

**NEIGHBOR**

All eyes on Iran's new President

August 2013

# SOUTHASIA

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## INSIDE:

### PAKISTAN

Disgracing National Pride

### INDIA

Prioritizing Efforts

### AFGHANISTAN

Next Step

### Bangladesh

Strengthening Ties

# The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

In a strange twist of circumstances,  
Pakistan is today at war with the  
same Taliban it had once pampered



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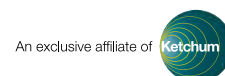
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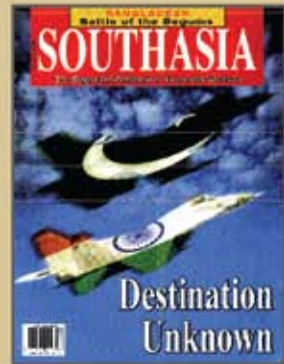
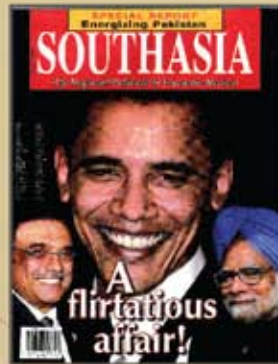
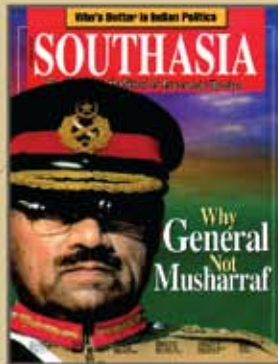
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# The attacks and after

A man called Satish Verma, who was until recently a part of India's Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe team, has claimed that both the 2001 attack on the Indian parliament and the 2008 Mumbai attacks were 'set up' with the aim to strengthening counter-terror legislation in the country. It needs to be recalled that in the aftermath of the November 2008 terror attacks in Mumbai, India passed two sets of very harsh laws that were regarded by human rights campaigners as an erosion of the country's federal structure and amounted to limiting fundamental liberties. The Indian Parliament, meeting after the November 26-29 Mumbai attacks, passed the said legislations. There was almost no debate on the laws and the ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh simply pushed them forward despite several amendments tabled by a number of parliamentarians. Among the two laws, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) Act sought to establish a new police organization to investigate acts of terrorism and other statutory offences while the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment (UAPA) Act radically changed procedures for trying those accused of terrorism, extended periods of police custody and of detention without charges and denied bail to foreigners. India's civil liberties activists and civil society expressed their abject horror about the new laws, describing them as draconian and excessive in relation to the measures that India really needed to take to fight terrorism.

It took Satish Verma four years since the Mumbai attacks to come up with the revelation that the Indian parliament in 2001 and the 2008 Mumbai attacks were orchestrated by the Indian government itself. His statement has caused considerable apprehension in Pakistan which has continued to be accused by Indians of all shades and hue for having orchestrated the attacks. It can be said for India that it has hundreds of under-secretaries working for its central and state governments and it does not mean much when one of them speaks about state complicity. The question also arises as to why would the Indians plan and execute such attacks as the ones it is said to have perpetrated in Delhi and Mumbai, resulting in the loss of life? If the idea was to implicate Pakistan, it could easily have done so through other means. It is of course in the fitness of things that Pakistan's Information Minister, Parvez Rasheed has sought an explanation from India over the statement by the former CBI officer and the Pakistan government would issue its response after the Indian government has come up with its version.

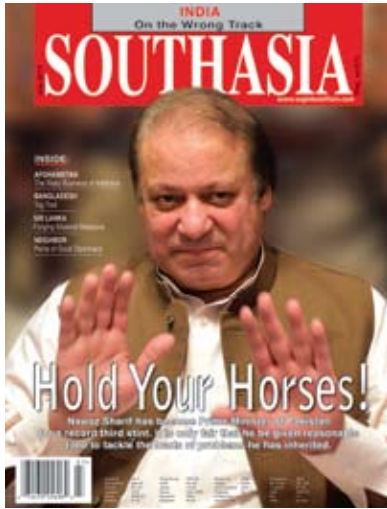
The fact to worry about is that both the 2001 and the 2008 attacks brought both India and Pakistan to the verge of a nuclear holocaust. Ever since, relations between the two neighbours have been rather unmanageable and hardly has there been any forward momentum in that context. India vehemently clings to its guns and approaches the question of normalization of relations with Pakistan with sticky fingers. It is therefore hoped that when Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh meets his Pakistani counterpart on the sidelines of the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly, he would be a bit more careful about mentioning the 2001 and 2008 attacks on India. Let's hope too that Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif would also take things in stride and discuss with the Indian premier the stunning revelations of Mr. Satish Verma in a more realistic tone.



Syed Jawaid Iqbal

## Our Prime Minister needs Time

Your cover story on Nawaz Sharif's win in the 2013 general elections was an informative read. The writer explained in detail the many challenges



which Nawaz Sharif has to face during his third stint as Prime Minister of Pakistan. Moreover, the nation is waiting for him to take action against the US drone strikes as well as to resolve the internal crisis which has brought Pakistan's economy at a standstill. Following the five-year rule by the PPP-led government, the Pakistani nation has been looking for a change. Being a popular leader in Punjab, Nawaz Sharif has taken over the premiership of Pakistan at a time when internal and external crises are out of control and the country needs a leader who can take prompt action. Although Nawaz Sharif has lead the country twice, he should be given time before he can make tough decisions. Even if he has been on the mantle of power before, he needs breathing space to think and evaluate the consequences of the decisions that he must take. The nation is expecting Nawaz Sharif to bring economic progress and development overnight, but this cannot happen.

The Prime Minister will need to evaluate all options and then take the best decision.

Yasir Dawood  
Islamabad, Pakistan

## The Right Track

India is fast becoming an economic giant in Asia and has a global presence. However; the railway system of India tells a different story. The country's growing population demands from the government to modernize its transport system since a majority of the population still prefers to commute through railway. With a rise in train accidents, the government must take necessary steps in revamping railway crossings as per international standards. Nearly 15,000 deaths occur each year because of unmanned railway crossings and safety systems which require maintenance or are outdated. Moreover, the country, which



needs fuel for industrial growth, is wasting it on fuel-inefficient locomotives that the government should replace at the earliest.

It is true that public-private-partnerships can bring modernization in the railway infrastructure. However; hesitation on part of the private sector to make any decision or discuss investment projects signifies the miserable state of the railway sector. The Indian government's decision to seek

assistance from China gives a glimmer of hope. China was facing similar problems in its railway industry and it dissolved the Ministry of Railways as the first step towards resolving the crisis and transferred all operations to the China Railway Corporation. India should learn from China's efforts in the railway sector as a case study and must implement similar practices to save its railway sector before it's too late.

Vinod Rakesh  
Bangalore, India

## Bangladesh's Leading Lady

Your profile on Sheikh Hasina Wajid explained the life and career of one of the most well-known Bangladeshi politicians. The eldest child of Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rehman, she began taking an active part in politics during her college days. This explains Sheikh Hasina's ability to play a larger than life role in Bangladeshi politics -- she is currently serving her second term in office as Prime Minister. Although she has been involved in politics since the 1980s and has outmaneuvered her opponents, Sheikh Hasina's political style does reflect self-interest. Political factions of Bangladesh have raised criticism over her governing style which has created rifts between the government and the opposition. It is interesting to note that Sheikh Hasina is harboring self-interest agendas even before becoming Prime Minister. For instance, in 1996 Lt General ASM Nasim's futile attempt to carry out a military coup had Sheikh Hasina's support and later in 2007, she supported the postponement of the elections when the army chief, Moeenuddin took over the government and declared an emergency.

Incidents such as these made Sheikh Hasina deal with political unrest during the last two decades. Moreover, in 2006, Hasina's indeci-



solar energy will also enable India to provide electricity to nearly 400 million households that are still deprived of electricity. Producing solar energy will assist India to cope with electricity shortages and long hours of power breakdowns which occur in summers and are a burden on the economy.

Ranveer Kartik  
Shahrjah, UAE

## Education in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has been a victim of a three-decade long civil war but the country has maintained its education standards -- literacy rate is at 94 per cent. This shows the level of commitment of the Sri Lankan government in providing a sound education to its citizens. However, the government's decision to change its medium of instruction from Sinhala, Tamil and English to the official language is creating barricades for progress. In 1950, the decision by the government to change the official language from English to Sinhalese irked the Tamils who initiated a separatist movement since they considered this an attempt to isolate

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sion over who would head the caretaker government created country-wide protests which claimed 40 lives. The army took over to control the situation, an incident which tarnished Hasina's public image.

Habibur Rahman  
Dhaka, Bangladesh

## India's Quest for Solar Power

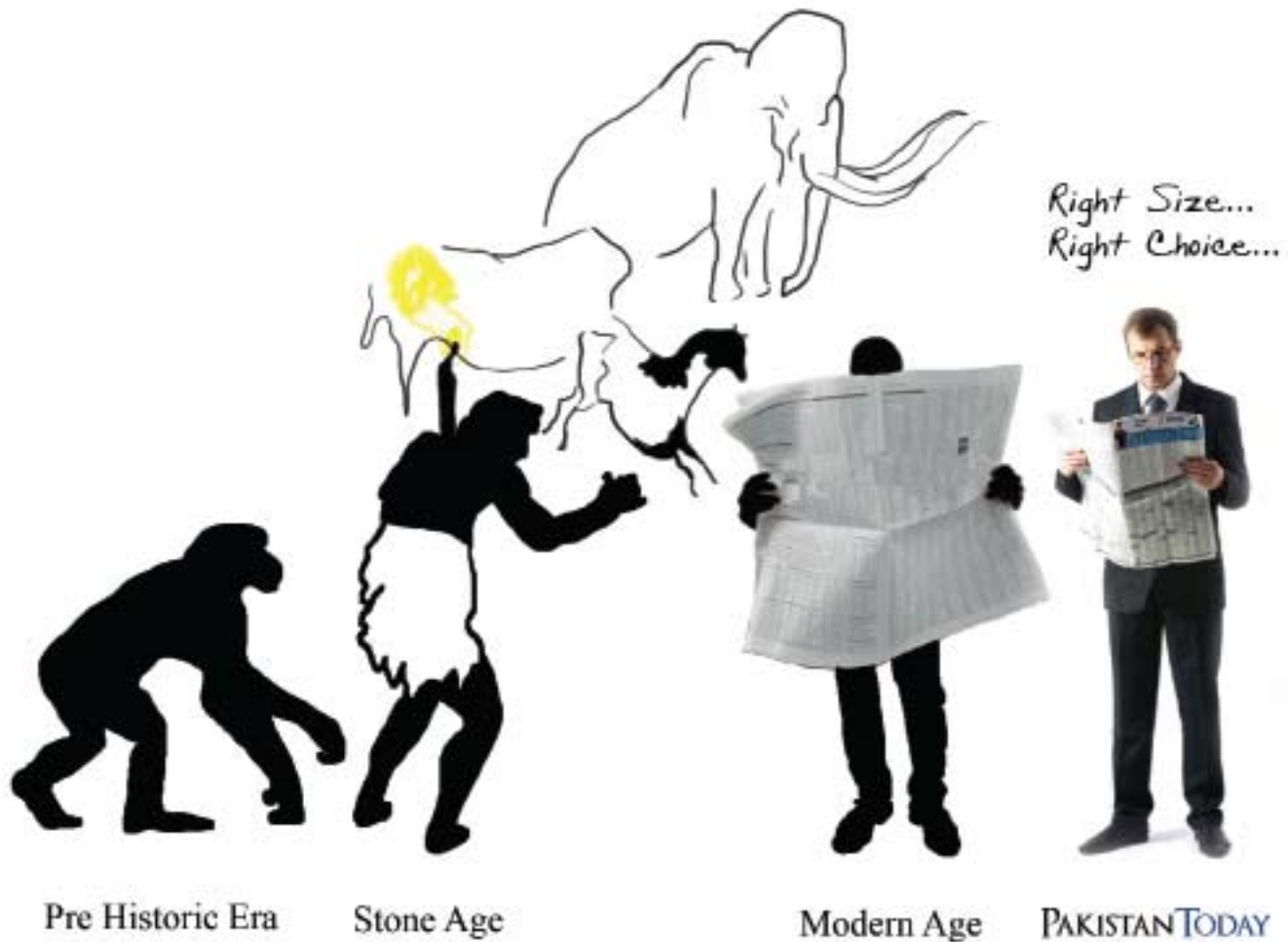
Your article "The Solar Frontier" gave an in-depth analysis of the efforts which India is making to become a global leader in solar power generation. Solar power will not only help the country meet its growing energy demands but will also impact consumer demands during summer. India is fortunate to have sunlight for longer hours which is why solar power is seen as a viable source of energy. In addition, as India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Therefore, the renewable energy sector will provide impetus to India's vision of becoming a leading Asian economy. India has come a long way in its quest to generate solar energy as in 2012 nearly 31 per cent of India's energy came from renewable sources. The government should create schemes to promote solar telecom towers and invest in renewable energy so that the technology can reach to individual households. Generating

them from the natives. The brain drain which occurred during the civil war further deteriorated the education sector of the country as teachers and students began relocating to other places. The Sri Lankan education officials must realize the need to revamp the sector and facilitate skill-oriented education which the country needs for industrial growth. Moreover, the government must understand the demands of the changing economy and create avenues to generate a work force which is attuned with the industrial sector of the country.

Ishan Kasun  
Colombo, Sri Lanka



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“Drone attacks are a serious violation of sovereignty and international law. They are also counterproductive and are not acceptable.”  
**Asif Ali Zardari**  
*President of Pakistan*



“Musharraf will have to answer for his guilt before the court.”  
**Nawaz Sharif**  
*Prime Minister of Pakistan*



“We have not violated anything on the Indo-Lanka accord.”  
**Mahinda Rajapaksa**  
*President of Sri Lanka*



“I will first show more transparency for strengthening trust and whenever the trust is tarnished, I will try to rebuild it again.”  
**Hassan Rouhani**  
*President of Iran*



“Negotiations with the US on what American and coalition security forces will remain in the country after 2014 have been put on hold.”  
**Hamid Karzai**  
*President of Afghanistan*



“This cowardly attack will not deter the security forces who are engaged in bringing peace and order to the Kashmir valley.”  
**Manmohan Singh**  
*Prime Minister of India*



“This situation obviously cannot continue for long. That is why we have decided that we must invest in renewable energy in order for us to be able to make the next leap forward in our country's development.”  
**Mohamed Waheed Hassan**  
*President of the Maldives*



“They (the opposition) have proven by withdrawing the motion that they don't want negotiations though we want it.”  
**Sheikh Hasina Wajid**  
*Prime Minister of Bangladesh*



“There is ample scope for increasing cooperation between Bhutan and Bangladesh in various sectors.”  
**Abdul Hamid**  
*President of Bangladesh*



“We also believe that hopefully India could help urge the new Iranian leadership, and also the old leadership and the supreme leader, to take advantage of this moment.”  
**John Kerry**  
*US Secretary of State*



“It is not a very pleasant time to be a woman in India. You have to be constantly walking with your elbows out and looking over your shoulders to see who is trying to brush past you.”  
**Shobhaa De**  
*Indian Writer*



“Hindi cinema is celebrating actors of all age groups and giving opportunities to explore their talent in full splendor.”  
**Madhuri Dixit**  
*Indian Actress*

PAKISTAN

# Opening Borders

Recently, Iran's Ambassador Alireza Haghghan sent a formal request to the Interior Minister of Pakistan, Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan to finalise the construction of crossing points at the Pak-Iran border for promoting bilateral trade. Pakistan has given the go-ahead to construct entry points at Pishin, Gabd (Pakistan) while Iran will finalise construction of new crossing points at Reemdan.

In addition, Pakistan has completed construction of Mand's entry point on the border and is waiting for Iran's confirmation for its formal inauguration. Presently, Taftan Zero Point in Pakistan and Mirjaveh on the Iranian side are operational that have



forged bilateral ties and have generated employment for thousands of people across both sides of the border.

Mirjaveh is the key crossing point between the two countries where the railway line from Pakistan also crosses the border while travelling from Quetta to Zahedan. Similarly, Taftan serves as Pakistan's sole legal border crossing into Iran.

Sources claim that both countries are willing to open international crossing points at Mand and Gwadar this year to promote trade. Moreover, the two countries will also establish immigration of-

fices while the National Logistics Cell will establish modern cargo terminals to facilitate a smooth flow of trade. **S**

AFGHANISTAN

# Afghan Opium Production

According to Head of the US Drug Enforcement Administration Michele Leonhart, Afghanistan will have to decide how to combat drug trafficking following the US military forces withdrawal from the country in 2014. Although there are a number of options on the table, the Afghan people and the government will need to make the final decision and follow the best approach.

Lately, Afghanistan, which is the largest opium producer in the world, experienced a rise in opium plantation and, according to UN estimates, there are nearly 154,000 hectares of land dedicated to opium cultivation in the country. The international community believes that even if the decision rests

with the Afghan government, foreign involvement would also be needed to oversee opium production to ensure that it doesn't fall in the wrong hands.

In addition, the Afghan drug trade was one of the key topics during the three-day 30th International Drug Enforcement Conference in Moscow. Russia's anti-drug service, however, has called on the UN to look at Afghan drug-trafficking as an international threat that will justify a foreign intervention when US troops leave the country. According to a report published by the UN Office on Drugs and

Crime, nearly a quarter of the heroin produced in Afghanistan -- 90 tonnes out of 380 -- passes through Central Asia, 75 percent of which is destined for the Russian market. **S**



# John Kerry Visits India

US Secretary of State John Kerry made his maiden visit to India after assuming office. Sources claim that John Kerry made efforts to bring closure to the Indo-US nuclear deal apart from pushing strategic defence sales. Kerry also co-chaired the Indo-US strategic dialogue with External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid and met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. In addition, Washington hopes to secure a large share of the Indian defence market where India has already spent nearly \$40 billion for defence procurement.

During his visit, Kerry also addressed Indian concerns over the US troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014. According to Kerry, the Obama admin-

istration believes that a strong India will be in the national interest of Washington. US Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz also accompanied Kerry, as the latter discussed issues such as climate change and education. Kerry's visit comes less than a year before India goes to the polls, with Gujarat's State Minister, Narendra Modi heading the opposition.

Furthermore, New Delhi is expecting to seal deals worth billions of dollars for helicopters, howitzer guns, weapons systems and platforms with the US. Several deals through the foreign military sales (FMS) route are in the pipeline and are expected to be finalised in 2013-14. Kerry's visit was deemed a success as New Delhi and Washington discussed



issues related to bilateral trade and weapons deals. **S**

# Trade Agreement with the US

Bangladesh has approved a trade agreement with the United States as it comes under intense pressure from Washington to improve labour rights following a series of factory disasters.

Bangladesh's Cabinet, led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, agreed upon the Trade and Investment Cooperation Framework Agreement (TIC-FA) with the United States.

The deal, however, will lead to stronger trade and investment ties between the two countries during the time when Bangladeshi garment exports to the US are experiencing a growing trend. According to sources, the deal will also ensure protection of intellectual property, curb corrup-

tion and ensure labour rights. Bangladeshi trade officials did propose the deal several years ago, but the government was reluctant to sign the accord for fear of being scrutinized for its poor labour and intellectual property laws.

Recently, Dhaka came under intense pressure, especially from western governments, to improve working conditions in the country following factory fires and the recent tragedy that occurred in Rana Plaza, killing 1,127 people. The US Embassy in Dhaka welcomed this decision and hopes to carry out further discussions on the agreement. In addition, two-way

goods trade between US and Bangladesh totalled \$5.4 billion in 2012. It is expected that the Trade and Investment Cooperation Framework Agreement will increase bilateral trade. **S**



SRI LANKA

# Trading with the EU

During his recent meeting with the Head of the Delegation to Sri Lanka and Maldives from the European Commission, Bernard Savage, the Sri Lanka Minister of Industry and Commerce, Rishad Bathiudeen, envisioned a better trade relationship with the European Union (EU) as the bilateral trade volume closed at \$5bn.

According to the Department of Commerce of Sri Lanka, there is an increasing trend in trade and the balance of trade between the two parties has been in favor of Sri Lanka during the last nine years. In 2012, however, the total trade between Sri Lanka and EU was at \$4,946.18 million. Sri Lanka's major export items to EU are

apparel, diamonds, tea, and rubber products.

Furthermore, EU is also one of the most diversified investor in Sri Lanka, with leading European companies operating in almost all sectors, namely FMCG, higher education, apparel, infrastructure, manufacturing, agriculture, technology, and even in strategic development projects. EU multinationals such as Unilever and British American Tobacco are now part of the Sri Lankan lifestyle with their presence in the country for over a decade.

The leading EU members with investments in Sri Lanka are UK, Germany, Italy, Belgium, France and Sweden while specific investment segments



include hosiery, knitwear, surf sails, electronic products, light engineering, diamond processing, tourism and recreational products. According to the European Union, more than \$148 million has been assigned for Sri Lanka under the 2007-2013 Development Cooperation Instrument. **S**

MALDIVES

# India Seeks Compensation

Indian infrastructure giant GMR has sought a compensation of \$1.4 billion from Maldives for the wrongful termination of its 25-year contract to develop and operate the Male International Airport.

GMR presented Maldives with



the \$1.4 billion figure after taking into account loss of profit and payments made to subcontractors and the government of Maldives. Sources claim that the arbitration process will continue as the Indian government is awaiting response from the government and the Maldivian Airport Company Limited.

Maldives awarded the \$500 million project to GMR for modernizing and operating the Ibrahim Nasir International Airport in 2010 during the previous regime of Mohamed Nasheed. However, the Maldivian government of President Mohammad Waheed Hassan unilaterally terminated the project in November 2012.

Following the termination, the

Maldives Airports Company Limited took over operations of the airport while the GMR got a stay order. However, the court ruled in favour of the Maldives that it has the power to take over the airport.

The abrupt cessation of the contract escalated tensions between India and Maldives affecting their trade ties and foreign relations. Maldivian President Mohammad Waheed stated that since former President Mohammad Nasheed signed the contract and resigned from power in February 2012, therefore, the contract is *void ab initio* or invalid from the outset. Hence, the current government does not have to bear any compensation for the termination. **S**

# A Widening Trade Deficit

Nepal's trade deficit has widened to Rs295.96 billion with the share of imports standing at 88.5 per cent of the total trade during the first seven months of the current fiscal year 2012/13. Trade deficit, however, rose by 28.9 per cent due to an increase in imports of petroleum products.

Experts suggest that rising import bills during growing consumption in the country and a decrease in supply were reasons behind the mounting trade deficit despite total trade volume increasing by 21.8 per cent to Rs 384.36 billion in the current fiscal year.

According to the Trade and Export Promotion Center (TEPC), Nepal's total exports increased by only 3.7 per cent to Rs44.2 billion while total imports increased by 24.7 per

cent to Rs340.16 billion. Nepal's largest imports are petroleum products that increased by over 22 per cent to Rs60.78 billion during the review period. Furthermore, Nepal's second

largest imports iron and steel products were worth Rs34.12 billion, showing an increase of 21.7 per cent. Although India is Nepal's largest trading partner, the latter's export to India increased by a meager 1.8 per cent which shows that Nepal has to tighten its trading sector to generate revenue. It is interesting to note that imports to Nepal from India increased by 26.9 per cent to Rs222.67 billion. **S**



## BHUTAN

# Whither Green Economy?

Bhutan recently held a two-day South Asian regional consultation on Green Economy in Kathmandu. The conference decided upon

a major research agenda to create a network of compatible institutions to help the region make a transition towards green economy.

Participants from Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Canada, India, Korea, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka attended the event jointly organized by the South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (Sawtee) and International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The Nepalese government is working to upgrade Nepal from a least

developed country to a developing country by 2022. Moreover, the government stresses on the need for understanding how a green economy can support this transition process.

The participants of the conference were of the view that the South Asian countries are unaware of the wonders which a green economy can bring. They pointed out three major challenges to sustainable development in the region namely; promoting social inclusiveness, managing urban transition, and building resilience. The conference called for the Nepalese government to come up with policies to minimize trade-offs between economic growth and environmental conservatism. In recent times, Nepal has been pursuing a framework to implement a green economy where its goal to become the world's first organic country has placed the country in international limelight. **S**

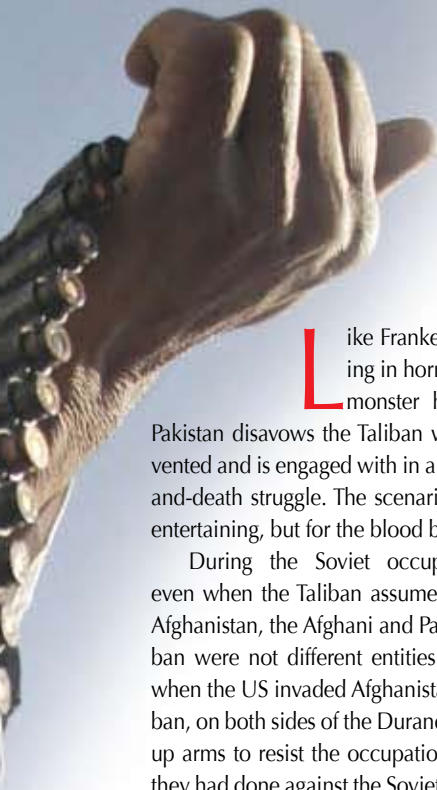


A man in a white shawl and turban, looking down, with a large stack of bullets in the foreground.

# The Taliban Conundrum

In a strange twist of circumstances, Pakistan is today at war with the same Taliban it had once pampered.

By S.G. Jilane



**L**ike Frankenstein fleeing in horror from the monster he created, Pakistan disavows the Taliban whom it invented and is engaged with in almost a life-and-death struggle. The scenario could be entertaining, but for the blood being spilt.

During the Soviet occupation and even when the Taliban assumed power in Afghanistan, the Afghani and Pakistani Taliban were not different entities. Therefore, when the US invaded Afghanistan, the Taliban, on both sides of the Durand Line, took up arms to resist the occupation, much as they had done against the Soviet forces. But this time, instead of supporting the Taliban's fight for freedom, Pakistan allied with the invader and, for a sumptuous fee, trained its guns on them.

Baitullah Mehsud yoked splinter groups of militants together in 2007 to form the *Tehreek-e-Taliban* Pakistan (TTP). Mehsud also adopted a wider agenda. While fighting the Americans and their allies was foremost, he added the application of *Sharia* as an ideological underpinning. This brought him into direct conflict with the government of Pakistan. But the strongest casus belli has been Pakistan's alliance with the US against the Taliban, which resulted in a prolonged war between the TTP and Pakistan troops.

During the last nine years or so, the Pakistan military has launched nine full-fledged and several small-scale military operations against militants. But it has failed to take them out. Some commentators argue that attempts have been half-hearted thus prompting a crescendo of liberal voices to clamor for the army to launch an all out military action in North Waziristan and cleanse the territory once and for all of the Taliban.

Because of the TTP's terrorist activities, the killing of 40,000 civilians and several

thousand soldiers and officers of the Pakistan army, besides renegeing on several agreements in the past, a strong lobby denounces any suggestion about talking with the group. However, only the charges about mindless killing through suicide attacks may stick. But army fatalities should be treated as normal occurrence in a war, where both sides take casualties. Taliban were also killed but their number remains unknown. As to going back on agreements, the allegations against the TTP have not been proven through an unbiased inquiry.

Apparently, there are two basic factors behind the ongoing war. The first is Pakistan siding with the US; the other is the implementation of *Sharia*. But some more have further muddied the waters. First, in this conflict, the record of the army's relations with the Taliban is murky. Second, is the matter of foreign nationals firmly settled in N. Waziristan; many of whom have taken local spouses. Even otherwise, asking the locals to drive them away or handing them over to the army would amount to asking them to renege on their hallowed tradition of "*Pakhtunwali*," under which a host must protect anyone whom he has given shelter under his roof. That is why Mullah Omar faced American invasion but did not surrender OBL.

There is no question that the TTP have made a menace of themselves. Mindless murders, like the latest attack on Justice Maqbool Baqar of the Sindh High Court, are the perfect recipe for suicide. These acts may swing public opinion against it, achieving what President Zardari's proclamation that fighting TTP is "Our War" and Gen. Kayani's hortatory speeches have failed to do.

The army's capability to kill or drive away every soul from the area is beyond any doubt. But an all out military action may spawn more consequences than its sponsors seem to have bargained for. For example, it would be seen as ethnic cleansing and invite the charge of genocide from the international community. Moreover, this time it may not be easy to shake the charge off as in the case of East Pakistan. The killings and the displacement of thousands of families would sow bitterness among the people that would stay fresh for many years. Anger may find expression in sniping and kidnappings as during the British rule. And the dream of establishing the state's writ may remain unrealized.

Ironically, despite its excesses the TTP has an edge over its detractors. Its demands for the implementation of *Sharia* Law and Pakistan withdrawing its support from the US against the Taliban are understood by the common man and therefore draw immediate support. On the contrary, the idea of "state's writ" is vague and beyond the common people's comprehension.

The TTP is fighting the government but it does not defy Pakistan's sovereignty. It has never called for independence. Its demand amounts to full autonomy and nothing else. That autonomy it wishes to apply is for the purpose of introducing *Sharia*. The allegation that the Taliban defies the Constitution also does not gel. Indeed the contrary would be truer, because, TTP's demand for *Sharia* supports rather than contradict what has been stated in the Objectives Resolution (Article 2A) and Article 227 of the Constitution.

Actually it is the American factor that has vitiated the atmosphere and destabilized FATA. The US dictates the Pakistan government's policy towards the Taliban. It therefore sabotages any steps taken by the government for engaging with the Taliban. For example, the US was aware that Nawaz Sharif was inclined to talk with the Taliban after he was sworn in. Yet it killed TTP's second-in-command, Waliur Rahman, in May with a drone attack. The consequence was foretold and the TTP promptly withdrew its earlier offer to talk. This is one reason why, in spite of the Taliban's brutal killing of innocent people and other excesses, the rightist lobby and religious political parties have never uttered a single word of reproof against the group. People like Maulana Fazlur Rahman and Mahmood Khan Achakzai openly favor dialogue. Nor is Imran Khan opposed to it. Ultimately, talks may offer the only way out of the quandary.

Those who fire verbal bullets on newspaper pages against the Taliban will have to have second thoughts. The idea of talking from a position of strength or only with those Taliban who lay down their arms, should be dismissed. As Gen. De Gaulle once said, "You talk to people who shoot at your soldiers. You do not talk to people who do not have blood on their hands. They are irrelevant." **S**

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

General Nick Carter, Britain's top general and deputy commander of the NATO-led coalition in Afghanistan has admitted that the West should have tried talking to the Taliban a decade ago, since it would have been easier to find a political solution when they were on the run in 2002. Prime Minister David Cameron too acknowledged that the original settlement for Afghanistan "could have been better arranged."

This vindicates Pakistan's stance, since it has been recommending negotiations with the Taliban for over a decade but its pleas fell on deaf ears. Now the US has been forced to concede concessions to the Taliban and what could have been an effective point of strength, if the Taliban were defeated, has become a position of weakness since it is the US and NATO troops, who have been vanquished in the guerrilla war in Afghanistan.

For the last two years, the US has been keen to hold negotiations with the Taliban but owing to the trust deficit, it spurned Pakistan's offer of brokering a deal to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table and suffered the consequences. Readers may recall the case of Mullah Mansour, a supposedly senior Taliban commander, who was flown to Kabul to meet President Karzai in November 2010. It turned out that he was really an Afghan shopkeeper who had been living in Pakistan and the imposter, who was flown into Kabul on a NATO aircraft, vanished after being paid hundreds of thousands of dollars. Since then the US interlocutors became wary and reluctantly sought help from their Pakistani counterparts.

Pakistan facilitated the move and the result was the establishment of a Taliban office at Qatar's capital, Doha, which has reset the parameters of the debate and facilitated negotiations. Qatar is an interesting choice, which was acceptable to the Karzai government too as a neutral venue.

The Amir of Qatar was hospitable enough to provide space because Qatar has been keen to play center stage in international politics. However, from the very outset, a row over the status of the Taliban office has overshadowed efforts to start peace negotiations there. The Taliban hoisting their flag over their building and the nameplate of their political office of "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan", which was the name and ensign used

of the political dispensation. Even the Afghans do not want a repeat of the repressive Taliban regime but the Taliban constitute an important component of the Afghan demographics and can be ignored at the peril of derailing the peace process.

The Taliban possess an important ace up their sleeves. US Army Sergeant Bowe Robert Bergdahl is a Taliban prisoner since 2009 and the Taliban are demanding the return of

# When the Chips

**The negotiations with the Taliban are realistic this time and much has changed in the group's dynamics with other stakeholders.**

By S. M. Hali

by the Taliban, irked Hamid Karzai, prompting him to call off the peace talks even before they commenced. Since then, the Taliban have removed the offensive icons. The Amir of Qatar, who according to the Taliban, had permitted them to fly the flag and the nameplate, has convinced the Taliban to display the flag and the signage inside the building only.

The US Administration had been keen to negotiate with the Taliban to ensure a safe passage to the drawdown of its forces and equipment. Moreover, for lasting peace in Afghanistan, it is essential that the Taliban are a part

five important Taliban leaders being incarcerated at Guantanamo for his exchange. There is a high probability of this exchange taking place, paving the way for the peace negotiations.

General Carter expressed confidence that NATO's handover of security to Afghan forces would eventually bring the Taliban to the negotiating table. Hamid Karzai, on the other hand insists that the peace negotiations, if any, will have to be Afghan owned and Afghan led. A pet phrase used by the Taliban has been "you may have the watches but we have the time", implying that they could wait out the



# Fall

agonizing period of US withdrawal and then they would have a free hand beyond 2014.

This is no longer true. The window of opportunity is closing rapidly. Next year in April, crucial presidential elections will be held, in which Hamid Karzai is not eligible to participate. If the Taliban miss the opportunity of participating in the elections, they will also lose the opportunity to be a legitimate part of the government. The worst case scenario is another bloody civil war, which may leave thousands dead, maimed, widowed and orphaned while millions more will be forced to seek refuge in neighboring countries. Pakistan has already borne the brunt of the previous exodus in 1989, when five million Afghan refugees sought asylum on its soil and it has hosted a majority of them for over

twenty-four years.

The US and the Taliban have not reached any consensus as yet. US Secretary of State, John Kerry paints a rosy picture, when he defends the peace overtures made by the US to the Afghan Taliban. After a decade of spending trillions and the human destruction, the US is taking the pragmatic line before it pulls out of Afghanistan next year. The public opinion in the US has clearly tilted towards an early withdrawal and doing all it takes to wrap up the unsuccessful Afghanistan adventure. Secretary Kerry's rationale is rather linear: he has said that the greatest issue between the US and the Taliban was the handing over of Osama bin Laden, who is now dead. Furthermore, the US also considers al Qaeda to have been defeated in Afghanistan and therefore, a broad-

based Afghanistan government, which includes the Taliban as a power stakeholder, makes sense.

Opinion surveys, rather limited to this part of the world, also indicate that both Afghanistan and Pakistan want early peace and the Taliban to be engaged in negotiations. Hamid Karzai needs to shed some of his rigidity because after the departure of the foreign forces, the Afghan National Security Forces will not be able to stop the onslaught of a battle hardened and increasingly confident Taliban, whom the superior and better equipped US and NATO forces failed to deter. ■

*Group Captain (R) Sultan M. Hali, now a practicing journalist, writes for print media, produces documentaries and hosts a TV talk show. He is currently based in Islamabad.*

# Myths and

**D**uring the last few years, voluminous literature has emerged about the Taliban. Though the word means 'students' in the Arabic language, in political terms it has come to be known as the 'Students of the Islamic Knowledge Movement.' The main emphasis of a majority of the writers on the Taliban is to present them as "terrorists, religious extremists, warriors, barbarians, fundamentalists, criminals, drug smugglers, anti-women, anti-education, regressive and brutal." No writer has so far tried to analyze the group's 'political ideology' from the standpoint of a spontaneous reaction to an unjust New World Order—where the mighty states want to control and exploit the wealth of the poor nations. The Taliban—dubbed as the enemy of humanity—are projected as a perpetual threat to world peace. South Asian states are particularly perturbed by the activities of the Taliban who are considered a catalyst for radicalization of societies leading to religious intolerance and terrorism.

The Taliban came into the limelight twice—first as holy warriors (*mujahideen*) during the Soviet war in Afghanistan that lasted nine years from December 1979 to February 1989 and then as a resistance force in the wake of the invasion of Afghanistan by the United States and its allies after 9/11. Once favorites of the West, the Taliban, who ruled Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001, were ostracized from the world community because of their support for the Al Qaeda, ruthlessness towards women

and imposition of an orthodox brand of Islam through the use of force. They assumed power during Afghanistan's long civil war and managed to hold 90% of the country's territory before being ousted from power in December 2001 by the U.S. military and Afghan opposition forces in response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the Twin Towers of New York. The Taliban refused to hand over the main leaders of Al Qaeda and instead demanded evidence against them.

It is interesting to note that the Taliban actually originate from Pakistan. The Interior Minister of Benazir Bhutto, Major General (retired) Naseerullah Baber (late) publically confessed, "Taliban are my brainchild." He minced no words claiming "I consider them as strategic and political allies of Pakistan." It is well established that Pakistan's political and military leadership, along with the CIA and others who resisted the onslaught of the Soviet Union, created a monster that they were unable to contain. Without understanding the contours of their ideology and ambitions, the advocates of the Free World supported and trained them, thus paving the way for Al Qaeda to find a sanctuary and launch worldwide terrorist attacks.

Pakistan's military establishment is now facing the bitter results of its policy of appeasement towards the militants and now openly attacks them showing no respect for past relations. It is true that creating and supporting the Taliban and other militants was a political decision but it was never de-

bated in the parliament. Noted writers like Steve Coll in *Ghost Wars* and Ahmed Rashid in *Descent into Chaos*, mentioned that Naseerullah Babar and others worked closely with Afghan leaders such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Ahmed Shah Massoud and provided training camps for guerrilla warfare with money coming from the CIA and elsewhere. The West abandoned the Afghan resistance forces promptly after the withdrawal of Soviet troops. Soon enough, they started fighting each other, which culminated into a horrific civil war. For the West, the dismemberment of USSR as a superpower was the goal that it successfully achieved using Pakistan and the students of *madrassas* (religious schools) it provided.

Though the Taliban is one identifiable homogeneous political entity, it is also a coalition of various groups that wish to capture state power and impose a particular orthodox brand of Islam through the barrel of gun. It is also a myth that Pakistani Taliban are different from the Afghan Taliban; they both represent the same ideology though having a different command and leadership.

*Tehreek-e-Taliban* Pakistan (TTP) is a foreign-planted organization. It is one of the many terrorist outfits and criminal organizations that have been created by the CIA for the furtherance of interests of USA and its allies in South Asia and elsewhere. The main aim is to contain socialist China, democratic India and nuclear Pakistan. These organizations use the name of Islam to advance their own

# Realities

The Taliban are truly an independent political entity that thrives on militancy but there could be a greater hand behind their continued existence.

By Huzaima Bukhari & Dr. Ikramul Haq



agendas and work closely with each other to raise funds for purchasing arms through drug trade and other organized criminal activities like smuggling and kidnapping for ransom. In reality it is a situation where many militant groups are engaged for more power and money. Therefore inter and intra fighting amongst them can easily be witnessed.

The Taliban phenomenon is complex and riddled with many puzzles. It cannot be understood without studying US foreign policy in which terrorism, drugs, arms and war play a pivotal role. From the early twentieth century, US leaders have been using arms, drugs and war hysteria as tools to advance their foreign policy objec-

tives. The military interventions by the US and its allies against a number of countries in recent years should be viewed in this perspective.

The ghastly attacks on GHQ Rawalpindi, PNS Mehran Base in Karachi, PAF Base at Kamra, intrusion in Abbottabad, the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, campaigns against Libya, Iran, Syria and other Muslim States should be seen from the perspective of keeping the threat of Talibanization alive, by US and its allies. Indian scholar, Dr. Sachithanandam Sathananthan observes, in his paper, 'The Great Game Continues,' that the purpose is not to eliminate the "Islamic threat" but to contain it within manageable limits and to spawn the

next generation of "terrorists." Inventing new enemies and eliminating old ones is part of the New Great Game. The "Islamic threat" through the Taliban is "Washington's leverage to intervene in Pakistan to distance Islamabad from Beijing and exploit energy resources abundantly found in Balochistan and, in the long run, perhaps derail the US administration's well-laid plans to bring Afghanistan to heel and to dominate Central Asia and its oil-rich Caspian Sea Basin." **S**

*Dr. Ikramul Haq and Huzaima Bukhari - partners in the law firm Huzaima & Ikram (member Taxand) - are Adjunct Professors at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS).*

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In the wee hours of June 14-15, 2013, militants of the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) launched a coordinated attack on the residency of Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah in Ziarat, Balochistan and destroyed that national heritage. The BLA took responsibility for the attack and vowed to destroy all such symbols in the province.

Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the first Governor General of Pakistan, lived his last days in the hill resort of Ziarat as he was suffering from tuberculosis. Since his death, the Ziarat residency was declared a national heritage and was re-named as Jinnah residency. That building was, in fact, built during the British days and served as a residency for British officers posted in Balochistan.

Rocket propelled grenades were fired at the residency, killing the lone policeman on duty. The attackers also removed the flag of Pakistan from the building and put up the BLA flag. The National Assembly, which was holding the budget session, strongly condemned the attack and the federal interior minis-

ter paid a visit to Ziarat to get first hand information.

For some time now, Balochistan has been facing an insurgency by the BLA and other nationalist groups though this is not only the issue, Quetta is rocked by several suicide attacks, particularly against the Shiite Hazara community, killing hundreds of people. Strangely, the attack on the Jinnah's residency took place in a Pashtun-dominated area which had been peaceful and almost free of crimes. If the BLA can target a national heritage in a non-Baloch area, it can also reach places where it has no physical presence like the Jinnah mausoleum in Karachi.

Ziarat is a hill resort in north western Balochistan. It is famous for its juniper forests and waterfalls.

Thousands of tourists from different parts of Pakistan visit Ziarat every year and also visit the Jinnah residency. The attackers not only destroyed the residency but created fear and insecurity among the people of Ziarat - that they could be vulnerable to such attacks in the future too.

The federal government instructed the Chief Minister of Balochistan to take all appropriate measures to protect the Jinnah residency from future attacks and pledged to restore the residency to its original shape in three months. But the damage has been done. Not only the people of Pakistan are in utter shock over the attack but the outside world is also questioning the failure of official authorities in protecting its national heritage from a blatant attack. Only one policeman was posted at the residency and surely it was not possible for him to prevent such an attack which was carried out by half a dozen armed men and neither was it anticipated by the authorities.

# Disgracing National

**The destruction of the Ziarat residency by rocket attacks was a traumatic affair that rocked the nation. Was it enough to shake the people out of their reverie?**

By Dr. Moonis Ahmar

Why were proper security measures not taken to protect the residency from acts of subversion and why were state authorities so lethargic in fulfilling their responsibilities? These are the questions that are being asked in the aftermath of the attack. How can the state effectively guard its national and strategic assets?

Four factors impact the causes and implications of the attack. First, the attack took place barely a few days after the oath taking of the Chief Minister of Balochistan Mr. Abdul Malik Baloch who belongs to the nationalist National Party. When the Pakistan Muslim League (N) emerged as the single largest party as a result of the May 11 elections, it agreed to support Malik hoping that he may be able to control years of lawlessness and insurgency in Balochistan. But, the attack on the residency gave him the message that despite the presence of nationalist parties in the Balochistan government, they would not stop their anti-Pakistan activities.

The BLA demands an independent Balochistan arguing that the Khan of Kalat's reported accession to Pakistan in 1947 was illegal and the new government of Pakistan forcibly took control of Balochistan. Ever since the assassination of Baloch leader Nawab Akbar Bugti in August 2006, Balochistan, particularly its Baloch areas, are in turmoil. No province of Pakistan has experienced repeated military action since

sons, torture and abductions in Balochistan is a serious matter which is used by the BLA and various separatist groups to justify armed struggle, particularly against the security forces and the non-Baloch settlers, namely the Punjabis. In view of numerous attacks on Punjabi settlers in Balochistan, including Quetta, there has been an exodus of settlers from Balochistan. Baloch nationalist and separatist groups consider the Punjabi dominated military and bureaucracy as being responsible for the loot and plunder of the province's natural and mineral resources. They also give the example of what they consider the "colonization" of Gwadar port and the brutal exploitation of gas and other natural, mineral resources of Balochistan by Islamabad.

Third, the tragedy in Ziarat has exposed the writ and credibility of both provincial and federal governments in protecting that national heritage. Disgracing the Jinnah residency and hoisting the flag of BLA means that the state is dysfunctional in Balochistan and has tried to cover up that episode by suspending a few officials and making some arrests. The sad reality is that the flag of Pakistan cannot be hoisted even on Pakistan Day and Independence Day in many parts of Balochistan, including Balochistan University. Like past acts of terrorism and violence in Balochistan, whether conducted by the religious ex-

be answered in the same terms. This is contradictory because the PML(N) in the past took a position to talk to such groups, such as the *Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan* (TTP) with which it wants negotiations. In reality, the Ziarat tragedy will provide further encouragement to separatists and other nationalist groups in Balochistan to augment their activities.

There are some in the Balochistan Assembly who indirectly refused to condemn the attack on the residency in Ziarat. While taking to *The Express Tribune*, Akram Shah, General Secretary of Pashtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party (PK-MAP) which is a coalition partner in the government of Balochistan, described the Jinnah residency as a "wooden house at Ziarat which was a symbol of slavery as it was built for the colonial British officer Sir Robert Groves Sandeman who ruled Balochistan until his death in 1892. The house has always reminded the Baloch and Pashtuns of the long period when they were the slaves of British Empire in the Indian subcontinent. For us, it's no more than the house of the then agent to the governor general of India."

Reacting to the statement, members of Balochistan Assembly said, "Akram Shah has hurt the feelings of millions of patriotic people in Balochistan and of those who had an emotional attachment with the historic building, Ziarat residency. The PK-MAP leader should behave like a responsible politician and not forget that his party is a coalition partner in the Balochistan government."

If the government fails to take a stern action against those who disgraced a national monument, it will prove its inability to rein in those groups who openly challenge the writ of the state and are able to get away with their violent acts. ■

*Dr. Moonis Ahmar is a Professor of International Relations at the University of Karachi and Director, Program on Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution.*

# Pride

the 1960s. In the May 2013 general elections, the voter turnout was very low in the Baloch areas of Balochistan which raised questions about the credibility of the polls.

Second, the issue of missing per-

tremists or ethnic nationalists, the Ziarat incident will also be forgotten.

Finally, the federal interior minister while talking to reporters during his visit to Quetta made it clear that the violent acts of separatist groups would

# Prioritizing Efforts

Flash floods in India continue to wreak havoc in poverty stricken areas throughout the country. Relief efforts and disaster management must feature highly on the government's agenda.

By Daniah Ishtiaq



The 'Himalayan Tsunami,' which struck India in June is said to have been triggered by excessively heavy rainfall of more than 220mm (8.6in) in a region home to the headwaters of the river Ganges. From the western Himalayan state of Himachal Pradesh, homes, hotels, roads and bridges have been washed away by the torrential rains and swollen rivers, even causing havoc along the mountainous territory from Kedar-nath down to the plains.

One might say that flash floods are a yearly occurrence in this region but what is it that makes this calamity so different? The answer lies in the fact that the loss of life this time around has been much more than in previ-

ous years. He claims that the sudden cloud burst, the nature of Himalayan geology and the often environmentally unsound development of the region have all contributed to the tragedy. The excessive boom in tourism has put a severe strain on the Himalayan infrastructure. It has also shaken up the Himalayan ecosystem, which comprises of mountainous terrain and glacial bodies.

The modern-day natural occurrences are a reality of climate change, change that cannot be stopped. Since 2000, the western Himalayan states of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh have witnessed an average of three cloudbursts per monsoon. But the ravaged villages of the flash floods tell the

extraordinary disaster. He claims that the sudden cloud burst, the nature of Himalayan geology and the often environmentally unsound development of the region have all contributed to the tragedy. The excessive boom in tourism has put a severe strain on the Himalayan infrastructure. It has also shaken up the Himalayan ecosystem, which comprises of mountainous terrain and glacial bodies.

around ninety percent of cash crops, particularly the apple crop, have been completely destroyed by the flash floods in the Kinnaur district. In recent times, people, on the basis of anonymity have also made claims of the intense political pressure behind the poor infrastructural development that is taking place at an alarming pace. This indicates lack of good governance and corruption at the policy planning level.

As the 2014 elections approach in India, political parties will need to revise their stance and start proposing policies whereby the government and key stakeholders will engage the communities and local authorities in making them aware of the flood risk in view of climate variability, along with taking responsibility of disasters and formulating crises management cells to respond to natural disasters. With all the relief efforts promoted on public and private platforms via donations, another grave threat looms over good intentions: fake donation websites that are emerging in cyberspace. Such website operate by means of emails as well as posts on social networking sites that request for donations towards fake relief funds.

Good governance is no doubt the key to a better future but the effort needs to be at both ends. Communities need to realize the inherent dangers of living on mountainous terrains and the government bodies need to identify and communicate with high-risk areas so that the community may take adequate measures in time. As the community begins to rise from the rubble left in the aftermath of the Himalayan Tsunami, serious efforts must be taken to mitigate the risks associated with natural disasters in extreme poverty ridden areas. **S**

*Daniah Ishtiaq holds an MBA from the Institute of Business Administration.*

One might say that flash floods are a yearly occurrence in this region but what is it that makes this calamity so different? The answer lies in the fact that the loss of life this time around has been much more than in previous years.

ous years. As the monsoons arrived in India a month early, the plethora of Sikh and Hindu pilgrims, who actually number up to more than 60,000, were still present rather than having returned home, as is usually the case.

Many have been left wondering what role human activities have to play in these frequent occurrences. People muse that perhaps a multitude of hydroelectric projects have further aggravated the cause. According to Deb Mukherjee, an expert on the Himalayas, the monsoon season was but one factor amongst several others; Mukherjee holds both, natural and man-made factors, responsible for this

grim story of how India is ill equipped to handle the natural disasters it faces which is further exacerbated by a weak infrastructure planning.

The loss of ecosystem services is priceless and according to the PHD Chamber of Commerce, 11% of the Gross State Domestic Product is lost due to a decline in prospective tourism. Tragically, the most affected by such a calamity have been the poor, with lands and shops having been washed away and entire livelihoods destroyed. Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister, Virbhadr Singh has said that the tragedy has pushed the state one year back in terms of development and

**N**o less a person than Jan Kubis believes that continued international support is critical for Afghanistan to proceed with the process of transition from foreign occupation to full freedom. Kubis is the UN Special Representative and the Head of the UN Assistance mission in Afghanistan. Afghanistan, in his opinion, would need support in economic, political and security sectors. Of the three only the case for economic assistance is easily understood. The entire economic infrastructure will have to be rebuilt as if from scratch after the devastation it has suffered from 12 years of US occupation.

But how international support could successfully translate itself into ushering in political stability is questionable. First of all, what shape Afghan politics will take after the departure of the alien forces is a matter of speculation. Even the peace talks with the Taliban that were expected to start last month have drifted into limbo.

Having realized its past error in abandoning Afghanistan to its fate after the Soviet withdrawal, the US is determined to use Afghanistan as one of its forward posts, for surveillance over Russia, China and its major anathema, Iran. Its troops will therefore remain in Afghanistan indefinitely after 2014, under one pretext or another. America is already in the process of negotiating such an agreement with the Karzai government. In fact, its basic concern is to secure the safety of its troops from Taliban snipers. The opening of a Taliban office in Doha for the purpose of United States-Taliban talks has to be seen as the first step in this direction.

For political stability, an understanding among the Taliban, the Kabul government and the Northern Alliance is of the core. It should also be understood that in Afghanistan's context, the "international community" actually means the United States and its poodle, Britain, as well as its neighbors -- Pakistan, Iran and India. Pakistan enjoys clout with the Taliban; India on the other hand has close ties with President

Karzai. All of these countries can prod the various factions to carve out a commonly agreed arrangement on the political set-up in Afghanistan after 2014.

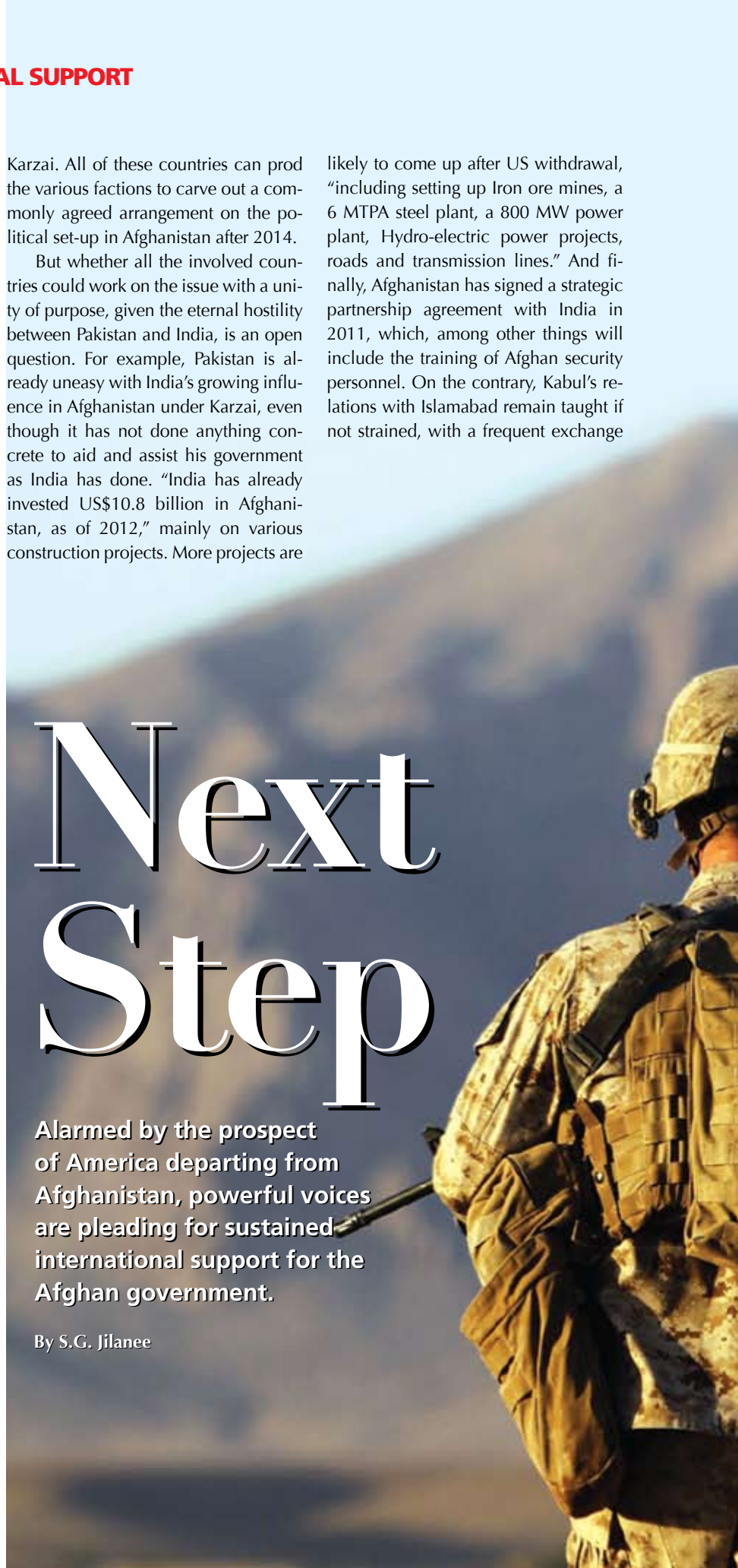
But whether all the involved countries could work on the issue with a unity of purpose, given the eternal hostility between Pakistan and India, is an open question. For example, Pakistan is already uneasy with India's growing influence in Afghanistan under Karzai, even though it has not done anything concrete to aid and assist his government as India has done. "India has already invested US\$10.8 billion in Afghanistan, as of 2012," mainly on various construction projects. More projects are


likely to come up after US withdrawal, "including setting up Iron ore mines, a 6 MTPA steel plant, a 800 MW power plant, Hydro-electric power projects, roads and transmission lines." And finally, Afghanistan has signed a strategic partnership agreement with India in 2011, which, among other things will include the training of Afghan security personnel. On the contrary, Kabul's relations with Islamabad remain taught if not strained, with a frequent exchange

# Next Step

**Alarmed by the prospect of America departing from Afghanistan, powerful voices are pleading for sustained international support for the Afghan government.**

By S.G. Jilanee





of barbs between each other. And yet, Pakistan has a crucial role in Afghanistan's peace and stability.

Nonetheless, the fact remains that the "international community" may do just so much. It may provide encouragement, but the initiative for political stability in Afghanistan must emerge from its own soil.

Jan Kubis has also mentioned Afghanistan's security. But, its security will be guaranteed by the presence of

US troops. Besides, it will have a fully trained national army of its own. Afghanistan, therefore, would have no external threats to its security. Even otherwise, except the Soviet Union and the United States, no other country has invaded Afghanistan within living memory.

What shape Afghanistan's politics will take after 2014 is anybody's guess. Presidential election is due in early 2014. Who will be the next president if Karzai is either defeated or decides not to run? And how will the new president deal with the country's myriad post-2014 problems? Because there can be no peace and stability if fighting between the Kabul government and Taliban goes on, some sort of power-sharing agreement with the Taliban is indispens-

able. But such an idea is anathema to President Karzai. No wonder, therefore, that Kabul went into conniptions when Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's special adviser on national security and foreign policy, Sartaj Aziz, allegedly suggested that Kabul accept some kind of power-sharing agreement with the Afghan Taliban, wherein, "parts of the country may eventually be ceded to Taliban control." Even though Pakistan officially denied Mr. Aziz having offered any such idea, the fact remains that Taliban do control fairly large swathes of territory in the North and have a strong presence in and around Kandahar. It is also an established fact that Mr. Karzai's writ, even now, is limited by and large to the capital and its precincts. And in view of these factors the idea attributed to Mr. Aziz does make sense.

As for the Taliban, they treat Karzai with contempt. They call him an American stooge and are averse to talking with him. It is hoped that Karzai's successor may bring change. All eyes are therefore set to the forthcoming election. However, the most crucial problem after the US-NATO pullout will be putting Afghanistan's economy on the rails. The torrents of dollars flowing inside Afghanistan will dry up. The CIA will no more deliver large packets of cash. But international financial support is critical to enable the country to stand on its own two feet. The United Nations that sanctioned its invasion and occupation as well as the invaders, must come forward with sizeable donations.

Not only do they owe it to the people of Afghanistan with whose lives they played havoc, but also because a politically and economically unstable Afghanistan may pose a threat to the stability of the region, especially Pakistan. A concerted effort is needed from the international community and especially its close neighbors to avoid a repeat of the Dr. Najibullah drama after 2014. **S**

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



# Strengthening Ties

**Bilateral trade between Bangladesh and India could prove fruitful, not only for the two countries, but also for the region at large.**

**By Raza Khan**

**T**rade relations between Bangladesh and India were recently increased after the two countries decided to develop the existing land ports and build a number of new ones at their common border for cost-effective means and an efficient exchange of goods. The agreement, if it sees the light of day, would be a harbinger of a new era of bilateral trade and would have wholesome effects on regional trade and politics besides increasing

the intra-regional South Asian trade manifold.

The agreement for enhancing the volume of trade between Bangladesh and India was arrived at in a meeting of the Joint Working Group of both countries in June this year. According to the agreement, trading infrastructure in the shape of land ports and roads would be developed and built. In this connection Bangladesh would build four new land ports to facilitate

trade shipments to and from India. These new land ports would be built at Jibannagar in Kushtia, Meherpur, Chilahati in Nilphamari and Teghamuk in Chittagong Hill Tracts.

India would spend Rs4.67 billion to develop seven import tax stations at different border points at Agartala, Petrapole, Dhoki, and Samastipur. The actual plan is to upgrade the existing land custom stations to integrate check posts with both custom and immigra-

tion facilities. In order to make the agreement practicable the two sides have also set timelines for developing and raising the trading infrastructure. The infrastructure would be developed within 150 feet of border areas which is a significant development in itself, for Delhi had earlier put a ban on the construction of infrastructure, whatsoever, in the 150 feet of border areas for security considerations.

Most of the bilateral trade between Bangladesh and India takes place through land ports. Despite their contiguity both the countries could not significantly improve mutual trade for various reasons. The most important causes of insignificant trade between the two key South Asian countries are poor infrastructure at land ports and political tensions. Now when both

develop the whole range of infrastructure envisaged in their recent agreement, a new era of industrialization in the shape of factories and mills in the entire border region is expected thus creating a lot of employment opportunities. The development of trading infrastructure in the border regions of Bangladesh and India and the anticipated increase in the trade volume would be mutually beneficial, however, Delhi would gain a stronger advantage out of it. India has a booming economy and resultant colossal industrial output. The improved trading infrastructure over land would result in a manifold increase in Indian goods landing at the Bangladeshi markets.

From an Indian point of view, good neighborly ties with Bangladesh have been of critical importance. After the

with Bangladesh to build and develop land ports infrastructure is economic, in order to sustain its excellent economic growth rate in recent years, Delhi has had to explore new avenues for exports. South Asia, where India is by far the dominant political and economic power, is the most suitable and cost-effective avenue for Indian goods. Bangladesh with a stable economy and a rising middle class is the natural destination for Indian traders.

For Bangladesh, forging political and trading ties with India is extremely important. Bangladesh has been perennially struck by political turmoil, with several military interventions. For an elected government, the biggest guarantee of stability and keeping the military and even judicial intervention at bay is a viable economy. This very reason seems to be the biggest motivation for Hasina's government that endeavors to enhance trade ties with India.

Enhanced trading ties between Bangladesh and India would not only be mutually beneficial but would also increase the volume of intra-regional South Asian trade significantly. Trading ties between and among states result in mutual dependency which leads to reducing political disputes and the same would result in resolving or reducing the intensity of disputes between India and Bangladesh, where disputes over water resources reign supreme. Seeing Bangladesh and India enhance trade ties and reap mutual benefits would motivate other South Asian countries to prioritize improving trading ties with their respective neighbors. ■

*Raza Khan is a political analyst and researcher on the political economy and the AF-PAK region. He has served in several senior positions in the Pakistan government and is currently writing his doctoral thesis on religious extremism-terrorism in Pakistan.*

If Bangladesh and India are able to develop the whole range of infrastructure envisaged in their recent agreement, a new era of industrialization in the shape of factories and mills in the entire border region is expected thus creating a lot of employment opportunities.

countries have vowed to improve and build land port infrastructure, a key obstacle in the enhancing of trading volume would be removed. However, much would depend on the financial, technological and human capacity of Bangladesh. Already out of the total 18 land ports which Bangladesh has had, only half are fully operational. Realistically speaking the Bangladeshi government could implement its part of the agreement with India if it involves the country's private sector in developing and raising the infrastructure.

If Bangladesh and India are able to

two regional rival powers—Pakistan and India—Bangladesh is the largest country in South Asia. Thus having Bangladesh on its side has been the desire of both Pakistan and India. But due to the bitter past and historical issues between Bangladesh and Pakistan and the role, which the Indian military played in Bangladesh's independence from mainland Pakistan, Dhaka has tilted towards India. Against this backdrop, India's harboring of Bangladesh through enhanced trade is one of Delhi's foreign policy aims. Although India's paramount objective in agreeing

# The New Pearl

**Chinese investments in Sri Lanka are not only raising alarm bells for India but are also giving it a run for its money.**

By Sijal Fawad

Even though Sri Lankan External Affairs Minister, G.L. Peiris, may have claimed that China's growing influence in Sri Lanka is "not at the expense of any other country (and) there is no danger to any other country," India can't help but raise brows over the strengthening bilateral relationship between the two countries.

With China working hard to foster stronger trade and economic ties with Sri Lanka, in addition to greater cooperation in security and defense, it is not surprising that analysts have focused their minds on China's strategic plans to garner greater influence in Asia. Bearing in mind China's evolving rivalry with superpower America, it is not too hard to conjecture that

the country requires Sri Lanka's support in setting a strong presence in Asia in general and South Asia in particular. This is also a subtle message to Washington, which is aware of the oriental giant's expanding influence in the emerging continent and is not too comfortable with it.

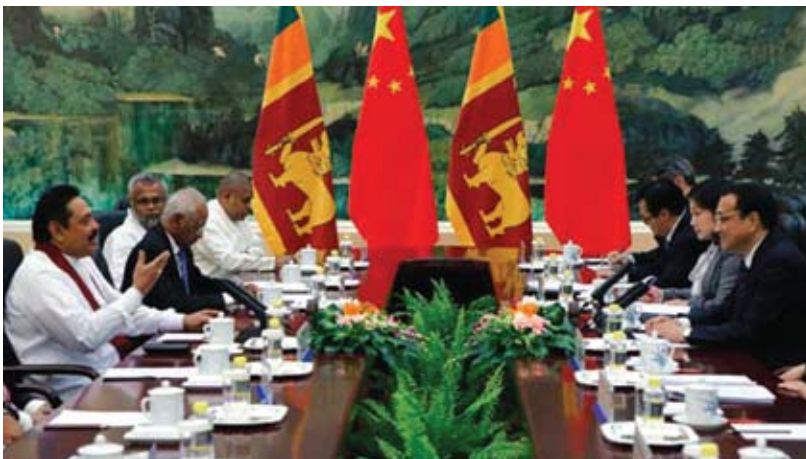
Delhi isn't too pleased with the progress in Sino-Lankan bilateral relations either and looks upon the mutual amiability as a threat to its growing influence in Asia. When Sri Lankan president Mahinda Rajapaksa visited China in May this year, relations between the two countries were uplifted to the status of a 'strategic cooperative partnership' with analyst M.K. Bhadrakumar describing the move as sym-

bolic, remarking, "This development will pose formidable challenges to Indian diplomacy."

China's extending helping hand for infrastructural projects in the island nation in the post-war scenario include a whopping \$2.2 billion in development loans; a level that easily surpassed the extent of Indian assistance to her neighbor after the country achieved victory over the Tamil rebels. In fact, in an article in Lanka Business Online, China has emerged as the top lender to the island country during January to April 2013, financing \$615.3 million for various projects.

But this is just one part of China's strategic moves in Sri Lanka. Other efforts include strengthening trade ties through negotiations of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Needless to say, the latter will facilitate greater access for Sri Lankan products across the Chinese border and Chinese-Sri Lankan trade can be safely be expected to receive a big boost.

Increasing military cooperation between the lately popular 'friend' nations is another bone of contention that is likely to make Indian policy-makers roll in their sleep. It is a stark reminder that Colombo will not be dependent on Indian military assistance as much as it previously had been un-





der the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord. Clearly, a shifting balance of power in the continent is on the cards.

And speaking of cards, China seems to be playing its cards quite well. There is no prohibition per se for Sri Lanka in developing its foreign policy relations with any country, including India. This makes China’s stance appear even more innocent than what one may directly believe. It also works well for Sri Lanka; after all, which country would want to be dictated about who to befriend and who not to. For China, strategic ties with Sri Lanka are a part of its efforts towards gaining a stronghold in Asia. In fact, many commentators and policy analysts have come up with a ‘String of Pearls’ theory, referring to China’s strengthening influence along its sea lanes of communication, including in maritime centers in countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, the latter being termed a key ‘pearl’ in this supposed string.

It is believed that through the smooth transport and communication channels helped by these strategic

moves, China is preparing for a whopping increase in local oil consumption through an uninterrupted flow of the energy fuel from the Middle East and Africa across the String of Pearls. Not to forget, China is also alleged to be strategically ‘surrounding’ India through its planned progress via this suggested strategy.

Besides, as Reuters pointed out in May this year, “Sri Lanka’s location astride an ancient and lucrative trade route in the Indian Ocean makes it of strategic commercial and military interest to Washington, New Delhi and Beijing,” particularly mentioning how the country had become a “visible front in the competition between the Asian giants.”

Other economic driving factors include China’s need to tap into other markets as the Yuan may likely be allowed to appreciate in the coming few years and a country that has recently come out of war and attracts tourists from all over the world is a great one for Chinese companies to set up shop. There are also claims that China is the one benefiting from infrastructural

development as Chinese contractors, subcontractors and laborers are involved in major projects rather than Lankan nationals and most of the raw material is also of Chinese make.

The motive to outshine the US in a fiercely developing strategic rivalry is another reason behind China’s carefully engineered moves. For the US and its pro-Asia policy ‘Pivot to the Pacific’, finding allies in countries such as India and Japan has turned out to be a successful move. With China, the loyalty rests in countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Cambodia, Vietnam and Sri Lanka.

Overall, as China gains stark prominence in global and regional geopolitics and its emergence as a superpower seems like a greater reality every passing day, one can better understand why it is striving for influence in the Indian Ocean through the strategic location of the island country. **S**

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# Inching to Stability?

Despite stepping into the realm of election politics, Nepal has a long way to go before it can achieve political maturity and stability.

By Asma Siddiqui

Nepal's political history has been peppered with conflicts and instability. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement, signed on 21 November 2006, ended a decade-long conflict with the loss of 14,000 precious lives. Consequently, the interim constitution was adopted on

15 January 2007, the same day the Maoists made their landmark return to Parliament. The Maoist lobby formed part of the interim government led by the Nepali Congress, which took office on 30 March 2007. The election of the Constituent Assembly soon followed on 10 April 2008, officially

declaring Nepal as the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal on 28 May 2008 and thus abolishing a 240-year old monarchy.

Despite achieving some semblance of political stability, Nepal remains a fragile state, facing new threats caused by the financial crisis,



the economic slowdown and security issues.

Nepal is currently undergoing a period of historic political change. The peace process is dragging its feet as the government is confronted with new challenges every day. Political intolerance has increased, following the collapse of the first coalition government on 4 May 2009, when the Prime Minister and former Maoist leader, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, aka Prachanda, decided to dismiss the army chief, General Rookmangud Katawal. Clashes between activists from different political parties have intensified, with incidents mostly provoked by youth wings of political parties and the student's unions affiliated with them.

Nepal's leadership has failed to draft a new Constitution. The mandate of the 602-member Constituent Assembly elected in 2008 ended on 27th May 2012 without a consensus as to how Nepal should be governed. During the ten year long armed rebellion against the monarchy [1996-2006], the majority of the rural masses and many residing in urban areas supported the Maoists. However, when the Maoists formed nearly 40% of the Constituent Assembly, they advocated for democratic centralism akin to the former Soviet Union. The other 60% opposed it for a myriad of reasons.

After the People's Movement of 2006 led to the end of the king's absolute power, interim arrangements were decided. The initial decision to form an interim constitution was made by the seven mainstream political parties. Although, on the outside, an expert committee, led by an esteemed Supreme Court judge, was appointed to draft the interim constitution, in reality, nominees of the political parties made the key decisions. Nearly five thousand submissions were received from the people but there is little

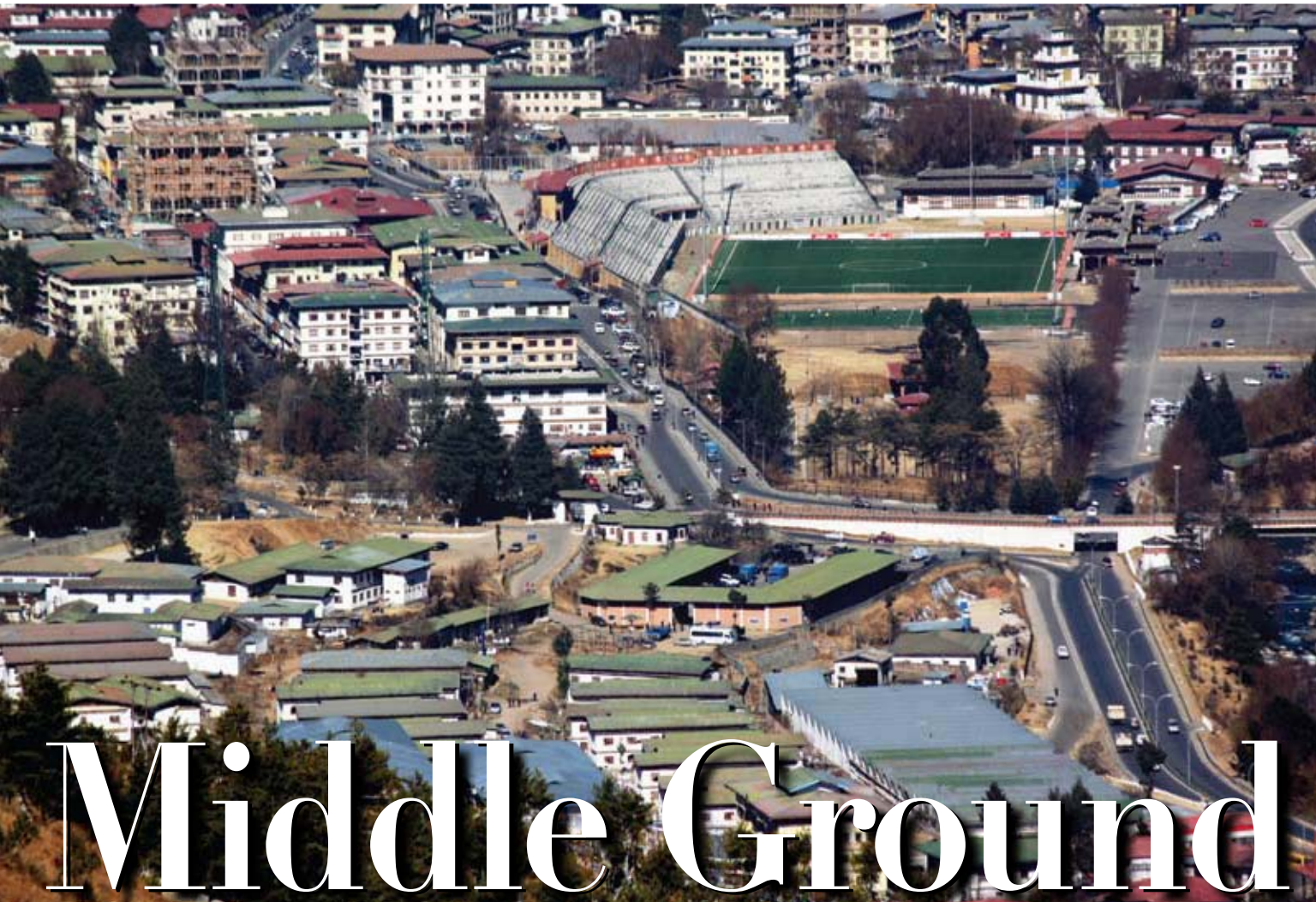
evidence that much heed was paid to them. The interim constitution was enacted nearly ten months after the recall of the ad hoc parliament.

Though the government had been led by Baburam Bhattarai of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) since August 2011, various civil functions were gradually shut down without a Parliament. Opposing parties did not want Bhattarai to lead the government during the elections but Bhattarai refused to surrender his post without a broad agreement on how the elections would be supervised. Mr. Regmi had earlier signed on an agreement that required him to resign from his post while an interim chief justice would hold his post. He is expected to return to the court after elections are held in November.

With the expansion of the cabinet led by chief justice Khil Raj Regmi, Nepal has firmly stepped into election politics. Looking at Nepal's political history over the past six decades, there are reasons to believe that elections can't be held easily or, when held, they won't be able to bring any respite and political stability in the country. Nepal's political crisis is not only a reflection of its own internal crisis, but is one that is beyond the control of Nepali politicians. Renowned American scholar and Nepal expert, late Leo Rose used to argue that the external relations of a bigger country are determined by its internal politics. He also said that the internal politics of a small country are determined by external politics. Being a small country, Nepal's internal politics seem to have a little to do with major political upheavals of the last sixty years and it seems there's still a long way to go for the country. ■

*Asma Siddiqui is a freelance journalist who writes on social issues.*





# Middle Ground

**Will Bhutan successfully find middle growth in preserving the environment and undertaking urban planning development?**

**By Fatima Siraj**

**B**hutan is well-known for its isolation from the world, both geographically and culturally. Its conservative approach, punctuated by a focus on the pursuit of GNH (Gross National Happiness) rather than GDP, impedes ‘too much’ development and restricts the way the country’s natural resources can be utilized. The prior-

ity of the Bhutanese government has consistently been to develop the rural areas where the majority of the population resides. Furthermore, the constitution of Bhutan states that 60% of the country must be covered by forests at all times.

Along with the need to dedicate land to agriculture and cultural heri-

tage sites, this stringent forest cover requirement poses a significant problem for urban planning. While it would seem that the issue of urban development only has to do with Bhutan’s conservative land laws, it should not go unnoticed that the natural topography of the country is also far from conducive for building the kind of

infrastructure that is typical of urban centers. Only limited flat land is available to the country as steep valleys and mountainous slopes characterize most of Bhutan.

According to the 2005 Census, the total settled areas in Bhutan comprised sixty-one towns. The minimum population in one town is required to be 1500 for it to qualify as an urban center. As a result, only twenty-five out of the sixty-one towns are classified as urban centers - a mere 30% of the total national population. Some 40% of the entire urban population is concentrated in the two largest cities - Thimphu and Phuntsholing.

Currently, Bhutan's situation is such that the urban areas generate only a small fraction of its total income. The country's major economic strength lies in the value generated by its natural resources; 12% of GDP comprises the export of hydroelectric power to India. Subsistence agriculture forms 40% of the economy, employing a staggering 87% of the population. However, Bhutan is undergoing a transitional period. It is currently experiencing a 7.3% average annual growth rate in its urban population and its National Urbanization Strategy predicts that by 2020, more than half of the population will live in urban areas. Hence experts are of the opinion that as more and more people flow into urban areas, the need of the hour is to focus attention on urban infrastructure development.

Rural-urban migration is increasing at an accelerating rate. According to one study, the major pull factor for young males is improving educational opportunities while another study quotes 'family move' as the major reason for female migration. Employment is also an important factor that pushes people to leave their rural homes in search of well-paid jobs, most of which are available in the public sector services.

Rapid urbanization has brought

with it many problems. Water shortage, air and water pollution, traffic congestion, municipal waste generation and land degradation are increasingly prevalent in Thimphu and Phuntsholing. In order to prevent these problems from accelerating, the urbanization strategy identifies objectives, which include improving the well-being of poor urban citizens, maintaining environmental stability and balancing regional urban growth. It can be seen that despite its attempt to modernize, the Bhutanese government is ensuring that it achieves the 'middle way'.

It realizes the need to build a road network to serve the urban population and strives to do it in an environmentally friendly manner. This slows down the process of development but at the same time shows Bhutan's consistent dedication towards achieving Gross National Happiness, a large part of which is environmental conservation and balanced development. This formula for achieving modernization is significantly different from the standard procedures followed by developing countries around the world. The strategy focuses on development at a sustainable pace, ensuring the preservation of physical and cultural resources in line with Bhutan's governing philosophy.

The vision for the proposed national urbanization system is, therefore, based on the premise that urban development must take place in a planned, socially acceptable, economically sound and environmentally sustainable manner with the focus on strengthening economic development in an attempt to promote Gross National Happiness. The government plans to adopt a pro-active approach that combines policy, financial and institutional integration to channelize urban growth into 'Regional Growth Centers.' This concept aims to decentralize the urban development process, shifting the burden from the two

major cities and ensuring more rural urban integration. As the overarching goal is to have balanced development in the nation, it is vital that regional development be equitable across Bhutan. Since the western region has the highest urban growth rate according to statistics, the regional growth plan should focus on the eastern and central regions to achieve its target.

Bhutan's steep natural topography poses a challenge to urban planning -- an issue that is further aggravated by political agendas that seek to minimize environmental degradation. While numerous NGOs have been working on urban development projects, it is vital that the country relax its land laws to assist them in their cause. Recognizing the policy constraints, however, the World Bank has developed three policy 'pillars' customized to match Gross National Happiness requirements. The first pillar is increasing access to improved infrastructure, markets and social services, which are particularly helpful in decelerating rural urban migration. The second proposition is encouraging private sector employment and investment, which would be beneficial in countering reliance on income generated from civil service and public sector jobs. And the last of the three pillars suggests improving management of the public resources dedicated to development.

How successful the 'middle way' proves to be for Bhutan in an era where modernization is otherwise taking place at a rapid pace with large disregard for environmental consequences remains to be seen. But the Bhutanese government deserves due credit for its consistent dedication in adhering to its unique governing philosophy despite pressures from those favoring rapid development. **S**

*Fatima Siraj is currently pursuing a BBA degree at the Institute of Business Administration. She frequently writes on marketing and social issues.*

# Dreaming a

**The solution to the growing energy crisis in the Maldives is in the country's renewable energy sector.**

By Muhammad Omar Iftikhar

The Maldives recently held its first International Renewable Energy Investors Conference in association with the Environment Ministry and various banks. Attending the conference were official dignitaries from the energy sector, who highlighted how the conference brought together international investors, project developers and energy companies to explore investment opportunities in the country's renewable energy sector. Moreover, the conference discussed the legal framework and the regulatory process in line with creating a long-term partnership with various stakeholders who could finance and manage renewable energy projects in the Maldives.

The energy crisis continues to loom over the island nation and President Mohammed Waheed Manik is making efforts to implement renewable energy projects across the country to solve this dilemma. Moreover, the Maldivian government is ambitious about developing its renewable energy sector which will eventually facilitate the country's long-term plan to become a carbon neutral country by 2020.

In November 2012, the country launched the Sustainable Renewable Energy Investment Plan to tackle the energy crisis by finding avenues to generate alternate energy and to conserve the energy that it was

producing through conventional means. As one of the components to produce energy was biomass, the project stakeholders didn't agree to the conditions. After revising the project and replacing the biomass component with solar energy, the country re-launched the project as the Maldives Scaling Up Renewable Energy Program (SREP).

The Maldives intends to use the Investment Plan to transform and upgrade its energy sector by reducing its dependence on costly fossil fuels for power generation and to boost investment from the private sector. Although the country has identified key projects to counter the energy crisis, it seems as if external and internal factors are hindering the Maldives in pursuing its renewable energy projects. Analysts believe that the ongoing political instability has distanced foreign investors from the country. The Maldives' political crisis, which reached its climax with the resignation of former presi-

dent Mohammed Nasheed in 2012, has led the international community to lose confidence in the various sectors of the island country. Although the international community views the Maldives as making efforts to build its renewable energy sector under the current President Mohammed Waheed's government, the erratic nature of the country's politics is hindering the Maldives' long-term goals.

Environment Minister of the Maldives, Dr. Mariyam Shakeela, views that the need of the hour is to become less dependent on fossil fuel because it leads to a climate crisis. Islands comprising the Maldives have ample but underused renewable energy potential, which the government should use to become a fossil fuel independent country. However, present or past governments have not explored the country's natural resources, which signal the government's vacillation towards curbing the energy crisis.



# Carbon-Free World

The World Bank (WB) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) have pledged their support to attract investment in the Maldives' renewable energy sector. In October 2012, the Energy Authority of the Maldives inaugurated the \$138 million renewable energy project to generate 26 MW of electricity. The World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and banks from Japan and Germany have funded the project, which is set to be completed in five years. As planned, the project will reach nearly 50 islands of the Maldives. The Maldivian government envisions running ten islands solely on renewable energy in the project's initial stages. Although the WB has been extending its support, the Maldivian government must realize that any assistance from the WB comes with strict repercussions and failure to meet the WB's demands might jeopardize the Maldives' economic security.

A major reason preventing foreign investment from entering into the Maldives is the problem of payment guarantees and the question of returns on investment (ROI). An underdeveloped country, the Maldives is a risky business for foreign investors. According to sources, the government of Maldives has allocated US\$5 million from the Inter-

national Development Association (IDA), which the WB will finance and the amount will be leveraged up to US\$25 million. Moreover, the World Bank will issue a security for this amount to provide guarantees to the investors, guaranteeing finances under the SREP investment plan.

Although the guarantee facilities have reduced the investor's concerns to some extent, it will take time to completely restore the confidence of international investors. The Maldives needs the help of financial institutions to develop its renewable energy sector and it seems as if the local banks are not willing to render their support. The country can change this attitude by bringing political stability after the September 2013 elections. Furthermore, the recent political chaos between the Maldives and India over the GMR Infrastructure row is probably why international investors are finding it difficult to trust the Maldivian government. President Mohammad Waheed's government terminated the \$500 million contract awarded to India's GMR Infrastructure to build the Male International Airport. India is now seeking a compensation of \$1.4 billion. With the Maldives becoming controversial in the eyes of India, it seems as if the foreign investors will

become extra cautious before making any deal with the island nation.

The Director of ADB, Yongping Zhai is expected to follow an extensive investment strategy to transform the Maldives into a renewable energy dependent country and has advised the Maldivian government to prepare a workable business model for the renewable energy sector. However, the Environment Ministry of the Maldives opposes this notion and wants to make the Maldives an oil dependent country. This tussle, to the fear of many, might become a burden over the Maldives' energy plans and will prolong the crisis.

It is also expected that if President Mohammad Waheed Hassan, from the Gaumeed Itihaad Party is re-elected, then he might implement strategies assisting the growth of the renewable energy sector, as much of the political tussle will also fade away by then. How the country follows a renewable energy plan and creates a favorable environment for international investment is yet to be seen. **S**

*Muhammad Omar Iftikhar is a former Assistant Editor at SouthAsia magazine. He writes on regional issues and social activism.*

After an unexpected victory in the Iranian Presidential election, Hassan Rowhani has emerged as a bastion of political change in Iran. The new President is politically moderate and a proponent of a more flexible policy course. Unlike the confrontational style of politics adopted by his predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, Rowhani is prepared to make political compromises with the West rather than take

a non-confrontational stance on the country's nuclear program. Furthermore, it will need to account for the implications of maintaining good bilateral ties with the US to South Asian countries.

Whether Hassan Rowhani will succeed in improving foreign relations between Iran and the West remains a moot-point. However, it would be safe to assume that Rowhani's past experience of cooperating with the interna-

the extra mile and remain strongly committed toward improving relations with Washington. While Hassan Rowhani intends to reduce tensions between the two countries, he is reluctant to engage in direct talks with the US. Since there is no other effective means of improving foreign relations without discussing Iran's nuclear enrichment program, such a strict position could be problematic for the new administration. Like his predecessors, Rowhani does not plan to completely suspend the uranium enrichment project in Iran. Instead, he favors an open strategy to do away with the sanctions, which have caused an economic crisis.

Rowhani has been viewed with both a measure of caution and optimism at the White House. President Obama has lauded the people of Iran for exercising their democratic right with care and making their voices heard. He has expressed a willingness to resolve the nuclear dispute with Iran and strongly believes that Iran wants to engage with the international community in a serious and substantive way. This new wave of optimism stems from Hassan Rowhani's image as a moderate leader. The new President has been perceived as Iran's "diplomat *sheik*" with a pragmatic approach towards maintaining foreign relations. He has denied suspicions that Iran wants to build its arsenal. On the contrary, he is willing to increase transparency and clarify its diplomatic position within the international community to increase the trust between Iran and the United States.

Improved relations with the West serve a doubled-edged motive. If the new Iranian President adopts a non-confrontational stance towards the West, this will positively impact the overall geopolitical scenario in South Asia. Development projects in the region have been brought to a standstill because of the strained bilateral ties

Whether Hassan Rowhani will succeed in improving foreign relations between Iran and the West remains a moot-point. However, it would be safe to assume that Rowhani's past experience of cooperating with the international community to encourage nuclear nonproliferation is a good indicator of diplomatic skills.

a hard line. Through the expertise of both conservative and reformist factions, Rowhani aims to mitigate international tensions over Iran's nuclear aspirations.

Hassan Rowhani's victory has encouraged a brand of liberalism in Iran that does not deviate from traditional policies and the official state ideology. It comes at a time when Iran's socio-economic position has remained consistently unstable. Inflation and unemployment rates are skyrocketing and a strict regime of sanctions is further aggravating the economic crisis. In addition, the protection of individual freedoms and human rights has been largely neglected in the region. But Rowhani's challenges are not restricted to the domestic sphere. Iran's foreign policy agenda also needs a new lease of life. In recent years, Iran has become a politically isolated region. In order to uphold its global image, the new administration must adopt

tional community to encourage nuclear nonproliferation is a good indicator of diplomatic skills. As the leader of the Supreme National Security Council between 2003-2005, Rowhani participated in countless negotiations on the fate of Iran's nuclear program. At the time, he managed to cut short the uranium enrichment program and agreed to Iran's compliance with the Additional Protocol of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. However, these efforts towards overall de-nuclearization came to a halt when Ahmedinejad assumed power in 2005.

As the new President of Iran, Rowhani will have another opportunity to pick up the pieces and strengthen bilateral ties with the West. Although the United States has expressed a desire to engage in direct negotiations with Iran, it remains to be seen what concessions Rowhani will bring to the fore. At this stage, it is also uncertain whether he will be prepared to go

between Iran and the West. Experts speculate that these projects could be resumed if Iran establishes good relations with the US. The construction of Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline is a major project that may be resumed if relations between Tehran and Washington improve. Initially India cautiously expressed its support for this project as it was faced with pressure from the US. However, by obtaining a waiver from the US, India has gradually established oil diplomacy with Iran. This is predominantly because India views Iran as an important route to Central Asia. As a result, it is likely that Rowhani's attempts to strengthen bilateral relations with US will be strongly monitored by India. Although Pakistan has also received sanction threats from the US, it has repeatedly tried to encourage the pipeline project. Since Pakistan is facing a power crisis, IPI pipeline is a saving grace for the country. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif intends to continue with the gas pipeline project. However, if this project is hindered any further, the US also stands the risk of losing control. Strained bilateral ties between the US and Iran have increased China's political clout in Central Asia. By improving relations with Iran, the West can once again reassert its political influence in the region.

It remains to be seen how Hassan Rowhani will react to the geopolitical challenges, which Iran will encounter with the arrival of a new government. If the new President does not adopt a flexible position towards the US and takes its foreign policy agenda in new directions, it could hinder development projects and stunt the political influence of the United States. ■

*Taha Kehar is a published poet and author who has previously worked for a media magazine. He is currently pursuing a degree in Law at the School of Oriental and African Studies.*



# New Directions

**What does Iran's new President, Hassan Rowhani mean for the country's foreign relations and regional influence?**

By Taha Kehar

# A Bleak Future

For centuries, the kingdom of Bhutan remained hidden in the heart of the Himalayas. This self-imposed isolation helped it in successfully preserving its ancestral Buddhist traditions.

By Kinzah Mujeeb



*Districts of Bhutan where Dzongkha is spoken as a native language*

Until a few years back, Bhutan successfully spared itself from social havoc by keeping its religion and culture intact. All this changed recently when Bhutan found itself struggling to maintain political stability. The landlocked country finds itself squeezed between two powerful neighbors, each offering a distinctive and spectacular flavor of multifaceted

religious and cultural hues. Bhutan is a multi-lingual society and, for a tiny country, it appears to have several spoken languages but it makes sense when one considers its geographic location and history. Despite being small, the torrential rivers and deep gorges have separated and isolated several villages and valleys, thus giving birth to several dialects.

There are two differing views regarding these spoken languages - 25 listed for Bhutan in the comprehensive catalogue of the world's languages whereas George Van Driem, a linguist at Berne University, lists 19. One of the key languages in this list, Dzongkha, spoken in the west of the country, is the official language of Bhutan and is an off-shoot of Tibetan, but it uses a

different script. It is commonly known as the language of the fort and became the national language only in 1971. Besides this, there are Sharchopkha and Nepali, spoken in the east and south, respectively. Although Dzongkha is largely spoken in Bhutan, English is the medium of instruction in schools. Meanwhile, the heavy influence of globalization is also visible through the prevalence of Hindi, which is not only understood but also widely spoken by most Bhutanese, thanks to the influence of Indian cinema.

It is obvious then language, culture and identity are inextricably linked together. It is generally believed that if you want to destroy a nation without the use of weapons, then you must destroy its language. Understanding that there are three domains of culture namely, literary heritage, spirituality and folklore, the Kingdom of Bhutan's Article 4 of its draft Constitution says that it is the 'state's responsibility to preserve, protect and promote the Bhutanese cultural heritage'.

Although the term Gross National Happiness was first coined by Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the fourth King of Bhutan, the idea behind this has prevailed since 1729. A legal code of 1729 states that "if the government cannot create happiness (*dekid*) for its people, there is no purpose for the government to exist." Since their government's focus revolved around the nation's happiness, language played a crucial role in bringing people together. However, since the advent of television in 1991, English has become popular in Bhutan. Since it is the medium of instruction in school, it is widely perceived as the language of opportunities, guaranteeing upward social mobility.

Furthermore, as English is used for communication in the mass media, there is evidence of consumerist values trickling down Bhutanese culture.

The Bhutanese people, experiencing a late interaction with the rest of the world, began enjoying the luxuries, equipment, ideas and fashion that they had deprived themselves of over the years. Due to imports at an accelerated pace, an increased rise in the consumption pattern was noticed. Now the locals possess numerous gadgets, equipment, accessories and luxury items quite like their counterparts in developed countries. A superficial observation of their extravagant lifestyle may mislead many into listing Bhutan among one of the developed countries of the world. In reality, however, the country is dependent on 40-50 per cent of foreign aid for survival.

To counter the influx of western values, newspapers such as *Kuensel* and *Tashi Delek* were introduced. According to Mindu Dorji, Editor of the

without many mistakes and that the standard of Dzongkha was far poorer than that of English." The complexity of grammar, spelling and strange concoctions of Dzongkha language has further promoted English in Bhutan, while making the national language appear static in its progress. He further added, "Today people are not sure of what concrete advantages they can avail from the knowledge of Dzongkha, so when there is a choice between the two, people naturally go for English."

Thus Dzongkha is losing its significance, while English continues to be used as a popular medium of communication. Consistent efforts need to be made to popularize Dzongkha. Since it is very different from English, the educational system must adopt a different methodology to teach Dzongkha.

**The national language is always the best means of communication for any particular country as it has the ability to reflect indigenous values and cultures. However, in light of recent events, Bhutan's national language appears to have a bleak future ahead.**

Kuensels Dzongkha edition, the government has adopted many innovative initiatives and activities to develop and promote Dzongkha and in that sense the language has progressed. However, soon not only private papers wanted Dzongkha out but the readership was also declining.

In fact, Lungtaen Gyatso, principal of the Institute of Language and Culture Studies (ILCS) in Semtokha, said, "despite studying Dzongkha for about 11 to 12 years in schools, majority of the students were unable to write

Reinforcing it in offices will also serve as an incentive for many students who believe that Dzongkha has no practical and professional value. The national language is always the best means of communication for any particular country as it has the ability to reflect indigenous values and cultures. However, in light of recent events, Bhutan's national language appears to have a bleak future ahead. ■

*Kinzah Mujeeb is pursuing a B.A in Media Science from SZABIST, Karachi.*



# A Natural Reserve

The Sinharaja Reserve covers large natural and modified forests. It lies in the south west of the island and is now a World Heritage Reserve, known for a wide variety of plant and animal life.

By Madiha Bilal Kapadia



**T**he Sinharaja Forest Reserve in Sri Lanka is located in the country's south-west lowland wet zone. It is Sri Lanka's last viable area of primary tropical rainforest. Originally declared a forest reserve in 1875 under the Waste Lands Ordinance and notified in the then Ceylon Government, the forest reserve was declared a World Heritage Site in 1988. The Sinharaja Forest Reserve is home to many endemic trees and wildlife, with more than 60 per cent of the trees in the reserve categorized as being rare. There is other unique wildlife in the reserve as well, including birds, mammals, butterflies, insects, reptiles and rare amphibians.

The links between the Sinharaja forest and the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka is rife with legends and lore. Both the forest and the people derive their name from the word 'Sinha' meaning lion and according to local legend, the race is the result of the union between a king's daughter and a mighty lion who lived in the forest. The Sinharaja forest, therefore, occupies a special position of importance for the people of Sri Lanka. Legend also claims that the forest was royal territory belonging to the ancient kings (*rajas*) of the country and in some early colonial records, the forest is referred to as the '*Rajasinghe* Forest.' Yet another legend claims that the forest was the last refuge of the lion, no longer found on the island.

At present, the Sinharaja Reserve covers an area of 8,800 hectares of nature and modified forests. The reserve lies in the south-west of the island and measures 21 kilometres in length. The Sinharaja rainforest is now a World Heritage Reserve and famous for a wide variety of plant and animal life that are endemic to Sri Lanka as well as a variety of shrubs and medicinal herbs. The Bata Na, which is found in the middle ranges of the forest, has unique flush, deep red and dropping leaves. Of Sri Lanka's 217 endemic wet lowland trees and woody climbers, 64 per cent have been recorded in the Sinharaja reserve, of which 16 are considered to be rare.

Almost 95 per cent of the country's endemic birds (about 19 species) are found here, including the rare red-faced malkoha, green-billed caucal, blue magpie and Sri Lankan spur fowl. Diversity among the reptiles and amphibians is remarkably high. The endemic green viper, endemic hump-nosed lizard and horned lizard are common here. Small tributaries and rivers of the forest support the fish such as striped Rasbora, walking catfish, Gal Pandiya (Doctor Fish) and endemic Comb Tail. Out of the 12 endemic mammal species of the country, eight can be found in the reserve. Giant squirrels, dusky-striped jungle squirrel, purple-faced

leaf monkey and the torque macaque can be frequently seen in the forest.

In 1840, the forest became British crown land and efforts were made towards its preservation. However, in 1971 loggers moved in and began selective logging. Logging roads and trails snaked into the forest and a woodchip mill was built. Following intense lobbying by conservationists, the government called a halt to all logging in 1977. Machinery was dismantled and removed, the roads gradually grew over and Sinharaja was saved. Much of the rest of Sri Lanka's rainforest stands on mountain ridges within a 20km radius of the forest.

The climate in the Sinharaja Forest Reserve is divided into seasons. These seasons are called the *Yala* monsoon and the *Maha* monsoon. The *Yala* monsoon occurs between May and June, while the *Maha* monsoon occurs between December and March. In a tropical climate, these are referred to as wet and dry seasons. Changes in climate include the disruption in rainfall and also rainfall patterns affecting crop cultivations, and this leads to a rise in temperatures affecting comfort levels. Forest cover needs to be maintained to ameliorate the effects of climate change. With forests getting confined to smaller areas, a cascade of harmful events can occur if the deforestation continues. Deforestation has also led to other environmental issues such as flooding, landslides and soil erosion. Poor natural resource management and land use patterns has resulted in the marginalization of lands, loss of productivity and depletion of non-renewable resources.

Deforestation is one of the most serious environmental issues impacting the Sinharaja reserve. Sri Lanka, according to the IUCN has the highest deforestation and wildlife habitat loss rate in southern Asia. The major cause of this degradation is the result of population pressure, inappropriate land use and lack of effective management. Sri Lanka ranks 52nd in the world

for population density and most of the communities surrounding the rainforest are engaged in monoculture tea, rubber and coconut plantations leading to encroachments and illegal resource extraction.

Many steps have been taken by the government to help conserve the Sinharaja Forest reserve. Rainforest Rescue International (RRI) is a non-profit organization based in Galle, Sri Lanka, that works to protect vulnerable environments through eco system restoration, development of sustainable livelihoods, education, research, and advocacy. RRI is helping to achieve the conservation by creating a rainforest corridor between the two largest remaining rainforests in Sri Lanka, the Sinharaja and the Kanneliya forest. This linkage will help stop extinction by creating more habitats, maintain migratory pathways, and encourage breeding to help maintain viable populations. Besides this, RRI is supporting purchase of rainforest and buffer zone lands at risk of clearing for agriculture, establishing nurseries to supply seedlings for restoration projects, educating children in environmental matters in schools and training farmers in organic agriculture to assist them in developing sustainable livelihoods thereby removing pressure on the rainforest.

Sri Lanka has, within its folds, an abundance of endemic species which have taken many of years to evolve; and for this reason, the same leverage that is given to protecting cultural heritage should be given to protecting the country's natural heritage. There are only a very few such forests left in Asia, and if encroachment on them were to continue, it would affect water sources. This can lead to loss of water, which, in turn, can impact agricultural production and shake the very foundations of the economy. **S**

*Madiha Bilal Kapadia holds an MBA in Marketing from IoBM and freelances for various publications.*



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# Spoils

What does cultural heritage truly mean unless confronted with loss of identity. A case in point is Afghanistan, which has been in a state of war for a very long time now.

By Zufah Ansari

**A**s much as it is indefinable, cultural DNA is what shapes a nation's identity. Cultural heritage often mirrors the history and the life of the community manifesting itself in the form of traditional practices, norms, and customs. It is always in a state of evolution and is often expressed through architecture, language, arts, religious sites, and monuments.

The role of cultural heritage lies in

the rhythm of life it sets for the present community alongside the preservation of what once was. Safeguarding heritage ensures accord and provides a sense of national identity for the people by bridging the gap between what is and what was.

Barring the current situation in the country, Afghanistan has a rich history – there are numerous ancient sites all over the country, each telling stories

from the past and connecting them to the present. In fact, the list of historic gems that Afghanistan holds is endless, as proven by the statistics of the 1980s, which showed that the country had about 2,800 archaeological and historical sites.

One such site is the ancient city of Herat. Holding a distinct place in history of Afghanistan, it has the Citadel of Heart - built by Alexander the Great

# of War

- and the tomb of Khwaja Abdullah Ansari that draws hordes of pilgrims.

Also, with its intricate *Kufic* and *Naskhi* calligraphy, the Minaret of Jam comes under the ambit of one of the most popular historic monuments. It is a reflection of the earlier Islamic influences that has shaped the Afghanistan of today.

Similarly, Bala Hissar is part of the league of ancient fortresses that saw its

all possible remnants of heritage that challenged their version of Islam. Under attack were places that bore evidence of Buddhism - like the Folangi valley and Kakrak - which were bombed and hundreds of statues lodged at the Kabul Museums were razed to the ground, inflicting a permanent cultural wound on the Afghani heritage.

The Buddhist pillar of the first century AD known as the Minaret of

forts from the Islamic era that are a reflection of various cultural and religious influences in the region.

Destroyed by the Taliban in 2001, Bamiyan owes its popularity to the presence of giant statues of Sakyamuni Buddha, with the smallest measuring up to 5.5 m and the largest standing tall at 55m. Other important sites, include the *Shahr-i-Zohak* (Red City), a remarkable set of ruins that was once a fortress protecting the entrance to Bamiyan in the 12th and the 13th century.

The destruction of the fort dates back to 1221 AD. It was attacked by Genghis Khan's grandson who was killed in the expedition and the fort was later confronted by Genghis Khan himself to avenge the death of his grandson, resulting in the complete destruction of the city.

Instances of sites becoming collateral damage to power conflicts have been reported in Afghanistan due to wars, but the demolition of the Bamiyan statues was an instance termed by the international community as an "archaeological massacre". The global sentiments were the prime reason that led UNESCO to declare the valley a world heritage site once the Taliban were overthrown in 2003.

Apart from the restoration of the statues, UNESCO is also looking at the construction of the Museum for Peace at Bamiyan to promote the heritage of Afghanistan and re-establishing ancient Islamic site of *Shahr-i-Gholghola* (the City of silence).

Besides UNESCO, archaeological foundations of different countries are also facilitating the rehabilitation of heritage sites independently to ensure that Afghanistan is able to recover its vital signs of cultural dignity lost amidst the wars. ■

*Zufah Ansari is an undergraduate marketing student with interest in culture and society.*

Apart from the restoration of the statues, UNESCO is also looking at the construction of the Museum for Peace at Bamiyan to promote the heritage of Afghanistan and re-establishing ancient Islamic site of *Shahr-i-Gholghola* (the City of silence).

fair share of sword and blood in the 19th century. Subsequent to the bloodshed, it suffered the wrath of the uprising organized by the Afghanistan Liberation Organization in 1979 against the pro-Russian regime.

Then there is the city of Balkh that played an important role in promoting Persian language and literature. It is home to the mausoleum of Khwaja Parsa from the Ghori period. Excavation of the area post-2003 also revealed remains from Achaemenids, which once again influenced the country in more ways than one.

It is sad that a country that has spent most of its existence in a state of war had no choice but to give in to the vandalization of its cultural heritage that it was subjected to. The worst was when the Taliban stripped off the country's illustrious ethos by imposing a radical belief system under the pretense of Islamic *sharia*, bringing down

Chakari was diminished as well. Also, forced out of existence by the militants, was the great Buddhist temple of *Tepe Shatur-e-Hadda*, a magnum opus of Gandharan art embellished with moldings that were one of their kind.

With two decades of war, the damage to Afghanistan's cultural heritage is irrevocable and cannot be compensated. But after the fall of the Taliban, a new sun has arisen on the horizons of the country that may well become a moderate Islamic state, thus allowing possibilities of restoration and rehabilitation.

Under the renewed fervour to restore the heritage of Afghanistan, UNESCO has proposed rehabilitation initiatives in different part of the country. Recent developments include UNESCO partnering with the government of Italy to refurbish Bamiyan, the city capital of the Bamiyan province. The city is the site of many Buddhist monasteries and

# Matrimony Online

The online matrimonial service is quicker and more economical.  
Is it dependable as well?

By Ayesha Malik

Matrimonial practices in Pakistan as well as in all of South Asia clearly make up a large part of the region's culture. According to Islamic tradition, "when a

man marries, he has fulfilled half of the *deen*, so let him fear Allah regarding the remaining half" (*At-Tirmidhi Hadith 3096*). In Islam, marriage holds a strong significance and according to

the Holy Quran, equates to the fulfillment of half of one's religion.

While there are specific guidelines regarding marriage, the process of choosing a partner is diverse and ap-

proached individually. The concept of arranged marriage is one that is practiced the most in Pakistan and India as well countries such as Bangladesh and Nepal. Most parents try and find the best match for their child by word of mouth, be it through their own relations or friends of friends.

Till recently matrimonial services were only approached through offices and professional organizations, most of which were not large scale and offered services to a select clientele through word of mouth advertising. As the demand grows however, a lot of these matrimonial service providers have moved their businesses towards online websites. This process is much less time-consuming, offers easier access for families and is less expensive.

With the expansion of e-commerce in Pakistan, many businesses have utilized the potential of websites and are catering to clients through online businesses. With respect to Pakistanis, there are some concerns regarding the reach of an online service that only a third of the population can access. Social institutions such as marriage, whether arranged or otherwise, are still thought of as a process predominantly handled by the males of a family. However, the dynamic revolving around the process is rapidly changing thanks to the popularity of social media.

Since there are so many divisions of cast, family, religion and so on, online matrimony websites have made the process of choosing a bride or groom easier through categorizing and narrowing down one's search online. One must only register on an online matrimony website and list down their preferences and those matching them will be displayed to them. While this is a concept that is remarkably unabashed, it may also be useful as it saves time and effort as well as the social junctions one must cross to find

a suitable partner.

In traditional Islamic law, it is generally considered that the bond of marriage be formed through the union of two families, but due to the rising usage of matrimonial websites, this is a concept that challenges contemporary Muslim practices. As there is greater access to technology, people can focus on what their requirements are without having to go through the time-consuming social practices of finding the best match. However, many disagree with the impersonal touch of matrimonial websites.

There are also concerns over the legitimacy of the social profiles, as it is much easier to give out fake information. Marriages in Pakistan are not prone to "westernization", not even the pre-planning processes, thus some traditionalists believe online matrimonial practices tread on the older practices. The concepts of modernity and globalization do not necessarily mix with the traditional marriage proposals, but there is a decided impact of online matrimonial websites on current trends.

While there is a rise in the social media usage in Pakistan, it must be realized that only close to 20 million users are considered to be online. Out of this, even a smaller percentage is registered at matrimonial websites and while most of these websites are legitimate and easy to access, often the users must sift through the registered users to come across suitable match themselves. Although there have been a number of successful matches made through online matrimonial websites, there is a considerable number of fake profiles set up on the websites as well, which causes many to doubt the legitimacy of the entries. It is understandable why many would be mindful of applying to these websites and creating their own profiles, given that this is a somewhat new concept in Pakistan. Furthermore, there are a lot of socio-economic

differences among families that apply for "rishtas" online and many find the whole process demeaning.

However, matrimonial services are somewhat similar to the process of a family physically going to a prospective match's house. It is just that some families prefer to rely on the services of a matrimonial website as they consider both the traditionalist and modernistic view to be similar. Besides, given the fast paced lives that the youth lead, it is quite understandable why families would prefer to look for *rishtas* online. Apart from this, there is a certain resistance being observed between the first-generation traditionalists and the second and third generation, which, again, has to do with the change in the dynamics of religious identities.

The principles, ideas and characteristics that used to be incorporated into the social structure of marriage and proposals are shifting to a much more upfront and less time-consuming process. The fact that it has become quite an impersonal process cannot be ignored however, but it is for these second and third generation individuals that matrimonial websites are most satisfactory.

There are several other South Asian nations that choose to look for matches online, the most significant being India. Indian websites such as matrimony.com are the equivalent of Pakistan's pakistanim matrimony.com, boast a high success rate in marriages made through them, and are largely popular among the young and old. As a website gains popularity and builds a stronger online presence, its legitimacy is no longer questioned and the success rate is thus bound to increase. **S**

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

**D**uring the last two decades, the developed world has seen a revolution in information and communication technologies (ICT). Countries like the United States were quick to leverage their technological advances in ICT to realize phenomenal economic growth. This was made possible due to consistent institutional commitment that drove R&D spending in ICT. On the other hand,

in most of the developing world, numerous examples of countries that missed out on such opportunities can be found. These are nations that are severely lagging behind in technological advances in ICT, thus hindering economic growth and Bangladesh is no exception.

The country's IT sector stands at \$350 million out of a \$100 billion GDP, which makes its total contribu-

tion to the economy less than a single per cent (0.35 per cent to be exact). In the latest E-Government Readiness Survey 2008, conducted by the UN, Bangladesh held the 142nd spot among 192 countries. Although an improvement from its 162nd rank in 2005, it does not reflect the aspirations of a nation that seeks to create a "Digital Bangladesh" in less than a decade.

Bangladesh has made some progress in recent years though. Around 20 years back, the IT industry was nothing more than a few vendors importing and selling hardware products locally. Today, Bangladesh boasts at least 320 officially registered software and IT services companies. Still, a lot needs to be done in order to transform it into an industry that attracts foreign investment. The government has formulated policy documents and ensured concrete steps for the development of the IT sector in the framework of overall national development, but many of these commitments have failed to materialize in the face of numerous political barriers.

However, despite all this, a few areas of the IT sector have been able to perform well. These include VoIP software, biometric software solutions and IT freelancing. Some prominent Bangladeshi IT companies include Reeve Systems, which is among the top ranked VoIP software solutions companies and Tiger IT which is ranked 3rd globally for its biometric software. Recently, US-based IT powerhouse Accenture purchased a 51 per cent stake in a local Bangladesh-based IT services provider named GPIT. The government has been aggressively pursuing ICT policy making in recent years and states the development of Information and Communication Technology infrastructure as one of its top priorities.

In order to create a competitive marketplace for technological investments, the government is working to-



# Quest for IT

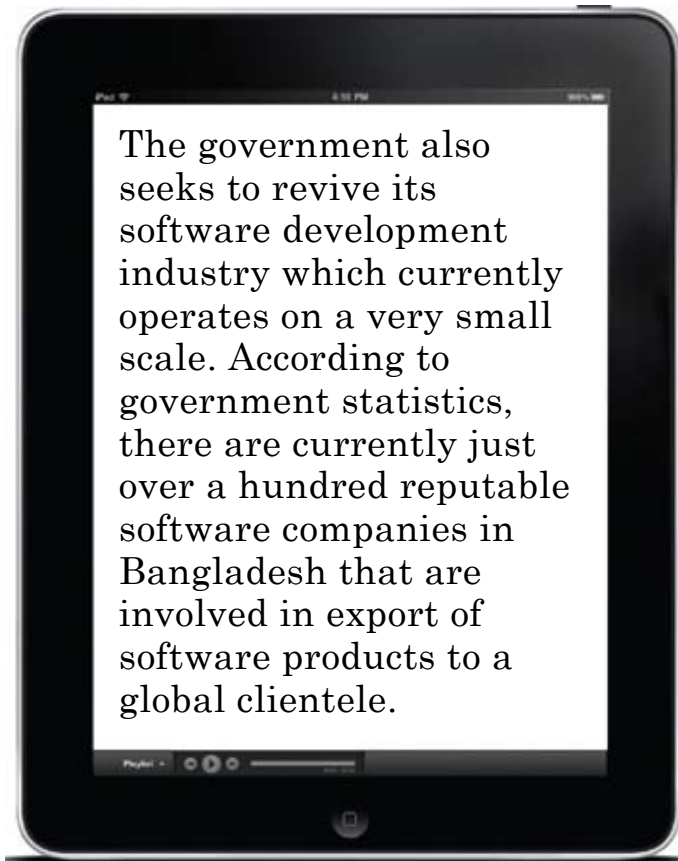
**The IT sector in Bangladesh is up and running but there are many miles to go before it becomes competitive in the region and people can take true advantage of the benefits it has in store.**

By Haseeb Ahsan

wards developing an effective legal framework that ensures protection of intellectual property. It is also looking to make major updates to its Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Law in this regard. In addition, the government seeks to enforce tough e-commerce laws that inspire confidence in consumers and promotes electronic trade.

Another area of active interest to the government is that of e-governance which will develop the capability to conduct all necessary public business online. Target public departments in this context include human services, justice and public safety, revenue, education, transport and motor vehicles and postal services. The government plans to provide each of the aforementioned ministries with state-of-the-art IT facilities, including necessary hardware, broadband internet connectivity and trained professionals capable of maintaining efficient operation of the system. Compared to other sectors, telecommunication in Bangladesh has been performing relatively well. The telecom network now includes 17 major operators with connectivity across the country. Bangladesh now has fiber-optic links in all major cities thanks to the Bangladesh Submarine Cable Company Limited (BSCCL) that was established in July 2008.

The government also seeks to revive its software development indus-



try, which currently operates on a very small scale. According to government statistics, there are currently just over a hundred reputable software companies in Bangladesh that are involved in export of software products to a global clientele. The government aims for substantial growth in the software industry and seeks to enter joint ventures with foreign software companies. The Bangladesh Export Promotion Bureau recently set up a Business Promotion Office in California's Silicon Valley. Government regulations have also been relaxed in recent years to stir growth in the technology industry. This includes complete exemption from customs duties and value added taxes (VAT) on certain hardware and software products.

In the long run, the stated goal of the Bangladesh ICT Ministry is to take concrete steps in order to attract foreign investment. A few notable projects include the 232 acres Kaliakoir

Hi-Tech Park, Jessore Software Technology Park (JSTP) - with an estimated investment of BDT 480 million - and Bangladesh Business Innovation and Incubation Center (BIIC) in Dhaka to encourage small IT business and hi-tech startups.

Despite government pledges in the past, most of the technology initiatives in Bangladesh have failed due to an ineffective implementation strategy, lack of regulation and rampant corruption in government

institutions. International technology transfer has been a major hindrance to the development of a vibrant IT industry, which operates mostly in isolation and lacks access to international technological shelves. Experience in other Asian countries (most notably Korea and Malaysia) has shown that political commitment, state patronization and pragmatic policy-making is vital to technological attainment. Unfortunately, Bangladesh lacks in all three areas. Lack of effective planning has led to the collapse of numerous projects in the past that looked promising on paper. A thorough examination of Bangladesh's technology needs and capacity assessment is required in order to propose practical projects suitable for the local technological climate. ■

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

## AMAZON LAUNCHES INDIA MARKETPLACE

On June 6, 2013, Amazon launched its newest online marketplace in India. The marketplace provides Indian consumers with a shopping destination to purchase products from third-party sellers. India represents Amazon's tenth marketplace launch. How has the program grown over time, and what does it mean for consumers and sellers?

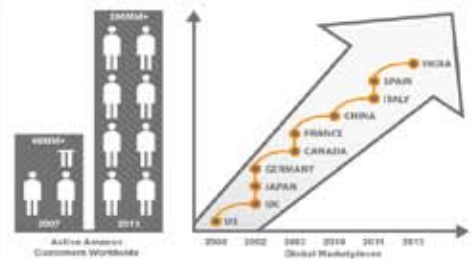
### Amazon's Online Marketplaces Today

Amazon has online marketplaces in ten countries, enabling third-party sellers to reach buying customers locally as well as globally.



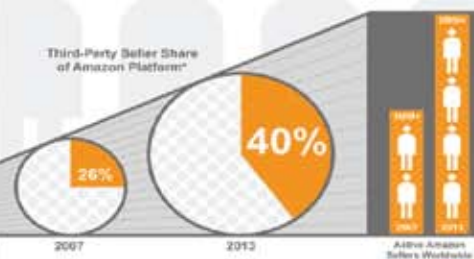
### Marketplace Expansion & Opportunity

Third-Party Sellers can result in ever-growing customer base.



### Third-Party Seller Growth

Third-party sellers make up an increasingly large part of Amazon's total paid sales.



### How Sellers Work with Amazon

The Amazon Marketplace enables third-party sellers to list their products for sale to customers, locally and globally. Sellers have access to a suite of services, including Selling on Amazon and Fulfillment by Amazon (FBA).



### How Fulfillment by Amazon Works

FBA helps third-party sellers grow by giving them access to Amazon's worldwide fulfillment network and logistics, advanced customer service, and trusted shipping options.



# Making Waves

Amazon is the world's largest online retailer. India, with its strong middle class young population, is watching the launch of an online marketplace with interest.

By Meena Ahmed

Shopping for genuine products is what Amazon.com is all about. The official Amazon logo with an arrow moving from A to Z indicates two things: first, it offers just about everything under the sun and second, it represents the smile of satisfaction once you've purchased something from the site.

Being a giant of the online retail world, Amazon has lately launched its operations in India. The motto 'shopping with confidence' is also applicable to Amazon.in but it does not have a retail presence yet. Since Amazon India is still in its initial stages, it does not deliver internationally. However, orders within India are very well facilitated.

"As a company, we tend to think big and encourage the spirit of innovation, invention and ownership amongst our teams. And given the extremely dynamic nature of our businesses, we value bias for action and focus on delivering quality results in a timely fashion," says

J. Valliyur, Director Amazon.in.

The site offers a huge range of local and international books for all age groups. In addition to that, it has an extensive range offered under categories such as kindle, movies and TV, mobiles and accessories, cameras and photography, and portable media players. However, at this stage, Amazon.in does not offer the complete range that Amazon.com provides to its customers, for example, clothing, shoes, jewellery, home, garden tools and toys.

Rahul Badami, an author by profession, is an Amazon.com customer from India, who shops regularly from this e-commerce retail giant. "I purchase around three to four e-books in a month from Amazon.com. Amazon India has just released and I am yet to experience their offerings," he explains.

Amazon is the world's largest online retailer, and, therefore, India - which has a strong middle class young population - is watching the launch of its online market-

place with interest which is 10th in the world. The trend is in favour of India as Amazon.in eliminated the middlemen - a common trait in South Asia - and encourages third-party sellers listing and selling their products directly to customers. "Amazon's catalogue of seven million local and imported books and 12,000 movies and television shows will be a great boost for the Indian market. Amazon.in has signed up 100 vendors across India and set up a 150,000 sq. ft fulfillment centre in Mumbai to service online orders. This means more jobs for Indians!" Shantanu Guha Ray, India Editor for Central European News (CEN), explains.

The Amazon development centers in India are growing manifold because of the rich talent pool in India. Its smooth organizational structure, opportunities to work on solving complex technological and business problems makes Amazon a stimulating and motivating place to work at.

"It is a private enterprise and its profits are its own. Hence we can't forecast on the benefits. Your guess is as good as mine," says Jagdeep Gupta, Executive Director Planning & Operations, Center for Science and Environment (CSE), one of the many book publishers on Amazon.com from India.

Amazon's operations have just begun in India and CSE books are also being sold through them. "CSE has no special relationship with them and they are another distributor for us like Flipkart and others," adds Gupta.

Flipkart is an Indian e-commerce company headquartered in Bangalore. Initially, in 2007, Flipkart focused on books, but later

expanded to electronic goods and some other products. The Indian economy is growing as companies are venturing out and buying businesses across the world. Having better e-commerce will help Indians access global products, while also providing local products to a global base of buyers in an instant.

Indian consumers will choose from a market that is truly global. Now, Indian consumers will be a part of Amazon's 200 million plus customers across nine marketplaces globally including Canada, Japan, China and the UK.

To improve the quality and have the best Amazon India team, the existing team has started advertising on its site about forming an army of traveling Code Ninjas after passing a Code Ninja challenge. "Our technical teams tackle some of the toughest and most interesting challenges available on the Internet today. If you fancy yourself a code warrior, think about flexing those ninja coding skills with Amazon. Take the Code Ninja time challenge. If your code passes the test, you will be contacted for a telephone interview. If your code is too similar to another applicant, you will both be disqualified, so please don't share or post your answers online," is what the Amazon site claims.

Arvind, an online shopper, finds it exciting to shop from Amazon.in, appreciating its services and products. He says he was thrilled to receive his purchase the very next day after placing the order.

About his Kindle shopping, he writes on Amazon.in: "The packaging is superb and just genius. The box itself has a nice amusing sticker which says 'Frustration

Free Packaging Guaranteed'. You just tear along one side of the box and it neatly opens up to show the product itself. No unnecessary gimmicks. Overall, this is a brilliant piece of hardware. And coupled with Amazon's great selection of books and the whole convenience factor, this is a must buy for anyone who loves reading books."

Arvind being an ardent buyer of Amazon.in would like to see newspapers being launched in India on Kindle. "Can you imagine how convenient that would be? Wake up in the morning to have your favourite paper ready to be read!" he adds.

The Indian market, especially the electronic retailing market has 13 million people who spent 800 million dollars in 2012. India's Internet penetration stands at about eight per cent with 137 million users, of which roughly 20 million are shoppers including the online travel agency market which was China's online market in 2005. China now has 538 million Internet users and 227 million online shoppers. India is trying hard to catch up. So in this case, Amazon is trying tough luck to expand its reach to India.

Subsequently, while predicting if Amazon India is trying to prove its economic mettle over the Internet Ray predicts, "It is too early to say that as this is an Amazon venture in India, not an Indian venture in the US." ■

*Meena Ahmed is a trained journalist who has worked with The News International and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). She is currently working as Group Communications Manager for FNCK Ventures.*



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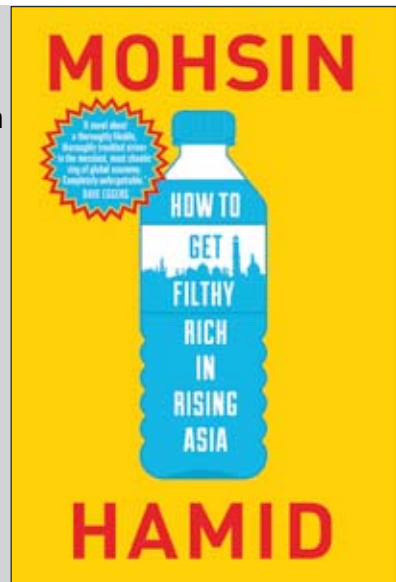
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# Shortcut to Success

**Title:** How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia  
**Author:** Mohsin Hamid  
**Publisher:** Riverhead Books (March 2013)  
**Pages:** 228, Hardback  
**Price:** PKR 2859  
**ISBN:** 9781594487293

*Reviewed By Atiya Abbas*



Five years after *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was published, Mohsin Hamid returns with his latest offering, 'How to get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia,' a funny title that had many young hopefuls asking: "So is it like a guide that tells you how to get filthy rich?"

Hamid is an author that many have a love-hate relationship with. As Tazeen Javed, who blogs at *A Reluctant Mind*, writes, "I found his first book rather ordinary. Hamid was descriptive in *Moth Smoke* and his protagonist was odious, obsessive and had no redeeming qualities. He became introspective in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*; the tone was improved greatly and the monologue in which the novella was written dominated the reader in such a way that it required great effort to see beyond the protagonist's point of view. With 'How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia' Hamid presented his readers with prose that is beautiful, lyrical and profound."

The protagonist is a young man whose rise and fall in Asia is documented through these steps. He could be you or me; indeed this novel is everyone's story about survival, be it in the village or city, in business, in love

or in life.

Hamid's writing is entirely in second person, a device that is reminiscent of the narrator, Changez, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Through this no-name Everyman, Hamid casts a camera's eye in the small and the large, from the "meaty gully with the slender trickle of water" to "the era of cities, bound by its airport and fibre-optic cables to every great metropolis." The protagonist starts a bottling water business, built upon a foundation of fraud and lies, much like every other business in the metropolis. Despite his success, the Everyman yearns for the pretty girl he met when he was a teenager and even though he marries another woman, has a son from her and eventually divorces her, he follows the pretty girl's career from modelling to cooking show host to the owner of a furniture boutique. The longing for a lost love is extremely poignant as marriages of convenience are rampant in this unnamed city where cast, creed and status come into play while choosing a life partner.

Just like the book is structured in twelve steps while trying to make sense of the chaos of story-telling and the relationship between the writer

and reader; Hamid's writing is structured in complex sentences and paragraph-length run-ons. This structured chaos is appealing but could have used tighter editing as the narrative suffers from clunky long sentences that have to be read twice to understand them.

The book is self-aware about its status as a 'guide' and tells the reader that this "self-help" tome might just provide the answers one is looking for. It mocks itself as a book and yet is sensitive about its characters and the reader's emotions.

Hamid's prose is beautiful and takes the reader on a journey from the putrid depths to the skyscrapers of the city. The author charts his characters' journeys with sensitivity and love. It makes the reader realize that here we are in this gigantic city, trying to survive amidst pain, destruction and loneliness. We continue to get up in the morning and try to make each day meaningful.

One of my favourite chapters was "Avoid idealists." As our no-name protagonist enters university, he befriends people from the student wing of a political party on whom he has to rely on to keep his room in the hos-

tel. "What's true of self-help books is equally and inevitably, true of people. Just as self-help books spouting idealism are best avoided, people doing so should be given wide berths too. These idealists tend to congregate around universities. There they find an amenable environment of young, impressionable, malcontented and ambitious individuals, individuals who, were they legends of yore instead of still-pimply and poor-personal-hygiene sporting men and women in contemporary Asia, would be dashing off to slay dragons and triumph over genies, individuals, in other words, who give corporeal form to the term sucker," writes Hamid.

As someone who went to a public university, all of the above rings true. University was a space that cultivated idealists, looking for young, energetic youth who are eager to believe in anything and will jump on any bandwag-

on to feel part of a cause. And then they turn into twisted, deformed versions of themselves because joining a political party did not really turn out as they had planned. It is indeed a sad sight, this loss of youth for ideals not worth believing in.

Perhaps the best thing that Hamid does is not romanticize Karachi or Lahore like he has done in his previous books – a common tendency among most Pakistani English authors. Instead he talks about the city as a mythological space "which intrudes in the form of power and gas outages, traffic noises and airborne particulates that cause you to wake wheezing in your bed. It can be glimpsed around curtains and through iron grilles. Television and radio also bring in some news of it, usually frightening, but then that has always been the case." We are a part of the city and the city encroaches upon our dreams in our attempts to make

them a reality.

With *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, Hamid has found a perfect balance of an engaging narrative and characters that one can genuinely care for. Throughout the book, readers will find themselves drawing parallels with the characters' real life counterparts. That is the genius of this work, that though the characters are unnamed you will find someone who you can relate to. The second-person narrative blurs the lines between the writer and reader, and there are times when you feel that the book and you are simply in conversation. For achieving such a momentary illusion, Hamid deserves an accolade. *How to get Filthy Rich* is definitely one of the better books to have come out in 2013. **S**

*Atiya Abbas freelances for various publications and writes extensively on effects of mass media.*

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# Roller Coaster Ride

By Anees Jillani

The relations between India and Pakistan are virtually like a ride on a roller coaster: up and down. They were up when PM Vajpayee took a bus trip to Lahore and down when General Musharraf decided to intrude into Kargil. They were again up when President Musharraf met PM Vajpayee in Agra and they were down when the summit failed. They were again up when PM Vajpayee met President Musharraf while attending the SAARC summit in Islamabad which subsequently led to a comprehensive composite dialogue but have been more or less down since the crisis erupted in Pakistan over the removal of the Chief Justice which led to the eventual downfall of Musharraf, followed by the Mumbai attacks. They appear to be on the upswing yet again after Nawaz Sharif's coming to power and there is talk of India again agreeing to a composite dialogue to discuss all the issues including Kashmir.

The 2008 Mumbai attacks actually changed the dynamics of whatever was happening in the context of Indo-Pak relations as otherwise the dialogue following the January 2004 Musharraf-Vajpayee meeting would have eventually led to a few positive breakthroughs.

The 12 coordinated shooting and bombing attacks in Bombay by members of *Lashkar e Taiba* began on November 26 and lasted until November 29, killing 166 people and wounding at least 308. Among the dead were 18 foreigners, including six Americans. At least 20 members of the security forces died. And nine attackers were killed. The Indian authorities claimed that Ajmal Kasab, the only attacker who was captured alive, later confessed during interrogation that the attacks were conducted with the support of the ISI.

The ten young men armed with rifles and grenades terrorized Bombay, now Mumbai: a city of 18 million, for four days, and turned the city's prime sites into battlefields until the security forces ended one of the deadliest attacks in India's history.

The then Pakistani rulers acted clumsily in handling the crisis and misread the international mood against terrorism. PM Gilani, soon after the attack, promised his Indian

counterpart that his country would send the ISI Director General to India. The PM House was quick to even issue a press release in this regard. However, the rulers failed to realize that the real power continued to vest in GHQ. The Indian Government had officially not even reacted to this before Pakistan Premier's Office retracted its statement about the ISI, apparently after the military authorities expressed their inability to comply with his understanding with the Indian Premier.

The Indian media is generally hawkish when it comes to Pakistan; and was even more belligerent after the Mumbai carnage. It is quite free as far as domestic relations are concerned but for some reason toes the Ministry of External Affairs' line when it comes to foreign affairs, particularly with respect to Indo-Pak relations.

As a result, the temperature arose tremendously and the relations were at an all time low. The PPP Government, instigated by its Interior Minister, Rehman Malik, kept making one promise after another to the Indians about convicting the guilty for their involvement in the Mumbai blasts but nothing concrete has so far come out, despite a passage of almost five years.

It is a sad situation and reflects quite badly on Pakistan's intentions to fight the menace of terrorism, particularly that which threatens the neighboring countries. Cases are pending in the Anti Terrorism Court in Rawalpindi and, like everybody else accused of a crime, the incarcerated can be assumed to be innocent until proven guilty. The question, however, is that what is taking the judicial process to come to a conclusion, especially when the Anti Terrorism Courts are fast-track courts and are statutorily bound to decide a case within a short time. The sooner this matter is concluded the better it will be for the state of Indo-Pak relations. ■

*Anees Jillani is an advocate of the Supreme Court of Pakistan 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.*



"All the great things are simple,  
and many can be expressed in  
a single word: freedom, justice,  
honor, duty, mercy, hope."

—Sir Winston Churchill

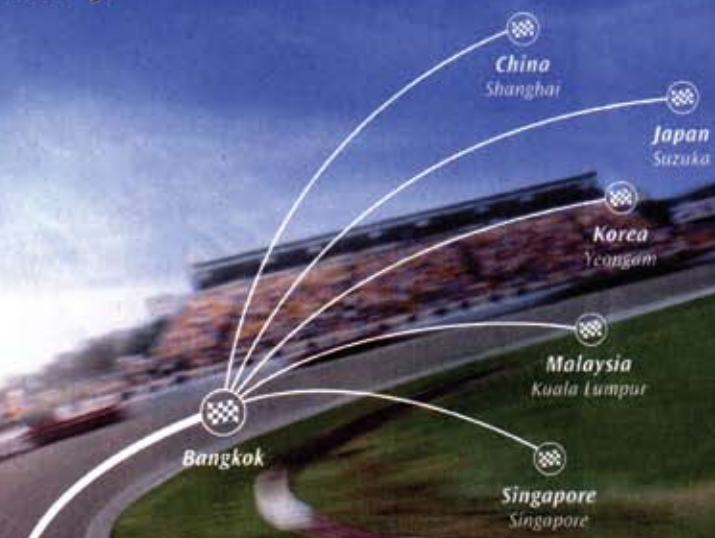
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