

NEIGHBOR
Aung San Suu Kyi

May 2012

SOUTHASIA

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The Regional Business & Economic Review

INSIDE:

PAKISTAN

Oppressing Osama's Widows

INDIA

The Water Tussle

BANGLADESH

Street Power

AFGHANISTAN

Time to Get Serious

Beyond the Bitterness

With frequent cross-border conferences, festivals and dialogue events in place, the Indo-Pak relationship is showing signs of thawing. But given the Siachen impasse, it seems too early to pick the fruits of hope.



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I am Pakistan

I am not just terrorism, poverty and corruption. I am **Abdus Sattar Edhi's** philanthropy. I am **Ansar Burney's** compassion. I have the courage of **Rashid Minhas**. I possess the beauty of **Sadequain's** calligraphy. I am **Arfa Karim's** brilliance. I am **Pervez Masih's** sacrifice. I am **Shahid Afridi's** exuberance. I am **Jahangir Khan's** consistency. I am the **1992 Cricket World Cup**. I am **Sharmeen Obaid's** Oscar. I am **Cowasjee's** pen. I am **Dr. Abdus Salam's** Nobel Prize. I am **Gulgee's** masterstrokes. I am **Noor Jehan and Mehdi Hasan's** voice. I am **Ayub Ommaya's** invention. I am **Adeeb Rizvi's** humanitarianism.

I am home to the ancient civilizations of **Indus Valley, Moenjodaro, Taxila and Harappa**. **Himalayas** and the **Hindu Kush** are a part of me. The world's 2nd highest mountain peak, **K2**, is my strength. I am **Shandur**, the highest Polo ground in the world. I am **Gwadar**, one of the world's largest deep sea ports. **Karakoram Highway**, the **8th wonder of the world**, resides within me. I have **Khewra** mines, the world's second largest and oldest salt mine. I am **Shah Faisal Mosque**, the ninth largest mosque in the world. I am **multi-ethnic** and I speak more than **60 languages**.

I am the **6th largest milk producer** and the **4th largest cotton producer** in the world. I have the **5th largest coal and gold reserves**. I am blessed with the **10th largest workforce** in the world. I have the **27th largest economy**. I have the potential to become the **5th largest telecom market** in the world. I am Asia's **2nd best performing stock exchange**. I am the **9th largest English-speaking nation** in the world. I am the **7th largest standing armed force**.

I am a country of **180 million** people. I am an ever-expanding middle class. A proud **nuclear-armed** state yet peace-loving, I have the **highest number of troops** in UN peacekeeping missions. I am a model of survival. I am **40,000 deaths** for global peace. I am an epitome of **resilience**. I am **hospitality**. I am a sea of **untapped potential**. I am a **goldmine of opportunities**.

**I am the bravest nation in the world.
Yes, I am Pakistan.**



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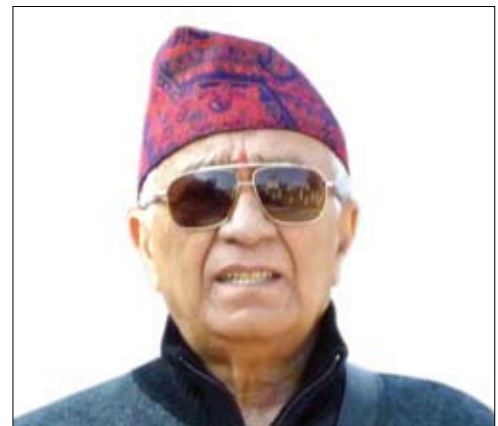
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Question but don't flout

At no time in Pakistan's history, spanning six decades, has the government in power been in such a serious and prolonged confrontation with the land's highest court. This has resulted in the government's functioning in almost all key areas coming to a grinding halt and increasing possibility of political turmoil. It is quite shocking to observe how the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Yusuf Raza Gilani, has not complied with court orders and has deliberately disregarded the court by not writing a letter to the Swiss government to reopen graft cases against President Asif Ali Zardari.

As a result, on April 26, the Supreme Court passed a judgment that is said to have added more chaos than clarity to an already messy and murky situation. The Supreme Court handed down a symbolic punishment lasting just about 37 seconds to Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, making him the first ever chief executive to be convicted for committing contempt. In a judgment in December 2009, the Supreme Court had directed the government to start proceedings against President Zardari but the prime minister had refused to comply on the pretext that Zardari being the head of state, enjoyed immunity. On May 8, 2012, the Supreme Court issued its detailed verdict in the contempt of court case against Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and set in motion a new round of heated debate and discussion on the fate of the incumbent prime minister. The Supreme Court verdict read that the premier had "willfully, deliberately and persistently defied a clear direction of the highest court of the country". It raised the possibility that he could face a five-year disqualification from being elected to parliament or a provincial assembly.

On the other hand, the political situation in Pakistan continues to worsen by the day as political opponents in the shape of the PPP, PML (N), PTI, MQM, Jamaat e Islami, JUI and ANP prepare for the next elections. At the same time, the energy crisis continues, people are killed by target killers in the streets of Karachi, industrial production takes a nose dive, the common man continues to groan under galloping prices and the power gap widens leading to daily street battles. To cap it all, Pakistan-US ties continue to be on an uneven keel and the country's external stability is fraught with dangers. Both Pakistan and the US continue to suffer from a huge confidence deficit while other nations in the vicinity, such as India and Afghanistan, take advantage and the US returns their sentiments with over-friendly overtures. President Barack Obama pays a surprise visit to Afghanistan and even signs a bilateral agreement with President Karzai while US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton visits India and lauds the country for taking steps to reduce its dependence on Iranian oil, saying New Delhi has put itself on the line to get Tehran back to the negotiating table. In Pakistan, everything is almost at a standstill as the constitutional crisis lumbers on with experts saying due process of law will have to be followed to oust the convicted prime minister in light of the Supreme Court's judgment. After all, as was noted by the Supreme Court, the executive may question a court decision, but it could not flout it – a point for the PM and his advisors to ponder.



Syed Jawaid Iqbal

Female Power

Your cover story on the women of South Asia was very engaging and timely. We live in a region where women have been at the forefront in politics, academia, entertainment and even the military. It was interesting to read the perspectives of four women, each representing an important country in South Asia. Often one finds publications covering the plight of women in only one country but it was enlightening to read and observe a trend emerging within South Asia, in one



publication. Despite the many odds against them, I am convinced that this generation of South Asian women is going to usher in change and work towards a common goal of introducing collective freedom for all women in their country. The most interesting movement is the change in mindset, where women of all ages, are more determined to cross all hurdles, ready to make their voices heard and usher in positive change. Whether it is sitting in the parliament fighting to pass a bill in the favor of women or it is rising to the top ranks of a global corporation, South Asian women can no longer be ignored or shunned. Interestingly enough, each of your articles

also shed light on the unsung heroes of South Asia: the women who are not as prominent as their counterparts and yet, show their commitment and strength just by surviving and fighting harder each day. Though poverty remains a serious hurdle, the women of South Asia are ready to make their voices heard.

Fazeelat Usmani
Karachi, Pakistan

2. Your story on South Asian women was very well presented and thought provoking. Owing to the dominant narrative that most women in South Asia are suppressed, oppressed and subjected to violence in all forms, it was refreshing to see movements emerging, individuals rising and mindsets changing in the favor of women throughout the region. However, while such efforts are in place and movements take time to bring collective change, what remains most important is a serious effort on the part of governments. While private sectors can act as pressure groups, women from all strata of society will only benefit if there are concerted efforts in place that guarantee their protection and well-being, on an official, state level. This is the most important aspect. Unfortunately, while we may be able to view international achievements of some women within South Asia, the fact remains that the majority continue to suffer from extreme poverty, lack of basic health, domestic violence, low or no education standards and a myriad of other impediments to success. Nonetheless, it is encouraging to see women taking a stand and speaking out for their rights. The ball has certainly started rolling and it won't be long before we will see women's movement taking some concrete steps and making tangible change.

Dhruv Shankar
Mumbai, India

Watch What You Say

The statement floated by Adm. Willard, Commander of the US Pacific Command that US Special Forces were stationed throughout South Asia, in countries like India, Bangladesh, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka



met with some well-deserved backlash. Willard claimed that these forces were working with special governmental agencies to train and cooperate with internal counter-terrorism and counter insurgency strategies.

While Afghanistan and Pakistan were not on that list, it is commendable that the governments of all nations, mentioned in the statement, responded strongly to the US and vehemently denied any governmental involvement in such a plan. It is important that such matters not be left to speculation and rumors. It is unwise for the U.S to issue sweeping statements and not expect any consequent reaction. The U.S seems to be rallying support for its counter-terrorism efforts and create a bloc in South Asia while isolating Afghanistan and Pakistan. There is no immediate need for the U.S to be involved in the Maldives, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka when it has not entirely stood by these countries in the past. Admiral Willard's statement sounds like a bluff, designed to illustrate America's might and guarantee its long-term involvement masked by a questionable act of goodwill.

Aly ul-Saleem
Male, The Maldives



Deciphering an Enigma

The Kalaash Tribe of Pakistan is a mystery to many but remains one of Pakistan's biggest national heritages.

The Kalaash people are only known for

their unique clothing and dances but few people really know anything more than that. Their ritualistic festivals and mystical customs remain an enigma. The well-researched piece on the Kalaash tribe certainly helped to draw attention to their customs, of baking certain types of bread, their celebrations and religious background. This tribe represents an ancient culture and is a symbol of pride for Pakistanis. Removed and comfortably isolated from urban areas, the tribe is able to ensure that its customs are preserved through generations. However, as globalization takes over, the tribe faces a survival threat and so care and effort must be dedicated to protect and appreciate the Kalaash people and safeguard their culture and customs. It is not only the work of the government and organizations working to preserve the culture and heritage of Pakistan, but is also the duty of international heritage preservation agencies to become involved and save a part of Pakistan whose beauty lies in the very enigma of its existence.

Mahvish Mehromjo
Lahore, Pakistan

Unreliable Partners

The third Trilateral Summit held between Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan was expected to discuss a long-term strategy for Afghanistan and

chalk out a framework for the three nations to cooperate after international troops leave in 2014. While the summit was meant to focus on rebuilding a prosperous Afghanistan, the meeting transformed instead into an Iran-Pakistan bilateral discussion. With the looming IP gas pipeline issue still at the forefront and numerous energy and trade discussions underway, in many respects, Afghanistan became an excuse for the two nations to conduct consultations and finalize plans without having to answer to the international community. It is disappointing that Iran would exploit the opportunity and Pakistan would welcome it when the need of the hour is cooperation and transparency. Iran's behavior is guided by national security and the threat of international sanctions, but the Summit could have proven enormously beneficial for the regional powers involved had they set aside ulterior motives and focused on the issue at hand. It should hardly come as a surprise then that Afghanistan is warming up to India, a nation that illustrates its commitment to rebuilding a war-torn Afghanistan.

Altamash Shajjan
Kabul, Afghanistan

Inspirational words

Your interview with Fawzia Koofi, Afghanistan's first female deputy speaker of the Parliament who is now running for Presidency, was immensely inspiring. The spirit of a woman who has suffered so much personal loss and stands brave and unwavering

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in the face of numerous threats, blew me away. It is women like Koofi, who become idols for South Asian women and set an example for others to follow. I was particularly interested in



reading her foreign and regional policy agendas. Through the plethora of work she has already done for women's movements and rights, both within the parliament and on a social level, Koofi illustrates that she fully realizes the grave danger that women will face

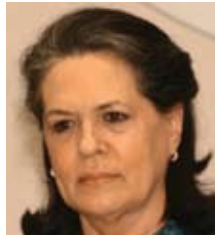
should the Taliban return to power. This understanding and motivation enable her to make her voice heard. Koofi has already rallied up immense support for her candidacy in a country that has not been kind to women in the past. This in and of itself, is an enormous feat. Whatever the case may be, it is guaranteed that whether Koofi becomes the country's first female President or stays in the Parliament and forms a strong pressure group, she has made her mark and has shown the women of Afghanistan, how it is done.

Dunya Mehmood
Philadelphia, U.S



"The international network of the defeated LTTE is still active looking for opportunities to revive the terror group."

D. M. Jayaratne
Prime Minister of Sri Lanka



"The present situation in other political parties is very bad. We should not allow the problems confronting the other parties to spread their tentacles in Congress."

Sonia Gandhi
President of Indian National Congress



"The objectives of Bhutan, and the Buddhist understandings of happiness, are much broader than those that are referred to as 'happiness' in the Western literature."

Lyonpo Jigme Thinley
Prime Minister of Bhutan



"Right to information is the fundamental right of the people in a democratic society."

Zillur Rehman
President of Bangladesh



"We cannot allow this country to be influenced by mafia and narcotics-related activities. It kills our economy. It destroys our reputation. So we are going to work against it."

Hamid Karzai
President of Afghanistan



"Our campaign aiming to boycott the polls has been successful and taking into consideration appeals made by the seven political parties, various organizations and people, we have withdrawn our strike."

Baburam Bhattarai
Prime Minister of Nepal



"If there is no democracy, everything will be finished."

Yousuf Raza Gilani
President of Pakistan

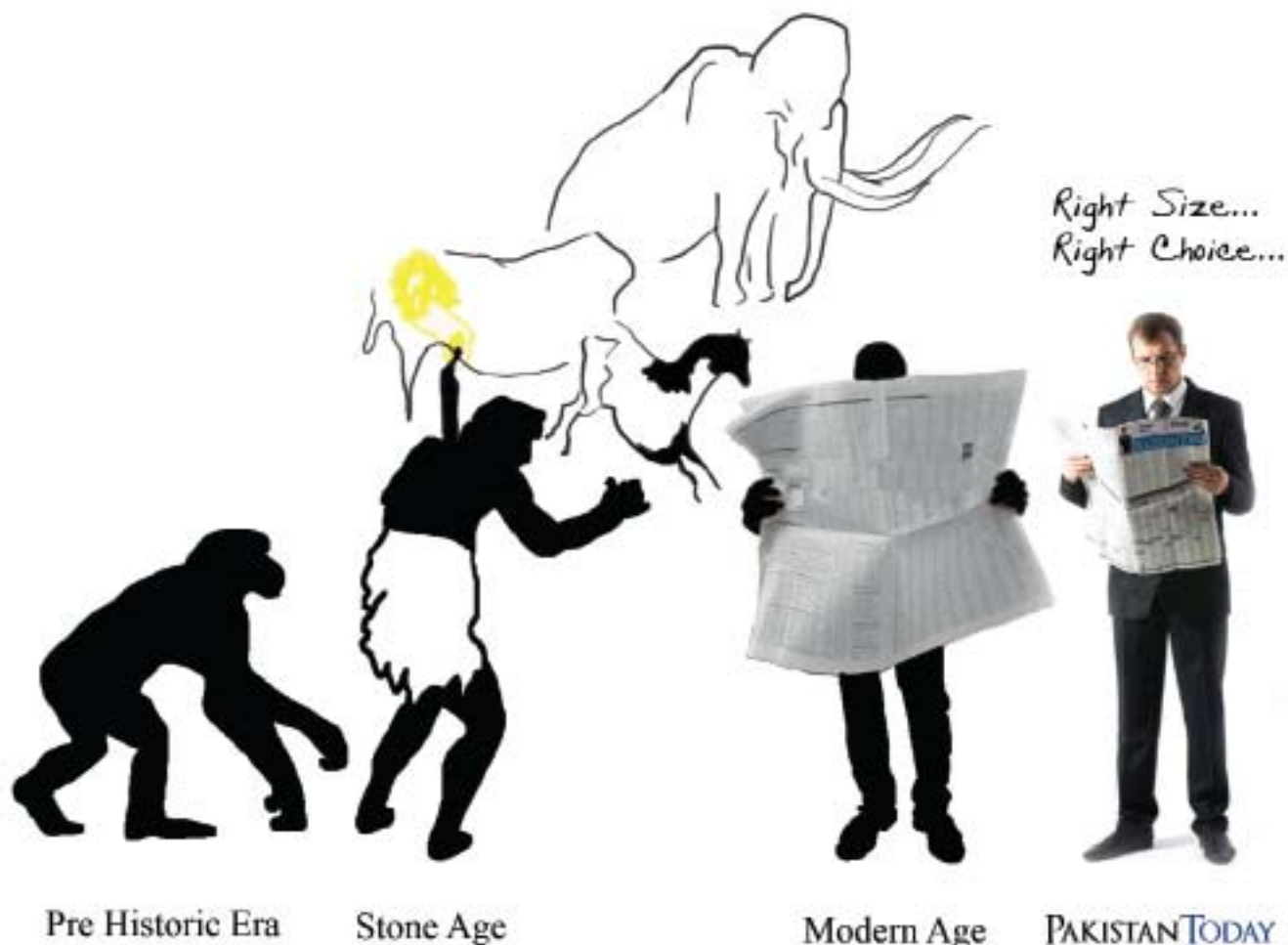


"The current unrest is because we haven't been able to work together."

Muhammed Waheed Hassan
President of Maldives



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AFGHANISTAN

Well Timed Surprise Visit

President Obama's unexpected, undercover, hush-hush visit to Afghanistan on the eve of Osama Bin Laden's first death anniversary has sent a strong signal to many players predicting what a post-2014 Afghanistan will look like. Choosing the moment carefully, President Obama's visit was not only aimed at showcasing American commitment to not abandon the country as it did when the Soviets withdrew

but to also send a strong, confident signal back home, that the President is ready to return to the Oval office for a second term.

While in Afghanistan, the President met with American troops and reiterated U.S. strength and commitment to fight-



ing the war and bringing its troops back home in 2014. He also met with Afghan President Karzai, with whom he signed a strategic pact illustrating American reassurances that the country will not be abandoned and also guaranteeing America's continued economic and de-

velopment aid.

Recent incidents have put a toll on the bilateral relationship but this particular visit quelled any suspicions of Washington's intentions. Pacifying the Afghan people, promising the Afghan government a future security arrangement and illustrating to the American nation, U.S. strength and commitment, President Obama's visit to Afghanistan was timed perfectly and achieved

enough.

The visit will enable the President to attend the upcoming NATO Summit, scheduled for May 20, with more confidence and an understanding of a new and more engaged bilateral relationship in the works. **S**

INDIA

An Eye in the Sky

India recently launched a long-range missile, Agni-V, with a range of 5,000 km and capable of targeting Europe and most of Asia, thus joining an elite group of seven countries with such capabilities. A week later, it unveiled and launched a space spy satellite that can monitor activities on Indian soil despite cloudy weather.

The result of a ten-year long domestic effort, Rिसat-1 (Radar Imaging Satellite), as it is called, is the country's first microwave remote sensing satellite. The 1858 kg spacecraft was injected into orbit by the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle, India's first ever rocket invented in the 1960s to reduce dependence on foreign investment and supplies.

Rिसat-1 will mainly be used for agriculture purposes and disaster management. Scientists say images from the satellite can help gauge the extent of flooding, drought or even damage from a tsunami, within hours of a calamity occurring. But the satellite, India's most expensive at 4.98 billion rupees (around US\$95 million), can also be used for defense purposes or to track insurgents in dense forests. India now joins a select group of countries including the US, Canada and countries in Europe, with similar technology.

The spy satellite, serves essentially as an "eye in the sky with 24/7 visibility, day and night... [that] can penetrate through cloud cover." More than just a



monitor for environmental hazards, the satellite is of strategic importance on India's borders with its neighbors. **S**

Keeping the Peace?

Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, visited Bangladesh amidst growing tensions between the current government and the BNP over the disappearance of former BNP lawmaker, Ilyas Ali. Ali was abducted recently and the BNP, under the guidance of Khaleda Zia, has staged massive protests and riots throughout the country bringing the economy and the state to a halt for five days.

Clinton's visit marked the first senior level official visit to the country after 2004. She met with both Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Opposition leader, Khaleda Zia to discuss the current political scenario. Clinton also met with Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, whose removal from the

Grameen Bank has been criticized by Washington and Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, founder of BRAC, to discuss Bangladesh and broader global development, as well as the challenges confronting civil society.

Her visit came at an opportune moment, when both Bangladesh and the U.S are exploring an enhanced partnership. It illustrated U.S commitment to building a peaceful, secure, prosperous, healthy and democratic country. During her meetings, Clinton raised the issue of abductions and also floated the idea of holding elections under a non-party caretaker government.

The visit proved critically important for Bangladesh, which hopes to



see itself as a middle-income nation by 2021, a drive that seems to be taking a hard hit, following political violence in the country. U.S assistance with the program could of course, be a godsend. **S**

Making Use of Natural Resources

Nepal recently held a three day Water Festival in its capital, Kathmandu, with the objective of creating awareness and promoting knowledge about the sustainability of water use and the need for conservation.

Nepal is currently the second richest country, after Brazil, in terms of water resources with its numerous river basins and fresh water flows. However, the majority of the poverty-stricken nation's population does not have access to clean drinking water. 42 percent of the Nepalese people live under the poverty line. Realizing that the situation is worsening due to climate

change, Direction Nepal, has introduced an initiative to showcase and further technological, social or legal initiatives of water conservation. The program hopes to convince inspired individuals, families, communities, institutions and government agencies to initiate water conservation measures at their respective levels.

Water is a growing existential threat for Nepal, which is one of the few countries in South Asia that is taking measures to prevent this calamity. An estimated 8.6 million cubic meters of water flows every year from the Himalayas to the plains of Nepal. The



country's 3,000 glaciers and 2,000 glacial lakes, along with snow melts, are the country's only source of fresh water. However, as many as 20 lakes are at the risk of bursting and trends in climate change show that the continuous decrease in snow accumulation and glacial retreat might lead to acute water shortages in the future. Furthermore, most rivers flowing through urban Nepal are highly polluted, thereby making them unfit as resources for clean water. **S**

SRI LANKA

Global Alliances

Sri Lanka's largest business chamber, the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce, has entered into a deal with BRICS - an international organization named after its key members: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa - to increase and strengthen trade ties.

Sri Lanka is currently looking to enhance trade on a more international level. According to the current agreement, Sri Lanka will trade in goods of a reciprocal nature with other members of BRICS. Sri Lanka will take the lead in promoting apparel, gems and jewelry, rubber, rubber products, spices, tea and tourism whilst Brazil will focus on promoting cosmetics, diamonds, emeralds, food and beverages, fresh oranges, medical equipment,

pharmaceuticals and tourism, through the project. Potential companies interested in the promotion of such goods are to follow a prescribed format to enter into trading partnerships either with Sri Lanka or with any other member of BRICS.

Except for Russia, all BRICS members are developing or newly industrialized countries, distinguished by their large, fast-growing economies and significant influence on regional and global affairs. As of 2012, the five BRICS

countries represent a combined nominal GDP of US\$13.7 trillion and an estimated US\$4 trillion in combined foreign reserves. An alliance with such



B R I C S

an influential group will heighten Sri Lanka's trade ties and make its goods more prominent on the global trading market. **S**

MALDIVES

Facing Suspension

The Maldives currently finds itself in a precarious situation, marked by growing political violence within the country and possible suspension from the Commonwealth. Under heightened protests and an interim government grappling for legitimacy, a Maldivian National Commission for Inquiry (NCI) was set up to investigate what really happened on February 7, 2012, when democratically elected President Nasheed was apparently forced to resign at gunpoint. While the current government of President Waheed, comprising a number of Gayoom loyalists, has vehemently denied all such allegations, the NCI is expected to conduct investigations and present a coherent account of the

events that transpired.

However, in an effort to be more assertive, during its last meeting on April 16, the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) warned that it will consider "stronger measures" if the terms of reference and composition of the Maldivian National Commission of Inquiry is not "amended within four weeks in a manner that is generally acceptable and enhances its credibility." The possible threat of suspension over refusing to conduct an inquiry, has led to a political outcry within the country with major political leaders calling on the Parliament to withdraw the Maldives from the Commonwealth. Former President Gayoom has also publicly criticized



the Commonwealth's character as having changed from being supportive of smaller member-nations to becoming the power-base of the bigger ones.

Given the inherent instability of the island nation that serves as an important strategic and economic route for both India and China, disengagement with the Commonwealth may have severe consequences for the country's stability. **S**



Pilgrimage Diplomacy

President Zardari has blazed a new trail with pilgrimage diplomacy

By S.G. Jilane

Pakistan's presidents have hitherto been practicing cricket diplomacy. Aware of Pakistani weakness for cricket, India's prime ministers would routinely invite Pakistan's presidents and prime ministers to attend cricket matches, even though their relations were tense.

The visits are largely private but often serve as informal summits, where the two sides talk frankly without being encumbered by a clutch of aides

whispering in their ears. And these occasions have often helped repair broken ties.

In 1987, India's Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi invited President Zia-ul-Haq to watch the cricket match at Jaipur despite the fact that he had recently accused Pakistan of aiding insurgents in Indian Punjab. Zia-ul-Haq's visit was rounded off with a meeting with Gandhi which resulted in watering down mutual mistrust.

In 2005, India's Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, invited Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf to a one-day cricket match in New Delhi. Referring to the meeting in his book, *In the Line of Fire*, Musharraf said that the visit that began as an informal one, ended in a "very positive joint declaration." In March last year, Manmohan Singh invited Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani to watch the India-Paki-

stan World Cup semifinal in Mohali.

These initiatives were evidence enough of India's desire to resuscitate bilateral relations that had nosedived following the November 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai, allegedly sponsored by elements in Pakistan.

Meanwhile there have been positive vibes indicating a change in the air with a marked urge among saner people on both sides to be realistic, put the ugly past behind and move on. For Pakistan it was perhaps the insult and humiliation by the U.S. that jolted the military leadership to realize that its neighbors should be cultivated and not hated.

Such positive indicators called for a summit to give the movement further boost but there were no cricket matches within sight. The only other alternative was a pilgrimage to the shrine of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti at Ajmer. President Zardari, accordingly, opted to go on a "private" trip to India and set the course for "pilgrimage diplomacy."

The economist in Manmohan Singh, meanwhile, assessed the benefit of exploiting the occasion for an informal tete-a-tete over an elaborate formal "summit" and invited President Zardari to a luncheon en route to Ajmer. As expected, the two covered more ground in their 40-minute face to face talk than could have been possible in a formal summit weighed down by a clutch of advisers and aides.

Together, they romped about the entire stretch of bilateral issues. Amongst other things, Dr. Singh raised the issue of Hafiz Saeed, the alleged mastermind behind the Mumbai attacks. Emphasizing the need to prosecute him, he reiterated that action against those involved in the terror attacks in India would be a major issue by which Indian people would judge their ties with Pakistan. Zardari referred to the legal issues involved and both leaders agreed that a structured discussion on Saeed should be held during the coming Home Secretary-level talks in Islamabad.

For his part, Zardari raised the issue of Pakistani microbiologist, Dr Khalil Chishty, 80, who is serving life-imprisonment in an Indian jail. Chishty came to Ajmer in 1992 to meet his ailing mother. Zardari also raised issues of usual reference to Kashmir, the Siachen glacier and Sir Creek rounding it off with an invitation to Prime Minister Singh to visit Pakistan.

The host agreed that concerted, step by step moves, to find mutually acceptable solutions were necessary to improve bilateral relations. "We are willing to find practical and pragmatic solutions to all our issues. That is the message President Zardari and I wish to convey," Dr. Singh told reporters after their meeting.

Zardari's assessment of the talks as "very fruitful," was underscored by the Indian Supreme court's order, immediately following the private summit, of not only allowing bail to Dr Chishty but also agreeing to hear a separate petition that he serve out the rest of his bail in Karachi.

Following Zardari-Singh parleys, Pakistan's commerce minister, Amin Fahim visited his Indian counterpart, Anand Sharma. Their meeting resulted in India literally opening the door for more trade with Pakistan. Besides the decision to consider easing visa facilities with the goal of a non-visa regime, India also agreed, 'in principle,' to allow foreign direct investment (FDI) from Pakistan besides opening a second integrated check post (ICP) on the border at Attari. The new post would pave way for the smooth flow of road traffic, provide upgraded and modern infrastructure for traders from both countries, and facilitate the people crossing the border.

Indian Home Minister P Chidambaram, Indian Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal and his Pakistani counterpart Shahbaz Sharif accompanied Sharma and Fahim in unveiling the plaque. Chidambaram termed the opening, a gateway of trade and prosperity to Central Asian countries that is bound to increase Indo-Pak trade

four folds.

Both countries have also agreed in principle to allow the opening of each other's bank branches in their territories to facilitate financial transactions and ensure smooth trade. Both commerce ministers told reporters that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) favored opening branches in each other's country.

While Sharma announced setting up of an India-Pakistan Business Council in the near future, Fahim said that they had also decided to open up negotiations in the hospitality, education and tourism sectors.

Furthermore, the Indian School of Business (ISB) at Hyderabad signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Karachi-based Institute of Business Administration (IBA) to provide executive education in Pakistan. Under the MoU, the ISB will offer open enrolment and custom-designed programs through its Centre for Executive Education.

And finally, India has offered to sell 500MW of electricity to Pakistan at about Rs15 per unit at the Wagah-Attari border.

Zardari's private visit seems to have touched off a tsunami of goodwill and an urge to improve relations as never before. But the tempo needs to be sustained. That would require sincerity of purpose on both sides. India has already taken some positive initiatives. Now it is Pakistan's turn. How it reciprocates India's gestures will be watched internationally.

But the foremost precondition for Dr. Manmohan Singh's acceptance of President Zardari's invitation to visit Pakistan is for the latter to allay India's concerns about terrorism being nurtured in Pakistan.

The following weeks and months will illustrate how sincere both sides are in implementing the promises they have made. **S**

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

Fighting for Ice

**Siachen is a pointless war that the two contenders
– India and Pakistan – continue to fight for nothing but pride.**

By J. Enver

When President Asif Ali Zardari met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi on April 8, the Gyari tragedy had already struck a day earlier and it was expected that besides other issues, the Siachen issue would feature prominently in the talks between the two leaders. Regrettably, nothing of the sort happened. In all probability, Mr. Singh expressed his concern over the fate of the 135 Pakistani soldiers buried under a mountain of snow in Gyari and then the discussion moved on to other subjects.

The whole problem is about something known as AGPL - Actual Ground Position Line, which denotes the position of Indian and Pakistani troops at the Siachen Glacier. The line runs across the edge of the Salto range -- a mountainous plateau with peaks rising above 8,000 meters (20,000 feet). The Indian army has been occupying the upper portion of the range since April 1984 and has blocked Pakistani forces from entering the area, which was until the Indian occupation, a no man's land.

Described as the world's highest battlefield as well as the toughest, Siachen is an incredibly pointless confrontation. The utter irony of the Siachen conflict was recently brought into world focus when the Gyari camp, located just below the glacier, and the battalion headquarters of Pakistan Army's sixth Northern Light Infantry battalion, was suddenly struck by an onslaught of thousands of tons of ice, rock and snow in the early

hours of April 7.

Neither India nor Pakistan had any presence on the glacier until 1984 when Indian forces covertly entered and took control of the region. For 37 years beginning in 1947, neither India nor Pakistan thought that the 70 km long Siachen Glacier had any strategic significance. Even the Simla Agreement of 1972 did not give much importance to the inhospitable and inhabitable barren mass of ice. Under the 1949 Karachi Agreement, the ceasefire line between India and Pakistan for the disputed Jammu and Kashmir region was identified as running to map coordinate NJ 9842 and "... thence north to the glaciers." Perhaps in view of the tough conditions in the Siachen region, it was not deemed necessary to demarcate the line with more clarity and this is what India took advantage of.

For India, military presence in Siachen costs 300 million dollars annually while for Pakistan it is 100 million dollars. One Pakistani soldier is killed every fourth day in Siachen while one Indian soldier is killed every second day -- not by bullets but rather by the severe weather. The accumulated cost of this pointless of all wars, which has been going on for the past 28 years now, exceeds \$5 billion while the total number of casualties is said to be around 4,000 soldiers on each side.


Both Pakistan and India maintain 150 manned posts. Each country has 10 battalions or some 6,000 troops on ground. The cost of half a dozen helicopters that the Pakistan army de-

ploys is Rs. 55,000 per hour. The classical cost unit is of course that of a roti (loaf of bread) that costs Rs. 100 by the time it reaches a soldier stationed in the peaks.

Siachen has also become the world's 'largest and highest' garbage dump as a result of the supplies sent to the troops. More than half of the garbage comprises plastic and metal from unserviceable ammunition, irreparable vehicles, supply tins, rotten food, discarded clothing and other similar material. The ice glacier does not produce any biodegradable agents, so the garbage gets absorbed into the glacier system and goes on to release harmful toxins like cadmium and chromium, which enter the glacial water system and pollute the waters that flow downstream and enter the Indus. Since the Indus is a source of life for millions of people downstream both in India and Pakistan, the havoc that this would create in the not too distant future can very well be imagined.

So what could be a judicious end to this war?

While India's occupation of the region is a violation of the 1949 and 1972 agreements that it signed with Pakistan, the Indians argue that a fear of Pakistani forces occupying their rightful territory is what has provoked them to keep holding on to the territory. Following the Gyari tragedy and in perhaps stark realization of the uselessness of this expensive war, Pakistan Army Chief, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani recently remarked, "Peaceful coexistence between the



**In Memory of 6 Northern Light Infantry
Siachen, Glacier
Kashmir, Pakistan**

two neighbors is very important so that everybody can concentrate on the well-being of the people... the decades of enmity between India and Pakistan should be resolved through negotiations.”

It is another thing though that certain quarters in India believe that Kayani's words were apparently designed to prod the international community to revive pressure on India to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement with Pakistan on the Siachen issue so that it could lead to a withdrawal of troops from the glacier. Some analysts also believe India's stance on continuing to dig its heels in Siachen is motivated by the threat of Chinese interest in the region and its relationship with Pakistan.

Although India and China have taken steps in recent years to improve their relationship, the fear of its northern neighbor always lurks in the Indian mind. India feels that controlling the glacier will continue to give it a strategic position both against Pakistan's northern areas as well as southern China. It would provide it a means to cut off access between Pakistan and China through the Khunjrab Pass in the Karakoram Range. Some intelligence reports have even pointed to

India's plans to take over the Baltoro glacier in Pakistani territory, which includes the world's second highest peak, K2, and enable it to completely encircle Kashmir.

Besides the AGPL, the two armies are fighting for nothing else in Siachen but nationalistic pride fanned by hawks on both sides. There is no strategic, mineral or tactical value to take advantage of. A withdrawal from the Siachen region would not put India and Pakistan at any loss if proper monitoring mechanisms were put in place. The challenge, however, is to devise a withdrawal system where no side is shown to have lost face or security.

Many alternatives to military presence in the region have been brought to light in the past. Pakistan has suggested that the non-demarcated areas under the 1972 Simla Agreement be identified as zones of disengagement. The idea of a peace park was suggested in 1994 to control the massive environmental degradation, caused by military operations. This suggestion could save both countries millions of dollars currently spent on the war, as well as save them from bowing down to a “sell out” to the other side.

The main disagreement has persisted over the position of the Line of

Contact after NJ9842 and where the troops should be redeployed once the line has been agreed upon. India wants Pakistan to recognize the current ground positions of its troops so that it can have a legal safeguard in the event that Pakistan backtracks. Pakistan says it has no such intentions. If somehow, both sides were to agree on a joint package, it would entail both parties agreeing to an identification of the ground positions of the armies, a suitable duration for the redeployment and demilitarization and formulation of methods to monitor activities until a demilitarized zone is created.

The situation must be resolved in order for peace to prevail and for the two countries to mutually take a step past their tumultuous history. Pakistan wants a climb down on what has become a ‘supplementary’ dispute and has been distracting attention from the ‘core’ issue of Kashmir. This is the time to take advantage of what General Kayani has suggested and open a new chapter in the sad saga of India-Pakistan relations. **S**

J. Enver is a freelance writer who writes on international affairs, media and communication, and culture and society.



Successfully promoting peace and engagement, Aman Ki Asha is now ready to broker trade and economic advancements.

By Ayla Joseph

The Second Indo-Pak economic forum titled “Dividends” was recently held under the auspices of Aman Ki Asha, a joint initiative undertaken by the Jang Group Pakistan and Times of India. The forum kicked off with much vigor and enthusiasm from both sides, determined to explore innovative options to enhance trade and explore mutually profitable business options. The meeting came at a time when much is being made of the bilateral relationship, which has seen more setbacks than successes. In the backdrop of dialogue and cultural fests there was also the dark shadow of the Siachen tragedy and the consequent deadlock between the two nations. An economic forum designed to bring together leading businessmen and experts from trade and investment representing both the government and private sectors, was perhaps a wise choice, in such times.

The two-day forum included six exhaustive discussions exploring ways to remove barriers to trade and explore new avenues where business leaders can cooperate, apart from easing visa restrictions on both sides. Sharat Sabharwal, the Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan, expressed hope that an agreement for liberalizing the business visa regime between India and Pakistan will be signed during an upcoming meeting of senior officials of the two countries.

While addressing the inaugural session, Prime Minister Gilani said that Pakistan was committed to resolving all

outstanding issues through dialogue and wanted to create an economically rich bilateral relationship, which could produce peace and prosperity for people on both sides of the border. He expressed confidence with Pakistan’s decision to revise the negative trading list with India, claiming that this move would prove instrumental in enhancing understanding and opening up opportunities.

Aman Ki Asha is designed to usher in a new era of peace and mutual cooperation. Shahrukh Hasan of the Jang Group claimed that given the recent turn in the economy, the world was turning to Asia and the South Asia region was poised perfectly for such an event. Marked with tremendous potential and an unparalleled opportunity, the region lies at the center and can reap maximum profits, if desired.

Executive President of the Times of India Group, Rahul Kansal, lauded the efforts undertaken by the initiative and called upon the media to promote the agenda of peace within the civil society. While cultural exchange was taking place through music, food and fashion festivals, commerce on the other hand remained stationary. The recent granting of the MFN status by the Gilani government, the consequent trade agreements signed, the move towards easing visa restrictions and establishing platforms such as Aman Ki Asha, can serve as a significant achievement and triggers further engagement.

High Commissioners from India and

Pakistan were present throughout to answer questions and present a detailed framework of the work conducted by both sides. Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar also expressed her desire to see people-to-people contact, which she deemed the foremost way to create better understanding.

While the efforts of Aman Ki Asha are commendable it was disheartening to see this particular forum succumb to Pakistan’s heated political atmosphere. The inclusion of PTI chairman, Imran Khan was largely unnecessary as he used the platform to present his party’s manifesto on an engaged partnership with India. The beauty of Aman Ki Asha lay in its neutral stance and its efforts as a nonpartisan private initiative. Chief Minister Punjab, Shahbaz Sharif also spoke on the occasion, appreciating the effort and expressing his conviction that a new era in economic collaboration was in place.

Having featured a politician like Imran Khan, whose presence largely overshadowed the conference itself, one wonders how much a nonpartisan image will now feature in initiatives undertaken by Aman Ki Asha. Whatever the case, it is certain though that private sector initiatives such as this achieve much more than government efforts and will certainly help to usher in a new era of peace, understanding, cooperation and dialogue. ■

Ayla Joseph is a freelance journalist based in New York, USA.

Trade liberalisation between Pakistan and India is expected to benefit both countries in many ways. But whereas India is approaching this issue as part of a broader strategy, Pakistan has long been under domestic pressure to pursue it rather tactically.

The recent granting of MFN (most favoured nation) status by Islamabad to India was hardly appreciated in Pakistan and largely criticised, even though it meant that Pakistan would effectively treat India at par with other nations in external trading.

As a result of the recent high level talks between Pakistani and Indian authorities, Pakistan has agreed to restrict the list of non-tradable items with India to a bare minimum. In return, India has promised to review all non-tariff barriers. In terms of energy agreements, the issue of importing 500 megawatts of electricity from Indian Punjab to Lahore is yet to be worked out.

India has already permitted an inflow of investment from Pakistan but Islamabad is yet to reciprocate.

It is difficult to ascertain if Pakistani companies have made any profitable investment in Indian cities (notwithstanding scandalous real estate deals in India by some Pakistanis). Some federal government officials believe that a few companies, owned by Pakistani citizens, based in Bangladesh, Singapore and Dubai, have invested millions of dollars in India.

In an act of goodwill, Pakistan recently organised a one-country exhibition in New Delhi and the response of Indian consumers was overwhelming.

Changing



Pakistani entrepreneurs showcased and sold a vast range of consumer products that included handicrafts, jewellery, precious stones, women's clothing, food items and marbles. India has said it will hold a similar event in Lahore or Karachi sometime this July.

Apart from holding single-country exhibitions in Indian and Pakistani cities, the two countries are also inching towards joint ventures in mega infrastructure projects like the controversial TAPI gas pipeline.

for India and Pakistan to participate in bilateral and regional large-scale projects of public importance. Pakistan's position is clear: it wants to pursue TAPI but is not ready to drop the proposed Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project despite all opposition from the US. Additionally, Pakistan is ready to import 500MW electric power from India but at the same time is also adamant about importing 1000MW electricity from Iran.

The mid-April inauguration of a modern trade gate or integrated check

rise dramatically once Islamabad and New Delhi seriously explore ways of doing more trade with each other.

Businessmen say formal exclusion of a long list of items from the negative list of tradable items with India would help in curbing smuggling of those items into Pakistan. Numerous medicines, herbal products and food items of Indian origin are either smuggled directly into Pakistan or enter via Dubai every day. In the first case, it affects the much-needed revenue generation and in the second case, the additional cost of indirect import inflates our overall import bill. That is why the Ministry of Commerce is now working on allowing imports of all-but-selected-few items from India. In return, India will provide Pakistani products easier and wider access into its markets.

Normalizing the economic relationship between Pakistan and India has always been the onus of whatever strategic framework Pakistani policymakers made to neutralize the air of animosity between the two countries. But for one reason or the other this objective has never been achieved.

Now, following the global recession and amidst slower-than-expected recovery of the international economy, the emerging ground realities demand that countries in Asia cannot afford to undermine the intra-SAARC trade potential. As a result, both India and Pakistan realise the urgency of enhancing trade and the direction of trade is gradually shifting from the West to East. (China and the UAE are respectively Pakistan's first and second largest trading partners, with the U.S listed as third, according to latest data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics).

In order to reap further benefits of this change in direction, Pakistan needs to prioritize its trading rela-

Directions

Pakistan precariously hovers between economic growth or complete economic meltdown. Recent senior level talks on bilateral trade between India and Pakistan could be an answer to Pakistan's trade and investment woes.

By Mohiuddin Aazim

According to Petroleum Minister Dr. Asim Hussain, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India have agreed on the transit fee that each country would charge for the transportation of Turkmen gas. The \$7.6 billion project will carry one trillion cubic meters of natural gas over a period of 30 years and will help Afghanistan, Pakistan and India meet their growing energy requirements. Preliminary agreement on TAPI is expected to be finalized during this summer.

The construction of the pipeline would open up numerous avenues

post at Wagah has won appreciation from the public and businessmen in both countries. Equipped with a dedicated passenger terminal and sprawling cargo facility, the trade gate will help in boosting people-to-people interactions and business contacts between the two neighbors.

Currently the volume of external trade between Pakistan and India is around \$2 billion with the balance of trade heavily tilted in favor of India. Commerce secretaries of the two countries have said on several occasions that bilateral trade volume would

tionship with South and Central Asia. In the coming years, reliance on the Middle East in terms of trade and investment will gradually become too competitive. Currently the US, Eu-

penditure without compromising on national security. This development is critical if Pakistan envisions greater investment in health, education and finance.

Normalizing the economic relationship between Pakistan and India has always been the onus of whatever strategic framework Pakistani policymakers made to neutralize the air of animosity between the two countries. But for one reason or the other this objective has never been achieved.

rope, China and India are penetrating further into Middle Eastern markets. If Pakistan normalizes its trade and investment relationship with India, it will help in reducing the trust deficit and in turn reduce the defence ex-

“Pakistan lies at the heart of a rapidly transforming world around its borders,” says Mr. Ijaz Nabi, a visiting faculty member at the Lahore University of Management Sciences. To the North and East are skill and savings-

rich, China and India. To the West are resource-rich Central Asian states, Iran and Persian Gulf states. “Reopening the traditional East-West-North trade routes and linking them with a strong North-South corridor will make Pakistan the trade hub of South Asia,” he argues.

Pakistan has a tough but urgent decision to make. It can either seize this opportunity with enthusiasm or else lose its way to a confused tactical approach. Time is running out and the country’s decision will depend on how it wants to reshape its economic strategy in the post-recession, knowledge-based, region-centric model of growth. ■

Mohiuddin Aazim is a Karachi-based political and economic analyst who writes for national and regional publications.

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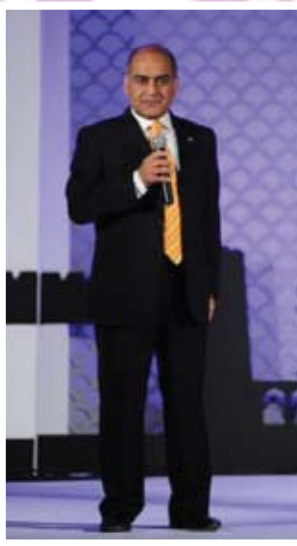
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Keep the Ball Rolling

Lifestyle Pakistan has given bilateral trade relations between India and Pakistan much-needed boost. But what will keep the momentum going?

By Sidra Rizvi

Even though barbed wires divide the sub-continent, the overwhelming response Lifestyle Pakistan received in India is proof that both countries still have much in common. Held in New Delhi from April 12 – 15, the 'Made in Pakistan' exhibition was a collaborative venture between Lifestyle Pakistan, Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) and the Indian Commerce Ministry. The exhibition showed off the best of Pakistani fashions, textiles, accessories, home furnishings and numerous other items spread over more than 300 stalls.

The four-day event was held in re-

sponse to the 'Made in India' exhibition that took place in Lahore earlier this year. According to the Lifestyle Pakistan spokesperson, Sidra Iqbal, around 100 Pakistani firms participated in this event showcasing their products, well-known throughout Pakistan. Top designers of the country such as Deepak Perwani, Maheen Khan, Faiza Samee and others were a huge part of the exhibition.

Along with exposing the potential to increase trade ties, the exhibition also brought with it the rich culture of Pakistan to be displayed in India. The *khussa* from Multan, bangles from

Hyderabad and other local handicrafts received much attention. Pakistani ethnic cuisines as well as local musical performances filled the four days with excitement.

Famous Pakistani textile companies such as Gul Ahmad, Orient Textiles, Bonanza, Al Karam and Junaid Jamshed also participated and were well received creating a very high demand for Pakistani textiles in India.

The Made in Pakistan Lifestyle exhibition has worked wonders towards introducing Pakistani brands in India and has made the people of India develop a fine liking for them. Given the



response the exhibition received, a more frequent occurrence of such events in both countries over the next few years is very likely.

Events like these carry tremendous potential to boost trade relations between the two countries, which in turn can help ease the ever-growing tension. Since the Lifestyle Pakistan exhibition showcased some of the top quality Pakistani products, a very wide consumer portal was created, resulting in the much needed exposure to the Indian Business community.

Realising the trade potential, a business delegation from Pakistan accompanied Lifestyle Pakistan to meet Indian counterparts and develop an international market for their products. Top Pakistani officials attended the exhibition and met with state officials to discuss and strengthen trade ties.

Ever since partition, the two countries have indulged in some form of conflict over various issues. With the increase of such exhibitions, there lies an opportunity to seal the rift. With bilateral trade between both countries standing at just \$2.7 billion, this sector is now more than ready to be explored.

Very recently, India made a decision to end the ban on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from Pakistan, a very positive and hopeful move said to boost trade ties. While cross border spending will rise only gradually, a goldmine for Pakistan investors is on the horizon.



But the boost did not emerge overnight. The governments on both sides have made a concerted and committed effort to renew ties, following the Mumbai tragedy. Things saw a positive turn when in September last year Pakistani Commerce Minister, Makhdoom Amin Fahim visited India, marking the first of its kind visit in nearly 35 years. This move was reciprocated when Indian Commerce Minister, Anand Sharma visited Pakistan. It is therefore safe to say, with some assurance, that relations between both countries are on the mend.

India will soon complete the removal of non-tariff barriers restricting imports from Pakistan in response to which Pakistan will endow India with a Most Favoured Nation (MFN) trade status. This will ensure India receives the best services that Pakistan provides to its trading partners.

Recently India's External Affairs Minister, S M Krishna stated that a 'liberalized visa agreement' was to be signed, allowing flexible travelling for businessmen in both countries. If allowed to grow, trade between India and Pakistan has the potential of reaching up to \$10 billion and efforts such as these are speeding up the process.

With the establishment of the dedicated Integrated Check Post (ICP)

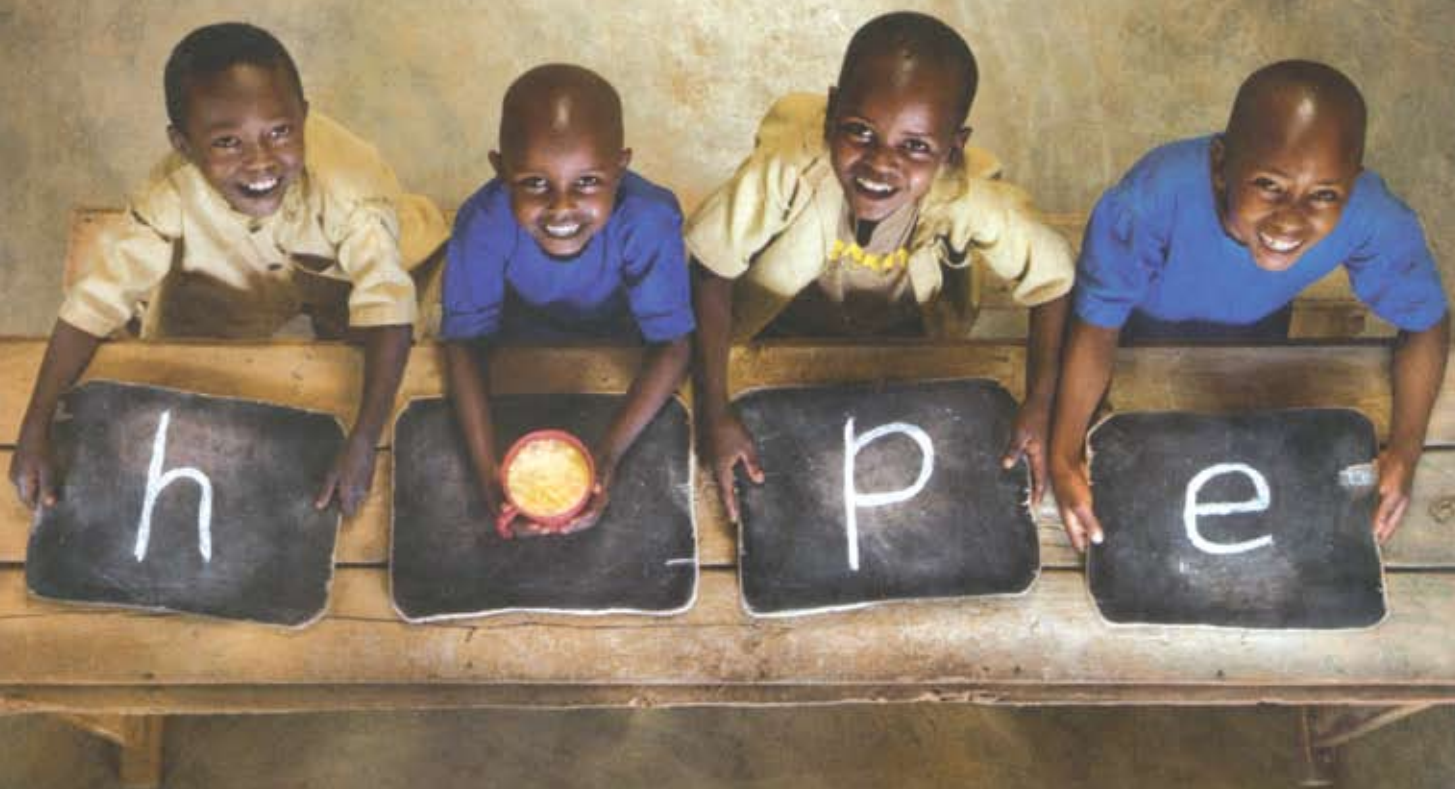
at the Wagah Attari border, the only trade exchange point, commercial traffic will see a marked improvement. Aimed at increasing trade via land, the ICP is expected to boost trade for years to come. A Mumbai to Karachi sea route is also being considered as a mode of strengthening trade relations.

As things move ahead, the two countries are looking forward to exploring various areas for bilateral trade. Indian Commerce Minister has expressed a desire that a power grid stretching across South Asia be set up for sharing electricity, a shortage from which both countries suffer. Not only will this improve trade between India and Pakistan, it can bring together other countries in the region increasing trade opportunities throughout the region. Strengthening trade will also see a rise in foreign capital, which can bring economic stabilization in both countries.

If bilateral trade keeps increasing on the rate it is promising, the idea of bringing peace to the region can become very real in the long run. Both countries suffer from similar problems and if they can find a common ground to work on they can manage to sit together and address the more serious issues hindering the peace process.

Bilateral trade between both countries has suffered vastly due to strained relations, which often result in India and Pakistan cutting off ties altogether. This not only diminishes the market for Pakistani products in India and vice versa but also gives an alleged boost to the illegal trading of goods via Dubai. Neither country can benefit when goods are exchanged in this manner. Therefore to minimize losses, establishing proper trading channels between the two countries is essential. **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

The way Pakistan behaved with Osama bin Laden's widows and orphans recalled a children's story of the "Dwarf and the Giant," in which, after the giant had killed the prey, the dwarf would cut away the victim's nose and ears.

In this instance, Osama lived, with his family for many years all over the place; even in Karachi. In Abbottabad

and detained them in a 'jail' on the flimsy charge of residing in Pakistan without permission.

Mr. Malik might have thought that persecuting a bereaved family - widows and orphans, was a smart act. However, nobody even acknowledged it as such, far less giving him any kudos. The reason is obvious. People perceive it as a dastardly act.

national for the same offence, even though many of them continue to live illegally in Pakistan.

It is common among decent people to bury the hatchet when the enemy is dead. They do not visit their ire on the enemy's widows and orphans. Islam particularly enjoins kindness to orphans. And Pakistan is supposed to be an Islamic Republic. But the gov-



Oppressing Osama's Widows

Saudi Arabia finally decided to accept the widows and children of slain Al-Qaeda chief, Osama Bin Laden. But why was there a show of such dramatization?

By S.G. Jilane

he lived within a stone's throw from the Pakistan Military Academy. Yet Interior Minister, Rahman Malik's dogs could not even sniff his presence. But when American Special Forces troops killed him, Mr. Malik came forward to add insult to Osama's family's injury

While Rahman Malik's minions were too prompt to detain and prosecute the Bin Laden family for breach of immigration laws by staying in Pakistan without permission, they have not been able to catch and prosecute any Uzbek, Tajik, Uighur or Afghan

ernment of Pakistan seems to interpret the injunctions in its own way.

The trial court sentenced the bereaved family to imprisonment and fine. The period of imprisonment has since been completed and the fine paid by their relatives. The court fur-

ther ordered that after the imprisonment had been completed and fine paid, the accused should be deported. But deport them where? That is the question. Two of the three widows are Saudi nationals. The third is from Yemen. The Yemeni government is reported to have agreed to take its citizen back. But the Saudi government till late, did not make any such commitment.

This is an enigma. Pakistan's persecution of the Bin Laden family can be attributed to the government's effort to allay U.S. suspicion that it was in cahoots with Osama and that it knew he was living in Abbottabad. In the aftermath of the US Special Forces raid that killed Bin Laden, voices in the Obama administration had been seeking explanations from Pakistan regarding how the most wanted man on the globe could live there without the knowledge of Pakistan's intelligence officials. Some had even expressed the suspicion that the Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) was privy to Bin Laden's hideout. They were so firm in their conviction that even after grudgingly accepting that the top brass of the ISI had no direct knowledge about Bin Laden living in Abbottabad, they would not give a clean bill of health to the ISI. Sources in Washington continued to insist that people at least at the lower level in the ISI did know.

However, Saudi Arabia was not encumbered with any such problem. There appeared no cogent reason for its refusal to accept its nationals. The Kingdom had revoked Bin Laden's nationality because he opposed its supplication to America and wanted Saudi soil cleansed of American presence. But it defies commonsense that the order of denationalization could also apply to Bin Laden's wives and his progeny till Doomsday, just as every Christian is born with Adam's sin.

A possible explanation could be the Saudi government's eagerness to keep itself assiduously in America's



What does the future hold for Osama's children?

good books.

Such an assumption is underscored by several indicators. For example, during Ronald Reagan's presidency, Riyadh at once coughed up one million dollars on just a telephone call from Col. North, a junior official of the State Department even though it knew that the money was needed to arm the contra terrorists to overthrow the lawful government of Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua. In 1981, the Kingdom allowed Israel the free use of its airspace to attack and destroy Iraq's nuclear reactor at Osirak, simply because Israel had full American backing, even though Iraq was an Arab League member. And now, when the US is overburdened by debt, Riyadh has pumped a hefty sum of 60 billion dollars in the US kitty by ordering a fleet of fighter planes.

Yet, it does not stand to reason that the US would object to Osama's family returning to Saudi Arabia. First, they pose no danger to the security of the American people. Second, their return home might even be useful for the US, because, with the help (and pressure) from the Saudi government, its sleuths may now be able to interrogate the widows, who had refused to cooperate while they were in Pakistan.

Saudi hesitation to receive them

created a problem for Pakistan. The question before them was how to handle these "stateless" and helpless people? How to arrange for the stay and support of aliens? Besides, sooner than later their plight would attract media attention. And when it did, both Riyadh and Islamabad would be in the dock before the international public opinion.

It seems, however, that the gravity of the situation was not lost on Riyadh. It had been mulling over the impact of its reluctance to take back its own nationals. Finally, Saudi Arabia allowed the widows to return to the Kingdom on humanitarian grounds. Citing senior officials, news reports claimed that the Kingdom was convinced that neither the widows nor the children were involved in any operations of the extremist group and that it would deal "with bin Laden's wives on humanitarian grounds." A chartered plane arranged by the Bin Laden family, flew the remaining family members out of Pakistan to Riyadh. Reports claim that the Saudi ambassador in Pakistan oversaw their departure thus letting the matter, somewhat, to rest. ■

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

The Water Tussle

The Indian Supreme Court currently faces strong judicial, environmental and economic opposition to its recommendation of interlinking all national rivers. Which side will win?

By Sundararajan Murari

An order issued by the Indian Supreme Court last February to the Government of India, to implement in a time-bound manner the interlinking of all national rivers starting with the Ganges in the Himalayas to Cauvery in the south, has received heated criticism. Jurists say that it is a clear case of judicial overreach. Experts argue that it is unworkable and financially unviable. Environmentalists state that it will be an ecological disaster as millions will be displaced and flora and fauna will be endangered.

Others wonder why the court, which was not inclined to interfere at one stage in the dispute between

the Tamil Nadu and Karnataka on the sharing of the Cauvery water, has now usurped the power of the executive by issuing a directive to the Union of India on a much more complicated question of the networking of rivers.

Analysts argue that the court has not looked into the international ramifications stemming from such a project as India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal are all geographically inter-linked with the river system.

The apex court alone is not to blame for its extraordinary judgment. It was led by an affidavit by the Union Government, when a writ petition was filed in 2002. In its affidavit, the Centre told the court that the networking

of rivers had been considered with great seriousness after the then Union Water Resources Minister proposed the linking of the Ganga and the Cauvery in 1972. The report was consequently given a quiet burial as the National Water Development Agency termed it as unworkable.

The NWDA said that the Rao proposal envisaged a 2,640 km-long Ganga-Cauvery link as its main component and involved large-scale pumping of 550 meters that would require 5,000 to 7,000 MW. Even if such a link was established at such a cost, it would irrigate only an additional four million hectares. The scheme also did not include any flood control measures. The

Central Water Commission found the proposal to be grossly underestimated and economically prohibitive.

In 1977, Capt. Dastur proposed the construction of two canals – the first, a 4,200 km Himalayan Canal at the foot of the Himalayan slopes running from the Ravi in the west to the Brahmaputra and beyond in the east, and the second, a 9,300 km-Garland Canal covering the central and southern parts. Both the canals would be integrated with numerous lakes and interconnected with pipelines at two points, Delhi and Patna. The proposal was then examined by two committees of experts who concluded that it was technically unfeasible.

Despite such reports, a writ petition was filed in the Supreme Court in 2002 after President Abdul Kalam spoke in favor of the networking of rivers to address the recurring problem of floods in one region and drought in another. The Supreme Court recorded that the National Water Development Agency had said in May 2000 that peninsular rivers could be linked by 2035 and the Himalayan rivers by 2043. The Court frowned upon such a long delay and said the project should be completed in the next few years. That was in 2002.

The Supreme Court took another ten years to firm its position following the National Council of Applied Economic Research report of 2008 that argued that the project would yield higher returns from agriculture, would control floods, provide water to drought-prone states, ensure safe drinking water to people and even help with power generation. Relying solely on this one report, the bench on Feb 27 “directed” the Centre to constitute a “special committee.” It said that the committee should submit a bi-annual report to the Union Cabinet that would then consider the report and take decisions.

Critics have argued that the court’s

reference to “the unanimous view of all experts” that the project is “in the national interest” is patently untrue, because there is a substantial body of expert opinion that is highly critical of the project. Such a serious error would not have occurred if there had been consultations with scholars of various disciplines. The Court fails to take note of, or treats lightly, the strong dissent on the part of several State Governments.

In a joint statement, 60 prominent citizens requested the Supreme Court to reconsider as “the judgment gives categorical directions to the Government on a matter which is clearly in the executive domain, namely the implementation of a particular project.” By declaring the project to be in the national interest, the court not only anticipates the result of the examination but also makes it extremely difficult for governmental agencies and Ministries to undertake an objective examination.

The project itself is flawed. Instead of starting from the identification of the needs of water-scarce areas and finding area-specific answers, the project starts by looking at a map of India, decides a priori that the rivers of India can and should be linked, and then proceeds to consider the modalities of doing so. “This is a reckless and major redesigning of the geography of the country,” prominent citizens have said. Pointing out that “rivers are not pipelines” they argue that “the grand design consisting of 30 projects involving upwards of 80 dams is bound to have major environmental/ecological consequences.”

“The idea of transferring flood waters to arid or drought-prone areas is flawed because there will be hardly any flood-moderation and this project will be of no use at all to drylands and uplands of the country.” The idea of transferring water from surplus to deficit basins is equally flawed be-

cause the very notions of ‘surplus’ and ‘deficit’ are highly problematic. The idea of a ‘surplus’ river ignores the multiple purposes that it serves as it flows and joins the sea. The notion of a ‘deficit’ river is based on ‘demands’ on its waters derived from wasteful uses of water.

Eminent jurist and former Supreme Court judge, V. R. Krishna Iyer has also said that the matter is more technical and judges cannot decide on the course of rivers, whether they should be linked or not, and if at all, how they should be linked. A matter of such capacity can have adverse geographical and political ramifications and a national debate involving, especially river engineers, is essential before a project such as this can be undertaken. The project also entails regional dimensions. Both Nepal and Bangladesh have already expressed serious apprehensions.

Regardless of the Supreme Court’s diktat, the project cannot take off without the consent of numerous States, all of which have stakes in the project. The judgment itself admits that Karnataka, Bihar, Punjab, Assam and Sikkim have given a kind of “qualified approval” with definite reservations with regard to environmental and financial implications, and socio-economic and international aspects. Assam, Sikkim and Kerala have said that they should have the exclusive right to use their water resources and that such a transfer should not affect their rights.

With geopolitics at play and domestic concerns elevating, it will take a long time for the project to take a concrete shape, if at all. ■

Sundararajan Murari is a senior Indian journalist who has been covering Sri Lanka for the past 25 years. He was associated with the Bangalore-based English daily, Deccan Herald and retired as an associate editor of the newspaper.

Time to Get Serious

With the Chicago NATO Summit fast approaching, Afghanistan's problems appear very real while its future remains bleak. Will some concrete steps finally be taken?

By Daud Khattak



After months of negotiations, the United States and Afghanistan finally agreed on what is termed as the 'Enduring Partnership Agreement,' on April 22 thus removing at least one of the uncertainties surrounding the troubled relationship of the two governments ahead of the two-day Chicago Summit, scheduled to begin on May 20.

Earlier, Afghan President, Hamid Karzai had urged upon the United States to present a written commitment of paying two billion US dollars to support the Afghan security forces for a decade following the scheduled withdrawal in 2014. Suspicions existed as authorization and appropriation of that amount lies in the jurisdiction of the US Congress and cannot be committed by the executive.

However, Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton's statement in Brussels on April 18 pledging support for Afghanistan after 2014 perhaps encouraged the Afghan negotiators, led by former

foreign minister, Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta to finalize the draft of the 'Enduring Partnership Agreement.'

Now eyes are fixed on the Chicago Summit where over 50 heads of states are meeting to review the progress on the goals laid out during the Lisbon meeting last year. The key area of focus will be the 2014 withdrawal and the pledges of financial support for the Afghan government. This will include both civilian and military assistance.

Before the finalization of the Strategic Partnership Agreement, the handing over of authority of detention centers to Afghans and the lead role for Afghan security forces in night raids were the major roadblocks. Both hurdles were removed after the signing of two separate agreements between the US and Afghan negotiators, to the satisfaction of the latter.

Now that the two countries will have a somewhat smooth sailing towards May 20, the key question is how big of a role is the Summit going

to play in bringing an end to the decade-long war and ensuring stability in Afghanistan and the region.

The United States would be fully justified in informing its NATO allies and the Afghans that the back of al-Qaeda has been broken and its leadership is no longer able to organize well-coordinated attacks against the West as they were able to before 9/11. However, there will be much less to say the same about the Taliban and its affiliates, such as the Haqqani Network.

The well-coordinated attacks in Kabul, Jalalabad and Gardez on April 15 and the ensuing fight in the central capital of Kabul that lasted for several hours, leaves little room for optimism in a post-withdrawal Afghanistan. Notwithstanding the quick and very much organized reaction from the Afghan security forces, the message conveyed by the perpetrators of the attacks was loud and clear: We are very much alive and can disrupt security any time we like.



The second important aspect is the strength and training of the Afghan security forces after 2014. Although the United States is expected to pledge around \$2.5 billion a year, NATO partners are yet to present a concrete plan of development in the civilian sector as well as support for the Afghan security forces whose number would be reduced to a mere 230,000.

There is nothing clear about the not-so-secret talks between the United States and the Taliban representatives. Even if it is believed that the two sides are still in contact, it is not clear that the Taliban would accept the Strategic Partnership Agreement under which the United States is likely to keep its Special Forces at some key locations in Afghanistan. One of the foremost conditions from Taliban for any peace settlement is the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan. Would they accept the presence of US troops is anybody's guess?

The presence of US Special Forces

in Afghanistan beyond 2014 to support the Afghan security forces is an assurance for the Afghans that the United States is not abandoning the country this time as it did after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. However, it is equally important to gauge how Afghanistan's neighbors will view the long-term US presence in the region.

To some diplomatic sources, the US troops would be stationed in the western province of Herat (bordering Iran), the southern province of Kandahar (bordering Pakistan) and the central capital of Kabul. Since the US-Pakistan relationship is currently undergoing a diplomatic deadlock and Iran already has strained relations with the United States, the two neighbors would certainly come out with reservations which might affect their relations with Afghanistan.

Neither Pakistan nor Russia has signaled joining the Chicago Summit, as these lines are written, which is already a pointer to their reserva-

tions about the future of Afghanistan. The only country that will be happy with the long-term US presence in Afghanistan is India, which has invested billions of dollars and is planning to further strengthen its strategic partnership as well as its people-to-people contacts with the Afghans.

Another important point about the future of Afghanistan is the question of political stability in the country. The next presidential elections are scheduled to be held in 2014. Since Hamid Karzai will be completing his second term the same year, and under the Afghan Constitution, he cannot stand for a third term in office, it is unclear as to who will be the next president of Afghanistan.

Looking at the level of political awareness and the still dominant role played by tribalism, it is unlikely that the majority ethnic Pashtuns would agree on a person other than a Pashtun even though elected through the use of vote. One such expected candidate might be former foreign minister, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, who is an ethnic Tajik.

It may or may not be a deliberate act on the part of Hamid Karzai but there is no proper candidate for the Afghan presidency among ethnic Pashtuns in 2014. This vacuum may cause political instability in the system that can hardly be called stable and the leadership question may spark tribal and ethnic conflict, which will only benefit the Taliban and other destabilizing forces in the region. **S**

Daud Khattak is Acting Director at Mashaal Radio, RFE/RLPrague, Czech Republic. As a senior journalist, he has covered the Taliban movement in Pakistan and Afghanistan. He writes for the Christian Science Monitor and Sunday Times.

On March 12, the Bangladesh Nationalists Party (BNP) enlarged the electoral coalition from 4 to 18. Other than its traditional Islamist partners, like Jamaat-e-Islami and the Islamic Unity Front (fractured into three), no other party has the political strength to mobilise as many activists to organise anti-government protests.

Most of the mega 18-party alliance members are a “one-leader” party and among them, seven new partners are not even registered with the Election Commission. Obviously, the question regarding their political activism and ability to muster strength during an anti-government rally, will arise. The alliance partners often keep their activities limited to forming human chains and holding indoor discussion meetings. Despite limitations, they wish to stand together.

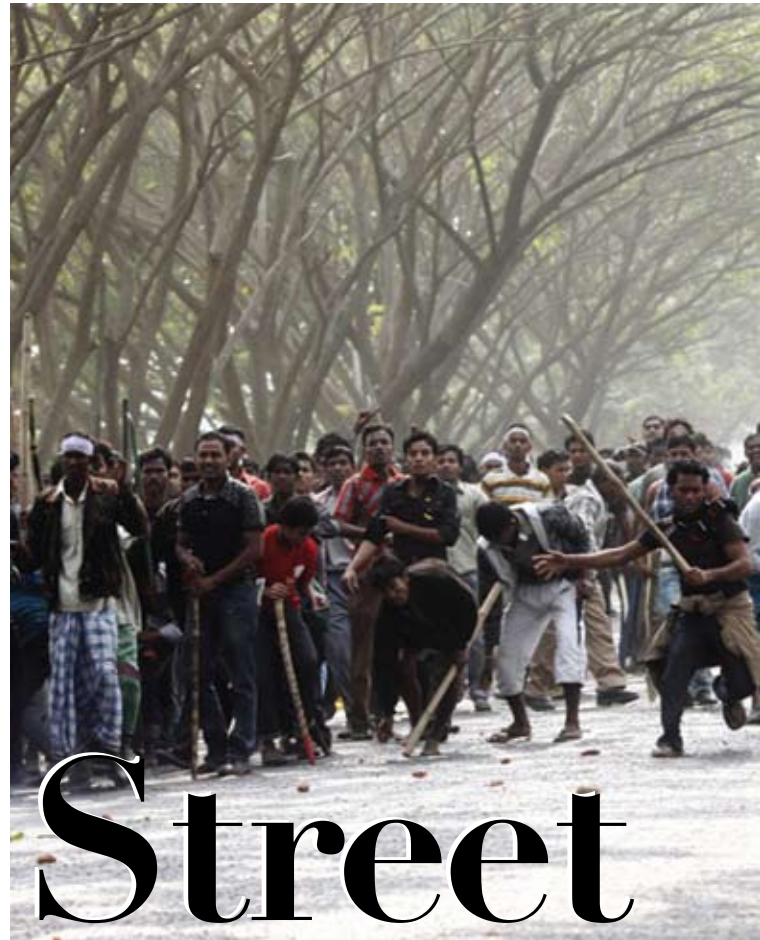
However, the main opposition needs to acquire more strength to exert pressure on the government to hold the upcoming general election under a neutral caretaker system. The government scrapped the articles and clauses from the constitution after the high court revoked the system last May.

BNP, which opposed the caretaker system in 1996, somersaulted soon after the system was deleted from the constitution and informed its supporters that it will boycott the election schedule next year, out of fear of rigged elections. Simultaneously, it also boycotted the by-elections and mayoral polls, wherever electronic voting machines (EVMs) had been deployed.

The 18 party mega alliance is hopeful that they will be able to gain a political edge on their demand for a caretaker system to hold a credible general election and also reject the notion of e-voting. However, political observers do not predict any such achievement. Firstly, the high court verdict is against the caretaker government, which it deems illegal and unconstitutional.

Second is the notion of e-voting, which the opposition predicts will be manipulated. The electronic wizards of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology explained that the gadget is full-proof from hacking or manipulation. The opposition has however ignored the explanations of the e-wizards.

In 20 years of a democratisation process, which began after 15 years of military dictatorship, the democratic culture is conspicuously absent.



As the two political parties in Bangladesh find themselves at loggerheads, street protests dominate the political landscape, bringing the country to a standstill.

By Saleem Samad

In fact it has not taken root since the independence of Bangladesh, some forty years ago, according to Professor Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah, a political scientist with Dhaka University.

He argues that regardless of who



Power

was in the opposition, both parties have deliberately boycotted the parliament, making the legislative process inconsequential. Nevertheless, the absentee lawmakers do not forget to receive doles from the national exchequer, VVIP protocols, red passports, duty-free exotic vehicles and many other facilities at the expense of the public's money.

The recent stand-off between the government and opposition provoked the business community to raise their voice after weeks of countrywide shut-down and street riots which led to a deterioration in the investment climate. The opposition fought street

said that the abductors did not seek ransom, nor anybody contacted her to release the beleaguered leader on certain conditions. But she reaffirmed that she will agree to any conditions for her husband's freedom.

Opposition leader Khaleda Zia, however pointed her finger towards elite anti-crime force, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), which she created in 2004 when she was prime minister. The government repeatedly scoffed at the allegations and claimed that the law enforcing agencies had launched a massive manhunt.

The opposition immediately clamped a countrywide shutdown on

battles with thousands of riot police in bulletproof vests, armed with shot-guns, tear-gas grenades and with the support of armoured vehicles and water cannons.

Earlier on April 17, BNP's former lawmaker Elias Ali went missing along with his chauffeur. Tahsina Rushdi Luna, wife of Ali claimed plain-clothes security agents had picked him up at midnight and his car was found abandoned in a posh area of capital Dhaka. She

April 22. From road transportation to national school exams, from banking to access to health care, everything lies at a standstill. Frustrated with the developments, independent newspaper Daily Star, in an editorial urged the government to reconcile and requested the opposition to restrain from political rancour on the issue of the missing leader.

Instead of reconciliation, the government's crackdown on opposition leaders was widely criticised as scores of central leaders of the BNP and their adopted partners escaped the police dragnet. On the other hand, the High Court refused to hear the bail petitions of the hiding leaders as none have appeared in person at the court, due to fear of being picked up from the court premise.

Earlier, the Jamaat-e-Islami leadership found itself in a precarious situation. Most of its central leaders were in prison, facing charges of crimes against humanity during the bloody war of independence in 1971. They were accused for forming the dreaded Al Badr, a death squad for abduction and extra-judicial killings of professionals including teachers, physicians, engineers, sportsmen, journalists and litterateur. Thousands of members of the Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing, Islamic Chattra Shibir (Islami Student Front) were detained. It seems unlikely now that the Jamaat-e-Islami would be able to contribute in the present street protests. **S**

Saleem Samad is a journalist, elected Ashoka Fellow for Journalism and recipient of the Hellman-Hammet Award.

A Permanent Solution?

The Tamils in Sri Lanka vehemently demand an independent Tamil Eelam as a solution to their grievances. But the granting of such a demand could have a domino effect in the South Asian region.

By Maria Saifuddin Effendi

Whether the punitive action against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) can ensure positive peace at social, political and economic levels was among the most important questions raised after the killing of Vellupulai Parbhakran by the Sri Lankan army. After nearly three decades of being conflict stricken, Sri Lanka is currently going through a transitional phase.

During the transitional phase of any conflict, a society assumes slow progress and development in every sphere; politics is no exception. The country is facing challenges and risks at various fronts. International development agencies are conducting post-war peace building processes. They are funding and supporting ongoing activities and initiatives for the rehabilitation of war victims as well as the reconstruction of a war torn society.

To ensure a long lasting peace

process, it is pertinent to streamline uninterrupted and sustainable development, further the reconciliation process to remove ethnic paranoia amongst all groups and have a viable and culturally sensitive peace-building program in different parts of the country. Following the accusations of alleged war crimes, rebuilding the international image of Sri Lanka is also critically important. However, more pressing issues such as the re-integration of the LTTE in the socio-economic system to prevent them from recuperating their military strength, pose a serious risk and challenge to the Government.

In the backdrop of Operation 2009, expectations developed for a quick mechanism to address and redress the ethnic grievances of the Tamil minority. The lack of political will to discuss and experiment different options, including the granting of

total autonomy or creating Tamil Eelam through a referendum under UN auspices, frame the current political scenario of Sri Lanka.

Since the beginning of 2012, Indian leaders have been visiting the country to gauge and discuss the political scene. Indian Minister for External Affairs, S.M. Krishna visited the country in early 2012 followed by Indian Opposition leader, Sushma Swaraj, who recently visited Colombo and discussed various issues including the 13th amendment (for more power sharing in the provinces).

Since India hosts a sizeable Tamil community, it is genuinely concerned for a better and feasible conflict management process to address Tamil deprivations. The Indian experience of peacekeeping in the island country does not serve as pleasant memory amongst the Indian Government or the military.

Karunanidhi, former chief minister of Tamil Nadu, has said that a referendum, conducted by the UN, to establish the Tamil Eelam is the only solution. He argues that a number of countries have gained recognition through the UN and post war Sri

Lanka is no different. This particular statement raised eyebrows in India as to how an already dissatisfied Tamil community in Sri Lanka could challenge the territorial integrity of the two countries. The Tamil tigers are known for their tactic to lay low, regain their military strength and hit back with greater force. Keeping strategic and geographical purview in the scene, India is more interested to anticipate and support a federal solution under unitary perspective to cure ethnic and socio-economic ills of Sri Lanka.

At home, there is palpable unrest among the Tamil minority as the war crimes are considered a question of genocide. Given the bitter past, the Tamil community has lost all hope and trust in a permanent solution to their problems. To them, any permanent solution to their grievances is nothing short of an independent state called Tamil Eelam; an autonomous entity that will bring an end to the negative peace Sri Lanka is currently enduring.

On the contrary, the Sinhala dominated Government is neither talking about implementing the 13th amendment nor has it offered any power sharing package to Jaffna, the capital of the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. Reviewing the statement by former Chief Minister of

Tamil Nadu, the Sri Lanka government does not wish to surrender its national interests by holding a referendum or deciding the fate of the Tamil minority through or under UN auspices. In any case, a federal solution within a unitary framework sounds favorable.

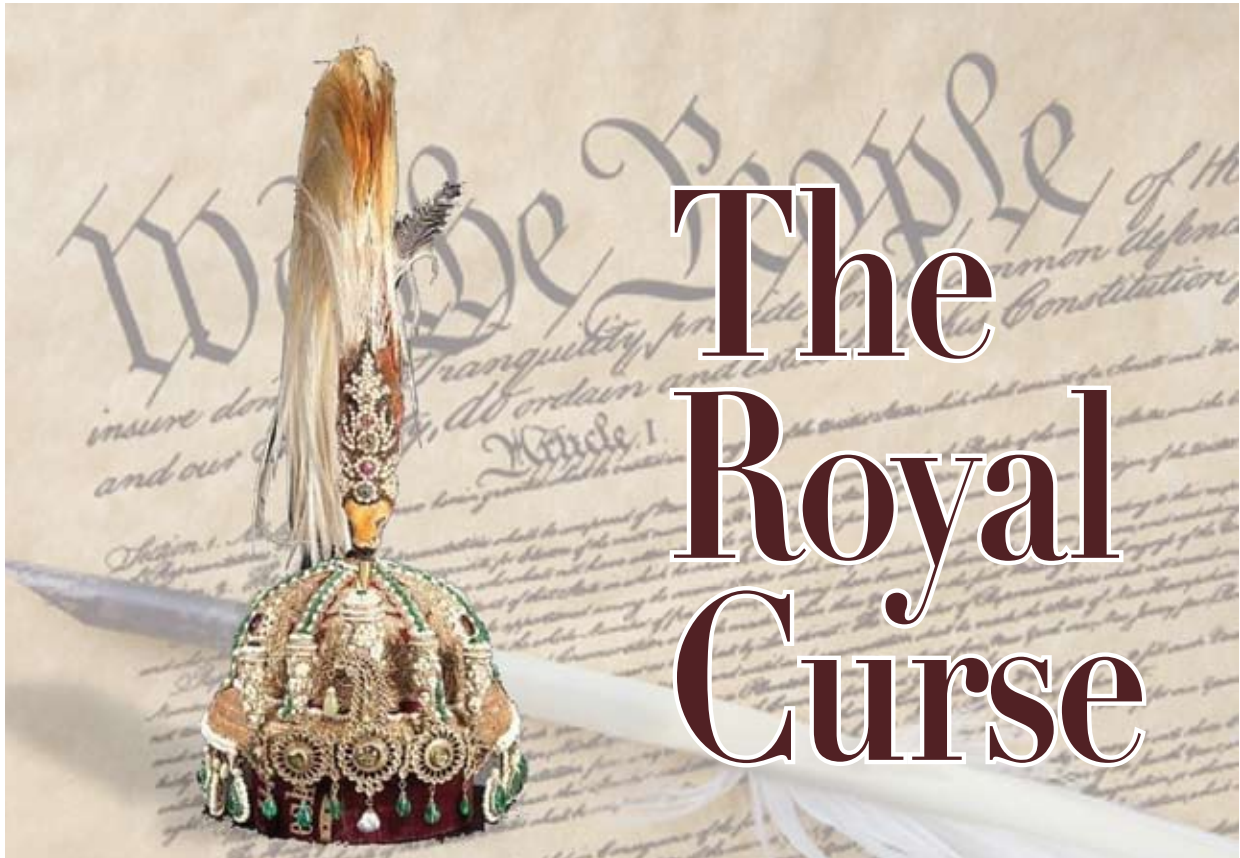
Regionally, any solution out of territorial integrity or federal arrangement would not be welcomed by any South Asian state. Unfortunately, all eight states are turmoil prone and serve as a hotbed of internal crisis, civil war and secessionist elements or insurgencies. If the Tamil minority is given the privilege to hold a referendum or is given a UN sponsored solution then Kashmir, the seven states of northeast India, the Maoist movement in Nepal, internal strife in Bangladesh and Afghanistan and intra-state conflicts in Pakistan will no longer require the federal and unitary system of their respective governments.

The economy, foreign relations, industry, agriculture, governance and the building of state institutions are sectors where a newly formed state has to focus all energies sans disruption from the sub-ethnic or sectarian groups.

Having discussed the options of a Tamil Eelam at the local and regional level, a federal arrangement, devolution package and power sharing mechanisms in the north east of Sri Lanka may prove as a breathing space to the suffering Tamil community. While it may not serve the purpose of securing a separate entity, this move will buy the government some time. **S**

Maria Saifuddin Effendi is Assistant Professor for Peace and Conflict Studies at the National Defence University.





The Royal Curse

Despite numerous efforts and with much dismay and concern, Nepal's constitution remains far from completion but could this delay re-usher an era of monarchy?

By S. M. Hali

The mountain kingdom of Nepal, which abolished monarchy in December 2007 as part of a peace deal with Maoists, who had agreed to re-join the government, is on the brink of a constitutional crisis. Governed by a Constituent Assembly (CA) under the proviso of an Interim Constitution, the CA was tasked with drafting Nepal's permanent constitution. The predicament is compounded

by the fact that the CA has been unable to complete the assignment despite multiple extensions.

The Interim Constitution of Nepal expired at midnight on May 28, 2011. The CA had already extended the original deadline of May 28, 2010 by one year. The crisis aggravated when on May 25, 2011, the Supreme Court ruled that the 2010 extension of the Interim Constitution was unconsti-

tional; yet on May 29, 2011 the CA extended the Interim Constitution by a further three months. The Supreme Court has yet to rule on the constitutionality of this extension of the deadline. In August 2011, the CA again extended the Interim Constitution by yet another three months and in November, by six months until 28 May 2012.

Neutral observers note with con-

cern that a permanent constitution is far from finalized. With a legislative and constitutional vacuum looming, the government and the Maoists, who hold the largest number of seats in the CA, are locked in a political standoff over what happens next. The experiment of this landlocked South Asian state with democracy needs to be examined.

Primarily a Hindu monarchy, located in the Himalayas and bordered to the north by the People's Republic of China and to the south, east, and west by the Republic of India, the erstwhile tourist haven was rocked by a decade long civil war. In 1996, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) launched a violent struggle to replace the royal parliamentary system with a people's socialist republic. The bloody strife took a toll of 12,000 lives with King Gyanendra's attempt to quash the violent Maoist movement failing and on 18 May, 2006 he relinquished sovereign power to the people thus ending Nepal's official status as a Hindu Kingdom. In April 2008, general elections were held; former Maoist rebels won the largest bloc of seats in elections to the new CA but failed to achieve an outright majority. During the last four years, four Prime Ministers have ruled Nepal in a virtual game of musical chairs.

The promulgation of a new constitution will complete Nepal's transition from a mono-religious kingdom to a pluralist democracy. The problems that impede the process are myriad. Strong dissent has emerged to Nepal's new identity: numerous voices are clamoring for the restoration of a Hindu state. Nepal's current interim constitution suggests ambivalence between the two positions. On the one hand, the preamble declares Nepal as a 'secular, inclusive and fully democratic State'. On the other hand, it fails

to wholly protect the right to freedom of religion.

Article 23(1) provides that, "Every person shall have the right to profess, practice and preserve his/her own religion as handed down to him/her from ancient times paying due regard to social and cultural traditions. Provided that no person shall be entitled to convert another person from one religion to another and no person shall act or behave in a manner which may infringe upon the religion of others."

Legally, this perspective is flawed. Principally, it fails to comply with normative interpretations of the right to religious freedom by outlawing conversion and providing only for the preservation of a religious status quo. The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief has expressed 'deep concern' over anti-conversion laws, blaming them for vilifying religious minorities. A number of low caste Hindus, the Dalits, have been trying to convert to Christianity or Islam but they have been outlawed.

The other problems that encumber the drafting of the new constitution are whether Nepal should have a presidential form of government or a prime minister as the chief executive; how many states the new federal republic should have; whether the judiciary should be under parliament or be independent and whether the parliament should be unicameral or have two chambers. Party conflicts along with a lack of implementation of past agreements have unfortunately marred the process.

One MP has opined that public reaction may be tested by floating the idea of a "mini constitution" that would be enforced on May 28 as a token. Reportedly, Maoist chief Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda, whose party is likely to draw the most flak if the deadline is missed, has begun training

party cadre on what to do (perhaps taking up arms) if the new statute does not materialize in May. The constitution has a provision for extending the deadline by six months in case of an emergency like civil war. However, it also has the provision to be amended further, which could be used by the defaulting parties to extend the deadline by more than six months.

Should that happen, Nepal is headed for utter chaos with the possibility of public violence. Common Nepalese, who have the highest stakes in the matter, have been enduring inflation, lack of security and a crippling 14-hour daily power cut in the hope that things will improve after the new constitution comes into effect.

As the fog of Nepal's constitutional crisis thickens with the approaching deadline, Nepal's Minister for Industries, Anil Kumar Jha has sullied the waters by commenting that failure on the part of political parties to complete the assigned job could lead to monarchy returning at the helm. The ominous statement appeared the day former King Gyanendra returned to the capital from west Nepal, amidst an enthusiastic welcome and cheers of "you must come and save the country" by an exasperated people aspiring an end to their woes. Jha's coup de grâce to speculations maybe his statement: "We have a habit in Nepal to come to a consensus during the last minute and that is why the new constitution would also be a last minute event." There is still hope for a democratic future for Nepal but the clock is ticking. ■

Group Captain © Sultan M. Hali, now a practicing journalist, has contributed over 2000 articles, produced 125 documentaries and hosts a TV talk show. He is currently based in Islamabad.



Political Whirlpool

The Maldives is currently undergoing a precarious political tug-of-war. Unfortunately, external powers such as India, the U.S, and China are only complicating matters further with their ulterior motives in play.

By Syed Moazzam Hashmi

The Maldivian archipelago, which barely enjoyed the fruits of an infant democracy, seems to be caught in a tug-of-war amongst opposing external powers seeking to hog strategic navigational routes in the Indian Ocean; routes that India believes lie in its backyard.

At least four international naval powers: India, China, Europe and the United States with heavy stakes in the Indian Ocean are quite discernible in this regard. The European Union backed by the 56-nation Commonwealth is chasing the trail with conflicting interests against the United States while Sri Lanka and Pakistan

observe the situation with grave concern.

With the Maldives in its southwest, India believes that it has a legitimate right to hold the reins of strategic navigational routes in the Indian Ocean that provide it with smooth sailing through East Africa and the rest of the world

China has been catching up fast to compete with India in order to claim the leadership rights in the region. It had been making inroads in the Maldives for quite some time whereas the US is asserting its supreme position, being the single superpower in the world. The Chinese hegemonic out-

reach in the region is in conflict with India's own ambitions. The Indian concerns appear to carry weight, particularly in the presence of Chinese port-enhancement projects such as the development of the natural deep seaport in Gwadar, Pakistan, and a similar project in Sri Lanka.

Both Pakistan and Sri Lanka, share the India-allergic tendency based on their previous experiences, particularly the Indian ambition of economic and military expansion. This sentiment is heightened due to the fear of having India monopolize the strategic sea routes. The presence of other powers such as China and the US would

install the balance-of-power in the region.

On the flip side, Chinese economic outreach under its continuing port-enhancement programs in Myanmar, Bangladesh and Kenya ring alarm bells not only for India but the US and the European Union's interests in the region as well.

The hasty American response to the developing scenario in the Maldives was apparent with the immediate recognition of President Waheed's government as the legitimate force following President Nasheed's reportedly forced resignation in February. Following the US, the United Nations, the United Kingdom, China and others have also recognized the new government in the Maldives.

The US Assistant Secretary of State, Robert Blake, who flew into Male right after Nasheed's ousting in February, had rejected the MDP's demand for an early election after meeting the ruling hierarchy in the Maldives. Interestingly, the Commonwealth chose to go the other way, supporting Nasheed's demand of an early election and plugged in the required political weight by appointing former secretary general of the Commonwealth, Donald McKinnon as the special envoy to the Maldives.

India was also reasonably prompt in mobilizing its diplomatic icons to keep pace with the developing situation. The country was allegedly seen as galvanizing independent political movements across the political divide in the Maldives, which had challenged Gayoom's 30-year monarchy.

Besides the EU's insistence to conduct polls and an "urgent agreement" for political reconciliation leading to an end to the prevailing unrest in the Maldives, the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) also

supports an early election. However, a cluster of some former lawmakers and the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Dunya Maumoon, who also happens to be the daughter of former dictator Gayoom, had dismissed the call for an early election.

The tussle to keep a hold on the

Nasheed has been criticized for his dearth of certain "must" leadership traits, compared to his pedigree compatriot Gayoom. In the complicating strategic-political jigsaw, President Waheed serves as a temporary arrangement in the prevailing big powers game.

island kingdom in order to guard the strategic, military and economic navigational interests had ignited a chain reaction, which ultimately resulted in toppling the first democratic government of President Nasheed in February this year. His deputy, Waheed Hassan, promptly replaced Nasheed as the new president of an apparently United States supported government.

President Waheed, also known as *Baghee Waheed*, has since been struggling to seek legitimacy through various political maneuvers besides the already available American endorsement to his government. The situation grew more precarious when Waheed appointed key cabinet members from amongst Gayoom's loyalists, including his son and daughter.

Nasheed and his power-pivot, the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), reportedly enjoy the support of India countering both the US and Chinese influence. Despite the available external backing and the limited internal support Nasheed enjoys, he is viewed

more as a human rights activist: a cause that he has been championing all his life.

Nasheed has been criticized for his dearth of certain "must" leadership traits, compared to his pedigree compatriot Gayoom. In the complicating strategic-political jigsaw, Presi-

dent Waheed serves as a temporary arrangement in the prevailing big powers game. His realism rather than opportunism convinces him to lean toward the power pivot that apparently rests with Gayoom rather than his former boss, Nasheed.

Whether Nasheed wins the promised elections that are supposed to be held within a year under the new democratic constitution or Gayoom's daughter Dunya takes over the citadel of power in the Maldives, the international power struggle will not end in an archipelago where India is expected to perform better in the home grounds. More fireworks might be seen in Maldivian politics as the international strategic economic interests are as deep as the mighty Indian Ocean with everything churning underneath. ■

Syed Moazzam Hashmi is a political and security analyst, a senior journalist and former Political Affairs Advisor to the US Consulate General in Karachi, Pakistan.



Testing Political Acumen

Emerging victorious, Aung San Suu Kyi has created quite an impression in Myanmar and beyond. But how much political refinement will she need before she is ready to face the real battle for democracy?

By Col R Hariharan (retd)

Nobel laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi who had been leading the struggle for democracy led the National League for Democracy (NLD) to a resounding victory in the recent parliamentary by-elections in Myanmar. The re-entry of Suu Kyi and the NLD in Myanmar politics opens a new chapter in the troubled history of this nation.

Undoubtedly, Suu Kyi's charismatic leadership and tremendous popularity bagged 44 of the 45 seats for the NLD. On the flip side, despite its thumping success, the NLD will occupy only 39 of the 440 seats in the House of Representatives. The House of Nationalities – the upper house – will have only 5 NLD members out of 224 members. In light of the bigger picture, NLD has a long way to go to make a major impact inside the parliament.

But even token NLD representation in the parliament is of far-reaching political significance because Suu Kyi's presence as a member in the House will compensate for the numbers. With her entry in the parliament, the military leadership, orchestrating the government from behind, will be under tremendous pressure to preserve its special status assured under the 2008 Constitution.

The NLD had boycotted the entire army-engineered constitution-making process from the very beginning until the 2010 general elections. NLD's fundamental objection to the 2008 Constitution was that it legitimized the military role in a multi-party democracy. However, NLD's participation in the by-elections under the 2008 Constitution indicates a major shift in its political stance. President Thein Sein's positive and face saving response to some of NLD's objections appear to have influenced Suu Kyi's decision to join the political mainstream.

Her attitudinal change apparently started in 2007. Former UN Special Envoy, Razali Ismail, noted in April 2007 that Suu Kyi "had come a long

way to realize that democracy can only be done through the generals, with the latter still in the driving seat. This realization of hers is in stark contrast to the impervious, principled and unbending Suu Kyi I had met over twenty meetings ago."

Apparently, Suu Kyi has opted for political pragmatism rather than democratic dogmatism as a means to achieve her goal.

Thanks to President Thein Sein's positive push and the entry of Suu Kyi and the NLD in the parliament, the democratic process might gather its own momentum whetting the appetite for more peoples' participation with a diminished role for the army. This would coincide with Suu Kyi's goal of a democracy free from military over lordship. How the military leadership would respond to this remains the million-dollar question.

NLD has a long way to go to make a major impact inside the parliament. But even token NLD representation in the parliament is of far-reaching political significance because Suu Kyi's presence as a member in the House will compensate for the numbers.

This makes the reform process fragile and vulnerable to military leadership's susceptibilities.

In a video speech addressing Carleton University students last month, Suu Kyi, striking a word of caution stated, "Ultimate power still rests with the army so until we have the army solidly behind the process of democratization we cannot say we have got to a point where there will no longer be a U-turn. Many people are beginning to say that the democratization process is irreversible. It is not so."

Even now, the NLD has to overcome small constitutional roadblocks

that impede freewheeling democratic functioning in parliament. There is a constitutional requirement for parliament members to take an oath to "protect" the constitution. Newly elected NLD members, including Suu Kyi, have deferred their oath taking.

However, Suu Kyi has clarified that the NLD was not boycotting the parliament but only awaiting for the oath to be suitably amended with a phrase like "respect the constitution" to make it more acceptable to them. This is a clear indication that Suu Kyi would like to avoid confronting the government on such functional issues.

In light of all this, Suu Kyi is planning to travel overseas for the first time in 24 years, probably because she feels confident of the present scheme of things. This would also indicate that she may not take any precipitate action to rock the on-going democratic

process. It is expected that she would stabilize her party's political presence, explore all avenues available within the present constitutional set up and work towards a building a consensus to amend the constitution to make it more democratic.

The recent by elections came under close international scrutiny as they were considered a barometer for the progress of democratization of the country. There is a great deal of international optimism now as the elections were largely conducted fairly. The U.S. ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, chairing the UNSC meeting

on Myanmar, described the elections as a “historic and critical step on the path to consolidating and strengthening Myanmar’s democratic reforms.”

In a bid to encourage Myanmar’s democratization process, international sanctions slapped on the country are being loosened. Already the European Union has announced the suspension of sanctions – except for arms sale - for one year. The EU’s foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton said the bloc aimed to support progress in Myanmar “so it becomes irreversible.”

The U.S. has lifted the ban on investments in Myanmar as the first step. As the democratization process proceeds apace, other U.S. sanctions are likely to be lifted fully, sooner than later. With such broad based international support, the international community hopes that not only the Thein Sein government, but also the military leadership would be encouraged to continue the democratization process.

Myanmar is a huge reservoir of under exploited natural resources including natural gas. To resource hungry nations, it offers tremendous investment opportunities. Its infrastructure requirements are many and its development into a modern nation provides plenty of opportunities for international business. Already world leaders are making a beeline to Myanmar; David Cameron, the British Prime Minister made a quick trip to Myanmar and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is scheduled to visit soon.

President Thein Sein appears to be conscious of these complexities; he had been keeping Suu Kyi in the loop on important issues. However, whether he would continue to retain the confidence of the military leadership might determine the progress of the democratization process.

A brewing threat to progress in Myanmar is the stalled reconciliation process with ethnic militant groups

waging war against the state ever since independence. Historically, the inability of civilian government to tackle these insurgencies, particularly by the Karens, Kachins and Shans, in 1962 had provided a valid reason for the army to usurp power. Conscious of this danger, both Suu Kyi (and NLD leaders) and President Thein Sein have been holding talks with insurgent group leaders with limited success.

Only a strong democratic government can guarantee an equitable role for ethnic minorities to participate in nation building. One can only hope that the Myanmar leadership collectively realizes its responsibility in ensuring this. With no doubt, this would be the biggest challenge for Suu Kyi. ■

Col. R Hariharan is a retired Military Intelligence specialist on South Asia and is associated with the Chennai Centre for China Studies and the South Asia Analysis Group.



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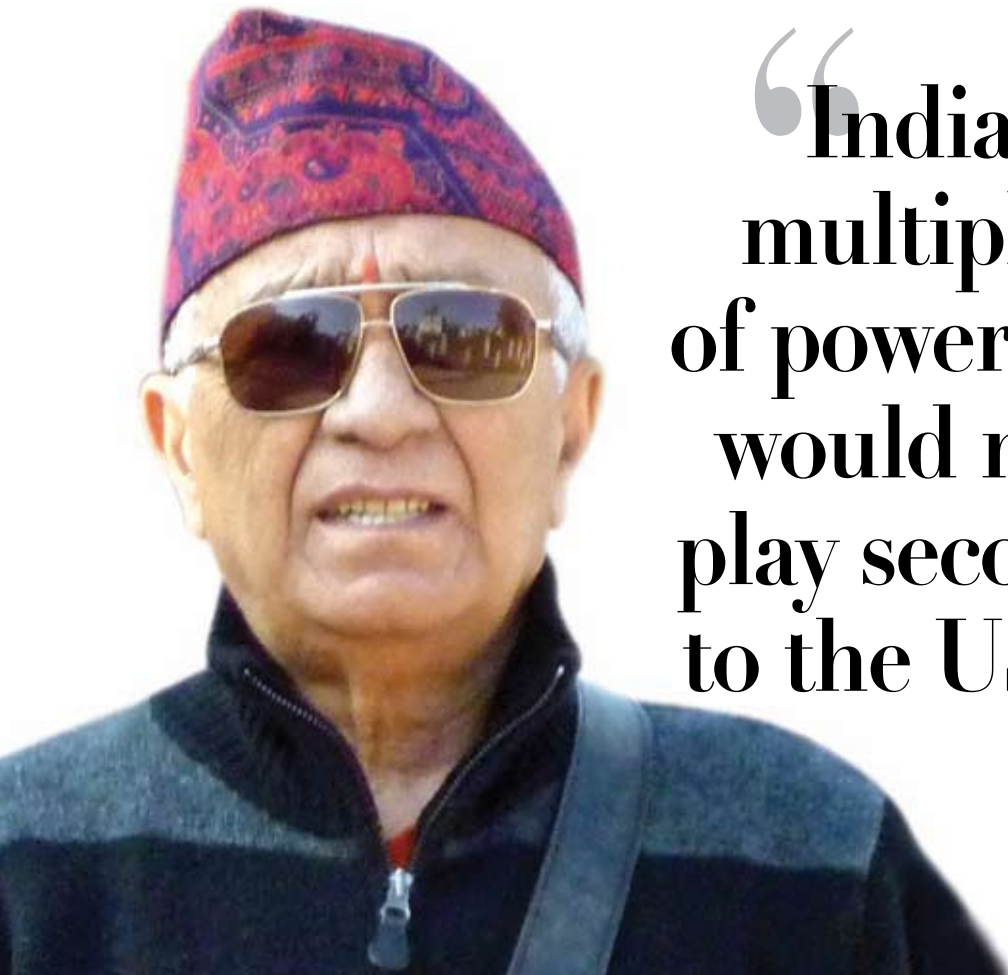
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“India supports multiple centers of power and thus would not like to play second fiddle to the US agenda.”

South Asia talks to Madhukar SJB Rana, former Finance Minister of Nepal, in this exclusive interview.

Madhukar SJB Rana is currently a Professor at the South Asian Institute of Management; Member Academic Panel SAARC CCI and Member International Advisory Board, South Asian Policy Research Institute, Colombo.

Much has been made of the US-India relationship over the years and even more recently, with state visits. However, is the US-India relationship oversold?

President Obama's remark that the Indo-US relation is a defining strategic partnership in and for the 21st century is certainly an example of oversell.

This is for the simple reason that India envisions itself as a global power in its own right -- and might-- in the course of the 21st century. When and if, India can emerge as the legitimate leader of South Asia then it will have

less need to anchor its geo political and geo economic strategies to the US as then the geo psychological fear of China will have evaporated.

Revolutionary developments in multiple land transportation systems across Asia will mean that prospects of Euro-Asian cooperation will grow. Much would depend on how Euro Asian powers like Russia and Turkey see their strategic interests. If both these countries begin to look East, as it is expected, then on this count too President Obama is over-selling the relationship. India cannot afford to

ignore both these nations, especially Russia, which is in a position to play a balancing role in India, China, Turkey and Iran through its Asian landmass as well as its strategic influence in Central Asia.

Given the vast number of recent geopolitical discussions held and trade and technology agreements signed, why is the US so heavily interested in India?

The US does not recognize that China is a co-equal power and will do whatever is necessary to ensure that it remains like the Middle Kingdom of

bygone eras. For this it has to contain China from traversing the High Seas into Latin America and Africa as well as overland into South, Central and West Asia.

No wonder, the US is keen on striking military alliances with Japan, Korea and Australasia as well as seeking intimate military cooperation with ASEAN, Af-Pak, Central Asian Republics and India. Interestingly, feelers are also being sent to Nepal despite the defacto defense agreement between India and Nepal (as laid down in the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship and its Protocol).

2014 will see NATO troop withdrawal and the U.S is expected to have a very serious Af-Pak policy in place. What are India's concerns regarding this matter?

Real politic dictates that a strategy of divide and rule is in the supreme national interest of the powerful. Hence, a strategic partnership with Af-Pak will ensure checks and balances to India's global aspirations if it goes against US foreign policy goals. An Af-Pak entente cordiale with the US will constantly underscore how vulnerable India is if it leaves the Kashmir question unresolved. Vulnerable on two counts: one, to the gross human rights abuses of the innocent Kashmiris and two, to keep India's long cherished ambition to be a permanent member of the UN Security Council at abeyance-- with or without veto rights.

India needs transit access to the oil and gas reserves of Iran and the Central Asian Republics, which may be difficult to have on purely economic reasons.

Will India remain a Non-Aligned Nation?

India's foreign policy has been and

will remain nonaligned. Non-Alignment gave it the soft power on which it could lead the so-called third world morally since post WWII. India being non aligned however, does not mean being neutral as can be seen from its Peace Treaty with the USSR to counter moves by the US and China to stop the breakup of Pakistan and the subsequent birth of Bangladesh.

Lately, foreign policy thinkers are proposing a (new) Non Alignment 2, which should guide India's foreign and strategic policy over the next 10 years. It is argued that NA 2.0 will help maximize current and emerging global opportunities and enhance India's strategic autonomy in a world where crises will be a future constant. It seeks to anchor its hard power on its soft power, which is its cultural heritage, nurtured by the values drawn from it. The interesting premise is that it is dependent on robust South Asian economic integration and full commitment to global multilateralism rather than bilateral Free Trade Areas. It also calls for a new look at the military strategies being pursued towards both Pakistan and China to create new options.

Investment in human capital is a strategic component of the grand strategy that seeks to integrate internal and external security challenges. It calls for massive de-bureaucratization of the state machinery towards greater partnership with civil society and the private sector; and a more managerial civil service that takes decisions holistically and strategically beyond the pale of the ministerial verticals.


With regard to US's recent foreign policy initiatives for India, at the people level there is a new attitude towards the US: the youth are largely pro-America and espouse American lifestyles, especially the upper class and the business community. Taking

advantage of this new geo psychology the US has taken the initiative to deepen and broaden bilateral ties in almost all areas -- military, economic, education, technology, human rights, nuclear and space cooperation, and terrorism. This new pro American attitude leads the younger generation to go further towards abandoning Non-Alignment because of the fear of China and distrust of Pakistan.

The countries have cooperated in a number of areas including health, education and even technology. How sustainable are the Indo-US strategic relations?

India is aware of the non-sustainability of the Pak-US alliance as it was betrayed by SEATO: as was the Shah of Iran with CENTO. India is also deeply aware of the anti India policy of the US as it sought nuclear weapons as the ultimate deterrence with the various US sanctions on technology transfer. Furthermore, India is also conscious of the fact that the US support to Pakistan placed severe stains on its military capabilities to be able to defend itself on the Pak front as well as the China front.

Convergence of interests may be there in the short haul as for example on democracy, fundamentalism, terrorism, Maoism, economic and financial globalization, rise of the middle class which tends to be pro US and more anti China and Pakistan.

The conflict arises from the fact that India supports multiple centers of power and thus would not like to play second fiddle to the US agenda, born out of the American need to contain China-- more than nurture India as a major power. Iran remains a grand window of opportunity for India especially if it can engage in barter trade for rupees. 



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honor, duty, mercy, hope."

—Sir Winston Churchill

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Young Afghan boys sliding around on the slopes of Bamiyan in homemade skiing gear are bound to be a strange site for anyone visiting the province for the first time.

The pristine mountains of Bamiyan - the central Afghanistan province - has started gaining the attention of skiing enthusiasts from across the world, after a program was launched in the area by the Geneva-based, Aga Khan Foundation (AKF). Once a foreign concept, skiing has become an increasingly popular sport with the locals.

“There’s still this image of Afghanistan as a country at war, but you can get quite a favorable impression by seeing the peaceful and secure nature of Bamiyan, and by seeing people having fun — skiing of all things,” said Robert Thelen, the regional director of

the AKF.

Although one of Afghanistan’s poorest regions, Bamiyan is also one of its safest, as its mostly Shia Hazara community do not support the Taliban who massacred the ethnic minor-

ity some eleven years ago after they gained control of the province.

Whether the idea of setting up a skiing industry is viable or not, is another story. “As far as the current setup is concerned, the idea of setting up a

Hope on

Afghanistan is largely known for terrorism and corruption but few are aware of the magnificent ski resorts and tourist getaways in the country.

By Manam Iqbal

resort is good and might attract a larger number of tourists as well but nothing can be said about the situation after foreign troops withdraw. It will all depend on the new political setup," said Saleem Safi, a political analyst and renowned Pakistani journalist.

For now, despite the scenic beauty of the place, only the most intrepid of adventurers decide to visit a war-torn Afghanistan. Travel to Bamiyan itself is perilous and dangerous, and there are no commercial flights to the province from Kabul. Travelers who take any of the two routes by road, run the risk of kidnapping or robbery by insurgents; the safest way to reach the place is by catching a humanitarian or diplomatic flight to the area.

But as a skier put it, once you get there, you are overcome by a feeling of security and tranquility. Bamiyan is one of the first provinces where a security transition took place.

"Right now is the best time for cre-

have the perfect slopes, with nothing but the swishing of the wind. Largely unknown, the area has an atmosphere of solitude – a far cry from the skiing resorts of Europe or America where tens of thousands of people assemble at the same spot. However, a climb up a mountain is usually lung-bursting and exhaustive, but some suggest a 'donkey lift,' where you hire a local's donkey for the ascent, is the best alternative.

There is also much more to Bamiyan than just the fascinating Koh-i-Baba mountain range. The province has multiple attractions, including the largest sitting Buddha statues, which were carved into cliffs overlooking the Bamiyan town. Although the Taliban blew them up in 2001, their ruins are still listed in UNESCO's World Heritage site. Numerous ruined pre-Islamic forts also dot the province.

But at the end of the day, it all comes down to security -- the big-

gear. "If security improves, ski tourism will work, if security gets worse, it won't."

Meanwhile, a few months back in Pakistan, the army held a weeklong skiing festival in Malam Jabba – for the first time after the area was cleared of militants. The Pakistani Taliban don't physically occupy any part of Swat anymore. They have been pushed back into Afghanistan after operation *Rah e Nijat* was launched by the forces. "Malam Jabba already had a skiing infrastructure in place, but it suffered damages after the extremists gained control of the area," said Yusufzai.

The most important element compulsory for a flourishing tourist economy is security. It is only when a sense of security is achieved, that travelers will feel safe enough to visit a country. Generally, tourism as an industry is one that revives relatively easily, even if temporarily damaged owing to civil unrest or political turbulence. A source of livelihood for many, it is usually a simple solution for dismal local conditions.

Both Afghanistan and Pakistan have much to offer in terms of tourism owing to their varied and beautiful topography. With tremendous geographical and human potential, it is only a matter of time before such spots can attract mass revenue and countries in South Asia can serve as safe, tourist destinations. Though there certainly is a massive decline in tourism in both countries, if the security situation is addressed, much can be reaped from natural inheritance. It will certainly take time and commitment, but with concerted efforts, perhaps the world can soon discover a little piece of heaven tucked away in Af-Pak. ■

Manam Iqbal is a communications graduate and holds a special interest in socio-economic issues in the region.

the Slopes

ating a ski resort, as you can't wait for peace to be fully restored. The project itself will create job opportunities for many people," said Rahimullah Yusufzai, resident editor of The News.

Although Bamiyan lacks the usual trappings of a ski resort – a proper infrastructure, chairlifts, cable cars or even passable roads and the après-ski of its guesthouses are limited to a bed, wood-burning stove and little more than kebabs and parlor games – it does

present the biggest challenge for everyone trying to rebuild and start afresh. "Tourism is definitely the easiest way to make a livelihood, but if the Taliban threat remains, there will always be security problems," said Iqbal Khattak, bureau chief of the Daily Times.

Jawad Wafa, who owns a guesthouse at the foot of the mountains, thinks security is essential for tourism to flourish. His little shop is stocked with second-hand, homemade skiing

Be Indian, Buy Indian

For South Asia, it is all about identity.

By Ashish Nangia

When we think of 'modernity', we often think of having the latest gadgets, the latest cars, or branded clothes. But modernity is much more than this. It is a state of mind, a belief in the power of the future, and of the power of rationalism and scientific thinking to solve the problems we are often confronted with.

Historians put the roots of moder-

nity somewhere in the 18th and 19th centuries, when humankind first came out of the depression and began to (re)discover the power of science and technology. New disciplines were invented to cope with a rapidly expanding world – physics, chemistry, the life sciences, mathematics. A world full of global exchanges came about – trade routes between east and west meant that it was now possible for the West to learn from Chinese and Indian wisdom, to import their spices, and to build lucrative connections. Indeed, for the

West, the only way it could measure its modernity was to compare it with the 'primitive' east.

Interestingly, a school of thought that is now emerging is that the East had its own versions of modernity, which have not been accepted into the Western canon of things until very recently. While the West had its own 'universal' standards, for example literature, art, philosophy, and so on, for the East, these things were usually designated as a subset of the universal. Thus, there were categories like Asian art, Indian philosophy, African art, Japanese fiction, and so on.

Till the late 20th century, the same seemed to be the case of architecture.

While Western architecture was the 'father' of movements such as 'Modernism', 'Postmodernism' and 'Deconstruction', for the major countries of the East such as China, India and the Middle East, architecture was forever doomed. It would appear, to be aping the West and producing mimetic copies of the parent canon. This of course was never true

Modern architecture in India – South Asian architecture from the 1800s to the end of the 20th century – evolved its own particular brand of modernity; modernism that was not dependent on the West, but rather in dialogue with it. This modernity depended instead on a past and an imagined future that was at once rich, full of possibilities and dependent on an imagined construction of reality.

When Jawaharlal Nehru's Congress came to power in 1947 the situation was different. There was a perceived need by Indian leaders to somehow 'build' the nation along lines that in some way reflected the 'identity' of the country. This question of identity aroused significant polemic, reflecting the diversity of India. For one, there was a rift between the 'moderns' and the 'revivalists', those who wanted to look forward and those who wanted to look to India's past for inspiration. India's past was too fractured and too vague an entity, in postcolonial India, to evoke associations of form and design in a truly national way. The danger of going modern, however, ran the risk of associating with the British; an act which Indian leaders felt would be too reminiscent of their recent past. Inventive solutions were found in state and state sponsored architecture that circumvented these debates, or at least strove to keep all parties happy.

in the new town of Chandigarh, for example, a French-Swiss architect and planner was engaged as the principal designer of the new project. At Bhubaneswar, Otto Koenigsberger, who had already been working in India for some time, was hired. The Scotsman Patrick Geddes, the American Albert Mayer and others who were not too evidently associated with the former colonial power too found their place in the sun, in post-1947 India.

Architecture of the state, however, continued to be a closely controlled phenomenon. A cartel of designers and architects, in conjunction with the powers that be, produced forms and designs which were modern in their outlook, yet attempted to create an 'Indian' identity. Using materials such as concrete, brick, sandstone and others, architects invented ways to offset the main features of the Indian climate – the harsh summer and the devastating monsoon. Architecture also made a strong political statement, one that emphasized the power of the state as the patriarch and benign overseer of the 'masses.'

The cartelization of architecture as a profession was also possible as long as there remained a few select schools of architecture in the country – predominantly those in Bombay, Ahmedabad and Delhi. However, change was imminent, and it came with the Janata party experiment and Indira Gandhi's emergency. These two projects proved that power was not held by a monolithic apparatus, and with the first winds of liberalization that came in the 1980s, architecture and design in India too saw change.

India embraced the world wide web, cable television and international publications. Travel became

easier and for the global Indian this meant exposure to the architecture of the world. Architecture practices employed foreign architects with the result that more and more international concepts entered India. Shopping malls, cinema multiplexes, industrial warehouses and factories, tall buildings and skyscrapers, all became part of the new architectural vocabulary.

For architects, this meant two things – the first was to acclimatize themselves with a global world and technology, and the second was to update themselves constantly with the latest gimmicks and software. Indeed, for the Indian architect his iPad and smart phone have become an essential part of his image, as are his buildings – but this would come a decade or two later.

Indeed, as new firms have shown, architecture and projects that employ high tech imagery and gizmos still have to prove themselves as having an 'Indian' and domestic influence. The tendency to employ and award contracts to large multinational firms has shown an apparent unwillingness to 'trust' the Indian with complex projects, and to ascribe to the 'Indian' anything else than what his or her own identity 'proves' him to be.

'Be Indian, buy Indian', the famous (and not apolitical) slogan of the 1980s is Orwellian in more than one instance in this case.

There is hope on the horizon. ■

Dr. Ashish Nangia is an architect with interests in sustainability, modern architecture and architectural history. He holds a Ph.D in architecture from the Universite de Paris Vincennes Saint Denis, and the University of Washington, Seattle.

Tough Going

Bangalore is known as the Silicon Valley of India but is it really up to speed?

By Haseeb Ahsan

Bangalore, home to six million people, is currently the third most populous city in India, and it continues to grow. Bangalore currently hosts more than 10,000 industrial units, of which a majority constitutes the Information and Technology (IT) sector. With much to boast of, the growing metropolis has earned a reputation as the Silicon Valley of India.

This new hub of technology however, did not erupt overnight. Its foundations were laid in the mid-70s when the Karnataka State Electronics Development Corporation envisioned Bangalore as the nation's electronic city. Later in the early 90s, with an IT boom, mostly in the services sector, Bangalore became the most feasible vicinity to do business. Playing host to a plethora of multinationals and harboring a vibrant demographic composition, the city has transformed into a cultural and economic hub in India.

Although, the industry has not yet produced groundbreaking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or Google, it does provide the best and most productive IT services like call centers, customer support and offshore software development to major companies worldwide. A pioneer in outsourcing, Bangalore's IT industry guarantees billions of dollars in revenue every year. This is the leading reason why many Indians, as many as 85% according to some statistics, working

in the U.S are returning home to find jobs or start their own ventures.

Ironically, during the global recession, the Indian IT industry benefitted immensely. Third world countries are famous for providing good resources at low rates. As a result, numerous developed countries performed cost-cutting techniques and outsourced their operations to a number of third world countries. With India serving as a major shareholder in the region, it of course reaped the most profits.

The magic behind the phenomenal growth of the Indian IT market is their Research & Development (R&D). Although the government hardly offers any substantial support, multinational companies like Microsoft, Yahoo and IBM have invested exorbitant amounts in developing this sector. Microsoft has set up its Research Center in India, which is the only such facility in any developing country. Similarly, other IT giants like Google, Intel and HP have also made huge investments. A core reason why India is able to attract diverse investment from the technical and service industry is due to the flexible business policies offered by its government. The approach towards investment has always remained positive and welcoming. Investment from the global services industry boosts employment at home and the Indian government continues to push corporations to form a system so that their

own people can get more jobs or become entrepreneurs.

Although the Indian Silicon Valley shows rapid growth, critics argue that it can never become the Santa Clara Silicon Valley. The central argument is that all major companies in Silicon Valley were formed on the basis of innovation. All successful products were unique in their own time, from Windows to the Google search engine and from Orkut to Facebook. This element is unfortunately missing from the Indian IT world where markets are trapped in a never-ending cycle of catering to non-innovative and laborious services like call centers, customer support or Business Process Outsourcing. Critics argue that India will not be able to climb up the ladder in innovation and creative development and eventually the industry will stagnate until another country, perhaps China, is able to offer services at an even lower cost.

Despite criticism, India's IT industry benefits from a competitive edge by offering resources at lower rates than anywhere in the world. This edge is so strong that it has compelled the world's top IT giants to invest in India, which has resulted in more job creation and more support to entrepreneurs. ■

Haseeb Ahsan contributes to various publications on entrepreneurship and skill development.



Freedom of expression remains a sensitive issue in South Asia. Though growing in importance, it seems unlikely that governments will grant such basic freedoms to their citizens.

By Faiza Hai

Demanding Protection

“Freedom is the right to choose, the right to create for yourself the alternatives of choice. Without the possibility of choice and the exercise of choice a man is not a man but a member, an instrument, a thing.”

- Archibald MacLeish

Freedom is one of the most elusive concepts to human beings. It is the longing of all persons, yet when gained or celebrated at the expense of others, its value is questionable. Freedom is a concept that

calls for wholeness. A person is not a fully free member of society if he is restricted politically, economically, socially, culturally or religiously. History has witnessed great thinkers, politicians, writers, and artists waste their lives trying to find the meaning of freedom. Men have spent generations floating various definitions, examples and quotations on what makes freedom so important.

Freedom of expression, as Justice Felix Frankfurter puts it, “is the well-spring of any civilization.” Speech,

words and expressions are not simply limited to public speaking. The right to express oneself is preserved in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is granted formal recognition by most nations. An essential part of freedom of expression is voicing one’s opinion publicly without fear of censorship or punishment. Unfortunately, such freedom is often curtailed by governments, especially in South Asia.

South Asia is home to one-fifth of the world’s population and is

described as one of the poorest regions on Earth. The most vulnerable to discrimination are not only the poor and minorities but also women and children. This is evident through discriminatory gender laws, physical punishment of both women and children, lack of equal and safe working conditions, child labor, female feticide and lack of access to education for girls, amongst numerous other grievances.

In an era dominated by the influx of media, South Asians are still struggling for their freedoms of expression and opinion. In 2011, during the closing session of The World Press Freedom Day, South Asian journalists highlighted the importance of press freedom in South Asia, stressed the need to evaluate and defend the media from attacks on its independence and paid tribute to journalists who

lost their lives in the line of duty.

In Sri Lanka, almost twenty journalists were killed during the last decade and in Pakistan, deemed the most dangerous country for journalists, at least eleven journalists lost their lives last year alone.

Journalists in South Asia are courageous supporters of press freedom and access to information. In recent years, South Asian journalists have had to face hard battles in their perseverance to report the truth. Standing bravely in the face of persecution and death threats, the journalists' community serves as an easy target motivated by political backing.

At a time when international media and governments around the world are raising a collective voice in favor of human freedoms, South Asia is only drifting further into darkness. Despite efforts made by hu-

man rights organizations addressing pressing issues, it seems interests of governments are greater than the rights of the common man.

It is imperative for the social and political situation throughout South Asia to become conducive to responsible reporting and for governments to guarantee journalists the freedom and protection they deserve. Until there is no protection, media freedom and individual freedom of expression will stagnate and ultimately deteriorate, plunging South Asia into an even more complicated and controlled web. The need of the hour is tolerance to differences of opinion and not persecution based on disagreement. **S**

Faiza Hai is currently pursuing an MBA in Media Management and is a freelance writer based in Karachi.

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Disfigured for Life

Acid violence remains under-reported but scores of women are victimized by this brutal act in South Asia every year.

By Zara Maqbool

The United Nations defines violence against women as ‘any act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women.’ Throwing acid on a woman is by far the cruelest form of abusing a person, leaving the individual paralyzed and psychologically unable to face society confidently again.

An acid attack is a deliberate act of throwing acid on a victim, mostly women, usually on the face that causes severe pain, permanent disfigurement, subsequent infections and often blindness in one or both eyes. The chemical agents most commonly used to commit these attacks are hydrochloric and sulfuric acid. The attacker commits acid attacks for a number of reasons, including revenge for refusal of a marriage proposal or other romantic or sexual advances; land disputes; perceived dishonor; and jealousy. Valerie Khan, Director, Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) says, “60 % of these attacks occur as the epitome of an already existing cycle of violence.” While acid attacks are most prevalent

in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India and Pakistan, they have also been widely reported in Afghanistan and in parts of Africa and Europe.

In Pakistan, approximately only 30% of acid cases are reported. Exact statistics on acid attacks in Pakistan are not available but roughly around 200 acid attacks take place in Pakistan every year; at least 9000 acid attacks were reported between 1994 and 2011, according to data compiled by the Progressive Women’s Association (PWA). A weak judicial system and lack of support from the police is partly to be blamed for the under reporting of such cases. Another major reason is that the victim’s families reach out of court settlements due to financial pressure, which prevents the compilation of any official statistics.

Acid attacks, a leading act of domestic violence, are common for a number of reasons. Acid is readily available not only in major cities but also in small towns across rural areas, costing less than Rs 100 a liter and is often used for household cleaning or

for cotton processing in rural areas. Shopkeepers are unaware of any regulatory requirement concerning the sales and anyone can purchase an unlimited amount without question.

An important precaution, one that many are unaware of, is that the victims of acid burn should quickly douse themselves with water, for at least 30 minutes as it is important to neutralize the severity of the acid as quickly as possible. Given the limited medical care facilities available in Pakistan, this might be the victim’s only chance to reduce the severity of the attack.

Shahnaz Bokhari, founder of Progressive Women’s Association (PWA) based in Islamabad says, “I am proud to say that the first Burn Center in Islamabad was made after PWA’s long sustained struggle for burn victims since 1986.” PWA is perhaps the oldest NGO working for burn victims. From 2003 onwards, Smile Again and ASF have made strides in fighting for the rights of acid victims in Pakistan. However, such crimes remain under reported and according to Bokhari, “from 1994 till 2011 we investigated

600 cases and were able to get only 2% convictions. This is the most disturbing element.”

Valerie Khan adds, “The first holistic intervention was launched by ASF-Pakistan with the support of Acid Survivors Trust International (ASTI) when the first Nursing Care and Rehabilitation Unit was constructed in January 2007. ASTI, the only international organization addressing acid violence, has established several ASF in South Asia.”

‘Smile Again,’ an organization started by Mussarat Misbah goes a step ahead by not only guaranteeing reconstructive surgery for acid victims but also training them and employing them at Depilex, famous beauty salon run by Misbah.

In other South Asian countries, the government has also taken a proactive approach to the crime. In 2002, Bangladesh introduced the death penalty for throwing acid and implemented laws strictly controlling the sales of acids. In 2011, Pakistan passed a law in the form of Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Bill that established tougher penalties for an acid-attack conviction -- 14 years to life behind bars and a fine of up to \$11,000.

But women’s rights activists are demanding greater regulation of the sale and distribution of acid to prevent these attacks. Better rehabilitation services are also crucial for victims so they can rebuild their lives. After an attack, the victim faces physical challenges, which require long-term surgical treatment, as well as psychological challenges, which demand in-depth counseling from psychologists at each stage of physical recovery

Reports of acid burn cases are alarmingly on the rise but legislation to counter this remains wanting. Many hope that Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy’s Oscar winning film, “Saving Face,” exploring acid-attacks, will bring the much needed pressure to transform

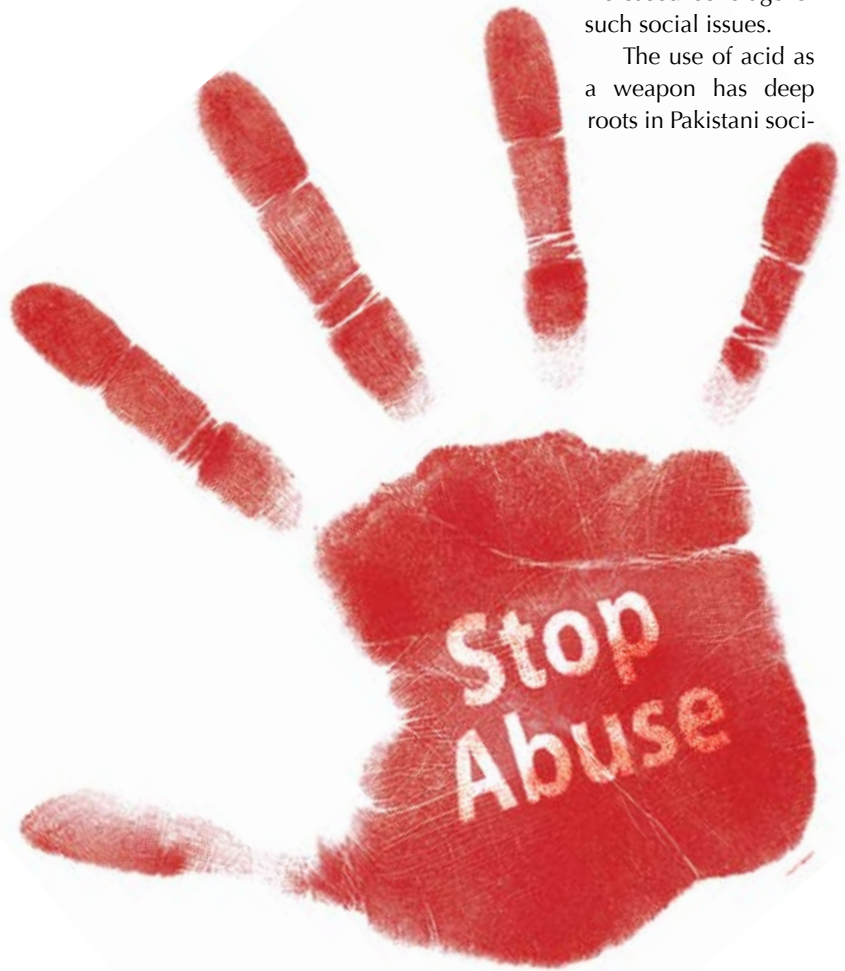
the Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Bill into action.

According to Shahnaz Bokhari, “This acid crime documentary has brought an Oscar award and I pray it brings awareness and implements genuine laws on the grass root levels

Every year, scores of Pakistani women are disfigured in acid attacks, usually at the hands of husbands or relatives. The attacks, often brought on by fits of jealousy or rage, go largely ignored and are rarely prosecuted. Only in the last decade, has the media

increased coverage of such social issues.

The use of acid as a weapon has deep roots in Pakistani soci-



so our women are relieved of this horrendous crime.” Valerie Khan supports her opinion, “A global response is needed for a global issue. It will motivate Pakistani policy makers to address and eventually eradicate this monster and project Pakistan as a role model to address a human rights violation. The documentary insists on projecting the efforts and results. In that sense it is a positive hopeful message!”

ety. Short of murder, an acid attack is the most devastating form of aggression, transforming the victim into a figure of horror and an outcast. If this is not the time to do something about this atrocious act of violence, then one wonders if there ever will be a right time. ■

Zara Maqbool is a freelance writer who writes on social issues.

A photograph of a shanty town structure built on stilts over a body of water. The building is made of weathered wood and corrugated metal, with a red sign that says "FOR SALE" attached to its side. The structure is supported by a complex wooden frame of poles and beams. In the background, a city skyline is visible across the water under a blue sky with some clouds.

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It is generally maintained that Urdu was born in military camps during the Mughal period. But the fact is that the antecedents of modern Urdu and Hindi had existed for around four hundred years earlier, commonly referred to by various names such as Hindvi, Hindi and Dakkani. During those four centuries, language was influenced by a number of factors arising from social changes and political developments in India. The book under review is a detailed study of how various factors kept on shaping and re-shaping Hindi and Urdu, and how these evolved as two different languages

theories and in doing so, has also described the political imperatives behind them.

Though it was the British who fully separated Urdu and Hindi along communal lines, Urdu underwent a process of 'Islamization' during the eighteenth century. This process consisted of an excessive use of Persian and Arabic words and references to the elements of the Muslim culture in India. Subsequently, a large number of religious books in Arabic and Persian were translated into Urdu and, at the same time, original works of a religious nature were also written in this language.

Urdu in their literature.

Besides religion, erotic and amorous themes have also contributed to the spread of Urdu but most of such literature is in the form of poetry and not in prose. The book surveys such literature as well.

While these developments were taking place, the protagonists of Hindi as a different language, continued their efforts in that direction. Besides the use of Devanagari script, they inducted words of Sanskrit into Hindi and eliminated the use of even the most familiar words of Persian and Arabic.

The British played a very signifi-

Redefining Language

Title: From Hindi to Urdu - A Social and Political History
Author: Tariq Rahman
Publisher: Oxford University Press, Pakistan (January, 2012)
Pages: 476, Hardback
Price: PKR. 1095
ISBN: 9780199063130

due to political considerations.

A number of theories exist regarding the area in which Urdu was born. Two well-known theories are advanced by Hafiz Mahmud Shirani and Syed Sulaiman Nadvi. The former maintains that Urdu was born in the Punjab while the latter advocates Sindh as its birthplace. There are other theories as well, one of which even regards Urdu as a descendant of the ancient language of the Indus Valley. The author has discussed and analyzed all these

Religious translation has been undertaken on such a large scale that now it is often claimed that 'after Arabic, the biggest treasure of Islamic literature is in Urdu.'

Since the medieval ages, Urdu was also used by Sufi saints and other holy men for preaching as non-Muslim natives could not understand Arabic or Persian. Devotional songs recited in the *Mehfil-e-Samaa* were often in Urdu. Additionally, reformist groups such as the Deobandis and the Barelvis, mostly used

cant role in making Urdu or Hindustani, as they often called it, an India-wide language. The author is of the view that the British considered it to be a lingua franca for the whole of India which 'probably it was not, before their arrival.' According to Tariq Rahman, they spread the language throughout the country by using it in the army, in administrative and legal domains at the lower levels, and in conversations with their domestic servants. They also wrote grammar and phrase books and

compiled dictionaries.

Another important aspect of the British use of Hindustani was that they favored the Persio-Arabic script for writing it. Historical research shows that the Hindustani they spoke was much closer to Urdu than to Sanskritized Hindi.

The princely states of India, most of which adopted Urdu as the official language, also played an important role in strengthening the position of Urdu during the pre-Independence days. Hyderabad, one of the two largest Indian states, had a Muslim ruler while the majority of his subjects were Hindu. Kashmir, the other

language of those broadcasts were invariably Urdu as it was believed that this was the language understood by most Indians.

However, in its domestic operations, the language of the broadcasts perpetually remained a matter of debate between the high bureaucracy of radio and the officials of the elected government. The bureaucracy maintained that Urdu was the most suitable language for most of the broadcasts while the officials of the elected government, being Hindus by faith, advocated the use of Hindi.

According to the author, after In-

during the early years of Pakistan, efforts were made to 'Islamize' classical music. This was done by eliminating or replacing words like *kanhiya*, *krishna* and *shyam* from *thumris* and *dadras*, which led to ridiculous results.

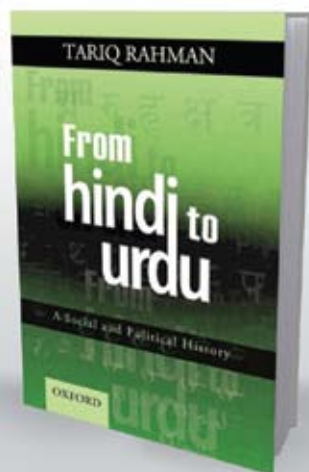
Parsi theatre preceded the cinema in India. The author states that initially the language of this theatre was Gujarati. But soon Urdu became its major language 'mostly because of business imperatives.' However, this was not the refined language of Lucknow but the language of the market place of Bombay.

When the cinema made its debut, it adopted a language of wide intelligibility, which was closer to spoken Urdu than to Sanskritized Hindi. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that many film personalities engaged tutors to learn Urdu or to polish their accent.

Pakistani films, too, use a language quite similar to that of Indian cinema. Of course, words of very obvious Sanskrit origin are eliminated. Within the electronic media, the computer is the latest entrant. The book also refers to the use of Urdu on the computer.

The central argument is that Urdu was not created in military camps even though this Turkish word does mean 'camp.' It is therefore not correct to associate it with Muslim armies or military conquests. Rahman also believes that even after two hundred years of drifting apart, spoken Urdu and Hindi is basically the same language. Scholars on both sides of the border can lay emphasis on shared cultural elements and, the author hopes, this would restrain the mutual hatred that threatens to destroy their land. ■

Sabih Mohsin is a senior journalist and radio professional with a special interest in book publishing.



Reviewed by Sabih Mohsin

such Indian state, had a Hindu ruler but the majority of his people were Muslim. Both of these states adopted Urdu as the official language.

In a largely illiterate Indian society, many more people followed the spoken word, rather than the printed word. As such, radio had a large audience. Soon after the advent of radio in the sub-continent in 1927, WWII ensued. The countries that opposed Britain began using the radio for propaganda against it in British India. The author maintains that the

dependence, Sanskritized Hindi began to be used in India for news bulletins and other official programs. Later, separate news bulletins were introduced in Urdu. Entertainment programs, however, used the popular Hindi-Urdu.

Discussing the situation in Pakistan, the author states that Persianized Urdu is employed in news bulletins and other official programs. However, Hindi-Urdu continues to be the language of entertainment programs. The author reveals that

While fighting against all odds, women in the Muslim world have greatly contributed to the social and political development of their societies. Women asserted their rights, highlighted their constraints and continued to struggle refuting the myth that “women rights” was an idea alien to Muslim culture. Great Ancestors introduces the readers to

increasingly dominant discourse in Muslim societies.

The book highlights the lives and deeds of women from diverse Muslim countries and communities who have, in the past, engaged in the struggle for gender equality. It provides examples of women struggling for their rights from the 8th century to the 20th century, in the Arab world, Egypt, Muslim Spain, India,

and acquiescent women of popular imagination.”

The book helps us understand women’s assertiveness in three different phases, at times interconnected, at times developing independently from one another. The first phase, as the author states, consists of women asserting control over their personal lives, especially in terms of bodily integrity, including sexuality and

Fighting As One

Title: Great Ancestors - Women Asserting Rights in Muslim Contexts
Author: Farida Shaheed and Aisha Lee Shaheed
Publisher: Oxford University Press, Pakistan (September 2011)
Pages: 258, Hardback
Price: PKR.795
ISBN: 9780195476361

women from Africa, Asia and the Middle East who fought for and defended their rights between the eighth century and the 1950s. Perhaps it is time that women of today learn something from the women of the past.

The book is a response to the apprehensions expressed in many circles underestimating the role of women in the Muslim world. Questions about feminism being alien to Muslim contexts, the defense of women’s rights have been part of an

Pakistan, Algeria, Iran, Turkey, Central Asia, Nigeria and Indonesia.

Fareeda Shaheed’s research allows the reader to connect the contemporary struggle for women’s rights [with our] historical past, engendering a sense of linkage with - and ownership of - both women’s assertions in the past and the contemporary movement. She tells the readers, “The strong and determined women emerging from the pages of history here effectively refute the myth of the silenced, cloistered

rights within the family. The second and a much less documented phase is women’s actions for solidarity i.e. initiatives by women to support other women and the third is women’s efforts to look beyond their lives and improve their societies.

Great Ancestors is a balanced combination of both physical and intellectual activism. Some women worked towards ensuring access to education and thrived on intellectual achievements or the knowledge of scriptures. Others fought to secure

rights within marriage or refused the marriage institution altogether. Yet others engaged in collective solidarity projects, including anti-colonial struggles or early forms of transnational feminist networking. The combination of a chronological and thematic approach within the narratives makes the various chapters easy to navigate.

Great Ancestors gives credit to some male voices as well, appre-

ingly, varied. Yet, Great Ancestors sets out to demonstrate that the efforts undertaken by women towards achieving gender equality in Muslim contexts have been ongoing for centuries.

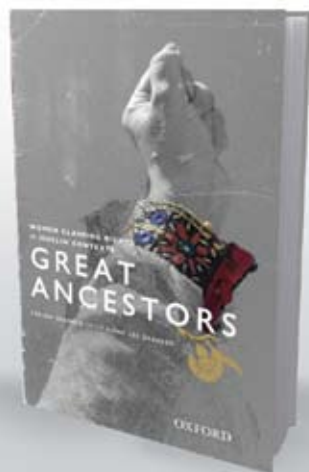
The book is divided into sections covering the period from the eighth century to the mid-20th century. Each section provides an overview of the period followed by short biographies of women who defied the

authority, the grand *Qazi* of Cairo, who came down to Baghdad at her request and ruled in her favor.

Great Ancestors is unique in the sense that it brings on record the countless women who fought for justice and empowerment, not only for themselves but also for their sisters in the society. For instance, Nana Asma'u of Nigeria launched an education movement for rural women in the 1840s which survives to this day; Sadigheh Daulatabadi established what was perhaps the first school for girls in Iran after having attended school disguised as a boy herself; and Muhammadi Begum became the first sole female editor of an Urdu journal for women in India. These are just some of the women discussed in the book who brought significant changes in the lives of women in the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century.

The book is more than just a compilation of the struggles of women for their rights in different Muslim countries and communities. It is a work that helps to dispel the myth about women's rights imported from colonizing countries to the colonies. It is this myth that de-legitimizes feminists as "westernized" women who betray their culture or religion by opting for a "non-indigenous" strategy. Great Ancestors takes us inside Muslim societies where female activists or scholars own the notion of women's rights as an indigenous value that is part of their own heritage and not an alien idea. **S**

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Reviewed by Arshi Saleem Hashmi

ciating the men who encouraged and supported gender equality and advocated women's rights. Farida Shaheed emphasizes, "The notion that all men in Muslim societies are misogynistic is as much a myth as the notion that women are only silent victims."

It is clear that the challenges women faced (and continue to face) are influenced by historical, social and political circumstances and that the strategies they designed (individually or collectively) are, accord-

norms of that time. Umm-e-Salama of eighth century Baghdad who sent a proposal to the man she had chosen to marry along with the sum of money needed for the mehr and her contemporary, Arwa Umm-e-Musa, who convinced her husband to sign a legal contract promising that he would never take another wife or concubine during her lifetime, serve as brave and inspirational examples. When Umm-e-Musa's husband later tried to have the contract annulled, she approached the highest legal



Siachen Lacks Strategic Military Relevance

By Anees Jillani

The Chief of Army Staff, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani of course would not remember but I once bumped into him at a dinner and pointed out the futility of fighting a war in Siachen. He took a hawkish line and eventually got irritated and asked me to resolve the issue with the Indians if I could. I told him that he was the Army Chief and I was nobody and the initiative had to come from him.

Following the April 7 sad debacle in Gayari, resulting in the unexpected death of 140 persons by an avalanche, former premier Nawaz Sharif has taken an even more belligerent stance and has suggested a unilateral withdrawal by Pakistan. He said that Pakistan and India were spending billions of rupees on defense, which could be diverted for the prosperity of the people. General Kayani then had to intervene by calling for a negotiated end to the confrontation and agreeing that demilitarization was an ideal option but it must be mutual.

The accumulated tab for the Siachen conflict now exceeds \$5 billion, which is the equivalent of Pakistan's entire annual defense budget. The casualty figure for each side is estimated at around 4,000 soldiers; the total casualty count for Pakistan in the 1965 war was 3,800.

This pointless war has been going on for the past 28 years; until 1984, India and Pakistan never attached any strategic significance to the 70 km long Siachen Glacier. The dispute started when on April 13, 1984, the Indian Army launched an operation to capture the Saltoro Ridge high ground.

More soldiers have died on both sides from frostbite than actual fighting since then but the impasse continues. An agreement appeared possible when Rajiv Gandhi visited Islamabad in 1989 and indicated his willingness to agree to demilitarization. However, his government's downfall gave a chance to the Indian military to raise technical objections. There have been several rounds of negotiations between Delhi and Islamabad since then and the plans for the next talks in Pakistan at the defense secretary level now seem like a real possibility.

Pakistan has made several proposals under the Siachen dialogue process, including the redeployment of forces in

the talks. The two sides have repeatedly come 'very close' to an agreement on the Siachen issue; once in 1989, and again (less so) in 1993.

The lurking issue is India's insistence, and this was pointed out to me by the Army Chief as well, that its actual ground position should be recognized before a withdrawal can be considered.

According to a Wikileaks cable of September 2008, one MEA Joint Secretary (Pakistan) "reported that the Indian army has drawn a line with its political leadership. It has told the government of India that withdrawal was tantamount to ceding the area to Pakistan due to the difficulty of retaking it should Pakistan occupy it."

The cable also noted that this position on the issue "is reflected in the Foreign Ministry as well." India would not make a deal on demilitarization without Pakistan signing a map laying out Indian and Pakistani troop positions before withdrawal. The primary purpose of this would be to justify action if Pakistan reneged on the withdrawal agreement. PM Manmohan Singh also told President Musharraf during the Havana meeting that his military advisers are apprehensive that Pakistan would re-occupy the heights, including Indian posts, were the sides to withdraw from their current lines.

But why is the Indian army resistant to giving up this territory? Some explain it as strategic advantage over China. Other argue in favor of internal army corruption, the distrust of Pakistan and a strong desire to keep hold of advantageous territory that thousands of Indian soldiers have died protecting.

The international community however disagrees with the Indian assessment and is of the opinion that "this remote region lacks military strategic relevance." In the meantime, 140 Pakistanis continue to lie buried under tons of snow while their compatriots look for them in freezing temperatures. ■

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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