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Why this Obsession?
While Pakistan and America have nurtured a meaningful partnership over the years, why is it that anti-Americanism is still rampant amongst the masses?
Insights and conversations on Advertising, Public Relations, Marketing, Media, Research.

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**COVER STORY**

Why this Obsession?

Our cover story this month attempts to explain the love-hate relationship between America and Pakistan and tries to find out the ground realities behind this phenomenon.

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**INDIA**

Corruption scandals are tarnishing the global image of this rising power.

**INTERVIEW**

Lt Gen William Caldwell in an exclusive interview with SouthAsia.

**AFGHANISTAN**

Is any long-lasting solution in sight for the Afghan people?
The state struggles between secularism and fundamentalism.

Proper mental health facilities are needed as part of post-war rehabilitation efforts.

Is China well-equipped to face the challenges of the new decade?

NATO’s credibility is at stake while the world continues to fight terrorism.

Internet facilities on Mount Everest—yes or no?
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The much awaited policy review by President Barack Obama with reference to Afghanistan and Pakistan has revealed no surprises. It is clear that U.S. forces expected to quit Afghanistan by next July, are not going anywhere in a hurry. The U.S. president has stressed in the review that while he is committed to begin U.S. troop withdrawal from the region by July next, the drawdown will actually conclude in 2014. As such, the statement puts to rest the widely held expectation that the U.S. would reduce the major portion of its 100,000 strong military presence in Afghanistan by the middle of 2011 and would operate there with a much smaller force. It is obvious that no such thing will happen.

On the subject of the U.S. approach to Pakistan in the context of the latter’s role as the U.S.’s major ally in the war against terrorism, the review emphasizes that progress in the Washington-Islamabad alliance had been “substantial” but “uneven” over last year and some adjustments are necessary. It says that the denial of extremist safe havens will require greater cooperation with Pakistan along the border with Afghanistan and calls for the laying of a foundation for a strategic partnership based on mutual respect and trust, through increased dialogue, improved cooperation and enhanced exchange and assistance programs.

The review points out that while important gains have been achieved as a result of the U.S. civilian presence in Afghanistan, for these gains to be sustained over time, there is an urgent need for political and economic progress. For instance, it says the momentum achieved by the Taliban in recent years has been arrested in much of the country and reversed in some key areas, but the success is still fragile and reversible. The review certainly leaves many questions unanswered. For instance, it does not say how the U.S. will strengthen Afghan military and governing structures to achieve the desired objectives.

Richard Holbrooke’s imprint can be clearly discerned in the new U.S. policy review but it is unfortunate that fate prevented him from sharing the podium with the President when the policy was being announced. The late Holbrooke spearheaded President Obama’s Af-Pak campaign as his special envoy with great diligence. He was a man who loved big challenges. He pushed for an ambitious military presence in Afghanistan, an effort to train Afghan troops, root out corruption and encourage economic progress because he believed that security and development go hand in hand. “Without security, you can build a bridge, you can build a school, and one grenade sets it off,” he said. It is sad that with all his hard work, U.S. success in Afghanistan and Pakistan still remains elusive. ♦
‘Getting Afghanistan Right’

While reading the commentary on the war imbroglio in Afghanistan as part of South Asia’s December cover story I could not help but wonder whose fault is it anyways. I also couldn’t stop but laugh at the irony of the famous saying: what you sow is what you reap. Though the Obama administration has come under severe pressure both on domestic front and the international community, why do we forget that this war mess is something that the Obama administration has inherited and hence will take time to solve? From the very beginning the Bush administration’s decision to go to war in Afghanistan was grounded in questionable assumptions. And while during a decade-long war some fatal mistakes were committed which spoiled prospects of success in Afghanistan, the blame cannot be entirely put on the present administration in Washington only. It is our collective failure in the region which has led us to this unclear situation. With the start of a new decade and with a unanimous decision to start withdrawing troops from the Afghan land by July this year and staying back as part of assessment procedure through 2014, let’s hope that a bright future – free of terror and intrusion – awaits the Afghans.

Hamid Shaheen,
Karachi, Pakistan

A terror decade

As the war on terrorism completed its first decade, it is extremely frustrating to observe that Pakistan and especially its people are still confused as to what they are fighting for. While our leaders, policymakers and tacticians are continuously busy planning to root out terrorism, the masses are still not able to grasp the objectives of this war thanks to the many conspiracy theories and slip-ups by our policymakers. This has resulted in the lack of support by the people for the war.

It is imperative that along with the government, the media and public figures should also initiate the task to sensitize and educate the Pakistani masses on this threat. It is time that the political parties in India realize that in this new world order what matters most is the quality of life that one offers to the general public. The public can no longer be lured in by

Your take on SAARC

I was on a flight from Karachi to Dubai and was reading the South Asia magazine. Arsla Jawaid’s piece on SAARC ‘Time to revisit’ in the December issue of SouthAsia was an accurate description of this regional body. In spite of being precise, it touched well the points and was on the dot. SAARC as a forum has failed miserably. South Asia has, as a region, has failed to capitalize the opportunities presented through this forum. It won’t be wrong to say that both India and Pakistan are mainly responsible for the failures of SAARC. The trade bodies, as the writer pointed out have not been able to do anything substantial as well. I think the only successful body is that of SAFMA. It seems SAFMA has focused more on track 2 diplomacy between India and Pakistan. But all the advances made by SAFMA were never translated into a meaningful policy or approach by the ones who matter.

Yahya Ahmed,
Islamabad, Pakistan

‘Options for progress’

Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, with his low-key political style has made history in Bihar, one of India’s most backward states. Winning with 206 of the 243 assembly seats, he out-seated flamboyant leader Laloo Prasad’s Rashtriya Janata Dal to 22 seats. The Congress was also beaten down to a pathetic four seats, its lowest-ever Bihar score. The results have important implications for Indian politics.

It is encouraging to note that the key to Kumar’s landslide victory lies in Bihar’s 11 per cent GDP growth, improved administration and, most important, his break with “identity politics” based on caste, religion and other social group attributes. Kumar, often termed as “Bihar’s Narendra Modi,” has created a new politics in which identities don’t matter; what matters is GDP growth. It is time that the political parties in India realize that in this new world order what matters most is the quality of life that one offers to the general public. The public can no longer be lured in by
Editor’s Mail

false promises but needs to be given its due rights – long held hostage by self-interests and power play in the country.

Seema Rao, via email

Burmese Democracy

I second Mr. Jillani’s thoughts that while Burma struggles for democracy in the country, our South Asian nations have a lot to learn and implement. Leaders in our part of the world seem to be content with either the political processes handed down to them through families – more of a political dynasty set up or simply winning votes through false promises. What our nations in the region need is strong democracy, one which can guarantee a smooth functioning of political process. Most of the politics in South Asia is based on personality-based politics where the deserving candidates are often marred by strong and mighty competitors. While the world rejoices Suu Kyi’s release and is lately deliberating on all her future moves, it is time that we as a region move towards a better implementation of the rules and definition of true democracy.

Ganesh Rao, Islamabad, Pakistan

‘Rivals turn partners’

Throughout 2010, South-Asia covered China very interestingly. It is always very intriguing to read about this mysterious land and more amazing to learn about its unprecedented growth in this past decade. There is a growing consensus amongst economists and geo-political analysts that the global economic power is in the process of shifting from the Atlantic to the Pacific. International community’s investment and forging partnerships with China is therefore not unexpected. What comes as more surprising though is China’s rigidity when it comes to it foreign policy and economic decisions. Be it the weakening political diplomacy with America or continuing tussle with Japan, China seems to be least bothered by what the global powers say or do. Similarly, the country is reluctant to curtail its cheap currency rates to address the economic woes of the developed economies. On the human rights front too China needs to seriously consider its violation of freedom of expression. Let us hope that this economic giant looks into its way in the new decade.

Huma Amir, Karachi, Pakistan

Features 2010

I would like to congratulate SouthAsia’s team for covering the social aspects of the South Asian life in such interesting and informative ways throughout the year 2010. The articles written on different social issues in the region were timely, well-written and articulate. Equally interesting was the variety of writers who came in from different walks of life and from all over the region and thus provided a very fresh perspective on different topics be it health, education, gender or child rights etc. I am looking forward to read more such articulate pieces in near future. Good luck!

Naima Rao, via email

Write to southasia

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“I will underscore that this [Wikileaks] theft of U.S. government information and its publication without regard for the consequences is deeply distressing. The illegal publication of classified information poses real concerns and even potential damage to our friends and partners.”

Hillary Clinton,
U.S. Secretary of State

“Whatever they [separatists] do, Kashmir will never become [part of] Pakistan and India is not going to budge an inch. I said this to father of (Hurriyat chairman) Mirwaiz Umar Farooq decades earlier.”

Farooq Abdullah,
Former Chief Minister, Jammu & Kashmir

“One of the main objectives of my government is to double per capita income to 4,000 dollars by 2016. A high per capita economy will help us to regain many opportunities we have lost during the war years.”

Mahinda Rajapakse,
Sri Lankan President

“The UN is in no way abandoning Nepal just because UNMIN [UN Mission in Nepal] is leaving. I think it is evident to all of us that the peace process in Nepal is moving into a critical period. This makes it all the more important that the leaders of Nepal move very quickly to resolve the issues of integration and rehabilitation, power-sharing and the drafting of a new constitution.”

B. Lynn Pascoe,
UN Under-Secretary-General

“Memorials, museums, park, galleries, crossings and statues in the name of great Dalit leaders like Dr BR Ambedkar would serve as an inspiration for the coming generation. It is not because of the parties which have ruled the country for a long time that the backward and deprived classes got reservation in education and government jobs.”

Mayawati,
Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, India

“We don’t know what to do with this [Wikileaks] whole thing: do we believe it or not believe it? I would go towards not believing it, that is better for Afghanistan. If anything, they helped the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan.”

Hamid Karzai,
Afghan President

“When I started hearing about the climate change issue, I started hearing developing countries say ‘we have a right to emit carbon because we have to develop’. It is true, we need to develop; but equating development to carbon emissions I thought was quite silly.”

Mohamed Nasheed,
President of The Maldives

“We could not pressure Pakistan to punish the 26/11 accused and neither could we pressure the U.S. to give us David Headley who knows more about the Mumbai attacks. Things stand in a state of paralysis. Our dossiers are being thrown in the dustbin by Pakistan.”

Prakash Javadekar,
Senior BJP leader, India
In their meeting last month in Kabul, Pakistani PM Yousaf Raza Gillani said the common threat of terrorism could be tackled through enhanced economic ties and increased trade relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

“The high level contacts have proved very useful in developing a better understanding between the two countries,” he said, adding that the interactions have also helped create a realization that as neighbors, both countries have to stand united to confront challenges.

Addressing the leaders and CEOs of the Afghan corporate sector and Afghan business community, the PM said the future of the economies of both countries was closely inter-linked and the geo-economic dynamics of the region made it an essential imperative.

He said Pakistan and Afghanistan have also agreed to work jointly to enhance regional connectivity and to establish corridors to facilitate trade and energy transactions. He said projects like TAPI, CASA-1000 and North South Rail link could transform the economic landscape of the region.

Mr. Gilani said he has proposed to President Karzai the establishment of special trans-border economic zones and to facilitate joint ventures and partnerships in the private sector. He said Afghanistan and Pakistan had vast human and natural resources, entrepreneurial talent and technological skills.

The PM said he and Karzai had agreed to fully implement the new Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement and redouble efforts to increase trade to $5 billion by 2015.

U.S. President Barack Obama paid a surprise lightning visit to Afghanistan last month to huddle with leaders and troops as his administration took a hard look at whether its war strategy is working. Obama flew to Kabul under cover of darkness. It was the second such visit since Obama became president, with his aides announcing nothing of his trip due to security concerns.

President Obama spent a mere three hours in the country at Bagram Air Base, the headquarters of the 101st Airborne Division where he was met by General David Petraeus, commander of U.S. troops in Afghanistan, and U.S. ambassador Karl Eikenberry. He then left for a base hospital to meet with wounded soldiers.

The President also spoke to Afghan President Hamid Karzai over telephone. In his special message to the American and NATO troops fighting in Afghanistan, Obama said the war had brought about positive results and paid tribute to the wounded soldiers, saying had it not been ‘you brave soldiers, away from home’, things would have been very crucial.

Obama’s trip came as his administration faced criticism over its review of the war strategy in Afghanistan as well as the leaked cables. Obama had originally planned to start withdrawing the troops in mid-2011; however after the U.S. election victory of the Republican Party which says the deadline encourages the Taliban to wait it out, the administration has shifted emphasis to say that the troop withdrawal would take place through 2014.

India’s Supreme Court, in its judgment last month has said work can resume at a memorial park being built by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati in the Delhi suburb of Noida. It had ordered the Mayawati government to stop building work in October 2009.

The Supreme Court has appointed a three-member expert group to ensure the park is built according to guidelines. The court said 50% of the 75-acre park must have trees as it was close to a bird sanctuary and that only 25%
could involve permanent structures.

Huge numbers of statues commissioned by Ms. Mayawati can be seen in the state capital, Lucknow, and other towns and cities of Uttar Pradesh. While critics accuse her of self-glorification, she accuses them of conspiring against her.

Ms. Mayawati’s spending on statues and memorials has been described as “shameful” by India’s Home Minister P Chidambaram. In 2009, she unveiled 15 new memorials, including two of herself.

Uttar Pradesh is one of India’s most deprived states, with a high crime rate and poor health indicators. Statues of political leaders are generally put up posthumously, but Ms. Mayawati says that belief is outdated. Ms. Mayawati is an icon for India’s 160 million low-caste Hindus. She is famous for building statues of herself and other Dalit icons but denies encouraging a personality cult.

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SRI LANKA

Pak-Lanka ties

In a recent four-day visit to Sri Lanka, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari met his counterpart Mahinda Rajapakse and discussed economic and military ties between the two countries.

The two discussed bonds of friendship, mutual respect and understanding between the two nations. The presidents agreed that the civilizational heritage of Sri Lanka and of Pakistan provided the foundation to build a vibrant and multi-faceted partnership.

In keeping with their vision of the future of Sri Lanka - Pakistan relations, the two leaders agreed that there is much scope to increase cooperation and to further harness the enormous potential available for consolidating and strengthening the bilateral partnership by building on shared values, leveraging common concerns and interests, enhancing connectivity between the two countries, increasing the synergies of their economies and, reinforcing the institutional framework for cooperation.

Both leaders agreed to promote a dialogue on security and defence issues relevant to their bilateral relationship, including through high-level contacts between Defence Forces and the training of Security Forces personnel.

the countries would also boost bilateral trade from existing U.S. $300 million to $1 billion in near future. Pakistan also offered a soft credit of U.S. 200 million to Sri Lanka for exporting, barter trade and easing its business transactions.

The two countries identified cooperation in cement, sugar, dairy production, textiles, tourism, light engineering, fresh fruits and vegetables, processed goods and pharmaceuticals as potential areas of mutually beneficial collaborative projects.

United Nations Under Secretary General for Political Affairs B Lynn Pascoe has said that Nepal’s peace process was moving toward critical period and urged the political leaders to prove their political will by making compromises and resolving issues of integration and rehabilitation, power-sharing and the drafting of a new constitution.

Wrapping up his two-day visit to Nepal last month, Pascoe assured that the UN would continue supporting the peace process through its agencies even after the withdrawal of UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) by January 15.

He further stated that the process would be under observation of the UN and the country would be an agenda of the Security Council for three years even after the exit of the UNMIN.

The term of UNMIN in Nepal ends on January 15. The Security Council had extended its term for the 7th time for four more months on September 15.

Meanwhile, political leaders and officials expressed a mixed reaction over the comment made by Pascoe. Talking to media about the status of UNMIN in Nepal, leader of the Nepali Congress party and Former Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat said that UNMIN’s presence is not important in the country as it has failed to exhibit its credibility in the issues of concern.
Global thinking

President Mohamed Nasheed has been ranked 39th in Foreign Policy magazine’s list of Top 100 Global Thinkers on the back of a number of high-profile environmentally-themed speeches and commitments such as a national pledge to be carbon neutral by 2020.

Pointing to a much publicized underwater conference held by the president in the Maldives—a promotional event designed to raise attention to cutting global output of greenhouse gas emissions amidst fears the country may be sunk by changing climate conditions—the magazine believed Nasheed has continued to be an important pioneer for greener political talk.

“Since taking office two years ago, Nasheed, a 43-year-old former human rights activist, has become the world’s most environmentally outspoken president,” the magazine claimed. “He has made his tiny country — a string of atolls in the Indian Ocean that sits an average of just 7 feet above sea level — a poster child for the need to stop global warming.”

Other names in the list included U.S. president Barack Obama in third place, Oxford University economist Paul Collier at 29th place and Salam Fayyad, the Palestine prime minister, at 23.

Corruption charges against Grameen

Bangladeshi micro-credit pioneer Grameen Bank has described as “total fabrication” claims that the institution diverted nearly $100m of aid cash. The denial came after Norway said it was examining reports relating to money from Norway, Sweden and Germany.

A documentary alleged that the cash had been transferred from Grameen Bank to other parts of Grameen. Danish filmmaker Tom Heinemann claimed Prof Yunus and his associates had diverted nearly $100m of grant money to another company - Grameen Kalyan - which was not involved in micro-credit. The documentary claimed that after the Norwegian authorities raised objections to the alleged funds transfer, only about $30m was diverted back to Grameen Bank.

The bank’s 1,600-word statement said “mental agony” had been caused by an “inaccurate and misleading news report published globally regarding an alleged ‘siphoning off’ of a large amount of money by Professor Yunus through one of his organisations”. Meanwhile reacting sharply to the controversy, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said the government will unearth the facts to find out if there was any unlawful activity.

Nobel Peace laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus set up the bank in Bangladesh in 1996 to make small loans to the poor. His micro-credit lending model has been replicated in other parts of the world. The original aim of micro-credit was poverty reduction, but in recent years some lenders have been criticised over exorbitant interest rates and alleged coercive debt collection.

Civil nuclear cooperation

French President Nicolas Sarkozy, on his four-day official visit to India last month held key talks on civil nuclear cooperation with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Paving the way for construction of French nuclear reactors in the country, India and France signed a general framework agreement and four other pacts for deeper bilateral cooperation in the atomic energy sector.

The general framework agreement between Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) and French company Areva was signed for
construction of nuclear power plant (NPP) units in Jaitapur in Maharashtra.

President Sarkozy also backed India’s bid for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council and supported India’s membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), a gathering of countries which export civil nuclear technology.

Experts say that the deal is good news for India - which is desperately short of energy to fuel its booming economy.

France is the world’s second largest producer of nuclear energy after the United States. It hopes to be at the forefront of an international revival of the industry which analysts say will benefit from worries about global warming and soaring energy prices.

India has 22 nuclear reactors and is seeking to expand its nuclear energy sector, opening up a market estimated at £90bn ($142bn) over 15 years. Supporters of the deal say that having more nuclear plants in India could help reduce global demand for oil and gas while at the same time significantly reduce the country’s pollution levels.

Nepal

The unchecked and unregulated collecting of boulders, stones and sand from Nepal’s rivers has placed many of the country’s crucial bridges in danger. Experts say it has also increased the risk of flooding and other threats.

The bridges are on the country’s most important highway, running across from the eastern-most part of Nepal to the west. If they collapse, the East-West Highway, the transport lifeline of the country, will be severely disrupted affecting large section of the population.

The same is true for many bridges in the western and central part of the country. During a field investigation in western Nepal, many people were seen at a time digging and collecting boulders and pebbles from around the pillars of the bridge on the Kuthia river.

These boulders and stones are later taken to the crushers in nearby towns. Stone crushers had been mushrooming across the country until a recent court ruling banned export of such resources to India.

The court decision came following a parliamentary investigation that found uncontrolled collecting of stones and boulders was threatening the normal courses of some rivers.

Most of them were exported to India where, experts said, they were used in the construction of infrastructure like roads and dams. As exports soared, hydrologists say, rivers had begun to change their courses, inundating human settlements and reaching unexpected parts of forests.

Maldives

At the launch of a report on vulnerability to climate impacts last month, Maldives President Mohamed Nasheed said poor countries as well as rich should look to cut carbon emissions and that continuing to equate the need to develop with the right to emit carbon dioxide is “quite silly”.

He said the Maldives has not received any of the “fast-start” finance pledged by Western governments last year.

The position of the powerful G77/China bloc - which includes most of the developing world - is that Western nations should cut emissions while others should only have to reduce the rate at which their emissions grow.

However, The Maldives and some other developing nations are known to be somewhat disenchanted with the fact that they have to sit inside the same negotiating bloc as countries that want to develop on the back of expanding fossil fuel use, and some that do not want a legally-binding global agreement to constrain emissions.

The Maldives is aiming to become carbon neutral by 2020; and Mr. Nasheed sees the low-carbon development strategy, when it is fully developed, as something that could be picked up by larger nations such as China and India.
Anti-Americanism in Pakistan

Every move by America to win the hearts and minds of the Pakistani public is seen as a form of deception which is devoid of any intrinsic value.

By Dr. Syed Rifaat Hussain

There is no gainsaying the fact that the graph of negative feeling about United States has been rising in Pakistan and the efforts made by Washington to win the battle for the hearts and minds of the Pakistani people have yielded very little tangible results. According to national and global public opinion surveys overwhelming majority of Pakistanis views United States as an unfriendly country. According to the data compiled by Pew Global Attitude Project since 2002, the annual average of those Pakistanis who hold a positive image of the United States is less than 20%. This public disaffection toward the United States stands in marked contrast to the decades of the 1960s and 1970s when Pakistanis turned out in large numbers to welcome visiting American leaders. The first lady, Jacqueline Kennedy, for example, was greeted by thousands of cheering Pakistanis, when her motorcade passed through the narrow streets of Rawalpindi in 1962. Standing next to President Ayub Khan in a convertible vehicle, she constantly waved at people who had lined the streets to catch a glimpse of her.

What explains this turn around in public sentiments toward the United States? The reasons for this Pakistani disenchmtment with Washington are varied and complex. The overarching reason is the transactional nature of ties between Islamabad and Washington. Rather than valuing Pakistan as an ally in its own right, Washington has taken an instrumental view of Pakistan. In the early 1950s, strategic links were forged with Pakistan with the sole aim of using the country as a bulwark against the threat of communist expansion in Asia. Pakistani concerns relating to Kashmir and the threat from India were never accorded a strategic priority by Washington. Pakistanis felt
“let down” and “betrayed” after the United States suspended aid during the 1965 India-Pakistan war. Pakistani efforts to cultivate China as a strategic ally in the mid-1960s were also disappointed by Washington due to strained Sino-American ties. The United States used Islamabad as an intermediary for its historic opening to China but failed to prevent the disintegration of Pakistan following the 1971 India-Pakistan war.

The strident American opposition to the launching of Pakistan’s nuclear program following the trauma of 1971 and Indian nuclear test in May 1974 only reinforced the Pakistani belief that Washington was insensitive to Pakistan’s legitimate security needs. The imposition of military and economic sanctions on Pakistan under the American anti-proliferation laws further inflamed the rising public resentment toward Washington. The temporary lifting of these sanctions during the Soviet-Afghan war during which Pakistan became the “frontline” state and their re-imposition in 1990 after the larger American goal of defeating the Soviet evil empire had been served, provided ample proof of American unreliability and punitive approach toward Pakistan.

The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union led to Pakistan’s strategic denigration by Washington. This was clearly demonstrated by President Bill Clinton’s visit to South Asia in March 2000 during which he lectured the Pakistani people and the government on virtues of democracy and praised India as the new rising power and preferred strategic partner of United States. The fact that President Clinton spent less than six hours in Pakistan and four full days in India was not lost on Pakistani public.

Following 9/11 terrorist attacks, Washington exerted enormous coercive pressure on Pakistan to distance itself from the Taliban regime in Kabul which had refused to disavow its links with al-Qaeda. Willy-nilly, Islamabad joined the U.S.-led global coalition against terrorism and to its chagrin watched the demise of the Taliban controlled Afghanistan. The American failure to physically interdict the fleeing al-Qaeda and their Taliban supporters including Mullah Omar who made their way into the tribal areas of Pakistan, forced the Pakistan military to deploy troops along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and to initiate military campaigns against al-Qaeda sanctuaries. The massive use of force by the Pakistan military generated a strong reaction among the local population and spawned armed resistance led by the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan.

TTP’s violent campaign including suicide attacks on military and civilian targets in major Pakistani cities claimed 30,000 lives including 2,000 Pakistani soldiers. These heavy losses received little appreciation from Washington and the American officials continued with their refrain that Islamabad ought to do more to bring the threat of armed militancy under control. Dissatisfied with the Pakistani military response and suspicious of ISI’s double dealings with some of the Afghan resistance networks operating out of the tribal belt, Washington intensified its campaign of drone attacks in the FATA region. Between 2004 and 2010, there were 199 drone strikes in which 1,934 people were killed. In 2010 alone there were more than 100 drone attacks in which 800 people lost their lives. These drone attacks were condemned by the Pakistani people including the Parliament as acts that caused civilian deaths (for each al-Qaeda and Taliban terrorist killed by U.S. drones, 140 innocent Pakistanis also had to die), violated international law and undermined the authority of the Pakistani government. Disregarding these strong anti-drone public sentiments, the Obama administration continues to employ them as the most efficient tool to degrade the terrorist threat emanating from Waziristan which Secretary Defense Robert Gates has characterized as the “epicenter of global terrorism.” Apart from the transactional character of Pak-U.S. bilateral ties in which Pakistani national security interests were either marginalized or totally ignored by Washington, another important factor that has inflamed anti-American sentiment in Pakistan is the mounting evidence of American blatant interference in the domestic affairs of Pakistan. As highlighted by the leaked U.S. Embassy cables sent from Islamabad, Washington has been deeply involved in not only managing civil-military relations but also using its clout to keep things hidden from the public eye. The deployment of elements of American special forces in FATA was not only flatly denied by the U.S. government but it was also kept as a secret from the Pakistani people. Washington’s secret dealings with the Pakistani establishment only reinforce the widely held Pakistani perception that American policies toward Pakistan either serve Washington or they are so narrowly focused that they fail to promote the larger and collective interest of the Pakistani people. Given this pervasive public suspicion of the American motives, it becomes exceedingly difficult for Washington to pursue those policies which actually promote collective good. Every American move to win the battle for the hearts and minds of the Pakistani public is seen as a form of deception which is devoid of any intrinsic value. Overcoming this unfortunate legacy of public distrust is the single most important challenge facing Washington in its future dealings with Pakistan.

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Once upon a time anti-Americanism was attributed to envy. Americans claimed that other nations were jealous of their resources, wealth, power and success. But that was between states. The common people were not concerned with what the U.S. had and what it was doing.

Today, the situation is different. In the internet age people across the world know all about U.S. activities in various fields, -from global warming, unwinnable wars, bullying its allies, to its blatant disregard for international law and ethical behavior. Others, as in Afghanistan and Iraq, have been direct victims of U.S. brutalities. Therefore, whereas the former dislike America, the latter hate it intensely. For example, even though America and Britain are hitched in a special relationship, yet, when George Bush visited U.K. there was such a wave of angry protest that he had to travel almost in a capsule to meet the Queen at Buckingham Palace.


In fact, a common thread of anti-Americanism runs from Japan across the Middle East to South America. Apparently it is an irony, considering America’s worldwide “philanthropy.” It rushes aid to wherever in the world there is a natural calamity - earthquake, flood famine, et al. In normal times it gives oodles of economic and military assistance to many countries. Pakistan offers an instant example. America sent large quantities of relief goods with men and helicopters, during the recent devastating flood and contributed heavily in cash for the rehabilitation of the affected people. Earlier, after the earthquake in Azad Kashmir also, the U.S. had poured similar assistance.

Besides, heavy doses of U.S. military and economic assistance sustain Pakistan’s defense capability and keep life going. As Pakistan’s former ambassador to the United States, Syeda Abida Hussein affirmed in a TV talk show, “Without American assistance we would starve to death.”

And yet, the PEW Global Attitudes...
Project found only 17% of Pakistanis having a favorable view of the U.S. The survey was undertaken perhaps in view of the recent realization by the U.S. administration that people in Pakistan are also worthy of their attention that called for a change in approach. So long, for six decades, America dealt only with the rulers, whether absolute monarchs or military dictators, while trumpeting its love and support for freedom and democracy.

The reason for this chameleon faced attitude was summed up by Guardian’s Gary Younge as, “The US supports democracy when democracy supports the US.” (Ouster of Democracy; 30 March 2004). There are think tanks galore in the United States churning out pompous findings on practically everything under the sun, but they do not appear to have diagnosed the root of this congenital affliction among Americans. Robert Fisk therefore derivatively calls them “Tink thanks.”

Perhaps this mindset, which Americans proudly call “exceptionalism,” has been bred by the arrogance of power. With so much power, human resources, money, technology and lethal arms, they claim to be a distinct species, who the laws of nations do not apply to. For the same reason they are impatient people seeking quick results; let the means be damned. In the first Iraq war, for example, their overwhelming force crushed the enemy swiftly and the forces went home with flying colors.

In the second Iraq war of 2003-2008, the U.S. proudly proclaimed a strategy of shock and awe. But, when the harrowing tales of wanton massacre and inhuman brutalities sent shock waves across the world, it changed the strategy to “winning the hearts and minds” of the Muslims. Karen Hughes was appointed as undersecretary of state for public diplomacy with the rank of ambassador. Outwardly her task was to change “foreigners’ perceptions about America.” But actually it was focused on Muslims. So, she went on a “listening tour” from the Middle East and Saudi Arabia to Pakistan and Indonesia.

How many hearts and minds she won is not known, but Pakistan’s president Gen. Musharraf went on record as having lost his soul to Hughes’ irresistible lure so as to decorate her with a civil award.

With the war going badly in Afghanistan, the United States realized that Pakistan’s active and whole-hearted support was basic for making any meaningful headway. So, it tried the goad with the government and the army. But the usual lubricant of dollars could achieve only so much. In the operations in Swat and South Waziristan Pakistan lost more soldiers and officers than the U.S. had in nine years in Afghanistan.

The army therefore has not displayed the same alacrity in its response to repeated U.S. demands to march into North Waziristan. Another factor behind Gen. Kayani’s reluctance is the need for the same kind of full popular backing for North Waziristan operation as in the case of Swat.

Ergo, the sudden emphasis on winning the hearts and minds of the Pakistanis! After the illuminating PEW report, President Obama promptly chose Farah Pundith, a Muslim Kashmiri American, for the job. In contrast to Karen Hughes, Pundith works quietly, worming her way like a virus into the hearts and minds of susceptible Muslims. At the same time Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the new U.S. ambassador Cameron Munter are going gaga about the newly discovered value of Pakistani hearts and minds and the need to win them.

However, it is not that Americans don’t know how hatred can be turned into love. But, they do not care because, their basic philosophy is “Oderint um metuant,” -a saying of Emperor Caligula that translates, roughly, as “let them hate as long as they fear.” Therefore, even when forced by circumstances, they would rather go out “buying” hearts and minds because it can give immediate results, rather than “winning” which would involve a lengthy process.

Therefore, dollars are flowing into Pakistan to buy support from newspapers, columnists and politicians for America’s crusade against al Qaeda and Taliban. However, discerning people are wary. In view of the frequent drone attacks mercilessly killing innocent Pakistanis, they suspect American motives behind the claim of American officials about a new-found love for the people of Pakistani. They also argue that this sudden surge of passion is calibrated to America’s victory in the war it is waging.

As soon as the war is won, Pakistan will cease to have any strategic relevance for America and will be discarded just as it happened after the Soviet army retreated from Afghanistan. Therefore, if there was any genuine desire to cultivate enduring friendship with Pakistani people, then the U.S. should have opened its gates for Pakistani exports. Instead it gives cash doles and supplies arms to the military.

But American policy is guided solely by blind self-interest. There is nothing altruistic behind it. Because Pakistan does not have any usefulness for U.S. interests in the long term, the Am-Pak romance has never been constant. By contrast America treats India with respect and its presidents ritually make a pilgrimage to India.

Anti-American feelings in Pakistan are therefore a reality that should surprise nobody, least of all the U.S. administration.

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A deluge of U.S. diplomatic cables has tarnished the reputation of Pakistan’s political and military leadership in the eyes of the country’s public, adding to anti-American sentiments in Pakistan. The situation post-WikiLeaks in Pakistan got so tense that the new American ambassador to Pakistan, Cameron P. Munter personally had to take charge where he made a point of meeting all the stakeholders in Pakistan to apologize.

The dispatches, released by the WikiLeaks website, show military and civilian leaders agreeing to policies in private meetings with U.S. diplomats that they would passionately disavow in public. Among those damaged by the cables is Pakistan’s powerful military chief, Gen. Ashfaq Kayani, who, according to the cables, would confide highly sensitive information to U.S. Ambassador Anne Patterson and use her to carry messages to his own political leadership. As they pored over the leaked cables, the Pakistani news media studiously ignored the other side of the story that emerges from the leaked communications: deep American frustration at Pakistan’s lack of cooperation.

Interestingly the politicians as compared to the military, post WikiLeaks came out victorious followed by a small media campaign from the presidency on asserting parliament supremacy which resulted in an ISPR clarification from the Army chief that, “the army respects all politicians and supports democracy.” In one missive, from September 2009, Patterson lamented that there’s “no chance” that Pakistan will stop funding certain Islamic extremist groups, no matter how much U.S. aid is doled out. Earlier that year, she’d concluded: “The relationship is one of co-dependency we grudgingly admit — Pakistan knows the U.S. cannot afford to walk away; the U.S. knows Pakistan cannot survive without our support.” Pakistanis see the cables in a distinctly different light, portraying both the government and opposition as fawningly pro-American and duplicitous.

Despite the alliance between Islamabad and Washington in fighting terrorist groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan, public opinion is highly sensitive about encroachments on the nation’s sovereignty, and the cables provide evidence for those who hold to the conspiracy theory that the United States runs this country. The Pakistani media are portraying U.S. diplomats as hyperactive meddlers,
constantly intriguing with Pakistan’s rulers to push Washington’s agenda. The WikiLeaks documents also included a 2009 cable that discussed removing fissile material from a Pakistani nuclear reactor, an incendiary issue in a country where many think the U.S. aims to strip it of its nuclear capability. An issue which is super sensitive to all Pakistanis which cemented an average Pakistani’s concern that the United States is after Pakistani nukes. Another cable from 2009 has Patterson suggesting that Washington downplay allegations of extrajudicial killings by the Pakistani military to foster “goodwill within the Pakistan military and civilian establishment that can easily erode if too much public criticism from USG (U.S. government) officials over these incidents is forthcoming.”

Ignoring the crimes could be a breach of U.S. law, which prohibits funding foreign militaries that are guilty of gross human rights violations too. Pakistan’s leading politicians appear to share the belief that America is the ultimate power in their country. One ambitious contender, Fazl-ur-Rehman, the leader of a hardline religious party that’s ostensibly anti-American, held a banquet for Patterson in 2007 to seek her help in becoming the next prime minister.

Opposition leader Nawaz Sharif, who’s publicly critical of the U.S., repeatedly assured U.S. diplomats behind closed doors of his pro-American feelings and thanked Patterson for the appointment of Kayani as Pakistani army chief. Patterson, who left Islamabad last month, was rarely out of the media spotlight in Pakistan, particularly in moments of domestic political tension, when she’d be seen ferrying among all the major players. She was the confidante and sometimes adviser to Pakistan’s leadership. Kayani divulged to her in March 2009 that he might oust President Asif Ali Zardari, while Zardari told her whom he wanted to succeed him if he were assassinated (his sister).

Kayani used Patterson to convey his concern to Zardari during the political crisis of March 2009; she met the army chief at least four times in one week. Zardari once told U.S. Vice President Joe Biden that he feared the military “might take me out.” The cables also disclose the clandestine operation of small numbers of U.S. special forces alongside Pakistani troops close to the Afghan border, described in an October 2009 cable as a “sea change in Pakistani thinking.” The Pakistani military and political leadership had pledged repeatedly that they’d never allow it.

The WikiLeaks documents also lay bare the Pakistani leadership’s acquiescence to the use of U.S. drone aircraft to target suspected militants in its tribal area, with Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani telling the American ambassador: “We’ll protest in the National Assembly (parliament) and then ignore it.” Pakistani leaders, including Gilani, claim they’re pressing Washington to stop them. The prime minister described the leaks as “mischief,” while Zardari spoke to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. He told her that “the so-called leaks will not be allowed to cast a shadow on the strategic partnership between the two countries,” according to a statement from his office.

Conclusion: nobody comes out good from the WikiLeaks and although it has absolutely tarnished America’s image where the trust deficit between America and Pakistani has increased but the real victim of WikiLeaks is the fragile, civilian-military relationship which received a serious dent. The reality is that the military must subjugate itself to political control, not because they are necessarily wiser but because they are the elected representatives of the people and through them remain accountable. And it is only those who are elected by the people have the authority and the responsibility to decide the fate of a nation. WikiLeaks could have done the job for politicians in terms of parliamentary supremacy for now, only if they could play the right cards.

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Out of the total number of U.S. embassy cables released by WikiLeaks, Pakistan features in about 10 percent. Here is a quick look at the extent to which America is involved in Pakistani politics:

Asif Ali Zardari  
President of Pakistan  
Described as “our best ally” by U.S. Ambassador Anne Patterson, President Asif Ali Zardari sees the U.S. as “our safety blanket” which helped Benazir return to Pakistan. In May 2008, he is quoted as saying that in times of great strain with the army, the judiciary and political opponent Nawaz Sharif, he shared his woes with U.S. officials, apparently for help. He was then “pressurized” by the Americans and the Army into according Musharraf a dignified retirement and later to restore Iftikhar Chaudhry as chief justice.

Nawaz Sharif  
Former Prime Minister of Pakistan  
Viewed by the Americans as an Islamist having sympathies with the Taliban and their affiliates, Nawaz Sharif, in a cable in May 2008, tells U.S. officials that he is “pro-American” and is “hurt” that the U.S. doesn’t remember his deploying Pakistani troops in Saudi Arabia during the first Gulf War. He also thanked Anne Patterson for the appointment of General Kayani as Pakistani army chief. Claimed to be under the “special hold” of the Saudis, Sharif has also been alleged to support Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) against India.

Yousuf Raza Gillani  
Prime Minister  
The premier is said to have urged the Americans to repatriate convicted Pakistani citizen Aafia Siddiqui so that he could “control the streets” and set the ground for rapprochement with the Sharifs. In August 2008, he told the Americans to continue with drone strikes as long as these target the right people. “We’ll protest in the National Assembly and then ignore it,” he is quoted to have said.

Gen. Ashfaq Pervez Kayani  
Army Chief  
In March 2009, the then U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, Anne Patterson met Gen. Kayani “at least four times” in one week where the General “used” her to convey his concern to Zardari for the ongoing political crisis in the country. Expressing disdain for the civilian leadership, Gen. Kayani said he doesn’t want the hot seat. “If I had wanted to do this, I would have done it during the long march,” he tells U.S. officials, rejecting coup rumors.

Gen (R) Pervez Musharraf  
Former President  
Cited as a “strong, forceful leader they [Saudis] know they can trust”, Pervez Musharraf informs U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi that Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri “might” be in Pakistan’s Bajaur Agency, but that Mullah Omar never entered the country. According to one cable release, he was mulling after just six months of the 2008 general elections to replace the freshly elected government with that of technocrats. Musharraf asked the U.S. government to assure PM Gilani that Washington’s support for Musharraf would continue, the cable added.

Maulana Fazlur Rehman  
Chief, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam  
The Maulana lobbied Patterson in November 2007, seeking U.S. support for his ambition to become prime minister. “He has made it clear,” reads the ambassador’s cable, “that … his still significant number of votes are up for sale.”
America Yes, America No!

‘Death to America’ may be a hollow chant for some and a means to gaining political benefit for others – but it certainly does not spell much trouble for the superpower.

By Javed Ansari

Perhaps no other national flag has been burned around the world with as much enthusiasm as the Stars and Stripes and no other effigies have earned the wrath of street protestors on so many occasions as those of American presidents. And yet, they all flock to America!

The term Anti-Americanism or anti-American sentiment refers to broad opposition or hostility to the people, policies, or government of the United States. In a book called The Rise of Anti-Americanism, published in 2006, Brendon O’Connor and Martin Griffiths said that the September 11, 2001 attacks were “quintessential anti-American acts, which satisfy all of the competing definitions of Anti-Americanism.”

Leaders in most Middle Eastern countries, including Afghanistan, condemned the attacks while Iraq was a notable exception, with a statement that “the American cowboys are reaping the fruit of their crimes against humanity.”

As far back as 1953, the removal of Iranian prime minister Mohammed Mosaddeq in a C.I.A. engineered coup resulted in widespread anger against America. The chant, ‘Death to America’ has been in use in Iran since at least the Iranian revolution of 1979. State sponsored murals characterized as anti-American can be seen on the streets of Tehran.

In 2002 and later in 2004, Zogby International polled the favorable/unfavorable ratings of the U.S. in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates. In the 2002 survey, 76% of Egyptians had a negative attitude toward the United States, compared with 98% in 2004. In Morocco, 61% viewed the country unfavorably in 2002, but in two years, that number had jumped to 88 percent. In Saudi Arabia, such responses rose from 87% in 2002 to 94% in 2004. Attitudes were virtually unchanged in Lebanon but improved slightly in the UAE, from 87% who said in 2002 that they disliked the United States to 73% in 2004. These countries mainly objected to America’s foreign policies that they considered unfair.

Anti-Americanism has its roots in Latin America as well. Vice-President Richard Nixon’s tour of the continent in 1958 prompted a spectacular eruption of anti-Americanism. The tour became the focus of violent protests which climaxd in Caracas in Venezuela where Nixon was almost killed by a raging mob as his motorcade drove from the airport to the city. In response, President Dwight D. Eisenhower assembled troops at Guantanamo Bay and a fleet of battleships in the Caribbean to intervene and save Nixon.

Fidel Castro, the revolutionary leader of Cuba, has throughout his career tried to coordinate long-standing Latin American resentment against the U.S.A. through military means. He was bolstered in his efforts by the failed Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961, planned and implemented by the American government against his regime. This disaster ruined American credibility in the Americas and gave a boost to her critics worldwide.
Castro called America “a vulture...feeding on humanity.” The United States embargo against Cuba created further resentment and the famed revolutionary Che Guevara, expressed his hopes during the Vietnam War of “creating a Second or a Third Vietnam” in the Latin American region against the designs of what he believed to be U.S. imperialism.

In Japan and South Korea, objections to the behavior and presence of American military personnel is sometimes reported as anti-Americanism, such as the 1995 Okinawan rape incident. The U.S. military presence in Okinawa remains a contentious issue in Japan.

While anti-Americanism has existed in Pakistan for many years, the feeling has gained more currency over the past decade as a result of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan following 9/11 and the drone attacks inside Pakistani territory, introduced by Bush and continued by Obama. In a poll that surveyed public opinion towards the U.S.A., Pakistan scored as the most anti-American nation, alongside Serbia.

Is America concerned about the rising anti-Americanism in Pakistan? The answer is yes, because of late the chant at the topmost echelons of U.S. policy with reference to Pakistan is that the U.S.A., in addition to cementing its relations with Pakistan’s civil and military elite, would like to win the hearts and minds of ordinary Pakistanis. This was best illustrated when the U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, Cameron Munter admitted that disclosure of American secret documents by WikiLeaks would cause escalating anti-American feelings in Pakistan.

Political analysts are of the view that anti-American slogans are a useful tool for political aspirants in Pakistan to make a place in the country’s political culture as there is widespread hatred for America and people strongly believe that U.S. policies are cruel. Therefore the sentiments of the masses are always exploited. The people have been led into believing that American policies are a continuation of British imperialism and that after the British masters left, the Americans took their place. They believe that the Americans, instead of helping build the Pakistani nation, have overtly worked to weaken its systems and institutions, have divided society on ethnic and religious lines and have created mistrust between various population segments. As WikiLeaks has recently revealed, American interference in Pakistan’s internal affairs has increased to an extent that it appears as if the country’s key decisions are not taken in Islamabad but in Washington.

America’s overall image remains quite negative in Pakistan though it is a fact that there are longer queues for American visas at the U.S. embassy in Islamabad than at any other embassy; American cities are the most popular destinations for Pakistanis who can afford to travel there; and more Pakistani students choose to get education in America than in any other country.

On the other side, Pakistanis give the U.S. its lowest ratings among the 22 nations included in the spring 2010 Pew Global Attitudes survey. Their support for U.S. involvement in the fight against extremists has waned over the last year. Fewer Pakistanis now want the U.S. to provide financial and humanitarian aid to areas where extremist groups operate, or for the U.S. to provide intelligence and logistical support to Pakistani troops fighting extremists. There is also little support for U.S. drone strikes against extremist leaders – as people generally say they are not necessary and kill too many civilians.

The U.S.-led war in Afghanistan is now widely opposed by Pakistanis. Nearly two-thirds (65%) want U.S. and NATO troops removed as soon as possible. Relatively few Pakistanis believe the situation in Afghanistan could have a serious impact on their country.

Nonetheless, despite the prevalence of negative opinions about the U.S., most Pakistanis want better relations between the two countries. Nearly two-in-three (64%) say it is important for relations with the U.S. to improve.

A paper dated Feb 6, 2009, titled ‘Pakistan-US Relations’, written for the Congressional Research Service, by K. Alan Kronstadt, a specialist in South Asian Affairs, states: “A stable, democratic, prosperous Pakistan is considered vital to U.S. interests. U.S. concerns regarding Pakistan include regional and global terrorism; Afghan stability; democratization and human rights protection; the ongoing Kashmir problem and Pakistan-India tensions; and economic development. A U.S.-Pakistan relationship marked by periods of both cooperation and discord was transformed by the September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States and the ensuing enlistment of Pakistan as a key ally in U.S.-led counterterrorism efforts. Top U.S. officials have praised Pakistan for its ongoing cooperation, although long-held doubts exist about Islamabad’s commitment to some core U.S. interests.”

Acknowledging that there have been misunderstandings between Pakistan and U.S. in the past, U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton stated on March 24, 2010: “There are sure to be more disagreements in the future, as there are between any friends or, frankly, any family members. But this is a new day. For the past year, the Obama administration has shown in our words and deeds a different approach and attitude toward Pakistan.”

How statements like these would serve to quell anti-American sentiments in Pakistan still needs to be demonstrated.
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The WikiLeaks Avalanche

Nobody in Pakistan has questioned the authenticity of the remarks made by any of the American envoys whose cables have been made public.

By S.G. Jilanee

The latest batch of WikiLeaks disclosures, a whopping 250,000, is an avalanche that has shaken many world capitals. Their overwhelming impact has sent even the mighty United States, reeling.

Earlier, when WikiLeaks released the cables on Afghanistan and Iraq wars, U.S. officials fumed but they were not furious. Adm. Mike Mullen accused Julian Assange of having blood on his hands. But there was no talk of shutting down WikiLeaks, perhaps because they didn’t mind being unmasked as accomplices in mass murder. But the diplomatic cables are different. They have exposed the worst intrigues of the U.S. policymakers to their extreme embarrassment.

Therefore they have gone raving mad. Sarah Palin who could not shoot a caribou on her recent hunting trip in Alaska, is calling for Julian Assange to be “executed.” Sen. Dianne Feinstein, who is known as a liberal, in an article in the Wall Street Journal, called for Assange to be imprisoned for 2,500,000 years, because each violation under the Espionage Act of 1917, under which she wants Assange to be “vigorously prosecuted,” is punishable by up to 10 years in prison, despite the fact that Assange is an Australian national who never set his foot on American soil.

Meanwhile, corporate America and its international allies continue to do their bit. Joining PayPal and Amazon, who had already cut off their services to WikiLeaks, most of the remaining venues through which the internet journal is funded are also freezing out the organization such as MasterCard, Visa, and a Swiss bank that WikiLeaks used to process donations. All these organizations are obviously responding to government pressure. Even the New York Times has discontinued presenting the leaked cables after a couple of days under pressure from jingoistic readers. Nonetheless, the damage (others say it is good work) has been done. Many world leaders and corporate CEOs - including BP and Pfizer - have been caught in the act;
their true face with all its warts and blemishes exposed to public view.

The first casualty has been Helmut Metzner, chief of staff to German foreign minister Guido Westerwelle. At the outset, the minister dismissed the reports as false and insisted there was a mole. But later, when he admitted having acted as a mole, supplying inside information to the U.S. ambassador, he was sacked.

America and its close allies are after Assange’s blood. America is also using pressure on others to fall in line. On the other hand Russia and China have suggested that Assange should be nominated for the Nobel Peace prize, while his supporters have started a cyber war against his tormentors.

The cables about Pakistan only confirm what many Pakistanis have long believed, that the drone attacks have the full support of the president and the prime minister and their occasional rant about Pakistan’s sovereignty being ravaged is only for public consumption. It had been well known through newspaper reports that the drones take off from the Shamsi air base that the government of Pakistan has “leased out” to the U.S.

In fact one cable quotes Gilani boldly telling Ambassador Anne Patterson that he “didn’t care” if drone strikes were launched against his country as long as the “right people” were targeted. “We’ll protest in the National Assembly,” Gilani said, “and then ignore it.”

Only the disclosure about Fazlur Rahaman seeking American blessings to become Pakistan’s prime minister was something of a surprise, because, few could expect an “aalim” in his own right and son of the illustrious Mufti Mahmood to stoop so low.

Nor is the information about the presence of American boots on Pakistani soil anything new. Nor is Zardari’s obsequiousness to America any secret. That U.S. Special Forces have been operating in FATA under the garb of trainers to the Frontier Constabulary had also been known to many people. They wear beards and dress like the local people. Three of them, so dressed, were shot dead some time ago on their way to attend the opening of a school in Swat. The incident was fully covered by the national media.

The shocking part of the cables on this issue was the disclosure about the army chief having consented to such clandestine operations. The cables contain narratives of meetings with President Zardari, Prime Minister Gilani, Chief of Army Staff General Kiyani, discussions with prominent politicians, including members of the opposition and private citizens. Also captured in the cables is the power struggle among key players, their ambitions, hopes, fears and frustrations. Here is a brief list of what they said and did according to the embassy cables:

General Kiyani thought of removing and sending President Zardari into exile during the long march days; Zardari said that Benazir Bhutto had come to Pakistan after getting “clearance” from the U.S.; Zardari had promised immunity and safe passage to Musharraf; Zardari has also named his sister Faryal Talpur as his successor and next president of Pakistan; General Kiyani said Faryal will be a better president than Zardari; Zardari showed Benazir’s will to Anne Patterson to convince her that he is her genuine heir.

General Kiyani wanted to replace Zardari with Asfandyar Wali Khan as president; the ISI chief calls Zardari corrupt; Kiyani tells Patterson, he dislikes Nawaz more than Zardari.

Nawaz assured his support to U.S. and wanted to bring AQ Khan in politics. Zardari told the U.S., we won’t act without consulting with you; U.S. Special Forces are operating inside Pakistan with the army’s tacit consent.

British Air Chief Marshall Sir Jock Stirrup called Zardari a numbskull who knows nothing about running a country. And finally, the cables say that Zardari government is weak, ineffectual and corrupt; bureaucracy is settling into third-world mediocrity; and the militants are driving agenda in Pakistan’s war on terror.

Remarkably, only Imran Khan comes out of the cables without any blemish. However, none of it is going to disturb the equanimity of the political actors. To start with, they brazenly deny the references about them in the cables, though that would mean accusing the U.S. ambassador of making it all up and attributing to them what they did not say. Yet, if that is so, then they ought to sue Anne Patterson for defamation.

On the other hand, nobody has questioned either the authenticity of the remarks made by any of the American envoys whose cables have been made public or the veracity of the cables. The proper thing for the Pakistani leadership exposed in the cables, should actually be to cover their nudity and reform. If they do so, if they turn a new leaf in their career, Assange’s mission to uphold the truth will have been served.

They will regain their self-esteem and cease to be looked upon as America’s lackeys. Pakistan will no longer be treated as a vassal state, doing the bidding of the master. But this would be like expecting a leopard to shed its spots, because, Pakistan’s military and political leaders have been traditionally subservient to Uncle Sam.

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Wither Pakistan Economy?

There could be great public unrest in the offing if the lawmakers in Pakistan do not reform public sector entities, boot out corruption and tax the elite and the agricultural sector.

By Sohaib Jamali

For a year that began with business shut down in the country’s biggest metropolis, 2010 couldn’t have been expected to offer great promises to Pakistan.

January 1, 2010 saw Karachi’s industrial and commercial hubs closed on account of the multiparty strike initiated by the Sunni Rahbar Council to express solidarity with the victims of the Ashura procession blasts and the affected traders.

The theme of strikes and lockouts continued throughout the year, as political infighting between ethnic groups was taken to the streets of Karachi – leaving scores dead, and dozens of shops, busses and other means of livelihoods blazed to the ground. This mayhem came side by side with the regular diet of terrorist-attacks, conducted sporadically across the country, allegedly by the TTP, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and the likes.

In an environment like this, foreign direct investment (FDI) could only go down – even if the global financial situation was favorable and even if Pakistan’s top FDI recipient sectors (financial and telecom) weren’t saturated.

In other impediments, cited by a few foreign players, was the rising cost of doing business. The country’s production centers were marred by persistent rise in electricity prices that came in the face of all too frequent instances of power and gas shortages. According to the latest available data, large scale production, measured by the Federal Bureau of Statistics, eased by 1.47 percent in Jul-Sep 2010-11.

And just as the country’s economic managers expected the farming sector to lead overall commodity production, in came the floods and washed away the hopes.

According to the Damage and Needs Assessment report prepared by the multilateral agencies World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, agricultural losses mounted to $5.04 billion – half of the total damage of $10.05 billion.

What was needed in the aftermath of floods was a combination of monetary and fiscal stimulus to reinvigorate the economy. However, both ends of the jumper wire were beyond use.

In the yesteryears, cheap and ample money supply had boosted consumer demand that kept the productive engines up and running. But high interest rates kept most of the private sector shy of borrowing; other private borrowers were shoved on the sidelines by the government. The elbowing out of private sector from the credit market continued throughout the year as the government scrambled for finances to plug the yawning gap.
between its revenues and expenditures.

Tax revenues fell short of forecasts on account of slow economic growth. Non-tax revenues also remained lackluster, since the government’s failure to revamp the ailing Public Sector Entities resulted in zero privatization, whereas a fragile security environment, amongst other things, resulted in non-materialization of the planned sovereign bond issues in the fiscal year ending June 2010.

According to the central bank’s credit data, the government took Rs201 billion from the commercial banks and around Rs244 billion from the State Bank itself during the Jan-Oct period. The rise in government borrowing forced the State Bank to remain hawkish for most part of the year; the SBP jacked up policy rates thrice during the year to 14 percent that further squeezed the room for private businesses.

A major reason behind increasing government borrowing was the withholding of its tranche by the IMF – forcing it to delay its sixth tranche that was originally due in August 2010.

Until the time of writing this article (Dec 11, 2010), the government was still struggling to roll out RGST, with major opposition parties standing unanimous against the tax. The bill when tabled in the lower house, is seen to attract severe public backlash even if it’s approved by the lawmakers.

Expressing their dissent against the RGST, the masses argue, and aptly so, that the government must get its own house in order first and broaden the tax base instead of taxing those who are already in the net.

Bringing its own house in order would require the government to tax the elite and the farming landlords – who form a majority of the lawmakers – and root out corruption from government institutions that lay waste huge swaths of money each deal, each year.

According to the National Corruption Perception Survey 2010 released by the Transparency International Pakistan, the country’s power ministry, police, taxation department and even the judiciary are in the top ten list of corrupt.

Unless the federal government clips the size of its cabinet, and the provincial governments start taxing the agricultural income, the country’s tax system will remain heavily skewed towards indirect taxation, which in itself is inflationary in nature.

So while the year may be 2011 outside Pakistan, inside the country, it is still perhaps the 90s. Threats of debt-trap loom large with major repayments to the IMF due from this year onwards. The road to salvation lies in increasing tax revenues, though not necessarily the RGST.

Even if the RGST is implemented, its success can not be ensured given lack of documentation in the economy and public mistrust against the government. RGST is also feared to increase consumer prices in economies that lack effective documentation like Pakistan, owing to which inflationary expectations are soaring high in the country.

That, coupled with gradual removal of power subsidies, commodity price shocks, and misadministration of domestic food supply chain is feared to cause hyper-inflation in 2011-12; even the State Bank recently warned of the risks of double-digit inflation in FY12.

So in a sense 2011 is crucial for Pakistan’s economy. If the government is unable to provide timely support to those displaced by the floods, fears of food price hike wouldn’t seem exaggerated.

Similarly, if the lawmakers do not turn around the white elephants (read: public sector entities), boot out corruption and start taxing the elite as well as agricultural income – as also advocated by the U.S. and multilateral agencies – the public could be expected to create unrest. For lack of finances and lack of the will to reform, 2011 could be worse than the last.

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There has been quite a furor in the parliament on the RGST bill in the wake of severe public backlash
In India, corruption scandals come in all shapes and sizes. From telecom licenses to bank loans, housing societies to organizing of mega sporting events, there has recently been a tussle to outreach the other in terms of the scale and audacity of corruption scandals. Those purported to be involved range from ministers and bureaucrats to judges, corporate honchos and even journalists. With institutionalized corruption at all levels being acknowledged as the order of the day, the malaise is taking the sheen out of India’s much-vaunted march towards progress and a rising stature at the global stage.

Graft in India is not a new phenomenon nor is it likely to be a thing of the past anytime soon. But its notoriety is beginning to negate the advances made by the country. Since perception is as important as reality, the image of deep-rooted corruption scares not just investors but also those Indians abroad who wish to return with their business and investment plans. Those inside the country have no choice but to coalesce and become part of the system. They have either been already corrupted or have resigned to the fact that there is no other way to get around than by participating in it. Such a mentality not only dilutes the value system but also proves to be a disincentive for those with entrepreneur skills looking for a level-playing field.

There is another widespread perception that is not helping the country’s fight against corruption. While there is no doubt that politicians are mostly at the helm of scandals and make the most of it, blaming them alone is proving to be counter-productive. In fact a herd mentality appears to be developing in the country wherein almost everyone else blames politicians for cases of corruption. Yet the fact remains that almost no segment of the society remains untouched from it. Ironically, recent cases of corruption suggest that the top leadership in the country is not only untouched by it but is also battling hard to restore order, albeit with limited success.

But that goes mainly for the office of the Prime Minister. Even the Central government’s recent communication to India’s Supreme Court on prosecution in corruption cases is an indication of the deep malaise. The government recently informed the court that prosecution is awaited in 126 cases registered from 2000-2010 under the Prevention of Corruption Act against various public servants. Sanctions were sought against 319 officials including two in services, 166 in government, 83 in public sector undertakings, 60 in banks and financial institutions and eight others. Customs and Central Excise accounted for the maximum number of 69 persons against whom prosecution is awaited, followed by the communications ministry with 32.

There was no mention in this list of Central Vigilance Commissioner (CVC), P.J. Thomas, against whom a charges-sheet is pending in the Kerala palmolein import case. Ironically, the Central Vigilance Commission was set up on the recommendations of the Committee on Prevention of Corruption, to advise and guide Central Government agencies in the field of vigilance. Now, finger has been pointed at the head of this apex vigilance institution itself.

The telecom licensing scandal, also known as the 2G scam, is the latest to have brought political parties at loggerheads, triggered probes and stalled the country’s parliament. According to one estimate, due to this scandal India lost up to $39 billion in revenue – almost equivalent to its de-
defense budget. It was all under wraps till a state auditor report revealed that the telecoms ministry gave out lucrative licenses and radio spectrum in 2007-08 at below-market prices. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report last November also said several rules were flouted when the licenses were given out which led to many ineligible firms getting licenses.

As the report came out in the open, Telecoms Minister A. Raja was forced to resign after days of initial resistance. Opposition parties, led by the Bhartitya Janata Party, raised demands for a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe which was refused by the government. This infuriated the opposition and it chose to block the normal functioning of the Parliament for three continuous weeks. Subsequent investigations have focused on the telecoms ministry, firms and lobbyists. Nobody has yet been charged though.

The minister denies any wrongdoing and maintains that he was only following existing rules and norms. Supreme Court, on the other hand, has questioned the credentials of CVC PJ. Thomas as he was the senior bureaucrat in the telecoms ministry before his elevation and has a separate corruption charge against him. The government finally told the court that Thomas would not oversee the investigations into the charges.

The country’s top investigating agency, the Central Bureau of Investigations (CBI), is probing allegations of corruption in the ministry and the government is willing to have the Supreme Court monitor the investigation. However, the investigations are likely to be meaningless unless they look into the dealings of some of the top industrialists in the country who have been direct or indirect beneficiaries. Then there are a string of power brokers, lobbyists and even journalists who have been overheard participating in the process.

Even as the dust was settling down on this huge scam, news surfaced that leading officials of Indian banks, lenders and financial firms have been accused of taking bribes to grant corporate loans. The size of the scandal is not yet known, yet media reports believe it runs into millions of dollars. Responding swiftly to these reports, the CBI arrested eight people, including the chief executive of LIC Housing Finance and senior officials at state-run Central Bank of India, Punjab National Bank and Bank of India. Bribes were reportedly paid by a private finance firm which acted as a “mediator and facilitator” for the loan beneficiaries.

Several leading Indian firms have been named in court documents filed by the CBI, including wind turbine maker Suzlon Energy, infrastructure firm HCC’s Lavasa unit and real estate firm DB Realty. As expected, all three have denied any wrongdoing. The probe is bound to widen if other banks were involved. Once again things came to such a pass that Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee had to issue a statement. He had to assure investors that this is a case of individual wrongdoing and not a widespread scam and that the banking sector will not be affected by it.

In October New Delhi played host to Commonwealth Games involving 53 countries members of the Commonwealth of Nations and 71 teams. The $6 billion sporting extravaganza was dogged by several cases of alleged corruption, including the purchase of equipment and issuing contracts. The anti-corruption watchdog identified more than 16 projects with possible irregularities and following the conclusion of the Games, the ruling Congress party sacked Suresh Kalmadi, chairman of its organizing committee and secretary of the Congress party’s parliamentary wing.

Three of his close aides have been arrested as the probe has widened. The allegations include manipulations of tenders in the building of stadia and other games infrastructure, and inflating bills for equipment such as treadmills and toilet paper rolls. The CBI recently raided the homes of the Games Organizing Secretary and the Games Committee Offices, part of a probe into $21.7 million of misplaced funds.

Yet another major scandal to have come up recently was the Adarsh Housing Scam in which Congress party politicians, bureaucrats and military officials were accused of taking over land meant to build apartments for war widows. The scam involved 103 apartments in an upmarket Mumbai district which violated norms, including environmental laws and land-use rules. Apartments that were estimated to be of $1.8 million each were sold for as little as $130,000. As the story emerged the government first had to sack the chief minister of the state and has since taken back permissions allowing owners to occupy the apartments, leading to the disconnection of water and power supply. The CBI is investigating this case as well.

Fortunately, India has managed to chart a path of progress despite this spate of scandals since independence. The country’s recent rise as a global power is due to its solid foundations and corruption is only an irritant in this process. However, to sustain this progress India will have to bring this monster under control. For that to happen though, those in the corridors of power and beyond will have to realize that the stakes are high and they swim and sink together.

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Dragon Strike

The powers that be are preparing India as a counterweight to China though the world would not be a nice place if it has an active rivalry between the two giants.

By Rizwan Zeb

One mountain cannot accommodate two tigers.

- Chinese proverb

K. Subrahmanyam, the don of strategic affairs in India once aptly opined that at the moment, U.S.A. is the global hegemon which is challenged by China. Are (Indian) policies in place to deal with this? Is India in a position to develop policies that would influence this outcome?

The U.S. in particular and the West in general would not like to see the emergence of China as the global leader; therefore, it is courting India as a counterweight to China. However, what is surprising to few is that it is acceptable to India to act as a tool of the West. According to the American narrative, India is emerging as a major global player and has the ability to impact the global geopolitics and American policies in the areas vital to American strategic interest. However, India’s rise is seen as a positive development in various power centers as it is seen as a partner and a counter weight to China. A number of studies conducted by the American Army’s Strategic Studies Institute on a possible course of U.S.-China and India relations. One thing which strongly comes out of these is that India will side with the Americans in any crisis with China. The understanding that a nuclear India is too big to ignore and can be used to secure its interests in an area where U.S.A. is facing a challenger, guided Strobe Talbot to conduct extensive dialogue with his Indian counterpart Mr. Jaswant Singh. The high point of this came with the defense agreement and civilian nuclear cooperation agreement between India and U.S.A. during the Bush administration. The Obama administration has accelerated the process which is clearly evident in his recent trip to India.

The history of India’s relations with China since the days of Hind-Chini bhai-bhai days is full of contradictions and mistrust. India declared China as the main reason for its 1998 nuclear test. Indian defense minister George Fernandes called China a “bigger potential threat” than Pakistan and described how his country was being encircled by Chinese military activities in Tibet and alliances with Pakistan and Myanmar. At the moment, there are a number of issues which can result in a conflict between India and China: territorial disputes, Chinese South Asia policy, Tibet, Sikkim, Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean, energy and resource competition.

Indian strategic community believes that China is seeking to deny India its proper stakes in the game of international politics. Beijing worries that geopolitical concerns are driving Indian China policy and that this is why it has become a part of the American led strategic alliance to contain China.

Overview of Sino-Indian Relations

India established diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China on April 1, 1950. In 1954, India and China signed an eight-year agreement on Tibet that set forth the basis of their relationship in the form of Panch Shila (Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence). For the next 5 years, Hind-Chini bhai-bhai was the motto of Indian policy towards China.

In October 1962, a border war took place between India and China in which the People’s Liberation Army literally humiliated the Indian army and pushed within forty-eight kilometers of the Assam plains in...
the northeast and occupied strategic points in Ladakh. Adding to the humiliation was the unilateral cease-fire announced by China on 21 November and withdrawal twenty kilometers behind its contended line of control. In 1967, armed forces of both countries clashed in Sikkim. These skirmishes are known as the Nathu La incident and Chola incident.

In an attempt to reengage, Indian President Narayanan visited China in 2000. In 2002, Chinese premier visited India. However, the most important visit by an Indian leader to China was Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s visit in 2003. This trip improved the situation between the two countries and brought the relationship on track. In 2004, the bilateral trade crossed the $10 billion mark.

In another development, in July 2006, both countries opened the Nathula trade route. Prime Minister Mr. Manmohan Singh visited China in 2008 and met both the president and the prime minister of China and discussed issues of mutual interest to both countries.

American-Indian Strategic Alliance

According to the American Army’s Strategic Studies Institute, in any future conflict between U.S.A. and China, India in probability will align with U.S.A. This explains the close defense ties between the two countries despite the fact that Indian armed forces are still based on the Soviet model. According to military experts, transforming from one model to another is a very laborious and time taking process. As it is not only the weapon systems which are to be changed but the whole orientation of the armed forces and operational understanding, India is eagerly working on military modernization which has been aptly called arming without aiming by Stephen Cohen. U.S.A. and India have signed a 10-year defense framework agreement that calls for expanded joint military exercises, increased defense-related trade, and the establishment of a defense and procurement production group. The U.S. and India have conducted more than 50 military exercises since 2002.

U.S.A. and India have also signed a civilian nuclear cooperation agreement which has provided a de facto recognition of India as a nuclear state, against all norms of international proliferation laws including the NPT.

Analysis and Conclusions

It seems that despite various diplomatic steps taken to improve the bilateral relations and continuous improvement in trade and economic ties, both India and China realize the limitation of their relations and are taking measures to safe guard their national interest. The relationship at its core is vulnerable and prone to misperceptions, accidents, and eruption of unresolved issues. However, in the foreseeable future both would not like the relationship to deteriorate as it will adversely affect their rise as global players.

In near future, U.S.A. will continue its support for India’s permanent seat in U.N. Security Council; take steps to further expand the security relationship and boost defense trade; support Indian membership in key export control organizations, a step toward integrating India into global nonproliferation efforts; and liberalize U.S. export controls, including the removal of Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) subsidiaries from the U.S. Entity List.

Nicholas Burns states: “A strong U.S.-India strategic partnership will prove indispensable to the region’s continued peace and prosperity. Both India and the United States have a vital interest in maintaining a stable balance of power in Asia. Neither seeks containment of China, but the likelihood of a peaceful Chinese rise increases if it ascends in a region where the great democratic powers are also strong. Growing U.S.-India strategic ties will ensure that Asia will not have a vacuum of power and will make it easier for both Washington and New Delhi to have productive relations with Beijing. In addition, a strengthened relationship with India, a natural democratic partner, will signal that the United States remains committed to a strong and enduring presence in Asia.”

American desire to establish India as a counterweight to China ignores certain facts which are totally against the philosophy of the founding fathers of U.S.A. While the U.S.A. and west describes India as a rising global giant, the vibrant economy, world’s biggest democracy ignores the fact that almost half of the world’s poor live in India. While India boosts of 8-9% annual growth rate for almost a decade now yet according to Newsweek, almost 85% of the Indians earn less than 45 cents per day.

Despite this miserable state of affairs, India is among the biggest arms and weapons purchasers in the world since 2005. India instead of addressing these issues is busy turning itself into a global player and geo-strategic giant. The biggest encouragement in this regard is coming from the West especially the United States of America which has its own axe to grind with China.

They are preparing India as a counterweight to China which clearly indicates that the U.S. can think of keeping its position as the global hegemon. The world would not be a nice place if it has an active India-China rivalry. It would be dangerous for the whole world.

Churchill once said, the Americans can be counted on to do the right thing, once they have exhausted all other options.◆

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Ali K Chishti: General, according to a recent survey, only 27 percent of Afghan soldiers could work unsupervised and the rest are reliant on NATO troops, while there were twice as many casualties during a battle in Laghman where 300 soldiers were ambushed by the Taliban. What are you actually doing to make them work unsupervised?

Gen Caldwell: More and more partnering is starting to take place daily where coalition forces, under the ISAF joint command are out with fielded forces and they continually have joint assessments to assess the capability of the Afghan forces to operate independently from coalition forces. Right now this is still a very young army and police force. The support structure is going to be built over the next 15 months. The buildout of the army and police doesn’t finish until October 31, 2011. So, all kinds of capabilities needed to operate independently have not yet been built and fielded into the force structure. Again, our focus until now has been a very infantry-centric force and getting as many ground units out there that could be engaged in fighting insurgency with coalition forces, providing all the support behind forces. Right now this is still a very young army and police force.

 Lt. Gen. William Caldwell, commander of the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A) and Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, is one of the most senior American generals in the region. Currently, he commands a multinational organization that employs trainers. He develops the interior and defence ministries that train and educate personnel in the police, army, air force, logistical systems and medical systems.

Lt. Gen. Caldwell’s mission is critical to ISAF’s overall strategy of transition of security to the Afghan government. He talks about it to Ali K. Chishti in this exclusive interview for SouthAsia.
them. So even though you may find some units today that have a leadership that’s maturing well, and is able to plan, coordinate and execute missions, they still are dependent on coalition forces until we finish the buildout of the army of police.

Is the Pakistan Army or police working to train Afghan National Forces and police, or assisting the ISAF, NATO forces to train the Afghans?

Currently there are no Pakistani military or police trainers inside our organization in Afghanistan. Islamabad offered some assistance to the Afghan government to do some training inside Pakistan for both the Afghan army and police. But the numbers have been very minimal that they’ve taken up and sent for training.

Could you provide a breakdown of trainers pledged, by country and specialization, including the countries that are not part of NTM-A, but contribute to ANSF training? If this is outside your lane, could you request MOI and MOD to answer this question?

We have many different countries engaged and involved in our efforts with trainers and we’ll be glad to provide that data to you. We do break it down by country, both within NATO and outside of NATO. And we can set that up and pass it through back to you.

What are you training them to understand about the enemy they face, especially the internal divisions of the coalition facing us, and the desired end state of the conflict? If you train an officer, how does he understand who is the enemy, how they’re divided, and how we want this conflict to end?

Right now, the focus is on developing the operated COIN environment, the counterinsurgency environment because that will change with time. So in their training programs at the basic level, it’s very COIN-centric. When you move to the mid-level we don’t have large numbers going through it yet, but we do have a mid-level command staff college here. That’s longer and obviously far more comprehensive, and looks beyond the days when we anticipate that they would be able to handle the insurgency that exists here down to a low level, and would in fact reorient and be able to use their forces in a more holistic manner. The Afghan Airforce we are developing where four of our Mi-17s were deployed in Pakistan for relief.

How do you address literacy? What kind of things are you doing for the soldiers?

Last November, when a member from the U.S. asked us about literacy in the force, my first reaction was we don’t do literacy training. We train soldiers and policemen to go out and serve their country. And what I quickly recognized is that unless we don’t take on literacy, we will never professionalize this force. Where it became stark notice to me is when we’re out on a range and you recognize that the young soldiers can’t even read the serial number on their weapon. So you ask yourself: how can we establish accountability for the money that the American taxpayers put in over here, if they can’t account for their equipment properly? If they’re issued a sleeping bag and other types of military gear and they’re given a piece of paper that shows what they’ve been issued, how are they able to read that and understand the basic stuff they’re responsible for and are supposed to maintain accountability of? They’re absolutely dependent on somebody else.

How is the Afghan local police program going to lay out in relation to the ANP, Afghan uniformed police units on the ground. Will the program involve those armed villagers answering to an ANP commander? And is there any concern about them being a force outside the conventional police realm?

The Afghan president signed a decree earlier last December to go ahead and start allowing the Interior Ministry to work out the procedures that will allow this process to take place. A couple things about the ALP: one is, it’s not going to change the face of the security nationally. But it could have a tremendous impact locally, which is a clear distinction.

It has the potential to thicken the security forces operating out there in some areas where this kind of force would take place. They will be answerable to national authorities. Their pay will come through the Interior Ministry and their chain of command is through the same ministry down to what is being called the deputy chief within the district, who will have the command and control, the guidance and direction over any Afghan local police. They are there for defensive purposes. They’re going to be restricted to only operate in the areas in which they’re locally formed. I think the Afghan president, who has spent a tremendous amount of time in the development of the decree that he signed is that there was no opportunity for some kind of rogue element of form out of this, so all the controls that have been placed upon it and their need for it to remain under national control.. And I understand that until I saw it time and again here to realize that for us to professionalize this force, to ensure that it’s going to be enduring and self-sustaining, we’re going to have to take on literacy – which today has about 27,000 police and army in mandatory programs – growing to 50,000 by this December.

So by next June, we will have 100,000 men and women in the police and army in continuous education programs, working to improve their literacy to about the third-grade level. ♦

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A Tale of Conflicting Interests

There are so many facets to the Afghanistan problem that it has become very difficult to find a long-lasting solution.

By Raza Khan

After the revelation that the Taliban commander, who remained engaged in talks with the Afghan government recently, was an imposter, the peace process between the insurgents and authorities in Kabul has fallen through with little prospects of revival. Consequently, the hope of bringing political stability to the war-ravaged country would also become a pipedream. The Taliban negotiator who was ‘mistakenly’ believed to be Taliban No 2, Mullah Muhammad Akhtar Mansur, turned out to be an ordinary person who was especially flown from Pakistan by NATO to hold talks with Afghan authorities. It means that Afghan Taliban conceived a strategy to hoodwink Karzai and his team.

However, it is quite important to ask that why the Taliban sent a pseudo-representative for negotiations with Afghan government? One explanation could be that Taliban wanted to expose NATO and American officials and tell the world that how shallow their claims have been of making dents in the ranks of Afghan Taliban and bringing some of them to the negotiating table. Taliban felt it necessary as for the last one and a half years there have been various disclosures and claims of the militia’s representatives meeting Afghan and even NATO authorities to reach a peace agreement. We have been hearing of such meetings taking place in Makkah, Maldives and even such an unlikely place as Malta. Each time Afghan Taliban spokesmen announced that no such talks have ever taken place with Afghan or NATO officials and termed it propaganda of their enemies to create schisms within their ranks.

Against this backdrop it is quite understandable that the Taliban came up with the idea of sending in an imposter so as to tell the world the kind of ‘Taliban’ commanders or renegades NATO and Afghan authorities have been talking. The imposter acting as Mullah Akhtar Mansur also reportedly got millions of dollars from the NATO authorities as token money to distribute it among Taliban ‘renegades’ or Leaders with no vision
even high-ups. Most likely he must have asked for the money. This was also a trick to show how easily NATO officials could be led by the nose by the generally naïve Taliban. In this regard Taliban strategy remained quite successful. At the same time on part of NATO it was a clear indication that they were not up to the task of negotiating with the Taliban.

The second explanation of the Taliban imposter episode could be that Taliban wanted to test the waters so that to ascertain to what extent NATO officials and Afghan authorities could go to get Taliban on board. As there was also a fear of arrest of an important Taliban commander, therefore, Taliban may have thought to send an imposter instead of the real commander. For Taliban it was important as only after knowing the real political advantage they could expect to get, could they make adjustments in their strategy. At least Taliban must now be convinced that if they agree to negotiations with Afghan government and sharing power they could expect substantial concessions from the NATO and Americans. However, knowing that the U.S. and NATO have never offered anything in concrete terms to them, Taliban also remained stick to their main demand - not to negotiate with Karzai administration until foreign forces are in Afghanistan. As Afghan government and U.S.-NATO officials again failed to offer something tangible to Taliban, the latter have declared that they were not going to budge a single inch from their well-known stance. Instead of making some concessions and showing any flexibility, U.S. President Barrack Hussein Obama on the occasion of recent Lisbon meeting of NATO declared there would be a delay in the complete troops withdrawal from Afghanistan. Although this may be more practical and realistic on part of the Americans as pulling all the troops from Afghanistan within a year after starting the process at an earlier declared date of July 2011 was almost impossible. But the problem is that such a declaration is in complete conflict with the stand of Taliban. Therefore, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid in a reaction maintained that NATO would be unable to establish a stable government in Afghanistan by that date. He described NATO’s plan to withdraw combat troops by the end of 2014 as “irrational” and would only lead to more “tragic events and battles”. It means that Afghan Taliban would not only step up their militant campaign but also do their utmost to further weaken the fledgling Karzai government.

Here it is important to assess that to what an extent Karzai has been sincere in peace talks with Taliban. Although he has been showing his complete readiness to talk to any representatives of Taliban and even shed tears on the Taliban recalcitrance to bring ‘peace’ to Afghanistan by not agreeing to negotiations and power-sharing. However, his actions have so far belied his words. This could be gauged from the composition of the High Peace Commission to negotiate with Taliban and making the former Afghan president Ustad Rabbani as its head. Since the very day of formation of the commission it was conspicuous that Karzai has something else on his mind than making Taliban reconcile. Because Rabbani has been one of the critical foe of Taliban who remained an important component of anti-Taliban Afghan Northern Alliance of non-Pakhtoon militias, which helped U.S.-NATO oust Taliban regime in November 2001.

Keen observers anticipated quite early that the Afghan High Peace Commission would be a failure due to its very composition and this has been proven quite evidently by now. There is further evidence of Karzai’s insincerity to the peace process with Taliban. Recently, one of the cables unearthed by WikiLeaks revealed that ex Afghan Taliban regime foreign minister, Wakil Ahmed Mutawakil, told American diplomats that Karzai always told U.S. and NATO officials not to withdraw from Afghanistan as it was important for the future of Afghanistan. On the other hand Karzai had been telling Taliban that he also wanted U.S.-NATO troops withdraw as quickly as possible but he had been powerless in this regard. By doing so Karzai only prolonged his stay in power. Otherwise, Taliban could have shown some flexibility but when they have been constantly told by officials of Karzai administration that they also share their agenda they had an impression that they had been on a winning track. This writer through his well-placed sources in Afghanistan and Peshawar could say with certain amount of confidence that this time round Taliban were quite eager to negotiate provided they get some concrete guarantees in return. One reason which Afghan Taliban commanders have recently privately mentioned for their readiness to negotiate is their war-weariness.

Keeping in view Taliban intransigence, Karzai’s insincerity, NATO’s incapability and divisions and Americans strategic agenda in the region and Pakistan’s continued enamoring with the idea of ‘strategic depth’ in Afghanistan, there are so many conflicting interest that it would be very difficult to reconcile them.
Secularism – Yes or No?

Bangladesh’s ammendment in its constitution has opened a debate in the country. What is the way forward for the country - a secular order or a strictly Islamic state?

By Dr. Moonis Ahmar

Two countries of South Asia, which during late 1970s and early 1980s had embarked on the process of Islamization were Pakistan and Bangladesh. In Pakistan, it was during the military rule of General Zia-ul-Haq where religion got not only state patronage but the process of Islamization aiming to transform the country as a ‘pure’ Islamic state was unleashed. In Bangladesh, the post-Mujib governments namely of Presidents Zia-ur-Rehman and Hossein M. Ershad tried to reverse the secular characteristics of the state of Bangladesh by declaring Islam as the state religion of the country.

Following the landslide victory of Awami League in December 2008 general elections, the verdict of people, apart from other things, was also attributed as their support for a secular Bangladesh. Sheikh Hasina and top ranking leaders of Awami realized that they cannot undermine the role of Islam in their country particularly when it was given legal and a constitutional shape in the post-Mujib era, but what they planned was to dilute the religious color of their country by embarking on a gradual policy of secularism. The first major victory for secularism in Bangladesh was seen when in early February 2010, the Supreme Court upheld a lower court decision declaring the Fifth Amendment, which dropped secularism as a guiding state principle, as null and void. Law Minister Shafique Ahmed commenting on the decision of Supreme Court stated that, “in the light of the verdict, the secular constitution of 1972 already stands to have revived. Now we don’t have any bar to return to the four state principles of democracy, nationalism, secularism and socialism as had been heralded in the 1972 statute of the state.” It was the opposition Jamaat-e-Islami, a former partner in the coalition government of Bangladesh Nationalism Party (BNP) led by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia (2001-2006) which had appealed against the verdict of High Court in the Supreme Court but lost the legal battle.

As reported in a Bangladeshi paper, The News Today of October 18, 2010, the President of Bangladesh, Zillur Rahman while speaking to journalists at a reception for the members of Hindu community at Bangabhaban (President’s House), marking their largest religious festival, said that, “secularism doesn’t mean absence of religion. Bangladesh is a secular country where people from all religions and creeds can perform their respective rituals peacefully with due festive mood in a brotherly atmosphere.” While analyzing the debate in Bangladesh on secularism and religion, one needs to take note of the fact that Bangladesh has the concentration of forth largest Muslim community after Indonesia, Pakistan and India. But, the dilemma of Bangladesh or the people of that country is the issue of identity. Whether they are Bengalese or Bangladeshis? During Mujib’s era, the emphasis was on Bengali nationalism which meant secular identity of Bangladesh based on language and culture. Bengali nationalism emerged as a force during Pakistan time with Awami League led by Sheikh Mujibur Rehman calling for upholding the Bengali identity instead of just Islamic identity which happened to be the only common bond between West and East Pakistan. When Pakistan was dismembered and East Pakistan became an independent country under the name of Bangladesh in December 1971, the ruling party Awami League declared their country as secular and...
gave it a constitutional cover. It was only after the assassination of Mujib in August 1975 and the turmoil which followed the end of Awami League’s rule that Major General (Retd) Ziaur Rehman assumed the reins of government. Although, Ziaur Rehman fought during the liberation war of 1971 against Pakistan and had in fact declared the independence of Bangladesh on the radio on March 26, 1971, he differed with Mujib’s notion of “Bengali nationalism.” He came up with the slogan of ‘Bangladeshi nationalism’ which meant that all those living in Bangladesh, regardless of their culture were Bangladeshis. In a subtle manner, he tried to accommodate the Muslim identity of Bangladesh. It was on account of his slogan of ‘Bangladeshi nationalism’ that he founded Bangladesh Nationalist Party which called for uniting all the people of Bangladesh regardless of their culture and religion.

During Ershad’s rule (1982-1990) he followed an Islamic path by giving priority to the Islamic identity of Bangladesh. It was during his tenure that the influence of Saudi brand of Islam deepened in Bangladesh perhaps because of the generous financial support provided by Riyadh and also the presence of hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshi workers, both skilled and unskilled, in Saudi Arabia and in other Gulf countries. The impact of pan-Islamism and the implications of the Afghan war during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan also caused a major change in Bangladesh. Hundreds of Bangladeshis went to Afghanistan to fight against what they called Jihad against the ‘Soviet infidels.’ The post 9/11 situation further deepened the role of various Islamic groups in Bangladesh against what they called American conspiracies against Islam and Muslims.

Now the question is to what extent the verdict of Supreme Court which lifted a four-year stay on the ban on the “abuse of religion for political purposes” will help the regime of Awami League to transform Bangladesh again as a secular state? Supreme Court of Bangladesh which declared null and void Fifth Amendment of the Bangladeshi constitution has in fact opened a Pandora’s Box. That amendment which not only legitimized the military orders during Ziaur Rehman’s rule but in fact the preamble of constitution included “Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim” thus giving an Islamic color to the country’s constitution. But to expect that Sheikh Hasina will undo with all the Islamic characteristic of Bangladeshi constitution is a wishful thinking because even some members of Awami League will not support the marginalization of the Islamic identity of Bangladesh.

Islamists in Bangladesh, along with their allies will try their level best to resist Awami League’s efforts to reverse the process of Islamization in Bangladesh. They will get the support of Khaleda Zia’s BNP because there are strong leanings of this political party as far as religion is concerned. Indian factor is also important because Awami League is termed as pro-Indian and its tilt towards New Delhi is bitterly criticized by its opponents, especially BNP and Jamaat. But one thing is certain: even if Awami League is unable to reverse the process of Islamization, it has certainly weakened those forces who want to transform Bangladesh as a secular country. Awami League is trying to divide the clergy into moderates and hard liners as it believes that by convincing moderate segment of clergy, it can push its agenda for a secular country. The real test of Awami League will come when it will try to amend the constitution so as to declare Bangladesh as a truly secular country. Although, it has two-third majority in the parliament which is required to amend the constitution and is also hopeful that the judiciary will not create obstacles in this regard, one can expect widespread popular agitation by those who have been the beneficiaries of the process of Islamization. Critics of Awami League term it as pro-Indian and pro-American and its attempt to reverse the process of Islamization will be resisted with full force not only by Jamhat-i-Islami but also by the BNP. Perhaps, the large-scale electoral victory which Awami League secured in December 2008 general elections has made that party over confident and indifferent to the demands of opposition. Already, a new phase of political agitation and strikes has begun in Bangladesh with BNP calling repeated strikes against the policy of ruling party.

Bangladesh today has a choice to make: a religious or a secular state. Culturally, Bangladesh cannot be a religious state because of the presence of large non-Muslim minorities. Muslims of Bangladesh are tolerant and moderate in their approach and behavior. That is the reason why, militant and extremist religious elements have failed to get an adequate space in Bangladeshi society. But, it does not mean that Bangladesh can be transformed as an anti-religious state. Since there is no clash between secularism and Islam and Bangladesh has a moderate society, it is possible that sooner or later there will be a consensus among different stakeholders in terms of moving forward and ensure a secular order in which the rights of all Bangladeshis are protected and they are not discriminated on the basis of religion or their place of origin.  

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Bangladesh is a country whose people combat hardships at every level while its two leading female politicians play havoc with the nation’s future.

By Hammad Raza

Bangladesh is in a political mess today. Politics has become a personal business of two mainstream political parties. The root cause of this messy situation is the personal rivalry of leaders of two parties. The army aborted a dismal interregnum and released from jail the leaders of the country’s two rival political dynasties two years ago, but the politics of hate and attrition grind away in Bangladesh hitherto. The reason of this unabated hatred is the personal vendetta of the prime minister of Sheikh Hasina Wajid against her potent rival Khalida Zia. The situation deteriorated when Khalida Zia was evicted from her house in Dhaka. This bad move triggered a protest strike called by Mrs. Zia’s opposition the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Violence broke out between her supporters and those of Sheikh Hasina’s Awami League. The country’s third powerful political force, the army, has backed the High Court’s eviction order.

The eviction is part of the League’s mission to break the BNP’s back. It is obsessed with airbrushing from history the legacy of the political dynasty founded by Mrs. Zia’s late husband, General Ziaur Rahman, hero of Bangladesh’s war of independence in 1971. In democracies, the opposition is part of the political process. Such moves driven by personal hatred only strengthen hands of undemocratic forces.

Yet the BNP was in a shambles even before the recent onslaught. The party has just 30 seats in a 300-strong parliament, which it boycotts. It is split: Mrs. Zia can count only on the support of a minority of BNP leaders. Meanwhile, the leaders of the BNP’s main ally, Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh’s largest Islamic party, have all been jailed. The alliance has hurt the BNP’s reputation, particularly internationally, says Moudud Ahmed, a former prime minister and Mrs. Zia’s lawyer. Yet the BNP needs Jamaat-e-Islami’s electoral support. This alliance can unleash a wave Islamizing the society and politics as religious parties are often in the habit of unmasking their real agenda once they get opportunity.

Sheikh Hasina has the support of the Indian government. The end to Mrs. Zia’s political dynasty has become almost a tenet of national security for India, which sees her family meddling in India’s domestic affairs. Mrs. Rahman’s right-hand man told investigators that the Pakistan embassy in Dhaka and the United Liberation Front of Assom, a militant group fighting for an independent homeland for ethnic Assamese in India’s north-east, paid the BNP and Bangladeshi spooks some $10m for the secret transshipment to Indian insurgents of ten truckloads of arms.

Western governments also oppose Mrs. Rahman’s return. They supported the thinly veiled army coup in January 2007, which prevented the BNP from stealing an election. Continuing the crackdown is a centre-piece of the Awami League policy.

Despite the government’s plunging reputation, popular support for Sheikh Hasina’s clan dwarfs that for Mrs. Zia’s. It is really amazing to see how the League remains stuck in divisive politics based on personal grievances that go back nearly four decades. The current democratic setup should not settle scores with political rivals. The battle can be fought on democratic forums. It is the duty of leaders to transform these conflicts from feudal contestations to civic contests. The ‘battling Begums’ must realize the fact that in democracy, the government and the opposition are complementary adversaries. Both are inevitable for each other.

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Healthy Minds, Successful Nation

As part of the strategy to stabilize and develop the war-affected regions, it is necessary to provide proper mental health facilities to develop trust and security in Sri Lanka.

By Fahmida Ashraf

After the end of the devastating 25-year civil war in May 2009, the important challenge for the Sri Lankan government is the resettlement and rehabilitation of displaced Tamils and reconstruction of the war-affected Northern and Eastern provinces (the Tamil majority provinces). As part of the rehabilitation process the Sri Lankan government has to deal with some important issues, such as, structural development; restoration of civil liberties; providing basic economic, social, and health facilities. The bloody last phase of the civil war has left a deep feeling of distrust and uncertainty in the minds of the affected people, mainly Tamils. There is a need to build greater trust and better relationship between individuals, families, communities and government institutions providing services to the Tamils in the Northern and Eastern provinces. According to the World Health Organization’s estimates about three percent of the Sri Lankan population is suffering from some form of mental illness. During a discussion at the Melbourne University in October 2010, Dr. Jayan Mendis, Director, National Institute of Mental Health in Sri Lanka stressed that during the post-conflict period mental health was the most important health issue in the country.

Sri Lanka basically has a government-funded public health system also supported by the private sector. According to the World Psychiatry Journal, October 2010, about 1.6 percent of the total health budget is spent on mental health. The Sri Lankan government has conducted a National Mental Health Survey for ascertaining the most common mental disorders. The 1873 Mental Health Policy has been redrafted and the government has now adopted the National Mental Health Policy based on community mental health services, particularly for the Northern and Eastern provinces. In this connection the Sri Lankan government is working with national humanitarian organizations as well as international organizations, such as, World Health Organization, International Organization for Migration, and USAID’s Office of Transition Initiative. The Australian government through its aid agency, AUSAID, in collaboration with the Sri Lankan Health Ministry has launched a project called the ‘Reconciliation through Integration of Mental Health in Northern Districts’ for implementing special mental health projects in the Northern Province. Moreover, there is a National Mental Hospital supported by psychiatrists, social workers, and support staff also having provincial psychiatric inpatient units all over the country. However, because of the civil war and uncertain situation many trained psychiatrists left the country. Therefore, there is a shortage of trained psychiatrists. According to the World Psychiatry Journal, October 2010, total population of Sri Lanka is about 19 million, but only 48 psychiatrists to deal with them. This means approximately one psychiatrist for 500,000 persons. Although, now some psychiatrists have returned to the country, yet to cope with the shortage the Sri Lankan government started a one-year diploma courses in 2008 and those who have completed the course have been appointed in rural areas.

The three decades of civil war and brutal policies of the Sri Lankan government and also the LTTE have traumatized the people, particularly people in the Northern and Eastern provinces. As part of the strategy to stabilize and develop the affected regions it is necessary to provide proper mental health facilities to develop trust and the feeling of security in the minds of the affected people. Though still much needs to be done in this context, however, it is important to note that the Sri Lankan government has not ignored this important aspect of the society and has been working for developing mental health facilities in the country.

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Maldives, the Indian Ocean tourist Mecca is best known for its pristine beaches and magnificent lagoons. Yet the last few years have seen disaster after disaster strike this island giving it a reputation that extends beyond its natural beauty. In 2004, the deadly Tsunami caused damage equivalent to 62% of Maldives’ GDP at the time as it struck the archipelago’s three major industries: tourism (accounting for 28% of its GDP) fishing and shipping. Soon after, the financial crisis crippled the Maldivian economy which actually contracted in 2009. Lastly, environmental changes threaten to submerge this collection of small islands and leave 400,000 Maldivians home and country-less.

These catastrophes strike Maldives just as it celebrates a shift to a more open and democratic political system. Under its previous president Maumoon Gayoom, Maldives was known for its closed and autocratic political system. But in October 2008, after months of intense local and international pressure, Maldives saw its first ever multi-candidate, multi-party elections. President Gayoom’s thirty year rule finally came to an end and Mohamed Nasheed, a political activist who had previously been jailed several times for political dissent came into power along with the newly formed Maldives Democratic Party (MDP) which he co-founded.

In his address at the inaugural session of last year’s Sixteenth South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) Summit, President Nasheed was quick to acknowledge Maldives’ history of political repression but also seemed hopeful for the direction the country was heading in. Nasheed stated that the Maldives’ agenda remained to ‘consolidate democracy’ and steer a ‘new, open political culture.’

Lying around seven hundred kilometres off the coast of Sri Lanka, the Maldives has long followed an admirably non-aligned foreign policy. This has led to the country staying neutral on controversial issues such as the Kashmir dispute; a departure from the common stance held by the other members of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference which it is a member of. Interestingly, at the same time President Nasheed recently announced decisions to renew ties with Israel; a move that many including the Information Minister of Maldives fear will establish the country as a target for attacks by extremist Islamic groups.

These fears are not unfounded: Maldives saw its first ever bomb blast in September 2007. The explosion in the capital Malé by religious extremists groups, injured 12 tourists and raised questions as to whether the Maldives can continue to stay moderate in a region characterised by the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. For some however, Islamic militancy is not an import rather it is a product of the Maldives’ own legislative fabric. Maldives is conspicuous in its state sponsored religious intolerance which has garnered sharp criticism from the international community and organizations such as the International Service for Human Rights. The Maldivian constitution breeds such intolerance through laws that prohibit Maldivians from practicing any religion other than Islam and a Religious Unity Act that stringently differentiates between the type of Islam that is allowed. Even the large population of non-Muslim expatriates, mostly Buddhist Sri Lankans and Hindu Indians are forbidden to practice their faith in public; all places of worship apart from mosques are banned.

The rise of fundamentalism may soon displace the mitigation of climate change as the Maldives’ most urgent priority. Maldives is the lowest lying country in the world, a fact well known by President Nasheed who has been outspoken in his quest to combat climate change. With Islamic fundamentalism becoming more and more mainstream, it will be interesting to see how the fledgling democracy will react if a conservative Islamic political party such as the Adhaalath (Justice) Party comes into power. If that happens, the Republic of Maldives may well implode as it replaces modernity with conservatism and plurality with intolerance.

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No End in Sight

While the UN prepares to withdraw from Nepal, questions about the legitimacy of the step will continue to trouble observers.

By Huma Iqbal

The peace process that Nepal entered five years ago, ending a decade-long Maoist insurgency, is heading towards a crucial phase. The mandate of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) is scheduled to end on January 15, 2011, leaving behind a sense of crisis in the public which is already wary of power-wrangling politicians in the country.

From the inability to reach a consensus for drafting a new constitution to resolving the issues of rehabilitation and reintegration of former Maoist combatants, resentment against the government is growing amongst the masses censuring politicians for their indifference to commitments they themselves made at the start of the peace process.

As the time to wrap up the mission is nearing, B Lynn Pascoe, UN under secretary general for political affairs is hopeful that the leaders will move “very quickly” to resolve the issues of power-sharing and has stressed time and again that the “United Nations is not abandoning Nepal just because UNMIN is leaving.”

While signing a peace agreement with the major political parties in 2006 and ending the civil war in the country, the Maoists insisted on the UN being part of the peace process, and from 2007 the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) began to monitor their People’s Liberation Army (PLA), with a temporary mandate to monitor the Maoist and national armies and assist with the peace process.

After the parties and the Maoists failed to work together to disband the PLA and rehabilitate its nearly 20,000 guerrillas within six months of signing the peace agreement, the UNMIN was given several extensions by the UN Security Council.

However, during its four years of assignment, beginning January 2007, UNMIN often faced criticism of being too lenient towards the Maoists. UN, on the other hand often expressed frustration at the political deadlock in the country which it alleged to have slowed the pace of progress. UN Secretary-General Ban ki-Moon, in his report to the Security Council last year reported: “Its [UNMIN] seeming indefinite presence may be taken for granted and the mission is repeatedly made a scapegoat for matters which lie beyond its mandate.”

International observers on the other hand are also critical of the political deadlock in the country. They criticize absence of any government since June 30, when Madhav Kumar Nepal stood down as prime minister, under pressure from the opposition Maoist party. After 16 attempts, the parliament has still not been able to choose a successor.

This political impasse is also said to be hampering the solution to the urgent problems that Nepal faces today which if not addressed soon can lead to grave consequences in the region. The most urgent amongst these is the reintegration of some 19,000 Maoist combatants, sheltered in various camps across the country. These combatants include child soldiers as well as women who are said to be the most vulnerable to the entire process.

The international community has also been visibly surprised over the lack of seriousness among the parties in power, as well as in the opposition, over the looming chaos and disorder. In November last, a U.S. $4.5 billion national budget was finally passed through presidential ordinance, following a four-month delay. Maoist members of the assembly physically assaulted Finance Minister Surendra Pandey as he presented a hurriedly prepared provisional budget to the assembly.

Nepal’s immediate neighbors, India and China, too appear wary of consequences of an unstable Nepal. While New Delhi says it feels the Maoists are not serious about the peace process, many members of the constituent assembly of Nepal are also doubtful about the entire peace process, labeling it as a mere game which is rapidly losing its relevance and legitimacy.

While the Nepali people helplessly watch their leaders push the country towards the precipice, the wrapping up of the peace mission brings no good news for this country of 30 million.

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It’s never too late!

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

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

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China 2011

The world’s most populous country is doing extremely well on all fronts and will continue to successfully carve its future in 2011 and beyond.

By Ilhan Niaz

China is a statistician’s paradise. Articles about China typically include figures relating to the country’s awe-inspiring economic growth, international trade, currency reserves and growing international clout as the new “Workshop of the world” – a phrase once proudly used to describe the United Kingdom. Suffice it to say that barring extraordinary events, the year to come will produce another set of impressive statistics. However, China is much more than economic statistics. It is a society in a delicate and potentially dangerous phase of modernization that is grappling with severe environmental problems, socioeconomic inequalities and the proximate possibility of political and strategic destabilization. 2011 is likely to be a difficult year for China though the problems likely to be encountered are not beyond the ability of the Chinese leadership to handle.

The most pressing problem seems to be growing tensions on the Korean peninsula. The bellicose and autocratic North Korean regime is intent on demonstrating its nuisance value to its far wealthier neighbors and is jealous of growing mutually beneficial trade and investment ties between its Chinese ally and South Korean nemesis. China’s handling of this situation will require all the depth and dexterity that its 2200 years old diplomatic tradition can muster. Clearly, China does not want war on the Korean peninsula for that would disrupt economic growth and probably result in the defeat of its North Korean ally. At the same time, the Chinese leadership is visibly reluctant to push North Korea completely into a corner and start knocking heads in Pyongyang, which is what the United States of America would like China to do. Thus far Chinese efforts to get the Six Party talks going again have failed owing to U.S. and South Korean unwillingness to talk to North Korea until it improves its behavior. The Chinese position is that modifying North Korea behavior without talking to it is unlikely to happen. To put the situation in more cultural-historical terms, the barbarian hermit kingdom of North Korea is demanding attention and tribute from the civilized world and paying a little tribute, disguised as aid for face-saving purposes, could save a lot of bloodshed and destruction.

While the Korean crisis is capturing headlines, China has to manage its leadership transition in 2012. Assuming Hollywood is wrong and the world does not end in 2012, the present Chinese leadership will be replaced by a younger crop of leaders. China is perhaps the only communist regime that has managed (in 2002) a peaceful and legitimate leadership transition. There were plenty of Sinoskeptics back in 2001 hoping that the leadership change would result in political crisis and/or violence (as happened in 1989 and before that in 1976-78). However, in 2002 it didn’t and it seems unlikely that the 2012 transition will be problematic.

Then there are more long-term issues and of these environmental pollution and Chinese policies to combat it locally and globally is one of the most important. China is facing an environmental catastrophe in terms of desertification and water and air pollution. China’s own vice minister for the environment warned back in 2005 that China’s rapid economic growth could fall apart due to pressing environmental problems. Given that the central government prioritizes economic growth and rewards local governments and civil servants who attain development objectives, it is unlikely that the ‘Economics first’ approach of its government machinery is going to be replaced anytime soon by the saving-fuzzy creatures from extinction approach. By the time environmentalism becomes the primary goal it may well be too late to retrieve the situation. With a per capita income of about U.S.$ 3700 in 2009 (World Bank estimate) China is much wealthier than India (U.S. $1134) but still far behind the developed countries. The economic growth of the past 30 years has pulled hundreds of millions of Chinese out of absolute poverty but expectations and inequalities are rising and changing at the same time leading to a greater perception...
of deprivation. Managing growth with equity while protecting the local environment is a challenge that cannot and must not be underestimated. While the World Wild Fund (WWF) may be eager to save China’s iconic Panda bear from extinction, China’s spiraling energy needs and dependence on fossil fuels has made it a leading contributor to global environmental problems even though its per capita income is in nominal terms about 1/10th of most developed countries. Even at far lower standards of living, China’s billion plus population represents a global environmental hazard. By 2020 China is likely to overtake the United States of America as the single largest producer of Carbon dioxide emissions, one of the major greenhouse gases. This is a problem for everybody and even though the Chinese leadership has announced green technology initiatives that will reduce the rate of increase in greenhouse gas emissions these emissions are likely to continue growing even though they are already too high. While this is an issue on which China can capture a leadership role for the sake of humanity’s common future, the Chinese government has stuck to the well-worn position that the developed countries should take the lead and convert to green technologies first rather than asking developing countries to bear an even share of the load. This argument does make a short-term and medium-term economic sense but it spells disaster for everybody in the long-term.

From Pakistan’s perspective, issues such as the global environmental impact of China’s economic growth are of little consequence compared to China’s relations with South Asia. Leaving on one side the clichés about Pakistan-China friendship, a shared rival in the form of India and long-standing economic and military cooperation are likely to ensure that there are few surprises in store for 2011. A prosperous, well-governed and strong Pakistan is in the Chinese national interest even as expanded trade and investment opportunities in India are likely to be exploited by China.

For 2011 one can hope that China will make wise, well-considered decisions in its enlightened self-interest and deal pragmatically with problems at home and abroad. Clearly, China needs to play a more active role in defusing tensions on the Korean peninsula even as it grapples with a leadership transition at home and growing environmental concerns domestically and internationally. Pakistan is one country that wishes China well on all fronts but there are plenty who would love to see China stumble and falter. If the past is any guide to the future it seems unlikely that China will lose its way in 2011 but with war clouds gathering over the Korean peninsula, a leadership transition at home and pressing environmental problems making themselves felt, there is trouble brewing under heaven.

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In November 2010, NATO held its 24th summit in Lisbon where its Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen unveiled the organization’s latest Strategic Concept. “The world is changing,” Rasmussen proclaimed, “We face new threats and new challenges. And this Strategic Concept will ensure that NATO remains as effective as ever in defending our peace, our security and our prosperity.” NATO’s new ten-year plan has identified 7 key areas of security concern for the transatlantic alliance: crisis-management, proliferation of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), secure communication, trade and energy transit routes, cyber attacks, technology-related threats, and environment and resource constraints. At the core of NATO’s strategic thinking is the belief, one that NATO’s official website spells out, that members must develop new capabilities and skills to combat the new and unconventional threats which have arisen.

NATO’s new plan has many implications for international relations and raises several questions. I would like to discuss three essential questions here.

**How new is NATO’s new Strategic Concept?**

It’s only partially new. Challenges of crisis management, terrorism, nuclear proliferation and threats from WMDs, secure communication, trade and energy transit routes, and resource constraints are all security concerns discussed in NATO’s previous strategic concept, the Washington Treaty of 1999. Nevertheless, the plan has added new concerns, such as those from Cyber attacks and technology-related threats, such as development of laser weapons, technology that impedes space travel, and electronic warfare.

But, perhaps, the “newness” of the plan can also be assessed through the shift in NATO’s strategy of combating these threats. Crisis Management is one such example. Whereas the last Strategic Concept dedicated only a few sentences to affirming the alliance’s commitment to prevent conflict or end conflicts, a significant portion of new the plan enlarges how NATO will manage crises. The document defines “crisis management” as helping manage developing crisis, stop ongoing crisis, and stabilize post-conflict situations. Where NATO puts most emphasizes, however, is in the second and third goals. Drawing on the Afghan experience, the plan states that NATO will develop the doctrinal and military capabilities required to execute counterinsurgency and stabilization operations, as well as post-conflict reconstruction.

Questions are being raised about NATO’s future role and its relevance in the changing scenario of the 21st century.

**By Shehzad H. Qazi**
An article published in 2005 in the NATO Review titled “Big World, Big Future, Big NATO” was one of the first to push this line of thinking. Amongst a series of recommendations, the author also argued that NATO would have to develop “armed forces with strategic civil-military capabilities able to manage a broad threat set to achieve desired political end-states.” In short, NATO would have to produce nation-builders. Such recommendations are also very common in the American politico-military discourse. This new emphasis on the nation-building aspect of crisis management, however, has dire implications. Counter-insurgency and post-conflict reconstruction are post-invasion engagements, and this makes one wonder if NATO foresees invasion, occupation and nation-building in its future? Should the world brace for more U.S.-led and NATO-backed invasions? And if so, which countries will be invaded?

What is NATO’s raison d’être?

Formed in the aftermath of the Second World War, NATO was supposed to be a bulwark against the Soviet Union and the expansion of its sphere of influence in Western Europe. It was the surest way for the U.S. to protect its economic interests and military assets in Europe. Through offerings of security guarantees and the promise of reconstruction, the U.S. commanded a leading role in Western Europe’s foreign defense and diplomatic policy, using this power to deter and contain its archival, the USSR.

The end of the Cold War brought joy to the organization because it had accomplished its mission. But, with the Soviet threat eliminated, NATO’s relevance was now in question. Nevertheless, U.S. desire to establish global hegemony, NATO’s own bureaucratic and organizational interests, and the lack of an alternative non-U.S. European security arrangement all allowed NATO’s continued existence. After forty years of a stable mission plan, however, NATO stood almost aimless and since then has been in the search of its new raison d’être. This search has been marked by ad hocism. NATO has adopted different Strategic Concepts and justified its existence on a mission-to-mission basis, such as the 1995 bombing of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the 1999 bombing of Yugoslavia, and the current occupation of Afghanistan.

Many commentators have described the alliance’s search for a new role as “NATO’s identity crisis!” It remains unclear if even after the Lisbon summit NATO has found a stable objective and a reason to exist. It has committed to combat a series of threats that are diffuse and will define the twenty-first century’s security agenda. These threats, however, have been identified by almost every international security arrangement and are on the national security agendas of major world players. This leaves NATO without a unique mission that was once its trademark. It also raises questions regarding whether NATO, as it exists today, is even the right organization to deal with these threats. Whereas drafters of the eleven-page Strategic Concept have chosen to market the organization as “An alliance for the 21st Century,” serious doubts remain about whether NATO has any meaningful or grand role to play in this century.

Will NATO survive the 21st Century?

This question is deeply tied to the last. Finding a new role to justify its existence is no longer NATO’s only worry. Over the years the European Union (EU) has begun moving closer toward establishing a common European defense. France and Germany have led this shift and seek to create a security arrangement that allows them to sidestep the American security agenda. This policy is in line with the EU’s goal to move out of the American camp and establish itself as an independent power. The transatlantic organization represents political realities of the Cold War. Today Europe has re-emerged as an independent power. According to John McCormick, a leading scholar of the EU, Europe has emerged as a superpower and the world has returned to bipolarity.

As a 2008 paper published by the EU Institute for Strategic Studies explained, there are clear demands in Europe to increase the EU’s defense capabilities and independently pursue European security objectives. The EU’s policy aims to invest in military research and development, acquisition of military hardware, and training of personnel.

Europe’s push for greater security independence does not mean, of course, that the EU and the U.S. will become hostile. It does, however, point out that with declining American power the EU is preparing to take greater responsibility for its own security. Moreover, it signals that as a distinct politico-economic power, the EU has certain security interests that may not always overlap with those of the U.S.

All this leaves the future of NATO in question. The alliance lacks a grand strategic mission and has provided a Strategic Concept that is only partially new. Furthermore, with the European Union working towards forging a common European defense the alliance will start to become less legitimate and relevant. In short, NATO may not survive the 21st century. If it survives, the organization will inevitably suffer a decline in its influence, bereft of power and acquiring a symbolic position.

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Social Economics

SRI LANKA

A Story of Poverty

Despite advances in human development and standards of living, more needs to be done in Sri Lanka is welfare programs.

By Rabia Hashmi

Separated from the subcontinent by the Palk Strait, Sri Lanka’s development story is a unique one. In spite of its small size, Sri Lanka started out extremely well after obtaining independence in 1948. Some rough estimates of real gross product per person in international prices from 1950 give Sri Lanka a figure twice that of India and 80% that of Japan. More remarkable, however, is the fact that she was able to establish and maintain a welfare state modeled on the three pillars of the British welfare system: education, national insurance and national health. Ravaged by ethnic conflict and rapid political changes, Sri Lanka was unable to build on this achievement and maintain its rate of development. Despite several changes in leadership between 1956 and 1977, the broad outline of poverty policy remained intact with social expenditure on education, health care and food subsidies taking up almost 10% of GNP per year. The economy, however, grew so slowly that Sri Lanka was cited in development literature as a case of ‘equity-with-no-growth.’

Looking at the food subsidy and education policies specifically, there is evidence suggesting that the main issue Sri Lanka faced was the inability to achieve its economic and welfare goals simultaneously.

Most shades of political leadership believe poverty to be an economic problem which can be eradicated through economic development and social welfare, the state being central to both tasks. The initial government’s first priorities were to deal with widespread poverty, the vulnerability of the export economy and to achieve economic independence. Instead of abandoning the existing structure, policymakers sought ways to improve it by expanding the role of the government. As a result, the state came to control the economy and thus became the chief job provider. The two opposing political parties of Sri Lanka, however, had differing views on development strategy and continued to engage in decades of political and economic tug-of-war. Adding to its unstable political climate, Sri Lanka also faced extremely high levels of inequality, especially at the lowest and highest income levels.

The food subsidy is one of the major welfare policies implemented by the Sri Lankan government. It started out in the form of a rice subsidy during the depression and continued during the difficulties of World War II. External historical circumstances such as the war help to explain the increasing commitment to food subsidies, it is also important to recognize the specific circumstances within Sri Lanka that made their elimination so difficult. By 1950, food and other subsidies were well entrenched in the economy. In the 1960s, these subsidies amounted to almost the entire cost of financing the rice programs, and a substantial portion of the program involved rice im-

Sri Lankans await better economic policies to overcome poverty
ports. Foreign aid did not become an important factor until the 1970s. More important, however, was the fact that the ratio of the subsidized price to the imported price varied widely. This meant that a major portion of the resources available to the government were allocated to the rice rationing program. Since the rice ration was available to everyone irrespective of income, the cost of delivering the rice to the lowest groups was very high.

A question that arises with regard to the food subsidy: why did the government insist on making the rice ration available to everyone? Even if administrative problems were resolved and the rations managed to raise the performance of low income groups through improved nutrition, the subsidy was an extremely costly way of trying to achieve higher productivity. At a time when the world price of major exports such as tea and rubber was falling, it would have been far more efficient for Sri Lanka to channel its funding elsewhere. Efforts to solve the underutilization problem could have been one avenue. Diversifying exports and creating an industry for intermedi ate goods could also help ease the situation. It would help improve the recurring balance of payments problem and decrease dependence on imports. In efforts to achieve increased productivity along with an improvement and expansion of welfare policies, the government had to allocate more funding to food subsidies. The opportunity cost for this was high, making the food subsidy an illustration of Sri Lanka’s trade-off between economic policies and welfare programs.

Along with its dedication to food rations, the government was also heavily committed to providing free education and health care. Given the extent of inequality in the country, the emphasis on education is explained largely by the widely held view that education was the key to respectable jobs i.e. government jobs, and that inequality in access to education was the fundamental source of other significant disparities. Characterized by a two-tier system, the educational base had an extremely wide reach and provided education to even the lowest income groups in rural areas. Especially in the case of Sri Lanka, a high literacy rate did not necessarily translate into high quality education. Instead of bridging existing inequities, the education system seemed to perpetuate them by producing people who were lower qualified, had fewer skills and were therefore less capable of performing in high level jobs.

The relationship between leaving school and the income level was negative in the early 1980s. To address this issue the government has, in recent years, expanded the lunch and textbook program. Furthermore, foreign aid is generally more readily available for buildings, equipment, and vehicles than for the salaries of teachers and maintenance costs. It is fair to state that the quality of primary and secondary educations declined in these years. The allocation of capital expenditures was clearly favored towards higher education at the expense of primary and secondary schooling. The number of higher education institutions continued to grow, but the quality suffered. Due to the relaxation of exchange controls, education abroad for members of higher-income families became easier and this too disturbed the equality of opportunity principle. In such a situation, perhaps, the best approach is not to act explicitly on education, but rather to create ample job opportunities. Once again, the employment problem emerged and its link with the development strategy followed. Since one of the major objectives of the government was to alleviate unemployment, the system of education interfered with this economic policy and helped reinforce it.

A closer look at these policies has revealed that on several occasions, the economic policies offset the anticipated welfare advances and vice versa. In terms of human development and standard of living, improvement in Sri Lanka has not been proportional to the number and history of welfare programs. Evidence of measured income distributions have shown that there was relatively little change over the entire period from 1950 to 1985, except for the misleading 1973 estimates. The increase in the migration of professionals also highlights the inequalities of income and opportunity. Inequality in the distribution of income rose. Furthermore, public evidence of inequality became more apparent, aggravating tensions within society. There may have even been an increase in poverty; there was certainly no decrease.

Most shades of political leadership in Sri Lanka believe poverty to be an economic problem which can be eradicated through economic development and social welfare, the state being central to both tasks

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The manipulative skills of politicians, leaders and the media have always allowed them to attain their goals by distorting reality. Fear, being an innate characteristic of man, can often be deliberately induced in an individual as well as an entire nation, to achieve political objectives. Moreover, the inbuilt fear of the unknown makes it easier for politicians to divide humanity around racial, ethnic and religious lines. With the help of the media, the fear of the unknown is not only triggered but is also emphasized and amplified, so as to generate feelings of hatred and hostility. The need to overcome fear, initiates the need to consider their own race being superior to the other, who are sometimes viewed as ‘intruders’ and ‘aliens’, while as ‘inferior’.

The rising problems of unemployment, corruption and the atrociously widening gap between the rich and the poor are the dreadful results of capitalist societies which indicate that the concept of egalitarian society will forever remain a myth. The flaws erupting from the deep-seated inequalities of capitalist societies need to be obscured from the eyes of the nation, for fear of dissatisfaction and protest by the public. Hence, be it ethnic minorities or even religious groups that outnumber some of the major sects, these immigrants are not fully integrated into the society, instead they are largely blamed for economic problems stemming from the flawed structure of capitalist societies. By presenting the Black workers as a threat to the white working class, employers not only reduce the potential unity amongst them but also minimize the bargaining power of the Blacks. This in turn, fueled the conflict and ensured that the clashes continue. Racial and ethnic targeting by the state, led to the shifting patterns of acts of racial hatred, vilification and discrimination by the public. Over the years, the frequency and intensity of racism was diluting. The malicious and direct racism, camouflaged itself through the subtle and indirect process of institutional racism, yet remained pervasive. But the relatively fading concept of overt racism spawned the rise of Islamophobia. This was mainly because the public became increasingly aware that the concept of racism, served as a smokescreen, behind which the errors of capitalist society and the shortcomings of politicians were concealed.

The term Islamophobia as an English-language neologism is a relatively new invention, although traces of several basic facts can be found even in European culture.

A major reason for the apparent hostility towards Muslims lies in its growing popularity around the globe, which is directly proportional to the threat posed to the west. Jews and Christian scholars have never missed any opportunity to present distorted images of Islam in a highly authentic and convincing manner. The repeti-
The fear factor

The association of Islamic activities with certain words leads to the information being ideologically loaded with connotative codes, i.e. phrases, which evoke particular attitudes and emotions. The western media has mastered the art of controlling the attitudes of their audience, while satisfying them with the false belief of freedom of media access and interpretation. For example, Islamic fundamentalist movements have almost always been smeared with derogatory remarks such as ‘fanatical’ or ‘extremist’. This in turn limits the perspective of the passive recipients of the media and deprives them of the ability to decode this process as way of reviving and rejuvenating the original essence of a religion.

The role and strength of media is evident in the way public has started making generalized statements, linking Islam with terrorism. The accentuating ‘culture of exclusion’, feeds on the rising conflict between Muslims and non-Muslim communities and has led to the creation of intellectual spaces in many universities where distorted images of Islam are presented and tolerated.

Former Europe minister, Denis MacShane, conveniently recommended Muslims to either adopt the ‘British way’ or lead a life similar to the ways of ‘terrorists’, a term which is now indeed, unfortunately synonymous, with Islamic beliefs. His exact words were, “It is the democratic, rule-of-law, if you like the British, American or Turkish way, based on political dialogue and non-violent protest. Or it is the way of the terrorist against which the whole democratic world is uniting.” This highly provocative statement aims at achieving deeper targets. It divides and antagonizes Muslim community and instills an, ‘us versus them’ feeling between non-Muslims and Muslims. Moreover, the protests of the Muslims are again shown in a negative light.

One of the major problems in governing multicultural societies like UK and U.S. lies in knitting the political views of the entire society, in such a way as to complement the government’s views. Instead of coming up with different ideas to gain the support of different ethnic minorities, they choose the easier way out, by presenting Muslims as a general threat to the rest of the world. The induced fear not only serves to unite the entire world against one religious group but also legitimizes the government’s interference in other Muslim countries. The tragic date of 9/11 served as a tool to carve the process of the New World Order. Afghanistan offered the needed requirements by allowing an oil pipeline to pass through it, whereas Iraq contributed by being the fountainhead of liquid gold. The violence done in the name of attaining peace by them is ignored; instead they emerge as heroes and saviors. Later, Colin Powell brushed aside the repetitive issue of weapons of mass destruction by simply admitting that they received wrong information.

Several reports reveal that after 9/11 British and American Muslims were largely marginalized and made to feel like outsiders in their own countries. Recommending documentaries like Fahrenheit 9/11 by Michael Moore would be a vain attempt, as many people strongly view Muslims as terrorists and no matter how convincing the documentary may be they would avoid watching anything that would contradict their existing belief. Moreover, audiences tend to decode polysemic media messages according to their own media literacy that will help reinforce their preconceived perceptions, rather than challenge their deep-seated attitudes and prejudices. These factors make it even more difficult for journalists, directors etc. to highlight the lies that are being projected to the audience as disturbing realities. The increasing aggression and hostility worsen the condition of the disaffected underclass of young Muslims, who are identified as ‘time-bombs’, because of the precarious balance on which their explosion of violence depends. One of the biggest concerns of the Muslims all over the world is, media labeling of Muslims as terrorists and no matter how convincing the documentary might end up creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

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Political and social marginalization of the Muslims by western societies has created an identity crisis for them.
Demolished Buddhist Relics

There is no hope in sight for the Buddha statues in Afghanistan’s Bamyan valley to be rebuilt.

By Muhammad Omar Iftikhar

Afganistan is home to ancient relics, monuments and citadels; the most historic being the minaret and archeological remains of Jam and the cultural landscapes of the Bamyan Valley. Among these ancient sites, there were certain statues that stood tall for centuries, exemplifying the craftiness of those hands which built them. These were the two Buddha statues of Bamyan, ‘Vairocana’ and ‘Sakyamuni’; measuring 180 feet and 121 feet respectively, situated in the Bamyan Valley.

Regarded as the largest standing Buddha statues in the world, they were carved out of sandstone cliffs and painted to highlight facial expressions and clothing. They were documented as a World Heritage site by UNESCO along with the entire Bamyan Valley, and represented a prominent regional cultural landmark. The city of Bamyan, largest town in central Afghanistan, was once part of the Buddhist Kushan Empire. By the 4th century, the city of Bamyan was home to one of the largest monastic communities in the entire Central Asian region.

The exact period in which these statues were carved is still unknown, but according to some geologists and studies, they were built between the 3rd and 7th century, during the reign of the Kushans who were guided by the native Buddhist monks.

These statues represented a classic blend of Buddhist and Greek art often referred as the Greco-Buddhist art, which unified the Buddhism and the Classical Greek philosophies after they originated in Central Asia centuries ago. This Greco-Buddhist art has been characterized by the strong Hellenistic art, which represented the beginning of the Hellenistic period in 323 BC after the death of Alexander the Great; the era when art experienced a revolution as an artistic sense of freedom was developed. It was during this same era when Buddha’s first representations in human form were carved in stone.

In March 2001, the Taliban commenced the demolition of these Buddha statues. It has been observed that this annihilation of ancient statues had little or perhaps no link with religion, but it was fairly associated with the ideology the Taliban’s upheld. The main reason for this destruction was revenge as the Bamyan province was home to Taliban’s main opposition, the Northern Alliance.

The Taliban destroyed these cultural heritage sites to provoke their opposition and to humiliate them. Taliban’s motive behind this damage was that the Buddha statues were idols being worshiped by the Buddhists, and in Islam it is forbidden to create or worship such idols.

This interpretation was not completely true, for the Bamyan statues were a reflection of the Buddhist concept of attaining pure enlightenment and reflected Buddhism’s century old heritage. But in reality, the Taliban only reiterated the actions of other civilizations - when invaders in the past conquered land and destroyed their local heritage to mark their victory.

As far as the rebuilding of these Buddha statues are concerned, it would take years and perhaps numerous generations before the world witnesses the colossal statues standing again with pride. Funds have been allocated and certain organizations are working on the reconstruction, but until the country gets peace, rebuilding of the statues and their fate hangs in the balance. The two hollow spaces in the Bamyan Valley which once had the giant Buddha statues would keep echoing the evidence of a rich cultural heritage, which once flourished.

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The importance of entertainment as a central cultural phenomenon cannot be overlooked since it serves as an indicator of larger cultural trends. Media is considered to be one of the most influential entertainment tools effectively utilizing its many genres. It is interesting to note that while particular entertainment preferences guide our choices influenced by cultural conditioning, appeal of some entertainment genre transcends cultural barriers. Reality television is one such genre of entertainment that has claimed universal appeal in the global media.

Reality television is characterized by programming in which ordinary people are featured encountering dramatic or unusual situations, supposedly while performing actual everyday tasks. The genre is not new and has existed of long in the form of game shows, but in the last decade it has been expanded to include a variety of topics, including drama, talent hunt, search for love, adventurous stunts, celebrity lifestyles, highlighting a cause, and crime etc. Reality television is not very ‘real’ in the sense that it employs sensationalism to attract viewership and boost ratings. Sometimes, they are scripted but an illusion of reality is created through editing. Shows based on lives of showbiz celebrities are most-ly popular because of the element of glamour.

In India, the more popular reality shows entice viewers with gossip masala. In some Indian reality shows, a heightened sense of sensational drama is achieved by having the participants behave in an exaggerated manner often considered scandalous and challenging to social etiquette. Some other reality shows are based on contests for the purpose of talent hunt, especially in music-related fields which has a huge market in India. To better understand the popularity of this genre in India, an introduction of some Indian reality shows might be helpful.

Many reality shows in India are inspired by shows from abroad, again highlighting the universal appeal of the topics explored. Big Brother inspired the production of the Indian version, Big Boss; Kaun Banega Crorepati is inspired from Who Wants to be a Millionaire; Sach Ka Saamna from Moment Of Truth, and Indian Idol and Chotay Ustaad – which features child singers – from the UK Pop Idol and American Idol. Among music programs, Indian Idol has served as a big platform for many budding singers. India’s Got Talent, is the Indian version of the ‘Got Talent’ series. The Great Indian Laughter Challenge, a competition of standup comedians, is a very successful comedy reality show on Indian television, inspired by the American program, ‘Who’s Line is it, Anyway? Another ‘hunt for love’ show MTV splitvilla, is based on the concept of the American dating game show, The Bachelor in which a rich bachelor finds the ultimate girl of his dreams by choosing from a group of girls through a process of grueling tests and elimination. Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa is the Indian version of BBC’s ‘Strictly Come Dancing’ and ABC’s ‘Dancing with the Stars’ and ‘So You Think You Can Dance’; Kaun Banega Crorepati is the Indian version of the UK game show ‘Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?’ This show combines the celebrity aspect of reality genre featuring the legendary star, Amitabh Bachhan. This is also the show on which the 2009 blockbuster film, ‘Slumdog Millionaire’ was based, creating a unique and highly successful reality film. Another important reality show called Haath se Haath Mila, (Let’s Join Hands) is an influential show highlighting the importance of community service by creating awareness about HIV/AIDS in India and features celebrities from Bollywood.

A quick glance on reality show format and their focus shows that their popularity stems from their perceived closeness to our own dreams.
and aspirations. The common thread that runs through most reality shows is their popular appeal in terms of the human aspect of sharing achievements, heartbreak, joys and tears in a quest for success. While the talent-hunt shows provide a useful platform for showcasing unexplored talent and to give them opportunities, their greater appeal also lies in the public’s own desire to see ordinary people change their destinies and achieve their dreams. In others, where contestants strive to find their dream partner, heartbreak and high drama entails through much of the series. The concept of making the contestants go through sometimes humiliating experiences to avoid elimination teaches values that the society does not approve of at large. At the same time, the viewers and men in these Indian reality shows have a fun time at the expense of the participants, while the girls end up demeaning themselves through catfights and obscenity. Feminists have been up in arms against reality shows that show women as sex objects, to no avail.

Another trend in the West which is still under consideration in India, is the reality show production of political figures as stars. Sarah Palin’s Alaska has faced strong criticism in the U.S. media, and a Time Magazine report questioned the motive of the show as being “the world’s most expensive political ad” at $1 million per episode, produced free of charge. In India, though no reality show has been made exclusively for a politician as yet, people with political links have occasionally appeared on such shows; Sanjay Nirupam was a participant in Bigg Boss, and Rahul Mahajan has featured in several reality shows.

Another important aspect of reality show production is its strong marketing value. Since people tend to identify and relate with participants of reality shows on various levels, there is a greater chance of being influenced by their preferences. Sometimes reality shows feature use of popular brands to boost their own profits. These brands pay high rates for advertisement. This is known as product placement. It is a form of advertisement where branded goods are casually placed in the story line. An advertisement is accepted as having a great impact on minors too, whether it is the decision of purchasing toys or imitating their favorite character’s actions. That makes it a big responsibility for the marketing agencies. The negative influence of smoking by lead actors is known to have influenced minors and adults alike.

In the U.S., an example of embedded marketing includes ‘Extreme Makeover’, which promotes sponsors like Sears and Ford. The designers of the program executing the makeovers are often shown shopping at Sears and fitting Kenmore appliances. The Indian show Haath se Haath Mila also uses placement ads to promote its message. Film clips of the stars supporting the cause and appearing on the show are used as embedded marketing tools to draw viewership and enhance profits. A few examples of product placement in Indian movies include Coke in ‘Taal’, Maruti Swift in ‘Bunty Aur Babli’ and Calvin Klein in ‘Salaam Namaste’.

Reality television is an indispensable tool of entertainment today. Unfortunately, many of these shows focus on profits and don’t mind promoting negative messages to boost viewership. What is actually required of them is more focus on creating awareness to improve perceptions of the society at large in a productive manner instead of providing meaningless or detrimental entertainment.

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This incredible news item not only spells out a milestone in the history of a South Asian country, it also highlights the many facets of advancing technology: Ncell, subsidiary of Sweden-based TeliaSonera, the first private telecom company in Nepal, has launched 3-G mobile internet services from none other than Mount Everest – specifically, at a height of 17,388 feet. Essentially, this means that a standard GSM, 3G-enabled network is now available at the top of the world. TeliaSonera is the fifth largest mobile company in Europe and possesses the controlling and operating stake in Ncell.

**The Pros**

At first sight, this seems like a really phenomenal development, which indicates that mountaineers, trekkers and other hikers using the trails of Mount Everest would be able to remain connected with each other and with the rest of the world. In common parlance, this means they will be able to post updates on Facebook, check their email, Twitter their experiences, email video clips and the possibilities are endless. All this will be attainable at economical rates. The reliance on expensive satellite phones as the only means of communication (facilitated by China Mobile in 2007) will lessen to a certain extent.

Moreover, this development also seems like good news for the population of Nepal. The company in question has pledged to invest in this network so that average Nepalese can also access all these services. That is actually the “ulterior” motive of the company – increase mobile phone penetration in the country. This is one of the ways to do it as through this network, Nepalese people will be able to avail cell phone services, including mobile internet.

Experts are also suggesting that this network could be used to gather weather-related information for the benefit of the climbers. Also, a warning of flash floods can be issued well in advance based on the alerts generated through this network. This spells relief for the areas which are affected by such floods – they can now have an advance warning and thus, prepare accordingly.

**The Cons**

There are quite a few travellers, who have expressed their scepticism, regarding the introduction of the 3-G network on the top of the world. Their main argument is that people travel and come to Mount Everest just to get away from the world of interconnectedness (read, Internet). They enjoy the remoteness of the area and the fact that they are away from the world of connectivity. This is no longer possible; they cannot “disconnect” anymore.

This particular disadvantage has the potential to “offset” the predicted advantage of more tourists. If climbers and tourists are looking for a more remote location with no infusion of technology, they might actually reject Nepal and Mount Everest as a potential location.

**A final word**

It is imperative to analyze every development from a critical eye in order to gauge its true utility. If this remains a purely commercial venture, designed to advantage only the travellers, it goes without saying that it will cause resentment among the local people – and for a good reason. If the profits of this venture benefit only the European company, then there will be no positive impact on the Nepalese economy. The introduction of a 3-G network seems like a great move, however, the regulatory authorities must ensure that the real benefits accrue to the Nepalese people first and foremost. ♦

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The enchanting nature that embraces Sri Lanka, is legendary. Visitors from all around the world flock to this tear-drop shaped nation, despite the war and turmoil it has witnessed, to remain enamoured by its natural beauty.

Sri Lanka prides itself on its natural allure and is therefore home to numerous parks that serve to somewhat further ‘harvest’ this natural charm. These parks provide conducive picnic spots for families where wild life is preserved. However, recently, yet another category has been added to the repertoire of parks in Sri Lanka which has raised several eyebrows. The government has recently embarked on a project to introduce the unique concept of Love Parks in Sri Lanka!

These Love Parks, otherwise known as Youth Parks, provide an avenue for courting couples to be together away from the interference of the prying eyes of the general public and police. Sri Lanka, being a South Asian nation that it is, generally withholds conservative values and shuns the open interaction of lovers in public places. Over-zealous police is known to warn or even arrest couples engaged in expressions of physical intimacy.

Due to the lack of places for lovers to have some private respite, the Ministry of Youth Affairs, thought of introducing these Love Parks where courting lovers or even young married couples can go and be together in peace. The parks will have musicians and possibly restaurants to enhance the romantic ambience of the place. The usage of these parks, however, is not without rules and regulations. Couples will be required to behave within appropriate limits of decency and children will not be allowed into these parks.

Despite the ministries good intentions, the idea of these Love Parks have garnered much public debate. While there is a section of the community which applauds their initiation on the basis of liberal thinking and human rights, there is yet another group of people who laugh at the idea as being simply ludicrous. They wonder why budget hotels are not being promoted instead! Budget hotels are thought to be sufficient for couples who desire private space and besides, they are thought at least create jobs in the service sector. The government is accused to be indulging in unnecessary antics, instead of focusing on rejuvenating the economy of the country after the ravages of war.

The concept of these Love Parks has also invited the ire of several conservative families. There are many who believe that these parks will provide the ‘license’ for immoral behavior and encourage their young sons and daughters to run off to these parks with their lovers instead of being at work or school. They associate these parks with westernised values which are alien to their society.

Whatever the opinions, these parks are definitely an interesting point of conversation. Also, their existence challenges the traditionalist mindset and forces us to confront the changing societal norms.

The fact is that whether these parks exist or not, courtships and love marriages are on the rise with greater interactions between males and females. Sri Lankan society, in general, is moving towards the westernised value system. The idea of these parks is simply a concept that is keeping in step with the changing times and could be looked upon as providing individual freedom within boundaries. In conclusion, they seek to appease the traditional values, while accepting modern challenges.

By Ruhie Jamshaid

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Candle lights, chocolates, beaches, exotic flowers, what would you want at your wedding? Yes, it is the most memorable day in anyone’s lifetime. A day when you actually, practically share your life with someone you think deserves to be in it. And why just stop at decorations? People of the west have taken their romance at another – more romantic – level.

Welcome to symbolic weddings. Most popular venues are islands of Maldives and the resorts near the beautiful Male beaches. The couple is married according to no religious rituals, prayers or vows. After weddings with particular themes and dress ups, these are the latest addition in the changing world of wedding ceremonies. These are ‘custom made’ or you may call ‘designer’ weddings. Guest list starting from no guests at all can go on inviting thousands of them. If the couple does not come up with a ritual on their own, they can choose from a list of many, such as floral vine ritual, sand ritual, rings ritual, candle of unity ritual and so on.

And one of the most commonly handpicked by the happy couple for their romantic wedding day are the Maldives Islands. Though Maldives’ economy is largely based on tourism, these symbolic weddings still don’t really contribute much to the economy. Most obvious reason is the lack of awareness about the symbolic weddings. But there are other reasons arising that may hinder Maldives to be a venue for such weddings.

In an incident in October last, the Island received much criticism after a video surfaced on social networks and video sharing websites, which showed employees at a spa resort mocking and humiliating a tourist couple renewing their marriage vows.

The complaint was taken really seriously and the government chalked up some strict laws for the conductors of these symbolic weddings. The regulations, approved by President Mohammad Nasheed include a compulsion to be conducted under the supervision of resort’s senior management, with clear and complete explanation to tourists; conducted in a language chosen by the tourists. The rules go on to state that; “the attendees to the symbolic marriage ceremony shall not engage in any disrespectful activity either actively or verbally while the proceedings are ongoing.”

However, the Maldives Islamic Ministry has expressed vehement opposition towards the Regulation on Symbolic Tourist Weddings. Maldives has a strict Islamic constitution. There are people who think that, despite the constitution that gives liberty to people to marry according to their religion but without a religious ceremony - in absence of prayers and vows, a wedding does not really take place. The couple will thus be believed to be living illegitimately together, having no such relation of man and wife.

While the tussle between the Ministry and the government continues, the couples from around the world who would have wanted to come to Maldives are no more certain about the revival of their vows in this Asian Heaven.

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I
t was the romance of the century. A
teen-aged girl had been infatuated
with a man more than double her
age. Understandably their marriage sent
“shock waves’ not only in Bombay’s
civil society but “all across India.”

Mohammad Ali Jinnah was forty-
one, a bright lawyer, a rising star on
the country’s political firmament, and
a Muslim. Ruttie Dinshaw Petit was
eighteen, called the “Flower of Bombay”
by her admirers, for her exquisite beauty,
the only daughter of the fabulously rich,
Sir Manockjee Dinshaw Petit, and a
Parsi. Jinnah was also, technically a wid-
ower. He was first married in 1892. The
next year he sailed for England to study.
And by the time he returned four years
later his “child bride” had passed away.

Yet, when Cupid struck, all differ-
ences were swept away. What each saw
in the other can at best be conjectured.
Khwaja Razi Haider, in his book, Rut-
tie Jinnah tries to suggest that “Ruttie
revered Jinnah’s wisdom and logic; he
was enamoured of her exceptional intel-
lect.” But if could not have been only
the meeting of the minds; their physical
attraction towards each other must also
have played its role. Ruttie was irresis-
tible; Jinnah handsome and charismatic.

Another reason for Ruttie to be
attracted to Jinnah could have been
her ambition to earn fame as the wife
of a reputed public figure as apparent
from the fact that after her marriage
she accompanied her husband to every
public meeting and sat in the front row.
Her nationalist bent of mind would also
have synced with Jinnah’s. With Jinnah,
Ruttie could also make her mark as a
political figure. In fact this could have
become a reality had she lived, because
it was her vacancy that Miss Fatima Jin-
nah, later, filled.

Jinnah frequently visited Sir
Dinshaw at his home and often stayed
on for dinner. They discussed India’s
political and social problems. Ruttie,
whose mind was “so alert, her intellect so lively and probing, (and who) took as much interest in politics as she did in …poetry,” often joined their conversation. She must have been favourably impressed by Jinnah’s brilliance that kindled the spark for him in her innocent heart.

Their 1916 holiday in Darjeeling did the rest. Instead of the Nilgiris, closer to home, the Petits and Jinnah both went to Darjeeling on a holiday perhaps because it is sited at a higher altitude with a more bracing climate. Thrown together as never before, here was an opportunity for the lovelorn pair to observe each other closely. Horse-riding and maybe long walks in Darjeeling’s salubrious climate and its serene beauty provided an ideal setting for romance to blossom.

Because Sir Dinshaw would not approve of their marriage they waited for two years until Ruttie came of age. And when she did, the impetuous damsel gave up her family, her home and even her religion. She converted to Islam, because, Jinnah would not agree to civil marriage. Their marriage was solemnized according to Muslim rites in 1918.

Ruttie’s conversion to Islam, more than her marriage as such, triggered strong resentment in the Parsi community. Particularly devastated was Sir Dinshaw. His wife and son, though, were more accepting of the situation. It was only when Ruttie was on her deathbed that Sir Dinshaw reconciled with her and spoke to Jinnah on phone to inform him of her demise. The post-nuptial euphoria could not sustain. Differences in temperament, tastes and age that lay hidden under love’s blinkers surfaced. Ruttie, ‘viva- cious, blithe, romantic and in the full bloom of her youth, would desire something more out of her conjugal life, than attending political meetings. But, with his hectic life as a lawyer and political leader Jinnah had little time for pleasure or for literature and poetry for which Ruttie had a penchant. Indeed, her very last letter to him reads like a poem dripping with love and philosophy.

One year after their marriage Ruttie gave birth to their only daughter Dina and in 1928, barely ten years after their marriage, the knot that had been tied with such passion, snapped; Jinnah living at his Mount Pleasant home, Ruttie in the Taj Mahal Hotel. The former was too egotistic; the latter too proud. Each, therefore waited for the other to make the first move, but neither did. Nor would Jinnah allow any third party mediation.

Jinnah had a cold exterior. His emotions never showed. But his heart was warm and tender. When Ruttie was seriously ill in France, Jinnah stayed at her bedside and arranged to shift her to another hospital for better treatment. As her health improved Ruttie returned home. Three months later she was taken ill again. And on 20 February 1929, on her twenty-ninth birthday, the “flower” totally withered away.

For the author it must have been a very painstaking exercise to collect material on Ruttie, because both she and Jinnah were most secretive about their personal affairs. Jinnah was always a loner. But Ruttie, too, did not have any intimate friend to confide in. She did not keep a diary either. The immediate cause of their rift remains unknown.

There is no firm information even about the nature of Ruttie’s ailment. In France, where Jinnah tended her, they again “quarreled.” So, she returned alone and continued to live separately. But the cause of the quarrel remains a mystery. And yet they remained in regular contact with Jinnah visiting her often. When she died, he broke down and sobbed “like a child.”

Perhaps things could have been different if Jinnah had made the first move after their break up and brought her home. She was eager to return if she were assured of welcome. In fact Jinnah owed it to her, because, she had sacrificed her all for him, whereas he had given nothing but exacted a price for his love, by demanding that she give up her religion.

The profusely annotated tragedy is a must read for its rare insight into the mindset of Mr. and Mrs. Ruttie Jinnah as well as a few lessons on the sidelines.

Reviewed by S.G. Jilanee

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In Islam, as in most other religions, religious scholars have tried to interpret their religious tenets in different ways. This has resulted in the coming into existence of various masaliks and even sects. There have been some other religious scholars as well, whose interpretations did command some acceptance for a short while but were forgotten soon after, leaving no permanent impact. Niyaz Fatehpri was a religious scholar belonging to the second category.

Niyaz Fatehpuri (1884-1966) was educated in Islamic learning under what is generally known as Dars-e-Nizami. He had also acquired the knowledge of English language and literature. He lived in an era during which, under the impact of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’s campaign for the acquisition of western education, many questions were being asked about traditional Islam. And the Ulema, traditional scholars of Islam, were faced with harsh criticism.

Niyaz Fatehpuri too, rejected the traditional interpretation of Islam. He was inclined towards a rational interpretation of Islamic thoughts. While doing so he often deviated far from the customary views held by most of the Muslims of South Asia. His only tool for propagating his ideas, which proved to be quite controversial, was his monthly magazine Nigar.

The appreciation received by Niyaz for his innovative views about Islam was at its peak during a short period in the 1930s and 1940s. It was then lost amidst the flurry of the struggle for freedom of India. That struggle was all the more trying for the Muslims of South Asia as they were compelled to demand the partition of the sub-continent as a measure to protect their rights. They were, consequently, made the victims of large scale killings and plundering by the fanatics among the Hindus, the majority community.

Niyaz had neither cared to build up a team of activists to propagate his views nor had he ever thought of providing any institutional support to his ideas, as had been done earlier by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. As such, his efforts to promote his ideas among the Muslims of South Asia who were already passing through turbulent times due to the political situation in the country, just fell flat.

The book under review, War Within Islam, is an attempt to present the essentials of Niyaz Fatehpuri’s thinking and to underline its importance, particularly in the context of the present global situation wherein the Islamic Civilisation is seen to be in clash with other major civilisations. The author, Juhi Shahin, holds Master’s degrees in Islamic Studies from the McGill University of Canada, and also from Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. She now happens to be a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of History at an American University. This book is a revised version of her M.A. thesis at the McGill University.

According to the author, Niyaz believed in the need for a re-interpretation of Islam in the light of the new knowledge that had become available by then. He also advocated and practiced a rational interpretation of Islamic principles. Thus his main targets of criticism were the Ulema whom Niyaz considered to be responsible for the stagnation in Muslim religious thinking, and which in turn, was making them suffer in social
and economic spheres.’

Giving an example of what Niyaz called ‘rational thinking’, the author has quoted the view of Niyaz in relation to the position of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). Generally Muslims consider God first in order of importance, followed by the Quran and the Prophet (PBUH) in that order. However, Niyaz assigned the top position to Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), then the Quran followed by God. His reasoning for this was the fact that Quran came to us from the mouth of Mohammad (PBUH) and we know about God from these two. A natural corollary of such a concept was the question whether the Quran was a Divine Revelation or was it the work (na’oozo billah) of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) himself?

Here the writer concedes that “This was one of the instances where he (Niyaz) may have taken his logic too far…” And also that such views “clearly would not be acceptable to any ordinary believer.” But there were some other views held by him which were not only acceptable to many ordinary believers but were also shared by some distinguished scholars.

Niyaz Fatehpuri believed that most of the ahadis or the sayings of the Prophet (PBUH) that have reached us, are fabricated. Similar views are held not only by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan but also by some religious scholars including Syed Sulaiman Nadvi. Niyaz attached great importance to Akhlaq or social behavior. And so did Shibli Naumani and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan.

But in spite of his liberal views on many issues, Niyaz was closer to the traditionalist view about women’s role in the society. Though he wanted them to be educated in other subjects as well in addition to religious knowledge, he was not in favour of their taking up jobs unless necessitated by difficult family circumstances. The author defends him by saying that it was a rational view dictated by the natural differences between man and woman which assigned a role to the woman within her household.

What is relevant to the present global situation in Niyaz’s thinking, is that he considered “all humanity to be equal in the eyes of God, no matter which religious practice they pursue.” He believed that a reward has been promised by God for those who fulfilled three conditions: belief in God, belief in the Day of Judgement and righteous conduct. He thus concluded that even those who did not call themselves Muslims, could become capable of receiving God’s promised reward. Such beliefs, if made acceptable to the small but more active extremist segments of the global society, can undoubtedly work as an antidote to the current worldwide extremism.

The book includes four appendices in which those themes have been listed which were discussed by Niyaz in his monthly magazine, Nigar, during the various phases of its publication. In Appendix A, themes discussed during the period 1926-1935, have been listed. Appendices B, C and D cover respectively the themes dealt with during the periods 1936-1946, 1947-62 in independent India and 1963-1966 while he lived in Pakistan. An examination of these appendices shows that he had presented and advocated his most controversial ideas about religion during the period 1926-1946. It appears that after the achievement of independence, he had turned his attention to socio-political issues and to history, while innovative ideas on religion had been mostly left aside.

Reviewed by Sabih Mohsin

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The Price of Clout

A popular journalist in India is in hot waters and paying a high price for showing off her clout.

Barkha Dutt, the 38-year-old star reporter and anchor of the biggest English-language cable news network NDTV, is sometimes called ‘Oprah Winfrey of India.’ However, she is increasingly being criticized by many, and is proving to be an embarrassment to her media colleagues since late November, as she was caught on tape talking to a corporate lobbyist, Nira Radia. In her taped conversation, Dutt agreed to pass messages to the governing Congress Party to get Anindithu Raja, a DMK politician from Tamil Nadu at the center of a telecommunications scandal and suspected of corruption, reappointed as telecommunications minister.

The calls, taped by tax investigators in May 2009, have exposed a world of deal making and information brokering in New Delhi. Copies of the tapes were leaked to the news media and published two weeks ago in India’s ‘Open Magazine’, and ‘Outlook.’

The tapes give an impression that Dutt was acting as a power broker; she vehemently denies the charge. She says that she was simply stringing along a news source who had access to information on a fast-moving story and that in any case, she never passed on the messages.

Dutt, daughter of female newspaper reporter, Prabha Dutt, says that she has been unfairly made to answer for the failings of a whole industry; this is true. The electronic news media is being regarded as a great success story all over the world, including in South Asia. However, the clout that many of the journalists appearing on television start having gradually starts to influence their personalities. As some would say, the power goes to their head and they start considering themselves invincible. Many of them even start regarding themselves as the king-makers who can make or break people.

Dutt may be on this ‘power-high’ while talking to a lobbyist on the phone.

God knows if Dutt ever charged Nira Radia the lobbyist for getting her favorite installed as the telecommunications minister or planned to do so but one thing is for sure: she was showing off her power to the lobbyist. And she is now rightly paying the price for this.

No doubt media plays a vital role in exposing corruption in any country but there are a few cases of anyone exposing the corruption within the media. If anyone ever makes this mistake, the media suddenly gets united and reacts as happened when the members of the Punjab Assembly recently passed a resolution deploring the behavior of a few media outlets; the same assembly under intense media pressure within a week passed another resolution eulogizing media’s role.

The situation is not much different in India but the treatment being currently meted out to Dutt shows that there are a few sane voices in the media establishment who are willing to stick their neck out to save the reputation of the whole institution. The Hindustan Times discontinued her weekly column, along with another journalist Vir Sanghvi, who was also involved in the scandal. The Delhi Press Club early this month experienced quite some fire-works when a journalist remarked that fellow journalists were jealous of Dutt and were thus targeting her. Many got up to object and shouted that they were not corrupt, and did not subscribe to the concept of ‘chummy relationship between the press and the powerful’ and that they should not be clubbed with the tarnished one.

Dutt says that “at a moment when the public gets anxious about the state of the Indian media, I am suddenly made to answer for everybody else.” This is the price one pays for being India’s Oprah Winfrey and for showing off her clout to others.

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Can a bank really stand for something? Can it balance its ambition with its conscience? To do what it must. Not what it can. As not everything in life that counts can be counted. Can it not only look at the profit it makes but how it makes that profit? And stand beside people, not above them. Where every solution depends on each person. Simply by doing good, can a bank in fact be great? In the many places we call home, our purpose remains the same. To be here for people. Here for progress. Here for the long run. Here for good.
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