

SPECIAL FEATURE
Sri Lanka - The New Trade Portal

December 2013

SOUTHASIA

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INSIDE:

PAKISTAN

Dynasties and Democracy

INDIA

When Lady Luck Leaves

AFGHANISTAN

The Day After

SRI LANKA

Showdown or Climbup?

Back to the Future

After a free fall in 2009, the UAE economy is bouncing back, with Dubai and Abu Dhabi – the real engines of growth – leading the way back to the future.



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Pakistan State Oil

A large, vertical key cutout is the central visual element on the left side of the advertisement. The key is made of a light-colored material, possibly wood or cardboard. Inside the key's shaft, there are several silhouettes of different modes of transport and industrial structures: a power plant with cooling towers, an airplane, a steam locomotive, a cargo ship, a tractor, and a truck. The background is a dark, textured brown.

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Technology Exhibition and Conference
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Pak-China Friendship Centre, Islamabad
10th International Safety & Security Exhibition
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2014, Karachi Expo Centre
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Bombs and Boots

A string of developments has taken place within a span of a few weeks which would have a lasting impact on the way things pan out in the region in the coming times. It started with the killing of the TTP leader Hakimullah Mehsud through a U.S. drone attack which brought to an end a life of brutal bombings and killings across Pakistan. Hakimullah had taken control of the Pakistani Taliban after the death of Baitullah Mehsud, who was eliminated by a U.S. missile back in 2009. Hakimullah took the mission further by unleashing a greater reign of terror over the past four years. In the last days of his life, though, he seemed open to peace talks with the Pakistan government, provided the latter acceded to his preconditions such as withdrawing troops from the entire tribal area and imposing Shariah law in the country.

Hakimullah Mehsud's killing certainly created a major setback for possible Pakistan-TTP talks. His successor, Mullah Fazlullah was supposed to pick up the baton from here but he has proved to be an even tougher customer. While the Pakistan government has been making overtures to set up a fresh schedule for peace talks, the Mullah has outrightly rejected the offer and is, instead, bent upon avenging Hakimullah's killing as well as perpetrating fresh violence, more specifically, against the Pakistani military and government personnel and installations.

In the interest of peace, it is important for the government to talk to the TTP, also referred to as the Pakistani Taliban. This is an umbrella organization of various militant groups based in Pakistan's FATA belt. Most Pakistani Taliban groups operate under the TTP while their current leader, Mullah Fazlullah has always demonstrated his anti-Pakistani feelings.

There are a number of other factors too that could negatively or positively impact Pakistan's situation vis-à-vis. peace talks with the TTP. For instance, the standpoint of the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI), led by Imran Khan, which is supposed to have a soft corner for the TTP, must be considered. This party was earlier advising the Pakistan government to allow TTP to open an office in Pakistan, which would have, in effect, meant that the government was according them official recognition. Following the killing of Hakimullah Mehsud, the PTI, whose government also rules the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, wants NATO and U.S. supplies stopped from passing through KP.

It is also important for the civilian government to take the armed forces into the loop and devise a collaborative approach. It must not be forgotten that it is the army that has actually taken forward the campaign against the TTP and has scored continuous successes. It is for this reason that they are the foremost target for the militants. They have wrested back many of the areas 'conquered' by the TTP, such as Swat, and have not allowed other parts of Pakistani territory to come under TTP control.

The proceedings of the Afghan Loya Jirga (a grand assembly of elders) which was held in Kabul recently, could also have long-term implications for the people of this region. The Loya Jirga sponsored a security deal with the U.S., under which thousands of U.S. troops would remain in Afghanistan once combat operations ended in 2014. This means that the huge American military presence currently in Afghanistan would not be subjected to the 'zero option'. While other NATO forces would leave the country, a fair-sized U.S. presence will continue to stay in the country for the next 10 years at least. This also needs to be seen in the context of the deal that the U.S. has cut with Iran recently. Under this agreement, the U.S. will release over \$4 billion in Iranian oil sales revenue from frozen accounts and suspend restrictions on Iran's trade in gold, petrochemicals and car and plane parts. In return, Iran would restrict its various nuclear activities and accept more intrusive inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Since the region will not see the backs of all U.S. soldiers in 2014 and the TTP is not willing to smoke the peace pipe with Pakistan, there is a need to redraw the strategic map in light of the new realities and prepare for a new onslaught – both from Taliban bombs and American boots.



Syed Jawaid Iqbal

Not that useless

The cover stories in your November 2013 issue mainly criticized the Commonwealth. The writers held the view that the organization is not doing much in terms of economic and trade relations among the member countries. This may not be entirely



true. A look at the past performance of the Commonwealth and the projects it has undertaken are a testament to the fact that it has delivered on a number of goals and has done some remarkable work in the fields of good governance, accountability and youth empowerment. Most of this work has been done in the African region and in poor countries. In Botswana, for example, a Commonwealth Africa Anti-Corruption Centre (CAACC) has been established. According to the Commonwealth website, "This is a flagship project that will provide a visible and tangible demonstration of the CW Secretariat's commitment to support its members' anti-corruption efforts."

The organization has done substantial work in the field of women empowerment in African countries. The Gender Section of the Commonwealth Secretariat has produced Women's Land Rights Handbooks for the women of Cameroon, Kenya,

Nigeria and Sierra Leone. These handbooks focus on judicial and administrative processes by which women may acquire and realize their land rights. Similarly, the Commonwealth Youth Forum plays a significant role in inculcating a sense of responsibility in the youth of Commonwealth countries. These are but some achievements of the organization. It can be argued that many of the projects and goals set by the organization are intangible, but their success in the long run can't be ruled out.

Manish Sharma
Lalitpur, Nepal

The great divide

In his interview to SouthAsia, former foreign minister, Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri made a wise comment in the context of the fight against terrorism: "We have to help ourselves." Nothing can be truer. Can we ask for international assistance to eradicate our homegrown terrorist organizations when there is no consensus in the country on whether or not the people blowing bombs in our country, killing thousands of people, are terrorists or not? It has been over a decade in which we lost more than 40,000 lives in this fight. And still our people are not sure whose war we are fighting – our own or on behalf of some foreign force.

The division between the two sections of society – one that believes that we should eradicate terrorism from

the country no matter what it takes and the other that believes that terrorists are our countrymen and brothers who are misguided – became ever so clear after the killing of Taliban leader Hakimullah Mehsud. There was a visible split in the country between those who thought that Mehsud's killing was a loss for Pakistan and those who believed that yet another terror-monger had bitten the dust.

How can the death of a person who openly defied the state and constitution of Pakistan, who took pride in killing innocent people and vowed to kill more at the altar of his skewed notions of faith be a loss to the country? Those who claim that Mehsud's death has harmed the peace process should read the manuscript of his last interview to BBC in which he clearly stated that "America is one of the two reasons we have to conduct a jihad against Pakistan. The other reason is that Pakistan's system is un-Islamic, and we want it replaced with an Islamic system. This demand and this desire will continue even after the American withdrawal."

This claim should be enough to open the eyes of those living in some kind of fantasy land when it comes to terrorism. We have to root out terrorism from our country. Failure to do so will mean a loss of another 40,000, or maybe more, lives in the next decade. Are we ready for that?

Ghulam Sarwar Abro
Hyderabad, Pakistan

Revival of film festivals

This refers to the feature 'New Hope for Filmmakers' in your November 2013 issue. It was heartening to know that a small like country like Bhutan, that kept itself hidden from the world eye for so many years, is making progress in various fields including filmmaking. The Beskop Tshechu film festival is a proof of that. Film festivals are not new to the South Asian region.





A distant dream

The article 'Struggling Female Parliamentarians' discussed an important issue in the context of female representation in Afghanistan. Another somewhat similar issue that made headlines recently was the disqualification of a female presidential candidate in Afghanistan. Khadija Ghaznawi, the only female candidate who had signed up to run for the presidential elections to be held in April 2014, was disqualified by the country's Independent Election Commission. Ghaznawi owns a logistics company in Afghanistan and is also a peace activist. She presented a very clear-cut agenda to end the ongoing insurgency in Afghanistan: open factories and provide jobs to people. "The Taliban are sick of fighting. If we provide work and education to their kids, they will stop," she reportedly said in an interview.

The IEC has given no reason or explanation for her disqualification. Although Ghaznawi is determined to fight her case, her disqualification seems strange considering that war

India regularly holds such festivals and so do Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. India, especially, has a very thriving film industry. Our local film industry has produced some really good movies in the past. They proved a success in Pakistan and also became popular in our neighboring countries where they were liked for their impactful stories and strong performances. Our film industry couldn't maintain its standards for many reasons and saw a decline over the years. There have been attempts to revive the cinema and one of them, as I remember, was a film festival held in Karachi.

This privately organized festival was called the Kara Film Festival and was held regularly in Karachi for some years. Many excellent movies were put on display and artistes from our neighboring countries attended it. But it couldn't continue for long because of poor law and order of the city. The festival provided a great opportunity to our entertainment-starved masses to see some great artistic work being done in the region. Such events do much more than just provide entertainment. They bring people closer and play a significant role in the aesthetic development of a society. In the absence of such outlets, people resort to unhealthy avenues. I hope the Kara Film Festival is revived and we form the tradition of having more and more such festivals in the country. After all, when Bhutan can have them, why not us?

Shagufta Baig
Karachi, Pakistan



lords and convicted criminals have allegedly been contesting the elections. In the presence of this kind of discrimination, the Afghan women can only dream of achieving their due rights.

Saleha Badruddin
Kolkata, India

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Oversimplifying history

After four decades of the bloody war that resulted in the dismemberment of Pakistan, while it may be easy for some people to say that 'some excesses were committed by both sides', the realities on the ground are completely different. The fact is that over a million people were killed in this war. Some sources put the figure even higher. The writer of the article 'War Crime Trials' termed the people of the then East Pakistan 'more sensitive and liberal for whom religion was apparently not so important'. He also claimed that the religious-minded people continued to believe in the ideology of Pakistan. Needless to say that the majority of those 'religious-minded' lived in West Pakistan.

I wonder how he will explain the rampant killings going on in Pakistan where self-professed 'devout Muslims' are killing their Muslim (and non-Muslim as well) countrymen; where the same self-professed groups of 'devout Muslims' are denying the ideology and the constitution of Pakistan. Historical facts and occurrences are complex phenomena. They can't be and shouldn't be simplified in terms of black and white.

K. M. Saifullah
Dhaka, Bangladesh

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"This was an appalling civil war, a civil war in which obviously the Tamil Tigers did some appalling things as well. But the end of the war, and this particular set of events where civilians seem to have been targeted – that needs to be properly investigated."

David Cameron
Prime Minister of the United Kingdom



"It has only been four years since the war ended, and Sri Lanka would take its own time and investigate the allegations. Pressure won't do anything. It is better to request than demand or dictate."

Mahinda Rajapaksa
President of Sri Lanka



"After signing the Strategic Partnership, one of our neighboring countries shot missiles, rockets, and bullets on Afghan soil, but America did not even recognize that such violation occurred."

Hamid Karzai
President of Afghanistan



"We intend to continue to work together with them (Pakistanis) through the strategic dialogue that we have established in order to work through these kinds of challenges."

John Kerry
U.S. Secretary of State



"It is always, we, the citizens, who will have the last word in the Maldives."

Mohamed Nasheed
Maldivian Politician



"If we can form the government in future, we shall represent the people rather than a party. We shall implement policies that introduces the next generation to a higher standard of living and towards developing policies that result in sustained development in all sectors of society."

Khaleeda Zia
Chairperson Bangladesh Nationalist Party



"Political autocracy, social divisiveness and economic liberalism. That's Mr. Modi reduced to three dimensions. Exactly what created the autobahns and the Volkswagens in the 1930s but also created the disaster of Germany."

Jairam Ramesh
Indian Cabinet Minister



"Elections are civilian affairs conducted to manage conflict in a society. But the way the parties project messages from different sides, it seems as if we're going into a war rather than an election."

Bhojraj Pokhrel
Former Chief Election Commissioner, Nepal



"If the situation needs to change in Jammu and Kashmir, we need to give power and responsibilities to our sarpanches and local bodies."

Rahul Gandhi
Vice President, Indian National Congress



"Why start with 2007? Why not start with the 1999 coup which was validated by the Supreme Court, or even Ayub Khan's martial law in 1958?"

Ahmed Raza Kasuri
Lawyer



"I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart. The memories that you've left with me will always be with me forever and ever. The chanting of 'Sachin! Sachin!' would reverberate in my ears until I stop breathing."

Sachin Tendulkar
Indian Cricketer



"We see it all the time in Pakistan; this notion of 'Take my neighbor, don't take me'. It's not that people are cruel or nasty; it's the need to be at a safe distance."

Fatima Bhutto
Journalist and author

PAKISTAN

In the dock

Former Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf was released from more than six months of house arrest, after a court granted him bail in a case involving the killing of a cleric in 2007. However, the PML-N government moved the court to try him under Article 6 for subverting the Constitution of Pakistan and declaring Emergency on Nov 3, 2007. While the government claimed that there was ‘nothing personal’ about the case, the former president’s legal and political representatives said that it was an attempt to keep him in the dock. The opposition also questioned the timing of the case, terming it as ‘a bid to divert public attention from the sectarian clashes in Rawalpindi and

Multan’.

Musharraf had been granted bail in all the cases against him, although the charges still stand. He was released when his lawyers submitted the bond in the case involving the killing of Maulana Abdur Rasheed Ghazi. The cleric and some 100 other people died during a crackdown on the Lal Masjid by security forces in 2007, when Musharraf was in power. In the other cases, Musharraf was accused of playing a role in the 2007 assassination of former Pakistani leader Benazir Bhutto, the killing of Baloch



leader Akbar Bugti, and having ordered the illegal detention of Supreme Court judges.

After stepping down as president in 2008, Musharraf left the country and spent nearly four years in exile. He returned to Pakistan earlier this year with a plan to run for political office, but was disqualified from running in the elections and barred from leaving the country. **S**

AFGHANISTAN

Trilateral talks

Afghan President Hamid Karzai met Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in an effort to bolster a fragile peace outreach to Afghanistan’s Taliban insurgency. The meeting took place in London and British Prime Minister David Cameron hosted the talks.

There are concerns about violence and instability in the region as US and international combat troops are set to withdraw from Afghanistan by the end of next year. Another key topic of discussion between Islamabad and Kabul was the Pakistani government’s move to free Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the former deputy leader of the

Afghan Taliban, to facilitate outreach to the Taliban.

A similar trilateral meeting hosted by Cameron in February 2013 had raised hopes for a reconciliation process, as Karzai and then Pakistani President, Asif Ali Zardari pledged to work towards a peace settlement with the Taliban within six months. But relations between Kabul and Islamabad deteriorated as cross-border clashes and nationalistic rhetoric emerged from both sides. But the election of Nawaz Sharif in May 2013 helped reset relations between the two



countries. “We have a feeling that Nawaz Sharif has good intentions,” said Aimal Faizi, Hamid Karzai’s spokesman. **S**

Mission Mars

With the aim of putting a satellite in space that would orbit Mars, India launched its first rocket, the Mars Orbiter Mission. Shot from the southeastern coast of India, the satellite is scheduled to search for methane and signs of minerals on the planet. So far, only the United States, Europe, and Russia have sent probes that have orbited or landed on Mars. Such probes have a high failure rate. Therefore, success would be a huge boost for India, especially since a similar mission launched by China in 2011 had failed to leave the Earth's orbit.

India's ties with China are marked as much by competition as cooperation. Although Indian scientists

deny any space race, analysts say that India has stepped up its program because of concerns about China's civilian and military space technology.

The low-cost mission positions India as a budget player in the global space race. The probe's Rs.4.5 billion price tag is a fraction of the cost of NASA's MAVEN mission. India is likely to capture more of the \$304 billion global space market with its low-cost technology. "This is a modest beginning for our interplanetary mission," said Deviprasad Karnik,

spokesman for the state-run Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO).

India's space program began 50 years ago and developed rapidly after Western powers imposed sanctions in response to a nuclear weapons test in 1974, spurring Indian scientists to build advanced rocket technology. Five years ago, India's Chandrayaan probe landed on the moon and found evidence of water there. **S**



To the gallows

A special court in Bangladesh has awarded death sentence to more than 150 border guards accused of murder and arson during a mutiny at their headquarters in 2009. A total of 850 people were accused of involvement in the rampage that broke out in Dhaka and spread to other towns. Seventy-four people were killed in the ensuing violence. The court also sentenced 160 mutineers to life terms, including a former lawmaker of the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and acquitted 171 soldiers. The rest received jail terms of up to 10 years and fines.

The 2009 mutiny took place due to grievances over different facilities for the army and border guards. It

shook the stability of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's newly elected government, which ended the revolt by negotiating a settlement.

The then chief of the roughly 48,000-strong paramilitary force was among those killed in the 33-hour rampage. Others included 57 top- and middle-ranking army officers as well as several civilians. After the mutiny, the paramilitary force was renamed the Border Guard Bangladesh instead of the Bangladesh Rifles.

The trial began in August 2011, with 801 force members and 23 civilians among those charged in 2010 after an investigation lasting more than a year.

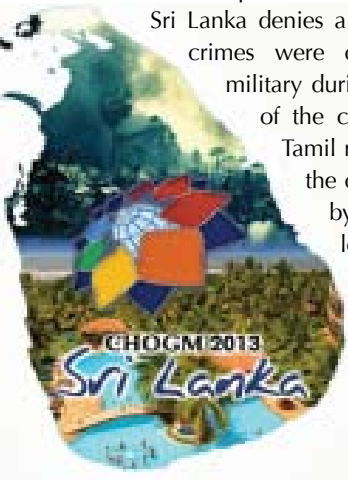


About 4,000 persons have already been found guilty of involvement in the mutiny, all in mass military trials. They have been jailed for up to seven years. Bangladesh's handling of the trials drew criticism from rights groups such as the New York-based Human Rights Watch, which said the use of torture and other abuse techniques to extract statements from persons while in custody violated standards for fair trials. **S**

SRI LANKA

Commonwealth conundrum

Sri Lanka finally succeeded in holding the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Colombo. But the summit was dominated by a bitter dispute over alleged war crimes. Sri Lanka denies allegations that war crimes were committed by its military during the final stages of the conflict against the Tamil rebels in 2009. But the country was forced by international leaders, especially U.K. Prime Minister David Cameron, to address the allegations by next March.



Let me be very clear; if an investigation is not completed by March, then I will use our position on the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council to work with the UN Human Rights Commission and call for an independent international inquiry," David Cameron said. Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa brushed aside the warning. "Do not dictate to me. I am not ready to take orders from others, as we have a tradition and culture and a good legal system with a law enforcement process to address any issue," he said at a news conference.

While only 27 heads of government attended this year's meeting, Malaysian

Prime Minister Najib Razak said the summit had helped strengthen the organization of mainly English-speaking former British colonies. In the final communiqué, countries agreed to push world bodies to adopt a Commonwealth report on new ways for small and vulnerable countries to access funds to fight climate change. It also suggested that small countries with high debts, including some in the Caribbean, use climate change funds that wealthier nations have already pledged for paying off of national debt. Smaller countries, in return, pledge to use their own funds to tackle rising sea levels and other climate concerns over a longer time frame. **S**

NEPAL

Towards democracy?

Elections were held in Nepal for a new assembly to complete the long-delayed constitution. The voter turnout was reportedly high and voting was largely peaceful although three people were hurt in a bomb blast in Kathmandu. The election was the second since a 10-year Maoist revolt ended in 2006. The previous assembly, elected in 2008 after the overthrow of the monarchy, failed in its task of coming up with a new constitution.

An interim government was formed earlier this year by Nepal's major parties. Led by the Supreme Court Chief Justice, Khilraj Regmi, this interim

government oversaw the elections. A group of opposition parties, led by a Maoist faction, boycotted the polling.

It wanted a new government with representation from all the political parties to conduct elections at a later date.

More than 100 parties contested, including the three major ones, the Maoists, the Nepali Congress and the Unified Marxist-

Leninist. Among the more than 16,000 candidates, nearly 6,000 were women. **S**



People's president

Abdulla Yameen of the Progressive Party of the Maldives was elected president of the country after his shock victory in the November 2013 elections. Yameen, who is half brother of long-time Maldivian ruler Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, was sworn in by the chief justice at a ceremony attended by his defeated opponent Mohamed Nasheed who conceded defeat after a bitterly fought battle.

The presidential polls in the Maldives were cancelled a number of times by the supreme court of the country. The situation had become so serious that the international community had put the nation on notice to elect a leader by November 17 or risk censure. Western diplomats had threatened international isolation

unless the Maldives allowed its people to freely elect a leader. The European Union had warned of "appropriate measures" if elections did not go ahead while the Commonwealth had threatened to expel the country from its membership.

The United States and India were among the first countries to congratulate Yameen on his election. New Delhi had had an uneasy relationship with Male after the toppling of the former President, Nasheed. Nasheed had once taken refuge at the Indian High Commission in Male to avoid arrest. He had also claimed that the February 2012 coup to topple his government was triggered by a police mutiny and months of public protests orchestrated by Yameen's party and was supported



by the then Vice President, Waheed.

Nasheed had also accused Yameen's half-brother Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who ruled the island country with an iron fist for 30 years, of being behind his downfall. But after the announcement of the election result, both Nasheed and Yameen pledged to work together to bring stability to the country. **S**

Hundred days

The government of the People's Democratic Party of Bhutan completed its first 100 days in office. On this occasion, a cabinet meeting deliberated at length on the pledges fulfilled by the government. Of the 34 pledges the party made during its election campaign, the prime minister declared 11 as fulfilled and one partially fulfilled.

The Ministry of Information and Communication launched designated seats in city buses for the elderly and pregnant women and disabled people in Thimphu, and a 30 percent discount in fares for students, while the Labor Ministry revised the national minimum

wage. It also presented its proposals for the youth employment policy in addition to submitting proposals on building homes for the elderly near monasteries and giving allowances to senior citizens. "We're doing further studies on these issues, which, in principle, have been approved by the cabinet," Labor Secretary, Pema Wangda said.

Some other pledges already fulfilled by the governments are the initiation of a meet-the-people program, tabling of the Right to Information Bill, starting the Nu2M annual grant to every gewog, cutting down on the government's wasteful



expenditure and providing free electricity to rural homes. The pledge of exemption of taxes for small and rural businesses has been fulfilled, but waits endorsement by the parliament. The pledge of doing away with preliminary exams for the civil service could not be fulfilled. **S**



Back to the Future

The UAE has bounced back and past mistakes will not be repeated – hopefully.

By Javed Ansari

The UAE was speeding full power ahead – hurtling towards the future with a super vision and a super-ambitious program that few other countries around the world could match. Then the financial crisis of 2009 occurred, on the heels of the bigger international financial meltdown of 2008, the economy of the UAE was all but crippled and the uncontrolled growth ground to a painful halt.

Things came to a point when wanted sections in the UAE's newspapers became leaner, passenger queues at immigration counters at airports became smaller, the teeming souks and malls became deserted, traffic on roads thinned down and hotel occupancy shrunk to a bare minimum. In fact, there were instances when expatriate workers from India and other South Asian countries just left their cars at airport parking lots

and quietly took flights back home. As had always been feared, the bubble had burst.

Of late, traffic on Sh. Zayed Street is coming back to normal which means that the UAE has bounced back. Those who have been through it all, notice an air of confidence all around. There are smiles on faces and the feeling is rife that it is business as usual.

Overall, ever since the 1970s, the UAE had proven to be a promising



location for continued growth. The financial crisis of 2009, in fact, proved to be a shocker for an otherwise complacent economy which has survived because of its in-built resilience and is now emerging from the hole it had dug for itself.

It is also remarkable that instead of being bogged down, the business and investor class in the Emirates refuses to be licked and is reorganizing itself because it is really optimistic about

achieving growth despite all the pressures. What this translates into is the sort of development which will have more chances of surviving similar frights in future. Now entrepreneurs will tread with care where funding is concerned. And, as in the case of Dubai, there will now be no racking up of billions of dollars of debt to fund superlative projects.

It is said that 30 years on from when it appeared on the global

map, this federation of seven gulf emirates is today the longest surviving successful experiment in this kind of nation-building anywhere in the world. From the largely desert-bound Trucial States, the UAE has blossomed into a full-fledged country that offers its people all the amenities of life and has, at the same time, carved for itself an important role in the global community.

Dubai makes an impact on the

world's psyche with its famous man-made islands and huge skyscrapers like the Burj al Khalifa while Abu Dhabi hosts Formula 1 racing and has built the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque which celebrates the rich cultural diversity of the Islamic world and combines the historical and modern values of architecture and art. The mosque is the eighth largest in the world.

The UAE is also known for its large ports and logistics facilities based in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, the financial centre and tourism industry of Dubai and the energy reserves of Abu Dhabi. The five emirates – Sharjah, Ajman, Ummal Quwain, Rasal

Khaimah and Fujairah – complement what Abu Dhabi and Dubai offer. They are gradually adding to the cultural diversity and business dynamism of this increasingly important Arab country.

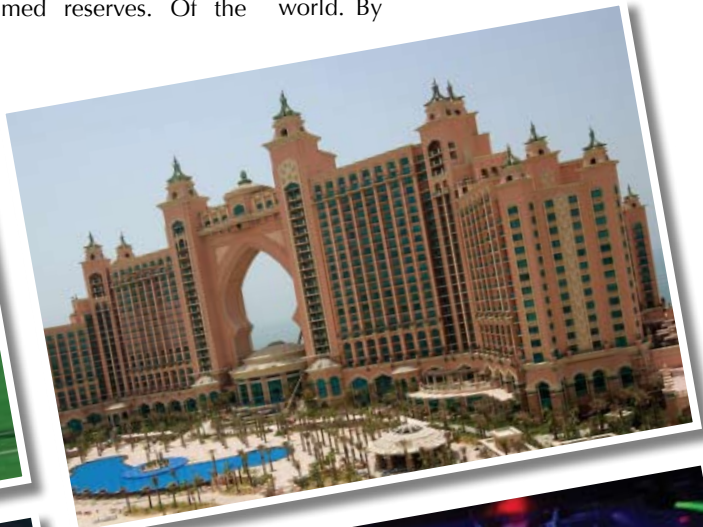
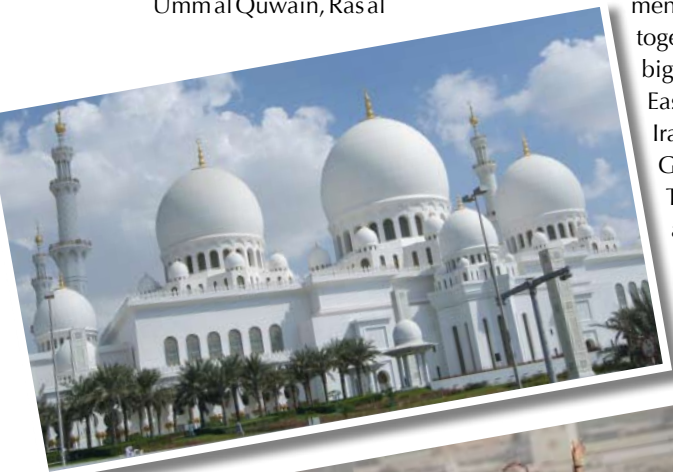
For example, according to a recent study, the number of millionaires in the UAE is predicted to grow by 13.5 percent by the end of 2013. The study forecasts that the country will boast a total of 54,600 millionaires by the end of 2013 and by 2017 the number will increase 34 percent to 69,000, with their wealth rising 48 percent to \$269bn.

It would be interesting to mention that the seven emirates together represent the third biggest economy in the Middle East, after Saudi Arabia and Iran. Only Qatar has a higher GDP per capita in the region. The UAE oil reserves total about 98 billion barrels, almost as big as Kuwait's claimed reserves. Of the

emirates, Abu Dhabi has most of the oil with 92 billion barrels while Dubai has just 4 billion barrels and Sharjah has 1.5 billion barrels. Most of the oil is found in Abu Dhabi's Zakum field which is the third largest in the Middle East.

In comparison to the other countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the economy of the United Arab Emirates is one of the most dispersed and the least dependent on the energy sector, although the revenue generated by sales of oil and gas comprises a significant proportion of the budget. This dependence is particularly strong in Abu Dhabi, which earns 55% of its GDP from sales of carbohydrates. However, the emirate wants to reduce this proportion to 35% by 2030 through diversification of its economy.

The financial crisis of 2009 had a negative impact but growth resumed fast. The Port of Jebel Ali in Dubai is the seventh-largest in the world. By



2030 the volume of goods passing through this port is expected to increase by more than seven times, which will leave behind both the ports of Shanghai and Singapore. Jebel Ali now also has the Al Maktoum International Airport, which is planned to become one of the world's major such facilities in the years to come. The location of the UAE between Europe and Asia has, in fact, created considerable potential for the development of logistics, ports and airports as a highly stable and profitable business in the long term.

It's traditional versus modern when things are seen in the Abu Dhabi versus Dubai perspective. Abu Dhabi is a force to be reckoned with by any standards. It may be traditional but it is also modern. The average net worth of Abu Dhabi citizens is \$17 million and the city has investments of \$1 trillion around the world.

Comparatively, Dubai can be termed as an economic basket case – and more liberal. It became bloated on real estate and rapid growth, creating a bubble that almost destroyed it when the crunch came. The external debts of a range of Dubai companies were said to have hit some \$80 billion and this sent the world into a panic. It was Abu Dhabi's cash that bailed Dubai out.

In terms of entertainment, the most positive way to look at it in the case of Abu Dhabi would be through its calendar of events. The city has become known in the region for major music concerts (including the Killers, Coldplay and Aerosmith) while sport events are also a major draw. It offers Formula One car racing, it hosts FIFA World Club Cup events and now even has a proper cricket stadium for ICC-recognized Tests, ODIs and T-20s.

But if entertainment is the question, Dubai edges out big brother, what with its bars, restaurants and nightclubs, plus a whole host of sporting events, from golf to tennis, horse racing and cricket plus international trade

exhibitions and an internationally-recognized air show. The city has also held many big name music acts like Elton John and Sting, not to mention Indian and Pakistani entertainers.

Abu Dhabi has made significant investments in the development of its Corniche area and has also made massive strides in building public beaches which has revolutionized beach going in the capital. Dubai has plenty to offer in terms of beaches but mainly for people who can afford private getaways. Hotels dominate ownership of much of the original coastline in Dubai, while the new beaches (on the palm, mostly) are the preserve of apartments and villas.

and laziness all around.

It is true though that globalization, urbanization and digitization are the key trends that are shaping the future of the UAE which is fast earning for itself an international appeal since has been promoted to the emerging market status. This recognizes the country's strategy to diversify its economy and become a regional hub for global business and tourism.

The UAE offers a stable, efficient and pro-business environment, aviation connectivity to more than 200 cities and proximity to the world's largest sovereign wealth funds. There is also significant investment in infrastructure which is important for

From the largely desert-bound Trucial States, the UAE has blossomed into a full-fledged country that offers its people all the amenities of life and has, at the same time, carved for itself an important role in the global community.

Traffic in Abu Dhabi city, however, is nothing short of a nightmare. There is daily chaos on account of various major developments, giving way to a system that just doesn't seem to work. One tiny error or accident and the entire network grinds to a halt. Dubai is not great either and this is something the UAE government really must look into.

It's not all hunky dory across the UAE because with all the good things, you also find the bad – the seamy side of unbridled growth - reckless driving on highways, dishonest landlords, inefficient real estate staff, crime on the streets and sexual harassment, rampant hypocrisy, idiotic police officers, bureaucratic nincompoops

attracting talent since the country's strategic location gives it access to 50 per cent of the world's population within five hours.

With its global aviation connectivity, friendly time zone, world-class infrastructure and services, combined with a diverse population and talent pool, the UAE has no rival in the Middle East as a location for today and tomorrow. It offers a unique opportunity that needs to be harnessed, developed and invested in – because all indicators are that the country is on the fast track back to the future. **S**

The writer is Editor of this magazine and a regular contributor on political subjects.

Return to Growth

A high-speed train, numbered 5039, is shown in a modern station. The train is blue and white, moving towards the viewer. The station ceiling is a prominent feature, consisting of a grid of green and white panels. The overall scene is brightly lit, with a warm yellow glow emanating from the station's interior.

The UAE is back on the track to galloping growth.

By John Oldfield



The UAE, with Dubai generally seen as the jewel in the crown, has probably seen more dynamic growth over a short time than any other place on earth. The 'Asian Tiger' economies have had their day in the sun, India and China have long been in focus, but no other place has seen such a dramatic and rapid transformation, in particular Dubai. The fascinating question now is, after a period of stagnation during the worldwide downturn, what does the future hold?

The signs for the past 18 months look bright. It was recently reported that the UAE has overtaken China and South Korea to become Asia's third strongest economy in terms of GDP per capita according to the Boao Forum for Asia Asian Competitiveness Annual Report 2013.

The UAE continues to be a world leader in facilitating trade, despite stiff competition from other world economies, retaining its position as number one in the MENA region, and number five in the world in Trading across Borders category, according to the latest World Bank Doing Business Report 2013.

Successive regulatory reforms have pushed the UAE's overall global ranking in the Doing Business Index from 37th two years ago to 33rd last year, and to 26th this year.

Dubai's economy is headed for the fastest expansion in six years, with the gross domestic product surging to 4.9 percent in the first half, buoyed by vibrant growth in trade and tourism, according to the government's Statistics Department. Dubai's real GDP grew to Dh169 billion in the first half of 2013 from Dh161 billion in the first half of 2012 and growth covered almost all non-hydrocarbon sectors.

With such an accelerated growth rate, Dubai has gained a new momentum to make a further big leap in spite of the lingering global financial malaise, bolstering its eligibility to host World Expo 2020.

Dubai and Abu Dhabi are among the best cities in the world for investors, according to the New York-based Reputation Institute's City RepTrak report, which is based on a survey conducted last year among 18,000 respondents from the G8 countries. Both cities beat some of the world's most reputable metropolitan areas such as Zurich, Geneva and New York. Individuals and companies expressed a preference to invest in nations

where investments are secure, the population is friendly and there is respect for the rule of law.

It would be an overstatement to say there is rivalry between Abu Dhabi and Dubai, but a sense of sibling competitiveness perhaps exists. The two places are, of course, hugely different.

Part of the success and resilience of the UAE has been due to the way in which the government was initially established. The constitution – which was classified as provisional until being made permanent in 1996 – left sovereignty with the individual seven emirates, particularly in areas pertaining to their own development. This included administration, economic and social policy, and even control over each emirate's own mineral and oil wealth. This arrangement gave each individual emirate the assurance that the combined entity represented a distinct net benefit with respect to collective sustainability and prosperity.

Being the capital of the UAE, Abu Dhabi's economy is strongly influenced by the government and government spending. The priorities are traditional areas such as oil and gas, power, the military and infrastructure projects such as Etihad rail and the expansion of the airport. In 2013, Abu Dhabi reportedly spent about \$50bn on various projects. Abu Dhabi has a dominant role as it holds most of the UAE's oil and gas reserves, as well as 87 percent of the land area and 43 percent of nationals. Abu Dhabi's hydrocarbon revenue per national is US\$232,000, the highest in the GCC. As a result, Abu Dhabi has a per capita GDP of US\$82,000, more than double the UAE average.

The bright lights of Dubai, together with astute marketing, have made it a successful tourist centre and almost a mandatory stop-over destination. Now once again infrastructure projects are starting to progress. But the engine of

Dubai is still the private sector. Dubai has historically drawn on a long tradition of international commerce to create an unrivalled regional hub for trade and manufacturing, now focused on the Jebel Ali port and free zone, as well as a broader services economy. The value of Dubai's foreign trade in the first half of 2013 set a new record, reaching Dh679 billion, compared to Dh584 billion in the same period of 2012, showing a growth of 16 percent.

Operating autonomously, it seems Abu Dhabi and Dubai will remain in friendly rivalry, while always being the twin giants of the UAE. Sharjah is the third largest emirate and has some oil and gas reserves. Situated next to Dubai and, along with adjacent Ajman, it forms the smallest but most densely populated emirate. As a result of cheaper rents in these emirates, hundreds of thousands of workers commute from there to Dubai daily.

The other three emirates have smaller expatriate populations. They are subsidized by revenue transfers from the federal government. Umm al-Quwain, the smallest emirate, has recently begun producing gas from a small offshore field. Ras al-Khaimah, at the UAE's northern tip, is the fourth largest emirate, with a little offshore gas. Finally, Fujairah is the only emirate situated on the east coast. It is rising in importance as the terminus of a strategic new pipeline bypassing the Straits of Hormuz and associated downstream industries.

So, after a somewhat roller-coaster recent past, the key question for the UAE must be one of economic sustainability. No country in the world is immune from the adverse effects of a worldwide slump, but some lessons have been learned.

The Institute of International Finance (IIF) has voiced concerns about the possibility of a "renewed cycle of risk taking" despite raising

the UAE growth forecast for 2013. But the IIF also welcomed the plan of the Central Bank of the UAE that includes limits on banks' exposure to real estate and government-related entities.

Local governments have started to incorporate environmental policies into their remit. Authorities have also turned their attention to renewable energy; Abu Dhabi now hosts the U.N. International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), and is advancing in its plans to establish the first carbon-neutral city.

The UAE government has publicly committed itself to fighting corruption, and has put various anti-corruption mechanisms in place. This has included ratifying the United Nations Convention against Corruption, joining the Arab Anti-Corruption and Integrity Network and establishing the State Audit Institution (SAI) as a federal audit authority overseeing the use of public funds.

It can be said that the grand visions for Abu Dhabi and Dubai held by Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan and Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum have been realised and being built upon. There can be no doubt that the country has continued to make incredible progress to the point that it has become a role model for others. The 2009 financial crisis undoubtedly had its impact on the county, but even that proved to be only a blip. The UAE had returned to positive growth coupled with a buoyant mood of optimism for the coming years. ■

The writer has been creative director with Ogilvy & Mather, BBDO, McCann Erickson and Saatchi & Saatchi in various parts of the world. For the past two years he has been based in Dubai as Regional Creative Leadership Officer for Pirana Communications. He contributes regularly to the U.K.'s Campaign magazine.

Up and Up!

Property development in Dubai is rebounding after the financial crisis.

By Javeria Shakil

In a 2005 interview to a leading media group, Damien Harrington, then associate director of CBRE, an international real estate firm operating in the UAE, claimed that he didn't believe that the construction boom in Dubai was unsustainable. "Dubai has been expanding continuously for 30 years. There has never been a crash here," he declared.

The interview was printed in December 2005. A year back, in 2004, the rate of growth of Dubai's economy was almost 17 percent – four

times higher than that of the economy of the United States.

This was the time when thousands of people, a large number of them investors, were moving to Dubai, one of the seven emirates comprising the United Arab Emirates. It offered them a tax-free environment, the promise of little government intervention and a safe place for investment in a region rife with volatility.

Harrington believed that Dubai's future was bright and investors, especially in the construction sector,

were of the view that the construction business would continue to grow as it would be several years before supply met demand.

Hardly two years later, however, in 2008, Dubai's construction bubble burst in the wake of the global financial recession that saw some of the world's strongest economies collapse. The impact of the crisis was so hard that real estate value in the kingdom fell by 60 percent in some cases. Real estate consultant and broker, Jones Lang LaSalle put the decline in value of



residential transactions even higher – at 65 percent – while their volume had decreased by 53 percent by 2010.

In 2002, the Dubai government had allowed foreign ownership of property in certain areas. This resulted in a surge in real estate investment as the growing expatriate workforce went on a spree to buy property in the emirate. According to some estimates, the price of property quadrupled in the six year following the 2002 decision. The construction bonanza continued as banks eagerly lent money. But soon after the financial crunch began in September 2008, banks across the UAE stopped lending. In no time, about 50 percent of Dubai's real estate projects were canceled or came to a halt.

The ensuing panic saw hundreds of people fired from their jobs. Workless and without residence permits, people started leaving Dubai in hordes, leaving a number of housing units vacant. The price of property came crashing down. The example of Burj Khalifa, known as Burj Dubai formerly, is worth mentioning. Before the crisis hit, the price of office space in that building, as claimed by the developer, had reached US\$4,000 per sqft. Some ten months into its inauguration, the price decreased by almost 40 percent.

The property doom that many had failed to foresee had arrived. It stayed for almost two years. Those two years witnessed major wheeling and dealing, one of them being the name-change of Burj Dubai to Burj Khalifa 'to honor the UAE President, Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan for his crucial support.' Some speculate that the crucial support was in the form of a bailout that saved Dubai from going completely bust.

But as the sudden and largely unpredictable property boom of Dubai surprised people, its rebound also amazed many. The construction sector, especially, started picking up within two years of the disaster. One of the

reasons was the emirate's strict laws.

Many developers started to go back to their unfinished projects in order to complete them. The other alternative was to return all the advance payments to customers – a legal obligation which would have cost them dearly. The cost of walking away from these projects was much higher than completing them. Another reason was the decline in construction costs and low interest rates.

But most important of all perhaps was political turmoil and the eruption of violence in the Arab World. The Arab Spring, as it came to be known, resulted in regime change in many Arab countries. In the wake of violent protests and political instability, the affluent class in these countries started to transfer their wealth abroad. And what better choice of a country for an Arab than Dubai, a fellow Arab state?

As a result, while the economies of the countries that were affected by the revolutionary tides, almost collapsed, a surge was recorded in the buying and selling of property in Dubai. In addition to buying property, a large number of businessmen from the turmoil-affected countries also transferred their businesses to Dubai, thus contributing to its growth.

The surge in economic activity was so strong that Dubai recorded a phenomenal growth of 4.4 percent in 2012 – far better than that of many advanced economies of Europe and the U.S. Today, average property prices have once again reached high levels. Property investors operating in Dubai predict a further 10 to 15 percent rise in prices.

Words such as 'tallest', 'biggest' and 'most expensive' in the context of construction are once again a part of the lexicon in Dubai. The rulers have even announced another gigantic project – a new Taj Mahal which would be four times bigger than the actual mausoleum. Construction of many new shopping malls and hotels

is also underway and the situation is more or less the same as it was prior to the 2008 crisis.

So will the current boom continue?

The sudden increase in property prices and frenzied activity in the construction and real estate sectors reminds people of the pre-financial crisis situation. There are concerns over the sustainability of this renewed construction bonanza. Fahd Iqbal, head of Middle East Research at Credit Suisse, a leading international real estate company, answers some of the concerns in an online article.

In his opinion, supply is now much more closely controlled than before as new development projects are primarily backed by government-owned developers. He gives the example of Emaar, a partially government-owned developer, which has announced two multi-billion dollar projects.

He also believes that "Dubai's legal framework, infrastructure and finances are much stronger than before. The RERA (Real Estate Regulatory Authority) has greater depth now, the escrow law has been established and a mortgage law is imminent."

Another factor, in his view, is the improved cash flow in Dubai, thanks to its thriving tourism and trade segments. "The successful restructuring of the bulk of Dubai's debts has left the emirate better placed to service its liabilities," writes Iqbal.

These, and other factors, make Dubai the world's favorite trade and tourism hub, not to mention the first choice for residence of many wealthy people. And by showing resilience and a remarkable ability to bounce back, Dubai has proved that it is a wise choice when it comes to prudent investment. **S**

The writer is Assistant Editor at SouthAsia. She focuses on issues of political and social interest.

Dubai Expo 2020

‘Connecting Minds, Creating the Future’

Dubai is the first Middle Eastern location to be chosen for the World Expo Trade Convention in 2020. This is a win that will further add to the UAE’s passion to bring people together for business and pleasure.

A sense of jubilation went through the UAE as news came from Paris that Dubai has been chosen as the venue for the World Expo Trade Convention in 2020. It was celebration all round. People just came out and danced in the streets to rejoice and make a big noise about the historic win which had beaten rivals Brazil, Turkey and Russia. Fireworks exploded from the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, following the announcement. The Dubai Crown Prince, Sh. Hamdan bin Rashid al-Maktoum, even scaled the top of the Burj Al Khalifa and unfurled the UAE flag to mark the celebration.

Dubai will be the first Middle Eastern city to hold the Expo, which takes place every five years.

Countries show off all that they have to offer at the Expo – business prospects, industry, tourism, architecture and technology.

Happy in the win, the ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid al-Maktoum promised to astonish the world with the event when it takes place in Dubai in 2020.

"Dubai Expo 2020 will breathe new life into the ancient role of the Middle East as a melting pot for cultures and creativity," he said.

"I extend my thanks to HH Sheikh Khalifa (the president of the UAE and Ruler of Abu Dhabi) for his great support, and to every country that voted for Dubai to host Expo 2020," Sh. Mohammad said.

He expressed his gratitude to the people of the UAE and thanked them for their support and enthusiasm which fuelled the victory.

"Today, you are all champions," he said.

Sh. Mohammad also thanked all the Arab countries for their heartfelt encouragement and said that they all shared the historic moment for the region. He praised the Dubai 2020 bid committee for all their hard work and said he was proud of the team that had earned this victory for Dubai with two years of hard work, dedication and commitment.


In a statement, UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan also reiterated his earlier remarks that "Dubai Expo 2020 will undoubtedly stand out as the best edition in the history of the event in terms of preparation and presentation."

In a telephone conversation with Sheikh Mohammed, Sheikh Khalifa said: "From day one when we submitted

our bid to host Expo 2020, we were fully confident that Dubai deserves to win the bid, and that our country possesses all it takes to successfully organize a unique event that will add a new and outstanding imprint on the Expo series of events."

The chairman of Dubai's Expo 2020 Bid Committee, Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, who is also chairman and CEO of the Emirates Group, said: "We are immensely proud to have been awarded the honour of hosting World Expo 2020.

"The competition has been fierce and we respectfully commend our competitors," he said. "This is a moment to be embraced and owned by the entire nation and beyond – this is your Expo. It is an Expo for the World. The vision of our bid has always been about more than just Dubai and the UAE."

According to Dubai authorities, Expo 2020 will rake in around \$23bn. Financing for the six-month event will cost a total of \$8.4bn, with the government spending around \$6.5bn on infrastructure projects. A huge exhibition centre will be built in Dubai to host the event, plus new hotels and an extension to Dubai's metro line. 

What's Left?

The Left could have a future in the Pakistani context, provided it addresses the people's economic issues.

By S. M. Hali

The Left in Pakistan has had a checkered history. The Socialist movement in British India owed its origin to the Russian Revolution and the subsequent migration of a large number of the Soviets to northwestern areas, more specifically into the territory that is now Pakistan and which was held by the British Empire in 1922-27.

The colonial government of India repressed the Left from its very inception, accusing its proponents of

devising conspiracies to topple the government. However, the strong ideological moorings of the Left influenced virtually all other streams in India. They are even credited with the rise of radical trends inside the Congress in the post-First World War period. The militant anti-imperialist stand of communists attracted various revolutionary fighters. Among them were the Gadar fighters of the Punjab, Bhagat Singh's peers, Bengali revolutionaries, the militant working-

class fighters of the Bombay and Madras presidencies and radical anti-imperialist Congressmen from different parts of the country. Even Subhash Chandra Bose, the Indian nationalist who unsuccessfully attempted to liberate India militarily from British rule in the waning years of the Second World War, called himself a Socialist.

The Left played a major role in transforming the demand for independence to a pro-people concept of freedom – not just from



the colonial regime, but also from social and economic exploitation and sectarian strife.

With the division of the subcontinent, the Left underwent numerous metamorphoses from a counterpart to political conservatism of the hard-liners of the Communist Party to the reformist electoral project enshrined in the birth of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which projected Islamic socialism as its *raison d'être*.

In Pakistan's formative years, after the demise of the Quaid, the Left came into direct confrontation with the government. The then Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan faced the first attempted *coup d'état* by a collusion of Leftists, including renowned intellectual Faiz Ahmad Faiz and some disgruntled elements of the armed forces. The coup was crushed and the protagonists tried and incarcerated.

Strengthened by the support of the rural class, thanks to its tough position on economic and social issues, the Communist Party promoted the cause of Pakistan's farmers and laborers against the nexus of the landed gentry. Although the 1954 general elections were won by the Communist Party in East Pakistan, yet the class struggle peaked when members of the Pakistan Muslim League and the Communist Party were involved in a violent scuffle with the East Pakistani police in 1958. The government dismissed the Communist Party government in the province and then arrested over 1,000 members of the Party in West Pakistan, after banning the party.

Pakistan's Leftists were left high and dry following the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s, with two factions emerging in the post-split scenario: Pro-Beijing and Pro-Moscow. The pro-Moscow Left dissolved into so-called liberal, progressive bourgeois parties while Ayub Khan hijacked the Maoist Left. The Chinese

bureaucracy gave full support to Ayub Khan's dictatorship. When Marshal of the People's Army, Chun Lee visited Pakistan in 1966, he made a farcical comparison of communist democracy, terming Ayub Khan's system of "basic democracy" akin to the communist system. Pakistani Maoists started supporting Ayub Khan. In their myopic viewpoint, they declared Ayub Khan's foreign policy progressive, ignoring the Marxist point of view that foreign policy is merely a continuation of internal policy to safeguard and prolong the reign of the rulers.

Oblivious to the unprecedented economic growth internationally, Pakistan's Left missed the boat. The post-World War II boom also benefited Pakistan, where the process of significant industrialization took root, giving rise to an anti-capitalism phenomenon: the proletariat. Rendered rudderless, Pakistan's Left started seeking progressives among the bourgeoisie, to whom it could lend support, instead of organizing and identifying itself with the proletariat. Its sustenance of the working class was confined to mere sloganeering. Resultantly, when a revolutionary movement, the first of its kind, began in 1968-69, and explosive *avant-garde* events swept away Ayub's military dictatorship – one of the richest presidents of an impoverished country – the Left again found itself in the lurch.

It saw light at the end of the tunnel with the emergence of the PPP, whose program was radical socialist since a Communist leader, J.A. Rahim, was the author of its basic manifesto. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto appeared in the political arena as a challenge to the Ayub dictatorship and claimed to be the representative of the masses.

Bhutto, despite being a landlord from Sindh, and having served as foreign minister in Ayub's cabinet, was an intelligent bourgeois politician,

who raised the slogan of Socialism and joined hands with some Leftists to form the PPP. Ayub's crackdown on Bhutto made him a symbol of resistance, enhancing his popularity and grip on the party.

The emergence of the PPP as a party of the masses was no fluke; elsewhere in the developing world too, parties with a socialist program had attained popular appeal. Pakistan's Left was again found wanting, when it supported Bhutto on face value, taking him to be a supporter of the proletariat. His style of freely quoting Karl Marx – "Workers of the world unite; you have nothing to lose but your chains" – endeared him to them. But Bhutto was in fact a radical bourgeois, whose feudal bent of mind would be his own and the masses' undoing.

Instead of organizing and launching a class struggle, the Left identified with the working class' illusions in Bhutto and the PPP and missed a golden opportunity to rise to the occasion. When people ultimately rose against Bhutto, the movement was hijacked by right-wing religious fanatics and reactionary forces and the Left failed to offer any alternative during this period. Bhutto was hanged after a sham trial and General Ziaul Haq's repressive regime curbed whatever steam remained. The military rule ended following the plane crash that killed General Zia, and elections were held in 1988, bringing Benazir Bhutto to power. But she further disillusioned the working class. The breakup of the USSR disenchanted the Left and currently they are in disarray. The present grim economic social milieu makes it ripe for the Left to play its role but the lack of credible leadership only adds to their problems. ❏

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A recent speech by Bilawal Bhutto Zardari was a stark reminder – both comic and tragic – of the fact that the lives of almost 180 million Pakistanis continue to be in the hands of royal families. The British need not have left.

At 25 years of age, Bilawal shares the PPP's chairmanship with his father, Asif Ali Zardari. His only credentials

political power – a kind of power that even the Bhuttos of Pakistan can only dream of.

In Bangladesh, the emergence of dynastic politics can be traced back to the night of August 15, 1975 when Sheikh Mujibur Rehman was assassinated along with most of his family members by a group of junior army officers. His daughter, Sheikh

landed elite of Punjab and Sindh. In contrast to India, the absence of land reforms allowed this class to further consolidate its interests.

Add to this the system of political patronage based on racial and ethnic identities, particularly in rural areas, and you have an ideal environment for the emergence of personality cults and big family names. Notwithstanding

Dynasties and Democracy

The major political parties in Pakistan are nothing more than dynasties. This phenomenon also exists in other South Asian countries.

By Waqas Aslam Rana

are that he is Benazir's son and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's grandson. But it would be unfair to single out the PPP; the Sharifs also run their PML-N as a family business (pun intended), while the Wali Khans have a stranglehold on the ANP in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. And let's not forget Moonis Elahi, scion of the House of Zahoor.

Most major political parties in Pakistan are nothing more than dynasties. But does this phenomenon also exist in other South Asian countries?

The Gandhi family in India has dominated not only the Congress, but politics in general since independence. Nehru's offspring may have the Gandhi's surname, but it was the former patriarch's founding role in setting up the modern Indian republic that still translates into unrivalled

Hasina, was spared by virtue of being in West Germany at the time. General Ziaur Rehman subsequently assumed the presidency. Now his widow Begum Khalida Zia has been slugging it out with Sheikh Hasina for the past two decades in a game of musical chairs, both sides using history and hatred to fuel the passions of their followers.

It is beyond the scope of this article to examine dynastic politics in all of South Asia, but it should be clear how entrenched and pervasive it is. A closer look at Pakistan can offer some answers to why this status quo exists.

It is a well-known story how democracy in Pakistan never really took off, and partly to blame is the composition of the original Muslim League. True democrats like Jinnah were an exception and, after partition, the party came to be dominated by the

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's personal charisma, this is how the Bhutto clan has come to dominate the PPP.

This state of affairs continued until the 1980s, when the urban industrial and trading class finally started to throw its weight around in Pakistani politics. Blessed by Ziaul Haq's special attention, the Sharifs came to dominate the Pakistan Muslim League of that time. Given a free hand and an open check book, they ensured their complete dominance in the Punjab and still continues, with senior Sharif's third stint in power at the national level.

Had Nawaz and Shahbaz allowed upward mobility in the PML-N, at least the urban middle classes would have had a chance to taste power. Unfortunately, the Raiwind throne has so far kept it all in the family. The

MQM is perhaps the only party to have genuinely brought in a section of the middle class into politics. But the party's alleged use of violence as its major political tool has outweighed the benefits of such inclusion.

The stranglehold of personalities and families over Pakistani politics also has a lot to do with the army's regular disruption of the democratic process.

prolonged his political life. Back then, his government had come to be largely reviled and if not for the coup and his subsequent exile, it is quite probable that he would have lost his grip on the PML-N.

One last factor needs to be highlighted briefly: the absence of a credible system of local governance in Pakistan. This has contributed to

practice of giving development funds to MNAs and MPAs and preferring to rule through the ever pliant bureaucracy. As things stand, it is difficult to see a big change in the near future. Forces like the PTI have temporarily jolted the system, but it remains to be seen how much Imran Khan can do to keep out nepotism and clan loyalties within his own party.



With the generals officially calling the shots for almost half of the country's existence, it is a bit much to expect organic political parties to develop that are able to generate future leaders.

What is more tragic is that the army's actions have made martyrs out of national leaders, which has actually strengthened dynastic politics. The best example is the hanging of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto after he was deposed, giving his progeny a perpetual sympathy card to appeal for votes. Similarly, in hindsight it can be argued that the coup against Nawaz Sharif in 1999 paradoxically

the lack of options when it comes to national leadership. Both the khakis and civilians are to blame for this. While Ayub Khan instituted 'Basic Democracies' and Pervez Musharraf installed his own version of local government, both were intended to keep themselves in power by overriding provincial politics rather than encouraging the emergence of genuine local representatives.

Civilian leaders for their part have not proved any better and rightly fear that effective local governance will erode their power. Hence the ridiculous

However, with a couple of more election cycles, the hold of big families on major parties cannot be taken for granted. An ever-watchful media, an increasingly aggressive superior judiciary and an army averse to overt takeovers should combine to create an environment where politicians are held to greater scrutiny than we have seen so far. ■

The writer is a commentator on issues of public policy, political economy and international relations, with a focus on South Asia and the Middle East.

The once flamboyant Lalu Prasad Yadav has fallen on bad times. He was the *de jure* chief minister of Bihar for seven years (from 1990 to 1997), and ruled the state for another eight years, from 1997 to 2005, through his spouse Rabri Devi whom he installed in his place after he resigned. He was also India's railways minister for five years. In 1997 he formed a new political party, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), and in 2004 he was the longest serving president of any Indian political party.

Today, he is a convict. In October 2013, a special Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) court sentenced Yadav to five years of rigorous imprisonment, a fine of Rs.25 lakh and disqualification of his membership from the Lok Sabha.

Though he has company in jail – his predecessor in office, Jagannath Mishra, besides Jagdish Sharma, MP, and quite a few others who were also simultaneously sentenced to various jail terms – that would be small comfort for Yadav.

Yet, withal, Lalu Prasad Yadav's reputation as the most colorful political leader remains intact. Like Jawaharlal Nehru, he is a magnet for the multitudes. As chief minister of Bihar

His exclusive style and mannerism is so popular that it is imitated and mimicked even by film and TV stars. He promoted the "Bihari culture" that includes the use of Bhojpuri dialect in the entertainment industry.

Yadav's character and exploits read like a fable. Coming from the low-caste Yadav community, whose main occupation is cattle-breeding and selling milk (*gwala*), he graduated from Patna University. He was active in politics even during his student days and was the president of the university's students' union. After graduating in law and obtaining a master's degree in political science, Yadav entered national politics and was elected a member of the Lok Sabha in 1977 as a Janata party candidate. He was only 29 then and one of the youngest members of parliament at that time.

He became a member of the Bihar Legislative Assembly in 1980 and was re-elected for another term in 1985. Yadav was nominated as chief minister of Bihar in 1990 by the Janata Dal. By that time, he had established himself as a leader of the lower castes as the representative of the single-largest caste of the Yadavs, that made up 11.7 percent of the state population.

Disillusioned with the Congress,

such as arresting BJP stalwart Lal Krishna Advani in 1990 when he was passing through Bihar on his historic rath *yatra* to Ayodhya.

Yadav's misfortunes began with his indictment in a case of massive corruption that hit the headlines as the Fodder Scam. First came his resignation as chief minister in 1997. But the final blow fell in 2005 when his RJD could manage to win only 54 seats in the state elections that year, whereas his rivals – the Janata Dal United (JDU) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) – secured more seats. As a consequence, Yadav's chapter was almost closed.

In the 2010 state elections, the RJD tally was reduced further to just 22 seats, whereas the ruling coalition claimed "a record 206 out of the 243 assembly seats". In the Lok Sabha too, the picture was equally bleak as the RJD could win only four seats in the 2009 general elections. Against this background, the future of the RJD in the 2014 elections hangs in the balance.

Looking back at Yadav's performance in office, there is little doubt that he was a failure as chief minister. During his tenure "every economic and social ranking of the state went to the lowest level when compared to other states of India." Law

When Lady

Lalu Prasad Yadav today typifies a person whom luck has forsaken. He spends his time inside a jail while his party is left in a shambles outside.

By S.G. Jilane

he would often land unannounced in some field in a village and within minutes crowds would gather around his helicopter to listen to him.

the Muslims also flocked to his side, especially because he had projected himself as a secular leader. He reinforced his image by taking steps

and order broke down, kidnappings were on the rise and private armies mushroomed.

However, it was his stint as



Luck Leaves

railways minister for which he is best known at home and abroad. Through his innovative reforms, he turned around the Indian Railways from a loss-making organization to one that registered remarkable profits. In the four years under his leadership, the railways made a cumulative total profit of Rs.250 billion.

Aware that road transport, both for passengers and goods, presented

stiff competition to the railways, Yadav initiated steps to attract passengers and freight towards the railways. Wisely, he did not touch passenger fares. Instead he provided comfort such as cushioned seats in the lower class. He also introduced faster goods haulage at reduced freight charges. Both measures led to a turnaround that surprised everybody and Yadav received international acclaim as a

management wizard. He addressed students at Harvard and Wharton and received invitations from several other Ivy League schools in the United States for delivering lectures on his style of management.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation produced a four-hour long documentary 'India Rising' in 2007, featuring Indians from various fields. Yadav was the only politician to be featured in the documentary, discussing the turnaround of the Indian Railways.

But it was the Fodder Scam that proved to be his Achilles' heel. Though embezzlement had been going on since long, it was during Yadav's term as chief minister when it was discovered that huge sums of money had been siphoned off to non-existent companies. Ironically, it was Yadav himself who initiated investigations that ultimately led to his conviction.

The Fodder Scam itself was quite an innovative method of corruption. The players chose a relatively low-key department of animal husbandry that does not generally attract much attention. The scheme involved the fabrication of vast herds of ghost livestock, for which fodder, medicines and animal husbandry equipment was supposedly procured. In this way about Rs.9.50 billion were embezzled.

Yadav's conviction may be startling

news. But at its very best, it simply is an acid test of India's justice system. How far it will succeed in changing the overall corruption scenario remains questionable, particularly when at least 1,460 lawmakers are reportedly facing various criminal cases. **S**

The writer is a senior political analyst and former editor of SouthAsia Magazine.



The Day After

What will happen to Afghanistan after U.S. and NATO forces leave in 2014? It is only the Afghan people who can find a lasting solution to their problems and the Loya Jirga would be a useful step in that direction.

By Daud Khattak

The Afghan Loya Jirga has finally approved the U.S.-Afghanistan bilateral security agreement (BSA) on November 24, paving way for long-term U.S. military presence in Afghanistan when the rest of the international troops will leave the landlocked country in 2014.

The agreement will now be presented to the Afghan parliament where the general mood is already supportive and it is likely that the agreement will be approved without any hiccups. This will be a relief for a vast majority of Afghans who see the post-withdrawal U.S. presence as a key to their country's lasting peace and security.

However, while the Afghan

Loya Jirga, attended by around 2500 representatives, gave President Hamid Karzai the green signal to go ahead with the security pact, a later statement of President Karzai created a new controversy about the future of the BSA.

Addressing the opening session of the Loya Jirga, President Karzai said that the agreement might have to wait to be signed until after Afghanistan's presidential elections. If Karzai stays true to his words, the BSA is not going to be signed till April 2014.

Reacting to Karzai's surprising statement – surprising because it came at a time when the Loya Jirga was sit to approve the BSA – the White House said

on November 22 that it is “imperative” that the Afghan authorities conclude the agreement with the United States before the end of December 2013.

“Failure to conclude the BSA by that point would make it impossible for the United States and our allies to plan for a presence (in Afghanistan) post-2014,” White House spokesperson told a news conference on November 22.

While it is unlikely that President Karzai will postpone the signing of the BSA when the Loya Jirga has already approved it, and the Afghan parliament is likely to follow suit, analysts believe the Afghan president is desperately trying to improve his highly flawed image with the common Afghans by

giving the impression that he is standing up to the Americans.

Known for his bluffs over the years, Karzai's current move is also being seen as an almost futile effort to get leverage ahead of the 2014 presidential election and to get concessions for himself, his family and his favorite candidate.

Whatever Karzai's motives are, the Afghans generally believe that U.S. presence will not only be a moral boost for the nascent Afghan Army and the police, which will be fighting the Taliban after the international forces' withdrawal, but also keep the flow of international assistance for rebuilding efforts in the war-ravaged country.

In such a situation, it is most probable that the bilateral security agreement will be signed within the date set by the United States to ensure the U.S. and its allies prepare their plans for the next year.

"Though the terms of the security agreement are still not clear to us, if the two sides agreed upon, will send a direct message to Afghanistan's neighbors alongside opening ways for continued international assistance for Afghanistan," said Barmak Pajhwak, Senior Program Officer with the United States Institute of Peace.

He added that the most important step in Afghanistan's transition period would be the upcoming presidential election and the peaceful handing over of power from one elected government to another.

Doubts are being expressed about the holding of the April 2014 presidential polls which comes ahead of the beginning of the international withdrawal and the key question is the credibility and legitimacy of the election process.

Serious questions were raised about the 2009 presidential election when the one time foreign minister Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, who was a runner-up in the elections, refused to accept the results.

Since the Afghan Constitution bars President Karzai from contesting the presidential election for a third term, 10 (now 11 confirmed) strong candidates,

including the president's brother Qayyum Karzai, are in the field this time. Prominent among them are Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, Dr. Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, Dr. Zalmay Rassoul and former jihadi leader Abdul Rasul Sayaf.

Almost everyone among these strong candidates supports the bilateral security agreement with the United States and believes that the nascent Afghan army will need both technical and material support from their international backers to guard their country against the Taliban and their affiliates running safe havens in the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Apart from a moral boost for the Afghan security forces, the presence of U.S. troops will keep the window of assistance open and the world community, particularly the United States, will continue keeping Afghanistan under its radar.

A complete U.S. withdrawal will not only leave Afghanistan in total disarray but will also affect the security situation in Pakistan. Since the new Pakistani government has time and again voiced support for a stable, peaceful and prospering Afghanistan, it is most probable that Prime Minister Sharif's team is clearly seeing the perils involved with the country's past policies of so-called 'strategic depth' and interference in Afghanistan.

A complete withdrawal from Afghanistan means a signal to a civil war in which the Taliban are likely to emerge as one of the strongest parties. In that case, it is unlikely that the Pakistani Taliban, presently using the tribal areas as their stronghold, will not get a moral boost to expand their activities to the settled areas and major cities of Pakistan.

The security agreement, therefore, will not only keep Afghanistan from slipping into another civil war but will also help keep the Pakistani Taliban under control. Since Nawaz Sharif's advisor on foreign affairs, Sartaj Aziz, has already visited Kabul in July 2013, while the prime minister himself is set to meet President Hamid Karzai in

December in the Afghan capital, the signs are visible about a considerable improvement in relations between the two countries over the past few months.

According to Hamid Karzai's aides, the president has privately admitted that he had fruitful contacts with Nawaz Sharif's government which gives enough hope for a new beginning for the two neighbors.

At the same time, PM Nawaz Sharif's realistic approach towards his country's relations with the United States is also going to play a key role in ensuring peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region.

Although sectarianism in Afghanistan has never been a serious issue affecting the security and stability of that country, the roots of ethnic divisions have been considerably strengthened over the past few decades. With an army not fully trained and equipped, and faced with a ruthless enemy (the Taliban), a complete withdrawal can bring the country face to face with another civil war as has been seen in Iraq over the past few years.

It is this reality that pushes the Afghans, both President Hamid Karzai and his opponents alike, to go for a bilateral security agreement (BSA) despite reservations at some levels.

"We worked very hard, as foreign minister, my colleagues in the National Security Council, the Ministry of Finance and others to take into consideration in this BSA the national interests and sovereignty of Afghanistan," said presidential candidate and former foreign minister Zalmay Rassoul in a recent interview with the Wall Street Journal.

A vast majority of Afghans believe only the BSA could keep the country united and safe from internal instability and foreign interference. ■

The writer is Acting Director at Mashaal Radio, RFE/RL Prague, Czech Republic and has covered the Taliban movement in Pakistan and Afghanistan. He also contributes to the Christian Science Monitor and Sunday Times.

The Face-Off



As Hasina tries to remain glued to her chair and Khaleda struggles to wrench her away, the people of Bangladesh watch in suspense.

By S.G. Jilanee

Political standoffs in Bangladesh between rival parties, particularly the Awami League and the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) – one led by Sheikh Hasina and the other by Begum Khaleda Zia – are nothing new. But lately the situation has taken a new and ominous turn that does not bode well for the country.

At issue is the kind of government that will conduct the general elections due in January 2014. The term of the incumbent 14-party coalition, called *mahajote*, led by the Awami League, ended on October 24. But Prime Minister Hasina is determined to stay

in office and hold elections under her oversight.

This is unacceptable to the opposition. It demands a caretaker government comprising non-political and neutral persons with unquestionable integrity. In fact, Khaleda reminds Hasina how she had raised hell for a caretaker government when the shoe was on the other foot and Khaleda was prime minister.

With the end of the government's term, therefore, Khaleda upped the ante. She demanded that the incumbent prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, should resign and a caretaker

government inducted.

To press her demand, the BNP held a mass rally at Dhaka's Suhrawardy Uddyan on October 25, where Khaleda called for a continuous 60-hour strike throughout the country, from 27th to 29th October. Reacting to the BNP's move, Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina took a dramatic step and made a telephone call to her rival on October 26 though they had not spoken to each other for many years.

But Khaleda was wary. She detected the trap set for her. Therefore, in the thirty-seven minute talk, she fully availed the opportunity to

give the caller a piece of her mind. Hasina invited her rival to dinner at Gonobhaban, her official residence, to talk their differences over. But she also requested that Khaleda should call off the strike.

Accepting the invitation, Khaleda called her rival's bluff, pointing out that the call for the strike was given on October 24. So, if Hasina was really sincere about holding talks she should have called the next day. In that case perhaps something could have been done. But now it was too late because the *hartal* was to start the next morning. Khaleda, therefore, suggested that both talks and *hartal* should go on simultaneously.

This was obviously unacceptable to the prime minister. Meanwhile, the government made public the contents of the conversation through the media. This ploy also boomeranged because it helped Khaleda to put her case across before the people's court without any effort.

On October 28, Hasina presided over a mass meeting at Suhrawardy Uddyan. Incidentally, once again her meeting took place one day before another 60-hour strike was declared by the BNP.

In her rally speech, Hasina repeated her request to Khaleda to call off the strike and talk. But it is the issue of the interim government that is the bone of contention. Hasina has softened her attitude from insisting on the continuation of her government during the interim period. She has now agreed to form an all-party government and asked Khaleda in the public meeting which portfolios she wanted for her party in an interim government. Thus the see-saw goes on.

To foil the strike and suppress agitators, Hasina has taken the unwise step to encourage her party's student wing – the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), which is already notorious for violence and killings – to assist the

police. The presence of the BCL adds a new dimension to the face-off as it pits one party directly against the other. This policy is likely to add to the tally of the loss of life and property during *hartals* and, might ultimately push the country into a civil war-like situation.

It is certain that the BNP alliance will increase pressure with every passing day. It may boycott the elections and has also threatened to obstruct it physically. If the BNP boycotts, then Jatiya Party – one of Awami League's important allies – will also follow suit, its chief Hussein Mohammad Ershad has declared.

Important foreign powers such as the U.S., the U.K., the E.U. and China, besides UN Secretary-General

Bangladesh would not have been independent. And if Indira Gandhi had not taken Hasina and her sister under her protection after their parents had been killed, they would have been very insecure.

Understandably, therefore, India feels most comfortable with an Awami League government under Hasina having complete rapport on all issues. With the BNP in power, that equation changes. But India has to play its role for political peace in Bangladesh.

India and Bangladesh are both unhappy with the U.S. because of the interest its ambassador in Dhaka, Dan Mozena, has been taking to promote dialogue between Hasina and Khaleda and his meetings with the latter. India

India has remained aloof so far even though it is Bangladesh's closest neighbor and also maintains intimate relations with Sheikh Hasina. In fact, Bangladesh owes its birth to India's midwifery and Hasina, her safety.

Ban Ki Moon, are exhorting the rival leaders to defuse the volatile situation. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has written letters to both Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia to "sit down and find a negotiated way out of their political differences so that there would be free, fair, transparent and inclusive national elections in Bangladesh".

However, India has remained aloof so far even though it is Bangladesh's closest neighbor and also maintains intimate relations with Sheikh Hasina. In fact, Bangladesh owes its birth to India's midwifery and Hasina, her safety. Without India's assistance,

was therefore cold on his recent visit to the Secretary of India's External Affairs Ministry to sound India out on the situation. A MEA source said that "India and Bangladesh are on the same page in the emerging situation." It also added that they knew "who was on which side in 1971. This was a reference to U.S. support to Pakistan while India supported Bangladesh.

Given the existing level of polarization how the present impasse will be resolved remains to be seen. ■

The writer is a senior political analyst and former editor of SouthAsia Magazine.

Showdown or Climbup?

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings have a symbolic significance in international politics. CHOGM 2013, however, was a different affair altogether.

By Javeria Shakil



At present, the happiest man in Sri Lanka is its President, Mahinda Rajapaksa, as he has managed to do what seemed highly unlikely until a few weeks back: hold the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2013 in Sri Lanka and quite successfully at that.

Although these meetings have a symbolic significance, these occasions every two years are regarded as sedate events in international politics. CHOGM 2013, however, was a different affair altogether.

It ran into controversy right when the venue was announced as Colombo two years ago. The host country Sri Lanka has been facing criticism for a long time from various international

quarters for the alleged war crimes of its armed forces committed during the last weeks of its fight against the LTTE-led separatist movement. It is said that more than 40,000 Tamils, mostly civilians, were killed in the last 100 days of the fighting.

The mass killings created a rift between Sri Lanka and India, whose Tamil population in the Tamil Nadu state shares close ties with the Sri Lankan Tamils. It is also alleged that India secretly supported and trained the LTTE cadres. A self-proclaimed regional superpower in South Asia, India has been pressurizing Colombo over the issue.

But never was India's displeasure as obvious as it was just a few days

before the Commonwealth Summit started. Deliberations took place on whether or not to send the Indian prime minister to Colombo while Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J. Jayalithaa urged the Congress government to completely boycott the summit to show "empathy and solidarity with Tamils, not only in Tamil Nadu but elsewhere."

Canada had already announced that it would not send its delegation to the meeting while in the United Kingdom, opinions on the country's participation in the event were divided.

The visit of Navi Pillay, United Nations Human Rights Chief, hardly two months ahead of the conference did not help matters either. Ms. Pillay,

who had visited Sri Lanka to investigate war crimes, leveled serious allegation against the Sri Lankan government of violation of human rights in her post-visit report. The government of Sri Lanka strongly denied the accusations and refuted Ms. Pillay's claims.

It was against this background that CHOGM 2013 was held. And, as a result, sparks flew all around, making the summit probably the most happening event in the organization's entire history.

When Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh finally announced – just a day before the conference – that he would not go to Colombo, a war of words ensued among government officials of both countries. The flames of this war also engulfed other nations. Mauritius boycotted the meeting and while U.K. Prime Minister David Cameron attended, he left no stone unturned in ensuring that his visit give a rough ride to the host country.

In a gesture that clearly showed where his country's alignment in international politics lay, the U.K. prime minister visited India first and met with the Indian PM, before heading to Colombo. During his India sojourn he also made some pointed remarks vis-à-vis the human rights situation in Sri Lanka. As if that were not enough, he visited Jaffna, the war-affected northern province of Sri Lanka, on the first day of the summit.

In a rare and surprising display of newly acquired political muscle, the Sri Lankan president gave fitting replies to the comments made by international delegates as well as the media. Answering a question posed by a foreign journalist, President Mahinda Rajapaksa said, "I would not shake his (Prince Charles') hands, I will say Ayubowan whether it's a King, Queen or beggar. That is the way I would greet the Prince. Since he is coming to see me, we will not only talk about what happened in 2009, but the entire 30-year conflict. I also have some

questions to ask." Defence Secretary, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa alleged that the U.K. government was acting "as if Sri Lanka were still a British colony."

The Sri Lankan government, especially the president and his defense secretary, continued to fight the country's battle on the diplomatic front. "It was a matter of life and death for us. We had to face LTTE terror for thirty years. They killed innocent civilians, children and even pregnant women. No one gets killed in Sri Lanka today. There is peace and harmony," the president said on one occasion.

He claimed that his government had rehabilitated and released the LTTE's child soldiers about a month after the conflict had concluded, while 14,000 of its cadres had been reunited with their families within three years.

To prove to the world that its hands were clean, the Sri Lankan government allowed journalists from the U.K.'s Channel 4 – the network that aired a number of documentaries on the alleged war – to come to Sri Lanka for the coverage of the conference. Journalists representing the channel were also granted permission to visit the northern parts of Sri Lanka. But the visit couldn't materialize due to 'demonstrations' against Channel 4 by 'pro-government elements'.

The country which came to Sri Lanka's defense in the situation was Australia whose Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, expressed his support in no uncertain terms. "We are here as much as to praise as to judge. It is important not to isolate countries emerging from conflicts. Sri Lanka's willingness to host this Commonwealth shows its commitment to democratic pluralism and freedom based on the law and ought to assure all its citizenship that just as today is better than yesterday, tomorrow will be better than today," he said in his opening speech.

While Australia provided diplomatic support, Sri Lanka exploited its growing trade ties with China to

send the message across that it may be a 'teardrop' in the Indian Ocean, but it has the backing of world giants.

On the sidelines of the Commonwealth Summit, the country's Board of Investment made some extraordinary deals with a Chinese company which has pledged to invest USD1,300million to develop Colombo. The most significant part of this deal is that the China Communication Construction Company will invest this money to reclaim 233 hectares of land surrounding the sensitive area of the Colombo Port.

The real achievement of the host country, however, was something else: the final communiqué released at the end of CHOGM 2013. It was this important declaration that determined what Sri Lanka had achieved on the diplomatic front.

And, as turned out, the country emerged quite successful as the communiqué mentioned only slightly the issue of human rights violations that had become a nightmare for the Sri Lankan government.

Internationally, CHOGM 2013 will be remembered for the controversies it threw up while regionally it is expected to set a new course for the existing and would-be regional powers.

Now that President Rajapaksa is the new chair of the Commonwealth, what steps he takes to satisfy the international community on the human rights issue and what becomes of the March 2014 deadline given by U.K. Prime Minister David Cameron to investigate war crimes, remains to be seen.

Meanwhile tough times seemingly lie ahead for the Sri Lankan masses that may have to bear the brunt of the huge loans taken by their government to meet the summit's expenditures. ■

The writer is Assistant Editor at SouthAsia. She focuses on issues of political and social interest.

Winds of Change

Now that Nepal has had a fresh round of elections, it is expected that some order will prevail and the nation will start moving on the road to democracy.

By Asma Siddiqui



Nepal has been governed by monarchs for hundreds of years. It has around 125 ethnic groups and many castes that constitute approximately 27 million people who do not see eye to eye when it comes to deciding the political future of Nepal.

After country's transition from a monarchy to democracy, a Constituent Assembly was established to formulate the constitution but the legislative body spent all of its four-year term without completing the job. A second assembly has now been elected to do the needful

Nepal's second national elections since the abolition of the 239-year-old monarchy were held on November 19, 2013. They were hailed as a ray of hope for the nation that has been deprived of democracy for a long time.

The people of Nepal have yet not recovered from the scars of the decade-long civil war. A fragile economy, crippling power cuts, ethnic divisions and a deplorable security situation has further increased their problems.

There are expectations that the elections will give way to a peace process that will finally end the conflict which has caused much harm to Nepal. The newly elected, 491-member Constituent Assembly, which will also function as a parliament, is expected to draft a new constitution for Nepal.

The country has seen five government changes since 2008 when the outgoing Constituent Assembly was put in place. The recent elections

were supposed to be held last year but were delayed due to conflicts among political parties. Even before the November elections, 33 parties led by the CPN-Maoist of Mohan Baidya, decided to boycott the polls as their demands were not met.

The foremost demand was the formation of an interim government headed by a political appointee. It is another thing that they could not explain how such a setup would ensure transparency in the elections. The group also demanded a deferral of the elections till May next year.

The only demand that was somewhat acceptable was the resignation of Chief Executive Regmi from the post of chief justice. But Regmi refused and made it clear that he would hold on to his post.

The Baidya group also threatened that it would create havoc and chaos

during the elections and since it had the potential to disrupt the polling process, it was decided to deploy the army during the polling.

A total of 61,000 army personnel were deployed while the army also formed a separate 'Election Unit' to meet the needs of the elections.

The decision to deploy the army did not go down well with the opposition parties. In fact, they pleaded with the UN not to support the army's involvement in the election process as it would be against the peace pact.

The group also met the ambassadors of the European Union to raise this issue. In a statement issued on September 30, the UN demanded that an "inclusive election" should be held. But the opposition alliance openly declared that it would carry out 'political and publicity' campaigns and effectively and strongly boycott

the elections.

This meant chaos, violence and riots.

Despite the deployment of the army and tightened security, the elections were marred by incidents of violence with bombs exploding in the capital, Kathmandu. However, voters came out in large numbers to participate in the polling process which was overseen by foreign observers.

Now that the polling is over, the main responsibility lies on the political parties, the government, its allies, the security forces and, above all, the masses to ensure that the newly elected assembly completes its task as only this can put an end to the uncertainty that has been surrounding the country for years. **S**

The writer is a freelance journalist who contributes pieces on social issues.



After the Elections

Democracy is a new phenomenon in Bhutan, which was a monarchy not long ago. Perhaps a greater sense of direction is needed for the political parties to make a real difference.

By Asna Ali

Tiny, isolated and landlocked, a small country caught between two titans, Bhutan is a monarchy and the only country in the world that, for many years, measured the Gross National Happiness of its citizens.

However, there is more to the country than meets the eye. Closer scrutiny reveals the very unique set of problems Bhutan faces, thanks to its geographical location, size and, most of all, a society that is slowly transforming and modernizing itself.

No longer a traditional monarchy, Bhutan started its steady march towards democracy under the rule of former King Jigme Singye Wangchuck who gradually gave up some of his authority to the national assembly. The first parliamentary elections were held in 2008 and were won by the Bhutan Peace and Prosperity Party (DPT). Right on schedule, the second parliamentary elections were held earlier this year and power was handed over without a hitch to the

opposition, the People's Democratic Party (PDP).

So far so good. Bhutan looks like it is well on its way to becoming a successful democracy but not everyone agrees to this sanguine point of view. Certain Bhutanese newspapers have pointed out the dwindling presence of political parties, post-election, as a sign that all is not well with this fledgling democratic state.

A lack of funds is one of the more obvious reasons for political parties



being unable to maintain a nationwide presence. To have an existence more tangible than a set of political ideas, parties need members, sympathizers and donors.

For long-established parties in countries such as the United States, UK or even Pakistan this is not much of a problem. Parties and their leaders are adequately recognized and there is no dearth of funds. But to exist on a firm footing in an infant democracy is a bit like playing a game in which no one is quite sure of the rules.

To solve the funds problem, the previous government suggested that political parties should receive state funding to keep their operations going. The idea does have some merit as a flourishing and well-established party system will help the democratic process. On the other hand, doubts have rightly been cast on the ruling capability of parties that are not even able to sustain themselves.

Even though a lack of resources is seen as the key issue plaguing Bhutan's political parties, it is merely a symptom of a much wider problem that has a lot to do with the internalization of the democratic process.

In countries that have a long-established tradition of democratically elected local and central governing bodies, political discourse does not end after elections. The selection of candidates is just one step in a self-sustaining circular process. The existence of multiple points of view and continuous debate regarding various administrative issues is seen as a matter of course. The victory of one political party over another does not signify that its opinions are the only valid ones. Those in government heed the words and respect the opinions of the opposition and even those of smaller fringe groups.

In such an environment, finding something to do post-elections is not a problem for the losing parties. They have enough presence and clout

to continue propagating their ideas both at home and abroad. There is attention from the media and from the international community as well which keeps a party alive in the memories of their voters.

Bhutan's political landscape consists of only a few key players at the moment. The winning party from the first election has become the opposition this time around and vice versa. A few new players emerged in the elections but they were knocked out of the race early without any substantial gains in terms of solidifying their presence.

Due to a lack of understanding both on the part of the public and the politicians there is confusion regarding what role political parties can play in Bhutanese society.

Following the elections, the new parties have all but disappeared and even the ruling party and opposition are finding it hard to keep their grip on the electorate.

This is because the sense of political will and purpose engendered by an election is always somewhat lost afterwards. There is a lingering feeling of "now what?" For politicians and party workers who have no real foothold or community standing, apart from the importance they gained during the campaign process, this is very hard to come to terms with.

Due to a lack of understanding both on the part of the public and the politicians there is confusion regarding what role political parties can play in Bhutanese society. Looking outwards to the rest of the world, there is a sense that they are supposed to contribute to social discourse and to also have some say in foreign and economic policy.


A severe lack of direction has

resulted in Bhutanese political parties having a sense of 'going adrift' post-election. Who makes the rules? That is the question on everyone's mind.

This obviously does not point to the unpopularity of democracy in the country, but rather to a lack of awareness of what it entails. The democratic process consists of much more than holding elections every few years.

There are obviously sections of Bhutanese society that would have preferred a continuation of the monarchy in its old form. For people used to being governed by

a single sovereign, the idea of such a wide-ranging choice is a little disconcerting. Although democracy has been adopted by the country in a slow and systematic manner, it still needs plenty of time and a few more election cycles to become stronger and self-sufficient.

There is a need for the larger political parties and the media to step up and introduce the concepts of multiple opinion, free-ranging debate and effective integration of leaders from different ends of the ideological spectrum into the policymaking process. Only then will democracy be truly accepted and partaken by the general public. In the meantime, party members should reach for their pockets for funds. Nobody said democracy was easy! 

The writer is a business graduate. She has an interest in political and social issues.

Another Killing Field?

Killing of the Rohingyas is not merely a matter of Muslim genocide but an issue that is fast building towards religious fundamentalism.

By Huzaima Bukhari & Dr. Ikramul Haq



In Myanmar (formerly Burma), violence against the minority Rohingya community by the Buddhist majority has a bloody history. Since 2012, the Rohingyas are being subjected to a planned genocide—a fact confirmed by reputable human rights organizations such as the Amnesty International and the Human Rights Watch. While the extremist Buddhist monks persecute them on religious grounds, the country's President, Thein Sein, openly declares that the Rohingyas are "illegal immigrants".

According to the United Nations,



around 140,000 Rohingya Muslims have suffered "widespread oppression and brutal violence in makeshift refugee camps with many dying unnecessarily." Atrocities committed against the community were not possible without state complicity. In its report released in April 2013, the Human Rights Watch alleged that security forces collaborated with Buddhist monks and also took part in the killings of Rohingya and Kaman Muslims in the Rakhine state last summer.

The report terms the massacres 'well-planned', exposing the nexus behind the mass killings and torture of Muslims. According to the report, "Political parties, associations of monks and community groups issued numerous anti-Rohingya pamphlets and public statements that explicitly or implicitly denied the existence of the Rohingya ethnicity, demonized them and called for their removal from the country, sometimes even using the phrase 'ethnic cleansing'. The statements were frequently released in connection with organized meetings and in full view of the local and national authorities who raised no concerns."

State complicity was further exposed in a video footage of the Meikhtila riots released by the BBC. In the video, Buddhist monks could be seen leading a murderous mob while the police stood by, playing the role of onlookers. Even then the government kept denying the involvement of the security forces and did not punish the culprits responsible for the killings of the Rohingyas and Kamans. The official stance that security forces "were overpowered by mobs" does not seem plausible since the same forces had brutally suppressed various uprisings during the 40-year-long military dictatorship in Myanmar.

The horrifying round of anti-Muslim riots in March and April 2013 was a bloody re-run of the 2012 massacre of the Rohingya and Kaman Muslims in Rakhine where, according to official

estimates, 110 people were killed and 125,000 were forced to flee to refugee camps.

Evidence suggests that violence against the Rohingyas was state-sponsored. Various senior army officers and government officials repeatedly expressed their fears that the Muslims would force their religion on the Buddhists and would try to "steal" Buddhist women. A senior minister once reportedly said, "If they are not deterred, the western gate will break (an obvious reference to the country's border with Bangladesh)," and that "human rights do not apply to Muslims." The Burmese Consul General in Hong Kong, U Ye Myint Aung, even wrote a letter to local newspapers and diplomatic missions, describing the Rohingyas as "ugly as ogres".

There has been a marriage of convenience between the government and the Buddhist monastic order, the Sangha. It is strange to note that an organization that earned worldwide admiration for its peaceful pro-democracy movement against the military regime in 2007 would suddenly resort to the genocide of Muslims.

Early this year, monk Wiseitta Biwuntha, also known as the Venerable Wirathu, launched the 969 campaign. He urged his followers "not to transact with Muslims economically or socially and to demarcate their houses and properties by putting up the 969 emblem."

Many allege that the anti-Muslim policy is crucial for the survival of the ruling elite. The government is supporting anti-Muslim extremism knowing that it would encourage a multi-ethnic conservative alliance between the Buddhists and the establishment forces. The state-run media intentionally highlights and sponsors anti-Rohingya propaganda, promotes violence and spreads hatred against them.

The 140,000 Rohingyas who live in subhuman conditions in displacement camps believe that nothing is left for

them in Myanmar. Some are even paying smugglers to sneak out to Malaysia or Thailand by boats. The conflict is also taking a bizarre turn in the wake of a threat of retaliation by the Pakistani Taliban. Many believe that "a homegrown radical movement may take place".

"I'm afraid that some of the young men in the camps could become terrorists if they keep living in this way," says a Rohingya activist, Aung Win.

The entire world community has become a silent spectator while violence against the long-marginalized Rohingya, whom the United Nations has termed as one of the world's most persecuted minorities, is on the rise. It is a matter of concern that after emerging from half a century of military rule, Myanmar is faced with this predicament that poses a serious threat to its economic and political reforms as well as to global interfaith harmony.

It is widely alleged that hardliners in the army are restraining the government from further reforms by igniting violence. In some of his speeches, President Thein Sein has emphasized the need for trust, respect and compassion between the people of different faiths and ethnic groups. But, at the same time, he also insists that the Rohingya Muslims are "illegal immigrants".

This attitude would not help establish peace. The government needs to show determination to protect all the minorities and counter violence from any group. It is time the pro-democracy opposition renounced its indifference, became united and countered religious bigotry. The country's salvation lies in the victory of non-sectarian forces.

The world community should also come forward. It is not merely a matter of protecting the Rohingya Muslims from genocide but of developing a common front against religious fundamentalism that has Fascist potentials and tendencies. ■

Rohingyas – the most persecuted community

The Arakan state in Myanmar shares its borders with Bangladesh and is inhabited by two ethnic communities – the Rakhine Buddhists and the Rohingya Muslims. The former are in a majority while the latter form the minority. The Rohingyas, numbering approximately two million, have been enduring continued persecution triggered by the ethnic cleansing policy of the country's military regime. About 1.5 million Rohingyas have been living in exile in many countries around the world.

Arakan was never a part of Burma or Bangladesh and was, in fact, a separate region until the Burmese King Bowdawpaya invaded it in 1784. Arakan's last dynasty ruled from the 15th to 18th century and was influenced by Muslim culture to the extent that the basis of Muslim faith, the *kalima*, was inscribed on its coins. Rohingya Muslims are natives of that region, as mentioned in the fifth volume of Asiatic Researches. The colonial British census records of 1825 A.D. show one Muslim for every two Buddhists in Arakan.

The constitution of Myanmar provides indigenous status to all people permanently residing in Arakan or in the Union of Burma before 1825. The Muslims, prior to 1825, were counted as one of the lawfully indigenous races of Burma. But today the Rohingyas are termed illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and denied citizenship rights.

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It was an unprecedented move when Saudi Arabia turned down a two-year non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. No country had ever before refused the seat and, in fact, Riyadh had lobbied for it and had even prepared its diplomats for the post.

It is common knowledge that while the developing countries are in an overwhelming majority in the UN, they enjoy almost no power in international affairs. Although this is the position from the beginning, when the UN was founded in October 1945, it remains so even today when the number of non-permanent members has risen from 51 to 193.

It is true that the failure of the League

the history of the causes of the failure of the League of Nations. The League was established at the initiative of US President Woodrow Wilson, primarily to prevent the recurrence of wars between nations. For this purpose, Article 11 of the Covenant was designed whose main task was to "ensure that a war never broke out again."

But the League proved to be ineffective, particularly in the 1930s, though its fundamental weaknesses had begun to appear even before it was founded. Its first and most debilitating weakness was refusal of the US Congress to ratify its draft, in whose framing US President Woodrow Wilson had played a major

weakness of the League. Similarly, the failure of the League to resolve the Teschen crisis between Poland and Czechoslovakia, also in 1919, had further shown its weakness. This crisis and many that followed, especially in the 1930s, led to WW2 and necessitated that the big countries be given effective powers to maintain peace and security in the world.

However, the framers of the UN Charter, mainly the victors of WW2, had tilted the balance too much in their own favor while framing it. Veto power for the U.S., Russia, China, U.K. and France meant that any of them could block a UN resolution or action, even if a large majority of the UN members voted in its favor

A Royal Snub

The Saudi rejection of a seat in the UN Security Council was an unprecedented move. It expressed their displeasure with the way things were being run in the UN.

By Mansoor Alam

of Nations, founded in 1918 at the end of World War 1, to maintain peace and security, had made it necessary to vest the permanent members of the UN with extraordinary powers. The question is: was it necessary to create such an undemocratic institution and give so much power to the five victors of WW2? Had it not made the UN a lopsided organization? Is it not responsible for the present bickering in the world?

It would be appropriate to briefly examine the causes and weaknesses of the LN, especially since many educated people, even in the developed countries, may not know

role. Moreover, Germany, the second most powerful European country, was not allowed to join because it was held responsible for starting WW1. Consequently, within one year of its birth, i.e., 1919, the ultra-nationalist Italians, angered because, according to them, the Big Three had broken promises made to Italy at Versailles and had militarily occupied Fiume, a port city with a large Italian population and kept it occupied for almost three years in spite of Italy's pleas to vacate it. Finally, the Italian government had to use its military to force them to leave the city and restore its status. This episode had demonstrated the

or against it. This made the UN a highly non-democratic institution in a democratic age. At present, the number of developing countries is more than the number of permanent members. It has only changed their ratio without changing the power equation between them. Veto power has been given to the permanent members of the Security Council, which is neither healthy for world peace nor in their own interest and has made the UN a lopsided organization. This is one reason why the former USSR and the U.S. have repeatedly used their veto power against any decision they considered contrary to

their own narrow national interest or that of their client states.

The U.S. military intervention in Vietnam and its disgraceful defeat by the Viet Cong, followed by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and its occupation of that independent member of the UN for ten years, despite increasing condemnation by over 2/3rds majority in the UN

gave rise to Palestinian militancy and has now caused Muslim extremism and terrorism, though the U.S. does not recognize it. The result is that Muslim extremists have made the world unstable. Although, the U.S. government and its very powerful legislative organ, the Senate, do not agree with this conclusion, it cannot be denied and an overwhelming

reason that several wars have broken out between the Arabs and Israel in the Middle East. And though Israel has come out victorious in all of them with the help of the U.S., a large number of Arabs and Muslims from all Islamic countries are joining the Al-Qaeda, to wage war against the U.S., which in their eyes has become not the sole superpower but the sole



General Assembly, amply illustrates both the afore-stated points. Neither of the two superpowers could stop the eruption of a nasty and bloody war between Iran and Iraq in 1980.

The frequent use of veto power by the U.S. in the Middle East, in favor of Israel and against the Arabs, first

majority of the UN members also think so and have often voted in the General Assembly in favor of the resolution calling on Israel to vacate its wrongful occupation of Arab land since the 1967 Yom Kippur War. A larger percentage of Arab and Muslim states also resents it. It is for this

‘unjust’ superpower.

Israel’s acquisition of nuclear power, many decades ago, with the active collusion of the U.S. and some West European states, rankles the Muslims in general. They see that the West, led by the U.S., has been doing everything possible, including

permission to Israel to commit aggression against Arab countries, to prevent them from acquiring nuclear weapons, while it has exempted Israel from the purview of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. No wonder that an overwhelming majority among more than one billion Muslims of the world accuse the West of following double standards against the Muslims and actually think that the West was waging a new Crusade against Islam.

Double standards are considered a norm rather than an exception in international relations, but the West's policy of blatant double standards, causes great heartburn to the Muslims, and even non-Muslim developing countries. Because of this one-sided Western attitude, the NPT has lost its efficacy. It is not surprising then that Iran is trying, in spite of tough UN sanctions and Israeli threats of attack, to become a nuclear power. Undoubtedly the US has put pressure on Israel to exercise restraint for the time being, because this may further aggravate the threat of war and terrorism in the world. Such restraint looks like an attempt to treat cancer with Panadol.

It is also due to the lopsided attitude of the U.S., in particular and the West in general, that they have failed to persuade three nations (India, Pakistan and North Korea) to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). This situation is obviously causing great concern to the world, including the big powers, because of the enhanced risk of nuclear war between two Third World nuclear powers, India and Pakistan, who have already fought three and a half wars, since their independence in 1947. A nuclear war between them could easily engulf other countries and inflict great damage.

In this background, the Saudi decision to renounce its seat in the UN Security Council must be welcomed. It is only hoped that it will prompt other developing countries, particularly the

OIC members, to forget their petty differences and follow the lead. A united stand by a majority of non-permanent members on the lines of Saudi Arabia, will force the major powers to make the UN a more democratic institution which could work to end all wars or threats of war.

Developing countries would otherwise remain second-class members of the UN. The tension and threat of nuclear war would continue and ultimately seal the fate of the UN as it had done in the case of the League. It is axiomatic that the long-term health of all ideas and organizations depends on its ability and capacity to modify and grow. If it remains impervious to the changing times, it is bound to stagnate, decline and ultimately die.

The fact that there was no bloody and violent revolution in the U.K. as there was in France and Russia and China was because British society had adjusted to changing circumstances right from 1215 when it had signed the Magna Carta and again, in 1668, about 100 years before the French Revolution. It was called the glorious revolution because it had replaced the old order with a new one but without shedding blood in a civil war.

It is imperative that the permanent UN members who are not only democracies themselves but also great advocates of democracy and liberalism among the developing countries, should allow and lead the reformation of the UN to reflect the changing demographic, economic and political realities of today's world. Such democratization of the UN is inevitable. The only question is, will it come about peacefully or through another world war which could be more devastating and which may end all forms of life on the planet. The veto-wielding powers should not be swayed by their narrow interests but by the interest of humanity at large.

Now some emerging world powers, led by India and including, Germany,

Japan, Brazil, South Africa and Egypt, are making great efforts for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. Their veto power would be in their narrow interest and will not make the Charter a more equitable document or the world a just and safe place.

If a reform of the United Nation has to take place, then all its 193 members must feel empowered and be given the right to override the veto by 2/3rds majority. In spite of the veto power, the UN has not succeeded in resolving any of the territorial disputes either between non-nuclear powers like Iran and the UAE or nuclear and non-nuclear powers, like Israel and the Arab countries or between two nuclear powers, like India and Pakistan. Unfortunately, the acquisition of nuclear weapons by developing countries has made them more rigid. If there has been no world war since WW2, it is not because disputes have been resolved, with or without UN intervention, but it is because of the balance of power between nuclear weapon states, which has created the fear of total annihilation of both the victor and the vanquished.

Though the Cold War has ended between the two superpowers and the danger of a nuclear war between them has greatly receded, the danger of such a war between developing countries, both nuclear and non-nuclear, continues to hang over the world like the Sword of Damocles.

It is unlikely that all the Third World countries will unite and produce the desired result. It is hoped that at least the Arab League and OIC members will follow the Saudi example. If they could also give up their seats like Saudi Arabia, or announce their resolve not to seek a non-permanent seat in the Security Council, it will greatly help the Palestinian cause and show their individual and collective interest. **S**

The writer is a former Ambassador of Pakistan and Director General (R) of the Foreign Service Academy.



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Emerging Trade Portal

With a healthy growth rate, Sri Lanka could be the next business hub in the region.

By Javeria Shakil



To hold international events, which include foreign dignitaries and visitors, is a difficult task, especially for an underdeveloped South Asian country. And it becomes even more difficult if the country in question is a small one like Sri Lanka which has limited resources and which was fighting insurgency as recently as 2009.

This year, the small island nation surprised the world by hosting five major international events – simultaneously. The most important one, and also the most controversial, was the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. Along with CHOGM 2013, the Commonwealth Business Forum, the Commonwealth Youth Forum and People-to-People Forum were also held in and around Colombo. A host of foreign delegates as well as visitors attended these events. Since all of them were high profile events, foreign media was also present in strength.

To benefit from the presence of the large number of foreign visitors in the country, Sri Lanka's Ministry of Economic Development, Ministry of Industry and Commerce and Ministry of Investment Promotion together with Sri Lanka's Export Development Board, the Tourism Promotion Bureau and the Board of Investment, co-organized a trade, tourism and investment exposition titled Reflection of Sri Lanka. The aim of the large scale event, which was inaugurated by Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa, was to utilize the opportunities provided by CHOGM to showcase the various industries of Sri Lanka.

Although the venue for the exposition – the 'Folk Art Centre' in Battaramulla, a suburban area near Colombo – was an unusual choice for a trade show, it turned out to be

a wise decision as it added color to the exhibition and aptly projected Sri Lanka's culture, especially its eco-friendly policies.

It was obvious that much effort and thought had gone into decorating the venue. The main entrance, for example, was festooned not by colorful ribbons or other ornaments but by bottle gourd vines that made a beautiful and unique border. Then there were small patches of wheat crops and hut-style tea stalls entertaining visitors with a variety of world famous Sri Lankan teas.

The exhibition focused on seven key sectors of Sri Lankan exports: tea, apparel, gems and jewelry, spices, food, rubber products and ICT/BPO. According to the press release issued by the Export Development Board, the exposition hosted over 800 exhibitors comprising 350 direct exporters, 200 small and medium enterprises, 150 foreign technology providers, about 100 local machinery manufacturers and tourism stakeholders.

Speaking to SouthAsia about the exhibition, Ruchira Withana, Director of MIS and Industrial Registration & Productivity in the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, said, "This is not the first expo to be held in Sri Lanka; we hold such expositions from time to time. But what differentiates Reflection of Sri Lanka from other events of similar nature is its sheer magnitude. This is the biggest trade event in Sri Lanka's history."

Trade, tourism and investment are the main components of the Sri Lankan economy. The country's exports contribute nearly 17 percent to the GDP. "Our export volume is around USD10 billion and the government of Sri Lanka has set the target of increasing it to USD20 billion by 2015," said

Rishad Bathiudeen, the Minister for Commerce and Industry, in his press briefing to journalists from Pakistan.

In 2009, 63 percent of the total export earnings of Sri Lanka were derived from two products: garments (44 percent) and tea (17 percent). Realizing the adverse effects of dependence on only two sectors, the Sri Lankan government started making efforts to broaden the country's export base. "The government plans to explore and focus on new markets, especially in China and the African region," Bathiudeen said.

One of the reasons for this shift is the changing dynamics of international politics. There is increasing pressure on Sri Lanka to try those who allegedly committed war crimes in the concluding months of the three-decade-long civil war against the Tamil Tigers.

The U.K. spearheads this campaign. Incidentally, the U.K. is also a main export destination for Sri Lankan goods with an over 15 percent share in the country's total export. Sensing the change in the international community's tone, Sri Lanka is looking for new markets to save its economy from a possible shock.

This is why the Reflection of Sri Lanka exposition also gave an opportunity to foreign buyers as well as investors to visit Sri Lanka and explore new business avenues. "Around 170 foreign business delegates have been invited from 60 countries," said Withana. "We received applications from as many as 2000 people but we couldn't accommodate all of them. In addition to businessmen and industrialists, especially those who were in Sri Lanka for the Commonwealth Business Forum, around 3000 foreign visitors are also expected to come to the exhibition," he said.

While the exposition showcased

famous Sri Lankan export goods such as gems and jewelry, tea and textile items, the lesser-known sector of boat manufacturing also received much attention. There were stalls by leading boat-manufacturing companies of Sri Lanka, some of whom export their products to Scandinavian, Asian and Middle Eastern countries. Their products ranged from fishing boats to leisure boats, house boats, pedal boats and floating restaurants. One company at the exhibition, with a range of 40,000 boats, claimed to be the largest boat manufacturer in South East Asia.

The other sector which offered innovative services was tourism. Sri Lanka has seen a sharp rise in tourism since 2004 after the civil war. A number of hotels and resorts have been built and unique services are offered to tourists. One such service is that of 'home stays'.

Travel companies offering the service have designated homes in different parts of Sri Lanka where tourists visiting the country can stay with a Sri Lankan family. "Introduced some two years ago, the service has gained popularity with tourists as it is a novel way of introducing the local culture to the world," said Siri de Silva, a former president of the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises in Tourism (ASMET).

The tea stalls that offered a wide range of Sri Lankan teas also caught visitors' attention. In addition to the usual green and black tea, there was flavored tea, organic tea and the highly expensive silver and golden-tipped tea. The gems and jewelry stalls were a favorite with female visitors, both local and foreign. In 2012, Sri Lanka exported gems worth USD111 million; the British royalty is among the famous buyers of Sri Lankan gems. The blue sapphire on the engagement ring of Princess Kate



Middleton came from Sri Lanka.

Other famous Sri Lankan exports which attracted attention were textile products and ceramics. Sri Lanka has been exporting garments to some of the world's leading brands despite the fact that it does not produce the raw material. It imports raw material from India and Pakistan among other countries.

With a growth rate of 7.8 percent in the third quarter of 2013 – the highest in the region after Bhutan – business-friendly policies and lucrative investment opportunities, Sri Lanka is trying to launch itself as an up-and-coming business hub in the region. And the Reflection of Sri Lanka exposition surely marked the country's arrival as a new player in the regional markets. ■

The writer is Assistant Editor at SouthAsia. She focuses on issues of political and social interest.

Carpet weaving is Afghanistan's second largest industry after agriculture. Out of a population of over 25 million, around one million Afghans are employed in this sector. This makes carpets one of the most significant legal exports from Afghanistan – the illegal ones being heroin and opium, whose smuggling is the most lucrative economic activity in the country.

Most carpets in the country are produced by a huge network of weavers based in rural areas. A large part of the production takes place in the northern provinces, but a sizeable chunk also comes from the western province of Herat and the areas surrounding capital Kabul.

According to reports, some 95

percent of the production takes place in homes on free-standing looms that are supplied by carpet dealers who also provide the wool and designs as they have a better idea of popular trends in the international market.

An interesting fact about the Afghan carpet industry is that it is one of the few industries in which women are making a significant contribution. The carpet industry has enabled a large number of Afghan women to make a living. It proved particularly useful during the Taliban regime (1996-2001) when women were not allowed to work outside their homes. Back then, carpet weaving provided many Afghani women a source of income.

The time required for carpet production depends on the size,

quality, and materials used. The process is tedious and time-consuming and even skilled weavers take about a month to make a meter-long *chobirang* (a traditional rug), which can fetch up to \$190 in the international market. Similarly, the weaving of a high-quality 10 meters square carpet takes a single family some ten months to weave.

Once the work is done, the dealer comes for inspection and purchases the carpet if it meets his requirements. The money that a weaver gets depends on the type of carpet. Costs can range anywhere between \$50 for the smallest and simplest carpet to \$500 for a detailed, large and high-quality rug.

Given the difficult nature of the craft, it is not surprising that it remains



Carpet Futures

Afghanistan's carpet industry has good prospects for growth and global exports.

By Samina Wahid

almost exclusive and unique to the Afghan community – a fact in which they take great pride. The community is also fiercely protective of its skills. “We don’t want to transfer it to other communities, it is our traditional skill and we only transfer this rare art to our children,” Shitab Ali, a senior weaver, is reported to have said in an interview. “It takes a lifetime to acquire this skill and if we transfer this art to other communities, what will we do?” asked Ali.

Meanwhile, there has been a shift in the Afghan carpet weaving industry in the last 30 years, particularly with regard to the cutting and washing process – an essential stage in carpet production. Today, a lot of cutting and washing takes place in Peshawar, Pakistan. In fact, some reports indicate that a good 80 percent of Afghani carpets are finished in Pakistan after which they are exported with a ‘made in Pakistan’ tag.

One of the reasons for this practice is the lack of cutting and washing facilities in Afghanistan due to decades of war, political instability, lack of credit and land. In the absence of a proper infrastructure, carpet dealers consider selling the unfinished product to Pakistani wholesalers a viable option since a long-term investment in a finishing facility is a risky proposition.

It is because of this shift that Afghanistan’s carpet manufacturers and dealers are losing out on major profits. In fact, Afghani manufacturers reportedly receive a mere 10 percent of the profit that the Pakistani exporters get. Those who still choose to finish carpets in Afghanistan find the business quite slow since international buyers are hesitant to visit the country. They would rather go to Peshawar and purchase rugs since this city is considered to be comparatively safe than the cities of Afghanistan.

Carpets are also shipped via air from Afghanistan to Dubai and then further on to other international

markets in Europe and North America. However, only a few Afghan dealers use this route since air transport is an expensive option, given the small size of the industry. Transporting carpets by road in trucks to Pakistan remains the most cost-effective option for dealers – over 90 percent of the carpets that make their way to the international markets are sent to international destinations from Karachi.

Given the long and arduous production process, Afghan carpets come with a high price tag. This is the reason why the industry suffered a great deal during the global economic recession. Studies show that globally, carpet exports were down by 44 percent soon after various economies were hit by recession. Export sales of Afghan carpets were down to 11 percent in 2010 but experts say that the figure is slowly climbing up, now that the economies are recovering.

It is for this reason that the international community considers the carpet industry to be an area of the Afghani economy which has a real growth and export potential. The U.S. Departments of Interior and Defense awarded a \$1 million contract to a consulting firm in 2010 in a bid to improve the existing market for Afghan carpets. Tremayne, a company based in New Jersey, U.S.A., was responsible for identifying suppliers and commercially viable transport routes out of Afghanistan along with luring buyers to a sales hub in Turkey.

Even then, Afghanistan cannot depend on foreign assistance forever and must find its own home-grown solutions to generate revenues from carpet sales to turn it into a sustainable industry. There is too much at stake here; Afghanistan cannot afford to lose an industry for which there is a real global market. ■

The writer is a freelance journalist who contributes regularly to various leading publications.



One may think that in a world where almost everything has a price tag attached to it, a smile is one of the few things that are free. It doesn't cost a penny to curve one's lips into the universal, heart-warming language of smiles that doesn't need to follow a particular semantic. A smile is lovely whether it is crooked or straight, shy or open, broken or joyful.

At least that is what you would

One such place where it has become increasingly popular is Nepal and more specifically the capital, Kathmandu.

While for some people, fixing their teeth might be enough, for a large number, cosmetic dental surgery is a must for achieving perfection in the looks department.

As Sushil Koirala, an internationally acclaimed dental surgeon from Nepal, points out, cosmetic dentistry goes

stars and brides-to-be – aspires to achieve the confidence that comes with having that 'perfect' smile.

Clinics that specialize in minimally invasive dental procedures have gained a lot of popularity in Kathmandu. Such procedures do away with the discomfort and inconvenience of having to wear braces and are said to be suitable for both the young and the old alike.

With procedures such as full-



Tourism of Another Kind

Beyond trekking, paragliding and bungee jumping, Nepal now offers another tourist attraction – dental surgery.

By Fatima Siraj

think until you came across a poster listing the 'cost of a smile' in terms of a tooth crown costing this and this much and teeth whitening costing this and this much, etc.

The term 'a million-dollar smile' seems to have been taken quite literally as cosmetic dental surgery gains popularity across the world.

beyond just enhancing beauty and actually has a positive psychological impact. A smile reflects more than just well-being and inner happiness.

A 'dazzling' smile can prove a powerful accessory that adds to one's self-confidence and, in Nepal, everyone – from politicians to beauty pageant participants to television

mouth reconstruction and smile enhancement, cosmetic dental surgery has changed entire personalities and given people the much-needed confidence boost. One such person whose life was changed by cosmetic surgery is Nepalese Maoist politician Narayan Shrestha.

He had a gap in his front teeth

and would smile infrequently. After getting the gap removed through dental surgery he is now seen smiling more often. In a statement given to a Nepalese publication, he said about cosmetic dental surgery, "It has changed my personality. People say my smile looks much better."

The popularity of cosmetic surgery in Nepal is not limited to the local population only. Foreigners are also visiting the country in large

numbers to take advantage of the low-cost procedures and return to their homelands with a brand-new smile and a brand-new attitude to complement it.

Cost-effective dental surgery is adding to Nepal's repertoire of tourism attraction as tourists can get an array of high-quality dental services at affordable rates.

Some of these services include white fillings which cost around \$7-9, porcelain inlays which cost \$50 due to their long-lasting results, crowns


which cost \$80 and root canal therapy which costs a mere \$40. All of these services would cause a drain on the average person's pocket anywhere else in the world. This gives Nepal a great competitive advantage in dental tourism.

Kathmandu has some of the finest, state-of-the-art dental clinics that offer quality dental care under trained professionals who get the job done for less than half of what one would pay in a western country.

Every year many tourists visit Nepal to trek, paraglide, bungee jump and to absorb its rich culture. The extent to which dental tourism is becoming popular in the country can be gauged from the numerous dental spas and clinics that have sprung up in Kathmandu. Their marketing efforts are geared mainly towards attracting tourists. Many of them have customized websites highlighting their modern facilities and professionalism.

The introduction on the homepage of the website of one such provider of dental services shows just how developed, widespread and marketable the industry has become: '...has been serving the foreign missions, tourists, diplomats, UN staff and expatriate communities along with local Nepalese patients with a commitment to provide the care, that is of an International Gold Standard.'

These convincing words are followed by a detailed list of prices for various services along with the names and qualifications of all the dentists who work for the clinic.

Testimonials given by satisfied patients, a lot of whom are celebrities in various fields and tourists from far and wide, are also posted. This shows that Nepal's dental clinics are thriving. They are likely to gain more popularity and clientele should they continue to provide dental treatment in a safe and hygienic environment that matches up to international standards but without the exorbitant charges that characterize much of the global dentistry today. 

The writer is currently pursuing a BBA degree. She focuses on marketing and social issues.



It is essential for a society that aspires to be progressive to maintain the precarious balance of gender involvement as women can play the role of change-makers and give shape to an entire scenario. In such a society, what is required of women is perseverance in the face of discrimination, poverty, intolerance and adversity.

The women of Bangladesh provide an interesting study in how marginalized and suppressed factions strive to move forward with hard work and a touch of luck.

Cultural practices and norms often bar women from active participation in certain fields or from taking roads less traveled. However, Bangladeshi women have crossed many a threshold, including participation in politics and have been active in the political arena, especially since the 1990s. But there are still many areas where the condition and performance of women is far from satisfactory.

The Millennium Development Goals reiterate the fundamental need for women's rights as far as education and empowerment is concerned. The Grameen Bank project led by Nobel Laureate Mohammad Yunus primarily focuses on empowering women through micro-credit.

The project understands the central role of women in raising a family and in the alleviation of poverty. Therefore, it projects the whole idea by facilitating their social status. It is a general perception that women prefer small-scale businesses because those are easy to manage. The other reason is cultural norms that restrict women to low-income, low-profile jobs.

Bangladeshi women have always been active in the agricultural sector but since the land ownership laws are tilted in favor of men, women are compelled to transfer their rights to male family members to look after their land. It is rare to find a woman who has full-fledged rights to her land holdings.



Search for

Women in Bangladesh lack social status and even encouragement for their work in agriculture and business. Where are they headed?

By Nida Mujahid




that they hardly have any right over the land on which they work.

Even in cases where women are land owners, various studies indicate that they leave most of the major decisions such as cultivation and supervision of their lands to the male members of the family. There are instances when women are forced to give up their inheritance rights in favors of other family members. Sometimes they do so on the basis of compassion.

Despite the introduction of a number of land reforms, the steps taken so far have largely been unsatisfactory, and women, especially those who belong to the lower classes, still face the typical problems.

Gender-progressive groups can play an important role in creating awareness of the land ownership issue. The female political leadership of the country can also introduce reforms in the current land ownership laws that were made years ago and have lost their usefulness. If the issue is dealt in the right manner, the majority of Bangladeshi women working in this informal sector can make a substantial contribution to the economy.

The women of Bangladesh have a long way to go in terms of land ownership and societal significance. The most plausible milestone would be the realization of their contributions and respect for their decision-making capacity.

The past few years have been sluggish when it comes to alleviating the social status of women. To achieve this proposition, women should be trusted in their agricultural work, household duties and businesses. Encouragement at all levels will work towards improving their overall situation. 

The writer holds a degree in International Relations. She focuses on South Asian affairs and human rights issues.

Identity

A fairly large number of Bangladeshi women work on farms and play an important role in crop production. From collecting fodder to sowing to land preparation and livestock care, it is women who

handle most of the stressful work in the fields.

However, their efforts are categorized as household work which economically undermines their participation. Added to this is the fact

An Ancient Cave City

The Gondrani caves are famous for their mystery and promise more historical finds.

By Aisha Malik

The geographical location of Pakistan has given it importance in the realm of ancient cultures. One only needs to look towards Balochistan, especially its coastal city of Las Bela, to get some idea of how old the cultural history of Pakistan is. Las Bela is close to the mysterious city of Shehr-e-Roghan, which is also called Gondrani.

Essentially a cave city, Gondrani has seen several archaeological diggings sponsored by international organizations. The locals have many mythical accounts of how the cave city was founded, its cultural as well as religious background and the evolution of the area after the arrival of the British.

Sitting in the middle of mountains, the cave city is home to a number of Buddhist monasteries. Although it has largely remained hidden from the media, the city is regularly frequented by archaeologists and tourists.

At present, there are almost 500 caves in Gondrani but according to the locals, there were close to 1500 caves here at one time. There is a lack of accurate information about

the city and its caves but it is home to a real archaeological treasure. The city is said to have been built in the 7th century AD, and is located 18 kilometers to the north of Las Bela.

There are many theories surrounding the creation of these caves, as well as about the people who lived in them. The accounts have evolved and taken shape over the centuries by different historians. The general consensus is that the caves were built by the followers of the Buddhist ruler Somani, who ruled Sindh in 636 AD. British geographer Colonel Sir Thomas Hungerford Holdich is said to be among the first archaeologists to perform an extensive survey at this site.

Tourism opportunities in the area have been few due to the difficulties that lie in the way to the location as well as the political instability and poor law and order in Balochistan. It is mainly the locals who offer their services for a tour of the interconnected caves.

The overall structure of the caves presents a beautiful sight due to the intricacy with which it is built. The

internal walkways are carved out in such a way that each is connected with a veranda spread out in front. The general belief is that the area is haunted by ghosts, particularly of the deceased local notables.

Although it gives the impression of an ominous, dark mountain at first, the many caves in the area become more highlighted as tourists make their way towards them. Walking towards the caves makes for an arduous journey but the beauty of the caves prove that the trek is worth the effort.

In the day, the caves are lit up from the inside and give off a very grand feeling of depth. There is a vast difference in the appearance of each cave and they remain well-preserved except some erosion that has occurred due to the weather.

A closer look at the caves reveal meticulously designed differences in the structures. A class-system is also visible to the trained eye, as some caves are ill-constructed and offer few comforts in terms of space, while others are very well-formed with intricately designed interiors.

Even in the absence of any kind of


facility and despite the rocky terrain, tourists are known to visit the place. Many use aids such as Google Maps to make their way towards Gondrani while others cover the distance through word-of-mouth directions.

Visitors are offered tours to the area through the Karachi-Quetta Highway, which was previously known as the RCD Highway. As the caves are located at a certain height, it is a difficult terrain to navigate for most amateurs. A dirt track exists a few kilometers to the north-west of

the city of Bela that leads to the caves. The distance ranges from between 15 to 18 kilometers and while the scenery around the area is quite dramatic, the caves are difficult to locate.

There are several kinds of habitation in the area with a number of cave houses and huts among them. Since the construction and features of the Gondrani caves is quite distinctive, it becomes easier to spot them once you reach the place.

The Gondrani caves are sought-after for their air of mystery and the

promise of a further unveiling of history. The area can become a center of archaeological education and a great tourism site if the government takes some interest in its development. The Buddhist origin of the caves can also attract international attention. In fact, the cave city can become a permanent source of revenue for the local tourism industry. 

The writer is a graphic design graduate who freelances for several publications



The Tuna

Since the tuna fish is key to the economy of the Maldives, fishing methods need to be rationalized to maintain a workable balance.

By Amber Anwar

Tuna steaks, tuna salads or ready-to-eat canned tuna – whatever your choice is, tuna is scrumptious in all forms and carries a high nutritional value. No doubt it tops the list of the world's favorite sea food. But its high consumption rate begs a question: for how long will the people be able to include tuna in their meals?

Spread over a part of the Indian Ocean, the Maldives is surrounded by incredible marine life and is home to all kinds of tuna species – Skipjack, Yellowfin, Bigeye, Albacore and Bluefin, to name a few. The Skipjack and Yellowfin are found in great quantities in the ocean surrounding the atolls. Tuna fishing is the lifeblood of the country with around 70 percent of the population employed in the fishing industry. Second to tourism,

fishing is the largest industry in the Maldives that benefits the citizens and the country as a whole.

For many generations now, the Maldivians have counted on life beneath the ocean for earning their livelihood. The three major tuna processing plants set up on the sandy islands provide employment opportunities to many locals. Tuna is the nation's primary export that contributes significantly to the country's economic stability and growth.

Since tuna fishing is the major – and in some cases the only – source of sustenance for many, the decreasing numbers of the saltwater fish that was once found in abundance is a matter of grave concern.

For centuries, the people of the Maldives have used the traditional

pole-and-line method for catching tuna. The method is quite simple: a hooked bait is used to attract fish which are then caught one by one. Once a fish is hooked, the fisherman pulls the line to swing the fish on the deck. It is considered the most environment-friendly means of fishing that ensures sustainability of the tuna fish for future generations.

However, this method is no longer practiced by many fishermen. Dangerous fishing techniques that include using fish aggregation devices (FADs) are used to harvest more and more fish. They are the primary reason for the decline in tuna stocks. These devices attract not just tuna but other creatures such as dolphins, sharks, whales, rays, turtles, sea birds, etc. as well, thereby causing much destruction



Question

to marine life in the area.

Just around the Maldives Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), another method – purse seining – is used to catch tuna. In this method, entire schools of fish are caught through large nets called purse seines. These nets catch whatever comes their way, resulting in an ample by-catch. This is yet another cause for a noticeable decline in tuna stocks in the ocean.

Overfishing with the help of FADs and purse seining methods to meet the growing demand of tuna is reducing the number of tuna fish in and around the Maldives. The entire ecosystem is also at stake due to overexploitation that is causing a total chaos in the tropic chain. Due to the rise in temperature of the ocean's surface, fish are moving deeper in the ocean, away from the reach of the traditional fishermen whose methods are not designed to catch fish in the depth of the ocean.

While to catch tuna in the Indian Ocean is becoming harder for the ordinary fishermen, many countries are using the new methods to catch

tons of tunas every day. Since this is certainly not something that can be accomplished through the centuries old pole-and-line method, the people of the Maldives are facing tough competition which is giving their economy a hard time.

Almost 70 percent of the population in the Maldives is associated with the fishing industry and it is certainly going to be difficult for them to survive if tuna ceases to exist in the surrounding sea waters. The direct and indirect employment opportunities provided by the fishing industry will also be adversely affected. The country's GDP would face a high loss if fish exports declined. Apart from the financial aspect, the people who rely on protein nutrition from tuna would be deprived of a rich source of nutrition if fish is not caught and supplied at the current rate.

Since fishing is the basic occupation and a primary source of income for a large number of people in the Maldives, something must be done to save the economy from collapse. If overfishing continues through the use of

advanced devices, it may become difficult for the Maldivian nation and marine life in the Indian Ocean to survive.

Harmful fishing techniques need to be replaced by the traditional pole-and-line method. If this cannot be done, then the rate of fishing should be lowered so that the fish population increases before another huge net catches them. Steps should be taken to reduce by-catching to protect marine life.

Although sustainable fishing methods are used by most of the Maldivian fishermen, who display a responsible attitude towards marine environment, if the same approach is also shown by fishermen of other countries, it could result in a bright future both for the Maldives and the tuna fish.

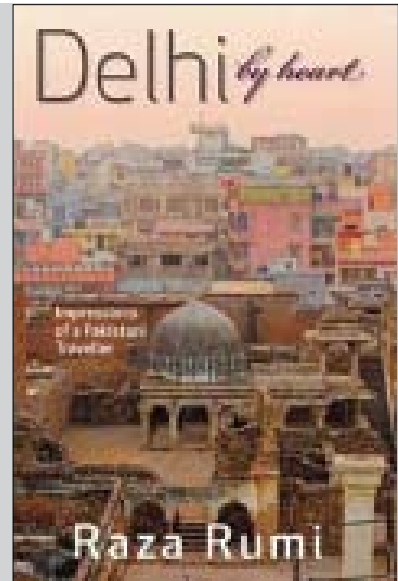
The world's appetite for tuna seems to be growing with time. But this fish can only stay on our plates if sustainable fishing methods are used around the world. **S**

The writer holds a B.A. in Marketing. She covers topics of relevant professional interest.

Writing from the Heart

Book Title: Delhi by Heart:
Impressions of a
Pakistani Traveller
Author: Raza Rumi
Publisher: HarperCollins
(March 2013)
Pages: 352, Paperback
Price: \$28.73
ISBN-13: 978-9350294185

Reviewed by Tariq Bashir



Delhi by Heart is a passionate rendition of a great city's story steeped in history and rich traditions of religion, literature, music and cuisine. By all standards it figures as an excellent first book by Raza Rumi who seems immersed in, and equally perturbed by, the violence and mindless massacre of Partition, as the book unfolds. His Apa's unfulfilled longing to roam the streets of her Amritsar, and the charred remains of burnt houses in the Shah Alam area of Lahore when she returns after the wave of riots has subsided, paint a heart-wrenching scene befitting any good movie on 1947. Raza Rumi writes from the heart.

At times he sounds like a traumatized adult who is baffled and confused at the *raison d'être* that forcibly detached him from his history, his cultural 'half' when he sets out to find many unanswered questions and does find some of them.

His quest starts from the dargah of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi wherefrom emanates an absorbing and highly readable account of Delhi. The

dramatis personae of Rumi's excellent work include historical figures like Amir Khusrau, Nizamuddin Auliya and Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, to name but a few and the contemporary characters of Delhi like Qurat-ulAin Haider, Saadia Dehlvi, Khushwant Singh and many others.

Delhi, at times, comes across as an answer to the queries of Pakistanis and Indians of Rumi's generation about the rationale of creating an iron curtain of hatred and animosity on both sides of the Radcliffe Line. At other times, it feels as if the author is urging his readers not be consumed by the flames of gratuitous hatred fanned on a minute's notice by zealots, of which variety there is no shortage in both Pakistan and India. He mirrors Faiz Ahmad Faiz's *yeh dagh dagh ujala...* when he laments on being personally shut out from what became the Union of India in 1947 while almost ruining his Hindu forefathers' decision to embrace Islam six centuries ago at the hands of an ascetic when the family was en route to Varanasi for a holy pilgrimage.

Later in the book Rumi shakes off the baggage of Partition and swiftly moves on to unearth the dialectics of Sufism through the influence of Hazrat Nizamuddin, and especially Amir Khusrau on Sufi Islam by way of music. Unlike the almost uniform mimetic philosophy of Shia Islam in whichever society it exists be it South Asia, Persia or the Arab world, Sufi Islam, especially the Chishti Silsila, Rumi tells us, relies heavily on the co-mingling of Islamic teachings with the indigenous Hindu customs, beliefs and practices. Thus a very tolerant, non-violent, humane and almost romantic creed is born.

Rumi's visits to Balli Maran, the *mohalla* where Mirza Ghalib used to reside, are movingly described in the book. The genius of Ghalib is aptly described through his poetry but his letters in the aftermath of the Civil War of 1857 show the agony felt by the sensitive Asadullah, shedding enough light on the destruction wreaked on Delhi by the British.

One of my arguments about the book being a must read is mainly

based on the vast historical, cultural and religious canvas it paints so beautifully, making it one of the best contemporary works on Delhi. It is not an episodic history of the city but more of an in-depth and well-researched one with a keen eye but interspersed with the writer's observations on his numerous sojourns to Delhi. A bit like an A-grade documentary where, in order to create a profound and lasting impact on the viewer, the presenter frequently goes back into history to recreate the events he is narrating.

Apart from being frustrated at the rigid and destructive views of a large majority of Pakistanis on India who dismissively refuse to treat India outside the prism of the Kashmir dispute, he seems equally perturbed by similar unforgiving and 'brainwashed' views held by Indian Muslims in particular.

His exasperation palpable, he pleads that heritage and cultures, languages and civilizations can be shared beyond national boundaries. Why is there an exclusivism and hankering after final solutions when nationalisms encounter each other?

Rumi's exasperation with puritanical politics on both sides often finds refuge in the Sufi *dargahs* of Hazrat Nizamuddin of Delhi and Data Ali Hajvery of Lahore, however distant their message of love, tolerance and inclusion might seem in today's politics of nuclear brinkmanship. Stubborn denials of our Hindu past and the latest phenomenon of Hindutva in India frantically attempting to erase from memory anything sounding less 'Hindu' including the mention of beef eating in religious scriptures and Muhammad Ali Jinnah's acceptance

of Cabinet Mission proposals are a few examples of the path of self-destruction both sides have trodden for decades with hardly any visible change in sight.

It is difficult to predict how much ice Rumi's book will melt in the short to medium term as far as relations between India and Pakistan are concerned. But history tells us that sane voices always get drowned out in the cacophony of nationalist hyperbole and hate-fuelled gibberish. Having said that, although being a drop of love and peaceful co-existence in an ocean of false nationalistic pride, voices like Rumi's need to be cherished and listened to in order to celebrate and enrich the shared cultural past of Pakistan and India. **S**

The writer is a Lahore-based lawyer.

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Waar Strikes

Waar is a Pakistani film that tackles the subject of terrorism in a more convincing manner than has been done before.

By Muhammad Omar Iftikhar



Waar, directed by Bilal Lashari, has raised the bar for Pakistani films, setting the cinematography benchmark even higher. The English-language film features Shaan, Ayesha Khan, Shamoan Abbasi, Meesha Shafi and Ali Azmat. Although Zinda Bhaag, another film from Pakistan directed by Meenu Gaur and Farjad Nabi, became an Oscar nominee, Waar received unprecedented public appreciation because of its patriotic theme.

The movie revolves around Major Mujtaba (Shaan Shahid), who is a retired army officer and specializes in counterintelligence. After an Indian spy Ramal (Shamoan Abbasi) arrives in Pakistan and the authorities learn about his devious schemes, they force Mujtaba to come out of retirement and help them catch Ramal. Although Mujtaba doesn't want to be a part of the game anymore, it is his desire for vengeance that makes him rethink his decision. The major had lost his wife and son in a bomb blast a few years ago and Ramal, he is told, was the one who had planned the attack.

Actor and singer Meesha Shafi plays the role of Laxmi, an Indian spy disguised as a social worker, who takes orders from her superiors in India and directs Ramal about his objectives. Singer Ali Azmat makes his big-screen debut in the role of Ejaz Khan, a politician who wants to build a dam to protect Pakistan's future. His character reminds one of Imran Khan because of similarities in their body language and his revolutionary vision to bring about a change in the country.

Although the film has a strong cast, it seems more like a collection of good shots put together. Many scenes simply do not have any link or coherence. There is no explanation for some actions taken by the characters. For instance, you are left guessing what

could be the motive behind the killing of Ejaz Khan and his wife. It is also strange to see Taliban commanders joining hands with an Indian spy to wreak havoc in the country. Similarly, no explanation is given about how an Indian spy becomes the Taliban's associate in the first place.

These and other unanswered questions in the plot lead to ambiguous situations which make the movie look like a compilation of well-executed scenes having little connection. This is

people think it is military propaganda.

Regardless of what the critics say, Bilal Lashari's venture needs to be praised. His action sequences are commendable. The opening scene, for instance, where Ehtesham (Hamza Ali Abbasi) and his team infiltrate a terrorist hideout to rescue a Chinese looks like a scene out of a Hollywood film. It requires a certain level of vision to execute something like this.

The Waar plot is a straightforward one with Major Mujtaba chasing Ramal

Waar is an attempt to tell the world that the armed forces of Pakistan are doing everything in their capacity to curb the menace of terrorism and its intelligence agencies are fighting, behind the scenes, against the enemies of the state.

probably because Bilal Lashari is still inexperienced in film direction and Waar is his directorial debut.

Some movie critics may term the film as an ISPR-funded propaganda, but director Lashari refutes all this. Written by Hassan Waqas Rana, the film was screened in 42 cinemas across Pakistan and bagged Rs.11.4 million on the opening day. This means that Waar did strike a chord with the audience.

From a broader perspective, Waar is an attempt to tell the world that the armed forces of Pakistan are doing everything in their capacity to curb the menace of terrorism and its intelligence agencies are fighting, behind the scenes, against the enemies of the state. The movie focuses on the serious matter of foreign hands destabilizing the country and perhaps that is why

and the intelligence agencies trying their best to protect the country. There may be loopholes in the story but the acting is mostly flawless. Shaan takes most of the screen time and delivers his part with perfection. His expressions, body language and dialogue delivery shows why he is still Pakistan's most sought-after actor. Although Ayesha Khan, who plays the role of an intelligence officer working under Shaan, is a good actress, her performance on the big screen is not up to the mark.

The proficiency with which actors use firearms, especially in the scene where Mujtaba is displaying his skills in the firing range, is a textbook scene that sends chills down the spine. **S**

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By Anees Jillani

The Tense Nepali Polls

Nepal finally conducted the much-awaited elections on November 19 in the midst of heightening tensions which were being seen as critical to the country's stability and development.

Voters chose a new Constituent Assembly following the dissolution of the last one in May 2012 after failing to produce a much-anticipated post-war constitution. It was hoped that the previous Assembly would come up with a new constitution to help the country emerge from the 1996-2006 civil war that killed more than 15,000 people but it failed mainly due to the contentious issues relating to the structure of the State and sharing of power.

The current polls were criticized by some for failing to register all the eligible approximately 16 million voters. 12.5 million were registered, leaving a significant section of the population disenfranchised.

The elections were marred by an opposition alliance which attempted to obstruct election-related activities, threatening to prolong the country's political instability. As a result, the army was deployed for the first time to provide electoral security since fighting ended. An opposition 33-party alliance held a 10-day nationwide transportation strike which led up to the November 19 polls. The CPN-Maoists and their allies conducted door-to-door campaigns to dissuade people from participating in the elections, burnt copies of the election code and enforced local transportation strikes. Cadres of the two Maoist parties clashed violently in some cases.

At times it appeared, in the words of the former chief election commissioner who oversaw the country's first national post-conflict poll in 2008, "... as if Nepal was going into a war rather than an election. Elections are civilian affairs conducted to manage conflict in a society, and not lead to conflicts."

The country's 240-year old Hindu monarchy, which Maoist rebels had been fighting in the decade-long conflict, ended with the 2008 national election. A 601-member Constituent Assembly was elected. Women won 33 percent of the seats, with 39 females elected coming from the Dalit community, the marginalized, historically lowest caste in the country.

The Assembly, however, failed in its principal mis-

sion to draft a new constitution, despite being given four extensions. A caretaker government led by Maoist PM Baburam Bhattarai came to power. Shortly after the dissolution, a breakaway party led by Mohan Baidya split from the mainstream Maoists, accusing party leaders of surrendering too much during the peace process, including disbanding the People's Liberation Army.

Unable to forge consensus on when to hold elections, Bhattarai stepped down in March 2013 and, in a controversial move, Supreme Court Chief Justice Khilraj Regmi became the head of government. The latter, with the support of the four major political parties, announced the November 19 poll date. The Communist Party of Nepal (CPN)-Maoist breakaway party then allied with an alliance of 33 small parties, to protest the election.

Nepal is a beautiful country. Its capital, Kathmandu, has been called a museum without walls. For 2,500 years the Newars, its inhabitants, created countless masterpieces of Buddhist and Hindu art, whose fame travelled far, via the strategic trade route between northern India and Tibet. The great flowering of art and ideas, and resulting wealth, closed in on itself when in 1850 under Rana rule, Nepal adopted a policy of deliberate political isolation, which lasted a century. Since 1952, Nepal has been making bold strides to catch up with the rest of the world while striving to maintain its own cultural identity.

Its political leadership, however, has not been meeting the expectations of the electorate. There is political stagnation and the constitutional crisis has contributed to the steady and continued erosion of the rule of law, stalling development and choking off access to justice for the people. Many Nepalis voted but remained skeptical that the same people will end up in power. This is the problem with Nepal – the voters make the same people powerful, and they stay interested in power only, not improving the country. Sounds familiar? ■

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.



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