THE COMPLETE MAGAZINE FOR THE REGION

MARCH 2019

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SOUTHASIA

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

Pakistan and India are again locked in a military confrontation that could lead to a full war. While India is engaged in pointless jingoism, no thought is given to the suffering millions in South Asia.

Afghanistan	Afg. 50
Australia	A$ 6
Bangladesh	Taka 65
Bhutan	NU 45
Brazil	BRL 20
Canada	C$ 6
China	RMB 30
France	EUR 45
Hong Kong	HK$ 30
India	Rs. 65
Japan	¥ 500
Korea	Won 3000
Malaysia	RM 6
Maldives	Rf 45
Myanmar	MMK10
Nepal	NcRs. 75
New Zealand	NZ$ 7
Pakistan	Rs. 300
Philippines	P 75
Saudi Arabia	SR 15
Singapore	S$ 8
Sri Lanka	Rs. 100
Thailand	B 100
Turkey	Lira. 2
UAE	AED 10
UK	£ 3
USA	$ 5

OPINION Mohammad Bin Salman

INDIA Pre-election Tricks

AFGHANISTAN Search for Peace

BANGLADESH Superwoman!

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The Prince's Visit

The two-day visit of the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Muhammad bin Salman to Pakistan in February, was a high-profile occasion. It served as an opportunity for Pakistan to put its best foot forward and demonstrate to Saudi Arabia how indebted it was for the fact that the Saudi Kingdom had come to its rescue in its hour of need. There was an unparalleled level of mutual warmth that Prince Muhammad bin Salman, commonly known as MBS, and the Pakistan Prime Minister, as well the people displayed during the visit. There was much pomp and circumstance as the prince was feted by Pakistan's civil and military elite. Parts of the federal capital were under virtual lockdown to ensure the security of the visiting royal and his large retinue. The Crown Prince's remark that he should be deemed as Pakistan's ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia made great impact. Prime Minister Imran Khan made an impromptu request to the Crown Prince for the release of some 2,500 Pakistanis languishing in Saudi Arabia's prison. The Crown Prince responded positively and the next day, much to everyone's surprise, more than 2,000 Pakistanis were out of jail and free to return home. Prime Minister Imran Khan's request to facilitate Pakistani Hajj pilgrims also met with a positive response from the Crown Prince.

The Crown Prince's visit laid the foundations of the beginning of a new relationship between the two brotherly Muslim countries. Saudi Arabia, a leading Gulf nation and one of the world's major producers of oil, is also the centre of Islam as it is here that the Islamic religion was born and spread to the rest of the world. The holy prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was born in the city of Makkah and this is where the Ka'aba is located, the place that millions of Muslims flock to every year to perform Hajj. Pakistan is a major Muslim nation, the only one with nuclear capability and a highly professional army. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have always enjoyed very healthy military relations and Pakistan is committed to sending its army to the kingdom to protect the holy places of Islam in Makkah and Madinah whenever such a situation arises. Pakistani labour has participated in meeting a major part of Saudi Arabia's construction needs and their remittances to Pakistan comprise a major part of its foreign exchange earnings. Now, that Saudi Arabia is moving towards a major change and Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman is playing a key role in bringing about this change, Pakistan has an opportunity to move beyond its role of merely being a source of blue collar workers and is ready to help Saudi Arabia with its multifarious professional expertise in various areas.

During the Crown Prince's visit, MoUs worth $20bn were signed. The Saudi investment pledges were greatly welcome, especially Saudi Arabia's intent to build an oil refinery near Gwadar which would serve as a strategic asset for Pakistan. It was being hoped that when Saudi Arabia's pledges begin to materialize, these mutually profitable ventures will contribute to Pakistan's economic revival. The visit coincided with India's belligerence towards Pakistan following the Pulwama incident in Kashmir and India's efforts to isolate Pakistan internationally. It is obvious that India's designs did not bear fruit and that facts of the Pulwama incident only indicated that it was a local endeavour, the blame for which India conveniently laid on Pakistan to malign the country and gain political mileage by building anti-Pakistan hysteria. The international community was non-plussed that how could Pakistani elements smuggle explosives through many layers of Indian security in such large quantities to kill over forty five Indian soldiers? If anything, the incident reflected a major lapse on the part of India's own security capability.

It is being pointed out that the Saudi Crown Prince is interested in creating a regional linkage involving the kingdom, Pakistan and other Asian countries as part of his Vision 2030. He also wishes that Saudi Arabia should participate more meaningfully in CPEC and reap the advantages that this initiative on the part of China promises. If this happens, it will play a major role in deepening and broadening Pakistan's cordial relations with Saudi Arabia. A note of caution. This should not be done at the cost of Pakistan's ties with other regional states. It should be clearly understood that Pakistan cannot afford to get involved in any regional power games.

Syed Jawaid Iqbal
Editor in Chief

THE 18TH AMENDMENT

This is with reference to the SouthAsia cover story on the 18th Amendment. Te 18th Amendment has given provinces the power to govern themselves without spoon-feeding from the Federation. With a parliamentary form of government where there are infinite checks and balances, this seems a rather sinking proposition. For the Federation to work effectively, a Presidential system is needed. That would mean a strong and joint Federation that works for sovereignty, integrity, and prosperity of Pakistan. The 18th Amendment has its pros and cons and for it to function properly, the Provinces and the Federation need to work together as a unit.

Muhammad Noman,
Karachi, Pakistan.

EQUAL RIGHTS?

Although women face a lot of obstacles in the business world, from balancing work and family to securing financing, more women are operating new businesses and many of them are at the helm of established businesses. The fact remains that women are crucial to economic growth around the world yet the equality gap is still there. A public relations mission is required to attract women to senior board level positions – not just because it's fair, but because it represents greater prosperity for all.

Dr. Dua Meer,
Kathmandu, Nepal.

HASINA'S NEW AGENDA

Hasina Wajed's third consecutive win is questionable. However, her recent utterance shows a subtle change. She has hinted it's not going to be a one-party rule anymore and she will retire after this tenure. She thinks everybody should take a break so the younger generation can be accommodated. Her practices differ from what she is saying. This time, her agenda seems to be of providing basic necessities to the people. But her previous tenures indicate that this too will be a dictatorship. Bangladesh needs a progressive and liberal political party which is ready to amend its out-dated political approach.

Masooma Anees,
Dhaka, Bangladesh.

LACK OF ORIGINALITY

It is a sad fact that Pakistan as a country is not making any advances towards developing a professional advertising sector. The TV commercials for various advertisers are also not made in Pakistan which means that this sector is not making any progress. The manufacturing companies are making great profits by selling their products and services to a vastly growing population. These profits are not re-ploughed in the country but are sent abroad to their principals. It is a pity that audiences in this country of over 200 million people mostly get to see TV advertising that is adapted from other markets. If this continues, what will the future hold for the advertising sector in Pakistan?

Chloe Hugo,
Dubai, UAE.

GOOD DECISION

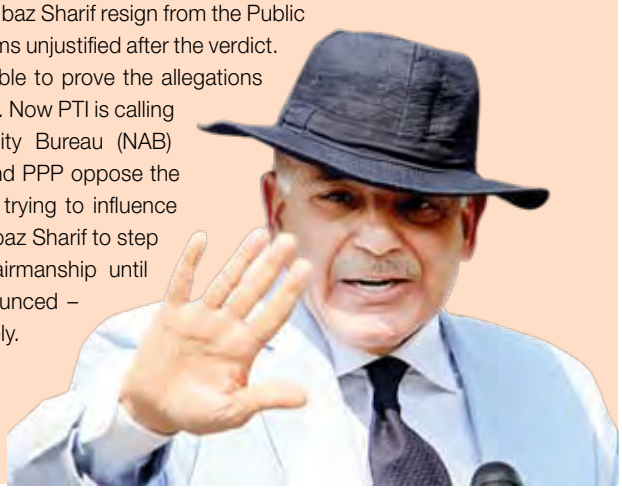
We all have grown up hearing the line, where are your manners? It's a sigh of relief to see that the International Cricket Council has showed no leniency about the comment made by Pakistan cricket team captain Sarfraz Ahmed against South African all-rounder, Andile Phehlukwayo. In Pakistan, cricketers are no less than superstars hence, this lesson will leave a lasting impact on the masses as it has clarified that racism in any shape or form is intolerable at the national and international level. Pakistan cricket, in general, is going through a rough phase and it seems this incident has only added to it. Hopefully, people will learn from it and, as a society, including the so-called superstars, will control their language and avoid racism as a conscious effort.

Shayan Sheikh,
Hyderabad, Pakistan.

SHAHBAZ'S BAIL AND PTI

The verdict to bail Shahbaz Sharif by the Lahore High Court put PTI in a difficult position; PTI's Fawad Chaudhry called it a "strange verdict." The Party's wish to make Shahbaz Sharif resign from the Public Accounts Committee seems unjustified after the verdict. So far, PTI hasn't been able to prove the allegations that were imposed on him. Now PTI is calling the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) unfair – though PML-N and PPP oppose the PTI view. It seems PTI is trying to influence NAB and they want Shahbaz Sharif to step down from the PAC chairmanship until the final decision is announced – which seems highly unlikely.

Athar Mehmood,
Lahore, Pakistan.



WHAT IS RE-BRANDING?

This has been bothering me for some time. Recently I came across a very well-known brand that shifted from one claim to another and that too within a span of only a month. From my point of view, there's a word called re-branding. The brand could have used that as there's no harm in re-branding a product. Various brands have done it in the past and many are still doing it. What was the need to change the product entirely?

Amne Gill,
Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

DINE-OUT MADE EASY

Until recently, the only entertainment for Karachiites was dining out, but the flourishing food industry with cafes opening at every corner have changed for the better. Being a health-conscious person, I always found it difficult to dine out but now with the calorie count mentioned in a lot of restaurant menus, I am a happy person. Now there are places where one can go and eat – have salads and grilled yummy food at reasonable prices. Good that society is becoming more aware of what they are eating. Pakistan is surely progressing in the food industry and that is a treat for me.

Najeeba Nazeer,
Karachi, Pakistan.

CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT BILL

People of northeast India has come out on the roads as the Indian Lok Sabha has passed The Citizen Amendment Bill, 2019. Political parties and citizens are concerned that the Bill can hurt the identity, language and culture of the indigenous people. Now illegal immigrants from minority communities - Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians, and Parsis from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan - will be given citizenship after seven years of residence – instead of 12 years. In a rally in Assam, Narendra Modi assured the people that the Bill will provide succour to those who have embraced the idea and ethos of Mother India. Let's hope it does.

Jasir Ahmed,
Kabul, Afghanistan.

"There is nothing wrong with intellectual differences flowing from freedom of thought as long as such differences remain confined to intellectual debates."
Pervez Musharraf, former President of Pakistan

"I come from a poor family, I have seen poverty. The poor need respect, and it begins with cleanliness."
Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India

"We are putting together the mechanisms of accountability and reconciliation."
Ranil Wickremesinghe, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka

"There was surely some kind of negligence. If the terrorists could bring such a big vehicle without being checked, it had to be because of failure on our part."
Satya Pal Malik, Governor of Jammu and Kashmir on Pulwama attack.

"This system is too confusing for the literate to wrap their heads around. We cannot imagine how the illiterate will understand it."
Senator Rubina Khalid, chairperson, NA parliamentary committee, Pakistan

"It will take some time for cinema to evolve to the point that it truly can be considered to have revived."
Noman Ijaz, Pakistani TV actor

"Resilient and valiant nations do not get scared of challenges but cope with the issues bravely".
Dr. Arif Alvi, President of Pakistan

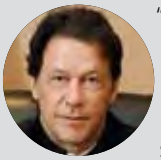
"Factors affecting effective regional cooperation are mindsets and perceptions emanating from the past."
Sheikh Hasina Wajid, Prime Minister of Bangladesh

"Show me someone without an ego, and I'll show you a loser."
Donald Trump, President of the United States

"Your targets can only be realized on the basis of dreams."
Recep Tayyip Erdogan, President of Turkey

"There is so much to the song – the sur, shayer ka dard, the singer's delivery but one can't feel any of that in today's music."
Farida Khanum, Pakistani singer

"I'm asking all Pakistanis living in the country and overseas to support the Diamer and Bhasha Dams. So we can mobilize Pakistan into a better future."
Akon, American singer



"I've always looked at all my life as a struggle. There were ups and there were downs. It also strengthened me as a person. No university teaches you what adversity can."
Imran Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan

"Terrorists neither recognize boundaries nor require passports to spread their message of hate and discord."
Ashraf Ghani, President of Afghanistan

"Fake news has become an art form."
A.E. Samaan, American author.

"5% urban educated elite aside, women seem to be the playground (battle-ground) where we practice a medieval form of religion"
Shoaib Mansoor, Pakistani TV producer

"As women we are expected not to be happy at our weddings, but why not?"
Faiza Saleem, Pakistani comedian

"There is nothing called negative character. The negativity and positivity exists in all of us."
Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Indian film actor

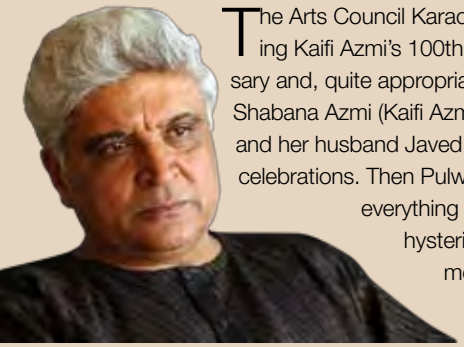
Gracious Prince

Things took a positive turn and it was really heart-warming when Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman responded to Prime Minister Imran Khan's request and ordered the release of over 2,000 Pakistani prisoners from Saudi prisons during his visit to Islamabad.

Amid emotional scenes at the Allama Iqbal International Airport, five Pakistani prisoners landed in Lahore from Jeddah. Ecstatic family members lauded the premier's efforts to bring their loved ones back home. The released Pakistanis narrated the hardships they had to face and thanked the Prime Minister and the Crown Prince for showing such graciousness.

The questions is, did previous Pakistan governments ever make a serious attempt to have the prisoners released?

More Loyal than the King



The Arts Council Karachi was celebrating Kaifi Azmi's 100th death anniversary and, quite appropriately, they invited Shabana Azmi (Kaifi Azmi's daughter) and her husband Javed Akhtar, to the celebrations. Then Pulwama happened and everything went haywire. In the hysteria that the Indian government and media kicked up against Pakistan, while there were many casualties, a noted one was that Shabana Azmi and Javed Akhtar cancelled their trip to Karachi. It became obvious that more than Shabana Azmi, it was Javed Akhtar who was prominent in criticizing Pakistan. It has been noticed that Javed Akhtar never loses an opportunity of being intensely critical of Pakistan. Is this because he is a Muslim and has to be 'more loyal than the king' in demonstrating his Indian credentials? Shabana doesn't seem to bothered about her being a Muslim.

The well-known couple resorting to jingoism was rather unfortunate since there was not a slightest piece of evidence found that Pakistan was involved in terrorism in Pulwama.

Hina's Relevance

Hina Rabbani Khar made waves when she was active in politics. Starting with the Musharraf government (a member of the Shaukat Aziz cabinet), she later moved on to the Pakistan People's Party. It was her expertise both in economics and foreign relations that she was chosen to handle the concerned ministries for the parties she was in. Her fashion style was iconic and made people stop and look at her bags, her sunglasses and even her jewellery. Now she seems to be out of it all and is probably happy running her restaurant in Lahore. There was also some talk of an enquiry being instituted against her financial affairs. Outspoken as she is, perhaps Imran Khan needs her in a relevant role.

Back to Square One

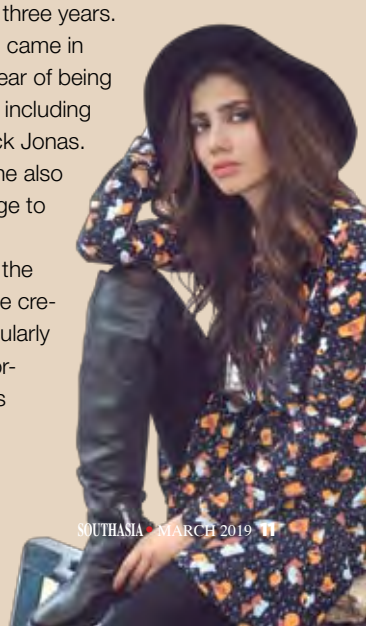
Ever since it started in 2008, Coke Studio has been promoting Pakistan's multiculturalism. Rohail Hyatt produced the show until Season 6 and was replaced by Strings members Bilal Maqsood and Faisal Kapadia. In March 2018, Ali Hamza and Zohaib Kazi took over. It is now being speculated that Rohail Hyatt will return for Season 12. Ali Hamza has hinted that he would be stepping down because of personal reasons. Last season, Coke Studio got into a lot of controversary with such numbers as Ko Ko Korina sung by Ahad Raza Mir and Momina Mustehsan.

50 Sexiest Asian Women

This speaks a lot for the beauty factor in Pakistan. Pakistani actor Mahira Khan got the fourth spot in Eastern Eye's 50 Sexiest Asian Women list for 2018. Sanam Saeed bagged the 19th position.

India's Deepika Padukone topped the list. This happened for the second time for Padukone in three years. Last year's topper, Priyanka Chopra, came in second as she celebrated another year of being a great global ambassador for India, including her high-profile nuptials to singer Nick Jonas. Talking of nuptials, Deepika Padukone also created great waves with her marriage to actor Ranveer Kapoor.

Pakistani actor Sanam Saeed got the 19th place on the list for "pushing the creative boundaries in Pakistan and regularly speaking about a wide array of important social issues, including women's empowerment".



MEDIA'S ROLE IN COMBATING MALNUTRITION

Commitment from media is critical for mobilizing and generating affirmative action to defeat the menace of malnutrition in Pakistan.

This was emphasized in a meeting organized by Scaling Up Nutrition Civil Society Alliance Pakistan (SUNCSA Pak) in collaboration with Nutrition International (NI), to discuss the role of media in highlighting the impact of malnutrition.

Ms. Aaliya Habib, Coordinator SUNCSA, said media is an integral part of civil society and its involvement is essential for addressing the challenging situation of malnutrition in Pakistan. Half of the country's population is suffering from different forms of malnutrition, which is one of the causes hindering country's development, she said.

PAKISTANI ENTREPRENEURS FOR UK ALUMNI AWARDS

Pakistan's Osman Haneef is one of the finalists for the UK Alumni Awards 2019 of the British Council. Osman is CEO and country manager of MILVIK Pakistan. He will get the Entrepreneurial Award for his efforts in furthering innovation in Pakistan after launching his company BIMA mobile. Other award-winning entrepreneurs from Pakistan are Nousheen Zakaria, Zahid Tauseef and Muneeb Malik.

NEXT ADASIA IN LAHORE

AdAsia 2019 will be held in Lahore from December 2 to 5. Pakistan earlier hosted the 16th AdAsia (in 1989) also in Lahore and it was a roaring success. The logo of AdAsia 2019 was designed by Shahzad Nawaz. The theme of the ad congress is 'Celebration of Advertising and Creativity in Asia.'

Nepal Launching Own Satellites

Nepal will be launching its own satellites called 'Birds 3' by May. The satellites will orbit with the help of two Nepalis completing a Master's degree in Engineering from a Japanese University. According to Rabindra Prasad Dhakal, chief of Technical Department, Nepal Academy of Science and Technology (NAST), the pair has been provided with Rs 20 million.

Fashion Statement

London, New York, Milan and India Fashion Week had been burning fashion runways. Now the Fashion Design Council of Bangladesh (FDCB) has initiated the TRESemmé Bangladesh Fashion Week 2019.

This will breathe new life into Bangladeshi fashion and design. The event is certainly something to look out for. Participants will include Rifat Rahman, Tashfia Ahmed, Sadiya Mishu, Musarrat Rahman, Swati Kalsi from BD, Bhutani designer Kencho Wangmo, Pakistan's Faiza Samee (known for designing three wedding dresses for Benazir Bhutto) and Anu Shrestha from Nepal.

BAN BACKFIRES

The ban on Turkish soap operas in the Arab world has backfired as people have started learning Turkish to watch dramas on websites of Turkish channels, according to Miriam Berg, an assistant professor at Northwestern University in Qatar.

The Dubai-based MBC Group, the Middle East and North Africa's largest private broadcaster, had pulled the plug on Turkish soap operas, amid a rift between Turkey and some Gulf countries as Ankara backed Qatar in a blockade imposed by them.

The main target of the ban was to hinder Turkey from using its soft power to create a positive image of its culture in the Arab world. But the ban has backfired. Actually the opinion has shifted from positive to very positive. It's so positive that many of the Arabs think it is unjust to ban these shows as entertainment and politics should not be confused. Fair enough!

FREE EDUCATION IN THE MALDIVES

The President of the Maldives, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, has launched a free education scheme for students in the Maldives. It is a key campaign pledge and a signature policy initiative of the new administration. Students at the Maldives National University and the Islamic University of Maldives will no longer have to pay course fees. The scheme will also cover a very high percentage of course fees at private colleges.

INDIAN BOY SENT BACK

An Indian boy, who had mistakenly crossed the border and entered Pakistan in August last year, was sent back home recently via the Wagah Border. The 16-year-old Assamese boy, identified as Bimal Narjee, was handed over to the Indian Border Security Force in a goodwill gesture by the Pakistan Rangers after an inquiry and verification of documents.

Priyanka as Guru Osho Disciple

Priyanka Chopra's next project is based on a Netflix series called Wild Wild Country which she is producing by herself. The story follows the controversial Indian guru Rajneesh's (aka Osho) cult-base in America. Priyanka Chopra and Barry Levinson are developing the character of Sheela who was the disciple of the guru. Priyanka Chopra will play Sheela.

NEW MD AT PCB

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has announced the appointment of Wasim Khan as its new Managing Director. Khan is an MBA from Warwick Business School and a former professional cricketer with a wealth of experience in cricket and cricket management. In a 58-match first-class career, he scored 2,835 runs with five centuries and 17 half-centuries, with the highest score of 181. He was awarded an MBE (Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) in 2013 and, two years later, was appointed Chief Executive of the Leicestershire County Cricket Club. In 2005, he was asked by Lord Mervyn King, former Governor of the Bank of England, to lead a £50 million community development project that operated in 11,000 state schools and engaged 2.5 million children across England and Wales.

MORE THAN THE FIGURE

Senator Sherry Rehman is not for PIA cabin crew's body shaming. She wants focus on big structural and safety issues like the routes and fleets rather than the waistlines of the crew. PIA has made a policy to address complaints of passengers about "obese" cabin crew. One question being asked is what is the desired standard/BMI for PIA cabin crew? Also, what took PIA so long to notice the obesity of its cabin crew? While most people agree with the senator, some are still adamant that the cabin crew should maintain their physique.

ANOTHER VENTURE FOR JON BIRD

VMLY&R has promoted Jon Bird as Chief Retail and Commerce Officer. He will be leading global commerce employing e-commerce, relationship marketing and connected retail, across all major markets. Bird joined Y&R as Global Managing Director of the retail marketing division Labstore in 2014 and was promoted to executive director, global retail and shopper marketing for Y&R two years later. Earlier, Bird served as director of retail marketing for M&C Saatchi and CEO and executive chairman and IdeaWorks.

PROMOTING CEYLON TEA

Sri Lanka is set to launch a campaign to promote its popular Ceylon Tea this year. The campaign will start from China in May and Russia in September, followed by Germany, Ukraine and Japan. The country's Plantation Ministry aims to create global awareness of Ceylon Tea. It will be promoted with the lion logo, a symbol of Sri Lanka. An estimated 25 million U.S. dollars have been earmarked for the campaign.

PTCL HOSTS START-UPS

Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL), hosted start-ups and entrepreneurs from the National Incubation Centre (NIC), in Peshawar. The start-ups earlier presented their ideas, business models and prototypes to the senior management at PTCL Headquarters in Islamabad.

The session was led by Dr. Daniel Ritz, President & CEO, PTCL, along with senior executives of PTCL. Murtaza Zaidi, Director, NIC Peshawar, participated with top start-ups including E-Guard, Azadi E-Bike, Darewro, Bera, Eleven.pk and NANO IT Solutions.

BHUTAN SHORTLISTED

Bhutan has been selected as one of the final four among 13 countries in the 2019 Intellectual Property (IP) Sharing Project. The IP sharing project is a support program for developing and least developed countries to foster creativity and innovation through intellectual property rights. The Korean Invention Promotion Association (KIPA) is initiating the program and has shortlisted six project proposals from Bhutan. KIPA is a non-profit organization based in Seoul, South Korea.

IMRAN'S PORTRAIT

Sonia Nisa, a calligrapher, has made a portrait of Prime Minister Imran Khan, using the words of the national anthem. She has used black non-drip gloss, metal gold paint and different sized paint brushes to do the portrait. It took her eight to ten hours to finish it. Sonia does not have any art qualification and it is her sheer talent and devotion that led her to produce the portrait. The portrait will be displayed at an art exhibition in Doha.

Mansha Will be a Vamp

Mansha Pasha will play the vamp in the play Surkh Chandni. Directed by Shahid Shafaat and written by Asma Nabeel, Surkh Chandni will address the sensitive social issue of acid attacks. Mansha says her character "is somebody who causes an acid attack."

The reason Mansha took up the role was that she hadn't done anything negative in her career so far and this wasn't just a typical negative character.

Besides Mansha, the cast includes Sohai Ali Abro, Osman Khalid Butt, Asad Siddiqui, Lubna Aslam and Gul-e-Rana.

HAROON SHARIF – CHAIRMAN BOARD OF INVESTMENT (BOI)

Haroon Sharif has been made the Chairman of Board of Investment (BoI). He is a well-known global expert of economic policy, international development, economic diplomacy and financial markets who worked as the Regional Advisor to the World Bank Group for promoting economic cooperation in South and Central Asia and was involved in the execution of CASA-1000 and Islamabad-Kabul-Dushanbe Expressway. Previously, he held positions in the World Bank (South Asia), Department for International Development (UK) and Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan.

PAKISTAN CABLES WINS NFEH AWARD

Pakistan Cables Ltd. was awarded the 11th NFEH CSR Award 2018 at the 11th Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Awards organized by the National Forum for Environment and Health (NFEH) in Islamabad. Some 55 Pakistani companies that have made a significant contribution to social development through different remarkable projects and activities were given awards.

President Azad Jammu and Kashimir Sardar Masood Khan conferred the award on Mr. Fuzail Ahmed, Regional Sales Manager North, Pakistan Cables. The CSR Award is the Company's first local award recognizing its continued efforts in supporting social causes for uplift of society. The Company has a history of supporting philanthropic initiatives. Pakistan Cables CSR areas of interests include environment protection, education, health and women's uplift in society.

NBP GETS NEW PRESIDENT AND CEO

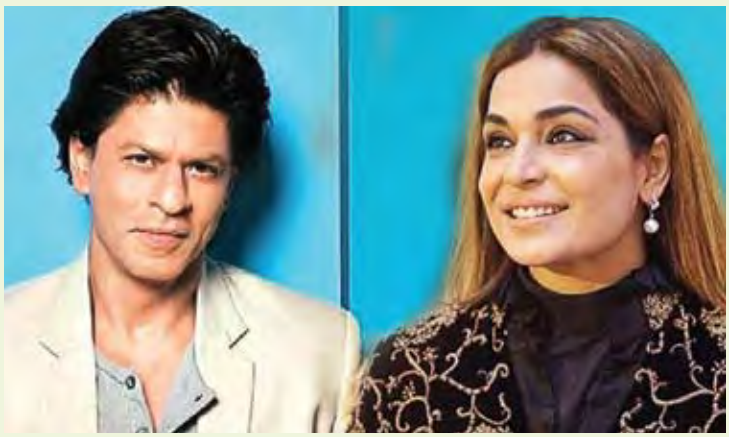
Arif Usmani has been appointed as the President and CEO of National Bank of Pakistan. Usmani is a seasoned banker with more than 35 years of experience across Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, West Africa, Slovakia, Hong Kong and Singapore. He has also served at Mashreq Bank. His previous experience includes stints as global head of wholesale banking at Abu Dhabi Islamic Bank PJSC and managing director and country officer of Citibank NA Pakistan. He has also won several awards, including the Managing Director's Performance Award.

FIRST FEMALE HINDU JUDGE

Suman Pawan Bodani is Pakistan's first Hindu judge. She is from the rural area of Shahdadkot in Sindh. She was 54th in the merit list for the appointment of civil judge/judicial magistrate. After completing her LLB from Hyderabad, she moved to Karachi to pursue her LLM from SZABIST. She was affiliated with Justice (R) Rasheed Rizvi's law firm where she practiced law for two years.

The English Teacher

Actress Meera says she wants to work with Shah Rukh Khan sometime soon. The 41-year-old actress has also revealed that she has a special liking for the English language and would have been an English teacher if she were not an actress. She also says that she loves Persian. Meera has urged the government to give free medical facilities to artistes and their families, adding that it would be a big boost for the film industry if the people were looked after with respect. Her film 'Baji' is expected to be released at Eid-ul-Fitr this year.



The agreement was signed by Muhammad Farooq, EVP/Group Head, Payment Services & Digital Banking Group, NBP and Mr. S. M Arif Director/ Chief Business Architect Mobi Direct in presence of dignitaries from both sides, Mr. Tariq Jamali President/CEO(A) NBP is also seen in the picture.

NBP, MOBI-DIRECT AGREEMENT

NBP and Mobi-Direct have signed an agreement under which NBP will be Mobi-Direct's digital payment switch. This is in continuation of the two MoUs that NBP had signed with Mobi Direct in August 2018. The latest is the final agreement, enabling NBP to become a consortium member and settlement bank for Mobi Direct's digital payment switch. As a consortium member, National Bank of Pakistan will be able to use Mobi Direct payment processing and transactions switching infrastructure and shared agent network for promoting nationwide branchless banking services to provide real growth to the unbanked segment of the population.

Chinese to Invest in Pakistani Films and Music

A delegation of Tencent, one of the world's biggest Chinese music companies, called on Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Chaudhry Fawad Hussain and showed their keen interest about investing in the production of films and music in Pakistan.

Fawad Chaudry invited the Chinese filmmakers to come to Pakistan and shoot the scenic beauty of the country's northern areas. The minister stressed the need for a formal agreement between the Chinese company and the Ministry of Information to rejuvenate music and film in the country.

JUDY JOHN EDELMAN'S GLOBAL CCO

As a PR shop, Edelman continues to sharpen its creative chops. It is hiring Judy John as its first Global Chief Creative Officer. John has spent 25 years in the agency world and is best known for her work as a member of the team behind the P&G brand Always and its award-winning "Like a Girl" campaign. John comes from Leo Burnett, where she served as a chief creative officer for North America and CEO for the agency in Canada along with earning almost every industry award. She will lead Edelman's team of more than 600 creatives and planners globally.

K-ELECTRIC HAS NEW CHAIRMAN

The K-Electric (KE) Board of Directors has elected Ikram Sehgal as the new Chairman of the Board of Directors. Sehgal has more than 40 years of business experience. He is the chairman of Pathfinder Group, Pakistan. He is also Chairman of the Karachi Council on Foreign Relations and Vice President of the Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors. He has previously served on many boards, including Bank Alfalah.

Sehgal is a regular columnist in the print media since 1987 and is a member of international organizations like the prestigious World Economic Forum (WEF). He has organized the renowned Pakistan Breakfast every year in Davos for the past 18 years.

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Begum Nawazish Ali Now on Web

Ali Saleem, best known as Begum Nawazish Ali, is making a comeback with his own web series directed by Nadeem Baig and produced by Uzma Nadeem. The format of the show will be the same as before and interviews of Meera, Humayun Saeed, Mehwish Hayat, Sohai Abro, Azfar, Sadaf Kanwal and Zahid Ahmed have already recorded. Begum Nawazish Ali will now have gray hair as this is her comeback after 12 years.

NEW CEO AT PTCL

The PTCL Board of Directors has appointed Rashid Khan, currently CEO of Ufone, to the post of CEO, PTCL, with additional charge of CEO, Ufone.

The CEO of PTCL, Dr. Daniel Ritz, has decided to leave PTCL for personal reasons upon completion of his 3-year contract, in order to re-unite with his family in Europe.

Dr. Ritz has said that it has been a privilege and an honour for him to lead PTCL and the PTCL Group through a period of significant transformation.

Power to the Girl Child

Ladli Laxmi Yojana is a scheme introduced by the government of Madhya Pradesh in India with the objective to lay a firm foundation of girls' future through improvement in their educational and economic status and to bring about a positive change in social attitudes towards birth of a girl. The scheme was inaugurated by Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan in 2007 and was followed by expansion to six.

Ladli Laxmi Yojana is an initiative of the Madhya Pradesh state government for improving the health and educational status of girls in the State. It seeks to prevent female foeticide and to bring a positive attitude among people towards girl child birth, with the aim to preventing child marriages.

ETISALAT SETS NEW RECORD

Etisalat has been declared as 'The Most Valuable Portfolio Brand' in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) by Brand Finance, the world's leading independent brand business valuation and strategy consultancy. This is recognition of the company's impressive portfolio of brands. It is the first Middle East group to surpass some of the finest MENA brands across the telecom, aviation and FMCG sectors to break the $10 billion barrier in terms of wider portfolio value.

Etisalat boasts of a portfolio of top brands, i.e. Etisalat UAE, Etisalat Misr, PTCL, Ufone, Mobily, Maroc Telecom and Etisalat Afghanistan. In 2018, Brand Finance declared PTCL as the fastest growing brand in Pakistan, with a brand value of USD 119 million. Both PTCL and Ufone contributed to the current Etisalat's brand portfolio value.

CHICKEN FEET FOR CHINA

China is happy to import chicken feet from Pakistan. Chicken feet have become a major export to China. Some 1,300 kilograms of chicken feet are collected from markets in Peshawar on a daily basis and are transported to Islamabad every night for processing in a factory in the I-9 sector. After the feet are exported to China, they are used in Chinese cuisine. Due to this, local people are facing a sharp increase in the prices of chicken feet, which is the food of the less-privileged classes.

A 'NON-MILITARY' STRATEGY

India seems to suffer from a paranoia against Pakistan. It claims that its Balakot attack was an intelligence-driven counter-terror strike rather than escalatory military aggression.

BY VICE ADMIRAL (R) TAJ M KHATTAK

The 'Two Days Air War', as it were, ended abruptly after the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) responded decisively to the Indian Air Force's (IAF) rash foray into Pakistan's air space, which had never happened since the 1971 Indo-Pak war. In the 'strike' on six targets in Indian Occupied Kashmir and the air engagement which ensued, the IAF lost two aircraft, with one pilot captured and another dead when his aircraft caught fire and fell on the other side of the border. After the first day's attack, Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj declared that India didn't want any further escalation in tensions with Pakistan. So what does one make of Indian actions of not agreeing to any joint investigations or talks in the wake of the Pulwama incident and nearly starting a war by violating Pakistan's airspace in such a reckless manner?

Of late, a new and discernable pattern has begun to emerge in India's action against Pakistan, which has been termed as a 'non-military' military strategy'. It is being defined by India as actions based on assessment of an imminent threat, ensuring that Pakistan's military personnel and infrastructure are not targeted and civilian casualties avoided. In effect, New Delhi's line after the IAF's intrusion, has been that the operation was an intelligence-driven counter-terror strike rather than an escalatory military aggression.

Shorn of semantics, what it apparently means is to adopt a 'safe' course of action, with nil or minimum risk of losing either one's own men and material or of the adversary, Pakistan. There is obvious logic in this because any bungled-up operation resulting in loss of human lives will be a huge embarrassment and a deficit in the Indian military's register. On the other hand, any significant hurt to Pakistan will leave no room for the government in Islamabad but to respond and thus escalate tensions. No one will be able to predict its eventual trajectory with any degree of accuracy and India wants to avoid this.

There is some evidence to support this argument, since in the post-Uri so-called 'surgical strike', the Indian army's Director General Military Operations (DGMO) was visibly anxious and went to some lengths in assuring his Pakistani counterpart that the strike was the end of the matter and no further action was planned. Similarly, after the Balakot intrusion, India's Defence Secretary Vijay Gokhale said that Pulwama had been avenged and there was nothing more to it.

After the Uri incident in 2016, India claimed to have carried out a surgical strike on the Line of Control (LoC). To date, no one seems to know exactly where it happened. The Indian army did release an odd photograph or two of its Special Forces resting on some hillside but nothing more, even though there was constant clamour in the parliament for concrete evidence. There was no loss of life despite the incredibly tall claims. Again in the Balakot incident, India did not produce a shred of evidence. A film from Bollywood after every such incident is now a given staple for the Indian public for furthering hatred against Pakistan – an unmistakable agenda of the BJP, whether in or out of power.

For India, the upshot of this strategy is that it immediately puts Pakistan on the defensive, which then goes into an extensive exercise like inviting international media and briefings to discredit Indian claims. After the reported surgical strike on the Line of Control, Pakistan's Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) took a large group of media persons to the LoC who reported no signs of any surgical strike. The United Nations Military Observers Group in Pakistan (UNMOGIP) also reached a similar conclusion but that didn't shame India. In spite of all this effort, there was yet a nagging doubt, that maybe, just maybe, Pakistan wasn't revealing the whole story. Through these tactics, India aims at creating doubts in the minds of Pakistani people against its own government and organizations, which serves its purpose well.

As witnessed repeatedly, India goes into an over-drive and indulges in a vicious, consistent and frenzied media circus to launch propaganda against Pakistan. Indian TV anchors are in a class of their own when it comes to stupidity, aggression and irrationality. Anyone on the Indian soil, who dares express a view different from the official narrative, is instantly branded as being unpatriotic and is advised to leave the country. This kind of intolerant behaviour wasn't heard of even in Hitler's Nazi Germany or Mussolini's Fascist Italy during WWII, let alone in a democracy which India claims to be and where freedom of expression is fundamental to governance.

As per media reports, for the attack on Balakot, the IAF strike package comprised 12

Mirage 2000 aircraft which took off from Gwalior and flew over Himachal Pradesh and Indian Occupied Kashmir, before crossing over into Azad Kashmir, nearly 25 kilometers north of Muzaffarabad. This would give them over ten minutes warning for any PAF aircraft from the nearest base for interception, which is enough to drop their load and get away, if challenged. The aircraft were reportedly armed with SPICE 2000 (Smart, Precise Impact and Cost-Effective) and Crystal Maze Mk2, also called AGM 142 Popeye PGMs. The SPICE is a kit which converts a conventional bomb into smart munition and is manufactured by Rafael of Israel and can be released onto its target from as far away as 100 kilometers.

The IAF also deployed the Israeli Phalcon and indigenous Netra early warning aircraft to monitor the mission — to direct the aircraft as well as to keep an eye for Pakistani F-16s that might be deployed to counter them — and a Heron long range UAV that was used for monitoring and assessment. Sukhoi Su-30MKIs fighter jets were also airborne and standing by, as a precautionary move. The aircraft numbers and weapons load would appear more suitable against a nuclear facility and look disproportionate for a few hutments as target. So what is India up to?

India's Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale had called the air intrusion an absolutely necessary 'pre-emptive strike' as India had received what it considered credible intelligence, indicating more terror attacks in Indian Occupied Kashmir. Balakot is not in Azad Kashmir but in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and is about 60 kilometers from the LoC.

This new Indian strategy is as much out of depth as the earlier ones like 'Cold Start' and dangerous for peace in the region. For far too long, India has used terrorism as an excuse to oppress Kashmiri Muslims and deny them their due rights to determine their own future as accepted by the UN and enshrined in its charter. It is not known what lessons India has drawn from the recent escalation of tensions with Pakistan but whatever they are, it will be in its own interest to acknowledge that eighteen years after 9/11 and the US defeat in Afghanistan, the shine has come off from the bogie of terrorism and the world has moved on. Instead of coining meaningless and fancy phrases every now and then, it would be advisable for India that in the region's interest, it works towards solving all outstanding issues through negotiations in a peaceful environment. S

The writer is a retired Vice Admiral. He can be reached at tajkhattak@ymail.com

TWISTED PRIORITIES

If the Indian leadership did not come out of its jingoism and continued to reject Pakistan's offers of negotiations, it could be mutually assured destruction for the two big neighbours as well as for the region.

BY S. M. HALI

Twelve days after the Pulwama attack, the Indian Air Force's 12 Mirage 2000 fighter aircraft flew across the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir. Pakistan Air Force fighters scrambled to intercept the threat and forced the intruders to beat a hasty retreat after jettisoning their external fuel tanks. Indian media claimed that IAF fighters targeted and destroyed a terrorist training camp in Azad Jammu Kashmi, but the Indian Defence Ministry distanced itself from the claim.

Following the September 2015 Uri attack, the Indian leadership had raised its jingoism to a level from where it could not back down. To appease the belligerent Indian nation baying for Pakistan's blood, Bharati military planners orchestrated a fake surgical strike. It was claimed that 9 terrorist training camps were destroyed across the LoC in Azad Jammu Kashmir and 34 terrorists killed. India failed to back its false claim with any videos or stills of the alleged strike and even the Indian media started asking awkward questions.

This time around, the stakes for India are much higher. General elections are due and the BJP is facing a trust deficit since it has failed to live up to its tall claims of raising the economic level. Extremism and intolerance have permeated to a point that even international human rights organizations and academics are taking cognizance of Indian brutalities against the minorities.

Unable to isolate Pakistan diplomatically, India is seething with anger at Pakistan's

initiatives. Pakistan's opening of the Kartarpur Corridor has endeared Pakistan to the Sikh community in India and across the globe while international observers have also applauded the move.

In a desperate attempt to divert international opinion away from its brutalities in IOK and mass genocide of the Kashmiri youth as well as to garner support of the Indian masses, first Modi choreographed the false flag operation in Pulwama in which more than forty Indian security personnel were blown to kingdom high. Any sane observer would question the madness in blaming Pakistan for the heinous attack. Adil Dar, the alleged perpetrator of the assault was a local Kashmiri. The over 300 kgs of RDX explosives used in the attack originated from the Indian Army. The movement of the CPRF convoy was supposed to be confidential. It got delayed by two days and there was no way, the movement could have been leaked. The car used in the attack was local. Moreover, India claims that it has fenced the LoC and no cross-border incursion could have taken place.

India's illegal occupation of Kashmir has been challenged by the UN. Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had made it clear in parliament on August 07, 1952: "We want no people in the territory of India against their will and with the help of armed forces… …we want no forced marriages or forced union of the states of India". Nehru also declared on September 17, 1953: "Whether it is Kashmir or any other part we are not going to hold it by the strength of arms…."

Nehru reneged from India's international commitments and wreaked havoc in the occupied territory. India has never succeeded in winning the hearts and minds of the Kashmiris. Former Indian spy agency RAW chief AIS Dulat, in his 2015 book 'Kashmir: The Vajpayee Years,' says: "Under the surface, there has been a lot of anger, hatred and alienation. Never before has it seemed so much in the open". He further states: "Now, you have slogans put up: 'Indian Dogs Go Back!' It's bad and the common Kashmiri is suffering."

Indian Air Force pilot Abhinandan Varthaman

BJP veteran leader Yashwant Sinha has stated: "India has lost people of the valley emotionally". The Government of India has passed the emotional barrier in Kashmir and has driven the people into a cul de sac of helplessness. Even if India increases its military footprint from seven lakhs to 70 lakhs in Kashmir, it wouldn't be able to wrest Kashmir where it matters, that is in the hearts and minds of ordinary Kashmiris.

This time around, the stakes for India are much higher. General elections are due and the BJP is facing a trust deficit.

Arundhati Roy states: India is an "occupying force" in Kashmir and is wielding power through the barrel of the gun. "Kashmir is in the process of being isolated, cut off from the outside world by two concentric rings of border patrols – in Delhi as well as Srinagar – as though it's already a free country with its own visa regime. Within its borders of course, it's open season for the government and the army. The art of controlling Kashmiri journalists and ordinary people with a deadly combination of bribes, threats, blackmail and a whole spectrum of unutterable cruelty has evolved into a twisted art form."

On July 8, 2016, when popular youth leader Burhan Wani was brutally murdered, another mass uprising commenced. To protest the assassination of Burhan Wani, IOK was in flames. To quell the revolution this time, India started using pellet guns.

On February 27, 2019, only a day after India's fake surgical strike, Pakistan Air Force shot down two IAF intruding fighters. After the 26 February intrusion, this writer was on Indian TV channels where former air and army chiefs, drunken with the stupour of arrogance, were trying to talk me down. Only a few hours later, PAF gave a befitting response to India.

It is hoped that the Indian leadership will shelve its jingoism and accept Pakistan's offer of negotiations and take a step back from the brink since both adversaries are equipped with nuclear weapons and any conflict can lead to mutually assured destruction of both. S

The writer is a practicing journalist. He contributes to the print media, conducts a TV show and produces documentaries. He can be reached at sultanm.hali@gmail.com

PEACE INITIATIVE

Peace will always be elusive in South Asia if Indian atrocities continue in Kashmir. India and Pakistan need to adopt a saner approach to bring progress to the region.

BY S.R.H. HASHMI

The Indian security forces have been behaving in a rather shameful manner in Kashmir: killing people indiscriminately, raping women and even using pellet guns on humans which, apart from killing many, have injured hundreds, with many cases of people losing their eyesight.

In these circumstances, it is not very difficult to judge the level of resentment and hatred felt by the Kashmiris for the Indian authorities. Surely, the Indian forces themselves provide cause enough to the Kashmiris to rise in protest against the atrocities of the Indian government.

If, then, a Kashmiri ends up launching a suicide attack in Pulwama, killing dozens of Indian soldiers, it should not be taken as something unexpected. After all, what would these Kashmiris do but target Indian security personnel in strikes which are entirely locally planned and operated, with absolutely no involvement of Pakistanis, civilian or military.

While one grieves on the loss of human lives, even if they were Indian soldiers, one should not forget that it is a cause-and-effect situation. Therefore, India's accusation of Pakistan over such incidents is rather unwarranted. Kashmiris and Pakistanis are not alone in protesting against Indian atrocities. All right-thinking people around the world, as well as human rights organizations, regularly protest over Indian atrocities against the Kashmiris.

Overlooking clear evidence, India has chosen, yet again, to accuse the alleged Pakistan-based terrorists to be behind the attack which even Indian leaders are rejecting. Not stopping at that, India even launched an aerial attack on Pakistan's soil without causing much damage but claimed it to be a successful operation against a terrorist training camp.

Showing restraint, Pakistan did not react immediately and said it reserved its right to take befitting action. Sure enough, Pakistan scrambled its military jets and made a symbolic attack on Indian aircraft, deliberately avoiding military and civilian targets, to prove that it is quite capable of exacting revenge and that India better not take Pakistan for granted.

Mistaking Pakistan's restraint for weakness, India again sent its jets across the border; Pakistan shot down two and captured the pilot of the aircraft that was downed in its territory.

In round one, Pakistan has definitely come out a winner. However, there is not much point gloating over this small victory. Pakistan has made it very clear that it does not want escalation because, God forbid, if things go out of control, South Asia could end up having an all-out war between two nuclear-armed neighbours resulting in total disaster for both.

The Pakistani leadership is very clear on this point and luckily, there is some realization on the Indian side as well. During her visit to China, Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj said "India doesn't want further escalation".

That means India is also well aware of the dangers of 'further escalation' but is hoping Pakistan will not retaliate and that by appearing tough, Modi will get some extra votes in the forthcoming elections.

In fact, this constant state of heightened tension and escalations is in no one's interest. Pakistan knows this very well and has been extending a hand of friendship to India. Prime Minister Imran Khan has also repeatedly done so. However, a mere wish is not enough to bring about peace. What is really needed is drastic change of attitude on both sides.

Without a satisfactory solution of the Kashmir problem, an environment of trust cannot be built between India and Pakistan. It is not enough for both countries just to 'wish' the Kashmir problem away. They have to adopt a realistic approach and take hard decisions to make that happen. Analysed, in a realistic and non-emotional manner the Kashmir problem entails:

1] Pakistan cannot snatch Kashmir from India, and even if it made a dash and occupied some territory, it would not be able to hold on to it for long.

2) There is no way India will loosen its grip on Kashmir on its own or even under pressure from resistance movements, since it is prepared to go to any extent. Unfortunately, the influential countries which could possibly pressurize India to behave, seem to have put their conscience to sleep and are no longer bothered about Kashmir.

3) In the light of point 2, there is simply no possibility of the international community to pressurize India to accede to the Kashmiris' demand for freedom or merger with Pakistan.

So the solution for Kashmir has to be found, keeping clearly in mind and accepting the fact that the geographical boundaries and controlling powers for the two Kashmirs will remain what they are now.

Without a satisfactory solution of the Kashmir problem, an environment of trust cannot be built between India and Pakistan.

All that is possible is to bring some relief to the Kashmiris in the Indian-held territory so as to enable them to lead near-normal lives initially, gradually improving to normal within a reasonable time-frame.

As for Pakistan, it claims that it gives only moral support to the Kashmiris in the held territory. However, it has got to go a step further and stop indirectly 'encouraging' fighters in held Kashmir to rise against the Indian government, through such measures as strong statements or issuance of commemorative stamps on the martyrdom of Burhan Wani. While his spirit, and of other brave men like him, needs to be appreciated, one has to remember that there are very thin lines between courage and stupidity. That means one has got to realize sometimes that simply continuing a futile fight with absolutely no chance of victory, is pointless and only brings more grief to all concerned.

The other consequence of this militant approach is that relations between Pakistan and India keep worsening, giving India an excuse to do mischief in Balochistan and elsewhere in Pakistan, apart from making the solution of problems between the two neighbours yet more difficult or even impossible.

Avoiding heroics and theatrics and adopting a realistic and constructive approach is the answer. S

The writer is a free-lance contributor with interest in regional, South Asian and international affairs.
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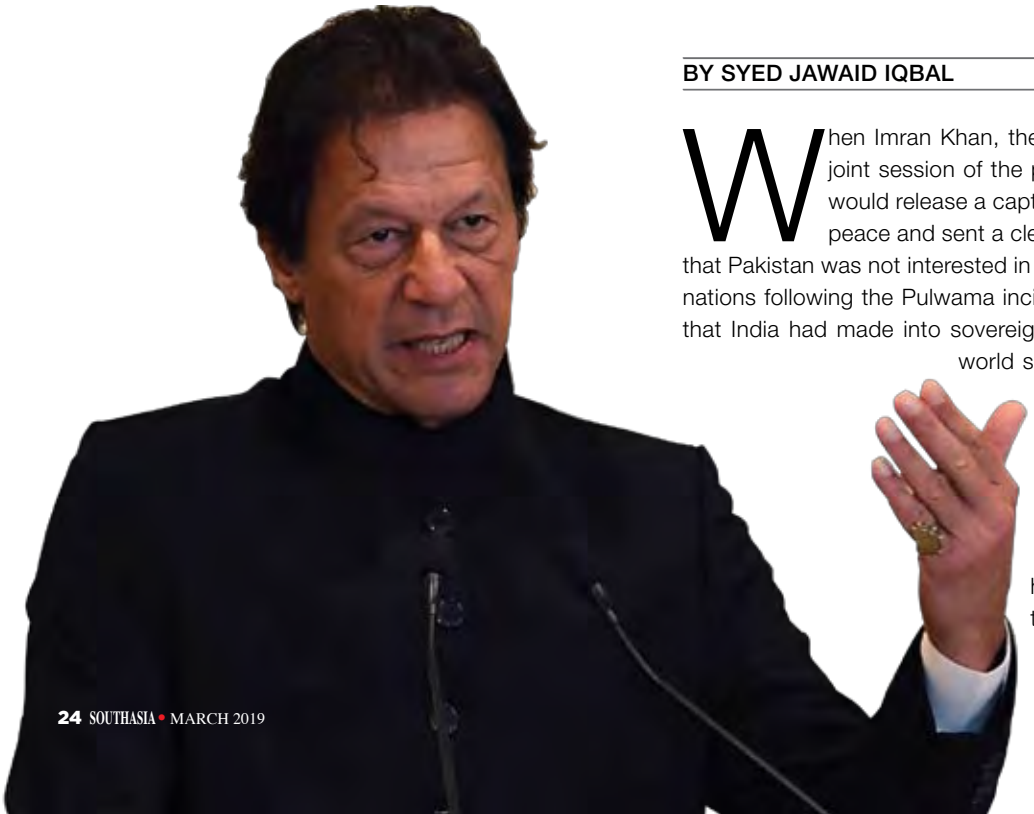
A PEACE GESTURE

Prime Minister Imran Khan displayed true statesmanship when he agreed to release a captured Indian pilot. Will he be paid back in the same coin?



BY SYED JAWAID IQBAL

When Imran Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, informed a joint session of the parliament on February 28 that Pakistan would release a captured Indian pilot, the gesture was one of peace and sent a clear message to India – and to the world - that Pakistan was not interested in escalating the tensions between the two nations following the Pulwama incident on February 14 and the incursions that India had made into sovereign Pakistan air space subsequently. The world saw in Prime Minister Imran Khan a man who was sincere in taking Pakistan and India towards peace, progress and prosperity and was not interested in bogging down the two countries in a mire of endless confrontation.

Relations between India and Pakistan have never been good since 1947 when the two nations became independent

from the British. The departing rulers left behind a bone of contention – Kashmir - and the two neighbours have ever since bickered on the bone, with no solution in sight. South Asia is said to comprise a fifth of humanity and the nations of India and Pakistan, out of the eight countries that form SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), are the most populous. India has a population of some 1.3 billion while Pakistan has over 200 million inhabitants. Both nations have contiguous borders and both are nuclear armed.

India and Pakistan, after over 70 years of independence, have tried, though half-heartedly, to solve the Kashmir conundrum but have never succeeded. They have fought major wars on the issue and the central point of focus in the evolution of defence policies in both these underdeveloped nations continues to be Kashmir. In fact, both countries have developed nuclear capability based on the 'threat perception' from the other side and have funneled precious funds into their respective nuclear programmes besides developing other lethal weapons. This same money could have been spent more judiciously in improving the lot of the people. In both nations, the biggest quantum of funds is always allocated to defence spending. The state gets meagre money for development, which means that while other nations race ahead and their people progress, the populations of India and Pakistan, as well as their governments, suffer from an animus that has no immediate answers or explanations.

India and Pakistan can learn from recent history but it seems they suffer from a brute denial of realities and refuse to budge from their hardened positions. There is a lesson in the post-World War II Friendship Treaty between France and Germany which led to cooperation between the two countries and it was this thawing of relations that formed the basis of the European Union. The enmity between the USA and China was legendary. Then, in July 1971, President Nixon's National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger secretly visited Beijing during a trip to Pakistan and opened lines of communication between the two major nations. This is when China started opening its doors to the western world. On June 12, 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean Chairman Kim Jong-un met in Singapore. This was unthinkable earlier as, until not very long ago, North Korea had been described by the U.S. as part of an 'axis of evil'. Now more meetings are being held between the leaderships of the United States and North Korea and the political climate is improving.

India and Pakistan can learn from recent history but it seems they suffer from a brute denial of realities and refuse to budge from their hardened positions.

Over 40 Indian security personnel were killed on February 14 in Pulwama (Kashmir), when a suicide bomber drove an explosives-laden car into their convoy. Without thinking of its own continued atrocities in Kashmir and the desperation of the Kashmiri people, New Delhi immediately started blaming Islamabad for the attack and threatened a retaliatory attack. It also announced that it would launch a diplomatic offensive to isolate Pakistan in the international community. In response, Prime Minister Imran Khan promised to conduct an investigation if New Delhi could provide "actionable evidence" but also warned that Pakistan would retaliate suitably, if attacked.

It may be emphasized here that despite fighting many wars, India and Pakistan have also been engaged in peace negotiations over the past decades. All the same, both overt and covert talks between the two countries have never reached fruition because of the war-mongering mentality of certain elements on both sides. The climate of recent confrontation between India and Pakistan is a product of the escalation that currently suits the BJP's election prospects. It needs to be realized, however, that political expediency achieves nothing except vitiating peace and blocking development and progress. Prime Minister Imran Khan has extended a hand of friendship to India and has said: "You take one step, we will take two." In this age, no two nations can even think of an all-out nuclear confrontation. Any conflict between India and Pakistan could take a turn for the worst. It is important that these two major nations choose peace as their only option – and work towards it with sincerity, rather than getting involved in a war which would lead to nothing but mutually assured destruction and the reverberations of which would shake the whole world. Prime Minister Imran Khan has made a good beginning by releasing the IAF pilot. Will better counsels prevail? S

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WAR OR PEACE?

While Pakistan's armed forces are always ready to combat any act of aggression, it is the politicians in both India and Pakistan who must set their directions towards peace.

BY DR. MUHAMMAD ALI EHSAN

Air space violations are bad - yet they are avoidable and in a sense understandable and forgivable. But when air space is violated on purpose and utilized to engage targets in a rival country's territory, then the intent and purpose of these violations comes under scrutiny and is termed as ill-chosen because the intruding aircraft commit an act of aggression and the targeted country retains the right to respond in self-defence in the face of such aggression.

The Indian aircraft that violated Pakistan's air space and 'dropped their payload' in haste before returning did something worse – they reinforced and hardened the military realization and assumption that the Indians were testing the political and military resolve of Pakistan. If Pakistan did not show its deep-set commitment to defend its territorial integrity and sovereignty by responding, this would surely be taken as a sign of weakness and only embolden the Indian military to commit further violations and attempt to engage other targets. Pakistan waited and, in line with 'strategic patience,' that both its political and military leadership had been demonstrating since the beginning of the 'Palwamma tragedy,' only cautioned India that it retained the right to self-defence and that 'we will also surprise you but in a different way'.

The mood in the country was apprehensive and the nation as a whole felt deeply aggrieved on the act of Indian aggression. That Pakistan's air defence and air force could not respond to India's aggression raised 'many civilian eyebrows' about the professional competence and capability of the country's armed forces. Soldiers are always fixated with the enemy; civilians get obsessed when hostilities break out. But the good thing is that external aggression unified the Pakistani nation and all political differences were set aside to give a matching response to the Indian aggression.

On 6th April 1991, Shahayar M. Khan, the foreign secretary of Pakistan and Mukhund Dubey, the foreign secretary of India, signed in New Delhi an agreement for prevention of air space violations between the two countries. Ideally, if strategic and military assets are close to the hearts of the military leadership - agreements and deals should be the politicians' best kept assets because when deals and agreements are violated, politics fails and the onus of the failure lies on the shoulders of the political leadership.

One military lesson that the Americans have taught to the whole world is that in fighting the war on terror, the machines in the air are more effective than the boots on ground. It were such two Indian machines that carried out deliberate violation of Pakistan's air space. To understand the changed air threat spectrum faced by Pakistan, it is important to look at the current military strategies of the two leading

armies of the world that wholly rely on the use of drones and military aircraft as tools of extended military reach beyond borders.

First is the American military strategy of 'deterrence by punishment' which is used to 'reach out and hit before being hit'. In the second instance, IDF's (Israel Defence Forces) militarism policy of 'reprisals are the surest way to restore deterrence'.

India, which considers itself a regional hegemon, also wants to replicate these strategies. The IAF (Indian Air Force) has no doubt the capability and the capacity to execute these military strategies – a point proven by its air violation that went unchecked. Yet Pakistan is no Iraq, Syria or Lebanon, nor is it Afghanistan. It can get tough and stop any military machine or military aircraft from intruding its air space. This was proven by Pakistan when it downed the two Indian fighter aircraft violating the country's air space in an air combat the very next day.

Unfortunately, for Pakistan the simple act of engaging military aircraft violating its air space will be seen by the international community less as an act of self-defence and more 'an overreaction' that could have been avoided. The military temperature in the region is on the rise. The chances of miscalculations are increasing by the hour. Prime Minister Modi is Asia's new Hitler and unless the world community does not wake up and rein him in, he may lead the world to the edge of another military catastrophe.

It's not by sending jets to Pakistan that India can set its western neighbour's direction in future. It is instead by sending goodwill messages of peace and cooperation that it can contribute in developing an enabling environment for both countries to coexist as good neighbours.

If peace is to return to the South Asian region, it is the politicians who should be putting their heads together and conferring about possibilities of compromises and peace – not military leaders drawing attention to the mounting threats and the growing prospects of war. An armed confrontation in the end is a political act and politicians need to find a solution to the growing military tensions before it is too late. S

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BEYOND BRINKMANSHIP

It seems South Asia will always remain a troubled region. Both India and Pakistan need to pay attention to the voices of reason so that they can develop better bilateral ties.

BY TAHA KEHAR

Despite pleas for restraint from the international community, the unsettling standoff between India and Pakistan has taken a perilous turn in recent weeks and hampered peace initiatives. As the war rhetoric flows thick, the benefits of dialogue and good diplomacy appear to have taken a backseat in a tumultuous game of brinkmanship. Under these chaotic circumstances, both sides need to recognise the need for de-escalation and avert the danger of a nuclear war.

If viewed from the chronological aspect, the currently prevailing tensions have their roots in a deadly attack in Pulwama district of Indian Occupied Kashmir on February 14, which killed over 40 personnel of the Central Reserve Police Force (CPRF). The Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) claimed responsibility for the attack and Adil Ahmed, a local Kashmiri, was identified as the attacker.

The incident rekindled long-standing hostilities between both countries as India categorically accused Pakistan of being involved in the attack and extending support to proscribed terror outfits, such as the JeM. Pakistan fervently denied India's allegations. Addressing the nation on February 19, Prime Minister Imran Khan urged Indian authorities to share 'actionable intelligence' on Pakistan's involvement in the attack and offered to cooperate in any investigations in this regard. While the Prime Minister pledged to take action against any elements in Pakistan that were found to be responsible for the attack, he asked New Delhi to not pursue a senseless blame game. Imran Khan also warned Indian authorities that any military action from New Delhi will lead to a reprisal.

Over the next few days, Pakistan adopted a conciliatory posture and made concerted attempts to assuage its neighbour. On February 21, the Pakistan Prime Minister chaired a meeting of the National Security Committee where it was decided that action against proscribed terror outfits would be accelerated at all costs. On February 22, Pakistan reinstated its ban on two charities that were linked to JuD chief Hafiz Saeed – and that too against the backdrop of a stern warning from the FATF that the country had failed to do enough to curb terrorism financing. While these were, at best, cosmetic measures that would have limited implications in the long run, they demonstrated Pakistan's attempts to prevent a war-like situation in South Asia.

Amid these developments, India remained skeptical. New Delhi's allegations against Pakistan did not ebb and its posture remained aggressive. It found ways to chastise Pakistan through the imposition of trade restrictions, the revocation of the 'Most Favored Nation' status, and the threat to reduce the flow of water to Pakistan. Even Indian showbiz personalities joined the chorus with their nationalistic sentiments and anti-Pakistan rhetoric.

On February 26, India staged a surgical strike that involved Indian aircraft entering Pakistan. As per India's claims, a significant JeM camp near Balakot was targeted and 350 terrorists were killed. Pakistan's National Security Council convened an emergency meeting on the same day and declared India's account to be "fictitious, reckless and self-serving" as the only damage caused was to the trees in Balakot (the place is located in KPK) after the Indian Air Force warplanes dropped their payload in the region. ISPR DG Major General Asif Ghafoor also rejected India's claims and maintained that local and international journalists would be taken to the area to assess the extent of damage. In a press statement on February 26, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said that Pakistan reserved the right to retaliate as and when it deemed fit.

The situation took an unpredictable turn when Pakistan shot down two Indian fighter jets from its own side of the Line of Control and arrested an Indian Air Force pilot on February 27. In order to stave off a crisis, the Pakistani authorities hurriedly assured the other side that the pilot was being treated well. Later in the day, the ISPR DG and the Prime Minister made rational statements that drew attention to the ineffectiveness of war and the value of bilateral peace. In a similar vein, Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj indicated that India would be willing to avoid any further escalation and act with some semblance of restraint.

The prospects of a full-fledged nuclear war seem bleak but threatening and it is important that the significance of diplomacy and dialogue be duly emphasized. India and Pakistan have a turbulent history of war, limited conflicts, LoC violations and simmering hostilities. Soon after it came to power, the Narendra Modi-led BJP government in India consciously used the pre-existing tensions to its electoral benefit. This was seen in 2016 when the BJP government falsely claimed that it had carried out 'surgical strikes' in Pakistan mere months before crucial state elections were to be held in Uttar Pradesh.

At this critical juncture, India is weeks away from general elections that will determine the fate of a ruling party whose chances for re-election appear somewhat slim. In order to prevent any drastic electoral damage to the BJP, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is believed to have rekindled India-Pakistan tensions to divert attention from his government's perceived weaknesses in tackling the crisis in Kashmir and, thereby, secure his vote bank.

The challenges brewing between both countries have more to do with timing than any other consideration. According to some analysts, the Pulwama attack coincided with the arrival of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman in Islamabad, the ICJ hearing of Kulbhushan Jhadav's case and Pakistan's presentation at the FATF. Only time will tell if this dangerous game of brinkmanship will evolve into a thirst for diplomacy or produce unrest in South Asia. Until then, it is the voice of reason that ought to guide all discourse on bilateral ties between India and Pakistan. S

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Saudi-Pakistan ties greatly benefit both nations

BY SHAUKAT AZIZ

Editor's Note: *This article was published in the Arab News on February 17, 2019. The visit of the Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman to Pakistan took place on Feb 17 and 18, 2019. While the article mentions the close ties that exist between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, it also focuses on how the Crown Prince proposed to carry these ties forward as a result of his visit.*

As Crown Prince Mohammed begins his historic first visit to Pakistan, in which he is expected to address the nation, it is important to reflect on bilateral ties and how they can be deepened and broadened to become a true game-changer.

For decades, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have enjoyed a strong and close holistic friendship. Whenever Pakistan has faced challenges, Saudi Arabia has stood shoulder to shoulder and helped financially and diplomatically. For Pakistanis, the Kingdom holds immense cultural and religious importance. The presence of Makkah and Madinah makes Saudi Arabia one of the most significant countries in the Islamic world. Pakistanis, and Muslims in general, have a special reverence for the Kingdom and its leadership, and many Pakistanis visit every year for pilgrimage and other religious activities.

With the expansion of the Two Holy Mosques, a valuable contribution to the Muslim Ummah continues to be made. This has been one of the most massive construction projects in history, inspiring in both its scale and ambition, and I have witnessed the difference that has been made to the experience of making pilgrimage there. The two holy sites are now a feat of logistics, with a high-speed rail link and other ambitious infrastructure under construction that will allow it to accommodate 2 million people for several weeks a year. Other countries can learn much from such a wide-reaching development, which brings benefits not only for the Saudi people but for the whole region.

Politically, Saudi Arabia is one of the most significant countries in the Middle East, considered by many to be the voice of the Muslim world. King Salman, who is also Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, has an important global role to play, and has already demonstrated the ability to work with major powers to solve issues and challenges. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia already cooperate both bilaterally and through the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which is headquartered in the Kingdom. However, there is more the two countries could aim to do together in the field of global diplomacy. The role of the OIC and the Islamic Development Bank can be broadened to play a stronger role in both inter-Muslim cooperation and between the Islamic world and other faiths.

The Crown Prince has undertaken a notable program of structural and social reforms in Saudi Arabia, which

are already having a transformative effect. Since I first lived there while working as managing director of the Saudi-American Bank (Samba), I have seen the Kingdom change substantially. The banking sector has really developed into a modern and reformed business. In the energy sector, several industrial complexes have been set up to process hydrocarbons. There has been substantial economic growth and the country's infrastructure has developed substantially, with two newer cities, Jubail and Yanbu, becoming models of industrial growth for the world. There is also potential for expansion in tourism, culture and other new areas of economic activity, which can create jobs and further economic growth.

Pakistan can benefit from the reforms that the Crown Prince has already brought in, as well as those that are planned. For example, as the Saudi economy expands, it will require more manpower. The Kingdom is already one of the biggest employers of Pakistani expatriates — there are more than a million Pakistanis living and working there in all sectors and at all levels, from management positions to construction workers. For example, one of the first governors of the Kingdom's central bank, Anwar Ali, was a Pakistani who played a significant part in initially developing the country's banking system. Looking ahead, Pakistan could become a major supplier of engineers and other workers for the development being undertaken in Saudi Arabia.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit continues a long history of friendship, with promise for the future.

– Shaukat Aziz

Pakistan could also benefit from the expertise, technology and research that are being advanced in Saudi Arabia thanks to the new reforms. In recent years, the Kingdom has taken steps to improve its infrastructure, expand its education system and gradually move toward having a more open environment, while continuing to respect Islamic values and traditions. The country has an active program for its youth to study both locally and abroad. Universities such as the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology are truly world-class, and attract professors from across the globe. Exporting to Pakistan the knowledge that has come with carrying out these developments and reforms — particularly in infrastructure and education — would greatly benefit its people.

Historically, there have been close military links between our two countries: Pakistan provides the Saudis with training and advisers, while the armies, navies and air forces of the two nations collaborate in joint exercises. The number of joint exercises and training programs carried out by the two countries could increase to further strengthen bilateral ties, and contribute to regional stability. Reinforcing security cooperation and redoubling our joint efforts against terrorism are also necessary.

In recent years, Pakistan has been undergoing a significant program of investment in its infrastructure, largely as part of China's Belt and Road Initiative. It has seen the development of Pakistan's roads, railroads, ports and digital highways, and has been a significant boost to the country's connectivity. There are a number of investment opportunities for Saudi entrepreneurs in Pakistan, which can be a significant market for the Kingdom's private sector. Pakistan already has the labour supply and raw materials, including energy resources, but could benefit from Saudi expertise. Energy presents a particular opportunity for investment, from traditional sources to developing alternative energy projects.

The upcoming visit has the potential to offer a blueprint for a bright future of cooperation. While historically there have been many examples of strong ties and commonality of interests between the two countries, there are still many opportunities to bring them closer together. During this visit, the crown prince and Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan will be able to set the tone for how this historic relationship can progress.

When I recently met with the Crown Prince, we discussed these topics and the need for the Ummah to focus on growth. I am optimistic that Saudi Arabia will work toward building even closer ties with Pakistan. Linkages and interdependencies are the true safeguards of peace, progress and prosperity. S

The author was prime minister of Pakistan from 2004 to 2007, following five years as finance minister from 1999.

NEW DELHI

Pre-election Tricks

The Bharatiya Janata Party is conferring high civil awards on politicians to lure them before the elections.

BY S. G. JILANEE

Politics is a game of gimmicks to garner votes. And, like in love and war, all is fair in politics. In the past, the ploy commonly used for the purpose was to favour political leaders having a substantial following, with licences and permits and contracts in state-run projects. But having become almost routine, the practice is now trite and has shed much of its lure.

Fertile brains in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), therefore, retrieved an old ploy that had been gathering dust due to less frequent use, cleaned it and honed it for its purpose. Appropriately, it is called, "Award politics."

Recently, the BJP conferred India's highest civil award, Bharat Ratna on former President Pranab Mukherjee, besides the late Assamese singer Bhupen Hazarika and the late social activist and RSS veteran Nanaji Deshmukh.

Shiv Sena was roiled because BJP, though its alliance partner, did not announce Bharat Ratna for late Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a freedom fighter who is also known as Veer Savarkar.

A sizzling editorial in Shiv Sena's mouthpiece Saamana also lashed out at the BJP for conferring the Bharat Ratna on former President and senior Congress leader Pranab Mukherjee, while Sanjay Raut, executive editor of Saamana and Rajya Sabha member, asked in a tweet, "Who exactly has got Bharat Ratna? Today, Nanaji Deshmukh, Bhupen Hazarika and Pranab Mukherjee were made Bharat Ratna. 'Kaala paani' for Savarkar yet again."

Meanwhile, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's sister Gita Mehta has declined to accept the Padma Shri award, raising eyebrows over lack of political foresight on part of the BJP leadership. For example, though the Union government recommended names of former President Pranab Mukherjee, Bhupen Hazarika and Nanaji Deshmukh for the coveted Bharat Ratna, it clearly ignored legendary leader Biju Patnaik, along with his reputation and leadership stature. The denial of the honour to him is seen as mostly being due to political reasons.

When the BJP formed the government with a majority in 2014, the people of Odisha were expecting that Biju will certainly get the honour he deserved for so long.

However, Biju Patnaik, though a noted freedom fighter, once again became a victim of injustice despite contributing to the security of the country during the war with China in 1962 and India's war with Pakistan in 1965.

Biju Patnaik's role due to which Jammu Kashmir joined India, is well-known as it was Biju who carried VK Krishna Menon to Kashmir in his plane and convinced Raja Hari Singh to keep Jammu and Kashmir with India. Former Odisha Minister Damodor Rout revealed this when the Odisha Legislative Assembly in 2015 passed a resolution for giving Bharat Ratna to Biju.

Moreover, during the 1965 war with Pakistan, the then Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri sought Biju's help to ensure that Indonesian naval warships did not come to the assistance of Pakistan and Patnaik used his personal relations with President Sukarno to stop Indonesia's warship movement.

The list of Biju's contributions is long. However, the BJP government preferred to ignore the veteran freedom fighter.

Observers are of the view that if the BJP government had recommended the name of Biju Patnaik for this year's Bharat Ratna, the peoples' mood towards the Party could have been quite favourable in this election year because people love him.

However, BJP leaders at the helm failed to read the people's mood in Odisha and quietly ignored their beloved leader.

On the other hand, it has been reported

Pranab Mukherjee, Former President of India.

Bhupen Hazarika, Indian playback singer.

that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a 90-minute discussion with Gita Mehta and her husband before recommending her name for the Padma Shri award. But Mehta, the worthy daughter of Biju and elder sister of Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, humbly declined to accept the Padma Shri award, saying the intent behind it would be misconstrued in an election year.

It is being debated in political circles that the purpose of recommending Gita's name has been defeated. Had it been Biju instead of his daughter, the people of Odisha would have been very happy.

Meanwhile, former Minister and Prime Minister Modi's close aide, Dilip Ray has also criticized the central government for denying the Bharat Ratna to Biju.

Award politics is, however, not exclusive to the BJP. It has been used in the past as well. For example, the award of Bharat Ratna to M.G. Ramachandran in 1988 was widely seen as a cynical political move ahead of an election in Tamil Nadu. A promise to confer the Bharat Ratna on Madan Mohan Malaviya was made by Modi during the 2014 campaign and he fulfilled it soon after coming to power.

The choice of former President Pranab Mukherjee for the country's highest civilian honour has assumed a political overtone and triggered a debate on the yardstick being applied for the awards. Coming ahead of the general elections, the NDA government's move to honour a veteran Congressman has raised questions over its intentions. The selection appears to have been guided by considerations of political messaging with an eye on the approaching polls. The intention seems to be to touch the raw nerves of the Congress leadership as Mukherjee becomes the first Congress leader outside the Nehru dynasty to have been bestowed with the highest civilian honour.

The motive behind conferring Bharat Ratna on Mukherjee is interpreted widely as an attempt by the BJP to consolidate its support base in West Bengal. If so, it is a reflection of the sorry state of affairs in the country.

The timing of Gita Mehta's selection has raised eyebrows in political circles. It is no secret that the BJP has been trying to woo Patnaik who is maintaining a political distance both from the Congress and the BJP. Similarly, the choice to award Mukherjee appears to be in sync with the BJP's not-so-subtle attempts in the recent past to attract Congress icons. The saffron party wants to show that the Congress did not bother to reward the dyed-in-the-wool, party man for his contribution to party work and governance only because he did not kowtow to the first family. The choice of Assamese singer-composer late Bhupen Hazarika for Bharat Ratna can similarly be seen as an attempt to assuage the Assamese sense of identity against the backdrop of a wave of protests over the Citizenship Bill and the exit of Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) from the NDA.

This is the level to which the sanctity of the civil award has been diluted by political exigencies influencing the selection. In the initial years after Independence, the awardees were truly eminent personalities who contributed to the task of nation-building but the standards have been diluted since.

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ISLAMABAD

HOPE AND RESPONSIBILITY

Prime Minister Imran Khan can only deliver on his promises if he chooses the right man for the right job, lays a clear future path and ensures law and order.

BY AASMA WADOOD

Pakistan is passing through challenging times politically and economically. The rising prices of electricity and oil, increasing taxes, and the decreasing value of money have enhanced the pressure on the people. The situation is alarming and the people of Pakistan are eagerly waiting for a major breakthrough which the new government is struggling to deliver. Imran Khan is the third democratically elected prime minister in succession. This shows that democracy has successfully grounded itself in Pakistan over the last ten years.

The 2018 elections were different and unique as people voted for hope and change, with one of the highest voter turnouts - 55.8%. The PTI offered them a dream of corruption-free Pakistan, a better future, development opportunities, a better lifestyle, better education, protection, security, justice, equality, freedom of speech, - in short, a total transformation. Such hope was successfully triggered in the hearts and minds of the people. Young and old men and women came out and voted for the change. They voted for a better Pakistan. But after some six months of mounting economic and political challenges and incidents such as the one near Sahiwal, have the government reeling. Has it succeeded in keeping the hope alive and is the PTI government effectively shouldering the responsibility of that hope?

Change is the only constant in the world. Nevertheless, it always meets with resistance. Pakistan's society and systems have been subjected to chaos, insecurities, inequality and injustice for decades, imparting a lasting impact on its growth and development. In the past, people accommodated and accepted this chaos, insecurities, inequality and injustice as a part of their lives. They offered unconditional loyalties and commitment to their leaders. They trusted and followed the political leadership blindly. They never asked questions and the politicians never considered themselves answerable to anyone. It was unwise for any political leader in Pakistan to change that norm and provoke people to ask questions, seek answers and stand for their rights, irrespective of their political affiliations.

Imran Khan is leading from the front, working extra hours and going the extra mile to ensure that he and his government can make a difference.

In Imran Khan's 22 year long political struggle, he educated his followers to question the wrong and stand for the right. He has developed and maintained a direct connection with his supporters through the social media and other means. On a few occasions, he has changed his decisions, based on the opinion of the majority, which has indeed empowered the people, and their voice, forming the foundation of a new era of sustainable democracy in Pakistan. Such moves have been described as 'U-turns' on the part of his opponents and the media has made mindless use of the term, without analyzing why certain decision had to be changed.

The new geopolitical significance of Pakistan and CPEC are opening a new horizon of opportunities for the country. The government's performance on the diplomatic front is commendable. Pakistan is successfully connecting with its friends globally, reclaiming its lost position in the world. The PTI government's mini-budget was also regarded as a sign of hope in the grim economic situation in the country. The government is focusing on supporting local producers and this strategy can yield its full potential only if the government can ensure ease of doing business. The responsibility rests on the government to maintain focus and then plan and implement its strategy.

In this most challenging economic situation, Pakistan's friends such as China, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have come forward for the much-needed rescue. Moreover, the IMF can also be extremely effective in breaking the country free from the web of increasing taxes and oil and electricity prices. Even then, it is a long struggle for prosperity, including hardship, price pressures, inflation, etc. The government should focus on communicating with the people and educating them on the current situation as well as future challenges. It is critical to keep hope alive. It is notable though, that the information ministry has failed to highlight the government's achievements and avoid distraction.

Imran Khan is leading from the front, working extra hours and going the extra mile to ensure that he and his government can make a difference in the destiny of the country. However, the significance of team-building and delegation of authority cannot be ignored. Except for a few cabinet members such as Shah Mehmood Qureshi Asad Umar and Sheikh Rasheed Ahmad, the performance of other cabinet members can be described as below average with no prominent achievement in any sector.

Sustainable change is a gradual process. It needs time, planning and patience. Imran Khan enjoys the people's trust and is considered a custodian of their hopes. Addressing corruption is critical for Pakistan's development and success but it is not the only battle we are fighting. To buy time and to deliver the promised transformation, Imran Khan and his government have to do much more than the commitment they offer to eliminate corruption from Pakistan. It's time that more emphasis was placed on making the people's life easy and communicating with them about the potential economic challenges and possible solutions. Furthermore, an immediate and proactive effort is needed to ensure law and order in the country. Only then can Imran Khan and Pakistan succeed. S

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ISLAMABAD

THE DEBT TRAP

Pakistan needs to slash its budget deficit by mobilizing domestic resources and curtailing expenditures.

BY DR. AADIL NAKHODA

In recent years, there has been a surge in Pakistan's external debt. According to statistics obtained from the World Development Indicators (WDI), Pakistan undertook a borrowing spree from 2005 onwards, which saw its stock of external debts increase from $34 billion to $84.5 billion in 2017. External debt increased to $64.5 billion in 2011, a rise of approximately 90% between 2005 and 2011. Although, there was a slight decline to $58 billion in 2013, the stock regained its upward trajectory. The situation has resulted in chronic issues in the balance of payments. The creditworthiness of Pakistan has deteriorated, while the increasing pressure on foreign exchange reserves has been a major factor in the volatility of exchange rate today.

Although countries do accumulate external debt in order to finance various projects that require funds far greater than available domestically, the debt also has to be serviced through interest payments and principal repayments. The debt servicing on external debt for Pakistan was at $6.92 billion in 2013 and $6.74 billion in 2017. The figures include the principal and the interest payments. With exports at $21.9 billion in 2017, external debt servicing exceeded 30% of Pakistan's total exports.

The total external debt position as reported by the State Bank of Pakistan (considering slight differences with WDI data) was $96.7 billion on September 30, 2018, an increase from the position of $89.4 billion in December, 2017. Therefore, Pakistan had accumulated a debt of $7.3 billion in the nine months between December 2017 and September 2018. Once the recent financial instruments offered to Pakistan are accounted for, the amount of the country's gross external debt is likely to surpass the $100 billion mark. On the other hand, external debt servicing amounted to $4.48 billion (excluding short-term debt) in the first nine months of 2018. However, $5.52 billion was serviced in the first nine months of 2017. The difference was primarily due to the $1.6 billion more worth of principal paid in the first nine months of 2017.

The export receipts reported by the SBP in the first nine months of 2018 were approximately 10.7% higher than the export receipts for the same period in 2017. The cumulative import payments in FY18 were $7.3 billion more than the cumulative import payments in FY17. The trade deficit was $4.5 billion higher. Hence, the rise in import payments negated the increase in exports. The current account deficit in FY18 was approximately 50% greater than the current account deficit in FY17. However, in the first six months of FY19, the current account deficit has partially improved as remittances to Pakistan increased by approximately $1 billion over the same period in the first six months of FY18. Although, imports have declined in recent months, these are believed to be sensitive not only to global prices but also to the local demand of fuel and capital goods such as machinery, plant and equipment as well as transportation vehicles.

The biggest challenge that Pakistan faces is of its low exports. With less than $22 billion exported from Pakistan (approximately 8 percent of the GDP) in 2017, the country will most likely continue to struggle in terms of its current account. Although, remittances are able to cover the shortfall to an extent, increase in exports must be prioritized to tackle the current account deficit.

The change in the current tax regime, which is restricting business growth and creating an unfavourable business environment in Pakistan, is the need of the hour. The government has introduced the Finance Supplementary (Second Amendment) Bill 2019. Some of the incentives in the Finance Supplementary Bill 2019 were much needed. Incentives include reduction and removal of duties imposed on industrial inputs and smuggling-prone items. It also facilitates exporters by easing liquidity constraints and is likely to attract Greenfield investment by exempting sales tax on plant and equipment imported into the country.

The low value of exports from Pakistan results not only from the lack of diversification, even within the major sectors, but also due to the inability of the exporters to innovate and participate in production networks. In order to increase exports, a multi-pronged approach by the government and the exporters will be required.

First, the range of products within the more established exporting industries must be diversified. For instance, the textile industry has tremendous potential by diversifying its exports towards value added products, such as readymade garments and knitwear rather than exporting cotton yarn and fabric.

Second, the government must ensure that not only are tariffs lowered, the dependence of the FBR on custom duties to generate tax revenue is reduced as well. Tariffs tend to distort not only the costs of imported inputs that must be acquired to produce different varieties, reducing their overall competitiveness in the global market, but also increase prices in the output market. It is crucial that the 'Make in Pakistan' campaign is designed in favour of increasing exports rather than promoting import substitution.

Third, the Least Developed Countries Report 2018: Entrepreneurship for Structural Transformation by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) points out that entrepreneurial activity in developing countries is typically limited to imitation of low-value added products instead of innovation and creation of new products. Imitation of low-value-added products reduces the ability of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to export. The government must not only provide a viable business environment by easing the costs of doing business in Pakistan but also increase the knowledge of entrepreneurs regarding exporting activities. Therefore, export training programs for entrepreneurs should be promoted through universities, the HEC and relevant government institutions.

The increasing debt and its implications on debt servicing will require the government to undertake policies that are export-oriented. An optimistic 10% growth in exports each year for the next five years will propel exports past $35 billion in 2022. The debt burden can eventually be lowered by focusing on investment that is export-oriented. S

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KABUL

SEARCH FOR PEACE

Negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban and the assistance of other regional countries has renewed hope that the 17 year-old Afghan conflict could come to a close.

BY DR. MOONIS AHMAR

The dawn of 2019 reflects a perceptible breakthrough for peace in Afghanistan. First, it was a relative success which was achieved in Doha peace talks between the United States and the Taliban in which America indicated its intention to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan and the Taliban indicated they would not allow their country to be used against the U.S or its allies. Second was the Moscow conference on Afghanistan held in the first week of February which was attended by the Taliban leaders and the Afghan opposition groups, including the former Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

In both cases, positive developments were expected in Afghanistan because change in the approach of the Taliban in the post-U.S withdrawal period was evident. President Donald Trump also asserted that because of 'conflict fatigue' the warring groups in Afghanistan, including the Taliban, wanted an end to fighting and this made sense.

In his State of the Union speech on February 5, the U.S. President expressed optimism about ending the war in Afghanistan as he asserted that "my administration is holding constructive talks with a number of Afghan groups, including the Taliban, weighing a possible political solution to this long and bloody conflict. As we make progress in these negotiations, we will be able to reduce our troops from that war zone. Great nations do not fight endless wars."

Alarmists raise their concerns and suspicions about the manner in which President Trump wants to pursue an 'exit strategy' in Afghanistan. That is the reason why 70 U.S. senators voted against the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan and made it clear that such a move will give an impetus to those terrorist groups who want to use that country as their sanctuary. It is also argued by critics that the ostensible conciliatory posture of the Taliban spokesman Sohail Shahin in the Doha and Moscow

meetings, assuring the world that after the withdrawal of foreign forces, they will ensure that Afghanistan was not used against the United States or any other foreign country, needs to be tested. In the recently-held Moscow conference he made it clear that, "as the first step, we want all the foreign forces to leave and end the military presence in our country. After ending their military presence, their non-military teams can come and take part in the reconstruction and development process." Surprisingly, the Afghan Taliban are not demanding a majority share in power in the proposed provisional government and they have also assured better treatment of women.

The way forward in Afghanistan is, however, an uphill task because of four main reasons. First, the prevailing triangular trust deficit which exists between the United States, the Taliban groups and the Afghan government on matters of peace in the war-torn country. The Afghan government and the United States had not participated in the Moscow conference because of their resentment that Russia was using the forum to expand its own role and influence in Afghanistan. The Afghan government is suspicious of the Taliban's moderate face and is not willing to be bypassed in any future agreement for peace.

Commenting on President Trump's State of the Union speech and his reference to Afghanistan, Haroon Chakansuri, a spokesman for the Afghan presidential palace, said the speech 'reflected the essence of the Afghan government's strategic partnership with Washington. The U.S is our strongest ally and the Afghan government is working with it to eliminate the threat of terror that threatens Afghanistan, the U.S., the region and the international community." Furthermore, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, commenting on the Moscow conference, said "The Moscow conference is nothing more than a fantasy. No one can decide without the consent of the Afghan people." How the 'trust deficit' is to be reduced among the three major stakeholders for peace in Afghanistan is yet to be seen.

Second, it is not just the Taliban, the foreign forces and the Afghan government who want peace in Afghanistan. In that country there are countless warlords and other groups who will destabilize any agreement reached for a durable peace if their interests are not served. Within the Afghan government, the non-Pashtun and even Pashtun groups may not feel at ease about sharing power with the Taliban. It is a stark reality that the Taliban past is a major stumbling block as far as peace and normalization is concerned. How can the Taliban remove their historical baggage which still looms large as their repressive and suppressive mode of governance and intolerance vis-a-vis. minorities, while they were in power from 1996-2001 is a big question? The Taliban also know that Afghanistan today is different than what it was in 2001 and they cannot take the country back to the past.

Furthermore, if the will of the people is central to the Taliban, then they should become part of a political process and register themselves as a political party to contest future elections. Merely by carrying out terrorist acts targeting non-combatants, the Taliban cannot gain the support of the common Afghan. Why are the Taliban not willing to support a democratic and constitutional mode of governance is not difficult to comprehend. In the Taliban ideology, there is no space for political pluralism as they adhere to a very parochial version of Islam. In that case, they are a misfit in the post-September 2001 political order in Afghanistan which is multi-party and is based on elections.

Third, one needs to be mindful about Indo-Pak conflicts and their implications on Afghanistan. For a long time, Pakistan has been complaining of Indian interference in the affairs of Pakistan, particularly in Balochistan, through its network in Afghanistan by providing assistance to Baloch 'insurgent' groups. The two neighbours are blamed for their proxy war in Afghanistan as Pakistan firmly believes that India has used the space it got in the post-9/11 war on terror to promote anti-Pakistan feelings in Afghanistan.

The role of the neighbours of Afghanistan, particularly Pakistan, Iran, China and Uzbekistan, is fundamental for peace in that country. The way forward in Afghanistan cannot be gauged unless a consensus is formed among Afghanistan's neighbouring countries for peace in that volatile land. Most importantly, it is the Afghans who should be mindful of the necessity of peace in their country because, for the last 41 years, their country is in a perpetual state of instability, chaos, disorder, violence and wars, resulting in migration, displacement, casualties and injuries to millions of people. The warring Afghan groups and other segments of Afghan society must develop a realization that enough is enough and they need to cooperate on a one-point agenda to establish peace and stability in their country. A smooth sailing of the current peace initiatives can only be ensured by agreeing on complete cessation of hostilities, non-use of force, national reconciliation, tolerance, adherence to the rule of rule and good governance.

Finally, quite wisely, Russia has taken advantage of the power vacuum in Afghanistan by arranging back-to-back conferences involving different stakeholders. From 1979 to 1989, around 100,000 Soviet forces have fought pitched battles with Mujahedeen groups supported by Pakistan, the United States and its allies. But, as there are no permanent enemies or permanent allies in national or global affairs, the adversaries of yesterday are partners today and Russia has offered mediation between the United States and the Taliban for peace in Afghanistan. The Moscow conference no doubt gave enormous space to the Taliban who were once hated by Russia. The Northern Alliance, which is anti-Taliban, was firmly backed by Moscow but the paradigm shift in Moscow's approach vis-à-vis the Taliban has taken place in the recent past.

In essence, it will be the people of Afghanistan who will be responsible for the present and future of their country. Instead of blaming others for their destruction and ordeals, the Afghans should take on the responsibility of pulling out their country from the vicious cycle of violence and war by agreeing to establish mutual trust, tolerance and accommodation. Only then can they save their present and future from sustained disorder. S

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DHAKA

DEMOCRACY TO DICTATORSHIP

Poverty and corruption in Bangladesh is hidden behind a façade of development which is restricted only to the city of Dhaka while people in the country suffer from abject poverty.

BY SABRIA CHOWDHURY BALLAND

"Men are so simple and yield so readily to the desires of the moment that he who will trick will always find another who will suffer to be tricked."

–The Prince (1532), by Niccolo Machiavelli.

On December 30, 2018, Sheikh Hasina Wajed achieved her third consecutive win in the 11th general parliamentary election of Bangladesh. Her "landslide victory," as it has been labeled by many media, can be considered so only at the expense of the integrity and intellect of the 170 million Bangladeshis, not to mention the international community.

The preparations for the elections began at least in February 2018 with the arrest of the leader of the Bangladesh National Party (BNP), Khaleda Zia. The BNP, although in a state of limbo and rendered defenceless since the election of 2014 when it boycotted the elections, is the largest opposition to Sheikh Hasina's Awami League.

The arrests did not cease there. Countless members of the BNP and its supporters had been arrested, tortured and some killed, thus creating an atmosphere of terror and taboo associated with it. In fact, no one was allowed to question, let alone demonstrate any criticism of the Awami League, Sheikh Hasina and her family.

Every few days on the media one heard of and read reports of a Bangladesh with a booming economy, a Next 11 country according to Goldman Sachs, the country which will reportedly surpass even China in garments production. The image of Bangladesh projected to the outside world and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's primary rhetoric is development and progress.

The world sees a Bangladesh with skyscrapers, multiple bridges and highways, a metro rail system in the pipeline, industries, shopping malls, nuclear power plants and even a satellite. While this is all a reality, the international community, the donors and the investors see only the aspects Sheikh Hasina's administration wants them to see. Just as foreign "election observers" were only shown the polling stations that the ruling party wanted to take them to, similarly, an image was given of a Bangladesh which the ruling party wanted to project to the international community. The reality of the situation presented a stark contrast to the lustrous facade of development and socio-economic progress.

To begin with, Bangladesh has already indebted itself to China to the amount of $24 billion and counting, over a period of 20 to 30 years. The Awami League government has at no point disclosed exactly how these colossal loans would be repaid. The first obvious thought that comes to mind is raising taxes on the scores of millionaires the country is said to be producing, all with a net worth of a minimum of $30 million. However, no such plans were ever announced. In fact, the reality is quite to the contrary.

The Awami League cronies who have over a period of no more than 10 years amassed wealth of epic proportions, are for the most part, tax exempted. Thus, it leaves a scenario where the loans and debts are left for the future generations to pay off. Would the government automatically deduct an amount from paychecks? What about the high rate of unemployment? Will Bangladesh be obliged to lease parts of the country, such as its ports, in attempts to repay the loans? Considering that $81 million have been hacked from the Bangladesh Bank in 2016 and all other state and private banks are equally in the red, who is to pick up the tab for this development? Moreover, the Washington-based Global Financial Integrity released a report stating that in the 11 years from 2005, $81.7 billion

were siphoned off from Bangladesh in illicit monetary transfers and money laundering. All these occurrences have been under the Awami League government's watch.

These are issues which have not been addressed and if Sheikh Hasina and her administration have a plan of reimbursement mapped out to reimburse China and other investor countries, it is not known to the people of Bangladesh.

These figures are very disturbing and astounding, given that the funds belonged to the hardworking people of Bangladesh, the same people who are so much more in need of hospitals, schools, universities, clean air, clean water, safe roads, etc. These are the people who have suffered atrocious human rights abuses and lost loved ones due to the Awami League's extra judicial killings. These are also the very people who were entirely stripped of their citizens rights and dignity, guaranteed to them by the constitution of Bangladesh because the Sheikh Hasina government denied them of their most basic rights on December 30, 2018 when they rigged the elections and declared themselves the winners.

Another aspect of the development course Bangladesh is on is that it is uniquely based in urban areas. Dhaka, being the epicenter of all economic activities, will benefit from the highways bridges, metro rails, etc. The rural areas and even semi-urban areas have been almost completely neglected. Furthermore, focusing almost entirely on Dhaka has industrialized it heavily but absolutely no concern has been placed on the environment, rendering Dhaka the second least livable city in the world, after Damascus in war-torn Syria.

The international think tank Transparency International Bangladesh has released a report which lists Bangladesh as the 13th most corrupt country in the world in 2018. The country drops several several notches from 17th in 2017. The numbers speak for themselves in light of the tremendous amounts of money disappearing or being transferred out of the country.

These factors beg the question to Sheikh Hasina: what is "development"? Bangladesh is faced with rampant corruption, poor air and water quality, high inflation, a complete lack of freedom of speech and expression and no opposition. When law enforcement, the Judiciary, the Election Commission, the military, the Anti-Corruption Commission, and every other entity has been politicized in favour of the ruling party, when the Prime Minister and her party declare an authoritarian government with a free pass to extra-judicial killings, disappearances, false lawsuits, corruption, etc. without the people's mandate, where is the "development"?

The "election" was nothing more than the prolongation of the status quo. Only Awami League cronies remain the elite in every sector of the corrupt government and top level military. The rest of the country still languishes in quasi-poverty, creating a vast level of income inequality.

The Bangladesh of Sheikh Hasina is therefore one of sharp contrasts. Simply put, the facade of development and progress with languishing poverty, the extreme disparity between social classes and the title of a progressive leaderership amongst gravely atrocious human rights violations, paint a very different picture. The sustainability of Sheikh Hasina's model of what is really an extremely autocratic rule is, in any logical terms, precarious. S

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COLOMBO

RIDING THE CREST

Ranil Wickremesinghe is back in the saddle as Prime Minister of Sri Lanka but Mahinda Rajapaksa is one political leader who, though occasionally down, is never altogether out.

BY S.G. JILANEE

Sri Lanka's politics are nothing without their most colourful personality, Mahinda Rajapaksa. Whichever side of the aisle of power he may be, he always leads, alternating between the offices of president, prime minister or leader of the opposition. Currently, he has assumed the latter role for the second time.

Earlier, he was the leader of opposition from March 2002 till he became prime minister in April 2004. He won the presidential election in November 2005 and was re-elected in 2010. Though Rajapaksa lost the 2015 presidential election, he remained as active in politics as ever. Meanwhile, President Maithripala Sirisena decided to get rid of Ranil Wickremesinghe and appoint Mahinda as prime minister in October 2018, when the grand-coalition came to an end.

Rajapaksa assumed the role of the leader of the opposition once again, a few days after he resigned as prime minister. In his present role he has replaced veteran Tamil leader of the main Tamil party R Sampanthan who held the position from 2015.

His appointment was announced by

Speaker Karu Jayasuriya in Parliament which met for the first time after the reinstatement of Ranil Wickremesinghe as prime minister that ended the "51-day" political standoff in the country.

Meanwhile, M A Sumanthiran of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and Rauff Hakeem of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress raised objections against Rajapaksa's appointment. They claimed that Rajapaksa has ceased to be a member of parliament because he had joined another political party recently. Rajapaksa, by obtaining the membership of the Sri Lanka People's Party (SLPP), left the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) from which he was elected to Parliament in 2015.

The recent power grab through the backdoor has tarnished the images of both Mahinda Rajapaksa and Maithripala Sirisena.

President Maithripala Sirisena, whose arbitrary actions plunged the country into an unprecedented political turmoil for nearly two months, reinstated Wickremesinghe as Prime Minister, after sacking him on October 26 and appointing former President Rajapaksa in his place.

In fact Sirisena was left with no other option following two separate decisions by the Supreme Court, which annulled his illegal moves. Yet, to keep his face, the president said he offered to reappoint Wickremesinghe as the prime minister because, he respects parliamentary traditions and democracy.

However, Rajapaksa's jumping to replace Wickremesinghe was seen by all and sundry as an attempt to seize power through the backdoor with the support of President Sirisena and thwarted by united resistance from concerned citizens, as well as the decisive votes in the legislature and unanimous rulings by the Judiciary. After clinging on stubbornly to power from October 26 for 51 days, Mahinda Rajapaksa terminated his illegitimate tenure as purported prime minister by signing a letter of resignation at his residence on December 15. Thereafter, on December 16, Ranil Wickremesinghe was sworn in by President Sirisena as Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, once again.

The rightful restoration of Ranil as Prime Minister has been welcomed by all those adhering to principles of constitutional democracy both nationally and internationally. The undignified exit of Mahinda and triumphant re-entry of Ranil has a fairy tale ring to it where everyone lives "happily ever after." But, real life is different from a fairy tale.

Nonetheless, the Sri Lankan political crisis too has had a happy ending due to the defeat of the anti-constitutional or extra-constitutional coup. The celebratory mood therefore is understandable. However, there is no room for complacency. The rightful return of Ranil Wickremesinghe is indeed most welcome but it cannot be regarded as a grand finale to the political crisis which is certain to continue in new forms and ways in the days to come.

Any 1987-like armed intervention by India in Sri Lanka's internal political turmoil is, however, ruled out, because, the earlier attempt proved to be a costly blunder. This was mainly due to the fact that India under-estimated the capability of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and over-estimated the capacity of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF).

A similar error of judgment applies to the situation in the aftermath of the recent political crisis. Mahinda Rajapaksa's political defeat has led to an under-estimation of the ex-president's political capability and popularity. Ranil Wickremesinghe's political victory has resulted in an over-estimation of the Prime Minister's political capacity and popularity.

For many years now there has been sustained propaganda that Ranil Wickremesinghe is a serial loser and that he will never be able to lead the UNP to overwhelming electoral success. As such, Ranil was projected as a political liability for his party. Even many stalwarts in the UNP bought into rival propaganda that Ranil would not be able to lead the party to victory at elections. In order to cover up their own shortcomings and deficiencies, some party members found it convenient to scapegoat Ranil as the cause for the party's decline. Even Wickremesinghe stepping down to facilitate the presidential candidacy of Sorath Fonseka and Maithripala Sirisena in 2010 and 2015 has not helped to dispel such doubts about Ranil's "unwinnability."

However, the recent power grab through the backdoor has tarnished the images of both Mahinda and Maithripala while the jaded image of Ranil Wickremesinghe has been re-furbished. The arbitrary and unfair manner in which he was removed and replaced as Prime Minister made people of different backgrounds rally around Ranil and engage in a protest. In spite of Wickremesinghe's perceived faults and deficiencies, he became the symbol of the people's resistance movement. This has enhanced his political image to a great extent.

What the future may hold is unpredictable but currently Ranil rides the crest of a populist wave that has energized him with enhanced confidence. An ebullient Ranil is now planning to forge a new political front and seek a two-thirds majority in Parliament through early election. While his desire to seize the moment is quite understandable, there is every possibility that Ranil is misreading the situation and may be over-estimating the nature and extent of the political clout he enjoys right now. It would be a lethal error to overlook the political prowess of Mahinda Rajpaksa. S

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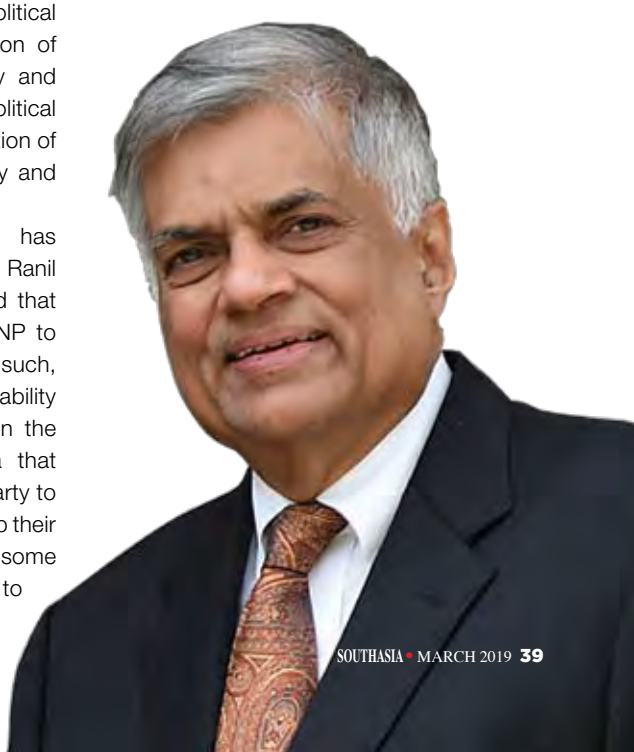

TEHRAN

PORT POLITICS

America has granted certain exemptions to the Chabahar Port despite unilaterally pulling out of its nuclear deal with Iran.

BY ATIF SHAMIM SYED

The Trump administration exempted the Iranian port of Chabahar from a new round of tough sanctions re-imposed on the Islamic Republic in November last year after the US unilaterally pulled out of the nuclear deal. The new round of sanctions explicitly targets Iran's energy and banking sectors seeking to minimize oil exports from the country.

In this context, the exemption afforded to the Chabahar Port may seem suspiciously generous. The US Department of State reasoned that the Chabahar exemption was granted in order to help land-locked Afghanistan. However, in reality, it may have been a bid to provide relief to India which has been developing the Iranian port for the past 15 years. India deems Chabahar as its strategic link towards Central Asia through Iran and Afghanistan.

The Chabahar Port or the 'Golden Gate' is situated on the Makran coast of Iran's Sistan-Balochistan province right at the mouth of the infamous Strait of Hormuz. It is the only Iranian port that boasts direct access to the Indian Ocean. Its proximity to land-locked Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan lends it great importance as a trade access point to these countries and the rest of Central Asia. In December 2018, India took over operations of the port.

Chabahar is located only 76 nautical miles from Pakistan's Gwadar port. India is currently stressing the economic benefits that can be reaped from Chabahar. However, the hasty development of the port coincides with the parallel development of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). India is openly hostile towards CPEC and sees the development of Gwadar port by China as an effort to gain strategic advantage in the Indian Ocean.

The sanctions granted by the US to Chabahar Port must not have come easily. It is a result of the Trump administration's policy for the region which deems India as a more trusted partner, and a stabilizing force against Chinese expansion. A major factor at play here may have been Chinese interest in Chabahar Port. A Chinese consortium reportedly visited the Iranian port and showed interest in placing investments there.

The Americans were further alarmed in March last year when Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, on his visit to Islamabad, hinted about handing over the development of Chabahar Port to China. Iran was apparently unhappy with the slow pace of Indian progress on the port. After more than a decade, India had nothing concrete to show the Iranians apart from being able to ship some wheat to Afghanistan through the strategic gateway. The reason behind sloppy Indian operations is its private sector's reluctance to make heavy investments in the port owing to the ever-present threat of US sanctions.

The US is aware that the Iranians are getting impatient with India's laid back attitude. They might turn to China which has shown great resilience in building the CPEC which connects southwestern China with Gwadar. Moroever, China's overall budget for the CPEC comes to around $50 billion. India's expenditure commitment for Chabahar is $500 million – a paltry sum in comparison. The US feared that if sanctions exceptions were not granted to the Chabahar Port, Indian investors will back out of the project, and it will fall into Chinese hands thus providing the country control of two extremely strategic ports in a strategically important region.

A look back at history would reveal that one of the reasons for America's covert assistance to Afghan rebels against Soviet invaders during the late 1970s was the Red Army getting dangerously close to the Strait of Hormuz through which the better part of the world's entire crude oil passes daily. American strategists are facing the same dilemma again. If China takes hold of Chabahar, it will come very close to the Strait of Hormuz – just 640 kilometers. Control of both Gwadar and Chabahar will also provide China with unchallenged access to the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. Such a scenario was not acceptable to the Americans. Granting sanctions relief to the port was the only option that allowed India to remain in the picture.

For Iran, Chabahar will not only pay economic dividends, it will also provide the Islamic Republic with leverage between two competing rivals in South Asia. It will offer an alternative shipping route to Iran which currently banks on hubs in the Persian Gulf. A thriving port in Sistan-Balochistan will help develop the impoverished province, paving the way for economic improvement of the masses in the restive region.

For the Americans, it was much more practical to tender a token exemption to India rather than letting China take control of a strategically important port. A slight concession in sanctions has not only kept China away from Chabahar but has also given America's new friend, Modi something to boast about during his election campaign. S

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KIEV

SPARKS OF CHANGE

The Ukrainian Presidential Elections will enable the country to eradicate pervasive corruption, tackle an unreformed and slow-growing economy and pursue peace.

(From left to right) Volodymyr Zelensky, Svyatoslav Vakarchuk, Yuriy Boiko, Oleh Lyashko, Yulia Tymoshenko and Petro Poroshenko.

BY SYEDA DHANAK FATIMA HASHMI

The Ukrainian people had made historic choices for independence, democracy and the free market more than a quarter century ago, but they have only partially achieved their vision of a fully democratic and prosperous state. Ukraine is undoubtedly an established political entity with internationally recognized sovereignty, widespread corruption and regressive political cycles. Moreover, Russian occupation, military aggression, hybrid warfare and a subsequent economic recession, have hampered its democratic and free market development.

Ukraine emerged as a very pluralistic but volatile democracy after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In the 1990s, the political system of the country evolved along two parallel lines that combined the liberal democratic facade and the power and resources of the post-Soviet oligarchy.

There were two revolutionary cycles, in 1992–2004 and 2005–2014. The cycles were soon replaced by simulated democracy that was driven mainly by oligarchic competition and subsequently by authoritarian consolidation, leading to civic protests and possible regime changes, which reset the cycle. The cycles have inhibited the transition from the Soviet to a fully democratic state of Ukraine.

Whether Ukraine's democratic development will set on a sustainable road following Euromaidan 2014, closer political and economic association with the European Union (EU) or on the Donbas war depends on the upcoming elections. There are numerous reasons to hope for the best, but the sustainability of present reform efforts and democratic politics is also a cause for serious concern. A number of key dichotomy areas have been addressed to the constitutional order of the post-Soviet Ukraine: Presidentialism versus Parliamentarianism, power centralization versus local self-government and institutionalized democracy versus persistent clan politics.

The present scenario of a presidential election campaign for Ukraine is shaping up to be, if anything, a big show. Ukraine has a hybrid presidential-parliamentary system which makes governance tricky. However, a presidential election on March 31, 2019, followed by parliamentary balloting later in the year, will examine whether the country's institutions and leaders are keeping pace with the people's desire for change or not. The level of change made in recent years since the 2014 Euromaidan revolution forced the regime of Viktor Yanukovych to flee to Russia.

The electorate's central concerns are the ongoing Donbas war launched by Russia, the economic welfare of the country and the level of corruption. However, the electorate must also pay heed to countering Kremlin interference for ensuring the stability and unity of the country. A realistic assessment of Ukrainian economic reforms over the last four years is indispensable. It is certainly incorrect to suggest that "nothing has changed" as it is evidently witnessed that a number of key factors have been taken forward. These include the price of natural gas for the market, reducing budget deficits, stabilizing national debt, decentralization of power to the local level, visa-free travel to the European Union, the establishment of anti-corruption institutions, changing procurement processes, the enhanced VAT refund system, changes to business regulation and the restructuring of the banking system. But, the future for dynamic economic growth is unfortunately lacking and cannot be ignored.

The administration has not been seriously involved in sinking corruption and in establishing a proper rule of law over the last four years. The evidence for Ukrainian citizens is abundantly clear and the current government has consistently appointed prosecutors who have not steered any significant prosecutions. In particular, the government has failed to bring known major oligarchs to justice, some of whom have obvious ties with Russia.

The reform of the Judiciary introduced by the administration was significantly derailed by the inclusion of judges with identified reputations of corruption, as assessed by independent observers. The police reform was stuck on the road patrols with little change in the system as a whole. The anti-

corruption institutions designed to address the problem have been constantly hindered in their operations by other levels of the judicial system, openly harassed and even infused with utterly corrupt officials. Civil society, which had remained vigilant and acted as a watchdog in exposing cases of corruption, has been attacked and beleaguered by the controlled media and police.

The implementation of the Asset Declaration System, cited by supporters as evidence of change, is a prime example of the management's thwarting of reforms. The objective of this system was to expose the illegal assets of high-level officials and politicians. The statements were, in fact, submitted and made public. However, the filings have not been seriously followed up and officials with clearly dubious assets have not been prosecuted. Worse still, the system was extended to require a leading anti-corruption filing by civil society. This extension was obviously a form of bullying, especially of activists.

The closure of many illiquid banks was also a frequently mentioned reform, but the public had been deeply deceived in the implementation of this policy. The state guaranteed funds to be paid to the depositors of those banks, which had failed. Simultaneously, there were very few efforts made to deal with the corrupt owners high-handedly. The most serious example of this would be the acquisition of Private Bank, the largest bank in Ukraine, whose oligarch owners have not been prosecuted and the public purse has lost about $4 billion (USD).

There is a disturbing lack of commitment to combating corruption and establishing rule of law over the past four years, and this is a major cause of electoral disappointment with the present administration. External observers, like Transparency International, say Ukraine continues to rank among the most corrupt nations of the world. Other institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and Western governments have repeatedly required progress on corruption as a condition for loans and assistance. Corruption is the sole reason that the flow of investment has been reduced to a lamentable level. It has undermined the country's budget and has damaged its pension, training or infrastructure capacity. It has allowed oligarchic interests to continue to prevail, leading to excessively regulated prices. Small and medium-sized enterprises have become less evolving. Even the resources allocated to the essential war efforts have resulted in misappropriation of funds.

Keeping in view these corruption issues, a credible and transparent election process can reinforce the democratic system where voters can assess candidates on the basis of credibility. The outcome of the 2019 elections will determine whether Ukraine will experience Orange instability or Euromaidan stability and progress. If Ukrainian voters choose the latter, Ukraine's European integration by 2024 will be irretrievable. If they go for the former, the end-result could be unpredictable. Candidates with cash, controlled media and administrative power would have great favour of the election system. Only if a candidate with personal integrity and commitment is selected as the leader will true reforms be achieved. In achieving this aim, it is essential for Ukraine to consolidate all democratic forces to improve public confidence by strengthening the electoral framework. S

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BY MANISH RAI

RAQQA

The Next Round

Despite the demise of its physical caliphate, the IS remains a battle-hardened and well-disciplined force whose "enduring defeat" has not been assured.

The ISIS caliphate had a population of 10 million people within its borders. It stretched across two countries, Iraq and Syria, and contained major towns and cities, oil fields, factories and dams and was roughly the size of Britain. But now ISIS has lost more than 99 percent of the territory it once held in Syria and Iraq. It has shrunk to a tiny pocket in Syria's eastern Deir Ezzor province, with its fighters holed up in the village of Baghouz Al-Fawqani near the Iraqi border.

There is a growing perception among the people that these are the last days of the Islamic State but many analysts and even the US intelligence community warns that the group will continue to be a long-term threat. While the caliphate in physical terms is about to be extinguished, the extremist group still has thousands of fighters in its ranks in Iraq and Syria. IS forces have largely melted away from towns and villages in the conflict zone rather than confront advancing Iraqi and Syrian forces. No significant top

leader of the ISIS has been captured or killed in recent offensives and this means that top ISIS leaders and strategists have left the areas uncontested and are preparing for the next phase of the war.

ISIS has its roots in insurgency. Since the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, its leaders have been waging an insurgency campaign against coalition forces in Iraq. Even with fewer resources at their disposal, now IS will be a deadly insurgent group as it takes much less resources to carry out terrorist/insurgent attacks rather than defending a territory. The insurgents were planning a long-term campaign for at least a couple of years, especially after losing Mosul. After the fall of the town, a group adopted the calculated strategy of withdrawing to conserve manpower and pivot away from holding territory to pursuing an all-out insurgency in the coming future. The reality is that since losing Mosul, the IS's most sizeable and symbolic territorial possession, the Islamic State has not fought to the last man and last bullet to maintain control of any other population centre.

Even more surprising was its retreat in areas long believed to be its strategic bases - the borderlands of Iraq and Syria and the Euphrates river valley, where it had experience fighting or operating for around a decade and where it remerged powerfully in 2014. The group has shifted its base to the desert and rural areas as rural and desert-based insurgency is no less important for them than urban warfare to deplete enemies, recruit fighters and lay the groundwork for a comeback.

To adequately plan for the next phase of war, it is critical that the coalition forces fighting against the ISIS understand the variety of potential tactics undertaken by the group.

The group has already stepped up hit-and-run attacks in towns it had lost. This tactic diverged from the group's tendency at the height of its expansion in 2014 to engage in conventional attacks, including attacks via convoys and heavy artillery barrage. The new tactics tend to involve small units attacking from behind enemy lines or through hasty raids. Reverting to the old insurgency and terror tactics enabled the Islamic State to penetrate otherwise well-secured areas. Previous attempts to attack them through conventional fighting units had failed, even while the group was at the height of its power. This hit-and-run tactic also serves another very useful purpose: it demonstrates that nothing is out of reach for them, even if their ability to control territory plummets. It should be noted that ISIS is an adaptive and determined enemy. From an organization with a fixed headquarters it has phased towards a clandestine terrorist network dispersed throughout the region and when it spreads across the globe, it will be deadlier. The result of the transition will be that ISIS-perpetrated violence would be far less concentrated and more dispersed which will be hard to detect and control.

A part of the revised ISIS strategy is likely to include rejuvenated focus on planning and conducting spectacular attacks in the West in order to remain militarily relevant and to inspire followers globally. To adequately plan for the next phase of war, it is critical that the coalition forces fighting against the ISIS understand the variety of potential tactics undertaken by the group. A new strategy to counter ISIS should be formulated rather than a hasty announcement of the group's defeat. To fight a highly adaptive adversary like the ISIS, a new approach should have a different mix of tools, including military, intelligence, diplomatic, social and economic.

The toxic ideology of the ISIS can still affect an entire generation so the next campaign against the ISIS should also focus on eradicating it ideologically. An ideological defeat is a much tougher task because anti-extremism campaigns require patience and resilience. However, such measures offer long-term solutions as they tackle the root causes of radical ideologies. The United States and its allies have to understand that ideological defeat of the ISIS is as important as its military defeat. Only one phase of the war is over and the next one is about to come. S

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ALLAHABAD

KUMBH CHALO

The Kumbh Mela is a path to purification as well as a road to nirvana. This year, the festival is taking place at Prayagraj, former Allahabad.

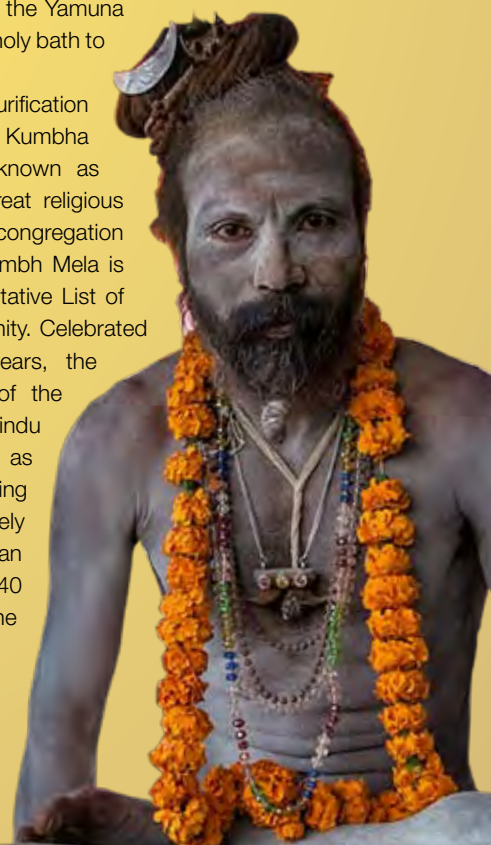
BY FAIZAN USMANI

The mystifying world of astrology is known by its weird constellation movements and planetary intricacies. Astrologically speaking, one's sign of the zodiac predetermines one's fate and preordains one's destiny to the extent of controlling and steering the entire wheel of fortune. Making it more of a mystery of mysteries, the zodiacal merry-go-round keeps taking place even without letting one know. To avoid any misfortune, one needs to decode one's destiny by knowing about one's star and keep tracking the planetary movements and their influences.

In Hinduism, astrology is known as *Jyotisha*, which is not merely a distinctive field of study, but a central part of the Hindu religion. Comprising Shiksha (phonology), Chandas (prosody), Vyakarana (grammar and linguistic analysis), Nirukta (etymology), Kalpa (ritual instructions) and *Jyotisha* (astrology), the Vedanga, or 'the limbs of the Veda,' are six auxiliary disciplines connected with the study of the Vedas, which are the oldest scriptures of Hinduism.

Jyotisha, fully known as *Vedanga Jyotishya*, is one of the earliest Sanskrit texts written about astronomy and documented by ancient sages within the Vedas. As per the *Jyotisha* Shastra (*rules*), when Brihaspati (Jupiter) enters Vrishabha (Taurus) and the Surya (Sun) and Chandra (Moon) are in Makra (Capricorn), it is the right time for Hindu devotees to partake in a pilgrimage to Prayagraj, former Allahabad, and gather at the holy ground of *Triveni Sangam*, a confluence of the sacred rivers of the Ganges, the Yamuna and the Saraswati, to take a holy bath to cleanse their sins.

Referred to as a path to purification as well as a road to nirvana, Kumbha Parva Chakra, commonly known as Maha Kumbh Mela, is a great religious bathing fair. The largest congregation of pilgrims on Earth, the Kumbh Mela is on the UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Celebrated four times in every 12 years, the Kumbh Mela (the festival of the sacred pitcher) is a mass Hindu pilgrimage of faith as well as the world's largest gathering of people, which is held solely for a religious purpose. On an average, some 130 to 140 million people take part in the



festival over a period of seven weeks.

As described in the Puranas, the ancient Vedic scriptures, the Devtas (the demigods) and Asuras (demons) made separate attempts to extract the Amrita, the celestial nectar of immortality, by churning the *Kshir Sagar*, the primordial ocean of milk.

Despite their continued efforts spanning thousands of years, both were unable to accomplish the task alone and thus decided to extract the Amrita in a collective effort. Once it was finally extracted, Devtas and Asuras fought with each other to get hold of the Amrita nectar. Doing so, the Devtas finally stole the Kumbha, the divine pitcher carrying the Amrita and a 12-day chase, equivalent to 12 human years, ensued across the *Brahmanda* (universe).

During the chase, Lord Vishnu, one of the most important gods in the Hindu pantheon, spilled a few drops of Amrita at four places, namely Haridwar, Ujjain, Nashik and Prayagraj. These places, as a result, became the present-day sites of the Kumbh Mela and millions of people gather to bathe in the sacred river water in each of these four places over a 12 year cycle.

These festivals are held periodically as per the Hindu calendar on a rotational basis at Ujjain, Nashik district (Nashik and Trimbak), Haridwar and Prayagraj (former Allahabad). As per Hindu tradition, a total of four bathing fairs are recognized as the Kumbh Melas: the Ujjain Simhastha, the Nashik-Trimbakeshwar Simhastha, Haridwar Kumbh Mela and the Prayagraj Kumbh Mela, also referred to as the Maha Kumbh Mela or the main Kumbh festival, because it is held at the confluence of the holy Ganges, the Yamuna and the Sarasvati rivers.

Being held this year by the Yogi Adityanath-led UP government under the slogan '*Chalo Kumbh Chalo, Chalo Kumbh Chalo*,' the festival is taking place at Prayagraj from January 15 to March 4.

From *Makar Sankaranti* (first day of the Kumbh festival) to *Maha Shivratri* (last day of the festival), taking a dip in the holy rivers on each day of Kumbh is considered a holy bath. However, as per Hindu beliefs, there are other holy bathing dates deemed as auspicious for cleansing a person of all his sins.

The *Akhara Parishad*, an apex regulatory body of the Kumbh Mela, 2019, has announced six auspicious bathing days that have further been classified into three categories: Shahi Snan (royal bathing), important bathing and normal bathing.

Other than the *Makar Sankaranti*, the *Mauni Amawasya* (February 4) and the *Basant Panchami* (February 10) are considered royal bathing dates, because on these days Naga Sadhus mingle with common devotees, take a holy dip in *Triveni Sangam* and stage mock *Akharas* to perform Hindu martial arts, displaying such ancient weapons as '*trishul*' (trident), '*pharsa*' (battleaxe), '*chimta*' (a pair of tongs), swords, etc. The *Paush Purnima* (January 21), *Maghi Purnima* (February 19) and the *Maha Shivratri* (March 4) are considered as important bathing dates during the festival.

The rare presence of Naga Sadhus in the festival brings out the political side of the Kumbh Mela as the weapons they exhibit in the festival were used by Hindu warriors some 2,000 years ago to safeguard Hinduism and to protect India from foreign invaders. S

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KANDY

Celebration Time

The social and economic significance of the Sinhala New Year Festival in Sri Lanka is an important occurrence.

BY KOMAL NIAZI

Sri Lanka is a country of different cultural and religious groups. Ethnically, there are four different cultures in the country - Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Burghers. Followers of various religious groups reside in the country and notable among them are Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians. According to the 1999 census survey report, 74% of the population is Sinhalese, 18% Tamil, 7% Muslims and only 1% are Burghers. There are two types of festivals (religious and cultural) celebrated in the country. Religious festivals are Deepavali, Eids and Christmas. Cultural festivals are such world famous festivals as Esala Perahera and Sinhala. In Sri Lanka's history of cultural anthropology, the "Traditional New Year" is celebrated in April and its history spans thousands of years. It is believed that the New Year celebration brings changes in thought, belief and norms. It is also associated with fertility of harvest and gives birth to new rituals, customs and traditions. It is celebrated according to the interpretation of New Buddhism teachings. The Buddhist outlook was predominant in transforming the New Year rites to what they are now.

According to Smith, "Given the universality of festivals, people need periodic times of escape from work, times in which they can be joyous together". The New Year festival is celebrated on April 13 and 14 and both days are declared public holidays. This folk festival is an occasion of merriment among people. The Sinhalese New Year begins with cultural rituals like cleaning of the house

and lighting of an oil lamp to bring prosperity in the home; women play Raban (a type of drum) to announce new things in the home. Virtually all the people celebrate rituals with their families under astrological calculations. They make Kiribath (milk rice) for lighting fire and when they start a new business. They also start rituals with firecrackers and believe that with the burning of firecrackers, no evils will enter their home in the coming year.

When the families complete important rituals, they meet each other and mingle in the streets. Homes are kept open and children play with each other. Cultural dishes such as Kayum (small oil cake) and kokis (crisp and light sweetmeat) are served to guests while neighbours take a special part in outdoor activities. Celebrations in cities and villages may be little different for certain reasons, including the difference in lifestyle. The special flower YakFrabadu is a sign of the start of the New Year in Sri Lanka.

The New Year festival is also known as the harvest festival. People worship the sun to bring prosperity to their lives. There are different opinions regarding worshipping the sun. The Sinhalese festival brought in more enthusiasm when agriculture was the main profession of the Sri Lankans (mostly Buddhist). Gamlath suggests, "The ancient who knew no secret of nature and thus depended on it as the blind celebrated New Year festival not only to rejoice crop cutting but also to worship nature inclusive of the sun. In those harvesting festivals, people stored grain in their barns. Now days, however, this festival is more meaningful for the people than it used to be when agriculture was the main profession. It is blessed with many social, economic, and religious activities. To participate in these activities is leisure for the people. These activities also remind us of the harvest season activities that prevailed in the past. As Bhattacharya reminds us, "Festivals coincided with post-harvest or provided relief from the monotony of the lean seasons. Economy and time are so closely linked with leisure in societies and borne out by history which tells us the same relationship is extended in the case of hunter-gatherer communities".

The New Year festival promotes artistes. It also provides them with opportunities to earn money, establish a market for cultural goods and services and make unite them as a part of the community. Festivals are unique experiences. Most items are available at low prices as compared to normal days and a poor person can buy what he otherwise could not. All this is possible due to the joint efforts of public and private bodies.

Festivals are important in getting a better understanding of the social and economic structure of society, where economic and cultural relations among people are an important part created by these festivals. The New Year festival provides an understanding of Sinhalese culture, religion and lifestyle. It helps decipher the hidden meanings behind the celebrations. It is suggested that these events might have the effect of encouraging visitors to consume a greater proportion of locally produced food, which can have a healthy benefit for the consumer, and create a better economic and ecological environment for the local community. Festivals can also help the economy as they improve the economic activity and people can earn more money.

The social power of the New Year festival leads to healthy social outcomes, such as trust and communication and social networking increases in society. Social change brings economic prosperity at the micro level. It strengthens the internal capacity of the people and provides opportunities for the progress of society. S

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ISLAMABAD

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

There is a debate raging in Pakistan about naming of the new airport in Islamabad. Looks like the country has run out of the names of national heroes and perhaps a nationwide competition could do the trick.

BY SAIMA MIRZA

In Pakistan, like many other world countries, infrastructural projects are preferred to be named after leaders of the political party in government. This can be seen as an interesting development in political behaviour as, until the late 20th century, it was a common practice to name such projects after national or freedom heroes. The trend, on the one hand, undermines the altruistic services of national heroes and reflects our fading love for them; on the other, it shows how much political parties are loyal to their leadership. The same is the case with the naming process of the new Islamabad International Airport. It is Pakistan's first Greenfield airport, built to meet the growing needs of national and international air traffic. Previously, a part of the Pakistan Air Force's Nur Khan Airbase in Rawalpindi it was being used for general air traffic and was officially known as the Benazir Bhutto International Airport. The airport was returned to the PAF after the inauguration of the new airport in Islamabad and its name was also reversed as it was originally a military base.

The new Islamabad International Airport was inaugurated by the then Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on May 1, 2018 though its name is yet to be decided. Earlier, following democratic principles, Mian Nawaz Sharif, who was the Prime Minister then, formed a four-member committee for this purpose. However, he was disqualified as PM only two weeks later. Eventually, the committee came up with three names and Shahid Khaqan Abbasi presided over a cabinet meeting to discuss the proposed names. These included Madar-e-Millat Fatima Jinnah Airport, Liaquat Ali Khan Airport and Ghandhara Airport. But Abbasi rejected all the three names without giving any reasons. Available information reveals that most of the federal ministers were of the opinion that the new airport be named after a personality of the Pakistan Movement and agreed on the name of Liaquat Ali Khan – the first prime minister of Pakistan and the right-hand man of Mr. Jinnah.

The naming process got interesting when former Chairman of the Senate, Raza Rabbani of the Pakistan People Party, wrote to Khaqan Abbasi to consider the name of Benazir Bhutto for the new airport as she was first the woman prime minister of Pakistan and the Muslim world. He argued that the former international airport in Rawalpindi had been officially named the Benazir Bhutto International Airport, so the same could be repeated for the new airport. The government did not pay much heed to Rabbani's request.

Assumingly, the previous government may have rejected the PPP's request on partisan basis but the matter remains unresolved. It is surprising how none of the parties have given approval to the name of Fatima Jinnah – the Mother of the Nation. This is especially disappointing from a party that adopted the name of Muslim League – the founding party of Pakistan for itself. Fatima Jinnah was the head of the Muslim League's women's wing during the Pakistan Movement. She stood by her brother Jinnah and the All India Muslim League for the cause of Pakistan and gathered Muslim women under the flag of AIML. She abandoned her career and did not marry. What is more surprising is that, after the creation of Pakistan, she was alienated and not given any public portfolio. This was done while she was a living symbol of democratic principles and contested the country's first presidential elections against a military ruler in 1965.

There is no difference of opinion about the services rendered by Benazir Bhutto for the democratic cause but there has been no consensus among political parties over her name being given to the new airport. Therefore, Fatima Jinnah, beyond partisan comparisons, stands as a perfect symbol of national unity and the liberation of Pakistan's women. She stood against a military ruler before the formation of the PPP. Moreover, the PTI's main agenda has been to revive the Quaid's Pakistan and sooner or later it will be dealing head-on with the matter. Therefore, it is high time and a good opportunity for the government to acknowledge and establish the nation's pride by naming the airport after Fatima Jinnah. This will also help Pakistan to clear its image against gender biases in the wake of reports pointing to gender inequality in Pakistan.

Since the international airport in the federal capital will host millions of global passengers, it must demonstrate that Pakistan has a great respect for its national heroes, particularly women of the freedom movement. The country already has the Quaid-e-Azam International Airport in Karachi and the Allama Iqbal International Airport in Lahore in addition to the Benazir Bhutto Hospital in Rawalpindi, SZABIST in Karachi, the Liaquat National Hospital in Karachi, etc. Thus, it will be best to name the new airport as the Madar-e-Millat Fatima Jinnah International Airport because no one can dispute the name of the mother of the nation. Also, it will send a strong message to the international community that Pakistan believes in gender equality. The name will serve a dual purpose – acknowledging the services of Fatima Jinnah and encouraging Pakistan's women to participate in all spheres of life by following her footsteps. S

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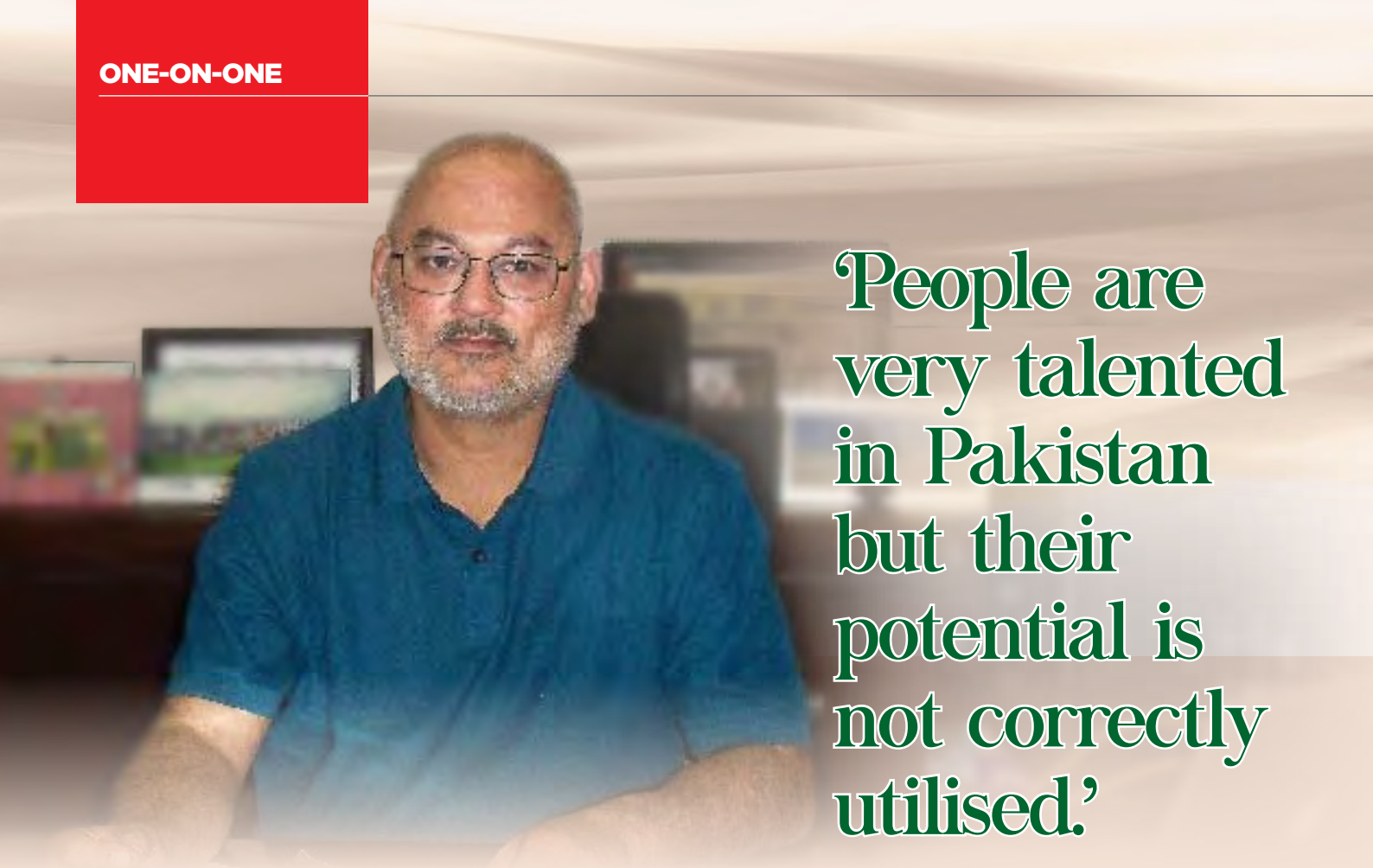

'People are very talented in Pakistan but their potential is not correctly utilised.'

Fouad Husain, Chief Executive Officer, GroupM, a leading media buying agency in Pakistan, talks to *SouthAsia* in this exclusive interview.

Please tell us a bit about your professional genesis.

My first media training came from Abbas, a person who used to look after print at Lintas. I met Mr. C.A. Rauf three times and the third time we met, in 1997, he offered me to work for him. He told me to join from the very next day and I still can't forget that I was paid Rs. 5,950 for the job but I agreed. Rauf sahib was a very nice person. He used to come to the office and have sessions with the new employees. I was also one of them so I had the pleasure of knowing how he faced difficulties and achieved great heights. It would not be an understatement to say that C.A. Rauf, Javed Jabbar and Anwar Rammal were the crème of advertising and established outstanding agencies in Pakistan and also motivated international agencies to come here. They were geniuses in every way.

I got to learn from some of the best people in the industry. From working with Rauf sahib till today, I've been learning every single day.

How are you dealing with the media situation now that the government is also getting into the act? Advertising agencies think media houses have destroyed their business. Is that true?

Legislation is the work of the government which, unfortunately, previous governments were not doing. To say that the government is making things difficult for the media houses would be wrong. Every government advertisement is for the people, be it polio vaccination, health messages, etc. The government should be facilitated. The government has also started working with professional agencies. Their recent campaign 'Pakistan Banao' was designed by us.

We don't have rules and regulations in this industry and that is the reason TV channels, creative agencies and print and radio are in decline. This is because of poor financial management and planning. The media has to act collectively. Do we produce something that creates synergy, has competition and yet pays employees monthly? I still ask some company owners that how can they even ask their employees to work when they don't pay them. Legislation is necessary and is gradually taking over.

How is specialized media planning and buying an advantage for advertisers?

Globally, when Mindshare was formed in London in 1996, it was the media departments at J. Walter Thompson and Ogilvy that were merged. The more volume you can derive, the better discounts you get. You give value back to your clients. Over time, it went from discount generation to value creation and today clients work with discounts, value propositions and as business partners.

We work on three personalities at a time or even less, yet we are the company that came to Pakistan in 1999 and today we are market leaders for our honesty with our clients. We have very strong global systems and have the best auditors from the Big Four audit companies. In terms of annual training budgets, there is no other agency that spends so much to send their people abroad for exposure and training. So, we are slightly ahead of the curve. Today, whenever there's something new about to come from media or clients, it is discussed in this office.

Where do you get trained management for your business?

GroupM has the best-trained systems globally. I was also trained at GroupM and was lucky to visit countries and hear international speakers. GroupM sends people every year for training. For the first time, one of our persons is going for a four day seminar to France. This helps us as there's a lot to learn.

People are very talented in Pakistan but their potential is not correctly utilised. Earlier agencies did not pay attention to their employees' training and development.

They didn't understand that the difference was huge. My employees regularly go for training and I hardly think about hiring senior management from abroad.

How do you bring cost-effectiveness in media planning for both advertisers and media?

Cost-effectiveness is very simple in terms of clients. You need to make sure that in the media you are planning or buying, the message of the client is properly delivered to the audience. Our work is to advise them whether they can benefit from television or digital and also not go only for the top three newspapers but rather opt for ten regional newspapers in order to expand the message as far as possible.

Another advantage for clients is that we have a strong relationship with managements. GroupM follows a policy that if there is a 90 days credit period, the cheque must be delivered within 90 days without delay. We don't treat media as a vendor. Just as we are business partners for clients, media is a business partner for us. For any big project, like Pakistan Idol, we advise in all areas - from designing, optimal pricing and the duration of advertisements during breaks to how to sell to the clients. Sometimes they bring up some raw stuff as well but then it is our job to brainstorm and produce the best possible work that relates to the market. In a nutshell, you have to help each other to be a market leader and that's where we have the expertise.

What is the future of digital advertising in Pakistan?

Digital is growing very fast and it will hurt TV badly. Print and radio are in decline but cinema is growing. The more the number of multiplex screens, the better will be the cinema industry. In the next three years, the number of films produced every year will go up by three times because with the increase in screens, the revenue potential will also increase and people will be interested in investing.

Some films are still good today but they lack technical expertise. If you compare Chinese films of 15 or 20 years back, they were similar to Hollywood's 70s films. Today, Chinese and Hollywood films are equal in quality and some Chinese films have better screenplays as they are not on CJI while the West works only on green background where you can edit everything. CJI does not have that real-feel. In the chariot race scene in Ben Hur, released in 1959, 70 people died as the race was live. It is not always about upgrading technology and improvising things.

Print is in decline as they seem to think no one can beat them. Radio died because it had no innovation or investment plans. TV is dying as they believe people will watch it no matter what they broadcast. With digital, people watch what they want to watch. Digital will also die at some point and the evolution time will shrink. Like TV had 50 years, digital might have 20. We have to be ready for tomorrow.

Why are most TVCs not made in Pakistan?

We honestly don't know how to make them or script them. We go to India as they are far more professional. If they have an 8.00 am shoot, the entire crew will be on the set by 7:30 am. They even shoot a commercial in one day and process it for editing the next day. The commercial is ready the third day. In Pakistan, if the director wakes up by afternoon, there is no morning shoot and they have to wait for the next day for the proper light.

We also lack creative writers. No one remembers the advertisements made in the last 10 years in Pakistan but everyone is familiar with ads like 'Subah Mina ka Sham Minah ka' and 'Aye Khuda Mere Abbu Salamat Rahein' made 30 years back.

Today, if there's a TV play or film to be made in India, it has a proper script. They don't copy the story but adapt it. It's all about groundwork, education, writing skills and proper learning. In my literature class, we used to learn precise writing. In TVCs, you deliver the message in the least possible words and you need a good educational background.

Your agency has won many international awards. How does that help?

Because our international credentials are so strong, we don't need to introduce ourselves to multinational clients. Also, if a new multinational client desires to expand their business to Pakistan, we automatically get a call as Mindshare is already their agency.

Winning awards helps us with local clients as well, like Tapal, Dalda, Habib Bank and Colgate. They are not multinationals but when they see that we work with multinationals, they have faith in us. We win awards on the basis of our work and in the areas we specialise.S

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NUSRAT IMROSE TISHA

Superwoman!

Nusrat Imrose Tisha is a National Award winning Bangladeshi actress and model. She has done popular television dramas and films.

A household name in the Bangladeshi film and television industry is that of Nusrat Imrose Tisha. She is a singer turned actor who has won a National Award. She is a model and a TV and film actress and her elegant demeanour and impeccable acting have won her leading roles in many films and TV plays.

Nusrat Imrose Tisha started her acting career as a hobby and a child actor in a TV drama "Sat Pohorer Kabbo". The multi-talented actress came into the limelight through a talent hunt program "Notun Kuri" where she came second. Two years later, in the same contest, she won the Gold Cup award. She also came up with a music band called "Angel Four" that released an album as well. Sadly it did not go well and after her father and Ustad (teacher) passed away, she lost her passion for singing.

Born in Bangladesh in 1983, she is the daughter of Enamul Haque and Shahin Mahfuza. She comes from a musical background and her music learning started at the age of 5. A Media and Communication graduate from North-South University, Nusrat Imrose Tisha first stepped professionally in the industry as a model at the age of 17 in a TVC "Meri Lip Gel" which was praised by the media. This led to more ads for brands like Coca Cola, Keya Cosmetics, Citycell and Bombay Sweets. After winning at Meril Prothom Alo Awards in 2003 and 2004, she started appearing in TV plays and impressed audiences with her acting. By 2004, she had acted in 14 TV plays.

In 2005, Nusrat took a break from her career. It is rumoured that her break was subject to her relationship with TV series and film director Mostafa Sarwar Farooki to whom she got married in 2010. Tisha says she needed the break to deal with the change and to prepare for a better life. The relationship started in 2005 with Tisha getting the impression that Farooki was a rude person but she found a good friend and a human being in him. After they got married, Tisha

confessed that he had become more disciplined and responsible than before. She now finds him to be a completely changed person and she says sometimes it is hard for her to keep up with him.

Her notable works so far are Kebol ee Raat Hoye Jai, Sixty Nine, Brazentina, Bahattor Ghonta, Day Out, Golapbhromon, Angry Bird and Doob: No Bed of Roses.

After a four year gap, she returned to the film and television industry in 2009 with a drama film "Third Person Singular Number" directed by Mostafa Sarwar Farooki and Anisul Hoque. The film was inspired by the book 'Tin Parber Jibon O kichhu Bastab' - a case study by Syed Manzoorul Islam. It was the story of a young woman Ruba who was in a live-in relationship with a guy who got jailed. The film followed her struggles after that and showed her navigating a conservative society. Her comeback was of cutting-edge quality and the film was a great hit. Since then, there was no looking back for Nusrat. She got busy with films and TV plays. Her films like Runway (2010), Duboshahar (2013), Mental (2016) and Ostitto (2016) were received well. Her film released in 2012 was nominated for the Meril Prothom Alo Awards in the Best Film Actress Popular category.

In 2017 Tisha was seen in Doob: No Bed of Roses where she was cast against Irrfan Khan. Doob is a Bengali word that roughly translates into lawns and pastures, especially in southern India. The story builds up around two families discovering the finer fabric of love when the headman of the family passes away. As a successful filmmaker, Irrfan Khan is shown facing a midlife crisis when he has a tryst with his daughter's childhood friend, causing a national scandal. Farooki was inspired to make this film because of a real-life incident that shook the very foundations of Bangladesh's judgemental Muslim society.

The film shows how women struggle in society and find strength in despair. The film was initially banned and denied a censorship certificate in Bangladesh on the grounds that it was based on the life of the late Bangladeshi author and film director Humayun Ahmed who divorced his wife of 27 years after falling in love with an actress 33 years younger than him. The ban was eventually lifted and the film was released in October 2017 in Bangladesh, France, India and Australia. It is said that No Bed of Roses will be representing Bangladesh at the Oscars. Nusrat Imrose Tisha is a versatile actress who makes every character her own and works really hard to do justice to it. In an interview when she was asked which superpower she would like to have as a superhero, her reply was that she wanted to be a superwoman.

As part of the 40 years anniversary celebration, Nusrat Imrose Tisha was appointed by the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a 'goodwill ambassador' for its Dhaka diplomatic mission.

She has also won Meril Prothom Alo Awards for Best TV Actress in 2009 and 2011, while, from 2010 to 2014, she won the Meril Prothom Alo Awards for Best TV actress in the popular category. She has also won the Bangladesh National Film Award in 2016 for Ostitto.

Her work and age do not match with the amount and varied genres of work she has done. From music to modelling to acting, she has proved her mettle in everything that she has set out to do. She is confident, sure and humble. Her dedication needs no explanation as, for her, hits or flops are not important as she loves her work and enjoys focusing herself fully.

Nusrat Imrose Tisha is not just a girl next door. Her dynamic roles and performances have made her a superstar. This is all for the right reasons because she is hardworking to the core and is surely a superwoman. S

BY ADIL AHMAD

Arshad Saeed Husain, Managing Director, OUP.

KLF – AGONY AND ECSTASY!

Every year, as the New Year has dawned, it has brought with it a simmering excitement that builds up to a crescendo within a specific set of Karachi denizens, the literati of this mega metropolis by the sea that in many ways succeeds in retaining its small town coziness.

The ship that Ameena Saiyid and Asif Farrukhi launched almost a decade ago has grown into a mighty armada with a new admiral at its helm, Arshad Husain, formerly managing director of Abbott Pharmaceuticals. Ameena and Asif have now launched the Adab Literature Festival.

The Karachi Literature Festival (KLF) was launched in March 2010. Inspired by the success of the first two editions in 2010 and 2011, the Children's Literature Festival (CLF) was launched at the end of 2011.

The momentum, begun with the KLF, also led to the Islamabad Literature Festival (ILF, launched in 2013), the Teachers' Literature Festival (TLF, launched in 2014), and many others.

This reflects the depth of Pakistan's literary and cultural roots, and the desire and energy to celebrate the pursuit of knowledge, understanding and creativity. In celebration of Pakistan's 70th birthday, the KLF was also held in London in partnership with Bloomsbury Pakistan at the Southbank Centre, as part of the Alchemy Festival.

The ILF and KLF were directed by Ameena Saiyid, founded by Ameena Saiyid and Asif Farrukhi, and produced by Oxford University Press. The KLF, ILF, CLF and TLF are open to all and free. The first of a kind in Pakistan, the ILF and KLF bring together and celebrate authors writing in diverse languages, genres, and traditions. They feature debates and discussions, talks, English and Urdu poetry (mushairas), book fairs, book launches, readings, signings, satire, theatre, film screenings, music, dance and art programming.

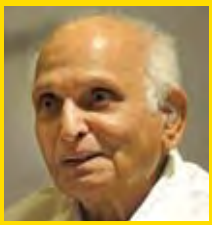
The first edition in 2010 saw literary giants such as Bapsi Sidhwa and Shamsur Rahman Faruqi take the stage on the inaugural day and share their views on writers and the art of writing. Poet Iftikhar Arif, short story writer Aamer Hussein, poet Zulfikar Ghose, novelist Mohsin Hamid and short story writer and novelist Intizar Husain made the 1st KLF an affair to remember.

In 2011, the 2nd KLF had the presence of British scholar Karen Armstrong and authors Daniyal Mueenuddin and Ahmed Rashid.

William Dalrymple and Shobha De in 2012's 3rd KLF illustrated that the festival had a broader canvas where literature, culture, art and geopolitics seamlessly merged into a single frame.

The first three KLFs took place at the now defunct Carlton Hotel, and ever since then the KLF has been organized at the scenic Beach Luxury Hotel which fronts the verdant Chinna Creek mangrove forest. It was a befitting venue for the book launch

Iftikhar Arif (KLF 2010)



Intizar Husain (KLF 2010)

Bapsi Sidhwa (KLF 2010)

Karen Armstrong (KLF 2011)

William Dalrymple (KLF 2012)

Shobha De (KLF 2013)

of Rina Saeed Khan's "From Mountains to Mangroves – Protecting Pakistan's Natural Heritage" at the 9th KLF.

In 2018, eminent historian Francis Robinson and renowned playwright and poet Noorul Huda Shah delivered the keynote speeches on the opening day of the 9th KLF, with Shayma Saiyid's Kathak performance giving new meaning to poetry in motion.

The keynote speakers on the last day were distinguished Indian politician Mani Shankar Aiyar, enduring and endearing satirist Anwar Maqsood, and celebrated Indian novelist and musician Amit Chaudhuri.

Pakistan-India relations, or the absence thereof, were in focus at two sessions that dealt with the effects of partition titled 'Love Thy Neighbour' and 'The Flames of Separation', which were fortified by the histrionics of Mani Shankar Aiyar who, midway through his emotionally charged discharge, went suddenly silent as the public address system collapsed, quite mysteriously, one might add.

Another first for the KLF this time was the open-mic session, a Sindhi mushairo and an English poetry slam. The performing arts had a wider representation as well with powerful theatre offerings — 'Art', 'Chup' - and dramatic readings.

The sudden passing away of Asma Jahangir came as shocking news on the last day of the event, casting a dampner on the proceedings and leaving Anwar Maqsood in an uncharacteristically sombre frame of mind. The death of the great Pakistani author Intizar Husain was mourned, as also were that of Rasa Chughtai, Saqi Farooqi and Munnu Bhai.

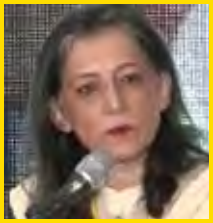
A very important feature of the KLF is its acknowledgement of homegrown talent.

Rasul Buksh Rais took home the Pepsi Non-Fiction Prize as well as the German Peace Prize for his book "Imagining Pakistan", while "The Party Worker" by police officer-turned-novelist Omar Shahid Hamid won the Getz Pharma Prize for Fiction.

Rajmohan Gandhi
(KLF 2014)

Zehra Nigah
(KLF 2015)

Pervez Hoodbhoy
(KLF 2016)



Ayesha Jalal
(KLF 2017)

Mani Shankar Aiyar
(KLF 2018)

Kamila Shamsie
(KLF 2018)

Anwar Maqsood
(KLF 2018)

Javed Jabbar
(KLF 2018)

Zia Mohyeddin
(KLF 2018)

The Italian Consulate in Karachi presented the 'Italy Reads Pakistan Award' to Omar Shahid. In collaboration with the KFL, the Metropoli d'Asia, an Italian publishing company specializing in contemporary Asian novels, would now translate his latest book into Italian.

The 235 speakers (205 Pakistani and 30 international) expressed their views on a number of subjects during the festival and interacted with literature buffs. Book launches constituted, as they usually do, a major chunk of the festival's goings-on, and the Beach Luxury Hotel's deck served as the venue for a wide array of bookstalls set up by both the major and minor publishers of Pakistan, serving up a rich variety of fare. Authors whose books had been launched could be seen signing copies with long lines forming in front of different stalls.

From its tastefully appointed kiosk Tapal Danedar gave out endless cups of free tea to grateful book buffs badly in need of a caffeine kick.

Amongst the many highlights of the 9th KLF was Kamila Shamsie on her latest novel "Home Fire" which was long-listed for the prestigious Man Booker Prize and has garnered international acclaim. Centered around a British-Pakistani family torn apart by a conflicted past, this novel features themes that are very relevant today.

Also vying for attention was a panel discussion on the #MeToo movement, a timely conversation if there ever was one. The panel featured prominent transgender activist Kami Choudhry and journalist/politician/academic Nafisa Shah.

Sunil Shankar's short play 'Chup', co-written by him and Fawad Khan, dealt with issues that can't be discussed openly, like missing persons and enforced disappearances. Then there was a session on the relationship between fiction and politics in which Kishwar Naheed, Arfa Syeda Zehra, and Qaisra Shahraz discussed the depoliticization of literature in Pakistan, and the divide between English and Urdu reading audiences.

There was a welcome focus on Sindhi literature with a talk titled 'The literary traditions of Sindh' featuring Jami Chandio and Syed Sardar Shah. A Sindhi Mushairo showcased the verses of Imdad Hussaini, Aasi Zamini, Ayaz Gul, Haleem Baghi and Sahar Imdad.

The 9th KLF focused on poetry that spanned the new and the old, ranging from Zia Mohyeddin reading Shakespeare to a session that investigated slam poetry. Another session titled 'The other muse: poetry in English' grappled with the state of English poetry in Pakistan.

There was, at some point, a feeling amongst the purists that the carnival atmosphere of the KLF did not sit well with a serious pursuit such as literature, and the redoubtable Javed Jabbar went on record in this connection, becoming conspicuous by his absence from the KLF for a three years period, finally breaking his fast at the 9th KLF, realizing perhaps that in this day and age of the hybrid, the serious must cohabit and coexist with the somewhat frivolous if the dwindling reading habit is to harbour some hope of a revival. S

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BOOK

BENEATH THE CAROB TREES

Healing and Hope

BY NADYA CHISHTY-MUJAHID

Book Title:	Beneath the Carob Trees: The Lost Lives of Cyprus
Author:	Nick Danziger and Rory MacLean
Publisher:	Armida/Galeri Kultur
Price:	$12.99
ISBN:	9789963229758

The gentle, almost wistful title of this remarkable book conceals tragic tales of unspeakable horror. Award-winning photographer Nick Danziger and bestselling author Rory MacLean have collaborated with the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus (CMP) in order to create a publication approved by the United Nations. Funded by the European Union, the book focuses on the arduous search for the remains of Cypriots (both Turkish and Greek) that died and disappeared during the bloody tensions between the two post-colonial communities in 1963-1964 and 1974. Grim though the subject matter undoubtedly is, Danziger's lens and MacLean's pen have come as close to doing justice to this heinous and complex topic as any set of creative minds can be expected to do.

To quote MacLean: 'The primary objective of the CMP is to return the identified remains of missing persons to their families in order to arrange for a proper burial and close a long period of anguish and uncertainty' (p. 29). '

This endeavour commenced under the auspices of the CMP in 1981, and to date, while hundreds of remains have been located and several identified, the remains of hundreds of individuals are still unaccounted for. The CMP has had to engage in the grueling and often sadly thankless task of requesting informers to come forward with information on the whereabouts of people who might have been killed and buried. Often this proves difficult because many Greek and Turkish Cypriots simply 'disappeared'—snatched from their homes or workplaces; and in some cases were even taken off vehicles of public transport, such as buses. Naturally, virtually all are assumed dead, and even those who knew them are now in the late autumn of their lives since decades have passed since the strife and conflict, though unhealed wounds still abound.

But as the project continually and continuously demonstrates, humans are incredibly resilient when it comes to granting dignity to the dead. Families in Cyprus have braved the loss of homes, livelihoods, possessions, and material goods but, regardless of the uniqueness of their personal tragedies, all are united in their desire to attain closure as regards the bones and remains of their loved ones. Danziger's photos display an extraordinary breadth and scope, ranging from portrayals of diplomats interviewing key personnel, to ruined houses, to archaeological excavations, to funerals and counselling, and of course, bones — literally hundreds of them.

In the hot, occasionally unforgiving climate of Cyprus, MacLean notes, it takes human flesh just a matter of three months to decompose. However, bones exist for centuries, and CMP's archaeological teams engage in widespread and highly sensitive excavations across the country, especially around the UN-declared Buffer Zone in old Nicosia that officially divides the formerly hostile communities—a zone that is only a few meters at its narrowest but extends to six kilometers at its widest. Sometimes the clues are just misleading and end up frustrating even the most patient and determined of investigators, but CMP personnel believe that the rewards outweigh the tribulations. Sadly though, even the most rewarding of excavations are simply pyrrhic victories, given the deep and profound sense of tragedy that pervades this noble but difficult endeavour.

Following the excavations and the unearthing of remains (some of which naturally date from much earlier periods) the bones are most likely to be those of the disappeared and are forensically cleaned and catalogued painstakingly. Occasionally, belongings of the victims such as rings found on skeletons, for instance, are used to identify them, though only thorough genetic analysis (which is conducted on virtually all the relevant remains) can determine identity with over 99 percent accuracy. Sometimes a lucky guess helps pinpoint whose remains are before one — in one case a man was identified because he was one of the few who possessed gold teeth! MacLean recounts interviews with several descendants of the disappeared as well as his interactions with forensic specialists, geneticists, grief counsellors, and sometimes aged individuals who knew the victims when they were much younger. Danziger's pictures are bracketed between a forlorn shot of the abandoned Nicosia International Airport (where some of the worst fighting took place) and an old, and equally abandoned, Trident plane which acts as a metaphor for the general theme of aging loss that pervades the book.

Books such as these leave one with deeply conflicting views about humanity. On the one hand there is no escaping the undercurrents of barbarism affiliated with such strife and violence; yet one's faith in humanity can be partially restored by the courageous efforts of the CMP teams, none of whom are strangers to fierce opposition and death threats. The reality of fear is prevalent throughout the text — one informer only spoke out after the murderer had died, finally admitting that the victim was shot and buried beneath a carob tree. But healing and hope are fortunately also part of the complex equation entailing the CMP's work. And for that alone, readers can be somberly thankful. S

BOOK

FACTFULNESS

Fighting Ignorance

BY NOOR JAVED SADIQ

The world has become a deadly place with rise in corruption, natural disasters, deadly diseases and violence. But is it really so or the news and media are feeding us with biased/messed up facts?

Researcher and lecturer in global health, Hans Rosling's book Factfulness have challenged the biased social and news media with rational facts. His son Ola Rosling and daughter-in-law Anna Rosling have helped him in shaping the book. In 2005 they founded the Gapminder Foundation, which aimed at fighting devastating ignorance with a fact-based world-view. 'Factfulness is a stress-reducing habit of only carrying opinions for which you have strong supporting facts,' writes Hans Rosling. The book gives you an outlook on the world scenario that he repeatedly highlights in the book as "The world may still be bad but it is significantly better."

Factfulness starts with a questionnaire of 13 general knowledge, fact-based questions about the state of our world which gives the reader a clear image of how distorted and outdated our facts are. The questionnaire unravels that child mortality has decreased in the past couple of years, fewer people are living in critical poverty conditions and women have better rights today. When compared, the same questionnaire scored better by chimpanzees than humans. Hans Rosling points out that humans are less factful because of "Instincts."

The book walks you through ten instincts that impact human psychology. The Gap Instinct rationalizes how humans urge to divide all kinds of things into two distinct and conflicting groups. He factually explains how the world is more than developed and developing, rich Western world and poor Eastern world, haves and havenots. The reality is that the world used to be divided into two groups but it is not like that anymore. Today most people live in the middle class and there is no gap between the developed and the developing or for that matter the rich and poor.

The Negativity Instinct is mainly fuelled by the media that promotes negative news and almost never shows positive news. Rosling explains this through the phrase: "it can be both better and bad." The world is evolving and with bad, good is also growing and evolving, but it is almost never talked about in news which gives us a systematically messed up/ bad view of the world around us. For example, today there are no countries with life expectancy below 50 years. And in the last 20 years, the rate of people living in extreme poverty has declined from 29 percent to 9 percent.

Straight line function is an exception rather than the rule. The Straight Line Instinct talks about how humans are conditioned to think linearly. He highlights that as a country progresses and becomes prosperous, the rate of childbirth declines. He descriptively explains how a bend in a straight line shows a realistic picture that eliminates fear and negative thoughts. As in the real world, we have S-bends, slides, humps and doubling lines.

Humans are most likely to process stories. Anything that is dramatic grabs our attention, giving us an overdramatic world view. This makes the media filter through news of earthquakes, war, terror attacks, floods and fire which makes us believe that the unusual is usual. The Fear Instinct can be controlled by systematically calculating the risks.

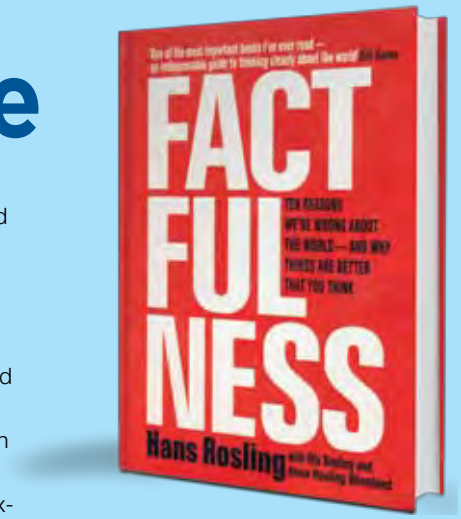
For dealing with the Size Instinct, Rosling recommends a look at numbers in proportion – looking at trends rather than numbers alone is best. The Generalization Instinct highlights how our habit of generalizing and stereotyping leads to incorrect conclusions and judgements. The Gapminder invented Dollar Street to highlight different categories and how avoiding dividing into different categories can be helpful for a better understanding.

The Destiny Instinct drives us to believe that destiny is pre-determined. To nullify the Destiny Instinct, we must recognize small improvements and changes. The Single Perspective Instinct drives us to seek a simple solution or answer. The quote "The world cannot be understood without numbers and it cannot be understood with numbers alone" clears the cobweb of Single Perspective Instinct.

The Blame Instinct blocks our ability to focus on contributing factors and so we tend to blame one individual for any situation or uncertainty. Rosling provides a piece of great advice here: "Look for causes, not villains and look for a system, not heroes."

Lastly, the Urgency Instinct can be handled by reminding ourselves that urgent decisions are rare and so in most cases it is best to relax and analyse the situation before making any decision.

Factfulness is a comprehensive book that Hans Rosling produced before he died in February 2017. It is backed with examples, statistics and a global historical view. Rosling's personal stories bring vibrancy and interest to the book. The message of Factfulness is simple and clear - that it is good to be more open-minded and sceptical about things in life. As he concludes: "Worry about the right things... ignore the noise, but keep an eye on the big global risks."



Book Title: Factfulness
Author: Hans Rosling, Ola Rosling, Anna Rosling Rönnlund
Publisher: Flatiron Books
Price: $18.46
ISBN: 9781473637467

BOOK

HYBRID TAPESTRIES

A Meandering Tale

BY J. ENVER

Book Title:	Hybrid Tapestries: The Development of Pakistani Literature in English
Author:	Muneeza Shamsie
Publisher:	Oxford University Press
Pages:	676
ISBN:	9780199403530

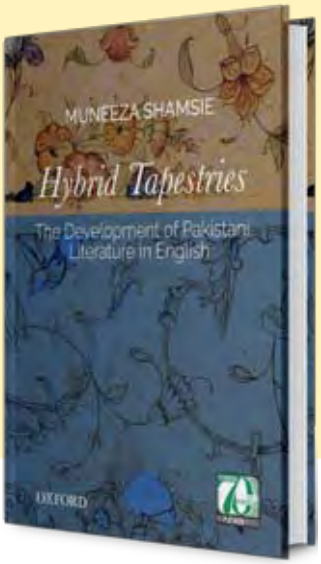
If an extensive historical map of Pakistani English literature was ever needed, it is provided in *Hybrid Tapestries*, a book written by Muneeza Shamsie and published by the Oxford University Press. Shamsie traces the narrative from its multiple origins, including pre-colonial and colonial contacts and moves across the twentieth century to extraordinary new talent. The volume homes in on thirteen innovative Pakistani writers. It begins with those who became Pakistanis after Partition (such as Shahid Suhrawardy and Ahmed Ali) but who had published major works prior to Independence. She also remembers Atiya and Samuel Fyzee Rahamin besides discussing everyone from Zulfikar Ghose and Taufiq Rafat to Bapsi Sidhwa, Sara Suleri and Hanif Kureishi.

Hybrid Tapestries encompasses poetry, fiction and drama. It includes poets Alamgir Hashmi, Imtiaz Dharker and Moniza Alvi; novelists Kamila Shamsie, Mohsin Hamid and Uzma Aslam Khan; short story writers Aamer Hussein Daniyal Mueenuddin and Jamil Ahmed and playwrights Sayeed Ahmad, Rukhsana Ahmed and Ayub Khan-Din.

The book contains an extensive discussion on essays, letter writing and memoirs, including the letters of Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Aly Faiz; essays of Anwer Mooraj, Moni Mohsin and Eqbal Ahmed; travelogues of Salman Rashid; and memoirs of Firoz Khan Noon, Tehmina Durrani, Kamran Nazeer and others. It also brings forward new perspectives and critical writing on the diverse socio-political reasons for the emergence of a Pakistani national literature in English.

Hybrid Tapestries is a meandering and difficult narrative that must have posed many challenges to the author. The Muslims of India in Shamsie's earlier part of the story were more inclined towards Persian rather than English. They did not probably realize at that point that Persian was on its way out and English was the language to learn if one were to achieve any success in governance, bureaucracy, entrepreneurship or even politics. Muslim writers seemed to never devote their time or talent to writing in English. They stuck to their beloved Persian and later Urdu, while those from other sects and religions developed finesse for expression in English and honed their skills accordingly.

English was a foreign language for Muslim writers and taking it up would have been like an act of betrayal for them. It also perhaps reflected a sense of subjugation of South Asian Muslims to the British Raj. Muneeza Shamsie's own development as a person also could be the motivation for her writing the book. She was born in Lahore in what was then British India. Her family migrated to Karachi at partition in 1947. Her Oxford-educated father, Isha'at Habibullah (1911-1991), played a leading role in developing the corporate sector in the newly created Pakistan and became the first Pakistani to head a multinational in the country. Her mother, Jahanara Habibullah (1915-2003) was the author of a memoir, first published as an English translation and later, in the original Urdu, as *Zindagi ki Yadein: Riyasat Rampur ka Nawabi Daur.*



Muneeza, a voracious reader since childhood, grew up in a home where books and the written word were a part of family life. Her aunt was the noted feminist and writer Attia Hosain (1913-1998) while Shamsie's grandmother in Lucknow, a feminist and activist, Begum Inam Fatima Habibullah, was the author of a travelogue *Tassiraat-e-Safar-Europe* about her journey to Britain in 1924 with her husband, Sheikh Mohammed Habibullah, OBE, a Taluqdar of Oudh.

Shamsie was also sent away to school in England at 9. She took Chemistry, Biology and History in her "A" Levels and wanted to pursue a career in science. She then discovered there were no careers for women scientists in Pakistan - in fact Pakistan had few career opportunities for women at all, except in education and medicine.

Muneeza Shamsie had become quite aware of the acutely limited and stereotyped images of the sub-continent in English literature, culture and films. On her return to Pakistan, she realized how little she knew or understood about her country and she started to look for answers in the genre she loved best: fiction. V.S. Naipaul, Khuswant Singh, Ahmed Ali, Mumtaz Shahnawaz, Zulfikar Ghose - and of course Attia Hosain - were among the early post-independence writers she read. Soon she came to know, and attended readings by a new young generation of English language poets in Pakistan who were forging a new body of contemporary Pakistani English literature.

In the introduction to *Hybrid Tapestries* Muneeza Shamsie describes how her interest in writing and books developed from the personal to the professional when she started to write freelance. This enabled her to keep track of new developments in creative and critical writing which were given further context when she was sent by the British Council to attend a Cambridge Seminar in 1999.

All these influences emerge in *Hybrid Tapestries* which brings out Muneeza Shamsie as the leading authority on Pakistani English literature today.

FILM

BIRD BOX

Chilling Invisibility

BY SYEDA MAHAM RASHEED

If it were not for Sandra Bullock, Bird Box wouldn't have made such a mark as it has and would have passed by with little attention. The American film is a violent, suspense-filled, sci-fi thriller based on a post-apocalyptic world which has turmoil, unpleasant deaths and swearing. Based on a 2014 novel of the same name by Josh Malerman, this film is too much to take in and is not at all suggested for kids.

Directed by Susanne Bier with a screenplay by Eric Heisserer, the film has left critics stony but since its release, it has become a lure for memes and gathered the platform's best film numbers ever.

Academy Award winner Sandra Bullock (Malorie) does classically rock-solid work and leads an all-star supporting cast that includes the great Trevante Rhodes along with Jacki Weaver, Danielle Macdonald, Sarah Paulson and John Malkovich.

Bird Box immediately makes you recall the two good films of 2018. It shows shades of 'Annihilation' where there are some unexplained aliens and the team that turns up against each other as the danger gets more dangerous. It is closer to 'A Quiet Place' where aliens will kill you if you speak so you have to keep your voice down. In Bird Box you will kill yourself if you look at supernatural entities that cause people who look at them to commit suicide. So you have to keep your eyes covered.

It is an end-of-the-world film about a woman and two children who are trying to survive a 'presence' that causes anyone who looks directly at it to commit suicide in gory ways. Though the 'presence' is never seen, which I guess was the main turnoff, it results in many gruesome deaths and bloody sequences. These include accidents, shootings, explosions, stabbings and affected ghost-like people attacking.

The film opens in the present scenario and then flashes back to five years before when it all started to collapse. Malorie is seen as an expectant mother who is not even sure whether she will form any connection of sorts with her baby. She is seen expressing the same concern and fear with her sister on the way to her doctor. The two also discuss the reports broadcast everywhere of mass instant suicides by people seeing something that turns their eyes all weird and which manifests itself in Eastern Europe and Russia.

The 'thing' then quickly turns up in the United States and people start to kill themselves by throwing themselves out of the window and coming in the way of traffic. The starting scenes of chaos and massive self-destruction are very well-depicted and are totally horrifying, giving you goosebumps seeing a woman banging her head into a glass window or another woman peacefully getting into the driver's seat of a burning car.

The high point of the film comes later. A small bunch of survivors takes shelter in a home while mayhem rages outside, including the irritable Douglas (Malkovich), another pregnant woman Olympia (Macdonald) whose child will be the one among the two children taking the treacherous river journey with Sandra, emotional Charlie (LilRel Howery), and expected love interest Tom (Rhodes). As they run out of supplies and realise that they are going to have to get to a store somehow, cynicism develops. An attempted escape to the store in a car with black painted windows is a total horror.

The 'presence' is like a mysterious force which reduces the world's population; only one thing is certain - if you see 'it', you take your life in unexpected ways. What really happens to the victim after he or she sees 'it' is not clearly shown in the film. The victim, just as mysterious as the 'presence', dies in an awful way. Facing the unknown, Malorie, played by Sandra Bullock, finds love, hope and a new beginning only for it to be undone.

Five years after the portentous unseen 'presence' drives most of society to suicide, the mother and her two children make a frantic attempt to reach safety… blindfolded. They are exposed to the risk of being injured, destroyed or lost. Malorie flees with her two children, whom she just calls boy and girl, down a perfidious river to the one place left that may offer refuge, the Janet School for the Blind. To survive, they undertake a long, harrowing, death-defying two-day journey down a river blindfolded. The three of them enter a rowboat and Malorie sightlessly guides the boat downriver. The river journey of the trio is intercut with flashbacks showing how they got there.

Viewership of the film was high as it became the most-watched film in the first week of its release on Netflix. The film maintains its chilling atmosphere throughout, particularly with the use of Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross's thumping score. It is very much a film that rides on its mood and the lead actress - Sandra Bullock. Overall, Bird Box is a strong thriller for Netflix and a tense and entertaining watch for viewers.

The film had its world premiere at the AFI Fest and the limited theatrical release began soon before it ran worldwide on Netflix. S

FILM

PINKY MEMSAAB

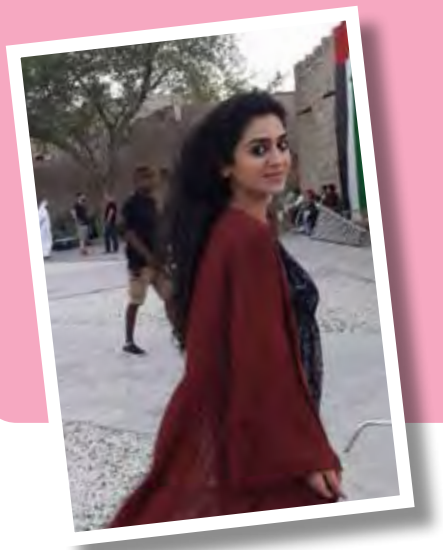
Unrealistic Realities

BY NOOR JAVED SADIQ

Pinky Memsaab, a Pakistani drama film, is a peek behind the life of Pakistani expats in the United Arab Emirates. It circles around the life of a socialite (Mehr) who lives in Jumeirah, Dubai, her submissive and naive Pakistani housemaid (Pinky), an ambitious investment banker (Hassan) and a happy-go-lucky chauffeur (Santosh).

With a captivating plot and impressive acting, the film could be a box-office hit. But its weak execution, choppy editing, open-ended scenes and confusing transition of characters spoil all the hard work. The film that could emerge as a modern-day woman-empowerment story ends in a rather over-ambitious conflict.

Pinky Memsaab lead roles Mehr and Pinky are played by Kiran Malik and Hajra Yamin. The visual expressions are quite realistic. Hajra Yamin has a theatre background and it is a treat to watch her in the film though a smoother script would have served her better. Writer and director Shazia Ali Khan has tried to tackle a complex, thought-provoking and multifaceted portrait of the two demented souls who embark on a journey of self-discovery. Khan's subject is very strong and touches the prevalent reality of expats. But it falls short in delivering. Call it weak execution or rushed introduction of the side characters but it looks immature. In trying to not give away too much too soon, the writer has made important details and information fizzle out. By the time the film reveals them, the excitement has already gone. One such character is that of Mehr's father played by Khalid Ahmed who has a conflicting relationship with Mehr. He is discussed in the film but it is not until later that his face is shown.



Other characters in Pinky Memsaab are Sunny Hinduja who is a chauffeur and Pinky's confidant, Adnan Jaffar, Mehr's husband and an ambitious investment banker, their son Ahad and a Filipino maid. The first half of the film revolves around Pinky, a divorced naive girl hailing from a village in Punjab who comes to Dubai for her first job. The film shows her struggles in an unknown place and how she copes with the lavish life of her memsaab and adjusts in her new home. Her perception of her memsaab being perfect makes her want to be like her so much that in a scene she stands in front of the mirror with an unlit cigarette and acts like her memsaab Mehr.

As the film progresses, it gets complicated and a lot of scenes build up but it feels like they are left incomplete. The film lacks momentum and flow. Ashar, who is a mutual friend of Mehr and Hassan, appears out of the blue in one scene, creates havoc and then vanishes. His character could have been built slowly. Writer-Director Shazia Ali Khan said in an interview that it is not a commercial film and hence spice and a commercial angle is not much visible in the film. According to her, it is a realistic film that tackles the real lives of expats. The character of Kulsoom Api (Hajra Khan) is quite confusing as it is not in sync with the theme of the film. Though the role of Hajra Khan is short, her acting is at par and she makes an impact.

This film is not well-received as Pakistan's native language is Urdu and the film has a lot of English lines and English and Arabic subtitles. Even at a 58% literacy rate, the Pakistani people who go to cinemas understand and enjoy films in Urdu. Colour grading of the film has not been done professionally while the camera is shaky from start to finish.

Since this is Shazia Ali Khan's first attempt at film-making, hopefully, she will get better in future. She has invested time and money to make a film that depicts the unglamorous side of Pakistanis living and working in Dubai and it is certainly a great effort.

A film like Pinky Memsaab could probably do well in a film festival because such topics go down well with foreign audiences. In Pakistan, non-commercial films only stand out if they are exceptional or there is some sort of commercial angle attached.

The plus point of Pinky Memsaab is its cast that does not leave any loopholes in doing their roles. The side characters are exceptional as well. Overall, the film is not a flop but it could have had done with a lot more attention in so many aspects. Hopefully, Shazia Ali Khan's next venture will be more fine-tuned and will be both for the commercial as well as the parallel cinema. S

FILM

SIMMBA

Warped Chauvinism

BY HADIQA IQBAL

ACP Sanghram Bhalerao, shortened as 'Simmba', is the name of a corrupt police officer and also the name of the film that outlines the story of an orphan child called Shivgadh who was to be raised as a corrupt police officer. The purpose behind this ambition is to gain power and money which is possible with a police uniform that everyone salutes and does not dare to underrate.

The film is directed by Rohit Shetty and has become a bigger hit than his previous films. Shetty maintains his combination formula of comedy, entertainment, action and continuous roar of lions in order to deliver the silent message of the unacceptability of rape. Several critics say the storyline is from a Telugu film 'Temper' though this is not the case.

The plot of the film is a continuation of Rohit Shetty's 'Singham' as we witness Bajirao Singham (Ajay Devgan) narrating the childhood of Simmba. Singham and Simmba both belong to Shivgarh but while Singham is an honest police officer, Simmba (Ranveer Singh) is raised to be a corrupt officer. From his childhood, Simmba is very clear about becoming a dishonest police officer and for that, he studies every night and works hard during the day to become a police officer so that he can start earning unfairly.

For Simmba, police officers can only make money in the form of bribes and this is because he himself has observed it every day. He gets bribes from some local thieves and a jeweller and, while he is enjoying his life as a corrupt police officer he is transferred to Miramar police station and is warned to be aware of the local strongman Dhurva Ranade (Sonu Sood) who seems to have the local police and politics in his pocket. From the very beginning, Singh and Shetty make sure that the audience stick to their seats till the end and go back from the film as a 'paisa wasool' presentation.

While Simmba is driving to Miramar police station, he sees Akruti (Vaidehi Parashurami) on the way teaching kids. This is how he used to study once. As soon as he arrives at the station, he comes across his love interest Shagun (Sara Ali Khan) running a catering business. Akruti later builds a sisterly bond with Simmba when she arrives at Miramar police station to file a complaint against the brothers of Dhurva Ranade (Sonu Sood) called Sada (Amrit Pal Singh) and Giri (Saurabh Gokhale) for dealing with drugs in their pub and using children as peddlers. At that time Simmba does not pay much attention to her as he is busy enjoying brotherly ties with Ranade and making money out of him.

The second half of the film has twists and turns as Simmba is now developing a conscience and avenging rape when Akruti is raped and brutally injured by Sada and Giri. Simmba ignores her demand to file a complaint against Ranade's brothers. Then Akruti risks her life and goes to the club to videotape the illicit actions of Sada and Giri but gets caught. Akruti's accomplice runs away with the phone and manages to reach the police. Simmba, trusting Ranade, does not believe that a crime has taken place until he recovers the video from Akruti's cell phone. From then, Simmba plans to kill Sada and Giri while making it look like an encounter.

Sara plays a supportive and motivational role by talking about her late father, the legendary 'encounter police officer', who would have done the same thing as Simmba. In the climax of the film, the entry of Ajay Devgan and Akshay Kumar is responded to with claps and shouts of the audience. Ajay supports Simmba in his encounter statement and also unveils that he could instil a fear of law in the minds of men who do not respect women.

Although Simmba is the main character of the film, Rohit Shetty focuses more on the portrayal of women with his female cast. We see Ashwini Kalsekar as the judge giving the final verdict, mother and wife of Ranade (Sarita Joshi and Shriswra) speaking against him, daughter of the constable (Ulka Gupta) and Shagun, all supporting Simmba's encounter.

Ranveer plays his role with great enthusiasm, self-confidence and comes across as a loving character enjoying life. His 80s-90s looks, tightly tucked shirts, flaky and serious looks (biting his own lower lip while chasing crooks) and the word 'police' tattooed on his forearm are enough to impress viewers. Sonu Sood, as always, does a great job as the negative lead. The constable Nityanand Mohile is also a strong character in the film.

Lines like 'Je mala mahit nahin te mala sangh (tell me something, I don't know)', 'Main paison ka nahi sirf pyar ka bhooka hoon… aur mujhe pyar sirf paison se hai', 'Temper nahi… otherwise my temper will hamper you' and 'bhai from another aai' are my favourites and the delivery in the Marathi accent adds more tarka to the film. These lines were written by Farhad Samji. Also, the song 'Aankh Marey' has everyone grooving.

According to critics, Simmba is not only ahead of Singham but far superior to Dabanng, the blockbuster that defines the category.

The film smashes a record of around Rs. 100 crore in its opening weekend. Though the digits are lesser than those of Padmaavaat (which Ranveer did with Deepika Padukone), 'Simmba' can be described as the biggest solo hit in Ranveer's career. His other big solo is 'Befikre'. S

SOCIAL MEDIA

AAGAHI – APNAY MUSTAQBIL KI

The Rights of Women

BY MUHAMMAD ALI KHAN

Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy has produced another animated series - *'Aagahi – Apnay Mustaqbil Ki'* for the social media. The series aims to educate Pakistani women about their legal rights. It demonstrates how to file an FIR, etc. It explains the law on domestic violence, divorce, cyber-crimes and inheritance and shows the procedure for reporting such issues and who should be approached for help. Other topics include forced marriages, divorce rights, inheritance rights, domestic violence, sexual abuse and acid attacks.

The Urdu word *'Aagahi'* means 'awareness.' This is a public service campaign consisting of 14 short animated films. Each short film has been conceived, produced and directed by SOC Films and is between 2 to 3 minutes long. Covering the law, its interpretation and the security it gives to the person in question, the short films clarify legislation as stated in the Pakistan Penal Code and give an overview of how the legal provisions granted to them can be applied.

The first episode of the series 'How to Register an FIR (First Information Report)' gives insights into how women can file an official FIR at the local police station and further highlights the crimes that one can file an FIR against. These crimes include murder, rape, theft, kidnapping, domestic violence, acid attacks and others. The police have the authority to arrest the alleged culprits of these crimes without any warrant. It is worth noting that the police can only begin an investigation once an FIR has been registered. With a voice-over by Aamina Sheikh, a leading actress, the narration is in Urdu with English subtitles. The series is also available in regional languages to cater to all Pakistani women.

The victims of domestic violence often lack the courage to stand against their abuser because they have no support and no awareness of their legal rights. They continue to live under the burden of inhumane doctrines set by the men in their family. In Aagahi, domestic violence has been divided into various episodes. Episode 2 identifies different forms of abuse such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse and economic abuse while episode 3 informs viewers on how to seek protection against such violence. The video educates women on the various steps they can take to protect themselves such as filing an FIR, seeking a protection order, visiting the medico-legal centre at a government hospital or seeking refuge at a shelter, if needed. The series additionally shares telephone numbers of various helplines, counselling services, shelters and legal support services where women can seek help.

The fourth instalment of the Aagahi campaign sheds light on the Nikahnama. The video titled 'Know Your Nikahnama' has details about the various sections in a Nikahnama, highlighting important information that the bride should know before she signs this legal document.

It is surprising that many brides are never given the chance to review their Nikahnama as it is considered wrong to have obligations in the Nikahnama, a taboo conceived by certain illiterate people. The three-minute video talks about the rights that are extended to the bride through the Nikahnama, like the amount of Mehr, the right of divorce and the fixed monetary allowance the husband gives to his wife every month. It also has details of various helplines, counselling services and legal support services for people who may have inquiries concerning their Nikahnama.

Getting a divorce in Pakistan is really difficult, firstly, because it is considered taboo if a woman even talks about getting a divorce and, secondly, because the people lack knowledge. The series

outlines the process of 'Talaq and Khula' in the fifth episode. It gives details about how the groom must give the right to divorce to the bride through the Nikahnama. In case the husband doesn't grant his wife this right, she can still seek Khula and apply for a divorce through the family court. The episode also describes the twelve grounds on which a married woman can apply for Khula.

The series explains how a woman can file for Khula (divorce) through the courts. The sixth short film 'Filing for Divorce' (Khula Laynay Ka Tareeqa) answers the questions about registering the divorce, who keeps custody of the children and whether or not the wife has to return the Mehr given by her husband.

According to a study, Pakistan is the second worst country when it comes to gender equality. Moreover, it is the third most dangerous place for women around the world as various cases of domestic abuse, violence and rape have hit the headlines in recent years while many go unreported.

'Aagahi – Apnay Mustaqbil Ki' is an attempt to fight various social injustices. It serves as a tool to inform women about their rights and how they can claim these rights. The series is also being shared free of cost with all news channels for wider dissemination. The initiative can prove to be a game-changer in putting an end to abuse against women and the first step towards change is awareness.S

RESTAURANT

ZAOQ

Treat for the Taste Buds

BY FAIZAN USMANI

There is another delicious addition to the plethora of eating places in Karachi. It is called ZAOQ and it is located in the Lucky One Mall, which is said to be the biggest shopping mall in Karachi – and obviously, the biggest such facility anywhere in Pakistan.

ZAOQ is an authentic chain of restaurants offering Pakistani cuisine. Lucky One, like other shopping malls, has its own food court located on an upper floor. ZAOQ is different. It is right on the ground floor where you get served on your table. The choice is yours whether you want to sit inside the cosy restaurant or in the attached open hall.

The restaurant has sophisticated décor and an elegant ambience and claims to offer an entirely new dining experience. It is said to be a journey through the glorious heritage of the sub-continent.

Zaoq Restaurant now has two branches in Karachi and three in Doha. The first restaurant was launched in 2009 in Doha. It offered to the people of the Qatari capital genuine Pakistani cuisine for the first time in a formal setting and the people of Doha really appreciated the elegance, refinement and good taste – all reflecting the true meaning of ZAOQ.

It is true that getting to the Lucky One shopping mall in Karachi is quite a brave effort because it is located at the far end of Gulshan e Iqbal and the road connecting the area to the rest of the city is quite a bottleneck. But once you somehow get there, you find that places like ZAOQ are quite a treat for the taste buds – especially if you love Pakistani food. S

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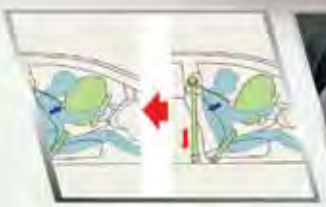

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