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October 2013

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MALDIVES

The Real Challenge



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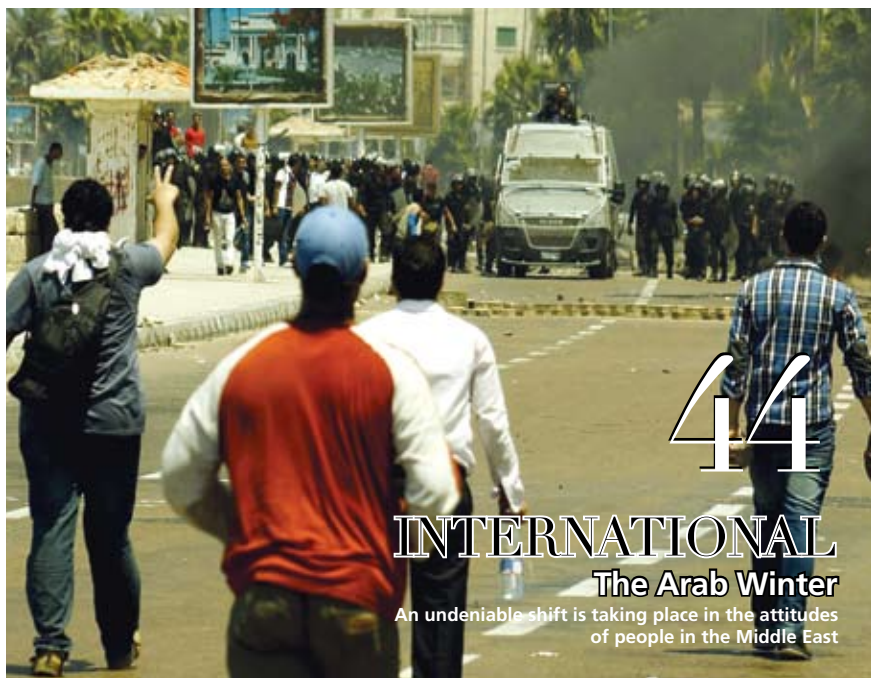
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Sit Back - or Hit Back!

As if to further negate the peace initiative and to tell the Pakistan government that the proposed talks were just a ruse, the Taliban struck again on Sept 22 when a pair of suicide bombers blew themselves up amid hundreds of worshippers at a historic church in Peshawar, killing at least 81 and wounding some 140 people. This was quite contrary to the TTP spokesman's cautious approval of the APC resolution for a "meaningful dialogue" with the government.

Earlier, the killing of top Pakistan army men by Taliban insurgents had already thrown a spanner in the works and was considered a reversal of the efforts to kick-start peace negotiations with the TTP. An All Parties Conference was held in Islamabad where the political parties had promised they would support the government in these talks. Later, the Taliban presented their own charter of demands and said they wanted complete withdrawal of troops and release of all militants detained in different prisons of Pakistan. There was some sort of acquiescence on the part of Pakistan and a number of key persons were released, including Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, a senior commander.

The Taliban action of killing Pakistani troops came as a real shocker as it was thought that some headway was being made with the Taliban which would see the end of terrorism and extremism in the country. The Peshawar suicide attack further dashed hopes of any peace talks. Earlier, the APC was being termed as successful in bringing the divisive politicians and the army on the same page concerning the talks. There were reports of positive sentiments on the Taliban side as well. It was not clear then why some militants chose to explode a mine under the vehicle of Major General Sanaulah Niazi, the GOC of Malakand, killing him and his two associates and then carrying out a suicide attack in a Peshawar church? Was there some kind of agenda behind these killings?

It is true that the government and people of Pakistan have had enough now and want an end to the continuing insecurity and terrorism, but at what cost? It certainly does not mean surrender on TTP's terms. The Taliban 'shura' announced that it wanted CBMs from the Pakistan government preceding the peace talks. This would translate into release of TTP prisoners and return of Pakistan Army's combat forces to their barracks in the tribal areas. If this were so, then why was it only the Pakistan government's obligation to create a congenial atmosphere for the talks and not that of the Taliban? By killing army personnel and members of a church congregation, the TTP displayed a very negative approach – something that was just the opposite of building a positive mood for the talks.

In a fitting response the day after the army officers were killed, the Pakistan Army Chief, Gen. Kayani, said he understood that peace must be given a chance through the political process but he did not want to leave any doubt that the country would let terrorists coerce it into accepting their terms. He said the Army had the ability and the will to fight the terrorists. Former President Asif Ali Zardari, while condemning the Peshawar carnage, said he hoped this would open the eyes of those who still believed in appeasing the militants.

The Pakistani people and most of the leadership have reacted to the gutless tactics of the TTP in a befitting manner and the peace process may even be derailed. The people cannot be expected anymore to give the talks the kind of support they would have earlier because now it is a question of whether to sit back or to hit back.



Syed Jawaid Iqbal

New chief

This is with reference to your cover story "The Search for the Next Army Chief". The year 2013 has been



remarkable for Pakistan for a number of reasons. This year, Pakistan witnessed a transfer of power from one government to another, the chief justice of the Supreme Court will soon complete his term and the COAS and CJCS will soon hand over charge to the next persons.

On many occasions during the last five years, the political situation became so critical that a military coup seemed inevitable. In fact, there were calls from some quarters to overthrow the government. But the military showed restraint. This was a welcome change from the past. The term of Army Chief Ashfaq Parvez Kayani ends next month. It is hoped that his successor will follow his example and will not derail democracy in whatever form we have it.

Wameed Rafiq
Mississauga, Canada

Rule of merit

Lt. Gen. (R) Talat Masood briefly touched on the subject of appointment of the new Chairman Joint Chiefs of the Staff Committee (CJCS). He rightly said that rotation on this

position will encourage better integration and coordination between the three Services. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee is the highest-ranking military officer in the armed forces. However, he does not have any authority over the combat forces. The post was created in 1976 when the military became aware of the importance of joint warfare after its experiences of the 1971 and 1965 wars.

Since then, the post was mostly held by officers of the army. From 1976 to 2013, only three officers from the air force and the navy – two admirals and one air chief marshal – held the post. Fairness demands that the principle of rotation be followed again.

Sabeeh-uz-Zaman
Islamabad, Pakistan

Fighting terrorism

In the article "Whither Terrorism?", the writer states that terrorism ceases when either a terrorist organization loses its steam; is successfully put down by police action or military force or as a result of dialogue. In today's world where sophisticated weaponry is easily available for anyone with wads of cash, attempts to solve disputes on the negotiation table can prove quite futile. Those who believe in the effectiveness of dialogue give the example of the U.S. While it is true that the U.S. was eventually forced to initiate dialogue with the same Taliban it had been fighting against for more than ten years in Afghanistan, this case should be seen in isolation.

The Afghan Taliban have been fighting against a foreign occupation and this makes their case completely different from that of Pakistan's. The Taliban in Pakistan have waged a 'jihad' against their country's elected government. They do not believe in the Constitution of Pakistan despite



the fact that its core article, the Objectives Resolution proclaims, among other things, that sovereignty belong to God alone. We are already suffering much in terms of men and materials at the hands of terrorists. We should not lose any more territory – geographical or ideological – to them.

Daud A. Khan
Peshawar, Pakistan

The Egyptian conundrum

In Egypt, hundreds of people protesting against the overthrow of democratically elected President, Moham-



mad Morsi, have been killed by the military. Even if there were any hopes of the reinstatement of the Muslim Brotherhood government, these were dashed by the intensity and ruthlessness with which the Egyptian military launched attacks against Morsi's supporters. While protests continue in Cairo and other places, it seems highly unlikely that they will bear any fruit. Regardless of the outcome of the movement going on in Egypt, what will be put to test, yet again, is the resilience of the Muslim Brotherhood. For decades now, the MB had been a target of the Egyptian military's wrath. Since 1954, when it was banned by then President, Gamal Abdul Nasser, the party had largely operated underground.

Few would have thought it would rise to power one day. But it did. That may be why its president showed unwise haste to curtail the military's powers. It resulted in the ouster of the MB government itself. Analysts and foreign policy experts believe that the Brotherhood is going through one of the most difficult phases of its history. If it again manages to come out of the crisis that it faces, it will have to tread carefully in the future. Perhaps, removing the tag of a radical movement will do the party much good. It should work to become an all-inclusive party.

Sohail Bhatti
Sharjah, UAE

Safe workers

Your article 'Rebirth of an Industry' raised a good issue. It is heartening to see the swiftness with which the government of Bangladesh acted to make changes in the labor laws. This step was taken after the Rana Plaza tragedy occurred. The overhaul in labor laws came in July 2013 – only two months after the accident. It shows that the government of Bangladesh is concerned about its people. Similar tragedies occurred in Pakistan in

September 2012 when two factories in Karachi and Lahore caught fire on a single day.

It has been one year since the accidents happened. Yet, no laws have been made to avoid such tragedies in future. The laws that are already in place are hardly implemented. It is time the government of Pakistan learnt



something from its Bangladeshi counterpart and made changes to its labor laws as well as building regulations to ensure safety of workers.

Rahoul Hosain
Dhaka, Bangladesh

The water issue

The water situation in the Maldives is worsening gradually. In 2012, a dozen islands almost ran out of water. In the absence of a proper system, the options for delivering clean water are few on most of the islands and atolls. Only three islands – Male, Vil-

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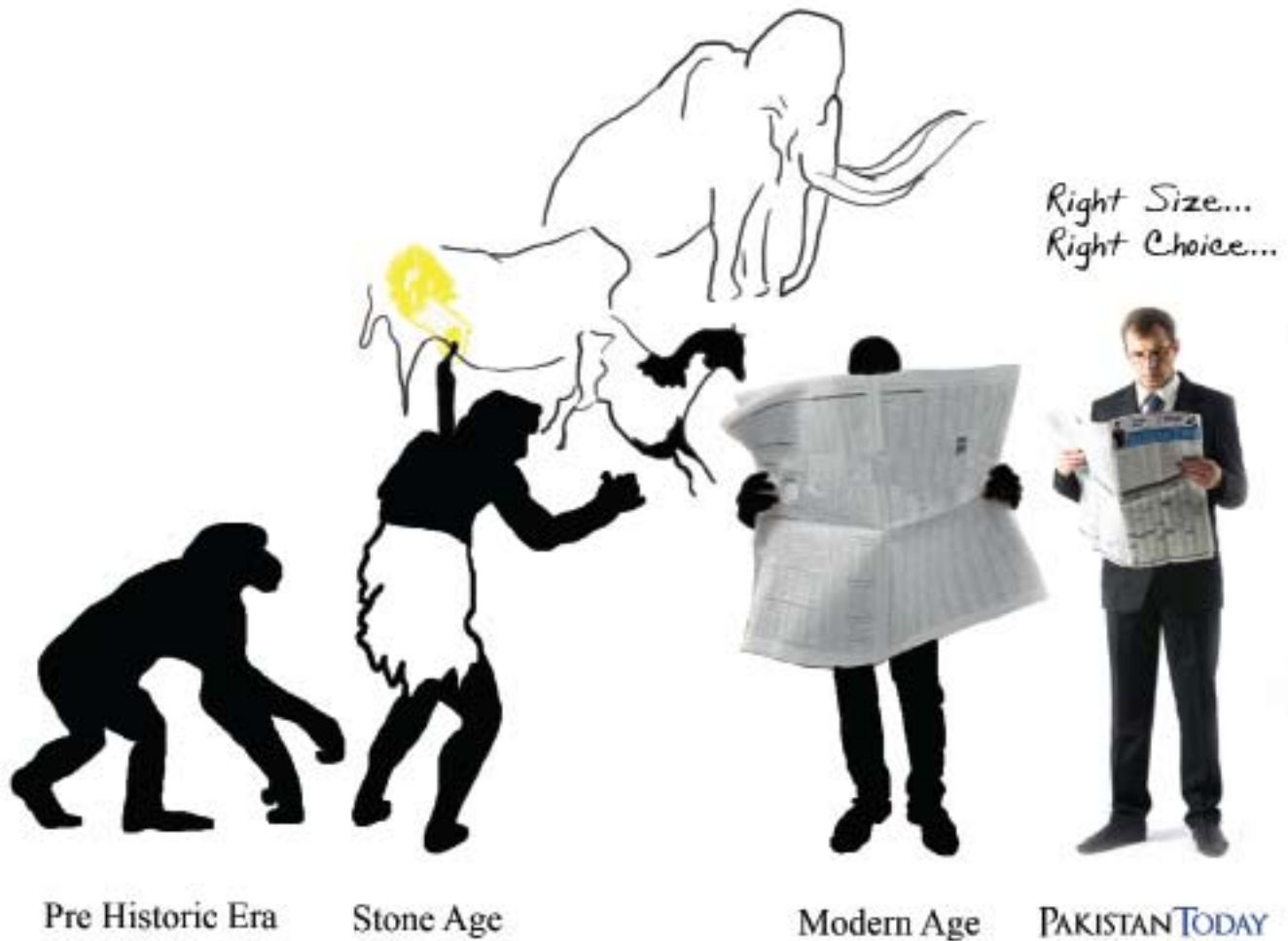
ingili and Hulhumale – have a functioning water supply and distribution network. To deal with the problem, people on other islands use barrels to collect rainwater. Some have dug wells. On most islands, people spend 85 percent of their income on buying fresh water.

Sadly, this problem affects hundreds of people living on Maldivian islands and has failed to gain the attention of the country's politicians. The election campaigns of most of the politicians, who participated in the elections, revolved around personal rivalries and petty squabbles. Hardly any politician focused on the problem of water scarcity. It is hoped that when a new government finally assumes power, it will keep this issue on its priority list.

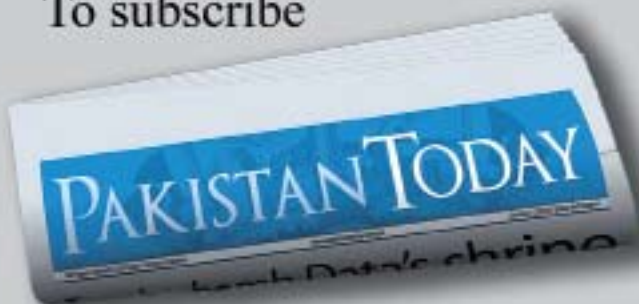
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"Anything going wrong in India – they blame us; anything going wrong in Pakistan – we blame them. I think this blame game has to stop."

Nawaz Sharif
Prime Minister of Pakistan



"Democratic transition to power means strengthening of democracy and I'm confident that Pakistan will be the ultimate winner."

Asif Ali Zardari
Former President of Pakistan



"Rich nations must not pursue policies that hurt the growth prospects of emerging economies."

Manmohan Singh
Prime Minister of India



"I always say that religion is personal, but the festivals are for all. Peace, friendship and harmony are our pride."

Sheikh Hasina
Prime Minister of Bangladesh



"We're extremely keen to attract more investments from India and we have made foreign direct investment regulations more conducive to Indian investors by permitting investment in Indian rupees and by allowing them for majority shareholding."

Tshering Tobgay
Prime Minister of Bhutan



"For the two countries (Pakistan and Afghanistan), the primary concern is lack of security for their citizens and the continued menace of terrorism."

Hamid Karzai
President of Afghanistan



"Clearly, a more holistic approach is needed to provide truth, justice and reparations of people's suffering during the war."

Navi Pillay
UN Human Rights High Commissioner



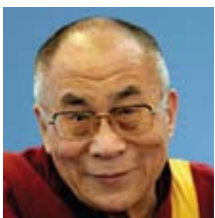
"The fundamentals of the Chinese economy are sound. The growth rate could have been higher had we continued with the past development model."

Xi Jinping
Chinese President



"The Afghans actually have been resilient. They have prevented the Taliban from accomplishing their goals."

General Joseph Dunford
Nato Commander



"I always have a dream that within this century the world will truly become a real happy human family."

The Dalai Lama
Tibetan Spiritual Leader



"Inclusion and identity-based federalism would be the main agendas of my party which is the only party among Madhesi outfits that had brought together Madhesis, Tharus and Muslims."

Bijay Kumar Gachhadar
Chairman, Madhesi Janadhikar Forum-Democratic



"Players get injured and eventually quit the game at an early age. What do you do then, especially without proper education? I'd like to tell all the youngsters: concentrate on your studies and play cricket alongside."

Robiul Islam
Bangladeshi cricketer

PAKISTAN

Changing of the Guard

Pakistan achieved another significant milestone when Asif Ali Zardari, who was President of Pakistan from 2008 to 2013, completed his five-year term. His ascent to the office in 2008 came as a surprise for many. It is widely perceived that under Mr. Zardari's presidency, the Pakistan Peoples Party government did little to address the major problems facing the country, especially the electricity crisis. He was a controversial figure as president and was often embroiled in disputes with both the Army and the

Supreme Court.

His major accomplishments include ensuring a smooth transition of power from one elected government



to another and a constitutional amendment that transferred most of the president's powers to the prime minister, which made the president's post a largely ceremonial one. Asif Ali Zardari displayed some statesmanship in keeping together the coalition partners of the PPP-led government for five years and enabling it to complete its term despite a hostile political environment. He has been replaced by Mamnoon Hussain, who is a long-time member of the ruling party, the PML-N, and has served as Governor of Sindh for about four months in 1999. 

AFGHANISTAN

Protecting Cashmere


In a move to bolster foreign direct investment in Afghanistan, the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), the political risk insurance arm of the World Bank Group, has initiated a cashmere scouring and disinfection facility in Herat. Cashmere refers to Cashmere wool, a fiber obtained from various types of goats. The project will create direct and indirect employment in the country.

MIGA is insuring the project for up to 10 years against the risks of transfer restriction, expropriation and war and civil disturbance. The cashmere sector is currently underdeveloped in Afghanistan. Its

growth was mainly hindered by the high percentage of waste material in raw cashmere that increases its weight and, consequently, its transportation cost.

The newly built facility in Herat's Fibers and Textiles Industrial Park will process fiber for export. Traders will be able to command a higher net price for processed Afghan cashmere. This will stimulate greater harvesting of cashmere goats, thus increasing the income of local herders. In addition to indirect employment of herders, the project will also create 35 permanent jobs in an area with limited opportunities and will provide training to Afghan



workers. In the absence of a proper processing unit, Afghanistan has exported almost all of its cashmere wool in its raw form until now. There are great chances that this industry will go forward as MIGA's insurance will help reduce the risk profile of the project. 

Emerging markets

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh attended the G20 Summit in St. Petersburg, Russia. While speaking at the forum, he stressed the need to pay more attention to monetary policy coordination. He highlighted the difficulties faced by emerging markets, including India, in the wake of an impending switch in the U.S. Federal Reserve's approach to fiscal stimuli. This was in line with the stand taken by Singh and other Indian officials who have urged caution about the depth and manner of the so-called taper in the monetary expansion the US intends to carry out. Mr. Singh also used the global forum to send a signal to foreign investors, highlighting the

steps that India has taken to reduce the country's current account deficit to 3.7 percent of GDP in 2013-14.



On the sidelines of the Summit, the Indian Prime Minister also

attended an informal meeting of BRICS leaders, where the bloc announced progress in two of its key initiatives – the BRICS Bank, or the New Development Bank, and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) – a common pool to meet dire situations. The New Development Bank is said to have a subscribed capital of \$50 billion from BRICS countries. The CRA will have a size of \$100 billion. China is expected to contribute \$41 billion, while India, Brazil and Russia have pledged \$18 billion each, with South Africa putting in \$5 billion. **S**

Improved stats

Bangladesh has made significant strides in the reduction of the child



mortality rate despite being one of the world's poorest countries. In fact, it is

on track for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 4 and 5, which aim to reduce under-five child and maternal mortality. In fact, Bangladesh is one of the eight countries which have reduced their under-five mortality rate by at least two-thirds since the 1990s. In Bangladesh, deaths of children under the age of five decreased from 139 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 46 in 2011. In 1970, the country's under-five mortality rate was even higher – 239. Maternal deaths have also plummeted from 800

per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 240 in 2010. Almost 200 health facilities in Bangladesh have received better training in emergency obstetric care since 2000.

Although the number of poor women who give birth at health facilities has increased considerably, more than 70 percent still deliver at home. There is still a dearth of hospitals and trained doctors, nurses, paramedics and midwives. It is especially hard to retain medical personnel in rural areas. However, recent figures show that Bangladesh's child and maternal health statistics are better than those of India's. **S**

SRI LANKA

Stable future

The sixth South Asia Economic Summit (SAES) was held in Colombo from September 2-4. It was hosted by the country's leading economic policy think tank, the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS). Held annually in a different regional country, the SAES brought together leading experts from the academia, government, the civil society and the private sector. This year's theme was 'Towards a Stronger, Dynamic and Inclusive South Asia'. The summit tackled many critical issues facing the regional countries, including the imperatives for closer cooperation and emerging growth opportunities and challenges for South Asia in the context of fast changing global economic dynamics.

Issues such as what the South Asian states need to do to strengthen their economic growth prospects while managing risks and challenges were also discussed. While SAARC provides a platform to South Asian countries for diplomatic discussions, the SAES has emerged as an important source for vital analyses and policy insights in the regional integration agenda.

Key speakers this year included Pakistan's Minister of Planning and Development, Ahsan Iqbal, Sri Lanka's Minister of Constitutional Affairs, D.E.W. Gunasekera, the Secretary General of SAARC, Ahmed Saleem, the Executive Chairman of South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment, Posh Raj Pandey, the President of the



South Asian University, G K Chadha, the Deputy Executive Director of SDPI, Vaqar Ahmed, Golam Moazzem of Dhaka's Centre for Policy Dialogue and the Advisor of Commonwealth Business Council, Arif Zaman among others. **S**

NEPAL

Tourism ties

Nepal and India are poised to sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on investment and cooperation in the tourism sector. The draft, jointly prepared by a team of tourism sector experts from both countries, recommends hassle-free transport movement at major border points and easing of frontier formalities at the customs. It also recommends opening of the Banbasa Bridge on the Nepal-India border for more than 12 hours from the current three hours a day to facilitate tourists, especially those who visit Nepal from India. India is the largest tourist source market for Nepal, which received 174,146 visitors from India in 2012, among whom 122,775 being first-time visitors.

Nepal's Tourism Secretary, Sushil Ghimire, said that the country's



Ministry of Tourism is ready to revise the air service agreement with India if the existing air seat facility is

not adequate, given the increasing movement of travelers. "On behalf of my ministry, I will leave no stone unturned to facilitate and address or convince the Nepal government on the need for the MoU between the two governments," he said. The newly-appointed Indian Ambassador to Nepal, Ranjeet Rae, said that he would send recommendations to address the tourism sector of both countries.

Effective coordination with Indian railways and airlines was among other recommendations. Holding of annual Nepal-India tourism forum meetings to explore possibilities of a joint tourism promotion abroad is also recommended. **S**

Naval cooperation

As a move aimed at strengthening maritime security cooperation between India and the Maldives, an Indian Navy ship, 'INS Khanjar' berthed in the harbor of Male, the capital of the Maldives. The ship was on deployment for joint exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and anti-piracy patrols with the Maldives National Defense Force (MNDF). INS Khanjar undertook a joint EEZ patrol in the Maldivian exclusive economic zone. According to the Indian High Commission in Male, the officers on board and the MNDF Coast Guard personnel participated in a number of professional activities, such as refresher

training capsules on force protection, search and rescue exercises, high-risk boarding and other naval exercises.

INS Khanjar is one of the four Khukri-class missile corvettes of the Indian Navy.

The ship is designed for surface-to-surface warfare and its weapon system includes surface-to-surface missiles, close-range anti-air missiles, a medium-caliber gun and close-in weapon systems. It also has the capability to carry an Alouette



helicopter for air operations. INS Khanjar is part of the elite Eastern Fleet of the Indian Navy and is commanded by Commander BS Bains. **S**

Building bridges

The 8th annual Japan-Bhutan consultation meeting was held in Thimphu, Bhutan. The government of Japan is said to have proposed a change in its assistance policy for Bhutan, wherein the two governments will consider several long-term projects that would be reviewed and updated during annual consultations. The decision has been taken to ensure predictability of resources and to allow greater space for enhancing the feasibility of projects. Officials of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) termed the Maokhola Bridge, over the Maokhola River in Gelephu, a

priority of the Bhutanese government. According to the Ministry of Works and Human Settlement of Bhutan, the



bridge was proposed to the Japanese government last year as priority A,

in terms of importance. Construction of the bridge was one of the pledges made by the former MP of the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT) in 2008. But the project did not materialize during its tenure. Bhutanese officials claim that they didn't request any other donor to finance the bridge as they had already submitted an application to the Government of Japan. Construction of the bridge, which will span almost 800 meters, will require substantial grant aid assistance. According to a JICA official, "It will require long-term planning and a number of project-formation inputs from both sides." **S**

A Reliable Partnership



South Asia is one of the world's prime regions suffering from climate change, infrastructural problems, devastation from natural disasters and crops destruction. The World Bank extends support in these and other areas with an unmatched reliability.

By Tahera Sajid

The process of development in most countries in South Asia has been slow. It is frequently derailed because of a number of problems such as lack of funds, corrupt regimes, and well-intentioned but largely ineffective leaders. In this context, the World Bank Group (WBG) has long honored its commitment to the region by identifying issues, mobilizing communities and supporting initiatives of governments, community organizations and other stakeholders to keep the development process rolling.

With an impressive portfolio of 215 projects managed by its subsidiary institutions—the International Development Association (IDA) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development—the World Bank has been an important development partner in South Asia. In 2012, the total net commitments of the WB for South Asia reached an astounding \$38.7 billion.

According to the most recent poverty figures, about 571 million people in South Asia survive on less than \$1.25 a day. The WB's Development Marketplace (DM) offers a competitive grant program that funds innovative, sustainable projects for low-income groups. The DM has awarded, in aggregate, US \$60 million to social enterprises identified through country, regional, and global competitions. Onno Ruhl, the World Bank's Country Director in India, acknowledges that the Bank is committed to supporting innovative models and programs "that support underserved communities,

particularly in low-income states".

Its country partnership strategy for India is based on a lending program of \$3 billion-\$5 billion each year starting from 2013-17 to encourage inclusiveness of economic growth, cut poverty to 5.5 percent by 2030 from 29.8 percent in 2010, and increase the share of people living above the threshold to 41.3 percent from 19.1 percent.

In Bangladesh, to promote and facilitate public-private partnerships in infrastructure projects that offer expertise in evaluation, negotiation and implementation, the World Bank has been sponsoring 50 percent of the operating budget of the Infrastructure Investment Facilitation Center (IIFC) since its inception in 1999.

Another example of a successful initiative supported by the Bank in Bangladesh is that of the Rural Electrification and Renewable Energy Development Project (RERED). Under this project, Solar Home Systems (SHS) were established in remote areas as an alternative for electrification through other sources. Registered under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) for carbon credits, the project installed two million SHSs by 2012. The repeater Rural Electrification and Renewable Energy Development Project II (RERED II), which was approved in September 2012, is working to cover an additional 2.5 million people.

The crucial support offered by the Bank enabled Nepal to achieve its first Millennium Development Goal ahead of the schedule when it

reduced its poverty levels by half, with a percentage drop from 53.1 percent in 2004 to 24.8 percent in 2011.

In Sri Lanka, 200,000 households in 1,000 post-conflict villages have benefited from infrastructure and productive investment by the WB that allowed for the rehabilitation of 650 km roads. In addition to this, 12,000 hectares of land was brought back to production.

In Pakistan, 5.2 million micro-credit loans were provided since 2000 under the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund supported by the Bank. As a result, 4.7 million families received income support of \$12 per month.

The World Bank helps the developing countries improve "access to affordable connectivity, transform delivery of basic services, drive innovations and productivity gains, and improve competitiveness". Its consistent support for reforms in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector has drawn over US\$30 billion private investment for mobile network infrastructure in the IDA countries.

Young adults account for half of the unemployed in South Asia. To address the unemployment challenge of the technology-savvy youth, and to encourage ownership of ideas and their implementation, the World Bank and Microsoft recently launched a South Asia Regional Grant Competition in Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The project has been quite successful.

The WB has also supported projects that create awareness of social issues

such as violence against women. In Nepal, it funded the Violence Against Women (VAW) Hackathon this year where participants explored ideas and solutions to combat gender-based violence. Maria Correia, the World Bank's South Asia Social Development Manager, said: "We realize that engaging youth and tapping into their passion and creativity is critical for breaking out of the cycle of gender violence. Young people have the greatest potential to change their society and the future."

Access to basic necessities like healthcare and quality education is crucial to development. In the area of healthcare, the WB lays emphasis on fulfilling the nutrition needs of women and girls, and on providing skilled birth attendants to check infant and maternal mortality. As a result of the WB's support, in Tamil Nadu, 99.5 percent of deliveries now take place in medical facilities. In Nepal, the maternal mortality rate has declined from 538 in 1996 to 380/100,000 live births.

Education projects focus on school enrollment rates and vocational training. The World Bank has made significant contribution towards education reforms in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. In Sri Lanka, 2,825 classroom blocks have been built; in Bangladesh, the enrollment of female students in secondary schools jumped from 47 percent in 2007 to 55 percent in 2012. In Nepal, the net primary enrollment has increased to 95 percent and gender parity in primary education has been achieved. In Pakistan, secondary school graduation rate has increased from 30 percent to 39 percent during 2008-11. In Sindh, the female-male primary net enrollment rate ratio in rural areas also increased from 61 percent to 72 percent in 2007-11.

The World Bank provided support to the education reform program of the Punjab government in the form of financing close to \$800 million over

the last 10 years. It also helped in the provision of 34 million free textbooks to more than 11 million students in the 2010-11 academic year and in the hiring of more than 200,000 new teachers since 2003. The infrastructure of many schools was considerably improved with the construction of toilets, boundary walls, and new classrooms – all supported by the WB.

Greater accountability and transparency in governance is essential for governments to deliver better services and ensure economic well-being of people. Supported by the World Bank Institute (WBI), the Dhaka-based Affiliated Network for Social Accountability South Asia Region, (ANSA-SAR) and Global Partnership Fund (GPF), promote and strengthen the concepts and practices of social accountability by holding workshops, discussions and deliberation on development-related issues.

In Bangladesh, the Bank has been supporting the Local Governance Support Project (LGSP) since 2006 to strengthen self-accountable local governance. Recognizing its positive impact, the Government of Bangladesh has requested for an extension of the LGSP-approach to other local government levels.

The South Asia Social Accountability Network (SasaNet) is another collective initiative taken by the Centre for Good Governance (CGG) and the World Bank to develop a broader understanding of social accountability in promoting good governance among various government and civil society organizations. In India and Sri Lanka, the SasaNet has used citizen report cards and community score cards in demanding greater accountability and efficiency in the delivery of public services.

The South Asian region has been adversely affected by climatic changes that result in inconsistent and heavy rainfall, an increase in droughts in India, Pakistan and Afghanistan, fast

melting of glaciers in Nepal, and a rise in sea levels affecting coastal areas of Bangladesh, the Maldives and Sri Lanka.

South Asia's expected population increase from 1.6 billion people in 2010 to 2.2 billion by 2050 will further strain the already scarce regional resources. To successfully navigate the worst effects of climate change, major investments in infrastructure, flood defenses and drought- and heat-resistant crops are needed.

The Bank is contributing towards provision of services in irrigation and drainage, reforestation of water-logged land, and in facilitating the process of climate-smart agriculture (CSA) for food security.

It has always emphasized the need for regional economic cooperation, sharing of information and capacity building through mutual analysis and dialogue. The Bank's policy studies focus on finding the constraints that make South Asia one of the least-integrated regions of the world, with the lowest level of intra-regional trade.

Regional trade in South Asia is even less than that in sub-Saharan Africa. To deal with this problem, the WB suggests "trade in goods, services, and electricity, people-to-people contact, and cooperation in water resources management among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, and Nepal".

Over the last many decades, the World Bank has supported the development process in South Asia through timely and consistent provision of funds and expertise. By reenergizing the nascent economies and stabilizing the existing ones, the WB proved itself a truly reliable partner. ■

Tahera Sajid is a freelance columnist. She lives in Massachusetts, USA. Her writings and volunteer work focus extensively on socio-economic issues, interfaith dialogue and US-Muslim relations post 9/11.

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‘The first requirement for our economic recovery is that the budget should be brought under control.’

SouthAsia talks to Dr. Muhammad Yaqub, former Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, in this exclusive interview

The World Bank says it is ready to provide support to Pakistan’s future economic road map. How can the country make the best use of this?

Up to the early 1970s, the World Bank mostly provided project assistance on soft terms that proved helpful in building the productive capacity and physical infrastructure of the country. The recent World Bank assistance, however, has mainly come in the form of lending for policy reforms, budgetary support and technical assistance. It has usually been wasted without producing any concrete results. But, at the same time, it has built up our foreign debt.

Like its predecessors, the PML-N government is also taking ad-hoc economic decisions and has not given a coherent and internally consistent long-term economic road map so far. If it could lay out a long-term vision and road map to overcome the country’s chronic economic problems, the

availability and proper use of World Bank loans would ease the pain of policy reforms and also help enhance the country’s productive capacity.

But notwithstanding the statements of its leaders, the PML-N has not really come out with a comprehensive package of macroeconomic policy reforms. The finance minister takes pride in having been able to get commitments of loans of more than \$12 billion in the next three years from multilateral institutions. But, in the absence of structural reforms, these loans will basically be used in firefighting. Given the huge public-sector debt, the lack of capacity to service it and without a comprehensive economic road map, lending by the World Bank and other multilateral organizations would only encourage the government to remain in the firefighting mode and this will add to the external debt burden.

What ails the Pakistani economy and how can the country recover from its current problems?

Generally, the mother of all our current economic ills is the lack of good economic governance while, in specific terms, mismanagement of the budget is to blame for our economic woes. The former has led to poor economic planning and internally inconsistent macroeconomic policies that have hurt the rate of savings and investment and promoted stagflation. The latter has created the burden of huge public-sector debts and a high rate of inflation.

The first requirement for our economic recovery is that the budget should be brought under control. The tax base should be expanded to bring the rich and the powerful – absentee landlords, operators in the underground economy, professional groups, unincorporated business and industry, the land mafia and real-



Dr. Muhammad Yaqub – Profile

Dr. Muhammad Yaqub held the position of Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan from July 1993 to November 1999. His association with the SBP started in 1960 when he joined the institution as a research officer in the bank's research department. His remarkable performance earned him many promotions and he rose to the position of Director in 1975. He joined the IMF in 1972 and worked in several important positions. After resigning from there in 1992, he joined the Government of Pakistan as Special Secretary and Principal Economic Advisor in the Ministry of Finance. Dr. Yaqub resigned as Governor SBP in 1999, on his appointment as a member of the National Security Council. An economist by profession, Dr. Yaqub studied at prestigious educational institutions, such as the Princeton University, from where he did his Ph.D. in Economics in 1966. He did his first M.A. in Economics from the Punjab University in 1959 and also went to Yale University to do his second M.A.

estate tycoons and other 'rentier classes' – in the direct tax net. Additionally, a consumption tax of the VAT variety should be introduced and the economy documented. Tax administration should be freed from corruption and inefficiency.

All this should help increase the currently low tax-to-GDP ratio over time. Increased revenue should then be spent on employment-generating and growth-promoting activities rather than wasting it on current expenditure or prestige projects. The loss-making public-sector enterprises should be privatized. With the budget under control, the government will have to lay down a comprehensive macroeconomic framework within which the private sector could operate.

It is a tall order but without good governance, a fundamental improvement in the budget situation and a road map for policy reforms, the country will continue to move towards hyperinflation, debt trap and the collapse of the balance of payments.

Do you agree that the Pakistani economy cannot function in isolation and the concept of decoupling is not workable since there is always an interchange of trade and investment between countries?

The country cannot live in isolation in the current age of globalization and economic interlinks among countries. Pakistan has to improve its efficiency of production and the rate of output growth and ensure relative price stability to be able to compete in the world markets. It needs to generate foreign exchange not only to meet the country's import requirements for essential consumer goods and machinery, raw material and spare parts but also to continue to service its foreign debt.

Was the policy of deregulation correct when it was implemented?

Till the 1970s, the world was divided between the public sector-dominated and centrally-planned socialistic economies and the private sector-oriented, market-based free enterprise economies. Since then, the world has moved to a single system of reliance on the private sector as the engine of economic growth within a strong regulatory framework to control excesses and oligopolies. Pakistan did the right thing to take the public sector out of production and distribution sectors and privatize industries and businesses that were nationalized by the first PPP government led by the late Z. A. Bhutto.

However, we failed to develop a strong and effective regulatory framework within which the private sector should operate. This has created a dual society where a minority lives in an island of prosperity in an otherwise deep ocean of poverty.

What new measures did you introduce at the State Bank of Pakistan?

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and the banking system had been functioning like subordinate departments of the Ministry of Finance up until 1993 and the banking system was at the verge of collapse due to mismanagement. From 1993 to 1999, legislative reforms were introduced at a scale unprecedented in the banking history of the country. The SBP was made autonomous *de jure*, the monetary policy was freed from the shackles of the MoF, the Pakistan Banking Council was abolished, banking supervision capabilities of the SBP were strengthened, the grip of trade unions on banks was broken, the capital base of public-sector banks was strengthened and their governance improved to make them ready for privatization, corrupt bankers were successfully removed and prosecuted and the management of commercial banks was given to professionals.

Unfortunately, subsequent SBP managements did not adhere to the reformed framework and the SBP and the banking system have drifted back *de facto* to the previous position of subordination to the MoF with its associated adverse effects.

The world's mature economies have not handled themselves as well as they should have. Do you agree with this?

I agree. While the central banks of the developed countries have become more effective and coordinate their policies well to handle international financial crises, governments in several developed countries have indulged in wasteful spending and avoided tax reforms. As a result, they face unmanageable external debt, a slowdown in economic growth and high unemployment.

Do you think banking is a flourishing sector in Pakistan? What are your thoughts on Islamic banking?

Commercial banks have reaped huge profits in the recent past, taking advantage of three things. First, government borrowing from commercial banks gave them an opportunity to make profits without facing the threat of debt defaults and without having the urgency to mobilize additional deposit resources. Second, the SBP failed to improve governance of banks by reducing the influence of large shareholders in the business of running banks on a day-to-day basis and their manipulations contributed to rising profits at the cost of small depositors and genuine borrowers. Third, the SBP did nothing to reduce the interest spread and the banks were able to mint huge profits by giving negative real rates of return to deposits. In the process, the banking system became instrumental in transferring resources from the poor depositors to the rich borrowers. Only a strong SBP and strong prudential regulations can rectify the situation.

Islamic banking is in name only. The real Islamic spirit behind prohibition of fixed rate of return on lending was to stop the exploitation of the poor borrowers by the rich money lenders. In Pakistan, the cover of Islamic banking is used by banks to exploit the poor depositors to make huge profits.

How successful has micro-banking been in Pakistan?

Not very successful. The reason is that banks feel comfortable only in dealing with established businesses and large companies for lending purposes and do not wish to spread the scope of lending to small and medium borrowers who have difficulties in meeting their collateral requirements. Lending on the basis of collateral, rather than cash-flow

analysis, is the easiest course of action and banks do not wish to depart from that. practice unless the SBP was to initiate the process in a big way.

What future do you see for foreign banks here, considering that a number of them have already left the country?

Our domestic banking system is quite developed and there is no reason why the country should depend on foreign banks for its general banking business. In fact, the short-sighted approach of our past governments to sell domestic banks to foreigners to gather some foreign exchange to tide over short-term scarcity of foreign exchange reserves has created a situation in which there will be heavy transfer of profits abroad by foreign-owned banks. Both from the point of view of national security and economic independence, the government should avoid selling any more domestic banks to foreigners or allowing foreign banks to do ordinary banking business through branches spread all over the country. However, foreign banks should be welcome to open a few branches for foreign trade financing in big cities.

The World Bank has suggested that Pakistan should grant the status of the Most Favored Nation to India and that the two countries must sign power transmission and trade agreements. Do you approve of this?

Leaving aside the political aspects of their relations, both Pakistan and India can benefit from expanded trade between them. The problem is that normalization of economic and trade relations is not plausible without progress on the security and political fronts. Not much can be expected on the trade side without meaningful progress in resolving the outstanding disputes through peaceful means. ■

the often complex process of change that accompanies any reform”.

The challenge highlighted by the WBI is gigantic and requires extraordinary efforts. To achieve this goal, the WBI launched an initiative to support open and collaborative governance. It concentrates on both the ‘why’ and the ‘how’ factors – albeit with a considerably greater focus on the latter.

It is based on the premise that supporting open and collaborative governance can provide local change agents with the tools necessary to achieve the desired result: a world without poverty.

Committed to this vision, the WBI endeavors to strengthen citizens by offering innovative tools and practical approaches that focus on three key strategies: supporting open and collaborative governance, enhancing social accountability and leadership for coalition building.

The significance of these key programs lies in working in close liaison with governments to persuade them to “engage with citizens and organizations from the private and civil society sectors and vice versa by using innovative concepts such as building coalitions and tools aimed at ensuring that all stakeholders have the ability and capacity for effective engagement in order to solve difficult governance challenges”. In recent years, many countries which undertook these programs offered transparency in areas of finance and budgeting.

The programs also help create governments which are responsible and believe in self-accountability. The paradigm shift is that accountability comes from within, and is not imposed from outside. Some practical demonstrations of this paradigm are “budget data visualization, promoting

contract transparency and monitoring (inextractive industries or in public procurement) and facilitating all this through utilization of ICT tools”.

Another important program run by the WBI is ‘Private Sector for Good Governance (PSGG)’ which ensures across the board transparency for better service delivery.

Good governance is not possible without transparency and citizens’ right to know. To effectively question and check the performance of governments in all areas, the WBI has taken steps to create citizens’ networks, such as Affiliated Networks for Social Accountability (ANSA), Voices Against Corruption, parliamentary networks and the media.

Such groups focus universal entitlements, for instance education, health, clean water and housing. Working collectively, they force governments to take transparent decisions instead of deciding crucial matters behind closed doors. To further strengthen these groups, the WBI is working on a one-year collaborative leadership program that concentrates on “change agents” that ensure the success of development projects. Based on a rapid-result approach and with a focus on skill building to bring about changes in social attitudes, mindsets, and values of stakeholders, this program also addresses the “how” factor.

Although these initiatives have also led to some changes on the micro level, the pace of change is quite slow. The real impediment is said to be vested interests that wants the basic socio-economic structure to continue in its current form. This is the real cause of poverty and non-availability of essential services to over one billion human beings. Reduction in poverty, and its ultimate elimination, requires a

change in the system.

This further emphasizes the need for open and collaborative governance. Thanks to advancements in information technology, social and political awareness among people all over the world has reached new heights. Easy access to information, especially through mobile phones and the social media, has enabled citizens to give their feedback on governance-related issues and force governments to take the path towards development.

It is no longer about finance alone. The main emphasis has been shifted to transparency in government, access to the latest global knowledge, and the use of innovative ways to solve development challenges.

Coming back to the main “why” – one billion people do not have access to clean water, electricity, and other services crucial for their health and livelihood – although the issue is intrinsically linked with exploitative systems, it also relates to poor governance, lack of transparency and access to public information, weak accountability and low levels of citizens’ participation.

The importance of well-performing public institutions and good governance for development and poverty reduction has already been established on a global level. It has also become fairly obvious that even good policies and investments do not deliver in the presence of dysfunctional institutions. This calls for open and collaborative governance to reform public institutions – a complex and difficult task, both technically and politically. Poorly functioning public-sector institutions and weak governance is a major hindrance to growth and equitable development in many developing countries including those of South Asia.

In recent years, an increasing demand for effective, transparent, accountable and responsive governments was observed across the South Asian region. There are many reasons behind this phenomenon such as global focus on good governance and institutional reform in the wake of the so-called Asian crisis; the consolidation of democracy in Bangladesh and Nepal; economic liberalization particularly in India but also elsewhere; decentralization and expanding roles of sub-national governments; improved

delivery of key public services.

Poor public management compounds the problem of redefining the role of government. This results in a delay in the delegation of appropriate functions to the private sector which acts as a major obstacle to faster private-sector development.

Slack tax administrations, harassment of enterprises by the staff of regulatory agencies, dilatory judicial systems, and improper land registries – all increase the transaction costs for private citizens, enterprises, and the economy.

The importance of well-performing public institutions and good governance for development and poverty reduction has been established on a global level. It has also become obvious that even good policies and investments do not deliver in the presence of dysfunctional institutions

economic and social performance indicators; a growing middle class in many countries of the region; and increasingly innovative and assertive NGOs. With the exception of Afghanistan, these factors can be found in all the eight countries of the region.

Despite these developments, the fact remains that South Asia has the world's largest concentration of people living below the poverty line while billions lack even basic necessities. In this region, development is further impeded by vaguely defined roles of governments, their failure to improve the functioning of core agencies and address systemic weaknesses in public administration and ensure the

Against this background, the WBI's initiative to establish open and collaborative governance has special significance for South Asia. All South Asian countries should take benefit from it, especially when the World Bank has shown a deep commitment to help its client countries build well-functioning and accountable governments. The fate of billions can be changed if this initiative is implemented by governments. ■

The writers, partners in law firm Huzaima & Ikram (Taxand Pakistan), are Adjunct Faculty Members at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS).



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‘It is about time the most viable indigenous structural reforms were devised and implemented religiously in South Asia.’

SouthAsia speaks to Zafar Masud, Chairman and CEO, Burj Capital Pakistan and a Director at the State Bank of Pakistan.

While the World Bank may have moved positively towards reducing global poverty, less progress has been made in managing environmental sustainability. What are your views with respect to South Asia?

There's clearly a lack of awareness about the environmental sustainability and its repercussions on future food security, health issues and, ultimately poverty reduction, across South Asia. The World Bank can play a key role in creating necessary awareness amongst the masses and the governments through specific "awareness programs" on this subject, and taking seriously the implementation of the environment improvement benchmarks linked to its program lending.

Food prices are rising across South Asia. To what extent do you think weather and climate changes are responsible for this?

Escalation in food prices is a phenomenon across the globe and is not merely related to South Asia. These increases seem to be attributable to the adverse weather and climatic conditions to an extent and South Asia is no different. While the impact on food prices may not be attributable substantially to the climatic conditions hitherto, but if the required measures related to environmental sustainability are not taken seriously, then surely that would lead to prices shooting up at alarming levels.

The World Bank has said it is ready to help Pakistan in its energy crisis. How best can the country take advantage of this?

This is a great offer which the government must capitalize on, particularly in the areas of technical assistance and financing of ower projects. The World Bank's global expertise can help the government in learning and implementing the most

optimal energy policies and plans and addressing the chronic issue of circular debt which is not something unique in our context. Many emerging markets experienced it at one point or another and have been able to address it successfully. The World Bank will be in the best position to assist the government in these areas and enable Pakistan to have an effective and efficient energy system.

The World Bank says Asian countries can use fiscal stimuli to protect their economies despite a global slowdown. What are your comments with reference to South Asia?

It is not just a matter of fiscal discipline. South Asian countries need to undertake the much needed "structural reforms". Any fiscal or monetary action could merely help in the short run. Until the necessary

reforms are not undertaken, any measure on the fiscal or monetary side will be ad hoc in nature and this could sail the economy through the crises temporarily. It is about time that the most viable indigenous structural reforms were devised and implemented religiously in South Asia. There is no escape.

The new Vice President of the World Bank Group's South Asia Region, Mr. Philippe H. Le Hou rou, has said he agrees with the Nawaz Sharif government's economic plan and has extended the Bank's support in implementation of economic reforms. Do you think this augurs well for Pakistan?

Very well indeed. However, it's up to the government to take the maximum advantage of this offer and get the required support from the

World Bank in the areas of policy-making, technical assistance and financing. To my mind, the offer of the World Bank should be most relevant in making viable policies and obtaining technical assistance; the funding bit must come last. The change in the sequence of priorities may not bear the required fruit. **S**

Zafar Masud is Chairman and CEO, Burj Capital Pakistan. Prior to this, he was a member of Barclays Emerging Markets Management Committee and the Regional Managing Director for Southern Africa at Barclays Bank plc. Zafar was the founding member of the Dubai Islamic Bank team in Pakistan. He also serves on the Central Board of Directors of the State Bank of Pakistan as an Independent Director and as a Member of the SBP Board HR and Investment Committees.

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World Bankers



Eugene Meyer
(June 1946 - December 1946)

Eugene Meyer was the first president of the World Bank Group. During his six-month term, Meyer introduced issues and policies that laid the foundation of what the World Bank was to become in the years to come.



John Jay McCloy
(March 1947 - June 1949)

John Jay McCloy – the second president of the World Bank Group – settled the question of whether executive authority would be in the hands of the president or the executive directors. During his tenure, the Bank loaned about \$650 million, mostly for post-war reconstruction in Europe.



Eugene Robert Black
(July 1949 - December 1962)

Eugene Black transformed the Bank into a well-functioning, profitable development institution. He also established the Bank role as an impartial mediator in international disputes.



Barber Conable
(July 1986 - August 1991)

Barber Conable's extensive political skills made him an effective spokesman for the Bank. He made the fight against poverty the focus of his presidency. He advocated increasing the Bank's attention to environmental problems, promoting programs to curtail population growth, and advancing the role of women in development.



Lewis Thompson Preston
(September 1991 - May 1995)

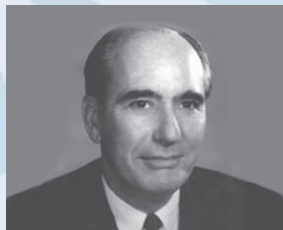
Many significant events occurred during Lewis Thompson Preston's tenure: the admission of the republics of the former Soviet Union to Bank membership, the initiation of lending programs in the newly democratic South Africa, and the influx of private-sector capital into developing countries to name a few. Preston emphasized the quality of lending over the quantity of lending.



James D. Wolfensohn
(June 1995 - May 2005)

Termed the Renaissance Banker, Wolfensohn oversaw significant reforms. Under his leadership, the Bank broke new ground in areas such as corruption, debt relief, disabilities, the environment and gender. He also worked with the world's leading economies to secure an agreement for 100% debt relief for the world's most indebted nations.

Although called the World Bank, the institution is not a bank in the real sense of the word. It comprises five institutions managed by the member countries. Established in 1944, the World Bank Group is headquartered in Washington, D.C. Here is an overview of the major contributions of the men who have presided over the World Bank so far.



George David Woods
(January 1963 – March 1968)

- One of the World Bank's most innovative presidents, George David Woods reinforced the Bank's role as a global development institution. He oversaw the Bank's evolution from a primarily conservative financial institution to a development institution.



Robert Strange McNamara
(April 1968 – June 1981)

- Fifth president of the World Bank Group, Robert Strange McNamara is credited with completely transforming the Bank. During his term, the Bank focused on the needs of the developing world. It started to address the problems of income disparity and poverty and became more involved in the economic and social conditions of its borrowers.



Alden Winship Clausen
(July 1981 – June 1986)

- With the onset of recession, Alden Winship presided over the Bank in difficult times. But Clausen proved himself the right person to meet those challenges, as he looked for solutions in market-oriented development strategies.



Paul Wolfowitz
(June 2005 – June 2007)

- Paul Wolfowitz placed special emphasis on two particular issues: poverty reduction in Africa and fighting corruption. Known as a 'good governance banker', he pushed through controversial governance and anti-corruption strategy after extensive global consultations.



Robert B. Zoellick
(July 2007 – June 2012)

- Robert B. Zoellick is credited with modernizing and recapitalizing the World Bank, making it more accountable, flexible, fast-moving and transparent. Like his predecessor, Zoellick also focused on good governance and anti-corruption.



Jim Yong Kim
(July 2012 – Till date)

- A physician and anthropologist, Dr. Kim has shown keen interest in international development. He is a co-founder of Partners In Health (PIH) and a former director of the HIV/AIDS Department at the World Health Organization (WHO).

Love and Peace

The sudden eruption of violence on the Line of Control in Kashmir could adversely affect bilateral talks between India and Pakistan.

By S.G. Jilane

Was it an unfortunate coincidence or a well thought-out conspiracy to douse Nawaz Sharif's overflowing enthusiasm about mending fences with India that five Indian soldiers were killed in an ambush in the wee hours of August 6 at the LoC?

As soon as Mr. Sharif was sworn in, he vowed to pick up the threads from the point they had been snapped due to Gen. Musharraf's reported misadventure in Kargil. And there is no doubt about elements in both countries which want to see to it that the pot is kept boiling. It ensures for them a good life. It guarantees their very relevance. Peace between India and Pakistan would make them redundant.

With the incident, temperatures rose. Indian artillery fire killed several people on the Pakistani side. In New Delhi, angry crowds raided the Pakistan High Commission. The Lok Sabha was in uproar. Hawks became hysterical and the rightist media went into conniption. The Indian General Officer Commanding Major General V.P. Singh threatened a "befitting response" to BAT attacks from the Pakistani side. The Indians use BAT for "Border Action Team"

which, according to them, is a mix of "Pakistani special forces personnel and terrorists" who carry out attacks on Indian targets.

In Pakistan, the Foreign Office summoned the Indian High Commissioner to lodge protests against the attacks. At one point, there were reports even about Pakistan considering reduction in its diplomatic staff deployed in its mission in New Delhi. Pakistan's parliament also adopted a resolution denouncing Indian firing which the Indian Lok Sabha promptly dismissed. It appeared that the August 6 incident had all but derailed the progress in a new phase of bilateral relations that Pakistan had initiated with much hope.

However, the dark clouds were not entirely shorn of silver linings. First, the DGMOs of both sides made contact on the hotline in an effort at damage control. Second, Pakistan offered joint investigations to find out the truth about the killing of Indian soldiers. It also suggested that the U.N. Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) should be called in. But, as usual, India did not accept the suggestion. It is opposed to any third-party involvement in the Kashmir dispute which, it insists, is a



purely bilateral issue between India and Pakistan.

In a carefully worded statement, Indian Defense Minister A.K. Antony also told the Indian parliament that the killers of Indian soldiers were "terrorists along with people dressed in the Pakistan Army uniform." Obviously, neither he nor Gen. V.P. Singh believed that the Pakistan Army was directly involved.

But elections are looming. For political extremists, particularly the



BJP, no issue is too small to belabor the Congress with. Pronto, therefore, they seized the opportunity to proclaim that the government was being soft on Pakistan. For the same reason, the Congress can't afford to look soft. So, as if to counter the opposition's charge, Antony played a little politics, changing his tune to blaming Pakistan officially for the killings. He had to because Congress must move warily in order to attract voters. And evidently, dialogue with Pakistan is not a vote-

catcher at the moment.

Nawaz Sharif faces no such challenges. He has just won a third term. His party commands a clear majority in parliament. And the opposition is in total disarray. He remains focused on dialogue to normalize relations. Actually, as a businessman, he has a realistic approach to issues which he sees in the context of cost and benefit. As he said in a recent interview to the media, it is the common people who

have suffered due to the enduring hostility between the two countries. It was in the same context that Mr. Sharif suggested that the two countries should "talk and fight poverty instead of each other."

The prime minister is known for his preference for direct, face-to-face talks over long-winded PowerPoint presentations and filtered policy briefs couched in diplomatic jargon. He calls it the "via Bhatinda approach." The term received wide publicity

after his interview to the Hindustan Times was published on February 3, 1999. His no-nonsense statement received wide applause from all corners. It inspired poet Ali Sardar Jafri to compose the memorable lines: *"Tum aao gulshan-e-Lahore se chaman bar dosh/ hum aayen subh-e-Banaras ki roshni lekar/ Himalaya ki hawaon ki tazgi lekar/ phir oos ke baad yeh dekhein ke kon dushman hai."* (You come with the gardens of Lahore. We come with the light of the Banaras morning, the freshness of the Himalayan breeze. Then let us find out who is the enemy).

And, above all, it inspired Prime Minister Vajpayee to undertake the historic Bus *yatra* to Lahore.

Contrary to apprehensions, however, the August 6 incident and the jingoistic rhetoric from India, back-channel diplomacy continued. As a result, a meeting between Nawaz Sharif and Manmohan Singh on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session next month that had, at one point, seemed out of the question has since been officially confirmed. The agenda of the meeting has been discussed between the Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan, Dr T.C.A. Raghavan and the Prime Minister's Adviser on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Sartaj Aziz. And, if all goes well, chances are that the ice will melt and the decks cleared for a purposeful, result-oriented "composite dialogue" to find clear answers to the festering disputes.

India's consent to the meeting is the evident result of the self-control Pakistan displayed in response to India's continued artillery fire on the Line of Control in the aftermath of the Aug. 6 incident, even though it caused several fatalities. Neither the Pakistani media nor its political leaders, whether in the government or the opposition, responded in kind to the bellicose rhetoric from the other side of the border. Even the Pakistan Army

The 'highway to peace' is strewn with thorns and potholes. The issues are myriad. Some of them are really daunting; others overblown into formidable challenges which would melt away if there is a mutual will.



ignored the Indian general's threat.

The "highway to peace", as Vajpayee called it, is strewn with thorns and potholes. The issues are myriad. Some of them are really daunting; others overblown into formidable challenges which would melt away if there is a mutual will.

Kashmir, of course, tops the list. Others include Siachen, Sir Creek, Wuller Barrage and what have you. Yet, Kashmir calls for a rethink. The human and material cost of the Kashmir dispute to Pakistan has been immense. It tried every means, overt and covert, from sending raiders and infiltrators to actual wars and suffered humiliation. The Indian Army and police unleashed havoc on the people of Kashmir in response to the violence Pakistani elements such as Gul Zamin stirred in the valley.

Suspension of bilateral trade has affected Pakistan acutely. The same commodities that it imported at a huge cost from other countries – such as tea from Kenya or Sri Lanka – it could have imported from India at a fraction of the price. Even now, as the Economist reported, "India is ready to lead a 500MW transmission wire over the border into Punjab. By extending its own pipeline network, it could also help supply natural gas, easing Pakistan's reliance on oil." India has also unilaterally granted MFN status to Pakistan.

Pakistan has not been able to wrest a single inch of the Kashmir Valley from India. It is in this context that Nawaz Sharif's initiative should be viewed. Hatred and war having failed, he wants to try the strategy of love and peace. And, who knows, it may pay dividends. Absence of tension, for example, may prompt India to withdraw its troops from the valley. As Milton said, "Peace hath her victories no less renowned than War." **S**

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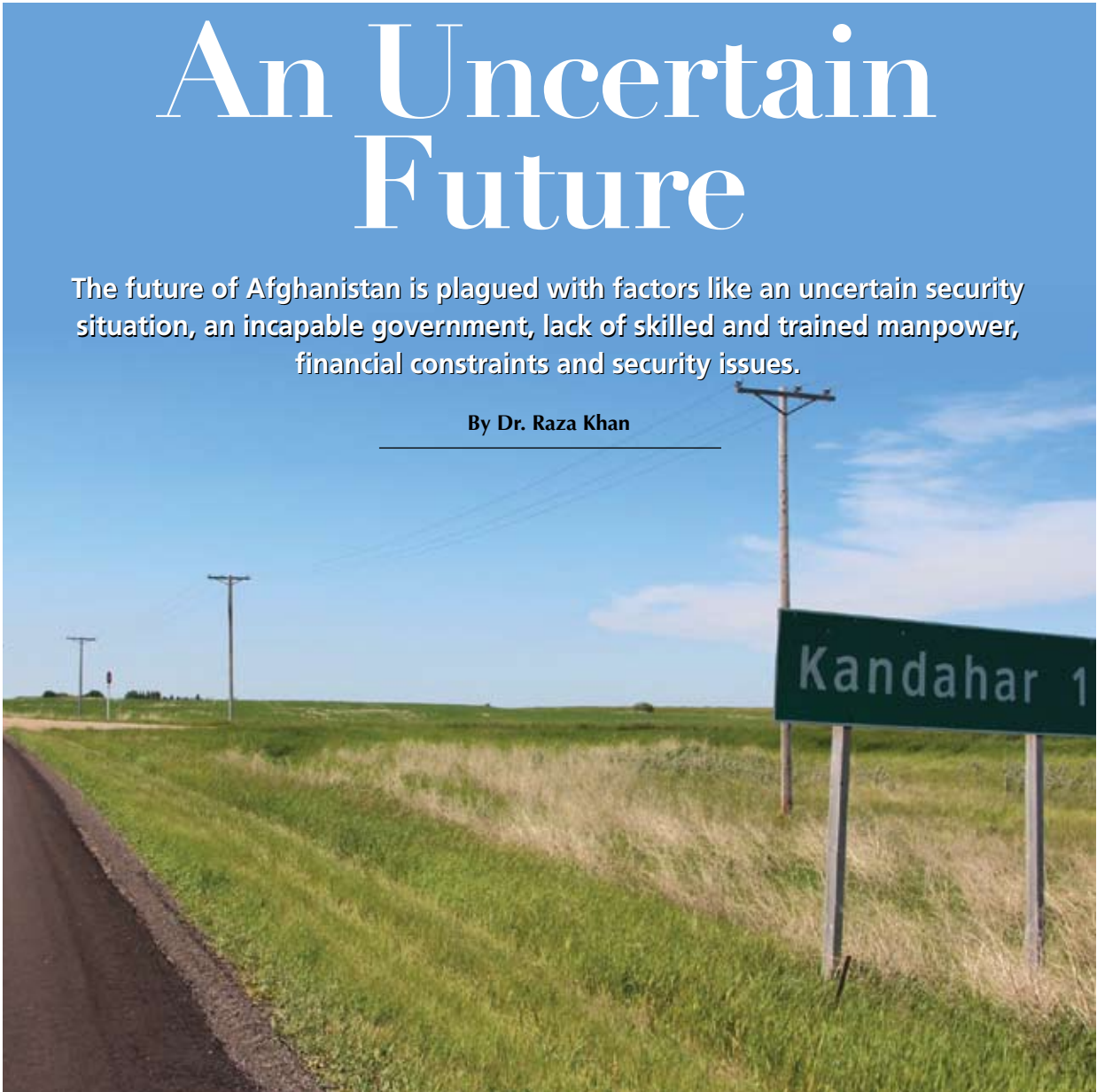
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An Uncertain Future

The future of Afghanistan is plagued with factors like an uncertain security situation, an incapable government, lack of skilled and trained manpower, financial constraints and security issues.

By Dr. Raza Khan



As the withdrawal of allied forces from Afghanistan comes closer, concerns about the reconstruction and rehabilitation of this war-ravaged country are growing in donor countries and organizations. Uncertainty prevails as efforts made so far have left a lot to be desired. Although some noteworthy development work has taken place

in a few sectors, how to build on it is the question that troubles all stakeholders.

Most of the reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan have been spearheaded by the United States, which reportedly spent around \$90 billion on the reconstruction of the country. Germany, France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Canada

and India are some other countries which made significant contributions to reconstruction and development work in Afghanistan. Pakistan also attempted to take part in the process and has been able to complete some important projects. China, too, has been forthcoming in helping Afghanistan with a number of mega road construction projects.

Overall, Afghanistan has received nearly \$290 billion in terms of aid for development, reconstruction and security. This is a huge figure by any standards. But the level of development in the country in the last one decade does not match the amount. The reason is the absence of a real, integrated and comprehensive strategy for development. Although a number of international conferences have discussed this issue in great detail, the strategies devised could not be implemented on the ground.

While every country initiated its own projects in Afghanistan, some countries and institutions funded projects which suited their specific needs. Countries whose troops were stationed in the country were part of the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) started reconstruction and development projects in the regions where their troops were located. In many cases, these projects were undertaken by the troops themselves. Most noteworthy among them are the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (RPTs), manned by U.S. military personnel. They got huge funding but could not go beyond the Quick Response Projects (QRPs), which have a short-term impact.

At the moment, some of the most important sectors in need of development and reconstruction are agriculture, road construction, cottage industry and mining. Agriculture has always been the backbone of Afghanistan's economy. This sector has seen a significant revival after the occupation of Afghanistan by ISAF.

Donor countries have provided farmers with micro loans and have introduced them to modern cultivation techniques. Consequently, Kabul has been able to produce sufficient quantities of different fruits and vegetables to supply to Pakistan, Iran and India. However, if international donors want Afghanistan to make a

real turnaround, they will need to invest more in the agriculture sector, specifically in the production of fruits and livestock.

The cottage industry has not seen any progress during the last decade. Perhaps the donors as well as the Afghan leadership failed to realize the potential of this important sector. Had there been an elaborate strategy to establish agro-based industry, it could have contributed immensely to the country's economic stability.

An uncertain security situation, an incapable government, lack of skilled and trained manpower and financial constraints are some of the factors that hinder the process of development, with security being the greatest challenge. Lack of expertise is another stumbling block. The import of skilled workers has been extremely costly, and consumed a large part of the developmental and reconstruction funds.

Another problem faced by the country is the concentration of development work in certain areas. Most of this work has been carried out in the north, northeast and western parts of Afghanistan. These regions are inhabited by the Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen and Hazara ethnic communities. These minority groups were marginalized by the Pashtoon-dominated Taliban regime. Taliban insurgency is relatively weak in these regions perhaps due to lack of local support. In the Pashtoon-dominated eastern and southern regions of Afghanistan, most of the reconstruction and development work has been carried out in the relatively peaceful Nangarhar province and, to some extent, in Ghazni.

Much of the development work in Afghanistan has taken place in the road construction sector where international donors have mainly focused on four kinds of road networks. These include regional highways

or ring roads, national highways, provincial roads and rural roads. Ring roads have been constructed to connect the capital Kabul with major regional centers – Kandahar in the south, Mazar in the north and Herat in the west of the country. National highways connect the capitals of the 34 provinces with the regional highways network. Provincial roads have been constructed to link provincial capitals with districts. Most of these roads have been completed.

These projects have facilitated the overall development process in Afghanistan and have improved the lives of the communities living along these roads. Most importantly, they have improved the movement of international and national troops and thus have been instrumental in extending Kabul's writ to various regions and corners of Afghanistan.

In the field of mining, the discovery of minerals of approximately \$1 trillion worth by the U.S. can be the single most important factor in the development process. If properly tapped, these mineral deposits – which include huge deposits of iron, copper, cobalt, gold and critical industrial metals like lithium – could transform Afghanistan into one of the most important mining centres of the world.

The reconstruction and development process in Afghanistan has many pitfalls and inconsistencies. If the international community and the Afghan leadership really want the process to be meaningful, they have to tailor their strategies to the needs of the Afghan people. ■

The writer has expertise on the Pakistan-Afghanistan region, the Muslim world, political Islam and extremism and terrorism. His doctoral research topic was 'Extremism-Terrorism in the Name of Islam: Causes and Counterstrategy'.



While it has successfully subdued the LTTE, the Sri Lankan government still faces accusations of war crimes.

By S.G. Jilane

President Mahinda Rajapaksa never had it so good. Everything seemed to have been perfectly cut out for him. The Tamil Tigers had been totally effaced and their leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran killed. One of the president's brothers, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, is Defence Secretary – “the most senior civil service position in the Ministry of Defense.” Another, Basil Rajapaksa, is Minister of Economic Development. Between them the three Rajapaksa brothers are in charge of five government ministries: Defense & Urban Development, Economic Development, Finance & Planning, Highways and Ports & Aviation. By appointing numerous other members

of the extended family to senior positions in state institutions, the president has turned the state into a family fiefdom.

It was in such serene ambiance that the issue of human right abuses and war crimes during the anti-LTTE campaign erupted as a kill-joy. President Rajapaksa won a decisive victory over the Tamil Tiger guerrillas in 2009. But the most recent UN report suggests that at least 70,000 civilians died in the last few months of the war.

According to Callum Marae who has made a film, “No Fire Zone: The Killing Fields of Sri Lanka,” the government of “Sri Lanka told some

400,000 civilians to gather in what they described as ‘no fire zone’ and then subjected them to merciless, sustained shelling.” Killing was done by both sides. The Tigers thought the situation would invite international intervention. So, they killed people who tried to get out of their captivity. But the killing by the government forces was wholesale and vengeful.

The government launched some impressive reconstruction and development programs in the areas devastated by the 26-year-long civil war. Yet, the wounds of human rights abuses and war crimes failed to heal. Ultimately, the UN Human Rights Council adopted two resolutions to

probe allegations of serious human rights problems in Sri Lanka.

Pursuant to the resolutions, the UN sent Navanethem Pillay, its High Commissioner for Human Rights, on a fact-finding mission to Sri Lanka. She is also a former judge of the Supreme Court of South Africa and former member of the war crimes tribunal in Rwanda. Initially, Colombo had been publicly hostile to her visit and the UN Rights body that had adopted the resolutions, but relented ultimately, saying it had nothing to hide, and even welcomed the visitor.

Perhaps it was the apprehension of boycott of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM) that Colombo is to host in November which softened the government's attitude. Canada had already announced its decision to boycott. Others were likely to follow had Colombo stuck to its obduracy.

The High Commissioner visited the former northern war zones in Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu and the eastern district of Trincomalee. She met a wide range of people, including leaders of the government, opposition, civil society and war victims. She also met with the families of the disappeared and was touched by what she saw. Later, in an interview with the media, she is reported to have said, "I have never experienced so many people weeping and crying. I have never seen this level of uncontrolled grief."

However, some of those whom she had met with in the North and East were subsequently visited and intimidated by members of the security and intelligence services. Reacting to the incidence, Ms. Pillay said in a statement that it was "utterly unacceptable that rights activists who spoke with her during her fact-finding mission had subsequently faced harassment by the police and the military."

In her final statement on Sri Lanka,

the High Commissioner made critical comments on the government both for its "lack of progress in investigating war crime allegations and a general drift towards an authoritarian style of rule." She said she was "deeply concerned that Sri Lanka, despite the opportunity provided by the end of the war to construct a new vibrant all-embracing state, is showing signs of heading in an increasingly authoritarian direction."

The criticism drew the ire of



the government and its supporters. President Rajapaksa is reported to have told the visitor that "his people believed the UN was a biased organization, and a report she was due to release next month had already prejudged the country."

Even some Buddhist monks staged a protest outside the UN office in Colombo against Ms Pillay's visit, while pro-government activists have accused the international community of drumming up false allegations of war crimes. At the same time, Sri Lanka's information ministry, in an unusually harsh statement, dismissed Ms Pillay's remarks regarding "lack

of progress in investigating war crime allegations and a general drift towards an authoritarian style of rule" and attacked her directly, saying her statement "clearly transgresses her mandate and the basic norms which should be observed by a discerning international civil servant".

"The judgment on the leadership of the country is better left for the people of Sri Lanka to decide, than being caricatured by external entities influenced by vested interests," the statement added.

But the timing of the report is important. The Commonwealth summit, which is barely a month away, is expected to bring renewed international focus upon Mr Rajapaksa's record. If things do not improve, other countries may follow Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper's example which may jeopardize the high-profile meeting.

Moreover, Sri Lanka's continued intransigence would make it awkward for the countries which backed the UN resolution and which continue to press Mr Rajapaksa "to investigate wartime abuses and introduce further devolution of power in the nation's Tamil-majority northern region," to still attend the CHOGM.

President Rajapaksa is firmly in his saddle. There is no opposition worth the name. And even if it were, it would not obstruct him should he use his wide powers to improve his human rights record by launching an investigation into war crimes and introducing measures to integrate the Tamils into the political mainstream. He may even form a Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the pattern of South Africa.

The ball is in his court. How he plays it remains to be seen. **S**

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

The Real Challenge

The President and the Opposition in the Maldives must make collective efforts to deal with the colossal environmental challenges that dog the country's progress.

By Dr. Moonis Ahmar

Ever since its transition to democracy and the first presidential elections in 2008, the Maldives has been in midst of political upheavals. Comprising over 1,000 islands, the Maldives was ruled by Maumoon Abdul Gayoom from 1978 to 2008. Although his long autocratic rule ensured stability, it

many of his policies. Nasheed specifically accused 'the beach resort' owners of financing the February 2012 coup against his government wherein he was forced to resign at gunpoint. He also blamed the army, the police and supporters of former President, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, and even his Vice President, Mohamed Waheed

first round, no presidential candidate could gain a clear majority. Mohamed Nasheed obtained 45 percent votes against his main rival Yaamin Abdul Qayoom, half-brother of former President Maumoon Gayoom. Yameen got 25 percent of the votes while the Maldivian millionaire resort owner, Qasim Ibrahim got 24.07 percent votes. It was expected that Nasheed may get sympathy votes as he was forcefully ousted from power, but he couldn't meet the requirement of 50 percent votes. The failure of presidential candidates to gain the minimum required number of votes paved the way for run-off polls, which were held on September 28. The battle was between the two major political parties: Nasheed's Maldivian Democratic Party and Yaamin's Progressive Party.

Although, there were reports of malpractices, the head of the Election Commission of the Maldives, Fuwad Thowfeek, rejected all such charges. He asserted that the electoral exercise, which was overseen by international observers, was largely transparent. In fact, the second round of elections provided yet another opportunity to the Election Commission to ensure that polls were held in a transparent



suppressed democratic forces.

Mohamed Nasheed was the first democratic President who came into power in 2008. Serious differences emerged between Nasheed and the business community which opposed

– who succeeded him – subsequently, of hatching conspiracies to remove him from power.

After a long period of political turmoil, the country recently witnessed its second presidential elections. In the

and free manner.

The issues which dominated political debates during election campaigns reflected a growing schism and increasing polarization in the social structure of the country. For a country which is facing the danger of disappearance from the world map, issues related to environmental changes were conspicuous by their absence from the election campaigns of contesting political parties.

The Maldives is said to be highly vulnerable to environmental changes. There are reports predicting the country may disappear from the world map in the next 50 years because of the gradual rise in sea levels due to global warming. Male, the capital city, is only two meters above sea level and so are most of the other Maldivian islands.

While environmentalists are alarmed about the future of this country, its leaders seem totally oblivious to the dangers it faces. Their indifference was evident from the issues that dominated political debates during the election campaign. These ranged from cultural vulnerability vis-à-vis what is perceived by Islamists as a Western 'cultural invasion', the growing influence of India on Maldivian society and political confrontations among contenders for the presidential office. Hardly any candidate highlighted the environmental challenges.

A number of issues have been raised by analysts with respect to the country's fast changing political landscape, their foremost concern being whether Maldivian society is ready for the change which the ousted president pledged to bring in? This aspect becomes crucial considering that Nasheed was not allowed to implement his policies by his opponents. Some other issues relate to

the permeation of Islamic extremism in Maldivian society and the impending environmental catastrophe and how well-prepared the country is to deal with such a huge challenge.

India's influence on the Maldives is also a cause for concern for many. Nasheed has been a target of scathing criticism for his overt pro-India leanings. He never tried to hide that he has a soft spot for India. For example, answering a question from a Chinese

interventionist approach towards the country. There are apprehensions that with its enormous economic and investment opportunities, the country may become a 'soft' battleground or 'an area of competition' between India and China.

The country's journey towards democracy has been rough, mainly because of newly formed political institutions. To worsen matters, issues which were not important, such as

The Maldives is highly vulnerable to environmental changes. It needs collective efforts from the new president and the opposition to deal with the serious environmental challenges.

journalist, he once reportedly said, "We, Indians and Maldivians, come from the same stock. We listen to the same music, we read the same books, we eat the same food."

The Maldives has a 100 percent Muslim population. Yet, unlike Bangladesh or Pakistan – the two other Muslim countries in South Asia – anti-Indian feelings are low in the Maldives.

In February 2013, Nasheed took refuge in the Indian High Commission when a local court issued a warrant for his arrest after he failed to appear for a hearing. He defended his act by arguing: "Mindful of my own security and stability in the Indian Ocean, I have taken refuge at the Indian High Commission in Maldives."

India's main competitor in the Maldives is China. Nasheed also hinted at Beijing's growing

upholding of cultural and religious norms, were given prominence by vested interests.

In the post-election scenario, the country needs collective efforts from the new president and the opposition to deal with the serious environmental challenges. There are reports that the affluent Maldivians are buying property outside the country because they are afraid that their islands may submerge in the coming decades.

This trend can set a dangerous precedent. The situation in the Maldives calls for unity among all stakeholders. They need to get their act together and take measures to prevent any such catastrophe. ■

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

In Nepal, a 22-year-old girl single-handedly supports her family of 11. Her average daily income ranges between \$5 and \$10 – depending on how many times she sells her body during the day. Does she deserve this fate? Some in her country would perhaps agree.

The young woman belongs to the Badi community, which is one of the 36 castes of Nepal's 'untouchables'. Certain professions are meant only for the unfortunate people who are born

finally, the '*Pani nachalne chiochoti halnu parne*' – the impure and the untouchable who are on the lowest rung in the caste ladder.

Historically, ethnic groups and castes are placed in one of these categories and face varying legal penalties and restrictions depending on the category they are a part of. Though the caste system was officially abolished in 1990, it is very much still present in Nepalese society and plays a fairly dominant role in the private

comparisons can be drawn between Nepal and India. Both countries share almost identical caste systems. One of the world's largest democracies, India has become a symbol of modernity and free thought. In India, the lines that divide Indian society on the basis of caste are blurring with time – although they have not completely disappeared.

A major change can, however, be seen in Indian society, especially with respect to specific incidents. In

Casting Away the Castes

A law in Nepal strictly prohibits any further caste-based discrimination in public and private spheres. This is a milestone for the lower castes who have suffered long enough.

By Daniah Ishtiaq

into these castes and breaking out of them is largely impossible, even in the 21st century.

Prithvi Narayan Shah, the first King of unified Nepal, described the country as "a garden of four Varnas (castes)". Broadly speaking, the caste system of Nepal is similar to the Hindu caste system. Castes are divided on the basis of religious, economic and political dominance and are known by many names.

The Khas people are high up in the social hierarchy. They are also known as the Thagadari – weavers of holy threads. Below the Thagadaris are the other three castes: the 'Namasinya Matwalis' who are "non-enslavable alcohol drinkers" and the 'Masinya Matwalis' who are "enslavable alcohol drinkers". Then there are the '*Pani nachalne choichoto halnu naparne*' who are impure but touchable and,

lives of citizens.

A World Bank report says: "Exclusion remains an important hurdle that Nepal has to overcome in order to be able to attain the development objectives of both the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and the Millennium Development Goals".

The Brahmins and other castes at the top of the hierarchy account for a mere 28 percent of the population of Nepal, according to the 2001 census. Yet, they are massively pervasive in politics, law and other professional fields. And although the lower castes – the Dalits and Janajatis, for example, represent 45 percent of the total population, they have virtually no representation in any area. This is a huge waste of a vast reserve of potential.

To have a better understanding of how deeply entrenched the caste system has become in Nepal,

a landmark judgment in 2009, the Supreme Court of India awarded life imprisonment to five Thakurs who belonged to the upper caste. They were accused of killing eight Dalits in Uttar Pradesh. In its judgment, the Supreme Court stipulated that the caste system be completely eliminated to ensure the rule of law and a smooth functioning of democracy.

Although, constitutionally, the caste system was abolished in India in 1974, its presence in society cannot be denied. Professor Andre Beteille, a prominent sociologist, holds politics responsible for much of its continuation. In one of his recent lectures, he claimed that in politics there is "a premium on being a backward caste these days". He is of the view that a caste is now the most important political tool for the mobilization of the electorate. But what does this imply?

It points towards the fact that while India has made immense progress in terms of non-marginalization on the basis of occupations and marriages, the caste factor is exploited for political gains. Its importance has resulted in positive developments too. In the 2011 Indian national census, castes were included in the headcount for the first time after the country's independence. Information about castes was last collected during the British rule in 1931.

Following in the footsteps of

its neighbor, Nepal also passed a law in 2011 to stop caste-based discrimination in all spheres, public as well as private. The law also proposed harsher punishments for public officials who were found guilty of discrimination. This is said to be a milestone for the lower castes who have suffered long enough. Change seems inevitable now.

All said and done, scars of injustices done to people in the name of castes will take a long time to heal. In Nepal, emotions run high due to the

very personal nature of this problem. Where the government is concerned, it can only make efforts to level the playing field in terms of occupations and, may be, even politics. To change collective thinking in a country where these notions date back to hundreds of years is something beyond its reach. There is hope though that persistent efforts may deliver results in the long run. **S**

Daniah Ishtiaq holds an MBA and she writes on social issues.





A Himalayan Feat

Bhutan is now a fully functional democracy and a beacon of light for other nations in South Asia that seek egalitarian freedom.

By Javeria Shakil

A total of four political parties – the Bhutan Peace and Prosperity Party (BPPP), the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Druk Nymrub Tshogpa and Druk Chirwang Tshogpa – contested the recently held elections in Bhutan. There were five parties initially. One could not contest as the Election Commission of Bhutan disqualified it.

According to Bhutanese law, a party contesting the election must field candidates in all 47 constituencies and each candidate must have a university degree. The fifth party, the Bhutan Kuen-Nyam Party, was disqualified as it did not put up a candidate

with a university degree in just one constituency.

Now comes the interesting part. Each of the remaining four parties sent a letter to the Election Commission, requesting it to review its decision and let the BKNP participate in the polls. Upholding the law, the Commission turned the request down.

Having recently witnessed the first ever transition of power from one democratic government to another in May 2013, the people of Pakistan may find the afore-mentioned incident hard to believe. In fact, such displays of unity and brotherhood are rare even in established democracies of

the world. However, the peculiarity of the electoral exercise in Bhutan was not limited to just one incident. The history of elections there, as well as the country itself, is replete with one-of-a-kind incidents.

This was the second election in Bhutan ever since its 2008 transition from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional setup. Unlike other monarchs, who let go of power following mass protests, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the fourth King of Bhutan, relinquished his powers without any public pressure and despite being a popular ruler.

Wangchuck is also credited with



introducing radical political and social reforms that included devolution of most of his administrative powers to the Council of Ministers and allowing for the King's impeachment by the National Assembly.

His most significant contribution on the social front was the introduction of television and the internet in 1999, making Bhutan one of the last countries to have television.

The first parliamentary elections in Bhutan were held in 2008 when King Wangchuck announced that he was abdicating the throne in favor of his son. This tiny South Asian country, with a population of just over 700,000 – out of which 381,790 were registered voters – was divided into 47 constituencies. The election was held in two rounds. In the first round, polling was conducted in 20 districts of the country and the two parties

that claimed most votes transitioned to the next round to compete for the 47 National Assembly seats. Of the four parties that contested the 2008 elections, the BPPP won and formed the government.

The Bhutanese must be the only people in the world to have mock elections at a national level. When the first elections were announced in Bhutan, the rulers thought it fit to conduct a mock electoral exercise to make people familiar with the process. Four fictitious parties – Blue Party, Green Party, Red Party and Yellow Party – were set up. Even though the contesting candidates were mostly high-school students, the nation took the exercise so seriously that UN and Indian observers were invited to monitor it.

In real elections, the voter turnout was 80 percent with the BPPP winning 44 seats while the only other party contesting elections – the People's Democratic Party – managed to win just three seats. General elections were also held in Pakistan in the same year.

As much as the result of the first elections in Bhutan was shocking, the results of the second elections also brought surprises. The PDP, which remained in the opposition for the five years, won 32 of the 47 national assembly seats. Tshering Tobgay, the former opposition leader, was sworn in as the new prime minister.

The main reason for the BPPP's downfall is said to be allegations of corruption leveled against some government functionaries, including the home minister and the speaker of the parliament that turned public opinion against the party. But it would be unjust not to give the PDP the credit it deserves. It ran a well-organized election campaign and addressed issues that struck a chord with the masses such as the formation of local governments.

Bhutan's relations with India, and the two leading parties' stance on the matter, was also a crucial factor that shaped public opinion. During his

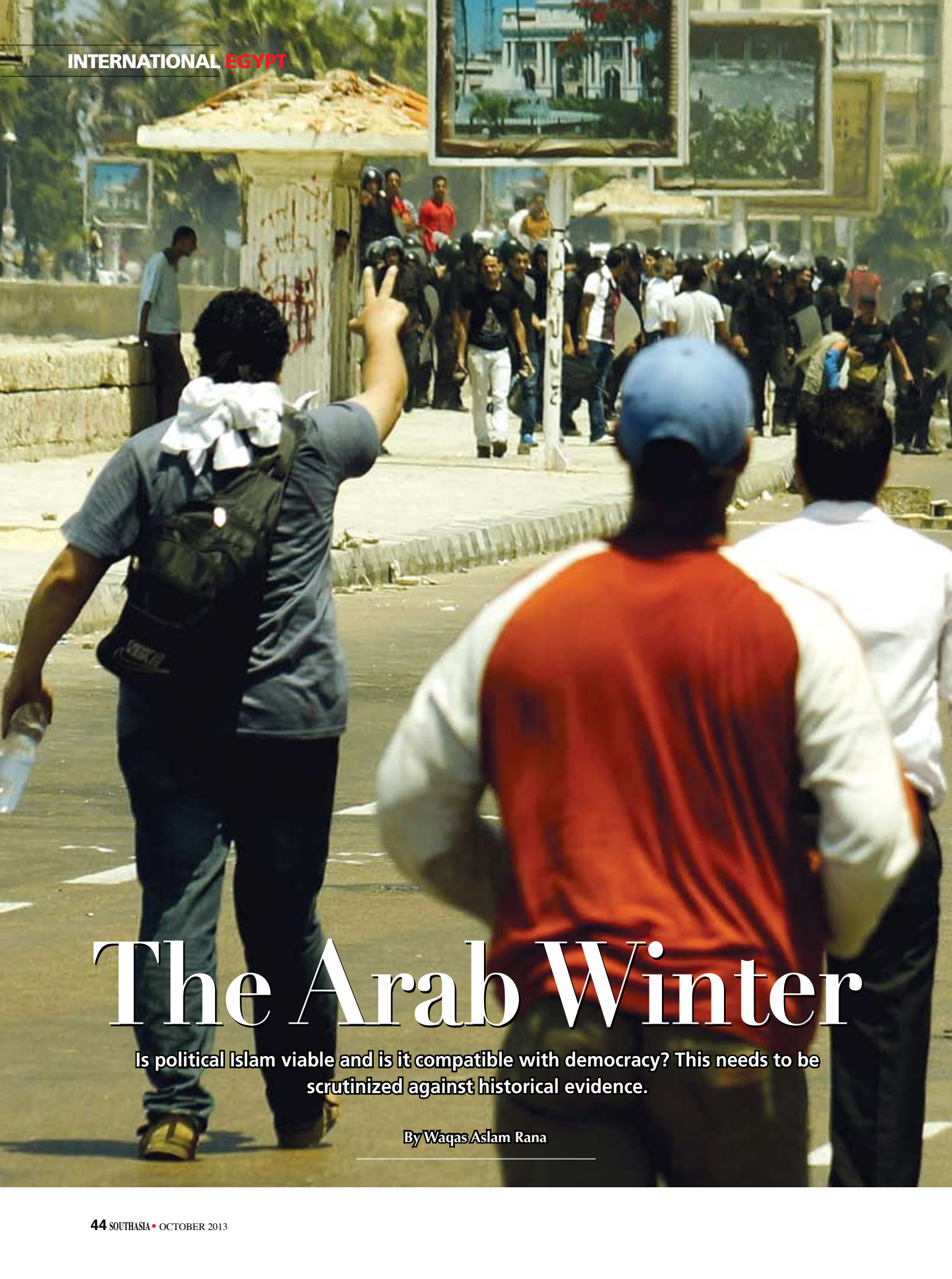
term, former Prime Minister Jigmi Y. Thinley had taken steps on the foreign policy front as well. He tried to improve the country's ties with China though this irked India no end. As a result, India withdrew its subsidies on the kerosene oil and cooking gas supplied to Bhutan. This led to a substantial hike in the prices of these commodities and had the masses fuming at the BPPP government. These decisions hurt the people of Bhutan and did not do any good to the country on the diplomatic front either.

However, looking at the broader picture, democracy did bring some positive changes in the lives of the people of Bhutan. Their standard of living improved significantly. According to World Bank data, the country's gross national income (GNI) increased from \$950 in 2003 to \$2420 in 2012. In 2003, only 84.6 percent of Bhutan's population had access to an improved water source (a household connection, public standpipe, borehole, protected well or spring and rainwater collection). By 2011, the figure had increased to 95.8 percent. The country's road network and basic health facilities also improved considerably.

Democracy, however, also brought in its wake charges of corruption and wrongdoing by politicians – a phenomenon hitherto unheard of in the country. Displaying a deep belief in the concept of accountability, the Bhutanese people expressed their displeasure with their government by voting it out of power in the elections.

Now that a new government is in place in Bhutan, how it handles the country's relations with its two difficult neighbors – India and China, between whom this Himalayan kingdom is sandwiched – will be a fascinating study for those interested in regional politics. ■

Javeria Shakil is Assistant Editor at SouthAsia. She writes on issues of political and social interest.



The Arab Winter

Is political Islam viable and is it compatible with democracy? This needs to be scrutinized against historical evidence.

By Waqas Aslam Rana



It seems like a lifetime when the flames of rebellion swept across North Africa and the Middle East. Erupting in Tunisia and quickly spreading to Egypt, mass movements for change spread to countries as diverse as Morocco, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, and Libya. Yet, only a couple of years down the road, this so-called 'Arab Spring' is fast turning into an 'Arab winter'.

The swift counter-revolution in Egypt shows that the old power structures remain firmly in place. As I recently stood in Cairo's Tahrir Square in view of military armored personnel carriers, it was difficult not to feel sorrow for what seems like a lost revolution. The Egyptian case is worth examining in some detail, since it is instructive in understanding the forces driving events across the region.

Regardless of one's view of the Muslim Brotherhood or its performance during a short-lived one year in power, the fact is that its democratically elected president Mohamed Morsi was deposed by Egypt's military. That many Egyptians still support this move, despite the violent crackdown by security forces

and a continuing state of emergency, shows just how polarized their society has become. This has re-ignited the debate between political Islam and secularism. The question remains as to what is the reality of these two seemingly opposing philosophies as they apply to the Middle East and indeed other Muslim societies?

With its roots in pan-Islamism and anti-colonialism, it was the revolutionary Egyptian Hassan al-Banna who first gave concrete shape to political Islam by forming the Ikhwan al-Muslimun, the Muslim Brotherhood, in 1928. With the organization's fate hanging in the balance today, it is hard to miss history's sense of irony. But the consequences are not just limited to Egypt. The failure of the Morsi government is being heralded by many as proof that political Islam is not viable, and even that Islam and democracy are incompatible.

This assertion needs to be scrutinized against historical evidence. It can be argued that the forces of political Islam have always been marginalized from mainstream politics and, as such, have never had the opportunity to govern. Decades of repression against the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt from Nasser up to Mubarak are well-known.

In Algeria in 1991, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was kept away from power by the military despite winning at the polls. Subsequent repression against the FIS led to a prolonged civil war that tore the country apart. While the situation may not deteriorate to such an extent, there are genuine fears that Egypt may be heading down the same path after the killings in August.

It seems democracy is a desirable thing for the Middle East, but only if Islamists do not get power. This narrative, heightened by years of state repression against Islamist parties, with Western powers either actively encouraging it or looking the other way, has significantly contributed to the rise of extremist forces such as Al Qaeda.

In a broader historical context, both

European and Ottoman colonialism ensured that the region's population had no experience in political evolution. Compare this with Europe, where crucially there was no outside power bearing down to snuff out the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the seeds for the eventual emergence of liberal democracy. Even worse, the post-colonial period in the Middle East was dominated by dictatorial regimes that only replaced foreign masters with local despots. In this environment, is it really surprising that political Islam 'failed'?

Still, it is worth considering the other side of the argument because, after all, there is a history of secularism in the greater Middle East. The central character in this story is Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, and how he brought modern Turkey into existence. The Turkish example is held up to show that secularization is the way to go for Muslim countries if they are to become modern and successful states. But this is an idealized version of history and glosses over uncomfortable realities.

For starters, in post-Ottoman Turkey, secularism did not emerge in response to popular will but was imposed by Ataturk in the 1920s. And ever since then it has existed uncomfortably in a relatively conservative religious population, a feature much in common with other Muslim countries. The Turkish army has directly intervened more than once in the name of protecting secularism, in the process entrenching its outsized political and economic interests. A very similar story played out in Pakistan and Egypt during the second half of the twentieth century: a strong military dominating the state and supported by a self-proclaimed secular civilian elite. Other variations were the secular socialist Baath Party regimes in Iraq and Syria, and the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran.

One common thread runs through all these cases; rather than espousing the European ideal of separating state from religion, this kind of secularism sought to attack and bring Islam under the state's control.

In the Turkish context, the emergence of the AKP under Erdogan shows that this particular vision of secularism is ultimately doomed in Muslim countries. Of course, the success of the AKP is so far an exception and Islamist parties in other countries urgently need to re-think their strategies to become more inclusive in newly emerging democratic frameworks.

The real point, though, is that the political Islam vs. secularism debate is a hollow one. It misrepresents the past, and sabotages the way forward for the Middle East. In his book 'Islam and the Arab Awakening' published last year, reviewing the events of the Arab Spring, noted scholar Tariq Ramadan says: "Having broken free from political dictatorship, they must free themselves from the intellectual straitjacket and the false divisions that prevent them from exploring new ways and new horizons together."

Without real contemporary experience of political evolution, the way forward for countries in the Middle East will be a tough one. It also does not help that the region is still central to global geo-politics, as the ongoing tragedy of Syria demonstrates. Democratic principles and humanitarian concerns are absent in the calculations of global as well as regional players and sectarian fault lines are as entrenched as ever.

To predict even the immediate future would therefore be foolish. There is an undeniable shift taking place in the attitudes of Middle Eastern people, who are demanding a greater voice in how they are governed. Real change will likely be slow and staggered, as we are witnessing in Egypt. However, history shows that once political evolution begins, the status quo eventually yields. How long that will take is anyone's guess. ■

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

UPCOMING B2B EVENTS ...



28 November 2013, Sheraton Hotel - Karachi
8th Information & Communications
Technology Exhibition and Conference
Website: www.connectit.com.pk
E-mail: info@connectit.com.pk



25-27 February 2014
Pak-China Friendship Centre, Islamabad
10th International Safety & Security Exhibition
Website: www.safesecurepakistan.com
E-mail: info@safesecurepakistan.com



28 - 30 May 2014, Expo Centre Lahore
12th International Exhibition for the Energy Industry
Website: www.pogee.com.pk
E-mail: info@pogee.com.pk



27 - 29 March 2014, Expo Centre Lahore
12th Edition of the International Machinery
Exhibition of Garment & Textile Technology
Website: www.megatechpakistan.com
E-mail: info@megatechpakistan.com



2014, Karachi Expo Centre
3rd International Multi-Modal Transportation,
Logistics & Material Handling Exhibition and Conference
Website: www.intertranspakistan.com
E-mail: info@intertranspakistan.com



September 2014, Expo Centre Lahore
12th International Plastics & Packaging
Industry Trade Fair
Website: www.plastipac.com.pk
E-mail: info@plastipac.com.pk



September 2014, Expo Centre Lahore
11th Edition of the International Food, Beverage
& Packaging Technology Trade Fair
Website: www.foodtech.com.pk
E-mail: info@foodtech.com.pk



September 2014, Expo Centre Lahore
3rd International Food, Beverages &
Hospitality Trade Fair
Website: www.foodtech.com.pk
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A day before Eid-ul-Fitr, a suicide bomber blasted into the courtyard of a mosque in Quetta, where several police officers had congregated to offer funeral prayers for a slain colleague. At least 35 personnel were killed in the ensuing bombing incident. This was not something new in Quetta or Balochistan or elsewhere in Pakistan as suicide bomb attacks on military installations, security personnel and the general public have become a daily routine. Target killing on sectarian grounds is another such menace.

There are a number of reasons for the situation which the people have been facing for some time. The major

blueprint for Pakistan hardly saw the light of day. The other important founding father Liaquat Ali Khan was subsequently assassinated on Oct. 16, 1951. The death of the Quaid and the killing of Liaquat Ali Khan were irreparable losses for the nascent state. The ruling elite forgot the sacrifices of these and other great leaders. They adopted the path of opportunism and negated all norms of democracy, as a result of which, the federal structure on which the state was to be based was replaced by the issues that the people face today.

With the celebration of 66 years of independence, the people should also have celebrated their freedom of expression, which should have

how could political stability come to a volatile environment?

India also achieved independence at the same time as Pakistan but it started its journey with great enthusiasm because it had politicians of great vision. Though Mahatma Gandhi was also assassinated in 1948 but leaders like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Sardar Vallabhai Patel put India on the path to progress and prosperity. Under the mature leadership of Nehru, India took decisions which strengthened democratic institutions and set the direction for economic progress. These decisions encompassed the drafting of the constitution and its implementation, elimination of

Why is Pakistan facing political instability?



Pakistan's society needs to be democratized. This can only happen if the political process is liberated from the clutches of the ruling elite and the feudal aristocracy.

By Mahrukh A. Mughal

cause is political instability which has plunged the country into a deep pit.

The creation of Pakistan was a great achievement of the Muslims. The Quaid-e-Azam had set the tone for governance for the country just three days before the official announcement of independence, in his famous speech in the Constituent Assembly in Karachi on August 11, 1947.

Unfortunately, the founder of Pakistan survived for only 13 months and died on Sept 11, 1948. His

included free practice of religion, faith and speech. But unfortunately these values were trammled through all these years under the stranglehold of the civil and military bureaucracy and the politicians proved themselves to be wholly incapable and inefficient in this respect. Another tragedy that Pakistan faced was that it could not eliminate feudalism from its midst. Politicians with feudal backgrounds became strong and took control of power. With four martial laws and an unending string of weak governments,

feudalism and initiation of a non-aligned policy in a bi-polar world.

The country got a proper constitution as late as in 1973, which was still a late date as Pakistan achieved independence in 1947. It is for this reason, primarily, that political stability could not come to Pakistan. The country's first constitution was actually formulated and implemented on March 23, 1956 and General Elections were scheduled in February 1959 but Martial Law was imposed on October 7, 1958. The creation

of One Unit was also a negation of the concept of federalism. It reduced the voting status of the people of East Pakistan and created misunderstandings between the two wings of the country.

For nearly a century before independence, different political leaderships had developed a political consciousness among the people of India, which had driven them to fight for their independence. Pakistan could not develop such democratic institutions and went under the hold of the military which destroyed whatever political stability the country moving towards. The first martial law came in 1958 and military interventions continued till 1999. The

further debilitating factor. Repeated rigged elections have eroded public confidence in the electoral institutions and have fuelled alienation and violence at the public level.

The Pakistani leadership has also been spoiled through the strong influence of the armed forces. International conspiracies have always been a part of any change in Pakistan as every leader comes through international interference and influence. In such circumstances, how would it be possible for such individuals to work independently and in the interest of the people of Pakistan?

If a proper local government system could be implemented, it would initiate decentralization of power,

a demographic makeup of 54 percent young people, which can be turned into quite an asset provided the politicians understand the significance of this statistic.

A miraculous change is required to bring the country out of its crises, whether financial, economic or energy-related. If the corrupt political elite are allowed to continue in their ways, and there is no end to the feudal system as well as the no-holds-barred acceptance of the corrupt, incapable and incompetent leadership and Army interference, then no change can be expected.

In the final analysis, it must be said that the Pakistani society needs to be democratized. This would only be




military always seemed to be hungry for power and crossed its jurisdiction in taking over the democratic political process.

The feudal system has also been a major problem. The country's feudal elite moved into politics much earlier in the day. The disastrous system has come to immensely affect national progress and there is no means in sight as to its elimination. The country has also failed to remove the differences between the rich and the poor. Pakistan's weak electoral system is a

which could facilitate and stimulate sustainable development in all parts of the country. Local areas could be rebuilt and public issues could be solved though public funding and the decentralization would subsequently facilitate the tailoring of solutions to local problems and local conditions.

Political stability could come to Pakistan through "revolutionary forces" and the youth could be this 'force'. It is interesting that whereas youth are the backbone of every country, Pakistan is fortunate to have

possible if the political process were to be liberated from the clutches of the ruling elite and the feudal aristocracy. For a genuine federal system to take root, power must be devolved to the grass-root level. All decisions must be made on merit and transparency and involvement of the people must be increased. 

The writer is a graduate and appears regularly on TV talk shows. She also writes on politics and economics in leading publications.



Job Market Woes

A literacy rate of 85 percent and a double-digit unemployment figure. The two just do not match – but this is a reality in today’s Iran.

By Reza Khanzadeh

Despite having a literacy rate of 85 percent, the rate of unemployment in Iran has seen a sharp rise over the years. There have been extensive discussions about the country’s continued double-digit unemployment rate. The numerous sanctions imposed on Iran and the economic mismanagement of its government are quoted as some of the reasons behind the increase in the unemployment rate. While these may be the two factors responsible, there are other, equally important reasons why so many Iranians remain jobless.

The first is the country’s educational system in general, and the student’s transition from high school to college through the national entrance exam or *konkur*. The second

is the limited resources such as lack of staffing agencies and career centers for individuals seeking employment. The third major reason is the specific social norms that have, over the decades, been deeply entrenched in Iran’s social fabric. The fourth reason is the lack of laws to protect the rights of workers.

In Iran, the process of obtaining official documents and information is very difficult, primarily because of certain restrictions within the country. While there have been news reports, articles and studies about Iran’s education system and unemployment, there is no means to document progress. Much of the unemployment data comes from government sources that may provide partial information

or skewed numbers that do not fully capture the problems of the job market. This is why the Islamic Republic places its unemployment rate at around 12 percent while independent sources, both inside and outside Iran, put this figure at a much higher level. With limited and conflicting information, it is difficult to provide a precise and quantitative explanation of this problem.

The information I have gathered comes from decade of traveling and living in Iran that exposed me to news reports and articles and provided me with the opportunity to have substantial conversations with university professors, students, graduates and the unemployed.

The main reason someone attends

college is to prepare for a career of their choice. Unfortunately, such an opportunity comes with its limitations. On entering their junior year of high school, students must decide on their area of focus – their major. The final two years consist of specialized concentration, with the senior year primarily consisting of classes at a vocational school. Towards the end of their public schooling, students begin to prepare for the national entrance exam, or *konkur*, which is the sole factor that decides who gets admission into college.

In addition to preparing for a four-subject general exam (Persian, Arabic, Religion, English) and a three-subject specific exam (depending on one's area of focus), students must also provide a list, during registration, of the majors they wish to pursue. After sitting for a grueling five-hour exam, which is taken by millions of students nationwide, they wait to see whose scores fall within the top 80 percent of the accepted students. Because of national quotas imposed on schools, even those who are admitted are not guaranteed the major subject or school of their choice unless their score places them in the top three percent of their respective fields.

Should students wish to change their majors, they must sit for the *konkur* again, which usually requires a one-year break from school in order to prepare for the test and begin college. Since it is quite difficult to change a major, most students prefer to continue their education and graduate in a field they have no interest. Also, the majority of graduates who enter the job market have little practical knowledge. Although their theoretical understanding is sound, their confidence in the ability to apply their knowledge is low. Lately, there has been talk of a five-year plan where relatively less emphasis will be placed on the *konkur* and more on high-school grades. But this is too early

to raise hopes as similar suggestions have come in the past as well but with no significant change.

Once students graduate, they are mainly on their own to find appropriate jobs. External resources such as online job search engines, recruitment agencies, career centers, workshops, internships, networking societies, groups, clubs, organizations and mentoring programs are either nonexistent or are still in the initial phases of development. Therefore, seeking their assistance to get a job is of little help. As a result, most people rely on newspaper classifieds and family and friends for information about job vacancies.

In addition to the afore-mentioned problems, there are three social norms that hinder one's chances of getting a job: (a) the applicant's level of confidence during the application process; (b) the lack of trust within the workforce; and (c) family reputation.

To fully understand why confidence is such an important factor, it is best to consider how the Americans go through this process. Most Americans embellish their resume creatively, frankly listing their strengths and abilities. In Iran, however, most individuals prefer a modest resume that mentions one's qualifications in a humble manner.

Decades of shady business activities and frauds have resulted in a lack of trust within the workforce. It is rare to see an employer hire an individual they do not know. In most cases, a family member, relative, and/or friend is hired, although there is no guarantee that this business relationship will be amicable. This lack of trust in strangers entrenched in the psyche of most Iranians explains why recruitment agencies are not fully utilized and why most graduates are not hired unless they are fortunate enough to have a relative who owns a business.

Consequently, many graduates

resort to jobs outside their field. But even these options are limited because the reputation and social standing of a person's family is also taken into consideration. For example, sanitation-related jobs may be seen by many families as an embarrassing profession. Therefore, taking such a job – even temporarily – poses the risk of ruining one's family name. There have been instances when a person was given an ultimatum to either quit or be ready to be shunned by the family.

Then there is the problem of workers' rights. The legal parameters within which individuals, who are not hired on the basis of their qualifications can exercise their rights, are very limited and, at times, nonexistent. There is no legally enforced minimum wage while laws against discrimination, child labor and unequal employment opportunities do not exist. This is one reason why so many businesses hire family and friends even though they may not be suitably qualified.

If the new Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, wants to make an impact on the system, he should focus on introducing educational reforms, investing in external resources and making laws to protect employees and employers. One of the most consistent complaints of the Iranian youth is the lack of employment opportunities. All the Iranians I have spoken to on this subject have echoed the same sentiment: "Because we can't find a job, we look for just about anything to keep us busy. Some of us take a positive path and some of us don't. Regardless, we hope Rouhani will bring about a change by creating more jobs." ■

Reza Khanzadeh is a contract researcher for the American Iranian Council and works as a translator in Iran. He holds an MA in International Relations & Islamic Studies.

India recently created history in the digital world by becoming the third largest internet-using country, after China and the U.S. Interestingly, three-fourths of India's online population is below 35 – significantly younger than internet users in other emerging economies.

According to comScore, a global digital management and analytics firm, India now has nearly 74 million internet users, a 31 percent increase from March 2012. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has revealed another interesting point: until March 2013, there were nearly 164.81 million internet subscribers in India, with seven out of eight accessing the internet from their mobile phones.

However, comScore says that mobile and tablet-based internet traffic in India is just 14 percent while the remaining traffic is via desktop computers and laptops. The sharp rise in internet users from March 2012 signifies India's efforts to improve its educational system and spread literacy. Moreover, India has been promoting education across the country and has a literacy rate of 74 percent – the third highest amongst South Asian nations, with the Maldives (93.8 percent) and Sri Lanka (91.2 percent) holding the highest and second-highest positions, respectively.

Comparing male and female internet users in India, sources claim that men under 35 and women between 35 and 44 are regular internet users. However, women account for less than 40 percent of all Indian users, a ratio less than other countries. Furthermore, comScore also revealed that internet users in India spend a quarter of their time on the social media, of which nearly 23 percent is spent on communicating via email.

Lately, online dominance has shifted towards Asia where India is leading the South Asian region.

Moreover, Asia accounts for 41 percent of all internet users in the world. This shows that there is still ample room for development. Furthermore, India is gearing to become the leader in internet usage and is already a key player in the global software market. Most western companies outsource

unlimited video calls and voice calls almost free.

The growth of internet penetration in India has also resulted in an increase in the number of mobile phone users. As of April 2013, there were nearly 900 million mobile users in India, making it a country with the world's

A Bright Digital

India is now ranked as the third largest internet-using country in the world. This bodes well for the future.

By Muhammad Omar Iftikhar

their projects to India and the country experienced mushroom growth of call centers in the last decade, which has augmented internet traffic originating from India.

India's fast growing internet-using population also hints at its technological advancement. The country has been moving ahead in the telecom and IT sectors and has made significant progress in space research and nuclear technology, giving it a clear edge over other South Asian nations.

Technological advancement has paved the way for the country's progress and has also benefitted individual internet users who can now communicate with anyone around the globe through wireless services and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP). Moreover, the Indian telecommunications sector is providing users with low-priced internet coverage, which has made

second highest ratio of mobile-phone users.

The Indian telecommunications sector is also making efforts to increase internet speed, hence allowing for faster browsing and downloading. Moving a step further from 3G technology, India is ready to introduce 4G Internet that will provide higher data speed, internet Protocol Television (IPTV) support, high-speed browsing, enhanced audio-video streaming and video conferencing support.

India's corporate sector will also reap the benefits of 4G technology that will further increase the country's internet penetration, which currently stands at nearly 12 percent while that of China is 40.1 percent.

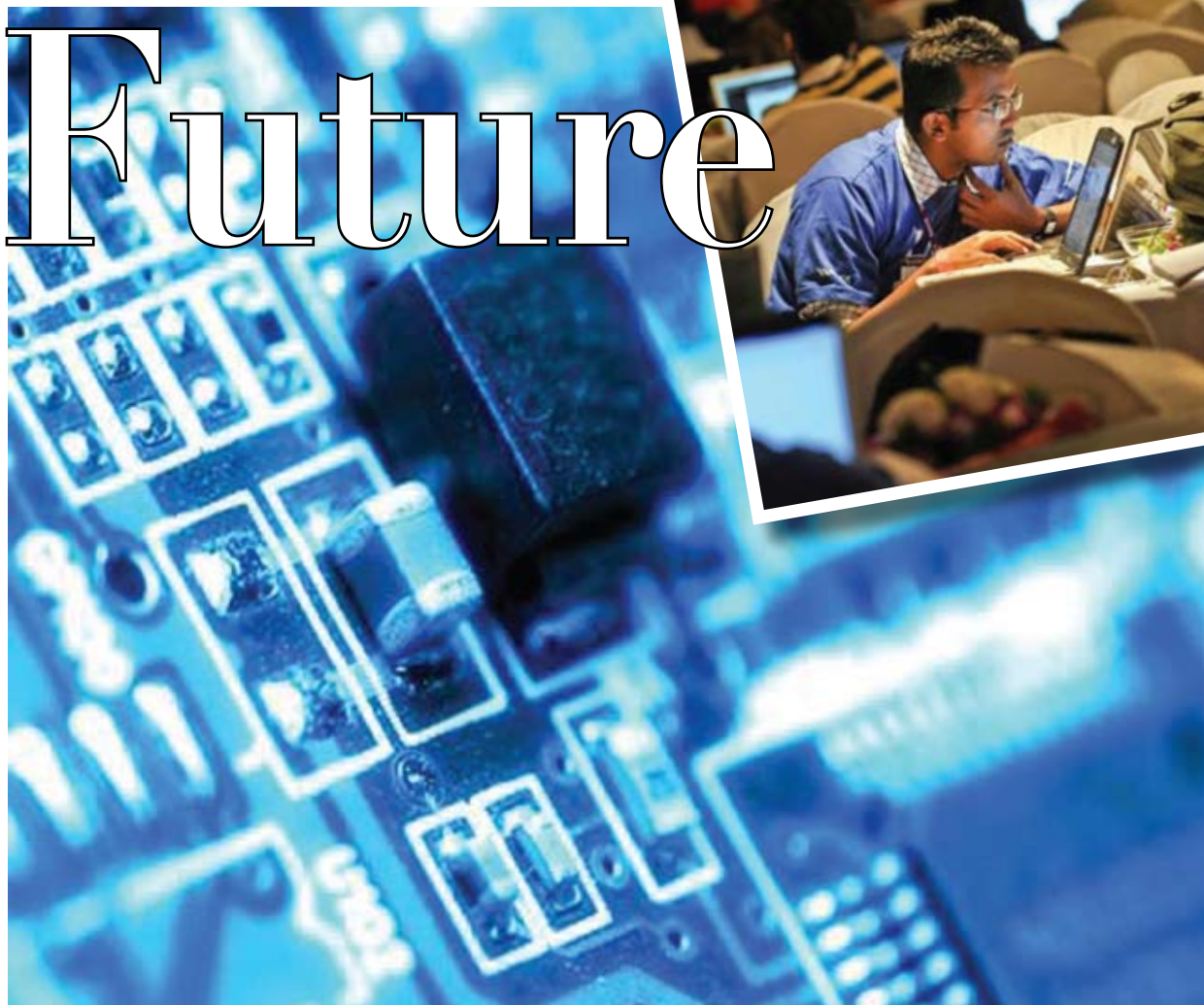
Although India's internet penetration is growing, it is also affecting the price of internet facilities. Sources say Indian telecommunications companies may raise internet rates

by 30 percent. The rising cost is associated with the new telecom licenses recently issued by India's Department of Telecom. Under these new agreements, telecom operators, including Internet Service Providers

the best of internet packages offered by cellular services. Furthermore, internet users in India are going in a big way for smartphones because non-stop access to the internet is fast becoming a necessity,

years. The rural areas are also likely to benefit from these technological advancements, especially with the arrival of 4G

Future



(ISPs), are required to pay 8 percent annually on their adjusted gross revenue (AGR).

Although a possible increase in internet prices may affect users in some ways, it will not affect those who are surfing the World Wide Web through their smartphones. A fairly large number of Indians now use the internet on smartphones, to get

as users, especially entrepreneurs, need to be in touch with their clients and colleagues all the time. Moreover, commuters spend many hours in traveling every day and choose to while away their time on the internet.

With the youth forming a major part of India's internet population, the country's internet penetration is expected to increase in the coming

technology, which will create jobs, thus improving the standard of living of the common man. It would probably be right to say that the country has a bright future in the digital world. ■

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

Tourism is perhaps one of the largest industries in Nepal and a significant source of foreign exchange and revenue for the country. That is why the Nepalese government declared 2011 as the Year of Tourism with the aim to bring in one million foreign tourists that year.

The country is home to eight out of ten of the highest mountains in the world – Mount Everest being one of them. This makes Nepal an ideal destination for those who like trekking, mountain and rock climbing and adventure sports. In fact, of all the different kinds of tourism opportunities that Nepal offers, adventure and eco-tourism are a major attraction for visitors.

According to the Ministry of Tourism of Nepal, some of the main tourist attractions in the country are rock and mountain climbing, trekking, bird watching, para-gliding and hot-air ballooning over the Himalayas, rafting, kayaking or canoeing, mountain biking and jungle safaris, especially in the Terai region, to name a few.

Sadly, however, the ministry has been unable to prevent mountain climbing accidents in the country. Some of the reasons for such eventualities are overcrowding and the failure to implement adequate safety measures for tourists.

Consider, for example, Martin Silagi's case. On May 14, 2013, Silagi, an Austrian tourist, fell almost 5,500 meters into a crevasse in the Himalayas while paragliding. Similarly, five people died in the same month when they slipped while climbing down Mount Kanchenjunga.

Due to a significant increase in the number of accidents involving visitors, tourism has taken a dive in Nepal. People – particularly those who are interested in adventure sports and mountaineering – are reluctant to come to the country because of lack of implementation of safety measures by the government.

According to rough estimates, Nepal attracted nearly 600,000 foreign tourists in 2012. Although it is a sizeable number, it is less than what the country's officials were hoping for. The Nepalese government is trying hard to attract new tourists, Indian and Chinese visitors being on the top of its list, even at the cost of its existing adventure tourists who comprise 40 percent of the market.


However, it has largely failed to provide a sound infrastructure to tourists. For one thing, international air connectivity to the country is poor. Only a few airlines are willing to fly to Nepal because of which ticket prices skyrocket during the peak traveling season. For an average tourist, going to Nepal can be an expensive proposition.

The fact that the internal road connectivity is just as bad makes the situation even worse. Thus, the overall travel cost to and within Nepal can be unaffordable for many. Nepal's record in air safety does not help matters either. In the last two years, there have been six air crashes in the country, killing some 75 people. These factors force a large number of potential adventure tourists to look for other options.

Despite all this, Nepal's Ministry of Tourism is determined to open five new 8000-meter mountain peaks in the Himalayan

Are the Peaks worth the Risk?





Nepal's decision to open five new mountain peaks for tourists comes amid growing concerns that the Everest has become overcrowded and dangerous for climbers.

By Samina Wahid

range this year in the hope that it would encourage people to come to Nepal. This move comes amid growing concerns that Mount Everest has become severely overcrowded and dangerous for climbers.

In April 2013, three foreign mountaineers found themselves embroiled in a controversy following a clash with Sherpas, an ethnic group of people who live on the mountains. The Sherpas kicked them and threw stones at them, the mountaineers claimed. They said that the incident was a result of overcrowding and commercialization. According to them, feelings of resentment are growing against the increasing number of "luxury mountaineers" who are taken to the peaks in style by commercial expedition ventures. This has also led to dangerous delays and long queues, thus causing several deaths in the process. A case in point is the death of four climbers in 2012 who had to wait for hours to get to the summit because some 300 'luxury' climbers were passing at the time.

In the wake of these incidents, the Nepalese government has set up a committee to resolve conflicts between climbers and Sherpas and to reduce delays during the peak climbing season (April-June). Still, the tourism ministry has no plans to decrease the number of climbers on some 1,500 snow-covered peaks. In fact, it plans to open more peaks – many of them still unnamed – for tourists in the future.

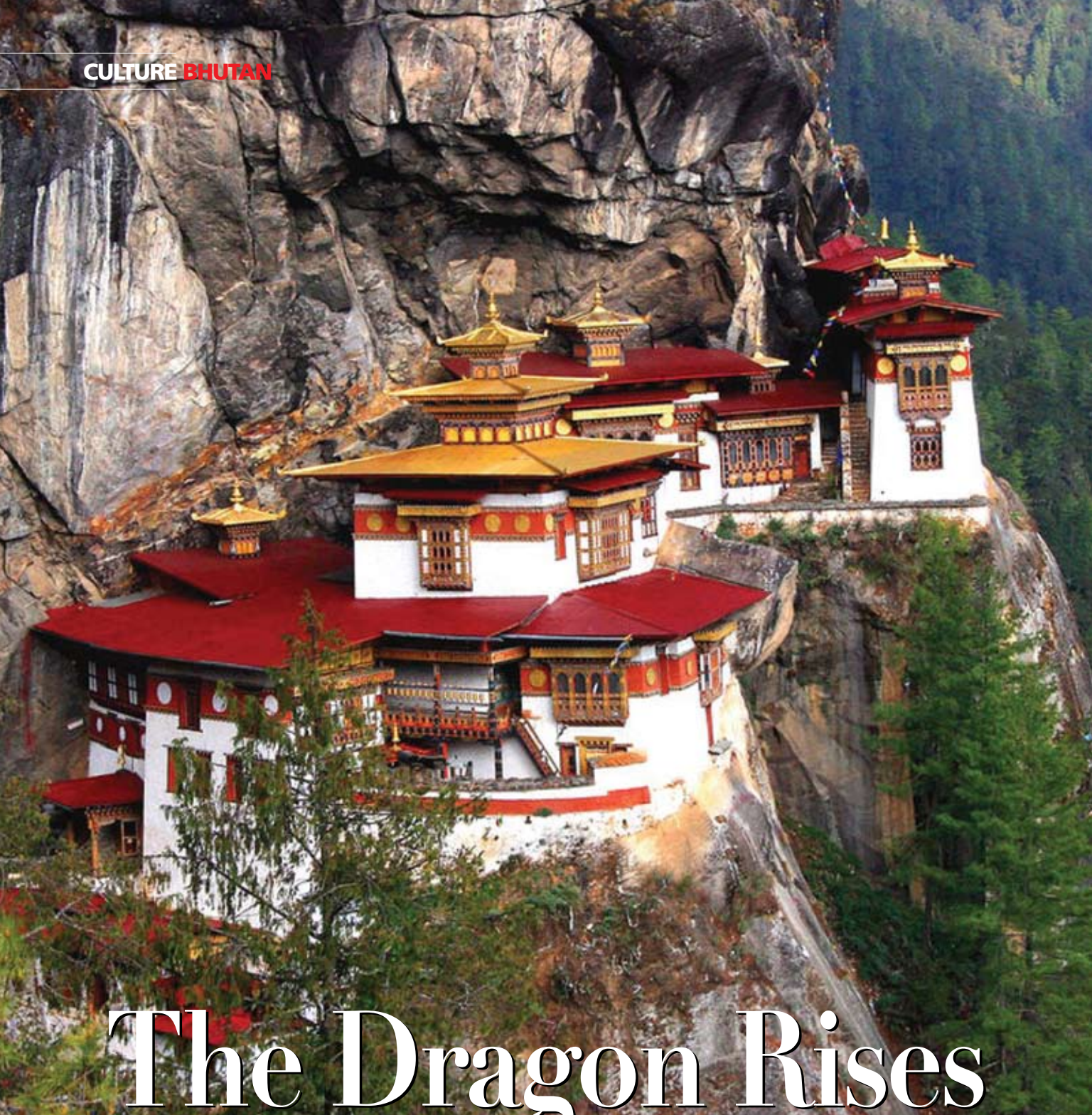
"We have 1500 Himalayan mountains with snow coverage and only 326 of them are open. We have to open more mountains and now we are making a plan for that. We have many mountains over 8,000 meters. There are four at Kanchenjunga and it's similar at Lhotse," senior tourism official Mohan Krishna Sapkota is reported to have said recently. "You can't compare Everest to other mountains, but we want to provide an opportunity to mountaineers to climb new mountains. We are managing how we can make for safer climbing on Everest, but the new mountains are another issue. We are opening new tourism products for Nepal," he added.

There is a need to ensure adequate safety measures for serious mountaineers before opening new peaks. The authorities concerned must make this a priority issue or else mountaineers will begin to think that the Everest is not worth the risk.

"Before I left for Everest, I said the danger was too many people on the mountain and accepted that as the main danger, I didn't think the main danger would be a mob of Sherpas throwing rocks," Jonathan Griffith, a British Alpine climber and photographer based in France told journalists recently. He was one of the three climbers who were attacked by Sherpas.

This sentiment should be a matter of concern for the Nepalese government. It must take stock of the situation. Otherwise, the country stands to lose out on a huge chunk of revenue brought in by tourism. **S**

Samina Wahid is a freelance journalist who contributes regularly to various publications.



The Dragon Rises

The fascinating culture of Bhutan gradually opens up to the world as globalization makes its inroads.

By Ayesha Malik

Bhutan remained a mystery to the rest of the world for a very long time. A landlocked country surrounded by mountains, it was Bhutan's geographical location that kept it hidden. Bhutan is also called 'Land of the Thunder Dragon'. It earned this moniker due to frequent thunderstorms that descend from the Himalayas.

Bhutan's isolation and lack of contact with the outside world has helped it preserve its ancient customs, all of which reportedly exist in their original form. Being a highly traditional country, it has kept its culture intact over the years and has worked hard to protect it from outside influences.

However, things are gradually changing with time. The Bhutanese nation is increasingly becoming acquainted with the concept of globalization, especially after the introduction of television in the country in 1999. Yet, the increasing information about the outside world has not affected the sound cultural base of the country mainly because the people of Bhutan hold their ancient culture and traditions close to their hearts. They also ensure that their future generations are equally committed to keeping these traditions alive. This is why the country has managed to retain its unique identity.

The main components that define Bhutan's culture are its traditional attire, its distinct architecture and its various traditional rituals, ceremonies and celebrations.

Bhutan's architecture is unparalleled in terms of originality and structure. It is said that the country's architectural style has undergone very little change. Most ancient buildings are still in their original form and present a fascinating view. The intricate, meticulously thought-out designs and patterns one finds on buildings in Bhutan are a sight to watch.

The fortresses and monasteries are perhaps the most prominent examples of distinct Bhutanese architecture. Most of them are built on a grand scale at highly strategic locations across the country. Their location and imposing structure gives them an almost ethereal quality. The people of Bhutan claim that these

buildings were built without any blueprints, drawings or even professional tools.

Another prominent aspect of Bhutanese architecture is the way in which villages are laid out. Houses in villages are quite small and they are divided into little colonies with each comprising five to fifteen units.

As thunderstorms and earthquakes are quite common in the country, houses are built to withstand natural disasters. They are also built in close proximity to each other to provide resistance against strong winter gales. Since the average altitude in the country ranges between 1000 and 5000 meters, the fundamental rule followed in the construction of all buildings is protection against natural disasters and harsh weather conditions.

Preservation of the natural as well as cultural heritage is of utmost importance in Bhutan. That is why a number of projects are underway to restore the buildings that were damaged by natural disasters. Restoration work is also taking place in some buildings to further define their ancient architecture.

Several international organizations have also lent a helping hand in the restoration of historical sites such as the Shingkar Temple and the Tamshing Monastery in Bumthang, to name a few.

A number of festivals are held at different times of the year in Bhutan. These include the Nomad festival, the Takin festival and the Tsechus festival. Sometimes, celebrations go on for days and include brilliantly choreographed dances, bright costumes and enchanting musical performances.

The government of Bhutan has formed many institutions to ensure that the knowledge of all traditions and customs observed in Bhutan is passed on from one generation to the next. Although the country takes immense pride in its religious, cultural and traditional identity, respect for other cultures and customs and, above all, for all beings is an essential part of Bhutanese society. **S**

Ayesha Malik is a Graphic Design graduate who freelances for several publications.



In today's world, how many people actually care about extinct or endangered species? Hardly a few. People rarely pay attention to any issue unless it affects them. This cold, robotic attitude towards wildlife has increased the miseries of the poor creatures manifold. Such an apathetic approach needs to be changed. But any change in public perception and behavior towards wildlife demands a better understanding of the issue.

In the South Asian region, many endangered animals are fast disappearing due to ruthless poaching. One such animal is the Asian elephant, which is being killed in large numbers for its ivory tusks and hide. It is believed that the ivory of Asian elephants is far better in quality than that of African elephants which is creating an increasing demand for tusks of Asian elephants.

Research on the subject blames poaching for the killing of 40 to 70 percent of male elephants. This is a figure that should not be taken lightly.

Hides of elephants also have a high monetary value. As a result, more and more elephants are being killed as governments and wildlife protection departments turn a blind eye to the problem. If necessary steps are not taken to put an end to this poaching, slogans such as "don't let the sun set on the Asian elephant" will soon become echoes from the past, as they will only recall poor decisions and regrets.

Another favorite target of poachers is the Bengal Tiger which is killed for its skin and other body parts which are used to make traditional medicines in many Asian countries. Found in parts of India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar, the Bengal Tiger is also at the verge of extinction due to excessive poaching.

When it comes to birds, Pakistan is a favorite hunting ground for rare birds. Quail, pheasants, houbara bustards, black partridges, white partridges and ducks are the most sought-after and the most hunted birds.

In many cases, the hunters are Arab princes from the Gulf states, who are issued hunting permits by the government of Pakistan. They are allowed to hunt in locations where the birds

are found. Their hunting methods also vary and can be cruel at times as trained falcons are used to kill birds.

Although there are set bag limits for hunting rare birds, the high and the mighty hardly follow them and are seemingly at liberty to flout rules at will.

According to a report that appeared in a Pakistani newspaper, in 2007 alone, 31 licensees were allowed a limit of 200 hunts each. It can be safely assumed that a minimum of 6200 birds were killed or trapped in that year.

Rapid population growth in South Asia also poses a major threat to wildlife, since wildlife habitats are destroyed as towns and cities spread. Hardly any care or concern is shown to preserve wildlife sanctuaries.

A highly ignored aspect regarding animals is their use in circuses and in fighting arenas. In these so-called leisure activities, the poor animals are forced to perform difficult, dangerous, and, at times, violent tasks.

No one bothers to think about the conditions in which circus animals are kept or cares about the methods that are used to train them. What happens to these animals once the show is over is another story. In most cases, circus trainers treat the poor creatures cruelly. Also, circus animals are not provided with a healthy and adequate supply of food and water. They are kept in cages, most of which are of the wrong size or the animals are chained up for long hours. Several countries such as Bolivia, Greece and Belgium have imposed a ban on the use of animals in circuses. India is also considering this option.

While there may be other issues that people find more relevant and worthy of attention, the importance of wildlife cannot be ignored. The media needs to create awareness among the masses of issues such as poaching, mistreatment of animals, hunting of rare species of birds, deforestation and other similar problems. In fact, much more, needs to be done – and soon – as time is running out. **S**

S. Danial Alam is a freelance contributor. He writes on social and cultural issues.

Whither Wildlife?

Rapid population growth in the South Asian region poses a great threat to wildlife, as natural habitats are destroyed and human populations occupy the space.

By S. Danial Alam





Cause Célèbre

The victory of the Afghan football team at the SAFF Championship final and the way it was celebrated in the country shows that war has not dampened the spirits of the people.

By Nabeel Naqvi

There is nothing that unites a nation better than sports do. An Indo-Pak cricket match, for instance, raises the level of patriotism, on both sides of the border.

One such display of the power of sports was witnessed recently when Afghanistan trounced South Asian footballing powerhouse, India, by 2-0 in the final match of the South Asian Football Federation Championship. The SAFF Championship was held in September 2013 in Kathmandu. The victory provided the war-torn country with a reason to celebrate.

And celebrate it did, in true Afghan fashion, with AK-47s doing the hurrahs on the streets of Kabul and in other cities of Afghanistan. During the TV broadcast, the eyes of millions of Afghans were glued to the screens and as soon as the referee blew the final whistle, groups of overjoyed people filled the streets in all parts of Afghanistan in a unique show of solidarity. Meanwhile, the members of the winning team held their hands together and danced in a circle with the national flag draped around their shoulders at Kathmandu's Dashrath Stadium.

Football fans in Afghanistan were particularly ecstatic, as their team's win over India avenged the defeat it had suffered at the latter's hands in the last SAFF Championship's final two years ago.

India had defeated Afghanistan then.

Another feature made the victory even more memorable. In the history of the competition, it was the ninth time that the Indians had reached the final, while the new champions Afghanistan, had made it to the finals for the second time only. In the semi-final, Afghanistan overcame the host team in a dramatic manner when two back-to-back penalty shots were saved by the Afghan goalkeeper.

The win also marked the 12th anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks and the subsequent US invasion of Afghanistan. But as bullets zipped through the air, the young and the old danced and laughed with equal zest, celebrating a victory that had brought them a much-needed respite.

Afghanistan joined the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) in 1948 and was among the founding members of the Asian Football Confederation six years later. The country is ranked at 132 in the latest FIFA rankings but has never featured in any major international championship. The latest triumph shows that the Afghans have the talent and relentless energy to achieve success.

Afghanistan did not participate in any international football tournament during the 1980s and 1990s due to wars and civil strife. It has, though, managed to establish its name among

the top teams of the South Asian region during the last ten years.

The Afghan football team has capable players, many of whom play for various football leagues around the world. Most notable among them is the stopper, Mansur Faqiryar – a standout performer in the SAFF tournament – who plays for a lower division German team VfB Oldenburg. Some others, like striker Balal Arezou and fullback Amiri, play for Indian clubs.

The popularity of sports, particularly football and cricket, is on the rise in Afghanistan. This is of meteoric proportions, considering that during the mid-1990s, the national football stadium in the capital was used as public executions ground. The Afghans continue to rebuild their country despite a sharp increase in militant activities and in the face of the exit of allied forces from Afghanistan in 2014.

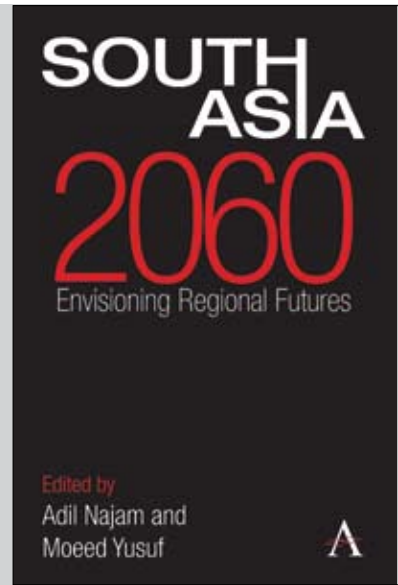
Three decades of bloodshed and conflict were more than enough to halt all sorts of recreational activities in the country but the recent victory of the Afghan football team and the way it was celebrated shows that even the long war and internal strife has not dampened the spirits of the lively Afghan people. **S**

Nabeel Naqvi is a freelance contributor who writes on national and international sports.

Reflecting on the Future

Book Title: South Asia 2060:
Envisioning
Regional Futures
Editors: Adil Najam and
Moeed Yusuf
Publisher: Anthem Press
Pages: 338, Hardback
Price: \$140
ISBN: 978-0-85728-074-9

Reviewed By Taha Kehar



No discourse on the future of South Asia in the global context is complete if it fails to explore the impact of its political cataclysm, nuclear competence and human development prospects. *South Asia 2060: Envisioning Regional Futures* uses these ingredients to produce a cogent analysis of the long-term goals of a region plagued by conflict and disparity. Edited by Adil Najam and Moeed Yusuf, the book is a compilation of 47 sets of expert opinion that examine future possibilities and shortcomings for regional cooperation in South Asia.

It has been frequently noted that essays that attempt to investigate future trends tend to offer fixed ideas based on guesswork. However, the content in this book use facts and data to provide a series of scenarios that lay the groundwork for further analysis. The book adds a new dimension to the ongoing debate on global politics. At a time when South Asia is globally both strategic and volatile, security implications for the entire world are vested in analytical narratives on the future of the region.

The book does not focus on creating a purely academic framework for understanding the future of South

Asia. Instead, various practitioners, public intellectuals and policymakers contribute their insights into issues such as regionalism, development and human well-being. Through a diverse range of opinions, the essays present practical and enlightening perspectives.

The contributors tackle the complex debates surrounding regionalism to forecast the regional future of South Asia. However, as Najam and Yusuf point out in their own chapter, they provide an 'optimistic verdict' on the future of South Asia as a region. By using this as a starting point to analyse regionalism in the South Asian context, the contributors provide a rather biased view. Although this does not significantly affect the main objective of the book, it does weaken its ability to offer a powerful indictment on South Asia. Had the subtle nuances of this debate been examined in more detail, a holistic analysis could have been produced.

Despite this weakness, the editors and contributors of *South Asia 2060* are to be commended for highlighting topical concerns and their impacts in an informative manner. According to the editors, regions are 'artificial constructs'. Through a detailed

scrutiny of the scope for regionalism in South Asia, the contributors provide innovative solutions to convert these artificial constructs into a permanent, political space. For instance, in his thought-provoking piece, Manan Ahmed Asif, Assistant Professor of History at Columbia University, writes that community-building in South Asia can be development through Bollywood. The approach is a 'rarely discussed facet' and delineates the importance of culture as a vehicle for creating a successful regional future for South Asia.

A sound regional future for South Asia will require effective state relations. The scope for democracy, and the importance of religion in the overall infrastructure of the state, will serve as useful tools for conflict resolution in the future.

The essays highlight specific concerns that need to be tackled to mitigate regional problems. William Milam, a senior policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars in Washington, provides a concrete analysis of whether South Asia will continue to be the centre of gravity for terrorist activity. An imminent nuclear risk, the stalemate between India and Pakistan and the

emerging dominance are some other prevalent themes in the book.

Various dimensions of economic and human development in South Asia have also received critical attention. The essays raise some pertinent points about the economic future of a region struggling to overcome decades of bad governance, economic mismanagement and weak control. Predictions about the South Asian economy in 2060 have also been used to offer a detailed assessment of future economic challenges.

Some chapters deal with conventional economic indicators. Globalization and trade are a proof of this predictable trend. However, some observations on development are skilfully interspersed with food and water security, electric power demands and even urban policies for environmental protection. As a result, the essays show awareness of key debates on development.

South Asia 2060 provides

a shrewd commentary on the challenges of human well-being and the prospects of improving living standards in the region. Issues such as poverty reduction, population dynamics, health risks, education, gender equality and the position of women are thoroughly analyzed. The contributors also provide some well-researched submissions that reflect on social issues to highlight the scope for development and change against a backdrop of regional cooperation.

In addition to these concerns, the essays also carry powerful observations on the emerging role of the media and the status of scholarship in South Asia. Some contributors open new avenues for debate and discussion by displaying creative ideas. For instance, Saad Shafqat, cricket commentator and novelist, goes the extra mile and writes on the importance of sports for a prosperous future for the region.

At a time when South Asia is both

globally relevant and politically weak, there is a growing need for academic scholarship and a policy agenda to diagnose the weaknesses and develop a strategy for improvement. Adil Najam and Moeed Yusuf have managed to look beyond the doom-and-gloom scenario that prevails in South Asia and search for a regional future.

However, it is difficult to envision the future of South Asia through guesswork alone. Practitioners, policymakers and academics need to diagnose the problems and suggest solutions for a better future. As a powerful contemplation on the scope for change and prosperity, South Asia 2060 is an attempt in the right direction. **S**

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



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Challenge from the ‘Sunny Side’ of Democracy

By Anees Jillani

The Maldives experienced its second elections on September 7 after the revival of democracy in 2008. Former President Nasheed, who was deposed by the Army and replaced by his Vice President, Mohamed Waheed, in February 2012, got the largest number of votes, 95,224 (45.45 percent of the total). His chief opponent, Yaamin Abdul Qayyoom, half-brother of former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, could get only 25 percent votes. Waheed could manage only 10,750 votes (5.13 percent). The total number of votes polled was 211,000. The numbers may appear amusing to the people of India and Pakistan where candidates even in a university election get more votes.

The Republic of the Maldives, however, is a tiny country with a population of only 350,000. Despite this, the country is in a political mess, with politicians unwilling to come to a settlement acceptable to all. Corruption is rampant as the stakes are high since those in power have acquired many of the 1,190 coral islands formed around 26 natural ring-like atolls, spread over 90,000 square kilometers, on long-term lease. Highly luxurious resorts have been built on some of them with the rents going into millions of dollars every year. It is not surprising then that the powerful cannot agree to share power.

The fact that bases and ports can be built on some of the atolls make the country a lot more appealing to countries with a stake in shipping lanes passing through the Indian Ocean. As such,, countries like the United States, China and India continue to interfere in the internal affairs of the Maldives.

Apparently, former President, Nasheed is close to India. This was amply proved when he sought asylum in the Indian High Commission a few months ago when the police tried to arrest him.

Maumoon ruled the Maldives from 1978 to 2008, thus becoming the longest-serving leader in Asia. Mercifully, he declared earlier this year that he would not be contesting the September elections. But then his half-brother Yaamin jumped into the fray on behalf of Maumoon’s Progressive Party.

Since no candidate out of the four who contested elections was able to secure a simple majority, under the constitution, the two candidates who won the most votes were supposed to go to the second round, polling for which was scheduled for September 28.

However, just four days before the run-off polls, the Supreme Court suspended the elections while examining a petition against voting irregularities filed by Qasim Ibrahim, a business tycoon and head of the Jumhooree Party, who managed to get 24 percent votes in the first round. The Election Commission had earlier rejected his allegations of irregularities as he had failed to substantiate them.

Notwithstanding the bitterness in the wake of the Supreme Court’s latest ruling, the election was expected to be a tough one for President Nasheed as Yaamin, Qasim and Waheed had joined hands against him. The acrimony surrounding the elections, and then the delay in holding them, is not good for the Republic of the Maldives. It is feared that political turmoil will continue and may actually worsen.

Nasheed and the supporters of his Democratic Party continue to lament his unlawful ouster in February 2012. Therefore, they would not be satisfied with anything less than Nasheed coming back into power which they consider his due right. On the other hand, the group led by the former autocratic leader Maumoon and current President Washeed, may not be willing to see Nasheed in power ever again.

The situation is quite similar to the tug of war we witness in Pakistan after every few years between the PPP and its opponents. We all know what the outcome is in such cases: military intervention. As a well-wisher of the Maldives, every Pakistani hopes that the country does not go through what we have been experiencing for the past 66 years. ■

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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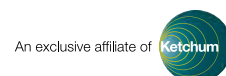
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