

INTERNATIONAL

Angela Merkel's Future

October 2016

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Is there a future for Saarc?

It looks like Saarc is dying a slow death considering that India has pulled out of the 19th Saarc Summit to be held in Islamabad in November, along with four other South Asian countries and Pakistan had no alternative but to postpone the summit. India started the domino effect by first announcing not to attend the moot. This was followed by Bangladesh, Bhutan, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. It is clear that these five countries are negating the very spirit of the Saarc Charter by their decision not to attend the 19th Summit and all because India has cast the shadow of its bilateral problems on the multilateral forum. Why India is behaving in this manner is because it has developed a certain stance on the Uri incident of September 18 and is blaming Pakistan for having been behind the attack. It is clear that the largest Saarc member is using the weapon of abstention to divert attention (unsuccessfully though) of the world from the atrocities that it is continuously perpetrating in Kashmir. However, in doing so, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is effectively contradicting his own call to fight poverty in the region and is closing the doors to so many other avenues of cooperation that Saarc has opened over the three decades since it has been in existence. On the whole, the performance record of Saarc has not been very satisfactory, as it is. Though a regional grouping of eight countries, it has failed to give South Asia the sort of unified image that was originally envisaged. Most importantly, while bilateralism was never a part of the Saarc objectives and disputes between any two member countries were never to be brought to the table, India's behaviour is very much out of place and the fact that four other nations are following the decision is even worse.

The Saarc grouping comprises India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and the Maldives. It represents 3% of the world's area, 21% of the world's population and over 9 percent of the global economy. It was established in 1985 as a regional cooperation platform that would help member countries solve their problems of poverty, unemployment, inflation and low rate of growth by cooperating among themselves. The model that it emulated was that of the ASEAN, EU, the Gulf Cooperation Council, SCO and many other regional forums. Self-reliance is a common quest for peace and development for all the countries that comprise Saarc. The grouping champions the spirit of mutual trust, understanding and a sympathetic appreciation of the political ethos that exists among the member countries. It promotes cooperation that should be based on respect of the principles of sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of member nations. It was in this spirit that the South Asian Free Trade Association (SAFTA) treaty was signed so that trade barriers could be removed between the Saarc countries. The treaty involved a phased elimination of tariffs and establishment of a mechanism for dispute settlement among members. In other important areas too, the primary focus of Saarc was to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity by realizing their full potential. In specific terms, these objectives covered agriculture, health and rural development, meteorology, telecommunication, postal services, transport, scientific and technological development, sports, art and culture, prevention of drug trafficking and abuse, women's development and education.

It is true that some progress has been made in many areas but a lot more needs to be done. Saarc was created for promoting regional cooperation yet South Asia is one of the most illiterate and poorest regions of the world even now. Problems such as illiteracy, unemployment, poverty and low productivity continue to plague the region. Numerous summits, meetings and agreements have been conducted and concluded and yet there are no tangible improvements in South Asia. In fact, there is the view that Saarc has created more problems than it has solved. It now seems India has lost interest in Saarc and in achieving the aims and objectives for which it was created. Perhaps, the one single factor that pulls India back from going ahead with further developing Saarc and helping make a success of it is the fact that it cannot digest Pakistan's reality as the region's second biggest power. That is perhaps the reason why, much in contravention of the spirit of Saarc, it allows its bilateral disputes with Pakistan to adversely affect the grouping. Perhaps India is more interested in giving a forward heave to Sasec (South Asian Sub-regional Economic Cooperation), which consists of all the Saarc countries except Pakistan and Afghanistan. Emerging as a more successful sub-grouping in the past 15 years, it has implemented 33 projects worth more than US \$6 billion. At the same time, Saarc has been allowed to become a tragic travesty of how Jawaharlal Nehru wanted South Asia to show Europe its place. Is there a future for Saarc?



Syed Jawaid Iqbal

Term Extension



This is with reference to the cover story on the extension of COAS's term. No doubt, Gen. Raheel Sharif has been doing a commendable job and under his leadership Pakistan has achieved a number of strategic goals and objectives, particularly in terms of the ongoing war on terror. However, I think an extension in his term is not a wise approach. The leadership of any national institution is always subject to change, but it is its internal strength, lasting vision and consistency that should be kept alive. Since the Pakistan Army is one of the most stable institutions in the country, a change in its leadership will not affect its functionality. Let the new army chief follow the good work done by Gen. Raheel Sharif.

**Ahmed Mursaleen Siddiqui,
Karachi, Pakistan.**

Destitutes called Dalits

In India, Dalits are the most marginalised and deprived people who have been subject to all kinds of socio-economic injustice, caste-based discrimination and physical torture by the upper caste Hindus for centuries. Deprived of such basic facilities as education, health and sanitation, there are some 300 million Dalits who have been living a miserable life because they belong to the lowest rung of the Hindu caste system and are not allowed to worship, work or live with the people of higher castes. In the name of religion, exploitation of Dalits is common in India, while some people even go to the extent of killing Dalits on petty issues and go unpunished. The pace of such atrocities against Dalit communities appears to be picking up in Modi's tenure.

**J. S. Rajesh Kumar,
Nagpur, India.**

Sloppy Restoration



Recently, a senior official of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

(UNESCO) in Nepal expressed concerns over inappropriate rebuilding and refurbishment of historic sites which were damaged in last year's earthquake. Located in the Kathmandu Valley, such partly-damaged historic sites include Majudega and Kasthamandap of the Hanumandhoka Durbar Square Monument zone, as well as Rani Pokhari, a 17th-century heritage site, which is now being rebuilt using cement in place of such materials that are normally used in the rebuilding of historic structures. The rebuilding process is being performed in a slapdash manner without paying attention to standard procedures that must be followed in the restoration. Since Rani Pokhari and the rest of the destroyed sites in the country have historical, cultural and religious significance, the government must carry out the restoration programme with proper care and attention.

**Amal Pasupati,
Kathmandu, Nepal.**

Olympic-sized Humiliation

Pakistan was given a wild card entry to the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, as none of its players qualified for any event in the Games, including the men's field hockey. In its sports history, the country sent the smallest ever 18-member delegation to the Games, which included 9 officials. Their representation was merely a token one in only four games - judo, swimming, shooting and athletics. Pakistan could not win a single medal at the Olympics. It was in



1996 when Pakistan won a bronze medal in hockey and the country has not been able to win a single Olympic medal for the last 24 years. Despite showing such dismal performance, no action has been taken against the Pakistan Olympic Committee. This only shows that sports have hit the dead end in Pakistan.

**Ahmed Ali Khan,
Gujranwala, Pakistan.**

Save the Sundarbans

Being built on an area of some 1800 acres at Rampal Upazila in Khulna city, the Rampal power plant is Bangladesh's largest power plant. The 1320 megawatt coal-based plant is an initiative of the Bangladesh-India Friendship Power Company (BIFPC), a joint venture between the Bangladesh Power Development Board and the National Thermal Power Corporation of India. According to standard criteria, a coal-based thermal power plant must be located at least 25 kilometres away from ecologically sensitive sites. Therefore, various environment protection agencies have shown their concerns about the Rampal power plant, which is located 14 kilometres from the Sundarbans, a UNESCO

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Beyond the Burqini

This is regarding the uproar being made by the western media for the use of burqini by Muslim women living in European countries. The trend is very disappointing, as the west is usually perceived as a custodian of human rights, but when it comes to recognising the rights of Muslims, it adopts dual standards. Among Muslim women, the increasing popularity of burqini as an easy-to-wear swimsuit covering the entire body makes sense. Honestly speaking, it is a matter of personal choice and for the majority of Muslims their personal choices are shaped by religion more than anything else. I think, the issue has been needlessly blown out of proportions and is being portrayed as a clash of civilisations, which is not true.

**Amna Ghareeda,
Male, Maldives.**



world heritage site that is also the largest mangrove forest in the world. The power plant needs to be relocated, as it is in complete violation of the Ramsar Convention, an international environmental treaty for the conservation of wetlands.

**Parveen A. Saqib,
Dhaka, Bangladesh.**



"Pakistan should warn Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for interfering in Pakistan's internal matter."
**Pervez Musharraf,
former President of Pakistan**



"Vietnam is a strong pillar of India's Act East Policy."
**Narendra Modi,
Prime Minister of India**



"There is still much work to be done in order to redress the wrongs of the past."
**Maithripala Sirisena,
President of Sri Lanka**



"Our regional initiatives with our neighbours are beginning to yield significant cooperative dividends, with the exception of Pakistan."
**Ashraf Ghani,
President of Afghanistan**



"I take a lot of satisfaction in assuming the role of the ruling party which has not targeted any business person and civil servants accused of being political."
**Tshering Tobgay,
Prime Minister of Bhutan**



"How can we talk to people who are raising 'Pakistan zindabad' slogans?"
**Maulana Ansar Raza,
Indian Muslim cleric**



"We have a clear stance on Kashmir and believe that the solution of this issue only lies in implementation of the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council."
**Nawaz Sharif,
Prime Minister of Pakistan**



"We are pursuing politics for changing people's fortune, not ours."
**Sheikh Hasina Wajid,
Prime Minister of Bangladesh**



"Nepal wants to develop a reliable and long lasting friendship with the northern neighbour."
**Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda,
Prime Minister of Nepal**



"Every day there are warnings of an imposition of sanctions on the Maldivians, because we enforce Islamic Shariah and teach Islam in schools."
**Abdulla Yameen,
President of the Maldives**



"We as Indians cannot and should not accept the fact that we are 155th in the world out of 230 countries in broadband and mobile internet access."
**Mukesh Ambani,
Indian businessman**



"Pakistan's equity market has been outperforming China's and India's markets by a big margin in recent years."
**Panos Mourdoukoutas,
American economist**

PAKISTAN

Premier Service

Pakistan International Airlines has recently launched its premier service on the Islamabad-London route. The service offers extended in-flight entertainment, first-class catering with a wide choice of dishes and beverages, well-trained cabin crew and lots of other features. Each passenger is provided a separate entertainment system, a display screen and a controller for in-flight entertainment. A



complimentary limousine service is also offered to Premier Business Class (PBC) passengers on their arrival at Heathrow Airport, London. Initially, six flights per week have been introduced, while the service will be soon launched on other international routes. The airline is using A-330 aircraft leased from Sri Lankan Airlines for the new service. **S**

PAKISTAN



Big Breakthrough

A group of Pakistani researchers has discovered some 30 genes that cause intellectual disability and mental retardation, which is relatively high in the country owing to cousin marriages. A team of 12 researchers from the Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Medical University (SZABMU) of Islamabad made the landmark breakthrough in collaboration with American and Dutch scientists. The medical breakthrough paves the way for neurological medicine, diagnostic procedures and preventive measures to reduce autosomal recessive intellectual disability (ARID) and other mental ailments and hereditary diseases in the local population. The research has been published in Nature's Molecular Psychiatry, a prestigious research journal with an impact factor of 13.3. **S**

INDIA

Special Relief

In Kochi city of Kerala state, the government has established daycare centres for the mentally ill. Providing free lunch with pick-and-drop facility, the 9-to-5 centres look after the mentally ill aged 15 to 50 years. Many sports and recreational activities are held for the inmates at the centres. They also get an opportunity to learn yoga for physical strength and mental relaxation. A vocational training programme is being started at the centres where inmates will learn how to make candles, medicine covers and such coir products as floor mats, doormats, brushes, mattresses, etc. **S**



INDIA



Digital Degrees

The Indian Ministry of Human Resource Development is going to launch a digital database at all academic levels from secondary school certificates to higher education degrees and professional qualifications. A part of the National Academic Depository (NAD), it will help educational institutions in the country to issue all board certificates and degrees in a digital format to facilitate timely retrieval and verification of academic records. The online database will also help deal with the issue of fake educational degrees, forged certificates and marksheets. Students will be able to upload their non-academic certificates, awards and professional documents on the database. **S**

BANGLADESH

Satellite Ambitions

To finance the country's first-ever satellite 'Bangabandhu-I,' the Bangladeshi government has signed a loan agreement of \$180 million with the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC). The Bangladesh government has already purchased a 119.1 east longitude orbital slot from the Intersputnik International Organization of Space Communications for a period of 15 years. Bangladesh is planning to launch its satellite in December 2017, becoming the 54th member of the exclusive club of satellite-owning countries. With the launch, it will be the fourth South Asian country to have launched a satellite after Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India. **S**

SRI LANKA



Malaria Gone

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has recently declared Sri Lanka free from malaria, which had been a major cause of deaths in the country. Becoming the first South Asian country that has gotten rid of the epidemic, Sri Lanka's victory over malaria is an outcome of over a decade-long anti-malaria drive, massive health awareness campaigns and a series of health reforms which were started in 1999. Besides intensively targeting mosquitoes and other parasites in the period, mobile clinics were deployed in the country to cater to more than 80 per cent of the population living in rural areas. **S**

AFGHANISTAN

Saffron Revolution

To increase saffron cultivation across the country, the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock is going to distribute some 280 tonnes of saffron bulbs among the local farmers. The Ministry has also provided saffron cultivation training to some 5,000 farmers in 34 provinces, while many farmers are being sent abroad for further training. The government has also established a state-of-the-art testing laboratory and many saffron processing and packaging units throughout the country. Making some 5.3 tonnes of saffron per year, Afghanistan has the capacity to produce 70 tonnes of saffron annually. **S**



MALDIVES

Stable Rating

Affirming stable economic outlook in the Maldives, Moody's Investors Service has assigned local and foreign-currency issuer ratings of B2 to the country for the first time in its economic history. Among the chief factors behind the development are the robust GDP growth prospects of the Maldives, which are mainly driven by the expansion in its tourism sector. Since 1999, tourism in the Maldives has raised its per capita income three times, which has now crossed the \$15,000 in terms of purchasing power parity. According to Moody's, the Maldivian economy is balanced by a healthy growth path and moderate per capita income. **S**



A New Phase

The world has benefited enormously from the process of globalization. The Bretton Woods conferees created a new set of global institutions in 1946 like the World Bank. Today's world also needs institutional engineering of the same scale.

By Shahid Javed Burki



Before I go into the main subject of this article, I should provide a brief on my nearly 26-year tenure at the World Bank. How I joined the Bank and what I did at the institution is relevant for the story I tell here. My story of the Bank covering from the time of its creation 70 years ago is that of the institution's evolution and the challenges it has always faced, mainly in attempting to remain relevant.

I was recruited as Senior Economist in the Development Policy Staff of the

Bank in part because of my knowledge of China and my expertise in rural poverty. That was in 1974 when Robert McNamara, the institution's president was aggressively moving into these areas. He had begun to think of bringing China into the Bank and had begun to concentrate the institution's resources into rural development and reduction in the incidence of rural poverty. In 1965 I had visited China as a member of a three-person team to study the country's controversial system of communes. Our

team visited 13 communes in several parts of the country and wrote a report that was not appreciated by Beijing. We were critical of the system. We found that the communes had resulted in reducing the output of food grains. They had also increased rather than eased rural poverty. At Harvard University where I had gone for graduate studies, I wrote a book, *A Study of Chinese Communes* which went into several prints.

At the Bank, in association with Mahbubul Haq and Paul Streeten, a

well-known and well-regarded British development economist, we launched a program aimed at meeting the basic needs of the under-privileged segments of the world population. The program ran into opposition at the Bank for two reasons: it gave greater attention to the role of the state in managing country-economies and it deflected the Bank from its main purpose – to build large infrastructure projects in its member countries. Both areas were to be emphasized by Jim Kim during his first term in office but were not popular with many in his staff. This is one reason why Kim's appointment was opposed by the powerful Staff Association of the Bank.

With the reappointment of Dr. Jim Kim as president, the World Bank has entered yet another phase in its continuous development. He is a medical doctor whose last job before being appointed to the Bank was as the president of Dartmouth College. His second tenure will last from 2016 to 2021, and would end with the first term of whoever wins the important United States presidential election. The United States that retains control over the appointment of the Bank president rushed through the decision to avoid the possibility that this task could fall into the hands of Donald Trump.

Kim is the Bank's 12th president. Eugene Meyer, the publisher of *The Washington Post*, was the first president appointed in 1946 immediately after the creation of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Robert S. McNamara, who headed the institution for thirteen years, from 1968 to 1981, remains his most celebrated predecessor. The IBRD was to be one of three legs of the stool that was to support the new world economic order. The decision to construct this stool was taken at a conference attended by hundreds of officials from more than two score nations who were treated as the victors of the Second World War. The other two were the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization. While the IMF was created at the same time as the IBRD, it took fifty years before the WTO was established.

The conference that led to the creation of this structure was convened by the United States and was held at Bretton Woods in the state of New Hampshire. To this day the international order that was then established is known as the Bretton Woods system although, as discussed later, it has evolved into something that is very different from the original construct.

How does the World Bank look to me at this time and what is its likely future? The staff's unhappiness with President's

With the reappointment of Dr. Jim Kim as president, the World Bank has entered yet another phase in its continuous development.

Kim's reappointment is mainly for the reason that he is taking the institution in an entirely new direction. Change is always difficult in a large organization where ways are firmly set. Kim has three preferences for the Bank's future involvement. He would like to see his institution move away even more from the financing of large infrastructure projects. Instead, he would like to see more of the Bank's human and financial resources helping the poor in poor countries. Finally, in recruiting new staff at the Bank, he would like to see more people come in with the needed skills for the fulfillment of his mission than bringing in generalists who can readily move from one job to another.

If we look at President Kim's mission in these terms, it is easy to understand why his reappointment was supported by such large emerging nations as China and India. Large infrastructure projects need a great deal of financial resources and the application of known technologies. The Bank in its heyday as a builder of large projects had the former but not necessarily the latter. The Indus Water Replacement Works in Pakistan were financed by the Bank with its own resources coupled with those it was able to get from rich countries. The needed expertise for constructing large dams, power houses, and large canals came mostly from the consulting firms that won the contracts for implementing these resource-intensive and engineering-heavy construction works. This is the kind of development work that the recently established Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) will be able to do. The same is true for the New Development Bank set up by the BRICS nations. The AIIB and NDB and the countries that dominate them are happy to leave the supremely difficult task of addressing the problem of global poverty to the World Bank.

The Bank can do the latter task better than the new institutions. It has the capacity to do the needed research to move meaningfully in this area. The meaning of poverty is not simply lack of personal and household incomes to provide basic needs to family members. It has to be understood in the broader sense. In his farewell address to the United Nations General Assembly,

President Barack Obama celebrated the fact that the incidence of poverty has declined significantly in the last few decades. But that has not finished the job at hand. History has not ended as was celebrated by the sociologist Francis Fukuyama in his best-seller, *The End of History*. "A world in which one percent of humanity controls such as much wealth as the other 99 percent will never be stable," Obama told his audience of almost two hundred heads of nations and states. "I understand that the gaps between rich and poor are not new, but just as the child in a slump today can see the skyscraper nearby, technology now allows a person with a smartphone to see how the most privileged among us live and the contrast between their own lives and others. Expectations rise, then, faster than governments can deliver, and a pervasive sense of injustice undermines people's faith in the system."

The globe, in other words, has benefited enormously from the process of globalization –from the relatively unconstrained flow of technology, information, finance, goods and communities – and also to a limited extent of people. Such a world has also produced several imbalances which if not managed could produce untold disasters. The ongoing struggles in Syria and Afghanistan are just two examples of the destruction that these imbalances can cause. The fact that these conflicts produced a wave of migrants when more than a million people roared into Europe in their attempt to leave behind these troubled spots is an indication of how in an interconnected world all places and people are affected. Global institutions are needed to manage this change. The Bretton Woods conferees met the challenge in 1946 by creating a new set of global institutions. Today's world also needs institutional engineering of the same scale. The difference is that then there were no institutions in existence. They exist now and the World Bank is one of them. Kim Jim, the current president seems up to the task. **S**

Shahid Javed Burki is a renowned economist who has served as a Vice President of the World Bank and as caretaker Finance Minister of Pakistan.





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Eliminating Poverty

‘At the World Bank Group, our goal is to end extreme poverty in the world and we will not allow corruption to stand in the way.’

Excerpts from a speech by **Jim Yong Kim**, President, World Bank Group.

“All over the world, citizens are rising in protest against governments that are perceived as corrupt. Corruption poses an enormous obstacle to economic and social development and the global goal of ending extreme poverty by 2030, but we know that we can and must do much more to combat it.

“Corruption is, quite simply, stealing from the poor. It undermines growth and prosperity twice over – not only in the act of siphoning away resources from their intended purposes, but in the long-term effects of services not delivered – vaccines that are not received, school supplies that are not delivered, roads never built. In my travels around the world, I have seen the corrosive impact of corruption on the lives of the poor and the resulting sharp decline of trust that citizens have in their governments.


“It is now time to go further; governments, civil society, the private sector and international organizations should work on a new agenda that draws on citizens’ demands for transparency and accountability, an agenda that draws on all partners and available tools. It’s an agenda that builds on what we at the World Bank are calling ‘radical transparency’ which is both, a recognition of the inevitable global acceleration of a transparency that is being forced upon us and our own commitment to use this transparency to fight corruption more effectively.

“The publication of the Panama Papers reminds us of the rapid expansion and power of transparency; leading to calls to end tax havens for the very wealthy who hide their money from governments. There is no going backward. We must ensure that greater transparency will drive the prevention and uncovering of corruption in the years ahead. Looking forward, we stand ready to support emerging international agreements that will build standards

and systems that enhance the exchange of information between countries to avoid the illicit flow of funds.

“We must do more to get citizens and the private sector involved. While information is becoming more accessible, it is troubling that the space for citizens and non-state organizations to voice their objections is often diminishing. The death of activists, such as Berta Caceres, Nelson Garcia and so many others in Honduras, has had a chilling effect on accountability. We must do all we can to protect the defenders of transparency.

“We know that successful anti-corruption efforts must feature a broad coalition of leaders both inside and outside of government, working together. While the global dialogue on corruption has often focused on corruption in the developing world, recent events highlight the role of policies and practices in developed countries that enable corruption. Studies have demonstrated that ill-gotten assets are often sheltered in developed countries, which further impoverishes developing countries.

“At the World Bank Group, our goal is to end extreme poverty in the world and we will not allow corruption to stand in the way. We will rededicate ourselves to fighting the cancer of corruption and move ahead with urgency stop those who are stealing from the poor. This is both our moral duty and one of the best possible strategies for economic development.” 





‘International policy cooperation would be beneficial.’

‘Our governance structure needs to reflect more accurately the true weight of emerging markets in the global economy.’

Excerpts from an interview of Christine Lagarde,
Managing Director, International Monetary Fund

On the global economic situation:

Global growth remains moderate and uneven. Despite a boost from a decline in oil prices, we expect the world economy to grow by about 3.5% this year, picking up modestly next year to 3.7%.

The outlook differs across countries and regions. In advanced economies, growth has rebounded, such as in the

US and the UK. In the Euro Area and Japan’s domestic demand, especially credit to private sector and investment has yet to recover fully despite monetary easing.

In emerging markets and developing countries, growth is projected to pick up from less than 4.5% this year to a little more next year, but it’ll vary widely across countries. Among the emerging

markets, and compared to advanced economies, India is the bright spot.

On key risks facing the global economy:

One emanates from what I’ve called “asynchronous monetary policy” - normalizing monetary policy in the US while most others are increasing monetary stimulus. Even if this process is well-managed, it may result in excessive

'...we need broader policy dialogue among advanced economies and the emerging and developing countries; policymakers need to be aware of the spillovers their policies might create, as well as mindful of the potential spillbacks.'

financial markets volatility as investors reassess risk perception.

Second, emerging and developing economies could face a triple hit of a strengthening US dollar, higher global interest rates, and more volatile capital flows. A stronger dollar will impact financial systems in emerging markets because many banks and companies will have increased borrowings in dollars over five years. A further risk is that the Euro Area and Japan could remain trapped in a twilight zone of low growth and inflation. These "low-low conditions" would raise the risk of recession and deflation, because they'd make it harder for many countries to reduce high unemployment and high debt.

Finally, there are increased geopolitical risks. These points to the need for a powerful policy mix that can strengthen recovery and provide better employment perspectives for citizens worldwide.

On the impact of slowing Chinese growth:

China's moving to a slower but more sustainable growth path - in the range of 6½-7% growth. This is good for China and for the global economy. In the short run, slower growth may reduce growth in China's trading partners. However, this is a tradeoff worth making as by pursuing the right policies, China will secure higher income over the medium term. Higher income will mean China will import more, proving a welcome and lasting boost to global demand.

On the progress on quota reforms at the IMF:

The IMF is a global multilateral institution. Our governance structure needs to reflect more accurately the true weight of emerging markets in the global economy. We're working hard to achieve that - on implementing quota reforms.

On more coordination between global monetary authorities to prevent shocks:

I've emphasized the need to enhance global cooperation to

embrace new multilateralism. Clearly, international policy cooperation would be beneficial, as coordination problems can arise between countries. Advanced economies may need to tighten monetary policy sooner if stability becomes a concern. Such action may worsen financial problems elsewhere. There's scope for greater international policy collaboration to minimize negative spillovers. We've learnt important lessons from the "taper tantrum" episode in May 2013. First, advanced economies can help with effective communication concerning normalization of unconventional monetary policies, to reduce the risk of creating large market volatility.

Second, we need broader policy dialogue among advanced economies and the emerging and developing countries; policymakers need to be aware of the spillovers their policies might create, as well as mindful of the potential spillbacks. And finally, there's scope for multilateral action that'd provide insurance against key downside risks, supporting economies more affected by market or liquidity strains, including through the use of IMF resources.

On the BRICS Bank impacting other multilateral institutions:

Look at the trend: the share of emerging economies in global GDP will continue to increase, with much of the increase driven by BRICS, in particular China and India. We are optimistic about the prospects of the BRICS Development Bank and believe the new bank can be an important source for investment financing. It could play an instrumental role in addressing existing infrastructure gaps - a key constraint to growth in many BRICS economies. More generally, to the extent that new multilateral banks make decisions based on economic principles, and complement and coordinate with existing development banks, we'd view these new institutions as a welcome development. **S**

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Aqeel Karim Dhedhi
Chairman AKD Group,
Islamic Republic of Pakistan

"I fail to understand what the rulers and ministers in our country are trying to achieve by excessively praising or complimenting the World Bank in its effort to alleviate poverty and augment the condition of the poor lot. If the Bank has done a lot to eradicate poverty, why has the ground reality not changed yet? This is a big question which needs an answer.

"I agree that the World Bank programs are conceived and planned after a lot of research keeping in view the problems and specific requirements of each country. So there cannot be any doubt about the sincerity and impartiality of the Bank. But the problem is with the recipient countries. It is the lack of honesty, sincerity and will to work on their part which makes the World Bank efforts go waste.

"I'm confident that if the government functionaries sincerely and honestly implement the program initiated by the World Bank, there is no reason why every common man in the country will feel the change and give due compliments to the World Bank."



Abdul Rasheed Solangi
Secretary Labour
Sindh Government, Islamic
Republic of Pakistan

"There is not even an iota of doubt that the World Bank programs have brought positive changes in the developing countries of the world. But in a country like ours where corruption is rampant, a lot of complaints have been received in the fair and transparent implementation of the Bank's programs. So there is an urgent need to root out corruption to obtain desired results.

"Frankly speaking, the officials overseeing or looking after the World Bank projects instead of concentrating on the execution of the program spend time in arrangement of their foreign trips and acquiring personal benefits rather than concentrating on the accomplishment of the task assigned to them.

"For those attached with the projects, each dollar means a lot to them for when they convert it to Pakistani Rupees, they get 100 times more. So unless and until corruption is rooted out from the country, the dream of rooting out poverty from Pakistan will never be fulfilled.

"The same is true with the help and assistance we are getting from various other donors. In short, it is the governance and management of the funds which matters and not the volume of funds received."

Poverty Alleviation

The World Bank strives to improve the lives of the world's poor by galvanizing international and national support to end poverty globally within a generation and to promote 'shared prosperity.'

By S.G. Jilane

Though it is called "World Bank," but actually, it is more like a philanthropic institution than a typical commercial bank, because, its motto is "working for a world free of poverty." That is the goal it has been pursuing single-mindedly for 72 years since its founding in 1944. It gives loans to countries for 25-years plus a five-year grace period on soft terms.

Commercial banking is done by its sister organization, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which gives

loans against collateral and imposes conditions on the borrowing countries, requiring them "to correct their macroeconomic imbalances in the form of policy reform. If the conditions are not met, the funds are withheld."

The World Bank Group that includes the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and International Development Association (IDA) works only to extend financial assistance to countries purely

for poverty alleviation worldwide.

The institution claims that it wants to galvanize international and national support around two goals: to virtually end extreme poverty globally within a generation and to promote "shared prosperity." It has therefore established ambitious goals to increase the well-being of the poorer segments of society.

The World Bank has also contributed heavily to development in South Asia. In the current fiscal



year it has approved “\$7.9 billion for 38 projects, including \$2.1 billion in IBRD loans and \$5.8 billion in IDA commitments. The leading sectors were Water, Sanitation and Flood Protection (\$1.4 billion); Transportation (\$1.3 billion); and Public Administration, Law, and Justice (\$1.2 billion).”

The Bank’s strategy for South Asia focuses on regional integration, growth, social inclusion, climate and environmental management, improved governance and gender equality.

Its South Asia Regional Integration Programme “manages a portfolio of \$910 million in energy, trade and transport and wildlife conservation. The signature project is the Central Asia–South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project, which plans to bring surplus hydroelectric energy from the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan to energy-starved Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Mizoram State Roads II–Regional Transport Connectivity Project, which will improve road links between the state of Mizoram in India, Bangladesh and Myanmar, is yet another item in advancing the regional integration agenda.”

India: Because, infrastructure gaps in South Asia hinder growth and lead to poverty, the Bank “signed a \$1.1 billion agreement this fiscal year with the Indian government on a second loan for the Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor, a freight-only rail line,” to bridge this gap. The project will increase the speed and efficiency for the movement of raw materials and finished goods between northern and eastern India.

Pakistan: A \$500 million second single-tranche credit was approved to support the government of Pakistan’s growth-oriented reform programme. “This development policy credit will be so structured as to foster private and financial sector development, mobilize revenue and expand priority social spending.”

The Bank also approved \$50 million to improve skills training programs in priority growth sectors in Punjab. The project aims to improve the quality and labour market relevance of training programmes as well as access to training, with a focus on employability. An estimated 70,000 trainees will directly benefit from the project, of which at least 15 per cent will be women, according to a WB report. .

As of February, 2016, the World Bank Pakistan portfolio has 26 investment lending projects under implementation with a total net commitment of \$4.99 billion. To date,



it has committed over \$5.6 billion in Pakistan, including \$1.2 billion during the 2015 fiscal year.

The Bank’s Punjab Education Sector Project helps provide stipends to 380,000 female students in grades 6-8, free textbooks to all students in public schools, improved access to quality education for over 857,096 students – more than half of them are girls – in 1,768 low cost private schools, as well as capacity support to 54,000 school councils.

“During the last decade, primary enrolment has increased to more than 61 per cent, and lagging female student enrolment has improved so that 59 per cent girls now go to school in Punjab.”

World Bank funding has also helped provide 34 million free textbooks to more than 11 million students in the 2010-11 academic year, helped hire more than 200,000 new teachers since 2003 and improved the school infrastructure by adding toilets, boundary walls and new classrooms in the province.

In June this year the World Bank approved a \$200 million credit to strengthen the Balochistan government’s initiative for community-based water management for irrigation

in the province.

According to World Bank Country Director for Pakistan, Illango Patchamuthu, “The Balochistan Integrated Water Resources Management & Development Project is designed to boost farmer incomes through new irrigation infrastructure and improved on-farm management and rangeland management. An associated objective is building the province’s capacity for long-term water resources planning.”

The main project beneficiaries will be small and medium-holding farmers up to “49.4 acres,” engaged in irrigated agriculture. Approximately 42,800 farm households will benefit from the project. Moreover, the province’s hydro-meteorological monitoring and river basin information systems will also be strengthened.

Bangladesh: World Bank support to Bangladesh during the current fiscal year, included the approval of “\$1.1 billion for three projects: \$400 million in additional financing for the Third Primary Education Development Program, \$375 million for the Multipurpose Disaster Shelter Project and \$300 million for the Income Support Program for the Poorest Project. The projects will benefit almost 36 million

people by improving the quality of primary education, building coastal communities' resilience to natural disasters, and increasing the nutrition and cognitive development of children from the poorest households."

Nepal: For Nepal, the World Bank has been a God-sent. It responded swiftly to the earthquakes in April and May this year, which killed and injured thousands of people besides destroying and massively damaging homes, government buildings and cultural sites. "The Bank's support included participation in loss-and-damage assessment and the approval of \$100 million in budget support and strengthening the financial sector." In addition the World Bank approved "a credit of US\$ 55 million in August for the Government of Nepal to scale up its Road Sector Development Programme and address post-earthquake reconstruction needs, including the strengthening of the country's strategic road and bridge network."

Afghanistan: In Afghanistan, people in Kandahar are reaping the benefits of the construction of an IDA-funded all-weather road linking

The Bank's strategy for South Asia focuses on regional integration, growth, social inclusion, climate and environmental management, improved governance and gender equality.

their villages to the provincial capital. Previously uncultivable lands are now producing good harvests as a result of the reconstruction of an ancient irrigation canal, benefiting hundreds of families.

The Bank has also launched a "Targeting the Ultra Poor (TUP)" programme as a part of the Access to Finance Project in Afghanistan (AAFP). The TUP programme is supported by US\$50 million through the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank Group's fund for the poorest countries. Since 2015 the TUP programme "has provided assistance to 6,725 families." It provides beneficiaries a three-year

package of inputs, including the transfer of productive assets (such as livestock); training (classroom and practical work); a subsistence support (monthly stipend as short-term income support); and basic healthcare through community-based health workers. Meanwhile, the scheme of raising livestock enables the ultra-poor rural families to earn their livelihood.

With such success stories, the Bank seems poised to achieve its goal of "ending extreme poverty within a generation." ■

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





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STAY AHEAD

Uphill Task

Poverty alleviation is a daunting mission that the poor countries must tackle with prudence to get out of the debt trap. Successful nations are those that avoid the aid dependency syndrome and rely on their own resources.

By Dr. Moonis Ahmar

When the Second World War was still underway, on July 1, 1944, a conference participated in by allied powers was held in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire to discuss the post-war financial and monetary system. It was at that conference that the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (later renamed as the World Bank) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were established as the two major global financial institutions to deal with monetary and financial issues which were expected to emerge after the end of the Second World War.

According to Key Concepts of

International Relations “like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank is a product of the Bretton Wood. Originally called the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), it commenced operation in 1946 with a membership of 38 states, including the United States, Britain, and France. The initial task for the Bank was to provide loans to the shattered economies of Europe. During the 1950s and 1960s, as Europe began to recover from the Second World War, the Bank turned its attention to Africa, Asia and Latin America, offering loans, guarantees, technical assistance, investment advice and political risk management to middle-

income countries seeking to modernize and develop.” The International Development Association (IDA) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) were the two other post-second world war institutions established to influence the global economy by the victorious allied powers namely the United States, Britain and France. The management of the World Bank is composed of Board of Directors with members primarily from the rich and advanced countries.

Since 1944 till today, the World Bank is known for disbursing large-scale loans, particularly to the poor countries of the Third World and its main goal is to help alleviate poverty in developing



and least developing countries. Furthermore, the bank is involved in mega project financing like dams and powerhouses. Yet, the World Bank is criticized for its failure to deal with issues which cause and deepen poverty and social backwardness in the Third World, including South Asia. Why were the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa lured into the debt trap of World Bank and IMF? Why did the leadership of these countries opt for the aid dependency syndrome instead of pursuing a policy of self-reliance? Is the challenge of poverty alleviation the task of the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the IMF and other multilateral aid giving agencies or is the responsibility of those who are at the helm of affairs for poor countries? These are the questions which are raised when one tries to analyze the role of the World Bank in the area of poverty alleviation.

Poverty alleviation is an uphill task but not an impossible one. Successful nations are those which avoid the aid dependency syndrome and rely on their own resources, particularly human resource. Except the war devastated countries of Europe where the Marshall Aid program was launched under the auspices of the United States, the disbursement of aid, particularly in the Third World by the western aid-giving agencies and banks, was primarily done to deepen the culture of aid and dependence. As a result, the majority of the Third World countries which have been the recipients of loans and aid from the World Bank, IMF and Asian Development Bank, are still poor and lower middle-income countries.

Unfortunately, the leaderships of many post-colonial states favoured a shortcut to get hard cash in order to run governmental expenditures and pay for imports by venturing on borrowing. As a result, the total debt of the Third World vis-à-vis the World Bank and other multilateral aid giving agencies is more than \$3 trillion. According to Pobreza e Metas de Desenvolvimento, in an article 'Poverty and the Millennium Development Goals,' "Poverty has been defined variously at different times in different countries. The definition used by the World Bank is stark - "people who live on US \$1 per day." According to this definition, in 2001, one billion people lived in poverty with consumption levels of US\$1 or less per day, and 2.7 billion on less than US \$2 per day. Now that more than half the world's population is living in cities, urban poverty is presenting a challenge in most developing countries. Within the physical environment of deprivation, there develops a culture of poverty with its prevalence of disease,

social disruption, violence in the home and outside and dependence on drugs and alcohol. In the mindset of the urban poor, risk taking behaviour is common."

However, two major countries of Asia, the Peoples Republic of China and India pursued a policy of self-reliance instead of plunging into the aid dependency syndrome. For at least the first five decades since the Communist Revolution of October 1949, the Peoples Republic of China formulated a policy to rely on its own resources. Although, for the first decade since the communist revolution, the Soviet Union helped Communist China in a big way for its infrastructure development and industrialization, the Chinese leadership decided to rely on its own resources till the time it was able to stand on its own feet. India, since emerging as an independent state on August 15, 1947 discouraged unnecessary imports and foreign aid because its leadership realized that aid addiction will weaken its foundations and result in permanent dependency.

As stated by Pobreza e Metas de Desenvolvimento in 'Poverty and the Millennium Development Goals,' "in the developing world several countries have created their own anti-poverty programmes. The first country to demonstrate that vast numbers can be rescued from chronic hunger was China. Early reports of visitors to China describing declining infant mortality, elimination of under-nutrition, improving longevity and coverage with health services including immunization using innovative methods, were first discounted as propaganda and only later caught the imagination of the rest of the world. India, with one of the largest populations of the poor, had established fair price grain shops at affordable prices as far back as the 1970s. Later, as the economy improved the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) was commenced in 1975 with the stated objective of reducing child malnutrition and morbidity/mortality among the rural and urban poor. Brazil took the lead in immunization coverage by nominating National Immunization Days."

There are also countries like Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and many ASEAN members where the focus was not on seeking more and more aid and loans but to modernize their infrastructure, industrialization and technological advancement through foreign investment and good governance. Unfortunately, the problem of Pakistan since its inception as a new state till today is two-fold. First, its sustained dependency on foreign aid and loans and second its inability to pursue a policy of self-reliance.

As a result, Pakistan is in continuous clutches of the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the IMF and other multilateral aid-giving agencies. Such aid and loan-giving agencies should not be criticized for plunging Pakistan in the vicious cycle of debt but the policies of successive regimes are to be held responsible for the country's endless economic predicament.

With a population of around 200 million people and more than one-third of the people living below the poverty line, the political economy of Pakistan has a dismal record and future prospects. Around 25 million children in Pakistan are out of school; more than one-third of the population is without proper food nutrition and access to clean and safe drinking water. Illiteracy and social backwardness tend to further galvanize the challenge of poverty escalation in Pakistan. Unfortunately, instead of relying on human resource by investing heavily on education, health and other areas of social and human development, the bulk of resources in Pakistan are consumed either for defence expenditures or for paying debts. Whatever is left is then used for running the administration of the country. With 22 billion dollars of exports and 45 billion dollars of imports, the country's trade gap has swelled and is either met with the help of foreign remittances of around 20 billion dollars or borrowed from external sources.

In 1999, when General Musharraf came to power, the country's external debt was 35 billion dollars; now it is more than 70 billion dollars. When the PPP government came to power following the February 2008 elections, not only foreign exchange reserves dwindled but the gap in income and expenditure also widened, forcing the government to borrow from the IMF and other multilateral aid/loan giving agencies. Likewise, after the May 2013 elections, when the PML government came to power, it faced a serious financial crisis and went to the IMF for a bailout package of \$ 7.5 billion.

Nevertheless, the challenge of poverty alleviation in Pakistan and other South Asian countries cannot be met by seeking loans from the World Bank or other multilateral sources, but by cutting unnecessary expenditures, curtailing imports, increasing exports, controlling rampant corruption and improving the mode of governance. Otherwise, the future will not be different from the past. ■

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



And Poverty Continues

Poverty has been greatly reduced over the past decade but millions of people around the world still need to be pulled out from telling conditions. Armed conflicts around the globe are one major reason why the people's quality of life is not improving.

By Dr. Mohammad Anwar Butt



The ambition of the world community to “end extreme poverty in all forms by 2030” is the top agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as Global Development Goals that came into force on January 01, 2016. Built on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the SDGs were formulated in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which more than 150 leaders of the world adopted at the Sustainable Development Summit held in September 2015 at the United Nations. During the conference, it was noted that hunger has been cut in half in the last 15 years though 800 million people around the world are living on less than US\$ 1.25 and are yet to be pulled out from extreme poverty by 2030 (SDGs 1, No Poverty). Out of the said number, 399 million, 40% of the world's poor, are living in South Asia (WB Annual Report 2015).

What is poverty?

The definition of poverty, according to Encyclopedia Britannica (2008) is:

“The state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions.”

The Oxford Dictionary defines poverty as “the state of being extremely poor.”

The World Bank terms people living on less than US\$ 2 per day as moderately poor and those living on less than US\$ 1.25 as extremely poor. It describes poverty as hunger, lack of shelter, being sick and not being able to see a doctor, unemployment, fear of the future and living one day at a time (Poverty Home, WB).

South Asia and Development

Although economic growth in South Asia was the fastest (between 6.9% in 2014 and 7.1% in 2015), yet 200 million people are still living in slums and about 100 million are without electricity. Many countries of the region are suffering from extreme forms of social exclusion, infrastructure gaps and increase in inequality (UNDP, South Asia Region). To combat extreme poverty the World Bank (WB) is operating in 3,085 locations of 9 countries of South Asia with 243 projects amounting to US\$ 49.78 billion. The current areas of focus are regional integration, economic growth, social inclusion, climate and environmental management,

governance and gender equality. The detail of WB interventions in the region from 2006 onwards includes:

For the Fiscal Year 2015, the WB approved 38 projects for the region totaling US\$ 7.9 billion including US\$ 2.1 billion International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) loans and US\$ 5.8 billion International Development Association (IDA) commitments (WB Annual Report 2015).

Status of Poverty in South Asia

According to Asian Development Bank (ADB): In spite of efforts made to alleviate poverty from South Asia, in Afghanistan, 39.1% of the population, in Bangladesh, 31.5% of the population, in Bhutan, 12% of the population, in India, 21.9% of the population, in the Maldives, 15% of the population, in Nepal, 25.2% of the population, in Pakistan, 12.4% of the population and in Sri Lanka, 6.7% of the population live below the national poverty line. The cleft between lower class and upper class is increasing and the region indicates a two-class society only i.e. poor and rich. The middle class, the possible conduit for change, is fast vanishing from the

No	Country	Projects	Amount in US\$ billion	Locations
1	Afghanistan	31	6.36	314
2	Bhutan	03	0.43	15
3	Bangladesh	40	9.61	552
4	India	94	24.42	1,468
5	Maldives	03	0.17	18
6	Nepal	22	1.51	292
7	Pakistan	32	5.34	235
8	Sri Lanka	13	1.73	163
9	SA Regional Integration	05	0.21	28
	Total	243	49.78	3,085

(Source: Global Reach Map, Region South Asia, WB Web)

region.

What to do?

More and more people are falling into extreme poverty due to armed conflicts which are of a domestic nature or have been initiated by the international new geopolitical constellation in the region. This fact has also been underlined during the formulation of the 2030 Agenda where it was indicated that the regions with instability and security issues due to armed conflicts are more poverty ridden and lacking in social development in comparison to other regions of the world.

Therefore, enhanced serious efforts have to be made by the international development partners operating in South Asia to overcome the hurdles in the way of peace, harmony and stability. It may create a peaceful and conducive working environment which is a prerequisite for effective and sustainable development. Bridging the gaps between the countries through the World Bank's "South Asia Regional Integration" approach is a step in the right direction and will be helpful in achieving SDG 1 i.e. "end extreme poverty in all forms by 2030" in South Asia.

Some World Bank projects which strengthen the interregional cooperation are Central Asia-South Asia Electricity Transmission & Trade Project, Nepal-India Electricity Transmission & Trade Project, Nepal-India Regional Trade & Transport Project, Mizoram Roads II Regional Connectivity Project and Strengthening Regional Cooperation in Wildlife Protection Programme.

Some common factors which slow down/dilute serious efforts of the international development partners to reduce poverty in the region pertain to:

International Development Partners

- Inconsistent or lower than required follow up by the international development partners for push up/hand holding and other supports, etc. to implementing agencies (government departments)

Governments

- Procedural issues (rules, regulations, hierarchy approval process, etc.)
- Lack of understanding among government officials of international development partner requirements (procurement and financial reporting in particular);
- Non-sensitization over safeguards (social, environmental and gender); which is very sensitive for development partners.
- Non-compliance of covenants agreed in Financing Agreement that includes delays in PC-I approval, matching government contribution, establishing Project Management Units (PMU), appointment and procurement of key staff and consultancy services, development of operational manuals, etc.

Given this backdrop, the International Development Partners, including the World Bank, together with governments of the region have to seek out new ways and means of international cooperation to overcome the barriers, some of them cited in the foregoing, in the way of sustainable development and subsequently poverty alleviation. **S**

The writer is a PhD from the Gerhard-Mercator University, Duisburg, Germany. His areas of interest are Community Development, Governance, Capacity Building, Institutional Development, Research and Education.



Salik Majeed

Senior Journalist

"Though there is no denying the fact that the World Bank has done a lot for eradicating poverty from the planet, the fact remains that the Third World has not yet come out of this menace. However, we must understand that the World Bank alone cannot accomplish this gigantic task. In fact, we require collective help and assistance from all other organizations working under the umbrella of the UN, NGOs and support from the developed countries of the world.

"It is interesting to note that in our part of the world the common belief is that the World Bank supports us only to control our economy and the so-called massive funding to make our country stand on her feet is a mere illusion. The fact remains that with all the funding from the Bank, a brute majority of our people could only afford to barely survive.

"A section of the enlightened ones, on the other hand believe that the World Bank and other donor agencies want to do a lot. But religious extremism and regional conflicts keep donor agencies at bay. Therefore, to drive maximum benefit from this external help and assistance, we have to sort out our internal issues first."



Mehboob ul Haq

Managing Director


Sindh Enterprise Development Fund, Finance Department, Sindh Government, Islamic Republic of Pakistan

"The efforts made by the World Bank to alleviate poverty and to reduce debts of poor countries are some significant initiatives that cannot be undermined. Their intervention in developing countries has most definitely brought about a positive change in the current world scenario.

"However, there is still a great deal of effort required to overcome this menace in order to reach those remaining in extreme poverty.

"This is mainly due to the reason that in our part of the world, those who have been able to evacuate themselves from this vicious cycle fail to find a permanent solution due to uncertain economic shocks, food insecurity and floods that threaten to rob them of their hard-earned gains and force them back into poverty. Therefore, it is very critical to find ways to tackle these issues, as we make progress towards 2030.

"Due to the complexity of the situation, the World Bank alone is not responsible for the state of affairs; it is crucial for the government to also play a vital role. In order to achieve these goals, the World Bank and the government must work closely to develop sound policies to mitigate poverty and raise the overall standard of living of the country."



Education for All

The World Bank's plan to reform and promote education on a global scale is backed by necessary funding. For effective implementation of its education goals in Pakistan, the World Bank suggests that the government must make at least one year of pre-primary education compulsory.

By Khawaja Amer

The World Bank's Education Strategy is to achieve the target of Education for All (EFA) by 2020. To achieve this, the Bank is channeling its efforts in two strategic directions: transformation of education systems at the country level and introduction of a high-quality knowledge base for education reforms at the global level. These efforts will focus on increasing accountability and serve as a complement to providing inputs. Simultaneously, at the regional and global levels, the Bank will help in developing new methods to guide education reform, such as the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER).

The World Bank Report says that just one third of countries have so far been able to achieve all of the measurable EFA goals set in 2000. Only half of all countries have achieved the most watched goal of universal primary enrolment. A recently published UNESCO report showing its concern says, "In order to achieve the new

education targets now being set for the year 2030 future targets for education must be specific, relevant and realistic. At current rates, only half of all children in low-income countries are expected to complete lower secondary education by 2030. In many countries even the core goal of achieving universal primary education will remain out of reach without concerted efforts."

Pakistan's Minister of State for Education and Professional Training, Baligh-ur-Rehman is of the view that the EFA-set goals are of immense importance for our policymakers, educationists and civil society that helps in identifying key lessons and recommendations for improving the education standards in our country. He admitted that it was unfortunate that millions of children were still out of school in Pakistan and that most of the EFA targets were not achieved. However, he reaffirmed the government's commitment for improving the quality of education and maintaining steady progress in achieving the defined

targets. Referring to the government's national plan of action declared in 2013, he said that it was a significant step towards improving education with the help of all the provinces and federal units.

For effective implementation of the EFA in a country like Pakistan, the World Bank suggests that governments should make at least one year of pre-primary education compulsory. Education must be free for all, which means parents will not have to pay anything for tuition, textbooks, school uniforms and transport. Policymakers should identify and prioritize skills to be acquired by the end of each class. Education policies should link up with the needs of communities. Teacher training should be improved to include gender focused strategies. Teaching styles should better reflect student needs and the variety of classroom contexts. It also suggests that the international community, in partnership with countries, must find the means to bridge the US\$22 billion annual finance gap for quality pre-

primary and basic education for all by 2030.

Referring to bridge the gap of annual financing, private institution owners suggest the initiatives for public-private partnership. They argue that the provision of schooling is largely provided and financed by governments. However, due to unmet demand for education coupled with shrinking government budgets, the public sector in several parts of the world is developing innovative partnerships with the private sector. Private education encompasses a wide range of providers, including for-profit schools (that operate as enterprises), non-profit schools run by NGOs, publicly-funded schools operated by private boards and community-owned schools. In other words, there is a market for education.

The main rationale for public-private partnership (PPP) programmes is the potential role of the private sector for expanding equitable access and improving learning outcomes. In low-income countries, excess demand for schooling results in private supply when the state cannot afford schooling for all. By providing demand-side financing and contracting private organizations to provide support services, governments can provide better choices to parents and grant them an opportunity to fully participate in their children's schooling. The education market highlights the importance of effective regulatory frameworks and contractual instruments to ensure quality and effective use of public resources.

Supporting the idea, the Director Programmes, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi, Baela Raza Jamil said that in spite of many efforts by the government and civil society to collectively upgrade the education sector, the education indicators failed to add up to a picture of a glass half full. "To reverse this, it is imperative that partnerships between the government and non-state actors are matched by coherence, upgraded norms of quality learning facilities, post-primary opportunities and, above all, progressively higher financing of education."

Though Pakistan has made significant progress in closing the gender gap, particularly in the early years after 2000, it failed to achieve any of the EFA goals set in 2000 with measurable targets. When the goals were set, there were 68 girls enrolled for 100 boys in Pakistan. By 2007, there were 83 girls but this only increased to 87 by 2012, which is undoubtedly a matter of concern and requires immediate measures.

A World Bank report says that except Pakistan and a few other countries, 69 per cent countries will achieve gender parity at the primary level by 2015, whereas only 48 per cent countries will reach the goal at the secondary level. Pakistan has not been able to achieve the desired gender ratio because of early marriage of girls followed by early pregnancy. On the other hand, the numbers of pupils per teacher has also decreased and 4 million more teachers are still needed to get all children into school. Trained teachers remain in short supply in one third of countries; in several sub-Saharan African countries, less than 50 per cent are trained.

The report also indicates that since 2000, many governments significantly increased their spending on education: 38 countries increased their commitment to education by one percentage point or more of GNP. In Pakistan, spending on education fell from 2.6 per cent of GNP to 2 per cent. Therefore, Pakistan is far from reaching the goal of achieving universal primary education and achieving a 50 per cent reduction in levels of adult illiteracy.

Director UNESCO Vibeke Jensen in a recent presentation discussing the budget allocation for education emphasizes the need to focus on what needs to be done urgently to make sure we reach the goals as fast as possible. She stresses that plans for achieving new goals will need to be set including ensuring of the implementation of government commitment to raise the share for education from 2 per cent to 4 per cent of GDP.

Since at times, countries fail to measure their respective achievements, the UNESCO's Institute for Statistics (UIS) has been tasked to develop a set of global indicators for learning outcomes, and then working with countries to promote their use in monitoring the progress of education. It is believed if this initiative establishes clear, measurable targets for literacy and numeracy; it could play a key role in shifting global attention towards learning.

The World Bank is one of the largest external education financiers for developing countries, managing a portfolio of over \$14 billion, with operations in 76 countries. The World Bank supports education through an average of \$3 billion a year in new financing. The Bank helps countries achieve their education goals through finance and knowledge activities in the form of analytic work, policy advice and technical assistance.

One of the main missions of the

World Bank is to help improve, among its clients and other development partners, knowledge of what shapes education outcomes and results; to better understand how to strengthen the linkages of the education system with the labour market and to build and support a network of economists and specialists who are interested in collectively addressing the challenges of the education sector.

Keeping in view this mission of the World Bank, the Sindh Chief Minister has recently approached the Bank for support and assistance. "World Bank has played an important role in the development of education, health, agriculture and infrastructure sectors in Sindh. Therefore, the urge for development of Sindh has brought me here at the WB Country office," said Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah while talking to WB Country Director Illang Patchamuthu at his Islamabad Office.

The Chief Minister also confirmed that the total development portfolio of the World Bank in Sindh was \$1.14 billion which included education, health, irrigation, agriculture and skill development. Presently two World Bank projects in the education sector, a \$66 million special grant for missing facilities and another \$400 million for the Sindh Education Reform Program, are in progress.

Though Murad Ali Shah's commitment and efforts to accord top priority to education is definitely very encouraging, it seems to be far from reality as mere allocation of a budget for education is not enough; it requires systematic planning, careful monitoring and maintenance of financial discipline to achieve the desired results. It is a shocking fact that though, in the fiscal year 2014-15, about 22 per cent of the overall budget in Sindh was allocated to the education sector, only Rs11.52 billion was actually utilized out of the total allocation of Rs33 billion. The Sindh education department failed to make use of even half of the budget which is an indicator of the non-serious attitude of the education bosses.

Here it is pertinent to mention that mere allocation of funds will not serve the purpose unless transparent and judicial utilization is ensured. Some Rs160.7 billion was allocated for education in fiscal year 2016-2017. This is the largest chunk of the current budget i.e. 28 percent. Almost a quarter (24pc) of Sindh's children aged between 6 and 16 are out of school; of the remaining 76 percent, 55 percent of class-V students cannot read class-II level Urdu text and only 24 percent can



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Muhammad Waseem

Additional Chief Secretary,
Sindh Government, Islamic
Republic of Pakistan

"The World Bank has done a lot for poverty alleviation, In fact, it was primarily established with a view to help, assist and support countries requiring funds to solve their basic problems like combating with natural calamities and rehabilitation of displaced persons besides managing funds for exploration of natural resources and rebuilding of infrastructure.

"The Government of Sindh is undoubtedly one of the beneficiaries of World Bank funding. The help and assistance provided by the Bank for rehabilitating the flood victims, reinforcement of Guddu and Sukkur Barrages and effective irrigation system has helped a lot in improving the conditions of the rural areas where 70 percent of our population lives.

"On the other hand the Bank funding helped the Sindh Government a great deal in arranging nutritious food for pregnant women resulting in massive reduction in the child mortality rate. Such help in fact means a lot, because the direct beneficiaries are poor people.

"The Bank's support in developing the agriculture sector of Sindh cannot be undermined. Massive increase in the per acre yield of dates and other fruits in Sindh has been possible with the cooperation of the World Bank."



M. Ali Khoso

Additional Secretary
P&D, Sindh Government,
Islamic Republic of Pakistan

"In today's world, where humanity is facing enormous challenges, the most pressing challenge is poverty.

The World Bank has made tremendous contributions toward fighting this menace. Its intervention in developing countries includes re-structuring governance, supporting developing economies and providing social safety nets to the poor households.

"In the coming years, every developing nation has an effective partner ready to free the people of the world from the shackles of poverty and that is the World Bank.

"In Pakistan, especially in the province of Sindh, the World Bank is an important development partner for improvement in agriculture and livestock sectors, the backbone of our rural economy. Moreover, it is supplemented by its Barrages Improvement Project. This is a two-pronged, or rather, a three-pronged strategy to alleviate poverty and augment poor rural households."



comprehend written English. While that pretty much sums up the 'quality of education', the infrastructural side remains equally bleak; 52 percent public and 40 percent private primary schools in rural Sindh still do not have functional washrooms; 33 percent private primary schools and 41 percent government primary schools also do not have boundary walls. This shows that the problem is not of money or budget but of governance.

The Chief Minister must also ensure that the education budget is utilized in improving the learning environment in classrooms and other measures are taken to improve the quality of education. He can take assistance from the World Bank's cutting-edge research and guidance on education for policymaking. In Angola, the World Bank's analysis of the education system helped pave the way for large-scale reforms in student assessment. It also helped in result-based financing of education.

Like parents in developed countries, parents in the Third World also want their children to succeed at school, but the obstacles in just getting them enrolled are enormous. Even though schools are free, the books and clothes required expensive and parents simply cannot afford the expenses of educating a child. On the other hand, the salary paid to school teachers is not enough to run a household in the midst of the high cost of living, which is the cause of the frustrating output of school teachers in Pakistan. In order to make both ends meet, teachers start giving tuitions at home and these continue

late. Some even muster the energy to give tuitions on weekends. As a result, they get so exhausted that they cannot take classes at school with full devotion. Unfortunately, the World Bank's education initiatives have no solution for such problems.

Another shocking revelation is that there are over 40,000 ghost teachers and 5,229 ghost schools in Sindh, which eats up quite a large share of the province's Rs. 145.02 billion education budget. In this backdrop, one of the biggest challenges for Murad Ali Shah would be to eliminate all ghost schools and remove the ghost teachers. Moreover, all those responsible for this menace in the Sindh Education Department must be severely punished so that the malady is stopped forthwith. Unless this corruption in the education sector is not controlled, any yearly increase in the education budget will not make any difference. When such measures are adopted and money is saved, it can be utilized for revising the salary structure of the teachers because at present it is simply miserable. Despite the nature of their job and their importance in society, government school teachers are still receiving very low salaries. The minimum basic salary of a schoolteacher is only Rs 3,530 per month while the highest basic salary is Rs 6,060. Such poor factors are a major cause for the declining standards of teaching at government schools. ❏

*The writer is a member
of the staff and a veteran
journalist.*



How South Asian countries are faring

South Asia shows resilience in the face of turbulent international markets and remains the fastest-growing region in the world, with economic growth forecast to gradually accelerate from 7.1 percent in 2016 to 7.3 percent in 2017, according to a World Bank report.

However, many South Asian countries show potential for accelerated growth in the short to medium term. The tailwinds of high levels of remittances coupled with low oil prices may be slowing down so countries should be well prepared for a more difficult global environment.

The World Bank's assessment of some South Asian countries is as follows:

In Afghanistan, persisting uncertainty around the security and political environment has hindered business activities and overall domestic demand. Growth is expected to only marginally increase from 1.9 percent in 2016 to 2.9 percent in 2017. Fiscal vulnerabilities remain high and will require a large revenue effort and sustained levels of aid. Future prospects hinge critically on improvements in security tapping into new sources of economic growth and creating an enabling environment for the private sector to invest.

In Bangladesh, growth is stable and projected to rise due to increased government consumption and investment, recovery in private investments and easing of regulatory and infrastructure constraints. The country should be cautious about trade and financial shocks. It should strive to boost private investment by reforming business regulations, mitigating infrastructure deficiencies and addressing financial sector weaknesses.

In Bhutan the economy is expected to gain momentum with the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) expected to grow at 6.8 percent in 2017 compared to 6.7 percent in 2016. This solid performance is driven by new hydropower investments, government consumption, and spending. Bhutan runs a large current account deficit of which half is related to hydropower. Private sector development and asset diversification are keys to reducing vulnerability to donor finance and addressing rising youth unemployment.

In India, GDP growth is expected to be 7.7 percent in 2017 compared to 7.5 percent in 2015 supported by a rebound in agriculture and stimulus from civil service pay reforms. However, delays in the adoption and implementation of key reforms could affect investor sentiment. Favourable overall trends mask important underlying divergences: between urban and agricultural households; between domestic and external demand; and between public and private capital expenditure, which should be addressed.

In the Maldives, GDP growth is expected to be modest at 3.5 percent in 2016 and 3.9 percent in 2017. Forecasts have been dragged down by a slowdown in tourism arrivals, especially from China and Russia. Fiscal consolidation and more sequencing of the investment projects is needed to contain the level of public debt. Youth unemployment with

skill mismatch and lack of local economic opportunities are a cause for concern.

In Nepal, the economy experienced a major shock with cross-border trade disruptions. This reduced economic activity, lowering growth prospects to 1.7 percent in 2016 compared to 3.4 percent in 2015. Disruptions increased inflation to double digits, affecting the welfare of the poor and vulnerable, while reducing revenue collection and slowing reconstruction efforts. Normalization is expected by the end of 2016, leading to a strong rebound in 2017 with GDP expected to grow by 5.8 percent.

In Pakistan, growth is projected to accelerate modestly from 4.5% in 2016 to 4.8% in 2017, supported by growing industry and services and greater investment as well as buoyed by low oil prices and substantial remittances. Sustained and inclusive growth with further acceleration will require tackling pervasive power cuts, a cumbersome business environment, and low access to finance through the successful implementation of tax and energy reforms.

In Sri Lanka, economic growth is expected to grow at 5.3 percent in 2016 and 2017 driven by increased public investment and postponed investments in 2015. The challenging global environment has taken a toll on the economy with reduced exports and remittances and significant capital outflows, leaving the country with higher public debt, lower reserves and rising inflation. ■

Global Economic Forecast 2016

- Global growth in 2016 is projected at 2.4 percent, unchanged from last year's disappointing pace, and 0.5 percentage point below January forecasts.
- Advanced economies will again see mediocre growth this year. Emerging markets and developing economies (EMDEs) are facing persisting headwinds.
- Commodity exporters continue to struggle to adapt to persistently low prices, while importers are so far showing greater resilience.
- Downside risks to growth have become more pronounced since the start of the year and policy uncertainty has increased.
- While the capacity for monetary and fiscal stimulus has narrowed, structural reforms could boost growth in the short- and long-term.

Silkbank plans to revolutionise banking in Pakistan

SILKBANK (formerly Saudi Pak Commercial Bank Limited) is a growing and innovative mid-sized bank with a strong focus on consumer and retail banking. The bank was acquired in 2008 by a consortium of investors.

Silkbank's vision and mission portray our philosophy. Our "Vision" is to be the "Benchmark of Excellence in Premier Banking" and our "Mission" is "To be the leader in premier banking, trusted by our customers for accessibility, service and innovation, be an employer of choice creating value for all stakeholders". The bank has always stood steadfast to the vision and mission, and is continually striving to take on a premier position. Our aim is to be the preferred bank for our target market through supreme service and an innovative suite of financial/banking solutions. The bank is working on adding more innovative products especially on the Islamic side to the already existing bouquet of our product offering.

Silkbank is well positioned in the market as an upscale premium bank providing high level of customer service with 88 branches in 33 cities. We have the widest product menu amongst the small to medium sized banks in the country. Our product offerings include retail, corporate & investment banking, SME, consumer and Islamic banking. Silkbank has both credit and debit cards, a collection of innovative deposit products and consumer loans including personal loans as well as a revolving credit/running finance facility. The bank also offers a mortgage-based SME lending facility and a host of other SME and middle market banking products.

Silkbank is the pioneer of a zero per cent APR credit card, besides being the only bank to have on its menu a daily profit payout savings account brand named "Munafa Rozana." Silkbank ready line, a running finance facility, is ostensibly the most preferred unsecured loan product in the market, with a significant growth rate. Our Islamic Banking Division, Emaan Islamic Banking, also has a presence across the country, offering a variety of Shariah-compliant products.

Being renowned for innovation, Silkbank keeps itself abreast on the technology platform. The bank has already released mobile application to offer complete banking experience in a new style and has an efficient and stable internationally acclaimed core banking system. We are about to launch branchless banking services also. Moreover, the bank intends to increase its presence on social media and engage in various digital marketing activities.

Silkbank has strategically chalked out its path for 2016 and onwards. To begin with, we intend further improving on our already high-quality service standards to give our customers a 'wow' experience. Silkbank plans to add 60 new branches in 2016 to the existing network and another 200 plus branches in the next two years. This should take the total distribution to 250 branches by the end of 2018. Most of the new branches will be dedicated to Islamic banking to cater to the rising demand for Islamic banking. This increase in branch footprint will enhance Islamic banking business solicitation, thus enabling it to grow its balance sheet size rapidly.

Silkbank practices an open-door policy and maintains a

culture which fosters open communication between staff and their line managers. We also have a whistle-blowing policy aimed at empowering staff to highlight any wrongdoing, besides having a strict policy for protection against harassment, to create a friendly and conducive work environment.

Our quest is to make Silkbank a dynamic and efficient organisation. In the coming years, Silkbank will build on its strengths and reflect strong revenue growth momentum. The bank will continue to optimise expenses through greater synergies and re-engineering of processes through higher efficiency and productivity.

Silkbank declared an operating profit of Rs.889mn for the half year ended June 30, 2016. The bank's profit before tax of Rs.536mn for the half year reflects a significant increase of 441 per cent compared to the same period last year.

Having become fully capital-compliant by end of last year, the bank is now steadily improving its profitability through a well thought-out business strategy for 2016 and beyond. **S**

Yes we can!

Silkbank has emerged as a benchmark of service excellence maintaining an upscale image and positioning. Our foremost focus remains our customers for whom we endeavor to provide innovative financial solutions.

Silkbank provides the widest product menu amongst its peer banks with product offerings to retail customers, small to medium sized businesses as well as corporates. We now also have on our menu Islamic banking products and investment banking services.

With the current business momentum and an attitude of providing exceptional service quality, Silkbank is all set to live up to its Vision of being "A Benchmark of Excellence in Premier Banking".



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Yes we can

A Comedy of Errors

The Indians congratulated themselves on conducting ‘surgical strikes’ against Pakistan whereas these were nothing more than cross-border firing incidents along the Line of Control in Kashmir.

By Javed Ansari

On the night between September 28 and 29, a number of cross-border firing incidents occurred on the Line of Control in Kashmir. India referred to these incidents as “surgical strikes.” The Indians had been talking about surgical strikes against Pakistan ever since the attack at the Uri brigade headquarters in Kashmir on September 18. The Pakistan Army dismissed the so-called surgical strikes as simply ‘an illusion ... deliberately generated by India to create false effects.’

India’s director general of military operations, Lt. Gen. Ranbir Singh

claimed that on the basis of receiving specific and credible inputs that some terrorist teams had positioned themselves at launch pads along the Line of Control to carry out infiltration and conduct terrorist strikes inside Jammu and Kashmir and in various metros in other states, the Indian army had conducted surgical strikes at several of these launch pads to pre-empt infiltration by terrorists.

India provided few details of the operation but it was said the “surgical strikes” consisted of a heliborne unit and Special Forces that infiltrated the

LoC and conducted assaults on the suspected terrorist launch pads that were two to three km beyond the LoC inside Pakistan. Pakistani defence analysts questioned the veracity of the claim, saying that if the Indian forces had moved into Pakistan-controlled territory, how did they manage to get out after the strikes, since Pakistan is in a constant state of war and its armed forces are always on the alert. How was it possible that if the Indian Army personnel had entered Pakistani territory to conduct the ‘surgical strikes,’ the Pakistan Army did not come to know



about it and failed to take necessary action?

The defence analysts even questioned the very capability of the Indian forces to launch such a sophisticated and coordinated attack. They said that surgical strikes can be conducted through airborne or artillery-based precision guided equipment or ground-based assaults, both of which require sophisticated intelligence collection, platforms to conduct the strikes and surveillance of target sites.

A cross-border air raid by either helicopters or drones would also be very difficult for India as Pakistan has an incredibly impressive air defence system. Pakistan-controlled Kashmir is a high threat area and any air operation over the territory would be under the cover of advanced weapon systems.

India's mischievousness is a continuing narrative. Some days before the cross-border firing episode, India's Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj addressed the United Nations General Assembly (September 26) and said Kashmir was an "integral part of India." The Pakistan Foreign Office wanted to know, and rightly so, that if Kashmir was an 'integral part of India,' then why was it on the agenda of the Security Council? This was tantamount to the Indian External Affairs Minister disowning the UN Security Council resolutions. It was also pointed out that the Indian minister's reference to Balochistan in her speech was a violation of UN principles and international law and indicated a continuous admission by India of its involvement in subversive activities in Pakistan.

India's current strategic position looks wobbly at best because its two biggest neighbours, China and Pakistan, with which it has fought wars, are both nuclear-armed and are allies too. China is also a rising global superpower with a GDP that is five times bigger than India's. When the Uri brigade headquarters was attacked on September 18, killing 18 soldiers, India immediately blamed Pakistan for the act. It did not bother to make sure first if Pakistan was really involved. "Every Pakistan post through which infiltration takes place should be reduced to rubble by artillery fire," boasted a retired Indian brigadier.

But the Indians are wary of Pakistan because they have known all along that any adventure into Pakistani territory would be retaliated with force by the other side and may be a cause of much embarrassment for them because their country dominates everything that happens in South Asia. They are also aware that India does not have as strong a military as is generally thought.



India's armed forces are more or less paper tigers though they comprise the world's second-largest military.

Besides its many other shortfalls, the Indian army suffers from scandal and corruption. There is the question that in the presence of such a big army, how do guerrilla fighters manage to attack heavily guarded garrisons on a repeated basis? The Indian armed forces face many other problems, like legal battles between generals over promotions, disputes over pay and the need for Indian military officers to lose weight. The three armed services nurse command and control disputes between each other while the ministry of defence is run by civilians and politicians.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his lackeys also seem to be running amok on other issues and their whole governance setup, especially at the centre, seems to be a comedy of errors. The Indian government has aggravated the situation by calling into question the Indus Water Treaty with Pakistan and also pulling out of the Saarc Summit scheduled to be held in Islamabad next November. Perhaps it was in the fitness of things when the Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, whose office was raided by the CBI at the behest of Narendra Modi, called him a 'coward and a psychopath.'

The manner in which India continues its atrocities in Jammu & Kashmir would shame the worst war crimes. Indian forces have shot dead people in the state with impunity because the Indian government has been riled up by the protests of the Kashmiri people

who have been mourning the killing of Burhan Muzaffar Wani, a young Kashmiri leader, in an encounter with the Indian army and police.

The Indian forces have been so cowardly as to shoot the Kashmiris with steel pellets which target the eyes and face; the pellets have to be surgically removed from retinas. Pellet guns are now used by the Indian forces as a matter of routine to suppress street demonstrations. Indian troops and state police have enforced rule over Kashmir by shooting at protesters for as long as there have been protests – some 27 years – since the popular uprising against the Indian government began in 1989. In fact, the uprising by the Kashmiris started some 70 years ago in 1947 when the Kashmir issue was left unresolved by the departing British rulers.

The response of the Indian forces to the latest protests in Kashmir has been ferocious; nearly 2,000 people suffered grievous injuries in just two days after the killing of Wani. The Indian paramilitary forces even attacked ambulances, in their revenge, shattering windows and cutting off intravenous drips. The Indian government clamped down on communications, social media and civil liberties in the state. The gravely ill couldn't get to hospitals and could not find medicines.

But India continued to be recognised as a democracy – the largest in the world – while Kashmir continued to burn. **S**

The writer is Editor of this magazine and a regular contributor on political and social issues.

Weathering the Onslaught

The survival of the MQM as a political party and the future of Altaf Hussain as its chief could be in peril.

By S.G. Jilane



Karachi is Pakistan's largest city, its major seaport and its financial, industrial and commercial capital. At the same time it is also the country's crime capital with extortion, kidnapping for ransom and target killing of political rivals, galore. Political parties have their own militant cells. For instance, Zulfikar Mirza, once home minister of the ruling Pakistan Peoples' Party in Sindh, openly boasted having issued 30,000 arms licences to members of the Peoples' Amn Committee that he had founded

to combat the Muttaheda Qaumi Movement (MQM).

To control the burgeoning militancy in the city, the government deployed a large force of paramilitary Rangers. They started well and the crime graph dropped. But, soon they became selective and turned their guns entirely on the MQM, raiding its offices, arresting its workers at random and often performing the disappearing act on some. One was even tortured to death. For a full three years, since September, 2013, the 'operation'

has been going on in full swing without an end in sight.

The MQM staged a 'fast unto death' to protest the Rangers' excesses. Party chief Altaf Hussain addressed workers on August 22, making some harsh remarks against those TV channels that did not give coverage to the MQM. He also spoke against the country and the Ranger's commander. Later, he apologized, explaining that he had been extremely worked up mentally, with reports of Rangers' wanton excesses.

Some MQM hoodlums ransacked the offices of ARY TV after Altaf's speech. But, it was the tirade against the country and the Rangers that made the difference. If calling Pakistan a "cancer" was heresy, reviling the DG Rangers was sheer blasphemy. The Rubicon had been crossed. Altaf Hussain had to be obliterated from the political scene as penalty.

The incident touched off a countrywide tsunami of ultra-jingoism. Condemnation started pouring over Altaf from all corners. Individuals rushed to the courts; one zealot sought his indictment for high treason, though under Article 6 of the Constitution, it is "Any person who abrogates or subverts or suspends or holds in abeyance, or attempts or conspires to abrogate or subvert or suspend or hold in abeyance, the Constitution by use of force or show of force or by any other unconstitutional means shall be guilty of high treason."

Altaf had committed none of these acts. Another sought a directive to the Election Commission to cancel the registration of MQM as a political party. Even the National Assembly passed a unanimous resolution condemning Altaf Hussain and renewing its pledge of loyalty to the nation's institutions, civil and military.

At the same time, Islamabad urged the British government to initiate action against Mr. Hussain under the British law for inciting violence in Pakistan. This was followed by senate chairman Raza Rabbani's visit to the speaker of the British House of Lords and letters from Lord Nazir and some MPs of Pakistani origin to the British home secretary. Even, a protest rally was staged in front of 10 Downing Street. But this was not the first time that a media house was vandalized. Political parties have often vented their anger on media houses in the past. Even the newspaper Dawn had to be shut down for a day in similar circumstances once.

Meanwhile, the state has unleashed all its fury against the party, with the demolition on a bulldozing spree against MQM's sector and unit offices all over the city, - over 200 had so far been razed at one point - while the Rangers were picking MQM office bearers at random.

This campaign was going on despite the fact that MQM in Karachi, under Dr. Farooq Sattar's leadership, ritually condemned Altaf Hussain's anti-Pakistan remarks and severed all connections with him. Even his name was struck off the party's constitution.

What was happening betrayed a naked anti-MQM (read anti-Mohajir) bias, because, Brahmdagh Bugti made



much worse remarks against Pakistan. He is a rebel. But no resolution was passed in any legislative assembly - provincial or national - to condemn him.

The use of unfettered force has led to a growing perception that the government intends to impose a non-official ban on the party. Excessive use of force always produces the opposite of the desired results. It fuels resentment among the victims. A glaring example is the current unrest in Indian Occupied Kashmir. Continuous curfew for more than two months, almost a hundreds deaths and many hundreds blinded by pellet guns, has failed to dampen the spirit of the Kashmiri people, who have been agitating since July 8, against the killing of Burhan Wani by the Indian troops.

Overkill also creates abiding bitterness. For example, what Pakistan troops did in former East Pakistan has left such a lingering scar that even after 45 years relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh are all but friendly.

Tearing off Altaf Hussain's pictures wherever found was also a thoughtless act. It was done once before. It did not help. Take the example of Soviet Russia where the holy Quran was banned and there were no mosques. But, the Quran stayed on, transferred from books to memory and private houses were turned into mosques for congregational prayers. Similarly, the MQM offices will be replaced with some makeshift arrangement and Altaf Hussain's picture will be preserved in the hearts of his followers.

Altaf's followers would not turn against him unless he does something to betray their trust, which he has not done. Therefore denouncing him as being in RAW's pay or "anti-Pakistan" just because he made some derogatory remarks against the country does not gel with the common MQM supporter.

Besides, Altaf Hussain seems to possess a Teflon skin. Nothing sticks. He is already under inquiry by the Met in London on suspicion of money laundering. Pakistan has accused him of connections with RAW, but never pressed the charge, because it would not stick.

As to the MQM, it has outlived worse times. It has been subjected to more fierce action under Generals Asif Nawaz and Nasirullah Babar, by the troops and Rangers. That is why saner elements consider writing any obituary of either Altaf Hussain's political career or the MQM as premature. Who knows, the 'fire' he seems to have ignited on August 22 may subside, or even die in course of time, because, nothing is permanent in politics.

Anti-MQM elements are gloating over MQM candidate's defeat in the by-election in PS-127, with PSP chief. Mustafa Kamal in the vanguard. But party circles argue that the defeat was due to the fact that it had set up a Muhajir candidate - Wasim Ahmad, to contest the seat, whereas, it was always a Sindhi who had won from that constituency. The last one was Ashfaq Mangi and though he represented the MQM, he was a Sindhi, too. Meanwhile, Farooq Sattar on his latest visit to Hyderabad also boasted that "not a single" MQM voter had broken ranks.

It is also a fact that Altaf Hussain and the MQM are inseparable, because, they derive their identities from each other. That is why many observers are reluctant to believe that Farooq Sattar would really eliminate Altaf Hussain from the party's leadership. To the contrary, the measure adopted by Sattar is perceived as a cover up, with mutual consent, till the current storm blows away. ■

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

The Iron Lady



When this woman from Manipur ended her 16 year fast, she had created a world record and invited attention to the plight of human rights violations in Jammu & Kashmir and other parts of India.

By Zehra Khawaja

For Irom Chanu Sharmila, it has been a case of Sweet Sixteens. She began her fast in 2000 and her struggle against the tyranny of the state of India lasted 16 years. The 'sweet' part is the success she was able to achieve with her passionate but non-violent protest; her 16-year fast was without parallel in human history. One of the most influential civil rights activists in India, she forced the government to step back on human rights violations in Jammu & Kashmir as well as the northeastern states, including her hometown Manipur.

The freedom fighters specially, in Jammu and Kashmir, thus owe a lot to this 'Iron Lady,' who soon after breaking her fast at a press conference, emphasized the Kashmiris' right to self-

determination and gave a very clear message to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in these words, "Oh, Mr. Prime Minister, you continue to indulge in violence. You need to stop this. You can rule with fatherly affection — without this draconian law that is the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA). As a civilization, we need non-violence."

Irom Sharmila started her hunger-strike when she was just 28 years old. The last thing she ate before starting the fast were sweets. Her fast didn't just include refraining from eating or drinking. She also refrained from combing her hair and even looking at herself in the mirror!

Her daily intake included liquids like Horlicks and Cerelac and fruit

juices consisting of essential nutrients that she was forcibly fed through a nasal tube. She used to wipe her teeth with dry cotton to avoid swallowing any liquid substance. She broke the fast with honey and water, followed by Horlicks and Chabon. In the 16 years of her fasting, she met her mother only once. Her brother, Irom Singhajit supported her throughout.

Yoga helped her keep physically fit during the fast. She had started practicing yoga at the age of 26. During the fast, she strictly followed the habit of doing yoga asanas and walked everyday to be physically fit. She used to read and write a lot of poems in the hospital. The poems were mostly about her homeland, Kanglei. She also wrote many poems about death, although she was always determined to live long.

Her only company in the hospital were a pair of guinea pigs. A biography has also been written about her life. It is titled 'Burning Bright: Irom Sharmila and the struggle for peace in Manipur.' The author is Deepti Priya Mehrotra.

She has a beautiful love story too, which had actually started during her fast. Her boyfriend Desmond Coutinho is a Goa-based British citizen. He read about her struggle and wrote a letter to her in 2009. Since then, they have been in contact through letters and gifts and are still very much in love.

Sharmila's fast helped to raise awareness against human rights violations in Jammu & Kashmir and the northeastern states, including her hometown Manipur. Though she had to break the fast without achieving her goal to have the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 repealed, her ideas are still a source of inspiration for people who seek peace and justice. In fact, success is not measured by what you accomplish, but by the opposition you have encountered and the courage with which you have maintained the struggle against overwhelming odds.

One of her colleagues very rightly argues, "We stood with her, but was that enough? Fasting is no more an inspirational tool for struggle, which will move the powers that be. The martyrdom of Swami Nigamanand to save Ganga River or Gurucharan Chhabra for liquor prohibition after prolonged fasting exposes this. Since, they cannot tolerate violence in society, state repression and the apathy of the world they inhabit, they undertake the sacrifice, hearing their inner voice. This is what our long struggle in Narmada valley has also shown us - this harsh reality of the state and society"

There is no denying the fact that nonviolent protests are very slow in

achieving the goals, but are far more productive and very effective. People can go on with their daily routines and still be part of the protest in their individual capacities as, unlike any violent agitation, they don't have to come out on the streets shouting slogans against the government. Such non-violent protests are a wake-up call to the government and it is left with no other option but to listen to the people as it knows that you can silence people for some time but not all the time. And if it does, it will dishearten more and more people in society; making the movement stronger. People have no animosity and anger as they are fighting for a cause - and not against anybody. Struggles make generations stronger and ignite a fire in their hearts for change.

A somewhat dejected Sharmila also said at the press conference that she did not know where to go. "I want to see my mother Irom Sakhi but I have promised to meet her only after the AFSPA is repealed. Therefore, I think I want to settle in an ashram," she said.

She is now expected to leave on a tour to address public meetings in northern, central and western India against imposition of the AFSPA. She said that rather than isolating her, Manipur society had in fact welcomed her decision to end the fast and she now had "the busiest days" of her life. "I have been having interactions with young people every day in the hospital, five to seven at one time. I am learning so much about what is happening and, I see a hope that has strengthened my resolve," she said.

Instead of fighting alone for restoration of human rights, Sharmila has changed her line of action and decided to enter politics which is of course a very good omen for the democratic forces that are determined to root out injustice and corruption from society. She told the court she wanted to end her fast so that she could be released from custody and contest local elections. "I have to change my strategy. Some people are seeing me as a strange woman because I want to join politics. They say politics is dirty, but so is society. I want to stand in the elections against the government," she said.


Her decision to directly participate in affairs of the state sounds very encouraging. There is the recent case of Arvind Kejriwal who in 2012, launched the Aam Aadmi Party which won the 2013 Delhi Legislative Assembly elections. Following the election, he took office as the Chief Minister of Delhi on December 28, 2013. His instant success created history in Indian

democracy. Interestingly enough in December 1999, while still in service with the Income Tax Department, Kejriwal and others found a movement named Parivartan (change), in Sundar Nagri in Delhi. A month later, in January 2000, Kejriwal took a sabbatical from work to focus on Parivartan and created history.

Sharmila has lots of offers from friends and supporters to stay with them but she does not want to oblige anyone. "I plan to visit other districts in my state in continuation of my struggle, to hold dialogue and understand issues better. After that, I will move to my own space where I will be interacting with people in the pursuit of our common goal against AFSPA and for justice, peace and understanding," the 44-year-old activist said.

When she announced her decision to break her fast and move on to electoral politics, there was widespread disbelief and debate about her decision. Since August 9, when she ended her fast, life has changed in major ways for this person who has become a symbol of determination and resistance. It is unfortunate that soon after her decision to take part in electoral politics, she was dumped by the people on whose behalf she had been fighting and she had to take refuge in a temple. But she couldn't stay there for 'security reasons' and had to go back to the police station and then back to JNIM (Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences_ --which had been her home for the last 16 years.

It is a regrettable fact that during her movement, the 'conspiracy theory' has also raised its head. While Sharmila was still being treated, functionaries of the Sharmila Kanba Lup (Save Sharmila Campaign), which had been supporting her since 2008, started accusing the government of brainwashing her to enter politics to stall the movement against AFSPA. The group has decided to move ahead with their struggle against AFSPA without the 44-year-old activist. "We will remove Sharmila's name from all our posters. She has nothing to do with us any longer. We feel disappointed and let down by her," said L Madhu Laima, one of the campaigners of the movement.

But those who know her say that she is a firm believer in the famous saying "Never give up, and be confident in what you do. There may be tough times, but the difficulties which you face will make you more determined to achieve your objectives and to win against all the odds." 

The writer is an advertising professional.

No Silver Bullets

The situation in Afghanistan is a complicated one – and war against the Taliban is one of the least favoured options.

By Huzaima Bukhari & Dr. Ikramul Haq

“The violent subjugation of the Palestinians, Iraqis, and Afghans will only ensure that those who oppose us will increasingly speak to us in the language we speak to them – violence”

– Christopher Lynn Hedges, senior fellow at The Nation Institute in New York.

After fifteen years of military intervention in Afghanistan by the United States of America and its allies, there is still their fragile control over a great part of the territory while the Taliban continue to capture and control important areas of strategic significance. The recent example of the attack on Kunduz and events leading to its capture and recapture by Afghan forces confirms

that in the coming days the country will remain in turmoil. Since the pull-out of all foreign combat troops by the end of 2014, leaving behind only 9,800 US troops, it is reported that the Taliban now hold more ground in Afghanistan than at any time since 2001.

Though an advisory and training contingent of international forces is making efforts to train the Afghan National Army, comprising 195,000 men, they have yet failed to counter increased attacks by the Taliban as they continue to pose a formidable challenge to the government and foreign occupant forces.

Afghanistan, a landlocked country with thirty four administrative provinces has seen no peace during the last four decades. This war-torn country

continues to be assaulted, first at the hands of the Soviets in 1978, then, after passing through many years of civil war, it is now facing threats both from within as well as the combined US-NATO forces. With the exception of a small area that is being administered by the government of Ashraf Ghani, the major portion of the country has come under Taliban control.

These areas, especially those away from Kabul, have almost taken the status of a Taliban and warlords' fiefdom. Fifteen years down the line the country has become more chaotic and vulnerable to in-fighting. In September of 2015, the Afghan Taliban recorded major successes since their ouster from power in 2001 — they managed to seize the district of Khanabad that connects



Kunduz to Takhar and other northern provinces.

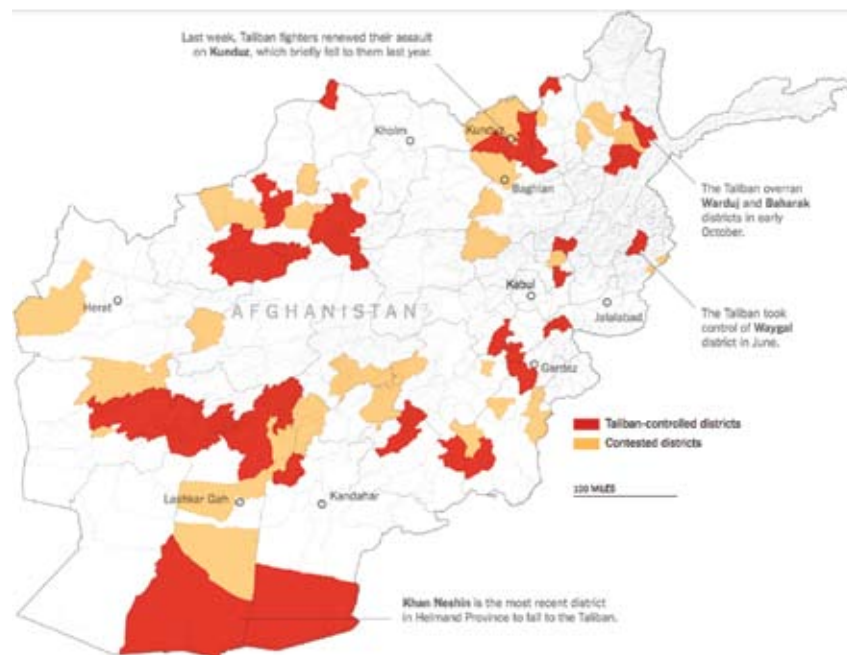
The main reason for the fall of the district as claimed by the Khanabad chief, Hayatullah Amiri, was the attack of the Taliban forces from different directions and lack of timely support from the capital. The recent insurgency, again in Kunduz, which occurred in August 2016, in which militants briefly captured its key district that was eventually recovered by the Afghan forces, clearly depicts the strength gained by the Taliban because of which they keep on attacking and capturing (even though for a short while) strategic positions in the country. In their latest attack, the militants blew up the Afghan-Tajik transit bridge in Kunduz which reflects their policy of destruction with respect to national assets.

While the Taliban's onslaughts continue, Afghan security forces look towards their own commanders for military guidance that rarely comes. On the political front, the leadership in Kabul remains divided as well. Recently, in a rare public outburst, Chief Executive, Abdullah Abdullah, criticized President Ashraf Ghani, calling him totally 'unfit' to rule the country. Neither in the government, nor in the public is there a sense of unity to fight the militants who have stepped up attacks in the north and elsewhere.

The areas close to Kunduz are strategically important as admitted by Brigadier General Charles Cleveland, spokesman for the coalition forces in Afghanistan. In the wake of the Kunduz attack, he called for US reinforcement which proved to be only a temporary effort to dispel the Taliban occupation of the area. The Taliban made further advances by taking over Nawa and Nad Ali districts — located a stone's throw away from the west of Lashkar Gah where the government exercises control only over a few administrative buildings. The residents of these districts are highly perturbed and have been asking for weapons to defend their once relatively peaceful homes.

Attacks on areas adjacent to Kunduz have given the advantage to the Taliban in the war against Kabul because they keep on blocking parts of the main highway leading north from Lashkar Gah. This road was heavily mined by them. Even after regaining the area in the last days of August 2016, the Afghan Army's 215th Corps took many days to clear the mines. The Taliban, in the meantime, continue to attack many other parts, such as the Baglan province, as they did in 2015.

The situation, as described by the top US commander in Afghanistan, General John W. Nicholson, is not improving. In a recent interview to *U.S. Today*, he cautioned, "There is no silver bullet



to defeat the Taliban." The General expressed his intentions of accelerated offensives against the ISIS in Nangarhar and Al-Qaeda in Kandahar that now pose a bigger threat than the Taliban in these areas.

There was hope for better combat on the part of the Afghan Army when, in June 2016, President Obama granted authorization for more aggressive targeting of insurgents. In the wake of this development, General Nicholson told newsmen at Bagram Airbase: "With the new airstrikes and help to Afghan forces, the military campaign would soon uproot all insurgent groups." This proved otherwise as within the next two months, the Taliban managed to not only attack strategic areas like Kunduz but also exposed security arrangements in Kabul through a number of suicide bombings.

The targeting of Taliban leaders and the killing of Taliban Amir, Mohammad Akhtar Mansour, in a US drone strike in May 2016 could not deter or disrupt the series of attacks. The replacement of Mansour, Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, proved more deadly. He showed a tight hold over the organization and even the financial situation of the organization under him improved, contrary to the claims of US intelligence. The reality is that the Taliban have unexpectedly proved to be more resilient than in the past even after the sudden demise of Mullah Mansour.

Since assuming of command by Mullah Haibatullah, the Afghan forces have sustained heavy casualties. A report by *Study of War*, a think-tank, claims that Afghan security forces still face capacity issues. In this scenario,

the slowing down of the US withdrawal is imminent. The United States wants negotiations with the Taliban and early withdrawal from Afghanistan, but this is proving to be an uphill task.

Unfounded allegations against Pakistan by the USA for supporting the Taliban, especially the Haqqanis, are making things worse for peace in Afghanistan. The oft-repeated stance of US that Pakistan needs to dismantle all sanctuaries of terrorists inside its borders is serving no useful purpose. Pakistan has recently offered effective management of porous borders on which Afghans have shown disgruntlement rather than appreciation. Under these circumstances, there is little hope for willingness of the Taliban leaders to seek meaningful negotiations. Excluding Pakistan from negotiations would be a fatal mistake since everyone knows that without Pakistan's participation no settlement of Afghan issues is possible.

Efforts to end war in Afghanistan cannot succeed unless all the regional countries — Iran, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan and China — sit together and find a solution for durable peace through economic activity. They need to make it clear to the US and its allies that their interference is neither beneficial nor desirable. Victory over the Taliban and other groups is not possible through use of force alone. The Taliban will have to be made part of mainstream politics where winning over voters is secured by peaceful campaigns and not guns. ■

The writers, lawyers and partners in law firm, Huzaima, Ikram & Ijaz, are Adjunct Faculty at Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS).

Crushing Dissent

Bangladesh may become a totalitarian country since only one party is in the forefront and all dissent is cruelly crushed.

By Dr. Syed Ali Madni

Will Sheikh Hasina succeed in her efforts to keep the one-party bit without the replacement? One of her party members has recently referred to Malaysia as a model, another moderate Muslim-majority country with a strong economic record and a democratic constitution, but with one party seemingly permanently in power?

According to a political analyst the results of the general elections expected to be held in 2019 are very much on her side as her only rival Khaleda Zia has been very effectively pushed to the wall, leaving her to wait and watch. But after the internationally condemned execution of those allegedly found guilty of war crimes, this may not be so easy says a political worker, mentioning the recent terror activities in the country. He argues that religious murders attract headlines abroad that may bring fearful nightmares to Sheikh Hasina: that, having defeated her enemies at home, she will somehow be brought down by meddling foreigners.

How long she can thrive on a manipulated victory? That is the question. In Bangladesh, from 1991 to 2006, the Awami League and BNP ruled in turns. But after coming to power after an overwhelming victory, the Awami League changed the constitution to abolish the need to appoint a caretaker government three months prior to general elections to ensure fair and free elections. The Supreme Court upheld the constitutional amendment but declared that the next two elections could be held under a caretaker administration. Hasina simply ignored the court ruling which resulted in a boycott of the 2014 elections by Khaleda Zia's



Party. The Daily Star, a pro-Awami League newspaper, commenting on the elections, wrote: "AL has won a predictable and hollow victory which gives it neither a mandate nor an ethical standing to govern effectively."

Though the election commission did not announce final figures for voter turnout in 2014 elections, the media, citing election monitoring groups, reported that on an average, just 25 percent of the electorate voted. The turnout in the general election in 2008, held under a caretaker government, was 83 percent. The government-appointed election commission acknowledged that no election took place at 570 polling stations but claimed that polling was fair in 97 percent of the constituencies. Prior to the election, opposition mobs set fire to at least 200 polling booths. Hundreds of opposition activists were arrested while BNP leader Khalida Zia was put under house arrest. As a result of the BNP boycott, the election result was a foregone conclusion. Before the polling day, the ruling alliance "won" 153 uncontested seats in the 300-member parliament. Out of 147 contested seats, the Awami League gained another 104 seats in the election while the others went to its allies.

It may not be out of place to mention here that though Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League (AL) and Khaleda Zia of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) have ruled Bangladesh for more than two decades, they hate each other and refuse even to talk. Both women inherited their political followings from relatives who were brutally killed. They have since turned the country's two largest parties into patronage-based personality cults that specialize in looking backwards.

The dejected BNP did try to reorganize on the first anniversary of the lost elections by mobilizing a mass anti-government movement but the attempt to forge a tough approach also fell flat. Cases were filed against thousands of BNP leaders and workers on charges of creating violence. Still, hundreds of leaders and workers, including the acting secretary general of the party, are in jail. Khaleda Zia and Tarique Rahman are facing many charges.

Naturally, under these circumstances, it has become difficult for the BNP to survive and to continue the movement against the government. The organizational structure of the party is on the brink of collapse and the BNP is now almost inactive. The party is neither in the parliament, nor in the streets. Soon after the crackdown on the activists of the BNP and its allies, most



of the central leaders became inactive as they were implicated in many cases.

The BNP was led by Ziaur Rahman during its first four years while Khaleda Zia has been leading the party for the last 32 years. She received a mandate as the BNP Chairperson from the last national council in 2009. The party constitution provides for the council to convene every three years but this has not happened. The executive committee meeting of the party could not be held after July 2012 due to political unrest. The BNP is run under the chairperson's sole authority. As a result, the responsibility of the good or bad of the party ultimately rests with Khaleda Zia herself.

It seems relevant here to mention the recent terror activity in Bangladesh. What happened on the night of July 1, 2016 at an upscale café at the Diplomatic Enclave in Dhaka – the city of mosques – was definitely not only the first of its kind in the history of Bangladesh but mindboggling too, because none of the terrorist was madrassah-educated and all were from English-medium schools. The well-planned and neatly executed attack killed twenty-nine persons, including 17 foreigners and two police officers, during an 11-hour siege at the restaurant.

Though ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack, according to Bangladesh's Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, the attackers were members of a homegrown militant group, Jumatul

Mujahedeen Bangladesh, which has been banned in the country for more than a decade. The national police chief Shahidul Hoque also confirmed that all the seven militants were Bangladeshis.

However, few Bangladesh political analysts believe that the government resists claims that the Islamic State and al-Qaeda are to blame. It likes to present itself as the best defender against Islamist extremism in Bangladesh to avoid any negative marking following a recently published report. It says, "In terms of international news stories per head of population, Bangladesh, a Muslim-majority country of more than 160 million, is among the world's most underreported places. But recently it has been attracting headlines for ugly reasons. First came the religiously motivated murders — of more than two dozen secular bloggers, liberals and others since 2013, typically hacked to death with machetes; then, on May 11, the execution of Motiur Rahman Nizami, leader of the country's largest Islamist party, for atrocities committed during the war for independence from Pakistan in 1971. Less reported is Bangladesh's remorseless descent into authoritarian rule. All three phenomena are symptoms of the same disease: a political culture that cannot brook dissent and which views power as a means to crush it." ■

The writer follows political and social developments in South Asia.

Same Page Politics

There is considerable erosion of unity in Sri Lanka's Unity Government and it needs to be corrected.

By Muhammad Ali Ehsan



The general assessment of political developments in Sri Lanka is that cracks are appearing in the UNP (United National Party) - SLP (Sri Lankan Freedom Party) and the Unity Government (UG). The five year period of unity government seems to be a long and difficult haul considering that the ministers in the UG continue to disagree and contradict each other despite representing the voice of the same

government. When ministers speak at cross purpose that shows that 'not all is well' in a government that came into existence in 2015 to lead Sri Lanka out of the rampant corruption and arrogant governance that Rajapaksa's government represented. Will this be possible given the current political cohesiveness and the individual behaviour of the senior members of this UG?

In one such current episode, Health

Minister and cabinet spokesperson, Dr Rajitha Senarathne accused his ministerial colleague S.B Dissanayake of defending Basil Rajapaksa over the distribution of GI pipes to the Local Councils, which he said was done for attaining electoral benefits in the run up to the presidential elections. Dissanayake on his part contended that there was nothing wrong with this practice as it is a norm for 'politicians

to use state funds in support of their party's activities.' A few days before, Deputy Minister Dilan Parera had taken Special Projects Minister Dr Sarath Amunugama to task for stating that the SLFP will be voting for the VAT (Value Added Tax) Amendment Bill in the Parliament. Such statements and public display of the 'confronting ministers' only goes to show that the UG ministers 'are not on one page' which only lowers the confidence of the general public in the government. What is lacking here is a basic political sense that calls for all debate and dissent to be ideally shown in the cabinet meetings. The collective responsibility of the ministers is never to publicly challenge what has already been agreed in the cabinet meetings. The increase in VAT was a decision taken in the cabinet and hence should not have been spoken about in the public. Not only such talk sends wrong signals to the public which starts viewing this UG in infancy under stress and strain but also sends negative messages to foreign investors who view the political instability as bad for investment. There is a dire need for President Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to get their cabinet ministers together and ensure that all of them understand their collective cabinet responsibilities.

Last year it was not about the cabinet and the ministers working at cross purposes and contradicting each other, but the parliament where the government took up several financial bills for debate and UPFA (United People's Freedom Alliance) MPs walked out, accusing the government for disregarding parliamentary traditions. The MPs said that they needed time to study the resolutions whereas Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe told the House that the issue of taking up these resolutions for debate was discussed with the party leaders.

The PM detested the idea of MPs getting up to speak on their own, comparing them with 'woodpeckers pecking on trees.' The MPs responded by protesting and accusing the PM of using unparliamentarily language by associating names of birds and animals with the MPs. The speaker eventually allowed the debate but the MPs continued to say that they could not participate in the debate without reading the resolutions. The PM accused the MPs of the UPFA that they came to the Parliament thanks to SLFP votes and now they were disrupting the parliament proceedings. In the midst of this controversy the financial bill was passed.

Both the cabinet ministers' public disclosures and the manner of

parliamentary proceedings speak of a deep political crisis within the UG in Sri Lanka. The SLFP has a history of breaking the monopoly of political power held by the urban elite. The party gave the choice to the Sri Lankan people to make a different political choice and elect an alternative party. It was because of this party that in Sri Lanka a two-party system was introduced that is so essential for any

corrupt and authoritarian government? How can the people of Sri Lanka limit their desire and the eventual possibility of good governance in time and space? The next parliamentary elections are due in 2020 and the presidential elections in 2021 while the local government elections are due early next year. What is required in Sri Lanka is the continuity and sustenance of a democratic government minus bad governance and

Like in Pakistan, the political parties in Sri Lanka are also not as democratic as one would wish them to be.

democracy. It was the same party that reduced the voting age from 21 to 18 to benefit the Sri Lankan youth that was waking up to the goodness of politics and what democracy could deliver. The party also moved on to implement the social welfare system in the country, including pension schemes, free education, health, etc. The crisis that SLFP has witnessed has been a post LTTE defeat crisis. Riding on the success of the anti-terror operation, power was blatantly abused not only by one but many political leaders with the loss of face under brewing corruption scandals.

Like in Pakistan, the political parties in Sri Lanka are also not as democratic as one would wish them to be. The political leaders in Sri Lanka, like the political leaders in Pakistan, have undue and centralized authority. The authority does not rest with the party but the leadership of the party and all members and other leaders are expected to remain subservient to the party leader by demand. However, the early call of elections in January 2015 was an opportunity that the junior leadership of the party took with both hands and when the rebellion worked, the existing leadership crumbled and lost. Although the SLFP has emerged from UNP but there has remained throughout the year's bitterness amongst the parties. The opposition accuse the SLFP for having politically capitulated at the hands of UNP and see no goodness coming out of the unity government for the people of Sri Lanka because they consider that a coalition government is always a weak government. But it is for the people of Sri Lanka to decide whether a seemingly weak and inefficient government is better than a

corruption. Authoritarian and corrupt democratic trends that the Sri Lankans left behind in 2015 must continue to be abhorred, detested and rejected. The Sri Lankan democratic and political change in 2015 can be attributed to the alliance between the leadership of SLFP and UNP. This positive change should not be thrown away because of the minor mismanagement of democratic affairs by the leadership of these parties. The low standards of political leadership within both the parties must catch the eyes of the top leadership. Low standards of education and political maturity in the middle and lower tiers of the party leadership must be identified and if found unsuitable must be replaced. Similarly, the level of debate in the parliament must be to the total satisfaction of all concerned including the opposition. The joint opposition was against the passage of the 'Office of Missing Persons' Law (being set up to investigate thousands of wartime missing persons in Sri Lanka). The government was accused of rushing the bill through the parliament without hearing the views of the opposition.

Lastly, since the existing UG is a national government it should take the opportunity to generate discussions and debates to create, implement and later consolidate people-friendly national policies for the remaining four years i.e. between 2016 and 2020. This should not comprise political bickering but the political possibilities must guide Sri Lanka for the remainder of the UG's years in power. "■

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

Driving Away Disaster

A source of water-borne diseases, Nepal has faced further complications after the 2015 earthquake but its water, sanitation and hygiene woes may soon have an answer.

By S. Mubashir Noor

In August this year, the UN finally conceded its central role in sparking a deadly cholera outbreak in the small Caribbean nation of Haiti in 2010. UN peacekeepers have been deployed there since 2004 to prevent a political crisis from snowballing into a bloody civil war. Their role was expanded to recovery and reconstruction following a catastrophic earthquake in early 2010 and their numbers enlarged. Nepal, in keeping with its international commitments, dispatched a contingent to help with the UN mandate. This noble gesture brought hell to the Haitians. Cholera, a disease unknown to their immune systems for over 150 years, quickly ravaged an unsuspecting population and the death toll climbed to 10,000.

To the UN's firm denials, locals then squarely blamed raw sewage seeping downriver from the Nepalese encampment for the outbreak. Nepal, coincidentally, has some of the worst water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) indices in the world and open defecation in rural areas is common even today. Unlike the Haitians, thus, snap flare-ups of cholera and other waterborne diseases in summer are a way of life for many Nepalese and most adults have acquired a degree of immunity to them from exposure to mild cases in childhood. Despite a surfeit of government initiatives in cooperation with international NGOs and UNICEF to upgrade WASH statistics, admittedly with some success, over half the population still has no access to

adequate sanitation.

Stonewalling Nepal's path to WASH progress is its unique confluence of structural and social realities. Nepal is

one of the poorest countries in the world with a GDP per capita that peaked at \$690 in 2015, but has generally hovered below \$400. It is landlocked and relies



heavily on India for trade, a state of affairs that triggered mass shortages of everyday staples last year when the Madhesi blockade tacitly endorsed by New Delhi was in full swing. Without foreign handouts and a tourism industry built around the Himalayan peaks, Nepal would be in dire fiscal straits.

A Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (NMICS) in 2014 found that 37 percent of Nepalese children under the age of five are “moderately or severely malnourished.” On its website, the international charity WaterAid cites grim data claiming two million Nepalese have no access to safe drinking water and over 600 children under five perish every year to diarrhea from contaminated water and poor hygiene. Also thwarting a speedy solution to Nepal’s WASH dilemma is the ramshackle state of the country’s water supply system, with approximately 75 percent of core infrastructure in need of repair. The widespread damage wrought by the earthquake in early 2015 further put paid to any aspirations of remedying these issues in a prompt manner.

The year 2016 has not fared any better. Environment & Public Health Organization (EPHO), a national NGO, reported the return of cholera

to the Kathmandu Valley this summer, confirming news stories of fecal matter floating in its water supply. By EPHO estimates, at least half of the water consumed by residents in the Kathmandu and Lalitpur municipalities is likely contaminated with pathogenic bacteria and industrial pollutants. Kathmandu has thus far struggled to design a water supply system insulated from sewage. Some 60 tonnes of household wastewater flows into the valley’s rivers every day, eventually moving downstream to lakes that make up its primary water source. It is a vicious cycle ripe for contagion. National statistics too make for stark reading. According to NMICS, the E.Coli bacteria contaminates water used by 71 percent of households nationwide.

Nepal’s distinct set of challenges deters a turbocharged approach to improving WASH delivery. Communities most vulnerable to hazards wrought by unsafe water live in scattered settlements across forbidding terrain. They are also loath to adopt better sanitation and hygiene practices while open defecation remains pervasive and socially acceptable. The high cost per capita of WASH programs in such regions coupled with Nepal’s economic woes often translates into these communities getting pushed down a priority list where urban centres take precedence. Also confounding a unified strategy among the surplus of government agencies charged with WASH programs in collaboration with international partners is the absence of elected local governments, which often leads to confusion of jurisdiction and duplication of effort.

Mother Nature has not been kind to Nepal either. The 7.8 magnitude Gorkha earthquake in May 2015 not only destroyed 8,000 lives, it threatened to violently shake the country back to the Stone Age. Nepal’s National Planning Commission puts the cost of post-disaster rebuilding at close to \$7 billion, an impossible amount without sustained foreign aid. The World Bank, meanwhile, predicts Nepal’s GDP will plummet to below two percent this year from its near five percent average in the 2010s, while UNICEF warns close to a million Nepalese may have been shoved into poverty as a result of the earthquake. In WASH terms, 5,200 water supply systems and 220,000 personal toilets were severely damaged which left over a million Nepalese without access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

Impeding the rebuilding effort is bureaucratic lethargy inherent in succeeding Nepalese governments. Although more than \$4 billion have

been poured in by international donors, the National Recovery Authority (NRA) instituted to roadmap and direct these efforts, has trudged along at a glacial pace. And this is after national legislators took six months to establish the NRA’s remit and assign it the resources necessary to complete its mandate. Political instability from the Madhesi blockade concluded in February and Premier K.P Sharma Oli’s resignation in July following a certain no-confidence vote has further set back the timeline to substantive progress.

That said, it would be unfair to insinuate that successive Nepalese governments deliberately skirted the country’s impoverished WASH indicators. Before the earthquake completely savaged project completion schedules, Kathmandu in cooperation with UNICEF and other international partners was steadily tipping these indicators towards the positive, hoping to achieve nationwide access to improved water supply and sanitation by 2017. Noteworthy achievements between 1990 and 2014 include raising the share of Nepalese households with access to drinking water from 46 percent to 84 percent today and reducing the rural open defecation rate by over half to 45 percent. Employing female health workers to teach basic hygiene and sanitation practices in rural Nepal is also credited with cutting childhood deaths from diarrhea by 50 percent between 2000 and 2010.

Significantly, the establishment of an independent Ministry of Water Supply and Sanitation in 2015 will help harmonize local and international WASH initiatives and streamline their service delivery. Challenges besides force majeure, however, remain. Prime among them is Nepal’s highly centralized political structure that prevents the devolution of authority and accountability to regional stakeholders. This often results in incomplete or outdated data sets to extrapolate policy reform.

Besides the strong focus on public-private partnerships to cover the gaps in infrastructure financing, surveillance and reporting activities on sanitation and water quality need to be localized in rural Nepal so that hitherto voiceless residents feel empowered to effect change. Nepal, lest we forget, is blessed with a superabundance of water resources. When coupled with the right mix of capital and strategy, it has the potential to perform a quantum leap in WASH indices over the next decade. ■

The writer is an Islamabad-based freelance journalist.



Dissent and Punishment

The Defamation and Freedom of Expression Act is a draconian measure taken by the Maldivian government.

By Faizan Usmani

The President of the Maldives, Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom ratified the Defamation and Freedom of Expression Act in August. The Act criminalises any defamatory speech, derogatory remarks and writings that aim to defame government, national security, state religion of the country and its social norms and

values. It even covers a mere sound or physical gesture that deliberately or unintentionally tends to defame.

As per the Act, it targets any actions that “threaten national security,” “contradict general social norms,” or any communications that appear to be a passing judgment on “any tenets of Islam.”

The law defines defamation as ‘publication of a statement whether spoken written, drawn, illustrated, or gestured that can be depicted, thought of, or inferred as damaging to a person’s reputation in the eyes of a third person or society at large.’

The law imposes a fine between US\$3,200 and US\$130,000, or



enforces 3-to-six month imprisonment, without any recourse to appeal to the punishment.

In the Act, there is a separate clause, titled 'Determining Punishments for the Media.' For publishing defamatory comments, it may revoke the licences of newspapers, television channels and media organisations, as well as websites.

As per the Act, a journalist cannot cover political rallies and demonstrations which are staged against the government. Speeches made during such protests cannot be reported as well. A journalist cannot report allegations without first seeking a clarification from the accused. If the accused refuses to comment on the allegations made, the journalist may no longer follow the story, according to the Act. The government has a right to stop live coverage of any event. When reporting any scandalous or legal matter related to the government, journalists will have to disclose their source of information first, says the Act.

Prior to approval of the Act, a joint statement was issued by the Delegation of the European Union to the Maldives, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway and the United States, urging the President to not approve the bill because of its unconstitutional provisions.

As per the statement, "the Defamation and Freedom of Expression Act infringes the fundamental protections guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)." "It allows severe penalties to be imposed against those who merely wish to exercise their democratic rights and freedoms," says the statement.

In its reply to the joint statement, the Maldivian government said, "Section 6 of the Draft Bill identifies a framework similar to what is set out in the ICCPR for exercising freedom of expression, which are, for the protection of national security, protection of public order, respect of the rights or reputation of others (anti-defamation) and for limitations on expressions made that are contrary with tenets of Islam.

"These areas are also reflective of the principles enshrined in Articles 16, 27 and 33 of the Constitution, which guarantees the fundamental rights set out in the Constitution: the right to freedom of thought and the freedom to communicate opinions in a manner that is not contrary to any tenet of Islam and the right to protect one's reputation and good name,



respectively. The Draft Bill also takes into account defences enunciated in settled law such as whistle-blowing and honest opinion," according to the government's statement.

"Criminalising speech on such vague and broad grounds as set out in the Bill is a direct attack on the exercise of the right to freedom of expression in the Maldives," says David Kaye, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression.

According to him, "The freedom of expression is a fundamental right and any restrictions on it must be narrowly and objectively defined, not a matter of common routine."

Critics are of the opinion that the recent move made by the Prime Minister Abdullah Yameen is nothing more than an attempt to get sweeping powers, as the Act chiefly targets journalists and media organisations. The timing of the Act also suggests the same, as it was introduced to the Maldivian parliament soon after an investigative report appeared in the media that some US\$80 million have been stolen from the state treasury by government officials.

Critics believe it is simply an attack on the right to freedom of expression and information, as given by Article 27 of the Maldivian Constitution. "This new law jumps on top of the Constitutional guarantee and criminalises the publication of a false statement that damages the reputation of another; retains the right for the damaged party to pursue the case in civil court; and clarifies that people are free to publish statements that may damage the reputation of an institution

but not those who run it, or work in it," says Azra Naseem, a Maldivian journalist.

In addition to that, the Act completely violates Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), both of which have already been officially signed by the Maldives.

"It does so to such an extent that even holding an opinion — not just expressing one — and 'seeing things as one wishes to', are deemed material subject to prosecution and punishment," according to Azra Naseem.

Far from suppressing dissent, the Maldivian government is gradually emerging as a 'public enemy,' who has no regard for their rights and takes extreme measures to serve its own interests.

Since the law has now been made and implemented, its long-term consequences may soon appear in the form of a revolt or something similar to it and that too in a highly violent manner.

"The Maldives is no longer a free and democratic society. It does not have an independent judiciary or an independent Majlis (parliament). Laws that curtail constitutional freedoms cannot be justifiably made in such an environment, by a Majlis that is corrupt, that pays no heed to the people and their representatives in opposition, and remains above all checks and balances required by a democratic society," says Azra Naseem. **S**

The writer is a member of the staff.



Rock and a Hard Place

German Chancellor Angela Merkel is risking her political future with her soft corner for refugees pouring into the country. How will this impact her politics?

By Hussain H Zaidi

For centuries, Germany has held a pre-eminent position in continental Europe. It was the first nation on the continent to go industrial. Except for the period

when Napoleon Bonaparte was at the helm in France, Germany's military strength has easily overshadowed that of its neighbours. In the realm of the intellect as well, Germany has had no

parallels in modern times, producing philosophers *par excellence* — Leibnitz, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Spengler, to name a few.

Today Germany is the European

Union's (EU) most populous and largest member. It's also the EU's biggest trading nation, the biggest economy and the most prosperous country. Therefore, successes or failures of Germany are bound to reverberate all over the continent.

Modern Germany has produced three tremendously influential chancellors (heads of government). In the 19th century it was Otto von Bismarck, who unified the nation; in the 20th century Adolf Hitler took the entire continent by storm; in the 21st century Angela Merkel, Germany's first woman chancellor, has emerged as the foremost leader of her times.

Ranked by Forbes magazine as the globe's most powerful woman back-to-back in 2015 and 2016 and chosen as the 'Person of the Year' by Time in December 2015, Merkel is in the saddle since 2005 and has headed the ruling Christian Democratic Union (CDU) since 2000, having won three national elections on the trot. She steered Germany through recession that set in during her first term. Already she is the longest serving incumbent head of government in Europe.

By virtue of Germany's weight in the EU, Merkel has been called the de facto leader of the world's most successful and most well integrated regional bloc. Very recently, she presided over the successful resolution of the Euro crisis precipitated by the default of Greece. Currently, she is in the forefront of the efforts to keep the EU alive and kicking in the wake of the decision of the United Kingdom to quit the 28-member bloc.

One issue on which Merkel has come in for adverse criticism, and which has the potential to draw curtains on her illustrious career, is migration. Her decision to welcome tens of thousands of refugees from Syria and other countries to Germany has generated outrage all over the country. Thanks to her open-door policy, more than one million refugees crossed into Germany in 2015.

Merkel's refusal to put a cap on the number of refugees that would be accommodated has left many of her erstwhile supporters gunning for her. Cracks are appearing within the CDU's coalition with the Christian Social Union (CSU). Opinion polls, of which the 'Iron Lady' has been too fond, report a steep fall in her approval ratings. But she has stuck to her guns. In the Berlin state election



Merkel's refusal to put a cap on the number of refugees that would be accommodated has left many of her erstwhile supporters gunning for her.

held on September 18, the CDU suffered heavy losses. The defeat has been put down to Merkel's immigration policy.

Two logical questions are: Why has Merkel been so generous towards refugees, in particular when her counterparts in other European capitals have not been that forthcoming? Why do Germans by and large not approve of her migration policy?

Two explanations, in the main, have been offered for Merkel's stance on the asylum seekers. The first explanation rests on her personal experiences. Merkel was brought up in areas which were part of what used to be East Germany during the cold war (1945-89). East Germany being a member of the USSR-led communist bloc was a totalitarian state. Like any other totalitarian state, it put severe restrictions on civil liberties, particularly the freedom of movement. The Berlin Wall was a potent symbol of such

restrictions. Merkel would not have become the leader of her nation had the Berlin Wall not been demolished and Germany unified. Being herself once a victim of the government's totalitarian policies and a beneficiary of post-cold war integration, Merkel thought it highly in order to welcome the refugees rather than send them back or set up barriers to their entry.

In the second place, the German Chancellor has been a staunch supporter of European integration. One of the pillars on which the edifice of the EU rests is repudiation of competitive nationalism, arguably the single most powerful factor behind the outbreak of the two world wars of the past century. Hitler's Germany, in particular, was wedded to the notion of a master class. Merkel's stand over asylum is in stark contrast to the kind of nationalism espoused by both Hitler and Bismarck. "We can do it," has been her slogan that reflects her position on migration. Having

UPCOMING B2B EVENTS ...



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Pak-China Friendship Centre, Islamabad

13th International Fire, Safety, Security & Health Exhibition & Conference

Website: www.safesecurepakistan.com

E-mail: info@safesecurepakistan.com



POGEE

16 - 18 May 2017

Karachi Expo Centre

15th International Exhibition for the Energy Industry

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1 - 3 August 2017

Karachi Expo Centre

15th International Plastics & Packaging Industry Trade Fair

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E-mail: info@plastipac.com.pk



1 - 3 August 2017

Karachi Expo Centre

14th Edition of the International Food, Beverage & Packaging Technology Trade Fair

Website: www.foodtech.com.pk

E-mail: info@foodtech.com.pk



1 - 3 August 2017

Karachi Expo Centre

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Website: www.foodtech.com.pk

E-mail: info@foodtech.com.pk



4th International Multi-Modal Transportation, Logistics Conference

Website: www.intertranspakistan.com

E-mail: info@intertranspakistan.com



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welcomed the asylum seekers in, she is now putting her shoulders to the wheel for their integration.

Many factors are at work behind the increasing anti-migrant sentiments in Germany and other European states. To begin with, freedom of movement being one of the cornerstones of the common market that the EU has put in place, no passport is needed for travelling between one member state and another — the UK being the notable exception to the rule. This means the refugees can travel from one country to another without much ado. Obviously, they would prefer to go to the countries offering better economic opportunities and living conditions.

Then there is the threat of Islamic militancy. Whether one likes it or not, in popular perception, terrorism has come to be associated with one religion. So there is a strong threat perception of terrorists' infiltration in the guise of immigrants. Reports have it that two of the militants involved in last year's Paris attacks had entered the country as refugees. It was that fear that goaded the EU into striking a multi-billion deal with Turkey on Syrian refugees. The perception that by welcoming Muslim refugees Germany has opened its doors to terrorists has gained wide currency.

Next is the question that to what

extent the immigrants are willing to be integrated into Germany or European societies? Integration in the present context means adopting German (or West European) norms and values. The refugees have a

to gainsay that her party's defeat and ascendency of far right parties, particularly the Alternative for Deutschland (AFD), in recent local elections in Germany has a lot to do with the chancellor's asylum policy.

The perception that by welcoming Muslim refugees Germany has opened its doors to terrorists has gained wide currency.

distinct culture based on a powerful religion and language, which may not only prevent them from adopting the host society's culture but also impact upon the latter.

Last, but in no way the least, is the economic factor. The refugees, for sure, would claim part of the national pie at the expense of the local population. If the total domestic product is to be divided between the citizens and the immigrants, whatever the latter consume will be a drag on the consumption of the former.

Merkel herself denies that the migration issue is the most serious challenge she has grappled with over the past eleven years. It is hard

The recent deal struck between the USA and Russia over Syria has generated a gleam of hope for Syrian settlement. Even if peace returns to Syria, the refugees will take a while in going back to their homeland. The Germans are scheduled to go to the polls for electing a new parliament in 2017. It's on the cards that the split on Merkel's immigration policy will bear heavily on the outcome of the popular vote. At any rate, the German chancellor's tenure already far exceeds the average shelf life of an elected leader in Western Europe. **S**

The author is a graduate from a Western European University.

Mugging the Media

**Turkmenistan is moving towards further totalitarianism
by suppressing media and free expression.**

By Dr. Raza Khan



While the ruling elite of Turkmenistan led by Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov is opening a multi-billion dollar airport and wishing to be part of the Central Asia-South Asia (CASA)-1000 energy transmission project to strengthen the country's economy, the large-scale curbs on civil liberties and civil society are discouraging foreign investment and more importantly, evolution of a democratic culture in the Central Asian country.

Any hope of transformation from whimsical rule to a participatory political regime was given a decisive blow in September when Berdymukhamedov controlled a regime that passed constitutional changes that will allow him to rule for the rest of his life. The constitutional amendment

for a life-long rule by the incumbent president is diametrically opposite to the zeitgeist and best practices of good governance calling for rule of law, accountability, transparency and maximalist participation of people in the ruling structures. These constitutional amendments were preceded by promises for wider public freedom and institutional reforms like the establishment of an ombudsman institution. In reality, President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov and his associates enjoy unlimited powers and total control over all aspects of public life in Turkmenistan.

There is no hope of laying the foundation of a democratic culture in Turkmenistan in the foreseeable future. The only social and civil society institution on which Turkmen

could bank for the beginning of the end of the personal iron-fisted rule is the media. However, the large-scale repressive restrictions on traditional and modern (interactive) media, from the Berdymukhamedov regime have completely straitjacketed the potential of media to play its traditional role of modernization, liberalization and democratization of the state and society.

Since becoming an independent state in the aftermath of dismemberment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR 1917-1991), Turkmenistan, like most other former Central Asian Republics of the Soviet Union, has been under personal rule. Before Berdymukhamedov, communist era leader, Saparmurat Niyazov (1991-2006) ruled with an iron hand.

During the regimes of Niyazov and Berdymukhamedov, Turkmenistan has been a totalitarian state. There seems no change in this state of affairs so far.

As far as media freedom in Turkmenistan is concerned, the traditional stringent curbs remain unchanged. The state controls all print and electronic media outlets and foreign media organizations often cannot access people living in Turkmenistan. The only source of Turkmen-language alternative news available in the country is Radio Azatlyk, the Turkmen service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). However, the radio and its staff has been facing official wrath as authorities have repeatedly targeted staff members. The country's judiciary, which is merely an extension of the government, has been handing down punishments to media workers instead of giving them relief from state repression. For instance, a court sentenced Saparmamed Nepeskuliev, a freelance correspondent for RFE/RL and Alternative News of Turkmenistan, an exile-run news website, to three years of imprisonment on August 31, 2015 although the charges for which he was prosecuted and on which he was convicted have never been known even to his family. Police had arrested Nepeskuliev in July for alleged narcotics possession. Also in 2015, government pressure eventually forced three other correspondents to cease working for RFE/RL.

In this situation, many Turkmen who wanted to keep themselves abreast of the real events and incidents in Turkmenistan and the world, arranged satellite dish antennas. Fearing that information through these satellite TV channels may increase political knowledge and education of the people leading to a possible movement for democratic rights, government functionaries started a crackdown on privately owned satellite TV dishes. They have forced residents to dismantle privately owned television satellite dishes, which could also receive Radio Azatlyk, offering to replace them with government-controlled cable packages.

Internet access in Turkmenistan remains limited and heavily state-controlled. Many websites — including social media and messenger services — are blocked; Internet cafés require visitors to register their personal data and the government monitors all means of communication. Internet law requires government agencies to maintain websites. However, it calls for more thorough government controls on the Internet, such as banning the transmission of computer data that does

not go through official providers.

In 2013 the new media freedom reform, the first such law ever to be passed by the nation, was passed in Turkmenistan. The law promised freedom of expression and a ban on all media censorship. It envisaged the ideals of a free and independent media and sought to prevent the “monopolization of the media by persons or entities” and stated that any member of the public could own or buy shares in a media company. It even went as far as to say that the government would provide subsidies for private investment in the industry. However, these so-called rather euphemistically called ‘reforms’ could not cut any ice regarding freeing the media so that it could play an independent role. Several rights groups had dubbed the law as a stunt to appease the international human rights groups rather than a serious attempt at reform. A clause of the 2013 law guaranteed Turkmenistan's five million inhabitants access to news media from abroad and raised hopes for a limited information revolution but it failed to improve the situation.

In fact, the 2013 so-called media reforms law was inherently stillborn and inconsequential as one clause itself stated all new freedoms provided by the law may be revoked at will to “protect the constitutional order, health, honour and dignity of the private life of citizens and public order” in the name of elusive ‘national interest.’ These contradictions severely damaged the credibility of these reforms. Time has proven the fears of the human and media rights groups as, after more than three and a half years of announcement of these reforms, the ground situation is antipodal.

International associations working for the rights of media and journalists have severely criticized the regime in Turkmenistan for its atrocities on the media and media workers.

Reporters Without Borders has consistently ranked Turkmenistan at the lowest rungs of the ladder of its annual Press Freedom Index. Media watchdog Freedom House decried Turkmenistan for its worst media environment and regulations. In its 2012 report titled “Worst of the Worst Repressive Societies” it reported that, “freedoms of speech and the press are severely restricted by the government, which controls all broadcast and print media.”

It may be mentioned here that before January 25, 2013, all of Turkmenistan's media outlets, including radio, television and newspapers, were owned and controlled by President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov. The one privately-

owned outlet was subject to rigorous government screening despite its focus on business and entrepreneurial affairs.

Direly in need for meaningful information, the people of Turkmenistan have been relying on word-of-mouth or pre-modern interpersonal communication strategies to circulate news because they have no faith in the government controlled media. The opening up of foreign networks and sources of information will be a radical improvement for the country and its people if it can be made accessible to the masses. However, in the prevailing political-governance situation it seems a far cry.

Every state has its standards for behaving and regulating of the national media. Historically there have been at least six normative frameworks imposed by the state-society, identified by media scholars for setting the standards of operations for the media. These include the authoritarian model of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the libertarian model of the nineteenth century, the totalitarian (Soviet) model of the twentieth century, the social responsibility model (USA-west) of the twentieth century; the post-World War II development media model and the democratic participation media model.

Analyzing the contemporary state-media system in the backdrop of the afore-mentioned normative media frameworks by regimes and states, Turkmenistan's media system is almost a copy of the Soviet totalitarian model in which there was no room for private and independent free media. Media outlets, like all other government and societal institutions, were subject to state ownership and control. Being a former republic of the Soviet Union, Turkmenistan has inherited this media model. However, there have been large-scale changes in the standards of media operations and freedom even in the formerly totalitarian and authoritarian states across the globe under internal and external pressures for democratic reforms and making media an outlet for public expressions of aspirations and desires. But there does not seem to be any effect of these global media and democratic trends on Turkmenistan. This does not augur well for the state and its people as in such a situation where the very democratic institutions are not allowed to function, the evolution of a democratic culture is a pipedream. ■

The writer holds a doctoral degree in International Relations and is a political-economy and security analyst specializing on South and Central Asia and the Muslim world.

For Honour Alone

Hundreds of women in Pakistan are killed in the name of honour every year. There is a need to take a serious look at the issue and find better ways to impart justice.

By Mahrukh Farooq

“They were threatening us because she got married outside her family [out of] her own free will and they didn’t like it,” explained Syed Mukhtar Kazim, husband of Samia Shahid, a British citizen of Pakistani origin who was working as a beautician in Bradford. She was found dead at her relatives’ residence in Pandori in Northern Punjab, Pakistan.

In an interview with the BBC two months ago, Kazim stated that he had asked his wife not to go to Pakistan and that the wait for her felt like ‘the longest week of his life.’ Samia had decided to pay a visit to her family on learning that her father was seriously ill. Less than a week later, her husband learned that Samia had died of a heart attack on reaching Pakistan. “She was naïve,” said Kazim. “She always thought about other people, not herself. Maybe that’s the reason she got killed.”

Despite the family’s claim of Samia dying from natural causes, forensic reports conducted by the

police show that she had actually been strangled. The latest update in the investigation, however, reveals that Samia had been raped before her death, by none other than her former husband, Chaudhry Muhammad

Shakeel, the man she had allegedly divorced to marry Kazim. Further reports suggest that the father of the victim had conspired to utilize the country’s controversial blood money law as a way to aid his former son-in-law from getting away with murder.

Samia Shahid’s case of so-called ‘honour killing’ is just one of many such incidents involving young Muslim women being severely punished for simply choosing to live life their own way rather than by the wishes of their family. According to the United Nations Population Fund, 1,000 women are killed in Pakistan every year. This accounts for nearly 25% of total honour killings around the world.

Much of this figure pertains to the perspective towards women’s role in Pakistani society which is based entirely on patriarchal ideals where women are considered to be wholly dependent, financially and in terms of security, on men. Such perceptions have permeated into Pakistan’s



social, cultural and religious beliefs, thus restricting women to their roles as homemakers, caregivers and mothers, rather than actual contributing members of society.

A recent report drafted by the Community Appraisal and Motivation Programme (CAMP), titled, 'Honour Crimes in Pakistan: Unveiling Reality and Perception,' depicted a research study that focused on the opinions of Pakistanis belonging to both rural and urban backgrounds on key issues associated with the practice of honour killing in the country. Some of its key findings showed that a majority of Pakistanis (63.8%) are completely unaware of their basic rights as citizens. In addition, an overwhelming majority (81.4%) claims to have no knowledge of the international law concerning the treatment of honour crimes, in spite of the recent focus that has shifted towards such events.

Although nearly six out of 10 respondents stated that they knew of the various domestic laws protecting the rights of women, the disabled and children, surprisingly, around seven out of 10 respondents admitted not having any awareness of fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution of Pakistan.

Perhaps the most disturbing revelation came from the respondents who had been affected by honour crimes. According to the study, more than nine out of 10 respondents stated that they preferred to resolve the issue within the family in order to avoid further violence as well as to protect the family 'honour.' Nearly 50% of respondents said they had chosen not to report the crime to the authorities. Only 10% of the respondents had the courage to approach the justice system for redressal.

After viewing the findings, one cannot help but wonder: how has family dignity begun to hold so much influence on the decisions related to abuse and domestic violence? And what exactly is it about honour that turns respectable, law-abiding citizens into cold-blooded murderers?

In order to find the answers to these questions, it is imperative that we look at the way in which honour-killing has been defined over the ages as well as its significance in today's society. Though the word, honour, itself is a connotation of worthiness and respectability, when linked to crimes committed in its name, it takes on a much darker meaning. According to the report drafted by CAMP, it entails the obligation or duty to protect honour at any cost, even if it requires



According to the United Nations Population Fund, 1,000 women are killed in Pakistan every year. This accounts for nearly 25% of total honour killings around the world.

the killing of a loved one.

The concept of honour killing is one that has survived many centuries and which has a strong foothold in many societies around the world today, according to many media reports. Contrary to what most people believe, honour killing is not a rural problem; there are, in fact, many instances involving the abuse or murder of women in the name of honour by families who have set up their existence in urban areas or cities. The case of Samia Shahid is a prime example.

The report also states that many of the incidents involving honour-related issues, in fact, do not have anything to do with the perpetrators' emotional need to protect family honour. Financial motives are fast becoming a reason for such crimes. According to Diana Y. Vitoshka, author of the report, 'The Modern Face of Honour Killing: Factors, Legal Issues and Policy Recommendations,' "where there are destitute economic conditions and chastity and fertility is currency, human life is cheap." A heinous twist to 'get-rich schemes,' the process requires that an economically weak person denounce a woman in the household for having an illicit

relationship in order to acquire monetary compensation from the co-accused or the family.

Hence, poverty, corrupt police officials charged with handling the case and an overall weak and unstable justice system have helped embolden criminals to indulge in honour-killing practices as a way of exerting their will and control over defenseless victims.

A lack of seriousness has aided the practice of honour-killing which has become rampant in Pakistani society. It has come to the extent that on the basis of mere suspicion, rumour or hearsay, a female member of the family can be targeted for the purpose of either asserting male dominance or fulfilling financial vested interests. There have been some positive developments in this regard, with the 'Domestic Violence on Women' Bill being passed in the National Assembly and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif personally taking notice of various honour-killing incidents, but until the government takes some solid steps towards restricting the practice and punishing those responsible, the Pakistani nation cannot even begin to hope for a society that treats women with respect. **S**

The writer is a member of the staff.

Diving Reforms

India's economic reforms meant to bolster the economy have the entire labour force up in arms.

"This strike is against the central government, this strike is for the cause of the working people... [It] will be 100 percent successful; we will prove that this strike is the world's largest ever."

This was the statement given by Ramen Pandey, President of the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) soon after a nationwide strike was called by nearly 10 trade unions in early August following the implementation

of Prime Minister Modi's economic policies. The entire country came to a virtual standstill as thousands of state-run banks, government offices and factories were closed and public transport disrupted.



Many members of the workforce, including factory workers, bank employees, school teachers, postal workers, miners and construction workers, took to the streets to protest against what they saw as an encroachment on their livelihoods and demanded that the government pull back the reforms.

In a 12-point charter of demands drafted by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, the association's representatives stated that workers were unhappy with the decision to implement such policies, going to the extent of terming them 'anti-worker and anti-people.' According to some union officials, nearly 180 million workers are said to have participated in the strike.

The strike had been called after talks between union leaders and Arun

Jaitley, India's Finance Minister, broke down and his promise to raise the minimum wage from 6,396 rupees (\$96) a month to 9,100 rupees (\$136) to unskilled workers rejected by the former. Ironically, it also came days after members of both houses in the Indian parliament passed a historic bill for Goods and Services Tax (GST). Experts claim that the bill, in question, not only had the potential to completely reform India's age-old taxation system but also pave the way for measures that would help boost the country's economy as well as increase its competitiveness on the international stage.

Unions and workers, on the other hand, are viewing this move with immense suspicion, many terming it as the threat of privatization taking over which will inevitably jeopardize jobs. Many workers, as a result, are demanding that the government take back its initiatives to close down unproductive factories, raise foreign investment caps in some industries and sell off stakes in state-run companies. Union representatives have also demanded guaranteed social security and healthcare benefits along with an increase in the minimum wage by almost double the amount originally proposed as a way of keeping up with the rising rate of inflation.

The concerns of union members and labour notwithstanding, many leading economic analysts see these reforms as the driving force needed to propel India into the international spotlight. According to government representatives, part of Narendra Modi's approach was to streamline India's current labour policies in order to make it easier for companies to hire and fire workers as well as provide social security and other benefits.

However, many experts agree, that the implementation of such reforms is easier said than done. Of the many factors influencing the execution of such policies, one of the elements the government has to take into account is India's large population. According to Goutam Chakraborty, an analyst at Emkay Global Financial Services, the process adheres to a high level of mutual exclusivity. "You cannot cut the labour force overnight and, at the same time, if you want to maintain all the benefits [to employees], it will be difficult for the public sector undertaking (PSU) companies to maintain their profitability to satisfy investors," he said in a statement to the media.

This is not the first time union workers have gone on strike in response to the government's desire to instill new labour reforms. Last year, nearly

150 million workers stayed away from their jobs to protest the passing of new labour reform bills in parliament. The Indian government then had no choice but to shift its focus to other areas of the economy.

Many other ventures put forward by the Modi government have been met with similar opposition. Ever since he took office in 2014, Narendra Modi has been relaxing the stringent restrictions imposed for foreign direct investment (FDI) as part of his 'Make in India' initiative that encourages multinational companies around the world to set up business within the country. Part of these initiatives have involved plans to sell holdings in state-run entities as a way of raising more funds as well as giving such companies the opportunity to benefit from international competition. However, due to resistance from employees as well as local manufacturers, the government was able to achieve only 47% of its disinvestment targets in the last two fiscal years.

"The government emphatically took land acquisition liberalization off the table last year, and intense union opposition always depressed the outlook for major labour law liberalization at the central level," Sasha Riser-Kositsky, an analyst at Eurasia Group, said in a statement to the media. "The demands expressed by the Unions are nothing new."

She further added, "GST was the last major economic reform likely to pass at the central government level before the 2019 general election. Now the government is pivoting from reform to electioneering and project implementation."

What remains to be seen now is how the government will react to the latest spate of strikes initiated across the country and what affect it will have on the country's economy. As a result of the strike, many states, particularly the southern states of Karnataka and Kerala, were badly affected. Daily life grinded to a halt as shops and business establishments were shut and train and road services disrupted by union activists. Two government buses were damaged in West Bengal leading to the arrest of nearly 20 protestors. In order to avoid further harm to the day-to-day running of the economy, the government will have to come up with a strategy that effectively caters to the preferences of the country's labour workers as well as ensures the security of India as a highly potential market for investment in the international market. **S**

—M.F.





No More of the Same

Floods have again ravaged Bangladesh but this time innovative solutions are being sought to combat the recurring menace.

By Fatima Siraj

As the Bangladesh government looks to deal with the aftermath of major floods that recently swept the north and north-eastern regions of the country, the people affected are facing what is now all too familiar for the locals. It is a well-known fact that Bangladesh's historical predisposition to flooding is closely intertwined with the history of the land itself.

The naturally low-lying topography of the country, coupled with a network of large rivers flowing within its boundaries, contributes towards this glaring phenomenon. Just how pressing

this problem is can be judged by the fact that every year, Bangladesh can expect 26000 sq km of land to be flooded; to put it into perspective that is about 18% of its total area being damaged year after year. The recurring floods remain within acceptable limits but the occasional floods that cause devastation are too severe to be ignored. Cases in point include the catastrophic floods of 1988 and 1998, which inundated 60% of the country's land area and were reported as being the worst floods in recorded history. Both these floods were primarily

caused by heavy rainfall during the monsoon season and simultaneous overflowing of the three major rivers - the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna. A statistical analysis of existing records based on Bangladesh's extremely dynamic chronology of past floods reveals that the nation can expect severe floods every 7 years and devastating floods every 33-50 years - figures that loom alarmingly over the government as it attempts to overcome the threat.

This year has been no different. As a result of heavy rainfall during the

Bangladesh's extremely dynamic chronology of past floods reveals that the nation can expect severe floods every 7 years.

July-August monsoon season, major floods have affected around 3.2 million people across sixteen districts, including Jamalpur, Kurigram, Sirajgonj, Gaibanda and Tangail. Together these five districts account for over 70% of the total people affected. The damage done has been significantly vast with over 25000 people having been displaced and more than 250,000 homes damaged to some degree. In addition, 28 people were reported to have drowned with 4 losing their lives to snake bites. Although the initial impact of the inland floods was felt primarily in the northern areas, it didn't take long for places in central and southern regions, including the capital Dhaka, to also get affected.

As water levels kept dangerously rising, thousands of people were forced out of their homes. While some managed to seek refuge in flood shelters, many families found themselves living under the open sky desperately in search for food, clean water, medical supplies and fuel. The European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) and NGOs such as Red Crescent took it upon themselves to undertake relief efforts by distributing food in affected areas but access to these was severely limited due to road and railway blockages.

Although the immediate danger is over and the situation has relatively eased, the after-effects of the severe inundation of dwellings and agricultural areas has left the affected people in distress. With huge amounts of crops having been destroyed in approximately 40,000 hectares of farming land, farmers will look to recover the lost crop. Furthermore, the displaced families will have to channel substantial resources into rebuilding their homes that were either damaged or completely destroyed. Even the homes that didn't undergo much damage lost their latrines and tube-wells, which poses a serious threat to public health and hygiene. In the education and public spheres too the floods played their role in adversely affecting their day-to-day running. Inundation of schools and their occupation as temporary shelters has inhibited access to education for the local children while inundation of embankments, roads and railways has disrupted the functioning of the country's infrastructure. This presents

an urgent task for the government which needs to take full account of the situation and embark on a countrywide rehabilitation plan so that people can return to their normal lives.

The government needs to provide support services for farmers who need assistance in procuring seeds and seedlings, for schools that need to be up and running again and homes that need repair and reconstruction. So far the waterlogging problem has been assessed and the government has responded by providing cash and rice grants. However, there is more that needs to be done and the best approach for the concerned authorities seems to be partnering with local and international NGOs, particularly the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS), which is carrying out periodic assessment of the situation and responding appropriately to needs.

While relief operations and rehabilitation efforts are undoubtedly important in light of Bangladesh's flood problems, what is even more important is preparation in terms of disaster management. The government's flood forecasting and warning centre provides the necessary information to anticipate approaching flood threats. However, the purpose of these forecasts, which is to minimize the damage, doesn't seem to be achieved. The government and partner organizations can solve this problem by joining hands to conduct community-wide engagement programs under which the local population can be trained in practical techniques and insights regarding disaster management. It can learn from the Maldives, which is a country much like Bangladesh in terms of susceptibility to natural disasters. The Maldives has taken to raising awareness, developing a tenacious mindset and equipping children with relevant disaster management skills right at the primary level. It is such proactive and long-term measures that Bangladesh needs to prepare for future flooding. Cash grants and crop grants are only a short-term solution to a recurring problem that needs a dynamic approach. In the end, involving the community seems to be the best way forward. **S**

The writer is currently pursuing a BBA degree. She focuses on marketing and social issues.

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Sense of the City

The Strategic Cities Development Project (SCDP) in Sri Lanka is set to usher in a new era of prosperity.

By Yasmin Elahi

Bouncing back from a 30-year old civil war that ended in 2009, Sri Lanka's economy has grown at an average 6.4 percent (2010-2015). This reflects the country's determined policy towards peaceful reconstruction and growth. Sri Lanka faces the challenge of providing basic urban services and infrastructure to the growing demand of an urbanization process and structural reformation. A shift in the rural/urban population ratio is a part of economic and industrial development. The country wants to give its citizens access to economic opportunities with better living conditions, while preserving its cultural values.

After Colombo, the important

secondary cities of Kandy, Galle and Jaffna are experiencing rapid growth in their population and industries, as well as providing huge opportunities to the country's already booming economy. The increase in population also brings in a higher concentration of poverty, congestion and decline in access to quality civic services and facilities. To meet this challenge, a comprehensive program called Strategic Cities Development Project (SCDP) has been launched.

SCDP is a part of Sri Lanka's National City Development Program. The project aims at improving basic infrastructure services in the rapidly growing cities of Kandy, Jaffna and Galle and creating

a network of well-connected cities. It is being supported by the World Bank initially through a \$202 million development credit. The project is expected to cost \$257.08 million with the rest being funded by the Sri Lankan government. SCDP is planned to be completed by December 31, 2021 and some 650,000 people are expected to benefit from it.

Aligned with the government's development agenda, SCDP aims at improving infrastructure and providing better living conditions to the residents and to the growing volume of tourists. The project will work on improving basic urban services i.e. water supply, drainage, traffic management, tourism



planning, connectivity, access to public places and preservation of cultural heritage sites.

Kandy is an internationally-acclaimed world heritage site under UNESCO where one of the most important Buddhist temples in South Asia is located in a hilly terrain surrounded by an environmentally sensitive area. Here critical problems of traffic congestion, environmental protection, water scarcity and solid waste management need to be addressed.

SCDP aims at improving Kandy's infrastructure such as relieving congestion by appropriate traffic planning, cleaning of canals to improve drainage, enhancement of parks and pedestrian amenities and other such issues. The project will include preserving Kandy's cultural importance through planning and engineering services, together with the preparation of a Cultural Heritage and Conservation Master Plan, the latter being an essential requirement for supporting the rating that Kandy has as a World Heritage City.

A resident of Kandy, Abdul Rauf lives with his family near a dangerous canal that carries sewage. Joe Qian, who works for External Affairs and Communications, South East Asia Region of the World Bank, quotes him as saying, "Our house gets flooded ten to fifteen times every year due to canal overflowing. My family and I look forward to the project so that we can live in a healthy and pleasant environment."

Jaffna has seen rapid growth after the civil war. The people of Jaffna want improved living conditions and better

municipal services, while preserving cultural heritage of the city which faces frequent floods and coastal erosion. SCDP has provisions for improving urban services and enhancing public spaces. In consultation with Jaffna's citizens, the project will improve the road network, improve the existing drainage infrastructure and rehabilitate the ponds which are important for flood management. It will also restore historic and landmark buildings and enhance selected streets and public spaces. Cycling will be encouraged to reduce pollution. Connectivity will be improved by improving traffic management measures and rehabilitating link roads.

Francoise Clottes, World Bank Country Director for Sri Lanka and Maldives talks about Jaffna, "Well-planned cities can be centres of innovation and job creation as experienced in many parts of the world and this is an opportunity for Sri Lanka to connect people to prosperity. There is substantial potential for economic growth in Jaffna, now that peace has returned. An improved urban environment is a favourable habitat for the developing enterprises that one day will become the engines of growth."

The historic port city of Galle has also facing problems related to rapid economic growth. The city is flooded routinely by overflowing of the main canals. This is due to lack of maintenance and people using them as a dumping place, which creates health issues.

In its plans for Galle, SCDP aims at taking flood and coastal erosion reduction measures by improving the drainage infrastructure. It will also restore buildings of historical importance

and enhance public places and selected streetscapes. It will provide for PPAs (Project Partner Agencies) to plan, design and improve urban infrastructure and offer better municipal services.

SCDP has a provision for compensating all persons or families displaced or otherwise affected by the project. Many initiatives will require the acquisition of land, so a detailed rehabilitation plan has been chalked out. People who are displaced by a project will be compensated in cash or kind. Assistance may also include transportation, food, shelter and social services during their relocation. To tone down resentment due to the displacement or the relocation process, cash allowances may also be given to make up for the lost working days and to meet moving expenses.

SCDP is taking great care to tackle sensitive issues in a practical manner. Environmental issues, protection of sites of cultural and historical importance and public sentiments are taken into consideration in a positive manner.

Project activities of the SCDP may cause temporary inconveniences but there is negligible public resentment about these hardships. People realize the fact that both the residents and tourists will enjoy lasting benefits as these cities will have a much cleaner environment and better living/economic conditions by attracting more investments. SCDP could prove to be a guideline for growing cities all over South Asia which face problems like those faced by Kandy, Galle and Jaffna. **S**

The writer is a freelancer with special interest in social issues.



Ending Malaria

Bhutan expects to emerge as a Malaria-free country by 2020.

When planning a trip to any South Asian country, travellers are always warned about certain diseases, including malaria.

The disease is caused by the bite

of a particular type of mosquito and is referred to as the most common disease in the region, utilizing considerable resources and adopting different preventative methods; all this comprises both short and long-

term strategies to control the disease. Despite continuous efforts, South Asia has yet to get rid of the malaria endemic.

A rare example is Sri Lanka which has recently emerged as one South



Asian country that has been officially declared free from malaria by the World Health Organisation (WHO). "WHO certification of malaria elimination requires a country to prove the absence of any locally acquired infections for a minimum of three consecutive years. Once this is achieved, continued vigilance is required to prevent malaria resurgence," says the *Frontiers in Public Health*, an international research journal.

Another South Asian country where malaria is now on the verge of elimination is Bhutan.

Bhutan launched its National Malaria Eradication Programme in 1964; this was later renamed National Malaria Control Programme (NMCP). In the early 60s, according to the World Health Organisation's annual report 'Eliminating Malaria-2015,' the then Bhutanese government formed an active surveillance system to control malaria, which was common in many areas of the country.

The government also carried out a series of indoor residual spraying (IRS) campaigns across the country, which produced positive results and, by 1966, reported malaria cases in Bhutan were reduced to less than 115, according to the WHO.

"Malaria risk areas are mainly forest and forest-fringe human settlements, in particular those with irrigation or development projects, such as hydropower project sites. In Bhutan, twenty-four percent of the population lives in areas considered free of malaria, located in four districts in the northeast and central part of the country," says Thinley Yangzom, a Bhutan-based epidemiologist.

However, the country witnessed a sudden rise in Malaria cases after a few years that forced the Bhutanese health ministry to change both its short and long-term strategies. As the surveillance system was found ineffective in the timely identification of cases, efforts were made to enhance or replace the system with new methods for early detection of the endemic.

In the late 1970s, the entire health system of the country was decentralised, which helped it expand its primary healthcare sector. However, the drastic move negatively impacted the ongoing anti-malaria drive, particularly in far-flung dzongkhags (districts), which found themselves unable to carry out mandatory indoor residual spraying by their own.

In a newly decentralised setup, it became even more difficult for most of the dzongkhags to buy the required number of insecticides and increasing

malaria drug resistance worsened the situation in many areas, bordering India. At the same time, various parts of southern Bhutan, such as Bumthang, Sarpang, Trongsa and Zhemgang were going through political instability and facing law and order challenges that triggered mass migration of people from rural to urban areas.

Such factors appeared to be detrimental to the successful implementation of the National Malaria Control Programme (NMCP) throughout the country. In the northern areas, thanks to the NMCP, the incidence of malaria cases significantly dropped, but in the rest of the dzongkhags and gewogs (sub-districts), the disease kept spreading.

In 1994, some 40,000 malaria cases were reported in Bhutan, showing the extent of the problem the country had

In Bhutan, malaria dropped from the 16th leading cause of lives lost in 1990 to the 46th in 2010.

ratcheted up because of lack of long-term planning and due to mismanagement of resources.

In 2003, the Bhutanese Ministry of Health renamed the National Malaria Control Programme as Vector-borne Disease Control Programme (VDCP), which also targeted the rest of the vector-borne diseases, such as Lyme disease, dengue fever and West Nile Virus, as well as malaria.

Under the VDCP initiative, the Ministry posted well-trained medical staff in basic health units, community health centres, maternity homes, general hospitals and in privately run clinics functioning across the country to enhance surveillance, report, coordinate and focus on timely malaria diagnosis, its treatment and prevention.

"Bhutanese surveillance system strives to meet the objectives of the VDCP's 2012–2016 malaria strategic plan: (1) to reduce the number of malaria-related deaths to 0 by 2018 (shifted to 2018 in the 2015–2012 National Strategic Plan), (2) to achieve 0 local malaria transmission by 2016, and (3) to obtain WHO malaria-free certification by 2020," according to the *Frontiers in Public Health*, August 2016.

Having adopted a comprehensive and a long-term malaria elimination approach, the VDCP first worked

to eliminate the disease in some 9 dzongkhags and gewogs which were highly prone to malaria, while enhanced control strategies were implemented in other parts of the country.

"Bhutan is one of more than 30 countries with a stated goal of malaria elimination. Bhutan has endorsed the goal of an Asia-Pacific region free of malaria by 2030 and is one of 18 countries pursuing this goal through membership of the Asia-Pacific Malaria Elimination Network," according to the *Lancet Global Health*, 2016.

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria provided financial grants to Bhutan to incorporate latest malaria control interventions and to scale-up its Vector-borne Disease Control Programme (VDCP). The Ministry of Health distributed long-

lasting insecticide-treated nets (LLINs) among the people and also introduced some new treatment methods over the period from 2006 to 2013.

In 2009, a sudden increase in malaria cases was noted owing to delays in focal indoor residual spraying (IRS) operations in some areas and due to the earlier monsoon season. 4-years old LLINs were also found ineffective in the prevention of malaria.

As per a study published in the August 2016 issue of the *Frontiers in Public Health*, 'in Bhutan, malaria dropped from the 16th leading cause of lives lost in 1990 to the 46th in 2010.'

Overall, the VDCP project produced significant results in Bhutan. By 2013, there were a total of 45 cases reported in the country, according to the National Malaria Surveillance System of Bhutan. In 2015, a total of 34 malaria cases were reported, while deaths related to malaria were zero since 2013, says Karma Wangdi, a Bhutanese journalist.

"Bhutan, free of indigenous Malaria is very close and to accelerate elimination, we all have to work hard," says DN Dhungyel, the minister of information and communications in Bhutan. **S**

—F.U.

Gender Gap



Women of the Maithili community in Nepal find themselves in a constant struggle to survive as respected members of society.

By Bushra Batool

The complex system of societies in which we live is based on the working of several institutions which function in an integrated manner to form a social structure. In the contemporary world, this seems to be true when we talk about the functionalities of entities, no matter be it a macro state level analysis or a micro level individual-based analysis. The increasing interdependence is inevitable and isolation in terms of state policies, be it in terms of social, political or economic scenarios, is not a good option. Similarly, the rapid specialization of human beings in terms of their qualifications and professions has caused an advancement in designated roles of human beings

that has created interdependence even more than ever before. May be the writings of Herbert Spencer and the theoretical foundations of his fundamentalist perspective are well-grounded and appropriate to various functions, referring to a large number of patterns of human societies and may be not to other aspects of human life but when it comes to gender differentiation, the Maithili community (located in Janakpur in the Dhanusa district of Nepal) seems to be spiritually following it.

There is a debate about whether societies exhibit social issues as a consequence of their weak social fabric and working mechanism or whether they are already entangled

in such traditions and cultures that destine them to face social problems. This may be true for the Maithili community in Nepal. As stated by a report of the UNICEF, Maithili, a province of Nepal, is unfortunately subjected to gender disparity which can be traced to the notorious feudal history of the country. The diversity of culture is mainly responsible for creating this notorious history and adds to the social exclusion and gender discrimination towards the female members of the Maithili's. Home to approximately 5.4 million people, Maithili is the second province of Nepal, as designated by the Nepalese constitution in 2015. Like other communities, the people



Maithili women are suppressed and dejected in the male dominated society where they are not recognized as equal individuals.



of Mithila have a particular approach towards certain aspects of life such as health care, education, employment and legal rights, etc. Ironically, Mithila is accustomed to gender disparity which prevails in all aspects of human life, subjugating Maithil women to a number of challenges. As noted by a Maithili woman Dollie Sah, founder of the NGO Lending Hands, the pattern of raising a Maithili girl is entirely different from that of a boy, no matter whether the child belongs to an educated family or not.

It is also noticed that Maithili women are suppressed and dejected in the male dominated society where the woman are not recognized as equal individuals. According to a recent report of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on gender review, Maithili women are not provided equal employment opportunities like men which adds to increasing illiteracy among women in that community. As a consequence, women of Mithili

are not aware of their basic rights as individuals and do not recognize their legal options.

Moreover, these women are supposed to stay at home to perform house chores and to serve their family members. According to estimates, 60% of Maithil women are confined to homes to perform family labour with no recognition or incentive. Although a number of Maithil women are engaged in doing home-based craft work, the income they make is much lesser than what the male members of society earn working in other sectors. This recessive attributes of the Maithili women make them highly inactive as far as decision-making in a family is concerned. Women are not supposed to be a part of decision-making in homes due to the perception of their being an inferior gender.

Out of the total, around 40% of Maithili women are active economically, including those who are engaged in some handicraft at home. For others, agriculture is one of the areas where they participate to a large extent. It is also notable that very few have skilled manual jobs and are given much less opportunities to be associated with professional, managerial and technical work. In the broader perspective, the gender disparity in the Maithili community can

be argued as a sub-set and reflection of the culture of Nepal. Most women in Nepal are in healthcare where their presence is 28.54%. The lowest participation of women is in Forestry at just 3.25%.

Psychological effects are also noticed as a result of the increased gender discrimination. According to reports, the preference of the male child over females contributes to the internalization of gender disparity and increasing frustration and psychological issues among women in the Maithilis. The dominating attitude of the males adds to the deteriorating health condition of women and the nutritious state of women is considerably low. There is also a correlation between the preference for sons and women's health; those women who do not deliver male heirs are rejected and face serious repercussions. It has also been pointed out by several research reports that those societies that strongly follow the practice of preferring sons are highly endangered, with the declining health of the female child as a consequence.

Notwithstanding all the social challenges and exclusions that Maithili women face, their struggles are also directed against society to fight and eradicate social disorders. Such struggles are especially against

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unequal opportunities for the two genders in areas of health, education, legal rights and employment. A number of non-governmental organizations are emerging which are aimed at providing economic independence to the Maithili women by creating earning opportunities outside their homes. There is also an initiative towards uplifting their social status in society. As stated by Coralynn Davis, who works as an associate professor of women and gender studies in Nepal, one of the core reasons of the dejection and inferior social status of these women is their economic dependence on their male family members.

JWDC (Janakpur Women's Development Centre) is an initiative for promoting Maithili women to have considerably better paid earning opportunities and is said to be improving lives of a number of Maithili women and inducing a positive change within the Maithili community. In addition, ILO (International Labor Organization) is also dedicated to employ Maithili women in several of its road construction projects underway in the region, thus extending support to Maithili women. This initiative of the ILO is not only aimed at providing economic independence to Maithili women but also to break the stereotypes that confine women to only household activities.



Several initiatives have been taken in modern Nepal in recent times which, as highlighted in report of the Asian Development Bank, include improvement in the health sector and is successful in increasing life expectancy and decreasing maternal mortality. This also paves the way towards improving healthcare facilities for women in the Maithili community thus leading to better maternal health. In spite of the fact that political parties in Nepal are largely run by men, some 24.5% female ministers are serving in Nepal, which indicates that the participation of women in government organizations is improving. Land ownership by women is also going through change and, as indicated by reports, 19.71% of ownership of land and houses is by women,


notwithstanding the score provided by the Human Development Report of the UNDP (2010) which says it is impossible in Nepal for a woman to own a home.

Although initiatives like the JWDC and Lending Hands, in addition to several measures by the government of Nepal, have brought improvements in the lives of Maithili community, like other communities of Nepal, a lot more needs to be done in form of formal initiatives including constitutional changes in order to instill a radical change in the Maithili community. Only in this manner can the pattern of social segregation, gender disparity and the element of female exclusion can be reformed. **S**


The writer is a free-lance journalist.

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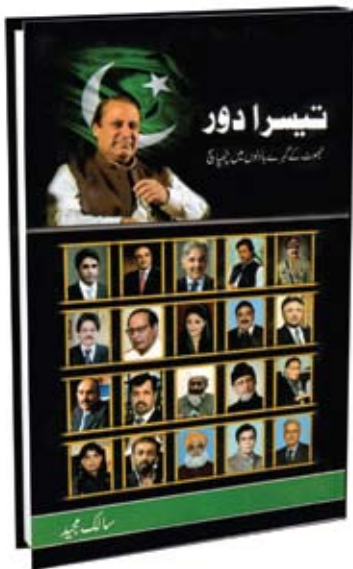
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Sizing up the Third Term



Teesra Dour is a collection of columns written by Salik Majeed, a veteran journalist, columnist and TV anchor. The volume very extensively covers the current political situation, highlighting the challenges being faced by the government as well as critically examining the successes and failures of Nawaz Sharif, especially in his third term.

Salik is a firm believer in the supremacy of democracy. He argues that contrary to the role of military rulers who succumbed to pressure from superpowers, the elected rulers always stuck to their guns. He quotes such instances as the military rulers surrendering before the Indian Army resulting in division of Pakistan while it was Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who brought 93,000 POWs back to Pakistan. Again, it was civilian Nawaz Sharif who made Pakistan a nuclear power despite severe opposition from the U.S. and other

countries.

The author's conclusions are based on information straight from the horse's mouth and his own findings based on comprehensive research, which makes the book compelling reading while his somewhat non-judgmental style leaves a lot for readers to reach their own conclusion. He describes his experiences competently while acknowledging the support and productive advice of his brothers-in-arms.

The book vividly discusses the successes of the Karachi Operation and the government's effort to carefully and intelligently handle it. He also dwells on strike calls and dharna by the opposition parties in Islamabad. He points out that instead of crushing the opposition or registering cases against the opposition leaders, the Nawaz government opted for peaceful and amicable solutions.

Condemning the element of agitation in politics, he argues that in any country such activities are very detrimental to its economic prosperity and wellbeing. While discussing the issue at length, he describes the economic as well as social benefits the country is expected to derive by the completion of CPEC, which, according to him, is a master

Book Title:	Teesra Dour
Author:	Salik Majeed
Publisher:	Welcome Book Port
Pages:	120

lauding the achievements of PIA during this regime.

The writer criticises Imran Khan's activities to the extent of demeaning an emerging political force. And herein, perhaps, readers may find the book's biggest weakness, because it may not be wholly correct to say that the opposition's politics of agitation is the root cause of the country's economic setback. In fact there are a number of flaws in the fiscal policy which is creating hurdles in the economic progress. A case in point is the controversy of taxation in the real estate sector.

Notwithstanding trivial objections, the third era of Nawaz Sharif is observed by a knowledgeable author and is quite readable. While the format and nature of the book — based on columns published in a newspaper — does

Notwithstanding trivial objections, the third era of Nawaz Sharif is observed by a knowledgeable author and is quite readable.

stroke of the Nawaz government.

Though the author attempts to utilise his experiences for a broader commentary on the Nawaz government, his analysis can be sufficiently criticised. For example, his bid to save Nawaz Sharif from the Panama Leaks controversy, defending Nawaz Sharif's expensive treatment abroad and

not do justice to the objective evident in the title, there are enough bits and pieces to make the book a good read. A seasoned journalist like Salik Majeed could perhaps shed more light on other national issues with his informative and thought provoking insights. **S**

- K.A.

Tale of a dying art

Book Title:	Khattati ka Shah Jehan
Author:	Rasheed Shahid
Publisher:	Al-Qalam Publisher
Pages:	196

The rule of soulless equipment and unfeeling machines repress a sense of empathy among human beings which turns them into heartless species, according to Allama Iqbal. The same goes for a miraculous multipurpose invention like the computer, which has impacted every phase of life and has ushered in the demise of such traditional art forms as calligraphy.

The book 'Khattati ka Shah Jehan' revolves around a late Pakistani calligrapher Sharif Gulzar, who can be referred to as one of the pioneers of calligraphy in Urdu journalism in the country, but owing to no patronage from the government and due to a lack of acknowledgement from the print media, Gulzar could not gain the status he deserved.

Born in 1931 in Punjab, Sharif Gulzar learned the art of calligraphy

from Khalifa Ahmed Hussain Suhail Raqam. In 1954, he started his career as a professional calligrapher at Roznama Hilal-e-Pakistan and later worked with such leading newspapers as Kohistan, Roznama Mashriq, Akhbar-e-Khwateen and many other Urdu publications. At Mashriq, he worked from 1963 to 1983 as a Chief Art Editor and Chief Calligrapher.

Compiled by Rasheed Shahid, the book contains 49 articles which are mainly written by Sharif Gulzar's colleagues and friends, describing his journey of being a leading calligrapher of his time and highlighting his valuable services to print journalism.

Among the leading contributors are Shakeel Adil Zada, Farhad Zaidi, Dr. Yaseen Rizvi, Intizar Hussain, Hafiz Shafeeq-Ur-Rehman, Abdul Rasheed Shahid, Mujahid Barelvi, Aftab Zafar and many others. The book is an account of the late artist's life and also a tale of the dying art of calligraphy.

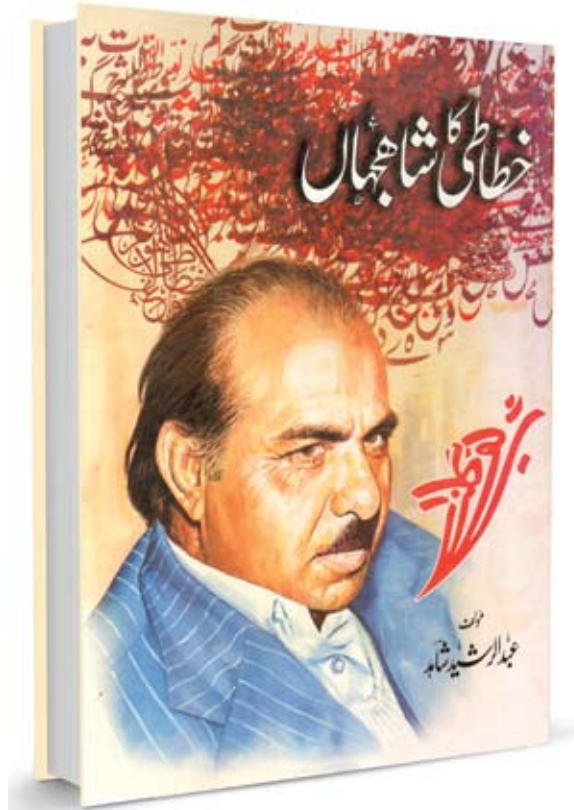
It starts with a foreword which gives a brief description about calligraphy, its technical aspects, different styles and its evolution as an exclusive visual art form which is now on the verge of becoming obsolete.

The compiler of the book, Rasheed Shahid, is also an expert calligrapher and has worked with Sharif Gulzar for more than two decades. He admits that the lot of art editors, layout designers and calligraphers are never mentioned whenever the evolution and development of journalism in Pakistan is discussed at any forum, which is really frustrating.

Overall, the volume covers the life of Sharif Gulzar in details and highlights his lifelong services and contributions to the art of page-making and layout designing.

Some rare calligraphy templates are also included in the book. Printed on colourful glossy paper, Khattati ka Shah Jehan is a great tribute to Sharif Gulzar and his work and also presents a valuable record of the history and evolution of calligraphy in Pakistan. ■

- F.U.



INTERVIEW

“This is the clash of civilisations”

Dr. Aisha Agha is a Pakistani defence analyst of international repute. In an exclusive interview with SOUTHASIA, she talked about the current situation in the region involving Afghanistan and its effects on South Asia and the world over. Excerpts:

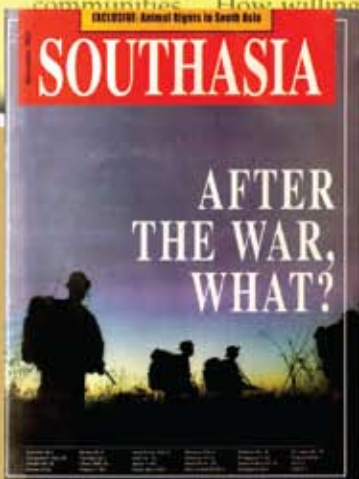
How effective is the Zahir Shah element regarding any future set-up in Afghanistan?

It is hard to say at this point what would be more effective. Let me tell you, there are internal and external factors that have been influencing Afghan politics for the past 20 years. Right now all the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan have their interests in Afghan politics. US, Pakistan, Russia, Central Asian States, Iran, India, all have their interests. Then there are Afghans living outside Afghanistan. Zahir Shah has been out of the scene for so long. The question is: What is the possibility of him bringing the people together. Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks and other communities. How willing are they

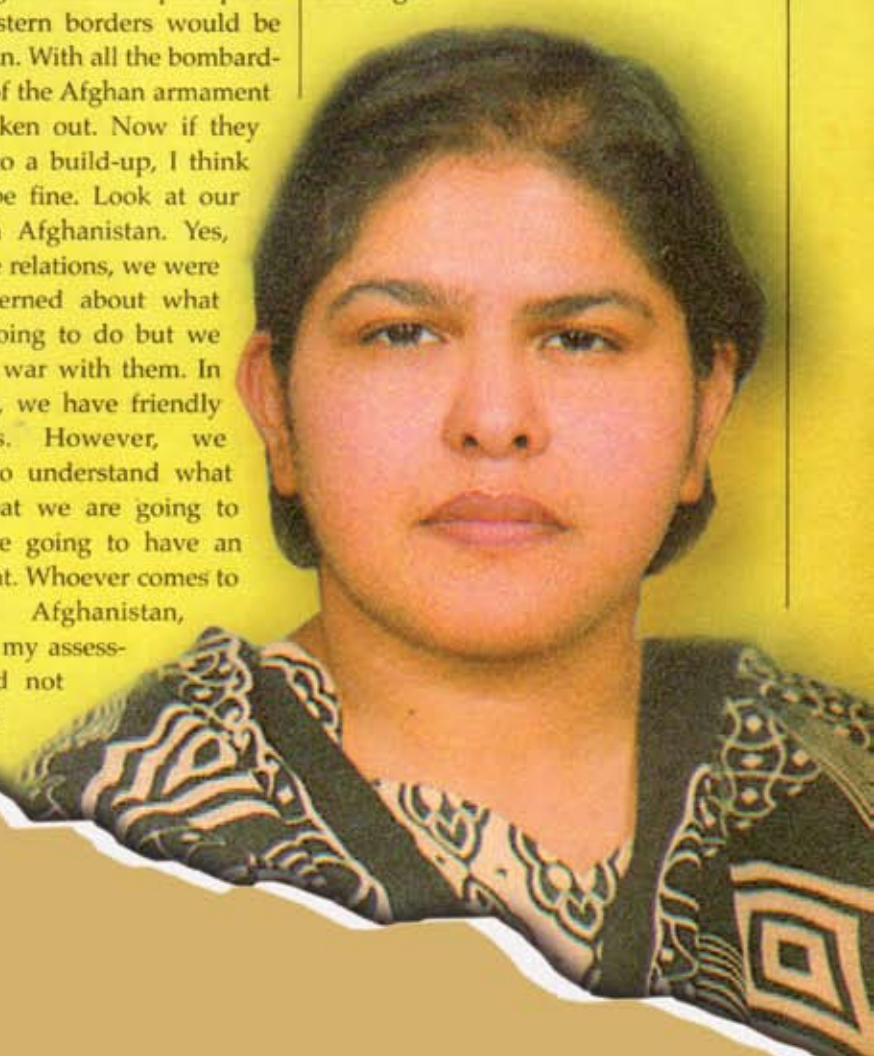
Pashtuns, would provide Pakistan a strategic depth in the event of any future war with India. Do you see the Musharraf government's decision to support the US on Afghanistan a deviation from the policy? And have our western borders once again become insecure?

I don't agree with the perception that our western borders would be insecure again. With all the bombardment, most of the Afghan armament would be taken out. Now if they don't get into a build-up, I think we should be fine. Look at our history with Afghanistan. Yes, we had tense relations, we were always concerned about what they were going to do but we never had a war with them. In Central Asia, we have friendly governments. However, we should try to understand what kind of threat we are going to have. We are going to have an internal threat. Whoever comes to power in Afghanistan, according to my assessment, would not be willing to threaten us.

ferent government is going to threaten us directly. Now secondly, the whole idea of 'Strategic Depth' is nonsense. This is a concept of the Second World War. An out-dated one. And Afghanistan with the kind of chaos it is experiencing for so many years, would never provide us with the strategic



A page from Southasia, 2001



Ad 10



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