

INTERVIEW
Anatol Lieven

April 2012

SOUTHASIA

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The Regional Business & Economic Review

INSIDE:

PAKISTAN

Pipeline Politics

INDIA

A Heavy Blow

SRI LANKA

A Turning Point

NEIGHBOR

Ulterior Motives



Standing Taller Speaking Louder Fighting Harder

A new generation of South Asian women has emerged, determined more than ever to fight for change.



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Contents

16

Standing Taller Speaking Louder Fighting Harder

Will the strong women of South Asia manage to turn around their fate?



India

A Heavy Blow

How will the election results of Uttar Pradesh frame the new political game in India?

30

Bangladesh

A messiah for the poor

Dr. Muhammad Yunus may be Bangladesh's only hope for a poverty-free tomorrow

32

Sri Lanka

A Turning Point

Sri Lanka faced a tough audience at the recent UNHRC meeting

36

Nepal

Making Loose Ends Meet

Why does Nepal's constitution lie in limbo?

38

28 Pakistan

Gas Pipelines: The international bone of contention

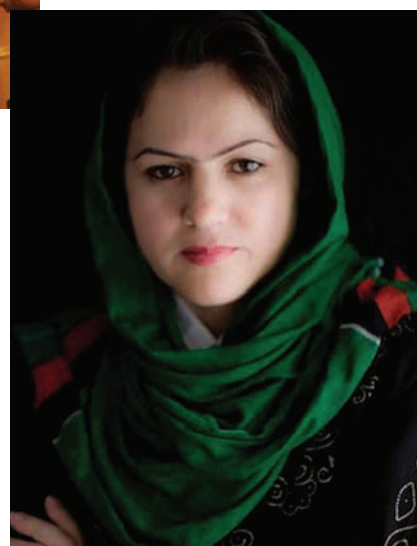


20

Interview

Fawzia Koofi

An exclusive interview with Afghanistan's first potential female President





45

International
 Could America's unfounded rhetoric on US military presence throughout South Asia prove true?



43

Neighbor
Ulterior Motives

REVOLUTIONS
Towards Revolution
 Is Pakistan ready for a revolution? **50**

INTERVIEW
Anatol Lieven
 Why is Pakistan not yet a failed state. **58**

48

The Water Threat

Could South Asia be oblivious to its greatest threat yet?



REGULAR FEATURES

Editor's Mail	8
On Record	10
Briefing	12

COVER STORY

The Winds of Change	16
Rise of the woman	18
Interview	20
Changing Priorities	23
An Uphill Battle	25

REGION

Pakistan	
Pipeline Politics	28

India

A Heavy Blow	30
--------------	----

Bangladesh

A Messiah for the Poor	32
------------------------	----

Afghanistan

Preparing for Survival	34
------------------------	----

Sri Lanka

A Turning Point	36
-----------------	----

Nepal

Making Loose Ends Meet	38
------------------------	----

Maldives

Cornered Democracy	40
--------------------	----

NEIGHBOR

Iran

Ulterior Motives	43
------------------	----

INTERNATIONAL

United States

Pushing Limits	45
----------------	----

FEATURE

Environment

The Water Threat	48
------------------	----

Revolutions

Towards Revolution	50
--------------------	----

Labor

Street Vendors	52
----------------	----

Tribal Cultures

Mystic Tribes	54
---------------	----

BOOK REVIEWS

A Different Narrative	56
-----------------------	----

Interview	58
-----------	----

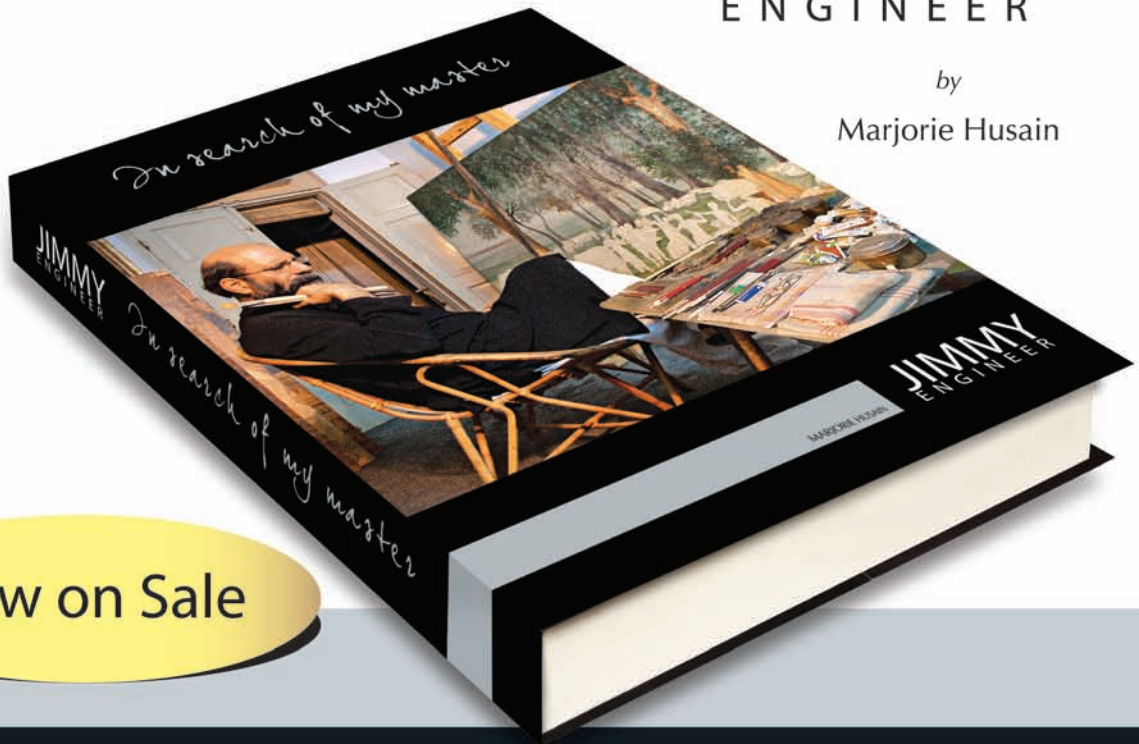
THE LAST STOP

Is this What We Call Democracy?	60
---------------------------------	----

In search of my master

JIMMY
ENGINEER

by
Marjorie Husain



Now on Sale

Ambassador Akbar Ahmed, Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies, American University in Washington, D.C. talked of the stunning calligraphic artwork that hangs above his desk, declaring:

"I am honoured to call Jimmy my friend and spiritual brother."

Hameed Zaman stated:

"Javid Nama for Jimmy is a conceptual nucleus around which the poetic metaphors flower."

Susan Saleem wrote in Khaleej Times:

"His imagination is nature. His drive is his country Pakistan. And his passion is to change the perception people abroad have of his country."

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The Killing Peaks

Everything is so mind-boggling about the Siachen War. It is the world's highest battlefield, where a war has raged between India and Pakistan since 1984 in extreme weather conditions. The conflict has been aptly described as a 'war above the clouds,' that has been fought between two nuclear-armed nations for the past 28 years though it still does not make many international headlines. The two contenders battle it out silently for the ice-covered territory away from public glare, except at times like the present when some 135 Pakistani soldiers have been buried in the deep snow following a dreadful avalanche.

Basically, it is typical Indian intransigence over its occupation of the Siachen Glacier, the world's longest glacier outside the Polar regions, that has forced Pakistan to defend its territorial integrity. Rightly described as the most pointless of all wars, it is a conflict where 4,000 soldiers have lost their lives for each side ever since hostilities started. Though the Siachen Glacier was never thought to have strategic significance for India or Pakistan but in April 1984, an Indian Regiment and the Indian Air Force captured the Salto Ridge in what was considered to be no man's land and therefore left unguarded. This act of unprovoked aggression on part of India was actually a fallout of the unresolved Kashmir dispute as the Siachen issue is said to have arisen over the interpretation of the precise location of the line of control in northern Kashmir.

Since the Siachen Glacier is a part of Baltistan, which is located in Pakistan's Northern Areas, the Pakistan army took rapid action to quell the Indian move, particularly since Indian occupation of the glacier also threatened the strategic Karakoram Highway. Ever since Indian forces have made ingress into the territory, Pakistan has taken all possible measures, though at a very high cost of men and materials, to stop India from making further forays in the region. It is quite inexplicable though that in these times when there is an universal effort to reduce and eliminate flashpoints of conflict around the globe, Pakistani and Indian armies still choose to stand vigil against each other in a very hostile environment comprising some of the world's highest peaks and large glacial expanses, altitudes of around 6,000m and temperatures that fall below 50°C in winters, plus unremitting wind chill, harsh blizzards and avalanches like the one that has hit the Pakistan side now. In these conditions, traditional measures for security and information cannot be carried out as men and equipment cannot move about freely and traditional warfare practices are rendered useless because such conditions are encountered nowhere else in the world.

There have been serious efforts from both sides to find a solution to the Siachen dispute and many diplomatic moves have been made to disengage the two forces. However, while India refuses to lose its grip over the territory it captured in 1984, Pakistan maintains that Siachen has always been its part and India should vacate the area. The standoff continues while precious lives continue to be lost in this non-war.



Syed Jawaid Iqbal

Never Forget

Your cover story on Pakistan-Bangladesh relations was interesting and very accurate. It was good to see an author detail the grievances that occurred against East Pakistanis and point out the various differences that had doomed a combined East and West Pakistan separated by miles and miles, from the very beginning. The two sides were completely different in terms of dress, customs, cuisine and, most importantly, language. Given the differential treatment of both wings, a break up was inevitable. Both wings



distanced themselves from each other and India exploited the situation. It is unfortunate that due to the hostility, brutal treatment and unparalleled violence, many in Bangladesh continue to live with the scars of 1971. Most still feel betrayed and have lost all trust in the government of Pakistan, which continues to isolate them. Many refugees rot in camps and live in no man's land, with no place to go. As was mentioned in an article, both Pakistan and Bangladesh can benefit immensely if they choose to cooperate in trade and investment. However, for this step to take place, the first step of admittance and rehabilitation must occur. An official apology is necessary for both sides

to move forward. Only then, will reconciliation be possible.

Noor-ul-Hasan
Dhaka, Bangladesh

2. I thoroughly enjoyed reading your interview with Yasmin Saikia. Her book, 'Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh', released by Oxford University Press, is enlightening, engaging and highly informative. The interview in SouthAsia helped to provide background information for Saikia's book and it was interesting to see someone exploring the issue of women and their subsequent treatment. Reading through her different experiences and what motivated her to write the book, it was eye opening to see someone dissect the Pak-Bangladesh animosity from a third perspective and analyze the issue neutrally. Whereas we easily get lost in the emotional attachment to the subject, Saikia interviewed hundreds of women who had suffered unmentionable crimes during the war and used those firsthand experiences to understand the 1971 conflict. As she mentions in the interview, the blame cannot be assigned easily to any particular group but is rather a collective burden borne by numerous actors in the conflict. I was happy to read that she had interviewed Bangladeshi women, Pakistani military officers and members of the Mukti Bahini, thus presenting a wholesome and varied picture to her readers. It is difficult to find many books on the 1971 war and the issue of rape that do not further a certain stance. Yasmin Saikia's book stands apart and allows you to make up your own mind. Thank you for featuring her interview!

Mumtaz Bashir
Chittagong, Bangladesh

Big Mistake

The French decision to withdraw its troops ahead of the schedule present-



ed by NATO can have severe impact on the organization. With the U.S desperately trying to achieve a settlement with the Taliban and NATO forces struggling to train the Afghan National Army, in the hope of a smooth transition, the French decision is bound to create some unnecessary hurdles. A key European military power, France has considerable influence over other European allies currently invested in the Afghan war. It is likely that the Taliban will re-emerge following NATO withdrawal, currently scheduled for 2014. With elections around the corner, the French decision, by and large, is a result of domestic politics. President Sarkozy faces heated opposition in a decision to remain entangled in a war that is increasingly unpopular. In a bid to garner more support, it is no surprise then that like every other politician, he is making a decision for power grabbing rather than the larger interest of the global community. Unfortunately, what many international players in Afghanistan do not understand is that if they do not make an investment right now and are only concerned about leaving the battlefield early, the problem will re-emerge and will return stronger and more lethal. While France has already made its stance clear, it is up to the remaining NATO allies to carry forward as per schedule and resist any further changes in withdrawal strategy. Any more hiccups, will only hamper the peace process and divert the attention of the brave agencies working on ground.

Fahim Khizdari
Kabul, Afghanistan

Soft Image

The year 2012 might be Pakistan's breakthrough year. Having already started with a bang, the country is certainly on the road to renovating its image abroad. Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy's coveted Oscar win has woken up the country and has provoked the world to ask itself, "Were we wrong about Pakistan?" A modern, independent and patriotic Sharmeen has presented a different, albeit not new, face of Pakistan. Furthermore, the Karachi Literature Festival brought together both national and international writers and was a stupendous success, showing the world that Pakistan was indeed, not a failed state. Today, a large number of Pakistani designers, artists, musicians and sculptors are representing Pakistan at global fashion shows, collaborating with international partners or attending award ceremonies on behalf of their country. It is heartening to see the world finally taking notice. It is admirable that the country is able to host such talent and have it serve as its ambassadors. With a reputation increasingly at stake and with the world perceiving Pakistan as a terrorist breeding ground, promoting Pakistan's soft image has never been more urgent. It is fortunate then, that the country has a new and patriotic generation desperate to change the global perception.

Maha Saleem
Lahore, Pakistan

Much More To Do

Myanmar may be slowly opening up to the outside world but much more remains to be done before the country can comfortably stand on its own feet. While the government has promised political and economic reforms and as pro-democracy Nobel laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi gears up to contest elections, the mood in Myanmar overall is jubilant. However, the government has hardly followed up on its promises. Myanmar will remain crippled till U.S. and European sanctions are not removed. In such a scenario, as the country tries to break free from a sole alliance with China, economic reforms must be the key focus. For a country under military rule since 1962, political reforms are also imperative. Though Myanmar has seen heightened U.S. interest and senior level visits, including that of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the U.S. has not shown any interest in removing the sanctions. Some 280 political actors still remain imprisoned and many on the streets of Myanmar have yet to see economic developments. The current government must follow up on its promises. Armed with a desire to engage with the international community and currently under the limelight, Myanmar can use this opportunity to usher in new measures and transform a controlled society into a vibrant economy.

Mark Oldfield
New York, USA

The Winds of Change

Violence against women has been a uniform practice throughout Afghanistan. While it is true that the situation of women has drastically improved after the arrival of U.S. forces in 2001, it remains contained and focused. Women today have entered the workforce, have chosen to serve in the military and are voting in the next election. Interestingly, for the first time

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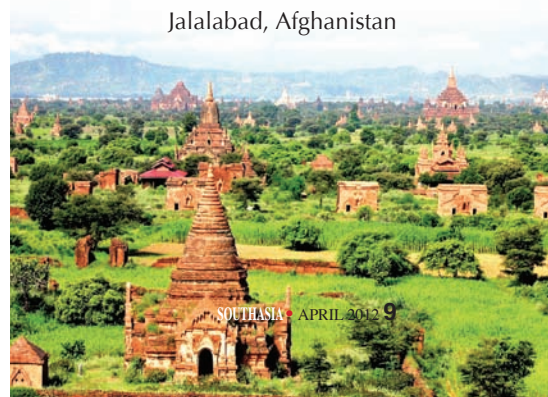
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a female MP, Fawzia Koofi, may have the chance of becoming Afghanistan's first female President. While numerous national and international organizations continue to focus on alleviating the situation of Afghan women, it must be remembered that domestic violence remains rampant and is difficult to target. Most crimes remain under reported and organizations find it difficult to change a mindset. In most cases, the entire family is involved and very often, teen brides set themselves alight to escape their brutal treatment. Much more remains to be done in Afghanistan and this can only come with a coherent social policy that targets education and social awareness. It is very challenging to change a mindset and the government's desperation to reach an agreement with the Taliban rings alarm bells for the treatment of women in the future. International human rights agencies must remain active in the country, even after NATO troops withdraw in 2014, to ensure that violence and repression does not return to Afghanistan and the lives of its women.

Lori Williams
Jalalabad, Afghanistan





"We must analyze why peace processes in South Asia have so little success,"

Shivshankar Menon
National Security Adviser to the Prime Minister of India



"It wasn't a coup. It has been portrayed in the Western media as a coup d'etat. But the president resigned voluntarily."

Mohamed Waheed
Hasan President of Maldives



"[Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline project] would be particularly damaging to Pakistan because their economy is already quite shaky. The additional pressure that the United States would be compelled to apply would further undermine their economic status."

Hillary Clinton
U.S. Secretary of State



"If Professor Yunus becomes the World Bank president, he could spread micro-credit as a poverty alleviation tool across the globe."

Sheikh Hasina
Prime Minister of Bangladesh



"The clerics' council of Afghanistan did not put any limitations on women...It is the Shariah law of all Muslims and all Afghans."

Hamid Karzai
President of Afghanistan



"Strengthened by the basic structures in place for a robust economic partnership, Singapore is in a unique position to harness the many opportunities for investment presented in my country."

Mahinda Rajapakse
President of Sri Lanka



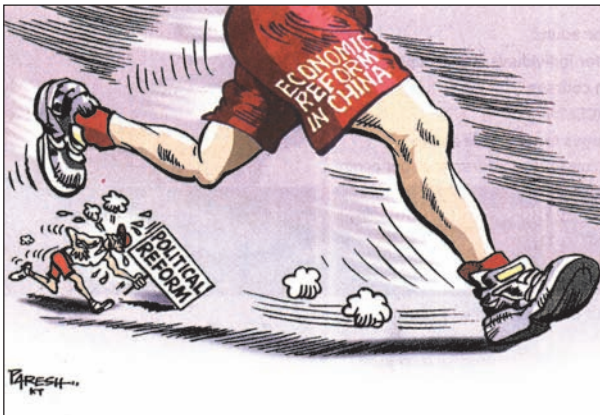
"If we are looking for any strategic depth it cannot be achieved militarily or come through a proxy war. The only way to do is through building trust with the Afghan state."

Hina Rabbani Khar
Foreign Minister of Pakistan



"Efforts are on to develop a new model of participatory democracy in Nepal."

Baburam Bhattarai
Prime Minister of Nepal



Delivering Worldwide



PAKISTAN

In Search of Light

Energy-starved Pakistan saw the light on its first on-grid solar power station, capable of producing 178.9 kilowatts. Recently launched in Islamabad and funded with a grant of \$5.4 million from the Japan International Cooperation Agency, this agreement will prove beneficial in addressing Pakistan's energy woes. The agreement was signed between Sibtain Fazal Halim, Secretary, Economic Affairs division of Pakistan and Chihiro Atsumi, Ambassador of Japan. The head of the Japan International Cooperation Agency also witnessed the signing ceremony.

According to the deal, two on-grid solar power generation systems (1000



KW each) will be set up in Pakistan. The first project will be located on at the roof of the Planning Commission building and the other will be located at the Pakistan Engineering Council.

This project will be directly linked

to the national grid to foster clean energy utilization and emission reduction. The system is expected to reduce gas emission by replacing a large part of the electric power generated by fossil fuel and will contribute to the climate change policy. The project is the first of its kind in Pakistan and will greatly help in overcoming the energy shortage, providing a comparatively easier way of generating energy with lesser investment.

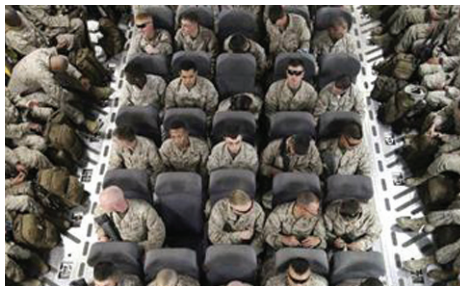
Pakistan has expressed hope that the launch of this project and the awareness created through the media can lead to the solution of its pressing energy crisis. The proposed system is not only economically viable but will also lead to income generation. **S**

AFGHANISTAN

Demanding Specifics

Afghanistan has demanded that the U.S. clearly spell out what kind of presence it expects to leave behind when most combat forces withdraw in 2014. Afghanistan has asked for post-2014 military specifics regarding the number of U.S. military bases, U.S. troops and the nature of their mission. Apart from U.S. military presence, the Afghan government has also asked for a detailed explanation of what its security forces will receive from American troops.

Russia, China and Pakistan are wary of an indefinite U.S. military presence in the country, even after troop withdrawal. Iran too has strongly opposed



the idea. Strong criticism from neighboring countries and an uncertain military presence has posed numerous problems for a Strategic Partnership Deal on long-term cooperation that Afghanistan hopes to sign with the U.S. American forces are, however, adamant to leave

behind a presence large enough to prevent members of the Al-Qaeda from finding safe havens again.

This demand comes in the wake of new sensitivities revolving recent incidents, such as U.S. Marines urinating on Taliban corpses, the accidental burning of copies of the Quran at the Bagram airbase and the unexplained shooting of 16 people in a village in Kandahar.

Both sides are holding separate talks to discuss the issue and negotiations are taking place on a frequent basis. The Strategic Partnership Deal is expected to be signed in May during a NATO summit in Chicago. **S**

Surviving Print

In an era of globalization when the world is connecting and interacting at lightening speed, most print media companies in the U.S, UK and other English-speaking countries are closing down and giving way to the all-permeating digital media. However, at a recent conference at the Indian International Center, media experts agreed that India will instead witness a strong growth in newspaper production and circulation for the next fifteen years before it can even see a glimpse of the downturn that is changing the print landscape in the U.S and elsewhere.

The major reason is the rising literacy trend amongst the population and their ability to read both English and regional language newspapers. Furthermore, the concept of the re-use value of newspapers is also very important in a country like India marred by poverty and inequality. For many, newspapers do not simply bring news but also recycle and serve as wallpapers for the home or packaging for serving street food.



International speakers from Australia and the U.S urged India to develop a digital media presence and emulate channels like the BBC, CNN and Al-Jazeera to establish a “global Indian voice.” **S**

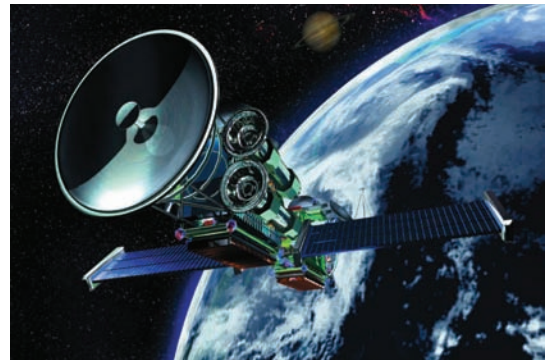
Rising Up

Staying true to its vision of a Digital Bangladesh, the state-run Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) recently signed a \$10 million consultancy deal with the American firm, Space Partnership International (SPI). According to the deal, Bangladesh will build and launch its first ever satellite into space by 2015 in a landmark move towards opening a new era in communication and broadcasting and creating new businesses. The satellite, named “Bangabandhu,” after a Bangladesh independence hero, is expected to exponentially improve the country’s economy.

Bangladesh currently pays \$11

million to foreign firms to provide private channels, telephone and radio services in the country. As a result of the contract, Bangladesh may earn close to \$50 million every year after the satellite is launched and \$3 billion in the next 15 years.

Apart from fostering media communication channels and improving telecom services in remote areas, the satellite will also facilitate telemedicine, emergency services and border security throughout the country. Meteorological data, including disaster warnings, will also be available via satellite. Such a state-of-the-art com-



munication technology will reinforce the vision of Digital Bangladesh and boost the country’s economic development.

On the political front, Telecommunications Minister, Rajiuddin Ahmed Raju, is in talks with concerned parties to try to launch the satellite in two years so that the current government can see it happen during its tenure, which ends in 2014. **S**

NEPAL

Integrating to Move Forward

After much negotiations and stalled discussions, the Nepalese government has finally agreed to integrate 6500 ex-Maoist combatants into the national army, thus inching closer to resolving the peace process and drafting a new constitution. Prime Minister Bhattarai announced the decision following a meeting of the Special Committee for Supervision, Integration and Rehabilitation of the ex-rebels.

The integration for former rebels was essential to the drafting of a new constitution. Following this announcement and keeping in line with the peace process, the Special Com-

mittee will hand over former People's Liberation Army (PLA) fighters, who have opted for integration, to the national army by mid-April. The deadline for drafting a new statute is May 27.

However, attendees at the meeting were unable to agree and finalize a plan on modality, the process and the standard norms for the integration. Disagreements prevented a finalization of plans on technical issues.

If approved, it is expected that the move will speed up the constitution draft, one that has remained in limbo



for far too long. Following reintegration of former rebels in the army, political parties will have no excuse to further delay it. **S**

SRI LANKA

Looking Elsewhere

As the June 28 deadline for U.S imposed sanctions on Iran to take effect approaches, Sri Lanka is looking towards Vietnam, Oman and other Gulf nations to import fuel. The country currently depends entirely on Iranian crude to survive and address its energy crisis. The situation could grow grave as U.S sanctions come into play in June and the European oil embargo, approved in January, takes effect in July. Sri Lanka's only refinery at Sapugaskanda currently processes 50,000 barrels of Iranian crude per day.

In efforts to look elsewhere, Sri Lanka has reached a memorandum of understanding with the Omani State Fuel Company with regard to obtaining fuel in the near future. A Sri Lankan del-

egation will be visiting the country to further enforce its commitment and desire for energy cooperation. Sri Lanka has also reached an agreement with Qatar to purchase refinery oil and refined fuel products for the Sapugaskanda Oil Refinery. In addition to this, the country is considering purchasing fuel from Saudi Arabia and Vietnam to address its energy woes.

Sri Lanka has already signed an agreement to purchase diesel from Vietnam. The two countries have signed 25 agreements of which 17 are for economic cooperation in trade, investment, tourism, oil and gas and



machinery. Sri Lanka's state-run Ceylon Petroleum Corporation has also struck a deal to import \$500 million worth of petroleum products from Vietnam over the next six months. Bilateral trade with Vietnam has risen to \$113 million as compared to \$93 million, a year earlier. **S**

Seeking Regional Support

Recently ousted President Mohamed Nasheed, has reached out to India and asked for assistance in pushing for early elections in the Maldives and restoring democracy in the archipelago of 1192 islands. The current Maldivian government has rejected all pleas for early elections, arguing that the current political atmosphere is not stable enough; a claim supported by the international community.

Nasheed and his supporters are, however, adamant to move forward and hold free and fair elections as soon as possible. He has accused the government, currently run under his

former vice-president, of conspiring with former dictator, Gayoom and staging a coup against him.

Nasheed is currently in the U.S to promote a documentary on climate change that showcases his efforts to bring international attention to an issue that his country battles everyday. Appearing on the mainstream media and having met with officials at the United Nations, Nasheed is determined to restore democracy in the Maldives. He will also be meeting with officials from the State Department and has publicly spoken on the importance of Indian involvement in



the current Maldivian political landscape. According to Nasheed, South Asia's strongest democracy, India can play a big role in restoring people's confidence in their decision to oust dictatorship in 2008. He will be meeting with numerous Indian political leaders next month, possibly including Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, and will be seeking their support for early elections. **S**

The UN Happiness Project

The United Nations has implemented Resolution 65/309, adopted unanimously by the General Assembly in July 2011, placing "happiness" on the global agenda. The Prime Minister of Bhutan, Jigmi Y. Thinley addressed a high level meeting on Happiness and Well-Being at the United Nations on April 2, 2012. The resolution passed with support from 68 member states and unanimously adopted by the UN, calls for a holistic approach to development, one that includes the concept of happiness. The conference titled "Happiness and Well-being: Defining a New Economic Paradigm," brought together hundreds of representatives of government, academia and other civic leaders to discuss the

issue. With on-going conflicts such as those in Darfur, Iran and Afghanistan, Bhutan's agenda did not receive the kind of attention it anticipated but the country hopes to convince the world to change global politics and economics and place happiness, rather than growth, at the center of the international economy.

It is befitting that a country, which has gained a reputation for introducing the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) should lead such an initiative. However, this particular move has also garnered massive opposition from those claiming that behind Bhutan's GNH lies severe discrimination and isolation of the Southern Bhutanese who face violence and suppres-



sion at the hands of the government everyday. Until the Bhutanese people of Nepalese origin are not guaranteed their social, economic, political, democratic and cultural rights, Bhutan will never be able to ensure a true sense of happiness or well being. **S**



The Winds of Change

Pakistani women are increasingly making an impact at the international level though it will take time for this to make a difference in the plight of women at home..

By Arsla Jawaid

According to a recent poll conducted by the Thomson Reuters Foundation, Pakistan is the third most dangerous country for women, preceded only by Afghanistan and the Congo. With domestic violence, dismal healthcare and brutal poverty serving as prime indicators, Pakistan's inclusion in the list is a no-brainer. The poll cited that around a 1000 women and girls were mur-

dered for violating their family's honor and close to 90 percent of Pakistani women suffer from domestic abuse, in some shape or form. However, despite the odds against them, women in Pakistan must also be included on the list of the most resilient and brave women in the world.

Innumerable statistics, countless polls and daily incidents point to scores of honor killings, acid attacks

and other forms of domestic violence that reflect the patriarchal, archaic laws still inherent in a country whose elite insist that it is indeed on the road to modernization.

Since its inception, Pakistan has boasted of its women starting with first lady, Fatima Jinnah and Rana Liaquat Ali Khan, both of whom worked diligently for women's rights and political reforms. Pakistan is also proud of its

first and till now, only, female Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, known internationally for her commitment to democracy and female emancipation. Even today, the PPP draws heavily on its reputation for being pro-women, though it has had little to show for it in recent times. Though important government portfolios such as the Speaker of the National Assembly and Pakistan's Ambassador to the US are currently women like Fehmida Mirza and Sherry Rehman, respectively, few concrete proposals and legislations have been passed to alleviate the plight of women. A landmark domestic violence bill, introduced in 2009 to protect women and children, is currently facing heated opposition in its passage through parliament from those who argue that it promotes western values and has been backed by western funding. Untrue on both counts, the bill lies in limbo, unable to attract even the pro-women support of the current government.

Though female oppression remains a serious issue hampering society, female participation has also increased with more women advocating for greater rights. Pakistan has witnessed defiance in the face of Mukhtaran Mai who chose to speak out against gang rape and today is working to educate every girl in her village. Raising awareness of acid attacks in Pakistan, Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy made her country proud when she won an Oscar for her short film, titled *Saving Face*. Vocal human rights lawyer, Asma Jahangir, continues to fight for women's rights and remains a strong critic of the Hudood Ordinance and blasphemy laws in Pakistan. The country has also seen women such as Bilquis Edhi, Abida Parveen, Noor Jehan, Ayesha Jalal, Kamila Shamsie and Bunto Kazmi, amongst numerous others, representing their country at the international level in the fields of fashion, media, academics, literature and philanthropy. Major General Sha-

hida Malik who became the country's first two-star general and Hina Tahir, the first female fighter pilot of the Pakistan Air Force, have showed young girls that the military could also serve as a viable, competitive and fulfilling option for Pakistani women.

With human rights records rapidly deteriorating, it is no surprise then that educated young women, comprising largely of the elite, are returning to Pakistan with an interest in social policy, triggering a massive growth in local NGOs, philanthropy institutes and policy centers. A blatant move away from the cliché careers of investment banking and medicine, many female members of the youth can be seen exploring and furthering careers in NGOs, global health firms, journalism or policy institutes, with a focus on women. An overwhelming majority is concerned and involved with the plight of women and is determined to bring a change.

Despite the international presence of Pakistani women and the subsequent movement to trigger a change in favor of women's rights, Pakistan remains embroiled in gender segregation. Women remain socially suppressed, economically degraded and politically absent. Apart from certain exceptions reflective of a class divided society, women at large remain subdued in a male-dominated environment where speaking up for their rights is an anomaly. While the government has done little to address the social and economic concerns of women, numerous programs introduced and conducted by the private sector and concerned citizens are in place to enforce education initiatives and provide safe havens to escape from domestic violence. Though the movement remains slow, there is hope. More and more women each day are not looking for options and avenues that provide a better and safer life. They are instead, betting on themselves.

While certain remarkable women

may be at the forefront, the average Pakistani woman symbolizes a form of resilience just by surviving. With all odds pitted against her, these women have shown time and again that they are as strong and determined as their male counterparts. Be it in a rural or urban setting, Pakistan today is witnessing an important change. The real heroes of this gender divided country are the illiterate women who risk sexual harassment everyday as they step into a man's world or work diligently just so they can send their children to school, children who become their only hope and give them the will to carry on.

Much more needs to be done in a country like Pakistan where talent is abundant but so are the problems. There is no doubt that the women of Pakistan are brave and resilient, ready to face any obstacle set before them. However, it is imperative that society changes from within. Despite heightened female participation in various sectors of the social economy, Pakistan today remains under-represented by its women, who ironically also remain the country's prime victims. It is unfortunate that despite the international attention accorded to exceptional women and the insurmountable work carried out by NGOs, women remain marginalized and suppressed.

Pakistan is a land that constitutes brave women, be they old or young, known or unknown or urban or rural. With global attention accorded to women's rights and issues, there is hope that the next generation of Pakistani women will bring a change in a country that is still very young. The winds of change are very much in the air. It only remains to be seen how strongly they will blow. ■

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Rise of the woman

Over the years, India has boasted of female empowerment, participation and presence throughout and beyond the country. But has this really led to gender equality at large?

By Semu Bhatt

Women comprise nearly half of India's population but a considerable chunk is still socially suppressed, economically exploited and politically passive. According to a Thomas Reuters TrustLaw Women survey of 2011, India is the fourth most dangerous place in the world for women due to the high number of infanticide, foeticide and human trafficking prevalent in the country. Gender violence, domestic abuse, dowry deaths, high female illiteracy, malnutrition, maternal mortality rates and an overall sense of being secondary to men, make for a macabre background. A matter of shame for a country that boasted of a female governor back in 1947, a female chief minister in 1963 and a female prime minister in 1966.

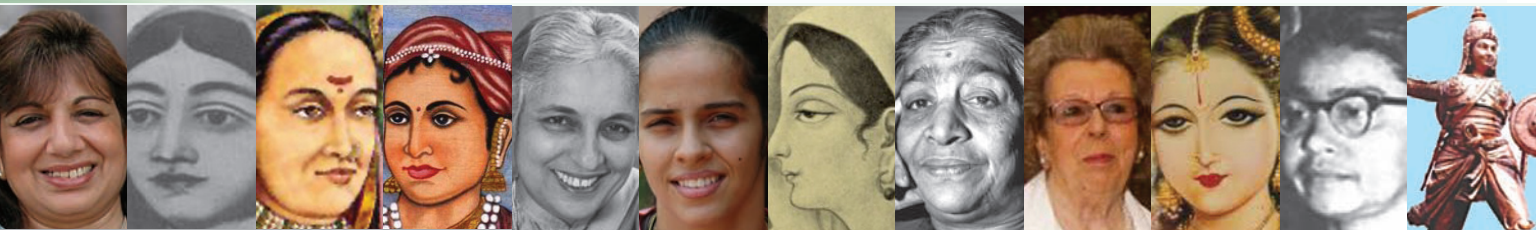
At the same time, this is one of the best moments in India where women are claiming political, social and professional space. The society is rapidly transforming in terms of accepting women as professionals, thinkers and

bread winners. Currently, one-tenth of the Loksabha members are women, with 17 of them under 40 years of age. The President, Loksabha Speaker and the Leader of the Opposition Party are also women; so are the Chief Ministers of three states. The most powerful Indian is a woman - Sonia Gandhi, chief of the ruling Congress party. In recent times, India has produced some exceptional businesswomen like Kiran Mazmudar Shaw, Simone Tata, Chanda Kochar and Indira Nooyi. It also has the world's largest pool of professionally qualified women.

No other scripture of the world has given more primacy to women as the Hindu Vedas, which hailed women as goddesses (Nari tu Narayani) and emphasised that gods bless those homes where women are honored (Yatra Naaryasthu poojyanthe, ramanethe thatra devathaha). Learning, power and wealth are all feminine principles. Land, nation, nature and the Universe are worshipped as the mother. The Hindu Gods trinity of

Brahma (creator), Vishnu (preserver) and Shiva (destroyer) are incomplete without the respective complementing energies of Goddesses Saraswati (learning and creativity), Lakshmi (wealth) and Shakti (power). The Rig Veda explains that the wife and husband, being the equal halves of one substance, are equal in every respect – a concept symbolised by the Ardhanarishwara, the half man-half woman Shiva-Shakti fusion in one body.

While the religious philosophy stayed, the social philosophy deteriorated with the passage of time, the strengthening of patriarchal and caste systems, and foreign invasions. Women were stereotyped into the mother-wife-daughter role and were confined to homes under male protection. Various repressive customs like veil, dowry, female infanticide, apathy to female education, severe lifestyle for widows, wife beating, witch killing, sati (immolation of a woman on her husband's funeral pyre), etc. took root in the Indian society.



In spite of these, women in the medieval and early modern period distinguished themselves in the fields of politics, literature and religion. Razia Sultan became the only female monarch to have ruled Delhi; Rani Durgavati and Chand Bibi battled the mighty Mughal forces to defend their respective territories; Jijabai reinforced the importance of a mother in a child's life by moulding Maharaja Shivaji. Writings of saint-poetesses like Akka Mahadevi, Meerabai, Lalleshvari, Rami Janabai, Andal and others are popular to this day. In their own ways, they tried to restore women's honor in the society.

Rani Abbakka Chowta of Ullal became one of the earliest Indians to fight the colonial powers as she thwarted several Portuguese attempts to capture her territory in the latter half of the 16th century. The 18th century Queen Ahalyabai Holkar of Malwa, considered the best female sovereign ever, ruled for 30 years providing an excellent example of good governance. Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi, who led her soldiers to war against the British, inspired thousands of Indians to rise against foreign rule.

The 19th century witnessed the opening of the first girls' school and women's university in India, the introduction of women into Congress and the first female graduates including a widow graduate. Interestingly, women themselves set off most of these women-centric initiatives. Aruna Asaf Ali, Captain Laxmi, Kasturba, Kamala Nehru and many others dedicated their lives to the cause of freedom. Women

not only stood shoulder to shoulder with their menfolk but also took on the responsibilities of their families so that the male members were free to pursue the freedom struggle.

Indian history shows that while the nation's socio-political scene is open to accept and respect women in powerful positions, it is also capable of subjugating them. This was the dichotomy that the women of independent India were forced to live with. The social reforms of the previous century, new educational opportunities and equal rights under the Constitution, made women question the rules laid down by the society.

Freedom fighters Sarojini Naidu, Vijaylakshmi Pandit and Sucheta Kriplani were the torchbearers for women in Indian politics. Indira Gandhi, the first female PM of India, was the country's most powerful politician ever. But it was her son Rajiv, who advocated for 33 percent reservation for women in local councils. In recent times, the alliance politics has raised the stocks of regional leaders like Mayawati, Jayalalitha and Mamata Banerjee. Unfortunately, none of these female political leaders have forcefully propagated the cause of women emancipation and empowerment.

Thus, the rise of women in politics has not changed fortunes of its female population or resulted in a new era of gender equality. But they, along with successful women from other fields, have instilled hope and confidence in millions of women to strive for better lives and goals. Village councils and municipalities have seen an

active women participation and political empowerment due to the reservation. Although there are cases of male relatives using women as their proxies, women are usually believed to take their responsibility in the local councils seriously. Impressive lists of female CEOs and CFOs have made the glass ceiling look less daunting to many female entrants. With every title Saina Nehwal wins, the motivation of sportswomen increases manifold.

Today, Indian women have made phenomenal progress in politics, arts and entertainment, sports, literature, science and business. Some of them feature in the lists of the world's most powerful and richest people. With rise in education and exposure, increased political participation and equal opportunities in a globalised world, Indian women will be keen to reclaim their deserving place in society and share in the decision-making process at all levels. The next decade is sure to witness a surge of women in political, social and economic spheres. But what is critical is for them to have the understanding to differentiate participation from empowerment and the willingness to reach out to those oppressed women who remain entrapped in the clutches of that other India. ■

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“Americans cannot put a mullah or a taalib on one side of the table and an American on the other side without including women and the people of Afghanistan.”

Arsla Jawaid talks to Fawzia Koofi, the woman who could be Afghanistan's first female president, in this exclusive interview.

A democracy activist, Fawzia Koofi is Afghanistan's first female deputy speaker of the Parliament. Author of the recent book, "The Favored Daughter" Koofi is running for presidency in a determined effort to bring change to Afghanistan.

Can you tell me a little bit about your background and why you decided to go into politics?

I was born in a political family. My father was a very outspoken Member of Parliament during King Shah's rule and was elected to the parliament four times. He was killed and later my four brothers were also killed. Growing up in a family that paid a high price for being in politics, I automatically chose to enter the field. More than that, the experiences, injustice and discrimination faced by Afghan women, during different governments and particularly during Taliban time, gave me the determination and reason to fight for change. That is why I decided to enter politics in 2005 when there was the

first ever parliament after 30 years of war and conflict.

Can you shed some light on the work you have done as the first female deputy speaker of the Afghan parliament and a twice elected Afghan MP?

Yes, this is my second term. When I first came in 2005, I was elected as the first ever female deputy speaker of the Afghan parliament. The challenges for a female politician all over the world are insurmountable. Being in a traditional country like Afghanistan where women were not seen in politics before, the challenges are even greater. You have to start changes from the very basic. My focus has been to further women's education, health and

job creation and introduce changes and reforms in the system. As a result, we are currently working on a law addressing violence against women. In many ways, we have made some good progress. At the end of the day, you have to pave the way for others.

It is obviously very difficult for a woman to enter politics in Afghanistan. Do you think the people of Afghanistan are ready for a female head of state?

I ran for parliament twice and in both terms I secured enough votes based on general voting. I think this in itself is very promising. I come from a rural area and to compete with men requires some strong will power. Last

time my challenge was to get the highest number of votes as a female candidate all over Afghanistan and I got it! That gave me the hope that if we really are determined and decisive to reach our goals then we can. The Afghan nation constitutes various progressive factions that are ready to change. They are the civilized section of the society, the women, the young generation, the kind of people who actually want to see changes in their lives but lack strong leaders in Afghanistan who will listen to them. Politicians have been leading the country through traditional means of politics and the silent majority never had the chance to raise its voice. They raised their voice in the last parliamentary elections and it showed. This is the sign of hope for me that if anybody has the determination then they can do it.

If you do come into power, what key issues will concern you and how will you make Afghanistan a stable and peaceful country?

First of all, the only face of Afghanistan is not war, terrorism and extremism. Afghanistan is a country with a very important geographical location, full of resources. My first priority is to change Afghanistan from a center of war to a country full of culture, tradition and natural resources. The second thing is to usher in justice, the rule of law, peace and certainly good governance. To dispel the international negative image of Afghanistan as a country that only produces war and terrorism, bringing in strong rule of law and good governance is essential. My priority is to bring justice in a way that people are regarded as human beings irrespective of region, ethnicity, religion or gender.

What is your regional foreign policy?

Afghanistan has a very important geographical location, which serves as our strength but also our weakness. Afghanistan needs to have a moderate foreign policy where it can live with its citizens but also with the rest of the world and that requires demonstrating moderate Islam to the Afghan people. Through this, we can frame our relationship with international partners.

Afghanistan doesn't have good experience of being in the hands of our neighboring countries, especially Pakistan, Iran and the Soviet Union. I think we need to continue to have a strong relationship with the western world. In the meantime, it is important to establish trust and confidence in our regional relationships and ensure that our neighbors understand that their security in Afghanistan is by no means at risk. I believe that our neighbors need to engage in the peace process. Peace alone will not come to Afghanistan through a sole relationship with the U.S. If we want to have a prosperous and stable Afghanistan, we need a regional settlement and solve the issues together.

There is a certain opinion amongst some policy experts that the U.S. is looking to establish a sphere of influence in the region. Afghanistan is just an excuse but Iran is the real target. What is your opinion on this?

Afghanistan has become a battlefield between the US-Iran relationship, Pakistan-India relationship and certainly of course, China. The Iran-American relationship is one of the prime reasons for insecurity in Afghanistan. The Pakistan-India relationship is the other reason. I think different countries are looking for their own strategic interest in the region. It is

important for Afghanistan to give this assurance to our neighbors that our strategic partner should be the entire world. The people of Afghanistan have suffered a lot. We are a country that has been so vulnerable economically, politically as well as in terms of security. Afghanistan needs strong partners to make sure it is not a security threat to the region. Any politician will have to give priority to their national interest before looking at the regional interest.

Since the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, do you think the situation of women has improved? Are they in a better place now?

One cannot give a black and white picture. There have been enormous changes since 2001 when the international community first arrived. The main achievement has been a certain level of liberation of women. We have been given a golden opportunity in terms of going back to school, going back to work and being involved in politics. Today, 27% of our MPs are women. I am so glad, it's a great achievement but there is still the problem of women who are living in the rural areas. The government has not been able to reduce the gap between women in the rural areas and urban areas. Women are still suffering from maternal mortality, lack of proper access to health services, education and above all poverty and justice. Women are subjected to injustice, having lived under a traditional justice system. There have been increased cases of domestic violence against women. There are challenges and there are problems but there has also been huge progress.

NATO troops are expected to with-

draw in 2014 and leave combat operations primarily to the ANA. Is the ANA ready to assume full responsibility and what would you say to the departing U.S forces and policymakers?

It was only in 2008 that the international community started focusing on the police and the army in Afghanistan. Before that the motivation of our army and police forces was very low. That is changing now.

A few months ago, there was an attack on NATO headquarters. There was a suicide bomber and one of our Afghan police officers held him back and threw him into the river, to avoid civilian casualties. He killed himself by doing so and of course the suicide bomber died too. You see, that is the motivation of our police and army to stabilize this country and take responsibility of the security of its citizens. Having said that, however, I definitely don't think that Afghan forces at this stage are ready to face international terrorism. Make no mistake, we are facing international terrorism; this is not an Afghan war. It is a war with many dimensions and solely relying on Afghan forces will be a mistake. Afghanistan will deteriorate if the international community quickly washes its hands and leaves Afghanistan due to political or financial crises in their own countries. It will make Afghanistan even worse. We need to properly end this war.

An office has been set up in Qatar, the Taliban are being convinced to enter into dialogue with the Afghan government and international forces. What does this mean for Afghanistan?

It is very uncertain now. Everybody is confused about what is going to happen next. I think the current

process of peace talks needs to be more inclusive and transparent. The Americans cannot put a mullah or a taalib on one side of the table and an American on the other side without including women and people of Afghanistan. They need to be included in this process, otherwise it will not be a process, it will be a project and I think that democracy is a process. Peace will be brought to Afghanistan through a process of inclusiveness that includes the civil society and institutions. As I have said before, I strongly believe that there is also a need for regional cooperation and regional mobilization in the peace process.

You have been targeted twice by the Taliban. Can you recount the experience and are you not scared for yourself and your daughters?

It is the situation that we are all afraid of. There is a sense of uncertainty about the political and security future. My main concern or fear is that we will go back to a situation where I had to look at the whole world from a small window of my house during Taliban time. I don't want that for my daughters. I am also afraid of my own security because as the peace talks with Taliban gain momentum, it becomes more difficult for women rights and human rights activists to work freely. Of course it's a problem for me because I have been so outspoken against Taliban. Certainly, there are some Taliban who don't like me but I think we need to keep moving forward because many people have lost their lives in Afghanistan and we've paid a high price for keeping our country secure.

You are running for President and you have written your autobiography "Letters to my Daughters" and then

your memoir "The Favored Daughter." What do you want to tell the world about women in Afghanistan?

I have been travelling around the world and I often hear the sentence, 'poor Afghan woman.' By writing this book, I want to demonstrate to the world that Afghan women are not poor; they are very strong. Although they are poor, uneducated and victims of violence, they are patient, resilient and face their struggles bravely every day. After my father was killed, my mother took the responsibility of the whole family and the property. She was extraordinary because she was also uneducated. If the women of Afghanistan are provided with opportunities and receive a little bit of support and training in capacity building and education, they can become an important element for change in the society.

Secondly, I wanted to tell my daughters, the women of Afghanistan and, if I may, the women in the world, that this world is very small and we will all die but if we die for our values and struggle for a greater and positive change then there is no reason to be afraid and we should move forward. The message I want to give to my daughters is to stand up and struggle for change for not only yourselves but for others. I want to leave this behind as my legacy.

What is your vision for Afghanistan?

I want the men and women of Afghanistan to live in a country where they are respected because they are human beings, not because they are men or women or come from a certain ethnicity. I want to see a country where there is justice and equality for everybody; a country that inspires the rest of the world. ■

Changing Priorities

Bangladeshi women today are taking charge of their personal and professional lives. However, gender bias and violence continue to challenge their dreams of emancipation and empowerment.

By Tahera Sajid

South Asian politics are dominated by dynastic trends and the presence of women leaders at the helm of affairs. The former is an unfortunate reality but the latter should be a source of pride for developing nations that have traditionally struggled with

Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh, these women must be credited for their determination and persistence against the norms of their male-dominated cultures. Unfortunately however, that is not a testament to female empowerment because not only do most of

Bangladesh is a developing nation of 165 million with an adult literacy rate of about 55%. It has been ruled, almost exclusively, for the past two decades by Bangladesh's two Begums – the current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Awami League (AL) and



Reaching out to make a difference

gender issues and have failed to provide their women with basic human rights. Whether it is the assassinated former Prime Ministers Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan and Indira Gandhi of India, or the still vibrant Khaleda Zia and

these women leaders have a strong male connection as the primary reason for their rise to power but also the life of an average woman has remained largely unchanged under their rule.

opposition leader and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Sheikh Hasina is the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangladesh's independence hero and first prime minister murdered

in 1975. Khaleda Zia is the widow of former president Maj. Gen. Ziaur Rahman, assassinated in a failed coup attempt in 1981.

As Prime Ministers, the Begums have been known to run corrupt regimes and have faced numerous criminal charges. In 2007, the army tried to end their monopoly when it seized power by splitting their vote banks and attempted to create alternate forces. However, the Begums' parties proved resilient and Sheikh Hasina returned to power in December 2008 and promptly resumed business as usual by filing more corruption charges against her opponent.

It is safe to say that the last two decades have seen Bangladeshi women become more visible on the social and professional scene but the gains have fallen short of expectations, especially under successive female Prime Ministers. So while the Begums focus on each other, the majority of women fight their own battles at home and in the social sphere against harassment, assault, kidnapping, acid attacks and dowry disputes.

Amnesty International reported that in 2010, Bangladeshi police had received more than 3500 complaints of physical abuse from women over dowry disputes and in 2011, violence against women topped all crimes reported to the police between January and June. Interestingly, 1586 out of 7285 complaints were of rape. Due to patriarchal social attitudes, women in general, but especially from low socioeconomic backgrounds, lack access to resources for protection or legal redress. Domestic violence however, transcends class barriers and acid-throwing is a brutal favored punishment of spurned suitors or disgruntled husbands. There is also extensive trafficking of women to other countries

in Asia and Middle East, lured by job prospects but forced into prostitution.

The Daily Star quoted United Nations World Food Program (UNWFP) on International Women's Day 2012 asserting that much effort was still needed to improve the lives of women in Bangladesh. The report said that almost half of the female population in Bangladesh is married before turning 16, which results in higher pregnancy rates in adolescents and undernourished mothers then give birth to underweight babies. Many young girls are still denied schooling and face bleak futures. UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon urged the government, civil society and the private sector to work towards gender equality in Bangladesh, which has unfortunately not kept pace with strides in economic development.

Clearly, Bangladesh's economic gains are not fully transferred to its women though their contribution to the economy is substantial, especially to the garment industry, which is the source of 90% of Bangladesh's foreign exchange. Institutions like the Grameen Bank and BRAC have revolutionized the lives of many rural women by extending micro-credit and have contributed to their economic empowerment. Unfortunately, Grameen Bank founder and Nobel Laureate, Muhammad Yunus, has been faced accusations by Sheikh Hasina in what is seen as a political move.

Gender bias has also often surfaced through religious expression. In April 2011, CNN reported that when the government announced its Women Development Policy 2011 exploring the inheritance of property, radical Islamic parties protested that it was a violation of the Quran's injunctions about inheritance. Ironically, the opposition party, BNP of Khaleda Zia

was supporting the protest and undermining the cause of women's empowerment just to gain political mileage.

In July 2011, Human Rights Watch reiterated its concern for Bangladeshi women who are increasingly on the receiving end of religious fatwas issued by so-called scholars. These decrees have resulted in humiliating punishments resulting in deaths of young girls wrongly accused of adultery. The punishments include imposing fines, lashing, cutting hair or blackening faces, and ostracizing families. While many of these incidents go unreported, human rights groups claim that at least 300 such incidents have occurred in the last decade. In 2011, a particular case in the Shariatpur district highlighted the seriousness of the issue when the shalish, a traditional jury that addresses disputes, ordered 100 lashes to Hena Akhter for an alleged affair, though reports claim that she had been sexually abused. She collapsed during the punishment and later died. Thus, the government's failure to effectively address such incidences and implement legislation continues to result in severe harm to women under the watch of their female Prime Minister.

It should be a matter of pride for Bangladesh that in November 2010 it was elected to the board of UN Women but to do justice to this role Bangladesh's Begums need to shift focus from personal and political gains and use their position to aggressively work towards the emancipation and empowerment of the average woman. Only then can Bangladeshi women truly be proud of their Begums. **S**

Tahera Sajid is a freelance journalist who lives in Massachusetts, USA. She is a community builder and an active advocate for interfaith relations.



An Uphill Battle

Remaining hopeful in a war-torn country like Afghanistan is difficult but not impossible.

By Mariam Jalalzada

The fight for the liberation of Afghan women has been an uphill battle for centuries. Despite tremendous achievements in the last ten years, the extreme violation of women's rights continues, domestic violence and self-emulations are on the rise and the opposition forces against women's progress remain influential. Although these and other factors, such as insecurity, the Taliban resurgence and the United States' decision to withdraw its military forces in 2014, make the future of women's struggle bleak, there are also reasons to remain hopeful, though rare.

After centuries of struggle for women's rights, for every step forward there

are one hundred steps back. Afghanistan continues to feature prominently on international gender inequality indexes (ranking 139 out of 145 in the UNDP's Gender Inequality Index) and has one of the worst ratios of women to men in the secondary level of education. Women constitute only 8 percent of the labor force (even though their contribution to the rural economy is enormous) and remain subordinate to men in the household and the workplace. Their freedom in every sense, from choosing their husbands to their movement outside the privacy of their household, is severely curtailed. Whether during the modernization efforts in the nineteenth and twentieth

century or the liberalization of the last decade, violent opposition continues to hamper women's struggle for their rights.

Today however, a positive energy drives young Afghan women to stand taller, speak louder, and fight harder. This mentality, in many ways, was provoked by the harsh realities of the Taliban era. Many Afghan women fear that if the peace process is not handled with care, they will find themselves once again at the mercy of a group that is ultra-conservative, uneducated, and extremely restrictive towards women.

Prior to the Taliban's taking over of the country and the protracted civil war, women were actively present in the political sphere as agents of egalitarian ideologies promoted by the communist regime and later served as the strongest critics of Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Although their presence in political spheres diminished during the civil war, the Taliban's complete ban on female education and employment shocked not only the people of Afghanistan but also the rest of the world.

Women were forbidden to leave their houses without a male escort, they were not allowed to seek medical care from a male doctor and were forced to cover themselves from head to toe. Flogging, stoning and public executions became commonplace methods the Taliban used for punishing those who did not abide by their rules. The image of a burqa-clad woman being shot in the head by the Taliban in Kabul's Ghazi Stadium remains a shocking reminder of the Taliban's atrocities.

Although many women were victimized many others resisted. Some women insisted on running home-based schools around the country.



They started and managed their own secret enterprises. Kamila, an Afghan female entrepreneur, launched her tailoring business during the Taliban era and recruited hundreds of employees, constantly escaping the scrutiny of the Taliban. Her story became the main subject of Gayle Lemmon's *The Dress-maker of Khair Khana*.

With few resources at their disposal and limited support from their government and society, Afghan women risk their lives by pursuing education, changing the patriarchal laws of their country and for raising their voices against domestic violence, humiliation, sexual harassment and rape. Women who survived the five-year long scrutiny of the Taliban are not only motivated to work harder to avoid returning to that dark period but are also inspired by the resilience and potential of the younger Afghan women. Thus, they remain hopeful and continue to fight for their basic rights and status in the society.

Encouraging this transformation are renewed and more active grassroots movements that work towards the betterment of women's lives. In the past, the fight for women's rights was a state-driven phenomenon and was conducted by the urban elite. Today, it is increasingly a mainstream and grassroots struggle. The advocacy of Afghan women and their international counterparts led to the women's equal rights law guaranteed by the 2004 constitution. It also established a quota of 25 percent women in the parliament, provincial council, and district assemblies. Afghanistan has also seen a record-breaking number of girls continue their education and join the labor force as teachers, doctors, nurses, judges, lawyers, managers, parliamentarians, advisors, and

journalists.

The involvement of grassroots (young students, working men and women, literary circles, mass media) has led to a collective call for action against discriminatory and illegal laws against women. In the words of one Afghan female activist, Wazhma Frogh, the active resistance of Afghan women to the government's restrictive laws was unimaginable a decade ago. The recently published guidelines released by the Ulama Council (the council that advises the president on religious issues) have triggered protests throughout the country. The guidelines explicitly place women as subordinate to men and state that women should not travel without a male relative escort and should be segregated at school and work. Although the Council does not have legislative power, the statement and the President's backing of it shows the attempts made by the conservative and male-dominated society to curb women's modest liberty and presence in the public sphere.

Another recent incident regarding 15-year old Sahar Gul, a young girl forced into marriage and tortured and mutilated for six months in the basement of her house by her in laws forcing her into prostitution, triggered a massive outcry from the human rights community. Additionally, the story of Gulnaz, who was raped and jailed only to be released if she agreed to marry her rapist, incited national and international outcry. Assertive advocacy by Afghan women and their international supporters forced the government to detain Sahar Gul's in laws and expedite Gulnaz's release from jail with no conditions attached. While this may not seem ideal justice, in a

deeply conservative and patriarchal society like Afghanistan where rape and prostitution are taboo subjects, such incidents are certainly a leap forward.

The sad reality is that the more Afghan women become critical of traditional laws and customs, the more hostile the environment in which they work becomes. However, such hostile environments have produced women who are vocal and actively fighting for women's status. Although only a few have gained international recognition, many unknown heroes fight for women's rights in their respective constituencies and provide justice as lawyers, chief prosecutors, and judges. Furthermore, the involvement of young and foreign-educated women who are launching social campaigns and supporting women-focused organizations inside or outside Afghanistan, is another hopeful sign for the future. For instance, Young Women for Change founded by two young Afghan women is a group of young women and male advocates committed to empowering Afghan women.

Both at home and in public, women have bravely continued their engagement and activism in political and economic spheres. In the face of increasing insecurity and violence, they have dared to step ahead and take charge of their lives. Women are indeed fighting an uphill battle, but not a losing one. **S**

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**When you fill their cup,
you don't just fill their belly**

**You fill their mind
and feed their future**



Fighting Hunger Worldwide

Pipeline Politics

Mad in its fury, the United States is going overboard to prevent all other countries from doing business with Iran.

By S.G. Jilanee

There is hardly any question that importing gas from Iran is not only essential but a national necessity. Pakistan urgently needs natural gas and, indeed, any sort of fuel that can assist the economy and make peoples lives easier. According to the Los Angeles Times, "more than half of Pakistan's manufacturers use natural gas to power their factories," and 21 percent of Pakistani vehicles run on compressed natural gas but "Pakistan produces only 30% of the natural gas it needs." The Iran-Pakistan pipeline would provide the country with over 750 million cubic feet of gas per day.

In February it was reported that water levels in Pakistan's main power-generating dams were dangerously low, thus affecting electric supply. Shortage of natural gas further compounded the problem, leading to prolonged power cuts all over the country that often led to public protests. Owing to a shortage of fuel for power stations and industrial plants, the country's entire economy is under threat.

The original idea was to lay a gas

pipeline from Iran to India across Pakistan -- IPI pipeline. But America bought India off with the offer of civil nuclear technology cooperation under the 123 Agreement. With India out of the loop, what remains now is the Iran-Pakistan (IP) project, which is turning the American stomach to an extent that everybody, from US Ambassador Munter to State Secretary Hillary Clinton are writhing with gripes and making unpleasant sounds. The focus of pressure is on Pakistan to ditch the deal with Iran.

The tactics Washington is using to dissuade Pakistan from its purpose range from ridiculous arguments and alternative offers to outright threats of sanctions. Some of the remarks appear totally idiotic, such as the US "oracle" in Islamabad, Cameron Munter, calling the IP pipeline a "bad idea." But he did not elaborate, because oracles don't.

This was an example of crass chutzpah, because the worthy did not pause to ponder why the US should determine what is good and what

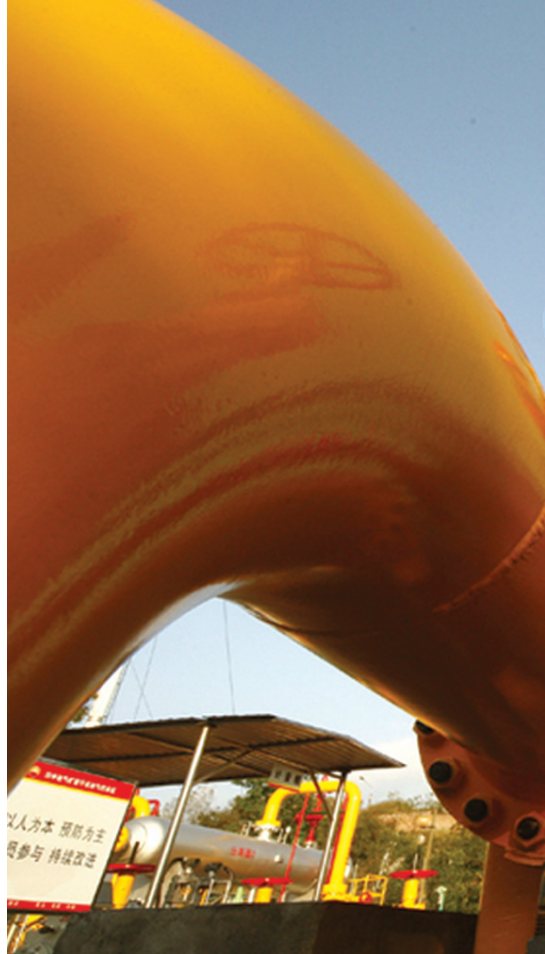
is bad for Pakistan, unless it treats Pakistan as a vassal. And yet they are never tired of repeating that America "respects" Pakistan's sovereignty.

Yet, another pronouncement, this time from state department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland, was not only funnier but also preposterous.

She had the temerity to say that Iran was an "unreliable partner," even though America never had any experience of partnership with the revolutionary government of Iran. On the contrary it was the US that proved to be Iran's "unreliable partner," because it refused to allow the Shah of Iran to be buried on its soil even though he was America's faithful stooge.

Besides, in Pakistan's experience it has been America that has proved to be an utterly selfish and thoroughly unreliable partner, of which there are examples galore. Iran, on the contrary, has never acted perfidiously with Pakistan.

US Secretary of State, Clinton has made it clear that Pakistan will be punished if it continues to engage





with Iran and begin a construction of a natural gas pipeline. At a hearing with the House Appropriations Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations she threatened sanctions if Pakistan embarks upon “the construction of such a pipeline either as an Iranian project or as a joint project” which “would be particularly damaging to Pakistan because their economy is already quite shaky.”

She further said “the US is working to find alternative solutions to the deficit that do not necessitate the building of the proposed pipeline.” That alternative solution involves a pipeline from Turkmenistan running through Afghanistan. “We think that that is a better alternative, both in terms of predictability and to avoid doing business with Iran,” she said.

But Washington ignores that gas obtained through the IP pipeline will be very economical, besides it is also the most viable source of energy because it could be commissioned within a short period of time. On the other hand the Turkmenistan-Afghan-

istan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline could take at least six years to complete but Pakistan’s energy needs are critical and immediate.

Moreover, whereas the IP pipeline will directly pass between Iran and Pakistan the TAPI will have to pass through Afghanistan for which Pakistan will have to pay some royalty, making it costlier. It will also give Afghanistan a powerful leverage over Pakistan, to counterbalance what the latter enjoys over the former now, for the transit facility for Afghan imports through Karachi.

It was in this context, as well as to emphasize Pakistan’s capability to take decisions, that President Zardari said in his speech at Ghari Khuda Baksh in January that to meet its energy needs Pakistan would take an independent decision. It would not take any pressure from anywhere.

Petroleum and Natural Resources Minister, Dr Asim Hussain also informed the National Assembly that a tender had already been floated for laying the pipeline for the project and

that the IP gas pipeline “would be commissioned ahead of its schedule, - by the end of 2012.” He also said that the installation of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) terminals would start after the approval of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC).

Even the recent decision of the Chinese bank to retreat from financing the IP project under pressure from the United States has not shaken Islamabad’s resolve to import gas from Iran. Foreign minister Hina Rabbani Khar told reporters that “There are multiple sources available and this is fairly a very viable project.”

One such source is Russia. It has offered to fully finance the pipeline if its energy giant Gazprom is awarded the contract without bidding. However, the demand being *prima facie* and unethical could be negotiated when the two sides sit down to business.

With geopolitics flaring up, Iran has also offered \$250 million for constructing the pipeline.

If Pakistan persists in the IP project it may have to face U.S. sanctions. But this will not be the first time. The country has faced sanctions in the past under the Pressler Amendment but it has survived. Moreover, this time due to America’s war in Afghanistan, Pakistan is in a position to adopt reciprocal countermeasures if sanctions are slapped.

What remains to be seen is how far Islamabad would resist US pressure, because despite posturing, appeasement remains the cornerstone of its policy, as has been observed with regard to the resumption of NATO supplies. ■

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On March 15 2012, Akhilesh Yadav, 38, from the Samajwadi Party (Socialist Party) was sworn in as the new chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. In doing so, he became the youngest chief minister of the state in India. While poll results played out as predicted, many analysts were not expecting a sweeping Samajwadi victory.

Uttar Pradesh is of utmost importance for national politics. The state constitutes 80 seats in the Lok Sabha and is famous for producing the majority of India's prime ministers. With a considerable influence on India's polity, UP serves as the bastion of the Nehru Gandhi dynasty. The polls were announced at a time when the central government was already reeling under tremendous pressure on the corruption and Lokpal issue. The Lokpal bill could not be passed in the upper House of the Parliament as the ruling Congress neither constitutes a majority nor the support of the coalition members of the UPA.

Pending bills that need to be passed in the Rajya Sabha will now find it difficult to gain approval as political equations turn fragile and possibilities of switch over by various regional parties increase. There already murmurs of a third front being developed by all regional parties, which are not in favor of either Congress or BJP. Of course, there are local compulsions to each state and therefore the two rival parties will not be able to join any one front.

The Congress Party in the centre had exercised its weight in Uttar Pradesh. The fact however is that the polity in Lucknow is sharply polarized and the dominant Brahmin community is now politically marginalized though socially it still calls the shots. Both, the Samajwadi Party of Mulayam Singh Yadav and the Bahujan Samajwadi



The Samajwadi Party has emerged victorious in Uttar Pradesh while the Congress Party has taken a hard hit. This may not bode well for the 2014 general elections.

By Vidya Bhushan Rawat

Party lead by Mayawati, represent the vast expectations of the marginalized people of Uttar-Pradesh.

Though Mulayam Singh claims to be a socialist follower of the 1960s Veteran socialist leader, Dr Ram Manohar Lohia, his party is essentially led by the Yadavas: a peasantry community. Mulayam Singh Yadav has also been very clear about his secular credentials and

has spent some time placating orthodox Muslim clergies like the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid.

Mayawati was politically groomed by her mentor, late Kanshi Ram, whose worldview revolved around Dr Baba Saheb Ambedkar, the father of the Indian Constitution, hailing from the formerly untouchable community, popularly known as the Dalits.

The Congress Party's managers wanted to project Rahul Gandhi for the 2014 general elections as the Congress's choice for prime minister. The party depends heavily on regional parties who regularly put pressure on the government. Congress had several ministers from Uttar Pradesh in the Central Cabinet who were given the task to build up the tempo for Rahul Gandhi. As promised, these ministers used their clout in the state to rally support and votes.

hai jo ghash nahee paise khata hai.' But such campaigning boomeranged because he did not answer his own party's track record. People would question what his party has done to eradicate corruption in last 60 years. Instead of presenting a defense, Rahul blamed both Samajwadi and Bahujan Samajwadi party for all that was bad in Uttar Pradesh.

The congress ruled the state till 1989 till marginalized communities began to influence Uttar Pradesh in

BSP but that would be difficult and challenging in the near future.

Mulayam Singh Yadav is now becoming a rallying point for various political leaders, looking to offer an alternative to both Congress and the BJP in the next general elections. While the Congress and BSP would like to delay the process as long as possible, forces like Mamta Benerjee and Mulayam Singh Yadav would definitely want to enforce a midterm poll so they can increase their tally and be in a position to head the next government or a part of it.

In the 2009 Lok Sabha elections when Congress needed the support of political parties, Mulayam Singh Yadav was ready to provide support. However, he was virtually humiliated by the Congress and was made a persona-non-grata. Similarly, when Mayawati and the BSP offered their support, Congress shunned them despite realizing that controlling Uttar Pradesh was essential. To counter political rivals, the central government then did its best to provide various grants to places like Bundelkhan where farmers were committing suicide or to the weavers of Banaras who were also squeezing under heavy debt.

Unfortunately, Congress's gamble to secure the 2014 elections under Rahul Gandhi did not pay off. Mulayam Singh Yadav will now play a much larger role at the centre while Mayawati will rebuild her party to prepare for the next polls in Uttar-Pradesh. Uttar Pradesh has clearly voted Congress out of its mind and it will take a concerted effort and developing strong state leadership for the party to even think of ruling the state again. ■

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The other contenders: Rahul Gandhi and Mayawati

In the 2009 general elections, Congress won 22 Lok Sabha seats from Uttar Pradesh against all expectations and the party publicly boasted that its Rahul experiment has succeeded though everyone knew that the Congress party's organization lay in great shambles. The Party refused to accept the identity polity of the state where the Dalits and peasants continue to seek representation and participation in power.

Rahul Gandhi aggressively campaigned in the state and blamed both Mayawati and Mulayam Singh Yadav for the ills of the state. Exploiting Mayawati's election symbol of an elephant, Gandhi would often remark, 'Lucknow me ek bahut bada haathi

the aftermath of the Mandal Commission Recommendation due to which, V.P.Singh's government collapsed. The BJP withdrew support from the government they were not allowed to perform carseva at Ayodhya to protect the Babari Mosque in October 1990. The Muslims of Uttar Pradesh never forget the dubious role of Congress party despite the fact that Congress went loud on the issue of job reservation for Muslims, amongst other things.

With such efforts in place, the poll results were a severe personal blow to Rahul Gandhi and a strong jolt to Congress's plan to appoint him as Prime Minister. The Congress Party now has a bleak chance to fair well in Uttar Pradesh unless it joins in alliance with



and legendary figure, Dr. Muhammad Yunus as President of the World Bank. The slot will fall vacant after the retirement of current President, Robert Zoellick on June 30 and a number of contenders have already entered the race to win the position.

Sheikh Hasina's proposal to support Dr. Yunus for the World Bank's top slot came as a surprise to many. According to the AFP report of April 5 2011, Dr. Yunus was forced to leave Grameen Bank, succumbing to opposition from the Prime Minister and the verdict of the Supreme Court that removed him from that position. Furthermore, his supporters argued that

critical of Yunus, Hasina accused him of sucking blood from the poor and pulling a financial trick to avoid paying taxes." The position taken by Dr. Yunus during the caretaker government was meant to provide an alternative to the Bangladeshi people as the two political parties, Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). He later withdrew his political agenda, which was apparently backed by the military establishment.

There are four major reasons to justify why Dr. Muhammad Yunus is an asset not only to Bangladesh but to South Asia and the developing world. The Beggars' Program, which started with

A Messiah for the Poor

Dr. Muhammad Yunus recently turned down a nomination for President of the World Bank. But what does this messiah for the poor symbolize for the developing world?

By Dr. Moonis Ahmar

On 22 February 2012, Bangladeshi Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina requested the visiting member of the European Union Parliament, Jean Lambert to support the candidature of Nobel Laureate

"he was victimized by the Prime Minister whom he crossed in 2007 when he set up a political party during the military-backed caretaker government. In December, 2010, following the release of a Norwegian TV documentary

1,000 beggars and is now reaching 100,000, helped mitigate the menace of begging in Bangladesh. According to the program, beggars were loaned \$15 per borrower to sell goods for profit. Yunus's innovation to allevi-

ate poverty through social business is considered a landmark and milestone in understanding the dynamics of social backwardness.

Social business illustrates a “cause driven business. In a social business, the investors or owners can gradually recoup the money invested, but cannot take any dividend beyond that point. No personal gain is desired by the investor. The impact of social business is on the people or environment, rather the amount of profit made in a given period.” It is because of his life-long dedication and commitment to improve the lives of the poor that led to the innovation of a “social business” concept (a fact, which is also recognized in the developed world), earning Yunus the title of “Messiah.”

Secondly, after receiving his Ph.D in Economics in 1969 and returning to Bangladesh in 1974, Yunus launched micro-credit financing. An economist with a non-traditional approach, he joined the Department of Economics at Chittagong University. His vision of poverty alleviation clicked when in 1974 he conceived and presented the idea of Gram Sarker at the village level to reduce rural poverty. He opened the Grameen Bank, which transformed the face of rural Bangladesh, particularly the women. Presently, the Grameen Bank operates 1,092 branches in 36,000 villages of Bangladesh, providing credit to over two million poor people with a capital of approximately US\$2 billion. The beneficiaries of Dr. Yunus’s vision of microcredit are the rural poor and primarily women. However, Yunus’s vision of poverty alleviation has faced heated criticism. As is common in many post-colonial states, people suspected his intentions to the extent that Sheikh Hasina and other politicians charged him of using

Grameen bank and his micro-credit schemes for personal benefit. Despite all such allegations, Dr. Yunus’s image and reputation remains unblemished and untarnished.

Thirdly, the principled position taken by Dr. Yunus regarding his nomination as the President of World Bank is admirable. He outlined his reservations about the functioning of the Bank and questioned why a U.S citizen always leads it. Criticizing the Bank for doing little to ameliorate poverty, Yunus lamented that, “despite its slogan of working for a World Free of Poverty, the World Bank has consistently failed to provide program funding for micro credit.” He has requested the World Bank “to increase its funding of micro credit programs” so that effective steps are taken for the alleviation of global poverty. Dr. Yunus urged the international organization to increase investment in micro credit to 2 percent of program spending, of which 50 percent of the amount should be reserved for those living on less than a dollar a day. It is because of his reservations that Dr. Yunus refused to accept the nomination for the President of World Bank as according to him, “he has dedicated his life to social business.” He stated that, “I have been a regular critic of the World Bank for its policies and programs. My criticism also included the fact that this Bank’s highest post is always reserved for an American citizen. I never thought of taking up the job of the World Bank. The World Bank should be turned into a bank for the poor with the aim of ultimately diminishing poverty worldwide.”

Finally, as a celebrity and because of his life-long contribution to the poor, Dr. Muhammad Yunus is above the top slot of the World Bank. Yunus realized that the enormous clout pos-

sessed by the Group of Seven in the functioning of World Bank will make him ineffective as the Bank’s President to take steps for the alleviation of poverty. Around 60% of the Bank’s holdings and capital belong to the G-7 countries with very little or no voice for the developing world in the policy matters of the Bank. Had Dr. Yunus been nominated and selected as the President of World Bank, his main priority, to improve the social and economic conditions of the rural poor, would not have matched with the priorities of a Western-centric bank.

In view of Dr. Yunus’s achievements to alleviate poverty, SAARC should seek his services and create a slot at the organizational level in the field of empowering the poor, particularly women. The UN Secretary General had appointed Dr. Yunus to the International Advisory Group for the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing from 1993-1995. He also served on the Global Commission of Women’s Health (1993-1995), the Advisory Council for Sustainable Economic Development (1993 to present) and the UN Expert Group on Women and Finance. Furthermore, he served as the chair of Policy Advisor Group of Consultative Group to Assist the Poorest.

Around 25 percent of the people of South Asia live below the poverty line or survive on under \$1 a day. The innovative ideas of Dr. Yunus to target issues that deepen social backwardness and under-development leading to the disempowerment of the people can prove immensely useful for South Asia. ■

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Preparing for Survival

Afghanistan faces a looming crisis but will it be able to get its act together before it is too late?

By Nasir Ahmad Mahmoodi

After more than ten years of large-scale international presence in Afghanistan, security remains the biggest challenge to the country, affecting all aspects of life. It is still the biggest burden on the country's budget and, as a recent World Bank forecast reflects, Afghanistan is miles away from financial independence

and remains dependent on foreign assistance. The vast scale narcotic cultivation and the processing and smuggling of drugs, besides the rampant corruption within the government system, are also to be added to the numerous challenges the country currently faces.

There is a lack of a prudent and co-

herent policy direction and diplomacy in the existing Afghan leadership. The leadership so far has emotionally reacted to events and has pursued short-term goals and objectives instead of engaging in a proactive and stable pursuit of wider interests based on a more comprehensive strategy. The recent resignation of Dr. Spanta, Senior

Security Advisor to President Karzai, shows that the team in charge of the Kabul administration does not share the same vision as the President, in facing existing challenges. While the Afghan national army and Afghan national police have shown significant improvements in terms of their quantity and quality, they still need continued training and advisory from foreign advisors and equipments and weaponry. Lack of a strong sense of nationhood in Afghanistan remains a major challenge among the different ethnic groups. It is feared that in the case of increased internal instabilities and hostilities, the Afghan armed forces, instead of acting as protectors of the nation, will succumb to their ethnic affiliations.

As the country edges towards 2014 and the countdown for withdrawal of the international forces from Afghanistan draws closer, anxiety and tension are growing in a country that fears a return to chaos and civil war. Fear of further instability and political rivalries fueled by escalated foreign interventions has already shown itself through the increase in the number of Afghan asylum seekers and a considerable decrease in property prices.

Women, minority groups and business owners are among the most concerned. A Human Rights Watch 2012 report illustrates that grave concerns regarding human rights, especially women's rights, are renewed and most believe that such achievements would be jeopardized by a decrease in the international security forces footprint and a possible compromise with the Taliban. The Afghan public, especially ethnic and religious minorities, can still recall vivid images of the years of civil war and the consequent era of intolerance, injustice and violence.

Given the current political landscape and the looming future, many firms and companies in Afghanistan consider 2014 a decisive year based on which they have already revised their business vision and strategies.

President Obama's constant pledges to pull out troops and the recent incidents of the Quran burnings in the Bagram Base and the Qandahar shooting rampage that killed 16 civilians, shows that troop withdrawal is imminent. Interestingly, such incidents came in the wake of a Taliban announcement stating that the peace talks had reached a dead end and that they had pulled out of the negotiations with the US and rejected any possible negotiations with the Afghan government. The reaction of major political parties to the recent developments was to form new alliances and resort to Jihadi literature inherited from the years of the Afghan war.

Historically, foreign intervention has not been kind to Afghanistan. Civil society and the public harbor bitter feelings following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. In order to prevent the repetition of a similar scenario, the Afghans now demand a responsible ISAF/NATO withdrawal that is arranged through a gradual decrease of military forces and a continued civilian/political support to Afghanistan. A responsible withdrawal should guarantee that Taliban extremism or any other type of radicalism does not come back to rule the country and that human rights are protected in Afghanistan.

In order to achieve such a goal, both the government of Afghanistan and the international community, notably the United States, need to identify and agree on their priorities and coordinate joint efforts to avoid further

loss of time and resources. The status quo can still witness positive changes if such agreements and coordination can be established between and among the players in the Afghan political scene. Recent bilateral strategic agreements between Afghanistan and a number of countries are seen as positive steps that provide limited guarantees for continued constructive international engagements. However, the strategic cooperation agreement between Afghanistan and the US has not yet been finalized even though a consultative Loya Jirga supported its signing. Both sides need to clearly provide for each other's interests and demands and prove that they will remain bound to the agreed terms of such documents.

In order to prepare to face the situation in 2014 and beyond, the Afghan government needs to have a thorough plan to take over the responsibilities from the international community. Besides preparing for a transition of security responsibilities, financial and economic responsibilities are also critical as all are inter-dependent and inter-related. Proper investments in the development of the mining and agriculture sectors, reforms in the taxation system and the strengthening of transit networks are required if Afghanistan is to move towards a better future. This demands strong and coordinated efforts to fight corruption and introduce better management in order to help Afghanistan survive the fragile circumstances and discover the right path to development. ■

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A Turning Point

The UNHRC-sponsored resolution on Sri Lanka is crucial for post-conflict ethnic reconciliation. This international move could also possibly backfire.

By S. I. Keethaponcalan

In May 2009, Sri Lanka was rejoicing. The country had killed two birds with one stone. The crushing of the LTTE resolved one of the fundamental problems the state was facing for over three decades and Sri Lanka's status internationally was boosted as a state, which achieved the unachievable, i.e. successfully terminating an armed resistance. The Sri Lankan leadership began to argue that it could become an example for other nations on how to deal effectively with terrorism. The international community also rewarded Sri Lanka with a commendation in Geneva for defeating terrorism.

However, the international euphoria did not last too long. Stories of very serious human rights violations allegedly committed during the last phase of the battle against Tamil civilians and surrendered LTTE cadres began to emerge coupled with photographs and video clips of these incidents, which the international groups claimed "tro-

phy footage," taken by members of the Sri Lankan armed forces. International actors, including the UN and USA, which assisted Sri Lanka to defeat the LTTE, were under pressure to address the alleged human rights violations, some of which were amounted to "crimes against humanity." Under the leadership of the US, some of the Western states began to demand an "international investigation" on the alleged atrocities. A resolution against Sri Lanka demanding an international investigation was to be introduced in Geneva. Eventually the US co-sponsored a deeply watered down version of a resolution in the UN Human Rights Council session in March 2012, which demanded that Sri Lanka implement the recommendations of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), a commission appointed by the government of Sri Lanka. There was no mention of international investigation against Sri Lanka.

Yet, Sri Lanka rejected all allegations of human rights violations and opposed the resolution in Geneva, tooth and nail. It argued that there was no intentional violence against the Tamil population as what was undertaken was a "humanitarian operation" and not a war. However, Sri Lanka's fundamental argument was that the states that were sponsoring the resolution, especially the US, had no right to criticize Sri Lanka because they were also guilty of serious human rights violations elsewhere. The killing of Osama Bin Laden and the treatment of Guantanamo Bay prisoners were cited as evidence of US involvement in human rights violations. Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe, Chief of the Sri Lankan delegation in Geneva, on the day of voting declared, "physicians heal yourself," a term that essentially means to solve your problems first. Sri Lanka strategically also used the argument that a resolution against it may serve as a precedence and could





backfire on other states in the future.

One of the major questions that transpired from this scenario was why the US was so interested in investigating violence or the alleged human rights violations in Sri Lanka. This question gained significance due to the fact that the US was a major ally of Sri Lanka during the last phase of the war and extended crucial strategic assistance to the country in the war against the LTTE. It was clear that the US unleashed a major assault in Geneva to get the resolution approved. It maintained that an international investigation and establishing accountability were crucial for post conflict ethnic reconciliation. Therefore, the US brought the resolution on Sri Lanka on the ground that it was trying to help the small state.

It is possible that there are other reasons as well. The US and other western co-sponsors of the resolution certainly wanted to preempt the

possibility of Sri Lanka becoming a model for conflict resolution in terms of internal violent conflicts. States like Pakistan and Nepal have already begun to discuss Sri Lanka as a model worthy of emulation, to deal with their problems. The US may also have geopolitical reasons to sponsor the resolution. The rapidly increasing Chinese presence and influence in Sri Lanka is certainly a problem for the US as it has a strategic interest in the Indian Ocean region. The US was losing its grip on Sri Lanka as, in the post-LTTE era, China emerged as the major partner of Sri Lanka and a predominant player in the region. The resolution also has the potential to ensure some western control over Sri Lanka and as a result, mitigating growing Chinese influence in region.

Sri Lanka, however, was confident that it could successfully defeat the resolution in the Human Rights Council, largely due to the fact that

it had powerful friends in the Council. China and Russia, both Security Council members, have constantly supported and protected Sri Lanka from international criticism. They also voted against the resolution in Geneva. States that supported Sri Lanka in the Council argued that it is wrong to bring in country-specific resolutions as it amounts to interfering in the internal affairs of a sovereign state. It is also obvious that these states agree with Sri Lanka on the argument that the resolution, in the future, could come to haunt them.

On March 22, 2012 the US sponsored resolution on Sri Lanka was endorsed by the UNHRC by 24 to 15 votes with eight states abstaining. The resolution empowers the UNHRC to work with Sri Lanka to implement the LLRC recommendation and requires Sri Lanka to come up with a roadmap. The immediate Sri Lankan reaction was to reject the resolution saying that it did not need external assistance in the implementation of human rights standards. Since the resolution is “non-intrusive,” thanks to India, and non-binding, due to the backing of China and Russia, Sri Lanka has the ability to be intransigent. However, non-compliance with the resolution has the potential to instigate more obstinate decisions in the future. One has to wait and see how Sri Lanka will react in practice as rhetoric is for local consumption only. It is, however, imperative to note that the resolution has the potential to be a turning point in the history of Sri Lanka. ■

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Making Loose Ends Meet

The Nepalese constitution lies in a limbo. Can it still be salvaged?

By Janardan Raj Sharma

The Supreme Court's unequivocal verdict that no further extension of the tenure of the constituent assembly will be allowed leaves little doubt that the assembly, elected in 2008 for a two year tenure, will terminate on 27 May after completing a 4-year extended tenure. What is doubtful is whether there will be a new constitution, even a rudimentary draft, before it terminates, and if not, what lies ahead? A political leadership that can rise above the petty partisan interest and personal ambitions to lead the country is yet to emerge.

A draft of a new constitution to in-

stitutionalize the federal democratic republic will not succeed unless the peace process concludes successfully. The court verdict may possibly mount pressure on the politicians to conclude the peace process, which was expected to be concluded within six months after the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement in November 2006. Unless the peace process closes, drafting of a new constitution will remain problematic.

There are several reasons for the delay in drafting a constitution. The 1990 constitution was drafted in three months following the success of the

popular movement. This was possible, among other factors, because the political forces agreed to the basic principles and structures of a multi-party parliamentary democracy, a constitutional monarchy, an independent judiciary and a free press. During the popular movement II in 2006, the single agenda was to establish a "total democracy," a vague concept that has now ended up in total anarchy.

The second factor is the delay in "mainstreaming" the Maoists, officially known as the Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist. There is still a fading hope that the Maoists will give

up violence by disowning their guerrillas after joining the peace process, dismantle their paramilitary structures such as the Young Communist League (YCL), return the private and public property they had stolen during the insurgency, and adhere to democratic rules. This has not happened in the last six years and there is no ground to say it will happen in the future. The Maoists have not yet renounced violence and continue to maintain their paramilitary structures. After having emerged as the largest formation in the 2008 assembly elections, some of its leaders are ready to transform it into a political party but a significant section within the party supports its revolutionary character. Such a split personality has fuelled suspicion amongst the traditional forces such as the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal-Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), of its real intentions.

Thirdly, the centerpiece of the peace process is the integration of the Maoist combatants in the Nepalese Army. The Maoists have been arguing that both the peace process and the drafting of a constitution should move forward simultaneously. The opposition, the Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML, want the peace process to be completed first before progress is made in the drafting of a constitution. The Maoists, by keeping their army and guns, implies that they want a new constitution written at the point of guns. They now admit that a blunder was made by holding assembly elections while the Maoists still had their army and weapons. The government is not ready to repeat the same mistake.

Last but not least is the factional infighting and power struggle across all the four major political formations – the Maoists, the Nepali Congress,

the CPN-UML and the quarrelsome constituents of the United Democratic Madheshi Front. The most intense is among the three factions of the Maoists – one led by its Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who is considered an opportunist but maintains a firm grip on guns and party funds. There is virtually no one to match his oratory skills, tricks and a life of aristocracy. Dahal is challenged by Mohan Baidya, his deputy, who wants the party to remain revolutionary. Baidya is popular amongst the anarchists, the miscreants and the disgruntled Maoists. The third force is led by Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai, considered India's blue-eyed boy. The personal chemistry among these three persons will, to a large extent determine what happens next.

Substantive constitutional issues are being used by the Maoists to gain maximum peace dividends. The differences lie in the form of government, the restructuring of the state, the election system and the nature of the judiciary. The Maoists have argued for a presidential form of government under which the president with full executive power is directly elected and is not accountable to the parliament. The Nepali Congress insists on a multi-party parliamentary form of government with a prime minister with full executive powers, something that the Maoists out rightly reject. The CPN-UML wants a midway agreement with a directly elected prime minister. Given their numerical strength in the assembly, a compromise is the only way out. It is going to be a hotchpotch system and whether it makes governance better or worse remains to be seen.

The trickiest of the dispute is the restructuring of the state. The assem-

bly's thematic committee recommended the restructuring of the state on the basis of ethnic identity and resource capacity within 14 states. Since there was no unanimity on the entire issue, a state restructuring commission was named to give an expert opinion. Unfortunately, it only added more confusion to the issue. The quarrel is on the name and size, not on the institutions to spur economic growth and social prosperity. There is just not enough time to resolve the wide divergence of views.

The failure to promulgate a new constitution will create a constitutional and legal void. The assembly will have to terminate but no one knows what will happen to the constitutional status of the government as well as the president. The president may be tempted to declare an emergency situation and hold fresh elections. This is possible if he has the backing of the international community, mainly India and the United States, which have often played a decisive role in the Nepali political process.

There is still hope. There is no alternative to concluding the peace process and finishing the draft of a new constitution to institutionalize democracy and good governance. A permanent peace and a constitution that has the ownership of all sections of the society is still possible if the politicians rise above petty politicking and lust for power. If the politicians fail to seize the opportunity, someone else will take advantage of the prolonged transition. In such a situation, democracy will be the main victim. **S**

Dr Janardan Raj Sharma is a research fellow at the Center for South Asian Studies in Kathmandu.

Cornered Democracy

President Hassan's decision to fill his key cabinet with former dictator Gayoom's loyalists may bring uncertainty and unrest to the South Asian nation.

By Syed Moazzam Hashmi

The infant democracy in the Maldives seems to have been pushed to the corner following the bloodless coup in February. The new President Mohammed Waheed Hassan has offered old wine in new bottles by hiring his key cabinet members from among the loyalists of the former dictatorial regime of Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, to stay in power and keep the wheel rolling.

However, whether it would help to continue the democratic process that began just three years ago in 2008, or would cool down or fuel internal unrest is yet to be witnessed. The archipelago of 1,192 coral islands, famed for its secluded resorts, is being keenly observed in the global perspective.

The murky situation was further spiced after former autocratic ruler Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who ruled the Maldives for three decades, threw down the gauntlet by returning from Malaysia to the capital Male on March 6. The former dictator's arrival convinced speculators and the ousted President Nasheed that the coup against him was masterminded by

Gayoom with the help of the nexus of rich resort owners playing the tune in the political orchestra.

The resort owners, often termed the godfathers of Maldivian politics, have been nominated as the main culprits igniting and further fueling the mutiny against democracy on the crutches of Islamist parties, in order to escape the tax net, which could have generated millions of dollars in revenue that Nasheed tried to install. Some 50,000 Maldivians of the total 330,000 in-

enues.

The beginning of a new democratic era in Maldives after the 2008 elections brought to the fore the former human rights activist Nasheed as the first democratically elected president of the Indian Ocean nation. Interestingly, Nasheed who had been jailed and tortured several times during Gayoom's regime was bruised again through his deputy, Waheed Hassan. He replaced Nasheed as the new president in February and is making

The United States has rejected Nasheed's demand for early elections saying that the judiciary, police and the election commission are not sufficiently prepared to ensure transparent elections.

habitants are employed in the tourism industry that generates 30 percent of Maldives' US \$2.1 billion economy, according to official figures. However, unofficial estimates account tourism up to 80 percent of the republic's rev-

hectic efforts to seek legitimacy for his government with the former boss following the trail. To further cement his foothold in the presidency, Hassan accommodated Gayoom's loyalists in key offices.

A representative of Gayoom's political party, the Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) denied that the aging former dictator would be playing a direct role in the country's politics. However, he has hinted at Gayoom's indirect involvement in Nasheed's downfall.

Interestingly, along with a bunch of Gayoom's loyalists, President Hassan has appointed the daughter and son of the former dictator as ministers without caring for the allega-

tions that Nasheed's protesting Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) has been leveling allegations against him.

Dunya Maumoon, who is tipped as the most likely successor to her father, has been appointed as the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs. She held the position of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2007-08 while her brother Ghassan Maumoon has been made the Minister of State for Human Resources.

Other ministerial appointments from Gayoom's rank and file include Dr. Abdul Samad Abdulla as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. He served as Gayoom's envoy in Bangladesh, and is also a member of the PPM whereas Abdulla Jihad has been given the Ministry of Finance and Treasury. Jihad served as Gayoom's finance minister in 2008 before Nasheed took over. Prior to this, he was the Maldives' MMA governor. A convenient player, Jihad has also worked as member of the Civil Service Commission since 2010.

Mohamed Waheed Deen who is appointed as the vice president, owns numerous resorts and was attorney general in Gayoom's regime. Another



President Waheed Hassan is accused of filling his cabinet with former dictator, Gayoom's cronies.

woman in Hassan's cabinet, Azima Shakooru, has been made the attorney general. She served in the same position in 2007 in Gayoom's cabinet. The spokesman of the PPM, Mohamed Husain Sharif Mundu has secured the portfolio of Minister for Youth Affairs.

If violent protests cost President Nasheed his job, they are still making a stir in the streets of Male and Addu city, the stronghold of Nasheed's MDP. Amnesty International and other human rights organizations have accused President Hassan's government of violently suppressing demonstrations. Earlier in March, protestors blocked President Hassan from entering the parliament while MDP lawmakers halted the proceedings inside and stopped the new speaker, Abdulla Shahid from entering the rambunctious Majlis, infamous for being the most corrupt institution in the country.

On the international front, the Friends of Maldives – a London-based pro-democracy group, has strongly voiced anger against the resort owners who are suspected of playing a possible role in toppling Nasheed's democratic government. The United States

has rejected Nasheed's demand for early elections saying that the judiciary, police and the election commission are not sufficiently prepared to ensure transparent elections. However, the Commonwealth Ministerial Group of the 54-nation organization, supports the demand for early elections to end the crisis. The Maldives constitution provides that elections could be held within a year.

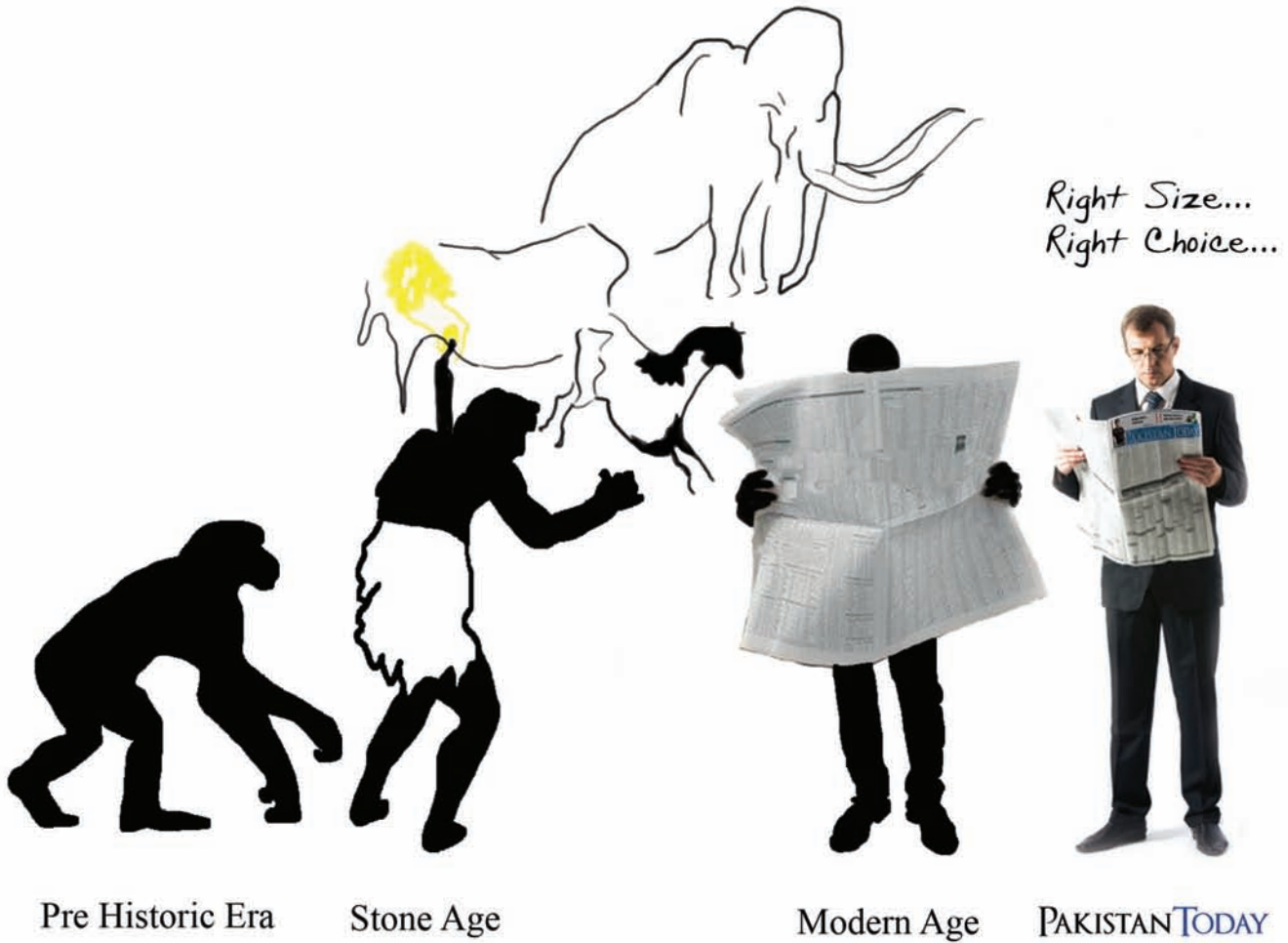
The MDP and Nasheed have stressed on the inclu-

sion of international experts in the Committee of National Inquiry (CNI) amid the European Union's repeated calls for an "urgent agreement" for political reconciliation and elections in the Maldives. Interestingly, Ismail Shafeeu, former Minister for Defense and National Security in Gayoom's regime, is on the three-member CNI.

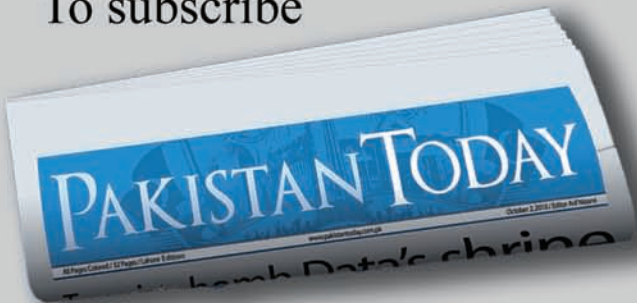
In the Maldives where personal gains seem to dominate politics, some judges among the independent judiciary that was recharged with more powers under the new democratic constitution, have allegedly sided with Gayoom, his family and loyalists against the graft, embezzlement, human rights crimes and corruption charges. The international community is keenly observing Nasheed to test his mettle in the promised elections with an expectation of turning the wheel of the budding democracy to get it back on track. **S**

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Ulterior Motives

Is Iran genuinely interested in a stable, peaceful South Asia or is something larger looming behind its efforts for regional cooperation?

By Reza Khanzadeh



On February 17, 2012, the presidents of Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan held the third Trilateral Summit in Islamabad. The main objective of this three-day event was to strengthen relations, increase security and enhance stability between the three neighbors, with a specific focus on Afghanistan. The issues discussed covered a wide range of topics from communication and cooperation to energy, infrastructure counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism. Although on a superficial level the summit appeared to be productive, the sincerity of each country's objectives remains questionable. Was there any breakthrough discussion concerning the region and Afghanistan's security or was it just another opportunity for Iran to

showcase and perhaps strengthen its personal agenda? More importantly, is Iran interested in pursuing a strong relationship with Afghanistan and Pakistan because it wants to increase regional cooperation or is it because of its own troubles within the international community.

Comparing this meeting to the previous two trilateral summits shows that little progress has been made. The wheels of international diplomacy and cooperation turn slowly, nevertheless, the tone and rhetoric of all three meetings is very similar. Over the years, issues such as agriculture, infrastructure, energy, private sector investment, border control, drugs, terrorism, Afghanistan's stability, regional strength and independence from foreign powers

have featured prominently in each of the three summits with little progress to show for it. While serious concerns remain outstanding, three basic advancements have been made. Firstly, the three countries signed a regional economic deal to enhance trade. Secondly, the meeting pushed forward the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline deal that is successfully developing in spite of America's objections. Thirdly, the three neighbors signed a joint statement declaring that they will not allow their land to be used against each other. However, such advancements do not hide the fact that the core issue that drew the three together – Afghanistan and regional stability – has yet to be improved, let alone solved.

Although Afghanistan's security is-

sue received proper attention during the trilateral summit, it was highlighted in an indirect way. Iran and Pakistan's bilateral discussions were instead at the forefront. Since Afghanistan depends on its neighbors for its own stability, it is imperative that Iran and Pakistan first strengthen their own national security and relationship before assisting Afghanistan. Speaking in the increasingly important bilateral relationship, President Zardari stated, "Iran and Pakistan ... need to inter-depend on each other for prosperity of the region."

If Iran can build a strong, secure, unified and stable region with its two neighbors, then the US and NATO footprint will be limited, allowing Iran to gain more influence in the region.

On the one hand, rhetoric illustrates that no real breakthrough occurred but, on the other hand, it would appear that Iran and Pakistan are moving in the right direction, albeit gradually. As a result, Iran's interest in her neighbors comes into questioning because nothing significant has occurred in the past three years and this summit did not bring any break through discussion for the future. What then are Iran's intentions with regard to Pakistan and Afghanistan?

A theory in political science argues that all governments are rational actors and hence make decisions that first benefit their own wellbeing and national security. However, clear-cut questions never develop clear-cut answers. Even though Iran may be interested in regional cooperation, there are indeed aspects of personal ben-

efits to its relationship with Pakistan and Afghanistan on an international scale.

Iran faces continued sanctions by Washington and Europe, Israel continues threats of military action on Iran's nuclear facilities and the ever-growing uncertainty of the MENA region symbolizes that it is in Iran's best interest to gain as many allies as possible. While rhetoric runs only skin deep, the signing of the joint statement declaring that the three countries will not allow their land to be used against each other, will provide some comfort to Teh-

ran. While it would be premature to assume foreign powers will have two less countries to look to for assistance against Iran, it does provide some temporary relief. Furthermore, Iran's foreign policy can be seen as a zero-sum game against the United States. If Iran can build a strong, secure, unified and stable region with its two neighbors, then the US and NATO footprint will be limited, allowing Iran to gain more influence in the region.

Iran used the Trilateral Summit as a platform to express its opinions and to counter criticisms and distrust of the West with regard to herself as well as South Asia. "There are countries determined to dominate our region and they have targeted our region for their domination and hegemony... today, clearly all these powers are interfering in our internal affairs, in the affairs of

our region with military presence. We believe that the problems of the region must be solved regionally... we should deny others the opportunity to interfere in our affairs."

Iran's view of the West is no secret. As a result, it is difficult to ignore this aspect of its national interest when it comes to building relationships with Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, Iran's interest in this three-way relationship, although complex, is explainable: Its involvement with Pakistan and Afghanistan will go as far as it benefits its national interests. Iran's number one priority is its own security against the West. However, this cannot be achieved single-handedly, thus the significance of a three-state alliance.

Iran's primary objective from the third Trilateral Summit appears to be driven more by national security and threats from the international community than by regional cooperation. That is not to say that her relationship with Pakistan and Afghanistan is not important but rather it plays a part in Iran's foreign policies vis-à-vis the West. The three advancements made, although beneficial for the region, mainly benefit Iran in its long-term pursuit of freeing itself from the United States grasp. Furthermore, having two more allies in the region will help Iran gain further stability during an unstable time, given its nuclear program.

All things considered, this approach by Iran is not unique or controversial. If Afghanistan or Pakistan were examined in place of Iran, it is likely that the same conclusion would be drawn. ■

Reza Khanzadeh is a Master's Candidate at NYU School of Political Science. He writes on issues of foreign policy, with particular focus on Iran.



Pushing Limits

What does the presence of U.S. Special Forces mean for South Asia and what are America's real intentions behind this move?

By S.G. Jilane

To many people in South Asia, the news that US Special forces are roaming about freely on their soil would sound incredible. But it is true.

Admiral Robert Willard, Commander of the US Pacific Command (PACOM) made the revelation at a Congressional hearing that US Special Forces teams are currently stationed in five South Asian countries: India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives, as part of its effort to enhance their counter-terrorism capabilities, in particular in the maritime domain.

Willard claimed that it is part of the "counter-terrorism co-operation with these nations." Afghanistan already has a surfeit of Special Forces wreaking havoc, killing innocent men, women and children as part of their "counter-terrorism cooperation" with the Afghan government.

These Special Forces assist teams are called Pacific assist teams. According to Willard, they are working very closely with India at a government-to-government level, "not necessarily DOD (Department of Defense) but other agencies assisting them in terms

of their internal counter-terror and counterinsurgency challenges."

Pakistan is the only SAARC country left out. But that is understandable because, these measures are directed against Pakistan's terrorist outfits.

Willard described Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (Let) as a very dangerous organization that not only has very good operational security but also a lot of international design in terms of their aspirations. He called it a very important threat and it was to help contain this threat that he was working "very closely with the nations

in the region.”

Willard told lawmakers that the US is especially working together with India to contain LeT, which is “responsible for many attacks in India, including the horrific attacks in Mumbai.” He further said that LeT is “affiliated with al-Qaeda and other VEOs and contributes to terrorist operations in Afghanistan and aspires to operate against Asia, Europe and North America.”

However Indian defense and foreign ministers exploded with righteous indignation at the news. “The US government has neither sought nor has the government of India approved stationing of US Special Forces personnel in any capacity in India,” they thundered. But, Willard never claimed that any approval had been sought or obtained. He clearly said that the defense ministry was not involved but his teams were assisting “other agencies.”

However, these agencies may be RAW or other intelligence agencies, whose workings are never made public. Besides, Special Forces troops need not go strutting about in battle fatigues and gumboots in full public view. They often operate secretly and in the darkness of the night as in Afghanistan or, as they did in Pakistan to kill Osama bin Laden. Like CIA agents, they are often part of the US embassy personnel so they can target people and claim diplomatic immunity; a typical example of credible deniability.

Similar mock-outrage was expressed in Bangladesh and Nepal and was scotched with similar credible denials. Yet, it is quite likely that Bangladesh, which is combating various militant outfits, might have welcomed Adm. Willard’s strategy of working

“closely” together in counter-terrorism. The same could apply to Nepal. Even though it is not plagued by active Muslim religious militants, yet, it was from Kathmandu airport that an Indian Airline plane was hijacked by Pakistani terrorists to secure the release of Masood Azhar from India’s captivity. India has of course been targeted by the LeT. Stationing US Special Forces in these countries may, therefore, be understandable.

But why of all places, should a peaceful chunk of floating paradise, like Maldives have to be defiled by America’s abominable, Muslim-hating Special Forces? There is no Lashkar-e-Taiba there to cause President Obama any sleepless nights, nary a trace of Al Qaeda, which Obama has dismantled, defeated and disrupted, anyway.

Indeed, why even Sri Lanka? But the United States is exceptional. It owes no explanation for its many acts of commission and omission that would challenge ordinary intelligence.

In Willard’s deposition there is actually much more than meets the eye. For instance, it seems that the US Pacific Command (PACOM) takes over from where the Central Command (CENTCOM) leaves. The latter secures US military interests up to Afghanistan.

However, lurking behind the bogey of LeT and the altruistic façade of counter-terrorism measures to secure the countries from the LeT menace, may be the more sinister design to contain the rising power of China, both economically and militarily. It should be recalled that when America wants to pursue a certain course, it invents justifications, even if brazenly false. Saddam Hussein “sitting on a stockpile of WMDs” with means to attack US mainland, as a justification to invade Iraq and unleash death and

destruction, is the most recent and glaring example of its perfidy.

However, Willard’s disclosures need to be seen in the context of President Obama’s recent decision for a wider and more visible US military presence in the Pacific. Pursuant to this policy, more US bases are to be acquired and more troops stationed all around in South-East Asia and the Far East. As a first step, the old bases in the Philippines are set to be reactivated.

Nonetheless, U.S boots on South Asian soil would be a recipe for disaster. Their presence would be an invitation to the LeT in order to justify the importance Willard has attributed to it. It would also give America greater leverage to interfere in molding the foreign (and domestic) policies of the countries where they operate. Maybe they would treat India with some deference, but with the other, smaller ones - Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives, there may be few scruples.

Indeed, in the context of the soured relations between U.S. and Pakistan, the Willard strategy seems ominous. It looks like an attempt to gang up all other SAARC nations against Pakistan. This is an issue Pakistan’s policymakers should be alive to so as to take appropriate corrective steps to contain the fallout of the Willard strategy.

The first step for Pakistan should be to dismantle all vestiges of the LeT from its soil transparently and squelch all incendiary talk of jihad against India. Those who do so should be extradited so they may undertake jihad on their own. Jihad is not terrorism. Jihad is not killing innocent people in Mumbai. Period. **S**

S. G. Jilane is a senior political analyst and former editor of SouthAsia Magazine.

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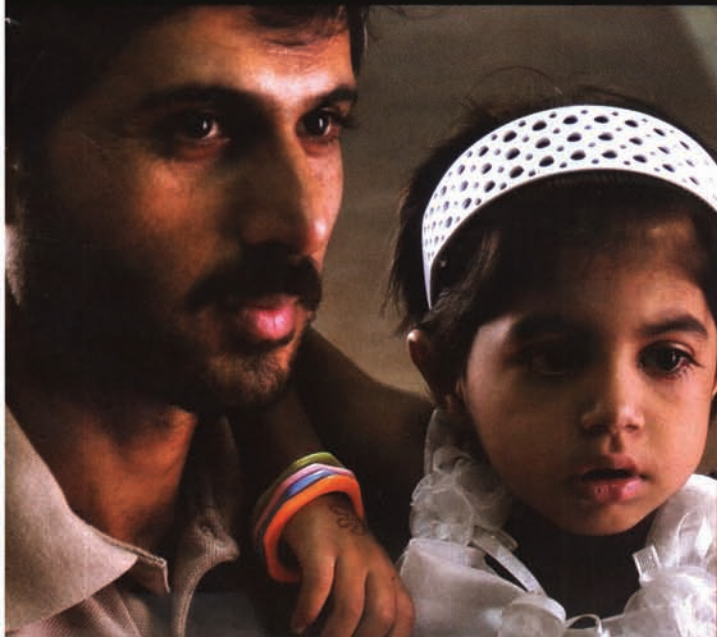


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The Water Threat

Water scarcity is a growing threat to the stability of the world. Protecting river waters has never been more important for South Asia. But is it already too late?

By Rizwan Zeb

Water is the essence of life. Unfortunately, it is also rapidly becoming a source of conflict and wars across the globe. The water humans consume and states control is increasingly contaminated or is growing polluted, dirty, unsafe and unhealthy to drink and use. According to various sources, at least 800 million people today do not have access to safe drinking water. Apart from consumption, rivers are also a source of livelihood for many South Asians who prefer to live by the channel to fish and generate income. As

rivers dry up, they will pose an existential threat to various fishing communities in South Asia. Furthermore, scores of children are dying of diarrhoea caused by contaminated water as opposed to other more commonly known problems such as conflict and AIDS.

Rivers around the world are facing serious environmental concerns such as pollution, over-extraction and the brutal effects of climate change. South Asia's water problem is increasingly deteriorating. On the one hand, geopolitical interests have given rise

to conflicts revolving around the use of water and the ownership of rivers. New Delhi allegedly uses river water as a weapon against Islamabad and Dhaka. Ironically, it accuses Beijing of doing the same. On the other hand, what is often not given due attention is the pollution that rivers face in these countries. South Asia's two major rivers, the Indus and Ganges, create innumerable problems for the masses.

River Indus or mighty Indus, as it was once called, is almost 3000 km long and throughout history has played an important role in the lives

of the South Asian people. According to experts, the Indus irrigates almost 80 percent of Pakistan's 21.5 million hectares of agricultural land. Almost 70 to 80 percent of its water comes from glaciers. Over the decade, climate changes and increased pollution have drastically hindered the flow and availability of water. Changing temperatures have also severely affected the melting patterns of glaciers. This coupled with other problems such as increasing deforestation in the Indus river basin area and an over extraction of river water for agriculture and other purposes is resulting in water scarcity which according to various experts, if remained unchecked and unchanged will result in serious and damaging proportions by 2025.

The Ganges is almost 2500 km long and is another endangered South Asian river. It runs through Nepal, India, China and Bangladesh. It also has a religious significance as it holds a fundamental position in Hinduism. Scores of Hindus pay homage to the goddess Ganga by cupping water in their hands and letting it fall back in her or simply by bathing in the river. With over population and the religious significance of the river, the Ganges today is one of the most polluted rivers in the world. Another factor creating problems for the river is New Delhi's ambitious energy producing projects. Delhi has already built a number of dams and barrages on Ganges and is working on a "Garland of river project." These dams and barrages are successfully producing electricity and providing water for agricultural purposes. Unfortunately, environmentally this is creating problems for the river itself. Once the garland project is operational, a large amount of water will be diverted from the Ganges creating

immense environmental problems not only for New Delhi but also for Dhaka.

Both Islamabad and New Delhi, have over the years taken a few steps,

in the future. India, due to its increasing pollution, rising poverty coupled with industrialization and urbanization, is estimated to suffer serious water shortage as early as 2030.

An over extraction of river water for agriculture and other purposes is resulting in water scarcity which according to various experts, if remained unchecked and unchanged will result in serious and damaging proportions by 2025.

though mostly symbolic, to address such problems. In the case of Pakistan, there is a national accord which ascertains the availability and distribution of water. Pakistan also has a number of departments and organizations addressing various issues such as the Indus Water Authority and the Water and Power Development Authority. All provinces have their own departments but the performance of these departments remains wanting. Both New Delhi and Islamabad, so far, have not taken any concrete steps to address the greenhouse effect and climate change.

Unfortunately, water and especially the state of river water is not high on the list of priorities in South Asia. As the South Asian population grows at a rapid rate, there will be an over extraction of resources and in many countries, water is rapidly becoming a luxury good. Furthermore, many countries lack the finances, or are hindered by insurmountable corruption, to construct dams and other water retaining facilities. If not addressed in the short term, both India and Pakistan will suffer from a major water shortage

Water scarcity is becoming a reality that South Asia will not be able to escape. According to expert estimates, by 2050 water scarcity could affect three-quarters of the world's population. Although South Asia, at the moment, is not among the most effected countries, if concrete steps are not taken and issues like population control, environmental degradation and climate change are not addressed, the situation will worsen. Such a scenario coupled with the existing threat perception and the rampant distrust between South Asian states, the region might witness an ugly reality of a war between India and Bangladesh or between India and Pakistan over the issue of water.

It is imperative that the region save itself before it is too late. ■

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Towards Revolution

Pakistan is certainly fertile ground for revolution - but is it ready just yet?

By Sijal Fawad



Spreading like wild fire, revolutions are once again gaining momentum and popularity. Synonymous with overthrowing dictators and ridding a country from years of autocracy, revolutions have created nations and changed political configurations in sundry cases. They have changed the maps of the world and, needless to say, the destinies of several people, whether innocent or not.

The idea, though practiced fully in the Middle East is now making its way to Pakistan. While many in the media and political fraternity are openly talking about a revolution, some are suggesting that only a 'bloody' revolution is the need of the day. With emotional rhetoric serving at the forefront of Pakistani politics, it is questionable whether such analysts have really pondered over the causes and consequences of a 'bloody' revolution?

Given the present social circumstances, it is not surprising that the symptoms of a revolution are verily present in the country. Various revolutions, including the English revolution of the late 1660s, Chairman Mao's revolution (1966), the Iranian Revolution (1979), all seem to have striking similarities. Almost all revolutions

in history were spurred by a financial and economic imbalance. The English Civil Wars (1642-1651) were instigated largely by a financial breakdown when King Charles I faced a dilemma on how to finance the rising expenses of the war with France and Spain. Extortionist-type taxes imposed on the general populace gave birth to a stream of condemnation.

Similarly, the French Revolution was spurred by a pre-revolutionary financial crisis when the proletariat was taxed nonchalantly while the noblemen and clergy were exempt from taxation. Even the colonists of the American Revolution revolted against taxation by the British aristocracy, albeit for a lack of representation than for the amount of taxes.

The financial predicament of the current Pakistani government is not shocking news. Though financial aid from foreign donors has beefed up the country's reserves so far, it will not be long before countries and international organizations will shy

Like the seeds of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, a class conflict and stark differences between the rich and poor, peppered by an excessively corrupt ruling body, are also present in Pakistan. While the country serves as a fertile ground for revolutionary seeds, is Pakistan really ready for a revolution? Objectivity says no – at least not for a very, very long time.

The country needs a leader who can pilot a struggle of mammoth proportions. Such a leader ought to have a vision, an agenda and a strong sense of nationhood. Not only that, a revolutionary leader ought to have the skill and courage to carefully and tactfully handle obstacles thrown his/her way, yet, never at the cost of the vision that he/she is leading. Only such determination, with a vision that benefits huge masses, can help build support for a revolutionary movement.

Given Pakistan history, one must also bear in mind that a revolution is only successful through a movement. It is for the people by the people. There

only the absence of a leader but also a common cause. Revolutionaries are fanatically devoted to their cause, often sidelining their own lives, let alone their interests. Their agitation and aggression is carefully planned. Revolutionaries, united by a common ambition, rarely deviate from their mission let alone abandon it midway.

Unfortunately, the Pakistani society is broken down in several religious, cultural, political, linguistic and social blocs. A fractionated social order makes a common aim and cause very difficult to identify with. Until an extremely dire situation or crisis erupts that overshadows all differences, the support for a revolution is remains unfounded.

Pakistan is then heading towards a situation of anarchy rather than an organized, cause-bound revolution. Failed states such as Somalia are mired with anarchism and total disorder. Scholars describe the situation in Somalia as a war of "all against all" as continuous insurgencies strain Somalia's stability.

A similar situation of different interests and mayhem is prevalent in Pakistan. In situations where Islamists are not reticent about suicide attacks, small insurgent groups, divided by religion or ethnicity, conduct target killings instead.

Unless Pakistanis identify a uniform cause, the country is unmistakably heading towards a failed-state model than a revolutionary transformation. What will hit it first? Only time can tell. **S**

Sijal Fawad is a Research Analyst for the Business Recorder newspaper and an external student of Economics and Finance at the School of Oriental and African Studies.

A revolutionary leader ought to have the skill and courage to carefully and tactfully handle obstacles thrown his/her way, yet, never at the cost of the vision that he/she is leading.

away from bestowing money on a local government, known for its corruption and inefficiency. However, once financial aid decreases, if not ceases entirely, Pakistan will have to face an extortionist form of taxation upon those who have already been drained for taxes.

is however a thin line between working with the people and autocratically leading the people. Sabotaged by selfish interests and power greed, revolutions can often go wrong. No revolution is lead by a single person alone. That instead, is a dictatorship.

Pakistan unfortunately faces not

Roadside vendors are a normal sight in almost all countries, whether developed or developing. Constituting the informal sector in the economy, these vendors can be found in urban areas around the world. Such is the case in Nepal, where the informal sector attracts both the employed and the unemployed workforce. Occupying strategic locations at roadsides or along footpaths, vendors utilize unused land or encroach on public spaces to set up their stalls and shops. In Nepal roadside vendors are usually women carrying out business transactions keeping one eye on their child, who is either tucked in between their arms or playfully lying beside them.

Age group, educational status, accompaniment of children and the reason of entry into the profession, differentiates female vendors in Nepal. According to a study conducted by CARE Nepal, an international NGO, 22 percent of these female vendors have children, 69 percent are without children and 9 percent are unmarried girls. Furthermore, 24 percent fall in the age bracket of 15-24; 60 percent in 25-40 and 14 percent in 41-59. Research also shows that 38 percent of female vendors are illiterate, 21 percent are literate and only 12 percent have acquired primary education.

Two major reasons are cited for entry into this profession. Firstly, given the high level of illiteracy present amongst female vendors, the occupation provides an easy way for them to earn an income. Most women are single parents or are compelled to work since their husband's income is not sufficient to run the family. Secondly, since unemployment is on the rise, many women are unable to find work and hence enter a lucrative business.

Earning additional income or uti-



lizing their leisure time is another factor why Nepalese women choose this genre of work. Female vendors also constitute two segments when it comes to mobility. There are those who have a fixed spot on the pavement or a stall where they sell their products daily. Others have a wheel cart and move from lane to lane in search of buyers.

Women involved in such practices also face numerous social issues. A common perception in Nepal, like most of South Asia, is that women belong to the weaker sex and cannot defend themselves like their male counterparts. A pressing issue is place management, as women are unable to get a permanent place to operate their roadside businesses. Many are uneducated and lack business training. Other issues include proper lighting that hinders operations after dusk and a lack of investment to expand the business.

More than often, women face health problems due to lack of proper shelter to prevent them from sunlight in the summer and cold winds during winter. Problems also include misconduct by their husbands, lack of admiration from the society, sexual harassment, male domination and inadequate time for their families.

In Greater Kathmandu, female vendors belong to four major ethnic divisions. They comprise Brahmin/Chettri, Madhesi, Dalit and Janjati. Amongst them, 55 percent of women belong to the Brahmin/Chettri ethnicity, also referred to as the privileged cast group. Close to 36 percent represent the Janjati class while only 2 percent constitute the Madhesi and Dalit class.

The Janjati caste includes both indigenous women who reside in Greater Khatmandu as well as those who come from other parts of the country. Interestingly, nearly 80 per-

Vendors

In Nepal, female street vendors face numerous social problems but continue to rise in numbers. The government must introduce reforms to help this informal sector.

By Muhammad Omar Iftikhar

cent of female vendors belong to other cities and migrate to Greater Khatmandu for the sole purpose of doing business. Some even migrate

any business and female vendors can be seen shouting information about their goods or setting up eye-catching stalls. Most female vendors give bar-

most common health issues include cold, cough and chest pain, which they encounter on being exposed to dirt and pollution. Body pain is also a frequent complaint since vendors push their carts around the city or sit on concrete pavements and uneven surfaces for the entire day.

At present the Nepalese government has not formulated any clear policy regarding street vendors as it is viewed as an unorganized trade. Public policy must cater to child-care, healthcare and investment that will sustain the vending business. If all vendors unite and demand recognition, the government will be compelled to formulate policies to give these vendors a voice of their own. **S**

Women involved in such practices also face numerous social issues. A common perception in Nepal, like most of South Asia, is that women belong to the weaker sex and cannot defend themselves like their male counterparts.

from India in search of work but become roadside vendors as barriers to entry in that profession are minimal.

Female vendors have now learnt the tricks of the trade and display their business acumen with ease. Accommodating buyers is an integral part of

gaining room to their customers. With insecurities looming upon them, they need to either meet a break-even point or earn a profit to survive.

Health issues are also a major concern for street vendors who have to bear changing weather conditions without a roof over their head. The

Muhammad Omar Iftikhar is Assistant Editor at Slogan. He writes on youth, development and social activism.

Mystic Tribes

The Kalaash tribe remains an enigma of the Pakistani society. Adamantly maintaining its unique traditions and culture, the tribe is both mystical and unique.

By Ayesha Malik



With a total population of just about 3000 people, the Kalaash tribe lives 2000 meters above ground level, surrounded by the picturesque mountains of the Hindu Kush. The tribe has its own language, religion and culture

that traces back to ancient Greece. The Kalaash valley remains unique with its beautiful colors, scenery and its hospitable people.

Theories about the origins of the tribe vary. Some historians believe that they descended from the tribes of Al-

exander the Great, while others agree on their origins being Macedonian. The people of Kalaash inhabit three valleys, the borders of which are connected to Afghanistan. Also known as the 'survivor tribe,' the Kalaash people harbor a very ancient Indo-European

faith. Some anthropologists claim that the tribe is largely polytheistic while others argue that they follow the god "Desau." Studies have also shown roots in "animism" as Kalaash people have long believed that trees, stones and streams have souls.

Kalaashi festivals, celebrating seasonal changes, are held throughout the year. Witnesses claim that these festivals are reminiscent of old pagan festivals of Europe. Ritualistic festivals include the baking of special bread made of walnuts, animal sacrifices and culturally significant dances and songs. What sets the Kalaash people apart is their strong sense of culture and its importance with respect to the ever-evolving modern societies. Historians argue that the tribe does not allow for an evolution of culture as many indigenous tribal communities are set in their ways of survival and remain so with dignity and integrity.

There have been several incidences of Kalaashi individuals converting to Islam in recent years but their numbers remain stable owing to the fact that the child mortality rate is quite low. The Pakistan constitution protects the community and their religious customs, as the Kalaashi people are considered a religious minority.

Among their tribal traditions, the most prominent festival is the Chamos, which is celebrated at winter solstice (December 7-22). The concepts of spirituality and purification are explored and celebrated. Activities such as goat sacrifices, singing and dancing, baking of special bread and dough and other events mark the end of another successful year in harvesting the fields. This particular celebration is dedicated to the god

Balaumain and his influence is felt in the decorations of shrines. Food offerings and sacrifices are made to the Jeshtak shrines as a sign of respect to the Kalaash ancestors.

Most famous among the celebrations is the baking of walnut bread, which is distributed to animals as well as shepherds as a token of appreciation and the continuation of protection of the fields. Small figurines are also made from dough, which includes ground walnuts, to gain spiritual significance.

The han, or temple, remains the focus of all these celebrations. The decoration of the han is one of the activities that occurs during Chamos. Small diagrams of herbivores, drawn with a dark paste, adorn the temple walls. Walnut tree bark is used to paint figurines, again for a spiritual connection to the temple. Individually stylized depictions of an "ibex" are drawn on the han and are referential to the rock art that is generally found in the caves in the same area.

The Kalaash people have retained their unique culture and its significance through decades. With the evolving environment, survival is difficult. While their modes of civilization differ from any other tribes in the area and their integrity has been challenged on several occasions, the strong will and inbred ancestral knowledge of these tribes have ensured the means of survival. Many indigenous tribal communities have lost their way owing to weaknesses in their cultures or people that have led to their extinction, but the Kalaash have been consistent in this respect. Strong, integral support and the cooperation of several research-

ers as well as national organizations have had a hand in the preservation of the beautiful Kalaash valley. It has received international recognition owing to its distinct ways of living, colorful culture and clothing and its rituals and modes of survival.

Although several different ethnicities and groups may be residing in Kalaash now, the most influential society is that of "Kho," which occupies the district of Chitral. Apart from the Kalaash people, the Kho speak their own language and are generally Muslim. The people of Kalaash commonly intermingle with this group and their relations extend to work and family.

Usually, individuals of Kalaash and Kho can easily understand and converse with one another and are able to accommodate each other in times of need. This may contribute somewhat to the loss of Kalaashi identity, apart from the threat of Urdu and English. In the long run, Kalaash may also require overseas sponsors if they are to survive. Due to a lack of awareness around the world about this small number of people, national preservation agencies should hone and appreciate the Kalaash valley and its protection should be imminent. As more individuals mingle with mainstream Pakistani society, the traditional Kalaash language comes under sociolinguistic threats. Promotion of the Kalaash culture and its distinction could help bring back the confidence of the valley's people and help counter resisting forces. ■

Ayesha Malik is a Graphic Design graduate who freelances for several publications, including de 'Sign, Slogan, Herald and Karachi Writers.

"I reflected on the idiocy of portraying Pakistan as a 'failed state.' It was hardly a scene reminiscent of Grozny or Mogadishu."

Anatol Lieven's major study, *Pakistan: A Hard Country* is one of the more comprehensive accounts of contemporary Pakistan in recent times. Lieven quite painstakingly attempts to shatter the stereotypes about the country,

and is currently a Professor of international relations and terrorism at Kings College, London. Perhaps due to his assorted background, Lieven's style thankfully is not overly academic and is pretty accessible especially for the lay readers fed on a diet of exploding Pakistan mantra.

The central argument that Lieven builds is that Pakistan does not merit the verdict of a failed or disintegrating state. For this purpose he looks

praetorian state. The diverse opinions within the country especially in the smaller aggrieved provinces are most critical of the conduct and adventures of the armed forces than the mainstream nationalist identification with the Army as a centripetal force. During Musharraf's time and after the killing of Osama Bin Laden, the military as an institution has come into sharp, critical focus within Pakistan. This domestic cri-

A Different Narrative

Title: Pakistan: A Hard Country
Author: Anatol Lieven
Publisher: PublicAffairs (April 2011)
Pages: 592, Hardback
Price: PKR. 1295
ISBN: 978-1610390217

which pervade the international and regional media. Pakistan, some say is world's most dangerous country while others hold that it is a failed state imploding from within. Often these descriptions omit a plain fact that there are 180 million people living in the country who lead their regular, irregular lives amid the chaos and rapid transformation that is taking place. One can argue about the trajectory that the country may take but its dynamism is hard to ignore.

Lieven is also not just another starry-eyed visitor to Pakistan and displays his relative familiarity with the country. For several years, Lieven reported on Pakistan while working for *The Times*. After his journalistic career, he switched to academia

at the robust society, its kinship networks and ingrained means of resilience. The other reason for Pakistan's viability is the Army, which Lieven views, in a less unfavorable light than most writers on Pakistan. A host of Pakistani intellectuals have criticized him for the 'romance' with Pakistan's armed forces.

Lieven has a right to project the military machine as he sees fit. While doing so, he does soften the overarching role of Pakistan's security establishment and how for decades it has (mis)governed and led the country. The meritocratic culture, efficiency and keeping-the-country-together arguments on the Army receive more attention than what Pakistanis have been experiencing in terms of a coercive and

tique is different from the western concerns on Pakistan's duplicity in the 'war on terror' as it challenges the role and space for the army as the dominant institution in the country.

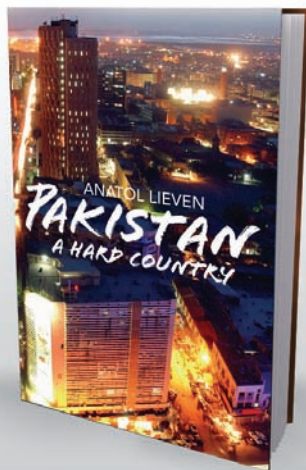
Historian Manan Ahmed last year wrote in *The National* that most books on the country end up presenting a picture as if "Pakistan is illegible outside of the military. Now, there is little doubt that this remains the case from a geostrategic point of view but does that really exhaust all manner of living in that corner of the world? No Pakistani in these books reads or thinks or paints or writes poetry or sets up a new shop or raises a family, or even walks in the park."

Admittedly, Lieven does cap-

ture the everyday life and recounts numerous anecdotes that he gathered during his visit and therefore this criticism is a little more valid for other writers say Bruce Riedel who view Pakistan via the prism of its military-intelligence complex. Having said that, the militarization of Pakistan's society and economy continue unabated and Musharraf's decade intensified this process further. This is where Lieven is less

nance quandaries, it is difficult to prioritize such issues. Hence the issue of an obsessive national security state re-emerges and tells us why social change has rarely been on the agenda of Pakistan's elites.

If anything, Lieven's book gives a very comprehensible account for the global readership. By delving into the complexity of its society, Lieven presents a humanized storyline about a misunderstood and maligned coun-



Reviewed by Raza Rumi

clear. Perhaps a more rounded discussion on militarization might have enriched his account.

But it would be unfair to underplay the merits of this book even if one has a problem with the Army's portrayal. For instance, Lieven highlights issue of climate change, water resource management and rampant population growth as some of the real dangers to Pakistan's future. In his view, these issues hold the key to the country's survival as a viable state. It is a matter of grave concern that despite two major disasters Pakistan is yet to have a national (or sets of subnational) policy and strategy. Our disaster preparedness remains abysmal and 2011 floods proved it once again. Many would argue that without fixing the broader gover-

try. However, the somewhat flawed discussion on the Army mars the overall analysis. It is hoped that his future work on Pakistan would take stock of how Pakistani scholars and writers frame their everyday reality. Overall, Pakistan: A Hard Country is a book that cannot be dismissed as it reaches a few considered conclusions about a dynamic and resilient country. As a Pakistani it is good to read such a narrative even if one momentarily ignores the brutal reality of a dysfunctional, post-colonial state that refuses to place citizen welfare above the imperatives of national security. **S**

Raza Rumi is a Lahore-based public policy expert and an editor at weekly Friday Times.



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“Pakistan is not a failed state. It is a troubled state.”

Arsla Jawaid talks to Anatol Lieven, author of the book ‘Pakistan: A Hard Country,’ in this exclusive interview.

Anatol Lieven is a professor in the War Studies Department at King’s College, London and a senior fellow of the New America Foundation in Washington, DC. He is author of *America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism and Pakistan: A Hard Country*.



Why did you decide to write a book on Pakistan?

I was a journalist here in the 1980s and I always wanted to write a book on Pakistan. I left in 1989 and for ten years I was working on completely different issues. Then of course, 9/11 happened and I came back almost every year for research and became more and more worried by the development of American policy towards Pakistan but also by the ways in which the Pakistani reality was being misrepresented in the Western media. Four years back I was commissioned to write a book on Pakistan by Penguin and I agreed at once.

As a journalist, how did you conduct research for this book and why did you adopt that approach?

It was twofold. I basically read everything I possibly could about the academic, historical and fiction literature of Pakistan. Then as a journalist I went out and spoke to people. Academics believe this is too informal but it is absolutely essential. You go out with a recorder to different parts of town and meet people from different classes. Sometimes people

will stop and talk to you. Sometimes it attracts a crowd and that becomes a problem. Sometimes if there is a very strong opinion it will show up. In the book, whenever possible, I try to quote people directly.

There has been a lot of talk about Pakistan being a failed state. In your recent book, ‘Pakistan: A Hard Country,’ you argue otherwise. Can you elaborate on this?

In the course of my career as a journalist, I visited and worked in some genuinely failed states like Afghanistan in the 1990s. Pakistan is not a failed state. It is a troubled state. Part of the argument is that there is a danger that American policies will push it towards failure and the book argues very strongly against those policies. It is an analysis of how Pakistan works. And to explore the different kinds of power, where it comes from, how it’s legitimized, how it’s exercised and how it’s mediated in Pakistan.

On the one hand, this maintains stability of the whole system. Resilient is a word I often use for Pakistan. The extraction of resources from a corrupt state and their distribution in patronage to politicians and their followers,

maintains the stability of the system but on the other hand, it's terrible for development. Pakistan does of course grow but it doesn't grow at nearly the rate as it could or did in the 1960s. We know that Pakistan can do it. It is not a failed state but not yet a successful state. It will survive in the short term but if it can't tackle some critical issues like the water issue in view of the rising population, 50 years from now, who knows.

Following the recent U.S congressional hearing on Balochistan, what impact do you think the hearing will have on Pakistan and, in your experience, is it wise to make such statements?

On Dana Rohrabacher and the Balochistan issue, remember this is not the Obama Administration speaking nor has this been adopted by Congress as policy either. This is one republican Congressman, with both a personal and party history of making crazy comments. It is abominable that an elected representative in the world's greatest democracy should be making such irresponsible statements about another country of which he personally knows absolutely nothing. I want to make my disapproval of that statement extremely clear but it is not the policy of the Obama administration.

Why was it important to convince your publishers to divide the book into different provinces?

Commentators obsessed purely with the Taliban and the extremist threat in Pakistan, often ignore the immense diversity within the four provinces. I had written that the Taliban were not as important in Sindh as they were elsewhere and my American publisher couldn't understand why I hadn't folded the Sindh chapter with Punjab! The provincial balance in Pakistan contributes to the resilience of the country. That balance was maintained under the military rule too. Recently

under civilian rule, one has seen great achievements for Pakistan. Redrawing the balance between different provinces, with the exception of Balochistan, has restored a measure of provincial harmony and balance.

There has been a lot of talk on drone strikes in Pakistan and US military operations in the country. With the consequent NATO blockade, where do you think this issue stands?

The key question is whether U.S negotiations with the Taliban will lead to an end in drone strikes. They won't in suspected Al-Qaeda personnel, I'm afraid. The US has been talking and fighting but the fighting is making talking all the more difficult. If you need Pakistan to bring a peace settlement then constantly infuriating the people is not a very good idea.

There is also a bigger issue. The US military has insisted on keeping permanent US military bases and security forces to prop up the Afghan government and army but also to continue attacking targets inside Pakistan. Firstly, this will make a peace settlement with the Taliban impossible because they will not accept any long-term presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan. I don't think they can compromise on that, though they may compromise on the timetable. Secondly, Americans have totally missed the point. If they keep launching attacks on Pakistan, far from being able to end the war and get out of this mess, the provocations will only drag them deeper.

Following the OBL raid on May 2, anti-Americanism has heightened in Pakistan. Republican rhetoric has also not been very kind. How important is rhetoric in this relationship?

Well rhetoric certainly doesn't help on either side. Anyone with half a brain knew that if the Americans spotted Osama anywhere, they were going to kill him. If it wasn't complic-

ity, it was certainly incompetence and Pakistan should conduct a thorough investigation on that and some people will have to go.

I think American diplomacy has been terribly mishandled. Complete misstatement of facts on the western side could have easily been countered by Pakistan. Both sides bear a share of the responsibility. The central tragedy is that for years Pakistan has been advocating a peace settlement with the Afghan Taliban. Only now have the Americans understood that a peace settlement is necessary. There is something idiotic that just as America is coming to Pakistan's page, relations seem to be deteriorating.

After all this research and visiting different parts of the country, how do you see the future of Pakistan?

If I knew that...I would be a richer man.

I am confident that Pakistan will survive in the short to medium term. Parts of it will prosper. In the longer run there are problems, which if not addressed could be an existential threat. There are no more water resources to be tapped and it is not efficiently used. Pakistan has the highest rate of water wastage in South Asia. The population will be 330 million by the middle of the century and that's beginning to look like a dangerous combination.

There are two things in Pakistani history that give me hope. The first is that when Pakistan was formed it was a very poor state but the first generation of Pakistanis got much more done in terms of capacity building than many do today. So it can be done.

Secondly, there is a need to improve the efficiency of agriculture. Pakistani farmers are more than capable of responding to incentives and responsibilities. However, you need a state that will make water a priority and I hope that the Pakistani state is capable of that. But I am worried. **S**



By Anees Jillani

Is this What We Call Democracy?

One thing that Pakistanis often get tired of is Indians taking pride in their democracy and criticizing Pakistan for tolerating military rule during most of its 65 year history. In India, recent elections in Uttar Pradesh showed that the Bahujan Samaj Party, headed by a billionaire Mayawati who was a simple school teacher a couple of years ago, has been trounced by the Samajwadi Party which is headed by a former wrestler, Mulayam Singh Yadav, who of course is also a billionaire now.

The Samajwadi Party took 224 seats out of the 403 in the legislative assembly, while the BSP, which was in power at the time of the elections, was a distant second with 80 seats. The Congress party, which is currently heading the national government, suffered a major setback in the elections and could manage to pocket only 28 seats. The consolation for the Congress may be that BJP, which is the main opposition party at the national level, also fared poorly and could bag only 47 seats.

It is no doubt praise-worthy that peaceful elections resulted in a smooth transition of power in a short time, which seldom happens in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. However, what does one do when one corrupt politician is replaced by an equally corrupt one, as chief minister for a state?

Akhilesh Yadav, 39, is son of the head of SP, Mulayam Singh Yadav, who himself has been Chief Minister of UP thrice. He is accused of amassing billions and promoting goonda raj. Despite this, the 112 million voters of UP, the largest and politically most important state of India, voted overwhelmingly for the Yadav family. The Yadav community voted enbloc for the SP as it was headed by someone who hailed from their community. The Muslims, disgruntled with BSP's performance during the past five years and still holding Congress and BJP responsible for the destruction of the Ayodhya mosque incident, made SP's victory possible

in many of the seats. This phenomenon of the community voting for candidates from its own community makes a mockery of the whole system.

Is this what democracy is all about? Replacing one corrupt leader by another corrupt leader, who was routed by the same voters for this very reason in the last election? And to top it all, politics in India, just like in Pakistan, appears to run in the families. The Gandhi family continues to be treated like a royalty and has virtually been dominating the Indian political scene since the early last century; the tradition has now rubbed on the other political families and the Indian Lok Sabha and the state assemblies are flooded with sons and daughters of old politicians. The appointment of Akhilesh as the new UP chief minister is the latest chapter in this regard.

Politics is thus no longer meant to serve the masses. It is a business venture, meant to amass wealth that you can later use without any hesitation in the next election. One example is sufficient to prove the efficacy of exorbitant expenses in an election: in the Tamil Nadu elections last year, the Indian election commissioner did not permit the ruling DMK party to use government resources and tried to control the expenditure. As a result, the ruling party lost.

However, this may be regarded as an exception rather than the rule as it is not feasible for a person without adequate means to contest an election even in 'democratic' India; it is virtually impossible in the 'Islamic' Republic and of course unthinkable when it comes to Senate elections where a seat may be sold for as much as ten crore rupees. ■

Anees Jillani is an advocate of the Supreme Court and a member of the Washington, DC Bar. He has been writing for various publications for more than 20 years and has authored several books.

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