

**NEIGHBOR**  
Myanmar Elections – and After

January 2016

# SOUTHASIA

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The Pains of Growth

### SRI LANKA

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# THE BLOOD STILL FLOWS

The two South Asian nations apparently pursue a policy of peace – but Bangladesh ends up prosecuting individuals with Pakistan connections for crimes alleged to have been committed forty years ago.



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# It's never too late!

“ You are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed - that has nothing to do with the business of the state. ”

*Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah  
addressing the Constituent Assembly  
on August 11, 1947*



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# The rapprochement

Are things looking up between India and Pakistan? Is a new light of hope just about to pervade the subcontinent after many dark days of desperation, despair and cold distance? Looks like the sun is at last emerging from the clouds. There have been at least four high profile meetings between leaders of the two countries and it is being hoped that, very soon, more good news will hit the headlines.

The story until the meeting in Ufa, Russia, between Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his Indian counterpart, Narendra Modi, had been a dismal one. Things started to look up for the two major South Asian nations when Narendra Modi and Nawaz Sharif met in Paris on the sidelines of the Paris Climate summit, though only for a mere two minutes. It was an impromptu meeting on the face of it and by his account, the Pakistani National Security Advisor, Sartaj Aziz later said that he quickly moved to a distance, when he realized that the Indian and Pakistani leaders wished to have a few moments to themselves. It is not exactly known as to what transpired in the brief exchange between the two prime ministers but it is certain that the brush led to further doors of renewed ties opening. The Pakistani political leader Imran Khan's trip to New Delhi also served to brighten the atmosphere. Among his other engagements, he was invited by PM Modi for a brief meet at the latter's residence. The iceberg that had existed between India and Pakistan seemed to be further melting. The national security advisors of India and Pakistan, namely Ajit Doval and Lt. Gen. (R) Nasir Janjua met in Bangkok and were accompanied by the respective foreign secretaries of both countries. The details of their talks have not been divulged but this much is clear that the Bangkok junket too was an ice thawing mission.

The Bangkok episode encouraged both sides that things were going in the desired direction. The renewed good spirit drew the Indian foreign minister, Sushma Swaraj to make a trip to Pakistan and receive the hospitality of the Pakistanis, particularly that of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his family. When Ms. Swaraj returned to New Delhi, she had to face some unpleasant music in terms of tough questions put to her by Indian parliamentarians, even to the extent of the colour of saree she chose to wear one day while in Pakistan and why she spoke in Urdu? It needs to be remembered that Sushma Swaraj's Pakistan visit had come about at just the time when the anti-Muslim (read anti-Pakistan) fever was at a high pitch in India and those Hindu extremists who find fault with everything Pakistani, had had good times, spiting prominent Pakistanis visiting India, from not letting ghazal maestro Ghulam Ali present his art to showing an unwelcoming attitude towards the Pakistan cricket board chairman Shaharyar Khan and from painting the face of a prominent Indian black just because he was hosting the launch of Mahmud Kasuri's book to the targeting of Mahira Khan, a Pakistani actress appearing in an Indian film.

It was therefore quite a pleasant surprise when one afternoon in late December, the Lahoris found Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visiting their city to attend the wedding of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's granddaughter. An Indian prime minister had come to Pakistan after a long time. That the visit came about without much hype and hoopla is what further added to the surprise and it was obvious that the iceberg had by now disappeared. It was said that Modi came over merely to participate in the wedding celebrations and that there was nothing on the agenda in terms of a political tete-a-tete. That may have been the official line because a congratulatory phone call could also have been just appropriate instead of Mr. Modi flying over in person. Besides, what was Sajjan Jindal doing in Lahore on the same day? It is known that Jindal has special ties with Narendra Modi and has been funding the BJP. He found it convenient to visit Lahore simultaneously with Modi and establish links with Nawaz Sharif and his family. Jindal has global interests in steel, a subject also close to the hearts of Nawaz Sharif's sons, who were present in Lahore for the wedding. Jindal is one of India's richest individuals and his mother is said to be the world's richest woman. All these factors must have combined to create an enabling environment for Nawaz and Modi to come closer and pick up the pieces from there. It is also being said that, on the lines of the quadrilateral talks that are being initiated between Pakistan, Afghanistan, the USA and China, to find a solution to the Taliban juggernaut, major global powers are also behind the India-Pakistan rapprochement.



Syed Jawaid Iqbal

## Diminishing secularism



This is with reference to Southasia's article on diminishing secularism in India. Despite the fact that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the ruling party, has been badly defeated in elections which were recently held in the state of Bihar, it looks BJP has not learnt from its mistakes and the Modi-led government has not taken any concrete measures to put an end to the recent wave of intolerance towards minorities in India. It is not only against the real spirit of secularism in the country, but it also suggests the nation is rapidly marching from religious pluralism to the Hindutva, or indu nationalism. The current level of intolerance is not a tussle between the majority and minority, but a battle between a secular India and Hindustan, the homeland of the Hindus only.

**Arjun S. Kumar,**  
*Chhattisgarh, India.*

## Governance through Coordination

In Pakistan, the military has a fine record of running the government, compared to those chosen by vote. Unfortunately, the country has not found the 'right man for the right job' through the electoral process so far and still relies on those who have been already tried and tested. On the one side, we find a total disarray in the name of good governance, and on the other, we have a highly-organised and perfectly-disciplined military that often comes to the rescue to avoid more damage to the country. I think all state stakeholders should work together to improve governance through ceaseless cooperation and coordination, since it is the system as a whole that needs a complete overhaul.

**Mahboob Rabbani,**  
*Karachi, Pakistan.*

This is with reference to Southasia's article on the fuel crisis in Nepal. A landlocked country, Nepal does not have plenty of options to meet its energy needs. However, the recent crisis has given greater credence to the idea that it has to think beyond its self-sufficient in meeting its energy requirements. In fact, we have not seen any oil exploration practices taking place in Nepal, while its neighbouring country China has invested a lot of money to use advanced seismic imaging technologies to search for untapped oil and gas reservoirs. Exploration for oil and gas deposits through seismic imaging or drilling is capital intensive, but Nepal can get financial support from the World Bank for this purpose. The good thing is that a new government has recently come and I hope it will use available options to cater to the country's energy needs.

**Sunita Kumari,**  
*Pokhara, Nepal.*



its citizens and on the other, the local press is repeatedly dictated by the government on numerous occasions. Lack of online connectivity across the country also hampers its growth as a true democratic state. As a result, civil society is not flourishing in Bhutan and one is unable to see any difference the much-trumpeted democracy has made in the lives of people.

**Rinzin Wangmo,**  
*Gelephu, Bhutan.*

## Fuel crisis in Nepal



## A democratic Bhutan

The small Himalayan kingdom, Bhutan had its first national elections in 2008, followed by the enactment of a new constitution. Going through the infancy stage, democracy has yet to take its roots, as the country is still ruled by a 'king,' who has been given enough power and authority by the parliament. On the one hand, the Bhutanese constitution guarantees freedom of expression to

## Future of Pakistan Cricket

India has again refused to play a bilateral cricket series with Pakistan. Allama Iqbal, the poet of the East, once wrote a famous poem in Urdu titled 'Tarana-e-Milli (anthem of the nation)', in which he emphasizes the universality of being a Muslim. According to him, Muslims, despite living in different parts of the world, are one nation. He wrote:

China is ours, Arabia is ours,  
We are Muslims and the whole world is our

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## Where is Bangladesh heading?

Once known for its religious harmony and viable secular ethics, Bangladesh is gradually heading towards extremism and radicalisation. The recent attacks on bloggers and foreigners were not committed by any outside forces or terror groups and the BD people themselves were behind the deplorable incidents, which also resulted in the cancellation of the Australian cricket tour last November. Despite such an alarming situation, the government in Bangladesh is still in a denial mode and accuses the opposition parties of creating intolerance among the citizens. The international community is shocked as no one in the world expected a peaceful, tolerant Bangladesh to turn into a fanatical nation and that too in a very short time. In such a bleak scenario, the Bangladeshi government needs to address the root causes, instead of blaming others.

**Zaib-un-Nissa,  
Chittagong, Bangladesh.**



homeland.

An inspirational and patriotic piece of poetry, the same expression serves as the slogan of Pakistan's national cricket team, which has been forced to play 'home' series with international side anywhere in the world, other than in its homeland. Unfortunately, our neighbours are not in favour of playing with Pakistan even at a neutral venue, adding misery to a side already battling to survive in international cricket.

**Wakeel Ahmed,  
Hyderabad, Pakistan.**



**Pervez Musharraf,  
former President of Pakistan**

"Maturity and equilibrium have to be established in the society."



**Sheikh Hasina Wajid,  
Prime Minister of Bangladesh**

"While freedom of speech is important, writers should respect religious sentiments."



**Wickremesinghe,  
Prime Minister of Sri Lanka**

"It is important to maintain defence ties with militarily advanced nations such as the US and Britain."

**Ranil**



**Abdulla Yameen,  
President of the Maldives**

"The only way to implement development projects is to 'cut through the red tape' to take the shortest possible route within the contours of the law."



**KP Sharma Oli,  
Prime Minister of Nepal**

"Though I had a great dream of developing the nation, massive earthquake and border blockade have laid obstructions to the same."



**Vladimir Putin,  
President of Russia**

"Apparently (the West) think they're infallible, but when the moment comes to take some responsibility, they disappear."

"We have to empower people from all sections, be it any community, region or language."

**Narendra Modi,  
Prime Minister of India**



"TAPI is not just a gas transit initiative connecting energy-rich Central Asia with energy-starved South Asia, but a trailblazing project that will open doors for greater regional economic collaboration and integration."

**Nawaz Sharif,  
Prime Minister of Pakistan**



"Without Afghanistan, Central Asia, South Central Asia, East Asia and West Asia will not be connected."

**Ashraf Ghani,  
President of Afghanistan**



"We have to work hard to ensure that our future generations also enjoy free education and free healthcare."

**Tshering Tobgay,  
Prime Minister of Bhutan**



"I will abide by everything that I'm saying on the campaign trail."

**Donald John Trump,  
American politician**



"ISIS has ambitions to elevate its presence and level of activity in Indonesia, either directly or through surrogates."

**George Henry Brandis,  
Attorney-General for Australia**



PAKISTAN

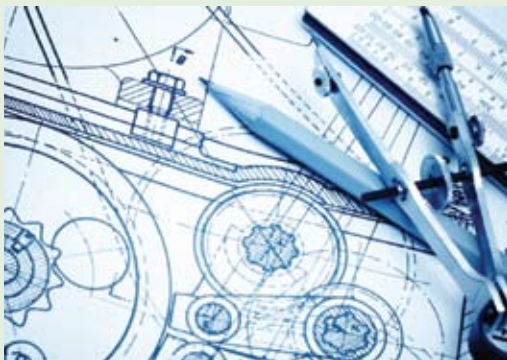
## e-Corridor

Pakistan and China will develop an electronic corridor (e-Corridor) to greater internet connectivity possible in Pakistan. In the initial phase, the work on the 'Tech City' will commence in January. After completion, it will serve an all-inclusive platform to provide training and capacity building services to IT companies and entrepreneurs. A research and innovation centre will be established



alongside to help Pakistan materialize its vision of accelerated digitization. Pakistan is also developing an 'e-commerce gateway framework' to establish online commercial ventures in the country, while China will set up an IT park in Karachi. **S**

PAKISTAN



## Engineers Affiliated

Pakistan has become affiliated with the Federation of Engineering Institutions of Asia and the Pacific (FEIAP) Accreditation System. The FEIAP Accreditation System is supported by UNESCO for substantial equivalence of engineering qualifications among its member countries. Earlier in 2015, officials of FEIAP and the Institute of Engineers, Malaysia evaluated the engineering education accreditation system of the Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) and found it meeting the FEIAP's criteria. Pakistani engineers can now register themselves as APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) Engineers and easily find jobs in FEIAP countries. **S**

INDIA

## Medical Park

The government of Gujarat in India will establish the country's first medical park, which will help India boost its production of high-end medical products and meet its indigenous requirements of medical equipment on its own. Currently, India exports medicines to more than 200 countries, but it is still dependent on other countries for medical equipment. It is the fourth largest market in Asia, the retail market of medical equipment in India is estimated at about Rs 60,000 to 70,000 crore, while its local production accounts for a mere 2 per cent of the global industry. A 'Pharmaceutical Park' is also under way in Gujarat. **S**



INDIA

## Electronic Markets



To ensure free movement of farm produce across the country, India is launching an electronic agricultural market next September. It will connect 250 mandis (wholesale markets) at different locations. The e-platform would give local farmers access to markets nationwide, save them from levies charged by various mandis and provide commodities to consumers at reasonable prices. The national online platform will cover 585 mandis by March 2018 and will enable farmers to sell their produce online. **S**

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## BANGLADESH

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# Battery JV

The world's third largest manufacturer of motorcycles and automobile batteries, Japan's GS Yuasa International is about to start production at the Chittagong-based 'Japan SolarTech' industrial zone. A joint venture between Japan and Bangladesh, zone has invested \$15 million to set up a production unit to make 30,000 automotive batteries per month. Yuasa will be the first Japanese battery to be made in Bangladesh and will meet a demand of 1.8 million batteries every year. GS Yuasa has 34 factories in 19 countries.



Bangladesh will be the first country where the Japanese's company is transferring its complete technology. **S**

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## SRI LANKA

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# Entrepreneurial Reawakening

The Sri Lankan government has recently launched a nationwide "Entrepreneurial Reawakening" program so that its young entrepreneurs can be engaged in Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Launched by Sri Lanka's National Enterprise Development Authority (NEDA), in partnership with the International Labour Organization (ILO), the program offers an online portal [www.ye.lk](http://www.ye.lk), in three languages and functions as a one-stop 'online shop' to collect and exchange information and business support services. In a country with over 4.2 million internet users, the objective is to get people engaged online in mainstream business activities. **S**

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## NEPAL

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# Vaccination Drive

The Nepalese government has launched a vaccination campaign in its Chitwan and Kaski districts to prevent Human Papillomavirus infections (HPVs) among women. HPV, a sexually transmitted virus, causes uterine cancer and has been found among 70 per cent of the total female cancer patients in Nepal. Being the first initiative of its kind, around 30,000 vials of the vaccine will be administered to 14,500 girls twice a year. The vaccine is said to be effective if administered to girls before reaching puberty. The government is going to expand the drive to 75 districts. **S**



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## MALDIVES

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# Digital Cable

A leading mobile operator, the 'Ooredoo Maldives' is going to deploy a fibre optic submarine cable in the Maldives. A \$25-million project, the highly-advanced fibre optic cable will support the Maldives' long-term broadband policy and will help it emerge as one of the most digitally advanced countries in the SAARC region. Based on the Huawei Marine's 100G Technology, the underwater cable stretches across 1,200 kilometres. It will expand capacity and increase network flexibility, thus multiplying overall Internet connectivity across the country. The project will be completed by December 2016. **S**





# Travesty of Justice

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed could have let bygones be bygones and worked for peace in South Asia but she seems to have a different agenda.

By S. M. Hali

There was a time when Pakistan and Bangladesh, originally a single country, were moving closer and there were signs of relations between the two becoming normal once again. It is clear now that Prime Minister Hasina Wajid, the daughter of the late Sheikh Mujib ur Rehman, had not forgotten the past. Bangladesh came into existence in 1971 and her father and many members of her close family were assassinated in a coup in Dhaka in 1975. It has become obvious now that Hasina Wajid was burning in the cauldron of vendetta and this came into the open when she initiated 'war crime' trials and began sending those senior persons to the gallows who were alleged to have participated in the crimes on behalf of West Pakistan in 1971. Perhaps, she even thought that the west Pakistanis were responsible in some way for the assassination of her father four years later - in 1975. The upshot of all this is that relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh have again become vitiated and bloodstained.

Bangladesh was born after a bloody struggle, midwifed by India on December 16, 1971. It continues to suffer from some kind of postnatal trauma even after a lapse of forty four years and its sitting Prime Minister, instead of building bridges of friendship with Pakistan, finds every opportunity to foment hatred between the two countries.

Pakistan achieved independence on August 14, 1947 when it comprised two

wings, East and West Pakistan, which were separated by a thousand miles of Indian territory. The Bengalis, who were at the forefront of the Pakistan Movement, soon became disenchanting owing to certain myopic policies of the central government in Islamabad. The declaration of Urdu as the national language sowed the initial seeds of discord between the two wings as the Bengalis wanted national recognition of the Bengali language too. Consequently, the language riots claimed numerous precious Bengali lives. It would be around their mausoleum (Shaheed Minar) that later generations of Bengali freedom fighters would rally. The Pakistan leadership's obsession with 'parity' between the two wings (to offset the east's numerical advantage) not only delayed the formation of Pakistan's constitution but also widened the divide. An arrogant attitude of the West Pakistanis towards their East Pakistani compatriots only vitiated relations.

Two catalysts expedited the final split. Firstly, the genuine grievances of the East Pakistanis were exploited by India in spreading rancour and acrimony between the two wings of Pakistan. Secondly, certain West Pakistani politicians, faced with the possibility of an East Pakistani led government ruling Pakistan — as a result of the relatively free and fair 1970 elections — blocked the military government's handing over of power to the victors of the polls, forcing East Pakistan to move towards

independence and declaring formation of Bangladesh on March 26, 1971. The Pakistan Army, mostly comprising west Pakistanis, cracked down on the Bengali insurgents and controlled the rebellion after thousands of west Pakistani army personnel, civilians and non-Bengalis in East Pakistan were massacred by the rebels. The Pakistan Army, in retaliation, was equally brutal. This led to a mass exodus of Bengalis to India. The situation was fully exploited by India, which was supporting the Bengali insurgents right from the beginning and was fully behind the formation and training of the mukti bahini.

After building international support for its actions and having taken the surreptitious step of staging the hijack of an Indian Airlines Fokker aircraft to Lahore and blaming Pakistan for it, India stopped over-flights of Pakistani aircraft across its airspace, thus barring the west from providing logistic support to the beleaguered eastern wing of Pakistan. On the night of November 21/22, 1971, India attacked East Pakistan with full force. With its far superior numerical edge, India overwhelmed Pakistan on the eastern front, liberating East Pakistan which became Bangladesh and 93,000 Pakistani soldiers and officers were taken as prisoners of war by India.

Bangladesh was keen to try the Pakistani PoWs for war crimes but the 1972 Pakistan-India Simla Agreement curtailed that. Subsequently, the Bangladesh, India, Pakistan agreement

was signed in New Delhi on April 9, 1974 to repatriate the Pakistani Pows. And the then Foreign Minister of Bangladesh declared that the Government of Bangladesh had decided not to proceed with trials of those having allegedly committed war crimes as an act of clemency. However, on August 15, 1975, the founder of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, along with his family, was assassinated as a result of a bloody coup d'état while a number of counter coups plagued Bangladesh for decades. Mujib's daughter Sheikh Hasina Wajid, who had escaped assassination because she was abroad, returned in 1991 to lead her father's political party, the Awami League and was elected to rule as Prime Minister (1996-2001). Later she was charged with corruption and murder but is currently serving as Prime Minister since 2009. She was re-elected in 2014 as a result of controversial polls since the opposition decided to boycott them owing to her highhanded policies, massive corruption and poor governance. This was an internal problem of Bangladesh but for Pakistan the point of contention has been her deliberate attempt to demonize Pakistan and its Army.

Prior to 2009 and the advent of Awami League's return to power, relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh were normalized somewhat. Pakistani Investors and industrialists, taking advantage of special incentives offered, set up their businesses in Bangladesh. Sports fixtures and cultural exchanges resulted in creating bonhomie, much to the chagrin of India, which nudged Sheikh Hasina to adopt a number of steps to denigrate Pakistan. She refused to attend the D-8 summit in Islamabad until the Pakistani government and the Army tendered an apology to Bangladesh for alleged war crimes in 1971. She instituted a "Friends of Liberation War Honour" for foreign nationals, who supposedly supported Bangladesh in gaining independence. To rub salt to the wound, a number of Pakistanis were also named, whose next of kin were invited to receive the award posthumously. The recipients were interviewed by Bangladesh media and through leading questions, they were coerced to demand that the Pakistan government and Army tender an apology to Bangladesh for war crimes in 1971.

The next big step was to institute a so-called International Crimes Tribunal, in which a domestic court based in Dhaka was established to prosecute Bangladeshis alleged to have committed crimes in support of the Pakistan army during the war in 1971 which led the independence of Bangladesh.

## Bangladesh-India-Pakistan Agreement (New Delhi, April 9, 1974)

**Clause 15:** In the light of the foregoing and, in particular, having regard to the appeal of the Prime Minister of Pakistan to the people of Bangladesh to forgive and forget the mistakes of the past, the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh stated that the Government of Bangladesh had decided not to proceed with the trials as an act of clemency.

This was deemed to be a demand of the people of Bangladesh, who wanted closure of the wounds of their liberation and sought justice for alleged war crimes. Coming four decades late, prima facie such a step would be acceptable if fair trials were conducted. The first person to be sent to the gallows was Jamaat-e-Islami leader Abdul Quader Mollah, whose trial was considered to be a mockery of justice and many international judicial organizations and human rights activists raised serious concern on this punishment. There was violent reaction in Bangladesh and scores of protesters were killed by the police in a crackdown.

Undeterred by the reaction, Sheikh Hasina persisted with the trials and Muhammad Kamaruzzaman, another senior Jamaat-e-Islami leader was executed which led to further violent protests. In November 2015, two more septuagenarians, Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, a leader of the Bangladesh National Party and Ali Ahsan Mojaheed of the Jamaat-e-Islami, were convicted of war crimes and hanged. International jurists and neutral observers found serious flaws in the trials. Among other inconsistencies, the defence team for both men was allowed only 4 witnesses, while the prosecution had 41 witnesses.

Salauddin Quader Chowdhury was the first BNP leader to have been meted the death penalty after the flimsy trial, giving credence to the allegations by the opposition political parties that a form of vendetta was being staged in the garb of war crimes trials to eliminate the opposition.

The dubious trial of Salauddin Quader Chowdhury became more farcical when during the course of the hearings, Aljazeera TV ran a report depicting five prominent Pakistani citizens, whose evidence could exonerate the accused. Mohammad Mian Soomro, former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Ishaq Khan Khakwani, former parliamentarian and federal minister, Amber Haroon Saigol, chairperson of the Dawn media group and two

prominent businessmen submitted sworn affidavits that Salauddin Quader Chowdhury was living in Karachi and later in Lahore in April/May 1971 when the four offences, for which he was sentenced to death, took place. They offered to present themselves as witnesses but their testimony was not admitted by the tribunal either in writing or in person.

Sheikh Hasina had tracked the alleged assassins of her parents and siblings and eventually sent them to the gallows. Perhaps that brought cold comfort to her heart. It may be her personal grief.

To try the accused for treason is a travesty of justice. One person's hero is another's traitor. Hasina could have taken a leaf out from Pakistan's book. Flight Lieutenant Matiur Rahman, the Bengali flight instructor of Pilot Officer Rashid Minhas, who tried to hijack to India the T-33 trainer aircraft being flown by the latter on 20 August 1971, lost his life in the ensuing struggle with his student pilot. Both were declared national heroes and each was awarded the highest gallantry award by their respective countries. For Pakistan, Matiur Rahman was a traitor but he was buried with full military honours. Many years later, when his daughter, now grown up, wanted to visit her father's grave at PAF Base Masroor (Karachi), she was extended full protocol and courtesies by Pakistan.

By the same token, Sheikh Hasina should have let bygones be bygones. But she has opened a Pandora's Box by conducting the war crime trials and executing innocent people. Pakistan reserves the rights to demand trial of those Bengalis who butchered Pakistani soldiers, their families and raped their women along with massacring non-Bengali East Pakistanis, whose mass graves are being paraded as those of Bengali victims of genocide. A simple DNA test would determine the truth. **S**

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



# Kangaroo Courts

Self-appointed war crime tribunals are conducting trials and giving one-sided verdicts in Bangladesh.

By S.G. Jilane

It is a burlesque, a mockery and a crass travesty of justice as a bunch of kangaroo judges preside over courts which are given the august title of “international war crimes tribunals” and dispense kangaroo justice in Bangladesh. These tribunals were set up in 2010 by Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, with judges handpicked for their loyalty. They have been awarding death sentences to top leaders of the opposition Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) with total abandon. Simultaneously, the ruling party sponsors a pressure group - naba jagaran mancha (new awakening platform) which organizes protests against their ‘lenient’ sentences and celebrates death sentences handed out by them.

The tribunals have tried more than 10 people, all of whom were top office-

bearers of the JI, except Salahuddin Qader Chowdhry and Abdul Aleem, who belonged to the BNP. They included the incumbent chief of the JI as well its Secretary and assistant secretaries general. Some of them, including Chowdhury, were ministers in the BNP government.

In all cases but two, the tribunals returned the death sentence. The exceptions were Prof. Ghulam Azam, 92, who was awarded 90 years, and Abdul Aleem who was awarded life imprisonment. Dilawar Hussain Sayeedee’s death sentence was commuted to life on appeal. As for, Golam Azam, Aleem and AKM Yusuf, they died in prison.

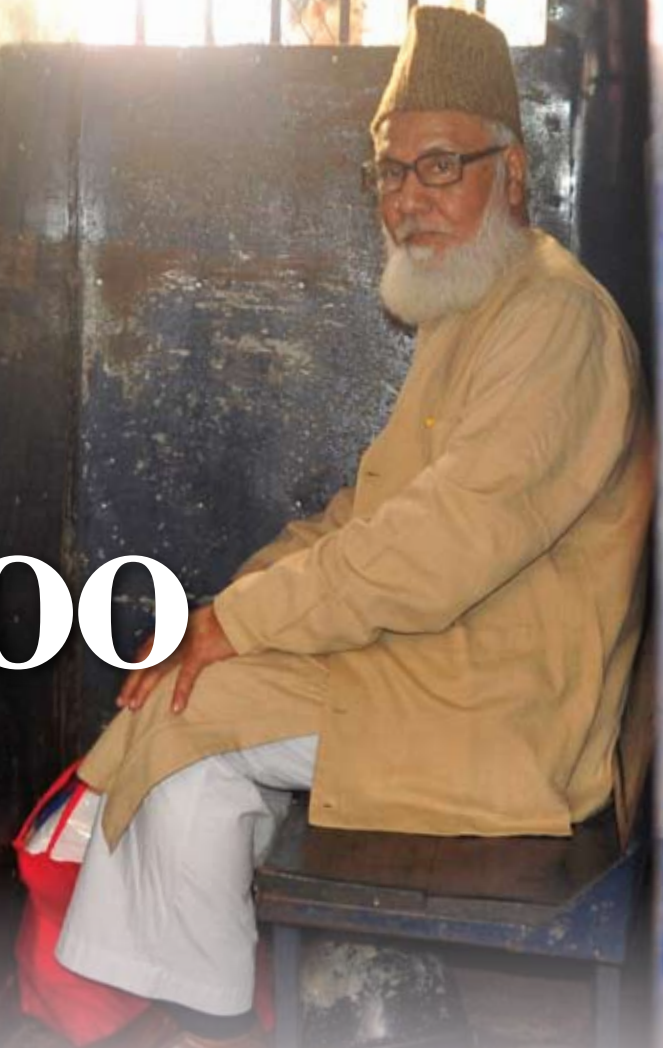
Two defendants who escaped the noose were Abul Kalam Azad Bachchu and Chowdhry Moeenuddin, because, they were living abroad. They were

sentenced to death in absentia.

The appeal of Matiur Rahman Nizami against his death sentence is pending before the BD Supreme Court. The rest, Abdul Qader Mulla, Kamruzzaman and Qasim Ali have, all been hanged.

According to Human Rights Watch, “The accused in all these cases were allowed a minuscule fraction of witnesses, counsel were regularly harassed and persecuted, defence witnesses faced physical threats and witnesses were denied visas to enter the country to testify.”

One report says Abdul Qader Mollah was hanged following hastily enacted retrospective legislation prohibited by international law. Another accused, Delwar Hossain Sayedee, was convicted despite credible allegations of the abduction



by government forces, of a key defence witness from the grounds of the court with the ICT refusing to order an independent investigation into the charge. Mohammed Kamaruzzaman was hanged even though witnesses and documents were arbitrarily limited by the courts."

But it was the execution of Ali Ahsan Mujahid and Salahuddin Qader Chowdhury on November 22 that evoked strong reaction from various corners, including the UN and Human Rights Watch.

"We have long warned that, given the doubts that have been raised about the fairness of trials conducted before the Tribunal, Bangladesh should not implement death penalty sentences," the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights said in a statement in Geneva.

"The trials did not meet international standards of fair trial and due process as stipulated in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Bangladesh is a party," it added.

Two days before their hanging, the U.S. State Department said the executions of Mujahid and Chowdhury should not take place until it was clear that the trial processes had met international standards. Yet, the Bangladesh government went ahead with the act.

Stephen Rapp, the former US ambassador for war crimes, who has long advised the Bangladesh government to make changes in the law to ensure fair trials, referring to the trial of Mujahid and Chowdhury, said:

"Throughout my engagement, I urged that the judicial proceedings of the International Crimes Tribunal respect the highest legal standards. It saddens me to say that I do not believe that was done in the cases of Salauddin Qader Chowdhury and Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid. Under the provisions of international law that Bangladesh has bound itself to uphold, the imposition of sentences of death in these cases is not justified."

Earlier, Amnesty International noted that the trial and appeal processes had suffered from "serious flaws."

"They were brought to the attention of the government by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other independent observers," said Abbas Faiz, senior South Asia researcher of AI. "The government authorities who had the power to stop the executions had full knowledge of these concerns. Yet, they went ahead with the executions."

Sam Zarifi, Asia-Pacific regional director of the International

## The trials of Chowdhury and Mujahid reveal the kangaroo nature of the courts at its worst.

Commission of Jurists, said the human rights committee of the United Nations is very clear that if a government wants to carry out a death penalty, it has to ensure that the judicial process has been absolutely fair.

"In the case of the International Crime Tribunal in Bangladesh, unfortunately this hasn't been the case," Zarifi told the VOA. "We saw witnesses not being allowed to testify, evidence that could exculpate the defendants not being admitted on vague grounds."

Alex Carlile, one of Britain's top legal experts and a member of the House of Lords said the trials in the cases of Mujahid and Chowdhury fell "far, far short of acceptable standards."

Pointing to the haste in carrying out the executions of the two men, "just three or four hours after their reported presidential clemency petitions had been rejected, Carlile said, "I think the speed at which the executions took place is obscene. It falls way outside any acceptable criminal justice policies. I think the Bangladesh government has lost all respect among lawyers the world over."

The trials of Chowdhury and Mujahid reveal the kangaroo nature of the courts at its worst. In Chowdhury's case, the court refused to accept any evidence from his alibi witnesses while still demanding that Chowdhury prove that his alibi was valid beyond a reasonable doubt. Human Rights Watch pointed out that the court allowed the prosecution to call 41 witnesses, but limited the defence to four witnesses only.

The authorities seemed so dead bent on sending this BNP leader to the gallows that before the hearing of his review petition they ordered international airlines flying into Dhaka to declare whether any of Chowdhury's defence witnesses were booked on their flights - the obvious purpose being to deny them entry on arrival.

Mujahid's lawyers submitted 1500 names of defence witnesses, but the court allowed only three of them. Also, it chose the number arbitrarily instead of identifying the most relevant witnesses. Moreover, shortly before the hearing on Mujahid's review petition,

one of his lawyers had to go into hiding following a police raid on his house and the arrest of another defense counsel in a related case.

Mujahid was sentenced to death for instigating his subordinates to commit abuses, even though no subordinates testified or were identified.


But, that said, the question is, was Pakistan's reaction called for? Those executed were paying for support to the Pakistan army which is said to have engaged in brutal acts against the common people of former East Pakistan. Given the background of the issue, Pakistan foreign ministry's statement that the trial of the two men was flawed and "Pakistan is deeply disturbed by the executions," was like rubbing salt on the wounds of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh's reaction was predictable. It summoned Pakistan's high commissioner in Dhaka to hand over to him a protest note. And Bangladesh's junior foreign minister, Mohammed Shahriar Alam, said Pakistan had "no right" to make any comment on internal issues of Bangladesh.

The protest note handed over to the Pakistani envoy said that by openly taking the side of those convicted, Pakistan had once again acknowledged its direct involvement and complicity in the mass crimes committed during the separation.

It further said the comments were nothing less than brazen interference in the internal affairs of Bangladesh, which was unacceptable.

"Pakistan should in no way make biased, borrowed and unfounded comments about the independent judiciary of a sovereign country," the note stated.

In some quarters, it was even said the executions gave a serious blow to Pakistan-Bangladesh relations. These elements believed the sanest course for Pakistan would have been to officially apologize for the excesses that are said to have been committed by its army in 1971 in order to salve the wounds. And leave the Bangladeshis to their kangaroo courts. 

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

# The Schism

From celebrating different festivals to speaking different languages, the two wings of Pakistan were always two different nations.

By Taj M Khattak



**R**ight from the time of creation of Pakistan, there was something odd about the relationship between its eastern and the western wings. Although the country was created as a separate homeland for Muslims of the subcontinent, and Muslims of East Pakistan had played a greater role in the Pakistan Movement, yet there were obvious and glaring idiosyncrasies between the two.

For example, while people of

the western wing celebrated the two Muslim festivals of Eidul-Fitr and Eidul-Adha with utmost religious fervor, for the people of East Pakistan it was always the occasion of 'Pohela Boishakh' or Bengali New Year and, historically a Hindu festival, which they celebrated with fervor and enthusiasm far exceeding that of the two Eids. So when the split came in 1971, for many in West Pakistan, it was like the poetic expression of Parveen Shakir –

'Iss tark-e-rafaqat pe pareshan to hun lekin, ab tak ke tere saath pe hairat bhi bohat thi'.

The bitterness of the split between Pakistan and Bangladesh could be traced back to nearly a quarter century of acrimony since 1947 - first on the issue of language and later on distribution of resources. Eventually, in 1966 when Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rehman launched his famous six points from Lahore on the eve of Pohela Boishakh,

it was akin to triggering a chain reaction with devastating results later in 1971.

There have been serious differences of opinion between the two sides about what actually happened in 1971. Bangladesh has accused the Pakistan Army of wanton killing of civilians and has come up with figures considered as being too exaggerated by neutral observers, while Pakistan has maintained that it were Bengali nationalists aided by India who started it all when they massacred innocent non-Bengali citizens in large numbers well before the March 1971 crisis ballooned.

In the decades following independence of Bangladesh, various foreign policy initiatives were undertaken by the two sides but the goal of normalizing relations to their mutually beneficial goal of diplomatic, political and commercial interactions has eluded them due to many reasons. Foremost amongst them was the difference in perceptions in Dhaka and Islamabad about their respective national interests.

The perception in Dhaka has been three-dimensional; firstly it has insisted on an apology from Pakistan for the excesses of the army during the civil war in 1971. Secondly, the pro-India political faction represented by Awami League and headed by Hasina Wajid, daughter of Sheikh Mujeeb-ur-Rehman, is generally perceived as opposed to any friendly relations with Pakistan because of its own close links with New Delhi. The third dimension is the general population of Bangladesh which desires brotherly relations with Pakistan.

This last-mentioned dimension is in sync with Pakistan's foreign policy orientation which aims at countering India's hegemonic attitude towards Bangladesh. The popular sentiments of the people are reflected most visibly in the crowd support for the Pakistan cricket team whenever it plays against India on Bangladesh soil. The man on the street in Bangladesh also despises India's support for the insurgency movement in the Chittagong hill tracts.

This strand of public opinion feels that since the people of Pakistan and Bangladesh have jointly carried out a struggle for an independent homeland for the Muslims in the

**The events of 1971 were far too complex and multi-dimensional than what has been conveniently portrayed by Bangladesh as 'atrocities' of the Pakistan military.**

pre-partition period, in the changed environment, they have no disputed borders nor territorial disputes. It would therefore be advisable to forget the past and move on with the global tide. They have, however, remained largely captive to the whims of the pro-India forces that are in power in Bangladesh.

A thousand miles away in Pakistan, most people at the human level are sympathetic to the Bangladeshis. But that was also a period when the general population in Pakistan could do very little as it was neither fully aware of what was happening in the distant Bangladesh. The country's electronic and print media did not report much on the events in that part of the world.

Pakistan, as a state did not tender an unconditional apology to Bangladesh for what the latter termed as 'atrocities' of the Pakistan Army. Foremost amongst the reasons for this that the events of 1971 were far too complex and multi-dimensional than what has been conveniently portrayed by Bangladesh as 'atrocities' of the Pakistan military. There are two sides to this, as of any narrative. Unfortunately, it is only one side of the tragedy which is presented to the world.

Other than the demand for an apology, there are issues of division of assets according to the size of the population of sides at the time of break-up. The repatriation of stranded non-Bengalis to Pakistan is also an issue. Some progress been made in this and some 127,000 non-Bengalis have been repatriated to Pakistan but Bangladesh continues to agitate for repatriation of more people. Obviously, there is a limit to what Pakistan can do in this regard.

Also, while Bangladesh calls them 'stranded Pakistanis', it has been consistently notified by Pakistan that they are citizens of Bangladesh and it has a responsibility to treat them as equal citizens in accordance with its constitution. Millions of people who have lived in the country for generations cannot be deprived of their homes and lands overnight simply because they speak a different language.

The political leadership of the Awami League also violated international laws of non-interference in the internal matters of sovereign and independent state when it sought military assistance from India for fulfillment of its political objectives. The UN charter and the post-1945 global world order was violated.

There is also the view held by some that after the 1971 war, the newly born country could have called itself the Republic of East Pakistan but by changing its identity and calling itself Bangladesh, it has no legal standing for claiming assets and resources.

Ironically, the issue of division of assets also goes back to the period of the common history of Pakistan and Bangladesh when the eastern wing felt deprived of its fair share of resources of the combined Pakistan for developmental activities.



# UPCOMING B2B EVENTS...



1-3 March 2016

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



**POGEE**

19 - 21 May 2016, Lahore Expo Centre  
14th International Exhibition for  
the Energy Industry  
Website: [www.pogee.com.pk](http://www.pogee.com.pk)  
E-mail: [info@pogee.com.pk](mailto:info@pogee.com.pk)



18 - 20 August 2016, Lahore Expo Centre  
14th International Plastics & Packaging  
Industry Trade Fair  
Website: [www.plastipac.com.pk](http://www.plastipac.com.pk)  
E-mail: [info@plastipac.com.pk](mailto:info@plastipac.com.pk)



18 - 20 August 2016, Lahore Expo Centre  
13th Edition of the International Food, Beverage  
& Packaging Technology Trade Fair  
Website: [www.foodtech.com.pk](http://www.foodtech.com.pk)  
E-mail: [info@foodtech.com.pk](mailto:info@foodtech.com.pk)



18 - 20 August 2016, Lahore Expo Centre  
3rd International Food, Beverages &  
Hospitality Exhibition  
Website: [www.foodtech.com.pk](http://www.foodtech.com.pk)  
E-mail: [info@foodtech.com.pk](mailto:info@foodtech.com.pk)

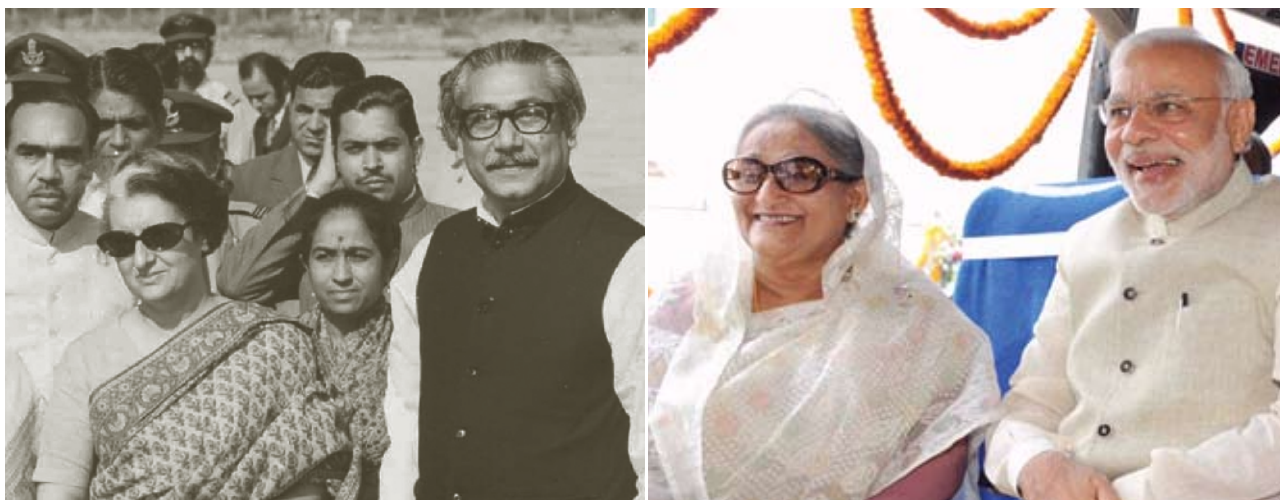


4th International Multi-Modal Transportation,  
Logistics Conference  
Website: [www.intertranspakistan.com](http://www.intertranspakistan.com)  
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Pakistan has informed Bangladesh that in matters of distribution of assets, there is also the issue of liabilities borne by the then unified state of Pakistan which needs to be factored in for any mutually acceptable and amicable solution.

Ideally, Pakistan should have taken the position stipulated in the Vienna Convention of 1983 which is an internationally accepted instrument for resolving such complex and tedious disputes and safeguards rights of both predecessor and successor states involving immovable and moveable property. But Pakistan vacillated in its position from time to time which sent wrong signals to Bangladesh.

Now, after decades of acrimony, there is a dampening of hostilities to some extent and a growing realization to move on in a changing world. But ordinary Pakistanis need to enhance their awareness level with respect to Indian conspiracies against improvement of relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh.

In the see-saw of Bangladesh domestic politics, it is clear that whenever the Awami League comes into power, its tensions with Pakistan spike up. This has happened again recently with the hanging of Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid of the Jamaat-e-Islami. It is a repeat of what happened earlier with the execution of 71 year old JI chief Motiur-Rehman for collaboration of the Al-Badr militia with the Pakistan Army during the 1971 civil war.

India is responsible for the downturn in Pakistan-Bangladesh relations as is evident from a recent speech by India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Dhaka where he

## CONVICTED WAR CRIMINALS

EXECUTED				DIED IN JAIL		SERVING TERM
<b>ALI AHSAN MOHAMMAD MUJAHIDEED</b> Secretary General of Jamaat-e-Islami	<b>SALAUDDIN QUADER CHOWDHURY</b> BNP National Standing Committee member	<b>ABDUL QUADER MOLLAH</b> Jamaat Assistant Secretary General	<b>MUHAMMAD KAMARUZZAMAN</b> Jamaat Assistant Secretary General	<b>GHULAM AZAM</b> Former chief of Jamaat-e-Islami	<b>ABDUL ALIM</b> Former BNP minister	<b>DELWAR HOSSAIN SAYEEDEE</b> Nab-e-Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami
DEATH	DEATH	DEATH	DEATH			

FUGITIVE CONVICTS				
<b>ABUL KALAM AZAD</b> Expelled Jamaat-e-Islami member	<b>CHOWDHURY MUEEN UDDIN</b> Islamic Orhalla Sangha leader in 1971	<b>ASHRAFUZZAMA N KHAN</b> Islamic Orhalla Sangha leader in 1971	<b>MA ZAHID HOSSAIN KHOKON</b> Fardpur BNP leader	<b>ABDUL JABBAR</b> Former Jalyia Party lawmaker

TRIALS AT A GLANCE	
VERDICT	18
UNDER TRIAL	5
PROBE COMPLETED	2
UNDER INVESTIGATION	20
	18
	9
	2
	32

APPEALS PENDING					
<b>MOTIUR RAHMAN NIZAMI</b> Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami	<b>ABDUS SUBHAN</b> Hayeeb-e-Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami	<b>ATM AZHARUL ISLAM</b> Jamaat Assistant Secretary General	<b>MIR QUISEM ALI</b> Jamaat Central Executive Committee member	<b>SYED MOHAMMAD QAISAR</b> Former Jalyia Party minister	<b>MOBARAK HOSSAIN</b> Expelled Awami League leader
	DEATH	DEATH	DEATH		DEATH

used vitriolic language about Pakistan with the obvious purpose of poisoning the minds of his audience.

Bangladesh has conferred the prestigious "liberation war" award on former Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee for his "active role" in its independence struggle and consolidating friendship with India.

If bridges of friendship are to be built between Pakistan and Bangladesh, the media can play an important part in highlighting the

benefits of mutual benefits from trading and other relations rather than remaining stuck in a groove. The hope lies in fuller implementation of the 1974 Tripartite Agreement which calls for letting bygones be bygones. It is the bedrock with which future relations of Pakistan-Bangladesh should be moored steadfastly and all external influences ignored. ■

*The writer is a retired Vice Chief of the Naval Staff in the Pakistan Navy.*



# Key Questions

**Trials based on crimes alleged to have been committed four decades back have become a priority in Bangladesh.**

**By Hussain H Zaidi**

**T**hough it broke away from Pakistan to emerge as an independent state — and thus understandably has a lot against the latter — Bangladesh has a great deal in common with the erstwhile parent state. In both countries, democracy has had a chequered history with the armed forces calling the shots most of the time. In each nation, dynasties have ruled the roost taking turns in the exercise of power. In each state, politics has been characterized by an intense

personal tug of war between the key players, which has polarized society and made the democratic façade look like a house of cards.

Bangladesh started as a parliamentary democracy, courtesy its 1972 Constitution. However, in barely three years, democracy was uprooted, the founding father (Sheikh Mujibur Rahman) assassinated and the armed forces took charge of the country. After a brief hiatus, Maj Gen Ziaur Rahman emerged as the undisputed ruler.

He was one of the notable Bengali military officers of the united Pakistan, who broke ranks with the army and organized resistance against the parent organization during the events leading to the creation of Bangladesh.

When in the seat of power, however, Gen Zia took an anti-India, and by implication, a pro-Pakistan, posture. To lend legitimacy to his regime, he held a referendum and got himself elected president in 1978. Curiously, another general, also named Zia, was to do the

same in Pakistan a few years down the road. Ziaur Rahman shared the fate of his predecessor in the government: he was put to death by a band of army officers in 1981.

Sheikh Mujib had not only spearheaded the creation of Bangladesh. True modern to South Asian tradition, he also laid the foundations of a political dynasty. After his demise, his daughter Sheikh Hasina Wajid took control of the political party - the Awami League (AL).

By the same token, the demise of Gen Zia in Bangladesh brought his spouse Khaleda Zia to the forefront and she headed the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). It symbolized intense and persistent antagonism, punctuated by the willingness at times to play ball against a common enemy. This blow hot, blow cold relationship between the two illustrious ladies would in large measure shape the subsequent political developments in the country.

Ideologically, the AL is a party of the centre-left and as a matter of principle is driven towards having strong relations with its mega western neighbour India. By contrast, the BNP is a party of the centre-right and has the reputation of being pro-Pakistani. As against the AL's secularism, the BNP supports mixing religion and politics and has found religious parties to be its natural allies.

The next strongman after Gen Zia, was Gen Hussein Mohammad Ershad. He took a leaf out of the book of his predecessor and sought to legitimize his regime through a popular mandate. His Jatiya Party (JP) won the 1986 parliamentary polls, which were boycotted by the two principal opposition parties — the AL and the BNP. Ershad also got himself elected president before the opposition's agitation, feeding on a weak state of the economy, which forced him to call it quits in 1990.

Ershad's ouster ushered in a game of musical chairs in which the two ladies have become the leading players. The 1991 elections brought Khaleda Zia to power. Though she completed her constitutional term, for most part of her tenure she remained preoccupied with putting down the Hasina Wajid-led opposition's agitation politics. Her party won the 1996 polls as well after the AL had chosen to stay away from the electoral fray. That turned out to be a pyrrhic victory, as in less than two months, Khaleda was made to step down, making way for her arch rival Hasina Wajid to win the ensuing elections.

In the continuing game of musical

chairs, Khaleda returned to power after winning the 2001 popular vote. She governed until 2006 before stepping down. The caretaker government, backed by the powerful military establishment, put both the ladies behind bars on corruption charges in the course of its clean-up drive. However, both were set free in a year's time as the country braced itself for the next electoral battle. The December 2008 polls again brought the AL to power. The party maintained its position in the disputed 2014 elections, which were boycotted by the main opposition party, the BNP.

A significant, and controversial, decision made by Hasina during her second stint in power was to set up a tribunal to try war crimes committed during the 1971 'war of independence.' A year earlier, in 2010, five military officers who were convicted in the murder of her father Sheikh Mujib were sent to the gallows.

The establishment of the tribunal was one of the promises that the AL had made to the electorate in the run-up to the 2008 elections. On the other hand, the BNP and the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), the nation's largest religio-political party, had opposed the constitution of the tribunal, contending that such a move would divide the nation. However, their opponents attributed their opposition to the tribunal to the alleged involvement of some of the frontline leaders of the two parties, particularly the JI, in war crimes.

The legal basis of the tribunal was the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973, which was amended in 2009. The amendments, inter alia, provided that a political party that had worked against the establishment of Bangladesh could be tried on the same charges as individuals. Obviously, the amendment aimed at bringing the opposition parties in the net. They also allowed the government to file appeals with the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, the highest court of the land, if the tribunal ruled for acquittal of a suspect.

The Act in its current form has a very broad scope covering not only war crimes but also crimes against humanity, crimes against peace, genocide and 'any other crimes under international law.' Both abetment and failure to prevent the commission of such crimes is punishable. Conviction under the act is punishable by death or a lesser penalty. Conviction or otherwise by the tribunal can be challenged in the Appellate Division of the apex court. The suspects are tried on the basis of the report furnished by the War Crimes

Fact Finding Committee.

The establishment of the tribunal to try war crimes was supported by the United Nations, the European Union and some international human right (HR) organizations. However, of late, the fairness and transparency of the trials have come widely under question from human right watchdogs. A few notable opposition leaders are on the list of the high profile persons convicted under the act giving rise to backlash from the parties on the receiving end.

The convictions and subsequent executions have also precipitated adverse criticism from the Pakistan government and a section of society. The reaction from Pakistan is understandable, as the convicts were punished on the charge of collaborating with the Pakistan army. The Pakistan government also argues that the convictions in question are a negation of the 1974 tripartite agreement among Pakistan, India and Bangladesh in which Dhaka in a spirit of reconciliation had committed not to proceed with the war crime trials as an act of clemency. That is the reason the 1973 Act was not invoked until the AL government decided to proceed with the trials in 2009.

The counter argument is that the trials in question are an internal affair of Bangladesh. They were instituted by a popularly elected government in accordance with the law of the land. It is also indisputable that gross human right violations were made during the military action that ended in the creation of the country. Those excesses are too recent to slip out of the collective consciousness of the nation.

The fairness or otherwise of the trials aside, it's all the more important to take into account their socio-political impact. Would the trials and penalties unify or divide the people of Bangladesh? What would be their opportunity cost? Though ethnically largely a homogeneous society, Bangladesh has the characteristics by and large shared by developing and less developed countries. These include political instability and polarization, fragility of democratic institutions, a culture of corruption and nepotism, large scale poverty and acute capital deficiency. Given such myriad problems, what ought to be the government's priority? Institution building and economic turnaround, or trying people for war crimes committed more than four decades ago? Let the people and the government of Bangladesh answer these questions. ■

*The author is a graduate from a Western European University.*

# New Silk Route

Energy hungry India and Pakistan have joined hands with Afghanistan to strike a deal with Turkmenistan for building a gas pipeline.

By J. Enver

Energy is becoming an urgent issue in India and Pakistan and, with their fast-growing economies, both countries find themselves starved for power and gas resources. The size of the Indian industry is very large and can always

do with additional energy sources. Pakistan's is a smaller economy but even then, its energy resources are not keeping up with demand. The country has almost exhausted its indigenous gas reserves while there has been no mentionable addition to its power

producing capacity. Afghanistan's is a much smaller economy and its industrial sector is still in its infancy. But going forward, the demand for energy sources will certainly grow in Afghanistan and it could do with all available energy sources. The fact that



Many people see the TAPI pipeline as not only transporting gas, but also connecting one of the most economically disconnected regions.

the country has the potential to serve as transit territory for a gas pipeline emanating from Turkmenistan and going into Pakistan and India, could itself become a source of additional revenue for Afghanistan.

It was in this backdrop that leaders from India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan converged in the remote Karakum desert, nearly 300 km northeast of the Turkmenistan capital Ashgabat recently, to launch the 1,814km Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline, named after the countries it will cross. The pipeline will cost an estimated \$10bn.

After the ground breaking ceremony, President Ashraf Ghani called the project a 'new silk route.'

"TAPI will revive Afghanistan's importance in the region. This is a national and regional project to defend Afghanistan's future generations," he said.

Ashraf Ghani, Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Indian Vice President Hamid Ansari officially launched the project. Expected to be operational by the end of 2019, the pipeline will pass through Afghanistan and Pakistan. There is hope in Kabul that TAPI will attract investment and help stabilize Afghanistan's faltering economy.

It was after years of uncertainty that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Ashgabat, in July 2015, gave the project a new push, and was seen by observers as India's attempt to reassert itself and counter China's "one road, one belt policy."

Many people see the TAPI pipeline as not only transporting gas, but also connecting one of the most economically disconnected regions, with unending border disputes and geopolitical conflicts between India and Pakistan, as well as trouble on the two sides of the Durand Line that divides Pakistan and Afghanistan.

After Russian giant Gazprom significantly reduced the import of Turkmenistan gas, leaving China as the single major investor, Ashgabat had been looking for new buyers. Turkmenistan has the fourth largest

reservoir of gas in the world. From the country's Galkynysh gas field, the pipeline will enter Afghanistan, passing through Herat and Kandahar and Quetta and Multan in Pakistan and cross into India at Fazilka in the northern Indian Punjab.

India and Pakistan have assured all possible support for the project and will share 42 percent each of the 90 million metric standard cubic metres of gas that can be transported per day while the rest will be used by Afghanistan, which is seen as a positive sign. It is being said that since the project involves high stakes, this will reduce the risk of its being sabotaged.

Besides security, the lack of clarity on financing is also a concern. The Asian Development Bank did initial feasible studies and several international companies, including Mobil, Chevron, Total SA and Exxon had shown interest. But they later backed out as Ashgabat did not allow foreign companies to invest in their gas fields.

Now TurkmenGaz is said to be leading the TAPI consortium, in which Afghan Gas Enterprise, Inter State Gas Systems of Pakistan and GAIL of India are shareholders. None of these companies, however, have the capacity to singly fund a project of this magnitude, which, if completed, will be one of the world's largest pipelines.

If the project is delayed, the cost is also likely to rise. Pushed by the US earlier as an alternative to IPI, the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, TAPI has been labelled as a "transformative project for the entire region." But after Iran's deal with P5+1, the US might not be so encouraging about TAPI.

While it is widely hoped that the this pipeline could reintegrate the region and enhance cooperation, given the security threats, financial uncertainty and geopolitical backdrop, the coming four years will show if the long held pipe dream can prove its skeptics wrong and become a reality. ■

*The writer contributes articles on national subjects.*

## The Gas Crisis in Pakistan

Natural gas has always been a dominant part of the energy mix in Pakistan. The country was fortunate that it had access to abundant supplies of natural gas right from the beginning when the Sui Gas field was discovered and started supplying natural gas in the mid-fifties and was subsequently joined by more gas fields in Balochistan, Sindh and Punjab. It was for this reason that the country's planners never seriously thought about looking for other energy alternatives. In fact, there was a time until the very beginning of this century when natural gas comprised almost 50 percent of the country's energy content while the other portions was represented by hydel power, petroleum and coal.

One Pakistani government after another, including the military regimes, were complacent about the energy mix, until the day arrived when it was realized that the country's gas reserves were fast depleting, while the volume of electricity obtained from dams was just not adequate.

Energy is fundamental to quality of life. It impacts the economy is the lifeline of the infrastructure and technology. In Pakistan, the lack of management, strategic vision, investment in the energy sector and exploration in more gas reserves has led to chronic shortage of natural gas.

According to estimates, Sindh produces 70% of the country's natural gas while provincial consumption stands at 45%. Gas shortages in the province are, therefore, a serious matter which needs immediate federal intervention. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) government under article 158

has demanded an additional gas supply of 100 mmcf from the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Resources for setting up of a combined cycle gas turbine for power generation projects. At present the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province has gas supply and consumption of 370 mmcf as compared to the summers when gas consumption stands at 260 mmcf. The surplus of 110 mmcf will only be available in the summers when demand remains constant at existing level. The ministry's Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) has approved the allocation of 100 mmcf to KPK on condition that it would receive a gas supply of 50 mmcf from January 2016 in the first phase and other 50 mmcf from January 2018 in the second phase. The provincial government would undertake all the risks and costs associated with the projects. These power plants would help resolve the future energy needs of the province.

In Punjab, according to official figures, SNGPL is facing a shortfall of 700 mmcf, which is almost 27% of the total requirement while unofficial sources have reported a shortage at 40%. Exports of textiles have dropped down to 4% and textile production to 25% in the province. Hundreds of workers in more than 2,000 small sized surgical hammering and forging units in Sialkot and surrounding sectors have been rendered jobless due to unprecedented gas load shedding. Some 60% of the industrial sector in the Punjab contributes 65% to the total national GDP and has been worst hit by this gas crisis. A public plea has been made by the All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) for their exemption from gas load shedding as it is leading to economic strangulation of the industry and the national economy.

To resolve the shortage, the government has imposed Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC) on new connections



for industrial use in 2011. The government has invited expressions of interest for the construction of a two phased 1100-km South-North gas pipeline that will reduce the cost of gas transmission. New Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) fueled power plants would also be installed to reduce gas shortage. The government has planned to import LNG at \$18 per million British thermal units, more than four times the current wellhead gas price of \$4 per mmbtu. At Badin, around 140 Mcf of gas reserves have been discovered and steps are being taken for its proper utilization. The completion of the Pak-Iran gas pipeline project would also help fulfill gas shortages. The SNGPL has also cut off gas supply to non-paying consumers who have added exponentially to the national circular debt. A National Assembly Standing Committee has also directed the SNGPL to provide gas to domestic consumers three times a day in winters. Gas supply had also been cut off for almost 5-6 days a week to the CNG stations to restore smooth supply of gas to domestic consumers, but more practical and long term measures are needed.

In order to rectify the situation, more indigenous energy resources need to be explored. Proper production, management,

distribution, allocation and consumption strategies must be planned. A constitutional amendment is required for a proper action plan to cover existing energy resources and their utilization. It would be in the fitness of things if all federating units understood and cooperated with each other on their provincial energy needs and their overall contribution to the national GDP. It is obvious that Pakistan needs more exploration and investments in the gas sector. The use of CNG as an alternate fuel to petrol, owing to disparity in oil and gas prices needs to be reduced.

The operative IPPs should be paid properly and on time. Taxes and gas bills should be paid to avoid accumulation of circular debt. Private and foreign investors in gas and oil fields should be encouraged. At domestic level, wastage and consumption of gas should be avoided. A comprehensive national energy policy which includes regularization of illegal connections, fresh allocations for the transport and housing sectors, ban on gas-run electricity generators and illegal commercial consumers are the immediate policy changes required and must be implemented by the government to overcome this gas shortage crisis in Pakistan. ■

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# The Pains of Growth

India may be galloping forward on the road to development but it still needs to do a lot more to improve the life standards of its people across the entire spectrum.

By Dr. Raza Khan

India has experienced a high rate of economic growth over the last decade but in many respects this growth has not translated into overall development of the country and

society, raising many questions marks regarding the sustainability of the Indian models of economic growth.

Usually economists measure economic growth in terms of gross

domestic product (GDP) or related indicators, such as gross national product (GNP) or gross national income (GNI). In terms of GDP growth, India has done remarkably in the last

decade, maintaining 7 to 8 percent growth and at times even higher. At the end of the last century, India's GDP was around US\$480 billion. After the economic reforms introduced in early 1990s gathered steam, the GDP grew five-fold to reach US\$2.3 trillion in 2015 (as per IMF estimates). This GDP growth during January-March 2015 was 7.5% compared to China's 7%, making it the fastest growing economy.

This GDP growth has not translated into high levels of development because that is a holistic and all-encompassing concept. GDP growth only does not determine that the state or area in question, by having high economic growth, could necessarily be developed. This is specifically the case with India. It is important to note that in terms of development, it is not the aggregate GDP that is important, but what matters more is the GDP per capita. India has much higher levels of GDP than, say, Singapore, New Zealand or Belgium, but the latter are more developed in almost all respects than India due to the higher GDP per capita.

India lags behind the mentioned countries in GDP per capita because of her mammoth population, which is nearly 1.2 billion. The measure of GDP per capita is achieved by dividing the GDP over the number of people in the country. Singapore, New Zealand, etc. are more developed than India because they have a very low population in comparison to India. According to economists, if a country has to have sustainable development its economy must grow at a rate three times higher than its population growth. In case of India, the country has experienced economic growth between 7-9 percent in the last decade but in real terms its population growth has not been below 2.5 percent.

India has been able to have sustainable development. However, for such development, high level of economic growth and low level of population growth is the only condition. Sustainable development also requires a country to have a high human development index (HDI). The HDI is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living. The health dimension is assessed by life expectancy at birth, the education dimension is measured by means of

India has indubitably achieved high rates of economic growth but has largely failed to use this growth for overall development which must be an alarming situation for policymakers.

years of schooling for adults aged 25 years and more and expected years of schooling for children of school entering age. The standard of living dimension is measured by gross national income per capita. On all these counts of the HDI, India lags far behind the 'developed' states of the West.

Coming back to GDP per capita as a yardstick of development, even the measure is not a good tool of gauging development in a country. In this situation, spending patterns that are skewed towards the rich exclude the needs of the poor. Thus growth in per capita GDP may not lead to a reduction in poverty or to broader social and economic development. In case of India, economic growth has not resulted in significant levels of reduction in poverty. According to the 2014 World Bank revised methodology for calculating poverty, the world had 872.3 million people below the poverty line, of which 179.6 million people lived in India. In other words, India with 17.5% of total world's population had 20.6% share of world's poorest in 2011. The levels of poverty in India can also be gauged from the fact that more than 300 million people, almost one-fourth of the country's population, in India (a figure close to the population of the USA) still have no electricity. Even the access of basic social services like potable water and access to sanitation facilities to most Indians is not available.

Development not only concerns humans material needs but also improvement in their social conditions. Thus, development is growth plus change including social, cultural and institutional change for the better as well as economic transformation. This is a very vast but quite appropriate explanation of the concept of development. Development in the social context may mean improving the

life standards of people. In this context, India lags far behind the developed countries as the life standards of the majority of Indians leave a lot to be desired. Insofar as cultural change is concerned, a lot of Indians may have shattered traditional shackles to have obtained some measure of social and political mobility, still a very large number of Indians could not shatter the traditional fetters to develop their personalities and social conditions.

This is very much evident from the fact that the caste system is still very much entrenched in India, official claims notwithstanding. Institutional change in India may have occurred significantly but the very features of good governance that primarily include, transparency, accountability, participation and rule of law, are still very much absent in India. The country may have a democratic political system but this system is more ostensible than democratic at the core. In other words, democracy is not only the name of elections but a whole culture. India has not been able to evolve a true democratic culture. For instance, democracy requires equality of all people and equality of opportunity but having a well entrenched caste system that in many respects is quite institutionalized. However, India has held national elections in a very sustainable manner since the country's birth, which is something of a great achievement in the Third World.

Keeping the afore-stated facts and figures in view, one can safely determine that India has indubitably achieved high rates of economic growth but has largely failed to use this growth for overall development which must be an alarming situation for policymakers. ■

*The writer holds a doctoral degree in International Relations and is a political-economy and security analyst.*

# Hate Agenda

The Awami League in Bangladesh has followed thoughtless policies of fanning communal hatred over the past few years. The misguided approach is now posing a threat to democracy.

By S.G. Jilane



**B**angladesh under Sheikh Hasina Wajed is not what it was supposed to be - a sonar Bangla (Golden Bengal), peaceful and plentiful. Peace and harmony - both social and communal - had been the hallmark and core values of Bengal, of which Bangladesh is a part. It was here that the founder of the Bhakti movement, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was born, It was here that the Muslim saint, Shah Jalal and his associates preached. And their message was love, peace and tolerance. Also from his seat in Bengal, Nawab Sirajuddowlah ruled over the hearts and minds of people in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.

Communal conflict was unknown and no one, Muslim or Hindu, vilified Islam. There were no professed atheists. The two communities lived together like the Padma and Meghna flowing side by side..

Communal poison was injected by the Hindu Mahasabha out of resentment against the Muslim League's demand for a separate state. The result was the havoc, following the Direct Action Day called by the Muslim League on August 16, 1946 - that The Statesman labelled as "The Great Calcutta Killin"- which led to the Noakhali riots.

During the years it was part of Pakistan and for a number of years after liberation, the country remained free from intolerance, whether political or religious. Gen. Ziaur Rahman attempted a healing touch by trying to put the bitter memories of the 1971 civil war behind and move on. For him it was more important for Bangladesh to progress for which it was imperative to look ahead and forward, instead of remaining stuck in the past and thinking of revenge. His forward vision to put Bangladesh in a leadership role, led to the birth of SAARC.

But Sheikh Hasina turned all that upside down. She seethes with political vendetta against her rivals, the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and Bangladesh National Party (BNP). She dug up the painful past, set up courts to try people accused of alleged excesses during the 1971 war and started a witch-hunt of JI and BNP leaders.

The courts, though in no way meeting international standards of judicial procedure, were arbitrarily named "international war crimes tribunals," and filled with judges loyal to the ruling party. Predictably, they returned death sentences in almost all of nearly a dozen cases, involving top leaders of the JI - its chief (amir), deputy chief, secretary general, assistant secretaries general, media

chief and so forth. Some of them were ministers in the BNP government.

The most recent hanging of Ali Ahsan Mujahed of the JI on 22 November, has been denounced by institutions and individuals, alike,

**Communal conflict was unknown and no one, Muslim or Hindu, vilified Islam. There were no professed atheists. The two communities lived together like the Padma and Meghna flowing side by side.**

including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the US State Department, Alex Carlile, one of Britain's top legal experts and a member of the House of Lords, Stephen Rapp, former US ambassador for war crimes and Sam Zarifi, Asia-Pacific regional director of the International Commission of Jurists.

But the Hasina government goes on merrily with the dance macabre. Every hanging is celebrated with tempestuous jubilation, song and dance by the government-patronized naba jagaran mancha (new awakening platform). Blinded by political vendetta, she has overlooked what her mindless policy has done to the social fabric of Bangladesh.

For starters, the witch-hunt of political rivals and persecution of JI has polarised society as never before. It has sown the seeds of perpetual hatred and bitterness among people on both political and religious grounds. Meanwhile, the JI, instead of disintegrating, remains solid as granite. It has not become unpopular among the masses because, they are a long way yet to embrace the gospel of "free thought" which is synonymous with condemning Islam.

Worse, the anti-JI policy has spawned atheists who blog infamies against Islam. Amazingly they comprise even people claiming to be Muslims even though atheism and Islam would be incompatible. Astonishingly, some Hindu atheists have mustered the audacity to vilify Islam, on the soil of Bangladesh which claims to be a Muslim country, whereas no Hindu attacks Islam in India though it is a Hindu-dominated country.

This is a phenomenon unthinkable for Bangladesh with its deep Muslim roots. Predictably, it has evoked violent reaction from Muslims. Out of nine bloggers, six Muslims (Ahmad

Rajib Haider, Sunnyur Rahman, Shafiu Islam, Oyasiqur Rahman, Asif Mohiuddin and Faisal Arifin) and three Hindus (Avijit Roy, Anant Bijoy Das and Niloy Chatterjee Neal), have been attacked since 2013. All, except

Asif Mohiuddin, succumbed to their injuries. The attacks were claimed by Ansarul Islam Bangladesh.

Political polarisation has led to frequent clashes between rival political workers throughout the country, robbing it of its pride assets of peace and harmony. The volatile situation has also attracted other violent groups into the arena, including the dreaded IS, which claimed responsibility for killing an Italian aid worker in Dhaka's diplomatic enclave in September.

This state of affairs has shaken the very foundations of democracy in Bangladesh. And it is all of the AL government's own making. The country had always been moderate. It was neither aggressively religious nor offensively secular. Nobody attacked others' religious sensitivities in the name of free speech.

Hasina Wajed introduced a new kind of secularism which is belligerent and provocative. It targets only Islam, but does not find any fault with other faiths such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity.

It is Hasina who released the genie of hatred and violence out of the bottle, which she now finds difficult to control. Neither victimisation of political rivals will bring peace, nor hunting them down will uproot the Ansarul Islam, because, as a result of the provocation by the bloggers it receives more support from the common folk and more recruits. On the other hand, any attempt to restrain the atheists is greeted with a deafening howl of protest from her party as happened when a few bloggers were arrested.

Sheikh Hasina's blind vendetta has brought the country to its present sorry pass. Is she willing to tide it over remains to be seen. ■

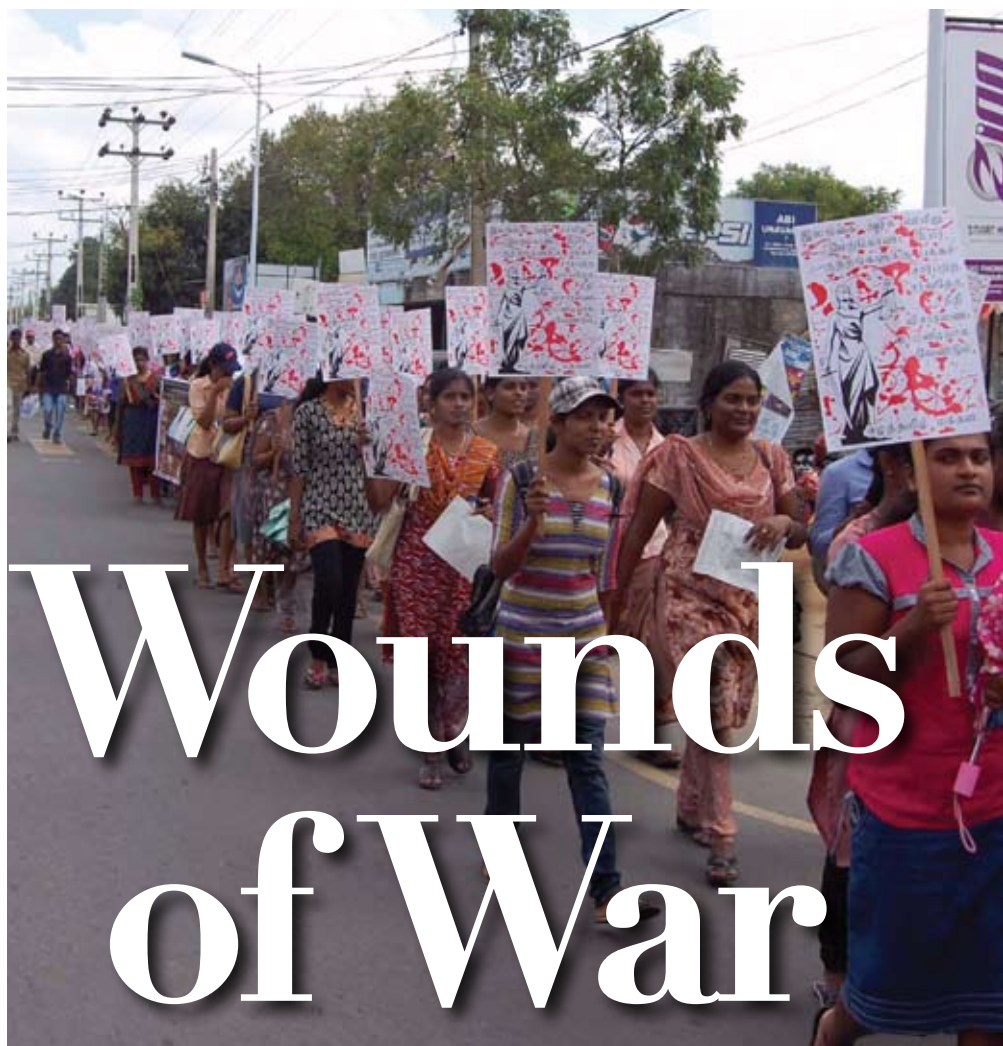
*The writer is a senior political analyst and former editor of Southasia.*

President Maithripala Sirisena, under tremendous pressure domestically and internationally, has finally promised to investigate, through credible process, the heinous war crimes committed during the 26-year civil war that ended in 2009. Since then, there have been persistent demands that war atrocities, committed by the Sri Lankan military and the rebel Tamil Tigers or Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, should not go unpunished. During the last six years, there has been little progress in healing the wounds of war, though there have been calls for establishment of something on the pattern of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Percy Mahendra Rajapaksa, who served as President of Sri Lanka from November 19, 2005 to January 9, 2015, won the war, but became a target of criticism of human rights groups for committing what they called "unprecedented war crimes." Many reports, including those of the United Nations, found "patterns of grave violations," especially in the last phase of war. Rajapaksa, who lost elections in January 2015 polls, says that his main reason for not cooperating with the war crime probe was its illegal institution by the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). In March 2014, UNHRC authorized an international investigation into the alleged war crimes.

The present government has decided to set up a special court to investigate the thousands of killings, rapes and abductions that occurred during the conflict. A UN report, released on September 16, 2015, also demands that the inquiry should include international judges. Earlier, on March 12, 2012, the UN passed a resolution condemning war crimes in Sri Lanka under Rajapaksa. It was reported in the media that former President Rajapakse, fearing punishment for his role in war crimes, was opposing international war crimes apparatus and was urging all parties "in the island nation not to allow the passage of new laws aimed at persecuting members of its armed forces." On the other hand, human right groups demand independent investigation, which they say, alone would reveal all facts about state-sponsored crimes against humanity, help punish the guilty and also pave the way for a better future.

War crimes are prohibited by the Geneva Conventions, of which Sri Lanka is a signatory. In 2002, the International Criminal Court (ICC) was created by the Rome Statute to prosecute individuals for serious crimes, such as those related



# Wounds of War

**In its quest for justice and fairplay in the post-war period, Sri Lanka runs after a dream.**

**By Huzaima Bukhari & Dr. Ikramul Haq**

to wars. Sri Lanka is not a signatory to the Rome Statute, therefore it is only possible for the ICC to investigate and prosecute war crimes in Sri Lanka if the UN Security Council refers Sri Lanka to the ICC. Rajapakse disowns any allegation of crimes, let alone war crimes. It is alleged by human right groups that Rajapakse pressurised the Sirisena government to block the UN investigation on war crimes but failed.

Rajapaksa believes that if any member of the armed forces was involved in any wrongdoing, he should be tried under the local laws and in local courts. "The present attempt being made in this country is to introduce these faulty laws and procedures to

Sri Lanka and to jail our war heroes expeditiously. No self-respecting citizen should allow this to happen," he said. However, the Sri Lankan government maintains that the process to fix accountability as mandated by the latest UNHRC resolution will be purely domestic and dismissed claims by the opposition that it would be a hybrid mechanism. "I wish to stress that this would be a Sri Lankan process, not a hybrid process. It will be the Sri Lankan institutions and systems who will be implementing the process," Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera said. It is yet to be seen whether it will be acceptable to Tamils and others who distrust the government and accuse it



## Brief history of 26-year civil war and atrocities

The war comprised a series of intermittent battles from 1983 to 2009 between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a separatist organization that wanted an independent Tamil state in the north of the island country. The fighting ravaged Sri Lanka's economy and at least 80,000 lost their lives while hundreds of thousands more were injured or displaced. The war crimes included attacks on civilians and civilian buildings, rape of women, executions of combatants and prisoners, enforced disappearances by the Sri Lankan military and paramilitary groups backed by them, acute shortage of food, medicine, and clean water for civilians trapped in the war zone and child recruitment by the Tamil Tigers. The Sri Lankan army defeated separatist Tamil Tiger rebels in May 2009. The UN Human Rights office released a report of its investigation into the civil war and accused both sides of atrocities during the fighting between 2002 and 2011. After independence from British rule, increasingly assertive Sinhala nationalists, resentful of what they saw as British favouritism towards minority Tamils, began to fan the flames of ethnic division. A Tamil separatist movement gained momentum during the 1970s when a number of armed Tamil groups emerged in the north and parts of eastern Sri Lanka. But in 1983 the insurgency was transformed after a brutal anti-Tamil backlash following the killing by insurgents of 13 soldiers spread throughout the country. The LTTE emerged under the leadership of Velupillai Prabhakaran as a ruthless and highly effective fighting force. It came to run what was in effect a shadow state in the north and east. The group used suicide bombings and other attacks to devastating effect in the capital Colombo and elsewhere in the 1990s. It also killed high-profile figures, including Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa. After various peace initiatives and ceasefires failed, the government launched a final offensive in 2009 and defeated the Tigers. The UN estimated that in the final 2009 offensive alone around 40,000 ethnic minority Tamils were killed. The report recommended that a hybrid special court integrating international judges be set up. Sri Lanka has agreed to a South Africa-style truth and reconciliation commission, but has refused to allow international intervention. The current Sri Lankan government has said that no one, not even the former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, would be shielded from allegations against them.

of partiality.

There are some positive developments as well. President Sirisena, since taking power has taken many steps towards national reconciliation. The government has returned thousands of acres of land confiscated during the war by the military in the island's east and north and has made public all government reports on war abuses to ensure transparency and accountability. But the United Nations says much more needs to be done to investigate the thousands of reports of people who went missing during the civil war. Some Tamil groups have also complained about the slow pace of reconciliation, including the failure to withdraw significant numbers of military personnel from the Tamil-dominated former war zone.

On November 23, 2015, the United States praised Sri Lanka's new government for speeding up efforts towards reconciliation with the ethnic minority Tamils. Steps such as the return of land, efforts to find the missing and

**Sri Lanka is not a signatory to the Rome Statute, therefore it is only possible for the ICC to investigate and prosecute war crimes in Sri Lanka.**

the lifting of bans on Tamil groups "will help heal wounds that linger six years after conflict ended," said Samantha Power, US Permanent Representative to the United Nations. President Sirisena is trying his best to mend relations with the United States and other Western nations, strained under his predecessor Mahinda Rajapaksa, who was criticised for not doing enough to promote reconciliation between the Tamils and the majority Sinhalese.

Sri Lanka has to move fast to satisfy the aggrieved and the victims of war that justice and fair play will be ensured in the post-war era. Dr. Abdul Ruff

in his article, Scared of Punishment: Rajapaksa opposes war crimes tribunal, concludes that "Sirisena has to deliver justice for the Tamils but leaving Rajapaksa unpunished would defeat that mission." The question is not that of punishing anybody but rather forgiving for which the pre-requisite is truth; admitting atrocities and seeking redemption. ■

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

# Mountain Conundrum

Nepal is seeking political dialogue from within to address genuine concerns of the people.

By Muhammad Ali Ehsan

Predominantly a Hindu country, Nepal has done little to lure benefits from its giant neighbors, China and India. The landlocked country has always been at a disadvantage which was further pronounced because of its almost exclusive reliance on India – something that the leadership now looks at with concern, considering the economic blockade at the Indian border and the huge internal problems and economic losses that Nepal faces today. However, as it moves forward on a democratic path, the leadership in Nepal is more likely to understand the need to extract economic benefits in line with its national interests that call for taking advantage of its very favorable geographic setting and allows it to benefit from both its big neighbours.

Creating a strategic balance and reviewing the foreign policy of the country are the two big challenges that the state faces today. While India may reflect on its autocratic policy, it is up to the Nepalese leadership to stop remaining 'India-landlocked.' If 'ideological binding' was the only and predominating factor for people living in two different areas to remain united, then East Pakistan would never had separated from West Pakistan. Indian ideology and Hinduism as the dominant religion of Nepal may not just be enough to combat the growing suspicion and mistrust that the Nepalese feel towards India – especially when there is this feeling that the big neighbor should have done more to help Nepal move forward during this critical time and phase of huge internal problems and national transition.

The relationship between Nepal and India is deep. The Indian army still maintains Gorkha regiments that consist of Gorkha troops who almost entirely



are recruited from Nepal. The citizens of the two countries travel across without the need of a passport or visa and no legal restriction prohibits the Nepalese from working in India. Despite the big neighbor's hand of friendship that Nepal has enjoyed, the country continues to suffer from energy woes. Only 40% of the population has access to electricity. The problem is pronounced considering that the electrification rate in the rural areas is only 5%. There are over 200,000 families affected by the earthquake and is still living in temporary shelters at an altitude of 1500 meters. The winters have set in with no access to electricity. The question then is, was this an appropriate time for India to play politics? The Indian sponsored Madhesis protest at the India-Nepal border blocks the much needed aid and assistance.

It is only up to Nepal to find a



way out of the political crisis it faces today. The Madhesis, who consider that the September 2015 promulgated constitution has left them marginalized, ride on Indian backing and support to execute this 'inhumane blockade' that is creating huge difficulties for people of their own country. It is beyond belief that India could not bring this minority group, with which it enjoys ethnic lineage, to opt for a meaningful and result oriented dialogue and give up on this harsh form of protest. Such is the level of human misery and disgust that even hundreds of cargo trucks carrying medicines were not been allowed to cross the border. Nepal imports 60% of its medicines from India but it is now forced to airlift the life-saving drugs and medicines to address the 'medical crises, that the country now faces.

Factories that indigenously produced medicines are mostly located near the Indian border and stand closed. The Red Cross Society in Nepal is importing blood bags from China as its supplies are stuck at the Indian border. The situation no doubt is getting from bad to worst. The Nepalese Prime Minister Sharma Oli addressed the world community saying that the blockade was having an impact several times greater than the earthquake that killed over 8600 people in the country. Yet the several rounds of talks between the government and the protesters have failed as India is not pushing the protestors for the resolution of the crisis.

The infant democratic government of Nepal has taken a stand that it will 'not compromise on the issue of nationality, national sovereignty and the dignity of the people' though the people are facing acute shortage of fuel and essential goods due to the border blockade. On the diplomatic front, the Nepalese government has been repeatedly asking the Indian government to ease the flow of goods through the border but that has had little effect. Resuming trade at the two border points with China may bring about the much needed relief and may also be that minor step that would bring the much needed equilibrium in the country's foreign relations that having been one-sided and unilaterally inclined towards India may now bend backwards and towards China – a change in foreign policy that seems to be under gradual transition.

The seven state Federal model of the new constitution is still not negotiable and the Nepalese government seems ready to discuss anything and everything with the protestors except any change. The re-demarcation of the boundaries was the primary demand of the protesting Madhesis and with

both sides taking a hardliner position, the state of current political deadlock is only hurting the common people. That leaves the world to ask the big question, 'will the new Nepalese president and prime minister succeed in solving the acute problems that their country faces today?'

To answer this question one must first understand the demands of the protesting people from Terai. They consider the present constitution discriminatory as their proportional representation in the parliament has not been guaranteed by this constitution. They want no hills to be part of the two states they demand. Currently the Hill leaders have established and carved out states as a mixture of Hill and Terai to ensure that their vote base remains intact, guaranteeing them a place in the current as well as the future Nepalese Assemblies. The Terai protests which were initially peaceful turned violent only when the government used and exercised excessive force to curb them. According to an estimate, the protests that started in August 2015 have left over 50 people dead due to police crackdown on the protestors.

The government plan to handle the protest crisis is heading nowhere. If it wanted to tire out the protesters then that is not happening. Crushing the protesting people altogether will be a mistake as will be the deployment of the Nepalese army that few in the government quarters are suggesting. Playing the 'China Card' to signal India to back off also sounds workable on paper but on ground it is least viable considering the geography and lack of infrastructure to operationalize the benefits of such a choice in the short term. China may also be reluctant to annoy the Madhesi leaders considering that long-term stability in Nepal can only be achieved if the Madhesis are accommodated and not side lined in the political process. China will have its work cut out and would not like to alter the geo strategic balance at the cost of annoyance of a sector of population in Nepal and also India that is keeping a keen eye on the changing political developments in its client state.

For the Nepalese government to come out clean from the political muddle it finds itself in - the choice is simple – political dialogue that should address the genuine concerns of all stakeholders. For what else democracy aims at, if not this? **S**

*The writer is a retired lieutenant colonel of the Pakistan Army. He is currently pursuing a Ph.D in civil-military relations.*



# Paradox in Paradise

The rising sea level threatens the very survival of the Maldives, an island country and archipelago in the Indian Ocean.

By Samina Wahid

**T**he survival of the people of the Maldives, the world's lowest-lying country has always been precarious. With more than 80 per cent of land less than 1.6 meters above sea level, the rising sea and tidal waves are washing away the country's coastline on many of the 196 inhabited islands. Worse still is the fact that there is no insurance policy in place for residents to cover the costs. Over the years, climate change has become a real cause for concern for the Maldivians who are not equipped to deal with the rapidly changing environment around them. Global leaders concluded talks recently on the issue, hoping to sign

an accord that can slow down climate change in the region but nothing concrete has come out of it so far.

The reality is uglier and less romantic than what one sees in pictures. The coastline is littered with floating bottles and cans next to diapers washed from beach landfills. Even the islands' famed coral reef has been affected due to over-fishing that has deprived the reef of its cleansing fish. The coral is also suffering from El Nino's last visit in 1998, a tsunami that occurred in 2004 and an overall warming of the waters. Marine life is unable to cope with the wastewater that remains largely untreated by the

islands' inhabitants.

Financially speaking, the country's nebulous political past is responsible for its persistent public debt. The small paradise, 1,000 nautical miles away from any land, is following the same path as many other territories going through an ecological and financial crisis. The Maldivian government is adopting a more proactive approach, as it is well aware of the consequences that a decaying ecosystem could have on tourism, which accounts for 40% of the island's GDP.

But another threat has the government concerned: just barely above sea level, the islands risk going



under rather sooner than later, as ocean water levels rise from the effects of global warming. It was in the face of this threat that President Mohamed Nasheed, back in 2009, made what was a stunning pledge. He vowed to make the Maldives carbon-neutral within a decade, by moving to wind and solar power. His aim was simple: to raise general awareness and set an example for other small, less energy-integrated countries.

Sadly, however, the leaders that followed after Nasheed were overthrown in 2012 felt that a 100 per cent cut in emissions by 2030 was a bit too ambitious so the target was

revised to 10 per cent by 2030. Critics of the present government say this stance may have something to do with encouraging oil drilling in the country. Interestingly enough, the Maldives has a long-standing history of taking the lead on climate change issues because it remains the most vulnerable country to rising sea levels. In fact, the islands will be inundated by the end of the century if the mid-range prediction on sea-level rise proves correct -- no part of its thousand-plus islands is more than 2.4 meters high.

Stark contradictions also exist in the Maldives' second biggest industry, fishing. Traditional pole-and-line caught tuna is as sustainable as tuna fishing can be, yet the groupers and snappers which form a cornerstone of the coral ecosystem which underpin the islands, are being fished out. Sea cucumbers, fat as marrows, are going the same way and the use of the lagoon-nurseries where sharks and rays breed their young for sea cucumber farms is growing, along with the risks of pollution.

Many of these problems could be solved. Some solutions, like solar power, are cheaper in the Maldives than the status quo, but incur an upfront cost. The inevitable tension between raising incomes in a relatively poor nation and over-exploiting the natural source of the wealth is creating a paradox.

But perhaps the biggest challenge of all is apathy. For most Maldivians, the problems are out of sight and out of mind. Travel in the vast archipelago is expensive and most Maldivians will see only two or three of the 1,200 islands. Many, especially women, cannot swim and so do not see the riches below the sea's turquoise

surface, such as the orange and white clownfish snuggling into the waving mauve and green-tipped tentacles of their anemone homes.

It makes sense for the Maldives to implement an innovative and adaptive strategy that includes healthier climate-resilient ecosystems as the way forward. Environmental organizations such as Bluepeace in the Maldives advocate an ecosystem-based adaptation for the short and long term. That entails conserving terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems as well as restoring those degraded. Of particular concern is the health of coral reefs on which the nation's key economic activity of tourism depends critically. Coral reefs are also the first line of defense against wave action and storm surges. The warming seas triggered large scale coral bleaching in 1998 and 2010, causing much damage. Ibrahim Naeem, director of the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Coastal Zone Management Centre, located in Malé, agrees. Adopting integrated coastal zone management (ICZM), a scientific method to balance competing demands, can help countries to reconcile those demands and many pressures on the coast.

For the longer term, elevating entire islands is an option, albeit a very expensive one. An example is the reclaimed island of Hulhumalé that stands two meters above sea level.

Can the Maldivians adapt fast enough to outpace the rising seas? Despite their passionate climate advocacy for over a quarter century, that remains uncertain. ■

*The writer is a freelance contributor for various publications.*



# Parameters of Progress

**There are many areas of development in which Bhutan steals a march on other South Asian nations.**

**By Almas Jawaid**

**B**hutan has won the honor of being recognized at the 87th freest economy in the world out of 157 countries and territories by the Fraser Institute, a Canadian public policy think tank. According to the report, the degree of economic freedom in Bhutan is the best among not just South Asian nations but also among giants such as Russia (which

ranked 99th), China (111th), India (114th) and Brazil (118th). The country has been featured for the first time on the World Economic Freedom list that measures the degree to which policies and institutions of a particular country are supportive of economic freedom. To put it simply, economic freedom occurs when individuals enjoy the right to choose their trade, market,

transactions and resources without the use of violence, theft and/or fraud. As per the report, the government's role in an economically free nation is limited to protection of its people and their property by upholding the rule of law and safeguarding their rights. The less the government intervenes in business and trade transactions, the better it is for the economy.



last 20 years, Bhutan has outpaced other South Asian countries in terms of poverty reduction and Bhutan's poverty reduction leads countries with similar 1990 poverty levels like India, Indonesia, Sudan, Cambodia and Pakistan. Bhutan performed very well in the area of rule of law where the people have the freedom to choose their resources and market with the law protecting their rights, eliminating the threat of fraud or any other violation of law. While its rank is the best in South Asia, Bhutan falls behind in size of government on the world average (6.6 vs. 8) which is for government consumption and government enterprise or investment. Bhutan also falls behind the world average in sound money (6.9 vs. 8.1) which is freedom to own foreign currency bank accounts and also on freedom to trade which is the same as that of Nepal (6.5 vs. 7). This has to do with regulatory trade barriers and controls on the movement of capital and people.

For a country that has long believed in and promoted the concept of Gross National Happiness

among individuals. "Corruption, for instance, decreases happiness but economic freedom decreases corruption," says Fred McMahon, a Fraser Institute fellow who manages the world economic freedom network. "If more permissions are required to do something, there emerges a need to pay off someone and if no permission is required, there is no one to pay off," he adds. Countries with little corruption are prosperous and happy nations by default so Bhutan can certainly stand to benefit on the global front given its GNH measure.

At the same time, however, happiness or economic freedom does not mean an absolute lack of government intervention. In fact, the latter is necessary to maintain security and ensure that people abide by the rules of the game. If the government makes and implements laws to protect the people, property and intellectual rights, then businessmen need not worry about crime or property theft. It's the role of the government to give subsidies and tax benefits for specific areas, explains McMahon. Having said that, if the government interferes or tries to do too much in business, it can quickly turn into Socialist or Communist ideology, which has had mixed results to date. Given the lack of government intervention in such matters, more and more opportunities are offered to the Bhutanese people to carry out activities that lead to economic wellbeing by meeting their own needs as well as providing services that fulfill others' needs.

Today, Bhutan's biggest challenge is the efficient use of available resources to achieve economic independence. The only way towards this goal is to promote a business model that would enable each individual to be productive, creative, hardworking and risk taking. A citizen can only look up to the state to provide an enabling platform to nurture its risk-taking aptitude to be a creative entrepreneur. A simple step towards such objective could be an initiative on the part of the government to spell out clear and stable regulations on each potential sector; active participation of the state in promoting and taking ownership in every business unit along with private entrepreneurs. Only then, Bhutan could possibly harness the best of its human as well as other natural capital to realize its monarch's and the nation's dream of realizing economic self-reliance. **S**

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



Being included for the first time since its publication in 1996, Bhutan has scored a total of 6.86 in the measure of economic freedom. The average score of the top 10 countries is 9.4 and the average score of the world is 8.1 while that of the SAARC countries is 6.6.

The report measures degrees of freedom in five major areas with 24 components and 42 distinct variables which include size of government, legal system and security of property rights, sound money, freedom to trade internationally etc. Data from the World Bank, IMF and other institutions were also considered.

According to the World Bank, in the

(GNH), experts agree that enhancing economic freedom would lead to further happiness among Bhutan's people. GNH covers many issues that the GDP measure does not cover. Enhancing economic freedom would, therefore, lead to speedy economic growth and swift poverty reduction, thus supporting the GNH model and strengthening Bhutan's position in the world.

Experts also say that economic freedom increases life control factors such as trust, employment, health and education, all of which are not just indicators of a progressive country but are factors that can lead to happiness



# A matter of soul searching

The world must get ready for more fear and panic following the Paris attacks.

By Dr. Moonis Ahmar

November 13, 2015 will be remembered in Europe for a long time because of deadly attacks launched at several points in Paris killing around 130 people. The mayhem in Paris reminded people of terrorist attacks in Madrid and London in 2004 and 2005 which killed and injured hundreds of people.

When the Islamic State (IS) claimed the Paris attacks, all of Europe and the West vowed to track down the killers and the planners behind the attacks. Syria, where IS groups are involved in large-scale violence and massacre, all in the name of Islam, invited French bombing of IS hideouts. In fact, as

reported on November 16, 2015 by the New York Times “the Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the catastrophic attacks in the French capital, calling them the first of the storm and mocking France as a capital of prostitution and obscenity.” IS went further in its responsibility of launching attacks in France by stating that, “Let France and those who walk in the path know that they will remain on the top of the list of targets of the Islamic State.”

France retaliated by vowing to avenge the massacre of innocent people carried out by IS by liquidating its command and control system

primarily located in Syria and eliminating it from the scene with the help of its allies. Recently the German parliament Bundestag approved Berlin joining action against IS, a step taken to support the French appeal for joining war against the IS.

As France is trying to settle down and restore normalcy, other European countries are trying to figure out a firm policy to prevent such attacks in future. At stake is the future of the Schengen Visa regime which for the last two decades has established free movement of people in Europe. The November 21 issue of The Economist stated that, “the assault on Paris by

the Islamic State (IS) on November 13 was an attack on life's innocent pleasures. The terrorists shot anyone who strayed into them. The deadly grasp of IS now reaches out from its base in Syria and Iraq. A day before the Paris, suicide bombers killed 43 people in Lebanon. 224 died when a bomb destroyed a Russian aircraft flying over Egypt." Back to back terrorist attacks in different parts of the world seem to have launched another spell of terrorism unleashed by the so-called Islamic groups.

The Paris attacks will have far reaching implications as far as Europe and the Middle East are concerned. There will be four major ramifications of the November 13 carnage in Paris.

First, Europe will have to do enough soul searching and will need to pay the price of preventing terrorist attacks on its soil by curtailing the free movement of people, goods, services and capital. Since the formation of the European Union (EU) in November 1993 and transformation of the vision of European from the Atlantic to the Urals and United States of Europe shared by Charles de Gaulle, Kurt Adenaur and Mikhail Gorbachev into a reality, it is for the first time that the EU will have to enforce travel restrictions by imposing border controls. It is not only because of the Paris terrorist attacks that the EU may revise its Schengen Visa regime but the influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and North African countries to Europe via Greece has also contributed to the redefining of a borderless Europe. Second, the spillover effect of Paris terrorist attacks on Muslims living in Europe will also be substantial, particularly in France, Germany, Britain, the Netherlands and Belgium where there is a large concentration of Muslims. Mosques and religious schools where patronization of extremism and indoctrination of Islamic militancy is suspected will be the targets of police and security agencies of these countries. The lives of Muslims living in other parts of Europe will also be disturbed because of racist and xenophobic groups getting further space in the aftermath of the Paris terrorist attacks. If intolerance, extremism and militancy permeates to European culture, it will have a devastating impact on the whole world because democracy, multiculturalism and freedom which have been considered as the hallmarks of Western civilization will be seriously questioned.

Third, following the Paris terrorist attacks, one can expect France and its

NATO allies to deepen their military operations against the IS in Syria. In that case, the sufferings of the people of Syria will be further augmented, resulting in a fresh exodus of refugees. Already millions of Syrian refugees have taken shelter in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon and their plight will worsen in the coming days with fresh bombings of French and allied powers. Following the recent outbreak of tensions between Russia and Turkey over the shooting of a Russian war plane by the Turks, prospects to establish peace in Syria will diminish further. Moscow's allegation of Turkey using stolen oil from Syria and Iraq by IS is like a 'bombshell' as such an allegation has put Ankara in an embarrassing position.

Nevertheless, enough destruction has been caused to Syria following the outbreak of civil war in 2011 and the emergence of IS. Conflict between Turkey and Russia, the two major players in Syria, will further deteriorate the situation and provide space to the forces of militancy and extremism. Finally, the Paris terrorist attacks will unleash phase two of the so-called war on terror which was first launched following terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 in New York and Washington. The resolve of the French President to track down the attackers and their perpetrators would mean a new phase of war on terror which may cause more instability around the world. One can understand the French sentiments but by unleashing another war in Syria under the resolve to eliminate IS will destabilize not only the Middle East but will also deepen the West's military intervention in the region.

One can take note of several conspiracy theories emerging after the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the end of the cold war about the promotion of new threats to the West. Since the ideological war between communism and capitalism was over in 1991, the vacuum which existed in global power politics had to be filled. Samuel Huntington's theory of 'clash of civilizations' was considered one such assumption that in the post-cold war era, the vacuum created as a result of the cessation of the threat to the Western world will be filled with the emergence of threats from Islamist forces. The formation of Al-Qaeda and now the Islamic State is considered to be part of the conspiracy theory perceived to be shaped by the West in order to justify its interventions in many Muslim countries. The so-called U.S. led war on terror following

the events of 9/11, the attack over Afghanistan and Iraq and the vicious cycle of violence emanating from the Arab Spring in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Syria, in a way provided space to so-called Islamist forces who challenge the U.S.-led Western world by carrying out lethal terrorist/suicide attacks in Europe and in the United States. As a result, from Morocco to Indonesia, the surge of Jihadi culture threatening the Western world has provided a sort of justification for the West to use military force against the Islamist groups namely Al-Qaeda and now IS.

But, the Western approach to deal with the rise of Islamic militancy has been counter-productive because of two main reasons. First, the use of excessive force in the form of aerial bombing in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan tends to cause damage to innocent people, thus triggering the rise of anti-American and anti-western sentiments. Second, despite the use of hard power against Islamist groups, there is no end to terrorist attacks. As a result, the vicious cycle of terrorism and the use of hard power continue to plunge almost the whole world in a perpetual state of chaos and disorder. Around thirteen years of war on terror by spending trillions of dollars seem to have not yielded positive results because of a flawed approach and the misguided strategy of the West and its allies.

Europe's soul searching in the backdrop of terrorist attacks in Paris needs to take into account the gains and benefits since the formation of the European Union. Will EU not fall in the trap of those who want to reverse the process of a border-free Europe? By overreacting to the Paris attacks, the EU will certainly damage the gains which it accomplished since 1993 and will be back to square one. What is required is a wise and prudent approach on the part of France and the other EU members while dealing with terrorist threats by strengthening the intelligence network and denying visas to those who have suspicious credentials and want to use their entry to the EU for the implementation of their notorious plans to create fear and panic by launching another phase of terrorist attacks. Most importantly, a political settlement of the Syrian conflict must be reached soon as a bulwark against the forces of militancy and extremism. ■

*The writer is Meritorious Professor and Dean Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Karachi.*

# Forward and Back

After Aung San Suu Kyi's massive win in the general elections,  
Myanmar is still caught in a state of inertia.

By Taha Kehar



On November 8, the National League for Democracy (NLD) won the general elections in Myanmar by a landslide. According to a survey, the party had secured 80% of the contested seats. NLD is therefore expected to form a new government by April 1 once a new president and two vice presidents are appointed by both houses of parliament.

However, skeptics believe that it is unlikely that the party led by Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, will be able to assume public office. In the past, the NLD has been repeatedly blocked from entering the corridors of power even though it has garnered considerable political support.

During the general elections in 1990, the party won by a landslide. However, it was prevented from assuming power by the military regime that has ruled the country since 1962. Analysts believe NLD will meet a similar fate and the democratic forces will, once again, be disregarded in favour of the army.

However, it would be wrong to simply write off the prospect of a democratic regime holding sway in Myanmar. Despite the growing distrust over the military's intentions, there is still hope that a NLD government will seize the country's reins in April.

In the months leading up to the formation of a new government, Suu Kyi has made consistent efforts to strengthen relations with officials who could jeopardize her party's chances of coming into power. A series of meetings has been held between Suu Kyi and senior military figures.

Since the elections, she has also met Lower House speaker Thura U Than Shwe, President U Thein Sein and Army Commander-in-Chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing.

Suu Kyi's meeting with U Than Shwe is arguably a ground-breaking development that is likely to alter the political fabric in unique and interesting ways.

It appears as if history no longer has a bearing on the political direction that Myanmar will take. As a result, U Than Shwe, the former dictator who kept the NLD leader under house arrest for 15 years between 1989 to 2010, has billed her as the "future leader" of the country.

The information was revealed through a Facebook post by Nay Shwe Thway Aung - the grandson of U Than Shwe - and has put speculations at bay.

In a similar vein, Suu Kyi has discussed the painstaking details of

As the future of democracy in Myanmar hangs in the balance, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the NLD's victory in the November polls will impact the country's political map.

the handover of state power to the NLD with the outgoing government. The outcomes of these talks have been broadly successful. On his Facebook page, Information Minister U Ye Htut said "Suu Kyi led the meeting to hand over head of state and government duties smoothly and systematically. According to the information minister, even the most trivial details involving the transfer of power have been looked into.

However, there are still a whole range of questions that have yet to be answered.

Although the president and army chief have vowed to accept the results of the November election, there are a series of hurdles that need to be addressed before democracy can prevail.

As per Myanmar's constitution, the army can monopolise 25% of all parliamentary seats. In addition, it has the authority to control several key government posts. These include defence, interior and border security. It is difficult to envisage a NLD government if such principles continue to exist.

The matter is further complicated by a series of restrictions imposed on candidature. Under Myanmar's constitution, 70-year-old Aung San Suu Kyi would be unable to serve as president because her late husband and sons are British nationals. While she has suggested that she will rule through a proxy candidate, there is no guarantee that the military regime will not use this constitutional principle to thwart the NLD's attempts to assume control.

As the future of democracy in Myanmar hangs in the balance, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the NLD's victory in the November polls will impact the country's political map.

At this critical juncture, political point-scoring is the driving force that will determine how far democracy can

go.

Amid negotiations with senior officials, Suu Kyi has employed a diverse menu of tactics to heighten the NLD's position as a party that is conscious of social and political needs. Although the outcome has been favorable, there remains a shadow of doubt over how effective the NLD's tenure will be.

In early December, Suu Kyi was seen picking up garbage in her home district to set an example for the NLD lawmakers and encourage them to keep their constituencies clean. She even urged journalists who were reporting on the scene to stop taking photographs and collect trash.

Whether it was a publicity stunt or a genuine concern for the environment, Suu Kyi managed to do what none of her predecessors had done. She put her finger on the pulse of an issue that merits public importance. Myanmar does not have regular trash collection or landfill sites. Encouraging lawmakers to act as garbage collectors will emphasize the NLD's commitment to serve the public. Moreover, if the military regime goes back on its promise, the party can seek support from the people to ensure that democracy is achieved.

However, Suu Kyi's critics believe the NLD is not the only change-agent in Myanmar. Many of them are of the view that the party lacks professional experience and largely consists of dissidents. Suu Kyi has also been flayed for monopolizing the party's functions and failing to nurture a new leader who can manage its affairs.

Amid these tensions, Myanmar stands the risk of either moving towards a bleak future or existing in a vacuum created by a military dictatorship. However, April 1 will define the course that the country will take and no conclusions can be made before this date. ■

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



# Reviving Cricket

PSL could open doors for international cricket to return to Pakistan.

By Faizan Usmani

**A**t last, the first edition of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) is around the corner. As repeatedly stated by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), the rationale behind holding Pakistan's own T20 league is to bring international cricket back to the country. However, PSL is going to be held in the United Arab Emirates from February 4 to February 23.

PSL is a franchise-based Twenty20 tournament which is being launched with the official approval of the International Cricket Council (ICC). The mega event is similar to the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), the Sri Lanka Premier League (SLPL), and the Indian Premier League (IPL).

A three-week tournament, PSL will feature local and international players who will represent five teams from



major Pakistani cities like Lahore as Lahore Qalandars, Karachi as Karachi Kings, Islamabad as Islamabad United, Peshawar as the Peshawar Zalmi and Quetta as the Quetta Gladiators.

Based on their experience and track record, players have been grouped in five categories, i.e. Platinum,

Diamond, Gold, Silver and Emerging. Each team can pick three players from each of the top three categories, while at least two players will be selected from the Emerging category. Each team has been sold as a franchise for a period of 10 years and will have a 16-member squad, including ten to eleven Pakistani cricketers plus foreign players.

Among the international players are some leading names like Chris Gayle, Dwayne Bravo, Darren Sammy,

Kevin Pietersen, James Anderson, Kumar Sangakkara, Shane Watson, Brad Haddin, Shakib Al Hasan and many others.

The idea of PSL first emerged in 2007 but it took PCB eight years to materialize the project owing to frequent administrative changes



in the Board. The purpose was not only to revive international cricket in Pakistan, but organize PSL as a useful instrument to take the PCB out of its financial crisis incurred through repetitive cancellation of bilateral series against many international sides.

Surviving in the cricket world with its nomadic existence since 2009, no country, at the moment, needs international cricket on its own land other than Pakistan. Now having sold its five teams for 9.3 billion rupees (93 million dollars) finally, the much-awaited Pakistan Super League is ready to take off next month. Given that the ICC clearly refused to send its match officials to Pakistan for a series played between Pakistan and Zimbabwe last year and the Federation of International Cricketers' Associations (FICA) has repeatedly warned international teams against touring Pakistan, the question remains: will the PSL be able to revive international cricket in Pakistan?

"The global game cannot afford to rest until Pakistan is fully incorporated again. We need this land of cricket warriors every bit as it needs us," said Mark Nicholas, the former Hampshire batsman.

According to him, "The ICC must continue to watch over Pakistan and ensure that pastoral and fiscal help is at hand, as it is expensive and destabilising to play home games abroad. Zimbabwe's recent visit to Pakistan was a success, as were trips by Kenya and Afghanistan. The next move should be for a representative ICC team to tour the country, a World XI if you like," says Nicholas.

Waqar Younus, a former Pakistan fast bowler who is currently the head coach of the Pakistan cricket team,

fears the future of Pakistan cricket could be shaky if its exile does not end in the near future. "If international cricket is not revived in the next couple of years I fear the game will die down. No international cricket (at home) has hit Pakistan badly. Look at the generation which took up the game in or around 2009. They have not been able to watch international cricket and a whole lot of players have not played in Pakistan," says Younus.

Chairman of the Indian Premier League (IPL) Rajiv Shukla, who is also a senior official of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), says "If Pakistan continues to play in the UAE, its cricket will suffer. If PCB develops Lahore into a safe venue by constructing a team hotel near the stadium and by providing adequate security, then India will have no objection to play in the city."

Continues Shukla: "If one incident happened does it mean there should be no cricket in Pakistan?"

In complete contrast, former Indian batsman Sunil Gavaskar terms Zimbabwe's tour of Pakistan last year as a 'baby step.' He says, "Whatever the country's Boards may decide, I am sure not many top Indian players would like to go there and play if they are asked today. After what happened in 2009, most players would refuse to tour the country. India's top players may not tour Pakistan."

"There are more steps required before it can say that international cricket is back in Pakistan," says Gavaskar.

Though Gavaskar's remarks may appear to be quite harsh for many of us, PCB Chairman Sharyar Khan, too, thinks on the same lines. In a reply to the question, 'Is Pakistan safe

for international cricket?' Khan says, "No, not yet. Not completely. It's only safe because we're able to take precautions."

"Around eight to nine years ago, Imran Khan said nobody will attack cricket in Pakistan because the public will turn against those terrorists. I disagreed with him right away and felt it was a wrong statement. To me, terrorists will attack cricket because it's so important to the public. The terrorists want to achieve something out of it and it's a fact, which has to be accepted. The army is doing a brilliant job, but we have to make sure the safety of foreign cricketers in Pakistan. And if you don't understand and realise this reality, you are turning a blind eye to the real issue that exists on the ground."

Taking the aforesaid into consideration, PSL is not more than an overhyped idea to bring international cricket back to the country. The league will bring money to the cash-starved Board, offer its local players the opportunity to play with leading international players and will enhance a positive image of the country. However, unless PCB manages to organize the event on its home grounds, its ability to bring international cricket back to the country may not be a possibility.

Even if PSL turns out to be a huge success, it would not bring international cricket back to the country unless it is held in Pakistan and nowhere else. When the chief of Pakistan cricket doesn't regard Pakistan as a safe place for international players, it will take more than a mere PSL to revive international cricket in the country. **S**

*The writer is the member of the staff.*

# Climatic Change

The world gets ready to fight another war – against Mother Nature.

By Zufah Ansari

With World War II being the backdrop of the birth of the United Nations, seventy years ago, once again, seven decades later, the multifaceted body now faces another looming threat to life from the war that is being waged against nature.

At the Paris Climate Conference, 196 countries unequivocally agreed to sign the planet earth's health insurance policy against one of the most complex issues that is faced by humanity, in the form of floods, melting glaciers, rising sea levels and extreme high and low temperatures.

Governments of participating countries signed a pact to jointly collaborate to increase efforts to significantly preserve the earth for succeeding generations.

One of the most prominent countries, emerging as a catalyst in the conference was India, one of the fastest growing economies of the world. It is unfortunately, at the same time, the fourth largest greenhouse gas producer, with an 85% increase in GHG predicted

by 2030.

This is why India has become the target and not countries like the USA which has a quarter of the South Asian population but generates more than twice the emissions as compared to India or China which produces 26% emissions.

Despite being the 4th largest emitter, India only contributes 2 tons per capita while the USA and China contribute 20 tons and 8 tons, respectively.

Over the years, India's climate policymakers have been perplexed amidst contradictory expectations, of protecting its population against climate change and at the same time managing the need to develop low cost energy alternatives.

Though India has always prioritized the latter over the former due to concentrated efforts by the government and the private sector, India's role became more prominent in the Paris Accord.

Prior to the Paris Conference, India had consistently rejected the call to

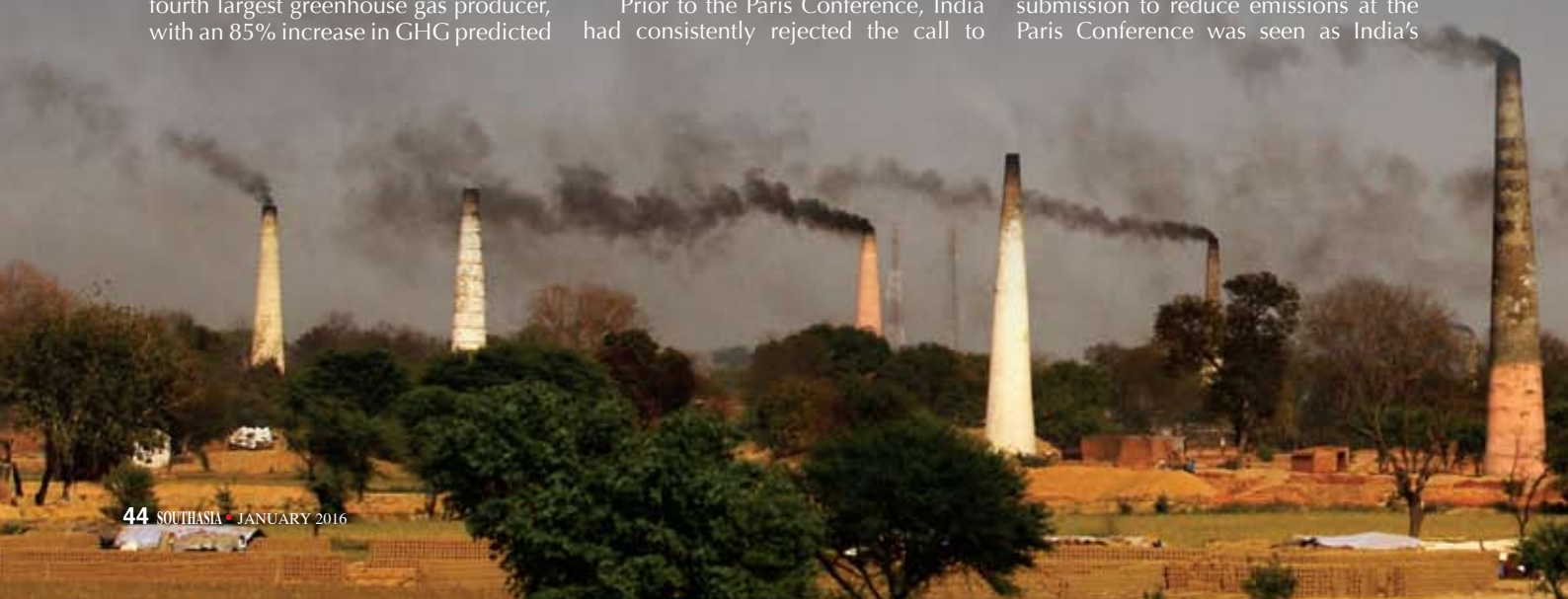
submit a target for reducing greenhouse emission as the policymakers believed it to hamper the poverty alleviation goals of the country.

Indian delegates remained steady on the principle of putting the major responsibility on developed nations to cut their carbon emissions and provide the infrastructural and financial support to reduce the growing climate threat.

At the Paris Climate Conference, India's role was seen as one that could make or break the negotiations.

Previously, India had pledged to reduce Co2 Intensity by 20 % by 2020 as compared to levels in 2005, changing the game to reflect India's renewed stance on climate change. While keeping a part of the pledge, India formally submitted its national contribution for the Paris Climate Conference.

Despite, the Indian government's top priorities being social and economic development and poverty alleviation, submission to reduce emissions at the Paris Conference was seen as India's



conscious effort to ensure constructive climate talks on a global level.

One of the primary reasons why India's role in climate stability was considered an integral one was because the country of 1.2 billion people was likely to join the list of top emitters with its growing development efforts and access of a larger population to electricity.

In the recent past, India has taken exceptional measures to ensure that as a country it is contributing to minimize the impact its development plans might have on the environment.

The Indian government recently became part of a solar power alliance that aims to shift energy dependency on solar power production.

The country aims to fulfil 40 % of its energy needs through renewable resources and has also targeted to develop 100 GW of solar power capacity. The country has also set a target to develop 100 GW of solar power capacity by 2022.

Earlier, India's Ministry of Environment and Forests shared 20 initiatives that are being undertaken to address the climate's impact on the country, steps which will eventually become part of India's National Action Plan on Climate Change. These initiatives will eradicate 11% of India's emissions.

India is also actively pursuing initiatives such as the Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency to improve the use of energy across sectors by setting energy standards for vehicles, buildings and appliances and other mechanisms of tax exemptions and insurance funds to curb emissions.

India's unwavering stance on the climate change responsibility remained consistent at the Paris Conference as it continued to insist on the notion that each country has a different responsibility towards climate preservation, with developed countries playing a more aggressive role as opposed to developing countries.

With its stringent stance on



differentiation, India deemed the accord to be a success despite the stark difference of opinion between developed and developing countries. Yet India closed the accord on a positive note, believing that the pact unanimously adopts climatic justice for society. The Indian delegation also confirmed that the broader aims of the nation will remain intact.

The Paris agreement is being considered a victory for humanity and the environment and a step forward for collaboration between countries.

In wake of the climate emergency, the Paris Climate Conference was the first instance where every country in the world actively pledged to curb emissions in order to collectively combat climate change both internationally and domestically.

The 196 countries present at the Conference agreed to aim at capping the global temperature rise below 2 degrees. They agreed to strive and achieve temperature levels of 1.5 degrees, keeping countries like Africa, island based states and underdeveloped countries in mind. The countries

submitted their national contributions which they will reduce in order secure optimal climate conditions.

Moreover, governments agreed to scale up finances, mobilizing 92 billion Euros a year from 2020 to help the developing world cope with the changing climate. The Accord also confirmed technological support and capacity building to mitigate the risk of climate change, especially of vulnerable nations, with the UN assisting member states to achieve the mammoth task of overcoming climatic devastation.

The conference acted as a platform where a framework for carbon emission reduction after 2020 was mutually agreed upon by participating countries. The accord's highlights included the acceptance of the notion that curbing emissions is a common yet differentiated responsibility of each country. It has been the unwavering argument in India's debate over climate change measures as well. **S**

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



# Books for Guns

Hussaini's mobile library brings hope to Afghan children.

By Faizan Usmani



**O**n July 3, 1991, the Council of the American Library Association in Georgia, passed a resolution on the restoration of library services to Afghanistan by the former Soviet Union that “destroyed all indigenous intellectual potential in the Afghan nation including the ruin of historical sites and such library facilities as had existed in the cities of Herat, Kandahar, Mazar-e-Sharif and Kabul and plundered national archaeological and historical wealth, particularly in the areas adjacent to the border with the Soviet Union.”

The Resolution further states, “the Association urges the Soviet Union to restore library service to the citizens of Afghanistan through the return and or replacement of those intellectual and historical materials it has taken and reconstruct those facilities housing them to make them available to Afghan public, and be it further.”

However, the Russians never revisited Afghanistan to return the stolen material or to restore its lost libraries. Whatever happened in the country thereafter further ended any chances of bringing its libraries back in the near future. Nevertheless, a ray of hope emerges from Bamiyan, which is the capital of Bamiyan province and the largest town in central Afghanistan.

The word ‘Bamiyan’ is derived from Sanskrit, which means ‘the place of shining light.’ In the 6th century, the caves of Bamiyan served as an early Hindu-Buddhist monastery wherein thousands of the Buddhist monks lived, meditated and carved the giant Buddha statues.

Having lost its glimmer and shine in the last few decades, the war-torn part of central Afghanistan still has a ray of hope where a 35-year-old Saber Hussaini, who hails from the same place, is playing his part to give Bamiyan its shining light back.

He is an author and storyteller and, above all, an agent of real change, providing storybooks to a bullet-ridden childhood led by every youngster who happens to be born in this unfortunate part of the world, known as Afghanistan.

In October last year, Hussaini purchased volumes of children's books from his personal income, started a pedal-powered mobile library and has been on his bicycle since then, distributing books among the schoolchildren in far-flung villages and small towns in central Bamiyan. He travels to five villages every day carrying books in a small, wooden

box on the back of his bicycle, which cannot contain more than fifteen books at a time.

He does not sell a box of candy or snacks to children, but you may find him standing in front of schools, inviting young boys and girls to get

all statues in the country. This was a ‘culture war’ fought to the death.”

Saber Hussaini also belongs to a war-weary Afghan generation, but has taken up the gauntlet to provide his coming generations with picture books and rhyming stories in place of

**Saber Hussaini also belongs to a war-weary Afghan generation, but has taken up the gauntlet to provide his coming generations with picture books and rhyming stories in place of toy guns.**

their favourite reading material from him for a certain period at no cost whatsoever.

According to Dr. Albert R. Vogeler, an Emeritus faculty member of the departments of Liberal Studies and History at California State University, Fullerton, “Swept for centuries by Asian conquerors, riddled by ethnic rivalries and civil wars, disrupted by successive British, Russian, and finally American invasions, victimized by commercial exploitation and religious repression, Afghanistan has not been hospitable to libraries.”

“Regional languages were mutually incomprehensible and literacy was unusual. Indigenous printing dates only to the later 19th century, and a government printing monopoly controlled the subjects and numbers of books. Libraries were few, but Kabul had four important repositories of books, manuscripts, and antiquities,” says Vogeler.

“As a result of the Russian invasion of 1980 and internecine wars among rival resistance groups, Kabul was repeatedly bombarded. The materials in the Kabul University Library were partly dispersed for safekeeping, partly looted, and partly burned. Similarly, the National Archives and the National Museum, smashed by rockets, lost much to fire and theft. The Northern Alliance burned thousands of books in the Kabul Public Library when it seized the city. Worse still, when the Taliban took over in 1996, they systematically destroyed every remaining book they deemed “un-Islamic,” including all foreign language books and all books with pictures—and, incidentally,

toy guns. To promote reading among the schoolchildren, Hussaini devised a novel idea to exchange their toy guns and other plastic weapons with storybooks and collections of rhymes.

According to him, Afghan children need to have a true understanding of education, instead of such tools that perpetuate war and turmoil.

“My aim is to promote reading habit among Afghan children so that they can get more knowledge and information, as I want them to be deeply attached to the sources of knowledge and wisdom for the rest of their lives,” he says.

“The books Hussaini brings are very interesting, simple, and help us in our formal education in schools. Before having access to this mobile library, we had to go to different places to search for books,” says Mursal, a student of the Bamiyan Central Girls School.

Zarafshan, who also studies in the same school, believes Hussaini’s mobile library is a treasure for schoolchildren. “These books help us find out about the world where we learn about other people’s tolerance to each other, and no one kills each other,” she says.

There is a poem in Dari (an Afghani language), which says, “Bamiyan is a world of miracles.” Hussaini’s mobile library shows one can do wonders for the cause without receiving heavy donations or getting any support from the state. At least, he is playing his part in creating a bright future for the children of Afghanistan. **S**

*The writer is a member of the staff.*

With respect to gender disparity in education, Bangladesh has indeed come a long way over the last 20 years, with female enrolment and completion rates surpassing those of their male counterparts. Yet, there still remains a need for massive improvement in the area, what with the country's current education system being plagued with issues relating to a lack of female teachers, irrelevant curriculum and a non-conducive learning environment, the reparations of which seemingly continue to elude the federal government.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Bangladesh's literacy rate currently stands at 61.5% with a ranking of 193 out of 215 countries. Although this paints a somewhat grim picture, it still represents a stark difference between now and the state of affairs that existed two decades ago, when there was a dearth of government programs geared towards the institution of progressive educational frameworks.

Studies conducted during this period show that the primary education sector is one that has benefited the most from such endeavors. As of 2012, the net attendance ratio of primary school participation for male students, according to UNESCO, is at 77.2% while girls have made sure to surpass their male counterparts with a net attendance ratio of 81.2%. The same goes for the overall literacy rate between both genders in the country; for young men, aged between 15 and 24 years, the literacy rate, as of 2012, stands at 77.1% while for young women of the same age, it stands at a whopping 80.4%.

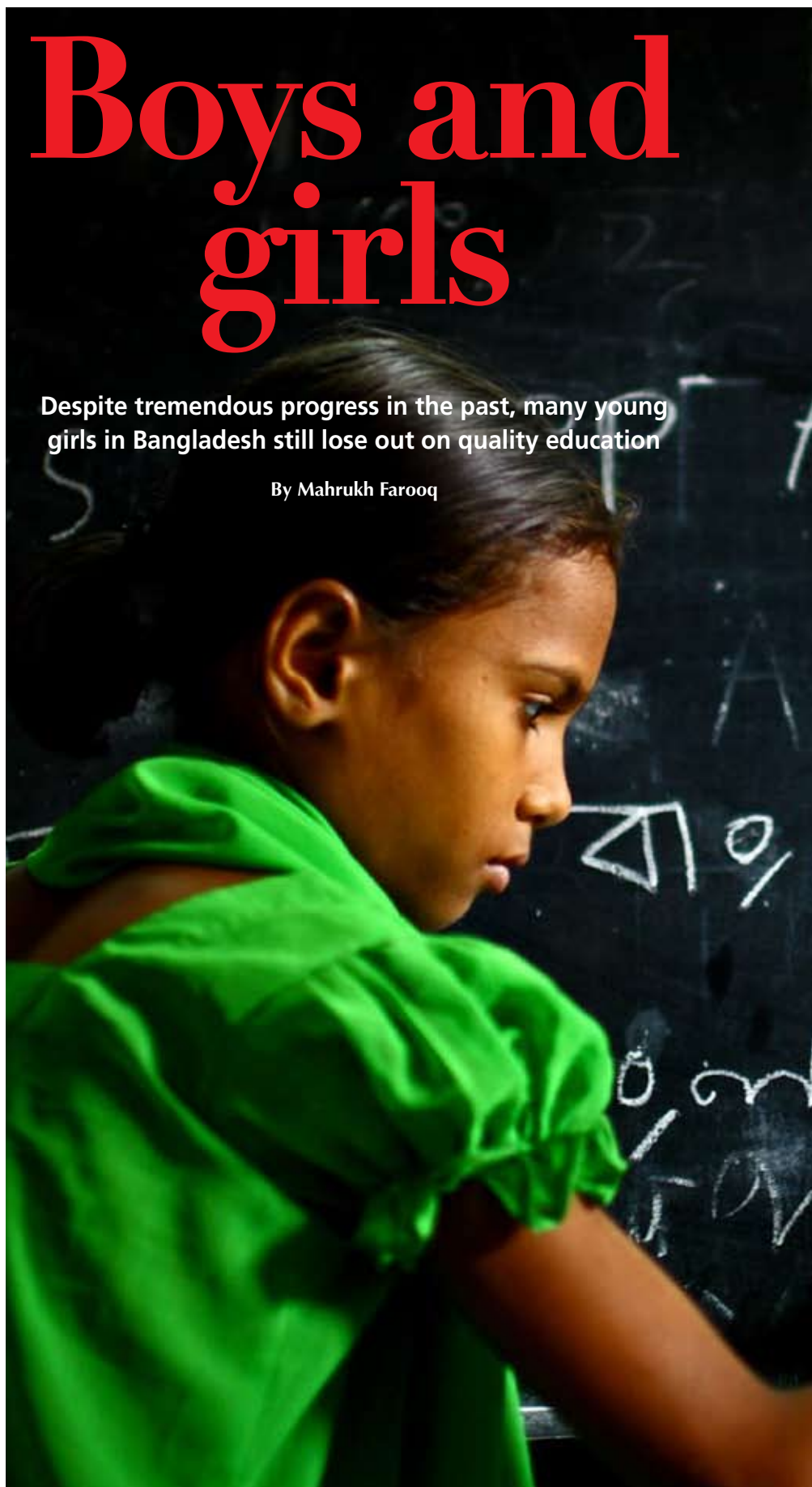
These massive increases in overall literacy of both genders in Bangladesh can be attributed to UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) initiative in which two parts of the Primary Education Development Program (PEDP II and III) were introduced. According to the program, one year of pre-primary education prior to school entry was supported with every government primary school having a pre-primary class. As a result, approximately 50% of pre-school children were estimated to be receiving some form of pre-primary education in 2012 with the figure increasing to nearly 67% in 2013.

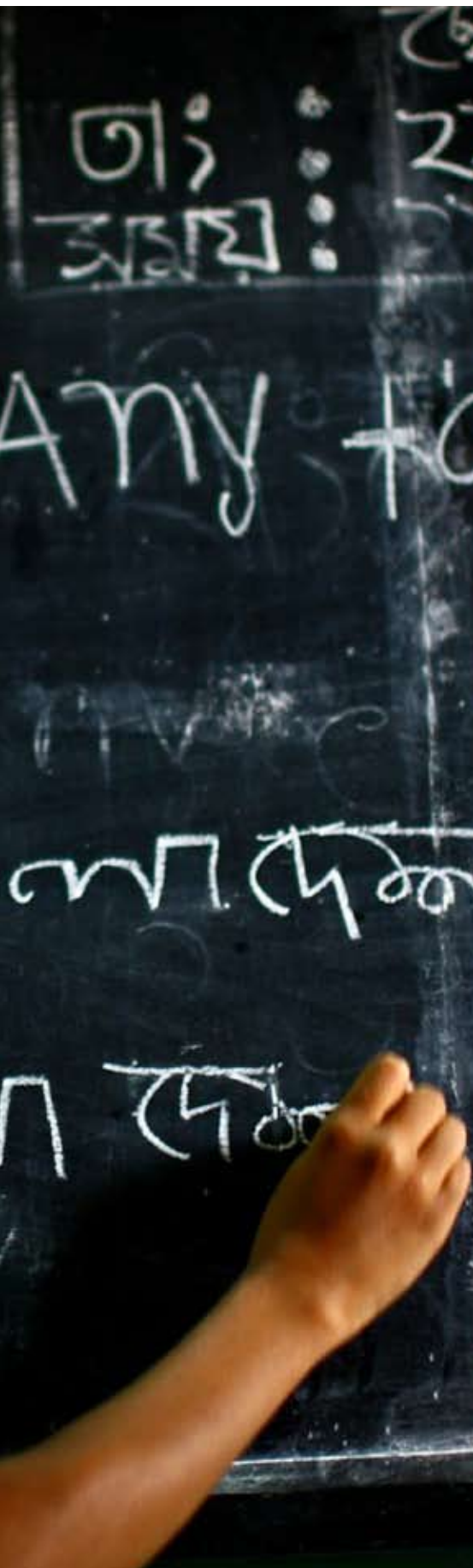
Many of these achievements can be credited to the recent rise and reform of madrasa education. With a curriculum based on Islamic teachings and an environment geared towards

# Boys and girls

Despite tremendous progress in the past, many young girls in Bangladesh still lose out on quality education

By Mahrukh Farooq





satisfying the religious sentiments of many devout Muslim families – for example, the belief that girls and boys should occupy separate spaces and have no direct contact with each other – such institutions give Bangladeshis peace of mind upon giving their girls a proper education. Perhaps this is why, according to a recent study, nearly 1.5 million girls are currently enrolled in such madrasas.

This rather encouraging trend does not, however, replicate itself in the area of secondary school education where figures posted by UNESCO are shown to lean more towards the average point on the scale. The net attendance ratio for secondary school participation for males drops to 42.9% whereas for females, the figure decreases to approximately 47%. In its review of its EFA initiative, UNESCO points out that over one-fifth of students do not complete the five-year primary cycle due to dropout and grade repetition. A high dropout rate at the secondary school level results in less than a third of the age group completing the secondary school certificate, which represents up to 10 years of schooling.

There is also a rising level of concern for the quality of education being delivered in these institutions, mainly because very few studies have been conducted in order to properly assess their validity and authenticity. This, in turn, indicates that many female students currently enrolled in such madrasas will most likely not be able to complete secondary school. According to interviews conducted by The Brookings Institution, a nonprofit public policy organization based in Washington DC for a research paper on Global Education, of madrasa principals in Sylhet, only 3-4 percent of girls completing their matriculation will be able to pursue higher levels of education.

Data from the Madrasa Education Board of Bangladesh on the number of girls and boys who appear for their grade 8 (Junior Dakhil Certificate, JDC), grade 10 (Dakhil) and grade 12 (Alim) exams estimate that, on average, 33% fewer girls appear for their grade 10 exams as compared to the number sitting for their grade 8 exams. By the time the madrasa's students go on to grade 12, the school is missing up to 79% of its female students. Further compounding the issue is the fact that only a small percentage of girls who successfully graduate from such madrasas are able to enter the labor market.

Due to there being an overall lack

of data that would help both experts and analysts to fully determine the performance level of such institutions, one can only rely on observations made by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Empowerment and Human Development Society (EHDS). The findings indicate that girls studying in these madrasas face a multitude of challenges, particularly pertaining to the kind of education being delivered as well as the type of classroom environment being provided. Most madrasas in the region are run by male principals and even classes are taught by male teachers, resulting in many parents hesitating on letting their daughters continue their education. Cloth dividers used to separate girls from boys and male teachers in the classroom end up affecting female students' ability to see the blackboard and their teachers.

Though outwardly trivial, it is the failure to address such kinds of issues that have, in fact, led to girls in Bangladesh missing out on quality education. In addition to this, madrasas, on the whole, receive less attention from the federal and local governments as compared to the plethora of other projects currently occupying their agenda. Even several NGOs do not engage such institutions in an effort to improve gender equality. By not attempting to resolve such problems, the government is inadvertently creating a precarious situation for the country's education sector, with the number of girls dropping out of madrasas increasing every year.

The Brookings Institution, through its research paper titled, 'Improving the Quality of Girls' Education in Madrasas in Bangladesh: Discussion Guide and Program Plan, 2015-2020', outlines several measures by which the federal government as well as NGOs working in the country can counter such challenges. These include teacher training, the induction of more female teachers, refining the curriculum and increasing the number of madrasas offering higher level education. At the community level, the study calls for programs to end early marriage, increase parent and community motivation and engagement as well as involvement by local government, NGOs and donors.

Through the implementation of such strategies, it is very likely that the eventual outcome of many young girls looking forward to a bright future will be positive. **S**

*The writer is a member of the staff.*

# Business and Pleasure

Tourism is the name of the game in modern, business-conscious Bhutan.

By Samina Wahid

Tourism became a major industry in Bhutan in the mid-seventies, founded on the principle of sustainability in terms of environmentally friendly, culturally

acceptable, and economically feasible. Bhutan's unique culture is based on its tourism industry. The government is deeply aware of protecting the country's environment, values and

cultural traditions by promoting tourism in line with its vision of Gross National Happiness (GNH). Tourism in Bhutan, as such, started with the objective to generate income as well as increase the



living standard of the people.

Bhutan's tourism policy of "high value, low impact" has helped the country safeguard its rich living culture. In the absence of regulations on travel, tourist influx in the Kingdom has resulted in a negative environmental impact on Bhutan's unique culture and unspoiled nature of inner parts of the country. Preferring higher quality tourism, the number of tourist is maintained at a manageable level, and is exercised through a tourism policy of government regulated tourist tariff.

Only a decade ago, some hundreds of tourists visited the Kingdom, at a fixed tariff of USD 150 per day. Considering the tourist influx from all walks of life, the fee was revised in 2012 to USD 200 per day for lean seasons and USD 250 per day for peak seasons, inclusive of a sustainable development fee (SDF) or royalty of USD 65 to the government. This is used towards the country's free health care, education and building of tourism infrastructure.

Bhutan's tourism industry is flourishing at a fast pace, contributing to the economy in terms of GNH. Till now the tourism sector has provided employment to 28,000 people. In 2014, a little over 100,000 tourists visited the Kingdom, which helped generate an income of Nu. 73 mn. Interestingly, the income generation from the tourism industry comes next to the hydropower project income.

In the last three years, Bhutan has seen an unprecedented growth in the number of international tariff paying and informal regional tourists mainly Indian; which undoubtedly has earned millions of dollars revenue for the country. Bhutan's sustainability as a top tourist destination is its exclusivity, which is largely defined by the current daily tariff policy. However, the government reviews the tourism policy only, after carefully analyzing if it would add benefits in line with the socio-economic development of the nation.

A good example is the 'high value and low volume,' tourism policy which has been the guiding principle developing the tourism industry in Bhutan to ensure the preservation of its environment, culture and value system. The importance of this principle is recognized by the Indian government, but when it comes to applying it, most of the business agents focus more on international tourists than on regional tourists – resulting in violation of tourism rules and regulations. This is on account of all visitors who require a visa, other than regional Indian, Maldivian and Bangladeshi nationals

who do not. Similarly, International tourists are guided by certified guides, who follow proper discipline, while regional tourists have direct access to the inner parts of Bhutan on their own and often hurt the sentiments of the locals by undisciplined acts, such as visiting temples in improper dress.

A case in point, the enormous opportunities in the marketing of ecotourism products shifted the overriding principle to 'High value, low impact.' In the absence of the Tourism Act, it has its limitations for not eliminating the root cause of many issues the tourism industry is currently facing, such as the practice of undercutting tariff, seasonality problems, unregulated regional tourism, uneven distribution of tourism benefits and so on. The Bhutanese can travel freely in India, but Bhutan does not recognize the impact from the increasing number of regional tourists, so it has reached a point where some measures need to be taken.

Bhutan's geo-political situation has been considerably upgraded owing to India, which is Bhutan's most important trade and development partner. There is no denying that the economy of Bhutan is dependent on India for financial assistance and migrant laborers for development projects, especially for road construction. But each economic program takes into account the government's desire to protect the country's environment and cultural traditions.

Bhutan's hydropower potential and its attraction for tourists are key resources. The Bhutanese economy is overly dependent on hydropower, whose exports account for some 45 percent of government revenues. Another 25 percent contribution to the GDP comes from hydropower infrastructure construction. Most development projects, such as road construction, rely on Indian migrant labor. Given the high capital investment and low employment opportunities of this sector, the Government is providing incentives for controlled expansion of tourism, and tourism-related services. The sustainability of the tourism industry is at stake and often compromised when travellers engage in wanton acts. Hence, the government encourages visits by environmentally-conscious tourists.

Reviewing the tourism policy, an alternate can be to increase the daily minimum tariff, while regulating regional tourists. In that case, an SDF will also be set on a monthly basis at the beginning of each year to ensure distribution of tourist inflow throughout the year and by region.

But this may not be feasible taking into account uncertain policies as labour, trade, finance and industrial licensing continue to hamper foreign investment. Another alternate can be liberalizing the tourist quota, but it would attract unwelcome visitors into the country and that is not acceptable. The need to have a comprehensive tourism policy is such that focus is on quality rather than quantity, with equal benefits spread to other parts of Bhutan, regulation of regional tourism, enforcement of proper pricing mechanism and creation of gainful employment.

The Bhutanese government is considering tourist accessibility to eastern and southern Bhutan to avoid over-crowding in the west and central dzongkhags. Eastern Bhutan is as good as unexplored since only 3.6 percent tourists visited parts of eastern Bhutan in 2014. The government has pledged to increase tourist visits to 20 percent in the coming years, by increasing tourism in areas like Samdrupjongkhar, Samtse and Sarpang. With this plan the government needs to address concerns over the need of basic civic amenities, promotion of historical places and opening trek routes to tourism. In addition, the government has proposed to develop incentives to promote and encourage repeat visitors with a target to achieve 10 percent repeat visitors within five years. Druk Air's "My Happiness Reward," a frequent flyer program is to encourage visitors to travel on the airline and attract repeat visits. Druk Air is the only national airline, and is now serviced by Bhutan Airlines and more domestic routes are to be covered by both the airlines in the near future.

From the very beginning, the Bhutanese hospitality industry was designed to cater to western high-end tourists. Until recently, the need to meet the demand created by flourishing regional tourism is foremost. The contribution of tourism, the largest source of hard currency earning for the country, is the development of cross border tourism, an important priority for Bhutan to attract investment opportunities for building a smart infrastructure and providing basic facilities for the development of tourism. It goes without saying that opportunities in tourism and hydropower development will contribute to national, regional and local development plans within the framework of GNH. **S**

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

# The Aftermath



**Seven months after a devastating earthquake wreaked havoc in its serene valleys, Nepal's road to recovery has proved to be a slow and challenging process.**

By Mahrukh Farooq

At first glance, 12-year-old Sushma looks like an average schoolgirl; standing right at the threshold of puberty, yet still desperately clinging to adolescence. Alas, her bright smile hides an immense trauma no young girl should have to bear. Like many other children, Sushma's world was turned upside down on one fateful day in April when two devastating earthquakes measuring up to 7.8 on the Richter scale struck the northwestern region

of Nepal's capital, Kathmandu. The disaster killed nearly 8,000 people, injured over 16,000 and completely destroyed nearly 300,000 homes.

Sushma remembers that day, all too vividly. "I was at home that day when all of a sudden, people from upstairs started screaming, 'Earthquake!' After that, our house collapsed." With nowhere to go, Sushma and her family ended up spending the night in a tomato shed. "We lost everything that day", she recalls. "When I looked



Several months following the catastrophe that befell Nepal, thousands of people are still displaced, rubble and debris from buildings still remain scattered on the streets and for many children, school continues to be a distant dream.

says Kathy Ludwig, Charity Development Project Manager for the Luxembourg charity Aide à l'Enfance de l'Inde (AEI), which is currently funding two rehabilitation and reconstruction projects in the area. "[Currently], we can only help two villages. The country needs a lot of money."

As if these conditions were not challenging enough, the impact of protests held by Nepal's minority Madhesi people, on the pretext that their interests were not being properly represented in the constitution, created further problems for the country. All imports into Nepal were blocked, causing many people to go without basic items such as food, clothing, medicine and even fuel. The president of the Luxembourg charity AIE, Françoise Binsfeld, on a recent visit to the country, described the situation as 'desperate.' "We passed a queue of vehicles several kilometers long which had been waiting for three or four days for a few litres of fuel," said Françoise. "You could [even] see lines of people queuing to purchase cooking fuel." Locals complain of costs of taxis, medicine and food almost tripling as rehabilitation and reconstruction slow down to an almost complete standstill. Add to this a dynamic political environment with the country having just elected a new leader and drafted a new constitution and one is left with a hotbed of virtually insurmountable issues.

"We hope the crisis will be resolved very soon from the political point of view," says Kathy. "If it continues, the situation will get worse and we will have a real humanitarian crisis." With a substantial number of people living in some of the most remote areas of the country, many of which have already been cut off by rivers overflowing during the rainy season, the recent blockades have only aggravated the extremely challenging

task of providing relief to the region's residents. Currently, there is a paucity of funds needed to carry on the reconstruction of nearly 11 schools, eight water tanks and a dispensary. As a result, many families have been forced to make temporary homes out of mud and corrugated sheets.

Apart from the various challenges faced by Nepal's population as they struggle to recover from one of nature's deadliest attacks in several decades, numerous experts have expressed concern regarding tourism, its largest industry and perhaps its biggest source of revenue. Possessing eight out of 10 of the highest mountains in the world as well as a rich culture and history, Nepal has become one of the most attractive destinations for travelers worldwide.

Currently, tourism in Nepal supplies more than 504,000 jobs according to a survey conducted by the World Travel & Tourism Council in 2013. And considering that the country was ranked 145th among the 187 countries on the Human Development Index (H.D.I) in 2014, it is no wonder why Nepal attaches so much significance to the sector. Nepal is in desperate need of money, now more than ever. Even though the president of the Adventure Travel Trade Association, Shannon Stowell, after getting a chance to survey the country in October, has reported back to industry leaders that Nepal is 'ready and open for business,' it is necessary for the government in Nepal to secure more funds to help spur the reconstruction process.

In order to ensure sustainability in terms of a healthy economy and society, it is imperative for Nepal to get back on its feet and restore avenues leading to some of the most spectacular tourist destinations in the world. **S**

*The writer is a member of the staff.*

around, I saw debris of buildings, and animals and people buried. There were insects flying around and thieves roaming about. I was very scared."

Within six weeks of the earthquakes, however, Sushma was back at school thanks to a UNICEF-funded Temporary Learning Centre. Apart from carrying on with their education, children there are also provided with therapy through drama and music, so that they were able to express themselves and their feelings.

Unfortunately, Sushma can be classified as one of the few lucky ones to have had her life returned to at least some degree of normalcy. Several months following the catastrophe that befell Nepal, thousands of people are still displaced, rubble and debris from buildings still remain scattered on the streets and for many children, school continues to be a distant dream.

"There was so much destruction,"

A young boy in a military uniform is the central focus of the image. He is looking slightly to the right with a serious expression. The background is a vibrant red, featuring a large, stylized yellow and black tiger head logo, which is a symbol of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The tiger's mouth is open, showing its teeth. The overall composition is dramatic and evocative.

# New Directions

**Sri Lanka may be still licking the wounds of civil war but there are many serious efforts afoot to give new directions to its displaced youth population.**

By S. Mubashir Noor

**S**ri Lanka's civil war officially began in 1983, but its roots lay in events three and a half millennia earlier. Around 1500 BC, Aryan invaders from the North swooped down on the Indian subcontinent and conquered its Dravidian denizens. Time, intermarriages and internal migration healed most ethno-religious rifts, but Sri Lanka's divides continued to fester as the Buddhist Sinhalese and Hindu Tamils squared off for over 26 years. The former claim ancestry from the Aryans,

the latter from the Dravidians.

Structural inequalities between ethnic groups gave birth to strife after most civil wars, and Sri Lanka was no exception after its independence from Britain in 1948. Sinhalese nationalists begrudged their British masters for favoring the island's Tamil minority simply because they staffed the lucrative tea export business. After Britain's exit, these nationalists took advantage of the superior Sinhalese numbers to fan sectarian flames and redress Sri Lanka's

status quo in their favor.

In 1972, Sinhalese politicians changed the country's name from Ceylon to Sri Lanka, and installed Buddhism as the state religion. This triggered a Tamil backlash that had bloomed into a full-blown insurgency by 1983. Separatists killed thirteen soldiers in a series of face-offs that year, provoking nationwide rioting that ended 2500 Tamil lives. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) emerged from this bloodbath as Sri Lanka's premium rebel force, under



the ruthless leadership of Velupillai Prabhakaran, began taking over territory in the northeastern parts of the country.

The Tamil youth of the Jaffna peninsula and other LTTE-controlled areas were the most vulnerable players in Sri Lanka's civil war. They unwittingly sank into a giant whirlpool of hatred and both the LTTE and Colombo used them as pawns, shields and bait. Child soldiers, some barely in their teens, received cyanide pills from LTTE commanders in a macabre suicide-pact to live and die by the Eelam flag. A few of these thousands were willing participants and the LTTE used a mixture of coercion and rewarded cooperation to pry one child from each Tamil family.

Reportedly, over 500 child soldiers died in the single battle at Kilinochchi in 1998. There are box-loads of case

files which are a testament to similar atrocities. A 2004 UNICEF report revealed that the LTTE recruited over 3500 underage fighters, two years into an uneasy ceasefire with Colombo. The Sri Lankan government, too, is guilty of equal crimes. Allan Rock, a special adviser to the UN Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, claimed in 2006 that, "Sri Lankan security forces rounded up children to be recruited by the Karuna faction," a turncoat LTTE wing helmed by "Colonel" Karuna Amman.

Sri Lanka's Tamil youth today live in emotional limbo and betray a nihilistic streak born of the country's dark past. A particularly grim caricature painted by the elderly depicts young Tamil males as creatures of street corners; smoking, drinking and harassing women. Underage addiction to drugs and alcohol has skyrocketed and so have regional suicide rates. The mistrustful presence of military personnel in former LTTE areas complicates their postwar reintegration into Sri Lankan society. Coupled with ramshackle community infrastructure and employment options limited to manual labor, many young Tamils have developed a disconnect with their milieu and dream of moving abroad.

Sri Lankans voted Maithripala Sirisena into office in January last year on pledges of uniting a fractured country. The new president promised to shun the divisive politics of his forerunner Mahinda Rajapaksa and usher in an era of inter-race harmony. Last May, however, a damning report by the American think-tank Oakland Institute rubbished Sirisena's peacemaking credentials, alleging "Six years later, a silent war continues under a different guise." The report accused Colombo of resettling internally displaced Tamils in areas with poor amenities and continuing an unnecessary and heavy-handed military occupation in former LTTE areas, with one soldier for every six civilians.

The report also condemned Sri Lanka's army for profiting off its presence, asserting it "officially run luxury resorts and golf courses that have been erected on land seized from now internally displaced persons." Still, Sirisena soldiered on and announced a war crimes tribunal in September that would log atrocities committed during the civil war, prosecute war criminals and pay reparations to the victims. Colombo also lifted bans on eight groups and 267 persons related to the Eelam cause, and released 1000 acres in the Palali high-security zone to resettle Tamil families.

Furthermore, Sri Lanka's economic instability shackles Sirisena's

development agenda. Though the country boasts a 7.4 percent growth rate, its budget deficit-to-GDP ratio hovers above 6.5 percent and serious liquidity problems are offset mainly through the \$5 billion dollars in overseas remittances. Predictably, the IMF cracked down on Colombo to curb spending and introduce austerity measures, which took effect with November's budget. Also predictably, these measures widen the infrastructure gap and make it harder to ratchet up investment in education and training programs for minority groups.

Nevertheless, Colombo recognizes the urgency of reintegrating young Tamils into mainstream society. In October, Sri Lanka's Police Department announced the recruitment of 1500 such youth, while the Prison Department also hired 100 of them as trainee officers. International donors are also helping rebuild Sri Lanka. India has already erected 10,000 houses in the northern province, and will build a total of 50,000 dwellings for internally displaced Sri Lankans. The UN-Habitat's Project for Rehabilitation of Community Infrastructure (RCIF) is also working to resurrect key public resources in 80 war-torn villages of the Mullaitivu and Killinochchi districts. These include internal access roads, drainage systems, preschools and community centers.

Germany has set up the Sri Lankan-German Training Institute (SLGTI) in Kilinochchi to provide vocational training for Tamil youth. This facility offers apprenticeships in food processing, construction and automobile mechanics among other programs. Moreover, to promote interfaith dialogue and better race relations, the Centre for Peace Building and Reconciliation (CPBR), a UK non-profit organization, convenes conferences and workshops bringing together Sri Lanka's various racial and religious identities. Over 33,000 Sri Lankans of all shades and stripes participated in CPBR peace-building events last year.

Though funds are tight and Sri Lanka needs international patronage to broadly reintegrate young Tamils into mainstream society, the social fault-lines produced by 26 years of war will not disappear overnight. Indeed, these divides, more than an inadequate number of social uplift programs, hamper efforts to speed up the process. That said, time is a great healer and if successive Sri Lankan governments follow Sirisena's lead and the post-apartheid South African model, the country's Tamil youth will regain their self-esteem and sense of place in modern Sri Lanka. ■

*The writer is a freelance columnist and audio engineer.*

# Future of Health Care

The health care infrastructure may be better in the Maldives than many other countries but there is still a long way to go.

By Samina Wahid

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Maldives as a member of the United Nations. To commemorate this historic occasion, the UN in the Maldives unveiled its “UN50 photo exhibition” capturing the development

journey of the Maldives over the past five decades, especially health, and how the World Health Organization (WHO) has been a crucial partner through the years. The photos and narrative exhibition captured the Maldivian government’s

engagement with the WHO to promote socio-economic development, advance the health agenda, protect the rights of children and advocate gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Recent years have seen a major



expansion of health service delivery in the country with more focus on curative health care. The Maldives has one of the best doctor-to-population ratios amongst its neighbors and other small island countries. In 2005, there were 379 doctors with a doctor-to-population ratio of 1:775, while in 2010 there were 525 doctors with the doctor-to-population ratio of 1:609, making the physician density (per 1000 population) as much as 1.642.

Back in the 90s, the Maldives' medical establishment consisted of a central hospital for males, four regional hospitals and 21 primary healthcare centers. The situation since has changed, given that the life expectancy in the country has gone up to 71 years for men and 72 years for women. The Maldives has also worked hard to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) because of which several immunization programs have been introduced there. As a result, the infant mortality rate has decreased over the past years. Previously, 70 per cent of infant deaths were neonatal deaths since a large number of births were premature.



Today, however, infant mortality has considerably declined since tremendous priority is given to maternal health. The Ministry of Health has conducted various health programmes such as the safe motherhood programme to control the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR).

The biggest challenge today is the presence of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), in terms of the number of lives lost due to ill-health, disability and early death. NCDs require specialized and expensive services, including health experts, machines and infrastructure. There is a major disparity in the quality of services available to address NCDs between the capital, Malé and the islands. Many islands have impressive buildings but the health resources are missing. The quality of service is largely constrained by the lack of competent doctors and nurses available and their willingness to reside in the islands. Other issues include the lack of maintenance of infrastructure and machinery in the health facilities on the islands.

An important issue is the fairness or equality of the country's health financing arrangements. The amount people pay for health care through the various sources of financing, out-of-pocket payments, private insurance, social insurance, and taxes — affects the amount of money they spend on things other than health care. The Maldives has seen health expenses rising through the decades, as the trends in health expenditure for households suggest and household expenditure has increased at a much faster pace than government expenditure. As a result, out-of-pocket expenditure for Maldivian households in 2011 reached 49 per cent of the total health expenditure in the country.

The growing cases of NCDs and the ageing population trends pose a major financial burden for the national health account. To address ongoing financial constraints in the health sector and potential pressures in the future, experts

recommend that innovative financing schemes and the use of technology be explored. Innovative financing can be explored through establishing partnerships with the private sector. 'Health tourism' is already established in South Asia and the Maldives has the potential to tap its natural beauty, pristine environment and serenity to establish itself as a future destination for wellness and health tourism. This can reduce the leakages in the health sector caused by medical care sought abroad by the local people themselves. Another option to address health financing is to explore the use of technology in service delivery. One such channel is telemedicine, which can help to extend consultations and service provisions to remote locations. Unfortunately in the Maldives, despite heavy investments, telemedicine has not been operationalized.

Many experts believe that the strong foundations of primary health care, which have been successfully established in the Maldives over the past three decades, are disintegrating as primary health care is no longer the focus of the health sector. It is important to strengthen and develop management capacity in the health sector with improved reporting and accountability mechanisms. There is a need to develop a common vision among health professionals, policy makers and service providers on the priorities of the health sector. Furthermore, the health system needs to take into account the emerging health risks in the population. Climate-related health risks demand enhanced community action and prevention. It is therefore critical that preventive health care be considered a priority and that public health services and professionals be reoriented to address the emerging health issues in the Maldives. **S**

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



# Inside the US invasion of Afghanistan

**Book Title:** 88 Days to Kandahar  
**Author:** Robert L. Grenier  
**Publisher:** Simon & Shuster, NY  
**Pages:** 444  
**Price:** USD: 28.00  
**ISBN:** 978-1-4767-1207-9



*Reviewed by Javed Ansari*

It is amazing that Robert L. Grenier, the author of '88 Days to Kandahar' has captured the highs and lows of the war that the US conducted against the Taliban in Afghanistan with so much accuracy. Grenier was the CIA Station Chief in Pakistan from 1999 to 2002 and later also served as Director of the CIA

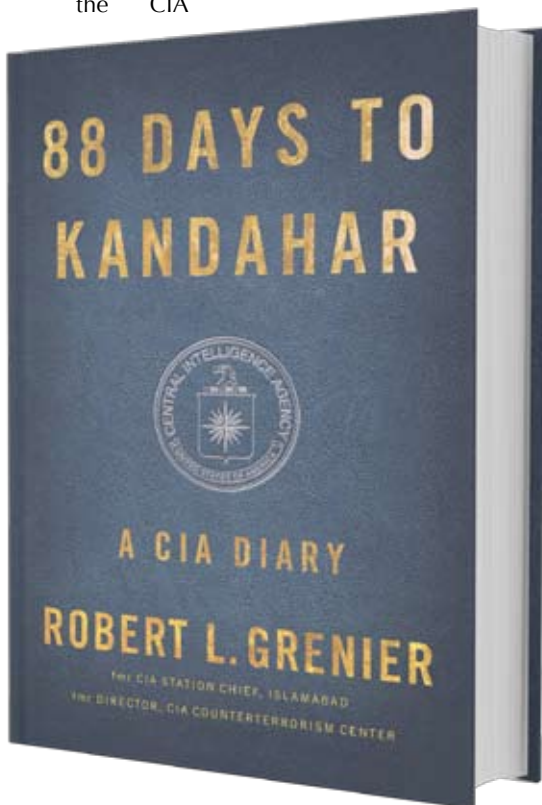
Counterterrorism Centre (CTC). '88 Days to Kandahar' is a true story and recounts in harrowing detail the US invasion against the Afghans following 9/11. The narrative tells how a good part of the invasion was run from the CIA station in Islamabad and how Grenier, as the man in charge, found himself caught in the cross wires.

The war drove away the Taliban and the al-Qaeda from Kandahar in just 88 days. But it is a fact that the US eventually lost the plot because the bureaucrats in Washington D.C. and the top US army brass seemed to apparently have no interest in winning the war they had started. They were probably more satisfied with having landed their boots on the ground and eventually achieving a firm grip over the country – a far cry from the time leading up to 9/11 when the Americans had tried with all their might to convince the late Mullah Omar that he hand over Osama Bin Laden to them and save his country from their wrath. When Mullah Omar refused to do so on the pretext of following the traditions of Afghan tribal hospitality and despite the many efforts of Pakistani generals and diplomats, the Americans rained hell over Afghanistan. What transpired subsequently was that

the U.S. never 'won' the war beyond their overrunning Kandahar and succeeding in installing Hamid Karzai as the president of Afghanistan. Since then, their firm hold on the country has remained in place and they are now able to control the whole region from their military and listening bases right at the periphery of Central Asia and very close to China, Russia and Iran. They make the ruse all the time of 'leaving' the Afghan people and army to their own devices and have, in effect, moved a very large portion of their arms and soldiers out of the country. But it is a fact that the Americans will never leave Afghanistan. Their role of self-appointed 'protectors' and 'saviours' may be over by their own reckoning, but their presence is for good in this strategically important part of the globe.

It was a controversial aspect of the US Kandahar campaign that it enabled the little known Hamid Karzai to assume power. Equally haphazard and also fascinating were secret attempts to reach some kind of deal with the Taliban to turn over bin Laden. Failing that, Grenier's station in Islamabad toyed with fomenting an internal coup that would topple Mullah Omar, the Taliban chief, and incorporate some elements of the movement into a new political structure led by Karzai. It came to nothing. Grenier also recounts in his book the opportunities the Americans missed to kill the Taliban leadership and large numbers of al-Qaeda fighters and only because the US military would not act unless there were "U.S. eyes-on" to confirm targets.

Although the hard cover edition of the book came out in January, 2015, Grenier's evaluation of the situation obtaining on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border is quite true and relevant to this day. It has particularly come into focus after the mayhem caused by the Pakistan Taliban at the Army Public School in Peshawar on Dec 16, 2014 and the Pakistan Army's Operation Zarb-e-Azb that came down with full vehemence



soon after. Nothing could be more true than the fact that Pakistani militants have found safe havens in Afghanistan. Mullah Fazlullah, the main perpetrator of the Peshawar school massacre is known to be hiding in Afghanistan and has not been apprehended despite the combined efforts of the Pakistan and Afghan armies.

Grenier is so relevant when he writes:

'In fact, the future threat posed by an Afghan safe haven has increased. Afghanistan is beset by a religiously motivated insurgency. That insurgency will not go away, even after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Pakistani militants have already shown a penchant for maintaining safe havens in Afghanistan and launching attacks towards the east. Given their religious sympathies, and close, longstanding affiliations with Pakistani religious extremists, not to mention their own latent antipathies towards Islamabad, it is simply not credible that the Afghan Taliban would refuse to permit the Pakistani Taliban to operate from areas under their control.'

Grenier's conclusion is most telling, particularly with reference to what is transpiring in the region today. In light of the US campaign that commenced against the Taliban in 2002, he

**Afghanistan is beset by a religiously motivated insurgency. That insurgency will not go away, even after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Pakistani militants have already shown a penchant for maintaining safe havens in Afghanistan and launching attacks towards the east.**

expresses his views thus: "A limited American engagement could not produce the sort of victory Americans are comfortable with. Its near-term results would be most unsatisfying. It would be designed to ensure that potential terrorist safe havens which might otherwise be uncontested, would at least be contested. Americans don't like playing for a tie. But in time, politics on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border would find its own level, The Taliban, denied the possibility of ultimate victory, would eventually find its place in Pushtun society, not as a conventional power-sharing party

among parties – its absolutist leaders are not capable of or interested in such a role – but as a regulatory influence enforcing fundamentalist religious norms on the local level." Every page of '88 Days to Kandahar' provides a fresh insight into how the region has evolved over the last decade and a half and what ground realities need to be taken into account for any possible solutions. It also provides an inside look into how the American CIA conducted the war from Islamabad and the clandestine role that the Pakistan Army and its intelligence forces played in the whole operation. A must read. **S**

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# The "shahr ki larki" is back

**R**aveena Tandon, who was famous as "Shahr ki Larki" in Bollywood, is now bored with her hip-shakings. "Frankly, after a point when you have done everything that one could expect from a glamour girl, it's time to look for more." "I enjoyed dancing until "Shahr ki Larki" came my way. But now I am [interested in] doing something successfully," she says frankly.

Raveena, whose debut was in "Patthar ke Phool," dipped at the box office, took almost five years before she came up with "Mohra." After her post-"Mohra" phase, when she could have actually picked up and chosen big films, Raveena chose to stay home and almost gave up acting for Akshay Kumar, her professional colleague.

Though the relationship had a brief inning, it pushed Raveena from the first row to the last. Finally, to comeback, she



A page from Southasia, 2001





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