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January 2019

INSIDE

PAKISTAN Israel Policy | **INDIA** Justice Denied

BANGLADESH The Radical Angle | **VENEZUELA** Migration Crisis

Modi's Mission

Modi's BJP will stop at nothing to forward its Hindutva ideology. The face of India will have greatly changed by the elections as India is veering off its secular stance.

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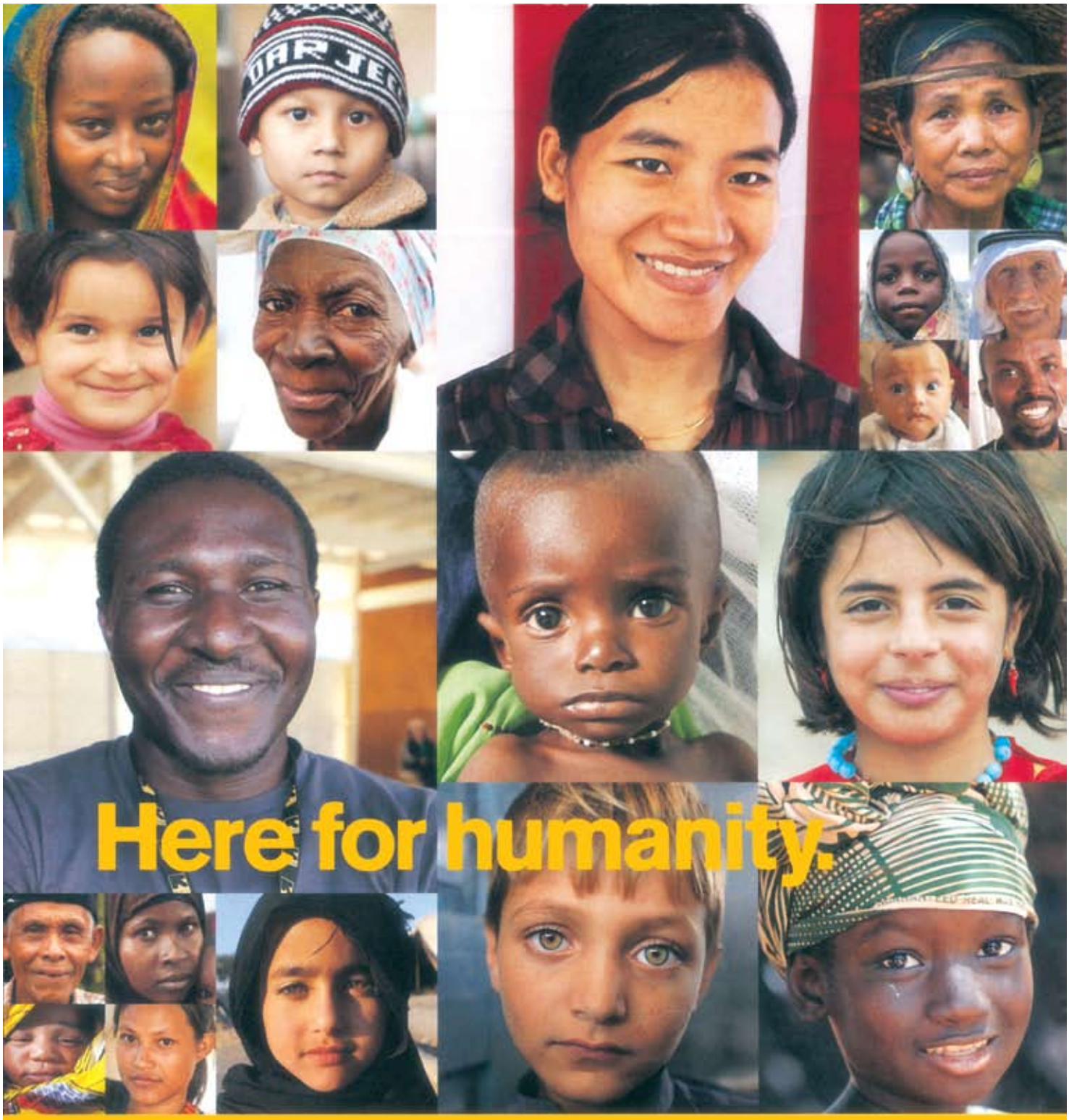

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“A people that elect corrupt politicians, imposters, thieves and traitors are not victims… but accomplices”

– George Orwell

SOCIETY FOR GLOBAL
MODERATION
STRENGTHENING TOLERANCE, INTERFAITH HARMONY AND DEMOCRACY

A public service message developed by CMC and supported by this publication

Contents

14
The Name Changing Spree
India wants to be a future Hindu state.

Islamabad

31
The Struggle Continues
Women in Pakistan want more rights.

Kabul

39
Batting For A Solution
It seems new peace moves concerning Afghanistan are bearing fruit.

Malé

41
Towards a New Agenda
Solih too has a 100-day agenda.

36
New Delhi

Arms Race Fever
India aims to be the arms leader in South Asia.

44
International
A Growing Crisis
Key problems are rocking Venezuela.

49
Neighbour
Church Split
Christianity faces a crisis of its own.

57
Chittagong
The Radical Angle
Radical groups are coming together in Bangladesh.

Jaffna
58 **The War Widows**
Sri Lanka faces a problem left over from its civil war.

REGULAR FEATURES
Editor's Mail 8
On Record 9
Briefs 10
COVER STORY
The Name Changing Spree 14
Directionless Development 15
In The Name of Ram 17
More to the Mania 18
No Walkover 20
End of Secularism 21
Towards the Ram Mandir 23
The Contest 24
Interview: Lt. Gen. Zameer Uddin Shah 25
REGION
Islamabad
Future of SAARC 30
Islamabad
The Struggle Continues 31
Islamabad
Revisiting No-No Land 32
Islamabad
Recovering The Money 34
Gwadar
The Gender Front 35
New Delhi
Arms Race Fever 36
Kabul & Islamabad
Harbingers of Peace 38
Kabul
Batting For A Solution 39
Malé
Towards a New Agenda 41
INTERNATIONAL
A Growing Crisis 44
Trade Winds 45
NEIGHBOUR
Defiant Rap 48
Church Split 49
Storm in the Gulf 51
FEATURES
Islamabad
A Dark Day 54
New Delhi
Crisis of Cleanliness 55
Chittagong
The Radical Angle 57
Jaffna
The War Widows 58
Laya
Celebrating Highland Culture 60
BOOK REVIEW
Women's Politics in Contemporary Palestine 61
The Music Too 62

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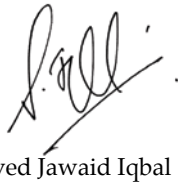
Towards Rule of Law

Two individuals who have played a primary role in Pakistan's political journey are Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Asif Zardari. Nawaz Sharif has served as Prime Minister of Pakistan three times while Asif Zardari has completed a successful five-year term as President of Pakistan. Both have now been charged with money laundering through corruption. Prime Minister Imran Khan has declared in very clear terms that he will carry out accountability under all circumstances. A banking court has extended interim bail of former President and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) co-chairman, Asif Ali Zardari and his sister Faryal Talpur till January 7, 2019. They are required to account for the money they are alleged to have laundered and the rule of law will apply to them with the same equitability as it has been done to Nawaz Sharif. The latter was handed down a verdict on Monday, December 24, 2018 in the Al-Azizia Steel Mills corruption reference by an accountability court. The sentence comprises seven years in jail and a fine of $2.5 million. Sharif has been acquitted in the Flagship Investments reference. His plea of transfer from Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi to Kot Lakhpat Jail in Lahore was also accepted by the learned court.

The influence of law in society depicts the level of fairness and justice by which every individual is treated, regardless of the person's standing. Rule of law in a healthy society places a constraint on individual and institutional behaviour. It does not matter what office an individual holds. It is the principle under which all members of society (including those in government) are considered equally subject to. Accountability of each individual is very important in this regard and all individuals and institutions, whether belonging to the government or in the private sector, are accountable under the law. It needs to be reemphasized that Pakistan was established as a welfare state where rights of all citizens were to be wholly protected and where the rule of law would be implemented in letter and spirit.

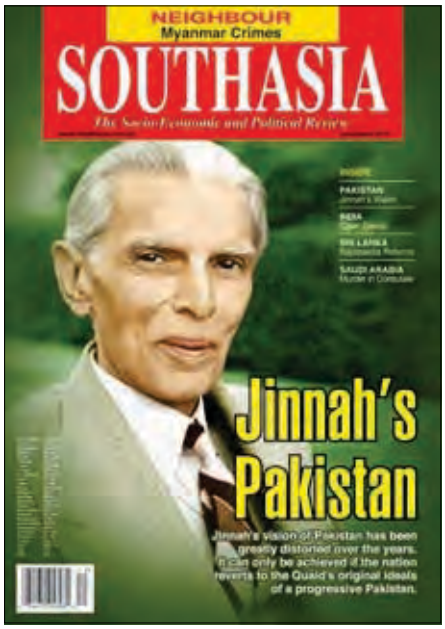
The main objective of a welfare state is to create social and economic equality and to ensure fair standards of living, fair access to justice, freedom of faith, complete transparency in decision-making of the judiciary and respect of human rights. It is clear that in Pakistan's seven decades of independence, none of this has ever been followed. A human rights commission report published in 2015 provides a shocking situation of human rights in the country. The people of Pakistan suffer from continuous and serious human rights violations but they have never had access to speedy justice. The summary courts established during the various martial laws did provide speedy justice to some extent but this did not continue for very long. An independent and properly functioning judiciary in Pakistan has always been a prerequisite for the rule of law but it had to be backed up by a just legal system and the right of every individual to a fair hearing. In the present times, this seems to have been ensured by the incumbent judiciary which is acting independently and it is for this reason that many people having held the highest offices in the land are now facing the courts. The Pakistan government also needs to revisit the legal system. It must ensure adequate legal representation, effective legislation, open court trials, transparent rules of procedure, and rule of law.

It is hoped that in the coming times, courts in Pakistan will be well on their way towards inculcating merit and public interest in dispensation of their judgments – and that Prime Minister Imran Khan's government will stand by its commitment to fight corruption. S



Syed Jawaid Iqbal
Editor in Chief

Paradise Lost



This is with reference to last month's cover story on 'Jinnah's Pakistan.' A separate Muslim state based on the two nation theory, Pakistan soon emerged as a classic example of a dream which went wrong after its inception. Contrary to the vision envisaged by Quaid-e-Azam, the country lost its direction as soon as its founder died. Called 'Jinnah's Pakistan,' the country ideally belonged to the suppressed minority of the sub-continent, but soon after the Quaid's demise, it saw its foundations shaken to the core when its successive leaderships divided the 'Land of the Pure' into 'East Pakistan' and 'West Pakistan.' The break-up of the country in 1971 was not enough to safeguard its founding ideals as rise of provincialism and ethnicity-based politics turned the country into a truly a multi-nation state. The need of the hour is to revert to the basic idea that was envisaged by the founding fathers.

Syed Mehboob Rabbani,
Karachi, Pakistan.

Brexit Countdown

According to Arnold J. Toynbee, a British historian, every civilisation is subject to both rise and fall. More than an outcome of man-made disasters, it tends to be a naturally and gradually occurring phenomenon that leads to a civilisation's downfall, despite its all grandeur and shining glory and history is witness to such occurrences time and again. The breakup of the British Empire is the most recent example that corroborates Toynbee's theory and also exposes the vulnerability of human expansionism that has to surrender to unseen powers. As the Brexit deadline is approaching, the erstwhile global powerhouse seems to be at a loss to

decide which direction it should choose to stay afloat. From expansionism to isolationism, this is perhaps the most crucial era in the history of the United Kingdom, where both unity and kingdom is found in a threatened state.

Mark Kimberly,
Washington, D.C.

Reforming the Tax System

The PTI government is taking a number of corrective measures to reform the country's ailing tax system. There is no doubt about the sincerity behind these reform measures. However, the way they are being undertaken shows the immaturity of the Ministry of Finance which seems to be operating on a trial and error mode. The ministry has separated the task of revenue collection from tax policy formulation. As a result, the Federal Board of Revenue is now only responsible for tax collection and administration. Seemingly, the move is a major one, but it is still not sufficient to improve tax collection in the country. In the past, similar moves were made in the electricity and gas sectors, but no significant improvements were noted in the overall functionality and operations of the sectors. Instead of resorting to cosmetic measures, the finance ministry should find some sustainable directions to reform the tax system.

Bina Ilahi,
Hyderabad, Pakistan.

Talking with the Taliban

In November last year, the Russian Federation hosted a meeting in Moscow with the Taliban to bring nearly a two decade-long war in Afghanistan to its end. Many such countries as Pakistan, China, India and the US were also invited to sit together to forge a path to peace in the war-torn region. I think it is a major development and

the negotiations with the Taliban should be continued in the new year as well. Since the US-led Afghan forces have utilised almost all military options under their sleeves to stabilize the long-troubled country by defeating the Taliban forces, the international community must pressurise the Trump administration to now resort to some peaceful means to end the stalemate. Such reconciliation efforts with the Taliban should not be taken as an act of cowardice and anything that could bring peace to the country would always be a better option than fighting a deadly war with no end in sight.

Shahzad Qadar,
Kabul, Afghanistan.

Anti-encroachment Drive

The on-going anti-encroachment drive in Pakistan has shaken the whole nation. Where many are happy, the concerned victims are questioning the law for looting them all these years. As businesses are not being compensated or re-allocated, there seems to be no logic in depriving people of their livelihood without providing them any alternatives. I agree that Pakistan needs a deep

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Hats off to SouthAsia

Monthly SouthAsia is one magazine I look forward to reading every month. I enjoy how it enlightens me about everything from politics, to entertainment, to the economy at large. The graphics of this magazine are exceptional and it leads me to read more about the political happenings taking place all over the world. No doubt the magazine is visually appealing and is at par with leading international publications. Its title exactly speaks about the main subject being covered. I am impressed by your graphics and layout team, as their relentless hard work has made SouthAsia one of my favourites for the last couple of years. Hats off to monthly SouthAsia!

Pardev Sami,
Narayanganj, Bangladesh.

cleanse, but detaining shopkeepers and uprooting on-ground businesses is an act that must be condemned. The anti-encroachment spree has left businesses in a tragic trauma. According to one estimate, nearly 50,000 families have been affected mostly in urban areas of the country. That is a huge number. I feel faulty planning is turning the anti-encroachment drive into a catastrophe. Something must be done to stop this.

Naveeda Shah,
Lahore, Pakistan.

"Remember that mindsets cannot be changed through force and coercion. No idea can ever be forcibly thrust upon anyone."
Pervez Musharraf,
former President of Pakistan

"Unlike India, which has a long-cherished tradition of democratic principles, we had suffered frequently from armed coups and that had slowed down the process of development."
Sheikh Hasina Wajid,
Prime Minister of Bangladesh

"This is an issue between those who believe in foreign thinking and those who respect local values."
Maithripala Sirisena,
President of Sri Lanka

"A republic is a form of government run by the citizens in which decisions are made with dignified and peaceful debate."
Ibrahim Mohamed Solih,
President-elect of the Maldives

"Nepal wants to develop friendly relations with neighbouring countries on the basis of equality and justice."
K.P. Sharma Oli,
Prime Minister of Nepal

"Muslims in India remain absent from public discourse despite their poverty, educational and economic backwardness and persistent political onslaught from the Hindutva forces."
Zakia Soman,
Indian women's rights activist

"Say goodbye to the IMF once and for all as the IMF's conditions enrich the rich and impoverish the poor."
Imran Khan,
Prime Minister of Pakistan

"Good governance with good intentions is the hallmark of our government."
Narendra Modi,
Prime Minister of India

"The criminal economy poses a huge challenge to security, stability and inclusive growth."
Ashraf Ghani,
President of Afghanistan

"There is no use of the economic progress the country makes if its people are divided."
Dr Lotay Tshering,
Prime Minister of Bhutan

"Since Pakistan continues to harbour terrorists, US should not give it even one dollar.'"
Nikki Haley,
US Ambassador to the UN

"The Republican Party has become a 'personality cult' under President Trump."
George Conway,
American attorney

PAKISTAN

Shelter Homes

The Pakistan government is establishing shelter homes for homeless people across the country. Under the initiative of the Social Welfare Department, five shelter homes have been set up in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while more homes would be set up in other provinces soon. The shelter home will be equipped with water geysers, UPS, electricity and health care facilities. Trained staff will be available to look after the inmates who will be provided free food and transport. The move is in line with the government's policy to provide housing facilities to the needy. S

PAKISTAN

Sin Tax

The Pakistan government is imposing a 'Sin Tax' on cigarettes and beverages. Consumers will now pay an extra Rs. 10 on each packet of 20 cigarettes and Rs. 1 on a beverage bottle. According to the Federal Board of Revenue, the move will generate Rs. 50 billion. The tax money will be utilised for the treatment of patients suffering from smoking-induced diseases and will also be used under the national health insurance programme. In Pakistan, some 1,500 people start smoking every day, while tobacco causes some 108,800 deaths every year, i.e. 298 per day. S

INDIA

Kids Robot

'Miko 2,' a personal robot for children, has been launched in India. Created by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), the robot is operated by wi-fi and has been designed to help parents in the early education of their children by engaging them in playful learning. It can teach and directly communicate with children. Available at Rs. 25,000, 'Miko 2' is powered by an emotional intelligence engine, which enables it to identify and adapt according to the child's mood. It has loads of such built-in features as games, riddles, fun facts, rhymes, music, etc. and can be reloaded with new content. S

INDIA

Engine-less Train

The Indian Railways is introducing the country's first engine-less high speed train called "Train 18." The 16-coach train has been built at a cost of Rs 100 crore per rake with 80 per cent locally produced components. Driven by a self-propulsion module, the fully air-conditioned train will also be the fastest train in India. 'Train-18' comprises two executive compartments in the middle with 52 seats each. Belonging to the next generation aluminium-bodied sleeper class trains, it is equipped with such modern features as CCTV cameras, diffused lighting system, GPS-based passenger information system and automatic doors and footsteps. S

BANGLADESH

More Remittances

Bangladesh has been recognized as the world's ninth highest recipient of remittances. According to a recent World Bank report, Bangladesh received remittances worth $15.9 billion, an all-time high, in 2018. In its latest Migration and Development Brief, the World Bank says in Bangladesh, after a steep decline in 2016, remittances were flat in 2017, but they showed a brisk uptick in 2018. According to the global lender, the top remittance-receiving countries are India ($79.5 billion), followed by China ($67 billion), Mexico and the Philippines ($34 billion each) and Egypt ($26 billion). S

SRI LANKA

Steel Coins

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka has issued new coins of different denominations. These coins are made of stainless steel that is less expensive than other metals and more durable than existing plated coins. Different edges are incorporated for easy identification of coins by visually impaired people. The weight of the coins is reduced to give more portability and the diameter and thickness of coins have been resized to maintain a progressive pattern. The coin's head side depicts the Armorial Ensign of Sri Lanka with the word "Sri Lanka" written in Tamil, Sinhala and English at the periphery of the coins. S

THE MALDIVES

Back to the Commonwealth

The People's Majlis of the Maldives has voted in favour of rejoining the Commonwealth. Endorsing President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih's decision, 62 members of the newly elected parliament voted in favour of the country rejoining the organization. The Maldives left the Commonwealth in October 2016 during former President Abdulla Yameen's administration, which accused the Commonwealth of interfering in the domestic affairs of the archipelago. The move came after a warning by the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, to suspend the country's commonwealth membership over corruption and deteriorating human rights situation in the Maldives. Rejoining the Commonwealth was also a part of President Solih's 100-day agenda. S

BHUTAN

Fish Database

The Government of Bhutan has initiated the country's first ever fish fauna survey. Funded by the Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation, the survey is being carried out in the eastern and central parts of the country to formulate a fish database and to find fish diversity and composition in different water systems of the country. It will help in planning and coordinating development activities without affecting the aquatic biodiversity of the country. Between 2013 and 2016, a similar study was carried out in Bhutan's western water systems, discovering over 100 fish species in the Amochu, Wangchu and Punatshangchu basins. S

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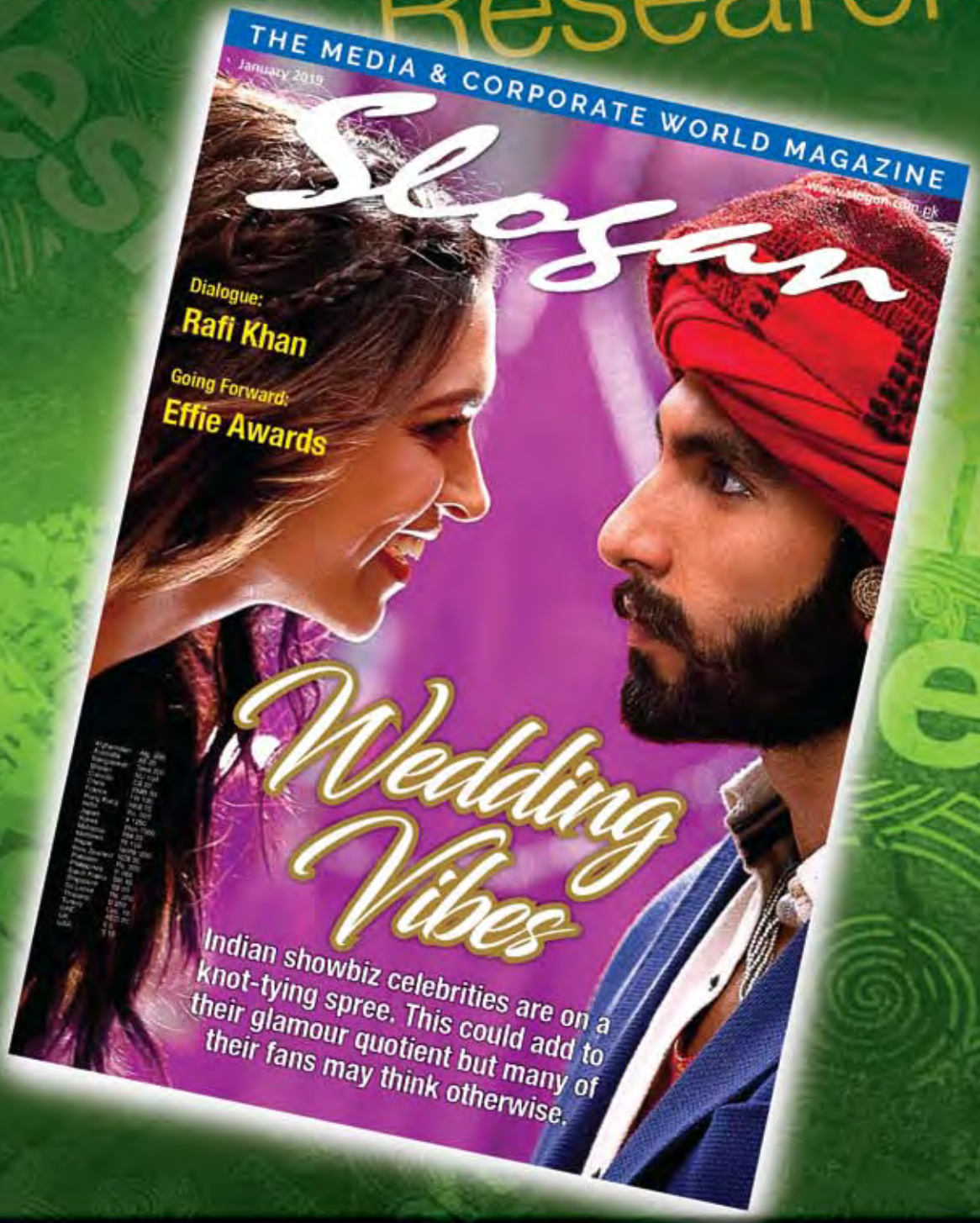

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JANUARY 2019

COVER STORY

PG 14

THE NAME CHANGING SPREE

The need to change names of various places has acquired an urgency in India.

By Pervez Hoodbhoy

PG 15

DIRECTIONLESS DEVELOPMENT

There is a fever in India to pursue temple politics.

By Dr. Sanghmitra S Acharya

PG 17

IN THE NAME OF RAM

The Indian Supreme Court is delaying hearing of the Ayodhya Case.

By S.G. Jilanee

PG 18

MORE TO THE MANIA

Modi is trying different vote-catching gimmicks to come out as a leader in the next elections.

By S.R.H. Hashmi

PG 20

NO WALKOVER

The 2019 general elections will be no cake-walk for Narendra Modi.

By Abdul Basit

PG 21

END OF SECULARISM

The BJP government is renaming Indian cities to acquire the identity of a Hindu state.

By Dr. Moonis Ahmar

PG 23

TOWARDS THE RAM MANDIR

Is the BJP headed towards political hegemony?

By Aneela Shahzad

PG 24

THE CONTEST

There is a tug-of-war between secularism and Hindutva in India.

By Dr. Arshad Syed Karim

PG 25

'WHILE GUJARAT WAS BURNING...'

During the 2002 Gujarat riots, Narendra Modi delayed the deployment of army troops in troubled areas.

THE NAME CHANGING SPREE

The need to change names of various places has acquired an urgency in India. The BJP's rapid exercise, especially ahead of the 2019 General Elections, is acquiring a hue that is distinctly akin to saffron.

By Pervez Hoodbhoy

Allahabad is now Prayagraj. Mughalsarai Junction Railway Station has been officially renamed as Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Junction. Three years earlier, the signs for Aurangzeb Road in Delhi were painted over to bear a new name – APJ Abdul Kalam Road (after India's missile hero). More changes lie ahead. About two dozen or so Indian cities allegedly owe their names to *Babur ki auladain* (sons of Babur) of which a few are Ahmadabad, Karimnagar, Jamalpur, Faridpur, Hajipur, Moradabad and Secunderabad. They too might disappear from the map of India and emerge reincarnated with Hindu names.

Renaming cities and roads is just one part of Hindutva's larger agenda to glorify the Vedic era and vilify Muslim rulers. Bit by bit, India's cultural landscape and education system is being altered to exalt an imaginary past of a pure Bharat Mata defiled by invaders. In 2014, Prime Minister Narenda Modi said India is troubled by "1200 years of slave mentality". Dinesh Sharma, Yogi Adiyanath's deputy, says it still more bluntly: "Mughals were not our ancestors, they were actually plunderers. They looted the country. This is not our history."

These utterances suggest loss of balance. Whether good or bad, Muslims and Mughals are solidly part and parcel of India's history. As a link of the historical chain leading to the emergence of modern India, for the very first time Mughal rulers had created a consolidated political entity, made institutions of governance that were essentially secular and gave India its most magnificent architecture.

Although first generation Mughals were invaders from Uzbekistan, subsequent emperors were born in India. Over time they absorbed local traditions, producing today's delicate cultural mosaic. Muslims of the subcontinent were Indianized centuries ago and developed habits and ways of thinking that were plainly distinct from the Arabs, Persians, and Central Asians. Moreover, whatever the Mughals "looted" was not taken elsewhere (as with the British); everything remained within India. Questioning their "Indianness" is absurd since every human's ancestors came from elsewhere, most probably Africa.

But the BJP's war is not just against Muslims, it is squarely directed against the concept of Jawaharlal Nehru's India as a secular, pluralist entity. With Gandhi's help, Nehru had managed to keep at bay fanatical RSS ideologues like S.V. Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar. RSS always feared and hated Nehru for this, and has never forgiven him for banning it after Gandhi's murder and for fiercely opposing a Hindu rashtra. One RSS activist wistfully writes that had Nehru handed over charge of India after independence to the deserving sanghis, India would have "attained ram rajya by now, with a hundred crore people chanting hanuman chalisa a dozen times a day".

How things have changed! These days Nehru is accused of having a "Pakistani mentality" – a surprise to most Pakistanis who have known him only as a Hindu adversary of Jinnah, implacably opposed to making Pakistan. None cared

that Nehru was an atheist by belief, not Hindu. His insistence that India was to be liberal and syncretic, and its strength would derive from religious diversity, was openly disbelieved and mocked. All this was written off as mere sloganeering, justifying Hindu majoritarianism under the cloak of democracy. The Congress-RSS enmity was dismissed as cosmetic, a petty domestic issue.

But now that ram rajya appears closer than ever before, and Nehru has long been in the dog house, a few opinions within Pakistan are changing. India's retreat from secularism – albeit flawed secularism – is strongly impacting its religious minorities. India's Muslims, Christians, and Parsis had once fully bought into the Indian inclusive identity but find that their patriotism is now being frequently questioned. Whether secular or religiously observant, more and more Muslims have become victims of hate crimes such as cow-vigilantism and so-called love jihad. Their perpetrators are not just encouraged but also rewarded by those in power.

One might have expected that within Pakistan the targeting of fellow Muslims across the border would have generated angry protests. In fact there have been none. Even commentary has been sparse. By and large one sees a kind of smug satisfaction because the heinous acts of Hindutva groups are seen as validating Savarkar's and Jinnah's two-nation theory. Some right-wing Urdu columnists trumpet that at long last Hindus are showing their true colours. For them, the BJP's aspiration to create a Hindu rashtra reinforces the moral justification for Pakistan to be an Islamic state. Further, it rationalizes the appalling mistreatment of Pakistan's non-Muslims and the near obliteration of Hindu religious and cultural symbols.

Significantly, Pakistan has not attempted to take up India's crimes against its religious minorities at any international forum. Surely the pot cannot call the kettle black. Further, preceding Hindutva's recent emergence, rejection of pluralism is written into Pakistan's 1973 constitution. Xenophobic distortions injected in the 1980s by General Zia-ul-Haq have helped create an alternate reality depicting all history as battles between virtuous Muslims and cunning Hindus. School textbooks contain the absurd notion that Pakistan dates to 712 AD when Muhammad bin Qasim conquered Sindh.

Deemed as corrupting Hindu influences, the celebration of cultural events such as Baisakhi and Basant, as well as kite flying, have been gradually forbidden or abandoned in recent decades. Even "Hindu trees" like banyan, neem, and pipal have been punished – far fewer can be seen today in comparison to earlier times. In the posh E-7 area of Islamabad, one can see the charred remains of a 200 year old graceful banyan, the victim of a jihad by students from a nearby madrassa.

The bottom line: Hindu majoritarianism and Muslim majoritarianism are equally ugly and repulsive. Instead, a rational outlook would be to recognize that all countries and their people are products of peculiar historical circumstances beyond anybody's control. Should one simply surrender to the blind forces that have created our present identities? Or can we dare to move ahead and work towards creating genuinely pluralistic societies that value and encourage religious diversity? Willingness to work out the answers shall determine whether India and Pakistan will eventually become civilized countries some day. S

The author is an academic who teaches in Lahore and Islamabad. He can be reached at hoodbhoy@mit.edu

Directionless Development

There is a fever in India to pursue temple politics. However, the many promises of development (vikas) that were made to the masses are nowhere in sight.

By Dr. Sanghmitra S Acharya

Rising oil prices, dearth of jobs, farmers' suicides and rural distress, broadening inequality - both economic and social and the aftermath of demonetization and levying of GST - all have been serious issues waiting to be addressed sincerely. But the political outfits and the persons at the helm, who have been democratically elected to their respective offices, have kept the people of India busy with the politics of religion - albeit in the garb of religiosity. Different parts of the country have hoardings and slogans ordaining temples - and the 'Ram Nam' pops up spontaneously submerging all issues.

Now with a series of showdown in the by-elections and with the general elections round the corner, desperate efforts are being made to divert the people's attention from these issues as they have become major threats to the ruling party. Promises made on these issues - of providing jobs to the jobless and relief to the farmers, for instance, are far from being fulfilled. The state leaders have left no stone unturned to establish that the consequences of demonetization have benefited everyone, with the Prasar Bharati -

the national radio, showcasing the evidence in the form of audio clips from 'beneficiaries' across the country. The common man, however, is yet to recuperate and make sense of it. The ruling party rode the high wave of doubling the income of the farmers by 2022. To materialize this promise, India's agriculture sector needs to grow by 30% annually. The reality, however, is that according to the Economic Survey 2017-18 which was tabled in the Parliament in January 2018, it grew at a lowly 2.1 per cent during 2017-18. Several new initiatives like Soil Health Card, Input Management, Per Drop More Crop, Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY) and Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) have been hyped as saviours of the farmers. A reality check suggests that during 2013-14, the insurance companies made profit worth INR 15794 crores when the average income of the farmer hovered around INR 20000/- per month during 2015-16. More than 300,000 farmers have committed suicide since 1998.

We are reeling in times when you question the government, or its prescriptions and you can be labelled as anti-national and charged with sedition. But when the politicians defy the Supreme Court ruling and proclaim on public platforms that it took only 17-18 minutes to raze the Babri Masjid to the ground on 6 December 1992 - at the behest of the right wing leaders, no action is taken. An artefact of architectural endeavour - which was constructed in years, was demolished without an iota of remorse evident in the perpetrators. On the contrary, delay in judicial proceedings is being questioned by posing the query 'how long should it take to 'write a paper' (of judgement)?' It is fairly well-established that the Babri Masjid demolition was a criminal act and a court verdict on the matter is awaited. Despite video clips which have captured the identifiable pictures of the participants in the mob frenzy, no one has yet been penalized. Many members of the ruling party have stated that the majority religious group - the Hindus are 'losing patience…' because the court has taken too long to give a decision on the issue. Therefore, 'what will happen if they lose patience…?' In effect, it was the mosque which was demolished by some differently inclined members of the majority community. So, the patience has been actually shown by the largest minority community - the Muslims. The delay in judicial proceedings should be 'testing their patience' instead!

It is fairly well-established that the Babri Masjid demolition was a criminal act and a court verdict on the matter is awaited.

The ruling party has blamed the Congress for purporting the delay in the case. They have even gone ahead to pose themselves as the 'aggrieved' party that 'deserves justice'. The Chief Minister of the State where the temple is located has proclaimed that the youth is eager to 'do or die' for the construction of the temple. A morally strong Chief Minister would have dissuaded the youth if they had actually decided as claimed. As the head of one of the states, his responsibility is to provide employment to the youth as promised by his party and to ensure peace and harmony. On the contrary, there is a conscious effort to drive attention away from basic issues like unemployment among youth, access to clean drinking water, proper health facilities, affordable health care, right nutrition, and dependable supply of electricity, proper roads, quality schools and colleges.

As is evident from the reply to a question asked in the Rajya Sabha (upper house of the Indian parliament) this year, 61.2% of primary health centres in the country have only one doctor while 7.69% of them do not even have a single doctor. India has 50% of the undernourished children in the world, yet spends only 1.02% of its gross domestic product on health and more than 300 crores in constructing the statue of a statesman, who himself would have admonished this extravagance of the government. According to the 2017 report of WaterAid, rural India had 63.4 million people living without access to clean water, which was more than any other country.

Harping about bringing the Indian rupee to the European stock market and raising the prestige of the country, assumed benefits of demonetization and distorted growth in the GDP are not enough to ensure vikas – development - the electioneering vehicle on which they rode to success.

The Hindutva ideology fostered by the present government will not go very far if the real issues are not confronted and addressed. Temple politics can vehemently contribute to a Godhra, a Muzaffarpur and lynching of individuals on illogical assumptions of possessing a certain kind of meat. It can also resurrect the 'science' in the mythological narratives and the epics (airplanes in the times of Ramayana, for instance). But it will fail to deliver the promises made to the people of secular India. The government needs to focus on the real vikas and leave the temple issue to the Supreme Court. Otherwise, the proverbial 'good days' promised by the government will not only continue to remain elusive, but will bring no laurels in the forthcoming elections as well. S

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In The Name Of Ram

The Supreme Court has touched a raw nerve of the BJP by delaying hearing of the Ayodhya Case.

By S.G. Jilanee

It was in 1992, when some Hindu zealots serendipitously discovered that the pulpit of the mosque built by the Mughal Emperor, Babur at Ayodhya, a.k.a. the Babri Masjid, was the exact spot where King Dasrath's first queen, Kaushilya, delivered her son, Ram. The discovery ignited a wave of religious fervour and extremist Hindu organisations - religious and political, exploited the situation to push their communal agenda.

The goal was to demolish the mosque and construct a temple in its place, dedicated to Ram. BJP stalwart, Lal Krishna Advani, undertook a rath yatra from Somnath in western India, across the country, to Ayodhya. People enlisted in hordes as kar sevaks (volunteer manual workers). Other leaders roused passions with their incendiary speeches. Ultimately, on December 6, 1992, a riotous mob of zealots demolished the mosque, while the Sangh Parivar leaders watched with unsuppressed glee.

However, commenting on the incident, India's former president, Pranab Mukherjee observed, "The demolition of Babri Masjid was an act of absolute perfidy...It was the senseless, wanton destruction of a religious structure, purely to serve political ends. It deeply wounded the sentiments of the Muslim community in India and abroad. It destroyed India's image as a tolerant, pluralistic nation." (The Turbulent Years: 1980-96")

Meanwhile, to the utter shock of the perpetrators of the reckless act, the prize had eluded their grasp. Starting construction of their cherished Ram Mandir, any time too soon was out of the question. All they had achieved was a major dent to India's proud secular image, besides opening the doors to a protracted litigation that has, since, entered its twenty-sixth year and yet, there is no end in sight.

Before any construction could start the primary issue to be settled was about who owned the land on which the mosque had stood. This led to a title suit in the Allahabad High Court, to which, a host of organizations and individuals became party.

In 2010, the Allahabad High Court divided the land, equally, among three parties; Rama Lalla (the infant Lord Rama), the Nirmohi Akhara (the principal challenger) and the Sunni Waqf Board (fighting for Babri Masjid).

Appeals against the Allahabad High Court ruling took the case to the Supreme Court., which made it clear that the government was only a receiver of the land it had acquired in Ayodhya; and that it held the land in trust, only to be handed over to the party that succeeded in the suit.

There was a possibility that a verdict of the Supreme Court would be out by October. But this did not happen. Meanwhile, Chief Justice Deepak Misra went into retirement. His place has been taken by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi.

A three-judge Bench of the Supreme Court, led by the Chief Justice, has since posted the title suit appeals in January before an appropriate Bench to fix a date for hearing the case.

The new bench will have the huge task of going through volumes of documents of evidence and statements of witnesses. The Ayodhya case file has over 9,000 pages of evidence sourced from scriptures like Ramayana, Ramacharitamanasa, Mahabharat, the Holy Quran, and texts from the medieval ages. The statements of the witnesses are contained in over 90,000 pages. The documents are in different languages including Sanskrit, Awadhi, Arabic, Persian and Pali.

Counting on using the verdict to inflame passions and garner votes, the BJP has been insisting for hearing before the upcoming general elections. In fact, the ruling BJP has made the Ayodhya Ram Temple issue an important poll plank. The Ram temple issue also figures in the party's election manifesto.

Meanwhile, the Chief Justice

rejected an urgent hearing as the Uttar Pradesh government argued that it was a 100-year-old dispute that should be taken up on priority basis, saying, "We have our own priorities."

By declining to fix until January 2019 a date for hearing the case, though, the Supreme Court has judiciously pushed back the prospect of any judgment in the run-up to the polls. The decision of a Bench headed by the Chief Justice to put off even the exercise of fixing a date for the final hearing is quite pragmatic.

Besides there is a precedent for the Supreme Court's decision to defer the Ayodhya case hearing. In the past, the Supreme Court deferred the hearing on Article 35A after the Centre and the Jammu and Kashmir government sought adjournment, saying that a ruling might disrupt peace in the Kashmir Valley and pose a challenge in the conduct of local body elections in the state.

The same argument may be used by the petitioners citing past instances when political parties tried to seek votes in the name of a Ram temple at Ayodhya that led to communal violence.

However, those set upon building a temple at the disputed site, are visibly miffed. Some BJP leaders as well as hard line Hindu affiliates are now clamouring for an ordinance or a special order to facilitate building a Ram temple at the site, the RSS being the most vocal. But such a step to bypass the Supreme Court would be highly injudicious and fraught with unpleasant consequences.

Moreover, the Congress and other parties are opposed to the ordinance route. Hyderabad lawmaker Asaduddin Owaisi, the chief of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul Muslimeen (AIMIM), has even dared the government to bring forth an ordinance "if it had the courage."

Such confrontation would be very undesirable and should be avoided. The Supreme Court has only postponed the hearing till after the elections, which has deprived the BJP of the opportunity to exploit the verdict to seek votes. The heavens have not fallen.

A verdict before elections might have boosted the BJP's position in the polls, but the party would certainly not be contesting the elections on the Ayodhya verdict. Therefore, instead of fretting and fuming, and talking of ordinances, the BJP jingoists should wait for the Supreme Court's verdict. The case has been going on for 26 years, so another few months should not make any difference. SA

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MORE TO THE MANIA

Modi is trying different vote-catching gimmicks to come out as a leader in the next general elections. Changing names of roads and cities is one of them.

By S.R.H. Hashmi

It is really surprising that while facing so many pressing issues like creating more livelihood opportunities for the poor, ensuring that they have better access to health care and helping the youth and so on, why are some Indian state governments engaged in an unproductive renaming spree?.

It is probably assumed by the BJP that in conditions where religio-nationalism has firmly gripped the country, any attempt to erase Mughal/Muslim connections in India would win the Modi government some extra votes. Moreover, the exercise is easy as compared to the difficult task of solving real problems of the country.

By the way, the renaming mania is not been peculiar to India. For example, in Lahore, Minto Park was renamed Iqbal Park and Lawrence Gardens was renamed as Bagh-e-Jinnah. However, there was no election frenzy behind it and neither was it driven by an over-riding bias.

It is also true that in 1989, the ruling military junta changed the name of Burma to Myanmar while the country's largest city Rangoon was renamed

Yangon.

Siam too switched names back and forth, but finally settled for Thailand.

As for the renaming 'revolution' in India, despite being clearly anti-Muslim, the Indian government did try to create an impression that the campaign was not designed against Muslims but was only an attempt to rid the country of names associated with invaders, which is why while renaming Aurangzeb Road in Delhi, the new name chosen was A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Road.

Renaming places is not the only Indian vote-catching gimmick. It has been reported that soon Indian Prime Minister Narindra Modi will make a decision about the future of the religious site of Ayodhya, which housed the 16th century Babri Masjid until it was demolished by Hindu fanatics belonging to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

These attempts by Modi to use religion to gain political advantage are no worse than Gen. Ziaul Haq's use of religion to maintain, strengthen and prolong his illegal grab of power in Pakistan.

By the look of it, such measures as well as the 'tough' anti-Pakistan statements by Indian civilian and military leaders, accompanied by cowardly, cross-border attacks by Indian forces on Pakistani civilians living near the border, are likely to continue or even escalate between now and the elections.

If Modi wins, India is expected to tone down its rhetoric as well as its aggressive military posture towards Pakistan.

The same sentiment is behind the very reluctant acceptance by India of Pakistan's offer for opening the Kartarpur corridor which was translated by India as a dirty political move and not as a friendly, humanitarian gesture. India said the attempt left the country no choice but to accept it, since rejecting it would have greatly angered the Sikhs. It is such extremist thinking that may cost the BJP the next elections

However, even if Modi wins, India is expected to tone down its rhetoric as well as its aggressive military posture towards Pakistan, thus opening a window of opportunity for attempts to improve relations between the two estranged neighbours which, given a bit of goodwill and tolerance, could complement each other for the benefit of both the countries and the region.

We have seen how arrogant and belligerent Donald Trump was who thought that as the head of a superpower, he could do what he liked to the rest of the world. However, over time, he has begun to realize the limits of his power as demonstrated by his exempting Iran of sanctions by certain important countries and softening of his stance towards China. After a befitting response from Prime Minister Imran Khan, Trump has realized that he cannot threaten and bully Pakistan into submission and make it do his bidding. He has now adopted a somewhat re-conciliatory approach towards Pakistan.

Much like Trump, Modi is also beginning to see the limits to his power. There was a time when the Indians were boasting about their capability of fighting a two-front war - with China as well as Pakistan - and Modi was even hoping to eclipse China with the help of the United States.

There were reports in the international media sometime back that both India and Japan are now trying to mend fences with China instead of joining the United States against it. It seems Modi is beginning to realize that instead of putting its full military might behind India, the US will use India against China - much like it had earlier used Pakistan against the Soviet Union - and then dominate the much-weakened India and China.

With this realization of Modi, there will be an opportunity for Pakistan to try to improve relations with India. To make that happen, Pakistan will have to accept the bitter reality that both India and Pakistan must remain contented with those parts of Kashmir that they already have and that in the absence of any pressure on India from the international community - which has become completely disinterested in Kashmir and limits its role to merely issuing moralistic, non-biting statements - there is no way India will let go the part of Kashmir which is in its clutches. All that is possible is to take measures that improve the conditions of the Kashmiris and enable them to lead near-normal lives, while still remaining under Indian rule.

As for Pakistan, it has to tone down its rhetoric and stop taking measures like issuing commemorative stamps on the martyrdom of Burhan Wani, which only encourage the Kashmiris to rise against India and suffer even greater atrocities, while irritating India and further spoiling the chances of decent relations between the two nuclear-armed neighbours, which would be just short of building a permanent wall of mutual hatred.

Pakistan is on record for having abandoned its own citizens to suffer a terrible fate in Bangladesh. Only a small number of them were brought to Pakistan and were settled in Punjab, which clearly meant that Pakistan had accepted the legal responsibility for these people. In this scenario, Pakistan hardly sounds convincing when it starts moralizing and grieving about the plight of Muslims in Indian-held Kashmir or even in India. S

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No Walkover

Considering the results of the recent state elections in India, the 2019 general elections will be no cake-walk for Narendra Modi and his BJP.

By Abdul Basit

As Indian democracy has evolved, the voting patterns and behaviours in India have also transformed. The advent of social media, rise of populism and the challenges posed by globalization have reshaped voters' choices and preferences. The local socio-economic and political issues have contributed equally to shifting voting patterns in India.

As a result, elections have thrown up unexpected outcomes that have defied predictions of political pundits and projections of pre-poll surveys. The elections have also shown that the actual voting trends have evolved in a certain direction while our approach to analysing the voting patterns still remains socially deterministic. Moreover, the West-oriented elite no longer leads India but a more vernacular elite leads it and the voters have elected this local elite whom they consider closer to their roots.

The results of the recent Indian state election epitomize the voting trends. Contrary to the traditional political punditry of the 2019 elections, there would be a ritual to re-elect the incumbent Prime Minister Narendra Modi. There could also be a miraculous return of the Indian National Congress (INC) under Rahul Gandhi as the elections in some states have thrown a major spanner in the works.

The INC has thrashed the BJP in the Hindi heartland states of Madhya Pradesh (114 out of 230 seats), Rajasthan (99 out of 200 seats) and Chhattisgarh (68 out 90 seats). These account for 65 seats in the Lok Sabha (the lower house of India's bicameral parliament). In the 2014 general elections, the BJP won 62 of these 65 seats but the road to Delhi in 2019 has become all the more difficult for the BJP. The 2019 election will be a referendum of Mr Modi and his government.

The results of the state elections have, in some ways, restored the balance of power in the Indian democracy and have thrown the 2019 elections well and truly open. Though the BJP would still enter the polls as a favourite, it will not be a walk in the park for the Modi Sarkar. The BJP will have to go back to the drawing board and re-strategize its election approach. The BJP will need to win the Hindi heartland though this dominance seems to have been broken by the INC for the time being. The BJP needs a major shift in strategy, along with cultivating more electoral alliances and shoring up the existing ones.

When the BJP swept to power in 2014, winning 282 of the 543 seats, it became the first political party in thirty years to win an outright majority in India. Since then, the BJP has enjoyed political dominance across India, particularly in north, west, central, east and northeast India. Its defeat in the Hindi heartland is a major setback for the party and this is likely to resonate in the 2019 elections if proper course-correction is not exercised. Over the last four and a half years, Narendra Modi's popularity and the BJP President Amit Shah's electoral strategies have been central to BJP's dream run. But, it seems that the Amit Shah electoral model has run its course and it is not delivering the same results anymore.

The results of state elections in India have heralded the political revival of the INC and is a turning point in Rahul Gandhi's political career. The INC has gained a much-needed momentum ahead of the 2019 elections. Moreover, after this impressive electoral performance, the party will get more space in the media, the main engine that shapes Indian public opinion. The INC also provides a potential centre of gravity for other like-minded opposition parties to form an electoral coalition with the singular objective of dethroning the BJP from New Delhi. The kind of strategic regional alliances that the INC will stitch up and sustain in different states will be critical in next year's elections.

The anti-incumbency factor has cost the BJP big time in the state elections. The party could not live up to the hype and over-expectations of its voters. The grandiose promises of job creation for the youth, increasing farmers' income and development for all have begun to bite. For instance, the farmers are angry for not getting the prices they wanted for their produce. Almost 55 % of India's 1.25 billion population is affiliated with the agricultural sector, directly or indirectly and forms an important voting bloc. In recent weeks, there have been large-scale protests by the farmers in India over falling prices and natural disasters.

Similarly, traders are unhappy with the BJP for the slow economic progress, a controversial demonetisation policy

and institutionalization of the Goods and Services Tax (GST). Likewise, the lack of jobs and growing unemployment has left the youth disillusioned. Meanwhile, moderate voters feel alienated because of the party's heavy reliance on the Hindutva rhetoric that has pushed religious polarization to dangerous levels.

The minorities, particularly the Muslims, are full of resentment due to the growing trend of Islamophobia in India. There is an emergence of cow-vigilante groups that have tortured Muslims on allegations of eating and trading beef. The so-called "love-jihad" narratives which peddle conspiracy theories that Muslims are dating Hindu women to convert them to Islam have disenfranchised the Muslim electorate.

Meanwhile, the Hindu nationalists are unhappy with the BJP for delaying the construction of a temple at Ayodhya, where a 16th century mosque was demolished by Hindu mobs in 1992. The right-wing Hindu extremist groups have demanded that the BJP government proceed with the construction of the temple despite the Indian Supreme Court's verdict to the contrary.

However, the INC must realise that a win in state elections in no guarantee for a victory in the 2019 general elections. The state and national elections are qualitatively different electoral exercises in their scope and agendas. The results of the recent state elections underscore the fall of the BJP, instead of the rise of the INC. Five months is a lot of time and the BJP is quite capable of staging a comeback. The INC cannot afford to lower its guard and take the wins in state election for granted, while the BJP needs to re-think its election strategy and try to win back its alienated voters.

The regional and sub-national parties are the X-factor. They would be the kingmakers who will be critical in determining who forms the next government?

The next Indian elections are likely to throw up a divided mandate, but a hung parliament is unlikely. Notwithstanding its poor electoral performance so far, the BJP would still emerge as the single largest party though it may not gain an outright majority to form the government singlehandedly. In most likelihood, it would be a BJP-led coalition government. S

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END OF SECULARISM

The BJP government is renaming Indian cities as a part of its drive to move the country away from secularism and acquire the identity of a Hindu state.

By Dr. Moonis Ahmar

The campaign to erase the legacy of more than 1,000 years of Muslim rule in India got an impetus when Narendra Modi, a Hindu extremist became Prime Minister under the BJP government in 2014. Not concealing his drive to rename Muslim/Urdu named cities and symbols in India and replacing them with Hindu names, Modi in 2014 said "India was troubled by 1,200 years of slave mentality". Out of Modi's 1,200 years of slave mentality syndrome, 1,000 years belonged to Muslim rulers and the remaining 200 years to British rule.

Augmenting feelings of religious extremism and intolerance, the BJP and other Hindu communal groups realize a valuable opportunity to reclaim what they describe as the "Hindu glory" which existed before the Muslim invasion and conquest of the bulk of the Indian sub-continent. Erasing symbols of Muslim rule in India has now become state policy which is being carried out by renaming the names of Indian cities and towns having a semblance of a Muslim or Urdu background.

The names of cities, airports and railway stations in India having Muslim/Urdu names are a profound target of the BJP government. For instance, the state of Uttar Pradesh, which has the largest concentration of Muslims, has proposed to rename the airports of Bareilly as Nath Nagri and Agra airport after the Hindutva ideologue Deen Dayal Upadhaya. Likewise, Aurangabad, Hyderabad and Ahmedabad will also be renamed. The famous road in Delhi called Aurangzeb Road is also a target of the BJP which, like other right wing Hindu extremist groups, considers Aurangzeb Alamgir, a controversial Mughal ruler who ruled for around 50 years and was responsible for destroying several mandirs and imposing the Islamic way of life on the majority population which happened to be

non-Muslim.

The transformation of secular India as a Hindu state has been going some time. Even Congress governments, which were termed as secular, failed to prevent communal riots in post-partition India and gave space to the right wing Hindu nationalist groups such as Jang Sang, RSS, Shiv Sena, Sangpariwar and Bajrang Dal. The failure of the Congress government of Prime Minister Narsimha Rao to prevent demolition of the 16th century Babri Mosque on December 6, 1992 by fanatic Hindu groups led by BJP leader L. K. Advani, rendered a major blow to Indian secularism. Consequently, it is correct to say that the process of 'Hinduization' of India began during the era of the Congress and reached its peak when the former Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi who was responsible for the bloodbath of Muslims in the communal riots of February 2002, became the Prime Minister of India.

Can erasing of 1,000 years of Muslim legacy in the Indian sub-continent undo the magnificent contributions of Muslim rulers in architecture, calligraphy, cuisine and gardening? Unlike the British who massively exploited India during their 90 years of direct rule and Nadir Shah who looted and plundered Delhi and took looted wealth to Iran, the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire owned India and made every effort to spend resources in that country. The reign of Sher Shah Suri, a Pathan ruler of India, is remembered for the construction of the Grand Trunk Road from Peshawar to Bengal and for his magnificent administrative system. In its essence, the Muslim rule in India under the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire cannot be termed as colonial and it will be a great injustice on the part of the present Indian government to distort facts.

The symbols of Muslim rule in India can be found all over the sub-continent and their removal by the BJP government will be like undoing major historical facts. If the drive of name changing continues, it will have serious implications on the two major Muslim countries of South Asia, Bangladesh and Pakistan where Islamists will demand the cities, towns and other places having Hindi names be replaced. There is no end to the insane and senseless drive because the biggest historical symbol of love built during the reign of Shahjehan, the Taj Mahal, is a world heritage site recognized by UNESCO. Its renaming could make India a laughing stock in the world.

There are other names having Muslim/Urdu names that are in the process of being changed by the BJP, The Mughalserai Railway Station in northern India near Allahabad is now named after Deendyal Upadhya, who was an associate of the ultra-Hindu right-wing party, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Singh (RSS). The city of Faizabad, which is 160 kilometres north of Allahabad, has been renamed as Ayodhya, a name associated with the birthplace of Rama, one of the Hindu gods. The BJP is also bent upon changing the name of city Muzaffarnagar to Laxmi Nagar. The north Indian city of Allahabad, which was named in the 17th century during the Mughal rule, has been renamed as Prayagraj, which, according to folklore is the place where the four-faced Hindu creator Brahma offered his first sacrifice after making the world.

There is no way the BJP, which has now been taken over by the extremist and fanatic Hindu mindset, will ever regret its policy to erase the Muslim legacy from the Indian sub-continent because of its clear vision that India should be a Hindu state. For that matter, all such names and symbols which are a reminder of Muslim achievements and legacy are being removed.

There are two major ramifications of the BJP's anti-minority, particularly anti-Muslim drive. First, the image of India as a secular democracy will he shattered not only in India but in the world. The world's largest democracy, which was proud of its colours and diversity, will be reduced to an inward, retrogressive, racist and chauvinist country with a high level of intolerance vis-à-vis religious minorities, particularly against the 200 million-strong Muslim community. Second, the surge of Hindu nationalism will be a major challenge to the secular face of India as, in the preamble of the Indian Constitution, India has been declared a secular country. What has been going on in India since Narendra Modi took over as Prime Minister is sufficient to prove that India is no more a secular state. The slogans and ideology of Hindutva are owned by the Indian state, thus causing widespread insecurity in the religious minorities.

The damage done during the Modi regime to Indian democracy and secularism is almost irreparable. Even if the BJP is defeated in the next general elections, the new government will have to take damage control measures in order to rehabilitate the image of India as a functional secular democracy. The BJP has suffered defeat in recent state elections in the key Hindi belt of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh, where the Congress (I) has been able to claim victory. This means, voters in the three states have spoken against Modi's communal politics.

Amidst the pessimism and gloom prevailing in India as far as the future of democracy and secularism is concerned, there is still light at the end of tunnel. The majority of the people of India do not support religious bigotry and the BJP-led drive to transform India as a Hindu state; they will certainly speak their voice in the next general elections. But, by changing the names of cities and public places having Muslim/Urdu semblance, the Modi regime has crossed the red line because the stigma of communal and religious intolerance put forward by the Modi regime cannot be easily undone by future governments. If the BJP government is trying to obliterate the Muslim legacy in the India, it is also challenging the face of India as a democracy and a secular state. Merely by following a parochial approach, the BJP regime has badly damaged the image of India as a secular democracy. S

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TOWARDS THE RAM MANDIR

Is the BJP headed towards political hegemony? With the coming 2019 elections and the growing ideology of Hindu dominance, it looks like India is bidding goodbye to its secular image.

By Aneela Shahzad

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his maiden speech to the Lok Sabha in 2014 said that the 'slave mentality of 1,200 years is troubling us', he had perhaps calculated from the day Muhammad Bin Qasim entered the region in 711 AD – even though the areas conquered by Bin Qasim were in present-day Pakistan, not India.

It is no secret though that the BJP is really troubled – but only with all the symbols that are reminder of invaders within a millennium. Of course, the Aryans who came at around 1500 BC, crushing the thriving indigenous civilizations in Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro and Lothal, and labelled the locals as 'scheduled' and 'other backward castes', of which PM Modi's ancestors have been a part – have been flushed away from memory and cause no trouble!

Perhaps because the symbols of the slave mentality that the Aryans left, are an exhibit only in the anatomy of the Hindu mindset, later symbols like the Babri Masjid and the Taj Mahal are tangible and invite the stalwarts of Hinduism to break these idols of invasion. Only, this clashes with the Nehruvian ideal of a 'socialist, secular, democratic republic', an ideal despised by many of his friends, including Dr SP Mukherjee, who later founded the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1951, that evolved into the Bharatiya Janata Party in 1980. The BJP rose from a mere two seats in the 1984 to India's largest party in the 1996 elections. This popularity came from its being a proponent of the Ram Janmabhoomi Movement, that culminated in the demolition of the Babri

The state of Gujrat, from where the BJP leader LK Advani mounted the chariot of 'rath yatra' headed for the Babri Mosque in 1990, was symbolic, as it was the state of the Somnath Mandir that had been raided several times by Muslim invaders – and was the same state where, in 2002, the then Chief Minister of Gujrat, N Modi allowed the massacre of over 2000 Muslims, perhaps dissipating some of the 'trouble'.

A Guardian journalist who was there after the incident reported the destruction of 230 unique Islamic monuments, including the tomb of Vali Gujarati, the grandfather of Urdu poetry. He said the mobs had 'thrown bricks at Persian inscriptions, and set fire to old Korans'.

Now, that the BJP is finally in power, the 'troubling' is only boiling to a point of explosion as the elections arrive in 2019. Names of Allahabad city and the Mughalsarai railway station have been changed; a UNESCO world heritage site, Taj Mahal has been dropped from the tourism booklet of the UP government and the pursuit for the Rambhoomi has been stepped-up. In March 2017, Chief Justice of India, J.S. Khehar advised contenders to make an out-of-court settlement on the issue – knowing perhaps well how the BJP would behave outside the court and also of the amount of pressure the Muslims of UP must be feeling for the impending BJP wrath in the matter.

Increased rhetoric by BJP leaders lately – like Sushil Modi, Bihar's Deputy Chief Minister, saying that 'a mosque can be built anywhere, but a Ram temple can only be built at the birthplace of the Lord Ram'; Union Minister Giriraj Singh saying that Muslims should help construct a Ram temple in Ayodhya because they are 'descendants of Lord Ram and not Mughal Emperor Babur' and later adding that 'If Hindus run out of patience, they will take over Mathura, Ayodhya and Kashi' – all add to the heat in the province.

But why did Giriraj mention all three 'Mathura, Ayodhya and Kashi'? This takes us to why Babar made the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in the first place, when his throne was in Delhi? Babar was of Mongol decent and he had brought only the last Muslim dynastic rule to the subcontinent. Before him, the five dynasties of the Delhi Sultanate were all of Afghan or Turkic decent – making the north of the subcontinent a receptacle for Islamic influence. This turned the whole belt of northern states, UP, Bihar, Bengal and even Assam, into states of considerable Muslim concentration.

The fertile highlands have many features of troubling Muslim heritage. For instance, the Rohilkhand, a large region in UP has been the home of

The Contest

There is a tug-of-war between secularism and Hindutva, which aims to build India into a strong, unified state fashioned on Hindu values.

By Dr. Arshad Syed Karim

It looks like religion is now leading politics in India though the country has been known to be a secular state for a long time.

It must be said in any case that the role of religion in politics is an old phenomenon. The treaty of Westphalia (1648) was the outcome of intervening of politics and religion. In case of the history of Indo-Pak subcontinent during the reign of Akbar the Great, religion was taken as a serious question in his court which led to his religious policy and Din-e-Ilahi. In the modern history of India, after the fall of the Great Mughals with the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, the British used the policy of divide and rule between the Hindus and Muslims. This led to the continuation of the socio-economic and political downfall of the Muslims throughout the 17th century up to first half of the 19th century.

The War of Independence of 1857 further detoriated the Muslim community. The second half of the 19th century saw the rise of the Hindu community in India's socio-economic life, bringing them more in the forefront with the establishment of the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1885. It was in 1906 when the Muslims, as a minor religious group in the subcontinent established the All India Muslim League for socio-economic and political development. So religion continued to exist in the politics of the subcontinent for centuries. The ruling class, whether the Mughals, the British or the Hindus, always perpetuated their central role over the Indian political system. Consequently, the other religious classes used religious teachings and messages against injustice and oppression and this maintained continuity between religion and politics in the state system.

The British initiated the principle of electoral representation and this made communalism an integral part of politics of the subcontinent. Communalism was a deeply-rooted element in the British Indian national independence movement.

The INC was dominated by MK Gandhi after he came from South Africa in 1915. Prior to that, the Hindu-Muslim controversy had already risen after the partition of Bengal in 1905.

Politically speaking, the Nehru family who were moderate Brahmins took over charge of INC with Motilal Nehru as its President and his son Jawaharlal Nehru as its Secretary. They prepared the famous report called Nehru Report in 1927 which highly smelled of communal bias, favouring a Hindu Raj in the subcontinent. This led the All India Muslim League leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah to offer his famous 14 points in 1928 in reply to the Nehru Report. The National Movement history further focussed on religion

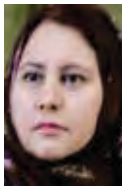
The assumed 'enemy' that has to be heroically destroyed by the BJP to win the Hindu vote, is not just the Muslims.

Rohilla Afghans who have served as the backbone for many Muslim Sultans in Delhi. They were instrumental in the Maratha Wars and were the only contingent that came to secure Delhi when it was going to be sacked by the British. Another heritage is the Aligarh Muslim University, which to this day holds its Islamic emblem and is managed by an all-Muslim panel and accommodates most of the scholarships for Kashmiri students from IOK. So, Mathura, Ayodhya and Kashi represent a triangle encircling several Muslim concentrations areas – a potential civil war in the making.

Yet, the assumed 'enemy' that has to be heroically destroyed by the BJP to win the Hindu vote, is not just the Muslims. The Ghar Wapsi has also targeted those whose ancestors had converted to Christianity. BJP leader and UP's Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has said, 'this campaign will continue unless conversions to other religions are banned altogether in the country'. So much for secular tolerance.

The BJP, though it has a great international outlook and makes efforts to bring India closer to global players, is practically crushing the secular, inclusive, democratic spirit inside the country. Such politics of hate and revenge will only yield hate and revenge. On the Taj Mahal exclusion last year, Laxmi Narayan, minister of religious affairs of UP said, the UP government was "rashtravadi (nationalist)" and runs on "dharam niti (religious policy).' Later in 2018, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat redefined nationalism, when he said, 'everyone who lives in India is Hindu by identity'. This leaves no livable space for over the 250 million minorities of India.

Yet, it does not seem viable that BJP would risk inciting the 250 million inside India. The voters would want a reassurance of Hindutva-love from the BJP and not another round of blood and batons. So, the BJP's election formula would be a low level of incitement at the most, like adding cow-vigilante killings every now and then, only to remind the Muslims that they are a separate nation, after all. S



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and politics in the subcontinent till the independence of India and foundation of Pakistan in 1947.

The Nehru dynasty-led INC continued after India's independence to rule India with a moderate religious attitude, making the country a secular state as per its constitution. After Nehru, his daughter Indra Gandhi, then her son Rajeev Gandhi, continued to keep India in a moderate religious and political environment. When Sonia Gandhi took over the Presidency of the INC after her husband Rajev Gandhi's assassination, she brought in a Muslim President, Abul Kalam, a Sikh Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh and being a Christian herself, remained as chief of the ruling party. Her son Rahul Gandhi as a Congress leader called himself a Hindustani encompassing all religious groups as a united force for the INC in the general elections of 2019 and presenting India as a real secular state.

The other political group that emerged and challenged the INC's political strength was the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which acquired political authority and removed the INC from national leadership when Atal Behari Vajpayee was the Prime Minister. He was a Hindu nationalist but was a moderate political leader. For four decades of its independence, India posed a danger to secularism in matters of state policy. The situation changed with the arrival of BJP as the ruling party. The BJP came with its background of Rashritriya Swagamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Bharitiya Jana Sangh (BJS) and it set about to rebuild India as a strong and unified Hindu state with Hindu values, generally called Hindutva. The present BJP, under the leadership of Narendra Modi, inherited the BJS mission, basing the Indian state system on Hindutva. This has considerably weakened secularism; the Indian electorate is now propagating Hindu nationalism and discarding secularism.

The contest of strength is between the BJP, led by Narendra Modi and the Congress, led by Rahul Gandhi. The latter is based on dynastic politics, as alleged by the BJP leadership. The BJP claims that dynastic politics is like a return to absolute monarchy which is a threat to democracy. The Congress leadership believes in Indian nationalism, merging religion, the caste system, regionalism and ethnicity. The coming elections will be a contest between the Hindutva-led BJP and the secularism of the Indian National Congress. S

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INTERVIEW

'While Gujarat Was Burning...'

During the 2002 Gujarat riots, Narendra Modi, the then chief minister of Gujarat, delayed the deployment of army troops in troubled areas to immediately stop the Hindu-Muslim riots that resulted in the killing of over 1500 Muslims in Ahmedabad. Zameer Uddin Shah, a retired lieutenant general of the Indian Army, makes interesting revelations.

Arfa Khanum Sherwani of the Indian TV channel, The Wire, interviewed Indian Lieutenant General (retired) Zameer Uddin Shah about how the Indian army lost crucial hours on the day communal violence began in Gujarat (western India). Lt. Gen. Zameer Uddin Shah, who was sent to control the Gujarat riots, waited for vehicles at the Gujarat airfield to take his troops into the city and made repeated requests to the then Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi, but none arrived.

Arfa Khanum Sherwani: During the 2002 Gujarat riots, had Narendra Modi, then the chief minister, taken the right steps at the right time, could there have been fewer lives lost?

Gen. Zameer Uddin Shah: My division was the Strike Corps and we were deployed in the Jaisalmer area. On the 28th of February, I went for an exercise and came back at around 6:30 pm. The Chief of Army Staff General Padmanabhan called me. I felt that there must be something important as the chief had called directly. All he said was to take as many troops as I could and put a stop to the riots taking place in Ahmedabad.

I reached the Ahmedabad airfield at 10 pm on the night of February 28. There were two brigades. It took 40 flights to bring them all to Ahmedabad. When we were flying over Ahmedabad, I saw that the entire city was burning. There were fires raging everywhere in the city. We were told that upon arrival we would receive vehicles, magistrates, police guides and, most importantly, cell phones as the army's phones only work when they are in direct line of sight.

I met Brigadier Mehra, who was my course mates. I asked him where the vehicles were. He said the state government would provide them and that he himself did not know much about that. I asked him where the chief secretary was as I wanted to speak with him. He said that the chief secretary was abroad and that another IAS officer was officiating.

George Fernandes (India's defence minister) met us there. He expressed happiness that the army had arrived. I said we were yet to be provided vehicles, etc. I had a map and we plotted the trouble spots on that map. At the airfield, we waited for the vehicles to arrive. Next morning, at around 10 or 11 am, George Fernandez came to the airfield alone. I told him that nothing had been arranged.

AS: No action had been taken from 10 pm the previous night to 10 am the following day?

ZS: Right, no vehicles were sent. We could not have gone by foot. The airfield was quite far from the city. That night I went to the CM's house. I saw that the rioters had surrounded the areas where the minorities lived and that the police was firing into houses through the windows. I asked them what they were doing. They said they were trying to bring the rioters under control. I responded that in that

case, the police should be firing at the rioters and not into houses. They became ashamed after hearing me say that. I noticed moreover that the police did not seem to be doing much.

AS: In the sensitive few hours of the night between February 28 and March 1, a lot of lives could have been saved but nothing was done?

ZS: Not even the next day. The vehicles only arrived on March 2. We went to the city after they arrived.

AS: The night of the 28th and the entire day of the 1st went to waste? You only got into the city on the 2nd, after which you tried to control the situation?

ZS: Yes, we were on the airfield the entire day of the 1st.

AS: Many questions have been raised regarding the fact that some police officers had joined the rioters and were ganging up against the minorities and the consequent failure of the police in fulfilling its responsibility.

ZS: The Home Guards had joined the rioters. Most of the Home Guard commanders were members of right-wing organizations. They were totally complicit in the riots. The police did not take any action against the rioters. Wherever a mob of rioters appeared, the police excused themselves by saying they had work in another area and left everything to the army. They never confronted the rioters directly. The homes of the few police officers who belonged to minority communities were also burned. That took place in the Police Lines area. The police action was utterly parochial and one-sided.

George Fernandes

Narendra Modi

AS: Who do you hold more responsible, the then defence minister George Fernandes or the current PM and then CM Narendra Modi? The latter has been accused many times since of not having fulfilled his chief ministerial duty and of having failed as an administrator.

ZS: There was an administrative failure. There was no chief secretary. The officiating chief secretary failed to take action. The police was largely non-committal. All its action was one-sided. And that administrative failure was the direct cause of the extent of the riots.

AS: The title of your book is 'The Sarkari Mussalman.' This is very interesting. Why did you call the book The Sarkari Mussalman? Usually, we see that term used for highly placed Muslims who are considered government stooges. The term is used derisively.

ZS: My father was posted in Nainital, but he was transferred to Ajmer and asked to deal with the Dargah Sharif. The Khuddam of the Dargah was displeased with my father on the assumption that he would push forth the government's agenda. So I had heard the term already in my childhood. People would say Mr Shah is a sarkari mussalman, and what they meant was that he was a government stooge.

When I was a second lieutenant, I met some horse-riders in a hotel in Mussoorie. I found out that it was the Aligarh Muslim University riding team which had come to participate in an event at the Indian Military Academy. I spoke to them about the dignity and prosperity that a job in the military offered. When I did an informal poll to see who was interested in joining, none of them raised their hand. They said to me that I am a sarkari mussalman, a government stooge, and so there was no reason to trust what I said.

AS: What kind of sarkari mussalman were you?

ZS: I played by the rules. Yes, there is another kind of sarkari mussalman. They are those who possess a discriminatory attitude towards their own community. They make a big show of being secular and openly say that they do not support Muslims. So there is a reaction. And they take action against members of their own community. I have written in my book that Salman Rushdie and Taslima Nasrin are taking advantage of this phenomenon. They were born as Muslims but now they write against Islam. So this was partly the reason behind the title. And my publisher said that the title was catchy.

AS: Given what is going on at

the Aligarh Muslim University, with attacks by right-wing organisations like Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad, do you think that the Modi government, the NDA government, is specifically targeting the Aligarh Muslim University?

ZS: Every government has targeted the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). The previous government appointed someone very unsuitable to the executive council, someone responsible for a fake movement. I wrote a letter to the HRD ministry urging them to not appoint that person to the executive council. Despite this, he was nominated.

I have always said that Aligarh Muslim University and Banaras Hindu University are at par with each other. But the latter gets twice as much grant money. Jamia Millia Islamia is one-third the size of AMU, yet it receives more grant money.

AS: How do you see the attack on the students of AMU? They were asked to prove their love for the country and their nationalism. How do you see this entire incident?

ZS: When I was VC of AMU, the member of parliament of the district wrote to me saying that AMU students were 'anti-national' because they criticized the government. I wrote back saying that our students were free to criticize whoever they wanted, but 'anti-national' activities would not be tolerated by the university administration. AMU is a modern, secular university.

AS: I want to know your opinion on the picture of (Muhammad Ali) Jinnah that hangs in Aligarh Muslim University. Should the university remove that picture or do they not need to do that?

ZS: The picture cannot be removed by force or under duress. There are a hundred pictures hanging there. My own picture hangs there. Jinnah was made an honorary member at a time when he was staunchly pro-Congress. The students at AMU have decided that the picture will remain there. They are also saying that there is a portrait of Jinnah in the parliament as well. Should that not be removed also?

AS: Now that it has been nearly five years and the country is heading towards elections, how do you evaluate the last five years? How do you evaluate the tenure of Narendra Modi from the perspective of India's largest minority, the Muslims?

ZS: I am completely certain that discrimination is not based on religion. I think discrimination is against those who lack the opportunities for education and training, of which the two largest groups are Dalits and Muslims. Since they are less qualified, who will give them jobs?

AS: But the better-educated Muslims were not spared in the Gujarat riots?

ZS: True, even the well-educated Muslims were killed in the riots. The most dangerous thing is that even middle-class Muslims who were living in localities and flats were driven out of there and killed.

AS: Given the violent politics of the time and the fact that some select groups have arrogated to themselves the right to decide what constitutes patriotism, is education enough to rid Muslims of the discrimination they are facing?

ZS: Yes, I am convinced that it will.

AS: You are saying that Muslims should focus on education at any cost?

ZS: Yes, and make sure the education does not take place in ghettoised schools.

AS: But given that RSS talks about making India a Hindu country, and the BJP is closely allied with the RSS, what place do you see for Muslims?

ZS: If they are educated and make progress, there will be no choice but to accept them. This is what I used to tell my students at AMU, that if they are more qualified and skilled than their competitors, they will no doubt receive job offers.

AS: You have also said many times that people should join the military and that especially Muslims should. Whether joining the military is the best way to be patriotic is an issue that is often discussed. But you recommend it.

ZS: I tried a lot at Aligarh Muslim University. I tried to train students to join the military. I used to tell students that if they wished to ensure their own security and the security of their families, they should join the military. S

Zameer Uddin Shah is a retired Lieutenant General of the Indian Army. He last served as the Deputy Chief of Army Staff (Personnel & Systems), in the Indian Army. After retirement, he served for some time as an administrative member on the bench of the Armed Forces Tribunal. He was also the Vice Chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University and is the brother of noted Indian actor Naseeruddin Shah.

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SOUTHASIA
JANUARY 2019

REGION

PG 30

ISLAMABAD
Future of SAARC
By Senator Rehman Malik

PG 31

ISLAMABAD
The Struggle Continues
By Saima Mirza

PG 32

ISLAMABAD
Revisiting No-No Land
By Saleem Qamar Butt

PG 34

ISLAMABAD
Recovering The Money
By Dr Muhammad Babar Chohan

PG 35

GWADAR
The Gender Front
By Nadil Shah

PG 36

NEW DELHI
Arms Race Fever
By Ali Raza

PG 38

KABUL & ISLAMABAD
Harbingers of Peace
By Awais Anwer Khawaja

PG 39

KABUL
Batting For A Solution
By Anish Mishra

PG 41

MALÉ
Towards a New Agenda
By Dr. Raza Khan

ISLAMABAD

FUTURE OF SAARC

What could make SAARC more effective is its positive role in regional security and development as well as global peace and stability.

By Senator Rehman Malik, Sitara-e-Shujaat, Nishan-e-Imtiaz

SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) was established in 1985 by the nations of the South Asia region that includes Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives. Afghanistan joined later. On creation of SAARC, each country agreed to cooperate in the formation of a trade bloc and to perform together for the economic and political development of the region. However, SAARC is losing its importance by every passing year though it was established with a great doable charter for its member countries.

South Asia has multiple issues due to certain bilateral-complicated problems and these lead to political divisions. This is one of the backward and underdeveloped regions in the world and there is a dire need for development and a higher rate of economic growth in all the member countries, but no favourable steps have been taken by the members to fulfil the need.

The region hosts 24.78 per cent of the world's population but accounts for only $11.64 trillion of the world's GDP (at PPP). Factors like poverty, illiteracy, inequality, unemployment, low productivity and malnourishment are haunting the population of the region. It is pity that the forum has fallen victim to regional politics and could not grow to the expectations of the people as the member states have not been able to strengthen their economic ties to a significant extent to work together towards the development of the region. There is a need for collaboration for developing their industrial and social sectors and improving their political ties.

I represented Pakistan at the SAARC Meeting of Experts on the implementation of the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism in Colombo, Sri Lanka in 1990. My proposal for establishing SAARC-POL (like INTERPOL), despite approval, could not materialise. As part of the SAARC Charter, the signatory countries agreed on the following five areas of cooperation:

- Agriculture and Rural Development
- Telecommunications, Science, Technology and Meteorology
- Health and Population activities
- Transport
- Human Resource Development

As a keen observer of development in this region, I regret to note that there has been no notable achievement made by SAARC so far. SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Area) was formulated by SAARC and it came into force on the first day of 2006 but the agreement has never been implemented.

Other fields of cooperation were also established, like environment, economic development, energy and sharing data of criminals, but again, none of this has proved to be fruitful. SAPTA, the South Asia Preferential Trading Agreement, was also formed in 1995 to promote trade amongst the member countries.

At the time of creation of SAARC, it was decided unanimously that no bilateral issue would be discussed at this forum but these issues have always dominantly emerged, affecting the performance of SAARC. The blame games and the inter-states conflicts amongst the member countries have caused further harm to the foundations of SAARC. It is unfortunate that instead of dealing with the problems jointly, the member states are blaming each other for the terrorism, violence, extremism and sectarianism occurring in the region.

The inclusion of Afghanistan, back in 2005, is said to be a calculated move by India to undermine Pakistan's position in SAARC. The increasing ties between India and Afghanistan and India's financial support to Afghanistan is a clear signal that both are willing to destabilize Pakistan.

The region has further encountered many unresolved border and maritime issues, including terrorism by the Afghan Taliban, refugee crisis, smuggling, narco-trade, Kashmir dispute, disputes between India and Sri Lanka over nationality of Tamilians, India and Nepal issue over their border, disputes between India and Bangladesh over Chittagong refugees, etc.

I would like to say that over a period of time, India has developed a high level of influence on the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Afghanistan as it occupies 70% area amongst all SAARC countries. Also, the small countries do not share borders with each other except for Pakistan-Afghanistan. These countries have become like satellites of India. On many occasions, India either by itself or by using another member country, cancels the meetings of SAARC. Pakistan tried to hold and host the meetings twice

in the past but India has not let it happen because of the number game to block a meeting. The details of these two incidents have damaged the credibility of SAARC.

The continuous time to time delay in different SAARC summits, following various pretexts, particularly at the behest of India, have paralyzed the organization. It can never function independently and effectively unless it gets out of the clutches of India. Due to its assumed dominant position in the region, India plays a hegemonic role, creating a sense of insecurity among other members of the association.

In 1988, at the conclusion of three-day summit, then Prime Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto addressed the summit of the SAARC. It was attended by the premiers of seven member states: Prime Minister of India Rajiv Gandhi, Sri Lankan President Junius Jayewardene, President Hussain Mohammad Ershad of Bangladesh, King Birendra of Nepal, King Sigme Wanchuk of Bhutan and the Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. Benazir Bhutto was the elected chairperson of SAARC for the next year at the inaugural session of the summit. It was the fourth such conference since the association was founded in Dhaka in 1985.

In her address to the delegates, she said:

'Mutual suspicions and rivalries have divided our countries in the past and kept them from coming together whole-heartedly in joint endeavours for the good of all our peoples,' 'Some of us are spending too great a proportion of our national resources on defence, maintaining large military forces that face each other. The truth is that our people face the same common problems - poverty, disease, slums and ignorance -- and it is to the vanquishing of these enemies that we should direct all our efforts.'

It was an idea to become one economic strong block in the interest of the citizens of each country.

Let us confess that the SAARC has failed to achieve its original targets. I propose that the veto power must be done away with. What happened in the Maldives at the behest of its neighbouring country is a matter of record. Nepal continues to be terrorized by India and has become a subservient nation to it.

It would have been a historic achievement if SAARC had played its role to resolve the issues between Pakistan and Afghanistan or Pakistan and India. I have hardly seen even a single effort to resolve these pressing issues. S

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ISLAMABAD

The Struggle Continues

In order to win their rights, Pakistani women need to be at the forefront of the struggle themselves.

By Saima Mirza

Generally, the struggle for women's rights in Pakistan is seen as a consequence of the Western feminist movement. People in power and religious fundamentalists term the struggle as unnecessary. They say it has been borrowed from the West and is an attempt to uproot existing social values as an agenda of the West. However, these critics are unaware of the historic struggle of women in the sub-continent. A close look reveals that the era of awakening of women's consciousness in the east and west is almost the same. Some may agree that women in this part of the world raised their voice against patriarchy and gender discrimination much earlier than the modern Western feminism, which was organized into a consolidated movement in 1960s. Literary writings of Rashid Jahan, Ismat Chughtai, Amrita Pritam, etc. in the earlier half of 20th century are evidence of this fact.

There was a political awakening among women in the pre-Partition period and Muslim women practically supported the Pakistan Movement under the leadership of Ms. Fatima Jinnah and other prominent figures. Sadly, after the creation of Pakistan, inclusion of women in all spheres of national life remained a dream. Women are still striving for their rightful place in public life despite the assurance of Article 34 of the Constitution of Pakistan. Though women are being educated and coming into various fields of life, they are deprived of significant decision-making powers in personal as well as public affairs. Women representation in the parliament has increased but most women legislators are mainly elected through reserved quotas rather than by general election. These quota-based elected women mostly belong to powerful ruling classes or are related to politicians in one way or the other. They usually follow their party line which makes them powerless in legislating for women in general. Pakistan is a signatory to several international human rights conventions but its parliament has not been able to legislate and implement accordingly. An example is rejection of The Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Bill, 2017 which was aimed at protecting child girls' rights.

Harassment is a normal occurrence that women face in offices, universities and colleges or on roads. For this, the responsibility is entirely put on the women regardless of their age. It is either directed towards their dress or the way they talk or walk. Dowry related violence, rape, domestic abuse and honour killings are also prevalent. According to the Human Rights Watch Report of 2017, almost 1000 girls are killed in Pakistan in the name

of honour annually. A United Nations report points out multi-faceted barriers depriving women from obtaining decision-making powers and has emphasized on the need of appointing women at key administrative positions. The World Employment Social Outlook-Trend 2018 has termed Pakistan as the worst country for women employment opportunities in South Asia. Similarly, on the gender parity index, Pakistan is ranked 143rd out of 144 countries, only ahead of Yemen. The same is the case in the education sector where Pakistan is the second worst country in the world in terms of out-of-school girls, ahead of Afghanistan.

Though there have been some women who have achieved glory, in general, women face serious problems and are left behind. Striving for the best is a natural human tendency and western women certainly enjoy more freedom. Freedom of speech, job, marriage and higher education are still considered privileges which are not thinkable for women in this part of the world yet though they attract women across the globe. This is the result of the long and tiring women rights struggle in the West. It is this struggle that enabled Jemima Khan, the former wife of Prime Minister Imran Khan, to support him publicly even after decades of separation. Imran Khan's Party, Pakistan Tehreek-E-Insaf itself emerged as a sign of hope for women and women equally played a vital role in PTI's jalsas for which they often got immoral titles, mainly by male members of rival parties.

In its manifesto, PTI promised inclusion of women on key positions in all main institutions, along with improvement in education, health, etc. In practical terms, the government of 'Naya Pakistan' seems to have chosen to follow its predecessors. Only 4 women are included in the federal cabinet of 30 members and the 30 members' parliamentary committee to probe election fraud has just 1 woman while the Economic Advisory Council does not include women at all.

Though Imran Khan's government is in its early days, but it is disappointing for women who strove hard for PTI's win. Women can prove a strong factor in overcoming economic and political challenges if they are given rights as well as significant decision power. There is a need to acknowledge that women in Pakistan have real issues both at work and at home and these must be addressed. The perception needs to be cleared that the call for rights of Pakistani women is not based on Western norms but to protect these women against various cultural and unconstitutional traditions. It seems that Pakistani women must continue to strive for their rights to make their conditions better. S

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ISLAMABAD

Revisiting No-No Land

Geopolitics is not an emotional activity. Pakistan must skillfully pursue its national interests and revisit its Israel policy.

By Saleem Qamar Butt

The recognition of Jerusalem as capital of Israel and the decision to shift the US embassy there by US President Trump have been very controversial moves. There is also a strange warming up of relations between the KSA and Israel, since both consider Iran as a common foe in the Middle East. The situation has remained a puzzle for Pakistan foreign policy strategists for decades. The emotional attachment of the Pakistanis with the Palestine issue notwithstanding, the majority in Pakistan is ignorant about the details. Therefore, in order to develop a cogent response to the riddle, a brief overview of the Palestine-Israel conundrum is considered imperative.

Israel is the world's only Jewish state, located just east of the Mediterranean Sea. The Palestinians, who are the Arab population that hails from the land Israel now controls, refer to the territory as Palestine, and want to establish a state by that name on all or part of the same land. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is over who gets what land and how it is controlled. Though both Jews and Arab Muslims date their claims to the land back a couple of thousand years, the current political conflict began in the early 20th century. Jews fleeing persecution in

Europe wanted to establish a national homeland in what was then an Arab and Muslim-majority territory in the Ottoman and later British Empire.

After the Arab Palestinian economy collapsed and 250,000 Palestinian Arabs fled or were expelled, on 14 May 1948, the day before the expiration of the British Mandate, David Ben-Gurion, the head of the Jewish Agency, declared "the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz-Israel, to be known as the State of Israel". The Arabs resisted, seeing the land as rightfully theirs. An early United Nations plan to give each group part of the land failed and Israel and the surrounding Arab nations fought several wars over the territory. Today's lines largely reflect the outcomes of two of these wars, one waged in 1948 and another in 1967. The West Bank is a chunk of land east of Israel. It is home to 2.6 million Palestinians and would make up the heart of any Palestinian state. Israel took control of it in 1967 (Israel fought a war with Egypt, Syria, and Jordan) and has allowed Jewish settlers to move in, but Palestinians (and most of the international community) consider it illegally occupied Palestinian land. Jerusalem is a city that straddles the border between Israel and the West Bank. It is home to some of the holiest sites in both Judaism and Islam and so both Israel and Palestine want to make it their capital. How to split the city fairly remains one of the fundamental issues dividing the Israelis and the Palestinians. Gaza is a densely populated strip of land that is mostly surrounded by Israel and is peopled almost exclusively by the Palestinians but it is currently under Israeli blockade.

Settlements of Jews in West Bank since 1967 are generally considered to be a major impediment to peace and considered a usurpation and colonization of Palestinian land by the world at large, including Pakistan. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a huge issue in the region. Israel has fought multiple wars with each of its four neighbours, all of whom nominally support the Palestinian national cause. Today, it has peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, but its relations with its other neighbours, Syria and Lebanon, are fraught. There are large, mistreated Palestinian refugee communities in all of Israel's neighbours except Egypt. Outside its immediate neighbours, the three

A fresh cost-benefit analysis will result in favour of Pakistan revisiting its Israel policy.

most important regional states in the conflict are Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. Though American support for Israel is massive, including billions of dollars in aid and reliable diplomatic backing (the US has given Israel $118 billion in aid over the years or about $3 billion per year). Half of all American UN Security Council vetoes have blocked resolutions critical of Israel). The main reasons for Israel being a darling of the USA include the influence of the pro-Israel lobby (thanks to AIPAC and now Jarred Kushner, as an influential Jew son-in-law in the White House), considering Israel a stable democracy and a key buffer against Soviet influence in the Middle East during the Cold War.

Now Israel is regarded by the USA as a partner for fighting terrorism. Some 83% of the world's countries and almost every country that isn't Arab or has a Muslim majority recognizes Israel's legitimacy and maintains diplomatic relations with it. But most countries are critical of Israel's brutal treatment of the Palestinians, gross human rights violations and ongoing occupation of the West Bank. Global public opinion at present is generally more sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, creating real concern among the Israelis that an international boycott movement, called BDS, could pick up some support. Israel is quite unpopular worldwide. In one BBC poll of 22 countries, Israel was the fourth-most-disliked nation.

The 1993 Oslo Accords kicked off a peace process is an ongoing American-mediated effort to broker a peace treaty between the Israelis and Palestinians. It aims at "final status agreement," which would establish a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank in exchange for Palestinians agreeing to permanently end attacks on Israeli targets. Any successful peace initiative would need to resolve the four core issues that have plagued the peace process: West Bank borders/settlements, Israeli security, Palestinian refugees and Jerusalem. So far there has been little success mainly due to the continued expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. The Palestinians' politically division between Fatah and Hamas and the challenge to initiate a serious dialogue due to extreme positions on both Israeli and Palestinian sides has also marred a breakthrough.

Despite available precedence of some meek behind-the-scene diplomatic engagements with Israel in 2005, even a fresh deliberate cost-benefit analysis will result in favour of Pakistan revisiting its Israel policy. The incumbent political government in Pakistan may find it an exceedingly bizarre diplomatic gamble to reach out to Israel in any way due to an expected political backlash from the opposition as well as from ultra-hyper religious bigots aspiring for a political lifeline in Pakistan. Nevertheless, like all other state policies, foreign policy also needs to be dynamic in nature and demands sustained updating, considering all internal, external, politico-economic realities and security interests, which should be debated in both houses of the parliament rather than precious time being wasted on trivialities.

Pakistan must continue to engage all Muslim and other friendly countries to support the Palestinian cause for a just and peaceful resolution, which has so many similarities with the bleeding Kashmir issue. Farsighted prudence demands that no such step be taken that dilutes Pakistan's principled stand in line with UN resolutions both with regard to the Palestine and Kashmir causes. Recognition of Israel's legitimacy should preferably be decided at the OIC level rather than as an individual state's decision and be linked with resolution of the Palestine issue as per UN resolutions, cessation of atrocities by Israel and its abandoning of settlements since 1967, with continued support to the Oslo Accord efforts towards a two-state solution if acceptable to the Palestinian people. S

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ISLAMABAD

Recovering The Money

The new government in Pakistan is paying a lot of attention to money laundering. It must also adopt e-solutions and new technologies to further facilitate the process.

By Dr Muhammad Babar Chohan

Prime Minister Imran Khan and the Chief Justice of Pakistan have separately vowed to bring back the nation's looted money stashed overseas. While the government and the judiciary appear to be determined, much more needs to be done on the legal, institutional, and technological fronts. A technically feeble legal framework, insufficiencies in the institutional arrangements and rapid technological advancements remain major challenges before the government to recover the plundered money.

As far as laws are concerned, the Anti-Money Laundering Act 2010 requires major surgery to effectively cope with the offences relating to illicit outflows. The PM has recently called for a new legislation that could strengthen the current laws to effectively control 'hundi', 'hawala' and other illicit forms of outflows with negative repercussions for the economy. The task forces constituted at the federal and provincial levels for identifying the administrative and legal lacunas in the current anti-money laundering regime and suggesting eradicative measures, need to be highly skilled. In particular, the team members must be well-versed in legal, institutional and technical aspects of the AML framework, with a deep understanding of its consequences, both at the national and international level. This suggests that a team comprising traditional government officials may not be able to suggest robust AML solutions because of lack of capacity on the simultaneous fronts of law, institutions and technology. For this purpose, technical people from the private sector need to be hired.

Institutional fragmentation is indeed a big challenge in containing the illicit money outflows. Bringing administrative harmony among institutions such as the State Bank of Pakistan, Federal Board of Revenue, banks, Federal Investigation Agency, Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan and other financial bodies, requires intelligent data-sharing. Pakistan's current legal regime is a scattered one, comprising federal, provincial and local institutions. Such fragmentation is a big hurdle in bringing about harmony and administrative cohesion among government institutions at different tiers.

It is not only weird but also naïve not to share data within the government departments. Apart from unavailability of a legal framework for such data sharing, there is also a lack of technological capacity to share and integrate data at the federal, provincial and local levels. Unless institutions are e-integrated through well-researched IT interventions, the task forces will remain hostage to traditional ways and means to handle the money laundering menace. The expected outcome may depict a 'garbage in – garbage out' kind of solution because of lack of research. The real job of the task forces is to adopt a multi-pronged strategy aimed at adopting both short-term and long-term measures.

In the short run, the loose screws in the legal, institutional and technical areas should be tightened with a view to strengthening the internal AML regime along with fulfilling the commitments made with the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the Asia-Pacific Group (APG) before September 2019 – the deadline for avoiding the notorious 'grey list'. It may be recalled that during their visit to Pakistan, the FATF and APG teams had expressed dissatisfaction over many weak areas of the AML regime, such as a 'deficient legal assistance system', 'absence of a criterion for new technology risks' and 'identification of transaction originators by the financial institutions'. These areas require immediate attention for identifying the e-variants necessary for linking institutions.

As a long term measure, immediate research work needs to be initiated, in collaboration with the educational and research institutions, so that an e-system of institutions' integration could be devised. This is the real challenging area. I have already suggested using Blockchain Technology (BCT) for this purpose. The BCT is a sort of 'distributed public ledger' that can hold immutable data through encrypted ways, making unalterable transactions.

It is reiterated that the BCT has the potential to effectively integrate

The Anti-Money Laundering Act 2010 requires major surgery to cope with the offences relating to illicit outflows.

institutions with a specialized focus on revamping the current AML regime. The e-integration of SBP, FBR, FIA, SECP, banks and other institutions will indeed provide multiple dimensions of data from all over the country that can be analyzed for purposeful AML analyses. Currently, the task forces are expected to submit monthly reports on their performance to the Prime Minister's Office. It is very much a manual job which is hardly needed once smart IT interventions are made. The system can indeed generate such reports automatically along with gauging individual and collective performances of team members. A robustly devised system may not need any task forces at all. The real issue is to immediately start research work on the innovative project of institutions' integration through modern tools such as the BCT. Technological interventions may also be based on BCT.

As a long-term measure, the federal and provincial task forces need to analyze practical case studies in finalizing their recommendations rather than focusing on models adopted by other countries. Such case studies can be extracted from current investigation cases before various agencies such as FBR, FIA and other federal, provincial and local agencies. The cases pertaining to irregular financial transactions, white collar crimes, tax evasion, huge real estate investments and tax frauds must be given top priority. This is because such case studies inherently carry intertwined data that could be helpful in identifying the e-variants necessary for developing inter-institutional data-sharing linkages through purposefully defined e-sieving.

The determination of the PM and the CJP to recover the illicit money stashed overseas undoubtedly deserves accolades. However, there is always a marked difference between 'ambition' and 'reality'. While 'ambition' is the first step towards achieving targets, it is indeed rightly directed and rigorous efforts that can transform it into a reality. S

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GWADAR

The Gender Front

In Pakistan, women are often prevented from advancing economically, due to social restrictions on their movement and gender mixing, as well as due to low education. CPEC is an opportunity to change all that.

By Nadil Shah

Gender has become prominent in today's political, social, economic and intellectual discourse because of the imbalance in opportunities. The discriminatory approach has stiffened the intensity of gender inequality in the world. Unequal distribution of the economy is considered the most important factor for perpetuating gender discrimination because most of it is occupied by men. Women are mostly involved in unpaid domestic work. The intensity and nature of gender inequality varies across societies, countries and regions.

Gender equality is very weak in the South Asian countries. A recent survey by the Thomson Reuters Foundation ranked India on top in terms of sexual violence and women being forced into slave labour while Afghanistan and Pakistan were rated second and sixth, respectively. Lack of an agency for women with an ability to make decisions independently, is one of the main causes of gender inequality. There needs to be economic independence and equal opportunities in this regard. Regrettably, the contribution of women is systematically denied and there is a dearth of economic opportunities for females in the South Asian countries generally and in Pakistan particularly.

In Pakistan, women's participation in the labour force is 25 percent which is very low because of the restricted social structure while for men, it is 86 percent. In the Global Gender Gap Report of 2017, Pakistan was ranked 144th out of 148 countries in terms of gender disparity and ranked 143rd out of 144 countries in gender economic participation. This is also considered one of the main factors for the low GDP in Pakistan.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is believed to be a game changer and would bring economic prosperity to the region, especially

to Pakistan. With a worth of $62 billion, bilateral agreements between China and Pakistan will link Kashgar to Gwadar. Most of these projects pertain to infrastructural development.

They include energy, roads, Gwadar city development, rail-based mass transit, special economic zones, social sector development and the western route, etc. Moreover, social sector projects comprise people exchange programs, transferring knowledge to various sectors, establishment of an academy of social sciences and promotion of the education sector through a consortium of business schools. All these projects deal with business and construction – tasks that are generally not performed by women in Pakistan.

Women are restricted to cooking, cleaning and child-rearing. In case, a woman works in the public sphere, she is a receptionist, a doctor or a teacher because these jobs seem to have become predetermined for females owing to 'Pardha'. Such jobs have no connection to CPEC as they are less involved in the decision and policy-making process and are categorized as a disadvantaged group for various projects.

The Australian High Commissioner Margaret Adamson says that there are many development projects, including CPEC, in Pakistan but women should be given enough space and economic opportunities to be engaged in development activities. Dr. Fouzia Saeed also says that economic development and empowerment of women has a significant relationship which needs to be explored. Rana Liaquat Ali Khan said that women, like men, have important roles in the development of a society if they are given equal opportunities. Despite this, women in Pakistan have been neglected in the development sectors.

The absence of women in development projects would not be an issue if there was a change in the psychology and attitude of the public regarding women's role in economic development. In the pre-industrial era, women were oppressed in China, like Pakistan today, but the country changed its policies. For eliminating oppression or women, China recognized their importance for the development of the country and created equal opportunities for them. They mainstreamed and empowered women by providing them a sense of equality. There was political opposition but since, like Pakistan, China lacked technical manpower, educational institutions, technical equipment and capital investment, it worked on female literacy, resisted religious biases, widened landholding, changed customs and traditional views about women, abolished job discrimination on the basis of gender and reformed the entire social fabric.

It is widely believed that reforming the family system, prohibiting forced and early marriages and the patriarchal mindset, would enhance the empowerment of women. CPEC is an opportunity for Pakistan to mainstream its female population and give extensive opportunities to women in the decision-making process. The Asian Development Bank has acknowledged that CPEC has the capacity to promote Pakistan from a low to a middle-income country, if balanced policies are made both for men and women.

Pakistan can start by even launching separate projects for women empowerment. It should also address issues of women working in public and private domains. In China, economic opportunities were provided to women as well as protection and facilities such as healthcare services. In the 1970s, the Communist Party gave educational opportunities to all women and empowered them so that they could contribute to the economic development of the country.

The policymakers in Pakistan should focus on comprehensive plans and make an evidence-based decision-making process for gender mainstreaming and economic development. After all, women comprise half the population of Pakistan and must contribute to nation-building in a more effective manner. CPEC could be a good starting point. S

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NEW DELHI

ARMS RACE FEVER

The launch of the Indian nuclear submarine, the INS Arihant, is a threat to strategic stability in South Asia.

By Ali Raza

After staying in a denial mode about the existence of an Indian nuclear submarine for a number of years, the Prime Minister of India has finally announced that it has completed its nuclear triad after completion of its first deterrence patrol on November 5, 2018.

A nuclear triad is a three-pronged military force structure that consists of land-launched nuclear missiles, nuclear-missile-armed submarines and strategic aircraft with nuclear bombs and missiles.

It is reported that INS Arihant is India's first indigenous nuclear submarine. The INS Arihant project was launched by India in July 2009. Gursharan Kaur, the wife of the former Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh, did the honours. It is said that INS Arihant is equipped with K-4 submarine launched ballistic missiles, which have a range of 3500 km. It is also loaded with twelve K-15 missiles which have a range of 750 km. Reportedly, the sea trials of INS Arihant began in December 2014 and in February 2016, it was declared fit for operations. It is also claimed by Indian officials that INS Arihant can remain under the surface for a number of months at one go.

It is said that the crew, comprising some 100 persons, is trained by Russian specialists. It is also being claimed that now India would be capable of launching nuclear strikes deep inside China. India is also said

to be planning on building six nuclear attack submarines, which would contain the Brahmos missile. The cost would be more than 90,000 crores. The Indian Vice Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral P Murugesan has said, "The government has given approvals for six new SSNs (nuclear attack submarines) earlier this year. We have started work but still are at the pen to paper stage". Negotiations between India and Russia for lease of nuclear attack submarines are also in final stages.

The completion of a nuclear triad by India is another treacherous design of India to attain regional hegemony. The world may see that just like the nuclear explosions of Pokhran (which were conducted despite India's repeated proclamations that nuclear technology for peaceful purposes would never be diverted for making nuclear weapons) the country has announced that it has successfully completed deterrence patrol and has been successful in achieving a nuclear triad after a long abstinence from building a nuclear submarine.

This has gravely endangered the strategic environment in the region and has the potential of triggering an arms race in South Asia. These concerns have also been raised in the past by many security specialists and analysts. The Indian Admiral Arun Prakash is of the view that "India and Pakistan are edging dangerously close to a spiral in the growth of their nuclear weapons arsenals. This could become a mindless race, driven by mutual suspicion, rather than the actual needs of deterrence and stability." Similarly, Richard Weitz thinks that the most dangerous aspect of security in South Asia "is almost certainly the nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan. "The dynamics of armament in South Asia are based by experts on non-proliferation and nuclear energy and are considered as far more complex than a classic race. India is exclusively responsible for the complex situation.

The completion of a nuclear triad by India is another treacherous design to attain regional hegemony.

In the past, the Pakistan foreign office has also raised concerns on the efforts of India to make a ballistic missiles system. Pakistan viewed it as an element that could destabilize deterrence and invited India to resolve the issue through a Composite Dialogue Process, but India turned a deaf ear to the requests. It can now be anticipated that in reaction to the Indian announcement of completion of a nuclear triad, Pakistan would be compelled to take measures that could ensure maintenance of deterrence. The responsible powers of the world must take measures that could put a restraint on Indian aspirations of building more and more nuclear weapons under the garb of strengthening security. Such steps would not strengthen the strategic security environment of the region and would only expose the region to a more dangerous situation. In addition, India must realize that the huge amount that is being spent on making advanced nuclear weapons could be used for the prosperity and wellbeing of its people. It should put a full stop to acts that could trigger an arms race at the cost of peace in the sub-continent.

Pakistan has never wanted to engage in an arms race and has always encouraged peace initiatives. The ground breaking ceremony of the Kartarpur corridor on November 28 is a message of peace, brotherhood and tolerance from Pakistan but India is viewing the action with negativity.

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KABUL & ISLAMABAD

Harbingers of Peace

As energy demand is on the rise around the world, better energy gathering, transmission and distribution infrastructures need to be constructed in the SAARC region and beyond.

By Awais Anwer Khawaja

Nepal witnessed an economic and humanitarian crisis due to its economic blockade by India in September, 2015. The allegations of economic blockade are refuted by India. Instead it holds Madheshi protesters responsible for the crisis. Being a landlocked nation, the quotidian imports of petroleum products from India to Nepal numbered 300 trucks daily which tanked significantly to as low as 5 to 10 during the crisis. Earthquake devastations, coupled with the blockade, caused a double whammy for the nation of 29.3 million in 2015.

Energy treaties have a significant role in today's geo-political sphere. The warring European nations learnt the importance of multilateral cooperation treaties following the cold war. Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) is an international treaty which lays the foundation for trans-border energy trade between various states of Eurasia. The treaty is a legally binding instrument encapsulating various facets, including investment promotion and protection, trade, transit, energy efficiency, third party access, quality standardization and dispute resolution, among its member states.

Pakistan has not ratified the treaty yet. However, it enjoys observer status at the ECT. Failure to join the ECT has partly blocked FDI in the energy sector in Pakistan, mainly from the EU and Japan. Benefits such as scaling down of power losses are also hamstrung by not joining the ECT. Even though there is a concept of an 'Energy Ring' among SAARC member states, nevertheless there is no legally binding instrument that exists between SAARC countries. In the absence of any legally binding instrument, the seminal cardinals concerning sustainable supplies, transit, third party access, investment protection and dispute resolution are not at the centre of relations between SAARC member states.

International law, substantiated by multilateral treaties, aims at striking a balance between smaller and bigger states, particularly amongst the likes of Nepal and India. Peter Frankopan, a British historian, in his prescient 2015 book 'The Silk Roads' foresees the shift of economic power and global trade towards the Central, Far Eastern and South Asian countries in the coming times. The natural resources-rich Caspian Basin will eventually be amphibiously linked with the South Asian states. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project is making tailwinds in the emerging energy cornucopia. Impediments manifested in political instability and security disorder will trounce in due course of time. TAPI envisages 1700 MMCFD of gas molecules flowing to South Asia member states, which translates into billions of USD annual trade. Historically, energy interdependence between the states incentivize peace in the respective regions. Energy starved Pakistan and India cannot rule out the potential economic benefits that will stem from the flow of energy from the Caspian Basin as compared to the flow of energy from the South Pars field/North Dome condensate.

Some also hold the view that TAPI is nothing more than a figment of the imagination as there are misgivings between Pakistan and Afghanistan and Pakistan and India. These are accentuated by the absence of US interest in the project in the backdrop of Turkmenistan refusing US corporations ownership of the gas reserves of Galkynysh/

Daulatabad gas field and this makes the whole project impractical.

An article published in 'The Diplomat' in April 2018 authored by an Afghan national contends that Pakistan cannot stand the economic benefits to be derived by Afghanistan and India from TAPI owing to its policy of 'strategic depth' which contemplates subservience of Afghanistan to Pakistan. It sees Afghanistan as its backyard in the event of India capturing Pakistan's territories. In other words, the author concludes that TAPI is an antithesis of Pakistan's policy of 'strategic depth'. The conclusions of the author are unsubstantiated as Pakistan's security paradigm has largely changed in the aftermath of acquiring a nuclear arsenal.

Moreover, transition of a pipeline passing through Pakistan's territory into Indian territory will give some political leverage to Pakistan over India. So far, as US interests in TAPI are concerned, although Turkmenistan has refused to confer ownership of gas reserves to US corporations but the US is still a proponent of the five states' Lapis Lazuli Corridor Agreement which envisages transition of Afghan goods directly to European markets. The US also wants less reliance of European markets on Russian gas. Houston-based Cheniere Energy has already started exports of LNG, gathered from natural gas of Eagle Ford Shale, Permian Basin and other sources to Europe and other destinations. The US-based ExxonMobil has also taken 25 % stake in offshore drilling in Pakistan. Energy penetration has long been the bedrock of the US 'security perimeter' in the Middle Eastern region.

Pipelines are usually perceived as harbingers of peace. Within the Gulf, the 'Dolphin Project', transiting from Qatar to UAE, has brought about resolution to the border disputes between the UAE and Oman and between Qatar and Saudi Arab. In a similar vein, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline is a 1,768 kilometers long crude oil pipeline emanating from the Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli oil field in the Caspian Sea and veering to the Mediterranean Sea. It is largely viewed as a counterbalance to Russian and Iranian dominance in the region.

The TAPI pipeline will also ease pressure on Pakistan which is presently confronted with depletion of domestic resources of gas that will partly sidestep the significance of the Iran-Pakistan (IP) project. The possible development will be in consonance with US interests in the region. The economic benefits in the shape of anticipated transit fee from India and cheaper gas molecules are not exclusive to Pakistan alone. Other participating member states will also benefit from the laying of the pipeline. India needs to satiate its industry's energy demand. There has been a breach of terms by Petronet of India of its agreement with Qatar for supply of LNG to India by refusing to off-take LNG from Qatar. As a result, there has been an unfurling of a conflict between both the states in 2015 and has exposed India's appetite for cheap energy. Unlike India, high value addition economies, for example, Japan and South Korea, can afford to buy costly energy from Qatar and other energy producing countries. On the contrary, Pakistan's and India's best-case scenario is competitive supplies from TAPI and other Central Asian countries.

Multilateral energy treaties among South Asian countries and between South Asian and Central Asian countries are vital to peace in the region. An energy treaty on the lines of ECT between SAARC member states is imminent to this end. S

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KABUL

Batting For A Solution

The Moscow format of talks on Afghanistan sought to unite all sections of society for a political solution to the Afghan quagmire.

By Anish Mishra

The Moscow Format is a six-party mechanism for consultations between Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, China and Iran. Its main objective is to achieve a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan. The first round of consultations under the Moscow Format took place in April 2017. The Russian government had originally scheduled the second round of consultations with representation of the political office of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Taliban) in Qatar invited to Moscow in September 2018. Due to Kabul's objection of what it perceived to be a Russian-led peace process, the talks could not take place in September 2018.

On November 9, 2018, Russia successfully hosted the second round of the Moscow Format attended by the six-parties mentioned earlier as well as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. India had made it clear that its participation in the November talks was only as an observer. The United States also attended the second round of the Moscow Format as an observer. Kabul did not provide political representation. However, it deployed the Afghan High Peace Council in Moscow. Representatives of the Taliban political office in Qatar

were also present in Moscow though the Taliban had reiterated their stance that they will only negotiate with Washington and not Kabul as they view the Afghan government as a puppet of foreign occupation. The Moscow talks marked the first participation of the Taliban in an international conference since the US invasion of Afghanistan18 years ago.

There can be no doubt that the ability of hosting the Moscow talks with attendance of the Taliban in a multilateral setting was a grand achievement of Russian diplomacy. Moreover, attention should also be paid to the efforts that Russia had made between September and November 2018, which brought those parties to the table who were not willing to sit together just two months before the talks. It must be recognised that Russia is uniquely positioned for playing the role of a facilitator of the Afghan peace process. The Russians have a decade of experience battling Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989. Having tasted defeat at the hands of the Afghan Mujahideen, the erstwhile Soviet Union has earned itself a grave in the graveyard of empires.

As Habiba Sarabi, the deputy chair of the Afghan Peace Council and only woman representative present at the Moscow talks, said, "Russia has the experience of war. If it gains the experience of peace, we welcome it." It is an open secret that Russia had developed close and cordial relations with the Taliban in recent years to the extent that it faces allegations of supporting the Taliban. Despite living in a multipolar world, the Russians and Americans have not emerged from their cold war mentality. Drunk on their superpower status in the former world order, it will still take them time to wake up from their hangover of power in the present world disorder.

Russia is also especially positioned in its relations between Pakistan and India in a way which no other major power can possibly maintain in the present day. The Russian arms industry is heavily dependent on Indian defence procurement. India's fierce non-alignment and historical relations with Russia makes it an indispensable partner that Russia cannot afford to offend; India also places high value on its relations with Russia. In recent times relations between Russia and Pakistan has also become very cozy. The Russian and Pakistan armies have participated in numerous military exercises in the Gilgit-Baltistan. Russia had once supported insurgent separatist elements in Balochistan to fulfil its dream of having a warm water port in South Asia after conquering Afghanistan. Today Pakistan has promised the Russians access to Gwadar Port. Sino-Russian relations have also turned warm over the last few years. Russia has an interest in being on the side of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in its bid to keep Central Asia under the Russian sphere of influence. As such, Russia enjoys strategic and balanced relations with both India and Pakistan.

From Donald Trump's policy on Afghanistan it is evident that the United States commits many follies in its dealing with Afghanistan. After having spent 18 years and $1 trillion fighting in Afghanistan, the United States has been unable to establish a peaceful Afghan State. The Americans don't want Afghanistan to become its Vietnam of the 21st century. Therefore they will not exit Afghanistan in defeat and have a grave adjacent to the Soviet Union. The United State's current reluctance to withdraw from Afghanistan can be understood by the concept of behavioural economist Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky of a "sunk cost fallacy". If the United States keeps thinking in terms of its past investments in Afghanistan, it will only end up prolonging its presence there and further burn American taxpayers' dollars in bombarding the cave-dwelling Taliban.

It is also ridiculous that a superpower like the United States holds Pakistan responsible for not being able to be victorious in Afghanistan. The people of Pakistan have made countless sacrifices supporting the "American War on Terror". They have gained the wrath of radical Islamic terrorist groups that have taken thousands of innocent civilian lives, including young children of the Army Public School in Peshawar. It is the duty of Pakistani diplomats all over the world to counter America's attempts to present Pakistan as a scapegoat for its failures in Afghanistan.

The Pakistani mantra of "Afghan owned, Afghan led" has been adopted internationally as the way forward for a final solution in Afghanistan. The United States have much to learn from the experiences of the Soviet Union. Following the Geneva Accords in 1988, the Soviet Union agreed to withdrawal from Afghanistan leaving behind a crony Afghan government led by Dr Najibullah Ahmadzai. On paper it was also agreed that the United States and Pakistan would cut off weapons funding to the Afghan Mujahidin and respect Dr Najibullah's government. Though the Soviets knew very well that this would never happen, they still signed the Geneva accords as they wanted to withdraw from Afghanistan anyway.

As the Soviet Union's Mikhail Gorbachev had expected, Pakistan and the United States continued to fund the Afghan Mujahideen to topple the Soviet backed government of Dr Najibullah. When the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, Dr Najibullah was left without foreign support and was not able to provide resistance against the Mujahideen forces. In 1996, Dr Najibullah and his brother was abducted while under protection of the United Nations, executed and their bodies were hanged in public for display. This led to the establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Taliban rule) until the American invasion in 2001.

If the United States and NATO forces suddenly decide to withdraw from Afghanistan, given that the Americans are well-known for their policy flip-flops whenever the administration changes, then there is a genuine risk that at the rate the Taliban are expanding, the current Afghan state constructed through the Bonn Conference, is bound to collapse if there is no peace settlement in Afghanistan. There are many parallels that can be drawn between Dr Najibullah's government and the present Afghan government. Also, without negotiations the Afghan civil war could possibly continue indefinitely.

The United States must wake up from its deep slumber and start acting in a rational manner. If President Trump really desires to save American taxpayer dollars, then America must create favourable conditions for an Afghan peace process. It is unfortunate that Afghanistan has become a battleground for proxy wars between major powers. Conflicting and vested interests have always been preferred and the welfare of the innocent Afghan civilians demanding their basic natural rights that form the foundation of human civilisation is put on the back-burner.

Though the Moscow talks did not yield any concrete solutions, the event was widely viewed as an icebreaker that would create positive dividends for future negotiations. A peaceful and stable Afghanistan could possibly create great opportunities for all the people of South and Central Asia. S

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MALÉ

TOWARDS A NEW AGENDA

The new president of the Maldives, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, has announced an ambitious 100-day agenda for his country. Is he moving in the right direction?

By Dr. Raza Khan

The newly-installed head of the Maldivian state, President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, soon after assuming power announced a 100-day plan for an economic turnaround, restoration of normalcy and putting the country on the path of development.

In his inaugural speech, President Solih set out his 100-day agenda. The programme includes reduction in the prices of electricity, covering tuition fees for undergraduate students, provision of free breakfast to school students, ceasing the issuance of fishing permits for foreigners and elimination of import duties levied on agricultural capital. In his first speech, he also said that his administration would allow pension funds to be utilized by Hajj pilgrims. He also promised that an equitable housing programme would be established. In the first 100 days, an air ambulance service would also be launched across the Maldives to accelerate emergency response.

Insofar as the 100-day agenda of President Ibrahim Solih is concerned, it is not very comprehensive but touches on the key issues faced by the Maldivians. The most important aspect of the 100-day plan is free education till the undergraduate level. Education is the single most important factor for the development of the state. If the president is able to put in place a system of free education, it would go a long way in giving the Maldives progress and stability. Since its independence, the Maldives has been suffering from political instability and chaos. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, ran the country autocratically for three decades until the archipelago's first-ever democratic elections in 2008, won by Mr Nasheed. Soon Gayoom was jailed and, subsequently, Gayoom's half-brother Yameen ruled the country since 2013 before he was defeated by Solih. Both Gayoom and Yameen, during their respective tenure, were involved in large scale human rights violations, especially against political opponents.

Like most South Asian countries, the Maldives is an energy-deficient state. President Solih's programme to reduce prices of electricity is a significant policy priority. The economic development of the Maldives depends to a large extent on the availability of cheap energy. Sizable infrastructure development, which took place in the country during the administration of President Yameen with the help of China, also increased the demand for electricity. If prices of electricity are reduced by the new president, it would be a significant step towards economic stability as well as easing the lives of the common Maldivians. However, it remains to be seen how much President Solih would be able to reduce the prices of electricity. Given the present situation of the economy, it would be quite difficult to reduce electricity rates significantly.

Free breakfast for students at schools is another key step by President Solih's government. The Maldives is a poor country where people cannot afford education of their children so if education is provided free of cost it could be a great pull factor for parents to send their children to school. Free breakfast would be another incentive for people to put their children in schools and this would lead to a rise in literacy rates. The success of this policy would depend on how effectively it is implemented and how funds on sustainable basis are provided.

Establishing an equitable housing program for poor Maldivians is another important promise of President Solih. However, it would require huge sums of money which may not be easily available. It would be quite a daunting task for the new president to establish a housing program and deliver on a

sustainable basis.

How will the government utilize pension funds of the government for Hajj is quite elusive.

A realistic look at the 100-day agenda reveals that implementation on most of the items may not be possible in just three and half months. In this period, groundwork could be carried out but the agenda seems to be a message on part of the president of his earnestness to start a new chapter in the history of the country. In that context, some other important aspects of the first policy speech of the new president also need to seen.

In his first speech, the new president said that his administration would work to consolidate its position as a global leader in climate action in the Small Island Developing States platform and will strive to become the leading advocate for the cause. He also said that the revenue received from green-tax would be utilized solely for environmental protection programmes. The Maldives is a big exponent of global efforts for reversing climate change. The fundamental reason is that gradual climate change and the resultant melting of oceans and rising sea levels have threatened the very existence of the Indian Ocean nation.

On the external relations front, President Solih said the foreign policy of the Maldives will fundamentally hinge on advancing policies that have a stake in the progress and welfare of the country. Highlighting the foreign policy priorities of his government, President Solih said that human rights, democracy, and climate diplomacy would be the cornerstones of his foreign policy.

A very important policy priority which President Solih announced was that he would strengthen existing ties which the Maldives has had with India and other regional countries and said that the Maldives will uphold its shared role to retain enduring peace and harmony of the Indian Ocean. This is the most controversial policy area of President Solih as the stance would infuriate another neighbour, China. Beijing and Delhi have been vying for influence in the Maldives and the island has been a virtual sphere of influence under India before former President Yameen invited China to invest in infrastructure projects. President Solih would have been shrewd to have announced that the Maldives would expand its relations with both India and China instead of merely mentioning India. This shows that his government has made up its mind that it would completely fall back on Delhi for financial, political and military support.

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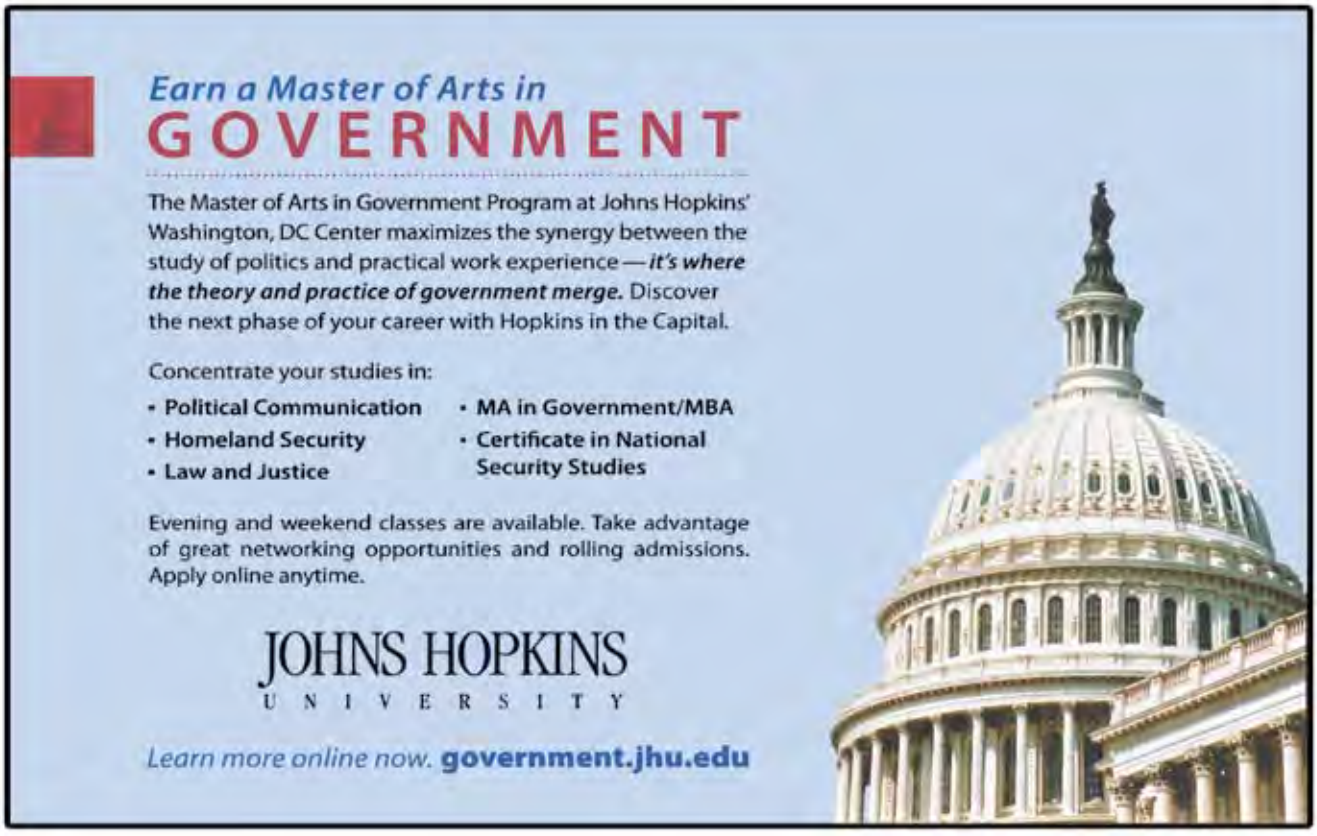

SOUTHASIA
JANUARY 2019

INTERNATIONAL

PG 44

CARACAS
A Growing Crisis
By S. Mubashir Noor

PG 45

MEXICO CITY
Trade Winds
By Osama Rizvi

CARACAS

A Growing Crisis

Venezuela is facing a rapidly deepening economic and humanitarian void marked by growing scarcity of food and medicines. Oil production is declining while hyperinflation is growing. The country faces a mass exodus of population.

By S. Mubashir Noor

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in early October sounded the alarm on a migration crisis that has for years taken a backseat to the one in Syria, but now threatens to snowball into a continental emergency.

According to the UNCHR, nearly two million Venezuelans have left the country since 2015, and an average of 5,000 are departing every day to seek asylum in neighbouring South American states like Colombia.

What happened?

Venezuela has the world's largest proven reserves of crude oil. It was once a wealthy country, yet today runaway inflation has climbed to 200,000 percent and it is easier to flatten tree barks into toilet paper than buy a roll in the market.

Crime rates have also hockey-curved upwards, while basic sanitation and health-care services have crashed. Many are fleeing to get the medical attention they need or simply to feed their starving children.

This, then, is a classic chicken and egg situation: did socialism sink Venezuela or did bad leadership sink socialism?

There are many takes on the crisis. Supporters of socialist President Nicolas Maduro blame Washington's sustained sanctions regime for the country's fiscal woes. These sanctions have crippled Venezuela's economy after a sharp plummet in oil prices four years ago ran its export revenues aground. Oil sales accounted for 95 percent of export revenues.

Moreover, Maduro partisans accuse the US of attempting covert regime change in 2017 in the shape of nationwide riots to replace the socialist government with pro-Washington puppets. The death toll from these riots soared over 100 after law enforcement used lethal force on the protesters.

Though Maduro has tried damage-control by introducing a new currency pegged to Venezuela's commodity reserves in the hope that inflation will reverse course, financial experts believe this measure is a house of cards, given that it does not address the underlying structural issues that surfaced from socialist policies.

And this is why international lending agencies, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), have refused to bail out Maduro's regime until it can prove the means to pay off the massive debt it has accumulated on interest payments. Maduro's supporters, however, counter that American coercion prevents these lending agencies from coming to Venezuela's aid.

All things considered, Venezuela's present economic turmoil arose from the cumulative toxicity of bad leadership, socialism itself and American intervention.

First, there is the underdog nature of welfare-state socialism in a capitalistic world. Big government spending only works when the vast majority of citizens pay their taxes, when the population-to-resources ratio is low as in Scandinavia, and most importantly, when democratic checks and balances ensure that no one branch of government gets too big for its boots.

Regrettably none of these conditions apply to Venezuela, where the ruling party has routinely violated the constitution in cahoots with a politicized judiciary and where nepotism and cronyism are a way of life.

Next, the nationalization of key state industries, such as oil giant PDVSA in Venezuela's case, while providing employment to citizens and ensuring foreign companies do not strip-mine national resources, has the huge downsides of inefficiency, wastage and lack of competitiveness.

Still, while oil prices were at record levels a few years ago, the profits managed to gloss over the myriad problems of governance, chiefly the government's criminal inability to create a robust sovereign fund to weather economic downturns.

Maduro's typically populist solution to quell revolt was by raising wages in the double-digit percentages. This naturally required printing more money, and had the entire foreseeable effect of decimating the value of Venezuela's

currency to the point where people needed wheelbarrows to buy bread.

Finally, we have the deep animus between Washington and Caracas that started when the socialists led by firebrand leftist Hugo Chavez came to power in 1999. To that point, US-Venezuela relations had been amicable, driven primarily by American thirst for cheap, reliable oil.

Former president Chavez, however, upended the status quo by pursuing a broad nationalization agenda under a new constitution that appropriated many American business interests. It was all downhill from there, and certainly not helped by the fact that Chavez became good pals with two of Washington's long-standing nemeses, Iran and Cuba.

Alas, as is often the case, ordinary citizens paid the price for decisions that were made far above their pay grade. The Venezuelan migrant crisis for now shows no signs of flagging.

Moving on to potential solutions, a larger and coordinated humanitarian response in neighbouring countries where the refugees are headed is imperative.

Beyond that, a recent policy paper by the renowned think-tank, the Brookings Institution titled "Venezuela – a path out of misery" urged the UN to create coalitions at home and abroad against Maduro's regime to maximize two-way pressure on the President to step down.

Yet, short of an invasion or a grand awakening of Maduro's conscience, it is hard to see him exiting quietly, not least because he likely fears the next government, plausibly pro-US, will prosecute him for crimes both real and fabricated.

This is why Venezuela may increasingly turn to China and Russia for help in the hope they value Maduro as a fellow antagonist to the White House.

The Kremlin has already signaled its intent to support Maduro by sending a team of technical advisers to help stem Venezuela's economic implosion. It had also last year rescheduled some $3 billion in loans.

China has similarly agreed to lend $5 billion that will plausibly be paid back in oil, and has signed a gold prospecting deal with the cash-strapped socialist state.

That said, it is hard to imagine this crisis drawing out indefinitely like the Syrian one as Washington has a strong distaste for disorder in the Americas.

And it would also surprise no one if the solution Trump cooks up to restore balance involves some manner of limited military engagement in Venezuela, either directly by American forces or through allies Brazil and Colombia. S

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MAXICO CITY

Trade Winds

President Trump wants to make America great again and when he talks trade with his immediate neighbours, he only cares about his own country getting the best deals.

By Osama Rizvi

Trump, ever since he came into office, has fulfilled much of his campaign promises: repealing of Joint Comprehensive Action Plan, informally known as the Iran Deal and starting a trade war with China, all in the cause of making "America Great Again". However, much to his chagrin, a cursory observation of the country's standing manifests a vivid fall in its global standing and growing rifts with its allies. The recent achievement of what is called US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (hereinafter USMCA) cannot compensate the loss the incumbent administration has by alienating itself from Transpacific Partnership, let alone save the international trade system which has been shocked by a full-blown trade war initiated by the US (read Trump).

Here are a few details about USMC and what is new in it: USMCA covers a region with more than $1 trillion in trade per annum. The new deal provides US dairy producers more access to the tightly control market of Canada; the latter will have to face more competition now. The auto-content quotas have been revised a tad bit and Mexico stands to lose while Canada seems to be positive regarding the deals effects on the auto industry. US has reduced its own threshold for buying online goods from Canada without import tax and increased Canada's—a boon for the Canadians and also for online business in

the US. The Intellectual Property and Patent terms have been increased.

While NAFTA, the precursor of USMCA, was taken as a word with "negative connotations," the latter does not change much if we tend to juxtapose the effort with a rules-based international trading system which Trump has challenged in all forms. The Trans-pacific Partnership (hereinafter TPP), in this regard, is instructive. The deal covers 12 countries located on what is called the Pacific Rim, namely Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand and others. TPP covers 40 percent of the world' economy with more than 800 million people. The most important feature of this deal was, as Obama said, US' "pivot to Asia" and that they would not let anyone else (China) write the rules in the Asia-Pacific region. The importance of the region, as highlighted recently by Peter Frankopan in his book Silk Roads, behooved a superpower like US to have a strong influence in the region. However, due to Trump's characteristic indifference towards diplomatic affairs, he opted to pull out of the deal.

Moreover, the recent trade war says much about the extent of peril the international trade system is in than the successful negotiation of a trade deal affecting only three countries. US and China are now engaged in an all-out trade war with tariffs of as much as $250 bn imposed by US and $60 bn by China. At the time of writing the global economy is considered to be in a dangerous position with the IMF revising down its estimated global growth for 2019 and 2019 to 3.7 percent. The recent stock market routs triggered in the US and spreadi to Japan, China and other bourses. They also serve as a testament to what are justified concerns of the global community regarding the future.

Trump has opened up many fronts: Iran and the cancelation of the Iranian deal has caused a rally in oil prices which only cooled down recently; tariffs are, as mentioned, spreading fear and the relationship of the US with its European allies are not good not to mention the Kashoggi case and possible rift between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the US - its main ally in Middle-East. It is safe to say that Trump has not been able to compensate for these actions as the deliberate exclusion from TPP and COP21 shows.

If Trump wants to be save the international rules-based trading system in its true form, then he would have to shed the delusion that a deal like the USMCA will do so. He has to work, first of all, in tandem with international organizations like the WTO and if there is a grievance, to follow a proper and designated way for dispute settlement. Moreover, the trade war needs to be put to an absolute halt. The international trading system can never be safe when there are such protectionist clouds hovering over the top two economies in the world with no signs of a clear sky. In fact, with the recent success of the Democrats in the mid-term elections, chances of the USMCA faltering are now high. Canada's Prime Minister Trudeau, has remarked that if steel tariffs remain the country might "ratify the deal".

Trump should realize that his country, which played an enormous role in shaping the current trade regime, stands to benefit the most from a stable global trading system. S

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SOUTHASIA
JANUARY 2019

NEIGHBOURS

PG 48

BANGKOK
Defiant Rap
By Inamullah Marwat

PG 49

MOSCOW
Church Split
By Khalid Hussain Mir

PG 51

MANAMA
Storm in the Gulf
By Manish Rai

BANGKOK

DEFIANT RAP

A music video that criticizes Thailand's military government has become a big hit in the country, indicating that public frustration with more than four years of military rule is mounting ahead of the coming elections.

By Inamullah Marwat

Thailand lost its democratic government in 2014 to a military coup, led by General Prayut Chan-o-cha. The political crisis came in the wake of a polls boycott by leaders of the umbrella anti-government movement, including the main opposition party, the Democratic Party, for reform before elections and replacement of the government led by the then Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, with a "reform council".

As per the latest statement made by junta leader and Prime Minister, Prayut Chan-o-cha, in a statement in March 2018 like the past, general elections in Thailand are expected to be held in February 2019 and it is expected that the pledges made this time will see the light of day. It seems Thailand is on its way to acquiring a democratic government in the wake of elections under a military regime. This has become more alive and palpable in light of the government's initial reaction, though it began with high-handedness in reaction to the release of a music video titled "Prathet Ku Mee" (Which is my country?) on YouTube. In the video, young rappers from the group 'Rap Against Dictatorship' have voiced their angst, something which is pervasive among Thais regarding the army's interference in politics, shrinking space for political opinion and rampant corruption, besides the long delay in elections.

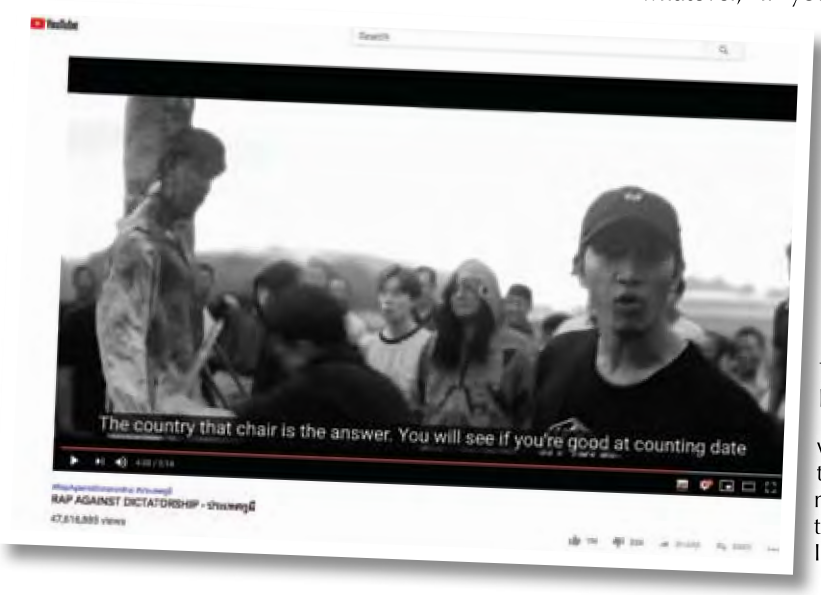
Prathet Ku Mee has resonated with the masses. It has put the government in a reactionary mode as it has expressed the people's latent anguish against the incumbent government. Now the question worth considering is whether the general elections pledged by the military government for February 2019 can really become a springboard for true democracy in Thailand?

After the video became viral on social media, it caught the incumbent government off guard and provoked it to go hard through prosecution under the Computer Crimes Act against those releasing and sharing it.

Prathet Ku Mee hit hard against the military for playing with the political spectrum and playing on the woes of corruption and censorship through severe actions against those who said no to the government. The video also features the 1976 massacre by the police.

In its first week, the video gained a lot of traction and its views crossed 25 million since it was posted on October 22. The government initially threatened to prosecute anyone involved in its release or sharing it. Government functionaries threatened to act under the Computer Crimes Act on the pretext that the video could provoke unrest. A government spokesperson said the song's lyrics were objectionable. However, better counsels prevailed and the government backed off from the idea of prosecution later as the Deputy Police Chief Srivara Ransibrahmanakul said that the lyrics were insufficient evidence to launch a prosecution and people were allowed to sing and share the song.

Interestingly, the government came up with its own rap song entitled "Government Thailand 4.0 Rap Video" in which a mixture of lyrics from the national anthem were used by the government to plead with the masses to be supportive of its actions. Some of the lyrics from the government's rap song in reply to Prathet Ku Mee were, "There are many talented Thais, if we work together, we'd be stronger, stronger" and "Gen M, Gen Z, Gen whatever, if you all agree, it'd be easier, easier."



Release of Prathet Ku Mee and what followed bares the murky course that democracy will take after the 2019 elections. The government initially threatened to go hard against the rappers via prosecution under the guise of the allegation of provoking unrest. It now seems there will be a more tamed transition from military government to a soft democracy. In the elections, those

Prathet Ku Mee's release and its aftermath have exposed the fault lines of the realities of Thailand.

expected to call the shots will not be the real champions of democracy but representatives of the status quo, namely the military.

The Thai people have a long way to go to reach the ideals of democracy – a setup in which the government is responsive to the woes of the public and does not shy away from visiting the unhealed wounds of the past. A real democracy involves all the stakeholders. Prathet Ku Mee's release and its aftermath have exposed the fault lines of the realities of Thailand today.

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MOSCOW

Church Split

Ukraine has gained permission to establish an independent church. This is a vital step forward but the Russian clergy fiercely opposes the biggest split in Christianity for a thousand years.

By Khalid Hussain Mir

On October 11, 2018 the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, a religious body headquarterEd in Constantinople (Istanbul) that supervises Orthodox Christianity, acknowledged the independence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The Church had remained obedient and submissive to Russia in the past. The leader of the Eastern Orthodox Church, Bartholomew of Constantinople, took the monumental decision to recognize the full independence of the Ukrainian

Orthodox Church after a three-day Synod.

The initiatives for independence of the church started on April 7, 2018 with an announcement by Ukraine's President, Petro Poroshenko. He said that the Russian Church's decision to cut ties with Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople led to a path of self-isolation and conflict with the entire international orthodoxy. The declaration also detached the traditional right of the Russian Patriarch to ordain Metropolitan Kiev. The breakup is considered to be the biggest split in the Orthodox Church in a thousand years and a difficult issue for many Orthodox Churches in Eastern Europe. The split is also seen as having a deep political significance.

The Russian Orthodox Church, which is one of the most influential churches in the Orthodox world and has 150 million adherents, has emerged as a politically powerful body due to its influential nature. The Russian Orthodox Church declared that it could no longer continue being in "Eucharistic communion" with the Constantinople religious body which means that Russian Orthodox believers can no longer have close associations with people from other branches of the Church. The Church further argued that the recognition of the Ukraine Church went against historical truth and made accusations that the Ukrainian Nationalists frequently attacked its churches. The Russian Orthodox Church, which claims customary and authorized rights over the Orthodox community in Ukraine, clearly denied all accusations directed against it for taking political sides in the conflict. It justified that it had worked for peace in eastern Ukraine. The Church also argued that the Constantinople patriarchate's actions could deepen religious divides in Ukraine and inspire breakaway branches to take over church buildings.

The recent decision is seen as the biggest schism in orthodox Christianity and is termed as a major blow for the power of Russian President Vladimir Putin. As per reports, the Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko has said that it is an issue of Ukrainian national security and an issue of statehood. He also claimed that the Constantinople Patriarchates decision is a great victory for the devoted Ukrainian nation over the Moscow demons. Moscow has claimed that they are spiritually inseparable from Ukraine and are in favour of Ukraine's independence. The President described it as a victory of good over evil and light over darkness. He said, "The independence of our

church is part of our pro-European and pro-Ukrainian policies that we have been consistently pursuing over the last four years."

As the chief spokesman for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate, Archbishop Yevstratiy said that the Russian synod's decision was a move towards self-isolation.

For more than three centuries, Ukraine and Russia have been united in the Russian Orthodox Church. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine endeavoured to establish religious independence and established an Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate. From the post-90s era, the Ukrainian nationalists were demanding to set their church free from Russian control, which dates back to 1686, when the Constantinople patriarch had signed an agreement to give religious leaders in Moscow authority over the Orthodox Church in Ukraine. The initiatives for Ukrainian Orthodox independence intensified in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea. Russia also said it had to protect ethnic Russians ahead of its military intervention in Ukraine in 2014.

Many Ukrainians perceive the Moscow branch of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as a tool of the Kremlin. But the Moscow Patriarchates argue that they have legal authority over the Ukrainian Church. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko accused that the Kremlin was trying to encourage a religious war and warned that Russian agents could try to take hold of church property.

In response to Ukraine's approach the Moscow Patriarchate also warned its worshippers not to attend any services conducted by clergy loyal to Constantinople and they would also boycott joint Orthodox Church ceremonies. There is a possibility of serious conflict because Ukraine has an extremely diverse religious life and Ukraine's Orthodox believers are divided among three Churches: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church based on the Moscow Patriarchate, the Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate and the small Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. Many analysts consider the Russian Orthodox Church a tool for spreading Russia's influence and entails the promotion of Russian nationalist and imperialist ambitions.

Ukraine is grappling with internal disturbances as well. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko has been involved in many problems and controversial issues during his tenure. He has fallen flat in his promises that he made with the people and has suffered a humiliating defeat against the separatists in the Donbas region. His economic policies have remained untrustworthy and his fight against corruption has gotten nowhere. It has resulted in an economic crisis in the country and in 2018 Ukraine became the poorest country in Europe.

Similarly, in the absence of a large voluntary defection from the Moscow-aligned Ukrainian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate, it is not clear what kind of steps the authorities will take next. New laws are yet to be passed and in such devastating conditions this might lead to forceful changes of affiliation and potentially bloody conflicts over church properties.

All such challenges and conditions have raised a serious question about Ukraine's future. Ukraine is traditionally a diverse religious but balanced society. But the recent events have changed the scenario. New policies might help to strengthen the Ukrainian state by creating a consolidated identity by force, but at the same time it will weaken it by alienating Ukraine's large minority groups. It will be interesting to see what kind of foreign policy will Russia now frame for its future relationship with Ukraine and what will be Poroshenko's status as he will face re-election in 2019? Similarly, the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church might play a vital role in the future contexts of these countries. S

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MANAMA

Storm in the Gulf

Because of the close relationship between the Bahraini people and Iran, the encouragement of sectarian divisions has been a primary tool for sustaining a power structure that is favourable to Western corporate and strategic interests.

By Manish Rai

The recent Bahrain elections have been declared a major success story by the Bahraini government as the highest number of females were elected to the parliament. The voter turnout is claimed to be 67%. The Al Khalifa royals have tried to showcase the elections as the beginning of a new chapter in the march to democratic development in the island kingdom.

The elections are the second ballot since 2011 when mostly Shia protesters took to the streets demanding more democracy. Courts in Bahrain, where the United States Navy's Fifth Fleet is based, dissolved the al-Wefaq main Shia opposition party and National Democratic Action Society (Waad) which was seen as a secular movement in 2017. It was accused of helping to foster violence and terrorism. In return al-Wefaq boycotted the elections. Moreover, Bahrain barred members of the dissolved opposition groups from running in parliamentary elections even in their personal capacity. In addition to this, Bahrain's electoral infrastructure inherently disadvantages the political opposition. There is no independent electoral commission and the Bahraini government does not permit either domestic or international observers. Hence the credibility of the polls was highly questionable as they excluded a large section of Bahraini society and opposition groups.

The majority of Bahrain's 1.4 million people are Shia, but the Sunni Al Khalifa family has ruled the country since the late 1700s. The country's Shia population has long complained about discrimination. Following the 2011 Arab Spring, they launched demonstrations and the kingdom promised reforms, but little has been done since then. Right after independence in 1971, the late Emir Isa bin Salman wisely concluded that domestic peace in Bahrain can only be attained through a partnership between the Sunni minority and the Shia majority. He promulgated a constitution following lengthy consultations among Sunni and Shia representatives who were freely elected by their respective communities and who were members of both the Constituent Assembly in 1972-73 and the National Assembly in 1974.

Currently Bahrain, which used to defend the constitution under the late Emir Isa bin Salman, has moved away from his vision and values and is quickly turning into an apartheid regime in which the majority has no rights or freedoms. Even the close allies of Bahrain, that is Saudi Arabia and UAE, just want to focus on protecting the Al Khalifa rulers so that Manama always remains in their orbit. The Saudis and the Emiratis have considered Bahrain a bulwark against Iran as it is unique in the Gulf because it is home to a Shia majority ruled by a Sunni monarchy.

For all intents and purposes, Bahrain has become a Saudi vassal state, politically and economically, and has toed the Saudi line on every regional issue. The Bahraini royal family is just taking instructions from Riyadh and oppressing its fellow Shia countrymen. All the pomp and show of democracy doesn't help at all to strengthen the democratic institutions. The election only extends to the powerless lower house of Bahrain's parliament as membership of the upper house is decided by the King. Once thought to be the Gulf state that was most likely to accept reform, Bahrain now resembles a miniature model of its master state Saudi Arabia a little more with every passing day. Like its powerful neighbour and benefactor, it is revealing itself to be a volatile repressive state instead of a mature and stable one that promotes inclusive politics and where grievances can be safely aired and addressed.

It's high time the Bahrain rulers realise that a gulf between them and the majority of the population is growing and the split may increase social tensions and exacerbate the long-standing structural issues that may lead to wider social unrest in the coming times. To start with, a goodwill gesture is needed to create an atmosphere of reconciliation with the Shia opposition groups. The Bahraini government should set aside the life sentence of Sheikh Ali Salman, secretary general of the opposition al-Wefaq group and Sheikh Hassan Sultan and Ali Alaswad, members of the same group.

Going forward, more detailed talks can be organised over the opposition's key demands, such as electoral redistricting, a more empowered parliament, judicial independence, recognition of the freedom of press, speech, and assembly, etc. A meaningful national reconciliation process has to be launched by the rulers of Bahrain to address widespread political marginalisation rather than creating a sham electoral process which serves no purpose. Bahraini politics will remain fragile and exclusionary, if the government fails to address these fundamental issues. The country is divided deeply along sectarian lines where the majority Shia find themselves living in what amounts to a police state. The trust deficit in society is huge; hence policymakers have to start looking for a common ground for reconciliation. SA

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SOUTHASIA
JANUARY 2019

FEATURES

PG 54

ISLAMABAD

A Dark Day

By Humza Irfan

PG 55

NEW DELHI

Crisis of Cleanliness

By Taha Kehar

PG 57

CHITTAGONG

The Radical Angle

By Mohammad Jamil

PG 58

JAFFNA

The War Widows

By Irshad Ahmad

PG 60

LAYA

Celebrating Highland Culture

By Mahrukh A. Mughal

ISLAMABAD

A DARK DAY

Pakistan is a major charity-giving country. It can move further down the path by organizing the non-profit sector to reach out to areas that remain unexplored so far.

By Humza Irfan

We all have a guardian angel and it is not the stuff of myths and legends. Rather it is a bundle of ideas, an enactment of a vision, and a mass of goodwill. But it remains largely invisible and seldom appreciated until it is gone. On July 8, 2016, Pakistan and the world bid farewell to Abdul Sattar Edhi, a humanitarian whose compassion touched millions. It was a dark day and it went darker.

Nonprofit organizations are often the extensions of their founders. They are an outgrowth of the compassionate human spirit and there is always a central character that fashions benevolence into something we can admire, see and touch. Edhi had truly created a philanthropic empire and reigned over it for half a century. Today, the Edhi Foundation provides services for relief and alleviation of misery that covers the entire human life cycle, from birth till death. It is most well-known as the operator of the largest fleet of ambulances in the world, which includes airborne vehicles and rescue boats. But in July 2016, everything was at stake. Shortly after the demise of the empire's leader, monthly donations fell sharply. Many people who donated to the foundation did so because of Edhi himself and now there was a void that could not be filled. Scaling down was not an option. Too many lives depended on the fate of the foundation. The question lingered, "How to perpetuate Edhi's compassionate spirit?"

Most nonprofit organizations in Pakistan go through similar experiences. But their survivability is the key to uplifting Pakistan and in helping it traverse through unfathomable challenges. Charity organizations are made on the promise of change. In fact, they are on the cusp of change. They have a special role in society. They fill voids left by public institutes and corporations. They are mission-driven and value-oriented. And, most importantly, they channel compassion of the entire populace towards areas which are of critical importance. In essence, nonprofit organizations turn human feelings of benevolence into observable change.

Pakistan is known for its textile businesses, its cricket stars, its football industry and breathtaking natural beauty. It is also home to the magnificent Himalayas, the world's largest mountain range. Nothing rivals these towering peaks, except Pakistan's adoration for altruism. The country is one of the most charitable nations in the world and, according to the Pakistan Center for Philanthropy (PCP), a staggering 98% of households donate in one form or the other. The annual figure amounts to nearly 1% of Pakistan's GDP which is comparable to some of the most developed countries in the world, including the United Kingdom and Canada where the counterpart figure is 1.3% and 1.2%, respectively. Many prominent Pakistanis are also world leading philanthropists. Pakistani cricketer, Shahid Afridi is hailed as 20th most charitable athlete in the world. Prime Minister and former cricketer Imran Khan is also recognized for setting some of the most exemplary nonprofits in the country. There are an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 nonprofit organizations currently operating.

Today Pakistan is at a crossroads where it is juggling a multitude of challenges amidst the rapidly evolving global landscape. While there are ample nonprofit organizations in the country, many such organizations are facing their own challenges. For the most part, giving has not been institutionalized. According to the PCP, most people donate to individuals rather than institutions or nonprofit organizations. While there is nothing inherently wrong with making charitable contributions to poor individuals, there is always a risk that these contributions will not lead to the desired outcomes. Only nonprofit organizations can lead sustained change. There is a great need to formalize giving so that one can better monitor use of resources. The informal giving pattern may only lead to short-term improvement in the lives of a few people. Organizations can use the same resources for developing facilities, providing vocational training, and relief against

illness. People are also inclined to donate to madrasas (religious schools) which are characterized by absence of monitoring and evaluation systems.

Many nonprofit organizations themselves are part of the informal network. Madrasas are prime examples of such institutions. According to a survey done in 2000 by the Aga Khan Foundation and Johns Hopkins University, 30% of all charity organizations are in fact religious schools. Of course, a lot has changed since then. But so far very little research has been done to identify the nonprofit landscape. Perhaps this should be the starting point in reinvigorating charity institutes.

There is also a growing cynical distrust of nonprofit organizations. Apart from a few prominent players, many organizations struggle to win the trust of the public. When celebrities open their own charities, they experience immediate brand loyalty. But when the founder is a commoner, they struggle to get their message across. Popular nonprofit organizations in Pakistan almost always revolve around prominent personalities. However, when such personalities fade away, these organizations experience dwindling support.

Perhaps charity is not the solution. Nonprofit organizations should embrace the social enterprise model. Such entities often make profits but they do so while working for social impact. In Pakistan there are rarely such organizations as they fear that making profits will derail them from their mission and they might end up losing their nonprofit status. Such organizations can introduce new products that contribute to their economic viability. For example, an organization can provide training to disabled citizens in creating handicrafts and it can then sell the products made by trainees, thereby earning profits which can then be used to fund more such educational programs. Organizations need to think of ways on how they can be more sustainable.

They can also reach out to Pakistani expatriates. According to research by the PCP, Pakistanis living in the USA donate $1 billion annually. This represents great potential. Additionally, nonprofit organizations can harness social media for outreach and increase their digital presence to improve their visibility. More visibility translates into greater inflow of donations.

Nonprofit organizations should be appreciated for the impact they are creating. They are, after all, our guardian angels. S

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NEW DELHI

Crisis of Cleanliness

India's 'ambassadors of cleanliness', have promoted indoor plumbing and community approaches to sanitation at the village level.

By Taha Kehar

Through an incisive editorial comment published in The Hindu on October 4, India's Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) was put under close scrutiny. The initiative, which prioritizes the country's sanitation needs, was critiqued for its narrow purview and seemingly myopic interpretation of 'cleanliness'.

Criticism levelled against the nationwide campaign isn't entirely unwarranted. Although the SBM -- which began in 2014 and is slated to last until 2019 -- has drawn accolades across the globe for ensuring access to toilets at home to approximately 60% of India's rural populace in 2014, it has been deemed problematic on many counts.

On many levels, the initiative is based on Mahatma Gandhi's vision to eradicate India's burgeoning national or social sanitation woes. However, the SBM seems to have taken on a saffronized bent in tackling the country's sanitation crisis and putting an end to open-defecation in the rural belt. For many analysts, this is an unsurprising development as the

Swachh movement was spearheaded by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014. While the campaign's genesis and overall premise sought work for to Gandhi's vision, its implementation has revealed that any endeavour to bring about a social transformation is bound to have its pitfalls in an inherently unequal, caste-bound society like India. Even four years of aggressively pursuing the SBM and waxing eloquent about its achievements has done little to alter this reality.

The Swachh movement has been a pivotal project for the BJP administration at the centre. The central government even raised INR 16,400 crore between 2015 and 2018 as cess to finance sanitation schemes across the country. If news reports are to serve as a gauge, a report tabled in the Indian parliament by the Comptroller and Auditor General pointed out in December 2017 that nearly 25% of the collected amount has remained outside the remit of the dedicated fund. In addition, the fund hasn't been utilized for the desired purpose. These findings raise doubts about the efficacy of the BJP government's attempts to ensure that the SBM reaches fruition.

Earlier this year, the SBM's Gramin wing also announced that it had successfully constructed 86.7 million individual household latrines. The wing proudly professed that access to sanitation has burgeoned to 94 percent in rural areas and open defecation has been eradicated from 507,369 villages in the country through consistent efforts to build toilets. At first glance, these come across as admirable achievements from a government that has repeatedly attracted censure for showing its flavour of fascism. However, according to a recent analysis by the Centre for Science and Environment, building toilets is little more than an initial step in alleviating open defecation. It is simplistic to assume that people will opt for toilets and almost instinctively unlearn the generations-old practice in villages to defecate in the open. In a similar vein, there is no palpable strategy on the government's part to deal with the solid and liquid waste generated through these toilet facilities. Skeptics have argued that the inability to dispose of this waste could be detrimental in producing a clean and healthy environment in India.

If independent analyses are anything to go by, the SBM seems to be operating in a vacuum. The initiative struggles to tackle the uneasy relationship between sanitation and the country's centuries-old caste discrimination. As indicated in the editorial published in The Hindu, "traditionally oppressed communities continue to manually remove filth from dry latrines used by the upper castes" in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. This serves as a cogent reminder that the SBM's achievements are dangerously hollow. They are also a glaring testament of the BJP government's failures in achieving its avowed sanitation goals.

Waste management remains a crisis in both rural and urban centres across India.

At this critical juncture, the outcomes of the Swachh mission need to be carefully appraised to ensure that they don't reinforce the marginalisation that has characterised India's socio-political milieu for centuries. If the BJP government wants to fulfill Gandhi's vision of eliminating the country's sanitation woes, it must set wider parameters and have the courage to tread uncharted territory. Sanitation cannot be used as a slogan to pump in financial resources for an initiative that will inevitably fuel the same schisms and dilemmas.

As per the editorial comment published in The Hindu, the BJP-led central government has kept an 87% target for urban toilet coverage. But these developments cannot be viewed in isolation. Waste management remains a crisis in both rural and urban centres across India. Laws on pollution control and preserving water resources have been swept under the carpet. Amid these challenges, it is difficult to envisage an India where public health outcomes are upheld.

If the lack of tangible progress made under the SBM is viewed in the global context, the matter is likely to take on an even more perilous dimension. India played a critical role in formulating the Sustainable Development Goals and it is widely believed that the country's national development goals have been embodied in this global framework. The country's inability to prevent manual scavenging by lower-caste Indians and focus on surface-level accomplishments might raise questions about whether India is meaningfully striving to fulfill its SDG commitments. This will reflect poorly on the BJP's governance structure. S

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CHITTAGONG

The Radical Angle

The Hefazat-e-Islam Party in Bangladesh has taken advantage of the prevailing conditions to pull together a series of long-established radical political groups and organizations that have never displayed much unity before.

By Mohammad Jamil

Hefazat-e-Islam is a fundamentalist Islamic group, which was formed in 2010 to protest against the secular education policy of the Bangladesh government. Unlike other outfits that operate in the capital, the Hefazat group is headquartered in Chittagong, where hundreds of madrassas draw tens of thousands of young Muslims for schooling. Many of these madrassas teach only Islam, using Arabic as the medium of instruction and have produced the Hifazat's leaders and activists, who have become a force to reckon with. Of course, Hefazat-e-Islam (Hefazat), Ahl-i-Hadith Bangladesh (AHAB) and Tablighi Jama'at are the three primary movements that stand for Islamic revivalism but have different strategies. The Hasina-led government believes that the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Hefazat-e-Islam are the same, unleashing a reign of terror by torching and vandalising political party offices, vehicles and public properties. The question is what is the Hefazat-e-Islam movement all about?

In July 2018, Ahmad Shafi lambasted Jama'at-i-Islami and Tablighi Jama'at, and said the latter would be doomed like the Jama'at-e-Islami. Can Hefazat be referred to as the Bangladeshi Taliban? The answer is certainly no. For one, there is no comparison with the Taliban, as Taliban militants are fighting to end foreign occupation, whereas Hefazat espouses what secularists say is intolerant ideology. It is a matter of record that the Hefazat was opposed to Al Qaeda as well as Harkat-al-Mujahedin. Its founder Shah Ahmad Shafi had neither supported military action in 1972 nor was it opposed to independence of Bangladesh; hence the Hefazat is a breed apart. Ahmad Shafi wanted Bangladesh to be run totally on Islamist precepts and should put an end to secularism. In 2009, Ahmad Shafi, along with Allama Azizul Haque, in a joint statement to the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed, condemned terrorism and militancy committed in the name of Islam.

The Hefazat emerged after it had opposed the 2009 Women Development Policy draft, which gave women equal rights by inheritance. In the face of fierce protests by groups in 2013, especially by Hefazat, the parliament passed a watered-down draft, giving greater rights to women on acquired property. Among the 13 demands put forth by the Hefazat was a ban on the public mixing of the sexes. In 2017, a press release signed by Moulana Munir Ahmed, the press secretary of the Amir (chief) of the organisation, Shah Ahmed Shafi, said that the government having realised the gravity and sensitivity of the issue decided to go for some positive changes in the textbooks. The Awami League government had drawn flak from civil society and academia for changing textbooks and recognizing Qaumi madrassa degrees following demands by Hefazat, who believed that it was a grave mistake to appease religious outfits for the sake of votes.

There are others who dub the Awami League as a fascist organization

and hold it responsible for the genocide in Bangladesh. Prime Minister Hasina Wajed and the Awami League are meticulously trying to weaken or eliminate their opponents. In May 2016, the head of the banned Jamaat-e-Islam, Motiur Rahman Nizami was executed for so-called war crimes committed during, what they say, the 1971 war of independence, after the Supreme Court had rejected his final plea against a death sentence handed down by a special tribunal. Phil Robertson, deputy director of Human Rights Watch's Asia division, had said: "Nizami's trial was neither free nor fair, as the tribunal cut corners on fair-trial standards." Motiur Rahman Nizami was the fifth senior official from the opposition parties to have been executed since 2013 for alleged war crimes during the 1971 war. Five opposition politicians, including four Jamaat-i-Islami leaders, had been executed since late 2013 after being convicted by the tribunal.

Sheikh Hasina continued with the policy of hatred and revenge against her opponents. Even before the elections in 2013, more than 500 people were killed in political violence. Former military dictator Hussein Muhammad Ershad, who led the country's third largest party, Jatiyo Party, a key ally of the Awami League grand alliance, had also boycotted the election. He was "detained" as part of the government's efforts to force him to participate in the January 5 polls, but he remained firm in his decision of an election boycott. Jama'at-e-Islami was already out of the field, as it was banned and not allowed to participate in the elections on the grounds that its religious character breached Bangladesh's secular constitution. The Awami League and its leadership appear to have created an atmosphere of harassment for opposition parties, yet pressed hard to ensure participation of all political parties in the upcoming elections for the sake of legitimacy.

In February 2018, the BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia was sentenced to 5 years on charges of corruption. In November 2018, Tarique Rahman, the fugitive son of Khaleda Zia, was sentenced to life and 19 others were given death sentence by a court in Dhaka over the 2004 grenade attack that killed 24 people and injured 500 others. According to reports and investigations, the attack on an Awami League rally on August 21, 2004, targeted Hasina Wajed, who was the opposition leader at that time. Hasina survived the attack with partial hearing loss. Commenting on the verdict, BNP secretary general Fakhrul Islam Alamgir had expressed the party's deep frustration, saying "it was a politically motivated verdict and a naked expression of political vengeance". However, Law Minister Anisul Huq said Khaleda Zia's son Tarique Rahman, the mastermind of the attack, deserved a death sentence.

The Awami League government is basking now in the glow of a vibrant and strong economy, which has created job opportunities and alleviated poverty. Of course, the credit also goes to the competent bureaucracy in Bangladesh as, without their help, the economic miracle would not have been possible. Bangladesh has been lucky that loss of life and property in the country in terror-related cases has been minimal as compared to Pakistan or even India. Between January 2005 and December 2017, some 746 people died in terrorist attacks, including 339 alleged terrorists; of those attacks, 91 percent took place since 2013. The Islamic State and al-Qaeda Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) had claimed responsibility for many of these attacks, which meant that other local radical religious groups did not participate in the terror acts. S

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JAFFNA

The War Widows

The wounds of the civil war still fester in Sri Lanka and the worst affected are the war widows who need strong economic, educational and psychological support.

By Irshad Ahmad

The month of September was very depressing when Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky, presented his worrisome fact-finding report before the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). He was the UN expert on the effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of states on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights, and his report was on Sri Lanka.

Prior to this, he visited Sri Lanka for 9 days for fact finding. His report recalled the atrocities of the civil war days. His report was also a reminder of the many physical, emotional and psychological wounds of war that have remained unhealed in the ninth year of peace. Among the countless damage, there were around 90 thousand war widows in Sri Lanka.

Through his important report, Bohoslavsky reported he found a large number of borrower women in areas that are poor and were affected by the war. They are being specially targeted by microfinance lenders who charge up to 220 per cent interest rates on loans and apply compound interest.

He described this as a form of extreme exploitation. Bohoslavsky reported 'the mechanism has been designed to make huge profits for the lenders and put a very heavy burden on the shoulders of the largely poor female borrowers'.

The UNHRC was informed that in Sri Lanka 'it is common to see women with three or four outstanding loans from different lenders at the same time, while some others borrow more to avoid defaulting on the loans they already have. Meanwhile, the collectors go to borrowers' houses to collect the instalments due, sometimes on a daily basis. Some stay at the family home for hours until they are repaid. Women are at times exposed to psychological and physical violence by these collectors and, in some cases; they were pressured by collectors to exchange 'sexual favours' for outstanding instalments. In some cases, borrowers have tried to sell their kidneys for money to repay loans'!

He requested the Sri Lankan government to make an assessment of the human rights impact of both its economic reform policies and infrastructure projects.

'The Sri Lankan legal framework does not establish the obligation to conduct a comprehensive human rights impact assessment of such infrastructure projects before they are started', he noted. For a durable solution, he advised the government to pass robust and comprehensive laws on the issues based on existing international human rights standards. He also stressed that 'human rights must be at the centre of measures by Sri Lanka to promote economic growth that would include everyone'. He was concerned about the number, frequency and seriousness of abuses by lenders and called for urgent measures.

Bohoslavsky urged the government 'to establish an interest rate cap for these institutions and also to pass and implement robust and strict regulations". He underlined that there should be guidelines in line with human rights standards on how microcredit lenders should assess credit risks. He also urged the government to declare a moratorium on the debts, until the legislation is passed, in order to prevent groups in situations of vulnerability.

Sri Lanka as a country is party to many important UN conventions. It has acknowledged various special procedures and has time

There were around 90 thousand war widows in Sri Lanka.

and again made several important commitments, at various international forums, for protection and promotion of human rights. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to which Sri Lanka is a state party, makes it compulsory for all the states to take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men (Article 3). It further makes it obligatory to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women (Article 6).

Similarly, Sri Lanka is also state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which stresses upon each state party to take steps, individually and through international assistance and co-operation, especially economic and technical, to the maximum of its available resources, with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the rights recognized in the ICESCR by all appropriate means, including particularly the adoption of legislative measures (Article 2). The ICESCR further undertakes to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights (Article 3).

Sri Lanka should honour its national and international responsibilities and should enact proper legislation to curb the victimization of war widows. It should seriously consider and implement Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky's report in totality by bringing all its national laws in line with its national and international obligations since it is a party to the various UN conventions for the promotion and protection of human rights. The Sri Lankan government and national human rights institutions should also play their due role in investigating the issue, finding the responsible elements and bringing them to justice. S

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LAYA

Celebrating Highland Culture

The Royal Highland Festival in Bhutan was a colourful display of the country's unique traditions, lifestyle and culture.

By Mahrukh A. Mughal

The Royal Highland Festival in Bhutan highlights the richness and spirituality of the country's highland culture and traditions, while allowing visitors to get a glimpse of the awesome yet harsh high-altitude landscapes of the country. The heart of the festival celebrates the highlanders' unique and beautiful clothing, dance, music, handicrafts, food, and intangible forms of culture. Bhutan celebrated the Third Royal Highland Festival and the Laya Run on October 23 and 24 with anticipation and excitement.

In this age of globalization, most nations have ceased their cultural celebrations and become a part of western civilization. Bhutan's Royal Highland Festival takes place every year for the purpose of subjective amalgamation and enhancing spiritual values within the state and amongst the people. The purpose entrenched in the teachings of Lord Buddha and their eternal truth were brought down from the Tibetan mountains and the Highland Festival further accentuates these teachings.

As a philosopher said, "Culture lies not in objects or monuments but in the mind and compassion towards all sentient beings". The Highland Festival of Bhutan includes diverse activities which attract tourists from across the country and overseas. At the Third Highland Festival and Laya Run, there was great excitement and enthusiasm in Bhutan. Highland culture offers great enrichment in art, drama, dance, music, handicrafts, food and aspects of culture and the Festival focused on these areas.

The small settlement of Laya in northern Bhutan is one of the most remote places on the planet. Laya was turned into a hub of celebration as the festival got underway. More than a thousand people, including tourists, attended the two-day festival.

Not only is it the northern-most settlement in the Last Himalayan Kingdom, it´s also the highest permanent town at 3800m (12,467ft) in Bhutan. The whole settlement has about 110 houses.

Laya is accessible only by a two-day hike from the closest town, Gasa. However, this is changing fast. A jeep road is being constructed and is scheduled to reach Laya within the next 3 years. Electricity has recently reached Laya.

The Royal Festival is a landmark activity of Gasa Dzongkhag. Gasa Dzongdag Dorji Dradhul said the festival is driven by the goal of making the Highlands a vibrant and thriving economy.

The festival aims to promote the sustainable livelihood of highlanders, showcase highlander's innovation, and exhibit the highlands as a pride of Bhutan. The festival also brings together highlanders from other parts of Bhutan to exchange values, knowledge, skills and best practices related to highlands and yak farming. People from eight districts took part in the festival this time.

The Royal Highland Festival was first introduced on 16th of October 2016 to mark the celebration of the Birth of His Royal Highness The Gyalsey, 400 years of Zhabdrung's arrival in the country and the Rabjung (60-year cycle) birth year of Guru Rinpoche. The festival showcases the beauty and wonders of Gasa Dzongkhag through its nature, history and age old culture and tradition.

The festival is gaining popularity among locals and visitors alike. Despite the fact it takes place at over 3000 metres above the sea level, the festival is emerging to be a crowd-puller.

The event included games and sport events. It was a good way to promote the beauty of Bhutan. The highland region of Bhutan is home to many travelers and pastoral communities. The festival helped to show that nomadic people need to rejuvenate their unique ways of life. It contributed to the country's Gross National Happiness index, and special prominence was given to cultural values and environmental conservation. The event also brought out the significance of climate change and presented a good opportunity to the people to find ways to fight this global menace. Socially, the cultural celebration was galvanized by social orientation and the unique customs of Bhutan. SI

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BOOK REVIEW

Women's Politics in Contemporary Palestine

A forceful critique of mainstream conflict resolution methods and failed woman-to-woman peacebuilding projects.

By Taha Kehar

Book Title:	Women's Political Activism in Palestine
Author:	Sophie Richter-Devroe
Publisher:	University of Illinois Press
ISBN:	9780252083525

Sophie Richter-Devroe ought to be commended for her methodological choices and focused analysis in *Women's Political Activism in Palestine: Peacebuilding, Resistance and Survival*. Her work systemically deviates from mainstream theoretical discourse that offers a top-down view of political resistance. Through a concise and well-structured analysis of political activism among women in conflict-riddled Palestine, Richter-Devroe doesn't scrutinize the larger struggles for social change in the public sphere. Her emphasis remains on exploring seemingly mundane practices and actions that symbolize dissent and the spirit of confrontation – even if it takes her into the neglected private sphere.

Breaking away from this narrow purview, *Women's Political Activism in Palestine: Peacebuilding, Resistance and Survival* delves into the ground realities in Palestine amid the long years of Israeli occupation. The skillful use of an ethnographic approach, peppered with detailed interviews and participant observations, allows the author to probe and pursue some challenging questions from within the system.

However, it would be incorrect to assume that Sophie Richter-Devroe has relied on state narratives to develop her analysis. The author's interactions with women in Palestine form the basis of her observations. The blinkered view of an outsider is conveniently edged out of the debate from the very first sentence. As a result, the insights appear to be authentic and devoid of any Western biases.

Richter-Devroe's academic treatise offers a layered analysis that tackles complex problems in a methodical sense. It begins with a critical appraisal of joint peace-building and dialogue initiatives between Israeli and Palestinian women. While these mechanisms have gained widespread support among international donors, they are intrinsically flawed because they rely on the unproven assumption that women are 'natural peacemakers'. In addition, these peacemaking ventures are merely an attempt to tame, rather than foster, women's political activism in Palestine. The author doesn't shy away from identifying the vacuum that these dubious methods have created. As a consequence, the narrative never pulls its punches and presents the flaws in these tactics with precision. It even refers to them as "mere marketing products" without any reservations.

By pouring scorn on these ineffective mechanisms, Richter-Devroe paves the way for an alternative approach. She recognizes the significance of day-to-day interactions in fueling the spirit of resistance to occupation. This makes it easier for us to consider indirect, informal modes of behaviour and action that are far more effective in strengthening women's activism. It is difficult to discredit this approach as it permits scholars to look beyond predefined parameters and investigate practices that aren't peddled by an external agenda.

In her attempt to identify the pitfalls of donor-sponsored peacemaking initiatives that are driven by a desire to discipline women, Richter-Devroe's book offers a glimpse of the popular resistance and activism in Palestine since the Oslo Accords. It fleshes out the impact of women's involvement in often 'gendered' politics. Through this approach, the author skillfully treads into a new terrain that steers away from orthodoxy and cultivates a new direction for scholarly discourses on Palestine, women and the essence of political activism.

The chapter on popular resistance allows for a convenient transition from Richter-Devroe's condemnation of orthodox ideas to her assertive attempts to push for a radical approach that accounts for informal practices. In some respects, this section of the book is a suitable buffer that prepares readers for a radical departure from the accepted norms of academic discourse on this subject.

The author presents a diverse menu of informal practices and strategies that enable women to demonstrate political resistance and survive in a battle-hardened region. For scholars who choose to remain prisoners to orthodoxy, these tactics are largely apolitical because they don't fall neatly into rigid categories. But Richter-Devroe tactfully defies these preconceived notions and examines how these practices allow Palestinian women to become "frontliners" at the intangible or ideational level. This shows that physical violence is not the only vehicle of political activism. Richter-Devroe's emphasis on everyday resistance comes across as somewhat refreshing as it reflects the lived realities of Palestinian women.

Overall, *Women's Political Activism in Palestine: Peacebuilding, Resistance and Survival* does not opt for a simplistic analysis that panders to Western ideals. No attempt is made to glorify the liberal peace paradigm. Instead, Richter-Devroe's account elbows away these approaches and focuses on establishing a locally-motivated conversation on resistance and peace building in Palestine. The result is a narrative that is rich with fresh insights and enlightening anecdotes, and affords a cluster of new solutions to old problems.

The Music Too

By Nadya Chishty-Mujahid

Book Title:	Ecovillages Around the World
Authors:	Frederica Miller
Publisher:	Findhorn Press
Price:	$18.35
ISBN:	9781844097432

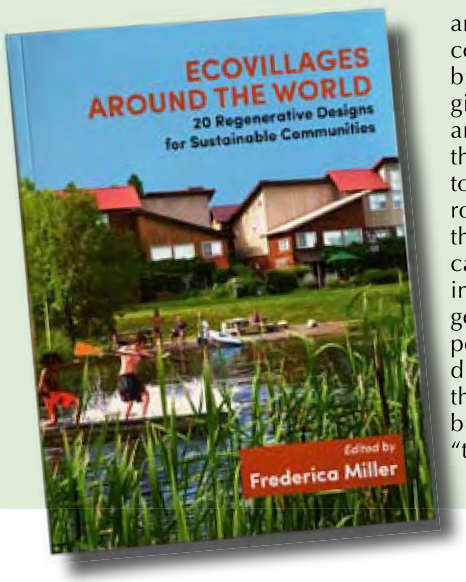
Although this is being marketed as a coffee-table book, Ecovillages Around the World, is far less frivolous than many books of this genre. Styled as a tribute to Hildur Jackson, who co-founded and headed the Gaia Trust with her husband Ross Jackson, the text puts together portraits of twenty notable environmentally-friendly ecovillages, ranging in location from places as diverse as Iceland to India. The strongest representation is found in countries such as Denmark, Italy, and Australia that boast two villages each in this remarkable collection.

Arranged in chronological order, the villages rank from the oldest, established in Solheimer, Iceland in 1930 to Permatopia, Denmark in 2017. This fact indicates to the reader how many decades have been spent by a few dedicated individuals in creating havens of peaceful, environmentally-friendly coexistence all over the globe. Without exception, these are all places of culture, pacifism, and humanitarian tolerance. While religion is not exactly a major lynchpin of such endeavours, almost all these venues possess a unique personal spirituality which is aptly encapsulated by the numerous photographs of temples, gatherings, and community centres strewn throughout the book.

On a more practical level, several of the cities are careful, occasionally to the point of necessary neuroticism, about how they conserve water and energy. Human waste is invariably used as manure to fertilize plants, and water has to be recycled and purified for the purpose of irrigation. Some cities focus on utilizing solar panels for energy, while others have ensured that their homes utilize available energy in a manner whereby its usage and efficiency is maximized.

What makes this book a true delight to peruse is the boundless creativity demonstrated by the inhabitants of ecovillages. Indeed, the village of Huehuecoyotl was originally established entirely for those individuals who wished to use ecology as a form of art. But even others, such as Auroville in India, take justified pride in the fact that virtually every building is a work of art in itself. Words cannot do justice to the beauty of the pictures used in the book, and one can only imagine how glorious some of these locations might be in reality. An especially striking image portrayed is that of the flower park in Lilleoru, Estonia which (as its name connotes) is quite literally a park laid out in the shape of a symmetrical flower of six even petals.

Credit must be given to philanthropists as well as supportive governments for enabling the founders of these areas to actualize their dreams. Some of the founders were true visionaries, such as Mira Alfassa who founded Auroville about fifty years ago and based her overarching concepts on the teachings of the revered sage Sri Aurobindo. These teachings are devotedly honoured and nurtured to this very day, and help to bind the community together as well as integrate newcomers into the ecovillage's way of life.



The pace of life in our postmodern world is so hectic and frantic that people often overlook such endeavours at best, or laugh at them at worst. On reading this book, one begins to appreciate what a mistake that is, especially since given climate change and global warming (not to mention nuclear warfare), there may come a time in the not-so-distant future when such villages become the only places where humanity can truly thrive and survive. Until I read this book I was under the belief that the term 'tree-hugger' is derogatory. However, I was shamed into realizing that appreciating trees actually provides believers with a sense of genuine empowerment and, in fact, there is a photograph in the text of individuals actually embracing a tree!

This is not to say that ecovillages are not besieged by challenges. Growing entirely organic crops without the assistance of pesticides is by no means an easy task, and conserving energy sounds good on paper but can be notoriously difficult in practice, especially when one is faced with adverse factors related to climate and location. The villages are not necessarily situated in ideal geographical venues; one of them is located in the Amazonian jungle! Naturally the inhabitants of ecovillages take their respective belief systems very seriously, but they realize that they cannot compromise on matters such as healthcare and the education of children.

Nevertheless, these communities are admirably self-sufficient — a couple of them even sport their own brand of currency! Such a move gives them a sense of autonomy and independence much valued by their inhabitants, and respected by tourists and visitors. In spite of the rosy picture presented by means of the writing and photographs, one cannot help but feel humbled at the immense amount of work that has gone into setting up these havens of peace. They may be different, often diametrically opposed, to some of the great urban centres of the world, but to quote the poet John Keats "they have their music too." S

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