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July 2014

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Reg. ss-973

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CORRUPTION **IN SOUTH ASIA**

South Asia has earned the dubious distinction of being the most corrupt region in the world. If this is true, what are the South Asian countries doing about it?



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SOUTHASIA

JULY 2014

VOL.18 ISSUE 7

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SouthAsia is published every month
 by Syed Jawaid Iqbal for and on behalf of
JAWZ Communications (Pvt.) Ltd.
 and printed by Union Graphics, Karachi.

Views expressed by the contributors are
 not necessarily shared by the editors.

Published since 1977 as *Thirdworld*, the magazine
 was re-launched in 1997 as *SouthAsia*.

Backing the Operation

The Pakistan Army has, after much deliberation, launched a full-scale offensive in North Waziristan under the name of Operation Zarb-e-Azb. According to reports, the operation should have taken place in 2010 or 2011, as per advice of Pakistan Army commanders, but was held back because of the indecisiveness of the then Pakistan Army Chief, Gen. Pervez Kiani. However, once the combined ground and air offensive was launched in June 2014, there was no turning back. While the government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was said to be on board, after failure of talks between the Pakistan government and the terrorists, the decision to launch the operation was taken on the initiative of the Pakistan Army, supported by the Pakistan Air Force.

The operation commenced with a mix of ground and air attacks to initially soften the enemy. The underlying purpose was also to provide a chance to the civilian population to leave the area. Another reason was to give a chance to the terrorists to surrender though this was a long shot and not many miscreants laid down their arms. While North Waziristan was evacuated by most of the local population during this period, the ground forces also took the opportunity to surround the area from all sides and move in later, when the time was right.

In North Waziristan, the Pakistan Army is operating in one of the most difficult terrains in the country. The offensive presents more hardships than the earlier attacks in Swat and South Waziristan. Additionally, the terrorists have been allowed to spend more time here and have had ample opportunity to dig in, making permanent settlements, entering into long-term liaisons and proceeding to even set up factories to manufacture IEDs, suicide jackets and bombs. They have taken advantage of the Pakistan government's inaction to organize themselves on more sustained lines and to plan attacks throughout Pakistan and even much further afield by turning North Waziristan into a sort of 'terrorism central'. They have assembled here from all parts of the world, such as Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Chechnya and China and have used the territory to train men, smuggle them to various parts of the world and launch terrorist assaults.

With the commencement of the operation in North Waziristan, Pakistan has entered a state of war. The country's armed forces must be supported in every way to make the operation a success so that the nation rids itself of the scourge of terrorism on a permanent basis. The people's nerves are being tested to the fullest at this juncture, especially in anticipation of the blowback that may come from the terrorists as a result of the operation. The militants may resort to retaliatory tactics using civilians as human shields in the operation areas or strike other strategic parts of the country to show that they are still a force to be reckoned with. It was perhaps one of these groups that took potshots at the PIA aircraft coming in to land at Peshawar airport. The upshot was a woman killed, passengers wounded and suspension of flights by foreign airlines.

With troops on ground now, there are even greater chances of casualties and this is one factor that the army and the nation must be prepared for. Now that the operation is going ahead in full force, it is important that things be taken to their logical end and the nation fully rallies behind the army in the successful completion of the task. It is well understood that while no operation can succeed in completely wiping out terrorism and its perpetrators, the problem can at least be minimized and future terror elements discouraged from occupying parts of the country as land they could use as a launching pad for terrorist attacks.

The issue of internally displaced persons (IDPs) must also be tackled more judiciously by the government. The IDPs are people who have abandoned their homes and moved out of the area to enable the troops to freely operate against the terrorists. They must be treated with sympathy by every Pakistani and accorded the necessary support. Government agencies appear to be awakening to the IDP situation rather late in the day. However, the effort must be supported by all citizens of Pakistan until such time that a conducive environment is created for the displaced persons to return to their homes.



Syed Jawaid Iqbal

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The good, the bad and the ugly

With the role of our intelligence agencies in the spotlight after the attack on Hamid Mir, and the ensuing battle between



media houses, there couldn't have been a more appropriate time for SouthAsia to run a cover story on the ISI, Pakistan's premier intelligence outfit. While it is true that the ISI has attracted heavy criticism from a number of analysts, it is also true that the agency has given its critics many reasons to criticize it. Its role in the Afghan jihad, for one, was most unfortunate. It may like to claim that the creation of the Taliban was in Pakistan's interest at that time but everyone has seen how disastrous this move has proved for us. At the same time, no one can deny the agency's services for the country. It gathers timely intelligence through its hundreds of operatives across the country which helps in preventing many acts of terrorism.

I noticed that almost all the writers, the majority of whom were retired armed forces personnel, reiterated the need for making the intelligence agency more accountable and its functioning more transparent. This is a wise demand, indeed. The agency should be answerable to some authority. This single step will go a long way in increasing its credibility and trustworthiness among the masses.

**Saadia Baig
Karachi, Pakistan**

The cover story was a good effort to critique the role of the ISI, the leading intelligence agency of Pakistan. The ISI has been a target of criticism

both from national and international quarters. Allegations of all kinds of shady activities have been leveled against it. Although the agency has vehemently denied such allegations, it is said that there is no smoke without fire. Perhaps it is time the agency did some soul searching. There is no doubt about the fact that it is the first line of the country's defense since it plays a crucial role in gathering information that could be critical for Pakistan's security but it is also hard to deny that it has gone beyond its ambit many times.

The biggest blemish on ISI's credibility is the creation of the Taliban. What was done to achieve strategic depth has resulted in the strategic death of the country. There are various other charges, some of them very serious in nature. The agency faces accusations of lapses in the discharge of duty, political interference and meddling in the affairs of the civilian government. While all these charges may not be true, the ISI needs to do some introspection as to why it has earned so much infamy. Also, there has to be some mechanism for its accountability. It is standard practice all over the world that sensitive agencies are given full rein to operate but their functions are overseen by some authority to ensure that they don't transgress their constitutional limits. The military and the civilian leadership should work towards this goal to avoid undue criticism of the ISI.

**Nadeem Jan
Islamabad, Pakistan**

Whither mutual coexistence?

I have read with growing sadness news stories coming out of Sri Lanka

about the increasing number of cases of attacks on religious minorities living in the country. Having spent a long time in Sri Lanka due to my professional responsibilities,



I had witnessed firsthand the harmony that existed between the Buddhists, Muslims, Christians and Hindus who lived there. Even though the war between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan armed forces was being fought at that time, it was more of an ethnic conflict. But what is happening now has obvious religious overtones and is worrisome.

If you go to Sri Lanka, you will find the worship places of Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Buddhists located a few meters away from each other. There are statues of Jesus, Mary and Buddha at almost every corner. Never were these vandalized – not that I know of at least. Attacks on religious minorities were unheard of. So what has happened to the country now? The government of Sri Lanka should take notice of the alarming situation. If it fails to act swiftly, it may have another conflict on its hands soon.

**Sabeeh Abbasi
Rawalpindi, Pakistan**

In the pipeline

The writer of the article 'A Balancing Act' was hopeful that Pakistan is in a unique position to build bridges between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Pakistan would certainly be in a better position to achieve this end provided that it first improves its ties with Iran. We have been hearing about the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline projects for many years now – and most of the time it is bad news. More often than not, it is



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Trying rulers

With the election of former Egyptian Army Chief, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who won with a thumping majority, the revolution charade in Egypt has come

full circle. What started with the Jasmine Revolution of 2011, which saw the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak, the ascent of the Muslim Brotherhood to power and its aftermath, has resulted in the rise of Gen Sisi to the seat of power. All this while Egypt gained little and lost hundreds of precious lives. Too soon have the chants of democracy and freedom vanished into thin air as Egyptians have welcomed their new ruler, another army man. What does this prove? A growing disenchantment with democracy, some would say. But the problem is much deeper than that. It is the failure of

successive rulers to take the path of moderation. While some crossed every limit in secularizing the country, others preferred to Islamize it without taking into consideration the reservations and rights of the minorities.

Sisi's victory can also be a precursor to a dangerous tendency: an unexplainable fascination with the military. This is not a new phenomenon. Nations that suffer extended military rule are likely to accept their condition – and rulers – and may even start to like them. However, the situation seems implausible in Egypt's case where hundreds of thousands of the masses gathered at the Tahrir Square to topple a military ruler. Here is hoping that the people of Egypt are actually trying different rulers to see who is the best to steer the country towards the right path.

Moed Khan
Jubail, Saudi Arabia

Pakistan which either pulls out of the project or gives in to the pressurizing tactics of western players. It is a fact that the IP project will benefit Pakistan. There is a severe natural gas shortage in the country which has affected the people as well as industries. Pakistan can easily meet its demand for natural gas through the pipeline project.

Wouldn't it be wise if Pakistan stopped dilly-dallying on the issue and did what is in its own interest? This will definitely improve the country's ties with Iran and build the trust that is required if Pakistan wants to mediate between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Hatim Zareef
Tehran, Iran

Much ado about nothing

There has been uproar in the Pakistani media over Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's visit to India to attend Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's oath-taking ceremony. Some are criticizing PM Sharif for accepting the invitation while others are angry with him for not bringing up the Kashmir dispute



and the water sharing issues in his meeting with Modi. Some believe he was not given the protocol he deserved and others think that India took him for a ride by

presenting its own demands. I think we are trying to read too much into the visit. The invitation to attend Modi's oath-taking ceremony was extended to all heads of South Asian countries and the ceremony was, accordingly, attended by representatives from all eight countries.

Nawaz Sharif received more coverage than any other leader present there because of the controversial nature of relations between India and Pakistan. Also, it is hard to deny that he was given a befitting protocol. He was given a seat right next to the outgoing Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. Pick up any Indian newspaper of those days and you will find PM Sharif's picture or statements prominently displayed on front pages. Instead of jumping to conclusions, we should wait and let both leaders move forward – even if it is done at a slow pace. And it would be better if we focus more on the positive points.

Bushra Hanif
Multan, Pakistan

The right to defense

The efforts of Bangladesh to acquire sophisticated military equipment and forge arms deals with the U.S. are being looked at with suspicion by many analysts. They seem to think that Bangladesh is amassing weapons for no reason at all as there is no threat to its sovereignty and security. They believe

that Bangladesh's threat perceptions are flawed. I am sure that all those who think along these lines must be aware of the concept of deterrence. Also, to say that the country's threat perception is unfounded is not true. Its security forces have had several border skirmishes with India over the last many years. Even if the chances of a full-blown war are slim, it is important for a country to keep its defense system upgraded and strong.



India and Pakistan are two countries in the region that spend humungous amounts on defense. They are also nuclear powers and claim that they have a significant number of atomic warheads. Does this mean that they are going to use nuclear weapons against each other in case of a war? Not likely. But they still spend a lot on making new weapons and upgrading the existing ones. This is done to maintain deterrence. The same is the case with Bangladesh. While it is easy to criticize Bangladesh for not spending enough on making the condition of its masses better, it would be better if those leveling such criticism compare the human development indices of their countries with that of Bangladesh.

Mojeeb Ulla
Dhaka, Bangladesh



"It is the millions living in poverty in both countries who deserve our foremost attention. I firmly believe that in our concerted efforts lies the welfare and prosperity of our two nations. It is my earnest hope that our endeavors will lay the foundation of a much brighter future."

Mian Nawaz Sharif
Prime Minister of Pakistan



"Today one harsh reality is that both Afghanistan and Pakistan are faced with the same challenges and it is in the interest of both countries to deal with it in a genuine spirit of good neighborly relations."

Abdullah Abdullah
Afghan Politician



"I have instructed officials to release the 78 Indian fishermen in Sri Lankan custody. I look forward to the release of all remaining Sri Lankan fishermen in Indian custody at the earliest."

Mahinda Rajapaksa
President of Sri Lanka



"I do not believe in using the official presidential residence for meetings or party activities amounting to misuse of state resources."

Muhammad Yameen
President of the Maldives



"The people consider five years tenure of any government lengthy. In my personal opinion, it should be reduced to four years by making amendment to the constitution."

Syed Khurshed Shah
Leader of the Opposition in Parliament



"We are seriously considering the counter-insurgency experience of the Sri Lankan military with a view to identifying those areas that could be operationally beneficial to Nigeria in its battle to defeat terrorism."

Alex Badeh
Chief of Defence Staff of Nigeria



"I appeal to our political leaders that we should not carry out psychological analysis of rape. Respect and security for women should be the topmost priority of the entire people."

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister of India



"In the near future, China will be the world's biggest economy. As an Asian country, Bangladesh takes pride in that."

Sheikh Hasina
Prime Minister of Bangladesh



"The government has fulfilled all the demands of the opposition parties. They should not obstruct House sessions anymore."

Sushil Koirala
Prime Minister of Nepal



"The two Sharifs – Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and General Raheel Sharif – should give a message that they are one for the continuation of the democratic system in the country."

Mahmood Khan Achakzai
Chairman of the Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party



"It is not necessary to get into khaki knickers and do the drill. Every citizen is welcome to join the Sangh endeavor to build a better society. For last 88 years this is what the RSS has been doing. But our work of instilling discipline and values is often misunderstood."

Mohan Bhagwat
Chief of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh



"I know it's a honeymoon period now but I hope it lasts a bit longer."

General Prayut Chan-O-Cha
Military ruler of Thailand

PAKISTAN | North Waziristan

At last!

After months of vacillating, Pakistan finally launched a military offensive – Zarb-e-Azb – against the Taliban in North Waziristan to destroy the militants' sanctuaries in the region. Initially, the Pakistan Air Force made only air strikes, sending F-16s and Mirage fighters to pound suspected militant hideouts in the mountains to disorient the Taliban. A ground offensive

by the Pakistan Army was launched in the next phase with the land forces, supported by gunship helicopters, combing through the area. Pakistan also asked Afghanistan to seal the border from its side to avoid the possibility of militants crossing over to take refuge in Afghanistan.

Hundreds of local people left their houses in the wake of the operation. To facilitate the internally displaced persons, camps were set up in safer areas of FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where the IDPs were provided basic facilities such as clean



drinking water, electricity and health service. According to reports, instead of providing relief goods and food, the government initially provided each displaced family a cash grant of Rs.12,000 to take care of their needs. Later, they would be provided with Rs.7,000 on a monthly basis. **S**

PAKISTAN | Lahore

New highs

The people saw yet another example of state brutality as the police forces opened fire at Allama Tahirul Qadri's followers, who had gathered outside his Minhajul Quran Secretariat to stop the authorities from removing barriers erected at the gate. Straight fire by the police at the Pakistan Awami Tehreek's supporters left more than a dozen people dead and over 90 injured. The dead included two women and a 16-year-old boy.



The attack was vehemently condemned by politicians, elected representatives and human rights organizations. PPP MNA Dr Nafeesa Shah said that it seemed as if the battlefield had shifted from North Waziristan to Lahore where police killed people in broad daylight. Sheikh Rashid equated the Lahore incident with the famous Jallianwala Bagh massacre under the British rule when the British army opened fire on peaceful protesters back in 1919 in Amritsar. **S**

PAKISTAN | Karachi

Gone for good

Cathay Pacific has suspended its operations in Pakistan for an indefinite period. The decision was taken in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on the Karachi airport, which left 38 people dead, including the 10 attackers. The decision was also taken in view of the threats given by the Taliban

militants who warned international firms and airlines to wind up their businesses in Pakistan or face attacks. The last Cathay Pacific flights between Karachi and Bangkok operated on June 29.

Before it stopped its operations, Cathay Pacific operated four flights a week from Karachi to international destinations. This is the latest

international carrier to cease flights through Pakistan after British Airways which pulled out in 2008 following an attack on a hotel in Islamabad. **S**



INDIA | New Delhi

Leading education



Ten Indian institutes have made it to the top 100 universities in Asia according to the Asia University Rankings 2014 published by Times Higher Education. In 2013, only three

Indian institutes were in the top 100. Panjab University led the Indian tally at 32nd place, followed by the IIT-Kharagpur (45) and IIT-Kanpur (55). Jadavpur University (76), Aligarh Muslim University (80) and Jawaharlal Nehru University (90) also made the

cut. "India is the most improved nation in this year's rankings by far. While it had only three top 100 institutions in 2013, it now has 10, thanks to the

Indian academy's growing engagement with the rankings process," said the Times Higher Education.

The rankings are based on such

performance indicators as teaching, research, knowledge transfer and international outlook that determine each university's strengths. **S**

INDIA | Chennai

From the heart



A minor miracle occurred in Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu, where a medical team transported the heart of a brain-dead man from one hospital to another, located about 12km away, in less than 14 minutes. This was made possible by precise coordination between surgeons of the two hospitals and the city traffic police, which created a 'green corridor', providing

red-light free access to the ambulance carrying the heart.

"As soon as the heart was brought, the procedure of its transplantation into the woman recipient's body began. Within hours, the heart was beating in the patient's chest," said Dr Suresh Rao, chief anesthetist at the hospital. The road connecting the two hospitals is a key artery in Chennai and usually carries heavy traffic. **S**

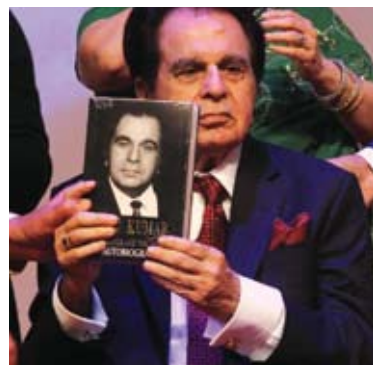
INDIA | Mumbai

Affair remembered

Dilip Kumar's autobiography, one of the most-awaited books in India, was finally launched at a star-studded ceremony. In the book *Dilip Kumar: The Substance And The Shadow*, Kumar, 91, talks about his early life, his film career and the many ups and downs in his personal as well as professional life. The launch ceremony was attended by

prominent names of the Indian film industry including Amitabh Bachhan, Dharmendra, Javed Akhter, Madhuri Dixit, Amir Khan etc.

Although a number of books have been written about *Dilip Kumar*, *The Substance And The Shadow* is unique because it is narrated by the actor himself who talks about his famous yet



brief affair with actress Madhubala. **S**

AFGHANISTAN | Herat

Price of vote

Nearly a dozen people had their index fingers cut off by the Taliban because they had voted in the presidential run-off polls in Herat. The 11 victims were attacked soon after they had cast ballots. Condemning the incident, UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Jan Kubiš, said, "Like millions of their countrymen and women, these ordinary Afghans were exercising their fundamental right to determine



the future path of their country through voting and not through violence and intimidation.

"They (the Taliban) know they have lost the support of the Afghan people," he added. According to initial estimates from the Independent Election Commission, about 60 percent of the country's 12 million eligible voters turned out to vote in the run-off elections to elect a new president for the country. **S**

Pakistani refugees

The Governor of Afghanistan's Khost province, Abdul Jabbar Naeemi has claimed that a large number of families have arrived from Pakistan's tribal region of North Waziristan to southeastern Khost after the military operation was launched in the agency.

He announced that a camp was set up on 2,000 acres of land for the refugees, who would be provided all essential facilities. Most of the displaced families are from Miramshah, the agency's headquarters where the Pakistan Army recently launched a



security operation.

A large number of Pakistanis had settled in Gurbaz district, Naeemi said, adding that local residents had shared their houses with the refugees. **S**

Thumping first!



The Pakistan government is fond of giving away thousands of laptops but it does not manufacture any laptop or desktop machines. An Afghan company has taken the lead and has

started manufacturing and assembling computers and components locally and has big plans for the future. Blue Sonic, a company founded by an expatriate Afghan, Syed Hashmi, has begun manufacturing some computer components in Afghanistan while it

already assembles computers, phones and other household devices. Based in Kabul, the company has an assembly line and will soon open a showroom.

Hashmi is optimistic about his business since there is no competition in his area. Also, there is an increasing demand for computers as 60 percent of the Afghan population comprises youth. **S**

Diminishing peace

Communal riots reared their ugly head in various parts of Sri Lanka with the government asking for the army's assistance to maintain law and order in the areas affected. A curfew was imposed in the southern resort towns of Alutgama and Beruwala where two nights of bloodshed left four people dead. Hundreds of troops were deployed in the areas to help police contain the violence, which erupted after a mob of Buddhist hardliners marched in

Alutgama, claiming the procession was stoned by Muslims.

The attacks are the latest in a series of religious clashes that hit the country following unrest in the past few months, when Buddhist mobs attacked a mosque in capital Colombo. Muslims make up about 10 percent of the 20 million population of Sri Lanka. Due to being relatively well-off, they are accused of having undue influence in the Buddhist-majority country. **S**



Wealthy future



Sri Lanka is likely to attain the per capita income of US\$7500 in six years. This was announced by the

Central Bank Governor, Ajith Nivard Cabraal, who claimed that with realistic economic trends, this mark could be achieved even before six years. Cabraal is certain that Sri Lanka will be "a much sought after country by both investors

and even for employment."

Although he admitted that the public debt is high – at 58 percent – he claimed that it is declining and the government of Sri Lanka is trying to bring it down to 3 percent by 2016. Sri Lanka's economic stability and low inflation has also been endorsed both locally and globally as the Central Bank has claimed that it has received a positive response to the treasury bonds issued for 30 years. **S**

NEPAL | Khatmandu

Turning safe

According to the Global Peace Index (GPI) Report, Nepal is the safest place to live in South Asia, after Bhutan. The Report, released by the Australia-based Institute for Economics and Peace, indicated that Nepal has been gradually turning into a safer place as peace indicators in the Himalayan country have improved considerably.

The GPI 2014 report ranks Nepal

in the 76th place with a GPI score of 1.99. The country was ranked 95 in 2011. According to the report, Nepal scored 1.8 of 5 points at the level of militarization while 2.5 and 1.4 marks on society and security, respectively. Nepal has been included in GPI since 2009. The Index had listed 149 countries in 2010 and 153 in 2011, 158 in 2012 and 2013. The data is



collected from a wide range of sources, including the International Institute of Strategic Studies, the World Bank, various UN Agencies, peace institutes and the EIU. **S**

MALDIVES | Male'

Medical initiative

The Maldives hosted a team of specialist doctors from India which conducted medical camps in the country. The team, which consisted of four doctors from the Indian Defense Forces, led by Col RK Thapar, was accompanied by an additional medical specialist and a paramedic from the Indian-built Senahiya military hospital in Male, held medical camps in the atolls of Kaafu, Alif Alif, Alif Dhaal and

Vaavu from June 15 to 20.

The doctors had specialties in internal medicine, dermatology, dental diseases, pediatrics and surgery. They consulted patients in regional health centers and performed minor operative procedures. The conduct of regular medical camps is a major initiative in defense cooperation between the Maldives and India. During the last camp held in January 2014, the Indian



medical team examined more than 2,000 patients. **S**

BHUTAN | Thimphu

First junket



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi chose neighboring country Bhutan for his first trip abroad. Modi was given a ceremonial welcome in Bhutan's capital Thimphu where he inaugurated a Supreme Court building constructed with Indian assistance. He also laid the foundation for a 600 megawatt hydroelectric power station, part of an energy cooperation plan to meet the country's energy demand.

Modi's decision to make Bhutan his first destination abroad is being seen as India's bid to re-establish its status in the region that was overshadowed by a hyper-active China, which has been building ports in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and its all-weather ally, Pakistan. It also overtook India as the biggest foreign investor in Nepal in the first six months of this year. **S**

Culture of Sleaze

South Asia is characterized by a vicious circle where a highly elitist and unaccountable political culture remains unchallenged.

By Jamil Nasir



Merely shouting from the house tops that everybody is corrupt creates an atmosphere of corruption. People feel that they are in a climate of

corruption and they get corrupted themselves," Jawaharlal Nehru is reported to have said shortly after the independence of India. Perhaps his words are very much applicable

to the entire South Asian region where everybody shouts about corruption but much of the shouting has, perhaps, made us immune to the negative impacts of corruption

on society and development.

But perhaps the gap between rhetoric and reality is increasing with each passing day. "Hardly a speech is delivered in South Asia without the mention of the need to fight corruption in the region. Yet despite the lofty promises, corruption is on the rise," notes 'Fighting Corruption in South Asia: Building Accountability' – a report released by Transparency International (TI) in May this year. According to the report, South Asia is the most corrupt region in the world. These findings are based on the analyses of 70 institutions across six south Asian countries – India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan

even democracies in South Asian countries are sham democracies. They are not inclusive at all. Few families dominate the political landscape. People at large are not stakeholders in such democratic systems due to deep social, economic and political inequities. Their powerlessness is thus mainly responsible for the low accountability of the ruling elite in South Asia. The South Asian region is characterized by a vicious circle where a highly elitist and unaccountable political culture remains unchallenged, the TI report says. The systems of governance in South Asia thus require transparency where the decisions and policies of

legislation, which provides immunity to whistle-blowers against criminal, civil and administrative proceedings, corrupt deeds in public-sector organizations cannot be exposed timely. The TI report suggests that Pakistan, Nepal, the Maldives and Sri Lanka need to develop comprehensive whistleblower-protection legislation. India needs to broaden the base of such legislation while Bangladesh should take steps to enhance awareness about whistle-blowing legislation already in place. The report also recommends that South Asian countries should take steps to strengthen the independence of anti-corruption agencies and the judiciary.

The menace of corruption also needs to be looked into as an economic phenomenon. Setting the incentive structures right and changing the rules of the game can go a long way in tackling corruption effectively. Several practical proposals have been floated by a number of South Asian economists to curb corruption. For example, Mr. Kaushik Basu, who has worked as the chief economic advisor of India, has proposed that bribes should be divided into two basic types, i.e. harassment bribes and non-harassment bribes.

Harassment bribes are the bribes which people pay to get a service what they are legally entitled to get. In case of harassment bribes, the act of giving the bribe should be declared a legitimate legal activity. The giver of a harassment bribe is not happy over the payment of bribe for obtaining his legal rights and if the law does not consider the bribe giver guilty, all punishment of the act of bribery is heaped on the bribe taker and the bribe giver will have an incentive to disclose the act of bribery, the argument runs. The change in law on these lines will deter bribe takers from indulging in bribe and incidence of bribery will be reduced.

Besides the simple proposal of Mr. Basu, Professor Jagdish Bhagwati, an American economist of Indian origin, has been arguing in his writings that over-regulation of the economy is the chief reason for rampant corruption. He says the bureaucratic corruption

The problem lies in the fact that even democracies in South Asian countries are sham democracies. They are not inclusive at all. Few families dominate the political landscape. People at large are not stakeholders.

and the Maldives.

According to the Global Corruption Barometer 2013 of TI, the citizens of South Asia consider that corruption in the public sector is a serious concern. Two-thirds think that corruption has increased in South Asia in the last two years. In 2011, 39 percent of the people perceived that the actions of their governments to fight corruption were effective. The number has gone down to 20 percent in 2013. Political parties are perceived to be the most corrupt, followed by the police, parliament, public officials and the judiciary on the corruption perception index. About 60 percent of the people believe that their governments are run by the very few big entities, and people do not have a say in matters that affect their lives. People cannot hold the ruling elite accountable for corruption due to their powerlessness.

The problem lies in the fact that

the governments can be scrutinized. It would be possible only through potent laws of right to information and whistle-blowing. "Corruption flourishes in darkness," the report says.

Five out of six countries analyzed by the report have the right to information laws in place, Pakistan being the first one to have adopted this legislation in 2002. But such laws fall short of international standards, the TI report mentions. It further emphasizes that legislation to give protection to whistle-blowers is highly important to expose corruption and fraud inside organizations but in South Asia only India and Bangladesh have dedicated whistle-blowing laws in place. India has just enacted it in 2014.

Unfortunately, just like the RTI laws, these laws are also weak. They have not fully become operational even in India and Bangladesh. Without effective whistle-blower

in India is mainly due to the 'permit raj' prevalent in India. Cumbersome rules, convoluted procedures and licensing requirements for import, export and investment, etc. give ample power to public servants and politicians.

The insight from economists like Mr. Bhagwati is that the economy should be deregulated as far as possible to reduce corruption. Recently Meghand Desai, again an economist by profession, in his op-ed 'Tackling corruption seriously' writes that removal of black money in the domestic economy can be an important step towards tackling corruption. His proposal is that all existing currency should be demonetized and it should be replaced with newly printed currency having no similarity to the old currency. All bank deposits get automatically converted while for the currency outside the banking

system, zero coupon bonds should be issued by the government. Such bonds should be marketable after a certain interval; their price will thus reflect the discount and would be a type of tax on black money determined by the market forces.

The reasons for the endemic corruption in the South Asian region are many. It may be argued that corruption is rampant due to partimomialism in South Asia. People think in terms of extended families, groups, communities, castes and tribes. Thus the cultural approach to corruption emphasizes that it stems from cultural norms and corruption levels are comparatively higher in societies where the partimomialism-human propensity to favor families and friends – reigns. According to Francis Fukuyama, partimomialism is the main stumbling block to the supremacy of law and effective accountability of the governments.

Colonial experience – the culture of baksheesh and plunder – is another source. Legal origins are also associated with the rampancy of corruption in a society. High potential for rent-seeking, huge discretionary powers in the hands of public functionaries and weak accountability mechanisms are some other potent sources of corruption. Multiple sources of corruption mean that it cannot be talked through a simple approach. The TI report rightly emphasizes the need for access to information and whistle-blowing legislation besides politically empowering the people by making the political institutions inclusive. **S**

The writer is a graduate of Columbia University with a degree in Economic Policy Management and a Chevening Fellow on Economic Governance.

Getting it done in South Asia

According to a Transparency International report, South Asia is the most corrupt region in the world with Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka being the countries where corruption is prevalent in all public-sector organizations.

A survey was conducted by South Asia Magazine to study what corruption means to individuals, the sources of corruption and whether corruption is the only way to get things done. Various people were asked for their responses. These included entrepreneurs, journalists, lawyers and students. Response was received from Pakistan, India, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

When asked who or what is the

source of corruption, 96% named both officials and society being as corrupt.

"Corruption does not only constitute an official taking bribe, it also involves the citizen giving bribe, making both inter-dependent," said Ahad, a lawyer. Freelance journalist Anoushka Ali explained the phenomenon as a vicious cycle that prevails as the individual is willing to pay more to get a job done faster and officials are willing to take bribe as fee. A number of respondents also mentioned those influential families for spreading corruption that control significant parts of various industries and businesses.

When asked if corruption was the only way to get things done, 8 out

of 11 people considered it possible to get things done without using corrupt methods, but they did say that it will take a lot of patience and time to achieve this. Some did not agree to this notion. Siraj Ahmed, a businessman, said, "In organizations like the stock exchange or a government body, it is impossible to get things done without handing out a hefty bribe."

The respondents also suggested that corruption can be described as a disease, misuse of authority and breach of justice and is more prevalent in South Asia than in other parts of the world. The remedy was described as the cleansing of society.

—Amna Nadeem



The Road to Corruption

Corruption is so entrenched in South Asia that it has become a way of life.

By S.G. Jilanee

Today, South Asia is almost synonymous with corruption. But it was not always so. During British rule, corruption was a practically unknown phenomenon. Government employees of lower grades sometimes accepted a few coins as '*buksheesh*' from a satisfied client – not for doing something illegal but for efficient performance of duty such as, say, a postman visiting to deliver a telegram at midnight. Officers would not even

touch tainted money.

However, things changed after Partition. Ambitious development schemes were undertaken. As aid in cash from international donors began to flow in quantities never dreamed of before, values began to erode. The temptation of *la dolce vita* – a good life – was irresistible. There were also opportunities galore. And discretionary powers created more avenues. So, a 'fee' began to be collected even for

such services which were a citizen's normal due, like diagnostic service in government hospitals or drivers' licenses.

Moreover, with independence, politicians entered the field of social activities as new players. With them came influence peddling. However, in the early years of independence, corruption among politicians was rare, if at all. In India, it was almost 'unknown', perhaps because Indians

were dedicated people who had suffered in the independence struggle and were imbued with the spirit to serve.

India's leaders, – particularly, its prime ministers – from Jawaharlal Nehru to Manmohan Singh – all had squeaky clean reputations. And all sported an austere lifestyle. Rajiv Gandhi was the only exception under whose stewardship the Bofors scandal happened. The mega scam related to the alleged kickbacks from a Swedish arms firm Bofors AB for winning a \$1.3 billion bid to supply 140 odd 155 mm field howitzer. The amount of kickbacks was estimated at \$11 million, paid to top politicians and key defense officials. It is said that the corruption scandal caused the defeat of the Congress in the 1989 elections. If so, the 2014 rout of the Congress offers a striking parallel, because this was also due to massive corruption in the party.

A study conducted by Transparency International in 2005 on corruption in India found that "more than 62 percent of Indians had firsthand experience of paying bribes or influence peddling to get jobs done in public offices successfully."

This is the type of corruption where one has to pay extra for doing the right kind of thing. Another type is where money changes hands for getting a wrong thing done. That is what corruption is all about. In India, for example, the heavy vehicles that ply on long routes are said to be forced to pay billions in bribes annually to numerous regulatory authorities and at check points on the interstate highways. But this could not happen if the truckers were themselves clean because in that case, they would protest against harassment and extortion.

In South Asia, all government departments are tainted with corruption. In government hospitals, corruption prevails in the form of non-availability of medicines, difficulty in getting admission, consultations with doctors, etc. Income tax and civil engineering (construction and building) are some other departments notorious for corruption.

The process of tenders and allotting contracts is also a source of large-scale corruption. The Bofors was a thing of the past. Much more has happened in recent times. The fodder scam in Bihar is one such example where about

\$160 million were embezzled from the government treasury by showing fake purchases of fodder for the animal husbandry department. Among other scams that made headlines were the \$5.2 billion 2G Spectrum scam and the Commonwealth Games scam involving \$12 billion.

Pakistan shares much with India, including corruption. The institutions and people involved in corrupt activities – mostly politicians and government officials – and their methods are the same. But Pakistan is way ahead in ingenuity, such as ghost schools and ghost teachers in whose name salaries are drawn and misappropriated by officials of the education department.

In Pakistan, the first story about corruption that made waves in the early 1950s was about a Chevrolet BelAir car acquired by the then Sindh chief minister, Ayub Khuhro, presumably by dubious means. With the passage of time and the inflow of American dollars, corruption burgeoned. It climaxed during Benazir Bhutto's two stints as prime minister, when her consort sanctified it by earning the sobriquet of 'Mr. 10 Percent' for himself. *The New York Times* published a lengthy special report – House of Graft – detailing corruption by Benazir and the Zardaris, including the chateau in Normandy bought in the name of Asif Zardari's mother.

However, there is a sharp contrast between the ways India and Pakistan grapple with the problem. In India, culprits are not spared, regardless of their status. Thus, Union Communications Minister A Raja, MP of the DMK Kanimozhi and a communications secretary – besides others – were detained and prosecuted in the 2G Spectrum case. Similarly, MP Suresh Kalmadi was indicted in the Commonwealth Games scandal and dismissed from the primary membership of the Congress party. Bihar chief minister, Lalu Prasad was sentenced to five years in jail in the fodder scam.

In India, the Central Bureau of Investigation is an independent and powerful institution. Nobody interferes in its operations. Besides, there are people like Anna Hazare, who organize mass agitation against corruption.

Anti-corruption laws in Pakistan are used by the rulers to harass the

opposition. The Federal Investigation Agency is hamstrung. If an investigating officer tries to be too smart, he is transferred. Amnesty is given to the corrupt for political ends. The National Reconciliation Ordinance is a glaring example of this trend. At a single stroke, it took a horde of offenders off the hook. The Supreme Court annulled the NRO and restored the status quo ante, but the government did not revive the cases.

In Bangladesh as well, corruption is common in the departments where it has been traditional and the methods are the same as in India and Pakistan. The only major scam the country has witnessed is the one related to the Padma Bridge. The World Bank turned down the proposed loan for the construction of the bridge after it found 'credible evidence' pointing to a high-level corruption conspiracy among Bangladeshi government officials, executives of SNC-Lavalin – the contractor, and private individuals, in connection with the Padma Multipurpose Bridge Project.

Corruption scandals in Nepal have been described in graphic detail by the Economist, such as 'resurfacing' of roads, where the contractor was paid but practically no work was done; buildings were paid for but were never built or simply repainted and passed off as new; the same roads rebuilt – as if from scratch – every year; and recorded as one item the construction of a road from A to B and then again, on a separate line, the road from B to A.

The Maldives is bracketed with Pakistan in the TI corruption index with 134 points. Corruption in the country is rampant but it is petty. In Sri Lanka, public procurement is a major sector where corruption is prevalent. But such practices are prevalent even beyond South Asia. Of all countries in South Asia, Bhutan is the least corrupt. It has scored 5.7 in TI's perceived corruption index in the region on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (very clean).

Corruption is denounced for a variety of reasons. Heavy punishments are also awarded. But so long as the goal is to be rich, it will thrive – and more so in South Asia. ■

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

The Cost of Chaos

If corruption is left unchecked, South Asia is doomed to chaos, conflict and anarchy.

By S. M. Hali

Transparency International (TI) has released its latest report titled 'Fighting Corruption in South Asia: Building Accountability'. Sadly, the report brings little joy to the people of Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. It finds South Asia to be the most corrupt region in the world. Ironically, these countries are also among the poorest in the world. Despite the fact that the South Asian sub-continent has attained strong economic growth over the past several years, it is the world's most corrupt region and rampant corruption is preventing its people from breaking the barriers of poverty.

Fifteen years ago, reporting on the pervasiveness of corruption in the region, the UNDP Human Development Report for South Asia (1999) outlined four distinct features of corruption. "In South Asia: corruption occurs upstream, not downstream; corruption money has wings, not wheels; corruption often leads to promotions, not prison terms; and corruption occurs with millions of people in poverty." Other than a gradual intensification, these features have hardly undergone any changes.

The TI report, while analyzing how well the 70 national institutions of the six countries have functioned to stop corruption, concluded that in South Asian countries, the governments and the people who want to expose and investigate corruption face legal barriers, political opposition and harassment that allows unbridled bribery, secret dealings and the abuse of power to remain unimpeded.

Bangladesh, which topped the list of TI's most corrupt nations along with Haiti in 2005, has its police, revenue

and land departments among the most public institutions. Corruption in India has reached an all-time high with rates being exactly double of the global prevalence. The global index for the number of people who have paid bribes to access public services and institutions is 27 percent in the last twelve months. In India, however, the number of people who did the same was 54 percent. The most corrupt institution in India is its political parties, with a corruption rate as high as 4.4 on a scale of 5 (1 being the least corrupt rate and 5 being the highest). The highest amount of bribe was collected by the police – 62 percent, followed by those involved in registry and permit (61 percent), educational institutions (48 percent) and land services (38 percent). India's judiciary has also been found guilty of malpractices, with 36 percent staff involved in taking bribes.

Anna Hazare's mass movement for the Lok Pal Bill and the rise of the Aam Aadmi Party to fight corruption depict the public mood. There were no surprises then that the Indian voters rejected the Congress party for its corrupt practices and expressed their confidence in Modi's exemplary record as Gujarat's chief minister since 2001. Under Modi, Gujarat's 10 percent annual growth rate exceeded that of China's while India's annual growth rate has fallen to 5 percent since 2008.

TI has declared that the Maldives must empower anti-corruption agencies to investigate and prosecute cases in order to fight corruption. It also suggested that the anti-corruption bodies should be granted 'suo moto' powers to instigate both corruption





investigations and prosecutions on their own initiative without prior government approval.

At present, the Maldives' Anti-Corruption Commission can only initiate investigations. It has to forward cases to the prosecutor general for any further action to be taken. The ACC itself has raised concerns over a Supreme Court ruling in which the apex court ruled that the body does not have the authority to prevent the state from entering into questionable contracts. The ACC has quoted a 2012 ruling on a legal battle, involving the Department of Immigration, the ACC and a Malaysian IT firm Nexbis, that had rendered the organization powerless.

According to TI, Nepal improved its status from 139th position in 2012 to 116th in 2013 out of 177 countries surveyed in the Corruption Perception Index (CPI). "Corruption in public bodies that should provide basic services to the poor means that economic growth is only enjoyed by the few," points out the report. The main reason for uncontrollable corruption in government organizations in Nepal is political interference. Interestingly, the Nepalese chapter of TI is considered the most inept, indolent chapter, now infested with retired civil servants. Definitely, the TI report on Nepal must be taken with a pinch of salt, since the same person has been commissioned to draft the National Integrity System report year after year.

In Sri Lanka, over 60 percent citizens are convinced that corruption in the country has increased over the past two years. TI finds Sri Lanka's ranking in the Global CPI in 2013 to be 91 out of 177 countries with a score of 37 out of 100; a slide down by three points since 2012. A score of 50 or less indicate a serious corruption problem. TI's observations depict corruption in the public sector to be a cause for serious concern. There are gaps in the anti-corruption mechanism while Sri Lanka's Bribery Act of 1994 is yet to undergo any revision or update. The current act does not include private and civil society sectors and does not conform to the provisions of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNAC).

In Pakistan, corruption is pervasive in all strata of society with the government, police and public service institutions leading in accepting bribes and graft. According to TI's latest report, in CPI, Pakistan scored 127 out of 175,

a slight improvement from 139 out of 174 in 2012. The previous government led by the PPP (2008-2013) is regarded as the most corrupt in Pakistan's history. The present incumbent in the corridors of power, the PML-N, does not have any corruption cases registered against it so far.

The TI's report has identified three important areas to effectively overcome corruption within Pakistan, in particular with its focus on the role of the judiciary, the need for better anti-corruption measures and greater freedom of information. TI's observations regarding the judiciary in Pakistan, historically subjected to nepotism, political patronage and favoritism, are pertinent but the report also commends the judiciary for taking up thousands of human rights cases and for declaring the controversial National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) unconstitutional for its attempt to grant amnesty to allegedly corrupt politicians and bureaucrats.

A full discussion on Pakistani organizations leading in corruption is beyond the scope of this article but some prominent cases are the Rental Power Projects, mismanagement of state-owned institutions like PIA and Pakistan Railways, the Hajj corruption case, the NATO container case, the Pakistan Steel Mills scam, the National Insurance Company Limited scandal, the Ephedrine quota case and the mediagate scandal, just to name a few.

If corruption is left unchecked, South Asia is doomed to chaos, conflict and anarchy. TI itself has recommended the use of the platform of SAARC to address corruption. Unfortunately, apart from one occasion, all SAARC summits have failed to address the issue thus it may not be the right platform to resolve the serious problem of corruption.

A leaf may be taken from China's book, where President Xi-Jinping's anti-corruption policy of taming both 'meat-eating tigers' and 'low-level flies' implies pursuing a top-down anti-corruption agenda, rather than a bottom-up strategy which bears no result without any big fish being netted. To rid South Asia of corruption is akin to the Herculean task of cleaning the Augean Stables but it has to be undertaken. **S**

The writer is a practising journalist. He contributes to the print media, conducts a TV show and produces documentaries.

Before Transparency International quantified the problem with facts and stats, Anna Hazare was asked the same question: what was the root cause of corruption? Mr. Hazare, austere and ascetic, reflected, "The root cause of corruption is selfishness; the selfish nature of human beings. They go to any lengths to pursue their self-interest."

In a way, Anna Hazare summed up the wantonness of human nature, and Transparency International assessed

the damage. Berlin's TI barged in and took names, and the conclusions are damning. For a place so obsessed with condemning corruption, there's certainly a lot going around South Asia – hot and happening South Asia – is now as famous for its corruption as it is for its cuisine.

It doesn't bode well for the world, of course, that its most populous area be its most crooked, but Transparency International makes its case with care.

The key findings are convincing: that 'citizens find themselves unable to access key information on how their governments are performing in order to hold them to account; that the lack of meaningful protection for whistleblowers means that the chances of detecting wrongdoing by those in positions of power are slim; and that widespread political interference in the critical work of anti-corruption agencies and the judiciary makes them ineffective in keeping a check

Access to information laws, it is said, is inversely proportionate to grubby, graft-taking officials. How does this apply to South Asia?

By Asad Rahim Khan



South Asian Sunshine

on government.'

But in the plethora of recommendations the report makes, one stands out: to make the right to information a reality. "Sri Lanka and Pakistan must pass strong right to information laws as a matter of urgency while any attempts to weaken existing laws in other countries must be fiercely challenged," the report says.

In short, what the U.S. likes to call 'sunshine laws': access to information laws, the theory goes, is inversely proportionate to grubby, graft-taking officials – the openness of the process exposes malpractice. But as far as the strength of the said laws is concerned, it doesn't take long to grasp why South Asia is as opaque as it is.

Start where TI started: Sri Lanka. In a region where the right and hard-right hold sway, one would have high hopes from the centre-left Freedom Party in Colombo – its very name heralds openness. And after quashing the Tamil Tigers (the rights and wrongs of which aren't the subject of this discussion), Sri Lanka has far less reason to hide sensitive information. One would think.

The Freedom Party came closest ten years ago, when Chandrika Bandranaike Kumaratunga pushed for a mild Freedom of Information Bill. But Kumaratunga came undone by the communist Janatha Vimukhti Peramuna, and the parliament was dissolved before the bill could see the light of day. President Kumaratunga's successor has since gone the other direction.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, one editor recalled President Mahinda Rajapaksa telling a group of editors that Sri Lanka hardly needed to have a Right to Information law, because he was prepared to answer any question they might have.

Taking a different tack, the impressively-titled Secretary to the Ministry of Media and Information Charitha Herath went as far as saying that such a law wouldn't be making it to the parliament either: it compromised national security. This might have held weight when Sri Lanka was reeling from a bloody insurgency. Not so much in peacetime, where Mr. Rajapaksa enjoys more authority than any premier in recent memory.

Sri Lanka's beleaguered press

guilds agree. In a joint letter following Mr. Herath's statement, various media groups wailed, "We are both shocked and alarmed that a public servant holding such a responsible position as Mr. Herath does, should make such an elementary blunder." Referring to Kumaratunga's lost chance, the pressmen went on, "Even a cursory glance at the proposed RTI legislation for Sri Lanka approved by the Cabinet in 2004 (...) would show that it specifically excludes all matters relating to national security and 'sensitive information.'"

That was two years ago, and pleas for sunshine laws – even fettered by national security – have since fallen on deaf ears. And as journalists begin facing worse and worse conditions in Sri Lanka, it seems Mr. Herath may be growing deafer.

Bangladesh is one better, with a Right to Information Act coming into force in 2009 (around when Colombo should have). The Act allows for greater accountability in clean language, empowering an information commission to provide citizens access to information. But Bangladesh's imagination didn't extend beyond Kumaratunga's either, and the institutions tasked with national security get a free pass. The centrality of the information commission to the act also cannot be understated; and a separate body to monitor the commission may be in Bangladesh's best interests.

But even handy legislation can fall foul of its citizenry. "There is a reluctance," a commission campaigner said. There should have been waves of applications in response to this positive law. But bureaucracy, as ever, is hurting Bangladesh and hindering a well-drafted law.

In terms of time spent developing its legislation, it is India that has made the most effort: it passed its RTI Act in 2005, replacing the older legislation in 2002. The Constitution enshrines the right to information as a fundamental right, and like Bangladesh, India boasts an autonomous information commission. But while TI ranks India's accountability miles ahead of its neighbors, the local criticism is brutal: alleging incompetence, red tape, and a government penchant for picking pliant civil servants as information commission bosses.

As for India's cross-border cousin, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan is coming to terms with sunshine laws as only it can: via intrigue, evasion, and parliamentary hi-jinks. As far as passing the bill into real law is concerned, the opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf stole a march on the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz: pushing through an RTI law in the province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa all by itself.

Faced with the PTI's obnoxious cat-calls, Nawaz League yawned awake, and mournfully slid its own RTI bill across the Punjab Assembly last December. The bill envisions an information commission twice as vague as Bangladesh's, and no protection for whistle-blowers – PTI's bill protects them, and TI commends Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa for as much. There's little else to distinguish Punjab's law from Imran Khan's, but that might be understandable: as much can be said for both parties' manifestos.

On a national level, the centre's sunshine record has been dismal. Pakistani strongman Pervez Musharraf came up with the Freedom to Information Ordinance in 2002, but the law lapsed waiting for parliamentary approval. As with India, the 18th Amendment to Pakistan's constitution eight years later allowed for a helpful article (19-A) to certify access to information as the be-all and end-all: a Fundamental Right, but fell short of fleshing it out. And thus far, the ruling PML-N has failed to pass any RTI law at a federal level, but then they've failed to pass any bill whatsoever.

Fitting then that South Asia, that quaint little place Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh mostly cover, is officially the most corrupt region on the planet. When pressed as to the causes of corruption, Mr. Hazare also considered matters spiritual, "There is no deep thinking about the purpose of life. And since there is no purpose to life, we want to fill that void with commodities, things. You become an MLA and an MP and in a short period of two or three years, you become a billionaire. How? Do you really need so much?"

In a region wracked with poverty, Mr. Hazare goes unanswered. **S**

The writer is a lawyer and columnist based in Lahore. He studied law at Lincoln's Inn.



The Wrong Battle Front

Operation Zarb-e-Azb may be in full swing but the real battle is far from being fought.

By Arsla Jawaid

A much-awaited military operation targeting militant hideouts in the tribal belt, specifically in North Waziristan, has finally been launched. Public opinion in favor of the operation is at its highest. The operation is in full swing and even the politicians, generally, seem to be on the same page. Prime Minister Sharif, in a rare appearance in the National Assembly, sought unanimous support when stating that the operation “will not end until all terrorists are eliminated.” While

rhetoric certainly helps to bolster, and in some cases create, public opinion it does not, however, play too strong a role in actually addressing the problem.

Some key points are clear from the outset. The government’s policy of negotiating and ‘giving peace another chance’ has failed miserably. Perhaps this is what was ultimately expected in order to create a push for a military operation but in the process, the state has not only illustrated its weak negotiating power to the militants but

has also exposed itself to its own public. Furthermore, Sharif is increasingly viewed as an indecisive prime minister; one who is disconnected not only from the socio-economic plight of his people but also the very real security threats his country faces. The recent Karachi Airport attack may have been the final straw for the military but Pakistan has suffered tremendously at the hands of ruthless militants and the operation may have come too late. Nonetheless, Operation Zarb-e-Azb has commenced and the military



is taking full ownership of it; as it should.

The timing of the operation is also interesting. Previous reports of internecine fighting within the TTP factions suggested a division between the Khan Said Sajna faction and the Shehryar-Mehsud tribe. Splits within the umbrella group between those who supported and opposed the peace talks with the Pakistani government were also widely reported in the media. The TTP strived to downplay the infighting while analysts proposed that the best time to strike was when the enemy was divided and was at its weakest. While arguments were being made in favor of launching an operation, the Karachi airport was attacked, laying any claims of weakness within the TTP to rest.

The enemy the Pakistani state faces is ruthless and elusive. It cannot be easily identified nor can it be easily eliminated. Despite rumours of infighting, the TTP remains strong with global recruits ferociously dedicated to its cause. Uzbek militants attacked the

Karachi airport and North Waziristan, where the operation is currently taking place. It harbors scores of local and foreign militants which include the Uzbeks, Chechens, those linked to the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group and Chinese Uighur militants, amongst others. The organization remains complex, which poses a tremendous threat to Pakistan. More dangerous than the very existence of terrorist groups is the goal that the state is attempting to achieve through this operation. Will success be measured through eliminating terrorist safe havens in North Waziristan or, as the PM stated, when every militant is exterminated?

If a limited operation in North Waziristan is attempting to reduce the internal militant threat, then the state must show increased confidence in its military that has shown remarkable success in the previous Rah-e-Rast and Rah-e-Nijat operations conducted in Swat and South Waziristan, respectively. If the purpose of this operation is grander, that is, if it aims to completely eliminate the terrorist threat, then the state must stop fooling itself.

The militants have infiltrated Pakistani society too deeply, making them harder to identify. They are increasing in numbers and strength in urban centers where targets remain plentiful and more sensitive. Military installations have been attacked repeatedly and airport attacks generate immense international media attention thus fulfilling the goals of the militants. Rooting them out is difficult and may well be near impossible. The state so far is attempting to fight a linear war by focusing its strength in the tribal belt alone. This will be detrimental to the security of the state as a vicious backlash is expected in urban centers where militants have successfully spread and settled. The National Internal Security Policy though ambitious is yet on the right path but it is now dormant with no real, cohesive direction on how to provide intelligence and security to urban centers. The absence of a comprehensive security apparatus that incorporates different ranks and centers while delegating tasks is worrisome and while the NISP was released, no steps have been taken with regard to its implementation.

It is not only the physical presence

of the militants that is cause for worry but, more importantly, the very ideology of extremism, which will be where the real battle is fought. The Pakistani military may be fighting an operation for the long haul but the state cannot afford to sit back and watch the show. The extremist ideology is so deeply embedded in the social fabric that reversing it is impossible. The absence of a national narrative on terrorism that presents a clear and unified understanding of where the state stands and what it demands has created further confusion in an already dithering state. The state itself needs to be clear and must decide on a counterterrorism narrative that will not alter with successive governments. This may perhaps be the most difficult battle the Pakistani state may have to fight and one that will remain long-term. This generation of Pakistanis is emotionally fragile and dangerously impressionable, thus making it ready fodder for right-wing, conservative agendas. A clear, counter-narrative will not only allow the state to unify but will also clearly identify who the enemy is and will illustrate the state's position on issues of national security.

In the short to medium run, even if the military manages to eliminate terrorist safe havens in North Waziristan, its success will barely translate in the urban centers if the state is unable to guarantee the security and safety of its citizens in the rest of the country. A backlash is inevitable and precautionary measures must be enforced before an unwelcomed situation arises. The military is doing its job but the state must do its duty to the citizens as well. In the long-run, the need for presenting a counter narrative will be imperative if militancy and extremism is truly to be eradicated from the state and the minds of its citizens. The education system and civil society can support a unified, socio-political strategy to create a narrative that can clearly exemplify the vision of a peaceful, unified Pakistan. For this to occur however, the state itself must be clear in what it stands for and what it wants. That already seems like an uphill task. ■

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The Drones Dilemma

In addition to causing great losses to the people of Pakistan's northern areas, drone attacks have polarized and fragmented tribal society.

By **Rustam Shah Mohmand**

The cataclysmic attacks of September 2001 on New York's World Trade Center brought about a fundamental change in attitudes and a transformation of political narratives. To what extent were the new doctrines – such as either you are with us or against us – orchestrated to accomplish pre-designed goals would be a topic for debate for a long time to come. But one thing is undisputable: the identity of the attackers – their training in the U.S. on a crash-program basis, their ability to go past the controls loaded with the needed equipment, their boarding four different aircraft at the same time and their being able to take over control so swiftly and make all the required mechanical adjustments for speed, altitude, angle, direction, etc. and strike the Twin Towers with such precision – would remain a mystery.

Such was the level of panic and fear that on the evening of the day the attacks took place, the U.S. administration identified the culprits and named Osama bin Laden the principal sponsor of the group that took part in the attacks. No time was lost in conveying to Pakistan some conditions which had to be complied with. The drones came when Pakistan began to battle an insurgency in its tribal areas which was the direct outcome of Gen. Musharraf's decision to send the military deep into those areas to 'block' the entry of the Taliban into Pakistan and also to demonstrate to the U.S. that Pakistan was 'sincerely' executing a policy that aimed to protect

U.S. interests in the area – albeit at an enormous cost to its own stability.

There were reports of some prominent pro-Taliban activists pouring into the tribal areas who had the potential of causing harm to the coalition forces fighting in Afghanistan. These militants had to be taken out. Rather than relying on Pakistan to eliminate the militants, the Americans wanted to hit them with precision drones operated from U.S. bases. Whether there was any formal agreement (of which there is no evidence) or a tacit understanding between the military ruler and the Pentagon is not clear. The attacks began in 2004 and have continued well into 2014.

It was June 2004 – exactly ten years ago – when Nek Mohammad, a tribal militant of South Waziristan was speaking to a reporter through a satellite phone from inside his mud compound. He heard the noise of the metallic bird hovering above him. A few hours later, the missile fired by the drone struck and tore through the compound, killing Mohammad and several others. A Pakistani military spokesman immediately 'accepted' responsibility – and that was to be the norm for a long time: accept responsibility so that public anger against the U.S. does not mount!

Slowly and gradually, drones became a permanent feature of U.S. policy in this part of the world. The strikes also became a part of the Pakistani consciousness and

acceptability followed.

Drone strikes into another country are clearly a violation of international law and inconsistent with the UN Charter. From time to time, voices have been raised against the brutality and illegality of drone strikes. The U.S. justifies the policy, claiming that it takes out 'enemy combatants' with no loss of lives to its troops. Because detentions and outsourcing of interrogation brought a bad name to the U.S., there was a policy shift which envisaged the elimination of suspects. Thus the role of the CIA changed from being an espionage network to a paramilitary organization that operates to eliminate potential opponents and hostile individuals or groups. Many Third World countries would emulate this example for years to come.

Over the past ten years, drones have been used in Pakistan's tribal areas to kill suspected militants. The attacks reached their peak in 2007-08 and then followed a downward trajectory. During the hundreds of attacks carried out, about 80 prominent tribal and foreign militants have been killed along with more than 400 of their followers. That is one side of the picture. More than 3000 civilians have also been killed and hundreds seriously wounded while many were disabled for life. The civilian toll includes women and children which comprises school-going boys and girls as well as aged men and women. The attacks have also decimated houses, markets, school buildings and other



public places.

Then there is another ugly facet to the gory picture of devastation wreaked by drones. The constant noise of the menacing birds hovering in the skies has robbed tribesmen of their peace, with sleep being the main casualty. The specter of fear and panic has contributed to the rise in psychological and mental diseases. That is the human cost of drone operations. But in a country where not much value is given to the lives of the poor, who would bother? The tormented people of the tribal areas, especially of Waziristan, have suffered untold miseries in terms of human losses, disabilities and destruction of economy.

The wounds inflicted on a helpless population would not heal in a lifetime. The civilian death toll has caused another serious and potentially explosive problem. In tribal culture, enmities are commonplace and perpetual. The informers (of the U.S. spy network) have only to toss a coin (of a special make) into the compound of the suspected person in order to attract an automatic response from drone operators sitting a long distance away.


But on many occasions, the informers of the spy network have deliberately targeted their enemies for the strikes. This has perpetuated enmities on a large scale because, in tribal societies, retribution follows to settle scores as the informers are well-known because it is impossible to conceal identity in the tribal system.

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter has declared that drone strikes and targeted assassinations abroad have seen the country violating human rights in a way that “abets our enemies and alienates our friends.” In a stinging attack on U.S. foreign policy, Carter said that the U.S. was “abandoning its role as a champion of human rights” and called on Washington to “reverse course and regain moral leadership.”

Drone strikes in the tribal areas have left scars so deep they may never heal. The strikes have highlighted the intrinsic fragility of a state that has swung from one crisis of identity to another and is struggling to discover its *raison d'être* in the face of mounting security and economic challenges. This huge uncertainty about the course and direction of a country has made it

subservient to dictates emanating from distant shores – a policy of submission that is so often justified for reasons of economic dependency.

After a long pause of more than six months, drones have struck again in June 2014 – an ominous reminder that the attacks would continue to cause devastation. The timing is important because Washington assessed that on the eve of the launch of a major offensive by the Pakistan Army and Air Force in North Waziristan, the time was just right for their drone war to restart.

Not only have drones caused unquantifiable loss to the area and its people, the attacks have polarized and fragmented the tribal society. It may appear to be a passing phenomenon but the long-term damaging implications, because of a society that is fractured, humiliated and disfigured, would be extremely adverse and would change the whole complexion of tribal society for the worse. 

The writer is a former chief secretary of KP and has also served as an ambassador.

Fixing the Politics



Imran Khan and his PTI have still a long way to go to reach the corridors of power.

By M. Saeed Khalid

In the mid 1990s, Imran Khan had already attained the status of a sports hero. By the same time, he had also successfully launched himself as a charity dynamo. Nearing 50, he still possessed a perfect physique and had the urge to accept a new challenge – or create one. So he decided to serve his country by forming a new political party under the name of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf, promising to change the elitist and corruption-ridden political system. What more could you ask for in a prime minister? But was life that simple?

Despite Imran's charisma and dedication, his party failed to win

seats in the first elections that it contested. People began to wonder whether his political venture was destined to be relegated to the inner pages of newspapers. That would have been the case if one did not take into consideration Khan's grit and his approach to life: never give up.

The people Khan had around himself in those days were mostly disgruntled minor players from big political parties. Things changed with the ouster of Nawaz Sharif's government in 1999. General Pervez Musharraf, the army chief and chief executive of the new regime, held the major parties in contempt and,

like Khan, blamed them for running a sham democratic system.

Discarding the main parties, Musharraf began meeting with the B-team of politicians and the maulanas. He is said to have sounded out Khan to join his government but realized that there couldn't be two leaders in the same team. The 2002 elections restored a chaperoned democracy, with Musharraf's hand-picked cabinet led by Zafarullah Jamali from Balochistan chosen as prime minister. The PTI barely managed to get one seat, which was won by its chairman, marking his formal entry into national politics.

If all aspirants to public office have a surplus of self-belief, Khan leads the pack in exuding supreme confidence, determination and stubbornness. In a brief conversation with him at a fund-raiser, this writer was struck by his unshakable conviction. One couldn't really disagree with his tirade against the corrupt rulers, but most people looked in disbelief when he repeatedly claimed to rid the country of corruption in 90 days.

Now that his party has been in power in Khyber Pakhtunkwa for over a year, he has probably realized that corruption is deeply woven into the social fabric. We do not hear the 90-day mantra any longer. On the positive side, there are encouraging reports coming out of the province that talk of better financial management as compared to the previous provincial government, with donor countries and organizations feeling more at ease in offering funds for development projects.

The PTI's boycott of the 2008 elections denied it participation in the assemblies but at the same time liberated Khan to target the two main parties for playing 'fixed' matches. Things started to look up for Khan as the establishment was aghast at Zardari's wheeling-dealing from his perch in the presidency. The PTI marked a triumphal re-entry with a mammoth *jalsa* in Lahore. It turned out to be a mix of rhetoric, sloganeering and musical interludes to keep the audience motivated and under control.

The election campaign in 2013 confirmed PTI's status as the third force in national politics after the PPP and the PML-N. The media loved him. His appearance on a talk show guaranteed top ratings. However, oratory and theatrics do not a winning party make. The campaign showed the limits of the PTI in mobilizing a winning vote bank. This shortcoming was made up by making the entire 'politburo' sit on the stage and address the public in turns, building up the tempo with regularly orchestrated slogans and yes, songs and music.

The educated urban youth, the backbone of the PTI, were dubbed 'burgers' by the opponents who accused them of representing the affluent segments of society. Khan

resorted to relentless attacks on the big two by promising to eradicate corruption, abolishing the patwari system and providing justice to the masses.

Khan still shows his lack of experience in running public office by continuing to boast of his cricket exploits and building hospitals and universities. His serious back injury caused by a fall from a make-shift platform for a *jalsa* resulted in a sympathy wave on the eve of elections in May 2013.

Despite running a spectacular election campaign, the PTI did not expect to win the national elections and was happy with its success in KP and winning over 30 seats in the National Assembly. The party claimed that it has been denied victory in some constituencies with the opponents resorting to help from local administration and election staff, and in some others by sheer arm-twisting of the traditional winning parties. This was particularly true of some semi-rural constituencies where the PTI is not so well organized.

PTI's demand for recounting in four constituencies cannot reverse the overall result of the 2013 elections. So what is in store in the new wave of protests and *jalsas* started by the PTI this year? The finger is being pointed at the PTI, the PML-Q and Tahirul Qadri's PAT for their role in possibly destabilizing the government.

It is somewhat early for the opposition to start agitating only a year after the elections. Imagine if the opposition in KP starts holding public rallies to protest against the provincial government. It seems that after his successful protest against the drone attacks, Khan thinks that agitation is a good way to stay in the limelight. This time he has raised the issues of rigging, high cost of living and power shortages.

Khan's biggest limitation in winning the elections is PTI's relative weakness in rural areas where votes are still cast on the basis of biradri, networking and paybacks. The PTI has thousands of workers but they are concentrated in the urban centers, particularly in big cities. It has managed to pluck some disgruntled stalwarts from other parties but their number remains small. In terms of electoral potential, the PTI is

more a party of notables rather than political workers. That means it is really becoming like the older parties.

Pervaiz Rashid and other wily veterans of the PML-N are bemused at Khan's antics, advising him to wait for the next elections. Many others also feel that Khan cannot maintain this level of agitation for long. He will have to settle for decisions by the election tribunals and the judiciary for reopening the ballot boxes or resorting to other methods of verification. There is another possibility for Khan to keep the pot stirring and proving unpopularity of the old parties: through by-elections, which are not uncommon.

Pervaiz Rashid, who is also the federal minister for information, summed up the ruling PML-N's irritation over the PTI's efforts to fast forward the political process by commenting that the captain-turned-politician was trying to convert elections into a 20-overs match. Khan should save his breath and keep attacking the traditional parties where they are weak. Conscious of the limited appeal of rabble-rousing methods, Khan has come up with a charter of demands to step up pressure on the government by formulating demands beyond the recounting in four constituencies.

The PTI's demands include: austerity by the federal government through reduction in its expenses; increase in the provinces' share in development projects; reduction of the general sales tax from 17 to 10 percent; prevention of gas theft; cheaper electricity and repatriation of money amassed through corruption and deposited in foreign banks.

Imran Khan has his reasons to shake up the old parties from their smugness and apparent confidence in the vote bank. The route to the National Assembly passes through dusty villages of the country. His biggest challenge would be to raise the level of his support in rural constituencies. The PML-N and the PPP will try hard to keep blocking Khan's way into the hearts and minds of people in the vast countryside.

No sir, this is not a T-20 or a One-day match or even a Test match. It is a whole series. **S**

The writer is a former ambassador.

The Muslim Question

The 16th Indian Lok Sabha has the lowest number of Muslim MPs ever. What does this signify for the future of Indian Muslims?

By Tahera Sajid

An exercise conducted every five years, the Indian general elections were held in nine phases from April 7 to May 12, 2014, to elect the 16th Lok Sabha from 543 parliamentary constituencies of the 28 Indian states. In a country of 1.237 billion, 814.5 million people were eligible to vote, making this the biggest-ever elections in the world.

The results were historic in many ways. The two major political forces in the contest were the National Democratic Alliance led by the Bharatiya Janata Party and the United Progressive Alliance led by the Indian National Congress. While the NDA won a total of 336 seats in a house of 543, the BJP won 282 – or 51.9 percent. This clear majority allowed the BJP to form its government without support from other parties. The UPA won 58 seats, of which the Congress won 44 (8.1 percent), facing the worst political defeat ever in a general election.

This clear mandate for the BJP is unprecedented and, on face value, shows the voter's confidence behind the political force or the dogma represented by a party known for its nationalist agenda. Many critics consider the meager representation of Muslims in the Lok Sabha at 4.2 percent (23 out of 543) to be a blow to inclusiveness, especially when seen in the context of the Muslim population representation in India – 13.4 percent. This stands out even more in states like Uttar Pradesh where the Muslim population is more than 18.5 percent, and which has elected 45 Muslim MPs to the Lok Sabha since independence but has offered no Muslim candidate this time. The 23 Muslim MPs belong to eight states and 11 parties and offer a scattered and diluted presence at best for India's largest minority community. As Christophe Jafferlot observed in *The Indian Express*, this situation "will

not help them to build a cohesive presence in the House nor to weigh much within their own parties." Even the induction of Najma A. Heptulla, the lone Muslim in Modi's cabinet, who holds the portfolio of Minister for Minority Affairs, is seen as more of cosmetic than functional value.

What does such a sweeping victory of a Hindu nationalist party say about India's pluralism and secularism? More importantly, what does this victory predict for the future of Indian Muslims?

There are two strong opinion camps on this issue. The first is of those



Muslims who fear and foresee further marginalization, unfair social treatment and hindered social development, threat to life and property, passing of contentious and controversial laws and selective application of justice in cases of communal violence.

The second camp believes that while the polarization of Muslim and non-Muslim voters due to riots affected voting trends in areas like western UP, another major reason is the disappointment of Indian Muslims with the Congress's fraudulent secularism based on 'all talk and little action'. Syed Ubaidur Rahman, the author of *Understanding the Muslim Leadership in India*, supports this idea, "The average Muslim's refrain is the same as that of the 'aam aadmi', that the Congress lost because of rising

food prices and corruption."

For decades, the Congress promised jobs and educational quotas to Muslims but failed to deliver on its promises. Social indicators place Muslims as performing socially and economically below national averages, even when recognized as educationally, economically and socially disadvantaged under Other Backward Class (OBCs) by the Indian Constitution, and deemed eligible for targeted uplifting schemes. They continue to have the lowest literacy rates among all minority communities in the country, at 67.6 percent in 2012, as against the national rate of 74 percent. They also remain under-represented in business and the professions, such as medicine and law, etc.

Muslims of Indian origin living overseas largely support the same narrative. Hamida Hirani, an Indian Muslim living in the U.S., has called the vote "less pro-Modi and more anti-Congress". She emphasizes that "the Congress party has not delivered on promises it made under the banner of secularism and the condition of Muslims has not improved despite decades of Congress rule. Things might get worse before they get better but since Modi is a known hardliner, his policies and actions will be under more scrutiny and that might help Muslims in the long run. People are desperate for change."

Modi has been widely condemned for the 2002 Gujarat massacre of Muslims and was not allowed to enter the U.S. and the U.K. for years. However, the success of his economic policies in Gujarat is also a well-acknowledged fact. The voting trend in areas where Muslims are a substantial part of the population has shown that many young people are desperate for economic opportunity and seem willing to overlook the BJP's anti-Muslim history to focus on Modi's strengths in governance and development. In choosing the BJP, they are simply rejecting economic deprivation to welcome economic prosperity. The analysis by Simon Denyer in the *Washington Post* also supports this mindset: "The promise of Mr. Modi and the reason for his wide lead in the polls is clear: a tough, practical and corruption-free record of economic management, though he never apologized for the massacre of 2002. As chief minister of the Gujarat

state, Mr. Modi has overseen growth averaging 10 percent a year over the past decade, significantly higher than for the country as a whole."

Modi also appears to be rising to the occasion and adapting to the role of a national leader. Dr. Syed Zafar Mahmood, President of the Zakat Foundation of India, has written about Modi's desire to offer "inclusive growth opportunities" to Muslims, quoting Modi's remarks at the joint session of the parliament in his write-up. "We will have to undertake focused activity and initiate special purpose schemes. I do not consider such schemes as appeasement; rather I see these as an instrument of ameliorating the life of Muslim community," he wrote.

However, Dr. Mahmood has also cautioned that words must be followed by action. He points out that contrary to the BJP's manifesto which promises to ensure a peaceful and secure environment where there is no place for either the perpetrators or exploiters of fear, the BJP government has not taken effective action on the recent murder of Pune resident Mohsin Shaikh or the Muzaffarnagar riots. The perpetrators of the riots continue to threaten and harass Muslims while the defeated BJP candidate Naresh Tikait even went so far as to declare that the riots "were a trailer; we can even throw you (presumably Muslims) out of the country."

In conclusion, although India is a nation composed of many diverse ethnic and religious groups, with their own complex group dynamics, one thing common to all is their aspiration for a better life. Hence, in the elections, Indian Muslims appear to have disregarded religious affiliation of candidates, rejected political opportunism of false secularism and opted for change. It is now up to the BJP to prove itself worthy of their trust. As prime minister, Modi must honor his role as a national leader and deliver on his promise of development for all, discarding the mantle of a nationalist leader with a divisive agenda. The ball is in his court, and the world is watching. **S**

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An Important Link

Repealing Article 370 will be extremely difficult for the BJP government even if it has the requisite strength to effect a constitutional change.

By Dr. Raza Khan

The statement of an Indian state minister of the recently installed government of the Bharatiya Janata Party about initiating a debate on the issue of abrogating the special status of Indian Kashmir, as enshrined in Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, has triggered a big controversy. There would be pervasive and far-reaching repercussions for India and the region in case the radical BJP government takes steps to scotch the special status of Kashmir within India's state structure.

The controversy started when soon

after taking charge, State Minister Jatendra Singh talked of the need for 'rethinking' Article 370 of the Indian Constitution which gives special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir within the Indian state structure. This special status primarily gives the Kashmiris the power to decide which of the laws, legislated by the Indian parliament, may be extended to the state. In this context, this is indeed a very important provision of the constitution. Therefore, proposing its abrogation caused ripples in the Indian political landscape – particularly in the

political and public circles of Jammu and Kashmir. Reacting to Singh's statement, Chief Minister of Kashmir, Omar Abdullah reportedly said, "Either the article will remain on the statute book or Kashmir won't be a part of India."

Although Minister Singh said afterwards that he was misquoted but it was not an isolated statement of any BJP leader that could be believed to have been taken out of context. The fact is, abrogating the special constitutional status of Kashmir was a part of the BJP's election manifesto and



even Prime Minister Modi had vowed to do it during his election campaign.

Apparently, the point regarding Kashmir's special status in the BJP manifesto was merely rhetorical and demagogical. In other words, the BJP included the demand in its election manifesto to attract votes of Hindu radicals and ultra-Indian nationalists. Here it must be understood that during electioneering, political parties and leaders, particularly radical political outfits, play to the gallery. They get carried away by the emotions of their supporters or of their own, which forces

them to make promises that are hardly doable. Constitutionally speaking, it would be well-nigh impossible for Prime Minister Modi's government to end the special status of Kashmir.

Article 370 was included in the Indian Constitution of 1950 by the Constituent Assembly of India. Therefore, its abrogation could not be done through mere rhetoric. Even if the BJP has the requisite strength of members to effect a constitutional change, it would be extremely difficult to repeal the article. The reason is that Article 370 is the only link between the state of Jammu and Kashmir and the Indian Union. If this article is repealed, it would be like severing the sole link of the state to the country, as also stated by Omar Abdullah.

The second reason, which perhaps motivated the BJP to come up with the announcement, is the party's desire to fully integrate the J&K state in the Indian Union. From the BJP's ultra-nationalistic, at times chauvinistic, standpoint, this makes a lot of sense. The party and its ideological allies, such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), consider India not merely a state but a concept and a reincarnation of Hinduism. They believe that no part of it could be severed, particularly those parts that constitute the state. Therefore, regardless of whether or not the BJP government could repeal the special status of the state of Jammu & Kashmir constitutionally, it would like to effect such a change politically and ideologically.

The BJP leadership also knows that changing the status of Kashmir may not be possible immediately. Thus, raising the issue is a clever move aimed at starting a debate in the anticipation that it could gradually transform into a popular demand over the years. The aim may never be achieved because of its unacceptability to Kashmiris, whether it is a popular demand in India or not. Even pro-Indian Kashmiri politicians like Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and leaders of the Kashmiri opposition party, the People's Democratic Party have rejected any move to abrogate Article 370. The common Kashmiri, who has suffered great injustices and repression at the hands of the Indian state, would also throw out such a move. Bewailing the possible legislation, PDP President Mehbooba Mufti said, "Experts believe Article 370 is the bridge of Jammu and Kashmir's accession to the country and if you break it, you go back to the pre-1947 position. Are you ready for that?"

To deflect the criticism coming its

way, the leadership of the BJP has come up with the justification that Article 370 is a hindrance in the development of Jammu and Kashmir. In this regard, the BJP leaders cite the state's subject laws which prevent outsiders from purchasing property in the state. In fact, these state subject laws were aimed at protecting the interest of the largely poor residents of Jammu and Kashmir. The underdevelopment of the valley has been due to the adverse security situation prevailing there since the 1989 uprising and the state terrorism unleashed on the people. Against this backdrop, the BJP's argument that Article 370 and the privileges available to J&K residents is a hindrance to the development of the state is without a kernel.

Any effort by the BJP government to end the special status of Kashmir by repealing Article 370 will bode ill for the relations between the residents and the state of India. A large majority of the people of J&K already have strong anti-India feelings due to the unabated state repression and large-scale underdevelopment that has resulted in poverty and unemployment. In this situation, any move by the BJP – which is infamous for its Hindu revivalist agenda – would be received unfavorably by the Muslim majority population of Kashmir.

Furthermore, any effort by the Modi government to put an end to the special status of Kashmir would further damage Delhi's relations with Islamabad. Pakistan is a significant party to the Kashmir dispute and any change to the status of Indian Kashmir is likely to derail the process of normalization of ties between the two countries. The recent endeavors by Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to ease the strained relations between India and Pakistan will suffer a big blow.

So the ultimate casualty, if the BJP's suggestion is put into action, will be peace in South Asia. The BJP government must rethink its strategy and realize that it is no more running an election campaign. Now, the heavy responsibility of governing one of the most populated countries of the world is on its shoulders. It must exercise restraint and show tact and magnanimity so that South Asia could develop and thrive. **S**

The writer is a political analyst and researcher. A Ph.D. in International Relations, he holds expertise in governance, terrorism and radicalism in South Asia and the Af-Pak region.

Winners and Losers

By casting their votes against all odds, Afghan voters have emerged as the real winners in the 2014 presidential elections.

By Daud Khattak

While final results about the winners and losers of the June 14 run-off polls, contested between two former ministers in President Hamid Karzai cabinet, will take a few more weeks to be made public, those who scored the real victory in the elections were the Afghan people themselves.

Despite facing numerous odds, threats and intimidations, war-weary Afghan men and women thronged polling stations for the second time in less than two months to elect their future leader through a democratic process.

Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, who was a runner-up in the 2009 presidential polls, once again failed to bag the required 50 percent plus one of the total polled votes on April 4 and thus the presidential election went into the second phase, with Dr. Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai as Abdullah's runner-up.

Unlike the April 4 polls, the second phase on June 14 witnessed an overwhelming support for Ashraf Ghani, who is an ethnic Pashtun hailing from the country's central Logar province. His support was particularly good in the southern and eastern provinces of Afghanistan.

Unofficial figures have revealed that Ashraf Ghani is leading with at least a million votes while Dr. Abdullah, who once aspired to be the successor of President Hamid Karzai, has already leveled allegations of fraud and rigging in the elections.

Unlike the first phase, where a total of 11 candidates were in the field, with nine of them being ethnic Pashtuns, tactics such as an appeal to ethnicities and even cheap tricks to grab votes were very much visible in the second phase which was a one-on-one contest between Ashraf Ghani,

who represented the Pashtuns, and Abdullah Abdullah, who represented the Tajiks and Panjsheris.

It was an appeal to the respective ethnicities that doubled the vote bank of Ashraf Ghani in the Pashtun belt in the south and east where a large number of people even defied their tribal elders and warlords who were supporting Dr. Abdullah.

This caused some bad blood in the rival groups that may lead to problems in the days ahead for the future president. However, it is most likely that the differences would dissipate over time.

It is generally believed that despite the allegations and counter-allegations, the two sides are likely to come to terms on how to steer the country out of the present crisis, including the security situation and the fragile economy.

Another important development seen during the two phases of the Afghan presidential polls was the Taliban's inability to disrupt the polls despite threats and orders to the people to stay away from polling stations.

This gives credence to the general belief among the Afghans and a number of local and international analysts that the Afghan National Army (ANA) has enough strength and expertise to defend the country against the Taliban after the withdrawal of U.S. troops by the end of 2014.

Regardless of whether the Taliban were unable or unwilling to disrupt the polls, the successful and uninterrupted election has encouraged the common Afghans and cemented their trust in their country's security forces. Besides, we have seen many examples of Afghans who overwhelmingly participated in the election despite threats.

Jawaz Jan, a resident of Tanai

district of the south-eastern Khost province, whom this writer talked over the telephone, related a moving tale. His daughter passed away on June 14 (the polling day) but he did not announce her death till the end of the polling time lest his village people did not go to the polling station and would attend the funeral.

Similarly, as the democratic process in Afghanistan is taking root, the warlords, who subjugated the common Afghans for decades, are now on the way out. For instance, none of the notorious powerful men and warlords managed to emerge as front runners either in 2009 or in 2014.

Instead, people like Hamid Karzai and now (almost) Ashraf Ghani have been preferred by the Afghan people to be their future leaders. The continuation of the system, despite all its weaknesses, is a guarantee of bringing an end to the culture of warlordism that had become prevalent in Afghanistan over the past three decades.

As for the two presidential hopefuls, both have explicitly expressed their willingness to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the United States while President Hamid Karzai continued to reject the agreement following his serious differences with the U.S., the key backer of the Afghan government.

Being a former foreign minister, Abdullah Abdullah is well-known among Afghanistan's neighbors, including Iran, Pakistan and India. Similarly, Ashraf Ghani also served in President Hamid Karzai's cabinet as finance minister and has been respected for his straightforward approach to issues such as corruption and administrative reforms.

Apart from the declining security

situation, the two other biggest challenges facing the next Afghan president will be the ever-increasing corruption and weak economy. Many Afghans, whom this writer spoke to, believe that Ashraf Ghani has the capacity to wage a relentless war against administrative corruption while he can also improve the country's economy.

As finance minister in the President Hamid Karzai-led transitional government (till 2004), some of Ashraf Ghani's key achievements included tough measures against corruption,

long-term planning and suggestions for poverty eradication, overhauling of the customs, issuance of new currency in a record time, adoption of non-deficit financing and centralization of revenues.

It is generally believed that his coming to power would be a good omen for Afghanistan's falling economy and would help bring the widespread corruption under control. His occasional ill-temper, however, is seen as one of his major weaknesses, particularly when it comes to his future relations with tribal elders and

opponents from other ethnicities.

The preliminary results of the runoff polls are not going to be made public before July 2 and may follow a period of sharp differences between the winning and losing parties. However, Afghan analysts believe that any of the two candidates who makes his way to the presidential palace would follow an inclusive approach, which will guarantee his five-year term in the palace. **S**

The writer contributes to the Christian Science Monitor and Sunday Times.



In May 2014, Narendra Modi, the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party, became Prime Minister of India. Despite this victory, Modi has a long way to go before he can strengthen India's relations with Bangladesh. The Muslim-majority population in Bangladesh views Modi's victory as a dark hour for regional cooperation among South Asian countries.

From the outset, Modi's electoral campaign appears to have unjustly targeted Bangladesh. While campaigning in West Bengal, he adopted a hardline against Bangladesh and vociferously supported the expulsion of 'illegal immigrants'. Narendra Modi's reaction to the presence of Bangladeshi immigrants in India appears ignorant, bigoted and completely unjustifiable. If the discriminatory views are translated into a concrete policy, the BJP government stands the risk of losing its support in Bangladesh.

At this critical juncture, India cannot afford to jeopardize its relations with Bangladesh since it needs the latter's cooperation to control insurgency in its northeastern states and consequently to develop transit facilities in Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya states.

In light of the current political climate, it is particularly disconcerting that Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina did not attend Narendra Modi's swearing-in ceremony.

A historical overview reveals that relations between India and Bangladesh have always been cordial. During Bangladesh's liberation movement, India assisted East Pakistan and was the first country to recognize Bangladesh as an independent state. In a similar vein, Bangladesh has maintained bilateral trade with India which stood at USD5.3 billion in 2013. Interestingly, India has a vested interest in maintaining good relations with Bangladesh as it wants to weaken China's influence in the local

business sector.

Although it has maintained good relations with Bangladesh, India has been unable to resolve its disputes with the country. According to Obaidul Quader, a senior cabinet minister, a change of government in New Delhi will not mitigate India's relations with Bangladesh.

Sheikh Hasina believes her government has tried to resolve the long-standing disputes with India involving the Teesta River dispute and the disputed boundaries. However, the BJP has adopted a lax attitude to finding an effective solution to these issues.

Recently, Bangladesh has raised its concerns about both issues with India's new premier. The main reason for addressing the Teesta water and the land boundary issues shortly after the new government came to power was to gauge Modi's reaction. If the BJP is averse to reaching a compromise,



Walking the Talk

If Modi's discriminatory views are translated into a concrete policy, the BJP government stands the risk of losing its support in Bangladesh.

By Taha Kehar

Bangladesh's predicament would remain largely ignored. Sheikh Hasina has already blamed Mamata Banerjee, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, for the failure of both India and Bangladesh to sign the Teesta River water-sharing treaty. In order to avoid an ongoing blame game and another failed attempt at solving the problem, there is an urgent need for discussion and debate.

The Teesta water-sharing pact and the land boundary dispute remain pending issues that require immediate attention. The speaker who represented Bangladesh at the swearing-in ceremony of Narendra Modi's cabinet raised both issues with the new premier at a bilateral meeting. However, the discussion remained, at best, weak and unproductive. The issue of the Tipaimukh dam along the Barak River in Manipur was not explicitly addressed. Moreover, the BJP's support for removing illegal migrants from Bangladesh was largely overlooked.

Apart from a series of half-hearted promises, Modi was unable to provide valuable diplomatic assurances. On the contrary, he paid lip service to good diplomacy and guaranteed that every possible effort would be made to resolve the situation.

Despite the new government's diplomatic stance, it is unlikely that Modi will be able to walk the talk. Before the electoral victory, there was considerable opposition within the BJP regarding the land boundary agreement. The previous

government made a consistent attempt to develop a political consensus on the boundary dispute. This ensured that the agreement come into effect and was not altogether discarded. Divergence of opinion within the BJP may hinder India's diplomatic relations with Bangladesh.

Amid the doom and gloom scenario, the Bangladesh government has resigned itself to the fact that its efforts will bear no fruit. It has refused to set a date by which the Teesta River pact will come into force and is merely seeking to convince India to initiate progress. Once the dispute has been resolved, Bangladesh will gain considerable autonomy over its water resources.

Furthermore, the land boundary agreement, which has been pending for five decades, needs to be given serious attention.

However, it remains to be seen if any solution will be reached. Following the second budget session in the Parliament, the BJP has opposed several bills and impeded the legislative process. The Land Boundary Agreement 1974 between India and Bangladesh is also among the bills.

Further delays in ratifying the land boundary agreement could pose countless disadvantages. Once the bill has been passed, it would give India its longest demarcated land boundary and resolve the issues of adverse possession in certain territories. India currently has 111 enclaves in Bangladesh.

On the other hand, Bangladesh has 51 enclaves on the Indian front. The inhabitants of the enclaves live in miserable conditions of poverty. The new government continues to cast a blind eye to their human rights. The BJP has falsely justified its opposition to the land boundary agreement on the grounds that India would lose several acres of land.

The refusal to pass the agreement could also weaken bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India. When general elections take place in Bangladesh, India's inability to tackle these concerns would further eliminate any scope for progress. In fact, it would strengthen hostilities against India in Bangladesh. It is obvious that following the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan, India cannot risk any further conflicts.

In order to develop an effective means of resolving issues that have been conveniently brushed under the carpet, the BJP government must adopt a more cohesive approach. Delaying decisions which should have been taken several decades ago is a sign of poor governance and lack of planning.

Bangladesh and India should cooperate with each other and ensure that the land boundary agreement is ratified. Similarly, the BJP must forsake its political agenda and give preference to national interests. Any new government that paralyzes the legislative process at the very beginning of its term cannot be relied upon to foster positive change. **S**

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Waiting for a Bounce Back?

In the absence of someone as charismatic as Velupillai Prabhakaran to lead another LTTE, there are slim chances of the group's re-emergence.

By Shahzad Chaudhry

Narendra Modi's accession to power in India has the potential of some serious tectonic changes in the geopolitics of South Asia. While it is popularly stated that India may never be the same again – with both positive and negative connotations – India's policy in the neighborhood may also see a significant shift. Modi's statecraft will include some lingering geopolitical interests and concerns that are likely to impact his economic agenda at home. Overtly though, he will need relative peace around India without signs of venturing to resolve any of its geographical or security issues by the use of force.

Perpetuation of a military conflict will countervail his primary intended course of encouraging economic growth which is dependent on domestic and foreign investment. However, the appointment of Ajit Doval as the national security advisor, and V K Singh, a former army chief, as the minister in-charge for matters in the north-east, will mean a more militaristic approach at the second tier of engagement in foreign policy. Modi's alma mater is the RSS, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which believes in the ideological domination of India and the region and holds a worldview that it would expect its protégé, Modi, to fulfill. That will need India to be assertive though it may go against the grain of development and regional stability, which remain intrinsically interdependent.

There are then likely to be two faces of India's disposition under Modi: one, that will feed off tier-one engagement for peace and stability built around economic contacts with India's neighbors; and the second that will

use the combined expertise of Doval and Singh at the sub-diplomatic level, seeking furtherance of its geopolitical agenda through imposing covert force and exploiting existing vulnerabilities in target nations. Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh, to some extent, stand out as the main contenders who will suffer from India's covert designs to foster geopolitical dividends.

There is one more factor, again domestic, that will determine Modi's likely policy towards India's neighbors. It has to do with Modi's capacity to garner sufficient parliamentary strength that can enable him to enact economic and fiscal reforms where laws will need to change to enable restructuring. Modi's economic plans are targeted on growth. He has the corporate sector on his side to provide the necessary stimulus to such growth that may then propel the overall economic outlook regenerating a stalled economy.

However, mere domestic investment may not be enough when the target area across India is hugely wide. Foreign investment too will be needed, as will be an environment for such investment, inclusive of assured inputs like a steady supply of electricity, oil and gas. To make these changes, Modi will need two-thirds majority in the parliament to go for the necessary reforms and restructuring to initiate the process of India's economic recovery. This is when domestic dependence might just begin to drive some of his foreign agenda.

Enter Tamil Nadu's Chief Minister Jayalalitha, with her party's hefty presence in the parliament and hence her relevance to Modi's endeavor to seek a law-making majority. Enter, also, Sri Lanka, a neighbor that will become



relevant with Jayalalitha's induction into the coalition, pulled into the vortex of what dynamics drive India's internal policy.

Tamil Nadu, India's southern-most state of some 63 million Tamils, has a historical ethnic affinity with the northern stretches of Sri Lanka which too are populated with the same ethnic stock with a similarity of language, culture and religion for most on either side. Sri Lanka's trade and other links are mostly confined to India's southern states across the narrow strait that divides both countries. Historical and religious fables connect the two with a shared cultural and religious history. At its narrowest, this strait, navigable only by small boats and fishing ships, is hardly twelve miles. That is the kind of proximity that pervades Sri Lankan apprehensions and India's sense of entitlement.

What became subsequently the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was initially a reactionary response to the Sinhalization of Sri Lankan socio-cultural ethos. When the British occupied Ceylon, they brought along a large number of Tamils from the south of India to be used as plantation laborers



in their tea estates. These Tamils are called Indian Tamils while those who belong to the northern and the north-eastern regions of Sri Lanka are native Tamils.

When in 1970, the movement to reassert Sinhala supremacy began it unleashed minority apprehensions in the Tamils and the Muslims of Sri Lanka. The Tamil response gradually became more organized and took on a militant hue. The LTTE, as a separately recognizable group with a militaristic approach to regaining Tamil rights in Sri Lanka, was recognized in 1983 with Velupillai Prabhakaran as its leader. That is also when it began an insurgency against the Sri Lankan state to carve out a separate Tamil Eelam consisting of the northern and north-eastern regions of Sri Lanka.

The movement was supported politically, financially and materially by an 80 million strong Tamil Diaspora, including the 63 million from Tamil Nadu in India. The premier intelligence agency of India, RAW, trained, equipped and supported LTTE operations against the Sri Lankan state. In an ironic twist, when India chose

to physically intervene in the Tamil struggle, it introduced its forces under the Indian Peace-Keeping Forces (IPKF) banner.

Except that, soon the IPKF was also fighting the LTTE because it would not fall in line with Indian aspirations. The IPKF was forced to withdraw after a rather bad experience, but did conclude an agreement that was incorporated as the 13th Amendment in the Sri Lankan Constitution that sought equal rights for Tamils. Internationally, European nations which carried sizeable Tamil populations and Canada which too had Tamils in reasonable numbers initiated a peace process that seemed skewed in favor of the Tamils in the eyes of most Sri Lankans. As a result, numerous rounds did not deliver peace. While the IPKF fought the Tamils, there were reports that RAW continued to support the LTTE. Among the many contradictions of this war, this was perhaps the most glaring.

What sustained the LTTE then in all its years of existence: a sense of alienation and deprivation? The sentiment still persists based on support from a wide Diaspora and still

remains viable. Tamil Nadu's religious and cultural affinity remains vibrant and India's apprehension of a growing Chinese influence in Sri Lanka, a reality. In fact, little can be done about it as Sri Lanka is on its way to recovery from the war years.

What is different? The absence of someone as charismatic as Prabhakaran to lead another LTTE. The likely reliance of India on a tier-two engagement will dwell on increased covert influence under a changed security team of militant minds. Internal dynamics will force India to be more aggressive in Sri Lanka as it asserts its supremacy in what it considers its own backyard.

Will the LTTE reemerge? Perhaps not, simply because neither it has the leadership nor is there the time for it to develop an organization as efficient as it once was. What might ensue will be an Indian assertiveness under Modi that will exploit the guile of its covert forces as they attempt at neutralizing China's presence in Sri Lanka. ■

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

Snail's Pace

The government of Prime Minister Sushil Koirala is facing criticism for its slow pace and indecisiveness in important matters.

By Javeria Shakil

When 74-year-old Sushil Koirala took the oath of office in February 2014, everyone in Nepal was too busy to celebrate the 'landmark' achievement to give any consideration to other factors – such as his age and the ability to run a difficult country like Nepal, which has highly complicated political dynamics. The people, including those who belonged to the over 130 political parties of Nepal, were happy because all the stakeholders had finally agreed on one candidate for the position of prime minister.

Their joy was not misplaced because there was bickering and wrangling soon after the general elections which were held in November 2013, six months after the Constituent Assembly was dissolved in May 2013. Even the conduct of the elections was an ordeal itself. There was much delay and uncertainty around the issue. Calls for the boycott of the elections by a number of political parties, including



the second biggest party of Nepal, the UCPN-M, did not help matters either. Violent protests before, and even on the day of the elections, resulted in many deaths. So the happiness of the Nepali nation knew no bounds when it finally chose a person to serve as prime minister, over two months after the general elections.

In their excitement of finally having resolved a leadership crisis, the political parties forgot to take into account many factors, the foremost being 'who' they had chosen to take charge of Nepal's affairs.

The incumbent, Sushil Koirala, has all the qualities of a statesman. He belongs to the well-respected political family of Koiralas. He is related to three former prime ministers of Nepal -- Matrika Prasad Koirala, Girija Prasad Koirala and Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala. Prime Minister Koirala has spent almost 16 years in exile in India after the introduction of the Panchayat system by Nepal's monarchs, which only served to enhance his stature.

His political leanings, which were social-democratic, swayed him towards the Nepali Congress. From being a member of the Central Working Committee of the party, he progressed to become the general secretary and then the vice president and eventually rose to the position of president of the Nepali Congress in 2010. His personal life is also a perfect example of simplicity and austerity. He never married and is a man of simple tastes. In a country where politicians are known for their wealth, Koirala does not own even a house or land. His total declared assets are three mobile phones. After this disclosure, the BBC declared him "one of the world's poorest heads of state". Earlier this year, on his return to Nepal from Myanmar where he had gone to attend the BIMSTECH Summit, Koirala deposited \$650, which was given to him as allowance for his stay in Myanmar.

Since Koirala continues to display such rare traits, it is hard even for his worst critics to doubt his integrity and sincerity to work for his country. But while his intentions remain above scrutiny and criticism, it is the lack of materialization of his plans and promises into actions that have set many a tongue wagging.

When the initial euphoria over

Koirala's selection for the prime ministerial slot died, the realization hit the people that he may be too old for the job and may not be able to assert his powers like a younger candidate would have. In a recent parliamentary meeting of the Nepali Congress, a large number of members criticized Koirala "for not exercising his powers and for creating inertia in the government by not taking decisions in time."

His indecisiveness became apparent when his cabinet failed to nominate candidates on the 26 vacant seats of the Constituent Assembly. In normal circumstances, 26 vacant seats in an assembly of 600 should not have mattered. But mattered a lot in the case of Nepal's Constituent Assembly which has the representation of several marginalized groups and even the transgender community. If some seats fall vacant after the elections, it is the government's responsibility to nominate members on those seats. But the government of Nepal, headed by Koirala, has failed to fulfill its prime responsibility. When the seats remained vacant even after six months of election, an irritated parliamentarian took the matter to the Supreme Court. An angry Supreme Court ordered the government to fill the vacant seats in 15 days.

It is not only the seats of the CA which demanded the government's attention. A fairly large number of positions in the administration, security forces, judiciary and foreign service still remain vacant because of the indecision of the government.

Then there is the matter of the local government elections. Installing the local government was one of the major promises of the Nepali Congress during its election campaign. After coming to power, the party announced that it would hold elections for the local bodies by June. However, Home Minister Bom Dev Gautam declared later that the elections would take place only after the promulgation of the new constitution. In other words, people should stop hoping to see their representatives working at the grass-roots level to get the local problem solved.

The situation has worsened to such an extent that the media has started ridiculing the government's attitude. Mocking the prime minister, a news

magazine wrote that perhaps Sushil Koirala takes the saying 'better late than never' too literally. Another newspaper declared that he believes in working "at a snail's pace".

Prime Minister Koirala was also criticized for his "lethargic attitude" during his visit to India to attend Narendra Modi's oath-taking ceremony. Many analysts were of the view that his visit failed to impress. Commenting on the importance and outcome of Koirala's visit, former foreign minister Ramesh Nath Pandey said, "Nepal failed to maintain symbolism and substance in New Delhi during the meetings with SAARC leaders and the Indian leadership. Symbolism and substance are very important in diplomacy. Symbolism helps shape a favorable atmosphere in diplomacy. Nepalese leadership failed on this front."

Besides these matters, Koirala has also been fighting health issues, some of which are quite serious. He has been undergoing treatment for tongue cancer for quite some time and visited the U.S. recently for a detailed health check-up. The age factor and the health issues have given the critics of Prime Minister Koirala yet another opportunity to target his performance.

Unfortunately, Koirala's critics do not belong to his rival parties only. A large number of them are either from the Nepali Congress or belong to its allies. Criticism of Koirala witnessed a surge as his government completed its 100 days in power in May. Many expressed their apprehensions about the ability of the Koirala-led government to deliver on its basic responsibility: make a new constitution for the country. Writing for Spotlight Nepal, journalist Abhijit Sharma noticed that much of Koirala's hundred days in office had been "marred by extremely slow decision making, coupled with a growing mistrust."

The mistrust may soon lead to widespread unrest in the country. Considering the threats of the allies of the NC government to quit the coalition if it keeps delaying important matters, the days ahead could be dangerous for Sushil Koirala's government. ■

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

Race Across the Waves

Strategically located on the maritime trade routes of the Indian Ocean, the Maldives has been equally eyed for influence by superpowers and regional interests.

By Haroon Janjua



The term 'arms race' is frequently used to describe the military situation in South Asia. An arms race is a competition or rivalry between two or more countries for acquisition and deployment of the latest weapons. In the context of South Asia, the phenomenon is fast turning into a dangerous development as all the countries of the region are vying for

sophisticated war weapons.

Strategically located within the maritime trade routes of the Indian Ocean, the Maldives has been eyed by superpowers, including the U.S., Russia and China, for its unique position in the Indian Ocean. With the prospects of the U.S. having to vacate the Diego Garcia Base due to Mauritius' claims on the island, the U.S. is scouting for

new bases in the region.

Already, the U.S. is pushing the Maldivian government to sign a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) to build military bases in the country. It is another significant move by the Obama administration and is also a part of America's aggressive "Pivot to Asia" policy with the aim to militarily encircle China in the vast Indo-Pacific

theatre. China, which has its own ambitions to become a great sea power, has offered aid to the Maldives for development of defense projects, including a naval base.

The Maldives is a member of SAARC. It considers India as an all-weather friend despite some hiccups in relations when India supported Mohammad Nasheed instead of Mohamed Waheed who had arbitrarily cancelled the \$511 million international airport project in Male, undertaken by an Indian company, the GMR Group.

However, both countries mended their fences soon and now the Maldives is seeking military cooperation and help from India in a big way, especially in developing a new naval base near Male, while New Delhi is also considering the Maldives' request for assistance in developing a base at Uthuru Thila Falhu.

The new naval base, expected to cost more than Rs.3,000 crore, would be located a few miles northwest of Male and would involve setting up of berthing facilities, repair stations as well as a training facility and housing complex for troops.

This project and several other prospects for cooperation in the defense field were discussed during the visit of Indian Army Chief General Bikram Singh who met the Maldivian National Defense Forces leadership in May this year.

Indian Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh also visited the location of the proposed naval base, which is planned to house the MNDF Coast Guard. The Foreign Secretary was briefed on the technical aspects of the project.

It is believed that China has also offered assistance to the Maldives for the development of the naval project. In February 2012, ousted president Mohamed Nasheed had told the *Indian Express* that just a week before he lost power, he was under high pressure from his armed forces to sign a defense agreement with China, a pact that he had been refusing to sign for three months.


Besides the base, the MNDF is also seeking India's assistance in strengthening itself and has expressed a keen interest in additional Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH), amphibious fast attack craft as well as small arms for its personnel.

A project to train 40 to sixty additional Maldivian National Defense Forces personnel in Indian academies is also under discussion. India is likely to consider the Maldives' request for coastal surveillance radars which the latter needs in order to refocus on strengthening its defense after the recent spurt in piracy close to its waters.

During the visit of President Abdul Gayoom to India to attend the swearing in ceremony of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the two had long discussions about co-operation between the two countries.

India has adopted a clear strategy to reduce the influence of China on the Maldives, in the interest of the security of the Indian Ocean region. It also wants to keep Pakistan at bay as Pakistan is trying to broaden defense relations and is aiming at the expansion of cooperation in military training, joint military exercises and defense production with the Maldives. The chief of the defense forces of the Maldives visited Pakistan in March 2014 for talks with Pakistan's defense secretary.

India has reasons to be worried with the growing ties between Pakistan and the Maldives. Intelligence officials say that after the bombing at the Sultan Park in Male in 2007, there was a crackdown on fundamentalists in the Maldives. Several allegedly fled to Pakistan. Ali Jaleel, a Maldivian national, had participated in the May 27, 2009, suicide attack on the ISI office in Lahore. He was linked to Al Qaeda and CDs asking "Maldivian brothers" to join the jihad were recovered from him. "Pakistan has launched a sustained campaign to indoctrinate the Maldivians. The spread of radicalism in Maldivian society has increased. India needs to have a more hands-on approach," said Ajit Doval, the new National Security Adviser of the Modi government.

Maldives is a small country. The SAARC powers as well as international powers should not play with the future of this tourist paradise. Instead, they should protect the Maldives and address the other problems it is facing, such as the rise in the sea level which is endangering the country's very existence. 

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Getting Ready for the Future

While Bhutan needs to step forward and move with the rest of the world, it should not allow globalization to alter the country's traditional outlook.

By Asna Ali

Popularly held notions about Bhutan paint it as an idyllic country that is largely isolated from outside influences. It is, after all, the only country in the world to use Gross National Happiness as a measure of success. Its constitution dictates that 60 percent of the country must always remain forested. But while the increasingly consumerist

and interconnected world would like to believe in the idea of a country that has escaped the negative effects of capitalism and the subsequent pursuit of money, the reality is far more complex.

Bhutan, like every other country, must interact with the outside world and let in foreign influences in order to survive. So far the country has

been meeting its economic needs through trade with other nations on the fringes of the world economy and also through its free trade agreement with India. However, the proposal of Bhutan joining the World Trade Organization has been around for a long time.

Though the plan was shelved in the past, the current government seems



determined to overcome Bhutan's myriad economic problems through WTO membership to ensure greater access to international markets.

Concerns regarding participation in the international market mainly have to do with the changes the membership could bring to Bhutanese society. It is feared that an influx of cheaper foreign products will crowd out local businesses as has happened in other countries.

The question of exactly what Bhutan has to offer in terms of exports has been raised many times. Bhutan exports hydroelectric power to India and its other main industry is tourism. Farming is done mostly on a small scale and there is lack of a skilled labor force for other industries. Due to these factors, unemployment and poverty is on the rise even as the urban population increases. The traditional way of life is undergoing changes even though Bhutan is still on the fringes of the international community in many ways.

These facts are used by the proponents and detractors of potential WTO membership to support their respective arguments. The current government and especially Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay believe that greater interaction with other economies would open new avenues for trade and help develop Bhutan. The influx of new businesses would bring employment opportunities and develop the badly needed infrastructure. Since coming to power, Tobgay has abandoned the Gross National Happiness measure in favor of a more pragmatic approach.

He believes that contrary to the world's expectations and desires of more conservative forces within Bhutan, the social and economic make-up of the country has changed drastically within the last few years. While tradition and religion are still very important, a more modern approach must be adopted. Tobgay and his government wish to increase happiness through more practical means. Rather than just advertising the idea at an international level to build Bhutan's profile, his government's policy is focused inward. Making basic utilities available to all and reducing the burden of national debt are some of the main goals. Furthermore, there is a clear desire to reduce corruption, a problem which plagued the previous

government.

Contrary to the government's aspirations, those who oppose greater globalization believe that Bhutan's economy will be weakened even further due to international exposure. The Bhutanese way of life has been fiercely protected but opening up to outside influences will inevitably bring changes in dress, religious and social convictions and alter the belief systems held sacred by the people of Bhutan. Capitalism is generally looked down upon by traditionalist Bhutanese and its ingress into the country is seen as something that will poison society.

For these individuals, the Gross National Happiness should continue to be a measure of success. It is argued that as it has done in the past, Bhutan will continue to survive, if not thrive, by continuing its business and trade in the same way as it did before.

It is due to these conflicting points of view that Bhutan has been unable to make a decision regarding the WTO membership for the past 15 years. Even though now there is a political will strong enough to drive the country towards globalization, any efforts in this regard cannot be truly considered successful if dissenting elements are not brought around to the same point of view as the government.

The government has shown itself to be committed to preserving traditional elements of Bhutanese social life which could certainly raise its credibility with conservatives. This can be seen in Thimphu, Bhutan's capital, whose buildings have been constructed along traditional architectural elements. But other restrictions, such as those regarding dress, have been eased.

While Tobgay and his government want to take advantage of the global community to benefit Bhutan's economy, their desire to raise the country's international profile is limited. Plans by the previous government to open new embassies have been shelved. The reason given for this is that the money spent on embassies could be better utilized elsewhere - a prudent approach suitable for a struggling economy.

Bhutan is also keen to maintain the status quo with regard to its relations with neighboring countries. India remains the clear favorite, as the two countries have trade agreements which are crucial for the survival of Bhutan's economy. China, however, is

a different story and relations are less friendly between the two countries.

There is no better time than now for Bhutan to open its gates to the international community. The country has managed to build a positive international profile and its successful transition towards democracy has made it very popular with international organizations. The national news media is thriving and there is much development in educational institutions. Tobgay is a progressive leader who understands that isolation is no longer an option for his people. He also understands the shifting dynamics of Bhutanese society and does not try to cover his country's shortcomings by hiding behind the GNH concept.

However, international trade brings with it several problems and these must be kept in mind while considering the decision. Bhutan must have a clear plan on easing up its business restrictions and making itself more attractive to foreign investors while at the same time protecting its national interests. It is a delicate balance that many smaller economies fail to strike.

The lure of foreign investment must not be allowed to override other concerns. One of Bhutan's greatest assets is its largely unspoiled forest land. Other countries that allowed foreign businesses to use and destroy local ecosystems should be a cautionary tale for Bhutan. While the more conservative concerns of some regarding the preservation of traditions may be a little naive, they are based on genuine concerns for the wellbeing of the country and should be given due consideration.

There is no question that Bhutan needs to step forward and embrace globalization. The real issue is that to what extent will this globalization be allowed to alter the country? A clear vision and strong policy would ensure that Bhutan benefits from its membership of the WTO and enjoys closer relationships with other countries, while avoiding the pitfalls of jumping headlong into cutthroat capitalism. How well the country handles these changes remains to be seen. ■

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

More Responsible Media

The media in Pakistan is free but not responsible enough. It needs to train its personnel on more professional lines and adhere to a code of ethics that reflects all round accountability.

By Javed Ansari

It is quite an incongruity that while most of the South Asian region struggles to imbibe the very essence of democratic norms through their media, Pakistan leads the pack with a media sector that surpasses all these countries in its level of media freedom.

Among the many real or perceived

mistakes that Gen. Pervez Musharraf committed, perhaps freeing the media was a major one. To start with, the very media that he liberated turned against him and was a major factor in his exit from power. It subsequently played a key role in vilification of the nine years that he ruled Pakistan, in his disqualification as an electoral

candidate and in providing support for dragging his cases through the courts.

In all these years, it transpired that the Pakistani media, particularly TV, became too big for its boots and it was soon realized that there was no mechanism in place to restrain it, besides of course the judiciary. After the full-blown freedom given to



the media by the military ruler, the succeeding 'democratic' governments found it increasingly difficult to contain it, especially the TV channels. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) was set up to manage the electronic media but it soon became evident that PEMRA was simply a licence issuing body and had no control over content. Of late, it seems to have drawn up some gumption but its decisions tend to remain lopsided, by and large. It is even alleged that while PEMRA is supposed to be an autonomous regulatory body, it is too much under the influence of the sitting government.

While the print medium in Pakistan enjoys as much freedom as the TV channels, it has hardly ever taken things too far. Perhaps one reason for this is that many newspapers still have editors and senior staffers who know their limits. These people are trained in such a way that they would always have qualms about crossing the line no matter what the temptation – and what the level of freedom.

Despite all this liberty, neither the print media nor the TV channels are governed by any kind of code of ethics so far. While print journalists exercise a sort of self-censorship out of old habit, most journalists and quasi-journalists working for TV channels do not exercise such censorship. Some are known to have been restrained by their managements but this is only for economic survival of the channels and does not pertain to ethical or moral requirements.

Some years back, in response to public protest, a set of TV practitioners had devised a sort of code of ethics which primarily called for censorship of footage that showed blood and mutilated bodies on TV screens. The restrictions were observed by the channels for some time but most have again taken to showing the blood and gore. And there is nothing that stops them from free coverage of terrorist attacks as the one on the GHQ, the Sri Lankan cricket team, the Mehran Naval Base, Kamra Air Base or, more recently, the storming of Karachi Airport.

Nowhere in the world are media persons allowed to get as close to the scene of action as in Pakistan where reporters and cameramen file their stories and footage in real time. While authorities on the ground do not stop them because perhaps they do not

wish to impede 'press freedom', the anchors, duty editors and producers who supervise the coverage, egg their reporting teams to get as close to the action as they can and file 'scoops' to 'build' the channel's ratings.

In their enthusiasm, they forget that such 'live' coverage is not tactically advisable because it tends to give out a lot of details about an ongoing operation which should have not been made public at that juncture. The information they have access to should not have been shared with anyone besides the personnel dealing with the incident as it could be misused by the 'handlers' of the attack (who are also watching the TV images at that moment) to their advantage. They would know what kind and how many more soldiers are being inducted into the retaliatory onslaught and what are their positions, etc., which would allow them to make necessary adjustments and give fresh instructions to the attackers.

Live coverage sometimes also borders on the ludicrous. When there were gunshots fired at the ASF Academy located on the other side of Jinnah international Airport, two days after the Karachi airport attack, one TV reporter went so far as to interview a soldier right when he was firing towards the direction where the shooters had fled!

A part of the problem is also the fact that both print and TV reporting and on-screen personnel, at best, receive rudimentary training or none at all in the way they should go about their job. Any jobless person with the right connections can become a reporter, anchor or photographer/cameraman these days – no questions asked. Where TV is concerned, a fairly good-looking, fast-talking female can easily land an anchor's job. There is no assessment of journalistic aptitude in the person to start with, nor the requirement of a proper education. True that many mass communications graduates also end up in these jobs but the organization employing them hardly ever puts them through formal training and they are never made conscious of the sensitivity of their work. The situation is further aggravated by the editors and producers they are answerable to as well as the owners of the news organizations, who have their own axe to grind.

The time has come when media organizations should take a serious

look at the way they do things. Hard-won press freedom is an important constituent of a working democracy and it is something that must be protected at all costs despite the many hurdles. At the same time, now that the media has matured and is looked upon as a key element of the democratic equation, it must organize itself on more professional lines.

There are various aspects that call for immediate attention. One is proper training for working journalists, whether in the print or TV sector. In fact, a beginning has to be made to first define who really is a 'journalist'. The reporters, cameramen and anchorpersons should then be given a basic idea about what their job really is. Now the time of ad hocism is over; only those people should be inducted into journalistic jobs who have the requisite education as well as the right aptitude. Since journalism departments in the country's universities generally do not focus on the profession's real needs, media organizations could do well to organize their own training workshops, even through foreign help, if required.

The other is the dire need for a code of ethics that equally applies to both print and electronic media. It is a fact that several attempts have been made in the past to draw up such codes and successive governments have also been involved in the process, but not much has been achieved. The current need is for all the concerned players to draw up on their own resources and devise a set of rules that pertains to ethics and moral principles for both print and electronic media. In fact, a separate training course should be run only for TV anchorpersons in this respect.

Pakistani media have enjoyed a level of freedom for the past decade and a half that was unthinkable for them before. Much as successive governments may have aspired to curb this freedom in their own interest, they have dared not disturb the apple cart. It now falls upon the media themselves to infuse a level of responsibility in their working so that the media sector can become an important and credible player in a democratic Pakistan. ■

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



More Talks – More Peace

There is so much room for relations between India and Pakistan to expand in various directions. Where there is a will, there is a way.

Informal talks can play an important role in building confidence between hostile neighbours. Countries like Pakistan and India, which suffer from a trust deficit, need to talk all the more. After Narendra Modi's ascent to power in India and with a view to bridging the trust gap, the first Pakistan-India bilateral dialogue was held in Islamabad recently. It was sponsored by the Regional Peace Institute which works to rationalize peace in South Asia.

Former ministers, noted journalists, educationists and policymakers were a part of the high-powered, twelve-member delegation from India that included former External Affairs Minister, Salman Khurshid, former Petroleum Minister, Mani Shankar Aiyar and members of the ruling BJP.

The delegation entered Pakistan

through the Wagah border checkpoint and, after enjoying the luncheon hosted by RPI Chairman Mahmud Kasuri, it travelled to Islamabad on the Lahore-Islamabad Motorway. This infrastructural marvel left the members of the Indian delegation quite impressed.

The group from Pakistan comprised 12 delegates including Mahmud Kasuri, Dr. Hafiz Pasha, journalists Ziauddin Ahmed, Arif Nizami and Dr. Moeed Pirzada, as well as a number of former ambassadors, generals and technocrats.

The talks focused on the Pakistan-India dialogue process, trade and business stakes between the two countries and social and media co-operation. The Indians appeared bullish and were optimistic that the Modi-led government would focus

on expanding the Gujarat business success story to the whole of India and even beyond into the SAARC countries under its Look-East Policy. They emphasized that India could not prosper without equally prospering neighbors.

During the dialogue, it was mentioned that the bilateral trade between India and China has now swelled to over US\$75 billion and is growing exponentially, despite the fact that both countries have a long history of border issues. They have set aside their political differences to carry out business and trade activities while developing a better understanding of each other in the process of the 17 rounds of border-related discussions held so far. The official figure for Pakistan-India bilateral trade is \$3 billion while unofficially it is \$4

billion with stagnation in this trade at present.

Although India's doctrine of normalizing relations with Pakistan is stated to be based on the principle of business first, the Mumbai attacks still haunt India and the threat of terrorism has been cited as a major deterrent that stops the bigger sub-continental power from moving on. The Indians also acknowledge that their country faces serious internal challenges in the form of economic and cultural differences that vary from region to region, the Kashmir and Ladakh issues, poor governance, corruption, lack of devolution of power to the panchayat level, hassle-free movement on the LOC, etc.

It emerged that both the Indians and Pakistanis advocate taking baby steps towards build-up of Pak-India relations. While Track-II is moving on, what the two countries need is Track-III diplomacy, with something worthwhile happening on the ground. The areas which can yield results faster are cooperation in medicine, education, sports, the software industry, culture, etc.

A new social movement with face-


to-face contacts between Indians and Pakistan citizens can also dilute the effects of political bitterness between the two nations. The citizens of India and Pakistan have a common heritage but both have evolved differently in the last 60 years.

In the various interactions, it was noted that there is no course on Pakistan studies in the universities of India. The same is the case in Pakistan. On the issue of terrorism, Pakistani participants maintained that the country itself is the worst victim of terrorism, terming Kashmir a longstanding issue which needs to be addressed for sustainable peace in the region. Some participants claimed that the deaths in the Jammu and Kashmir Valley have decreased considerably because of Pakistan's efforts and this needs to be appreciated. They maintained that finding solutions to political issues can be difficult but the process must move on.

It was argued that a liberal visa policy and opening of an Indian consulate in Karachi, was essential but in spite of repeated assurances by India, the visa issue remains a major deterrent for people-to-people contact,

tourism and business activities.

Some participants were of the view that the issue of grant of MFN status by Pakistan to India and the delay in announcing the NDMA agreed in late 2013 is on account of apprehensions on part of Pakistan's smaller economy. Businessmen in Pakistan are afraid of losing out to India's massive economy and the stalemate may continue unless the fear is addressed.

Discussions also dwelt on the media on both sides of the border not bridging the gap between the two nations. The only binding factor is the immense popularity of Indian films in Pakistan and of some Pakistani TV serials in India. However, the trend started by some TV channels and newspapers to take on board anchors, analysts and editorial writers from each other's country was appreciated and termed healthy in projecting a more balanced view which would also ensure that credible information and analysis was conveyed to viewers and readers. It was suggested that cooperation must move forward in this respect while media in both countries should avoid country-bashing as objective views are the right of every citizen. 



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Coup of Happiness?

The people of Thailand have proved that they are unwilling to put up with the restrictions of the army.

By Sijal Fawad

Political chaos rarely has a happy ending and the beautiful country Thailand is no exception. The first female Prime Minister of the country, Yingluck Shinawatra was ousted by the

Thai constitutional court in May for transferring the national security head, who was appointed by the opposition-led administration in 2011. Changes at the higher level were so abrupt

that even the elections scheduled by Shinawatra could not take place.

Following her departure from the government, a caretaker government was installed. However, the ensuing



violent protests by various government and anti-government factions forced the Thai Army to declare martial law in the country. Later, after only two days of futile talks between political parties, the Thai Army also declared a coup on May 22.

Even though the man behind the coup – Army Chief General Prayuth Chan-ocha – may stress on it being a ‘harmonizing’ coup with a ‘Happiness’ song, the reality is not so rosy. The real picture of the coup depicts a highly restricted and monitored media, government ministries infiltrated with men in green and politicians and leaders in detention. In fact, with journalists being threatened, the social media being regulated and penalties being imposed for voicing dissent, a Thai academic has compared the current-day Thailand to the society depicted in George Orwell’s novel *1984*!

Thailand’s history of coups, with the first one imposed in 1932, had largely been a reflection of society’s detachment from the political sphere in general. Politics was merely a power game, with military and civilian leaders showing little regard for the good of the people. This lack of public involvement changed in 1992 when the people fought back for civilian rule after the 17th coup in the country. This eventually led to the restoration of a civilian government and ushered in political stability for some time.

This time around, what is interesting is not the manner in which the coup was enacted or the army’s insistence that the people stay ‘happy’ with it, but the transformation of the Thai society into a potent force that is aware of its political rights and of the need for a free society with democracy. That the protestors have unleashed their wrath and expressed their disdain at yet another takeover by the army does not come as a surprise anymore considering the changing thinking patterns of the people of Thailand who are espousing liberal views. The level

of political consciousness among the Thais at this point in time is noticeably higher than it has even been in the country’s history. People are unwilling to put up with new restrictions and stringent rules imposed by the army, with protestors brazenly holding derisive placards and putting up serious resistance to the military police.

So with a more socially aware and advanced society, a far cry from the rural society which existed up until a few decades back and which was mired in paternalistic rule, the people of Thailand do not seem to be as pliable as the army would have anticipated. Past military coups, financial crises and blind authoritarianism has helped alter opinions, molding them into a more aware and politically conscious force.

In fact, Yingluck Shinawatra belongs to the party that championed this change, led by her brother Thaksin Shinawatra. Thus, in a way, the longstanding history of military coups and dictatorial regimes is what actually triggered the rise of a changing society. With this kind of a challenge at hand, the Thai Army will have to be prepared to use some muscle which will, quite obviously, not add to its popularity amongst the masses.


Economic consequences are another aspect that will serve as fodder for further igniting the rage of the protestors. Evidence suggests that economic growth slows down after a coup. In Thailand’s case, the additional military spending required to sustain the takeover – especially considering the U.S.’s threat to stop military aid to the country – could be one of the causes for decelerating the economic growth and also for the population’s disdain.

What further adds to the instability of this coup is the lack of any defined agenda by the army. Political and economic stability may be the ultimate goal, but the definite means for achieving these goals have not been pronounced by the Thai Army. Punishing people for propagating

democracy, whisking away those who sit in silent and peaceful opposition, and literally blocking off Thailand’s connections with the world through a heavily controlled media does not seem to be the optimal strategy to follow.

The consequent effects on the country’s economic growth and changing paradigms are also a cause for concern. Given the current stance of the military, one will be hard-pressed to believe that the situation will remain hunky-dory even after the army clears out. That’s why a sound agenda and strategy, backed by thorough deal-making and negotiations, seems to be the order of the day rather than the ruthless extradition of protestors under the guise of a ‘Happiness’ song.

That the military rule will come to an end is a no-brainer because it eventually will, like it has been in the past. General Prayuth has indicated that a temporary constitution will be put in place by September. However, it will be a year before the new general elections will take place. Thankfully though, the nationwide curfew has been lifted to curtail some damage to the country.

But this time around, while packing its bags, the military would have learned that the more politically conscious Thai population is a force to be reckoned with. Hopefully, this will discourage the army from indulging in any such a misadventure in the future. However, a more important point for contemplation is not whether or not the army will go back to the barracks but how the coup will affect an advancing nation’s economy and political stability. One hopes that the rising power of the people will save the country from further chaos and help restore democratic rule and freedom of speech sooner rather than later. 

The writer is a student of economics and finance at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.



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Kantha stitching is an age-old traditional craft which originated in rural Bengal and developed as a cottage industry over the decades. The possibilities of value addition in stitched and unstitched apparel through *kantha* embroidery are very high. The rich and exquisite *kantha* hand embroidery is highly appreciated in international markets. The popularity of *kantha* across Bangladesh, and now abroad too, as a fashion statement has a very humble beginning, like many other Bengali crafts. In Bengali, *kantha* literally means a quilt. Bengali women made quilts from old saris, folding them into layers and using itinerant running stitches with threads picked from the *sari's* borders.

It is warm as a wrap and soft for babies too. In the past, women made *kantha* quilts by recycling old *saris* and *dhotis* (men's wraparounds) and stitching several layers of cloth together with a running stitch to make a simple throw or quilt. Modern-day *kantha* embroidery is done mostly on new pieces of cotton and silk cloth and threads. Rural women give free rein to their imagination and come up with colorful designs. It can be the flowers they see, the pond they go to

have taken a lead. With nimble fingers and with needles and threads, they have utilized their craft to benefit their household and, ultimately, their communities.

These women are entrepreneurs with enough financial stability to sustain their handicraft businesses. They meet every day, chat and sew – some of them have been doing it for almost twenty years, may be more. Women like Halima from Jamalpur – the center of *nakshi kantha* in the country – work at a small-scale home-operated *kantha* factory, and have paid for their children's education. Halima has two sons and a daughter, both of them university-educated. It's not a minor achievement given that her father was an impoverished farmer and her mother a housewife who, like many in Jamalpur, knew the ancient art of the stitch. That was a time when sewing was used only for making small objects for the house – to decorate a cushion or a picture frame.

Halima and the other women speak their own language: of *pata kati*, *anas* and *seem*, *borat* and *sheer* – some of the many styles of stitching that go into a blanket or a bed sheet. The designs are first imagined and drawn, then

an experience she never expected and one she will never forget.

One of the largest embroidery showrooms in Jamalpur is known as Karu Polli Handicrafts, the brainchild of Nazma Rashid. From being a housewife prior to 1995, Nazma has become one of the pioneers of the *nakshi kantha* industry. Her husband, Mohammad Harun-ur-Rashid, a government employee, was initially skeptical of his wife's success. He thought that with his steady income there was no need for her to take on extra duties and that she would hardly have the time to do it since she had the responsibility of running the household. Besides, Jamalpur is a traditional district, one of the poorest in Bangladesh, and working was simply not the sort of thing Muslim women did. Such views were common at the time.

Nonetheless, Nazma participated in the training courses offered by several NGOs, most notably by the Ayesha Abed Foundation and the Small and Medium Enterprise Foundation, covering different aspects of the business from fine sewing skills to marketing to accounts and quality control. By 1998, she had registered Karu Polli with the Department of

Stitch By

The efforts of the women associated with the *nakshi kantha* industry have brought about a quiet revolution in rural Bangladesh.

By Samina Wahid

bathe in or the conch shell they blow in the evening. From an ordinary stitch, *kantha* has morphed into the beautiful *nakshi kantha*, a connoisseur's delight.

But there is a lot more to *nakshi kantha* than mere aesthetic appeal. Over the past few decades, there has been a quiet revolution afoot in Bangladesh – a women's revolution. While in many corners of the world traditional crafts like *nakshi kantha* are becoming rare, women in Bangladesh

marked upon the cloth with powder. Sometimes, the women receive design requests. According to Halima, an embroidered bed sheet might take two women a month to complete if they work eight hours a day. Her endeavors have taken her as far as Ahmedabad, Mumbai and Delhi. She was chosen to participate in a SAARC Business Association of Home-Based Workers' Idea-Sharing tour as one of the 130 Bangladeshi workers. It was

Women Affairs and in 2002 a second registration with the Department of Social Welfare was achieved. She mentions the efforts of the governor of Bangladesh Bank, the Jamalpur-born Atiqur Rahman, in liaising with local banks to free up loan availability needed for expansion of the *kantha* industry.

From an initial 'showroom' that consisted of a room in her small house featuring a sofa and sewing products,



Stitch

Nazma's business has never looked back. In 2003 Karu Polli moved into its current custom-built showroom where a range of products beyond *nakshi kanthas* including bed covers, saris, three and one piece suits, tops, dresses, Punjabis, fotuas, bags and wall mats are sold. Karu Polli features the work of 1900 artisans from at least five villages, employs a staff of six in addition to those involved in tracing and printing, which these days is done both by hand and using the more exact computerized 'skin print.'

Now Nazma spends most of her time in helping other women, particularly with the administrative skills she has acquired, such as how to apply for a bank loan or how to register a business. Nazma says she has

enjoyed witnessing the changes in her area. She said that when she first went to the Defulibari village nearby, the women used to say they needed sugar or flour. Now they speak of needing new furniture or jewellery. Most mud thatch houses have been replaced by tin and they have sanitary latrines.

Nazma believes that when a woman can earn money and help her family, she gains confidence. This is why she says there isn't a village without sewing businesses run by women. Their husbands, she adds, are extremely proud of them. The women have their sights set on exports. There is currently no easy way to market products or develop export sales, and middlemen from Sylhet or Dhaka with better access to the capital, often buy

in bulk both for the broader domestic market and for exports. One facility that could be of benefit, especially for larger businesses, would be the training of how to organize and manage internet sales; another would be to establish a *nakshi polli* or a *nakshi* 'village' as a centralized space where all women entrepreneurs, large and small, could showcase their products. It is thought that the convenience of a *nakshi polli* would be attractive to international buyers.

It is the efforts of these women that have brought about a quiet revolution in rural Bangladesh. Indeed, the *nakshi kantha* industry has put many Bengali women at the forefront of household and community development. **S**

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



The Gems Bonanza

The abundance of gemstones could make them prime drivers of economic growth in Afghanistan.

By Zufah Ansari

Despite years of war and geographical constraints, there are a few things that remain unique to Afghanistan. One such strength of the country is the precious and semi-precious gemstones deposits that are found there in abundance. In fact, Afghanistan has been synonymous with being the hub of valuable gems. Nuristan, Panjshir Valley, Jegdalek and

Badakhshan are the four major regions which are rich in such precious stones as lapis lazuli, emerald, ruby and kunzite.

The abundance of gemstones reserves and their many varieties make them one of the prime drivers of economic growth in Afghanistan. The gemstone industry of the country is estimated to have the commercial

potential of up to \$200 million according to statistics released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Gemstone mining in Afghanistan is much more than just an act of labor. It is a specialized line of work that is performed by qualified craftsmen. The craftsmen add an edge to the process of excavation with their unique skills. They usually belong to the villages

surrounding the mines and are familiar with the topography of the area.

However, despite having great economic potential, the mining industry is in a shambles. One of the reasons for its downfall is the way extraction is done. The process involves tunnel excavation using hand drills and high explosives, which leads to the destruction of 70 percent of the gemstone deposits. This results in wastage and causes damage to gems which, in turn, lose much of their value.

Another major hurdle in the growth of the gemstone industry is the absence of trade channels. The World Bank estimates that gemstones that survive unprofessional mining techniques are exported through grey channels, with 90-95 percent of the extracts transported to Peshawar in Pakistan for quality checks. This deprives the Afghan government of royalty gains.

The situation turns bleaker because of the lack of skilled gemologists and gemstone traders in Afghanistan who can spot real stones and differentiate them from fake or synthetic ones.

A thorough inspection of gemstones is required to determine their quality and detect impurities, such as foreign objects, cloudiness and tiny fractures caused by heat that is part of the natural process of gem creation. The ability to carry out this examination is essential to ascertain the quality and authenticity of a gem.

In the absence of the required expertise, Afghanistan's domestic gems market has seen a surge in the number of fake stones. This phenomenon has brought down the value of the authentic and graded precious stones.

Unfortunately, the government of Afghanistan has not yet invested in acquiring the latest technology to properly excavate the stones and to improve the methods of making jewelry from locally excavated precious stones.

Traders believe that some domestic sellers pass off synthetic gems as Afghan gems to foreigners, convincing them that buying the jewelry is a great bargain. As a result of such dishonest practices, the number of repeat as well as new customers is going down. Over the past few years, the number of foreign buyers of gemstones has decreased considerably.

The majority of victims who fall prey to the conning are American



soldiers deployed in Afghanistan. Many soldiers serving in the country have been duped into buying 'black diamonds' and 'blue sapphires', for which they readily paid large sums thinking that they would make a fortune out of selling them back home. While some spend a few dollars buying a carat or two, others spend thousands of dollars only to find later that the stones were fake.

The inability of the government to provide proper processing and designing facilities within the country has also contributed to worsening the situation. Such facilities are essential to eliminate the need for sending gems to other countries for the purpose of cleaning and cutting.

There is much more to the problems caused by the fake gems industry and the damage it has done to the Afghan gems market. Many Afghan gem traders believe that since jewelry from India, Thailand and Iran is silver coated in most cases and is made from ordinary material, it is cheaper in price and thus gives tough competition to Afghan gems at international exhibitions.

But gems experts also believe that the standard of marketing for original gems from Afghanistan is not up to the mark and therefore there is hardly any exposure of the quality products coming out of Afghanistan.


Moreover, the absence of proper export channels for precious stones has kept many interested international buyers from negotiating trade agreements with the Afghan government.

Over the years the Afghan government has taken some measures

to address the concerns of gem traders with regard to the gemstones market. Gemology courses have been introduced and are being taught to participants from Kabul, Panjsher, Nuristan, Kunduz, and Bamyan provinces. These courses help the gem traders in differentiating the real precious stones from the synthetic ones.

The structural approach to promote the gemstone market will allow traders and sellers to build a trust-based relationship with their clients, which will ultimately translate into more profits as well as regaining the upper hand in gemstones market at the international level.

Other notable initiatives include a mining law to ensure a more regulated stream of exploration and mining and encourage legalization of the gem trade. This is regarded as a measure that would encourage more investment in the sector, leading to better work practices and improved methods of excavation and gem processing. Additionally, the government is seeking help to introduce targeted marketing in order to differentiate Afghan gems from other kinds of gems.

With these new developments lined up, especially with the institutionalization of value-added cutting and polishing centers in Kabul, Afghanistan is expected to be on the road to offer an internationally acclaimed gemstone industry once again. 

The writer is a marketing student with a strong interest in culture and society.

Beyond Beautiful Resorts

Migrant workers in the Maldives are treated like slaves by employers.

By Asra Khurshid

The Maldives, an exotic island country located in the Indian Ocean, is renowned for its beauty and is undoubtedly a fascinating holiday destination. It is famous for its natural beauty - the blue water and the white beaches. It is also an ideal place for water sports such as swimming, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, water-skiing, windsurfing and kite boarding. Also, due to its extraordinary underwater marine life and clean waters, the Maldives is ranked among the best

recreational diving destinations in the world in addition to being a favourite honeymoon destination.

The natural beauty of the Maldives attracts thousands of tourists from around the world. Tourism is the country's largest industry and plays a vital role in inflow of foreign exchange and generating employment. No wonder then that in the Maldivian archipelago, there while 200 islands are inhabited by the local population, around 80 are developed for the purpose of tourism. The Maldives is

also famous for its water villas. Around two-thirds of the 5000 water villas in the world are located in the Maldives.

However, scenic beauty is not the only reason why the Maldives is famous around the world. Unfortunately, it is also known for human trafficking and minimal labor laws. There is a high ratio of migrant workers in the country who suffer at the hands of their employers. These migrant workers, and a large number of local laborers, are employed in developing and building the beautiful resorts for tourists.



Their hard work is not comparable to the money they get or the working conditions they work in. These workers are generally manipulated and not given their due rights. In most cases, they cannot even voice their concerns as trade unions do not exist in the Maldives. The workers build world-class resorts that the tourists are so fond of, but their own accommodation facilities are in a dilapidated condition.

It is not just the migrant laborers who suffer. The local workers are also underpaid and work under harsh conditions. At times, these laborers work seven days a week and are paid after six months. They are barely granted any leave. In fact, they do not get a holiday even on May 1. Working conditions in many of the luxurious resorts are poor and employees have virtually no rights. Laborers are often provided just porridge for breakfast. For the rest of the meals, they have to rely on their own catch of fish while they are also supposed to arrange for their drinking water. Many of them do part-time jobs so that they can purchase food and items of personal use such as soap and medicines.

The migrant workers come to the Maldives in search of better employment opportunities and living conditions but after reaching there they find themselves trapped by their employers who take away their passports and other important documents which forces them to stay. They are treated like slaves and can barely stand up against the atrocious behavior of their employers.

It's a combination of bad politics and corrupt business practices which views workers as nothing better than paid slaves. The living and working conditions of workers are in sharp contrast to the services they offer to the high-paying residents of the plush villas who are blissfully unaware that the attendants pampering them during their expensive stay sometimes go without salaries for months.

Employers give little consideration to the health and safety of workers. As soon as their official work ends, they are often made to run personal errands and chores for their employers. Even though there have been attempts to introduce labor laws, it is hard to say how strictly they are implemented. There is bad governance and no one

really puts in the effort to improve the working conditions for these poor workers. There are barely any health or safety laws to protect them despite the fact that they put their lives at risk every single day while building water villas.

The silver lining is that the issue is now getting a lot of attention and attempts are being made to enact and enforce effective labor laws in the Maldives. Labor rights organizations are also emerging in the country. After the enactment of the Anti-Human Trafficking legislation, the act of withholding passports or identification documents of migrant workers to exploit them has been criminalized.

This law is expected to bring about a change in the working conditions of workers as they will now not be under any threat and can opt out if they are not satisfied with their working conditions. If the law is strictly implemented, it will bring in a huge advantage to the hard-working laborers. Their situation will hopefully improve and they can look towards getting their due rights. **S**

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



Bhutan is known for the way it assesses the quality of life of its citizens through the Gross National Happiness (GNH) index instead of the universally used Gross Domestic Product (GDP) index. The term was invented in 1972 by the then King Jigme Singye Wangchuk.

Bhutan is also known for its diverse flora and fauna. Many rare species and endangered animals are found in the forests of Bhutan. But will the country remain as natural and beautiful as it is now? The question is often posed and assumes importance keeping in view the illegal poaching of wild life and cutting down of trees that is damaging the forests in Bhutan.

Bhutan has more than 770 species of birds and 5,400 species of plants.

Bengal tigers, Indian rhinoceros, clouded leopards, and bears are some animals found in the forests towards the south of the country. Tigers and Indian leopards are mostly found in mixed conifer and pine forests.

Fruit-bearing trees provide a natural habitat for the Himalayan black bear, red panda, sambar, wild pig, and barking deer. Bhutan is also home to antelope, blue sheep, Himalayan musk deer, marmots, snow leopards, Tibetan wolves, and takins – which is also Bhutan's national animal.

However, poaching in the forests is rampant because of the pricey medicines that are made from organs of musk deer, tigers and leopards. These medicines are doing more harm than good as rare animals are ruthlessly

killed to obtain ingredients required for their preparation. The number of poachers is fast increasing in Bhutan. They keep an eye on endangered animals and kill them whenever they get an opportunity.

The government of Bhutan is taking every possible step to curb the practice of illegal poaching. The kingdom has decided – by enacting several laws – to keep at least 60 percent of its land area under forestation; to dedicate more than 26 percent of its territory as national parks, reserves and other protected areas; and to identify a further 9 percent as wildlife corridors linking the protected spaces. Poaching and illegal trade of animal parts has been specifically targeted.

According to the Bhutanese



Protecting

newspaper Kuensel Online, some farmers in the country are involved in rampant poaching of wild animals. They undermine the government's conservation efforts by their ruthless activities. Records maintained with forest officials shows that poaching was not only confined to wild animals that came in contact with humans, but also solitary animals that lived away from human habitation.

Forest Director Chenko Norbu is of the view that the main reason for poaching is the people's desire to earn fast cash. In the capital city Thimphu alone, last year forest officials destroyed 121 snares set up to kill musk deer. In Thrumshingla, 18 snares were destroyed. Foresters seized three musk deer pods from Wangduephodrang and two from Gasa.

Chenko Norbu termed the situation highly alarming, considering the trend of wildlife poaching, especially of musk deer. In addition to musk deer, bear is also one of the most poached wild animals in Bhutan. The kingdom is also used as a conduit for smuggling tiger and elephant parts between the neighboring countries of China and India.

Environmentalists and conservationists are of the opinion that illegal poaching can destroy the natural habitat of animals. This, in turn, will affect the eco-system which can be disrupted and the region may lose its ecological balance and beauty.

In December last year, poachers were arrested both from the Jigme Dorji National Park and the Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park. In

2012, about nine school dropouts were caught trying to poach musk deer which they had planned to sell to make a fast buck.

The government has been taking all measures that it can to curb poaching. According to the WWF report of November 2013, a notice from the Ministry of Agriculture and

which may extend up to ten years, or both. In addition, any animal parts or products possessed by the offender will be confiscated and fines will be imposed for any missing animal parts or products.

While a significant amount of fines is imposed on anyone trying to kill animals, wildlife can only be protected

Environmentalists and conservationists are of the opinion that illegal poaching can destroy the natural habitat of animals. This affects the eco-system of the region.

Forests conferred fines and penalties for protected species under Section 82 (7) of the Forest and Nature Conservation Rules, 2006, (especially those pertaining to the Tiger {Panthera Tigris} and the Snow Leopard {Uncia uncia}) have been revised). According to the new rules, any person found in the act of making an attempt to catch or injure any of the protected species shall have to face a hefty fine of Nu 0.5 million.

Moreover, any person found in an unpermitted area, taking, destroying, capturing or trading parts and products of protected species, regardless of whether the animal was taken, destroyed or captured in Bhutan or elsewhere, will be face a fine of Nu 1 million or a penalty of imprisonment

if the government makes the people realize that they need to protect the ecosystem if they want to live a healthy life.

Only if the common man is made to understand the gravity of the situation and the many hazards of illegal poaching, only then can the government be truly successful in keeping its animals and people safe. The mere imposition of fines and restrictions, without explaining to the people the consequences of their actions, will lead to resentment and hatred and a decline in Bhutan's Gross National Happiness. ■

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

Wildlife

Despite the imposition of heavy penalties and fines on poaching, rare species of animals and birds continue to be killed in the forests of Bhutan.

By Asma Siddiqui



football players in the World Cup this year.

This time, Pakistan has produced about 70 percent of the world cup footballs. The hub of the country's sport goods industry is Sialkot where the Brazuca has also been made. The town has been producing hand-stitched footballs for more than a century. Some major international brands like Adidas, Nike, Puma, Select, Micassa, Diadora, Wilsons, Decathlon and many get their supply of footballs from Sialkot. Currently, sports industries operating in Sialkot produce over 30,000 footballs per day and around 60 million footballs annually, meeting 85 percent of the total world demand for hand-stitched footballs. Around

At this time, a serious threat also confronted the sports goods industry in the form of the thermo-molded ball. This ball is made by using technology that gives the football almost all the characteristics of a hand-stitched ball. To deal with the situation, a Sports Industries Development Centre was formed in Sialkot under the directives of the federal government. Costing more than Rs.435.637 million, the centre was set up to modernize the football industry in Pakistan.

The main reason behind setting up the SIDC was to aid the sports sector in adopting the modern technology of mechanized 'thermo lamination balls' through common facilities, consultative services, machinery and training. Businessmen and manufacturers associated with the

On the Ball

It may take a long time for the Pakistani Football team to make it to the FIFA World Cup but the country's Brazuca ball is already a part of the world event.

By Ayesha Ahmed

The FIFA World Cup has taken the entire world by storm, taking football, the most favorite game of the people across the globe, to the level of an obsession.

Like the rest of the world, in Pakistan, there are millions of football fans who are equally enthusiastic about the game. However, the sad part is that Pakistan does not have a football team to represent it in the event. Nonetheless, it has indirectly managed to take part in this year's World Cup with the production of Brazuca – the football used by the

60,000 highly skilled male and female workers in Sialkot are engaged in the task of making footballs.

In the past, Pakistan has made footballs for the German Bundesliga, the French League and the Champions League. Sialkot produced the Tango ball for the 1982 FIFA World Cup, and gained international recognition which further helped in the progress of the industry. However, while Pakistan was the world's leading football manufacturer until the 1990s, it had lost almost half of its global share to China by 2006.



industry benefitted from the SIDC as it helped the industry in dealing with the technology of those footballs that were a threat to the hand-stitched balls.

The SIDC facilitated the making of prototype balls for the industry, provided training to skilled workers in moulding, rubber technology and mechanized thermo-laminated balls, etc. In addition, the machinery installed was fully capable of producing and testing thermo-laminated balls so as to match the standards of FIFA.

The centre also helped the industry deal with the challenges of product development by modifying the ability and competitiveness of Sialkot's football industry in mechanized footballs. This facilitated in sustaining Pakistan's position in the international market.

That was how Pakistan managed to bind with China as a key supplier of the official Adidas World Cup footballs after a break of 32 years. China used to export footballs for FIFA earlier but failed to keep up with the demand. Also, the players had a hard time handling the machine-made footballs exported by China. This paved the way for a Sialkot company to step in and show its efficiency.

The company acquired the contract to manufacture more than 3000 balls for the major football tournament. This way, the hand-stitched football again caught the attention of football-playing nations and clubs that preferred using them as they matched their expectations as opposed to machine-made footballs.

Brazuca, the ball that is used in

the World Cup this year, features a striking new design and a new panel system. The ball's synthetic surface is made up of six identical interlocking panels, thermally bonded to keep the moisture out.

The only way to meet FIFA's newly introduced strict rules, concerning the roundness of the ball, is by using thermal bonded technology. The balls undergo a testing process at the factory before being considered just right to be used by the soccer players.

The balls are introduced to heat, humidity and high-intensity UV rays to assure their resistance to the harsh Brazilian sun. Besides, there are some other tests to determine if the printed designs will last the match while a test is done to determine the speed of the ball when kicked by a striker. If the ball clears these tests, it goes for mass production.

At the manufacturing end, about 1,800 workers make balls in different colors on dozens of assembly lines. They sew patches of synthetic material together and the ball is flipped inside out since stitching is done on the interior. The ball is then filled with air and, after examination, is placed in a circular machine that makes it round in an efficient manner. Workers are generally engaged in the job eight hours a day, six days a week..

Pakistan is lucky that it has been chosen by FIFA for manufacturing footballs for the World Cup.. The hand-stitched balls made by skilled workers in Sialkot's sports factories show that Pakistan has participate role to play in this thrilling sport, though its team has never played in the tournament. Despite facing competition with machine-made balls from China, Pakistani manufacturers have managed to bring back the production of hand-stitched World Cup footballs to Pakistan making the country a part of the Football World Cup

A big challenge for Pakistan's sports goods industry is to become a world leader in the manufacture of sports gear. The industry needs the necessary facilities and incentives to make this positive change in Pakistan's image. Quality standards and professional marketing techniques must also be adopted to give the country a lead in world markets. **S**

The writer is a Karachi-based journalist.



The Dishwasher's Daughter

Fathima Shabana, the daughter of a poor Indian dishwasher, has made it to the Indian Institute of Technology against all odds.

By Aisha Malik



The youth of India has just the right amount of passion and vigor to push them forward in the field of education. Although South Asia in general and India in particular is rampant with poverty and illiteracy, the scales are shifting slowly but steadily. The need for education as well as the awareness of its importance in molding one's future is being increasingly felt by the youth of South Asian countries. With the media at the forefront of education campaigns, and the social and digital media agencies promoting the cause of eradicating illiteracy, the need for spreading education, even in the most backward areas, is getting the kind of importance it deserves. A recent case of a motivated and committed student is that of Fathima Shabana, the 17-year-old daughter of a poor dishwasher in Chennai. Fathima stuck to her guns about getting an education in the face of serious challenges such as poverty and gender discrimination and successfully made her way towards the Indian Institute of Technology.

Fathima's achievements in education are particularly commendable if her background is taken into consideration. Part of a small community in Chennai, she and her family struggled to stay afloat. Her father, Shahul Hamid, has a mini-eatery or a 'dhaba' where he works as a dishwasher and serves food. He came to Chennai from a small village in Thoothukudi and has since been

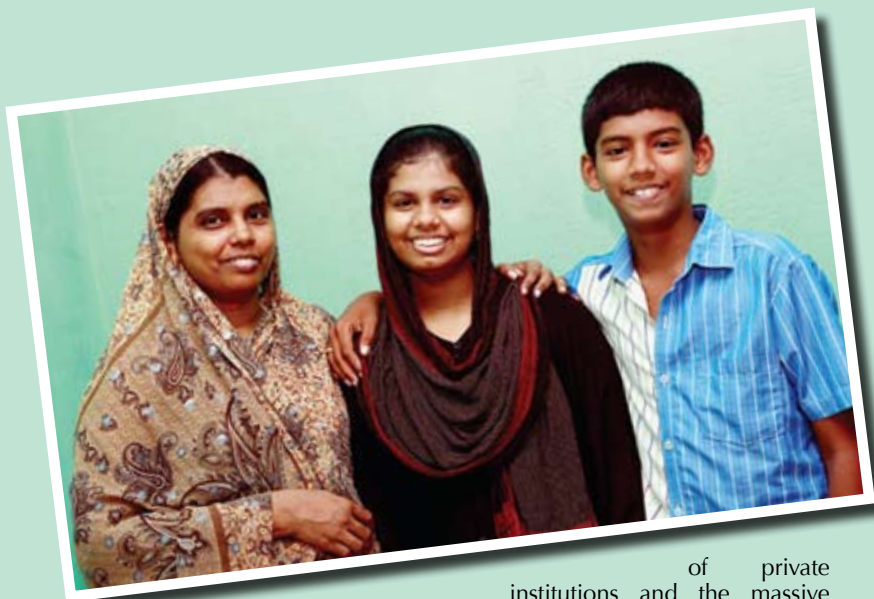
working day and night to ensure that his family does not go to bed hungry. With such adversity, one does not expect an environment encouraging enough for children to carry out their studies.

Fathima's father dropped out of school to pursue his current career, from which he makes only Rs.300 a day. Fathima has worked tirelessly to ensure that her father's hard work paid off in terms of her education, and the day finally arrived on May 25, 2014, when Fathima found that she had cleared the Joint Entrance Exams and had a chance to enter engineering at an IIT.

Hamid is overjoyed at his daughter's achievement as he has witnessed how hard Fathima worked to get this position. "My daughter has made me proud. I always knew she would pass her exams with flying colors," an emotional Hamid said. Although Hamid was unable to send Fathima to a private school, he saw to it that both his son and daughter attended a corporation school, which is free. Hamid reflects on how it had always been his daughter's dream to be an engineer and how he used to worry that he wouldn't be able to fulfill her dream with a paltry income of Rs.300.

Fathima's mother, Bahira Begum, is equally proud. "I couldn't attend school and neither did my husband. But we made sure that our children do not miss a single day of school and it has finally paid off," she says, planting a kiss on her daughter's cheek. Bahira Begum recounts how girls of Fathima's age would be playing on the streets while Fathima would devour books after books. She has always had a penchant for writing and it's evident from her scores.

While Fathima's parents did try to place their children in a private school, they soon realized that they could not afford the fee and shifted them to a school where they didn't have to pay fees. When Fathima was in Class IX, a team from a private coaching institute visited her school. It was looking for bright students to be coached for the JEE-IIT test. Fathima happened to be among the nine students who were selected and was put through a screening test. While her parents were unsure about the affordability of the



JEE coaching classes, the headmaster of Fathima's school was certain about her talent and played a major part in convincing her parents to let her appear in the JEE test. The headmaster was fully aware of the importance of this opportunity. Fathima studied night and day for her JEE entrance exams. She also scored a whopping 83 percent in her class X board exams.

Being a studious girl, she always strived to be at the top of the class and achieved first or second positions. It was her consistent performance that convinced the representative of the coaching institute to allow Fathima to be coached free of cost. Her forte being mathematics, Fathima was confident of doing well in the JEE, a confidence that wasn't misplaced as she aced the test.

The main difficulty she faces after clearing the JEE is the fact that colleges are far off and girls in her small community aren't encouraged or allowed to go to distant places, especially for education. Gender dynamics in rural areas of South Asian countries have held back many young women who have the potential to achieve laurels in many fields. It is yet to be seen whether Fathima will also become just another statistic in that list.

Besides the fact that she is a teenage girl from rural India, the affordability factor also comes into play. A dishwasher's salary can hardly be enough to put a child through college, especially with the soaring tuition fees

of private institutions and the massive overhead charges of studying for a professional degree like engineering. These are some constraints that a large number of students face and Fathima's story is no different.

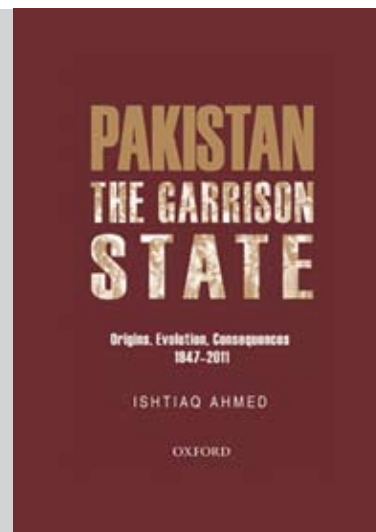
However, she has not lost hope and believes that she will be able to carry on with her studies regardless of the challenges. Her dream is to study computer science, as she claims that she thoroughly enjoys learning all about computers. "I do not have a computer at home, but we get to operate the ones at school and I'm very interested in learning how and why they work the way they do," Fathima says.

Her brother, a student of class IX, says that in his sister he has a solid role model to look up to. Being a class topper himself, he also harbors the dream of becoming an IIT professional, and is already planning a future for himself. Having experienced adversity firsthand and having seen their parents work hard to put their children into school, both Fathima and his brother want to give back to society through their education. Any child's dream is to make their parents proud, but the motivation one receives through supportive parents who, in Fathima's case, are practically illiterate, is a rewarding prospect. Hamid and Bahira Begum brim with pride as they look at their daughter, and give her their blessings. ■

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

Pakistan: Jinnah's Sparta?

**Book Title: Pakistan The Garrison State
Origins, Evolution, Consequences 1947-2011**
Author: Dr. Ishtiaq Ahmed
Publisher: Oxford University Press
Pages: 508, Hardback
Price: Rs.1295
ISBN: 9780199066360



Reviewed by Brigadier (R) A.R.Siddiqi

Dr. Ishtiaq Ahmad's book '*Pakistan The Garrison State*' makes an invaluable addition to our meager literature on the origins and evolution of the state of Pakistan. The bulk of the available literature on the subject falls into the category of historiography, worse still, sort of a hagiography, marked by an emotive, personalized and preferred account of the author.

In fact, before Partition, each cantonment had been a mini-garrison state quite apart from the rest of the area. The cantonments had their own laws, housing societies, grocery stores, places of entertainment and even graveyards well away from the civilian areas.

Cantonment-based troops would debouch out of their barracks and crush the great uprising of May 1857; the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar (April 1919) and resort to the unrestrained use of force during the Quit India Movement of October 1942. The above are just a few examples of use of force in the long inventory of the British who used the military as and when required according to the will of the British area commander.

That the entire pre-partition India had been virtually a garrison state could be seen in the sprawling network of cantonments across the subcontinent that served as the centre of the British military muscle.

The book remains refreshingly free of technical jargon – such scientific works are generally noted for killing much of their value and interest for a

general reader. The text flows smoothly to carry the reader along without making him scratch his head. It's an excellent example of 'righteousness made readable'.

Thus was laid the cornerstone in the arch of a military-dominated (militarist) garrison state that has remained practically unchanged since the birth of Pakistan. Democracy continues to exist in letter rather than in spirit. Something as ordinary as a recent media foul-up reflecting on the character of the country's premier intelligence agency drove democracy to the brink of an abyss.

The emergence of Pakistan as a garrison state was not exactly a post-Partition phenomenon. Chinese political scientist, Tan Tai Yong argues that British rule was mediated through a garrison state. (Pg12)

Dr. Ahmed delves deftly into the origins of Pakistan to discuss its status as a free country and state. Born as a dominion of the British Commonwealth like India, its Siamese Twin, Pakistan would slide deeper into the abyss with the passage of time to reaffirm its status as a subordinate entity.

The Kashmir war drove Pakistan inescapably into a military *cul-de-sac* permanently. Churchill, with his rare strategic vision, was supposed to be the first to foresee the geo-strategic importance of the future Pakistan as the state on the pivot of Central and West Asia and the need to retain it on the side of the West. In May 1947, at a Chiefs of Staff Committee meeting in London, he strongly supported his assumption

that it'd be 'good' for Britain to retain Pakistan.

The meeting was attended by the senior military and civil officers – RAF Marshal Lord Tedder (in the chair), Admiral Sir John H.D. Cunningham, Field Marshal Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, Lieutenant General Sir Leslie C. Hollis, Minister of Defence A.V. Alexander, Chief of the Viceroy Staff Lord Ismay and Major General R.E. Laycock. A memorandum prepared at the meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Committee in London on May 12, 1947 strongly supported the assumption that it would be good for Britain if Pakistan remained in the Commonwealth."(Pg37)

How would the architect of Pakistan have liked and envisioned Pakistan to develop? As a warring Sparta or a Castilian, enlightened Athens? Did he ever have the freedom to choose between the two extremes?

Despite his likely natural preference to see Pakistan, his territorial protégé, grow into a modern-day Athens, he all but lost his only chance to choose freely when a hostile India imposed a war on its jugular, the State of Jammu and Kashmir. The Kashmir war sealed the fate of Jinnah's fond dream to create an Athens in Pakistan. The Kashmir war all but destroyed Jinnah's one wish for lasting peace to turn Pakistan into a functional, modern state.

Jinnah projected his Pakistan as the Indian Muslims' Utopia – the Promised Land. However, the unforeseen mayhem and massive dislocations accompanying the birth of Pakistan cast

their evil shadow on Jinnah's heaven-on-earth. India's existential threat, materializing through the Kashmir war, placed the fledgling state in a military straitjacket, making it harder and harder to turn from Jinnah's dearly-cherished ideological state into a garrison state and as the latter day 'Fortress of Islam'.

How did Jinnah envision his dream state? As a civilized, enlightened Athens or a war-like Sparta?

The instant answer would be Athens but was that really feasible? How could the land of the martial races – Punjabi Musalmans (PMs) and the rugged, warrior-like Frontier Pathan tribes – be transformed overnight into the land of the great Athenians like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle? Did the thought ever cross Jinnah's mind?

Would he have ever opted for a 'mutilated, truncated, divided and moth-eaten Pakistan'? Did he accept it only to serve as his Sparta to humble an arrogant and aggressive Hindu India once and for all to re-establish the Muslim rule of the Sultans and Mughals?

Nonetheless, the one question that weighed on his mind had been about the aggressive designs of India and how to meet the challenge at all costs by military means for want of a peaceful option. Hence his quest for arms to make his meager and poorly armed fighting forces to meet the challenge of one or more imposed wars.

India's use of military force to get Kashmir accede to India confirmed Pakistan's worst fears about its hegemonic designs. Earlier on, India occupied three princely states on the western coast – Junagarh, Mangrol and Manavadi that had already acceded to Pakistan. Under the Partition plan of June 3, 1947, each princely state had had the sovereign right to accede either to India or Pakistan or stay independent.

Wary of a hostile India and woefully deficient in military wherewithal with little prospect of a war-torn Britain being of much help to Pakistan, Jinnah wouldn't wait to turn to the United States of America for arms aid.

As early as October 1947, Jinnah saddled Mir Laik Ali, an escapee from the princely Indian state of Hyderabad (Deccan), with the task of approaching the State Department to canvass for arms aid. Mir Laik Ali, a former finance minister of Hyderabad, was known for his expertise in high finance

and diplomacy. He was known for his skill to navigate through intricate talks involved in the process.

About the same time, Jinnah also alerted Ambassador Ispahani to contact the State Department with a similar request at his level. On October 17, 1947 Mir Laik Ali and Ispahani were received by Willard L. Thorp, Roy Thurston and two other representatives of the office of New Eastern Affairs to negotiate a loan of \$2 billion 'primarily' for defense.

In a subsequent 'memorandum', the two Pakistani envoys stated that the government of Pakistan was 'willing to designate the United States as its principal economic and military benefactor', (The American Role in Pakistan by MS Venkata Ramani, Radiant Publishers, India 1982, Pg16-17)

Ambassador Ispahani, while presenting his credentials to President Truman, projected Pakistan as the world's principal bulwark against the Godless Soviet Union. He 'launched into an anthological exposition' to describe Pakistan as the land of the 'descendants' of the great Muslim emperors of India, coming from the 'steppes' of Central Asia and Caucasian mountains, to come to the aid of the American people. Thus Pakistan would serve as natural defense against communism.

America expressed great concern over the flare-up between the two countries and remarked, 'Our longstanding and our very consistent stance has always been that the Kashmir issue must, and should be, solved by peaceful means' (ibid 53).

President Truman, in response, assured Ambassador Ispahani that America 'stood ready' to assist Pakistan in all 'appropriate way' to help the two countries and the world (ibid).

Furthermore, the lack of clarity about national identity drove Pakistan towards adopting an Islamic identity... The question was how to marry dogma with democracy. Could Islam be ever put to vote without running the risk of a negative vote? In other words, could Islam be ever denied the status as the sheet anchor and the *raison d'être* of Pakistan?

From Jinnah to Ayub to Yahya and onwards to the builder of the 'Fortress of Islam' Zia up to the present day and age of Raheel Sharif, Islamic democracy and its foster child, the cult

of Shahadat, (martyrdom) had kept growing from strength to strength.

The concept of the garrison state per se was propounded by the American political scientist Harold Lasswell in 1927 in the context of the Sino-Japanese war. It was 'premised' on the technological changes within the military to shift the balance of power to the latter from a tardy and tradition-bound civilian government.

The shifting of the capital from Karachi to Rawalpindi, the seat of the General Headquarters, was not only the evolution of the garrison state but also of the establishment of an enduring base of military power. Given time and opportunity, Karachi with its unquestionably higher state of education, economy and, last but not least, a robust public opinion, had the promise and potential to develop into a latter-day Athens – or something similar to that.

Dr. Ahmad finds the reviewer's concept of the state of Pakistan 'strikingly similar' to Lasswell's. He goes on to quote from the preface of his book 'The Military in Pakistan – Image and Reality' (Vanguard, 1996): "Since there is no other institution to rival the military in organization and discipline, above all, in its control of the instruments of violence, its image grows apace, and presently reaches a point of predominance and power where it becomes an object of mass reverence of fear. A sort of (sic) Prussianism is born to produce an army with a nation in place of a nation with an army. The national identity and interest is progressively subordinated to the growing power of the military images."

In his preface to Brigadier S.K. Malik's book, 'The Quranic Concept of War', General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq supports 'the application of military force by way of Islamic jihad. He writes: "This book brings out, with simplicity, clarity, and precision, the Quranic philosophy on the application of military force, within the context of the totality that is jihad. The professional soldier in a Muslim army, pursuing the goals of a Muslim state, cannot become a 'professional' if he does not take on 'the colour of Allah' in all his activities (P.246)."

Jinnah's Sparta with an Olympian divine mission! **S**

The writer is a former head of the ISPR.

The Rewards of 'Democracy'



If democracy is what happened on June 17, 2014 in Model Town, Lahore, then the people can do without it. Gen. Pervez Musharraf is described as a 'dictator' but never in his rule were people put to as much inconvenience and subjected to as many hardships as they have been under subsequent 'democratic' dispensations. Benazir Bhutto used to say, 'Democracy is the best revenge.' Pakistan now has a democracy - but who is the revenge against? The people of Pakistan?

Has democracy failed in Pakistan?

Why is democracy not delivering?

Poll: Pakistani youth disenchanted with democracy



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