

TRIBUTE
Khushwant Singh

April 2014

SOUTHASIA

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INSIDE

PAKISTAN

Whither Peace Committees?

AFGHANISTAN

Hope and Challenge

BANGLADESH

Which way, Islamic Radicalism?

SRI LANKA

Time to Move On



ELECTIONS IN INDIA

A Saga of Surprises

The biggest election show on earth will soon be underway as the Indians go to the polls. This time it will be more than a two-horse race with many shocks in the pipeline.



Afghanistan
Australia
Bangladesh
Bhutan
Canada
China
France
Hong Kong
India

Afg. 50
A\$ 6
Taka 65
NU 45
C\$ 6
RMB 30
Fr 30
HK\$ 30
Rs. 65

Japan
Korea
Malaysia
Maldives
Myanmar
Nepal
New Zealand
Pakistan
Philippines

¥ 500
Won 3000
RM 6
Rf 45
MMK10
NCRs. 75
NZ\$ 7
Rs. 100
P 75

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Singapore
Sri Lanka
Thailand
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UAE
UK
USA

SR 15
S\$ 8
Rs. 100
B 100
Lira. 2
AED 10
£ 3
\$ 4.99

UPCOMING B2B EVENTS ...



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4-6 September 2014, Expo Centre Lahore
12th International Plastics & Packaging
Industry Trade Fair
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E-mail: info@plastipac.com.pk



4-6 September 2014, Expo Centre Lahore
2nd International Printing, Labeling,
Paper & Paper Converting Industry Exhibition
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3rd International Food, Beverages &
Hospitality Trade Fair
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E-mail: info@foodtech.com.pk



4-6 September 2014, Expo Centre Lahore
11th Edition of the International Food, Beverage
& Packaging Technology Trade Fair
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10-12 March 2015
Pak-China Friendship Centre, Islamabad
11th International Safety & Security
Exhibition & Conference
Website: www.safesecurepakistan.com
E-mail: info@safesecurepakistan.com



2014, Serena Hotel Islamabad
4th International Multi-Modal Transportation,
Logistics Conference
Website: www.intertranspakistan.com
E-mail: info@intertranspakistan.com



2014, Expo Centre Lahore
12th Edition of the International Machinery
Exhibition of Garment & Textile Technology
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Not for Rent

What was really behind all those stories that a large contingent of Pakistani soldiers may be sent to Syria? Political analysts initially talked of a few divisions of the Pakistan Army being sent to the Middle Eastern country currently caught in a civil war that does not seem to be ending soon. Then the figure ballooned to 100,000 troops. It was surmised that since Pakistan had been generous enough to send its soldiers to the Middle East on so many occasions before, it would do so again. Instances quoted in this connection was the flushing out of Iranian rebels from the Khana-e-Kaaba by Pakistani commandos back in the 80s, Pakistani pilots flying on behalf of the Palestinians and downing Israeli aircraft, or Bahrain recruiting troops from Pakistan in 2011 to stamp out a rebellion. Perhaps what boosted the rumours was the fact that Pakistan has a large professional army and has been one of the largest contributors to UN Peace Keeping forces around the world. Then there was the visit of the Saudi Crown Prince, Salman bin Abdul Aziz's to Pakistan, in the wake of which, Saudi Arabia made a 'gift' of about \$1.5 billion to Pakistan. The visit of Bahrain's King, Hamad bin Isa bin Salman al Khalifa and earlier that of the Kuwaiti prime minister, also drove the rumor mills to work overtime. While it was thought that the visit by the Bahraini King was basically aimed at upgrading trade and investment links between Pakistan and Bahrain, it later transpired that the Bahrainis seemed to be more interested in enhancing defense links with Pakistan.

It was good that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif put the rumours to rest when he categorically stated that Pakistan had no plans at all to send troops to fight the forces of Bashar Assad in Syria, nor had his government been asked to do so. It is clear that sending Pakistani troops to Syria or any Gulf country for that matter would be a risky and even dangerous business. But beyond that, it is not conceivable how any national army with a high reputation for professionalism could be available against a certain financial consideration, no matter how precarious the country's own economic conditions. Does it ever happen that when a country raises a fighting force, whether large or small, it has somewhere in the back of its mind a mercenary role for this force? How could then the idea of sending Pakistani forces on fighting duties to some part of the world ever germinate in someone's mind? Why was it even thought possible that Pakistan would ever accept the idea of sending such a large slice of its troops to fight another country's war? The originators of the idea perhaps did not even stop to think that if the Pakistani army got itself embroiled in another Islamic country such as Syria, whose side would it be on – the anti-Assad Sunnis or the Alawite Shias who comprise the Syrian government led by Bashar al Assad? Since Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, which are predominantly Sunni, would have been involved in acquiring the services of the Pakistan army, it would have obviously been fighting on the side of the Sunnis and against the Syrian government. Pakistan has always enjoyed friendly relations with Syria so would its army fight against this country? Furthermore, if this happened, where would the Pakistan armed forces stand in the eyes of their own population which is predominantly Sunni but has a fair mix of Shias? It is obvious that if the Pakistan Army's top brass were confronted with the requirement of sending a large body of troops to fight in Syria, it must have shot down the suggestion in its very infancy, saying it was best to keep away from Syria's internal matters. Pakistan needs to take a tough stand on such quixotic ideas for future reference as well. No doubt that Pakistan has the 6th largest army in the world but no part of this army is available for rent and there is no question that the best place for the troops is to be in Pakistan, either guarding the national borders or fighting the militants.



Syed Jawaid Iqbal

Contents



13

Battle of the Ballot

The world's largest democracy is going to hold the world's biggest elections.

Pakistan 26

Whither Peace Committees?

If the government seeks to barter peace through accommodation and dialogue, it must do so on its own.



Bangladesh

30 Which way, Islamic Radicalism?

Some unscrupulous elements have been trying to sow the seeds of religious fundamentalism in Bangladesh.

Sri Lanka

32 Time to Move On

Instead of reopening old wounds, the big powers should help Sri Lanka in its post-war reconstruction efforts.

28 Afghanistan

Hope and Challenge

With all eyes on the new leadership, the Afghans look at the election process with mixed feelings of hope and uncertainty.

Maldives

34 A Case for Aid?

Growing ties between the Maldives and Saudi Arabia have given rise to concerns that the Maldives may be inching towards becoming a theocratic state.



Back to Square One

Three years after the Lotus Revolution that aimed to establish a democratic state, Egypt seems to have shown little progress.

36
INTERNATIONAL



38
Security

Going Strong At 65

NATO continues to strive to remain relevant in the geopolitical arena as an evolving, vibrant and committed organization.

Bangladesh

The Job Hunt

Approximately 2.7 million young Bangladeshis enter the job market every year. Out of them, only 0.7 million are able to find work.

48



Bhutan

Wiping Off a Rich Past

The recent residential construction boom in Bhutan poses a threat to the country's centuries-old architectural legacy.

52

42
Afghanistan

Turning the Tide

Kabul Dreams, the first rock band in Afghanistan, is making waves for all the right reasons.

REGULAR FEATURES

Editor's Mail	6
On Record	8
Briefings	9

COVER STORY

Battle of the Ballot	13
Greatest Show on Earth!	16
The Muslim Factor	18
A Run for the Money	20
Star Power	22
The Laugh Sites	24

REGION

Pakistan	
Whither Peace Committees?	26
Afghanistan	
Hope and Challenge	28
Bangladesh	
Which way, Islamic Radicalism?	30
Sri Lanka	
Time to Move On	32
Maldives	
A Case for Aid?	34

INTERNATIONAL

Egypt	
Back to Square One	36

SPECIAL REPORT

Going Strong at 65	38
--------------------	----

SPECIAL FEATURE

Always Underprivileged	40
------------------------	----

FEATURE

Music	
Music of the Times	42

Culture

Turning the Tide	44
------------------	----

Media

Issues and Solutions	46
----------------------	----

Employment

The Job Hunt	48
--------------	----

Dispute

The Shrimp War	50
----------------	----

Architecture

Wiping Off a Rich Past	52
------------------------	----

TRIBUTE

King Leer Bows Out	54
--------------------	----

BOOKS & REVIEWS

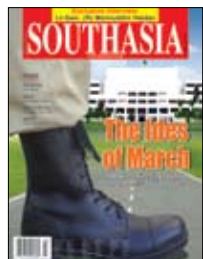
Rising to the Challenge	56
-------------------------	----

BETWEEN THE LINES

	58
--	----

Leave the military alone

SouthAsia's cover story on the possibility of a military takeover was well worth a read. All the articles carried in-depth analysis of the situation and reached the same conclusion: the army has its hands full and can't afford any distraction given the enormity of the task it is burdened with. It was equally heartening to note that this view was upheld by both civilians and military personnel. Among other things, it shows that our political and military leadership has matured over time. The politicians have realized, although quite belatedly, that they are responsible for running the country. It is their job to provide the masses with the basic necessities and amenities. They have to run the economy.



The military, on its part, seems to have realized that its actual job is to guard the territorial sovereignty of the country. It can assist the civilian machinery if its help is required in any sector but it is not supposed to interfere in the affairs of the civilian government. The country has a chance to come out of the morass it finds itself in if both institutions work with each other but within their respective ambits.

Jamal Noor
Islamabad, Pakistan

Some hope, at last

We are a nation which welcomes military rulers, distributes sweets when they topple an elected government and then patiently bears with them for long spells. Usually, we do not get

tired of a military government before it completes at least 7 years in power. Then disenchantment sets in. We start to complain and protest. We also realize the virtues of a democratic system all of a sudden and continue to protest against the military ruler till we send him packing.

We then spend millions on holding the polls and elect a democratic government. We shed tears of joy when the elected prime minister takes oath. And then we get sick of his government in a few months and start hoping that the army would free us from the shackles of a democratic government. Against this background, it is not surprising to see some politicians provoking the army to 'play its role to save the country'. The positive aspect is that the army has not shown any inclination to resort to such extreme measures. It is indeed a welcome change.

Abdullah Subhan
Hyderabad, Pakistan

Death fest

The Pakistani nation was horrified to see over 100 children dying of hunger and diseases in Sindh's Thar Desert – hardly a month after PPP Co-Chairperson Bilawal Bhutto held the Sindh Festival with great show and pomp, not to mention after spending millions. The most prominent feature of the SindhFest was its opening ceremony that was held at the heritage site of Mohenjo Daro. One would like to know how much public money was wasted on the arrangements and on taking dignitaries and guests to the site in chartered planes.

I can't help thinking that while the festival was held with much fanfare as society begums attended fashion



shows and bought designer dresses (to help some noble cause, mind you), the poor children of Thar, deprived of water, food and health care, were inching towards their deaths. Bilawal Bhutto did visit the famine-struck area once the media reported the situation but his visit can't bring those children back.

Salman Soomro
Karachi, Pakistan

Great expectations

The emergence of the Aam Aadmi Party in India is touted as the first sign of a revolution that is waiting just around the corner. Tall claims are being made about the wonders this party is going to do in the upcoming elections and how it can give tough competition to the long-established parties that have been in politics for decades. One cannot ignore the surprising entry of the AAP into politics when it beat the two giants – the BJP and the Congress – in the Delhi state elections. But it would be quite naïve to assume that the AAP can give a repeat performance in the Lok Sabha elections.

The AAP owes much of its popularity to the media, especially the social media. Its support base is in urban centers. The one aspect that distinguishes the AAP from its rival parties is its clean reputation. There have been allegations and rumors of corruption but no one has been able to prove any charges against AAP leaders. The party has yet to get its hands dirty running the government's affairs. If it succeeds in keeping its integrity intact, it may attract votes



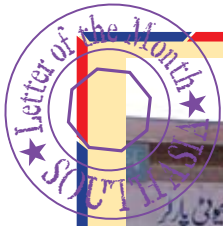
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Street art – theirs and ours

I thoroughly enjoyed Asna Ali's article on street art in Iran. I have seen a number of Iranian films and am a great fan of their cinema but I did not know about this new mode of self-expression that the Iranian youth has taken a liking to. My belief in the fact that you can't suppress a people's creativity – no matter how many restrictions and bans you

place – has increased manifold. But there is something I don't understand. The Pakistani nation has lived under military rules for the most part of the country's existence. Why hasn't this unleashed our creative demons in a similar way?

Why is it that we do have a 'street art' scene but it is completely different in nature? Instead of pithy social and political messages, we see advertisements of quacks, slogans of political parties and other random silly notes on our walls. The only positive point about them is that at times the stupidity of a message or the combination of two entirely different messages brings a smile to one's face. For instance, I have seen this wall where the famous slogan 'Pakistan ka matlab kiya?' was followed by the advertisement of a 'Haseena Beauty Parlor'. Is that all we are able to come up with?

Hasnain Mirza
Islamabad, Pakistan

from a wider segment of society. Till then, it should fight the battle but keep its expectations low.

Suman Irani
Mumbai, India

Devolve power

The Afghan nation will elect a new president in a few days' time. Although one hopes for a president who is sincere to the country and its people, such hopes seem far-fetched if one keeps in mind the list of contenders for the post. It is obvious that one of them is going to the presidential palace and there is a great chance that it will be Dr. Abdullah Abdullah. The new president will have to deal with a host of issues. He is going to face opposition and criticism from a number of quarters, especially from those who lose the election, but he should remain steadfast in the face of difficulties.

To rule Afghanistan is no easy job and the new president will have to take some difficult decisions. I have a suggestion in this regard, although I fear it may be considered pre-mature at this stage. It is a fact that Afghanistan is divided along ethnic lines and the divisions are deeply grooved in Afghan society. The country can be better managed if it is made a federation and the provinces are given maximum autonomy with the centre holding only a few important subjects like finance and



defence. If the present state of affairs is allowed to continue, the country faces the prospect of disintegration. It is time the people of Afghanistan decided what's best for them.

Anwar Khalilzad
Kabul, Afghanistan

Need for a closure

After the election of the second Constituent Assembly and the appointment of a new prime minister, Nepal is on its way to formulate the country's new constitution. The Nepali nation has suffered autocratic rule for years and made many sacrifices to introduce democracy in the country. In the decade-long civil war, more than 15000 people were killed and an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 people were internally displaced.

Now that the violent phase is over and some stability has emerged, it is time to hold those people accountable who were responsible for the bloodshed. It is estimated that 10,500 civilians and 3,000 Maoists were killed by the government. The time is ripe for the formation of a new Truth and Reconciliation Commission to bring this sordid saga to its logical end. It is hoped that Prime Minister Sushil Koirala will focus his attention on this issue. Hundreds of families



across Nepal await justice. The new government should not disappoint them.

Aadesh Suriya
Kathmandu, Nepal

Misplaced criticism

This refers to the article 'Celebrity Politicians'. I completely agree with the writer. Ever since some film actresses announced that they'd contest the elections in Sri Lanka, a storm of criticism has taken over the local media. They are ridiculed, their intentions are doubted and they are accused of using their celebrity to win votes. It is wrong to target female artistes who wish to contest elections on the basis of their profession because in the past a number of male actors have also contested elections and served as members of parliament. They were hardly criticized because of their celebrity status. So we should refrain from criticizing or ridiculing female artistes.



If and when they are elected, it is only then can we question their capability or ability to deal with their new responsibilities – not before that. They should first be given a chance to prove themselves before they are made fun of.

Sameera H. Saifudeen
Colombo, Sri Lanka



"If India is not willing to include a third force in resolving the Kashmir issue then the United States will have to play its role in ensuring a normal situation in the region."
Mian Nawaz Sharif
Prime Minister of Pakistan



"I have got confidence that I can do this because of the feeling we are getting from people around the country. It is different this time from five years ago."
Dr. Abdullah Abdullah
Afghan Politician



"The private sector has to work with a service-oriented mentality, not only with a business attitude."
Sheikh Hasina
Prime Minister of Bangladesh



"Pakistan and the U.S. have a long-standing relationship based on mutual respect and a shared recognition that a strong partnership between the two nations is vital to regional and international security."
Barack Obama
President of the U.S.A.



"Why is the Council of Islamic Ideology concerned with men's four marriages and why have they done nothing to ensure that women get their property as enshrined in Islamic Law? Or why have they failed to stop practices such as vani, swara and karo kari?"
Dr Nafisa Shah
Coordinator, PPP's Human Rights Cell



"If we cut ourselves, it's the same red blood that flows through all of our veins. Instead of looking at differences, we should be looking at common things amongst all religions, and move forward with our lives."
Karma
Nepali Actor



"I have served the country with utmost dedication and integrity. I have never used my office to enrich my friends or relatives."
Manmohan Singh
Prime Minister of India



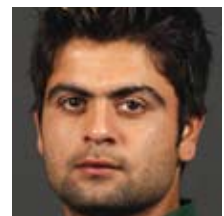
"The Sri Lankan government is not prepared to act according to the whims and fancies of foreign forces."
Mahinda Rajapaksa
President of Sri Lanka



"I want to say that the Maldives is a country belonging to every one of us. This is not particularly Adhaalath Party's Maldives. Nor is it specifically PPM's Maldives. Nor is it Jumhooree Party's Maldives. And especially, this is not just the MDP's Maldives. This country belongs to all of us."
Abdulla Yameen
President of the Maldives



"It's good to be pushed but if the opposition expects us to solve all the problems that came up in the last five years within seven months, then I don't think that's fair."
Tshering Tobgay
Prime Minister of Bhutan



"I want to help those who are struggling. I want to donate the fee of one match to the famine-stricken people of Thar. This country has given us a lot and now it is our duty to pay back."
Ahmed Shehzad
Pakistani Cricketer



"All donations sought in my show are used and channelised for entirely deserving and secular causes, contrary to the malicious messages being circulated by vested and unscrupulous interests."
Amir Khan
Indian Actor

PAKISTAN | Islamabad

Getting the power



Pakistan is all set to import 1,200 megawatts of electricity from India after the World Bank has offered to finance the feasibility study as well as the transmission line. According to a government official, Pakistan will import 500MW of power initially, to be enhanced to 1,200MW at a later stage. The plan will

involve laying a transmission line and would be implemented within a year.

Pakistan currently imports 35MW electricity from Iran to meet energy requirements of Gwadar, while work on increasing it by 100MW is going on. The two sides signed an agreement on the project in 2007. Pakistan also has another project in the pipeline for import of 1,000MW of electricity from Tajikistan under the Casa-1000 program. The country's power production ranges between 10,000MW and 16,000MW against a total installed capacity of 21,000MW. **S**

PAKISTAN | Thar

Rainwater harvesting

Over 100 children died in an outbreak of poverty-driven diseases in the Thar Desert in early March. The region is one of Pakistan's poorest and is home to some 1.3 million people, including a large population of Hindus. Life in the desert is closely linked to rain-dependent crops and animals. A drought in 2000 killed 90 percent of the livestock. According

to government data, rainfall was 30 percent below the usual between March 2013 and February 2014. The worst-hit towns were Diplo, Chacro and Islamkot and barely had a drop of water for months.

Residents and activists say that the effects of drought can be mitigated by learning from the example of countries that have dry regions. Construction of



canals and conservation of rainwater are some useful measures that could be adopted. "Rainwater harvesting should be made mandatory all over the country and especially in this part," said Abid Channa, a local social activist. **S**

PAKISTAN | FATA

Broadband or better life?

The Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Engineer Shaukatullah, has directed the Special Communications Organization to provide the latest and enhanced telecommunications and internet facilities in the far-flung tribal areas. The SCO has been asked to formulate a detailed proposal for provision of GSM mobile and broadband in FATA. Briefing the governor SCO officials

said that 152 tele-centers would be established in the areas in two years.

The tribal belt is among the most impoverished regions of the country and even the basic necessities of life are not available in most parts. It is also known for providing safe sanctuaries to local and foreign terrorists. Therefore, while making arrangements for broadband and other advanced facilities in the area,



the government needs to ensure that these services will not be misused by terrorists. Meanwhile, it can address other pressing issues that directly affect the people of the area. **S**

INDIA | New Delhi

Own manifestos

All politics is local, they say. Keeping this in mind, the Aam Aadmi Party's candidate-designates in Delhi were in the process of preparing

constituency-specific manifestos for the parliamentary elections. The party had already made it clear that it would release a national manifesto and leave

it to the individual candidates to prepare their own manifestos.

Of the seven seats in Delhi, three of the



AAP candidates prepared their own manifestos. However, the party did not

intend to force candidates to prepare manifestos as some candidates faced a

severe time crunch since their names were declared pretty late. **S**

INDIA | Mumbai

Protecting mangroves

Wetlands around Mumbai continue to be threatened despite an order by the Bombay High Court that has directed civic authorities to ensure that no reclamation or construction is allowed on wetlands. According to environmentalists, violations continue to take place every day. While the forest department could act on the violations on forest land, a problem arises when there is construction

on the wetlands or coastal regions.

Wetlands are areas of land that are either temporarily or permanently covered by water, depending on the seasonal variability. They are known to stabilize coastlines, control erosion, provide a habitat for plant and animal species, prevent floods and purify groundwater. They also regulate climate change by storing carbon. **S**



INDIA | Lucknow

No ballot

The BJP gave Lok Sabha tickets to two leaders who faced charges linked to the riots that broke out between Jats and Muslims in Muzaffarnagar and Shamli seven months ago. Over 60 people were killed in the riots. BJP candidates Hukum Singh and Sanjeev Baliyan were part of a *mahapanchayat* that was held despite prohibitory orders.

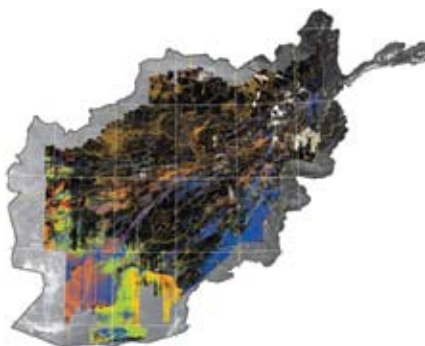
The Muslims of Muzaffarnagar are staunchly against the move and they

see it as the BJP's political move to gain from the riots. "That party has a history of promoting communal violence for political gain. Their leaders fanned tensions between the communities in a place where we had always lived in peace. We will refuse to vote and will not cast a ballot for the BJP," said Mohammad Ashraf, who lives in a camp set up for the people affected by the riots. **S**



AFGHANISTAN | Bamiyan

Treasure hunt



The Afghanistan Geological Survey is gaining the skills needed to explore and exploit the country's vast natural resources with the help of advisors from the U.S. Task Force for Business and Stability Operations (TFBSO). It comprises drillers and geologists who will train the first batch from the Afghanistan Geological Survey. The economy

of Afghanistan could witness a turnaround if the country is able to mine its natural resources.

Afghanistan is estimated to have \$3 trillion worth of mineral deposits, which remain unexploited. Gold, iron ore, copper ore, emeralds, lapis, rubies as well as natural gas are said to be found in large quantities in the north of the country. **S**

Going home

The Canadian mission in Afghanistan wrapped up its operation as the last 100 Canadian soldiers left the country. Canada's military engagement in Afghanistan began with the unpublicized arrival of the Special Forces in late 2001.

The death toll for Canadians in Afghanistan was 158 soldiers, one diplomat, one journalist and two civilian contractors.

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper released a written statement on the occasion that lauded the



record number of 40,000 Canadian troops that served in Afghanistan over the years, including those who paid "the ultimate price." **S**

Boom time

With the return of political stability after the January 5 elections, work orders from international buyers have registered a significant increase in Bangladesh. The country is the world's second largest garment exporter after China. It shipped overseas more than \$2.24 billion worth of clothing in January – 7.09 percent more than a year earlier, marking the 18th year-on-year increase in the last 19 months. The country may also import record amounts of both textiles and cotton in 2014.

Since Bangladesh grows little cotton of its own, the local textile and apparel sector is almost entirely dependent on the import of fiber.

Cotton consumption in Bangladesh may rise 8.75 percent to 870,000 tons in fiscal 2014-15, with higher demand for garments, according to a report by the Economist Intelligence Unit. Currently, Bangladesh enjoys the zero-duty benefit from the EU under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) scheme. **S**



Discovering ancient architecture

An ancient Buddhist temple, presumably a thousand years old, was discovered at Nateshwar in Tongibari upazila of Munshiganj. The temple includes a prayer room for Buddhist monks, an octagonal stupa and brick-built drains. Most parts of the

temple are already in a state of ruin, except for a 2.40-metre tall structure in the south-western part of the temple.

Its basement, with a 1.75-metre wide wall was constructed with over-burnt bricks, probably to protect the structure from moisture. The brick work



in the temple was artistically designed. Excavation work on the site was carried out by the Agrashar Bikrampur Foundation that had started excavating the place in 2010 with financial aid from the government. **S**

Up and up

The Sri Lankan Census and Statistics Department has released the country's economic performance report for 2013. According to it, Sri



Lanka's GDP growth rate for 2013 was 7.3 percent against 6.3 percent in 2012. The industrial sector recorded a 9.9 percent year-on-year growth with mining and quarrying showing 11.5 percent YoY growth, followed by 10.7 percent in gem mining.

The manufacturing sub-sector posted 7.5 percent growth, up from

5.2 percent in 2012, with textile and apparel recording 8.9 percent growth. Notably, processing of tea, rubber and

coconut showed only a marginal 0.6 percent growth, down sharply from 6.5 percent in 2012. Meanwhile, the

services sector displayed a notable increase, reaching 6.4 percent growth as compared to 4.6 percent in 2012. **S**

BHUTAN | Thimphu

Learning to save



As a part of its scheme to encourage savings, the central bank of Bhutan has asked banks and financial institutions in the country to “adopt schools and appoint dedicated staff to deal with students and offer them swift services”. The deputy governor of the Bhutan Royal Monetary Authority has said that it has become necessary to encourage savings and to teach prudent

financial management to students. Terming them the “future economic actors”, he said that their financial decisions will dictate the future of world economics.

The central bank of Bhutan has also published 5,000 comic books for primary schools in addition to producing audio-visual materials on counterfeit currency notes as a part of its financial literacy program. **S**

NEPAL | Kathmandu

Peaks on lease

Nepal may lease its Himalayan peaks to private tourism companies to ease traffic on Mount Everest. The proposal would involve hiring out some of the 326 Himalayan peaks that are currently open to lure climbers away from the Everest amid fears of congestion. It is one of the several new measures to attract more climbers to the impoverished country where tourism is a key source of

revenue. This step is expected to help Nepal kickstart its economy.

Lately, Nepal has introduced a number of measures to boost tourism and allay the concerns of overcrowding on Mount Everest. Officials have also slashed mountaineering fees for a range of other peaks, while requiring each climber scaling the Everest to bring back eight kilograms (17.6 pounds)



of garbage in a bid to clean up the ‘roof of the world’. **S**

MALDIVES | Male

Tourism investment



ASaudi real estate investment and development firm has announced that it will develop a US\$100 million resort on the Vadinolhu Island in Laamu Atoll in the Maldives. The resort will have 100 beach villas, world-class dining services, wellness facilities and leisure activities. The project is expected to be completed by 2017.

Luxury tourism currently accounts for 70 to 80 percent of the country's GDP. An IMF report has noted that

investment in Maldivian resorts can provide a quicker return as compared to investment in industries. The sector attracted over 1.2 million tourists in 2013.

The IMF report also noted that the tourism industry in the Maldives is still only lightly taxed in comparison to other destinations, despite the government's plan to increase tourist goods and services tax to 12 percent later this year. **S**



Elections In India

Battle of the Ballot

Can the BJP convert Modi's rightwing, growth-centric Gujarat model into a nationwide electoral triumph?

By M. Saeed Khalid



A 63-year-old vegetarian workaholic leading a frugal lifestyle, a defacto celibate and an introvert yet a crowd-puller as a public speaker who occasionally delves into writing Gujarati poetry. This is the profile of Narendra Modi, the man widely expected to become India's next prime minister following the general elections. But Modi has his darker side too and it has earned him the reputation of being a controversial, divisive and polarizing figure in India's chaotic democracy.

It is not surprising then that political pundits are regarding the 2014 Elections as the most critical since Indira Gandhi's massive defeat in 1977. The question that occupies most minds is whether a political worker from an ordinary background who gained popularity by virtue of staunch Hindu nationalism will hand the Congress its most humiliating defeat ever.

Every Indian election since independence has also been a referendum on the country's most eminent family. In the 1947-71 period, every election renewed the mandate of the Congress and the Nehru family. However, Indira Gandhi's dynastic ambition caused a split in the Congress

party with Morarji Desai leading the rival faction. Indira survived mainly because of the Communist Party's support but ended up calling early elections in 1971. She won on the basis of the popular slogan of '*gharibi hatao*', reducing her rival faction to a smaller role.

Four years later, in June 1975, the simmering discontent with Indira's autocratic ways snowballed after the Allahabad High Court invalidated the result in her constituency on grounds of electoral malpractices. Instead of resigning, Indira declared a state of emergency, ordering the arrest of the leading opposition personalities and resorting to rule by decree. This virtually turned the largest democracy into a dictatorship.

In the following years, emergency was lifted and elections were held in 1977, resulting in a humiliating defeat for the Congress with Indira and son Sanjay both losing their seats in the Lok Sabha. The Janata alliance swept into power and brought in its wake all kinds of troubles for Indira and heir Sanjay, including legal proceedings and even arrest. But Indira regained public sympathy in a remarkable turn of events as the Janata failed in coming to grips with India's multiple

challenges. She returned to power in 1980.

Indira's assassination led to fresh elections in 1984, resulting in a thumping majority for the Congress led by her son Rajiv. He was voted out in the 1989 elections and a new coalition of the National Front formed a minority government. Party feuds led to early elections in 1991 and resulted in a victory for the Congress and its allies after Rajiv was killed during the election campaign.

The 1996-1999 era was marked by repeated making and breaking of coalitions till the National Democratic Alliance led by the Bharatiya Janata Party came to power after the 1999 elections. The Congress, with Rajiv's Italian-born wife Sonia Gandhi as its president, suffered its worst defeat.

The 2004 election brought the Congress back in power as many allies joined the United Progressive Alliance. But Sonia Gandhi declined the post of premier, nominating Manmohan Singh, a respected technocrat without any popular base, for the position.

The completion of a decade of the Congress party being in power coincides with a period of economic slowdown, an ever-rising cost of living, growing disparity in incomes



and a spate of corruption scandals. The Congress also suffers from the absence of a charismatic leader. As an aging Singh reaches the end of his premiership, the dynasty's heir Rahul appears to have miserably failed in catching the imagination of a disappointed electorate.

Pitted once more against the Congress and its allies, is the BJP, the flag-bearer of Hindu nationalism. It leads the National Democratic Alliance. The BJP is considered business-friendly in comparison to the Congress that has centre-left tendencies. The BJP is considered a Hindu nationalist party but is open to foreign investment just like the Congress. In the trade unions' eyes, both parties are neo-liberal.

The posturing and rhetoric of the BJP and the Congress notwithstanding, India's two major parties have similar views on foreign policy, defence and economic reforms. Jay Mazoomdaar, writing on Tehelka.com, says: "For all its nationalistic protestations, the BJP's pro-U.S. foreign policy set the stage for the Congress to clinch big deals. With Pakistan, the UPA has been following what are essentially different variants of the A B Vajpayee line. Even Narendra Modi toned down his anti-

Pakistan rhetoric overnight after being anointed the PM candidate."

Both the Congress and the BJP are growth and foreign investment-friendly so the voters' choice will revolve around other considerations such as scarcity of jobs and a crippling rise in the cost of living. The UPA's second tenure performance is lackluster and charges of corruption continue to fly all around. The two leading parties are not particularly pro-poor and that could benefit the Third Front of the leftist parties.

Opinion surveys show that the BJP is in the lead, well ahead of the Congress. In fact, the latter may be heading for its worst ever performance. The BJP is enjoying a Modi-led resurgence while the Congress faces a deep degree of disenchantment over corruption scandals and economic slowdown. The only factor that perhaps goes against the BJP is its ability to convert Modi's rightwing, growth-centric Gujarat model into a nationwide electoral triumph.

The 2014 elections are marked by two new phenomena: the Aam Aadmi Party's success in tapping into popular resentment against the major parties and the role of the social media in mobilizing support. One must,

however, be prudent over the impact of these twin factors in a country as vast and as varied as India.

Though the BJP is widely seen as leading the race, the party and its regional allies may not get an outright majority of 272 in a house of 543. The definitive results will be known three days after the nine-stage polls that start from April 7 and go on till May 12. The support of some other smaller parties may be needed to reach a majority in the lower house.

Voting patterns in India have long been influenced by caste and religious affiliations. The Indian Muslims are apprehensive of Modi's opposition to secularism. Most of them still remember his role in the Gujarat riots which resulted in the death of more than 1000 people, mostly Muslims. But the younger generation of Muslims may be lured by his promises of an economic turnaround that would improve job prospects for the youth.

To Modi's dismay, AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal is punching hard at his vulnerabilities like his campaign being powered by big business who also own large media outlets. Kejriwal has made stinging attacks against Modi, portraying him as a danger to India's 180 million Muslims and a vassal of India's richest man, Mukesh Ambani.

In contrast to past election campaigns, foreign relations have received little mention this time. Modi has made only passing references to Pakistan, China and Bangladesh. Whether conducting relations with the neighbors, the big powers or the Middle Eastern countries, a BJP-led government may not bring radical changes but a certain degree of activism cannot be ruled out. Modi's premiership presents a moral dilemma to western countries, some of whom had placed visa restrictions on him.

Observers are increasingly looking at the largest state Uttar Pradesh for clues about the outcome of the elections. With 80 seats in the Lok Sabha, UP is a crucial battleground. Understandably, Modi keeps visiting Lucknow. If he can win in the traditional Congress stronghold, the journey to the prime minister's office would become much easier for him. ■

The writer is a former ambassador.

In any democracy, regular elections are the norm. But in the case of India's Lok Sabha elections, there are certain features that set them apart from similar exercises elsewhere in the world.

India is the largest democracy in the world with a population of 1.27 billion. Of these, 814.5 million are eligible voters—426.6 million are men, 387.9 million women and 28,314 transgender voters. Another 11,844 are non-resident Indians registered to vote but they may not be able to participate in the elections because mail-in ballots are not allowed. Yet another feature of Elections 2014 is that there are as many as 23 million

Moreover, this time the magnitude of the task is greater than ever because of an estimated 100 million new voters.

About 11 million personnel, including the military and the police, will be deployed to help conduct the elections. In addition, 5.5 million people, including school teachers and state and central government employees will work as polling officers and assist in the vote count. Voting will be done through electronic ballots for which 1.4 million electronic voting machines will be installed. Votes will be cast at 930,000 polling stations.

Six national parties, 47 state parties and most, if not all, of the

1,563 unrecognized parties will take part in the elections. A 'national party' is one that is recognized in at least four states; otherwise it is known as a 'state party'.

Some national parties are the Bahujan Samaj Party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Communist Party of India, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Indian National Congress and Sharad Pawar's National Congress Party. Important among the state parties are the Aam Aadmi Party, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, the NR Congress, Forward Bloc, the Trinamool Congress, the United Democratic Front, the Jharkhand Students Union, the Asom Gana Parishad, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, the Indian Union Muslim League, the Janata Dal (United), the Janata Dal (Secular), the Lok Jana Shakti Party, the Rashtriya Janata Dal, the Samajwadi Party, the Shiromani Akali Dal, the Shiva Sena and the Telugu Desham Party.

The main contest will be between Rahul Gandhi and Narendra Modi. One represents the ruling Congress

Greatest Show on Earth!

The statistics related to India's sixteenth Lok Sabha elections are simply astounding.

By S.G. Jilane

eligible voters between the ages of 18 and 19.

The amount of money candidates are allowed to spend on their election campaigns has been fixed at up to Rs.7 million. The process to elect the 543 members of the sixteenth Lok Sabha will kick off on April 7 and go on for more than one month, in nine phases, till May 12. Counting of votes will begin on May 16. In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the two most populous states in the country, voting will be spread over six days. With the excitement generated by the campaigns and the color lent by festoons, flags and rallies, India's general elections present the spectacle of the greatest show on earth.

It is a mind-boggling exercise in terms of manpower and resources.



while the other is nominated by the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party. The contrast between the two is classic David and Goliath – from age to education to background to political philosophy and to experience.

Gandhi is a full 20 years younger than Modi. He has degrees from St. Stephens College (Delhi) and Cambridge, under his belt. Modi was educated locally and did his Masters in Political Science from the University of Gujarat. Gandhi is a Brahmin, born with a silver spoon in his mouth. His father, grandmother and great-grandfather were all India's prime ministers. Modi is a *Vaish* from a family of grocers, who started life as a tea stall vendor.

Gandhi has a secular political outlook. Modi is communal and is blamed for the Muslim pogrom in Gujarat in 2002. From his earliest days as a school student, he has been an active *pracharak* (publicity worker) of the extreme rightwing Rashtriya Sevak Sangh that was responsible for Mahatma Gandhi's assassination.

Rahul Gandhi does not have any

experience of governance, whereas Narendra Modi has been chief minister of Gujarat since 2001. Modi is using the economic progress of Gujarat as a trump card to support his eligibility as the next prime minister of the country. He also catches the fancy of the masses for being a new face on the country's political stage. There is a large segment of voters that believes that Modi should be given a chance. The ruling Congress, on the other hand, suffers from incumbency fatigue after two consecutive terms in office. Besides, it is also weighed down by scandals of massive corruption. Modi's hands are clean. The BJP under Modi is therefore believed to emerge as the largest party after the elections.

According to the opinion polls conducted by NDTV in collaboration with the Hansa Research Centre, the BJP-led NDA is likely to win 229 seats. The Congress-led UPA can win 129 seats and the other parties can get 130 seats. Besides, the NDA is projected to win 8 and the Congress 22 seats in small states and union

territories. That leaves the remaining parties with 55 seats.

But there may be some surprises as well. First, there is the Third Front or the Left front of regional parties with its commitment to secularism and social justice. It stands united in its opposition to both the Congress and the BJP.

The 11-party Third Front has declared itself as an "alternative" to the dominance of the Congress and the BJP. As the Congress is not expected to win, the Third Front has aligned itself against the BJP which it sees as being "a dangerous mix (of) aggressive capitalism (and) a rabid form of communal ideology."

The second and more formidable challenge is posed by the Aam Aadmi Party. It sprung a surprise in its debut contest in the Delhi state elections last year when it emerged as the majority party. The AAP proposes to contest from 20 out of 29 states against the Congress and the BJP, and expects to win 100 seats. That figure may be too ambitious but given its increasing popularity, it may actually win a fairly large number of seats.

The size of the dent that the Third Front and the AAP may cause in the Congress and BJP's vote bank is difficult to predict but it is expected to be substantial. In the current Lok Sabha, the Third Front parties have 92 seats. It is quite likely, therefore, that jointly the AAP and the Third Front may further improve the tally.

With no party likely to win an outright majority of 272 seats, the majority party will have to form a coalition with smaller regional parties, which has been the trend since 1989. This will be a happy augury in case the BJP comes to power because a coalition would prevent Modi from riding rough shod over the minorities with his Hindutva or Hindu nationalist agenda.

Some analysts predict that on the foreign policy front, a Modi-led government is likely to take a more hardline stance on Pakistan. However, this may be a bogey because Atal Bihari Vajpayee, another BJP prime minister, also took many steps to improve ties with Pakistan. He made a bus trip to Lahore and later invited President Musharraf to visit India. ■

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



The Muslim Factor

The Muslim vote could again have a role to play in swinging the course of elections in India.

By Waqas Aslam Rana



The largest democracy in the world will go to the polls on April 7 in an extended process that will end on May 12. By that date, Indians will have selected 543 members of the sixteenth Lok Sabha, their country's popularly elected lower house of parliament.

As India's profile among the comity of nations has risen over the last 20 years or so, owing largely to impressive economic gains, the world's attention is naturally focused on the Indian elections. Geo-political concerns, economic interests of multinational corporations and regional dynamics in South Asia will

all be impacted by whether the BJP is able to mount a successful challenge to the ruling coalition led by the Congress party.

The minority factor has become increasingly important to Indian electoral politics over the years and is always crucial in determining the outcome of elections in the country. While a democratic system has kept the incredibly diverse populace of the Indian republic together, communal tensions have persisted since partition. The lingering issue of Kashmir is perhaps the single biggest unresolved problem, particularly since it is symptomatic of the uneasy place the Muslims occupy in the Indian polity. Not long ago, during the 1990s, the Khalistan separatist movement of the Sikhs was in full swing in the Indian Punjab, leading to Indra Gandhi's assassination.

While these and other minority-related issues continue to play a central role in Indian politics, changing trends in electoral politics have further raised the stakes as far as election outcomes are concerned.

First, political competition in India has surged greatly since the 1980s. Looking at the number of political parties as one indicator, it jumped from 38 in the 1984 elections to 117 for the next round in 1989. In 2009, this figure was 370. In many ways, the 1989 elections mark a watershed for Indian politics, when the Congress was ousted from power for the second time since independence. Since then, the era of single-party rule has ended and multi-party coalition governments have been the norm in India. Lack of representation for lower castes, minorities and sub-regional interests in general are the main causes of this shift.

A second major trend in Indian electoral politics is the declining margin of victory, especially since the 1977 elections. The average margin of victory in the national elections has steadily declined from around 25 percent in the late 1970s to about 10 percent in the 2009 elections. Compare this to the average victory margin in Britain's parliamentary election in 2010 of over 18 percent and it is clear how increasingly competitive the Indian political arena has become.

The third major trend that can

be observed is that the turnout for elections has generally been stable, notwithstanding variations within and between different states. The turnout ratio has continued to hover in the mid-50 percent range since the 1960s.

The role of minorities has become critical in the Indian elections as the afore-mentioned trends have intensified. Greater political competition, tighter victory margins and a significant potential for increased turnout means that wooing the minority vote now forms a major pillar of all political parties' election strategies. This is highlighted most pointedly by the aggressive courting of the Muslim vote by the BJP's Narendra Modi in his bid to become India's next prime minister, promising economic growth to replace the memories of the 2002 Gujarat riots.

It would be worthwhile to focus on the Indian Muslim population as a representative sample of how minorities impact elections, considering that at about 13 percent of India's total population (2001 census) they represent the country's largest minority group. Going purely by the numbers, it is clear how important the Muslim vote is. Of the total 543 Lok Sabha seats, there are 35 that consist of constituencies with more than 30 percent Muslim population. Furthermore, there are another 183 seats where Muslims comprise between 11 percent and 30 percent of the population. In any electoral scheme, but particularly in a parliamentary democracy where constituency politics determine national outcomes, such a significant chunk of the vote bank can only be ignored at the party's own peril.

Going beyond just the figures, the Muslim population's voting patterns have been important in shaping the course of elections and in the subsequent government-formation processes in India. In general, the Muslims in this country have voted for non-BJP parties or those opposed to it, particularly in states where the BJP is a main player.

This is mainly due to the fact that the BJP has been regarded as an anti-Muslim party because of its strong Hindu-nationalist leanings. Events like the infamous Babri Mosque demolition in 1992 and the Gujarat

riots in 2002 under Modi's nose have reinforced this image. His elevation to the BJP's candidate for prime minister in the elections is seen in a skeptical light by the Indian Muslims, even as the former chief minister is trying to cleanse his image by focusing his campaign on the economic growth experienced by Gujarat under his leadership.

While this might lead one to conclude that the Indian Muslims are left with only one choice, i.e. voting for the Congress, this is not necessarily true. In states like Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and even Gujarat, where the BJP is a big force, the Muslims have indeed voted for the Congress and its allies that have taken a decidedly pro-Muslim stance. However, this backing for the Congress does not always hold in states where the BJP is not a main player. Also, there are other 'secular' parties besides the Congress to choose from. In states such as Kerala and West Bengal, it is the local parties that oppose the Congress for whom Muslim voters become important, especially if the margin of victory is small. Thus, Indian Muslims often have the opportunity to vote strategically and impact the result.

One example is the key state of UP, where the Muslim vote has been decisive in the last two elections. In the 2009 Lok Sabha elections, the Muslims in the state voted to support the best possible candidates from the Congress and allied parties that were opposed to the BJP. This resulted in the BJP winning only 10 out of the 80 seats from the state.

In the forthcoming elections, these trends are likely to remain in place. However, it would be a mistake to take this for granted. Towards the end of its tenure, the Congress-led coalition government has been increasingly under pressure, not least from the popular anti-corruption wave currently in vogue.

Narendra Modi's credentials as a good economic manager may sway many Indians towards the BJP, but the real question is: will the Muslims and other minority groups trust him with power at the national level? **S**

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



A Run for the Money

In this Indian election, money from big businesses is likely to play an important role in the battle for political power.

By Taj M. Khattak

Money, especially big money, has nearly always proved to be the most effective solvent for ideology in any country. As India's political parties edge closer to elections, scheduled to be held from April 7 to May 12, money from big businesses will once again play an important role in this contest for political power. In fact, it is already being dubbed as the 'epic battle' between the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party. The Aam Aadmi Party, the new horse on the track, is fighting the elections on the basis of popular national sentiments of anti-corruption. The party, however, is unlikely to dislodge the well-entrenched political order which will

pander exclusively to the demands of big businesses.

On their part, the captains of India's various industries feel that they have an historic responsibility to bring in economic stability through the creation of more wealth as India drifts away from the trajectory of BRIC economies – an acronym for a group of rapidly developing countries – Brazil, Russia, India and China – that have the potential of becoming leading economies of the world within a few decades. How much of that newly created wealth will serve the interests of some influential individuals and how much of it will benefit the country can only be determined over a longer

timeline as any assessment after one or two elections could be misleading.

If big money has been able to make a slow but steady ingress into the Indian political system, the country has only itself to blame for this phenomenon. This is so because soon after independence, it didn't suitably amend the 1913 Companies Act, which had no statutory provisions to ban donations being made by business houses to political parties. The judiciary, to its credit, had voiced its concern on more than one occasion about damage to the country's political life if those with wealth were allowed to influence politics. Its warnings were ignored.



Far from the much-needed course correction, in 1960 the Indian parliament further added Section 293-A to the Companies Act, permitting businessmen and industrialists to contribute up to 5 percent of their net profits to political parties. In 1985, Section 293-A was further amended to authorize board of directors of companies to make donations to political parties.

It didn't take long for the negative effects of these steps to surface. They also resulted in strengthening the public perception about the rise in high-level political corruption, especially during electioneering. It is strange that while democracies the world over are closing the door on big business money entering politics, the biggest democracy in the world continues to allow this unhealthy trend to continue.

India started the liberalization of its economy in 1991 during the tenure of Prime Minister P.V. Narishmha Rao, when the current Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was finance minister. There has been some success in unshackling the economy from compulsions of what had been derogatively called the 'License-Permit Raj' of the 1950s and 1960s as the country peaked to 10 percent growth at one point.

But the slowing down of growth to less than 5 percent for the second year running has raised doubts about the effectiveness of liberalization reforms. It is, therefore, sad to see Manmohan Singh, the architect of the modern Indian economy, facing at the fag end of his public service, prospects of the electorate showing preference for Narendra Modi, who is better known for his authoritarianism and strong-arm tactics than a deeper understanding of economics.

Under Manmohan Singh, the Indian state has transitioned from being

a benevolent provider of all necessities of life till only recently to confining itself to the minimalist role (though not as much as big businesses would like it to be) of facilitating the full energies of private enterprise to inter-play. This accelerated the economy from what had been called India's 'Hindu Rate of Growth' for years. But the problem with big businesses in India is that they rarely, if ever, know where 'deregulation' ends and 'no regulation' begins.

Call it influence of big players on politics or a nexus between money and politics, the consistency in India's economic policies has paid off as there have not been any major back and forth adjustments in the taxation regime, whether direct or indirect, which has moved downwards and towards simpler formats for filling returns. The parity of the Indian Rupee with international currencies has been relatively stable. And most significantly, the regulatory framework of greater freedom for trade and industry has moved on towards leniency of rules and dismantling of stringent controls – a hallmark of the Indian economy for decades.

An unmistakable downside of India's liberalization policies has been the fact that it has not been able to produce a new breed of entrepreneurs espousing good corporate governance and honesty. Quite the reverse, the increased opportunities for creating wealth have created more greed and far too many economic power houses which tread the narrow path between right and wrong. The key to success in business in India has often not been in real entrepreneurship but in influencing major functions of the state such as taxation and permission to borrow money from abroad which can make a substantial difference to their balance statements over shorter periods.

The Indian businessman knows his ropes and invests generously in influencing policies and policymakers, in creating lobbying institutions such as the FICCI, the Confederation of Indian Industry and the Assocham (Associated Chamber of Commerce, an influential group of older foreign-controlled firms which have since largely gone native) and in building personal relations with patronizing political leadership. The approach

has generally been three-pronged and spread over bribery, getting nominated to advisory bodies and determining appointments of senior officials to influence high-level decision-making. This has correspondingly shrunk the space for politics based on the country's constitutional values.

The man mainly responsible for this change was Dhirubhai Ambani of Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) and the patriarch of the Ambani brothers, who showed how the regulatory mechanism could be bent to his advantage when other industrial barons symbolizing 'old money' remained glued to conservative strategies of perpetuating their control and frequently blamed pervasive state control for the lackluster performance of their business houses. He was able to widen shareholder stakes through equity ownership and to pull around an agglomeration of corporate and civic voters with significant political leverage. Ironically, today, his son Mukesh Ambani is embroiled in a scam and is under investigation for manipulation in natural gas prices from the Krishna-Godavari Basin off the coast of Andhra Pradesh.

Yet there are older industrial groups like the Tatas and the Aditya Group, which are beholden to greater transparency in political donations and have set up trusts to fund elections in a transparent and accountable manner. Whether the rest of the pack will follow their lead to keep the country's politics clean remains to be seen, especially when liberalization of the economy and doing away with license-quota has rendered such action to be of limited benefit.

Not long ago, India surprised the world when it produced a few billionaires on top of business houses with global reach. The bubble of 'Shining India' has burst as the performance of the Congress-led UPA government is regarded as dismal. People now want the economy to veer starboard. It is no secret that when a businessman makes a donation to a political party, he expects a *quid pro quo*. For the time being, India's 'New Money' is giving the 'Old Money' a run for the money. ■

The writer is a retired Vice Admiral of the Pakistan Navy and former Vice Chief of Naval Staff.

Star Power

Do celebs make good parliamentarians and politicians? What happens in the Indian elections will tell.

By Seemu Bhatt

There are three things that Indians love to discuss – politics, films and cricket. It is, therefore, not surprising to see the political parties unleash a star war by roping in celebrities as party candidates and campaigners in the world's biggest elections. For celebrities, mainly those past their prime, politics is a good second career. Given that the Indian population is largely star-struck, celebrities do not find it difficult to launch their political careers or gather crowds as political campaigners. For political parties, celebrities are a time-tested tool to create interest among voters and capture their imagination.

The most theatrical story of tinsel-town politics was the stunning entry and shocking exit of mega superstar Amitabh Bachchan. Big B, as Bachchan is fondly called, entered politics at the behest of his close friend Rajiv Gandhi, by contesting the Lok Sabha elections from Allahabad in 1984. In a mere three years, he resigned when his family's name was dragged into the Bofors scandal. Big B has since stayed away from the "cesspool" – the term he had famously used for politics.

Although politics has only gotten murkier since Big B resigned, there has been a spike in cine and sports stars joining the political arena in the last decade or so. The outgoing 15th Lok Sabha had its fair share of celebrities – Hindi film actors Shatrughan Sinha and Jaya Prada, regional film actors Vijayashanti, Satabdi Roy, Tapas Pal, Siddhantha Mahapatra and Jayasudha,



former cricketers Kirti Azad, Navjot Singh Sidhu and Mohammad Azharuddin and former footballer Prasun Banerjee.

The trend of big-ticket film personalities metamorphosing into big-ticket politicians began in Tamil Nadu. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), formed in 1949, was the first party to successfully use the movie medium to propagate its ideology. DMK founder, C.N. Annadurai and his political successor, M.K. Karunanidhi, were film scriptwriters. Their ideologically motivated films reaped considerable dividends for the DMK and led to the formation of the first non-Congress government in the state. The first actor-turned-chief minister in the state and the country was the great matinee idol M.G. Ramachandran, who formed the DMK breakaway ADMK (now AIADMK) in 1972. J. Jayalitha, the current Chief Minister and MGR's political heir, was one of his leading ladies in the films. Among these four Tamil Nadu film personalities-turned-politicians, they held the office of chief minister twelve times.

The relatively newer Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam, which is now the principal opposition party in the assembly, was formed by action hero Vijayakanth in 2005.

In neighboring Andhra Pradesh, Telugu film legend N.T. Rama Rao established the Telugu Desam Party in 1982. He even acted in and directed a movie while he was chief minister of Andhra. Chiranjeevi, union minister of state for tourism, is another southern superstar who has been successful in politics. He formed his own party but later merged it into the Indian National Congress. Now, his brother, Pawan Kalyan, also a star, has launched his party, the Janasena.

Unlike in the two southern states, where the line between politics and cinema has been traditionally blurred, the interest and involvement of the Hindi and regional film industries in politics was limited. Over the decades, there has been a steady trickle of entertainers who have been voted or nominated to the Indian parliament. Some popular Hindi film stars such as Rajesh Khanna, Vinod Khanna, Hema Malini, Dharmendra, Sunil Dutt and Govinda have been drawn to politics. Many of the stars turned out to be one-time wonders. Some got disillusioned

and left politics for good, while others took to politics like a duck to water. Celebrities like Sunil Dutt, Raj Babbar, Smirit Irani, Shatrughan Sinha and Kirti Azad made a successful transition into politics, while Govinda and Dharmendra chose to hang their boots. The Government of India honoured actor Dilip Kumar with a nomination to the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Indian parliament. He was also appointed Sheriff of Mumbai in 1980. Actress Shabana Azmi, who is a social and women's rights activist and a Goodwill Ambassador of the United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA), was also nominated a member of the Rajya Sabha.

Do celebrities make good politicians? Politics is a very demanding profession, where mere good intentions do not suffice. It requires a deep understanding of India's political history, insights into the functioning of democracy and awareness of various issues. Many stars-turned-parliamentarians lack such knowledge and are sometimes clueless about their own party's political stand. They are rarely present in the parliament or in their constituency.

Actor Govinda, who emerged as a giant killer in 2004 elections by defeating BJP leader Ram Naik in Mumbai North constituency, spoke only twice in the Lok Sabha in four years – that too for two minutes each. The Congress MP was a busy film star. As such, he could make himself present for just 37 out of 303 parliamentary sittings. Another case in point is that of former cricketers Siddhu and Azharuddin. Azhar fielded five questions in his five years as MP and has hardly been to his Moradabad constituency. Siddhu, on the other hand, was so busy with his TV commitments that a few cheeky voters in his Amritsar constituency put up his missing posters. No wonder then that Siddhu is not in BJP's candidates list this time, while Azhar had to request the Congress bosses to move him to a safe seat in Rajasthan.

This year's election has many political debutants from the sports and film industry – Gul Panag, Kirron Kher, Moonmoon Sen, Mahesh Manjrekar, Nagma, Ravi Kishan, Bhaichung Bhutia, Mohammad Kaif, Babul Supriyo, Bappi Lahiri and Paresh Rawal etc. Some seasoned campaigners like Shatrughan Sinha and Raj Babbar are

also in the fray. There are a couple of turncoats as well. Prakash Jha, a filmmaker, contested and lost as a Lok Janshakti Party candidate in 2009; now he is a Janata Dal (United) candidate. Manoj Tiwari, a famous Bhojpuri actor and singer, contested and lost on a Samajwadi Party ticket in 2009. This time, he is the BJP candidate in Delhi North-East. An army of other stars are expected to add glam at the hustings.

Many of them have been drawn from distant constituencies. Actors Nagma and Ravi Kishan are Mumbai residents, but are contesting, respectively, from Meerut and Jaunpur in Uttar Pradesh. They aspire to represent the local people whom they barely know. If they win, they will have to shuttle between their families and work commitments in Mumbai and their parliamentary responsibilities in Delhi. Would they have enough time then to serve the people?

Cricketer Mohammad Kaif has been given a Congress ticket from Phulpur – a seat that gave India its first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. A few days before his name was announced, he was playing the Ranji Trophy matches. For someone so absorbed in cricket, if he wins the election, can he be expected to participate in parliamentary debates on foreign direct investment, reforms in the agricultural sector, the Kashmir issue, reservation policies or new state formations?

While it will be wrong to say that celebrities cannot play an effective role in the parliament, past experience shows that very few have proven themselves as being exceptional parliamentarians. Stars can undoubtedly play a very important role in pulling votes or in motivating and educating people on poll issues. Even the Election Commission of India has acknowledged the influence of stars on people by roping in actor Aamir Khan as its 'national icon' for creating voter awareness. However, crowding the Lok Sabha with too many celebrities, especially if they are not equipped to or inclined to contribute significantly, may actually weaken the parliament's functioning and adversely impact the decision-making process at the national level. **S**

The writer is a Mumbai-based independent strategic analyst and author.

The Laugh Sites

Indian spoof websites are adding that bit of lighthearted color to an otherwise sombre election scenario.

World famous whistleblower and owner of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange woke up one day to find, much to his amazement, that he was endorsing India's Bharatiya Janata Party and its leader Narendra Modi.

The BJP was apparently using a leaked memo to claim that Modi was regarded as 'incorruptible' by Julian Assange and his WikiLeaks. The website and its owner soon issued a clarification that they never made such a claim. In its efforts to control the damage, an embarrassed BJP said that Modi did not need Assange's endorsement as he was "above such certificates."

Ideally, the matter should have died down within a few days but it did not – thanks to the spoof and satire websites that have grown in strength and influence over the last few years.

As a result, what followed was a flood of pictorial messages – or memes as they are popularly known – with a serious-faced Assange 'endorsing' funny lines such as 'Multiplayer games should never be considered interruptible' to 'America is not afraid of Pompeii. Given all its years of dormancy, it's evident that it is ineruptible' to 'If you are a bad gambler, you will lose a lot of money In Crap Tables.'

Although these web portals have existed for some years, the election season has provided them with the fodder they thrive on – politicians making all kinds of statements and their strange antics. Web portals such as The Unreal Times, Faking News, News That Matters Not, Farzi News, The India Satire and Hahakar News, to name a few, as well as some pages on Facebook, are actively producing satirical news.

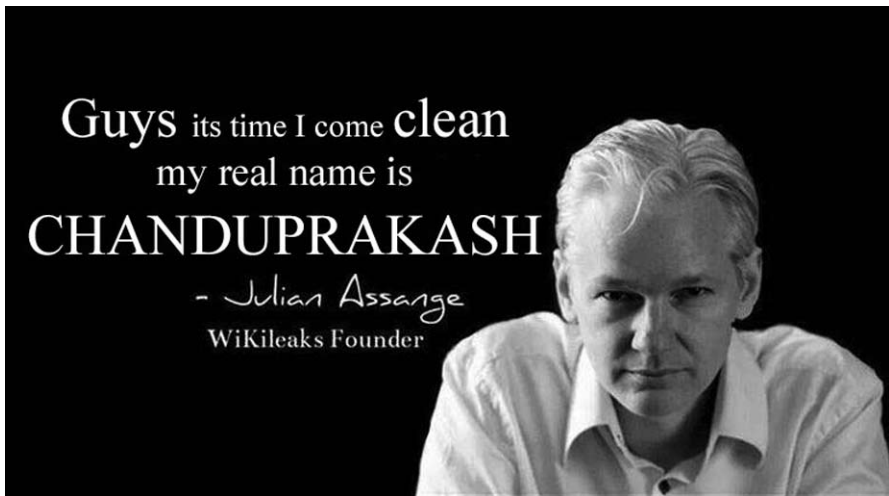
Their standard operating procedure

includes selecting random statements of famous politicians and twisting them to make fake news stories that read like serious news but have an inherent element of satire. They sometimes present completely outlandish ideas in the form of apparently innocuous everyday news. For example the headline 'Mumbai named second most honest city while Sharad Pawar was not in the city' or 'I never asked the

public that question about going to the washroom: Kejriwal.'

In addition to Indian politicians, these websites are known to target international politicians and cricketers in their spoofs. At times, instead of news stories, they present pictorial stories where speech bubbles are added to different





Narendramodiplans.com – that explained how Modi would run the country if elected as prime minister, was taken off after having received 60,000 visitors in 20 hours.

The single page website with the BJP leader's picture asked visitors to click on an option to know more about his plans for the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. But the option kept moving around and could not be clicked on. It was seen as satire on Modi's evasive attitude towards serious issues such as the 2002 riots in Gujarat.

A similar site about Rahul Gandhi – rahulgandhiachievements.com – is still functioning. This link leads to a blank page with just the date mentioned at the bottom.

All these websites are run by young, English-speaking urban youth who have good knowledge of using the internet. The reason they have limited themselves to the web world is that the mainstream media would not dare to air or publish most of the stuff they produce.

In addition to satire websites, a number of new online entities have also gained popularity. A web portal AIB, for instance, comes up with funny videos and Twitter messages while Jai Hind! is a biweekly show that combines television's production standards and the boldness that has become a hallmark of internet freedom to produce first-rate satire. Then there is a website which has a self-explanatory name: Newslaundry. Its motto is "sab ki dhulaai".

When Rahul Roushan, a former journalist, created Faking News in 2008, he was not sure about its success. He now believes that his website only "whetted the great appetite for political satire" as a number of new portals have opened since then. While a tremendous surge in their activities has been noticed in the run-up to the elections, many Indians hope that they will continue to provide the nation with the much-needed comic relief even after the elections. **S**

– JS



pictures of politicians to tell a funny story. Some websites publish fake poll surveys with funny results. For instance, the report '80% Aam Aadmi Party workers believe Arvind Kejriwal may become India's Prime Minister in 2019; India's most honest survey revealed.'

The trend of satire websites has existed in other parts of the world for a long time. In fact, popular spoof websites such as the internationally acclaimed The Onion have often come up with stories that have fooled many around the world, including governments and reputable news organizations. The owners of Indian spoof websites have drawn inspiration from their international counterparts.

Sometimes their news stories are so close to reality that the mainstream media print them as genuine news. A case in point is the fake story about a man suing Axe, the company that makes deodorants, after his several unsuccessful attempts at finding a girlfriend. This spoof story was picked up by the mainstream media and printed by many leading newspapers as a genuine story.

The impact of such websites has also increased over time. A website dedicated to spoofing Narendra Modi –



Whither Peace Committees?

While the government talks peace with the Taliban, innocent people continue to die.

By Shahzad Chaudhry

When the government decided to take forward the dialogue process with the Taliban, it restructured the composition of its peace committees and also considered, quite loudly, the need for including a senior member from the military as a part of the dialogue committee. Normally, this wouldn't have been the government position given that this government in particular has been persistently endeavoring and claiming more effective civilian control over the military.

Yet, the thought found greater resonance with every passing moment, reaching a crescendo which almost

suggested that the matter was a done deal. It was not.

If there is one thing that all who hold power must know, it is that even power has limits. The COAS met his Corps Commanders and his Principal Staff Officers and their combined wisdom was that the army must stay out of the business of dialogue, which anyway was a political effort. The army would, however, be on the standby to assist with any matter that the committee might need help with. The government agreed. However, it can be surmised that there would be a lavish intelligence support to the committee as it thrashed out the more

substantive issues with the Taliban Committee.

Consider this. The members of the original committee – persons from the media, a former military major and a scion of a religious family – were all considered anodyne; good people without much effect and influence. The Taliban must have thought that with this kind of an opposing interlocution there wasn't much hope to talk substance. The former committee, on the other hand, felt that given the likely nature of the talks, reflected in the three issues that were discussed, only the army could give a final verdict. Inclusion of the army



in the committee at that time would have made a significant difference. It is equally likely that given the not-so-laudatory press that the committee was receiving, its members found the less-than-muted wish of the Taliban to have a more influential government committee an opportune moment to bow out and save themselves from further embarrassment.

The three issues that found mention during the initial phase of the talks included: one, setting free the Taliban prisoners – these were deemed to be with the army and hence their release could have only been possible with the army's concurrence. This particular condition has since morphed into a more doable release of the non-combatants. Two, compensation to the 'people' of FATA who have lost their relatives and home and hearth in the military operations with these groups. This is a political decision

and will need to be dealt with at that level. And finally, the withdrawal of the army from those areas of North and South Waziristan that are home to many of the Taliban.

When you give someone a whole lot of money, release their fighting cadres from your custody and then withdraw your own troops from an area that you have beaten the other side out of, what you get is the other side now controlling the areas that it had lost earlier with added strengths of more troops released from your custody and significant financial support gained in compensation for the losses that they had borne when starting an insurgency against the state. This may not have a name as yet as a phenomenon, but it should be called the Circular Error of Stupidity. Let's call it CES from now on.

The army would not have liked its name to be added to the list of those who became a part of this CES. The government, unaware that such a thing even existed, would have been equally ill-informed about its consequences. However, it knew that a dialogue could not succeed without 'give' and 'take'. What it was to 'take' was pretty clear – peace at all costs. What it was to 'give', however, gave it much greater worry. The government did not want to 'give' alone; it hoped to have the army on the signing sheet when it bartered peace.

Philosophically, the approach to the peace issue is contradictory. The state hasn't lost, but is bartering for peace. The army, on the other hand, is meant to 'win' peace – unless it has lost the war in which case it cannot win peace and must then agree to 'finding' peace through other means. In this case, the political leadership will barter for peace to make up for the inadequacy of the army. In the process of asking the army to sit on the committee, 'bartering' for peace would actually mean that the army has indeed already lost; which is not the case. Hence the army chose out.

By opting to stay out, the army suggests that it be afforded an opportunity to lose first – which can only come through a war or an operation – and then the government would indeed be within its right to barter for peace. Or, if the government shies away from a war, or seeks to

barter peace through accommodation and dialogue, it must do so on its own. The dialectic may seem complicated but reflects the realities as they stand. It also explains that the dialogue for peace in the manner that the government seems to be pursuing does not stand to reason and, therefore, seems perplexing to most.

On the precondition of the release of the non-combatants, the army has been categorical: none exist. However, if there are some who can be identified by the Taliban, the army will consider if no serious charges against them remain. One feels there is reasonable chance to progress on this point if at all there are any non-combatants. Some commentators with more intimate knowledge now agree that there was a possibility that some people from the Swat operation may have been held in 2009, but are unlikely to be still in any kind of custody; especially children and women.

Asking the army to vacate areas where it has won its control and established, inter alia, the government's writ cannot be a reasonable demand for the following reason: no one vacates an area won by its force unless there is sufficient compensatory reason to do so – which in this case is the Taliban shedding arms and submitting themselves to the legal processes of the state of Pakistan. There should also be sufficient deterrent measures in place to keep a check on any recourse to their bad ways. Without any such assurance, handing areas back to the Taliban is akin to granting them the geographical base that they have been endeavoring to create for their movement.

Under such dubious conditions, it is unlikely that the dialogue process will give us a durable end-state. One of the sides must concede and move away from its averred gains. If the state compromises, it loses considerably in the longer run. Again, will the Taliban give up on their idealism or the opportunity to gain, especially when the Afghanistan chapter is yet to find a closure? The possibilities are endless and the army may just be right to hedge. ■

The writer is a retired Air Vice Marshal of the Pakistan Air Force and served as its Deputy Chief of Staff.

This year, the beginning of spring in Afghanistan will also be the beginning of the end of President Karzai's almost 12-year rule. The Constitution of Afghanistan allows a president only two terms in office, and President Karzai has just completed his second term. One cannot overemphasize the significance of the April 2014 presidential elections due to several considerations. First and foremost, it will be the first time ever in Afghanistan's history that power will be transferred peacefully from one elected president to another. Second, the timing of this election is highly crucial as all international forces shall be leaving the country by the end of 2014. The enduring presence of U.S. forces that will be instituted within the proposed Bilateral Security Agreement is yet to be decided.

Peace talks with the insurgents, the fight against rampant corruption, building of state institutions, accelerating the pace of reconstruction and providing an environment conducive for sustainable economic growth, are some of the recurring themes in the programs and agendas of presidential contenders. Foreign policy is another important area in which they are trying to show their capabilities to Afghan voters and the international audience.

Being a young democracy that started almost from scratch after the collapse of the Taliban government in 2001, the dynamics of politics in Afghanistan are interesting and,

at times, fascinating. Twenty-eight candidates originally filed for running the presidential campaign out of which only 11 were accepted by the Independent Election Commission. Two candidates have already dropped out of the race. Nine are still in the run but the probability of further drop-outs is high. After decades of civil war and instability, success in politics is not guaranteed by reaching out to the masses from party platforms or by pursuing certain political agendas. Today, becoming prominent in Afghan politics requires short-cuts. Being in high-level government positions is the easiest way to becoming prominent in Afghan politics. That also means becoming wealthy. Political corruption is one of the most serious challenges the country faces today.

In the absence of credible political parties, the Afghans give more importance to personalities. Educated Afghans might still be interested in candidates' agendas but this election is more about who the candidates are instead of what they offer. Thus, the criteria for credibility are personal profiles of candidates – their past performance and their capability to deliver on their election promises.

The coming years will be decisive in addressing some of the key challenges that the country faces. The most pressing issue for the future leadership will be bringing the much-needed peace to the country. Without

peace, there can be no security and without security no development program can succeed. That is why all candidates have placed the peace process at the top of their election agendas.

The fate of the Bilateral Security Agreement with the U.S. is yet to be determined. All presidential runners have categorically expressed their commitment to sign the BSA as soon as they take office if elected. The U.S. commitment to Afghanistan is crucial for the country's security as well as civilian sectors. The Afghan National Security Forces – no doubt a major accomplishment during the past 12 years – can only continue through sustainable financial and technical assistance of the U.S. and its NATO allies. That is why the future Afghan leadership will give high importance to this relationship with the U.S. No compromise on relations with the U.S. seems to be feasible.

Hope and Challenge

In his 12-year rule, President Karzai mainly focused on crisis management. The new Afghan ruler will hopefully take the country towards new frontiers of development.

By Ajmal Shams

Relations with neighbors, especially Pakistan and Iran, are equally important for the future elected administration. However, friendly relations can be achieved with alternative approaches and perspectives.

During the past 12 years of President Karzai's rule, the focus was more on crisis management. The decade ahead is that of consolidating the gains already made in various sectors. Afghanistan has been described as one of the most corrupt nations in the world by Transparency International. Improving Afghanistan's international image will be an important task for the future Afghan leadership, especially if it expects international monetary

assistance. In Tokyo, Afghanistan was pledged billions of dollars in development aid. Yet, the assistance was conditional upon the Afghan government's performance in rooting out systemic corruption and improving governance.

Bringing change in a post-conflict and war-ravaged country is a daunting task. The complexity of the dynamics of Afghan politics, its foreign aid-dependent economy, widespread corruption and ethnic divisions instigated by years of foreign intervention and civil war are the main hurdles to bringing social and economic stability. Yet, with a proper leadership in place that has both the vision and political will to lead the country in the right direction, change is very much possible and is, in fact, a

common desire of all Afghans. They expect that the new political order will benefit the common man unlike that of the past decade which created millionaires and billionaires with little positive impact on the quality of life of the average Afghan. The divide between the rich and the poor widened significantly. How this gulf can be bridged is something for the future administration to handle among plenty of other challenges.

With all eyes on the new leadership, the Afghans look at the coming election process with mixed feelings of hope and uncertainty. If everything goes well, the country will have an elected ruler in place with a renewed vision and a prioritized program for peace, stability and prosperity. Yet, there are chances of the election ending in a political crisis due to the complex political environment and because of the bureaucracy's purported intervention in favor of the candidate of its choice.

The political and economic stability of Afghanistan depends on the efficiency, legitimacy and competence of the new leadership. As of now, three candidates seem to have emerged as front-runners with Dr. Ashraf Ghani topping the list. The other two being talked of are Dr. Abdullah Abdullah and Dr. Zalmay Rasool. While all the three major contenders portray more or less similar campaign slogans, Dr. Ghani goes far beyond election rhetoric and has come up with a more specific, well-defined and focused strategy for peace, nation-building and state-building.

President Karzai and his entire state machinery have a major responsibility on their shoulders. There are concerns that both Karzai and his team might be using the state machinery in favor of a particular candidate. If true, the credibility of elections will be jeopardized and that will be a major blow to the electoral process. President Karzai must ensure free and fair elections if he wants to go down in history as someone who peacefully and smoothly transferred power to a legitimate successor. **S**

The writer is president of the Afghanistan Social Democratic Party (Afghan Millat Party). His main area of interest is political and developmental issues.



Which way, Islamic Radicalism?

In a shocking video, Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri urges the Muslims in Bangladesh to challenge the tyranny of politicians who have colluded with the West to weaken Islam.

By Taha Kehar



In 1977, President Ziaur Rahman systematically removed secularism from the constitution of Bangladesh and declared Islam as the state religion. Since then, secularism had an unclear legal status in the country. However, in 2010, the Bangladesh Supreme Court

restored secularism as an important foundation of the constitution when it prohibited religious fundamentalism in politics. Subsequently, this was elevated to the status of a fundamental principle of state policy in Bangladesh's constitution.

Interestingly, Islam continues to be the state religion in Bangladesh. Despite operating within an Islamic purview, the state has still managed to assert the political rights of non-Muslims who constitute 20 percent of the population. As a result, secularism

is neither incongruous nor a weak ideology in Bangladesh.

Against the backdrop of tolerance and diversity, there are unscrupulous elements who have been trying to sow the seeds of religious fundamentalism and resentment. An audio-visual message released in January 2014 specifically addressed to the 'Muslims in Bangladesh' is an ever-present testimony of a new wave of Islamic radicalism. The video message is purportedly from Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri and has been aptly titled 'Bangladesh: A Massacre behind a Wall of Silence'.

Although it was posted in January on the online portal, Jihadology, it only attracted media attention in February. Furthermore, it is difficult to determine the authenticity of the message. Throughout the video, an unseen narrator delivers a sermon which has been translated into English through subtitles. The narrator is supposedly Ayman al-Zawahiri, although there is no video footage to verify this. The credibility of the video can only be verified by the claim made on Jihadology that explicitly states the message is from Zawahiri and has been released by As-Sahab, the media wing of the Al-Qaeda.

In the video, Ayman al-Zawahiri urges Muslims in Bangladesh to challenge the tyranny of politicians who have colluded with the West to weaken Islam. The Al-Qaeda leader propagates the belief that a popular uprising and genocide provide the best means of protecting a religion that represents peace. This approach is likely to be dismissed as superfluous, extreme and short-sighted.

More significantly, the video message is marred with historical imprecision and fundamentally distorts facts to promote a biased viewpoint. Ayman al-Zawahiri narrowly interprets the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War as a conspiracy to undermine the Muslim Ummah in the subcontinent. The video discredits the fact that Bangladesh's independence was not a means of preventing hostilities against the Bengalis in the East wing. This is a misleading assertion that lacks a consistent explanation.

Labeling the events and tragedies of the 1971 war as a conspiracy serves to absolve West Pakistan of all responsibility in the skirmish. Pakistan was created for the benefit of the Muslim Ummah. However, the Muslim Ummah was divided on ethnic and



cultural lines. Before the 1971 war, the Bengalis were severely short-changed in the political arena. The Bangladesh Liberation War was a mechanism of avoiding further conflict and depicts the extent to which the desire for change can determine the fate of a country. It continues to be an ugly stain on the history of Pakistan. Seen in this context, Ayman al-Zawahiri's narrow depiction of history and indifference towards the political struggle of the Bangladeshi nation for the creation of Bangladesh is unlikely to trigger a movement that can strengthen Islamic radicalism.

Despite the misconceptions in Ayman al-Zawahiri's video message, there are some justifications for developing greater awareness about finding an Islamic solution. Over the last few decades, countless campaigns against Islam have been orchestrated in Bangladesh. These have largely favored the West and resulted in the ban of Islamic movements and frequent acts of violence against renowned Muslim academics and professionals.

The video message also makes reference to the status quo. It begins with the photographs of the Hefajat-e-Islam rally held in Dhaka in 2013. The images of the police crackdown on the participants of the rally are heart-wrenching. However, it is difficult to sympathize with the view that the plight of the Muslims in Bangladesh is an outcome of an elusive conspiracy. Ayman al-Zawahiri has not offered sufficient evidence to show how the major stakeholders – Indian agents, the Pakistan Army, the western media and politicians from Bangladesh and Pakistan – have been involved in this conspiracy. In the absence of such information, the video message reflects a false philosophy that will

indoctrinate those who uncritically accept its validity.

Some of the views expressed in the video could direct the law-enforcement agencies and policymakers towards finding a solution. For instance, Ayman al-Zawahiri has criticized the double standards shown by the West towards Islam. He explains that when Muslim countries wish to implement Shariah, they are billed as international criminal. However, if individuals make derogatory remarks about Islam, they are treated with utmost respect. These contradictions could serve as the rallying point for Islamic radicalism in Bangladesh. It is important to note that such tactics can be used to promote terrorism. Any delay or failure to deal with them can shake the foundations of democracy, secularism and progress.

The law-enforcement agencies in Bangladesh have been working towards combating terrorism. They have developed the capacity to handle complex situations and have been praised for their good work on international platforms. But the challenges of preventing a false philosophy from becoming a mainstream discourse are enormously difficult.

The government's response has been fairly balanced so far. It has not blown the matter out of proportion by giving it too much importance. However, the government must be prepared to tackle any quandary it may find itself in. After all, terrorism is driven by a dangerous mindset. Only time can curb its influence on society. ■

The writer is a poet and author. He is currently pursuing a degree in Law at the SOAS.

Time to Move On

The countries that are forcing Sri Lanka to investigate alleged war crimes do not have an enviable human rights record themselves.

By Javeria Shakil

It is said that those who live in glass houses should not throw stones at others. Perhaps this rule is not applicable to world politics where those living in glass houses are at the forefront of throwing stones at others. What happened in the 25th session of the UNHRC in Geneva at the end of March validates this hypothesis. In one of the sessions, superpower U.S. presented a resolution against Sri Lanka that called for an international probe into war crimes allegedly committed by the Sri Lankan Army during the last months of the three-decade long civil war. The UK strongly backed the US' efforts and the resolution was passed by 23 votes to 12.

The Sri Lankan civil war was a highly violent affair that spanned over 26 years (from 1983 to 2009) and was fought between the Sri Lankan Army and the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam). The LTTE, better known as the Tamil Tigers, comprised Tamil separatists who demanded freedom from the Sinhala-majority country in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka. Relations between the Sinhala majority and the Tamil minority were never amicable and had, in fact, turned violent on many an occasion. But the incident that provoked a full-fledged civil war is known as Black July in Sri Lankan history. According to some estimates, as many as 3,000 Tamils were killed in a horrible pogrom in Colombo in July 1983. The massacre was a result of an earlier attack by the LTTE on an army convoy. Thirteen soldiers were killed in the attack.

The civil war that broke out in the wake of the prosecution campaign claimed up to 100,000 lives according to the UN. Both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Army adopted a no-holds-barred attitude and launched vicious attacks against each other. The Lankan Army, being an organized force

with state-of-the-art weaponry, had the upper hand. To defy the army's advantageous position, the LTTE came up with a hard-to-counter weapon: the suicide bomber. It was the LTTE that introduced this deadly phenomenon in South Asia and used it for killing many important personalities, including former Sri Lankan president Ranasinghe Premadasa, foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar and a number of high-ranking military officials. The LTTE also used women as suicide bombers. This was established when former Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by a female belonging to the LTTE cadre.

With Gandhi's assassination, the LTTE became the only terrorist organization in the world to have killed two world leaders. It has also been accused of abducting children and manipulating them into becoming soldiers.

By 1997, the organization had become so violent that it was included in the list of foreign terrorist organizations by none other than the U.S. itself. Nine years later, the European Union took the same step, proscribing the LTTE as a terrorist outfit. From the start of the civil war in 1983 to its end in 2009, several unsuccessful attempts to establish peace were made by both sides in



the form of ceasefire agreements. A neutral body, the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, has documented 3,830 ceasefire violations by the LTTE as against 351 by the security forces during February 2002 to May 2007.

When the war finally ended in 2009, as a result of a massive assault launched by the government of President Mahinda Rajapaksa, it had effectively torn down the entire country. Thousands of lives were lost and the economy was in tatters. In fact, Sri Lanka registered a negative growth rate in 2001. It is against this background that the final offensive against the Tamil Tigers, in which 40,000 Tamils were allegedly killed, should be seen.

The demand of the international community that Sri Lanka conduct a thorough investigation into the allegations of war crimes rings particularly hollow when seen in the context of warnings given to the LTTE by the UN in the last phase of the civil war. It is true that the United Nations Security Council had made an offer to the LTTE that allowed "a UN-assisted evacuation of the remaining civilians in the conflict area, and join the

political process." Did the LTTE agree? It did not.

The Sri Lankan government announced the end of war on May 16, 2009. A few days earlier, on May 13, 2009, the UN Security Council had condemned the LTTE, denounced its use of civilians as human shields, and urged it to acknowledge the legitimate right of the government of Sri Lanka to combat terrorism by laying down their arms and allowing tens of thousands of civilians to leave the conflict zone. On May 14, 2009, the UN's Acting Representative for Sri Lanka, Amin Awad, had reported that 6,000 civilians "had fled or were trying to flee the war zone, but the LTTE was firing on them to prevent them from escaping".

It is against this background that the 'war crimes' allegedly committed by the Sri Lankan forces should be viewed.

The saddest aspect of this situation perhaps is that those at the forefront of the campaign against Sri Lanka do not have an enviable record when it comes to human rights.

During last year's Commonwealth Summit in Colombo, UK Prime

Minister David Cameron chastised the Sri Lankan government for not doing enough. While Cameron was being supremely patronizing, did it ever occur to him that one of his predecessors, Tony Blair, had played a rather shameful role in attacking Iraq? According to some reports published in the British media, Blair had examined ways of "justifying an invasion of Iraq" with his senior staff back in July 2002. As for the U.S. and post-war human rights violations, only one word should suffice: Abu Gharaib.

When attacking a foreign country can be validated on the basis of dubious intelligence reports and justified on flimsy grounds such as 'establishment of democracy', then a government's right to crush a secessionist movement by any means to keep the physical borders intact should also be respected.

Since 2009, there has not been a single suicide or bomb attack in Sri Lanka. The country's economy is growing at a rate higher than that of all other South Asian nations. Foreign inflows have increased and development work is taking place in all parts of the country. However, this does not mean that everything is fine in Sri Lanka. The Tamil problem still exists and the Tamils have many grievances. But the government is trying to bring them into the mainstream. A number of development projects are underway in the war-affected areas. New roads, highways and railway tracks are being constructed.

More importantly, a political process has started in the areas once controlled by the LTTE. Local bodies' polls were held in Jaffna and Vavuniya soon after the war ended and were won by the Tamil National Alliance – a coalition of moderate Tamils. The TNA also won the elections of the Northern Provincial Council held in 2013. It was the first ever election for the semi-autonomous body that was set up in 1987. Although a lot is yet to be done, things are moving in the right direction albeit slowly. Instead of reopening old wounds, the world community, especially the big powers, should help Sri Lanka in its post-war reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts. **S**

The writer is assistant editor at SouthAsia. She focuses on issues of political and social interest.



A Case for Aid?

What could be the real motives of the Saudis offering financial assistance to the Maldives?

By Huzaima Bukhari & Dr. Ikramul Haq

The donation of one million dollars by the Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, for the construction of ten “world-class” mosques raised many eyebrows. Some saw it as a step towards radicalization of the island nation. Others argued that aid for infrastructure development or projects in the social sector would have been a better choice. But the Saudis did not ignore this aspect. They donated \$1.5 million for financing health projects. The Maldivian Ministry of Islamic Affairs later clarified that the money for mosques was a personal donation by the Crown Prince.

It was reported that during the meeting between Maldivian President

Abdulla Yameen and the Saudi Crown Prince, both sides pledged to fight extremism and terrorism “in all forms and manifestations”. Both countries stressed the need for greater cooperation in the economic and trade sectors. According to *Saudi Gazette*, official discussions included potential investments in energy, tourism, transport and Islamic affairs as well as a soft loan of US\$300 million for the Maldives.

The visit was yet another sign of growing ties between the Yameen administration and the Saudi Kingdom. During his visit to Saudi Arabia in February 2014, Vice President Dr. Mohamed Jameel Ahmed reportedly stressed the importance his government

placed on enhancing ties with the Arab world and on “strengthening religious unity in the Maldives.” Shortly after Jameel’s return, the Maldives government announced that it would



introduce Arabic teaching in schools as part of a drive to “increase Islamic learning in the country”. Besides the Saudi government, the Saudi Arabian Muslim Scholars Association has also pledged a grant of 1.6 million Maldivian Rufiyaa “to assist in the provision of Islamic education in the Maldives.” These moves have been perceived as leading the Maldives towards becoming a theocratic state.

According to Vishal Arora, a New Delhi-based journalist, Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen, who completed four months in office on March 17, 2014, has pushed the Indian Ocean archipelago to religious conservatism. The Maldives, a string of 1,192 islands, has made several moves “to cement the supremacy of Sunni Islam” since Yameen was sworn in as president in November 2013. The top priorities set by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs reportedly include blocking all religions except Islam in the nation, ensuring that all laws and regulations adhere to Islamic principles and developing and strengthening the Islamic Fiqh Academy to issue fatwas.

The Ministry of Education has introduced Arabic as a subject in schools and is also planning to have schools teach the Quran as a subject up to grade VII. Yameen’s key foreign policy goals include “protecting the Islamic unity of the country and promoting Islamic characteristics internationally.” In December 2013, the parliament passed a bill to amend the constitution to restrict the legislature from removing the clause that gives Islam the status of state religion. The bill was introduced by the Maldivian Development Alliance, an ally of Yameen’s Progressive Party of the Maldives.

These moves, it is claimed, “have been made against the backdrop of a projected threat to religion from both domestic forces (read: progressive and pro-democracy parties) and foreign powers” (read: the Christian West). Speaking on the Maldives’ Conversion to Islam Day on February 2, 2014, Yameen warned his countrymen, “We should be very vigilant of foreign influences attempting to weaken our religious faith.” Yameen pitched himself as a savior of Islam in his campaign for the presidential election. “Think for yourselves, do you want

Islam in the Maldives or do you want to allow space for other religions in the Maldives?” he reportedly asked the people during an election speech.

Yameen, whose election manifesto pledged to implement the death penalty under the Shariah and to strengthen ties with Arab Muslim nations among other things, portrayed his rival Mohamed Nasheed as an enemy of the nation’s Islamic identity. Nasheed, who defeated former autocratic President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom in the 2008 elections, but was ousted in a coup in February 2012, had promised to bring true democracy for the nation’s progress. At his party’s victory rally following the elections, Yameen, who is Gayoom’s half-brother, said, “We (the coalition) worked together to save the Maldivian nation, to protect the sacred religion of Islam.”

The Maldives officially became an Islamic state in 1997. The country claims that all its citizens are Sunni Muslims. Article 9 of the Maldivian Constitution declares that “a non-Muslim may not become a citizen of the Maldives.” Such laws are a remnant of the legacy of Gayoom, who ruled the country for 30 years until 2008. While Gayoom was known for opposing the radical versions of Islam during his rule, his policy changed after pro-democracy Nasheed defeated him in the 2008 elections. To snatch power from Nasheed, Gayoom changed his tactics and sought the support of conservative Islamic parties and organizations. The 2013 presidential elections were, therefore, decisive. The voters had a choice between the continuation of restrictions and conservative policies and progress through a genuine democracy. Those who opted for the latter were outnumbered by a thin margin. The first four months under the new government offer a glimpse into the nation’s future.

The present government of the Maldives has sought cooperation from Saudi Arabia’s leadership in areas such as Haj affairs, the establishment of ‘awqaf’ and a center for Quranic studies. The Saudis were told that the country requires mosques to be built on every inhabited island. The capital, Male, currently has over 30 mosques. The most recognizable is the Islamic Center in Male, whose golden dome

dominates the low-slung skyline. Equally stunning is the ornate Hukuru Miskiyy or ‘Friday Mosque’ which was built in 1675.

In the Maldives, apart from internal political tussles and polarization, interference of some foreign countries has also become a regular feature. India and the United States showed concern when China announced that it would set up its embassy in Male in 2011. Western democracies have also expressed worries about the rising influence of Salafist parties such as the Adhaalath Party, coinciding with increasing radicalization of the island nation. The Saudis’ support for Salafist ideas is well-established and well-known.

The Maldives became a victim of terrorism when a bomb attack in Male wounded 12 western tourists in September 2007. In May 2009, a Maldivian member of Al-Qaeda was found involved in a suicide attack on the headquarters of Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence in Lahore. Hard on the heels of that attack, Pakistani troops arrested nine Al-Qaeda operatives at a training camp in South Waziristan in 2010. They turned out to be Maldivian citizens. This may explain to some extent why Saudi Arabia, the U.S. the EU, India, China and other South Asian countries have been showing so much interest in the Maldives. The recent “generous” help from the Saudi Kingdom to the Maldives has clear motives – the Saudis want Al-Qaeda to remain outside their land.

Many critics ask why the Saudis do not consider the more deserving parts of the world – East Africa, for example – worthy of aid. Yemen and the Horn of Africa are closer to Saudi Arabia, but no help has been extended to them. There is no help for the Rohingyas in Myanmar and the Muslims in Sri Lanka who face unprecedented atrocities. It is obvious that the Saudis are spending their money where they have interests. And this is not unusual as states are known to do this. **S**

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Back to Square One



The Egyptian Revolution of 2011 was aimed at overthrowing an authoritarian regime and ushering in democracy. Three years later, the country has all but moved on.

By Arsla Jawaid

As a revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests in the name of democracy swept through the Middle East in 2011, Egypt underwent its own 'Lotus Revolution', a popular uprising that saw millions of protestors, regardless of socio-economic backgrounds and religious affiliations, protest on the streets and demand an end to a myriad of grievances. Street protests, acts of civil disobedience, marches and riots – all ensued in an attempt to reconfigure the status quo and usher in a new era marked by freedom of speech, free and fair elections, a stable economy and a peaceful future. Demanding an end to high unemployment, inflation, police brutality and economic woes amongst other legal and political issues, demonstrators emerged, united in their desire to overthrow the authoritarian regime of Hosni Mubarak which they accused of plundering Egypt and plunging its people into despondency.

According to media reports, violent clashes between protestors and police forces loyal to Mubarak led to 850 people being killed and more than 100,000 injured.

As international media corps descended to cover what they labelled a historic turn of events, the west readily supported the wave of revolutions that were sweeping North Africa and the Middle East at that juncture. With slogans of 'democracy' and 'freedom', it seemed that 'change' was inevitable. Three years later, however, the country is back to square one with little improvement and only sacrifices to show for its heroic struggle for democracy.

Democracy is not an event. It is a process; perhaps one that the Egyptian people were not quite ready for yet. Democracy requires time to root itself, structures to uphold it, a series of democratic transitions to establish it and, above all, patience to sustain

it. However, ushering in democracy after three decades of Mubarak's draconian regime is not an easy feat and has been made particularly difficult in the presence of power-hungry, corrupt politicians. Mubarak was declared President in the wake of Sadat's assassination in 1981. Having held onto power since then, Mubarak increasingly became an autocratic ruler, curbing freedoms, maintaining an emergency rule, crushing dissent and suppressing all opposition groups (notably the Muslim Brotherhood), while arguing that such measures were necessary to control imminent threats from Islamist terrorist groups. As domestic unrest escalated, protests swept the nation. In a televised address, Mubarak dissolved his government and agreed to hand over power to the Head of the Intelligence Directorate. A day later, Vice President Omar Suleiman forced Mubarak to resign and announced that the Supreme Council

of the Armed Forces (SCAF) would run the country in the interim. The new head of state, Hussein Tantawi, promptly giving in to the demands of the demonstrators, suspended the constitution, dissolved the parliament and declared that elections would be held within six months.

While the SCAF attempted to run an interim government and introduce reforms, resentment with the political structure once again heightened. Supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood emerged on the streets and protests ensued against the SCAF that many accused of harnessing presidential powers. In March 2011, close to four thousand demonstrators filled Tahrir Square and demanded faster dismantling of the previous regime. Others accused the SCAF of planning a coup and bringing the country further under military rule. For those who had strived to overthrow the Mubarak regime, the sacrifices they had made were too great to abandon for a return to the status quo. Protestors clashed with the military in different parts of the country, leading to severe casualties, attacks on official buildings and a subsequent breakdown of law and order.

While Egypt's military rulers awarded themselves increased legislative powers, the country's first presidential elections took place and ushered in Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, making him the first Islamist head of an Arab state. However, his rule was short-lived as Morsi tried to usurp all state powers and issued a declaration immunizing his decrees from any challenge or forced revision. Many of Morsi's advisors resigned and judges spoke out against his actions. The move marginalized liberal and secular groups as Morsi attempted to impose strict Islamic rule in an effort to appease his Brotherhood backers.

Close to a year after he was sworn in, millions of protestors called for Morsi to be removed and new presidential elections to be held.

The Egyptian Movement of Change claimed to have collected 22 million signatures, demanding Morsi's removal. Many believed that the Brotherhood had rigged the votes and as violent clashes occurred between supporters of both camps, once again Egypt plunged into uncertainty and violence. After being given a 48-hour warning, the President was removed from office by the military. The Chief Justice was designated the new head of state. Regardless of the civilian front, the military continued to wield considerable power and used its influence to crush pro-Morsi demonstrations and riots in what has been termed by international human rights groups as a "massacre." The military has also forced the closure of public media and arrested journalists from media groups deemed as pro-Morsi, including Al-Jazeera.

Three years after the Lotus Revolution that aimed to overthrow a military dictatorship and establish a democratic state where the people reigned supreme, Egypt seems to have shown little progress. Expecting a return to authoritarian rule, Egyptians are fast losing hope. Protestors are brutally targeted and the revolution fever seems to have receded as quickly as it caught on. Egypt's move towards a peaceful democracy may be unattainable at the moment but the country is showing signs of moving towards some political arrangement. Perhaps mesmerized by the mantra of "democracy," Egypt's new election commission has announced the first round of voting for the country's new president to be held on May 26 and 27, with results expected to be announced by June.

Though Egyptians remain seriously divided over Morsi's ouster, the country's powerful former military chief Abdul Fattah El-Sissi has emerged a strong favorite to win the upcoming presidential elections.

Having comfortably settled within the military leadership, Sissi received foreign training at prestigious war

colleges in the US and UK after which he returned to Egypt to form close connections within the military ranks. A deeply controversial character, while deputy head of Military Intelligence (MI), he was recruited by Tantawi to join the SCAF after the overthrow of the Mubarak regime. It was during this time that he was assigned to build critical contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood on behalf of SCAF. Using his reputation as a devout Muslim, he set out to dramatize his performance by quoting Quranic verses and conducting the controversial "virginity tests" on arrested demonstrators in an effort to convince the Brotherhood of his Islamic views while at the same time maintaining a level of strong popularity within the military ranks. As a result, President Morsi appointed him commander-in-chief and defense minister, replacing Tantawi. While Sissi attempted to toe Morsi's line on domestic issues, on the security front he protected the interests of the military, thus guaranteeing the institution of his true loyalty. He also played a critical role in granting more powers and privileges to the military class in the formation of the 2012 constitution.

Sissi successfully deceived the Brotherhood and after Morsi's removal, appointed a special division to crack down on the Brotherhood's supporters. A strong nationalist dedicated to addressing Egypt's economic woes and a shrewd personality with the ability to seamlessly deflect blame to other political actors, Sissi could prove to be a manipulative president; someone who will ensure that the military is able to expand its influence in the political, economic, social and foreign policy arenas.

If Sissi is able to usher in political stability, this may be the temporary price Egyptians would pay for a democratic future that they desperately seek. ■

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Going Strong at 65

An agent of positive change for 65 years, NATO continues to face emerging challenges in the realm of international relations.

By Tahera Sajid



“Our strength and capabilities are inherently based on forming, sustaining, equip- ping, and training an adaptive force in which the only constant in the geopolitical terrain is change.”

(General Philip Breedlove, Commander SACEUR)

The international community today is constantly under threat from terrorism and economic challenges that affect and endanger so many nations. As individual countries struggle to find solutions, often more success is seen through formation of

alliances. The most successful of these alliances utilize analyses from diverse perspectives and combine resources to accelerate processes of change for desired outcomes. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization has been one such force of positive change throughout its 65 year history and has proved itself to be the most durable alliance in history.

Signed into existence in Washington, DC on April 4, 1949, with 12 members, today this robust 28-member alliance is a unique model of cooperation and strength.

Achieving substantial success in its missions over the years, NATO has actively worked with its member states and partnered with 41 countries and individual stakeholders from across the globe, impacting strategic decisions and providing informed global perspectives.

The first Secretary General of NATO, Lord Ismay, had famously stated – what would appear very short-sighted and naïve now – that the organization's goal was “to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.” Needless to say,

the perspectives on partnerships and priorities have changed significantly since then, and adapted to shifting geopolitical realities. NATO has formed strong bonds with Russia through the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) since 2002 and both have worked together on many fronts. As Gen Breedlove recently observed in the Turkish Policy Quarterly, 2014: "While NATO has different views with Russia in certain areas such as missile defense, there are many other areas in which we are working together in order to achieve the goals set out at the NATO-Russia Council summit in Lisbon in 2010." Areas of cooperation include counter-narcotics and piracy, scientific and technical fields, civil emergency response, nuclear weapons issues and crisis management, etc. Since 2008, Russia has also provided land transit routes to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan across Russian territory.

Taking up the cause of women and children suffering the repercussions of living in current or previously active war zones, NATO also supports the UN in implementing its Women, Peace and Security agenda, outlined in the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325. This and other similar UN resolutions, "call for full and equal participation of women at all levels in issues ranging from early conflict prevention to post-conflict reconstruction, peace and security."

Over the years, NATO has evolved into a vibrant organization, focused on resolving conflict and supporting the cause of peace, drawing ever more strength from adapting to changing times. It has been actively involved in supporting the cause of peace in countries around the world.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, which heralded the end of the Cold War, the focus on active crises brought NATO into Bosnia in the 1994 Bosnian war and then into Afghanistan as part of the security and training force working with the Afghan government, starting 2003 to date, and into Iraq for technical assistance and training from the operational phase spanning 2004 to 2011, to a sustaining role during 2012 and 2013. Since 2008, NATO has also successfully conducted counter-piracy operations around the Horn of Africa to protect the busy sea route, especially for international humanitarian vessels, including those of the UN World Food Program.

NATO also participated in the 2011 air campaign in Libya to implement the UN Resolution, UNSCR 1973.

Of all the missions, however, NATO's involvement in Afghanistan remains its longest and perhaps toughest combat commitment to date. Since 2003, working in active conflict areas, NATO has supported peace initiatives in Afghanistan "to enable the Afghan authorities to provide effective security across the country and ensure that the country can never again be a safe haven for terrorists". This objective seems to have been achieved in that the core leadership of Al-Qaeda has been rendered largely ineffective and the ISAF continues to train the Afghan National Security Forces to manage their country's security. After 2014, a smaller number of NATO troops - between 10,000 to 12,000 - will take on training and advisory roles for as long as mutually agreed upon by NATO and the Afghan government.

Pakistan has long been a major non-NATO partner. In 1994, the UN requested Pakistan to become part of the NATO mission in Bosnia. Since 2001, fully acknowledging the value of peace in Afghanistan as being directly linked to its own security, Pakistan has provided extensive contribution to Afghanistan in military cooperation and logistical support which has been widely appreciated as being instrumental in the fight against terrorism. In 2007, the Pakistan Military and NATO jointly established the Joint Intelligence Operations Centre (JIIOC) to improve coordination between NATO, ISAF and Pakistan. However, the tragic Salala incident in 2011 was a major setback in their relations. Controversially attributed to operational miscommunication between the Pakistan Army and the NATO-led ISAF troops, it resulted in the death of 24 Pakistani soldiers and created significant tension between the partners. Pakistan blocked NATO supply routes through its territory until a formal apology was delivered by the U.S. Nonetheless, Pakistan continues to work in close cooperation with NATO, terming the relationship to be largely one of mutual cooperation and geared towards upholding peace and security in the region.

Going forward, if a lesson from Afghanistan has been most consistent, it is the high cost of war in terms of precious lives lost that will always bear down heavily on our collective

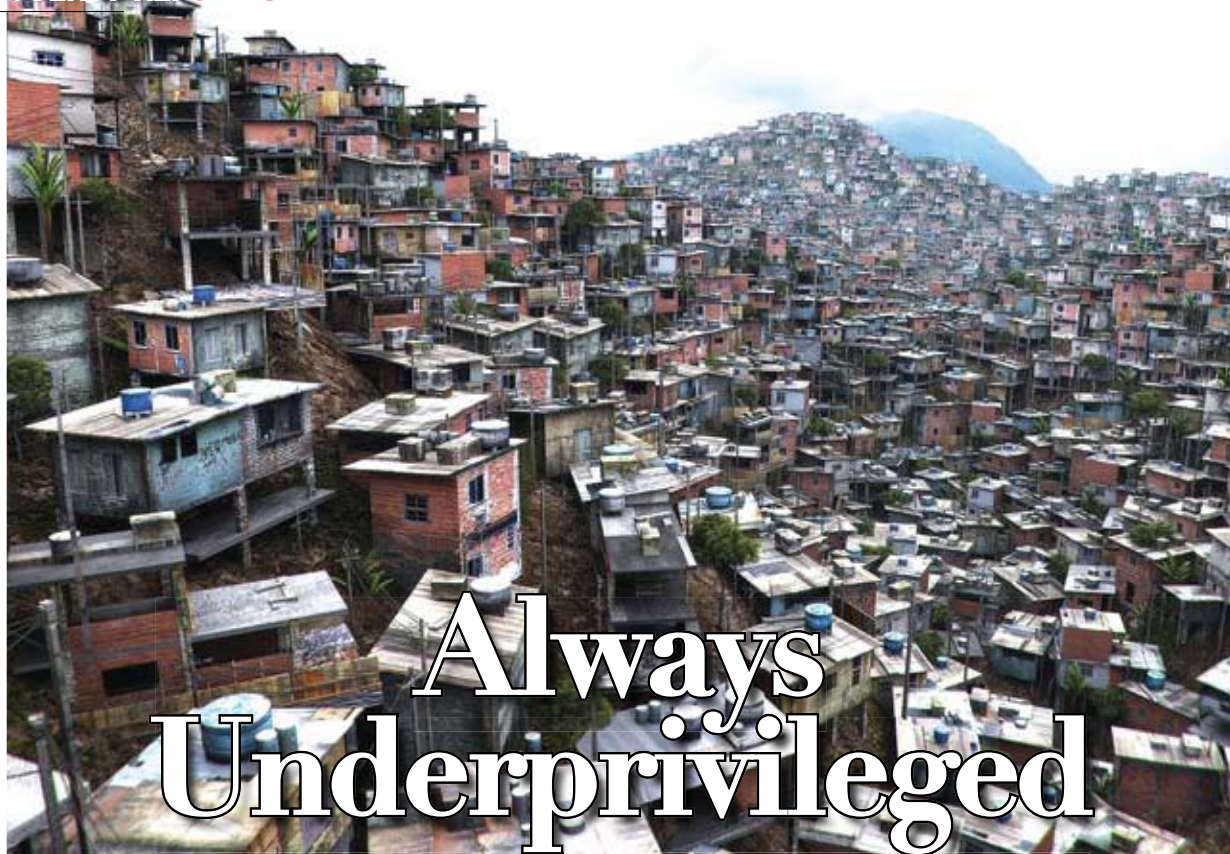
conscience. Hence, the most important future challenge for NATO will be to stay pro-active and non-reactive, and engage politically to find solutions to security threats before full blown conflicts develop.

Secondary to that, and yet equally significant, is the economic challenge due to the global recession. As NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen acknowledged in a joint press conference with the Prime Minister of Bulgaria, Martin Raykov, in March 2013, "I am concerned about the declining defence budgets. It is a matter of concern because we will need sufficient investments in defence if we are to address future security challenges effectively and continue to protect our populations effectively against new threats, like missile threats, like cyber threats, like terrorism." Hence, as Mr. Rasmussen went on to observe, pooling of resources, also known as Smart Defence, would offer a practical solution for NATO to tap into.

General Philip M. Breedlove, the Commander of U.S. European Command and NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) in the Turkish Policy Quarterly, 2014, also provides some astute analysis and insight regarding NATO's role: "Throughout the last 65 years of NATO history, the focus of the Alliance has evolved and adapted to its geopolitical environment; this is no different today. NATO's strength and capabilities are inherently based on forming, sustaining, equipping and training an adaptive force where the only constant in the geopolitical terrain is change. The global security climate continues to shift and evolve around us, demanding our constant vigilance".

In conclusion, at 65 years of age, NATO continues to strive to remain relevant in the geopolitical arena as an evolving, vibrant and committed organization. The NATO leadership clearly understands, and is fully committed to, the value of timely engagement, adaptability and preparedness in order to effectively manage emerging challenges in the realm of international relations. ■

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The SAARC nations may have utopian ideals of prosperity but the fact is that their masses continue to live in poverty.

By Majyd Aziz

“To me, a world without poverty means that every person would have the ability to take care of his or her own basic life needs. In such a world, nobody would die of hunger or suffer from malnutrition. This is the goal world leaders have been calling for, for decades, but have never set out any way of achieving it,” writes Muhammad Yunus, the founder of Grameen Bank, in his autobiography *Banker to the Poor*.

The idealistic belief of the Bangladeshi icon reflects the established opinion that an improved, committed and comprehensive poverty reduction strategy needs to be orchestrated to progress towards achieving this objective. The political and military hierarchies of the eight South Asian nations have to come out of their self-built rabbit holes and realize the impact that deprivation, abandonment and marginalization have had on a very large segment of their populations. If compared to regional blocs, such as ASEAN,

NAFTA, EU or even MERCOSUR, SAARC looks like a ramshackle shanty while the aforementioned blocs portray a palatial edifice with well-manicured gardens, ebullient lighting and residents having rosy cheeks.

The aim here is not to denigrate or belittle a region having 1.60 billion people but to highlight the glaring shortcomings and lack of opportunities that this population bulge suffers from. Income-based poverty alone is not the sole criterion to evaluate the multidimensional magnitude of poverty. Poverty has many facets that are recognized as essential components encompassing many structures of human insufficiencies. Some fundamental rights of each person are access to education, livable residential facilities, basic health services, safe drinking water, sanitation, fair and fast justice and a constitutionally defined right of enfranchisement. It is in this context that three significant points should be discussed:

1. The expenditure on development in the South Asian region continues to be very low despite the large populations.

Economic development is imperative for achieving any country's objectives of equality and participation in the comity of nations, for building up a formidable military force, for the health and welfare of citizens, for a workable and competent authority running the affairs of the country and for the preservation of national, cultural and ethnic history and traditions. Over the past decades, South Asian nations have suffered the ignominy of being in the center of external and domestic conflicts – whether hardcore secessionism or extremism or bitter political polarization. These conflicts often transcended all civil and social norms and at times result in the loss of people's faith in their governments as a whole.

SAARC countries today have surely achieved new heights of prosperity that are apparent in the collective

sense but the underlying discontent among the populace cannot be ignored. There is a growing feeling that the benefits of the formation of SAARC or attaining a democratic political dispensation or becoming stronger economic entities or attracting global attention are advantages that have not trickled down to the masses. The growing sense of lack of care and outright neglect has not abated.

A disturbing point lies in the procedure that allows elected representatives to obtain maximum political advantage through lobbying for what are usually referred to as pork-barrel projects. The mantra of 'you scratch my back, I scratch yours' has been institutionalized in developing countries too and this has resulted in a haphazard and injudicious resource allocation. Ergo, development in certain areas gets precedence over other areas or constituencies that are not in the good books of the ruling clique.

2. SAARC countries spend the bulk of their budgets on purchasing weapons. They are poor but their military spending is much more than that of developed countries.

A potent, well-trained and fully-equipped military establishment is always a nation's pride. It is imperative that national security is not sacrificed or put at risk just because there is rhetorical opposition from some quarters. Take Pakistan, for example. Notwithstanding the periodic imposition of a military-led government, the influence and authority of the military establishment has always remained paramount. International events and dependence on external largesse and financial support brought Pakistan to the frontline of the war against terror on the western borders even when the volatile eastern border required the deployment of substantial troops.

However, it is sensible for countries to determine what should be the equitable allocation for defence spending. It should be determined, in existing circumstances of each country, the optimum amount of military expenditure that will not destabilize the foundations of economic growth

and put at risk the prospects of raising the living standards of its population. Conventional wisdom dictates

Country	Population (Millions) 2012	Defence Allocation (US\$ Billions)
Afghanistan	30.00	11.500
Bangladesh	155.00	1.600
Bhutan	0.75	0.014
India	1237.00	46.000
Maldives	0.35	0.045
Nepal	27.00	0.210
Pakistan	180.00	7.000
Sri Lanka	21.00	1.500
Total	1652.10	67.869

that there must be the right mix of economic and military spending when formulating the national budget. The decision-makers have to be at level when determining high priorities of military requirements and long-term economic security. This is a vivid message for policymakers in SAARC capitals to absorb.

The time now is for SAARC's political and military hierarchies to stop playing the Curzonian 'Great Games' in the region and instead focus on bonding regional and economic cooperation. SAARC citizens want deliverance from the economic malaise and despondency. A glance at the population and military spending of SAARC countries points to the awesome allocation for defence.

3. What are civil society organizations, social movements and people's networks doing to fight the structural causes of poverty and social injustices in the region and beyond?

The altruism of a large number of socially-oriented organizations in SAARC working for the overall good of the region has been recognized as the achievement of a non-official Track II initiative. However, most NGOs are exclusive to their own countries and spearhead projects with resources from domestic support or through grants from international organizations. Primarily, these NGOs endeavor to offer pro-poor projects that are targeted to defined sectors or groups. SAARC can boast of the splendid work being done by the Edhi Foundation of Pakistan, the Indian Council for Social Welfare, BRAC of Bangladesh, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka, the Rural Women's

Network in Nepal (RUWON Nepal), the Tarayana Foundation in Bhutan, or the Welfare Association for the Development of Afghanistan (WADAN), to name a few.

The fact is that mainly due to the abdication of responsibilities by the governments, either due to bureaucratic or political compulsions or because of misallocation of financial resources or even lack of concern by decision-makers, the onus has been on the dedicated NGOs.

This is an unfortunate and incomprehensible aspect of governance in any country. Decades of rhetoric, corruption and ill-conceived policies and schemes have played havoc with the destiny of people living in the SAARC countries.

It is obligatory on the governments to prioritize their policies for the poor. The yoke of poverty can be removed through a concerted undertaking by all stakeholders. This is where the NGOs become the game changers. This is where civil society can have a deciding and powerful voice. This is where a radical shift is achieved in the quality of life of citizens. This connection is still missing due to vested interests and diversity of views.

In a nutshell, the poverty reduction strategy should be pro-poor in its most profound sense and should be designed to provide sustained economic growth, availability and affordability of social infrastructure and a transparent social safety net. Additionally, it should enable capacity building and empowerment of all income groups and segments of society. There is no need for a foreign-prepared recipe. All elements of the strategy should be indigenous and must be owned and accepted by everyone.

A poignant message for all political leaders are the words of Caliph Omar: "If a dog dies hungry on the banks of the River Euphrates, Omar will be responsible for dereliction of duty." Alas, this is 2014 and the SAARC political leadership leaves much to be desired. ■

The writer is former president of the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Music of the Times

Does sufi music have what it takes to keep
people's interest?

By Asra Khurshid

Sufism has been an integral part of the Pakistani culture and has impacted the way of life in a great way. Among other things that it has inspired, it has left a long-lasting effect on the music produced in this region, giving birth to a new genre. The inspiration for sufi music comes from the works of famous sufi poets such as Amir Khusro, Bulleh Shah, Khawaja Ghulam Farid and others.

Sufi music is all about emotions. It gives the universal message of peace and harmony and teaches love and devotion. This is the reason why people from completely different backgrounds are able to connect to sufi music even though they may not understand the language in which the message is conveyed.

The forms best suited for the expression of Sufism aesthetically are *qawwali* and *kafi*, with the *qawwali* being the most famous one. Legends like Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan played a vital role in spreading this form of music all over the world.

Some well-known Pakistani sufi singers are Abida Parveen, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Wazir Ali Shah, Sohrab Fakir, Sanam Marvi, Fareed Ayaz Qawwal



and Sain Zahoor..

Before its addition to mainstream music, sufi music was confined to rural areas and was mostly performed at shrines. Hardly a few people know the names of the sufi music performers who are world famous today. Their raw talent was discovered by music aficionados and their work was further refined. They were also given a platform to showcase their talent. Many such artistes like Sain Zahoor and Papu Sain are now world famous for their music.

The genre has gone through many changes over the years and has adapted to modern trends in music to stay relevant to the current times. That is why more and more people are listening to sufi music. The urban population, especially, seems more inclined towards it. The trend of having qawwali functions at wedding ceremonies is gaining popularity among the upper-class..

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the boom in the media industry gave young artists an opportunity to display their talent on a wider platform. With the increase in TV channels, new artists emerged. It was also the

time when some rock musicians experimented with sufi music, making it popular like it was never before. The rock band Junoon is credited with the amalgamation of rock music with sufi kalam. Their music became famous all over the world, even at places where Urdu or Punjabi is not understood.

Halfway through the decade, Coke Studio was launched. From combining qawwali with bhangra and ghazals with rock, this music has created a fusion of various popular musical genres and has gathered artistes from all over the country under one roof.

The popularity of sufi music is also increasing as it is being showcased at larger platforms such as the Coke Studio and Nescafe Basement. The fusion of sufi music with rock and pop music is attracting more and more people, especially the youth who can relate to this form of soulful and spiritual music. In addition to established sufi musicians, such shows are also giving a platform to new talent.

As a result of such experimentation, sufi music produced in Pakistan is gaining international popularity. Pakistani sufi musicians are performing at concerts and cultural programs

around the world. In 2010, Pakistani artistes Sain Zahoor, Rizwan-Muazzam and Pappu Sain opened the concert series at Ruhrtriennale – the biggest cultural festival of Europe held in the northwestern area of Germany. They mesmerized the audience with their enthralling performances in a three-hour concert.

But how long will the interest of the urban dwellers in sufi music last? In today's world, does sufi music have what it takes to keep the people attracted to it? Ventures like Coke Studio and Nescafe Basement may attract people towards this genre of music, but it is likely that their interest may be short-lived.

A counter argument given in this regard is that sufi music has existed in one form or another for centuries. It has retained its distinct identity despite all the fusions and experiments. Therefore, it can be safely said that sufi music is here to stay. However, it may keep changing its forms to stay relevant in this fast-changing world. **S**

The writer is a student at the Lahore School of Economics. She regularly writes on social issues.


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Turning the Tide

Music and the arts give a new message of hope to the people of Afghanistan and could become a harbinger of change in the coming times.

By Asna Ali

Throughout history, dictatorial regimes have sought much more than just to rule people. They desire control over every aspect of life, seek to disseminate only those opinions that align with their ideology and crush all dissent. To this end, freedom of expression is amongst the first things to be curbed in any country by totalitarian regimes. Accordingly, art, which in all its various forms, is a vehicle for self-expression, is also controlled, altered, destroyed and even banished.

Not surprisingly then, when the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan after years of civil war, music was altogether banned. There was no place for such outlandish notions in

a country torn apart by violence and in the firm grip of religious extremists. Artistic endeavors took a backseat in the face of a daily battle for survival.

It took another war to depose the Taliban's terrifyingly draconian government and a few more years after that to bring some semblance of normalcy to Afghanistan. Music began to re-emerge in the country in both traditional and modern forms, thanks to young artistes who sought to establish unique identities which had nothing to do with war or religion. They did this at great personal risk amid criticism and, at times, under threats to their lives.

Things were not always so in Afghanistan. Before the Soviet invasion

and its subsequent disastrous results, music was alive and well in the country. Its classical form had produced many renowned artists who had developed a certain style that was an amalgam of various influences from neighboring cultures. Pop music played on the radio and was also performed live.

But in the post-Taliban world, the cultural shift was so drastic that young artistes had to claw and fight to bring music out of the sidelines. These were tenacious youth, both men and women, who struggled then for artistic freedom against all odds and continue to do so even today. Their modes of expression reflect the changing times. Now Afghanistan has people who have become somewhat pioneers of



hip hop and rock music.

One such band is Kabul Dreams. It is, according to its members, the first rock band in Afghanistan. This is not the only unique quality it possesses. Its three members, Sulaymon Qardash, Siddique Ahmad and Mujtaba Habibi belong to different ethnic groups. They lived outside Afghanistan in three different countries – Pakistan, Iran and Uzbekistan – during the Taliban rule. This distance from authoritarianism provided them with exposure and opportunities. The band represents Afghanistan's diversity and the deep but not overpowering effect its neighbors have on it.

The music of Kabul Dreams has been described as similar to that of British indie rock bands; soft and soulful rather than harsh and loud. The band has been around since the late 2000s. Its members have worked hard to gain recognition both locally and internationally and their efforts are now paying off.

Instead of just playing at closed venues for small audiences, Kabul Dreams and other bands like it aim to connect with the Afghan youth and to impact the Afghan culture on a larger scale. Despite threats and general discouragement, they have persevered and played in front of audiences that have never heard live music before.

Through its very existence, Kabul Dreams gives a message of hope that is necessary to lift spirits and keep extremism at bay. They have developed a fan base that is growing by the day which shows that their countrymen are certainly not looking to a return to the old days of repression.

Despite the Taliban's continued presence, music festivals and live gigs continue to take place in Afghanistan through the combined efforts of many hardworking and motivated individuals. Sound Central, a festival held to showcase Afghan music, was a product of such hard work. Kabul Dreams and other bands like it took part in the event that allowed the locals to enjoy the music of the land. The festival also gave local musicians the opportunity to attend workshops and meet with bands from neighboring countries.

The problems that Kabul Dreams and other Afghan musicians face are not just security-related. When these musicians first appeared on the scene, there was just no infrastructure to support them. No studios and equipment to record music, no financial backers to sponsor their albums and no way to advertise and sell the music. There were also no music teachers and no art schools.

They started from scratch and used their own funds to promote their passion. Many reports suggest that their families were also critical of their activities and they had to keep their work underground in the initial stage. Things have changed a lot since those days. Music and art is being taught at least in some places. Bands have managed to produce albums and to tour abroad. They have been written about and discussed. They are seen as change agents and give hope to those who are worried about the future of the country once the U.S. forces leaves.

It is believed that because of the presence of alternative opinions and ways of life, the Taliban will have less of an influence on the minds of the Afghan people and will have to struggle much more intensely to

reintroduce their brand of beliefs.

This is a tenuous hope at best. The Taliban earlier left Afghan society in tatters and influenced it in more ways than one. Since being toppled from power, they have not slunk away to lick their wounds. Instead, they have regrouped and gained ground in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. This time, they launch attacks and terrorize civilians even more ferociously, as is seen in Pakistan.

In any event, the acceptance of music and other art forms is a reason for hope because extremism needs popular support to stay alive. The Taliban are successful not just because of their weapons and fighting ability. It is the popularity of their ideology and general support, whether vocal or silent, that has led to their becoming such a significant force. Despite the thousands of lives that have been lost due to their activities, they continue to find support and sympathizers.

The Taliban are not a force that can be overcome simply through military action. The need is to remove the support for the way of life they promote. By introducing more positives to replace the violent, authoritarian and misogynistic ideology propagated by the Taliban, Afghan musicians are pursuing their creative interests and are thus doing a great service to their country.

One can hope that Kabul Dreams and other musicians have inspired enough people and changed enough minds to ensure that a return to a life devoid of all entertainment and joy will not be immediately acceptable to the masses.

Music and creativity do not impact people the same way as guns and death threats. But their re-emergence and growth in Afghanistan against all odds shows how deep-rooted the need for self-expression is. It is a freedom striven for even in the harshest conditions and a kind of desire that eventually results in revolutions and overthrow of dictators. If it continues to be nurtured by the Afghan youth, it is very likely that they will be able to convince their fellow countrymen to adopt a new cultural direction so that the demons of the past are buried and their dreams for a better future come true. ■

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

Issues and Solutions

A recent report from the IFJ and SAMSAN examines the various pressing issues South Asian women journalists face and offers some answers.

Media is perhaps one of the most thriving industries in today's world. Rapid expansion in the industry has led to an increase in the demand for media persons. The growing reach of the media has blurred the concept of borders. These days, journalists travel to far-flung places to cover events of international importance and many have even sacrificed their lives in the line of duty.

There was a time when journalism was considered a men-only profession. Not anymore. Today, female journalists work alongside their male colleagues in the print and electronic media. In recent years, many western female journalists have covered wars in different parts of the world.

But sadly, despite all the progress, the working conditions remain precarious for women journalists in South Asia. The silver lining, in spite of all the difficulties, is that South Asian women are joining journalism in large numbers though they have to work in harsher conditions than their male counterparts.

Between February and July 2013, the South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSAN) – an alliance of journalists' trade unions, press freedom organizations and journalists in South Asia committed to working together to promote freedom of expression, freedom of association and journalists' rights in South Asian countries – organized a series of conferences in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Conducted as part of the IFJ-SAMSAN project on gender equality, the aim of the initiative was to highlight the pressing issues women journalists face and the need to develop a strong network whereby women journalists in South Asia can work together and organize themselves around common causes and concerns.

Some common problems reported by the journalists of all South Asian countries that participated in this

project were discrimination in the types of work assigned to them, promotional opportunities, sexual harassment, lack of maternity benefits and poor support conditions for working mothers. But problems vary from country to country. In Afghanistan, for example, there is no safety for women journalists or guarantee for their lives, especially if they cover and publicize critical issues like corruption or sexual violence against women.

Afghanistan presents a chilling reminder of the truly precarious status of women journalists in South Asia. Afghanistan's media opened up after 2006 and the country now has around 100 radio stations, at least 75 television stations and scores of news publications. According to information from the Afghan Ministry of Information and Culture, women comprise around 1500 of the country's 10,000 journalists.

However, for Afghan women who wish to join journalism, the first obstacle is often their own family as cultural taboos are strong in Afghan society. They also have to face social restrictions and the terror of warlords. Reporting is a highly dangerous field for women journalists and they are often discouraged to go out on assignments. The lack of security for women journalists has forced a large number of women to leave the profession. Since 2003, Afghanistan has lost at least five women journalists but their cases have not been investigated.

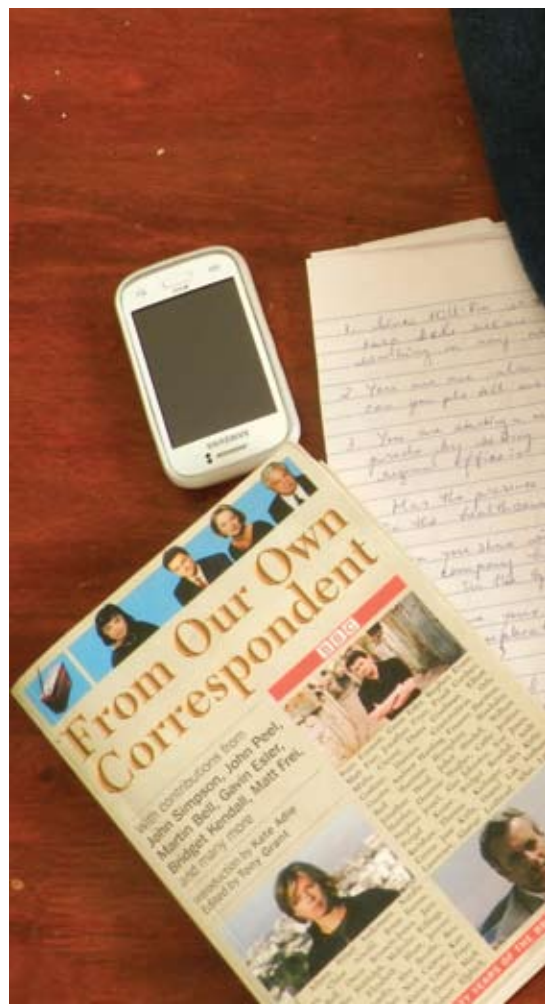
The situation is not so gloomy in Bangladesh where women journalists have held a prominent place. But there is little recognition of their issues and their struggles. Around 300 female journalists are working in Bangladesh but there are very few women at the policy-making level. Although female reporters are working on all types of news beats such as energy, economic, political, parliament, crime, sports and elections, they often face disparities in work assignments.

Fundamentalist forces like the

Hefajat-e-Islam pose a great threat to women journalists. Women have been attacked and ridiculed while covering public meetings and stopped from reporting in the field. A journalist Nadia Sharmeen was brutally attacked when she was covering a Hefajat meeting.

Bhutan is a much better country for women journalists. Until 2008, there were very few newspapers in the country but now there are 12. With the growth in media outlets, the number of women journalists has also increased. The general working conditions of both male and female journalists in the country are at par. Women are paid equal or even better wages than their male counterparts.

In India, women journalists are



far more visible, especially in the broadcast media, but the recruitment of women in smaller cities is still very low, partly because of poor pay and working conditions. Increasing criminalization and militarization also affects women and limits their opportunities. There have been several high profile instances of sexual harassment in the workplace but institutional mechanisms and adherence to court orders on dealing with these cases are absent.

In Nepal, women journalists are a little more visible now, especially in capital Kathmandu but they are still struggling with recruitment, challenging assignments and safety. For women from hill districts or from the Terai areas (the plains) of Nepal, the situation is much more precarious. Here, social attitudes coupled with a complete lack of recognition and much less support from the media houses make recruitment and work assignments a daily challenge. Sexual harassment is also widely prevalent, though women hardly speak openly about it.

In Pakistan, women journalists are at risk of losing jobs because of

poor security and low recruitment. In areas like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkwa, very few women are represented in the media. Those who are working are given stereotyped beats though a few have ventured into covering sports, politics and business. But for many it is still a struggle and they are regularly subjected to comments or barbs that they should be devoting their time to their families, not their careers. Women journalists in Pakistan are rarely seen as serious journalists and there is a lack of trust in their abilities by employers who will choose a man to cover an important issue.

There were also complaints of sexual harassment. With harassment being the norm, complaining is too often seen as making a big deal out of nothing. Women are expected to be silent on these issues. In job interviews, they are quizzed on their marital status or plans to have children and many women felt discriminated against because of this attitude.

There are very few women in journalists unions in Pakistan. Only 200 of the 14,000 members of the leading union of journalists, the PFUJ,

are women. Women are rarely voted in to positions of authority despite being well-represented in media houses and press clubs.

The number of women journalists in Sri Lanka has increased over the years and some of them are indeed holding senior editorial positions in the news media. However, there is an ongoing struggle to ensure better coverage for women and to create an environment conducive to women professionals.

As a country that has been in a conflict for 30 years, there was little or no safety training for women journalists, who often relied on sheer common sense to survive. Now the threats are silent but as lethal as the bombs that came earlier. In just a few months, two women journalists – senior editors of leading Sri Lankan publications – were forced to leave the country after receiving threats and attacks. They were not targeted as women, but as journalists who wrote on various issues that proved problematic to the powers-that-be.

For women journalists in Tamil media, the struggle is manifold as they have little or no support systems. Attrition rates are high and women often leave seemingly without any reason. This has given rise to suspicion that sexual harassment could be a cause.

The roundtables and the gender networking conference discussed strategies and campaigns that could address the issues faced by women in South Asia. The conference also put forward a common Gender Charter that clearly sets out minimum standards, principles and actions needed to underpin gender equity in media and outlined a practical program of action to support equality in media workplaces, journalist organizations and the media itself. Some major points cover gender equality in the media, the right to expect equal access, equality of opportunity, equal rights for journalists as parents, a fair portrayal of women and gender equality and participation of women in unions and associations.

Structural reforms in the overall media industry – and particularly in journalists' unions – are needed to improve the working conditions for women journalists in the region. There is also a need to ensure that women are properly represented in the unions' governing bodies. **S**



Bangladesh may be a small country but it suffers from a wide range of serious problems, one of them being the rising unemployment rate. According to a recent survey, around 47 percent of Bangladesh's educated youth are jobless, an eventuality foretold by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2012.

Back then, the ILO had warned Bangladesh that with a 3.7 percent rate of unemployment, it ranked 12th among the top 20 countries where joblessness was rising steadily. Today, the situation has worsened to alarming proportions. Bangladesh now stands second to Afghanistan as far as unemployment is concerned and the ILO predicts that at this rate,

unemployment could soar to 60 million by 2015.

While unemployment has been a longstanding problem in Bangladesh, it must be addressed and dealt with on a long-term basis. Reports indicate that some 2.7 million young people enter the job market every year but out of them only 0.7 million are able to find work. The number of the 'disguised

The Job Hunt

In Bangladesh, approximately 2.7 million young people enter the job market every year. Out of them, only 0.7 million are able to find work.

By Samina Wahid



unemployed' – an economic term used to denote underemployed people or those employed to a degree less than their potential – is about 32 percent.

These alarming figures are indicative of an underlying problem that there are many 'parasites' – for lack of a better word – within the population. Employed individuals make a valuable contribution to the economy via productive activities while consuming from it at the same time. Unemployed people, on the other hand, only live off the economy or their families and society. They are an absolute burden on the state. In addition to being a liability in the economic sense, they are considered a source of tension and turmoil politically and socially. The link between unemployment and crime is also obvious.

It is imperative therefore that the Bangladeshi government addresses the unemployment issue before it takes a turn for the worse. The lack of proper

investment has made a serious dent in the job market in Bangladesh. It is here that the government needs to step in and identify the factors responsible so that the overall investment climate can improve. Ideally, this should include infrastructure development and provision of resources so that potential investors are attracted. It is also important to take stock of the energy crisis and provide sustainable, long-term solutions so that the confidence of investors increases. Long-term political stability must be the priority of the government.

Some other imperatives would be lowering of the interest rate on borrowings, upgradation of the existing infrastructures to make it supportive of enterprising ventures, fiscal policies that create a level playing field for local entrepreneurs against foreign competitors and fiscal incentives such as tax reduction and tax exemption, etc. The government must take into account these factors so that economic activity in the country can pick up. There is also a need for clarity in policies being pursued to create employment opportunities.

New enterprises may have the capacity to absorb the unemployed, but capital-intensive enterprises will employ a smaller number of workers than labor-intensive ones which will understandably employ a greater number of workers. Thus, there is also a need for enterprises with a labor-intensive character to be identified and encouraged.

The government can also reduce unemployment by establishing vocational training institutions to train those who are unemployed. This will help them take up jobs to sustain themselves till the time they are able to find work more suited to their needs. The responsibility of setting up such institutions lies solely with the government because the private sector has, to date, not shown any interest in it.

In this regard, the government's role as a skill trainer is very important. Furthermore, returns on this investment will be visible once the unemployed people in question find steady jobs through which they can pay off their government loans (that they would receive at the time of training).

Some of these projects are already operational, their objective being to create employment by training and

encouraging small business owners and entrepreneurs. For example, there is the Youth Training Program that aims at creating a skilled workforce in the country.

Similarly, the women development ministry has training centers for women to encourage self-employment while the Bangladesh Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) is trying to provide jobs to all those who want to work outside Bangladesh.

These projects are the result of the vision of the Ministry of Labor and Employment that aims at reducing poverty through employment and human resource development by maintaining cordial industrial relations and connections between workers and employers.

Its goal is to create employment opportunities, generate semi-skilled and skilled manpower and enhance productivity in factories by creating a friendly environment between workers and employers. Alongside, are the ministry's claims about ensuring welfare of workers in different industrial areas while implementing labor laws and the enforcement of minimum wage.

While these projects may look good on paper, they have not been able to produce the desired results. The government needs to go the extra mile by taking up more such endeavors and solving problems that cause unemployment rather than applying cosmetic measures and providing temporary fixes.

The fact is that rising unemployment is greatly damaging the economy and society itself because the unemployed youth can easily fall prey to drugs and violence. However, they can prove to be a useful asset if they are trained in accordance with the requirements of the job market, both in and outside Bangladesh.

The country's policymakers must devise strategies to gain maximum benefit from the burgeoning youth population. This means a fundamental shift in educational content and enrolment patterns. The overarching need is to make critical investments in education, research, technology and development with adequate policy support for assured job creation. **S**

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



On March 4, the Sri Lankan Navy claimed that it had apprehended 32 Indian fishermen who were illegally fishing in Sri Lankan territory. Only a few months ago, India and Sri Lanka had agreed to work together to combat poaching. Ships belonging to Indian fishermen allegedly encroached on Sri Lankan waters in the Palk Bay and caught fish and shrimps that belonged to Sri Lanka. The quantity of fish caught by Indian vessels is so huge that it has

threatened marine life in Mannar, Kilinochchi and Jaffna.

To make matters worse, the use of advanced fishing methods by Indian fishermen is devastating marine resources and destroying the fragile ecosystem. Equipped with powerful engines, Indian ships practice bottom trawling. It involves two boats using drag nets that sweep the ocean bed, which results in killing many marine creatures that are found in the ocean depth. This has damaged the ecosystem

and there is also scarcity of fish and shrimps in the waters. Bottom trawling is regarded as an unfavorable practice all over the world for its devastating effects on marine life. According to some reports, it has completely exhausted fish stocks in Indian waters. This is why the Indian fishermen are now raiding Sri Lankan waters.

According to the World Wildlife Fund, the use of bottom trawls is now widespread. In an experiment off Alaska, 55 percent of the coldwater



The Shrimp War

Indian fishermen illegally poaching in Sri Lankan waters are harming the Lankan fishing industry as well as marine life.

By Asma Siddiqui

coral damaged by one pass of a trawl had not recovered a year later. When covered with marine life, these seabed areas provide a rich habitat for juvenile fish, shrimp, cuttle fish and other species. This practice can be likened to removing a forest, as eradicating the corals decreases the area available for marine species to live and thrive in.

Fishing is a major source of livelihood for the Tamils who live in the north of Sri Lanka. Since the war ended in 2009, they have been given the freedom to fish in Sri Lankan waters without any restrictions and limitations. During the war, they were allowed to go only one kilometer into the sea because of regular clashes between the LTTE and the Navy. Ever since the war ended, the government has given them more fishing rights, new boats and improved access to other parts of the island.

According to the Xinhua News Agency, the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Minister of Sri Lanka Dr. Rajitha Senarathne has said that the country's fishing industry loses an estimated U.S. 730 million worth of fish due to illegal poaching of South Indian fishermen. For 2013, the Sri Lankan government had fixed a target of U.S.\$ 500 million in revenue, but it had to keep its expectations low due to significant losses from poaching. In total, Indian fishermen poach at least 65 million kilograms of fish every year.

The loss of a major revenue source for Sri Lanka has angered local fishermen who throw stones at Indian poachers and even handcuff and chain Indian fishermen if they are caught. This maritime confrontation has also turned into a major diplomatic row between the two countries.

India feels it has done a lot for Sri Lanka, even ceding the disputed Kachchativu Island in the 1970s to its small neighbor. The Indians are unhappy with the ill treatment of its fishermen in custody of Lankan

authorities. India has also accused Sri Lanka of torturing and even killing Indian fishermen.

The killing and arrest of Indian fishermen by Sri Lanka is not a recent phenomenon. During the Sri Lankan civil war, when clashes took place between the fighters of the rebel LTTE and the Lankan Navy, hundreds of Indian fishermen were caught in the crossfire or were killed by the Sri Lankan Navy on suspicion of being Tamil Tigers or smuggling goods for them. Observers say that the Sri Lankan Navy has always dealt with Indian fishermen rather brutally, maltreating them and even killing them despite the fact that their crime – violation of maritime boundaries – was not so grave. While this may be true, the Indian government has done little to address the problems of Indian fishermen. It has often resorted to the demands of the powerful trawler lobby.

Many proposals have been made from time to time to resolve the issue, including a proposal to lease the Kachchativu Island in perpetuity or on the basis of reciprocal licensing. Unfortunately, the government of Tamil Nadu as well as the central Indian government did not pursue it vigorously. Now it is time for concerted action. For peaceful bilateral relations and well being of fishermen, India must take some actions, including sensitizing Indian fishermen about the need for staying within Indian waters. Another solution can be granting of licenses to Indian fishermen to fish in Sri Lankan waters in specified areas or on specified days and vice versa.

Hundreds of fishermen in both India and Sri Lanka are dependent on fishing as it is their only source of income. The issue is delicate and must be dealt with utmost care, keeping in mind the impact it can have on Indo-Lanka relations. The authorities in both countries must act quickly and decisively. If the issue is not resolved soon, it will continue to affect the Indo-Lankan relationship, apart from affecting the lives and livelihoods of fishermen in both countries. ■

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



Wiping Off a Rich Past

Old houses are giving way to modern buildings in the capital city of Bhutan, leading to an obliteration of the country's rich heritage.

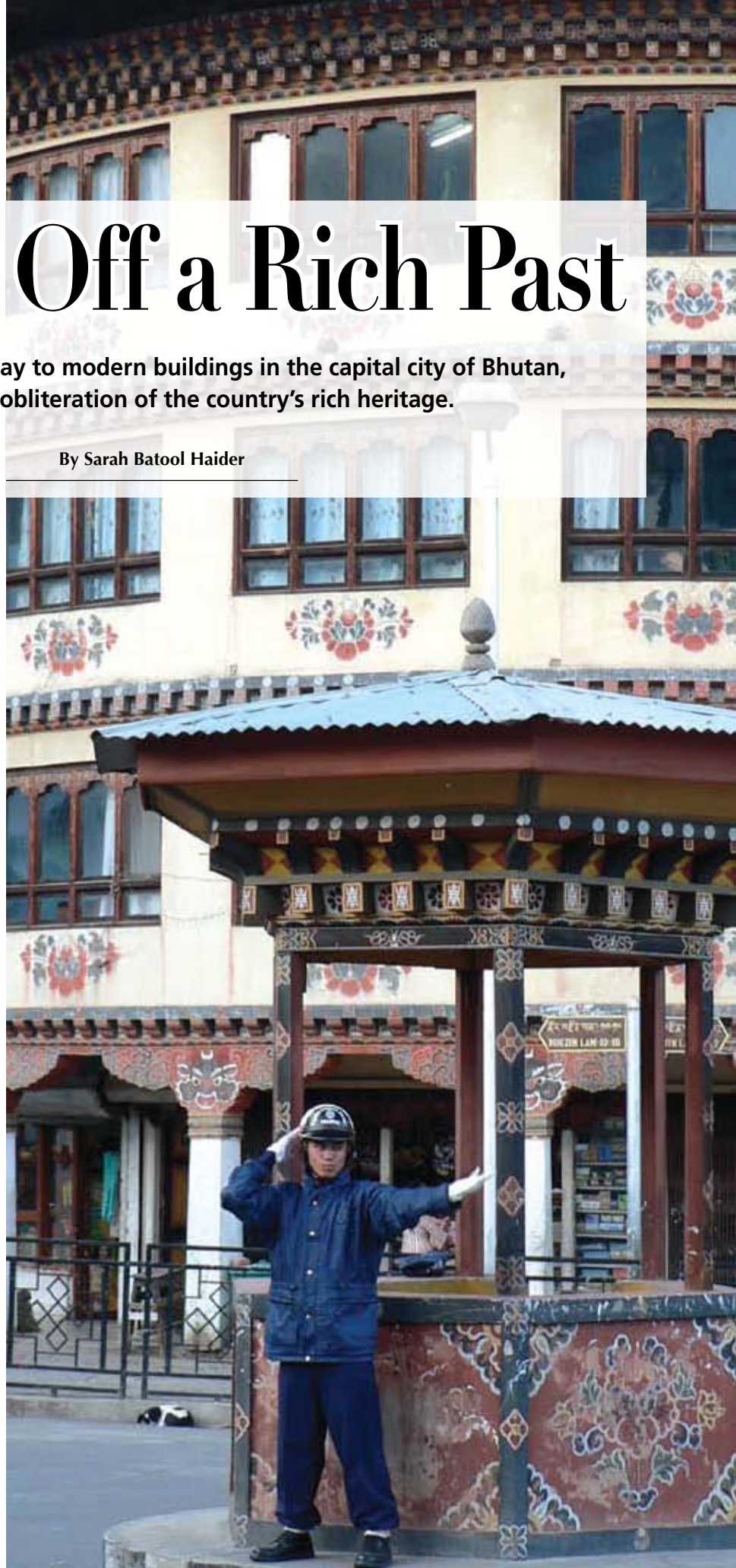
By Sarah Batool Haider

Throughout the world, the construction of high-rise buildings and similar modern structures is considered a part of development. This especially holds true for developing countries where modern construction is deemed important by the establishment and people alike in order to keep pace with the fast-evolving world. Although modern buildings, particularly residential ones, give a sense of progressiveness to inhabitants, their construction sometimes leads to problems. One of the most pressing problems that modern-day construction poses is the demolition of historical buildings.

For instance, in historically rich places such as Thimphu, the fast-developing capital of Bhutan, traditional houses are rapidly being replaced by modern buildings. Under the 10th Five Year Plan, the government of Bhutan planned to boost the socio-economic development of the country by constructing more advanced, innovative and environment-friendly buildings. This was done to showcase Bhutan as a modern society and also to strengthen the local construction industry by creating more jobs.

Though it was a positive step taken by the government, the construction drive resulted in wiping off the map many historical buildings. Owing to the recent residential construction boom in Bhutan, the traditional style and construction practices have sharply declined, posing a threat to the country's centuries-old legacy.

The traditionally designed buildings in Thimphu contribute a lot to the rich heritage of the country. Surrounded by exquisiteness and





a symbolic aura, they have always attracted a large number of tourists from across the globe. Sadly, however, over the last few years, there are hardly any traditional houses left for tourists to see in Thimphu. This is because a lot of old buildings in the city have been dismantled and replaced by tall, concrete structures. Though the buildings were a part of Bhutan's ancient culture, the residents of the city did not take much notice of the rapid changes and quickly became accustomed to the new buildings.

Apart from paving the way for modern buildings, the main reason why traditional houses in Thimphu were demolished was that the old buildings were not a good source of rental income for their owners. Therefore, more and more people preferred concrete buildings over traditional houses.

Earlier, any tourist visiting Thimphu would be mesmerized by the landscape filled with unique, traditional Bhutanese houses but now the city is filled with concrete structures. Centuries-old buildings such as Thromde in Changjiji and Babesa, which fall in the category of heritage sites, are among the few remaining historical structures in the country.

Traditional buildings in Bhutan are a blend of diverse characteristics. For instance, one of the defining features of Bhutanese architecture is that over the years, the style of construction has remained unchanged. This lends a sense of timelessness to the buildings and though the style dates back to hundreds of years, the existing structures appears completely modern to foreigners.

Similarly, since the building designs are ancient, there is no trace of the architects who crafted these buildings. This anonymity lends Bhutanese edifices some unique attributes that one cannot find in any other culture.

Another distinguishing trait of traditional Bhutanese architecture is the spiritualism that is inherent in all aspects of construction. All major construction phases – from laying the foundation stone to setting framed doors to the erection of prefabricated walls and ceilings, etc. – are preceded

by particular rites and rituals.

Unlike other countries, traditional buildings in Bhutan are unique because they are built without any building plans. Traditions were passed on verbally from generations to generations. In the past, the constructor had the final structure of the building in his mind. Consequently, the exaggerated plans that are commonly used in western cultures and which do not portray the architectural quality of a building but serve speculation purposes, became inapplicable to Bhutan. Moreover, traditional architecture is mainly based on an archetypical design with little local variations. Its simple but attractive appearance emerged mainly from natural needs and purposes without any unnecessary accessories and imitations.

All these features of Bhutanese architecture give rise to the idea that technological improvements and development cannot necessarily replace ancient culture or improve the quality of life.

Bhutan is one of the very few countries that have successfully held fast to its age-old traditions which have become a living reality for its people instead of a distant past. It is, indeed, sad to note that because of modern construction trends that took Bhutan by storm, the country has failed to protect its historical buildings which added to its rich heritage. Although modern construction is inevitable and there would be a need for more houses to accommodate the growing population, the government of Bhutan should take adequate measures to preserve its historical buildings. This is because historical edifices exhibit the rich traditional heritage of Bhutan and also serve as a reminder of the past.

It is extremely important to preserve the historical buildings in a city because they make its inhabitants understand their past. Such buildings make people feel more connected to their cultural and traditional past. Additionally, preserving and restoring historical buildings can allow people to comprehend how the past can shape the future. ■

The writer is a Karachi-based journalist.



King

Most people who are familiar with Khushwant Singh's name know him as a bawdy raconteur. The famous Indian writer, who passed away at the age of 99, was much more than that. In the words of Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, he was "a journalist, editor, historian and author." Singh also served as a diplomat. It is indeed true that despite his many traits and a multi-faceted personality, his main claim to fame was his raunchy jokes that he'd crack without giving two hoots about his surroundings.

Singh was born in 1915 to a prosperous business family in Hadali, a village in the Thar Desert which is now a part of Pakistan. He was educated in Delhi, Lahore and London. At the time of Partition, Singh was working as a lawyer in Lahore and chose India as his new homeland.

But he always remained his country's most strong critic. In one of his essays, he wrote, "Why am I an Indian? I did not have any choice: I was born one. If the good Lord had consulted me on the subject I might have chosen a country more affluent, less crowded, less censorious in matters of food and drink, unconcerned with personal equations and free of religious bigotry."

In 1947, he entered the Indian Foreign Service and started as the information officer of the government of India in Toronto. He then served as press attaché and public officer for

most famous weekly news magazine. He worked as the *Weekly's* editor for nine years and the magazine's circulation suffered a huge drop in readership when he left it.

Although Singh wrote a number of books, his most famous and widely read book was *'Train to Pakistan'* – a chilling novel about the 1947 Partition. He used the book to force Indians into looking at the horrors of their past. Describing the partition as a "poison injected into the Indian soul", Singh believed that "people should know this thing happened." "It did happen. It can happen again."

He continued to write about communal violence and religious bigotry. He protested against the 1984 pogrom against the Sikhs, the 1992 demolition of the Babri Mosque by Hindu extremists and the 2002 Gujarat massacre. He described India's history of retaliatory violence as "you kill my

returned a high government award, the Padma Bhushan, in protest.

Singh was a prolific writer and wrote more than 100 books and countless newspaper columns, including the famous column 'With Malice Towards One And All'. He was often called a womanizer and enjoyed his reputation of being a philanderer. But his philandering fame was mainly self-cultivated and he looked after his wife devotedly until she died of Alzheimer's disease in her mid-80s.

Although Singh called himself an agnostic, he wrote bulky volumes on the history of Sikhs, Ranjit Singh and the Gadarites. His *'A History of the Sikhs'* is a truly remarkable volume of work. He wasn't traditional but he was a true Sikh who emphasized how crucial it is to know your past.

After his wife's death, Khushwant Singh had become obsessed with the concept of death. He would often

Leer Bows Out

Khushwant Singh enlightened and outraged his readers in equal measure with his sharp insights, biting observations and raunchy humor.

the Indian High Commission for four years in London and Ottawa. In 1951 he joined the All India Radio as a journalist. Between 1954 and 1956 he worked with UNESCO in Paris. From 1956, he turned to editorial services. He edited the newsweekly, *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and two major Indian newspapers - *The National Herald* and the *Hindustan Times*.

In fact, Singh is credited with turning around *The Illustrated Weekly* during his tenure and making it India's

dog, I kill your cat. It's a childish and bloody game, and it can't go on."

But he took a U-turn when Indira Gandhi declared emergency rule in 1975, suspending the constitution, jailing political dissidents and muzzling the press. He supported the emergency and said it would provide a brief respite from the political turmoil of the time. However, when Indira Gandhi ordered troops to storm the Golden Temple, Sikhism's holiest shrine, Singh reviewed his stance and

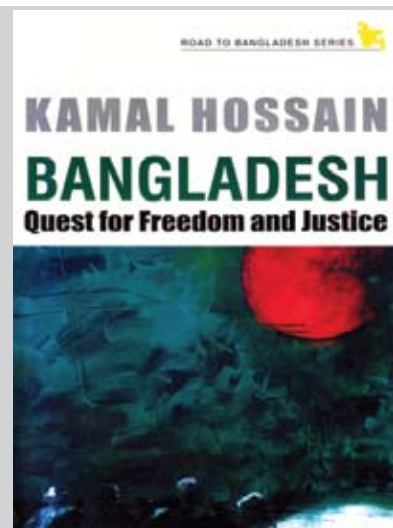
talk about it and had even written his epitaph. No one and nothing can summarize Singh's personality in a better manner than his own words: **S**

*Here lies one who spared neither
man nor God;
Waste not your tears on him,
he was a sod;
Writing nasty things he regarded
as great fun;
Thank the Lord he is dead,
this son of a gun.*

Rising to the Challenge

Book Title: Bangladesh:
Quest For Freedom
and Justice
Author: Kamal Hossain
Publisher: Oxford University
Press
Pages: 316, Hardback
Price: Rs.895
ISBN-13: 9780199068531

Reviewed by Taha Kehar



Kamal Hossain's *Bangladesh: Quest for Freedom and Justice* has been billed as a shrewd commentary on state formation in Bangladesh after its independence from Pakistan. The book, however, goes beyond its remit and presents an in-depth assessment of Pakistan's political landscape in the two decades after it gained independence from India in 1947.

It is easy to condemn history textbooks for fabricating details and overstating the impact of key political events. Hossain's historical analysis of the people of Bangladesh's struggle for justice and political recognition is different from the glut of biased textbooks. It chronicles the effects of key political developments through the lens of the author's personal struggle with the political system.

Kamal Hossain is a senior advocate in the Supreme Court of Bangladesh and has been actively involved in various phases of the country's struggle for democracy and justice. When Ayub Khan imposed martial law, he vociferously defended the freedom of the press and acted as one of the counsels for the victims of the Agartala Conspiracy case. Hossain's involvement with the Awami League's team at the Round Table Conference and his association with General Yahya Khan in 1971 provided him with a holistic view of the 1971 War. Following the independence of Bangladesh, Kamal Hossain served as minister of law, chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee and

minister of foreign affairs.

Owing to his concerted efforts to stabilize Bangladesh's democracy through efficient state-building, Hossain has developed a fairly comprehensive opinion of the country's quest for justice and stability. This book serves both as both an eyewitness account and an objective depiction of the major historical incidents.

The initial chapters of the book highlight the contribution of the 'people of Bangladesh' to the independence movement and, consequently, the creation of a new state. Interestingly, these sections portray the key milestones in Pakistan's history from the perspective of the Bengalis. As a result, the readers may find that the book challenges the majoritarian view and draws attention to the predicament faced by the Bengalis in Pakistan. Hossain's account provides a heart-wrenching reminder of a conflict that tore the nation apart in 1971 and explains its causes and effects. Historical facts presented in this book are not exposés that will surprise the reader. They seem to have found a niche in mainstream fiction such as Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* and have become a firmly entrenched – if not an altogether embarrassing – feature of Pakistan's history. Without providing this historical background, the author would have failed to observe the crux of the problem: the ruthless struggle for identity in a democratic society.

Following the 1971 war, Pakistan's east wing was now Bangladesh,

a country in its own right. There were numerous challenges that had to be reckoned with. Bangladesh required efficient state apparatuses, a constitution, a viable foreign policy and widespread international recognition. Hossain has skillfully addressed these challenges by exploring the sequence of events involved in the early nation-building process.

State apparatuses available to Bangladesh during the time of its creation were inadequate to help the fledgling country develop a political identity. The resources and expertise inherited from Pakistan merely represented the infrastructure of what was once a "weak provincial government". As a result, a series of alternative strategies for success had to be developed.

Kamal Hossain's account evaluates the contribution of the government in mitigating the pressures of managing a new state. The book adopts a fairly neutral and balanced approach to its subject matter. It does not seek to sugarcoat Bangladesh's achievements in the initial phase. To the contrary, it serves to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the government's approach to addressing Bangladesh's problems. For instance, the author categorically states that even though positive steps were taken to mitigate the risks to Bangladesh's fragile economy, the government did not have control over ecological factors such as floods and drought. This led to a reduction in crop cultivation and produced a massive economic

crisis which undermined the goal of democracy and justice. Despite these setbacks, public administrators expressed the desire to rise to the challenge and move the country in the right direction.

The author has aptly described a constitution as the 'autobiography of a nation'. Through a series of facts and personal anecdotes, Hossain considers how the overall structural framework of the constitution was established. Moreover, a careful examination of mechanisms proposed to give the constitution a democratic character has also been included. This offers an interesting historical overview of the genesis of Bangladesh's legal history.

While Bangladesh's struggle to maintain an internal commitment to democratic values posed a huge challenge, issues such as foreign policy and the new country's representation in the United Nation formed the crux of its international recognition. In the last five chapters, Hossain highlights the major pitfalls involved in Bangladesh's initial efforts to build good relations with its neighbors – especially India and Pakistan. Written in an objective

Hossain's account provides a heart-wrenching reminder of a conflict that tore the Bangladeshi nation apart in 1971 and explains its causes and effects. Historical facts presented in the book are not exposés that will surprise the reader.


and intriguing manner, the chapters offer a clear testament to the fact that a country's ability to develop sound foreign relations strongly influences its stability and executive competence.

Despite the initial veto from China over Bangladesh's entry into the United Nation, Hossain has described Bangladesh's introduction to the world assembly as 'befitting'. Interestingly, this observation appears to be carefully interspersed with the overall purpose of the book. By concluding this section on an optimistic note, the author shows that independence offers

a means to realize the importance of democracy.

In order to develop a system in Bangladesh that favors the interests of the community and avoids the ruthless struggle for political power, it is important to ascribe greater meaning to the fundamental purposes of Bangladesh's liberation movement. Only then can the quest for justice and freedom be realized. **S**

The writer is a poet and author. He is currently pursuing a degree in Law at the SOAS.



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There Are No Free Lunches!

First it was the Saudi Crown Prince Salman bin Abdul Aziz who visited Pakistan. He was soon followed by Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa bin Salman al Khalifa. Earlier, the Kuwaiti prime minister had also visited Pakistan. When Saudi Arabia made a 'gift' of about \$1.5 billion to Pakistan, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's Advisor on Foreign Affairs, Sartaj Aziz said it was a gift for the people of Pakistan and came without conditions. The visit by the Bahraini king was apparently aimed at upgrading trade and investment links but the Bahrainis appeared more interested in enhancing defense ties with Pakistan.

There was speculation that the Saudis and Bahrainis wanted Pakistani troops to fight in Syria but Pakistan Foreign Ministry spokesperson Tasnim Aslam said that Pakistan would not send troops to Syria nor arm the rebels there. It is a fact though that in 2011 private Pakistani security forces went to Bahrain to help put down a popular uprising there.

So what was the 'real' reason behind all this sudden love for Pakistan? After all, there are no free lunches.



RAWALPINDI: Prime Nawaz Sharif holds a meeting with King Hamad bin Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa of Bahrain during the latter's visit to the Joint Services Headquarters along with Defence Minister Khawaja Asif and the services chiefs.

Ties with Bahrain based on mutual trust, says PM

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said here on Tuesday that Pakistan and Bahrain enjoyed close and cordial relations based on mutual trust and understanding.

Welcoming King Hamad bin Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa at the PM House, he said the institutional framework of political consultation between the foreign ministries of the two countries provided a useful mechanism to review relations.

"We would deeply appreciate Bahraini support for early finalisation of a free trade agreement between Pakistan and the Gulf Cooperation Council," he said.

The prime minister said the Pakistani community residing in Bahrain served as a bridge between the two countries and had played a positive role in the development of Bahrain as well as contributed to Pakistan's economy.

Pakistan had skilled manpower which could play their role in different economic sectors of Bahrain, he added.

Earlier, on his arrival here on a three-day official visit, the leader of Bahrain was accorded a warm welcome by the prime minister and members of his cabinet at the Nur Khan Airbase.

The services chiefs and Punjab Chief Minister Mian Shahbaz Sharif were also present on the occasion. A contingent

of the three services presented a guard of honour.

The two countries signed six documents relating to cooperation in various sectors, including promotion and protection of investment, cooperation in food security, an air services agreement, cooperation between interior ministries, and cooperation in the fields of power and water.

Delegations of both countries also met under the leadership of the prime minister and the Bahrain king.

Pakistan's delegation included Minister for Water and Power Khawaja Mohammad Asif, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal, Prime Minister's Adviser on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz and Special Assistant Tariq Fatemi. Bahrain's delegation comprised Deputy Prime Minister Shaikh Mohammad bin Mubarak bin Hamad Al Khalifa; Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Dhahrani, Chairman of the House of Representatives; Ali bin Saleh, Chairman of Shura Council; Lt Gen Shaikh Muhammad bin Isa Al Khalifa and Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed bin Salman Al Khalifa.

Later, Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif hosted a dinner in honour of the visiting delegation.



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