remote spot in the Himalayas, and described her as one of the loneliest and yet noblest of white women in the world.

ARMY HEADQUARTERS' MOVE TO HILLS

An Army instruction issued today details the revised orders of the Government regarding the move of headquarters of commands to the hills during the hot weather. The headquarters, Northern Command, may go to Murree at the discretion of the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief. The Eastern Command, similarly, may go to Nainital, but in both cases as this is the consequence of decades of devaluation of speech, denigration of the bravest in the nation and a low regard for the truth. In the meantime, the bodies keep piling up, the "unknown" gunmen appearing again and again to kill or kidnap those who have the courage to tell the truth and to believe in a principle.

BEHAR GOVERNMENT'S EXCISE POLICY

In view of criticisms that have been appearing in several papers against the Excise Department of the Behar and Orissa Government, the representative of the Associated Press of India interviewed the Hon. Khan Bahadur Fakhuriddin, Minister in charge of the Department, to ascertain the real facts. The policy of the Government, the Minister said, would be to encourage temperance and to discourage the consumption of drink. For that purpose he was inclined to reduce the number of shops, raise the duty and increase retail market prices. As a matter of fact before the speeches referred to were delivered instances of such acts of violence and apprehension of further acts of violence had already been received by the Government, not only from officials but from private individuals also.

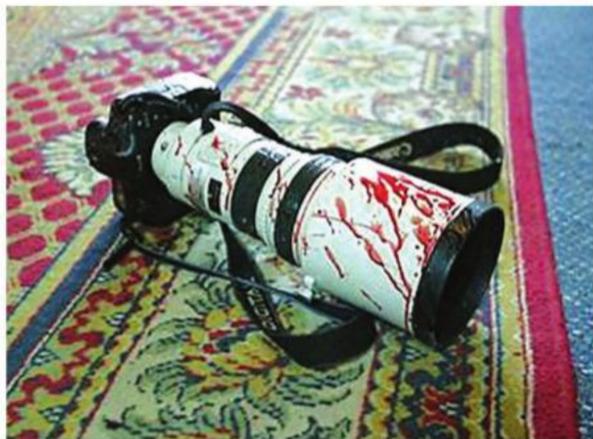
Travails of Pakistan's scribes

RAFIA ZAKARIA

Being a journalist in Pakistan is a dangerous proposition. A noose is put around your neck when you begin and it is tightened gradually as journalists you know are 'disappeared' or harassed or murdered outright. Many of those who manage to stay afloat are targets. The tiniest act of rebellion or upsetting someone powerful can constitute a real threat for the journalists of the country.

Ajay Laalwani, who worked for a newspaper, was in a barbershop in Sukkur on the evening of March 18. Suddenly two motorcycles and a car with four passengers drove up. They began to spray Laalwani with bullets and then sped away. Laalwani was taken to hospital but he did not survive the brutal attack. Ashiq Jatoi, the editor of the newspaper, said he believes that Laalwani's writing and reporting could have motivated the killing. Once again, whether this was actually true will remain mired in mystery. Past tensions between the reporter and law enforcement were mentioned and the fear that investigations might not be carried out the way they should was expressed.

In the days before the incident, Laalwani had received threats and was being harassed. Those sharing the news on social media attributed the killing to well-known "unknown culprits". In an effort to show that the case was being taken seriously and investigated, the police announced



that a special team had been created to investigate the killing. This in itself is ironic because prior to Laalwani's killing, the police had been harassing journalists, threatening them with consequences. On March 15, the police had arrested a number of journalists and political activists and registered cases against them under the Anti-Terrorism Act while they were protesting the killing of a Sindh University student named Irfan Jatoi in an alleged 'police encounter'.

Of course, it seems fair to say that this case, along with so many others in which journalists have been killed, will not be solved. There are so many

cases that require answers. One of them is the killing of Qais Javed who worked for the newspaper Ehadnama. He had also started his own web channel. He was shot dead in D.I. Khan in December 2020. But like so many others, he is just a number. One fine day, "unknown gunmen" appeared, sprayed him with bullets and absconded without being caught. Despite the passage of three months since the killing, there is no sign of the case being solved.

The latest death is of a young man named Waseem Alam who was shot dead in Karak when he was returning home on his motorcycle on

Saturday.

Alam was taken to the hospital where he was pronounced dead on arrival. An FIR has been registered. In Alam's case, family enmity has been cited as a motive. Police strongly suspect the involvement of Alam's father in the deed. His family reportedly said that Alam had not conveyed to them that he had received threats. But unless such cases are pursued and investigated and the murderer convicted in a court of law, one will never know the truth. And journalists like him will continue to become yet another statistic.

One can go on and on enumerating the killing and intimidation of Pakistani journalists. One can go on and on about how the cases are never solved. All of it is pointless for the simple reason that everyone knows that those who do not toe the line or are outspoken are targeted and made an example of.

This then is the primitive state of public discourse in Pakistan. Instead of tolerating differing points of view, instead of creating forums where divergent views can be expressed and discussed and a culture of tolerance fostered, the voices of those who disagree are muffled in various ways by various actors, state or non-state. This is not very different from what primitive man faced when he did not agree with his tribe. He would be made an example of to warn the rest of the clan.

Those tribes that did this accrued a survival disadvantage. While unity, whether it is tribal or national is important, survival requires the existence of divergent ideas. Killing or

intimidating journalists in this sense does not simply wreak havoc on the present, it condemns the possibility of the future. Evolution after all is based on adaptability and the existence of diversity of thought and it is impossible without the truth tellers that present the reality of the situation. Without them, only one version of the truth thrives and difference of opinion is exterminated.

The people in this environment never develop the skills to tolerate words or ideas that are different. Moreover, they risk being duped, as there is no guarantee that the version of truth that they have been believing and reading is not actually what was happening in the country.

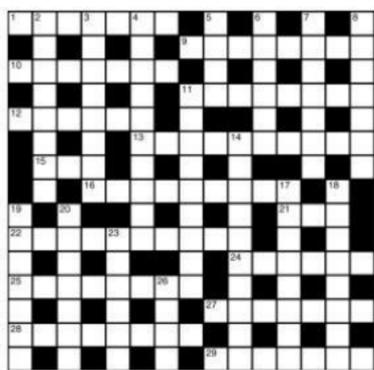
Pakistan's legacy of authoritarianism means that no one pays much attention to the growing roster of threats to journalists. With everyone eking out a marginal and precarious existence, few have sympathy to spare for the brave men and women who die or are picked up or face extreme threats because they were not willing to give up on a principle.

To those who target journalists, principles such as the belief in the freedom of speech is an indulgence. An attitude such as this is the consequence of decades of devaluation of speech, denigration of the bravest in the nation and a low regard for the truth. In the meantime, the bodies keep piling up, the "unknown" gunmen appearing again and again to kill or kidnap those who have the courage to tell the truth and to believe in a principle.

Dawn/ANN.

CROSSWORD

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YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



ACROSS

- Let's not have bird shivering — it's uncivilised (7)
- Brilliant band showing class in Sinatra number (5,3)
- Mr Bean remake involves good film director (7)
- Antiseptics pioneer takes in northeast one hears (8)
- Anglican thinker 'covering viewers' angles (6)
- Barrel-maker had succeeded in works without confrontation (10)
- Port stores uranium in ramshackle holding area (3,9)
- Cantor was behind this fixed idea (3,6)
- Principles not constant in lyric poem (3)

- Gives gears thrashing — like some white van drivers? (10)
- Mental activity is pre-empted by votes against (6)
- Bird and horse knackered by rodent (8)
- Couple crossing river that is in grassland (7)
- Not awfully keen about news boss being sharp (2,3,3)
- Shows rock debris navvies cleared out (7)

DOWN

- Beauty spot — at city limits? (3,5)
- Discussion of great intellectuals becomes more stringent (8)
- Kills time: then prescribes first time must be forgotten (10)
- In Herculean I'm inside sewer, doomed (4)
- Curry was one using fish and rice for starter (6)
- Fragranced candle supplier upset wag worth plenty (7,7)
- Sort of gas enshrouding Belgian battlefield tree (7)
- See 15 Across
- Self-interested Pickles accepting money after game? (10)
- Balboa's greeting to Abraham in Californian park? (8)
- Peak in clear — one near borders (8)
- See 7
- It takes a crowd gathered outside to cause trouble (7)
- Where driver starts, about to steer over missile (6)
- Northerner will need second home in country (4)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

