

US-IRAN RELATIONS  
A Bridge Too Far?

January 2015

# SOUTHASIA

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## INSIDE

**AFGHANISTAN**  
Paradise Gained

**INDIA**  
Big Brother Politics

**SRI LANKA**  
Another Battle of Survival

**BANGLADESH**  
Capping the Gap

# The Binding Force

The Pakistan Armed Forces have always played a leadership role in cementing the nation together



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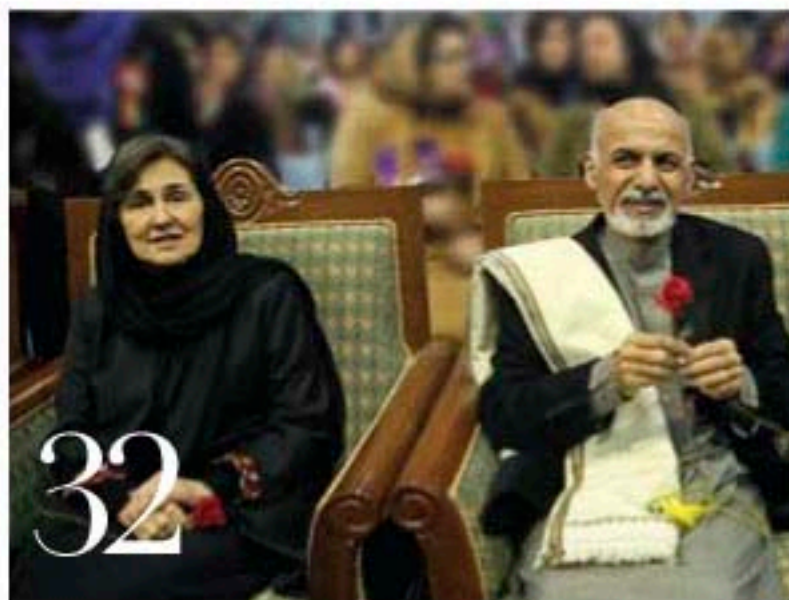


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# SOUTHASIA

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## Countering the Monster

It was a happy augury that representatives of all the major political parties in Pakistan found themselves huddled in a ten hour long meeting on Dec 23, in the aftermath of the Dec. 16 school tragedy in Peshawar. Among them were also the Pakistan Army chief and the director general of the ISI. That day they whittled out a 20-point plan that was to be put into immediate action. Among the salient points of the plan were formation of 'special trial courts' led by military officers, reactivation of the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), development of a special anti-terrorism force and ban on print and electronic media promoting terrorism. In subsequent days, the Pakistan Prime Minister held several small meetings with his close associates in the cabinet and formed separate committees to handle most of the issues that had been highlighted in the 20-points. This resulted in the formation of a National Action Plan with an umbrella committee and 17 sub-working groups related to the implementation of the Action Plan. It is commendable that the Prime Minister and his ministers chose to at last rise from their slumber and go about seriously addressing the terrorism issue that has confronted Pakistan so acutely over the years. For a change, instead of just leaving everything to the armed forces and their military operation in North Waziristan, they demonstrated their willingness to sit together and tackle the problem head-on themselves. It was also commendable that the other political parties also cooperated. Imran Khan called off his Islamabad sit-in and the MQM and PPP, despite having reservations about the 'special courts,' supported the government's new strategy.

The National Action Plan looks like a menu for improved governance, considering that it touches some very basic and significant issues and professes to strike those issues at the very roots. It takes into account all those factors that impact the spread of terrorism in the country and it intends to have mechanisms in place that would weed out the evil for good. The plan covers everything - armed militias, hate speeches, extremist material, finances of terrorist organizations, re-emergence of banned organizations, setting up of a counter-terrorism force, religious persecution, madrassah regulation, terrorist glorification by media, reforms in FATA, dismantling of terrorist communication networks, the worsening situation in Karachi and the Punjab, sectarian terrorism, the question of Afghan refugees and appropriate formulation of criminal justice reforms.

It is being said by some quarters that formation of so many committees would, in the end, lead to nowhere and the issues would entangle the running of the committees. The very fact that the interior minister is heading some 11 of the committees could prove to be a self-defeating act. But it is also true that the terrorist threat is an existential one and needs to be tackled from all possible angles instead of being given a surface-deep, one-dimensional treatment. In the past, one serious mistake on the part of succeeding governments was that no effort was made to look more deeply and more comprehensively into the matter. While the present government made all efforts to talk to the Taliban, the latter continued with their nefarious acts of terrorism. Then the armed forces launched the Operation Zarb-e-Azb which served to scatter the terrorists - but only for a while - because they regrouped and rendered even more bloody strikes on the civilian population, in some cases from across the border regions of Afghanistan.

Following the Peshawar tragedy, it is obvious that the people of Pakistan are in no mood to see further incidents of terrorism. For once, they are encouraged by the fact that Nawaz Sharif and his government are committed to their word and that the PM has, over the days since the massacre, demonstrated more by deed than by word, that he means business. In this he is fully supported by the Army which has also speeded up its operations and has brought the Afghan government as well as ISAF forces to cooperate in the elimination of terrorist groups. The setting up of special courts (read military courts) and their being headed by serving military officers had kicked up controversy and the view was bandied about that this was akin to imposing of martial law. It is good that the misconceptions in this regard have been satisfactorily removed and it has also been made clear to the dissenting political parties that the special courts would only be utilized to try terrorists and that their life would not exceed beyond two years. It is hoped that in the midst of all the action supported by good intentions, the enthusiasm with which the nation has risen to countering the challenge of terrorism would not be lost to bureaucratic plodding and the menace would be obliterated for all times.



Syed Jawaid Iqbal

## Wider Cooperation

The GCC countries already have connections with South Asia on many levels – economic, cultural and, in



the case of four South Asian countries, religious as well. It sounds all the more logical therefore, as your December cover story points out, that these ties should be organized on more productive lines and both regions should capitalize on each others' positive points. Realistically speaking, it is true that the SAARC grouping has not been very successful due to the continuing rivalry between India and Pakistan – and the future of this regional association is not very encouraging. On the other hand, while the GCC was established with equally noble intentions of economic and political cooperation, it too seems to be fizzling out, what with the State of Qatar not quite following the policies of other nations in the grouping and even the emirate of Dubai, while it is a part of the UAE, pursuing a more forward-looking economic and financial agenda because it is far ahead of the other emirates and neighbouring countries in terms of becoming a global financial and cultural hub. As such, it would be a good idea if the regions of SAARC and GCC could merge together into a bigger and wider zone of cooperation.

**Shahid Kamal**  
*Karachi, Pakistan*

## Building Bridges

The article 'Dynasty of Another Kind' was an interesting read. It is true that the family of Imam of the iconic Jamia Masjid in Delhi has held sway over the mosque from generation to generation. It is interesting though that while the Imam wields dynastic hold over the mosque, his presence does not benefit the Indian Muslims in any way and they continue to suffer at the hands of the vast Hindu majority. Wouldn't it be better if the current Imam Bukhari opened bridges of communication with the down-trodden Muslims of India and made an effort not only to understand their problems but also to make an emphatic



representation before the Indian government?

**Kalbe Ali**  
*Dehli, India*

## Branchless Banking

Of late there has been much activity as far as branchless banking is concerned and a number of brands have appeared in the Pakistani market that offer the convenience and access of such banking. This is all because cellular service providers and financial

institutions have come together to provide the ease and convenience of banking without the person having to actually go to a bank. This is certainly the need of the hour. Pakistan is a country of about 200,000 million people but a very small percentage is served by regular banking. The reasons for this are many. Regular banking still has a



long way to go to really cover the rural areas of the country, where at least 60 to 70 percent of the population resides. The rural inhabitant also has some sort of hesitation walking into a bank branch and he would rather do his or her banking (basically money transfers) through the corner general store. Like your interviewee, Nadeem Hussain, in the December issue of Southasia says, the biggest challenge that branchless banking faces is 'lack of awareness.' This is one single aspect that needs to be addressed with full force so that the benefits of branchless banking can reach more people in the country.

**Huma Ahmed**  
*Faisalabad, Pakistan*

## Hard realities

Yes indeed – jailed and then bailed! Looks like the golden run of Indian politicians like Jayaram Jayalalita is coming to a close. Madam Jayalalita may be a charismatic personality in her own right but, as they say, you



can fool some people all the time but not all the people all the time. Her romance with politics had to hit the hard lode of reality some day. Though her conviction may not have affected her popularity that much, she must have realized by now that there's more to politics than amassing huge wealth. So let's hope she will get down to doing some good work for her electorate this time around!

**Rajan Sinha**  
*Chennai, India*

## Statue of Unity

It was interesting to read about the Statue of Unity being built in India. While I agree with the criticism of the monument which basically revolves around the amount of money required to construct a structure of this magnitude, it is also a fact that once built, it will bring in a lot of revenue. Also, such monuments are a nation's pride. South Asia is lucky to be rich in natural beauty but unfortunately as a region it lacks man-made structures. I have visited a number of western countries and am always impressed by their beautiful statues and monuments which are common there. My only contention with the Statue of Unity is its name, which is a misnomer. While such monuments around the world represent a person, an idea or a belief respected and shared by the majority, the same can't be said about the statue

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## United We Stand

Though some time has passed, the nation is still trying to come to grips with the tragedy that was the attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar. The pictures of injured students, wailing parents and broken down families are still fresh in memory. It will be a long time before the nation fully recovers from the trauma although the incident will be etched on its collective memory for all times to come.

Regardless of the gory nature of the incident, much good has come out of it. It united the entire nation, for one. For the first time, people belonging to all political parties, religions and sects agreed on who the real enemy is. The government, the political parties and the armed forces sat together to formulate a strategy to deal with the terrorists. Not only that, the strategy was implemented and we all saw its result. Now it is hoped that the unity lasts long. United we can fight the militants.

**Rozina Mohsin  
Karachi, Pakistan**

of Sardar Patel. Perhaps the statue of a famous businessman from the state would have been a better idea as Gujarat is known for its entrepreneurs who made a name for themselves in the country and abroad. Hopefully, we will see more such structures in the future.

**Sohrab Patel  
Manchester, UK**

## Going It Alone

In the piece, 'Burqa Blue to Belt Green', the writer has made a good attempt to bring out how ready the Afghan forces (including women) will be to take over the country's security duties after the Americans and ISAF forces leave. However, a BBC Television report the other day presented a different picture. It showed how the Afghan Army is feeling left alone, now that foreign forces have begun exiting their soil and they (the Afghans) have to contend with the enemy on all their own. It is obvious that the Afghans are neither

ready nor confident about going it all alone.

Perhaps this will create



a welcome gap for the Indians to come and occupy the vacant space and thus fulfill their dream of having a cogent military presence in Afghanistan. As it is, Afghan personnel are already undergoing training at Indian military institutions and obviously being indoctrinated as to the suitability of Indians training and assisting the Afghans rather than other neighbours, like Iran and Pakistan, doing so.

**Gul Bahadur  
Kabul, Afghanistan**



"Is this the way of life that Islam teaches us? That we fight amongst ourselves and feel scared of fellow Muslims?"

**Perviz Musharraf,  
Former President of Pakistan.**



"A national tragedy unleashed by savages."  
**Nawaz Sharif,  
Prime Minister of Pakistan.**



"Afghanistan wants to bolster security and defence ties with Pakistan including cooperation in training and border management."  
**Ashraf Ghani,  
President of Afghanistan.**



"Truly there are so many tears this Christmas."  
**Pope Francis.**



"Enough is enough, now strict action should be taken against those who speak in favor of terrorists."  
**Gen. Raheel Sharif,  
Chief of Staff, Pakistan Army.**



"The soul is healed by being with children. Extreme anger and disgust for all those who took our children, our future, our healers away."  
**Shahrukh Khan,  
Indian film actor**



"The Peshawar tragedy has united the nation."  
**Mamnoon Hussain,  
President of Pakistan.**



"It is a senseless act of unspeakable brutality that has claimed lives of the most innocent of human beings – young children in their school."  
**Narendra Modi,  
Prime Minister of India.**



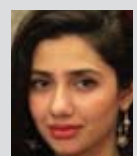
"Our thoughts and prayers are with Pakistan."  
**Mahinda Rajapakse,  
President of Sri Lanka**



"I was deeply shocked by the barbaric terrorist attack on the school in the city of Peshawar that led to numerous victims among innocent citizens the majority of which were children and teenagers."  
**Vladimir Putin,  
President of the Russian Federation.**



"Words are not enough to express our grief and condemn this heinous attack."  
**Altaf Hussain,  
Head of Muttahida Qaumi Movement.**



"The smallest coffins are the heaviest. It's sick how these cowards think."  
**Mahira Khan,  
Pakistani TV and film actress.**

PAKISTAN | Karachi

# More Gas



The Pakistan Petroleum Limited announced a gas and condensate discovery at its exploration well in Sindh. This is the sixth discovery in the block. The well was drilled in October and reached its final depth of 3,564 meters in December.

In August, the company discovered 42 million cubic feet of gas per day in Gambat South, its third and biggest discovery. The company has a portfolio of 47 exploration blocks, has been aggressively searching for new hydrocarbon reserves to make up for the decrease in production from its established fields, such as Sui. **S**

PAKISTAN | Peshawar

# Ancient Treasure



Buddhist sculptures and heads, dating back from the second to the fifth century AD, were discovered during an excavation at a Buddhist stupa known as Bhamala Buddhist Complex near Khanpur. The Director of Archaeology and Museums Directorate of KPK, Dr. Abdul Samad said that sculptures, heads and precious coins of the Kushan period were also found around the stupa.

Located near the Khanpur Dam, Bhamala is a national and world heritage site. It was partially excavated in the early 1930s by Sir Jan Marshal. Fresh excavations at the archeological site were initiated by the Hazara University in Mansehra. **S**

INDIA | New Delhi

# Welcome Note



India will issue one rupee currency notes after a gap of two decades.

Unlike other currency notes, the Re.1 notes will be issued by the government and will be signed by the finance secretary as was the norm earlier.

The governor of the Reserve Bank of India will continue to sign notes of all other denominations.

The government and the RBI discontinued Re.1 and Rs.2 notes, citing the high cost involved and focused on coins for smaller denominations. **S**

INDIA | Mumbai

# Pharma Profit



The Indian market has witnessed a nearly 20 percent annual growth in biosimilars (also known as biologics) in 2014. Biologics are drugs with active ingredients sourced from living organisms. These products are based on proteins, genes, etc., unlike normal,

small-molecule drugs where the active ingredient is a chemical. Due to this complex base, biologics cannot be as easily copied as other drugs.

In India, sale of biosimilars had grown 20 percent annually to approximately 2.5 percent of the overall market sales at the end of November 2014. Sales margins on biosimilar drugs range from 20 percent to 80 percent. With the U.S. drug patent pipeline drying up, the high-margin biologics are likely to sustain sales for Indian companies. **S**

AFGHANISTAN | Kabul

# Young Leaders

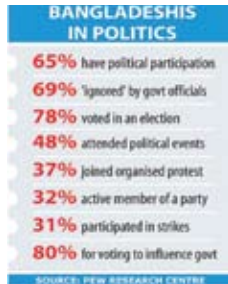
The youth of Afghanistan is achieving wonderful milestones in the fields of innovation, research and development, despite the country's scarce resources. A young Afghan student Mustafa has built a solar-powered motorbike which runs with the help of electricity whose energy is obtained from solar panels planted on the roof of the bike. The bike can run at a speed of 40 kilometers per hour. It

also has pedals which can be used during emergencies, especially when the energy of the bike has been totally consumed.

Another Afghan student Ghulam Sadiq, a graduate of a polytechnic institute in Jawzjan, is working on a project to build a helicopter while an Afghan engineer, Zmarai Helali, has taken an initiative to build an unmanned aerial vehicle and aircraft flown by autopilots. **S**



# Politically Active



Bangladesh ranks the highest in terms of people's political participation among 33 developing and emerging nations, according to a global survey by the U.S.-based Pew Research Centre. The country, however, has a very low political efficacy with over two-thirds of the respondents saying that government officials do not care about what the people think. The survey titled 'Spring 2014 Global Attitudes Survey' shows that 65 percent Bangladeshis have

a higher level of involvement in political affairs, though the Asia region ranks the lowest in this field with an overall median of 24 percent.

A total of 1,000 Bangladeshis aged over 18 were interviewed for the report. Eighty percent of them chose voting as the most useful form of political engagement while 78 percent said they voted over the last 12 months or in the more distant past. **S**

# Inching Closer



China will increase its official aid to Nepal by more than five times from the current \$24 million to \$128 million in 2015-16. China has also promised to build the electricity infrastructure in Nepal worth \$1.6 billion to counter an Indian offer for a soft loan for the power sector. Besides, Beijing is building a police

academy for Nepal as a special gift.

India announced a \$1 billion soft loan to build Nepal's infrastructure, including power projects. China responded with a \$1.6 billion power project, which is expected to generate 750MW of electricity.

A direct train connection from Nepal to Tibet is also expected to become a reality in about a year, as China has begun extending the Tibet rail line which brings it closer to Nepal's border. **S**

# Young Deaths

According to a report of the Royal Bhutan Police, from 2009 to 2013, 347 people committed suicide in the country – 15 percent of them in the age bracket of 15-20 years. According to the cases reported to the Education Ministry, a total of 24 students committed suicide within four years. In 2014 alone, 11 students took their lives. The feeling of failure to live up to the expectations of their parents



and families and being unable to face disappointments, humiliation, etc., add to the factors that drive the youth to contemplating suicide.

To deal with the problem, the Education Ministry has increased the number of counselors from 20 to 56. In higher schools, the government has deployed 87 counselors and more will be deployed. **S**

# Shopping for Ships



Sri Lanka will import two warships from India for its naval fleet. India, which delivered a warship to Mauritius for the first time, will build the two off-shore patrol vehicles (OPV) for Sri Lanka. These are under construction at the Goa Shipyard. The ships will

be entirely indigenously built.

The warships, with a capacity of 83 crew, will be capable of search and rescue missions, transportation of small detachment of troops and helicopter operations. They can handle external firefighting and can also be used for cargo handling. **S**

# Press in Chains



The Maldives has fallen in the Press Freedom Index of the Reporters Without Borders for the fourth consecutive year, dropping 5 places to 108th out of 180 countries. The index reflects the degree of freedom that journalists enjoy in each country and the efforts made by the authorities to

ensure respect for their freedom.

The Maldives rose as high as 51st in the index in 2009 but recent years have seen a steady decline with the country slipping to 73rd in 2011, 103rd in 2012 and 108th in 2013. **S**

"General Musharraf recently reiterated his support for the army's active involvement in running the country as according to him, our political parties lack decision-making and the country prospered under military governments. This argument could be easily reversed by pleading that the political process was weakened by repeated military takeovers. All military rulers ran the country by inducting B teams of the major political parties in their governments. The difference was that the generals follow the technocrat's advice while the politicians have a habit of running things by personal preferences. The generals commanded support of the civil service while the politicians promoted the yes men."



**Saeed Khalid**  
Former ambassador

"As General Musharraf insists upon an official, constitutional role for the armed forces in government, it is impossible not to think of his predecessor's take on the subject."



**Asad Rahim Khan**  
Lawyer and columnist

"Instead of running after symptoms, we should be exploring what our real problem is and then try to fix it. Our problem certainly is not the absence of a constitutional role for the armed forces. They already have one under Article 245 (1)."



"There has been an absence of governance. Since independence, with no competence or credibility of their own, our political oligarchy of no more than a bunch of self-serving elitist politicians got used to ruling the country in collusion with the bureaucracy. In the name of democracy, they made a mockery of the Quaid's Pakistan. No wonder, with its cohesive character, the military

# The binding force

## Can Pakistan's civilian rulers move forward without the assistance of the army?

By Syed Jawaid Iqbal

The bloodbath that took place at the Army Public School in Peshawar on December 16 is indicative of the lack of governance on the part of Pakistan's civilian rulers. There were reports that the Peshawar administration had been warned of a major imminent terrorist incident but it seems to have been taken lightly by both the federal and provincial governments and no measures were in place to counter such an eventuality. Even when the tragedy occurred and the civilian government was running helter-skelter, it was the troops and commandos of the Pakistan Army who came to the fore and eliminated the terrorists, besides removing the dead and injured from the scene.

The next day (December 17), Pakistan Army Chief General Raheel Sharif, made an emergency dash to Kabul where he held separate meetings with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and ISAF commander General John F Campbell. He is reported to have told the Afghan leadership that the terrorists were using Afghan soil to carry out attacks on Pakistan. He shared classified intelligence with them and told them that the mastermind behind the Peshawar attack, who was from Afghanistan, was giving directives to the terrorists.

The cliché goes that you can change everything but you can't change your neighbors. In Pakistan's case, it has to contend not with one neighbor on its western border, Afghanistan, but almost the whole world. Today's dynamics of global power-mongering require that the interests of all four big power brokers in the world today – the US, China, Russia and the EU – converge in this part. This tremendously increases Pakistan's strategic importance and further magnifies the challenges faced by the county.

However, where there is challenge, there is opportunity as well. If handled judiciously, the very dangers that are currently knocking at Pakistan's doors could be converted to its advantage and the nation could emerge as an important fulcrum in the global power

game. It is a pity then that the country's 'democratically-elected' rulers have allowed themselves to be embroiled in a continuous string of 'non-issues' – and are not paying much attention to all that is happening in the neighborhood. This is borne by the fact that the country still does not think that the IS is an existential threat to Pakistan. Just as it has woken up to the serious terrorist threat within the country, the government needs to become extremely vigilant and take urgent pre-emptive measures to stop the militant group's ingress in Pakistan.

Despite all its travails on the foreign policy front, Pakistan still does not have a proper foreign minister or even a minister of state for foreign affairs. The prime minister has kept this portfolio to himself though he has no time to formulate foreign policy. No wonder then that a mixture of confusion is evident within government circles regarding key foreign policy matters. In the end, the civilian government goes its own way and the army its own. In this backdrop, at least one good step the government has taken is that it has appointed Dr Maleeha Lodhi, as its permanent representative in the UN.

The various ways in which Pakistan is being 'misgoverned' is simply inexcusable. This has been brought into focus quite tragically by the Peshawar incident but even past record shows that the civilian rulers do not pay as much attention to governance as they do to foreign deals and development of certain choice sectors of the country. This has been a constant missing link during civilian rule in Pakistan. It is for this reason that whenever the country's economy has picked up, it is during military dispensations, which shows that the civilians have never had the vision or depth to truly appreciate the country's key problems and to deal with them accordingly. In these circumstances, it is only the military that has stepped forward and played its role.

When the US Secretary of State John Kerry invited Pakistan Army Chief



General Raheel Sharif over to the State Department on Thanksgiving, it surely was not to chat about the hospitality he had received on the trip. The meeting is said to have been hastily arranged. It took place in a very cordial and friendly atmosphere and served to again support the view that the United States gives greater importance to the Pakistani military than the civilian rulers in matters of running the country.

This is also borne by the fact that Pakistan has only made real progress during the periods when it was ruled by the military. Ayub Khan may have had many faults but everyone agrees that Pakistan took some important key initiatives on the development front during his rule. Yahya can at least be credited with giving Pakistan its first and only fair elections. He was followed by Gen Ziaul Haq.

A game of musical chairs followed after the death of Gen Ziaul Haq and again set the country back. In fact the period when both Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif ruled has been described as a 'lost decade.' Then came Pervez Musharraf in 1999 and he again set about putting the country back on rails. His good work was undone by the 'democratic' government of the PPP after the 2008 elections. When Nawaz Sharif won the elections in 2013 and took over prime ministership for the third time, the nation rejoiced on his arrival. Sadly, more than a year and a half later, Pakistan is still in the woods.

Having spent some 13 years in Afghanistan and concluding that there was not much for the US and NATO forces to do in the region anymore, the allied forces decided to call it a day. A reduced ISAF force will now stay in Afghanistan for another year to enable the new Afghan president to gain control. The US will not repeat the mistake it committed back in the 1980s after the Soviets quit the region and the Afghans were left to fend for themselves.

This time, however, the Americans are also depending a great deal on Pakistan to maintain peace on its western and northern borders. For its part, Pakistan has again started saying that its foreign policy would revert to seeking 'strategic depth'

in the region by ensuring that no further military adventures are undertaken and that other regional players, particularly India, do not take undue advantage of the vacuum caused by the NATO exit.

In these circumstances, Pakistan will be called upon to play a key role and this would depend on how the army handles affairs under Gen Raheel Sharif. The US knows that he is the right man for the job. He has grown up in a family with a proud military tradition. He knows the capabilities of the army as well as its limits in terms of military and civilian governance matters. He and his commanders have successfully led Operation Zarb-e-Azb in North Waziristan but it is good they have stayed out of political matters.

The army also closely monitors the 'tyre and tube' relationship between the incumbent Nawaz Sharif government and the so-called PPP opposition but leaves them to their own machinations since one is dependent on the other. If the 'tyre' of the Sharif government bursts, the 'tube' of the PPP opposition is bound to follow so they both protect each other. Where this leads the country is a question that continues to beg for answers. Meanwhile, the army has its external and internal roles cut out and continues to function as a binding force of national unity which commands equal respect both inside and outside the country.

In the aftermath of the school massacre in Peshawar, the government of Nawaz Sharif seems to have risen from its slumber and is pursuing anti-terrorism measures more proactively, including removal of the moratorium on capital punishment. The PM has also said that while there is an operation Zarb e Azb being successfully conducted by the army in North Waziristan, a similar operation needs to be carried out in the rest of the country to weed out the terrorists. A noble thought, Mr. Prime Minister, but can you do it without the assistance of the army – the binding force? **SI**

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emerged as a *primus inter pares*.

"Our problem is not the military's role; it is the strategic bankruptcy in our political cadres."

**Shamshad Ahmad**  
Former foreign secretary and diplomat

"The only role that the armed forces should have in Pakistan is described in the constitution, in that "under the directions of the Federal Government (they are to) defend Pakistan against external aggression or threat of war, and, subject to law, act in aid of civil power when called upon to do so.



"Times have changed since General Ziaul Haq indulged in muddled manipulation of the constitution and it is essential that the services remain entirely under government authority, no matter how flawed or incompetent that might be.

"The constitution is the ultimate law of the nation and is designed to control the application of political power by the elected government."

**Brian Cloughley**  
Author and defense analyst

"What has thus far been accomplished by the military's coups, constitutional tinkering and refusal to countenance opposition from democratically elected governments? It has perpetuated a colonial model of governance predicated on centralized control and decision-making, the empowerment and entrenchment of opportunistic local elites providing the state with political support in exchange for patronage, and the evisceration of democratic institutions including the courts and political parties.



"The military, motivated by its own worldview and interests, has played a counterproductive role in Pakistan's politics. It is unlikely this will change by providing it with a constitutional place in the government."

**Hassan Javid**  
Assistant professor, LUMS

"The armed forces should have no constitutional role in the government. Pakistan spends almost all its resources on state security, leaving little for education and healthcare initiatives. If Pakistan really wants to improve its long-term security, it should be funding educational programs – the best way to eradicate terrorism. The December 16 attack that killed nearly 150 children and adults, is the direct result of Pakistan's dysfunctional national policies."



**Shahid Mahmood**  
Editorial cartoonist

Pakistan-U.S. relations have been a rollercoaster affair with ups and downs, highs and extreme lows. They have been described as transient and based on expediency. The Pakistani establishment as well as the people have accused the U.S. of betrayal when Washington's focus shifted to other regions. On the other hand, the U.S. accuses Pakistan of duplicity and pursuing a double game – of hunting

state and a springboard for U.S. strategy to challenge the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The west, Washington and China, all used Pakistan's territory to arm, equip and launch the Afghan mujahideen. The blowback of the Soviet reaction was on Pakistan. The KGB, the Soviet intelligence agency, in alliance with the Afghan intelligence, conducted several terrorist attacks in the country. The long-term effect was

This scenario makes the role of the Pakistan Army highly significant from Washington's perspective. How the Pakistan Army uses this influence will contribute towards shaping the geopolitics of South, Central and West Asia.

Having learnt from its past experience, the U.S. is keen to ensure that the Pakistan military's cooperation is sought in stabilizing Afghanistan. The warm reception that Pakistan's

# Back in Step



**A definite warming of U.S.-Pakistan relations is attributable to the strict policies that Pakistan's military leadership is pursuing against the Taliban.**

By Talat Masood

with the hounds and running with the hare.

The history of Pakistan-U.S. relations goes back to 1954, when the two countries signed a bilateral security agreement that was essentially directed against the communist expansion in the region. The U.S. interest was to include Pakistan as an ally against the Soviets and Pakistan's interest lay in strengthening its defense capability against India by receiving the latest American weapons and equipment. But when the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965 took place, the U.S. suspended its aid and Pakistan started to look towards China for meeting its defense needs.

Interest of the U.S. in Pakistan was once again revived in the 1980s when the Soviet Union attacked and occupied Afghanistan. Pakistan became a frontline

the promotion of extremism and growth of militant organizations in Pakistan. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the interest of Washington in Pakistan and Afghanistan started to wane. The U.S., that had been ignoring Pakistan's development of its nuclear program till then, revived the Pressler Amendment to clamp sanctions and also suspended military assistance. U.S. interest in Pakistan was again revived after the 9/11 incident. The then military ruler General Pervez Musharraf who was an international pariah until then, became the most sought-after leader overnight and Pakistan became a key country in the fight against terror.

The U.S. and NATO forces will soon leave Afghanistan and their role will be primarily confined to military training and assistance to the Afghan National Army and paramilitary forces.

COAS General Raheel Sharif received during his visit to the U.S. was a strong indication of the focus and priorities of the U.S. in the region. The General had scheduled meetings with the entire top brass and also met Secretary John Kerry and the National Security Adviser. This was in sharp contrast to the cold reception that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif received when he was in the U.S. to attend the United Nations General Assembly session. It was a clear affirmation of the reality that just like the past, Washington's policies towards Pakistan are greatly influenced by security considerations and will continue to remain so in the near future.

The U.S. would like to preserve the gains that it has made in Afghanistan in the last 13 years. It would expect Pakistan's military to align its policies with the U.S. and the new Afghan government and contribute in stabilizing the region. The U.S. also realizes that unless the Pakistani military ensures that the sanctuaries are cleared of the Taliban and their

allies – the Haqqani network and Hafiz Gul Bhadar – it would be difficult to bring peace to Afghanistan. This is a major departure from the Pakistan Army's previous overambitious policies wherein it looked to the Taliban to guard its interests in Afghanistan.

In order to countervail India and fearing that it could use its influence among the Afghan Army or certain ethnic groups against Pakistan, the Pakistan Army tolerated the Taliban and provided them sanctuary. This policy has gone through a major reversal because of the challenge the Pakistan Army now faces from the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan. The U.S. is of the view

geo-strategic significance and its strong military that is considered valuable for the U.S., but only in so far as it can be used as a rental state to advance its strategic goals. At the tactical level, however, it will fully cooperate and assist Pakistan if interests converge, as is presently the case with regard to the stability of Afghanistan.

Another field of American interest in Pakistan is the latter's nuclear assets. The army formulates the nuclear doctrine and is responsible for its safety and security. Due to the imbalance in civil-military relations, it is the army that influences foreign and defense related issues and Washington is fully cognizant of the broad area of its influence.

In the last two decades, negative sentiment against the U.S. has become widespread in Pakistan. The American government, public and the media reflect a similar, or even stronger, sentiment with respect to Pakistan. However, ever since General Raheel Sharif has assumed the charge of the COAS, which also coincides with the period when the U.S. is withdrawing its forces from Afghanistan, a definite warming of relations is noticeable. This is also attributable to the very clear policies that the new military leadership has taken towards the Taliban. Pakistan now realizes that the threat of militancy is existential and success in this fight is vital for its security and stability.

The rather belated military operation in North Waziristan and other parts of the tribal agencies serves Washington's security interests as well as contributes to regional stability. This operation has gained a greater importance for U.S. planners as it coincides with the ongoing political, security and economic transitions in Afghanistan as a consequence of withdrawal of the foreign forces. Withdrawing its support for the Haqqani network and other Afghanistan-based militants is a crucial step the Pakistan military has taken that has increased its credibility with the U.S. and NATO countries. Interestingly, the militant narrative too has lost the traction that Pakistan is fighting at the behest of the U.S. as its forces as well as the NATO

forces withdraw from Afghanistan.

The U.S. finds the escalation of tension along the LoC in Kashmir and the working boundary between India and Pakistan a distraction in Pakistan's existential fight against terror. Washington will continue to encourage India and Pakistan to engage at the bilateral level but it will refrain from playing an active role in settling the Kashmir dispute or other issues.

From its past experience, Washington has realized that it should continue to support a legitimate civilian government in Pakistan and stay away from meddling in the country's affairs or take sides with any political party. The suspension of drone attacks for five months and their revival – mostly against militants in North and South Waziristan that are also a threat to Pakistan – has muted opposition against it. In addition, Washington's policy of avoiding public criticism of the Pakistan military or government policies has provided greater political space to improve overall and especially mil-to-mil relations. Of late, the Pentagon has been supportive of Islamabad's offer to train Afghan security forces and is trying to promote maximum cooperation between the Afghan and Pakistan military. The urgent manner in which the ISAF and Afghan forces have offered their assistance to Pakistan's operation against the Taliban, following the attack on Army Public School in Peshawar, is a further case in point.

General Sharif has repeatedly expressed Pakistan's willingness to train the Afghan security forces. For the last several years, the Afghan forces have been trained by India's military establishment and that has been a source of concern. Pakistan desires a certain balance by Kabul in this regard and wants to be treated as a partner rather than being looked upon with suspicion by the Afghan security forces. The implementation of this policy will contribute towards a better understanding and greater coordination between the two militaries.

In the immediate term, U.S. interests in Pakistan will be dictated by factors affecting Afghanistan's stability and Pakistan's internal security situation. However, Islamabad should be prepared to adjust to reduced expectations in other fields apart from some assistance from the U.S. in the energy, education and health sectors. ■

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that in Pakistan the only institution that is truly functional and can deliver is the armed forces. It may keep stressing the importance of democracy, but when it comes to advancing its hard strategic interests, the long-term goals are set aside.

The U.S. is withdrawing its forces from the region, but it cannot afford to ignore the security situation. Besides, Pakistan has an intrinsic importance – a country of nearly two hundred million people – it offers a sizable market once the economy starts to grow. Geo-strategically, it connects South Asia to Central and West Asia and is also a nuclear power. In fact, it is Pakistan's



# RECONNECTING

General Raheel Sharif has given a new flavor to U.S.-Pak relations.

By Shahzad Chaudhry

The year 2011 was bad for U.S.-Pakistan relations. Osama bin Laden was found hiding in Abbottabad and the Americans chose to annihilate him without taking on board their 'most-allied-ally' Pakistan and violating deep in its territory and airspace in a classic 'kill' mission. The failure on the Pakistani side was doubly embarrassing: Pakistan had long denied OBL's presence on its soil; and the American forces were able to make a surreptitious insurrection deep inside Pakistan's territory unchallenged and undetected by its land and air forces. Pakistan's hallowed military and the premier Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) bore the brunt of the resulting ridicule, both internally and externally.

On 26/11 of the same year, American forces went on an unprovoked and

unprecedented killing spree against a Pakistani check post on the Afghanistan border, literally obliterating 26 Pakistani officers and soldiers in cold blood. From being the 'most-allied-ally' to a target of venom, the slide in the relationship between the two militaries and the two nations was unprecedented. It seemed irrecoverable.

How and why it all happened may simply be an unintended consequence of other events of much significance, overwhelming diplomatic niceties and the heat of war taking a toll on deliberated decision processes. But what it left behind in its wake was far deeper and far intractable to resolve. The U.S. and Pakistan broke most contacts, in turn impacting cooperation in the former's ongoing 'war-on-terror'; public

opinion in Pakistan against the U.S. found a new force, strengthening the hand of the anti-U.S. forces in Pakistan so popularly propounded by the Taliban and the pro-Taliban elements in Pakistan; and the episode reinforced a most damaging negativity on Pakistan's role and allegations of dubious duality in Pakistan's claimed policy in this war. There was only abuse and denigration on both sides that explained the U.S.-Pakistan disconnect.

The next year was the year of repair. Diplomatic efforts to heal the ruptures succeeded with the U.S. finally apologizing – sort of – for the 26/11 blunder. Both countries realized the need to get a semblance of a relationship going for the sake of appearances rather than substance. President Obama,

having eliminated OBL and finding recompense by a return to the White House for another term, announced the withdrawal of the American forces from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. That really meant that the American mission in Afghanistan was practically done and over with, finding no relevance in spending precious resources any longer. Afghanistan was left to its own fate with the Americans realizing late in the day that Afghan nation-building was neither in their pale nor something they could bring about given the peculiar nature of Afghan society.

However, the U.S. forces had to return and the geography forced a rethink in U.S. considerations. Pakistani road network and contiguity with Afghanistan as well as its deep sea harbors still afforded the most practical and most efficient means of moving bulk out of Afghanistan. It thus became an American imperative to find relevance for Pakistan – even though of short-term rather than based on long term sustainable goals – in its relationship.

That in effect drives the brief resurgence that Pakistan envisions in its renewed acceptability in Washington. The space for this emerged during General Raheel Sharif's visit to the U.S. The usual duration of such visits by military commanders is normally two to three days. These are mostly reciprocal and are limited to the specialized areas of military functioning rather than an exquisite exposure of elements replicating a state visit. An acquaintance in Washington with access to official circles compares General Sharif's visit to that of an earlier military commander of the 1960s, Field Marshal Ayub Khan of Pakistan, who also happened to be a highly revered president of the country in times when the Cold War was at its peak and alliances were the key to seeking perimeters of security for both the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The sentiment was optimized when the visit prolonged into an almost three-week sojourn, and when U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry requested the general to stay on for him to arrive back from a visit abroad so that he too could meet the general. This meeting took place on a Sunday when the State Department was specially convened on a holiday to welcome the general.

Here is the rub though: the U.S. may have spent a trillion dollars on the Afghan expedition, and there will remain some lingering geopolitical concerns to protect, the cost of pursuing those with further physical presence may simply be prohibitive when compared to the value of the return. Also, American interests at

other locations such as in the Middle East (Iraq, Syria and Turkey), eastern Europe (Ukraine, Crimea), and the Far East (China, Korea, Taiwan and Japan) may simply be far more compulsive to attend to. That leaves U.S. interests in South West Asia and Central Asia (Iran, China, Russia) slightly relegated for immediate attention. This is when diplomacy and alliances fill in for active presence of the U.S. forces. Clearly, America doesn't want to leave Central Asia to the whims of both China and Russia but will contest it with the combination of capacities that it will leave behind in Afghanistan. Ashraf Ghani's rise to the political apex is beneficial for American goals given his strong pro-U.S. bias. That will keep Afghanistan's status as America's base secure.

This is where the Raheel visit came in handy. It grew in significance as it went along. The Americans have to be happy with the general. He has eliminated the Haqqani bases from Pakistan, a long time American demand, and has attempted to hit off well with the new administration in Kabul, which can only mean better chances of finding stability. Both add credibility to America's mission as it heads out of Afghanistan. In doing so the general in turn may have added some space for greater congruence in the U.S.-Pakistan relations. He appeared to them an honest, upfront soldier who meant what he said. That has given hope to the Americans that their wish to leave Afghanistan stable may finally come around. That isn't a small achievement, given the haste that the U.S. displayed in coming to terms with the intractability of Afghanistan.

The general had other interests. With the Kerry-Lugar Bill – enabling affixed annual aid to Pakistan – running out, the chances that other payments too by the U.S. to Pakistan might suffer – especially the Coalition Support Fund that reimburses Pakistan for the expenses incurred in the war on terror. The Pakistani military is also dependent on the U.S. for supporting many of the weapons systems on its inventory, including those that are under heavy use in the ongoing war. If indeed the U.S.-Pakistan military relationship sustains, there can always be the possibility that the foreign military financing – a facility available from the U.S. to assist friendly nations in buying American equipment, and those that are bought from national funds under the foreign military sales for fresh equipment, can be achieved. Importantly, such institutional binding can also be the means to a diplomatic relationship.

There were affiliated ramifications,

too, of General Raheel's visit. President Obama did a telephone chat with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif as General Raheel finished his visit. If the general had indeed delved into some effective diplomacy and political closing of ranks with the Americans, it was perhaps appropriate that Nawaz Sharif too was bought in, even if nominally. Hence the call. Locally, though, it became a bit awkward. Prime Minister Sharif on his recent visit to New York could not elicit such interest from the Americans and his visit went mostly bland. With the General the flavor was entirely different.

Perhaps it was there, or during his visit to Kabul before proceeding to Washington, that General Raheel Sharif learnt of the extension of the combat role of the American forces in Afghanistan. It is also possible that it was as a consequence of his discussions with the Americans and the Afghans (remember, Ghani recently was a guest of the General in Rawalpindi) that such revision of the task was instituted. It is likely that the Pakistan Army complained of the sanctuaries that the TTP enjoys in Kunar and Nuristan across the Afghan border even as it fought and dismantled the bases of those groups that threatened both Pakistan and Afghanistan from North Waziristan. It is equally likely that the issue of capacities, or a lack thereof, came up during discussions on the inability or inaction of the Afghan forces to undertake missions to reclaim the control away from those holding the Afghan areas as sanctuaries.

That threw up two options: Pakistan could extend its own capacity and capability to neutralize those who target Pakistani territory from Kunar and Nuristan with implicit diplomatic complexities; or more importantly, the U.S. could extend its resident capacity to do the needful. That the latter was politically more acceptable is more than obvious. Relate this to the counter-terror strikes that the U.S. drones have undertaken in the recent past with reports that Fazlullah was the intended target and the dots begin to connect.

It has the making of some coordinated functioning between the three sides, perhaps for the first time since 2002 when America moved into Afghanistan, bringing about a closure to a war that, for the most part, was fought in fragments and without any unity of purpose. Will this newfound congruence with the Americans be long-term? Only time can tell. ■

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



# Last Citizens Calling

No emotional or short-term measure will stamp out the menace of terrorism.

By Fakhar Ahmed

Pakistan geographically exists on the crossroads of one of the most critical resource rich and politically charged regions in the world. The neighbors include China, India, Afghanistan and Iran and the Arabian Sea, while the Arab Gulf region in the

vicinity invites huge vested interests from all over the world for various reasons. Pakistan has been fighting for its very existence since its independence and, in recent world history, birth of Al Qaeda, ailing dictatorships of the Arab world, global economy and wars in

Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Syria have all had their impact on how the Muslim nations are seen amongst the league of nations. The Muslim countries have a sizeable military potential, especially with Pakistan's nuclear capability and the strength of its armed forces.



A nuclear Pakistan with its strong military, its agricultural potential and the resilience of its people stands guard against the ill will of many international players. The threat to Pakistan has increased two-fold in the aftermath of the remnants of Afghan war in the shape of the Taliban and the new influx of increasing religious extremism such as Al Qaeda and many more. Now, with the given threat perspective, the anti-Pakistan elements, both internal and external, are using all tools to cut Pakistan to size, reduce or terminate its nuclear capability and support India as their proxy against China. They do this by retarding Pakistan's economic growth, supporting corruption and incompetence, and paving the way for more extremism, ethnic conflict, security lapses, bad governance and deteriorating state institutions. Some mistakes have also been committed, both by the military and the political

leadership in the past, which has created internal divide and polarization and now these factors have become a tool for external anti-Pakistan elements to play against the country. If the combination of internal bad governance, corruption and polarization continues and is fuelled by extremism and terrorism, then the future of Pakistan would definitely be at stake. The people need to understand their internal and external enemies and, most importantly, the threats within. Those at the helm of affairs in the political arena and the Pakistani civil and military establishment also need to be extra vigilant.

The recent terrorist attacks, particularly the gruesome incident at a school in Peshawar has created confusion in the rank and file of the military and the political leadership. The massacre of innocent children has shown the ugly face of the menace of the terrorism that Pakistan continues to face and the fear has reached every nook and corner of society. There is virtually negligible economic growth in the country, no foreign direct investment and Pakistan continues to remain energy starved. There is a huge divide between the haves and have nots and it is only the agriculture-based economy that has somehow saved the country from civil war. If the water management and dams are not run properly, the fate of Pakistan will become a big question mark sooner than later. This could probably be the darkest time in the history of Pakistan as continuing poverty, unemployment and lack of social justice is likely to open the way for more street crimes and even provide easy recruitment for the terrorist organizations

The rule of former President General Pervez Musharraf was technically the best in terms of governance and economic growth, and the general has largely been victimized for strengthening the military and ensuring national security, suppressing corrupt elements and revealing internal and external threats faced by Pakistan. It were some of his compromises on the political front that served to remove him from power. The assassination of Benazir Bhutto led the way to 'democracy' and brought the Pakistan Peoples Party to power but lack of strong institutions could not address the security, economy, water, energy and social development issues. The nation waited for the political leadership to deliver but it did not happen.

The democratic process continued and another change of regime through

general elections came about in 2013, but despite a huge mandate, the current political leadership has been questioned for getting into power through rigged elections. The Pakistan Muslim League government under Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, with many challenges facing the nation, is trying to fix the bigger issues related to energy and industry, but its reluctance in resolving the rigged elections has paved the way for the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), led by Imran Khan to gain mass popularity. The PML(N) government has somehow failed to develop a healthy civil-military relationship and has not produced a strong policy against terrorism and is losing sympathy from within the ranks and file of the military, which finally stood up to restore democracy in the country after long spells of military rule. Moreover, the city of Karachi, which is the financial hub of the country, is continuously disturbed due to street crimes, mafia wars and political conflict between the urban MQM and the largely rural PPP.

The conflicting interests of those at the top, huge money and power scandals and corruption and misuse of authority has made life for the common citizens very difficult. In such a situation, when civilian governance has stopped to function almost across the country, the Army has, under its current leadership, finally stood up and has taken the responsibility to restore law and order and fight terrorism. However, it cannot be successful on its own and needs political support to get a handle over the various issues in a holistic manner. No emotional or short-term measure will stamp out the menace of terrorism because it has international partners and supporters and even help and guidance from some of Pakistan's neighbors and western friends. It is only the Pakistan Armed Forces which can get foreign policy going and at the same time fight the menace of terrorism.

Though the month of December brings back dark memories of the fall of Dacca, the Peshawar carnage now overshadows it and the country confronts much bigger challenges than before. The people of Pakistan have, therefore, no recourse but to call the military establishment as well as political leadership to come together and save Pakistan. Time is fast running out and so is the patience of the people. ■

*The writer is a seasoned columnist who has been contributing to various national and regional publications.*



# Big Brother Politics

While India is increasingly seen as a protectionist regional leader, China is slowly making ingress in the South Asian turf.

By Sijal Fawad

Visiting Kathmandu a few weeks back, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was reminded of his country's waning popularity around the South Asian neighborhood. On the occasion of the 18th SAARC summit, the lack of any moving decisions or

meaningful progress made between the countries in the regional bloc prompted even the Nepalese Prime Minister Sushil Koirala to comment on his disappointment with SAARC.

The other SAARC nations may be able to digest the subpar regional

cooperation with a pinch of salt. But for the Big Brother of South Asia, India, the proceedings of the summit were a reminder of the rude awakening it has been facing for the past few years – its clout being overshadowed by the strategic planner and rival China among

the smaller neighboring countries.

India's evidently pale support for its smaller neighbors, especially in the economic development sphere, left ample room for China to make its presence felt. Considering that all South Asian countries had expected India's leadership role to outshine since then, it isn't surprising that India fell short in popularity amongst members such as the Maldives, Nepal, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Bhutan. India's less-than-friendly relations with Pakistan – no secret to anyone following South Asian politics even remotely – iced up its image as a regional leader even more.

Meanwhile, China continued to extend its strategic wisdom into the areas of trade and investment, especially focusing on countries that have a port to help strengthen its maritime presence for further economic growth and political gains. Free-Trade Agreements (FTAs), Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), Bilateral Investment Treaties (BIT) and various devices for increasing bilateral cooperation between China and South Asian countries followed while India was busy defending its protectionist stance. Where an agreement had not been made, China went ahead and granted South Asian countries such as Bangladesh the Most Favored Nation (MFN) status, getting oil exploration rights and access to naval ports in return.

Similarly, while India's close ties with Sri Lanka had largely been touted about with the Big Brother being the largest investor and trading partner, Delhi's unwanted interference in the country's civil war thwarted its reputation in Colombo as well. China, meanwhile, continued with its policy of extending bilateral trade relations, offered developmental aid in various forms and, to a great extent, fulfilled motives for extending its presence in the Indian Ocean and enhancing oil exploration facilities along port cities.

In the case of Pakistan and Bangladesh, historical animosity with India has always placed diplomatic ties and developmental cooperation on the backburner. These countries have always alleged that India has maintained a restrictions-infused trade policy with non-tariff barriers, tedious customs procedures, anti-dumping measures, etc. Even in Myanmar, Bhutan and Nepal, India's palling influence relative to China has not gone unnoticed.

As a consequence, exports from China into South Asia surpassed Indian exports to the region since 2000, with the gap widening, much to India's dismay.

The highlight of China's rising interest in these smaller regional economies has been its developmental assistance in the form of infrastructural facilities such as development of power stations, roads and rail networks, special economic zones, as well as offering credit facilities, project loans, interest-free loans, etc. As a result, China has been able to build its reputation as a country that will help smaller countries thrive as it moves on the path of economic prosperity.

India, meanwhile, has gained a reputation of being a protectionist regional leader, more interested in gaining control over regional politics than being a mentor and guardian for the smaller South Asian members. The

SAARC members as a bloc.

Besides improving its reputation and regaining acceptability as a leading nation in South Asia, India is also wary of China's rising influence around its vicinity and will not be satisfied with its regional economic rival gaining more prominence. A part of the recent strategy to be a more friendly and cooperative lead nation is also to make its presence felt and compete along similar lines with China over economic and political influence.

The lack of cooperation and multilateral trade in South Asia as a regional bloc is not unheard of by geopolitical analysts. While this is a cause for concern, it also presents an

**India has gained the reputation of being a protectionist regional leader, more interested in gaining control over regional politics than being a mentor and guardian for the smaller South Asian members.**

failure of the 18th SAARC Summit was a stark reminder of this and the smaller countries' support for giving China membership into SAARC has prompted India to make swift moves to extend its support to SAARC members and reclaim the favored leadership status it once enjoyed in the region.

Amongst the many steps taken by Delhi, the important ones are a free-trade deal in services with Sri Lanka with generous concessions, providing monetary support to build big hydropower plants in Bhutan and providing training facilities to civil servants in Afghanistan besides being one of the five biggest donors there.

The extent of India's concern to gain popularity and economic and political influence over the smaller South Asian nations can be gauged from the gradually warming relations with Pakistan, its historical adversary. Talks were held between both countries over reducing tariffs and trade barriers and increasing bilateral trade overall. The thawing of relations is a great step towards building economic relations and establishing political stability in the region. The stalemate between India and Pakistan has largely been the bottleneck in yielding any meaningful and significant progress in enhancing cooperation between

opportunity for India to assert its influence and clout over the region through mutually beneficial developmental assistance. When one brings in the fact that India borders most of the smaller South Asian nations, the importance of cultivating amiable diplomatic ties with its smaller neighbors becomes even starker.

Tarvi Madan of the Washington-based Brookings Institution, quoted by the South China Morning Post, a Hong Kong based newspaper, states: "An effective Indian approach requires presenting a viable alternative. It means convincing SAARC countries that it wants to take them along on the path to economic prosperity."

If India is not careful to take the right diplomatic measures at the right time, it can be sure that China will step in to fill in the gaps of a guardian, economic and developmental mentor where India lags behind. That's why, in the larger political, economic and strategic picture, both on a regional and international level, India is playing a smart move by being involved with its neighbors. However, compared to China, it will have a lot of catching up to do. ■

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The war which started with aerial bombing of Afghan cities in December 2001 – and resulted in the toppling of the Taliban regime in the country – formally ended after 13 years in a quiet ceremony held on a basketball court in Kabul.

The U.S. and Nato forces ended their combat mission in Afghanistan in December 2014 as President Obama issued a statement from the White House saying, "On this day we give thanks to our troops and intelligence personnel who have been relentless against the terrorists responsible for 9/11 – devastating the core Al Qaeda leadership, delivering justice to Osama bin Laden, disrupting terrorist plots and saving countless American lives."

Not all troops will leave Afghanistan though. As per the conditions of the Bilateral Security Agreement, some 1800 troops will stay in Afghanistan to help the Afghan Army and the police force in their counterterrorism efforts. They will also "train, advise and assist" the Afghan forces.

As the longest war in American history concluded, President Obama declared the U.S. "safer" and the nation "more secure." Can the same be said about Afghanistan? Unfortunately, no. Hardly two weeks before the ceremony, a suicide bomber attacked an Afghan Army bus in Kabul, killing six troops. In November 2014, a suicide bomber killed over 50 people watching a volleyball match in Paktika. In the same month, at least nine suicide attacks took place in Kabul alone, killing a number of foreigners. The attacks targeted the compounds of foreign nationals, vehicles used by embassies and U.S. troops.

Afghanistan is an unsafe place by all means and there is little hope of improvement – at least in the near future. The Afghans proudly claim that no foreign force has been able to rule their country ever. Their pride is not misplaced. From the British to the Russians to the Americans, the Afghan nation has fought many a mighty rival and forced them to leave Afghan soil. But at what cost? In today's advanced world, Afghanistan is among the very few countries which do not have a railway infrastructure. It has only four international airports with hardly one or two international airlines operating to the country. Although some infrastructural development has taken place with the help of international aid, the economic and country's social indicators are dismal. Above all, peace has eluded Afghanistan for nearly half a century.

To make matters worse, the Afghan society is deeply divided along tribal and ethnic lines. The fissures have come to surface at every critical juncture



# Paradise

of Afghan history. As a result, when the Afghans are not facing off foreign enemies, they are busy fighting it out among themselves. External forces have always exploited such internal divisions to their advantage.

But the Afghan nation is not yet ready to iron out the ethnic differences. In fact, tribal and ethnic affiliations mean so much to them that in the near past they refused to accept the computerized national identity card which did not mention their ethnic identity. As a result,

the authorities had to change the card in order to make it acceptable to the people. It was mainly due to ethnic divisions that the gains of the war against the Soviet Union were wasted away as the Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks fought among themselves. More than 100,000 people died in the civil war that saw the 'mujahideen' turning into warlords while their infighting gave way to the Taliban.

Although ethnic clashes have decreased significantly in the last few



# Gained

**Now that most of the US and Nato forces have left Afghanistan, how successfully will the nation pick up the pieces and maintain peace in the country?**

By Iffat Alam

years, this was mainly attributed to the presence of international forces in the country. With the departure of the majority of U.S. and Nato troops, it is feared that tribal divisions will once

again rear their ugly head. After the Taliban insurgency, factional conflicts are perhaps the biggest challenge the government will have to face. The differences between the Pashtuns and the

Tajiks – the two main ethnic groups in Afghanistan – have been exploited by the country's regional neighbors to achieve their own ends. Pakistan, with a large Pashtun population that shares blood ties with its Afghan counterparts, is seen to support Pashtun groups in Afghanistan while India has historically put its weight behind the Tajiks (Hamid Karzai was perhaps an exception). For years, the two regional rivals, India and Pakistan, have used Afghan soil for their proxy wars and the fears of the international community that the intensity of their power will only increase once they find an open playing field are not misplaced.

The biggest challenge facing the Afghan government remains the Taliban insurgency. The frequency of attacks by the Taliban recorded a significant increase in the last two months of 2014. This surprised many analysts as the war pattern did not conform to the strategy adopted by the militants in the past. Earlier, there used to be a lull in violence in winter months probably due to logistical difficulties. This did not happen in 2014 and there was an increase in attacks by the Taliban. They targeted foreign forces, their embassies, vehicles and other installations. In fact, when the international troops wrapped up their mission in Afghanistan, the Taliban declared their 'victory' against the U.S. The attacks came with such force that the chief of Kabul police resigned from his post, accepting his inability to discharge his duties.

The solution to the insurgency lies in the economic uplift of the people. It is easy for the militants to coerce large numbers of youth into joining their ranks in the absence of education and employment opportunities. Against this background, the promise of President Ashraf Ghani to slash foreign aid to Afghanistan and his claims of making the country self-reliant ring hollow. Afghanistan would be lucky to stand on its own feet but achieving this milestone will take a lot of time and is practically impossible without international assistance.

The war-ravaged country needs a complete rebuild and for that, the basic requirement is money. Militancy can't be eradicated without bringing in prosperity. And the government should come to terms with the bitter truth that it will have to depend on its foreign friends for some time. It is very much likely that there will be a surge in the attacks by militants. There was never a greater need for the Afghan government, the regional leaders and the international community, to come together and finish off the militants and their hotbeds once and for all. ❏

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In 2013, the Shahbagh protests and demonstrations in Dhaka to award capital punishment to those found involved in 'war crimes' committed during the military operation in the then East Pakistan (March-December 1971) deepened polarization and schisms in the country. The controversial general elections held in January 2014 further encouraged Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to endorse the biased verdict of the International War Crimes Tribunal (IWCT) to award death sentences to the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leaders found guilty of war crimes.

Several hundred people were killed in the pre and post-elections violence and the tension caused as a result of the boycott of the BNP. The international rejection of the elections complicated the situation even more.

In October 2014, the IWCT sentenced to death the chief of Jamaat-e-Islami, Motiur Rahman Nizami for crimes against humanity, including genocide, torture and rape during the 1971 war. The sentence against the 71 year old former legislature and minister sparked widespread protests and demonstrations in Bangladesh. Earlier, in February 2014, a special tribunal had sentenced another leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami, Delwar Hossain Sayedee, to death for a number of crimes such as mass killings, rape and atrocities committed during the 1971 military operation. More or less, the entire year passed in violence or deliberations of war crimes tribunal.

Critics of Sheikh Hasina argue that instead of focusing on important issues

such as poverty, underdevelopment, corruption and crimes, her government manipulated the verdicts of the tribunal for political consumption. With no cogent opposition and challenge to her second tenure, the regime seems overconfident that it will totally neutralize any domestic opposition. In view of the fragile nature of the BNP because of its weak leadership and exclusion from the parliament, one can expect two major possibilities in Bangladeshi politics in the coming years. First, the BNP can wait for another four years to assert its position in the next elections and second, taking advantage of the failures of the Awami League, namely corruption, nepotism, political suppression and an overt tilt in favor of India, it can hope to mobilize popular support to hold mid-term polls. The best way in which the Awami League can counter the BNP's strategy is by improving governance, economy and political stability.

Sheikh Hasina has managed to change her government's negative image, particularly in the international community, following the holding of the controversial and dubious general elections of January 5. Only India endorsed the results of the elections of Bangladesh. Initially, the western powers and the Commonwealth raised their reservations on the manner in which the elections were held – without the participation of the opposition parties – but with the passage of time, she has been able to get acceptance of the 'capital' which matters in global affairs.

Her grip over power – which was shaky in the first two months after the

elections – strengthened. This is evident from the country's normal economic and commercial ties with the west. But it also means that Hasina's regime has managed to stabilize her position by improving governance, overcoming energy shortages and unemployment. The export of garments, a major source of Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserves, has continued to rise along with the flow of remittances from overseas Bangladeshis. Hasina's resolve to firmly deal with what is called 'Islamic extremism' and to sustain her country's 'secular' credentials tends to provide her enormous space at the international arena. Yet, there are some fault lines which threaten the regime. These fault lines are her pro-Indian stance, corruption and crimes.

According to a report of the United Nations University, entitled, "Resilient people, fragile governance: Bangladesh" (2012), "Bangladesh is a development success story. The per capita GDP increased by 1.5 percent per annum during the 1980s, with this figure rising to 3 percent per annum during the 1990s, according to government data, and by nearly 6 percent per annum in the 2000s, according to World Bank estimates. Impressive reductions in poverty have occurred alongside economic growth, with a poverty incidence of 59.0 percent in 1991/92 declining to 31.5 percent in 2010. At the national level, Bangladesh has consistently achieved its target of self-sufficiency in rice production since the turn of the century through investments in agricultural research and extension, including the promotion of high-yielding rice varieties. In 2003,

## Capping the Gap

The people of Bangladesh have refused to back calls for destabilizing the government through street agitation.

By Dr. Moonis Ahmar

Bangladesh entered the medium Human Development League, according to UNDP's Human Development Report, where it remained until 2009 (in the 2010 and 2011 reports it is classified near the top of the low human development category, a result of thresholds being updated). It is on target to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for infant and child mortality and gender parity in education." Furthermore, in the last one decade, exports and remittances have doubled. By the end of 2013, remittances were around \$14 billion and exports touched \$25 billion. Bangladesh's economic growth rate is around 6 percent and its foreign exchange reserve rose to \$16 billion.

A country which was called by Henry Kissinger "the basket with a hole" is now termed as a success story despite political violence and turmoil. For the first time since 1971, Bangladesh got a current account surplus of \$2 billion and its garment exports touched \$20 billion a year. Interestingly, Bangladesh is not a cotton growing country. It imports cotton bales and process these to manufacture

garment products. According to UNICEF, the literacy rate in Bangladesh is 57.7 percent with the increasing number of female literacy. The microcredit scheme launched by Dr. Mohammad Yunus in 1974 is now a well-established program with an enormous socio-economic impact on the lower strata of society, particularly women. The success of Bangladesh to overcome famine is remarkable as the last famine which killed hundreds and thousands of people was in the year 1974. Forty years down the road, Bangladesh has managed to save its people from the calamities of floods, cyclone and famine. However, the governments cannot solely take the credit of all these achievements secured by the country. The resilience, innovation and hard work of the people made the impossible possible.

Does it mean that whosoever is at the helm of affairs in Bangladesh has no impact on the economy, trade, commerce, education and infrastructural development? If such is the trend in Bangladesh, it means the Bangladeshi people want a clear break from the past

and want to move on regardless of who is in power. But these may be assumptions and cannot be verified from independent sources as far as a change in Bangladesh's political culture is concerned. The failure of the BNP and the Jamaat to gain popular support amidst massive political repression unleashed by the regime of Sheikh Hasina may be the single important factor to remove pressure from the Awami League government. Furthermore, Sheikh Hasina has played the issue of 1971 war crimes very well as the general public refused to back the calls for destabilizing the government through street agitation. Had the economy been in shambles and serious law and order problems heightened bad governance, popular support would have been with the opposition. The message which has been sent to the opposition as a result of one year of the political standoff is clear: it should wait for 2019 instead of demanding for mid-term polls. ■

*The writer is a professor and dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Karachi.*

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# Another Battle of Survival

**President Mahinda Rajapaksa has been stabbed in the back twice – both times by people who were considered his close companions.**

By Javeria Shakil

In the 2010 presidential elections, Rajapaksa's main contender was General Sarath Fonseka. He was also the joint candidate of the opposition parties. Incidentally, Gen. Fonseka was the Commander of the Sri Lankan Army during the critical last few years of the 26-year-long civil war between the Tamil separatists and the state forces. In that position, he was among the most trusted men of President Rajapaksa and served as his right-hand man in eliminating the Tamil Tigers. The end of war in 2009 was a national victory and

one of its heroes was Gen. Fonseka.

Buoyed by the successful end to the war, President Rajapaksa announced early presidential elections to be held in 2010. His main rival in the contest took everyone by surprise. It was Gen. Fonseka. While he was considered quite close to the president, those in the know were aware of the growing rift between the two. A few months after the war ended, Rajapaksa 'promoted' Gen. Fonseka, making him the Chief of Defense Staff of the Sri Lankan Army. A move up in terms of rank, it was,

however, seen by many as an attempt to sideline Fonseka, who had started nurturing political ambitions. Therefore, his candidacy was surprising but not altogether unpredictable – not least for Rajapaksa who had seen it coming.

When, in November 2014, Maithripala Sirisena claimed that he would be the common candidate of the joint opposition in the January 8 presidential election, he took the entire nation by surprise, including the president. After all, it was only two days before the announcement that Sirisena



and Rajapaksa had shared a hearty meal. Sirisena was a long-time ally of the president as well as a member of his cabinet and held the portfolio of health minister.

The son of a World War II veteran Albert Sirisena, Maithripala was educated at the Royal College, Polonnaruwa and the Sri Lanka School of Agriculture. He went to Russia for further studies where he read political science at the Maxim Gorky Literature Institute. He had started delving into politics in his teenage years and was inclined towards communism initially. In 1967, he joined the Sri Lanka Freedom Party. A natural politician, he continued to climb up the party ranks and became the president of the All Island SLFP Youth Organization in 1983. He became a member of parliament for the first time in 1989 on the ticket of the SLFP. During his long association with the SLFP, the last post Sirisena held was that of the party's general secretary. A seasoned politician, he served on several important posts in various governments. During the term of Chandrika Kumaratunga, he was the Minister of River Basin Development. He also served as the Leader of the House.

In 2005, he was appointed as the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Irrigation by President Rajapaksa. After a cabinet reshuffle in 2007, he was made the Minister of Agricultural Development and Agrarian Services

Development. Since April 2010, he was serving as the country's Health Minister.

After a smooth sailing that lasted several years, President Rajapaksa's government was in hot waters throughout 2014 as the world community in general and the UNHRC in particular turned up the heat with the constant demand of conducting a transparent investigation of war crimes. Trouble was also brewing on the domestic front as the opposition parties made significant headway in the provincial assemblies. By mid-2014, there was widespread speculation of an early election. The rumors were so strong that political parties had started looking for a strong candidate to fight Rajapaksa. Names of former president Chandrika Kumaratunga and opposition leader Ranil Wickremasinghe were thrown around to test the waters. Against this background, when the name of Sirisena was announced as the common candidate of the joint opposition, it was nothing less than a bolt from the blue.

Before this announcement, President Rajapaksa had no formidable rival. But the situation changed swiftly after Sirisena made public his candidacy. As he joined the opposition alliance, many members of the SLFP also defected with him. This was a major jolt for Rajapaksa who, realizing the gravity of the situation, started his campaign with a renewed zeal. He did not let go of any opportunity to launch verbal attacks on

Sirisena for his betrayal and compared him to "someone who eats hoppers in the night and then stabs you in the back in the morning." President Rajapaksa's son Namal wrote in a blog post, "Like the snake that betrayed Eve in the Garden of Eden, or rather like Judas betrayed his men after the Last Supper, without a word of warning he switched sides, faster than a chameleon changing his color."

Sirisena did not stay quiet either. "One family is creating a soft dictatorship. There's corruption and injustice and rule of law has broken down," he said to a group of reporters. He claimed that he would abolish the executive presidency "within 100 days of being elected, repeal the controversial 18th amendment and re-instate the 17th amendment." But this is possible only if he is elected with a good majority.

It is quite difficult considering the situation on the ground. Although President Rajapaksa's popularity has suffered a great deal in the last few months, he is very much a popular politician who has done a lot for Sri Lanka, making it the fastest growing economy of Southeast Asia. He will fight tooth and nail as the January 8 election may very well be the battle for his political survival. **SI**

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# Quest for a Constitution

With the deadline for the promulgation of a new constitution in Nepal coming closer, it is not clear whether the elected parties will overcome their political differences to achieve the goal.

By Almas Jawaid Khan

Nepal was ruled by absolute monarchs for most of its history. A violent civil war to replace the royal parliamentary system with a people's republic ended in 2006. Two years later, on May 28, 2008, the Constituent Assembly of Nepal altered the Constitution to declare the kingdom a Federal Democratic Republic, thereby abolishing the monarchy.

Till now, the country is governed under the Interim Constitution of Nepal, which was prepared with a political consensus. It will be enforceable till the time a permanent Constitution is framed by the Constituent Assembly. The Interim Constitution was drafted to facilitate the process of constitutional transformation and to manage the transition of Nepal from a unitary, constitutional monarchy to a federal republic.

Following discussions on power-sharing among the big three out of the many political parties, the CPN (Maoist), the CPN (UML) and the Nepali Congress, the claims to control the government's leadership resulted in a deadlock. There are other political parties, such as the Madhesi parties, which support a framework with a weak central government and greater regional autonomy. All political parties make secretive, top-down decisions without disclosing to the public the issues at stake, relying on fear-mongering and extreme rhetoric.

Beginning the debate on writing a new constitution by May 28, 2010, the first Constituent Assembly (CA) of Nepal extended the deadline by a year because of political instability. After that, the extension became a regular occurrence. Due to its failure to draft a new constitution, the CA was dissolved on May 28, 2012, by the then prime minister Baburam Bhattarai, ending four years of a futile rule. The year 2013 would be remembered for the successful conduct of elections against many odds. The second Constituent Assembly was formed, yet again tasked with drafting the Constitution of Nepal.

Having a formidable presence, with a two-thirds majority in the Assembly, the alliance of the Nepali Congress and the CPN (UML) shares the responsibility of promulgating the new constitution. However, the UCPN (Maoist) led alliance – that includes the Madhesi parties – also wants its role in power sharing and opposes a majority-based constitution. The draft committee would have prepared the first draft of the new constitution by this time, had it settled all its disputes with consensus. The date of January 22, 2015 is now agreed upon by all the parties to deliver a new constitution.

It is not clear whether the elected parties will overcome their political differences to achieve this goal. Past attempts to draft a new constitution have repeatedly failed because of disagreements about the creation of federal states and the distribution of power between these and the central government in Kathmandu.

The main characteristic of federalism is decentralization of power. Nepal has huge hydropower potentials and there is a risk and possibility of the emergence of separatist voices in case of unequal economic distribution. Geographically, there should be no fewer than six provinces – most of them will be directly connected with international borders. If these provinces established incognito relations with the neighboring countries, the central government will be in a vulnerable state. The meeting of the Forum of Federal States that took place in India a few months ago came to the conclusion that Nepal should not jump into federalism right away.

Nepal's economy depends largely on tourism and foreign aid. Continued political instability and factional squabbles have prevented successive governments from deciding and implementing clear policy programs. Nepal shares borders with China in the north and with India in the south, east and west. Recently, China tightened security inside Tibet, along the border


with Nepal, as a strategy for containing Tibet's fight for greater independence. Subsequently, border management and information sharing has emerged as the key areas of collaboration between the two states, for which the Nepalese police received financial incentives, training and equipment from China. In return for its cooperation, Nepal, an impoverished nation of 30 million, which for years has relied on aid, trade and investment from India, has found a new benefactor.

Traditionally, the people of Nepal would go to India for higher education, as the Indo-Nepal border is open and the nationals of both countries are free to live and work in either country. Nepal's economy has enormously benefited from the surge in India's economy. However, in recent years, the increasing dominance of Maoism in Nepal's domestic politics along with the strengthening economic and political influence of China has forced the Nepalese government to gradually formalize its ties with India.

There is a great deal of public disappointment with the well-known political parties, which have remained deeply divided on the issue of power-sharing that derailed the process of taking the country forward. If the political parties fail to institutionalize Nepal's transformation from a monarchical to a secular federal republic soon, one cannot rule out the emergence of a new political power.

Given the level of political fragmentation, many analysts are skeptical of whether the new assembly will be successful in carrying out its task. Some political actors want a federal structure based on ethnic lines. But others oppose such a system, arguing that it would be discriminatory and hamper economic trade. As such, Nepal, with its more than 100 ethnic groups, could go back to where it was in 2008 if a political consensus is not reached. ■

*The writer is an HR professional and a freelance contributor. She writes on social and cultural issues.*



# Devil and the Deep Sea

How much have smaller countries like Bhutan benefitted from SAARC?

By Huzaima Bukhari & Dr. Ikramul Haq

Bhutan, the small Himalayan country that made a transition from absolute monarchy to parliamentary democracy in March 2008, is one of the world's smallest and least-developed economies. With the establishment of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) – a regional bloc of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, with Afghanistan becoming the eighth member in 2006 – there was hope that countries like Bhutan would benefit immensely from this regional initiative. However, even after three decades, there are clear signs of unfulfilled dreams. There is a unanimously approved agreement

to improve cross-border energy trade that can meet the energy needs of all members. Presently, cross-border energy trade is done at a very small scale and is limited to Bhutan, India and Nepal.

SAARC was set up to defuse regional conflicts, promote cultural and economic cooperation between member states and improve the lot of the people of this region through greater cooperation in all areas of economic growth as well as cultural development. Critics say that the performance of SAARC, founded with the goal of moving towards a European-style union, is still far below the expectation, having deeper ramifications for small countries such as Bhutan.

Bhutan, a largely agrarian economy with a few roads, little electricity and no modern hospitals, needs significant assistance from other members of SAARC to progress. The rugged terrain of the country poses a great challenge to infrastructural development. Luckily, over the past decade, Bhutan's economy has showed satisfactory progress in which inter-regional economic cooperation, particularly trade with Bangladesh and India, has played a significant role. However, it still needs energy supplies and connections to global markets. Despite a free trade pact among SAARC countries in force since 2006, high tariffs and curbs on movement limit intra-trade.

Since SAARC member states have failed to accelerate inter-regional trade for which infrastructure development is a prerequisite, China is stepping in to provide funds for building roads and other network facilities. China has promised \$30 billion for building roads in South Asia over five years, and also suggested increasing the trade to \$150 billion over the same period. It is pertinent to mention that China had applied for full membership of SAARC some time back – a move opposed by India. The promises made by China can be of great benefit to countries like Bhutan provided India does not oppose them.

In the 18th SAARC summit, the top items of the agenda were three connectivity agreements on road, rail and energy. However, only one—the energy—could be signed. The remaining two, it was decided, would be discussed again in three months. Critics believe that Pakistan's excuse of requiring more time for completing the "internal process" was a reaction to India's unwillingness to start the bilateral dialogue. It is obvious that even if Pakistan gets ready for these connectivity agreements, it would

only be considered or signed after six months when SAARC foreign ministers meet.

Besides the non-signing of the two agreements, there was no major breakthrough at the 18th summit. There were no worthwhile decisions on the flow of investments and financial arrangements to push the economies towards deeper regional integration,

**Bhutan, a largely agrarian economy with a few roads, little electricity and no modern hospitals, needs significant assistance from other members of SAARC to progress. The rugged terrain of the country poses a great challenge to infrastructural development.**

which was projected as the main theme of the summit. Undoubtedly, SAARC's activities have been sluggish and irritatingly slow. Though India described the 18th summit as a "success," the fact remains that except an agreement on energy sharing there was no breakthroughs—the Indians failed to clinch even the key connectivity proposals.

For Bhutan, there were many disappointments. Though the Kathmandu Declaration lists a lot of lofty goals like developing "blue economy" (ocean-based economy) for the region, monitoring cybercrimes, good governance, reinforcing cultural heritage, universal health coverage and food security, it remains to be seen how effective the actions and implementation on these promises would be.

The Kathmandu Declaration accepted that observer countries may be engaged in "demand-driven priority areas". It is a fact that almost all of India's neighbors are attracted to China, both for the lure of greater economic resources as well as for the strategic potential of keeping India in "balance". China has also been keen to play a greater role in South Asia as its policy is driven by a sense of vulnerability in Tibet and Xinjiang, the growing potential of a 1.6 billion-strong South Asian market and its own trade and maritime interests in the Indian Ocean. India is prepared for an intensive economic engagement with China at the bilateral level but is not ready to open its strategic space in the region for Chinese presence and influence. It is not too happy to admit China as a SAARC member or

even elevate its observer status in the organization. India is resisting pressure from its SAARC neighbours with respect to China under the argument that SAARC has yet to achieve internal cohesion and consolidation.

India's unexpressed fears are on two counts. As a full member, China will get the veto power in SAARC's affairs where decisions are taken unanimously. China

may therefore block projects that may offer strategic and economic advantages to India. After all, China restrained the Asian Development Bank and lately even Japan from supporting projects in India's northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh. China is also opposing Indian oil exploration projects in what it considers disputed waters off Vietnam in the South China Sea. India is concerned that as a dialogue partner, China could breach SAARC's solidarity if it conflicts with the organization's perceived economic and strategic interests, as it did with ASEAN in 2012.

India seems to be gearing to integrate its neighbours even in the face of the Chinese challenge as well as resistance from Pakistan. Indian officials have been informally sending out a message that Modi is on a fast train of regional cooperation. Those who will join him are welcome and those who do not may wait for the next train. How far Modi will succeed in this approach remains to be seen. This is the scenario in which countries like Bhutan have to face uncertainties within SAARC. The Pak-China strategy to minimize the role of India within South Asia and India's efforts to counter it would pose more challenges for SAARC to fulfill the hope and promises of small member states. However, many believe that this tug of war may bring more benefits to them as China will pour huge funds to win them over to implement its future designs of having an upper hand in the region. ■

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Effective communication is pivotal to developing good diplomatic relations. Unfortunately, for Iran and the United States, strong communication appears to be a long shot. A major sticking point in the relations between both countries is that they are predominantly handled by other countries. Switzerland holds the reins for America's relations with Iran while Pakistan has taken charge of Iran's relations with the U.S.

In the absence of clear and effective channels of communication, it is unlikely that relations between both countries can be put right. On the contrary, diplomatic ties have been significantly hampered and the stage is set for an unspoken conflict.

More often than not, the U.S. and Iran have no other option but to rely on these indirect modes of communication to improve ties. This is particularly unfortunate as diplomatic relations between the countries go as far back as 1856. Nevertheless, maintaining strong ties has emerged as the need of the hour and must be tackled in an efficient manner.

It is difficult to understand the importance of building bridges between Iran and the U.S. without focusing on the rise of Islamic State militancy in the region. The IS is a group of Sunni Muslims who have been in conflict with Iran's Shiite community for many years. Faced with this new threat, the U.S. has failed to extend support or coordinate with Iran in combating the IS militants. To the contrary, President Barack Obama has only indirectly communicated with Iran to tackle the crisis.

In a similar vein, the U.S. has, in some respects, strictly upheld its loyalties and political communities. Unfortunately, the desire to stick to their guns has soured diplomatic relations between both countries.

For instance, Iran's relations with its neighbor Syria have caused the U.S. to raise its eyebrows and take a backseat to strengthen ties. Although Iran shares a religious affinity with Syrian rulers, the U.S. views the latter with a mixture of uncertainty and doubt. The cycle of distrust has been accelerated by America's willingness to fund and train groups to topple the Syrian dictatorship. As a result, Iran's religious link with Syria and the U.S.' inflexible attitude have complicated relations between both countries.

Despite the shadow of defeat that looms large, there is a beacon of hope which could salvage ties between Iran and the U.S. A large number of students from Iran study at American universities and the figures have doubled since 2009. Unfortunately, this advantage has

not been capitalized on. Moreover, the inflow of students operates under a strict visa regime which potentially frustrates diplomatic ties.

Consequently, Iran and the U.S. are constantly suspended between a series of issues which have been overshadowed by a tradition of silence.

Another pressing concern is the unending deadlock in the nuclear talks. A deadline was set for November 24, 2014. However, the specter of failure in previous deliberations has impacted progress. Moreover, the rise of the IS in Iraq and the emergence of miscreants who wish to thwart a potential nuclear

agreement has also weakened relations.

The negotiation process has been marred with constant delays. Although Obama viewed the nuclear talks as a means of building bridges between both countries, this is nothing more than a paper promise. On the other hand, Iran shares similar goals with the U.S.

Unfortunately, both countries are unable to join hands and develop a suitable way forward due to a series of political factors. For instance, America and Iran are unable to come together and brainstorm a solution to defeat the IS owing to the U.S.' commitment to oust the Syrian dictatorship.

Furthermore, President Obama has decided to take diplomatic steps carefully and watchfully. With mounting demands to get rid of Syria's dictatorship, the emergence of stronger U.S.-Iran relations could send a powerful and somewhat contradictory message. In

# A Bridge Too Far?

The nuclear agreement may not be the most effective means of building bridges between the U.S. and Iran.

By Taha Kehar

order to avoid further uncertainty, the U.S. president has adopted a tactic that will not adversely impact the country's image.

It is also widely believed that several decades of mistrust have produced a network of doubts that weighs heavily on nuclear talks. The memories of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and the hostage situation in the U.S. Embassy are still afresh. For their part, the people of Iran have not forgotten America's

wholehearted support for the 1953 coup to oust former prime minister Mohammed Mossadeq. As a result, relations between the two countries seem to have reached a point of no return.

For the past 14 years, the U.S. has made consistent efforts to rectify the damage. However, it has simultaneously heightened pressure on Iran by imposing sanctions for sponsoring militant groups, backing anti-Israel groups and orchestrating human rights abuses.

Although former U.S. President George Bush made repeated attempts to spew hatred against Iran, he simultaneously sought to mend ties with the country. He reversed the decision to not participate in the nuclear talks. He also sent his secretary of state Condoleezza Rice to restore U.S. diplomatic presence in Iran.

However, with

the arrival of President Obama, hostilities from Iran's political leadership threatened to open a Pandora's Box. The U.S. president had growing concerns over the country's nuclear capacity and was particularly displeased at the detention of American citizens in Iran. As Obama's first stint in power drew to a close, sanctions on Iran were gradually extended.

The appointment of Hassan Rouhani as Iran's president was a major turning point. It urged Obama to foster stronger relations with Iran. The U.S. president initiated discussions with Iran in 2013 and subsequently agreed to negotiate on an interim nuclear deal.

However, it is important to recall that diplomatic relations can only be strengthened if a holistic approach is adopted. Relying solely on a nuclear agreement may not be the most effective means to build bridges. This is predominantly because both sides can pull out of such arrangements with comparative ease. On the contrary, both sides should bury the hatchet and erase the uncertainty by developing stronger modes of communication. Only then can the stumbling blocks which have undermined ties between Iran and the U.S. be overcome. ■

*The writer is a poet and author. He is a law graduate of SOAS.*





# Caste Questions

India struggles with caste-based discrimination despite its advancements in other fields.

By Mahrukh Farooq

**F**or centuries, India's civil society has been governed by its age-old caste system; a hierarchy of social classifications that defines different groups of people by confining them to certain occupations. Contrary to popular belief, religion has virtually nothing to do with this framework; rather, it is an organization that is governed mostly by custom and which is imposed socially

as well as economically on India's inhabitants.

The designation of caste, to a great extent, influences the opportunities made available to people belonging to a lower caste as well as the ability of such people to take advantage of such opportunities. According to a report released by the International Labor Organization (ILO) titled, "Equality at Work: The Continuing

Challenge" (2011), the poverty rate for Dalits – a group of people traditionally regarded as outcastes or 'untouchables' in Indian society – is almost twice the rate for the rest of the population, which are 65.8% and 33.3%, respectively. This is a result of limitations of access to certain types of jobs, wage gaps when compared to other population groups and distinction between castes in terms



are meted out the worst kind of treatment including being denied community water, being banned from entering shops, being denied services of local barbers and being excluded from temples to the point of even being served tea in separate cups. Consequently, many Dalits have few other options for livelihood and are ultimately forced to resort to 'manual scavenging' – the removal and cleaning of human waste – as a source of income. This, in turn, further contributes to the unjust treatment doled out to members of the Dalit community, thus creating a vicious cycle.

Children of Dalits also face immense discrimination at the hands of both teachers and fellow students. According to a report developed by the United Nations Development Programme and UN Solution Exchange (Gender Community of Practice), titled, "Report of National Round Table Discussion on Social Inclusion of Manual Scavengers, New Delhi" 2012, the owner of a Gujarat-based grassroots Dalit organization, Martin Macwan, points out that in Gujarat, nearly 70% to 80% of children from Dalit communities drop out of school before they even reach the seventh grade. Discrimination against such children ranges from being made to sit on the far side of the classroom to not being allowed to touch the utensils belonging to an upper-caste student. If any of these rules are violated, these children are treated to severe beatings at the hands of their teachers.

Though various policies and laws are in place in India's constitution which outlaw unfair practices based on caste for the purpose of safeguarding the rights of members of the Dalit community, discrimination continues to exist. In fact, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989, does not even include Muslim and Christian Dalits. Therefore, they are not provided the same level of protection that Hindu Dalits are provided under the same Act. Similarly, while the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955, prohibits the obstruction of access to community water on the basis of caste, many Dalits are left without any right to use clean drinking water. The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, prohibits any person, local authority, or agency from 'engaging or employing' a 'manual scavenger'. While this law, theoretically, is in effect, in practice, however, the results are yet to be seen.

Apart from the ineffectiveness of laws, there are many other barriers that restrict Dalits from leading normal lives. Dalits involved in the occupation of manual scavenging found themselves

unable to leave their jobs out of their own free will. The ones who did manage to leave faced threats and harassment from their owners. In addition, many of these Dalits were banned from accessing land-based resources, resulting in many of them to either sell off their livestock or leave altogether. In the case of any crime committed, Dalits are vulnerable to poor treatment on behalf of the police in the form of rebuffs and refusals to register and investigate complaints.

Many political leaders and members of government have come forward to decry the existence of caste-based discrimination and have even called for its immediate elimination from society. Yet, in spite of all this, little has been done to alleviate the suffering of Dalits in India and they continue to endure injustice at the hands of others.

There have been many government programs launched to help transform India's human waste management system and ultimately help Dalits find alternate livelihoods. Many of these programs include sanitation schemes that aim to help modernize the country's sewerage disposal system. In addition, there have been a number of rehabilitation schemes that aspire to initiate programs that put an end to the practice of manual scavenging and help promote other alternative means of livelihood for members of the Dalit community.

However, the only means possible by which India can hope to make inroads into alleviating the suffering of members of the Dalit community is by spreading awareness amongst the public with regard to the importance of Dalit rights and by empowering Dalits to reach out and change their status in society. The civil society in India is already making leaps and bounds in terms of improving the life standards of members of the Dalit community through awareness campaigns, protests and rallies. Many have, according to the Human Rights Watch, "piloted gender and market sensitive vocational training. Successful programs include cell phone repair, driving, computer training, furniture construction, tailoring, fruit selling, and shoe making."

The government can take inspiration from civil society when it comes to working towards the improvement of life standards for members of the Dalit community. It can help fund such programs and thereby speed up the process, ultimately helping Dalits reach their goal of a better life for themselves as well as their children much faster. ■

*The writer is an assistant editor at Slogan and has an interest in advertising, media and public relations.*

of access to quality education.

Dalits lie at the bottom rung of India's social ladder. According to a report developed by the Human Rights Watch titled, "Cleaning Human Waste: 'Manual Scavenging', Caste and Discrimination in India" (2014), Dalits have been "traditionally limited to livelihoods viewed as deplorable or deemed too menial by higher caste groups - including as manual scavengers, leather workers and cobblers, among others." More importantly, this kind of distinction categorizes them as 'polluted' and hence 'untouchable' and even justifies some level of discrimination against them. As a result, members of the Dalit community

The Afghans take great pride in their culture and traditions, which dictate their lives to a large extent. Cultural codes define their conduct and outlook towards many things. To protect and provide for their womenfolk is one such unspoken code. For a society that has kept its women under the cloak for decades, the sight of a woman accompanying and standing beside her husband in public gatherings was sure to cause ripples. The nature of the gatherings - political rallies - made the situation even trickier. It was a risky move by all means considering the conservative nature of Afghan society. But Afghan President Ashraf Ghani took the risk and was seen with his wife on various occasions during his election campaign.

Rula Ghani, wife of Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, is different from other Afghan first ladies in many ways. She is not shy of being seen or heard. President Ghani's predecessor Hamid Karzai ruled the country for over 10 years. He was never seen in public with his wife, Dr. Zeenat Karzai. In fact, Dr. Zeenat was mockingly called the 'invisible first lady of Afghanistan.'

Before Karzai, the Taliban governed the country. During their regime, women were not allowed to go outside their homes without a 'mehrām'. It was against this background that the frequent public appearances of Rula Ghani are seen and judged by the people and the media of Afghanistan. What seems to heighten the dislike of some radical elements of Afghan society is the fact that Rula was born and raised in a Christian family.

Born in Beirut in 1948, Rula studied in France, Beirut and New York. She met Ashraf Ghani, her future husband, at the American University of Beirut during the 1970s, where she was a student of political science. The couple got married in 1975 and moved to Afghanistan. Rula lived in the country for the next three years. The Ghanis were lucky to have left Afghanistan before the 1978 civil war started. Rula returned to Afghanistan in 2002, when Ashraf Ghani was appointed finance minister by Hamid Karzai.

While Ghani was busy in improving the economic conditions of Afghanistan and its people, Rula busied herself with a cause that was close to her heart: rehabilitation of the internally displaced persons in

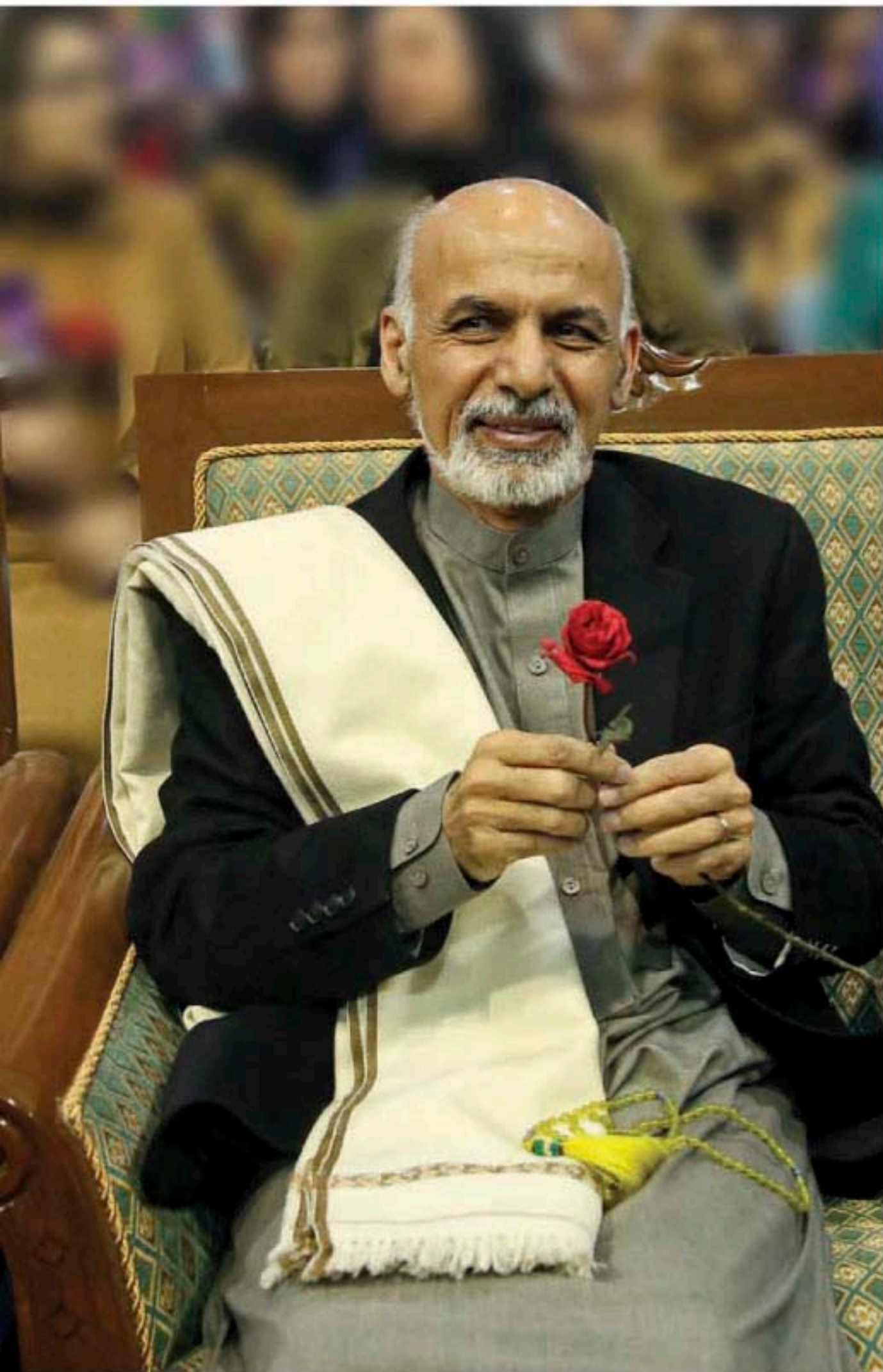


## A Different First Lady

Rula Ghani's understanding of the predicament of Afghan womenfolk is not superficial.

By Javeria Shakil

the country. Hundreds of people died during decades of war and infighting in Afghanistan while thousands were forced to leave their homes and move




to safer places. Estimates put the number of IDPs at over 750,000. The majority of the IDPs decided to settle in the urban areas of the country. Shocked at the way these people were forced to live, Rula joined a non-government organization Aschiana that worked for improving the lives of street children.

After working quietly for Aschiana for many years, Rula came into the spotlight when Ashraf Ghani announced that he would contest the presidential elections. Her presence at some public meetings surprised many. Rula also attended and chaired conferences that addressed the problems faced by womenfolk in

Afghanistan.

Being a prominent and vocal woman in a conservative Afghan society can have its own downsides. Ever since Rula made her first public appearance with her husband, she has been criticized for a number of reasons. First, it was her religious background that drew a lot of disparaging comments. Mohammad Mohaqeq, the deputy to Ashraf Ghani's rival candidate Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, called Rula "a foreigner, out of touch with a Muslim society," while Balkh Governor Atta Mohammad Noor said that Ghani's children and wife were not Afghans. She was also criticized for her alleged support for the French government's ban on veil.

However, both Rula and Ashraf Ghani were not cowed by the hostile statements. When he was elected president, Ashraf Ghani thanked his wife in his inaugural speech. In a society where women are considered non-entities, this was lauded as an unprecedented move by the national and international media. By setting up an office in the presidential palace, Rula has proved that she will not be a dormant first lady. But, at the same time, she also seems cognizant of her limitations. She has hinted that her endeavors will not clash with the traditional values of Afghan society. "There is a saying in Arabic that every situation must be considered based on the realities on the ground. I can talk in some places freely, but not in others," she said in an interview to the BBC.

Despite the fact that she does not belong to Afghanistan, Rula has proved time and again that she truly understands the predicament of womenfolk in Afghanistan and that her understanding of their problems is not superficial. In one of her statements, she commended Afghan women for the courage with which they went about their daily lives and raised their families in highly turbulent times, especially during the Taliban regime. Rula is determined to utilize her role as the 'bano aval' (first lady) to strengthen the position of Afghan women. "All I want is to let women know that I will be there to support and encourage them when they set out to do something," Rula said. 

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

**B**hutan is a mountainous country with a sporadically located rural population. Since a large number of the rural people are farmers, it is imperative that they begin joint marketing of their crops. This has several benefits – for starters, it decreases the cost of transportation and transaction. It also helps them in harvesting huge quantities of agricultural products which interests traders. This, in turn, is a key step towards providing people with market access and

income-generating opportunities. It also helps service providers to reach out to farmers in more effective ways.

The Bhutanese government is making efforts to revive cooperative farming. This will enable people to make money from agriculture. The United Nations Development Fund also extended its support to the project in 2011 through the Food Security Project, mainly to enhance the existing structure of the cooperatives. The project was designed to create

opportunities for income generation and self-employment in rural areas, and to help small farmers and rural women gain a steady income through the formation of self-help groups and cooperatives. The Cooperatives Rules and Regulations of Bhutan 2010 Act covers all aspects of cooperative development such as registration, monitoring, mediation and conciliation as well as provision of legal advice and services related to research, education and information. It also covers



# Beyond Conventional Farming

Cooperative farming in Bhutan empowers women who do not have a steady source of income.

By Samina Wahid

the registration of informal farmers groups.

Today, there are several initiatives assisting farmers with cooperative ventures, such as the Youth Business Cooperative (YBC), whose core business is vegetable marketing in Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan. "The YBC has planned an organized marketing system for vegetable growers in the country by linking markets with YBC stores and



## What is Cooperative Farming

Cooperative farming is creating shared farming ventures to address common challenges and provide mutual benefit. A cooperative business is defined by three major standards. It is owned by its members, those participating in the business, not by outside shareholders or investors. It is governed by its members. Each member of the business has a vote in major business decisions and in electing representatives or officers. It exists for member benefit, not profit for outside shareholders. Any profits are distributed equitably among members. In addition, cooperatives operate according to internationally recognized core principles and values, which include operating as an autonomous organization, investing in the training and education of their members, and supporting other cooperatives and the community. While cooperatives have an important role in farming, not all collaborative efforts meet those criteria. Buying a seed drill with neighboring farms, sharing a delivery van to a nearby city, or even running a farm together need not be classified or operated as a cooperative in order to provide fair and mutual benefit to those involved. Cooperative farming explores a variety of frameworks to work together as a group.

Source: *A Greenhorns Guidebook* by Faith Gilbert

collection centers. With the YBC engaging in the vegetable marketing program for nine items, selling vegetables should no more be a problem for farmers," said Rinzin Norbu, the project manager of the YBC. "Many small farmers find it quite expensive to take their produce to markets located in towns. But now farmers will not have to wait to sell their products or be disappointed if they are unable to sell it," he said.

Initiatives such as the YBC aim to create employment and reduce the import of vegetables. They give a high priority to roping in farmers as their main suppliers. However, to bring down the cost of vegetables that are not available in the country, the YBC has planned to make bulk purchases through the Food Corporation of Bhutan and sell them at a minimum profit to make vegetables affordable. "We will make vegetable affordable in Thimphu without compromising the quality and supply," Norbu explained. "The only reason why people are losing interest in growing vegetables is because of lack of market. If the YBC takes up the marketing, it could revive vegetable cultivation."

Cooperative farming also empowers women who do not have a steady source

of income. Women say their engagement in cooperatives and farmer groups has given them a sense of independence and confidence. They are able to contribute to their family and household expenses, educate their children and run their daily chores. The security of having their own income has empowered many women who never dreamed that their daily chores would generate income.

Karma Choeni Dema, 44, is one such woman. Chairman of the Shershong Cooperative in Mongar, Karma earns about \$100-120 every month from the milk and dairy products that she sells to the cooperative. The income supports her children's education. She also invested her savings to start a poultry farm, which brings in an additional \$100 in a good month. "I am self-sufficient and don't depend on anyone," Karma said. "I make enough money to send all my children to school." After leaving an alcoholic and abusive husband, she enjoys working for her community and doesn't look back. She says her dream is to help develop her community and improve the quality of life for rural women. As the chairwoman of her cooperative, she represents her community as the project officer and the livestock office in Mongar. Karma is one of the many beneficiaries of a project implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests (MoAF) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Cooperatives in Bhutan existed as early as the 1960s but they were informal community groups which did not generate income. According to the UNDP, by 2012, the opportunities for generation of income and employment had increased in the targeted poor areas. In 2013, the UNDP allocated \$120,000 to enhance food security in Bhutan by promoting water saving technologies, improving crop yields and forming cooperatives and farmers groups.

Cooperative farming is hugely beneficial for Bhutanese farmers. While government patronage has largely popularized the practice in the country, efforts must now be made to establish a national agricultural federation that gives a voice to Bhutanese farmers and present their interests before policy makers. Though the majority of the Bhutanese people live as farmers, there is no institution to address their problems and needs. This gap must be filled in order to create a nationwide grassroots movement in the country so that farmers eventually learn to sustain themselves and can create economic opportunities for the rural population. **SI**

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

# Rise and Fall of Kalat

**Book Title:** Remotely Colonial: History and Politics in Balochistan  
**Author:** Nina Swidler  
**Publisher:** Oxford University Press  
**Pages:** 336, Hardback  
**Price:** Rs.995  
**ISBN:** 9780199068654

*Reviewed by S.G. Jilanee*

In 1963, Dr. Nina Swidler visited Sharna, a distant village in Balochistan where she saw a tribal sardar holding an assembly on his lawn. Surrounded by tribesmen sitting on the ground, the sardar was dispensing tribal justice even though there was a judicial system functioning in the country and the sardar had no legal authority to do so. The incident kindled Swidler's professional interest as an anthropologist in the history and culture of the local people.

Remotely Colonial is the result of her painstaking research. Profusely annotated, the 300-page book, including a 30-page introduction, is an in-depth study of the history and politics of Balochistan, with particular reference to the Kalat state because of its peculiar relationship with British India.

The author explains her choice of the fascinating title to describe a 'colony' located far away from the seat of paramount power, where the British had little physical presence as their interest was limited to ensuring that the colony was able to meet the cost of its security. Far removed from the seat of power in Calcutta, Balochistan was the ideal example of remote colonialism. The British government's physical presence was confined to Quetta. Kalat – by being at the farthest end of the province – was simply out of their reach.

The situation hasn't changed much. As the author writes, "Balochistan remains remote to most Pakistanis, who know it primarily as the impoverished backwater of the country. Similarly, Pakistan remains a distant place for those Baloch who have never traveled beyond the provincial borders." At best, Pakistanis only know that there is a brewing insurgency in the province and

the army is engaged in putting it down. For all else it could be another country.

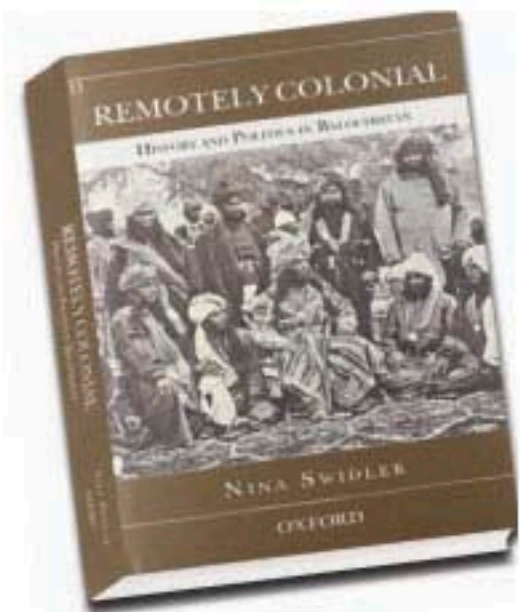
The chapter 'Kalat before the British' traces the history of Balochistan, beginning from the arrival of the first settlers in the 7th century BC. More migrants came during the 16th century. A pattern of social structure evolved "with such fascinating institutions as shadi-ghum – the obligation to participate in the good and bad times, to share joy and sorrow at all levels, from the life cries of the family to the defence of tribal land and honor." In the early 19th century, the port of Sonmiani in Lasbela was a centre of trade and industry, "specializing in the production of cloth and carpets." From here, "dyestuffs and hides were exported to Muscat."

The chapter on political space deals with the areas that shared borders with Kalat such as Iran (international border) and Kharan, Makran, Chagai, etc. (local borders). The status of Kalat itself was that of a "tributary chiefdom" under which the sardars owed allegiance to the Khan. The British acknowledged the Khan of Kalat as "the ruler of an independent state" but a political agent was posted in Kalat and the agent general could summon the Khan to Quetta for meetings. Relations between the Khan of Kalat and the British government remained strained throughout the 36-year reign of Mir Khudadad Khan, until the AGC, James Browne, forced him to abdicate in favor of his son in 1893. Having seen his father's humiliation, Mir Mahmud Khan, the son of Mir Khudadad, had learnt his lessons and declined to rule. This increased the British government's interference in the affairs of Kalat, including the appointment of a "political adviser."

Relations were further exacerbated in 1905 when some deserters of the Khan of Kalat's army moved into the cantonment and sought British protection. They were pursued by the loyal troops of the Khan and as they took shelter in a post office, a clash broke out in which a Levies soldier was killed. Meanwhile, the British drained the Khan's treasury step by step by increasing the amount of the existing charges and imposing new ones in various sectors.

In another chapter, the author gives a detailed description of a jirga with some interesting examples of how it functioned, the institution of the paramilitary force of Levies and the jirga-Levies system representing a "contradictory melding of tribal practice and colonial rule." Also discussed in the chapter are issues relating to the tussle of Kalat with the sardars of Jhalawan and Sarawan besides the succession conflicts among the Mengals.

Slavery was another issue the



British government had to grapple with. According to British estimates, in 1911 there were "17,800 slaves in Kalat of whom 9,300 were female." A whole chapter has been devoted to a discussion that reveals many a startling fact, such as the purchase of "one half a leg of a woman for Rs.25 and a whole leg for Rs.50" and what that entailed. The British, though they discouraged the practice, did not intervene except in cases where a slave escaped into British India.

Ahmad Yar Khan became the ruler of Kalat in 1933. He continued his efforts to get Kalat recognized as an independent state, different from other native states – without success. Meanwhile, the Government of India Act 1935 changed the complexion of Balochistan's politics as both the Congress under Mahmood Khan Achakzai and the Muslim League under Qazi Isa vied for political space.

Shortly before independence, Ahmad Yar Khan declared independence but later, under threat of military action, acceded to Pakistan in 1948. The One Unit in 1955 sparked resistance which was put down by military force. In 1960, the representatives of the insurgents and the government "met to end hostilities" after which they were arrested and hanged. Even the Khan was put under house arrest and taken to Lahore.

However, insurgency and armed opposition to the government of Pakistan has continued for all these years.

Literature on Balochistan is scarce. Most Pakistanis are still as "woefully misinformed about Balochistan" as David Fell, an officer of the Khan freed after negotiating with the representatives of the Pakistan government on behalf of Kalat.

Remotely Colonial is a treasure trove of rare information about Balochistan. Swidler treats every topic in minute detail – politics, life, culture, the sardari system, the importance of the jirga, slavery, insurgency and so forth. **S**

*The writer is a senior political analyst and former editor of Southasia.*

# Social Diary

I define beauty as  
**'Confidence'**  
#Makeup artist #Interview

**MATHAM**

The  
ridiculous  
rush for

Benefits of  
vegetable  
juices in winter

5 tips to take care  
for expensive  
oil paintings

It is the mag of  
**modern era**

Pakistan  
**OBSERVER**

**SOUTHASIA 15 YEARS AGO**

*Elected for the second time, President Chandrika Kumaratunga discussed her future plans in an exclusive interview with SOUTHASIA's Colombo correspondent, Lucien Rajakarunanayake just before the election*

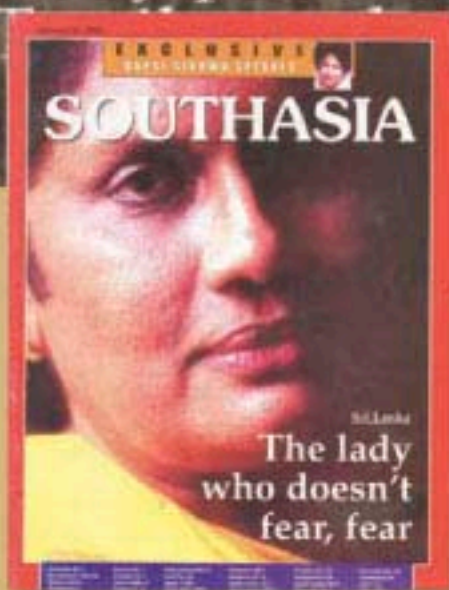
**SOUTHASIA:** Why did you decide to seek a fresh mandate at this time?

President Chandrika Kumaratunga: What you want to know is why I thought of seeking a fresh mandate so early.

Yes, more than one year ahead of the scheduled time.

No, it is well ahead of the expected time. Most governments choose to hold elections at a time they believe is most propitious to them, which they are permitted to do under democratic rules and practice. We have won seven provincial council elections after four years in office and into our fifth year in government. So we thought we are strong enough to go into a presidential election and later on into parliamentary elections.

“Ninety per cent of do



January, 2000

**Excerpts from an interview of former Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga, published in Southasia in January, 2000**

# “Ninety per cent of Tamil people do not want war”

**Elected for the second time, President Chandrika-Bandaranaike Kumaratunga discusses her future plans in an exclusive interview with SOUTHASIA's Colombo correspondent, Lucien Rajakarunanayake, just before the election.**

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**How do you assess your government's performance in the past five years vis-a-vis the pledges that you as chief of the People's Alliance gave to the people in 1994?**

I believe that we have successfully implemented the tasks entrusted to us by the people. These are the wiping out of State terror, re-establishment of democratic rule, strengthening of human rights, ensuring people's freedom, media freedom and such important matters.

Second is the economy. This involved building a strong economy out of one that

was completely destroyed in every sense of the word. I think we have already finished the major portion of that task, that of formulating a clear economic vision.

Then to draw up annual action plans and thereafter to find the wherewithal, especially the finances and various different skills, that was required to implement these action plans. I think we have done that successfully, and we are continuing along that path. We have given priority to strengthening the economic fundamentals, while engaging in a very costly and destructive war.

**There is a feeling that under your stewardship as Finance minister, the country's economy has suffered.**

No, definitely not. I would say that if it has suffered, it is only in having had to undergo the difficulties of being pulled out of total destruction into which it was plunged by the last government. We have strengthened the fundamentals, while a war is going on. We have brought in a very strict financial discipline. There is now a very strict management of the economy at the level of government. We have been able to limit wastage to a great extent. Corruption too has been reduced to a considerable extent at the top level, and I believe that this is what really matters most for an economy.

This is much more important than the corruption at the lower levels, though that is also unacceptable. But, what is most serious for the economy is corruption. Corruption at the top rampant under the previous regime, has now been done on the one hand by insisting on transparency in all economic dealings, including tender procedures, and on the other, by insisting on not deviating from accepted tender procedures, and thirdly, by my own personal intervention, at the cost of spending many hours to ensure that irregularities are stopped. I reckon that, we have been able to save more than Rs. 10 billion a year, by reducing corruption at the top levels alone. Here I only talk of the big tenders and not the smaller ones. We have definitely been able to strengthen the economy. The proof is in the fact that our economy has held up strongly while much stronger economies have been crashing all around us, in East Asia and elsewhere.

The appreciation we have received from serious and important organisations such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, the IMF and many investment analysts also go to confirm this fact.

I would honestly say, we have been able to reduce it to say by 50 to 60 per cent. But, certainly at the other levels it still exists and we have to attack that.**LS**

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I would honestly say, we have been able to reduce it to say by 50 to 60 per cent. But, certainly at the other levels it still exists and we have to attack that.

There is a feeling that under your stewardship as Finance minister, the country's economy has suffered.

No, definitely not. I would say that if it has suffered, it is only in having had to undergo the difficulties of being pulled out of total destruction into which it was plunged by the last government. We have strengthened the fundamentals, while a war is going on. We have brought in a very strict financial discipline. There is now a very strict management of the economy at the level of government. We have been able to limit wastage to a great extent. Corruption too has been reduced to a considerable extent at the top level, and I believe that this is what really matters most for an economy. This is much more important than the corruption at the lower levels, though that is also unacceptable.

But, what is most serious for the economy is corruption. Corruption at the top rampant under the previous regime, has now been done on the one hand by insisting on transparency in all economic dealings, including tender procedures, and on the other, by my own personal intervention, at the cost of spending many hours to ensure that irregularities are stopped. I reckon that, we have been able to save more than Rs. 10 billion a year, by reducing corruption at the top levels alone. Here I only talk of the big tenders and not the smaller ones. We have definitely been able to strengthen the economy. The proof is in the fact that our economy has held up strongly while much stronger economies have been crashing all around us, in East Asia and elsewhere.





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**17 February 2015, Marriot Hotel Karachi**  
4th International Multi-Modal Transportation,  
Logistics Conference  
Website: [www.intertranspakistan.com](http://www.intertranspakistan.com)  
E-mail: [info@intertranspakistan.com](mailto:info@intertranspakistan.com)



**10-12 March 2015**  
**Pak-China Friendship Centre, Islamabad**  
11th International Safety & Security  
Exhibition & Conference  
Website: [www.safesecurepakistan.com](http://www.safesecurepakistan.com)  
E-mail: [info@safesecurepakistan.com](mailto:info@safesecurepakistan.com)



**2015, Expo Centre Lahore**  
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**1 - 3 September 2015, Karachi Expo Centre**  
13th International Plastics & Packaging  
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**1 - 3 September 2015, Karachi Expo Centre**  
4th International Food, Beverages &  
Hospitality Trade Fair  
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& Packaging Technology Trade Fair  
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