

SOUTH ASIA

Afghanistan	Afg. 50
Australia	A\$ 6
Bangladesh	Taka 100
Bhutan	NU 50
Brazil	BRL 20
Canada	C\$ 6
China	RMB 30
France	EUR 45
Hong Kong	HK\$ 30
India	Rs. 100
Japan	¥ 500
Korea	Won 3000
Malaysia	RM 6
Maldives	Rf 45
Myanmar	MMK10
Nepal	NrRs. 75
New Zealand	NZ\$ 7
Pakistan	Rs. 200
Philippines	P 75
Saudi Arabia	SR 15
Singapore	S\$ 8
Sri Lanka	Rs. 100
Thailand	B 100
Turkey	Lira. 2
UAE	AED 10
UK	£ 3
USA	\$ 5

Kashmir Kis Ka Hai?

India has abrogated its own Constitution to usurp Jammu & Kashmir. Pakistan continues to rattle the world's conscience to the reality. The people of Kashmir meanwhile live in abject helplessness.



PAKISTAN
Governance Crisis

INDIA
Space Militarization

BANGLADESH
Vulnerable Minorities

KASHMIR
Mushaal Speaks



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

— George Orwell



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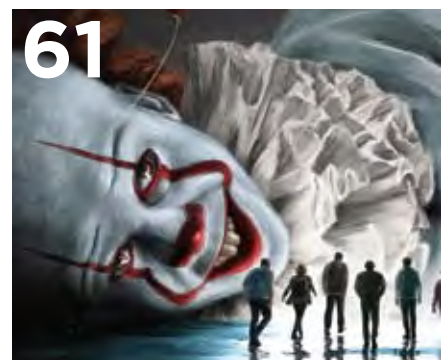
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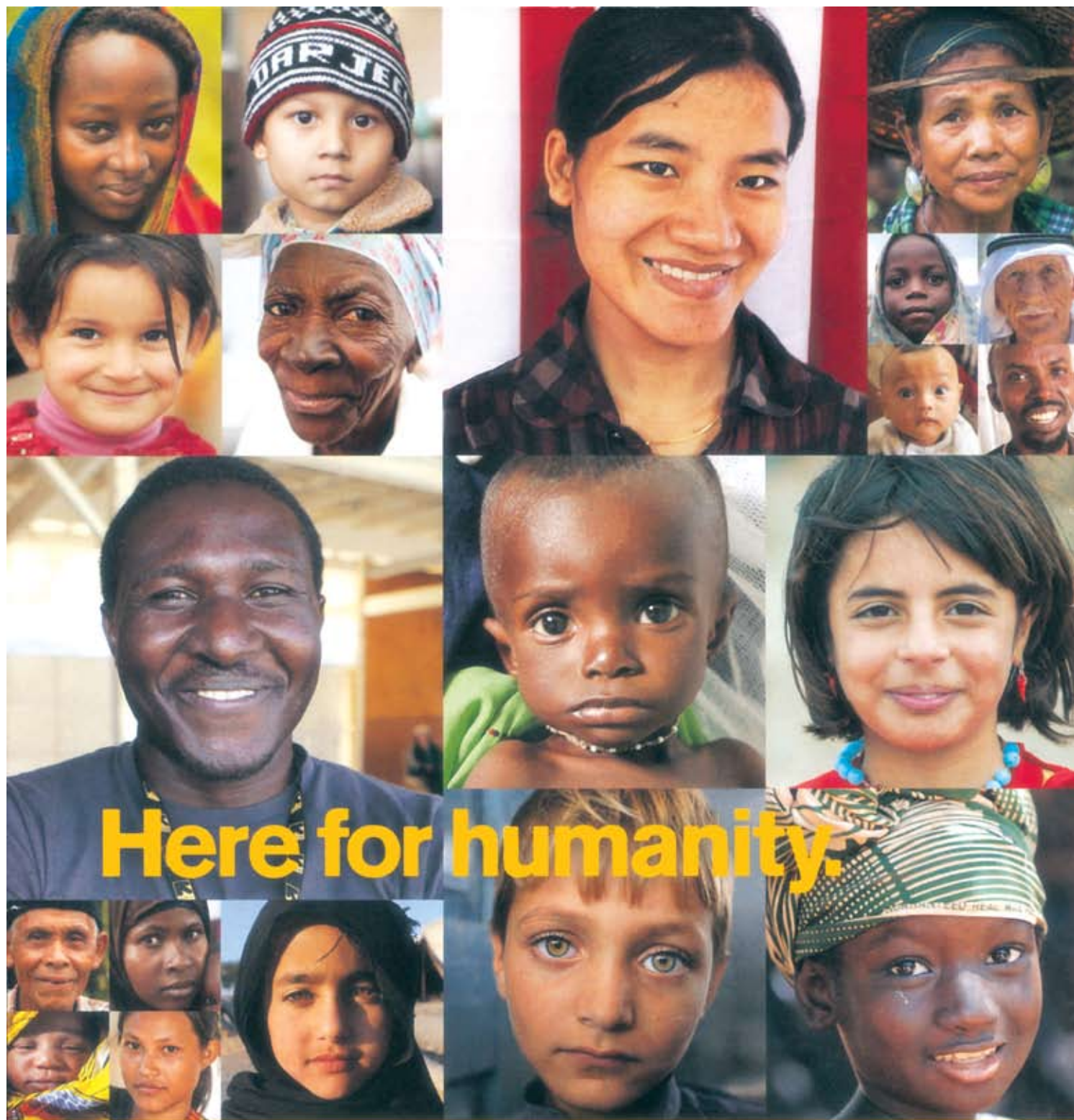
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Avoiding Doomsday




The recent decision taken by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to keep Pakistan on its grey list till February 2020 is another setback for this cash-strapped country. It exposes the level of complacency shown by the country's economic managers to deal with a matter that has turned into a crisis-like situation. Meeting in Paris on June 28, 2018, the FATF Plenary took the highly anticipated decision on the basis of a monitoring report of the International Cooperation Review Group (ICRG) that found several 'strategic deficiencies' in Pakistan's anti-money laundering (AML) steps and in combating the financing of terrorism (CFT) regimes. Other than Pakistan, the other states placed on the FATF grey list last year were Sri Lanka, Syria, Yemen, Ethiopia, Tunisia, Serbia, Trinidad and Tobago.

At that time, the task for Pakistan was quite simple and clear-cut: to come out of the grey list and to further avoid being downgraded to the black-list. It would have done this by fulfilling its 27-point action plan until the October Plenary this year. However, the task appeared to be too formidable for the PTI government. It was obvious that they had not done their homework. To control terrorism financing, the government was tasked with devising corrective measures, as specifically recommended by the Financial Action Task Force. A team of economic and financial experts was hired at high salaries to fulfil FATF's 27-point agenda. Some efforts were made by the finance ministry to remove the loopholes in the financial transaction system and form a flawless mechanism to stop money laundering and curbing terrorism financing. However, much to everyone's chagrin, the FATF decided in October to still keep Pakistan on its grey list. This indicates the harsh reality that the country has miserably failed to complete its action plan, as in the given 16-month period, it has just been able to work on only five out of the 27 tasks given to it to control alleged funding to terror groups. As per the latest statement issued by the FATF, it acknowledged Pakistan's commitment to address its strategic counter-terrorist financing-related deficiencies and to comply with

the FATF and APG requirements to strengthen its AML/CFT regime. However, the FATF statement came with a caution as it expressed serious concerns over the lack of progress made by Pakistan in addressing terror financing and mitigating money-laundering risks. In addition, the global financial watchdog clearly warned this already grey-listed country to take decisive action soonest possible.

Pakistan's continued placement in the FATF's grey list depicts a doomsday scenario for the country. It is now almost on the verge of being blacklisted as a terror-financing state, an infamous tag that is currently associated with only two countries in the world - Iran and North Korea. The Global Terrorism Index of the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) ranks Pakistan at 5th position in terms of countries most affected by terrorism. Issued by the Basel Institute of Governance, the Basel AML Index 2017 ranked Pakistan at 46th position among 146 countries in the world in terms of money laundering and terrorist financing risks. Now, with a mere 4-month lifeline at Pakistan's disposal to complete the unfinished 27-point action plan, its Ministry of Finance, in tandem with all concerned financial regulatory authorities and agencies, such as the

State Bank of Pakistan, the Federal Board of Revenue as well as the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan, needs to expedite collective efforts on a war-footing. Despite the dire situation, somehow things don't seem to be working in the desired direction. Knowing that India is making sinister efforts to damage Islamabad's endeavours and push it to the brink so that it is blacklisted by the FATF, Pakistan needs to move fast, set its house in order and make significant and sustainable progress to escape the financial doomsday. There is a feeling that some of those people in the government responsible for financial decision-making have a lop-sided approach towards the next actions that FATF could take against Pakistan. They need to realise in no uncertain terms that black-listing would lead this already economic-hit country to a freeze in official and private capital inflows as well as tough sanctions would be imposed on its banks and financial institutions. Time is really running out and it seems as if doomsday is just around the corner. 

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ایک سرگِ ناگہانی اور ہے
- مرزا اسد اللہ خان غالب

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President & Editor in Chief

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Challenges Ahead

This is related to last month's cover story on 'Whither World Bank?' The World Bank is an international organisation that helps emerging countries reduce poverty. It focuses on improving education, health and infrastructure while providing low-interest loans, interest-free credit and grants. So far it has successfully addressed social sector development in South Asia but some regions are behind others, especially in terms of adult literacy and eradication of poverty. The situation is perhaps more challenging in Pakistan where poverty, terrorism, high fertility rate and a generally conservative attitude towards women education and their low participation in workforce create an onerous set of constraints. The development stays in flux as the World Bank Group approaches the end of the third half-century of involvement in the process of development. Will the World Bank change its policies towards such countries?

*Fatima Saeed,
Karachi, Pakistan*



Man of Words

Zarrar Sehgal is an international economist and renowned legal consultant. It was really impressive to see his views as part of your cover story



in SouthAsia. It is good he shared his views regarding the World Bank and the developments it has made during the years in Pakistan and South Asia. Zarrar Sehgal holds the view that the current agenda and policy goals of the World Bank will need a massive influx of capital to sustain and promote growth in the lesser developed countries. In his

interview, he also pointed out that the World Bank is an active supporter of CPEC as this initiative will lead to large economic gains in infrastructure and transport growth in the coming years.

*Muhammad Ali,
Islamabad, Pakistan*

Deteriorating Education System

This is with reference to the article 'Price of Indiscipline' by Syeda Areeba Rasheed. Ragging is a menace that is deeply embedded in the minds of young adults. Despite the fact that ragging is a criminal offence in Sri Lanka, it has become a part of university life where the seniors shatter the excitement and the confidence of the newcomers to impose their superiority. A collective initiative should be taken to eliminate this mess. Everybody has a right to education and if the terror of ragging prevails, it will directly affect the quality of education and the mentality of new students. The aftershocks of ragging can even lead

to students suffering from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

*Rashmi Singhe,
Colombo, Sri Lanka*

Words of Wisdom

Prime Minister Imran Khan forcefully raised the Kashmir issue during his address to the UN General Assembly. There can be no peace in occupied Kashmir so long as Indian troops continue to terrorise the Kashmiri people. Therefore, it has become incumbent upon the United Nations to exert maximum pressure on Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government to not only lift the curfew in occupied Kashmir but also withdraw troops from Kashmir. Thereafter, it should allow the UN to hold a plebiscite as agreed to by Pakistan and India. The UN must act quickly or the entire region will descend into chaos and strife, bringing miseries to hundreds of millions of people.

*Hatib Ali,
Dera Ismail Khan, Pakistan*

Inefficiency of Public Transport

Dhaka's chaotic public transport service is a major headache for city-dwellers. The city is notorious for its never-ending gridlock and critical lack of road safety. Rapid population growth and urbanisation, extreme inequality, inadequate road space, unplanned roads and an archaic traffic management system are among the reasons behind this problem. Usually, buses and minibuses are the preferred modes of travel for the majority of residents. In the absence of better alternatives, they often have to endure



long delays, overcrowding and sometimes lengthy walks to be able to get into a bus. All these translate into tremendous sufferings and loss of health and money daily. We need to remember that the basic prerequisite for a good economy is the mobility of the people with access to an efficient public transport system. If the city is to survive with any degree of success, the city-planners must fix its transport system first.

*Azmol Fuad Talukdar,
Dhaka, Bangladesh*

Rain in Karachi

While the world eagerly awaits rain as one of the blessings of the Almighty, it is the other way round in Karachi, where the news of a rain spell is considered more as a warning rather than an intimation from the meteorological department. This is largely



due to the weak infrastructure of Karachi, which exposes its true loop-holes during prolonged rain spells. Mountains of garbage invade the city, destroying the fragile civic infrastructure while the stakeholders and administration continue to blame each other for lack of funds and resources. The water that accumulates everywhere destroys roads, enters homes, damages vehicles and endangers power infrastructures and street lights potentially causing serious accidents. As the mayhem continues, authorities seem to be sipping on their teacups or resting under the bridges while the city slowly steps into its grave.

*Gulshan Naz,
Karachi, Pakistan*



Malicious Practice

This is concerning the article 'Violence Against Women' by Irshad Ahmed. The article primarily discusses the sadistic practice, said to be a gynaecological test, women undergo to determine whether they had vaginal intercourse or not. Such an examination leaves a long-lasting impression on the life of the women. Many experience physical, psychological and social consequences and, in cases of rape, the practice causes additional pain to the original act of sexual abuse, leading to re-traumatisation and re-victimization. WHO very strongly condemns the practice and claims that there is no evidence that the method can produce accurate results. Unfortunately, forced virginity tests remain legal in Afghanistan despite President Ashraf Ghani's pledge to end the invasive examination in May 2017.

*Marzia Durani,
Kabul, Afghanistan*

Global Warming

According to the International Labour Organisation, countries which depend on agriculture are at risk of a serious water shortage and Pakistan is among them. In coming years, the water crisis will aggravate and the countries which run their economy by selling agricultural products will face high unemployment, inflation, poverty and gaps in incomes. Many countries, including Pakistan, Sudan and Yemen, which are already facing the spectre of global warming, will be the first to face global warming effects. To overcome the consequences of climate change and to save the agro-economy, Pakistan should start water management practices. It should build dams, stop water-logging and monitor the distribution of water among all provinces.

*Sajjad Wazeer,
Shikarpur, Pakistan*

"We must learn from history, there is no military solution for the Kashmir issue...we have to understand this reality."



- Pervez Musharraf,
former President of Pakistan

"Kashmiris and Pakistanis are one. Our grief is common as their tears move our hearts."



- Dr. Arif Alvi,
President of Pakistan

"Compromise for your dream but never compromise on your dream."



- Imran Khan,
Prime Minister of Pakistan

"I am the son of a freedom fighter, and a son of a freedom fighter automatically imbibes the value of democracy."



- Narendra Modi,
Prime Minister of India

"I believe in peace. Only peaceful co-existence can ensure peace."



- Sheikh Hasina Wajed,
Prime Minister of Bangladesh

"Where liberty dies, evil grows."



- Hamid Karzai,
former President of Afghanistan

"Corruption could lead to the collapse of the party and the downfall of the state."



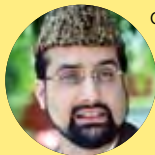
- Xi Jinping,
President of the People's Republic of China

"Despite all the achievements of civilization, the human being is still one of the most vulnerable creatures on earth."



- Vladimir Putin,
President of Russia

"The government of India cannot continue to deal with Kashmir with a clampdown."



- Mirwaiz Umar Farooq,
Kashmiri leader

"Donald Trump has gone from making absurd comments to being downright dangerous with his bombastic rhetoric."



- Lindsey Graham,
US Senator

"It's obviously nerve-wracking, because I don't know the ropes really, William is obviously used to it, but I'm willing to learn quickly and work hard."



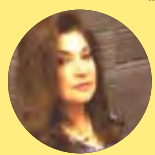
- Kate Middleton,
wife of Prince William, Duke of Cambridge.

"I guess the glass ceiling is in the West. For us, it's the glass wall."



- Princess Reema
Bint Bandar Al Saud, Saudi Arabian princess

"Rape is India's most common crime against women and has been described by the UN's human rights chief as a 'national problem.'"



- Scharmin Osmany,
Pakistani author.

"We want people to see the real Pakistan – we believe there is a Pakistan beyond what the Western media presents us."



- Sarmad Ali,
Chairman, AdAsia 2019 Organizing Committee

"No matter how tough my life was, I was always looking up at the sky and wishing for good things."



- Mahira Khan,
Pakistani actress

"I am obsessively bent on quality - to an unhealthy degree."



- Brad Pitt,
American actor

"I just really am trying, trying, all the time. But I like to be scared. I love to suddenly feel out of control."



- Kristen Stewart,
American actress

"It is very easy to point fingers at others sitting at home, but very difficult to play the game."



- Misbah-ul-Haq,
former Pakistan Test cricketer

"I am not someone who craves being captain, I am more interested in scoring runs for Pakistan."



- Babar Azam,
Pakistani cricketer

"I don't mind people hating me, because it pushes me."



- Cristiano Ronaldo,
footballer

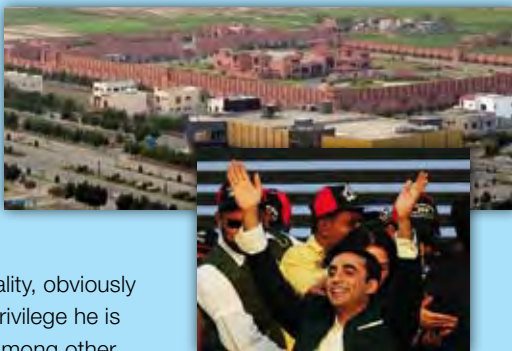
JEALOUS EX-WIFE

Reham Khan Prime Minister Imran Khan's former wife, was not encouraging about his speech at the UN General Assembly. There was a time, not too long ago, when Reham Khan couldn't stop praising Imran Khan. She now reportedly believes the Prime Minister should stop talking about Indian Occupied Kashmir. A lot of people think the lady needs to take her deteriorating mental condition seriously! It's obvious Reham doesn't have anything productive to do after the divorce. Perhaps some psychiatric help will do her good. Or she can still get her weather-girl job back on British TV.



THE HOUSE HE DIDN'T BUILD

Bilawal Bhutto's '*Jab barish hoti hai tou paani aata hai, jab ziada barish hoti hai to ziada paani aata hai*' explanation of the rain havoc in Karachi was hilarious. He seems to be untouched by reality, obviously because of the privilege he is surrounded by. Among other



things, the PPP Chairman owns a house in Lahore on which he did not spend a single paisa of his own. Malik Riaz (of Bahria fame) gifted it to him. The Bilawal House in Karachi is on 0.2 acres while the one in Lahore is on 25 acres! It is bombproof since it has 30 inch thick walls, each filled with security gadgets. The house itself has an airstrip for helicopters and small jets. It can easily cater to 10,000 people and is said to be worth Rs.5 billion.

BACK TO OLD JOB

Was this the right time to send Pakistan UN Permanent Representative Maleeha Lodhi home? After all, she conducted everything quite well when Prime Minister Imran Khan went to New York to meet world leaders concerning the Kashmir issue. He also made a great speech at the General Assembly. It turned out Maleeha had completed her tenure at the UN. The man who replaced her has been at the UN before – Munir Akram, who served as Pakistan's Permanent Representative from 2002 to 2008. He is back at his old job. Widely known for having a rather hardcore and aggressive approach, Maleeha Lodhi is said to prefer the peace-making route.



SHE WASN'T RECOGNIZED

Mahira Khan was at the Paris Fashion Week. It was L'Oreal that gave her the chance. In its report, Daily Mail, however, referred to her as a 'L'Oreal team member'. The newspaper had failed to recognize Mahira Khan, the most popular actress in Pakistan these days. Even then, nothing stopped Mahira from spreading her magic. During 'Le Defile L'Oreal Paris,' a part of the Paris Fashion Week, she danced down the runway with renowned English actress Helen Mirren. She was



Mahira Khan with Helen Mirren during the "Le Defile L'Oreal Paris" as part of Paris Fashion Week.



Mahira Khan with US singer Camila Cabello and other models at Paris Fashion week With US actor Eva Longoria (R).

also seen rubbing shoulders with singer Camila Cabello as well as Eva Longoria and Amber Heard.





Sajal says No to Indian film

Sajal Aly has rejected an offer to do an Indian film because she believes no Pakistani should work for India till the atrocities and human rights violations by India do not end in Kashmir.

Sajal is called 'the queen of expressions'. She has worked in many plays and has also appeared in the Indian film 'Mom' with the late Sridevi.

She believes there is amazing talent in Pakistan's film industry which has played an important role in the revival of the industry. She also praises the efforts of directors and producers who are working to better the entertainment sector.

She says, "If I can achieve the same level of fame and respect in my country why would I want to go to India?" **S**

Waheed Murad Celebrated



The late actor Waheed Murad was honoured by Google Doodle on his 81st birth anniversary.

Waheed Murad began his career with the film 'Insaan Badalta Hai' in 1960 as a producer. In 1961, he did a supporting role for 'Aulaad'.



From 'Aulaad' to 'Zalzala', he acted in 125 Urdu films.

He also worked in eight Punjabi films and one Pashto film. Songs such as 'Ko Ko Korina', 'Akele Na Jana', and many others made him an icon in the Pakistani film industry.

Among some of his other best known films are 'Dil Mera Dharkan Teri', 'Heera Aur Pathar', 'Armaan', 'Andaleeb', 'Mastana Mahi', 'Insaniyat', 'Devar Bhabhi', etc. He won several Nigar awards. **S**

IAF Chief Admits Mistake

February 27 still haunts the Indian armed forces as the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) let it be known to them quite clearly who they were dealing with.

The Indian Air Force has admitted to shooting down their Mi-17 helicopter on that day. The PAF also shot down two Indian fighter jets on that day, one of which fell inside Pakistan and its pilot was captured by the Pakistani forces but was released a day later on the order of Prime Minister Imran Khan, as a gesture of goodwill.

Indian Air Chief, Rakesh Kumar Bhadauria confessed to the shooting down of the helicopter after the conclusion of an inquiry against the concerned IAF officials.

A court of inquiry concluded that the Indians shot down their helicopter by mistake on Feb. 27. The incident took place in Budgam in which 6 IAF personnel were killed when a SPYDER air defence missile hit one of the IAF's choppers.

The Indian Air Chief told the media that action would be taken against the two officials who caused the incident. **S**



MOUNTAINEERS RESCUED

The British High Commissioner in Pakistan has thanked the Pakistan Army for rescuing their mountaineers. Thomas Drew said the Pakistan Army rescued five stranded UK mountaineers and the Army pilots did an astonishing job.

Pakistan Army helicopters rescued five British mountaineers from a 22,500 feet mountain after they had fallen and injured from Koe Broghail Glacier in Chitral. The British climbers were John James, William Tayler, Alastair Swinton, Thomas Livingstone and Uisdean Hawthorn.

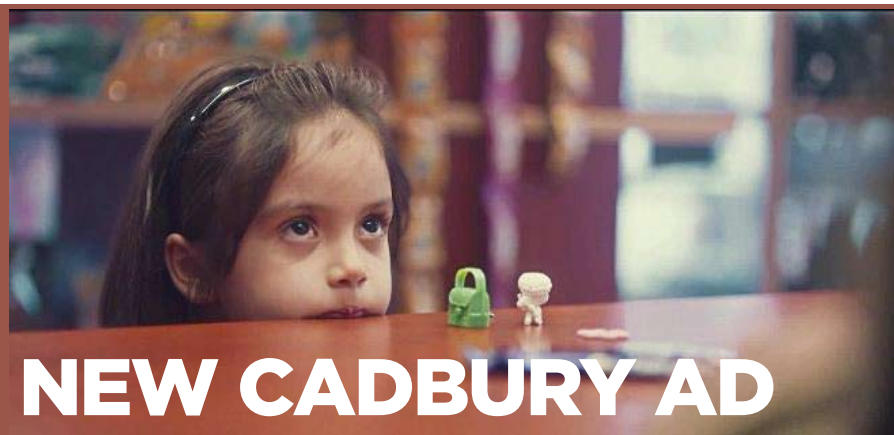
Earlier, at least three stranded mountaineers were rescued by the Pakistan Army from a peak in Gilgit-Baltistan. These mountaineers were scaling the Mir peak of



the Rakaposhi Mountain in the Karakoram Range. Army helicopters also airlifted the dead body of a mountaineer, Fida Hussain, from Miyacher Glacier in Nagar.

The Pakistan Army also rescued two Spanish mountaineers from the K-2 base

under harsh weather conditions. The rescued mountaineers, Jon Barredo and Eva Robles, thanked the armed forces of Pakistan for saving their lives. **S**



NEW CADBURY AD

A connection between a mother and daughter is truly special and that is what the new Cadbury commercial highlights. Usually, mothers are shown making all the sacrifices to see their children smile but Cadbury shows the other side as well. The mother does get emotional and hugs her daughter while the background says, 'Kuch meetha ho jaye, Kuch acha ho jaye'. **S**

FIRDOUS JAMAL AGAIN

It seems Firdous Jamal is not happy with any new actor. After he got a lot of heat for his remarks against Mahira Khan, he has now criticized Imran Ashraf.



Talking about young actors in general, in a TV show, he said these actors were not actors but models and mere show-pieces. He said they pretended to act but in fact, they could not act. He believes young actors are not spontaneous and are pretentious. For example, he says, there have been many other actors in the past who have played the role similar to the one Imran Ashraf played in 'Ranjha Ranjha Kardi' but they did it in a much better way. **S**

IMRAN PHONES HASINA

Prime Minister Imran Khan made a phone call to Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed to inquire about her health and convey to her his best wishes. The Pakistan Prime Minister underscored the historic and fraternal relations between the two countries and reiterated his commitment to strengthening bilateral ties between Pakistan and Bangladesh. **S**




FREE RIDES FOR PLASTIC RECYCLERS

The city of Rome is trying to become more environmentally-friendly by offering free metro tickets to travellers who re-cycle plastic bottles using machines set up in three stations of the Italian capital.

The initiative was launched in July. It has proved so popular that 350,000 bottles have been recycled. It will soon be extended across the metro network and run until July 2020.

The scheme has been welcomed by residents in a city with a chronic trash collection problem. "If you use the money to involve people (in recycling), even those who have no civic sense will recycle", says Rome resident Claudio Perelli.

Commuters need to download an app onto their mobile phones which registers the number of tickets they have earned based on the number of bottles fed into the recycling machines. One ticket valid for 100 minutes of travel costs 30 bottles, which must be inserted into the machine with the barcode label so that the machines can read them and register them on the app.


Rome is the first city in the European Union to launch the scheme at metro stations. Similar schemes have already been adopted in Beijing and Istanbul. 

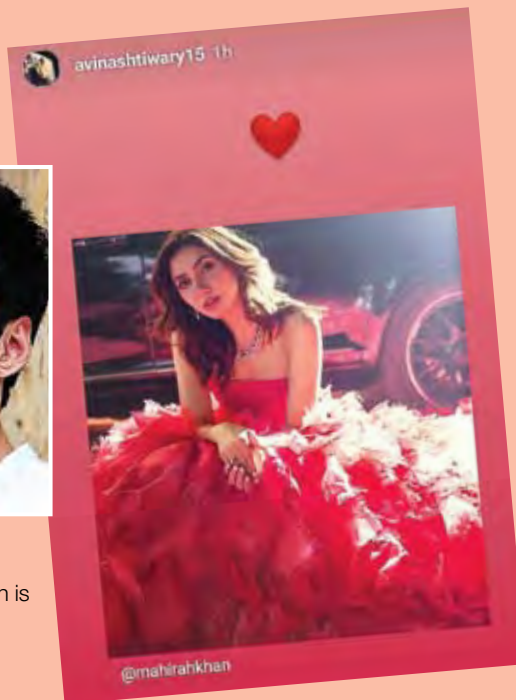


Indian actor has crush on Mahira Khan

Indian actor Avinash Tiwary seems to have a huge crush on Mahira Khan. He posted

her photos on his story with a heart emoji.

This is not the first time someone has admitted to having a crush on her. Many people publicly have similar crushes. As it is, Mahira Khan is known for her beautiful looks. 



MOHSIN ABBAS LOST

Mohsin Abbas has disappeared from the Duniya TV show 'Mazaq Raat' that gave him recognition as a singer. His career was going great guns when a marital dispute arose with wife Fatema Sohail. She accused him of domestic violence and appealed for help. As a result, Mohsin got fired from the 'Mazaq Raat' team. Subsequently, a screenshot of a video chat between Mohsin Abbas and his alleged girlfriend Nazish Jahangir was leaked and that brought in a new dimension. Both denied any truth of a relationship.

Now 'Mazaq Raat' has a new singer but Mohsin Abbas was in a class of his own. 





Twist in the Tale

Abdullah Kadwani and Asad Qureshi delve into a love-hate relationship with a twist in 'Kaheen Deep Jaley' featuring Imran Ashraf and Neelum Munir. Written by Qaisera Hayat and directed by Saima Waseem, this is a touching story of a complicated relationship between Imran

Ashraf and Neelum Munir. Rida is beautiful and innocent but she faces trouble and misery because of the misunderstandings created by her jealous sister-in-law. Defamed by the sister-in-law and suspected by her husband, Rida's life turns upside down and the rest is a twist. **S**



TRYING HARD

Shah Rukh Khan hasn't had real box office success since 'Raees' (2017). So he has been on the lookout for a potential blockbuster for a while and he seems to have found the right role with the right director for his next film. News is that he is in discussion for a Hindi remake of Quentin Tarantino's 'Kill Bill', to be directed by the wildly talented Anurag Kashyap.

SRK will play the baddie Bill, the role that originally David Carradine did with spine-chilling coolness. After getting killed at the box office with 'Zero', here's hoping Shah Rukh lives up to this opportunity. **S**

OFF CHANEL RUNWAY



Gigi Hadid was forced to escort a prankster off the catwalk after she invaded the Chanel show at the Paris Fashion Week. The 24-year-old model looked less than impressed as she marched the impostor off the set after she got onto the runway dressed in a houndstooth two-piece at Grand Palais in France.

The impostor, now known as Marie, describes herself as a comedian and YouTube personality. She crawled onto the stage and positioned herself in the middle of the models, including Kaia Gerber, as they presented the fashion house's spring 2020 collection.

Although she went unnoticed by the security guards, Gigi took matters into her own hands as she stormed up to Marie, placed a firm hand on her shoulder and escorted her backstage.

Marie was rather impressed with her antics as she explained on her social media pages afterwards. "You see, last week I did the Etam catwalk just like that because I've always wanted to walk the runway. I found it a bit low end so I decided to face the best runway, Chanel." **S**

Zeera Plus TVC

The new TVC of Lu's Zeera Plus has a tagline that says, 'Kuch rishtay bantay hee ek doosray ke liye hain'. It features Ahad Raza Mir and Sajal Aly. The two play the role of a couple sharing a cute banter.

Sajal is busy making tea for her on-screen spouse in the TVC and you hear the tagline at the end which says that some relations are only made for each other just like tea and Zeera Plus.

It is always good to have someone by

your side through thick and thin and that's exactly what Lu's Zeera Plus's says. Ahad and Sajal make a beautiful couple and are a great choice for the commercial. The couple are also on the screen in 'Yakeen ka Safar' and since then have announced their betrothal. **S**



PIA DISCOUNT

The limit on baggage weight puts everyone in a difficult spot. On pre-reserved seat purchase, PIA offers more baggage allowance to passengers. The facility is available at many international and domestic routes.



PIA seems to understand the dilemma and accepts excess weight in multiples of 5 kgs up from the time of buying the ticket to 4 hours before flight departure. This adds up to a 50% discount. The maximum baggage limit is set according to the destination. Now you can take an additional piece for Toronto! **S**

Zindagi Tamasha

Sarmad Khoosat's latest film 'Zindagi Tamasha' featuring Arif Hasan and Eman Suleman is showing at South Korea's Busan International Film Festival, often considered the most prestigious film festival in Asia. This is the second Pakistani film, after Jami's 'Moor', to be an official selection at the festival. The film's trailer is already drawing interest and critical praise from viewers, since it revolves around issues of religious mores, media shaming and sexual identities - issues not often dealt with in Pakistan's film industry. **S**



LAAL KABOOTAR BEST FILM

After becoming Pakistan's entry to the Oscars and earning Ahmed Ali Akbar a win at the Washington DC South Asian



Film Festival, 'Laal Kabootar' has received the Best Feature Film title through TSAFF's Archana Soy Audience Choice Awards.

Tasveer claims to be one of USA's largest South Asian film festivals and has a mission to engage and educate the community through thought-provoking films, stories and issues from South Asia and its Diaspora. **S**

Voice-Operated Wheelchair

A Lahore University of Management Sciences' (LUMS) student has developed a voice-controlled electric wheelchair that can be maneuvered through a smartphone application.



Faaiz Arbab, a graduate of the electrical engineering program at LUMS, is the inventor and has named it 'Gobee'. He developed this wheelchair in collaboration with the National Incubation Center in Lahore and AYEco.

The smartphone application for the wheelchair has a 'Call 'n Go' feature. According to the NIC, Lahore official website, the user can summon the wheelchair

from a distance of 15 kilometres. The wheelchair responds to the voice commands of the user and is able to turn left or right or move forward and backwards.

Arbab said he had the project in mind when he was in the early years at university. He started working on it a few years ago but did not feel it was ready for use and needed more work. He decided to submit it to the NIC in Lahore based at LUMS, which provided him with the right environment and support to complete his project. **S**

NOBEL PRIZE FOR MEDICINE

US researchers William Kaelin, Gregg Semenza and Britain's Peter Ratcliffe share the Nobel Prize for Medicine this year for discoveries on how cells sense and adapt to oxygen availability. Their research has paved the way for promising new strategies to fight anaemia, cancer and many other diseases. The trio had identified molecular machinery that regulates the activity of genes in response to varying levels of oxygen, which is central to a large number of diseases.

Kaelin works at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute in the US while Semenza is the director of the Vascular Research



Program at the Johns Hopkins Institute for Cell Engineering. Ratcliffe is director of clinical research at the Francis Crick Institute in London and director of the Target Discovery Institute in Oxford.

The three will share the Nobel Prize sum of nine million Swedish kronor (about 914,000 US dollars or 833,000 euros). **S**

PINE MOTIVATES

People's Incubation New Enterprise (PINE) organized an open forum for young entrepreneurs to encourage and inspire them.

PINE is a business incubation initiative under the collaboration of Rehan Ateeq and Arif Osmani. This event was held at the Osmani House supported by Roots-Tesco Pakistan.

The discussion revolved around start-ups and SMEs and how the ecosystem needs to be developed. While everyone seemed to agree that there are a lot of opportunities and areas that must be explored, there are challenges that new entrepreneurs face when they try to enter the industry. Pine provides a platform to young entrepreneurs. **S**





KASHMIR

DEAD-END OR NEW OPENING?

Kashmir is a long-haul campaign for Pakistan. There is so much more the country must do to win world attention to the cause.

BY JAVED JABBAR

While the UNGA speech by Prime Minister Imran Khan on 27th September 2019 was both unusual and compelling for its being extempore and for its pungency, it was not meant to be a magic wand that instantly transformed or resolved the crisis. Nor was it meant to present tangible solutions --- except to remind the world that it owes a debt to the people of Kashmir who have been caged like --- or worse --- than animals, as well said by the Prime Minister.

Seen and heard, remembered and impactful. Was the speech only one small step forward --- or a giant leap ahead ?

As we wait for time to reveal the answer to that question, as of writing this text, there have been notable gains for the case about Kashmir since the wretched actions by India on 5th August 2019. Statements of concern have come from China, Iran, Turkey, Malaysia and even some segments of the European Union, UK and USA, as also yet another issuance by the OIC Secretariat. There has been unprecedented coverage by the global media. But it is not anywhere close to the frequency and detail which the subject deserves. Disproportionately, much more coverage is given to the protests in Hong Kong in order to embarrass China. BBC, clearly wanting to preserve and expand its advertising revenues from India, insensitively launches a series called "Worklife India" --- even as the lock-down on the working lives of 8 million Kashmiris continues unabated. The insensitive indifference to Kashmir of leading media in most countries is appalling and shameful.

Do media matter ?

One eloquent indicator of how limited and superficial is global media coverage on Kashmir post-5th August 2019 is the fact that most reports in both leading print and electronic media around the world rarely refer to the hard fact that India has violated a dozen resolutions of the UN Security Council. Nor do most global media reports mention the huge number of Indian armed forces deployed to suppress Kashmir. Instead of citing the accurate, approximate estimates of 500,000 troops to now over 800,000 troops, most reports mention only the recent "additional troops" of about 45,000 moved in just before or after 5th August 2019. The moral of the story is that, per se, mere increased coverage of Kashmir does not mean more factual and more pertinent coverage.

And as for volume and frequency of coverage being seen as benchmarks for the imminence or the likelihood of positive change in an unresolved crisis, perhaps the classic case is that of Palestine. Whereas, the courage and tenacity of the PLO and the people of Palestine in general and over the past 40 years, in particular, have ensured that even Western global media take regular or occasional notice of Israel's cruelty, frequent media coverage of the plight of the Palestinians has not made an iota of difference to securing justice. Perversely --- increased media coverage of the suffering of the Palestinian people has actually led to Israel **expanding** its illegal settlements and its brazen outright theft of Arab territories.

While Pakistan should certainly formulate and implement a comprehensive, multi-dimensional strategy to continuously focus

the world's attention on the atrocities being committed against the people of Kashmir by the Indian State, the use of conventional media and social media can be only **one** of a multi-pronged approach to the future. The other components of how Pakistan is to deal with the situation arising after 5th August 2019 comprise factors that, in the limited space of this text, may be partially listed but require individual and separate elaboration later, or elsewhere.

Components of strategy:

A pivotal component of the strategy is the consistent reiteration of the fundamental principle. That Pakistan is irrevocably committed to the fulfillment of the right of self-determination for the people of Jammu and Kashmir. The "how" and the "when" that relate to this basic precept require continuous reflection and, whenever required, revision. Consideration of one hard fact is unavoidable. Of the 5 veto powers in the UN Security Council, Pakistan can rely only upon China to threaten to, or actually use its veto in favour of Pakistan, or to prevent any move against Pakistan. While this is comforting, this is not enough to secure UN intervention. For the foreseeable future, it is not possible to visualize a new UNSC Resolution that calls for the conduct of a plebiscite in Jammu and Kashmir under UN auspices. This does not mean that Pakistan should cease to campaign for its ultimate, ideal goal. It is only to ensure that we remain in a condition of reality-check.

After allowances made for the economic or strategic self-interest of States in maintaining non-conflictual relations with a large country like India, and thereby ignoring even the humanitarian aspects of the Kashmir tragedy,



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there are also other factors that deter widespread global support for Pakistan's just stand on Kashmir.

Internal reform imperative:

First: unfortunate but undeniable, is Pakistan's negative image. Acquired for reasons good and bad, this is a bitter reality that needs to be changed for the better as the campaign for Kashmir goes on.

Second: Pakistan's own inefficient, slow-speed in meeting all FATF requirements. We should have worked at hyper-speed to meet all criteria and swiftly end any scope for lingering suspicions and allegations. While acknowledging several corrective actions taken in recent months, the mid-October 2019 evaluation retained Pakistan on the grey list till February 2020. This retention should spur emergency-level action and signal even greater vigilance for the future, not complacency that allows a relapse. As a co-Chair of the Asian Committee, India works overtime to corner Pakistan in FATF.

Third: we must show zero tolerance for violent extremists and even verbally aggressive extremists. Neither category should be permitted to approach the LoC or conduct militia activities anywhere in the country. It should also not be allowed to circulate hate material or use conventional and social media for this purpose. We should comply with all UN-prescribed requirements about persons and organizations blacklisted for terrorism. The country has paid too high a price for the dubious, self-damaging thesis by which extremists have been permitted to spout rhetoric or conduct violence-linked activities inside and outside our country.

Fourth: where we rightly hold India responsible for perpetuating the oppression in Kashmir, we in Pakistan also need candid self-criticism and implement extended self-reform. This internal redesign and reconstruction, though painful but unavoidable, will be a protracted process spread over years. But action has to commence immediately if the change is to become tangible in the months and years ahead. There are already welcome signs that both the civil and military leadership are conscious of this need and are taking steps in that direction. However, due to the baggage carried from the past, complete coordination and synchronization between intent and action need to be ensured. Such single-mindedness alone will enhance our credibility and capacity

to conduct a global campaign for Kashmir that stimulates decisive action.

India has already prepared fake episodes of terrorism which it will proclaim as being Pakistan-linked in order to divert attention from its own brutalities. Any weakness on our part in permitting irresponsible elements to offer India material on a platter for exploitation will seriously damage the case we present for the rights of Kashmir.

Fifth: domestic political solidarity should project a united front, particularly to India. It is bizarre for Maulana Fazlur Rahman to insist on a march titled "Azadi" against the PTI government when that is exactly the slogan energizing enslaved Muslims of Indian-occupied Kashmir. The parading of uniformed JUI-F zealots brandishing sticks is a violation of the law against private militias. It is distressing to witness how major political parties support this most inappropriately timed and named plan. It is curious as how the private TV channels are giving this divisive scheme disproportionate coverage, even with criticism of it.

New public diplomacy

Pakistan needs to initiate and invest in a vigorous campaign of conventional as well as innovative public diplomacy. This new effort should use both media and non-media instruments to project the cause of the right of self-determination and to mobilize public opinion across the world. Though this should have happened several years ago, and particularly so immediately after 5th August 2019 --- better late than never!

To implement a truly notable campaign, substantial financial resources will be required. In view of the funding restraints faced by the Federal Government, it is unlikely to be able to invest more than a fraction of the amount needed to make a campaign noticeable at a time when the world faces multiple crises. For the first year alone, this writer estimates that an investment of about US\$ 15 million to US\$ 20 million are required to make a dent in the world's attention-span. The prosperous part of the Pakistani diaspora and parts of Pakistan's own rich class should be inveigled upon to contribute. It is even worth considering the launch of special bonds to raise financing --- because each dollar spent will fetch manifold returns! A simultaneous goal of this public diplomacy campaign has to be the alteration for the better of Pakistan's negative image in

overseas countries.


From somewhere near the bottom, we need to move several notches up by projecting our several strengths --- even as we work overtime to reduce our many weaknesses. Like charity, change for the better begins at home.

Competition for attention

As we strive to reform ourselves in order to invigorate global support to the people of Kashmir, it is sobering but necessary to remember that the struggle to keep the tragedy of Kashmir alive and central to the world's attention is an effort that has to compete with several other sources of on-going tension and conflict. These include: Yemen, Iran-Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, Kurds, Iraq, Turkey-Greece, China-South China Sea neighbours, Brexit, refugees and migrants from the Mediterranean into Europe, illegal and legal migration into the USA, Ukraine-Russia, North Korea, Afghanistan, Palestine-Israel, Libya, undermining of residential rights of 1.9 million people in Assam, India: Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh-Myanmar, Venezuela, West, Central and East Africa (Somalia), Venezuela, etc.

This is apart from other critical issues such as climate change, drought, unseasonal floods, hurricanes, rains, displacement of 65 million people as a result of these phenomena and human conflicts.

There is plenty of work to do --- starting with the building of a multi-party consensus within our own country. Far from sight in October 2019, but worth an investment of statesmanship and vision. The onus is as much on the Government as it is on the Opposition. But the Government has the larger share of responsibility. Let the struggle for Kashmir be energized by authentic, not bargain-based reconciliation.

Let the conventional news media also conduct their own internal reform to replace the fostering of daily acrimony and hyper-criticism with quiet, calm, constructive communication. 

The writer is a former Senator and Federal Minister and a member of the oldest Pakistan-India Track 2 Dialogue known as the Neemrana Initiative. www.javedjabbar.net



INTERVIEW

SouthAsia: Considering the prevailing scenario, what are the options Pakistan is left with in Kashmir?

Mushaal Mullick: Pakistan should come up with a consistent, full-fledged and all-encompassing policy on Kashmir. Devised for a minimum five-year period, the policy must be based on a holistic approach as merely a journalistic approach cannot grab world attention. To keep raising the Kashmir cause on international fora, there must be a dedicated and strategic Kashmir Cell, where all segments of society, especially the Kashmiris, who are the key stakeholders, must work in unison and speak as one voice to expose the brutalities being committed by the Indian security forces against the innocent people of Kashmir. The people of Azad Kashmir (AJK) and the Hurriyat leadership should be brought on board as, without actively involving them, it would be impossible to develop an all-inclusive Kashmir policy.

Q: Do you think Prime Minister Imran Khan's speech at the United Nations will make any difference?

A: At this time, it is very difficult to see any significant results coming from PM Imran Khan's address at the UN. Honestly speaking, Pakistan has always supported us by raising the Kashmir issue at the UN, no matter whoever is heading the country, be it Nawaz Sharif, Benazir Bhutto, and the others. However, when Imran Khan raised the Kashmir issue at the UN, the circumstances were extraordinary. The Indian government had unilaterally abrogated Articles 370 and 35-A, bifurcating the Kashmir Valley and depriving it of its special constitutional status. Since then, IOK was placed under curfew and the Indian Army resorted to extrajudicial killings to suppress the Kashmiris, while the top Kashmiri leadership was under arrest, including Yasin Malik, my husband.

We need a very strong policy on Kashmir. No doubt, PM Imran Khan spoke at the UN straight from his heart, but mere speeches cannot win us freedom. A more practical approach is required in matters where concerns are very serious and when the case has already been placed in the UN General Assembly

'We want everyone to own the Kashmir cause.'

Mushaal Hussein Mullick, the wife of detained Kashmiri leader Yasin Malik, talks to *SouthAsia* in this exclusive interview.

with some 12 resolutions passed by the UN Security Council in favour of the rights of the Kashmiris. I believe Imran Khan should have advocated those aspects in a more effective manner. Pakistan should demand for the appointment of a UN Global Ambassador on Kashmir as well as immediate de-militarization of IOK.

In his address at the UN, Imran Khan should have given a timeframe of 48 to 72 hours to the world leaders. He should have said that if the international community was not going to send UN peacekeeping forces to Indian-occupied Kashmir under UN Article 47, he would not be able to stop almost 2.2 million people of Azad Kashmir from crossing the ceasefire line as they want to help their Kashmiri brethren suffering from the brutalities of the Indian forces. He should have mentioned that the Pakistan government was under huge pressure from its people. These are the key points that must be highlighted and brought to the notice of the UN on an urgent basis. In fact, there was a crisis-like situation when the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) and others were protesting and marching towards the ceasefire line. The situation demands robust policymaking to save the Kashmiris who are dying from Indian bullets.

Q: What best can be done in the given scenario?

A: More effective measures need to be taken. The UN has special mechanism and procedures. They have special declarations on disappearances, right to self determination, torture and the rest. There are various facets of the UN mechanism which need to be engaged because the world has been under the illusion that Pakistan and India would go for bilateralism, something that has been a spectacular failure. A 50-year period happens to be quite a long time - it's half a century and still we are not getting anywhere.

My message to the Pakistani government is that the Kashmiri people will not buy any kind of dialogue with India as now they are coffin-clad, laying down their lives in millions for their freedom and the

'Pakistan needs to do something more concrete and should go an extra length to form and implement policies that are result-oriented.'

entire nation has not surrendered before the Indian occupation. We, the Kashmiris, have not made these sacrifices for any so-called peacemaking formulas or for any purported confidence-building measures. We demand our right to self-determination and will not accept anything less than an impartial and fair plebiscite to be held under UN auspices.

The Kashmiris are the main stakeholders and we know what we need. Besides the Pakistan government, we want everyone in the country to own the Kashmir cause, including the opposition, mainstream political parties and other institutions, such as the judiciary, the army, the media, civil society, the business community and the rest. Though some protests take place on the Kashmir issue time to time, but Pakistani people have never been mobilized at the grass root level. Some lip-service is paid on general forums but due to lack of pressure from the public, the Pakistan government has not been able to successfully form a well-defined, long-term policy on Kashmir. Pakistan's religious parties keep raising the Kashmir issue but a lot more effort is required to mobilize public support.

Q: Is Pakistan acting more aggressively at present compared to the past?

A: In my opinion, Pakistan needs to do something more concrete and should go an extra length to form and implement



policies that are result-oriented. Globally, there are various think-tanks, lobbying groups and strategists which can be used to internationally project the plight of the Kashmiris, particularly in the five permanent countries of the UN Security Council. Currently, many members of the U.S. Congress and the U.K. Parliament, as well as people in the U.S., U.K. and many other European countries are openly supporting the Kashmir cause. Besides this, the global media are giving very powerful projection to our plight, exposing the Indian brutalities on air. Slowly and steadily, it is trickling down through the international media and the global public is getting aware, which is a very positive development.

Q: Do you think that a full-scale war against India is an option for Pakistan?

A: India has waged a war on the Kashmiris. They are occupiers and have snatched all our fundamental rights. There is absolutely no political freedom in Indian-held Kashmir. There is a deep sense of claustrophobia among Kashmiris as they find themselves being cut off, completely defenceless and unaided. If you compare this struggle with the struggle made by Mahatma Gandhi and Quaid-e-Azam, such a situation never occurred for both these leaders. On the other hand, the leaders of the Kashmir

Liberation Movement are badly treated by the Indian authorities. Both Quaid-e-Azam and Mahatma Gandhi had British passports. However, the Kashmiri political leaders and the Hurriyat leadership are not allowed to have any travel documents.

My husband Yasin Malik is locked up in a death cell, despite the fact that he is a peaceful person and is the most popular political leader of a legitimate struggle. Day by day, Indian authorities are increasing pressure on him, because they regard him as a major threat to them. On February 22, the anniversary of my wedding with Yasin Malik, the Indian forces raided our house when there was no one at home except my mother-in-law. They searched through the entire house, looking for things they were interested in. Finally, they got away with a photo album of our wedding ceremony. This shows the disgusting mentality the Indian forces have towards the Kashmiri people.

Q: Do you think that the US President's mediation offer on Kashmir will produce any positive results?

A: I don't think so. In fact, we cannot just rely on one country to settle the long-festering conflict. Many attempts have been made in the past, but to no avail. The recent example is the Lahore Accord that took place between Nawaz Sharif and Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Then General Pervez Musharraf took the reins and made some progress. At that time, there was definitely a third party intervention, though it looked bilateral on the face of it. The former US president Bill Clinton played an instrumental role to resolve all legitimate issues peacefully, especially the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Clinton called on the Palestinian leadership and activists to the White House and at that time he also personally contacted the Kashmiri leadership. In those days, Yasin Malik was jailed in Jodhpur in India. Clinton got him out and sent him abroad for medical treatment because of the torture he had suffered in the custody of the Indian police in 2001. The Bush administration also followed the same policy on Kashmir, but things changed after that due to some known and unknown reasons.



'There is a deep sense of claustrophobia among Kashmiris as they find themselves being cut off, completely defenceless and unaided.'

Q: Do Pakistan and India need to re-initiate bilateral talks to find a way-out?

A: I think it's quite the opposite. As I said earlier, we have seen similar negotiations taking place in the past but with no positive results. In the guise of bilateralism, India basically lingered on with the status quo by using these talks as a time-gaining technique to tighten its grip

and increase its control of a state already occupied over the last 50 years. India has always been the winner in the end.

What Pakistan needs to do is to engage the permanent five countries of the UN, namely the United States, the UK, Russia, China and France, as well as other important member states and non-member states to make them realize that the Kashmir dispute is not regional but a global concern and it must be resolved without any delay. The Kashmir issue is a nuclear flashpoint and if the two nuclear power states come to an exploding threshold, the disastrous effects would spread all over the world. In fact, the settlement of the Kashmir issue is linked to the security of the world. Pakistan must focus on winning international support, not for any dialogue, but for the final settlement of the dispute.

Q: Do you think there could be a mutually-agreed solution?

A: The Kashmiri leadership and the public have always supported a peaceful solution for the settlement of the dispute. But each time it is India that ditches and the price the Kashmiri people pay is enormous in terms of the time lost. This is in addition to the torture and brutalities inflicted by the Indian forces which shamelessly use rape as a weapon of war.

Imposed through the puppet Legislative Assembly of IOK, the black laws such as the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Prevention Act (TADA), the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), the Special Powers Act, the Telegraph Act, etc., give complete immunity to the Indian forces and they cannot be persecuted. They enjoy the licence to kill with unconditional support from the Indian State. The need of the hour is to expose these facets internationally. Particularly in the last two years, the UN Human Rights Commissioner has released some critical reports on the state of human rights in Indian-occupied Kashmir. The UNHC has asked to set up an independent commission, which is the highest form of protest coming from the UN. Pakistan should demand the UN to send its peacekeeping forces to IOK and the demand must be loud and clear. ■

About Mushaal Mullick

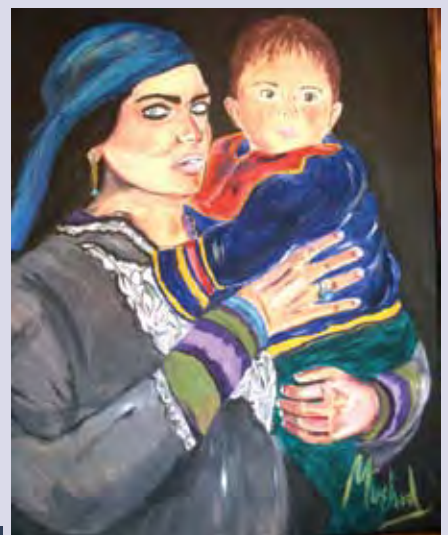
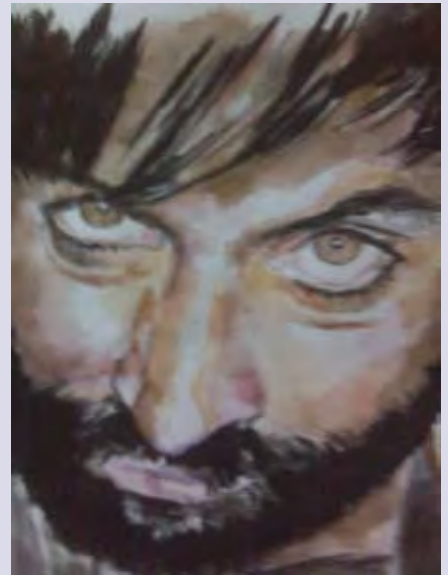
Mushaal Hussein Mullick is the wife of Yasin Malik, the Chairman of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front. She is also the Chairperson of the Pakistan Peace and Culture Organization. She married Yasin Malik in February 2009. They have a daughter, Razia Malik. The couple have not met for the last 6 years. Mushaal has done her Bachelors in Economics from the London School of Economics and is an artist, poetess and a freedom fighter. The biggest goal of her life is to win freedom for the Kashmiri people from Indian occupation. Reproduced here is one of her poems and some paintings.

Voyage of the Heart

By Mushaal Hussein Mullick

The lamp that lits you,
Who knows when it will suddenly decease?
The Voyage of life,
Stoning alone may now suppress
no more the wild unrest.
Life is walking on cut glass
Till the Shamadan flickers no more,
Yet the doorways to death cells,
asylums, prisons, curfews cannot
subdue my manic state.
Mocks, Wails, Laments(laah ments),
Teases, Illusions they say?
Ask them, have they seen the sightless see.....
At the glance of Sun, A storm begins to grow,
Who can but bury the sky under their eyes...
Principles of Liberty are left for the soul less,
These cages lock the human flesh.
Let the human soul sing and caress.
The Flag a mere cloth has marked their hearts.
Who to call, who to listen,
Majnu, Majnu and nothing else
Mock her, steal her honour, stone her
It is Beauty and the Empire of Beauty
from where poetry dwells.
Let the water of Dal seep you in
Like God's Beauty falling on Beauty.
In dreams Burhan I meet,
my brother from another mother
He says its same as my Kashmir,
thy Heaven where I have reached,
Oh my Yasin, where have you gone?
Its been 5 months and 25 days,

Since we heard your merry voice,
how it haunts me what you
whispered thy night of 22nd,
when we exchanged our wedding
vows a decade ago,
Now the tyrant whips you with a single blow,
And drags you by the hand cuff to such a low,
To little Raziyah your final words,
My daughter I am going afar ,
Yet she peeps restlessly thy
window searching the stars,
where Papa is hiding behind the moon?
Im afraid it's the gallows of barrack no 7, Tihar
Where no light descends,
Nor sunlight creeps into iron walls,
Calamitous was thy night of
severance, terrible beyond words,
I'd die with pain, had I to die that night,
Oh Kashmir, when the vultures took you away,
All your admirers left you astray,
You gave a glimpse of heaven as they say,
Another name for paradise,
Our Hearts are bleeding,
blood dripping from veins,
some brothers of Hitler are celebrating,
blood parties on our soil so red,
thy rivers are red,
with graves at every mile,
Oh my Kashmir.
These roses, these blossoms are
also the blood of the martyrs,
We may live or not Mushaal,
They will always blossom but never fossil...



IMPLOSION ANY DAY

The world has again put the Kashmir issue on the back-burner. There is no solution on the horizon and India is not willing to talk.

BY LAURA SCHUURMANS

After more than seven decades of a simmering conflict between India and Pakistan over the disputed Kashmir region, once again Indo-Pakistan relations have reached their lowest level after the two came close to war following the Pulwama attack on February 14, 2019. As the security conditions between the two archrivals somewhat calmed down in the months that followed, the heat flared up again after India took a decision to abrogate Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution in August 2019.

India claimed that this decision was made to fight corruption, crack down on terrorism and give equal rights to Kashmiri women to purchase land in Kashmir in the event they married a non-Kashmiri. India also believes this would bring more development into Kashmir. Be it a coincidence or not, this decision was made shortly after U.S. President Donald Trump in a controversial move offered to mediate between the two nuclear powers. Imran Khan warmly welcomed third party mediation, which India has always vehemently opposed. India considered the U.S. President's offer a mere flattering remark to please the Pakistani Prime Minister.

To calm down the tensions in the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir after stripping Kashmir of its special status, thousands of additional security forces were brought into the region, curfew was imposed and the entire region was - and at the time of writing still is - in communication lockdown. A Kashmiri friend wrote to me heavily heartedly that he felt that all they had had been lost all of a sudden. He became even more demoralized after receiving the belated news that his beloved grandmother living in the Kashmir Valley had passed away.



His family could not inform him earlier due to the communication lockdown.

Another Kashmiri friend of mine uploaded his profile picture on his WhatsApp of a blindfolded and chained Kashmiri, ready to die as an Indian soldier pointed a gun towards his head. 'You are free now' a third person in the picture said. A third Kashmiri friend went as far as claiming that the Line of Control dividing the disputed state between India and Pakistan had effectively lost its value and had overnight been transformed into a hard border.

In an emotional speech at the UN General Assembly, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan did not hesitate to point a finger at India and the RSS, the armed wing of the BJP, of which the honourable Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is an offshoot, and compared him and the organization to Hitler and the Nazi Party. Khan also reminded the international community that both nations are nuclear armed. He asked whether the entire world wanted to see South Asia descend into a nuclear conflict if Kashmir was not

resolved. Emotions were obviously running high. After all, it was Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru who had brought the issue of Kashmir to the United Nations in January 1948, offering a plebiscite to give the people of Kashmir their democratic right to self-determination. More than seventy years later, the Kashmir dispute has ended up in cold storage at the United Nations, where it is believed that the major powers are favouring India for their economic interests, leaving the people of Kashmir on their own.

In a statement at the United Nations, India responded diplomatically, stating that the inappropriate use of words and aggression of the Pakistan Prime Minister would only add fuel to the already burning fire. India clearly reminded Pakistan of its appeasement of both terrorist organizations and their individuals in Pakistan, the culprits of the ongoing antagonism over Kashmir between the two nuclear powers.

In an article published in the New York Times, the Indian Ambassador to the U.S. stated that India would talk to Pakistan

once it has become a 'normal' nation. He also reiterated that the Line of Control had remained intact. India also reminded Pakistan of the atrocities it not only committed in East Pakistan during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war, but also of the repression and human rights violations it has continued to commit in Balochistan where some movements favour the creation of an independent nation. Historically, the people of Balochistan simply wanted to accede to India instead of Pakistan during the partition of the British Raj in 1947. Today, some movements still feel that way. Likewise, Hyderabad located in today's India wanted to join Pakistan in 1947 but India allegedly took it by force.

I followed developments on the Internet, and watched an interview between a western journalist and Pakistan's Ambassador to the United Nations, Maleeha Lodhi. I thought she was sincere. She, however, was bluntly interrupted when she expressed her grief over the ongoing human rights abuses and oppression on the Indian side of Kashmir. Instead, the journalist was quick to shift his questions to China and its lack of human rights. Pakistan, after all, has enjoyed all-weather friendship with China, where the Uighurs and Tibetans have allegedly been living under the oppression of its communist-supported regime in Beijing. It was a smart attempt to divert the attention from Kashmir to China's oppression of its minorities.

Indian news channels as well, do not hesitate to point a finger at Pakistan's silence against the Uighur Muslims and Tibetans in China. Based on my own experiences and my work on Kashmir for more than a decade, I have also received blame for my alleged biased views on China where I was a proud postgraduate student at Beijing University for three years. I vividly recall discussions with a European embassy official who repeatedly and aggressively accused me of my imbalanced views of China where, what he claimed, democratic values were absent due to the oppression in Tibet and Xinjiang province.

I was scolded on numerous occasions and encouraged to visit Taiwan and get a more balanced view of Mainland China. He even went so far as to give me a book written by a European PhD scholar on China's naval expansion based on research conducted


by a Taiwanese University. 'This may give you a balanced perspective' he said, as he handed me the book. When, some months later, I was having a few drinks with the same gentleman, I asked him why his country did not support the Kashmiri freedom struggle where millions of Kashmiris were living under the shadow of the gun. I continued saying that Pakistan, in fact, was the only country in the world giving some support to the people of Kashmir. He looked at me with an air of confidence and arrogance and stoically responded that he thought that Pakistan is an Islamic terrorist-infested nation dominated by a dictatorial military establishment where he could not even buy a beer.

He threw the question back at me cynically asking 'why would anyone be interested in peace in Kashmir?' He then continued drinking his beer and changed the topic of discussion as if the Kashmiris have no value and do not exist in this world. Human rights obviously did not matter to him. He probably had also forgotten about the discussion on China we had a few months earlier. Although his expressions were of a personal nature, what utterly shocked me were his heavily politicized views by siding with the Uighurs and Tibetans while having no interest in taking a tough stance to protect the human rights of the Kashmiris. I may be wrong and I hope I am but it did not take long for me to conclude that his country, which is one of the world's leading exporters of weapons, carried more importance to penetrate into the Indian market than the life of a Kashmiri actually mattered.

Going back to Kashmir, which has continued to be under lockdown since early August, the international media has steadily withdrawn attention from the disputed region. The ongoing demonstrations in Hong Kong, on the other hand, have continued to receive headline news throughout the world.

This has left Kashmir once again on its own. It seems that human rights matter provided they suit a country's political agenda. The million-dollar question we can ask others and ourselves as well, is how will Kashmir be resolved?

The UN Security Council Resolutions and Kashmir's right to self-determination have been put in cold storage. Seeing the fire burn between India and Pakistan over Kashmir may even suit some foreign powers in satisfying their own geopolitical agenda in the wider geostrategic and geo-economic context. The international community at large obviously does not want to burn its hands on Kashmir. Based on my humble experiences and more than a decade of research on Kashmir, talks can and probably will only start when there is sincerity from both the Indian and Pakistani top leadership to sit down around the negotiating table and move step by step to normalize relations. This means that while on the one hand, Pakistan may need to take more rigorous steps to crack down on its terrorist-sponsored activities, on the other, India should be willing to talk.

Any step towards normalization of Indo-Pakistan relations will undoubtedly improve the overall security conditions in Kashmir and the wider region. All that is needed is a joint-political will of which the Vajpayee-Musharraf framework is one concrete example that worked and from which we can all learn lessons by keeping heads cool in one of the world's most heated conflicts. India, Pakistan and the people of Kashmir are left with a great challenge to bring about a peaceful resolution to Kashmir for which the Kashmiris as well, will need to make considerable concessions. Both nations can move a step forward to start resolving this issue, provided there is political will and sincerity from leaderships on both sides of the Line of Control. 

About Laura Schuurmans

The writer was a postgraduate researcher at the School of International Studies at Beijing University. She actively works on international security issues in the wider Asian region. She has published a number of articles and research papers. Her prime focus has been on the Kashmir conflict. She has also participated in many seminars in Asia and Europe, including the European Parliament in Brussels. She has been based in Jakarta for more than 20 years and has actively witnessed the development of political Islam, which has added to her in-depth understanding of international security issues involving religion.





ALL IS WELL

India does not want to take the risk of the Muslim-majority population of Kashmir going with Pakistan, in case things come down to a plebiscite. So the country's leadership is taking a monumental leap backwards.

BY CYNTHIA RITCHIE

Now that the crisis in Kashmir has captured global attention, it is important for those of us who've either travelled in the region extensively and/or have detailed on-ground knowledge, to continuously remind the world of the fundamentals of the Kashmir Crisis, so as to clear any additional confusion or attempts at obfuscation.

It can be difficult for anyone to understand the cultural, religious and military aspects of the region – much less the multilayered, multi-generational geopolitics of the nuclear flashpoint that is Kashmir.

Political posturing wrapped in the flamboyant colours of a staged Bollywood production could easily distract the easily vulnerable. Modi's House of Mirrors is meant to distort reflections of reality; this confusing situation makes it difficult for many to distinguish between truth and illusion with numerous, competing versions of reality. Between India, Kashmir and

Pakistan, perhaps the most accurate version of reality belongs to the Kashmiris. However since the media clampdown several weeks ago, precious few Kashmiris have been able to get their stories out to the masses.

And many outsiders who fear the unknown have, frankly, found it easier to turn a blind eye. This is thankfully changing though.

In 1967, psychologist Thomas Stampfl invented a technique known as 'flooding' – exposing the patient to painful memories with the goal of reintegrating their repressed emotions with current awareness. In this context, we will remind students of history of the territorial disputes between India and Pakistan, decades ago, and the fact that – despite India's political machinations – the will of the people was to go with Pakistan, as painful as this must have been for India.

Elaborating further, when partition occurred in 1947, the people of the former North West Frontier Province (now known as the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, located along the international border with Afghanistan),

had a chance to vote: become citizens of India or Pakistan. The vast majority of these voters were Muslims and over 99% voted to go with Pakistan. It is also important to note that, according to some declassified documents, prior to elections, the then-British Governor – who was said to have a 'soft corner' for the Muslim population – was recalled by Mountbatten [at the insistence of Nehru and Gandhi] on a mysterious 'sick-leave' – never to return. This maneuvering was an attempt to try and sway the vote. Despite the extensive political connivance of Nehru and Gandhi, and Mountbatten's favouritism towards India, the people voted to become Pakistani citizens.

Although the chronology of events in the subsequent decades remains bitterly disputed, similar patterns can be seen and inter-linked with Kashmir. Since the British Empire left, the epicentre of conflicts has been seemingly centered around metallurgical and waterways assets. The Indus Waters Treaty, brokered by the World Bank in 1960, was an agreement to give control of the eastern rivers of India

(the Beas, the Ravi, and the Sutlej), with control of the western rivers (the Indus, the Chenab and the Jhelum) to Pakistan. This agreement has, notably, resolved a number of disputes between India and Pakistan via legal procedures, within the framework of the treaty.

Coming back to the behavioural technique of 'Flooding' as a method for overcoming fears, since people naturally tend to fear the unknown, so one of the best ways for fear reduction is to educate and enlighten them on a consistent basis.

India has its own economic struggles, with some states demanding independence; acknowledgment of this by the Indian Government requires courage and willingness to integrate repressed emotions of past experiences with current awareness. Sweeping matters such as these

under the rug will not help the masses of people suffering – in India, Pakistan and especially Kashmir.

As the saying goes: Knowledge is Power. With all the challenges of the information age, the world is vastly more informed as to the matter of Kashmir.

We mentioned early on that it's easier (mentally) for people to turn a blind eye to things they don't understand (fear). And a common tactic for any bully, be it a small child or one of the largest 'democracies' in the world, is to avoid third-party mediation and, in India's case, to try to exhaust the defenders of Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Movement, and the defenders of the Kashmiris' Right To Self Determination. What are some of these techniques? Propaganda machines populated by huge centres of professional trolls; accounts traced to India and Afghanistan use insults and hack personal information among their many intimidation tactics.

Why would a democracy allow such a massive disinformation campaign? Why would India not want third-party mediation in this matter, if all is well?

Because once the masses are consistently educated, over a sustained

period of time, they can decide for themselves how best to influence the governing bodies, (including the United Nations Security Council) to enforce the Kashmiris' Right to Self-Determination – as guaranteed by the United Nations many decades ago.

History, again, appears to be repeating itself: Pakistan is facing politically-oriented conflicts along the Afghanistan-Pakistan International Border and in Kashmir – both of which have strong connections to India's expansionist plans.

In 1952, India's first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru (formerly an Indian Independence activist) acknowledged, "Kashmir is not the property of India or Pakistan. It belongs to the Kashmiri people... we have made it clear to the leaders of the Kashmiri

people that we would ultimately abide by the verdict of their plebiscite... we have taken this issue to the United Nations and given our word as a peaceful solution; as a great nation we cannot go back on it. We have left [the] solution to the people of Kashmir; and we are determined to abide by it."

However, India does not want a repeat of NWFP elections – decades ago. India does not want to risk the Muslim-majority population going with Pakistan, so they have – for years – been populating parts of Jammu with non-native Hindu residents. Why? In the event there ever is a plebiscite, the newer 'residents' will potentially throw the vote. Not really the 'impartial plebiscite', that all parties agreed to, is it?

It is interesting to note that Nehru and Gandhi worked closely together after partition, so many decades ago, yet the so-called modern day leadership has taken a monumental leap backwards: no longer believing these UN Resolutions are relevant: No. 47 of April 1948, No. 51 of June 1948 and August 1948, calling for ceasefire followed by plebiscite in Kashmir. Gandhi was assassinated by a member of the RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh],


the Fascist Hindu Movement, which is the dominant influence on the B.J.P. (Bharatiya Janata Party) today.

During elections, Modi's nationalist B.J.P. won a massive majority, yet that massive majority was based on less than forty per cent of the vote. Again, the voices representing the masses of over one billion people are really nowhere to be seen. Today the BJP, comprising India's President, Prime Minister, and leadership – all of whom are Hindus – are more interested in solidifying Hindu Rule over the Muslim-majority state of Kashmir, which is home to about 7 million people. Since Modi suspended autonomous rule in Kashmir, Gandhi's ashes were stolen, statues vandalized, and photos defaced by some of the same RSS-driven mentality that killed Gandhi in the first place.

Yet, the Indian Government claims 'all is well' in Kashmir – so much so that tourism and businesses are said to be resuming. What would the more than 2,000 people, including mainstream political leaders locked up or under house arrest, say? It is likely the international community won't know until the mobile, internet and phone services (that Modi's government cut) are restored.

If 'all is well', why deny access to US Senator Chris Van Hollen? Van Hollen was visiting India on trade and other matters, when he asked to visit Kashmir. Pakistan later took Senators Van Hollen and Maggie Hassan to Muzaffarabad, AJK, to speak to the people, and assess matters on the ground.

Kashmir is seeing its third month in lockdown. No foreign journalists have been allowed by the Indian Government to report in Kashmir since August 5.

Why the smoke and mirrors, if all is truly well in Kashmir? 

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BY NIGHAT KAMAL AZIZ

There is something about royalty that transcends borders. Maybe it is the “*once upon a time*” syndrome that we all enjoyed as children. Stories of a prince charming, married to a beautiful princess, winning hearts and minds with their endearing behaviour, are irresistible to most.

But it is seldom that such stories are witnessed in real life.

Hence, the arrival of Prince William and Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, was like a breath of fresh air in the murky atmosphere of Pakistan, beset with national and international dilemmas. For the people, weary of watching disturbing news most of the time, the visit of the young couple was a welcome distraction from the drudgery portrayed by the media incessantly.

The fact that they had themselves initiated the desire to visit Pakistan, and that they made a conscious and sincere effort to reach out to the public, was a gesture that was not lost on the hosts.

Kate would have looked lovely in whatever she wore but she chose to wear the ‘shalwar kameez’ with a shawl. The national colour of Pakistan that she selected to wear when visiting the Presidency and the Prime Minister, showed her respect for her host country and her desire to please. Her modest and graceful dresses created a stir throughout Pakistan. The responsible designers were sought out by all channels. The colours she donned, the violet blue, the apple green, the light sky blue were instantly popular amongst the locals.

Accustomed to nothing less than limousines, Pakistanis were pleasantly surprised to witness the royal couple unravelling their lithe bodies as they alighted from the little rickshaw, which was decorated with Pakistani truck art.

Kate, glittering in a long dress and the Prince resplendent in the local dress of a buttoned down sherwani as they came to attend the reception hosted for them by Islamabad

Winning Hearts and Minds

The visit of Prince William and Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, was like a breath of fresh air in the murky atmosphere of Pakistan.

at the National Monument situated on a hillock overlooking the whole city.

How often is it that political figures visit a country with the sole intention of creating

goodwill only?

Their visits to the cancer hospital, an orphanage, a school and especially a mosque appeared spontaneous and genuine. Clad in modest attire, both barefooted and with Kate covering her head with a scarf, they displayed their respect for people of a different religion and belief.

Watching them, effortlessly and elegantly creating goodwill, one felt that all you need is a little bit of sensitivity and sincerity of purpose to create inter-faith harmony and lessen the woes that the world is facing.

They held no carrot or stick to the people. They did not appear intimidating. They simply showed respect and consideration for the people of Pakistan.

Their visit was a reminder of Diana, loved and respected by everyone here. The cap with a feather that she had worn years ago during a visit to Chitral was worn by Kate now. She would have been proud of how her son and daughter-in-law - two young people - conducted themselves. By coincidence or intention, they took their cue from how she had behaved during that historic visit to Pakistan.

While visiting a school in Islamabad, a girl told the Prince she was a great fan of Lady Diana. William's answer, “So was I”, brought a lump to many throats.

The local newspapers splashed stories of a Prince and Princess from a faraway land, blending in with the locals, wearing their attire, speaking a few words of their language, respecting their customs and conquering hearts with their smiles.

In this age of intrigues, selfish motives and hypocrisy, this refreshing and endearing goodwill visit, brought joy to the Pakistani people.

William and Kate looked almost from another world – a world of innocence and sincerity. **S**

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Governance Crisis

There are serious concerns over how the province of Punjab is being run and Chief Minister Usman Buzdar is in the eye of the storm.

BY S. M. HALI

The PTI-led Punjab government came to power amid high expectations. Better employment opportunities, enhanced governance, agricultural loan availability and higher price realization for farm produce were the top priorities of Punjab voters.

It seems, however, the provincial government's performance over these issues has been below average. Let us briefly examine the reasons for its shortcomings, the broad avenues of failure and the recommended plan of action.

In fairness, PTI did not win an absolute majority in the July 2018 general elections both in the center as well as in the heartland of Pakistan, Punjab. PTI had to cobble support of other parties to form a government. Even before the elections, it had to make compromises to attract "electables", who jumped ship from the two main parties, PML (N) and PPP, in a bid to climb the bandwagon and ride on the rising tide of PTI's possible victory and ascent to the throne. A number of these "electables" had dubious track records and defied Imran Khan's strict regimen of honesty and integrity. The second factor was that though the PML (N) had been governing at the centre for five years but in Punjab it had been at the helm of

affairs for a decade. Not only did the former head honcho, Shahbaz Sharif, rule with an iron hand, he installed popular development projects, albeit most were cosmetic and high budget, which enabled the executioners to siphon off a lion's share. He also installed his party's devotees in the civil bureaucracy and local bodies. Resultantly, when the PTI took up the mantle of power, it faced multi-pronged challenges. Their lack of experience in dealing with matters of governance coupled with the "go-slow" tactics adopted by the PML (N) sympathizers in the civil bureaucracy, police and local government, was obvious. The situation aggravated when the "electables" who were brought on board from other political dispensations or allies, who cast their lot with PTI to form the government, demanded their proverbial pound of flesh. The milieu turned further bleak when a person with limited experience and a chequered political career, Sardar Usman Buzdar was appointed as Punjab Chief Minister.

The incumbent Chief Minister started his political career by joining the PML (Q) in 2001, being elected District Nazim of Taunsa Sharif, where he served until 2008. During his unillustrious tenure as Nazim, he was accused of making 300 bogus appointments, for which an application was filed against

him with the NAB. The case, however, was dropped in 2016. Buzdar joined PML (N) in 2013 and contested the 2013 elections but failed to secure a seat. Prior to the 2018 General Elections, he joined the Janoobi Punjab Suba Mahaz, which merged with the PTI in May 2018. Buzdar was allocated a PTI ticket to contest the 2018 general elections from Constituency PP-286 (Dera Ghazi Khan-II) and he won.

In a surprise move, on 17 August 2018, Imran Khan nominated him as PTI's candidate for the office of Chief Minister of Punjab, for which the PTI Chief received severe criticism, especially since the post is of utmost importance to any political dispensation. A shrewd and street-smart politician was required to steer the province towards development and thwart the machinations of PML (N) stalwarts, who consider Punjab their fiefdom. Imran Khan may have considered Buzdar pliable and easier to control from the center. His selection may even have been biased to keep other strong contestants from his own party at bay since the Punjab CM can be a threat to the centre, if he turns rogue.

Nevertheless, police officials and bureaucrats loyal to PML (N) wreaked havoc in Punjab and the CM's weak grip over governance exacerbated the milieu. Heinous



crimes, committed by paedophiles, popping up now and again have shocked the nation, but their repetitive occurrences indicate poor control. Police reforms, which had been promised by Imran Khan as well as Buzdar, have become a victim of political wrangling. There have been gruesome murders carried out by the police itself, of mentally deranged petty thieves, apparently innocent unarmed families slaughtered mistakenly as terrorists and numerous cases of Punjab Police being involved in extra judicial killing, rape and other crimes. The custodians of the law have, however, considered themselves above the law and refuse to be reined in. The PTI government had promised to bring in anti-torture legislation within one month. However, one year on, torture, custodial killings, private torture cells and 'black holes' internment centers continue to persist, causing pain and agony to the citizens.

It is mysterious why the Prime Minister is persisting with Mr. Buzdar and has not sent him packing while numerous other cabinet members have been shown the door for incompetence or failure to deliver the desired progress.

In the development sector, unemployment, poverty, inflation and even sporadic cases of corruption are rampant, which have a direct bearing on the Prime Minister's credibility and overall performance of the PTI. There have been murmurs of bad blood between the Punjab Governor and the CM, which has hampered the execution of essential development projects.

The solution lies in appointing a seasoned politician at the helm of affairs in Punjab with a handle on the complicated situation. Mr. Buzdar has been given ample opportunity to prove himself but he has not come up to the task. The Prime Minister had argued that Buzdar hailed from an impoverished region in Southern Punjab, was honest and upright and he would be able to address the issues of poverty alleviation and development of the province. Unfortunately, Mr. Buzdar has failed to even formulate a credible roadmap to end poverty and strengthen institutions. Apparently, a hard decision awaits the PM sooner than later. ■

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KABUL ►

Reality and Rhetoric

Talking to the Taliban is the best and most viable option after nearly two decades of the U.S. and its allies trying to fight a war in Afghanistan.

BY MAJOR GENERAL (R) INAM UL HAQUE

The air is filled with renewed optimism about Afghan peace. During the first weekend of October 2019, US Special Envoy for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad heading a 5-member US delegation, met with an 11-member Afghan delegation led by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar - the Taliban chief negotiator - twice in Islamabad. It was their first contact after the Doha process was scuttled after a tweet by President Trump in September 2019. The US embassy described the meetings as "consultations follow(ing) discussions held between the US and Pakistan during the UNGA." The Pakistan Foreign office hoped the revived contact "would provide an opportunity to review the progress made under the US-Taliban peace talks... and discuss the possibilities of resuming the paused political settlement process..."

What led to the change of heart by President Trump? The analysis space is rife with speculations and assumptions. The list goes on like this... Prime Minister Imran Khan was able to persuade President Trump for resumption of talks after discussing Pakistan's significant leverage over the Taliban Movement. The same might have been conveyed by China, Russia and Europe. That Trump's brinkmanship did not work with a steadfast Taliban. That the social, psychological, political and human cost of the conflict is getting unbearable for the US with rampant suicides and PTSD among veterans. That the war is causing significant economic hemorrhage.

That the Taliban are on the offensive all over Afghanistan, with US retaliations

increasingly going errant. Bombing civilians tending farms, attending marriage parties and funerals has already eroded the *raison d'être* of the



conflict and its moral groundings. That the Afghan elections are over and so are the worries of President Ashraf Ghani regarding the Taliban's opposition and obstruction. That Afghanistan's mineral, oil and gas, transit trade and other economic potential is too alluring for the US, the region and the world to let this conflict continue in perpetuity. That the Indian factor played up in syncing the peace deal with the firming up of the Indian stranglehold in IOK after abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, ostensibly coordinated between the US and India.

There are also speculations that the US has made inroads into the Taliban Movement and the non-conclusion of the deal has had the desired pressure on the Movement; and that reviving the peace process and re-negotiating the contentious issues of ceasefire, forces' withdrawal, intra-Afghan dialogue and power-sharing might now be advantageous to the US. And lastly, those opposing the deal within the US and Afghan governments have 'realized' that a 'bad deal' is still better than 'no deal'.

Besides the afore-listed real or anticipated postulations, the fact of the matter is that President Trump wants a closure on this longest war in US military history 'on US terms'; and not only fulfill a campaign promise, but also enhance re-



Zalmay Khalilzad

election chances in the 2020 elections. Bringing an end to this politically unpopular war is too big a crown for any US President, hence the feelers about the resumption of talks. This also explains opposition to the peace deal - within the US political spectrum, especially from Democrats, in league with elements within the Department of Defence, CIA and the Afghan government, besides other spoilers - who have been dubbing the peace process analogous to surrendering to the Taliban. Anyone well-versed in US politics knows that the domestic agenda dominates decision-making, always and every time, sooner or later.

There is another theory that has traction in Pakistan about the origin, aims/objectives and sponsorship of Da'ish or ISIS/IS. As per this formulation, ISIS is a US/CIA creation, planted in eastern Afghanistan (next to Pakistan) and armed to ensure residual US influence in Afghanistan with or without a peace deal. ISIS is one of the fallback positions of the US deep state, besides the Orbaki Militias - created by the CIA's Para Military Division in 2001 to topple the then Taliban government and to this day operating in Afghanistan outside the Afghan government's ambit. That the deep state is not interested in total Afghan peace and complete withdrawal of US forces; and through the peace process, it has been able to secure permanent or scheduled presence of the US military and intelligence assets in Afghanistan - in return for the much-needed fiscal resources for Afghan reconstruction and development. This enduring US presence is aimed at keeping rising China and Pakistani nuclear capability in check.

There are four pointers lending

credence to this hypothesis. First, ISIS suddenly appeared on the Afghan scene shortly after it was defeated in Iraq and Syria. Second, ISIS easily and speedily entrenched itself in the mountains of eastern Afghanistan despite the robust counter insurgency presence of the US and its Afghan allies. Third, the US decided to adopt a 'containment strategy' against the ISIS in eastern Afghanistan despite its 'counter-insurgency strategy' elsewhere. Fourth, the US Department of Defence and CIA have publically differed on the IS potential in Afghanistan; with CIA downgrading it and the Department of Defence considering it sizeable. The last point supports the idea about the ISIS being a creation of the CIA in addition to the orbaki militias. There is a very old Taliban truism about the supposed American design for this region, which goes like this; 'Bahana Iran, thikana Afghanistan, nishana Pakistan' - [the US pretext for presence in this region is Iran, base is Afghanistan, and the ultimate target is Pakistan].

So, typical to its character, Afghan peace remains elusive and hostage to competing agendas and interests even among the US and its allies. The obtaining situation is not what meets the eye and seems a concoction of deceit, hidden agendas, lack of trust, wider regional and international politics and is beholden to the US. President Trump might have been forced by any combination of the rationales described above to 'review and subsequently resume the peace process - as other alternatives are arduous, painful and uncertain.

As far as Islamabad is concerned, it should adopt a 'whole of the government' approach while dealing with the US, that includes not only the Special Representative Khalilzad but also the Departments of State and Defence and the CIA. It should be mindful of the internal dynamics of the US and Afghan administrations and know that the Trump administration may be having a limited shelf life, given the impeachment inquiry. ■

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The Lost Citizens

A human crisis of great proportions is brewing in the Indian state of Assam. It will certainly have an impact on Indo-Bangladesh relations because popular sentiment there is hostile to India.

BY DR. MOONIS AHMAR

India under the Modi regime is passing through an interesting but a dangerous phase. On the one hand, the BJP/Shiv Sena duo is making every effort to enforce 'Hinduism' in India by ridding the country of religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians, and at the same time the Muslim population in Assam is being deprived under the "National Registration Act" from franchise and citizenship.

'Exclusion' and not 'Inclusion' is the cornerstone of the Modi regime which has been recently reflected in a decision made by the Central government to deprive millions of Muslims of Assam from citizenship and at the same time grant non-Muslim migrant's Indian citizenship.

In August, the issue of rendering millions of people in Assam stateless emerged. According to reports, a list of citizens in the state of Assam entitled National Register of Citizens (NRC) shortlisted two million residents out of 32 million who were to be deported because of their origin in present day Bangladesh. The NRC is perceived a well-crafted policy of the Indian Central Government led by the BJP/Shiv Sena to take advantage of the anti-migrant movement in Assam since the 1980s. It demanded that those who settled in Assam following the March 1971 Pakistan military operation in the then East Pakistan against the outlawed Awami League and Mukti Bahini (freedom force), should leave and go back to their country of origin, i.e. Bangladesh. The list, which was issued by the NRC in August this year, asked those people whose names were left off the list to apply within 60 days to a quasi-legal tribunal to decide about their citizenship. But those applying for a review were asked to provide documentary evidence to prove their lineage as a bona fide resident on or before March 24, 1971, a day before the launching of the military operation.

As rightly pointed out in an article, "Why



India just stripped 1.9 million people of citizenship" by Makana Eyre in the September 10, 2019 issue of The Nation that, International watchdogs, including the UN, Amnesty International, and the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, among others, have condemned the NRC update, which began in 2013. In the six years of the update process, roughly 33 million people in Assam were required to prove they have valid roots in the state prior to March of 1971, the date of the start of the Bangladesh War of Independence when a large influx of migrants came to India, especially through Assam. The government of Assam did not respond to multiple requests for comment, but it has said that those left off the list did not make a strong enough case for their Indian roots or tried to use fake documents. In a recent statement, the Indian Minister of Home Affairs, Amit Shah said the state would "provide legal aid to the needy people amongst those excluded from NRC."

Paradoxically, if the Indian government, under the pressure of nationalist groups in Assam, wants to deprive millions of local residents of their citizenship, it is planning to move a bill in the Indian parliament recommending granting non-Muslim refugees citizenship. The Indian Home Minister Amit Shah, who is also Secretary General of the BJP, said in a speech in Kolkata that his government would give citizenship to non-Muslim refugees from Afghanistan, Bangladesh

and Pakistan who have lived in India for at least six years. Amit Shah has been criticized heavily by those who term his proposed plan discriminatory and targeting Muslims. An overwhelming majority of two million people living in Assam who may be disenfranchised are Muslims. And India has no treaty with Bangladesh to deport those who, according to the Indian government, have been living in Assam illegally for long. Bangladesh is already grappling with more than one million Rohingya refugees from Myanmar and is certainly not in a position to absorb more than two million people which India wants to deport to Bangladesh.

The crisis of citizenship in Assam will have far-reaching consequences in India and beyond its borders because of three main reasons. First, if two million Muslims in Assam, who are blamed by local nationalist groups to have emigrated from the then East Pakistan in 1971, are disenfranchised, it will open a Pandora's Box and may destabilize India because this is not only the issue of Bengalis in Assam but there are another couple of million Bangladeshis living in Delhi, Mumbai and other Indian cities who, in the last four decades, emigrated and settled in India. Will the Modi regime also disenfranchise them and deport them to Bangladesh?


Second, the policy to target Muslim migrants in India, while planning to accommodate non-Muslim refugees by giving them citizenship, will cause communal schisms

in India. And it is not only the question of refugees from Bangladesh who have settled in India but Shiv Sena and other Hindu extremist groups want to convert Muslims and Christians as Hindus. There are around 250 million Muslims and Christians in India. Can Hindu militant and radical organizations succeed in converting such a large segment of the Indian population to Hinduism?

Third, as far as Indian Muslims are concerned, like Muslim Kashmiris, they bear the brunt of Hindu fascism. Hindu ultra-nationalist groups like the Shiv Sena and RSS have threatened Muslims that if they fail to convert as Hindus, they will be pushed to Pakistan as their loyalty is suspected. What is happening in Assam under the cover of NRC is merely a tip of the iceberg as the ultimate aim of BJP/Shiv Sena and RSS is to cleanse India of non-Hindus. But this may also be wishful thinking of those elements in India who managed to seek a majority in the April-May 2019 general elections. After getting a popular mandate, they want to use it to declare India as a Hindu state. It is just like the December 1970 election results in East Pakistan in which the Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, won

the majority of seats but used its electoral success to seek secession from Pakistan. Or, the Nazi Socialist Party of Adolf Hitler which won the January 1933 elections but imposed a dictatorship along with unleashing its policy of anti-Semitism by liquidating Jews and other non-Aryan communities in Germany and the territories which came under its occupation since 1938. If BJP/Shiv Sena and RCSS want to follow Nazi Germany and transform India into an authoritarian state targeting non-Hindus, this may be a pipe dream but it's a dangerous plan that cannot be underestimated. The implications of disenfranchising the Muslims will ultimately challenge the unity of the Indian state.

Finally, the diversity of India is its plus point and if the ultra-right wing Hindu nationalist parties and groups want to transform their country into a Hindu state, this will challenge the ethnic, cultural and lingual identities of various communities which cannot be transformed as a nation that merely follows the Hindu religion. By moving in that direction, India will contradict its own state foundation which was based on a secular, democratic and politically pluralist society.

What will be the policy position of the government of Bangladesh on the possible deportation of around 2 million stateless people from Assam to Bangladesh? During the on-going tenure of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, one can observe a clear tilt in favour of India. During her recent visit to New Delhi, she may have discussed the matter with Narendra Modi. If Bangladesh refuses to accept 2 million people from Assam under NRC, what will be the response of India? Certainly, the crisis involving stateless people of Assam will have a fallout in Indo-Bangladesh relations and popular sentiment in Bangladesh, despite the Awami League-led government's tilt towards India, is hostile to India. Henceforth, one needs to keep in mind the emerging cleavages in Indo-Bangladesh relations in the backdrop of the lost citizens of Assam. 

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BENGALURU

SPACE MILITARIZATION

Space weaponization implies deployment of weapons in outer space by sending weapons from the earth to destroy satellite capabilities of other states.

BY DR. AHMED SAEED MINHAS

India, on March 27, 2019, joined the elite club of those space-faring nations that have space weapons on their inventory.

Before the Indian test of Anti-Satellite (ASAT) weapon, only the US, China, and Russia had this capability. It is indeed a milestone for Indian space expertise and sufficiently demonstrates its prowess in outer space-related security. However, it is imperative to analyze whether the Indian ASAT test was merely a technology demonstration or had other motivations leading to strategic repercussions.

Albeit, the Indian side did try to exercise damage control efforts when out of jubila-



tion, Indian Premier Modi claimed to have made India a space superpower after the successful execution of 'Operation Shakti' by successfully shooting down one of its own working satellites in Low Earth Orbit (LEO).

The Indian Prime Minister's initial claim of becoming a space superpower indicates the basic motivation behind the Indian act of polluting outer space with thousands of debris pieces while space is supposed to be the common heritage of mankind and whose Long Term Sustainability (LTS) has been a source of concern for those sections of the world community that are peace-loving.

The Indian scientific community's selec-

tion of the title for the ASAT test, i.e. 'Operation Shakti' is a reminder of the titling of its first ever nuclear explosion back in 1974. It was coded 'Smiling Budha'. Both the tests were against norms and ethics. The two codes, i.e. for the nuclear explosion and ASAT tests were chosen deliberately by the Indian leadership to hedge behind Nehru's portrayed soft face of India. There was no reason for Buddha to smile on displaying a very destructive technology, i.e. nuclear weapons. In case of the ASAT capability too, there was hardly any reason to associate it with Shakti, i.e. Power, amid the severe security implications for other space-faring nations and their assets in outer space.

The question also arises - how could India become a space power in quick time? The simple answer is, through proliferation. India has internationally acknowledged a track record of diverting peaceful technologies towards strategic weapons development. India did its 'Peaceful Nuclear Explosion' (PNE) in May 1974 by diverting nuclear technology acquired for peaceful purposes. Following a similar path, India exploited its access to advanced missile technologies under the rubric of Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), of which it became a full member in 2018 with the discriminated support of the USA. The US, in order to checkmate rising China, has put all global security norms on the back burner and is making the mistake of creating a monster which will soon ask for its power share from the US. The US should be mindful that the Indian test had even surprised the US for not knowing in advance about the Indian intent of developing space weapons.

Why did India need to become a space weapons-capable state?. It wanted to accomplish its long-outstanding dream of becoming a great power motivated by the Hindu-dominated mindset of Maha Bharat. The mindset further received strong traction when the RSS-tainted Modi took over the driving seat of hardliner and nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). The Modi government, from day one of its rule has believed that only a militarily strong and economically viable India could win the status of Great Power. Secondly, India, like any revisionist state, desires to pull the strate-

gic balance in its favour so that to have an upper edge to tilt the strategic deterrence balance towards its side. Third, India wants to be acknowledged as a technologically-advanced state and win support of becoming a permanent member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). This would make it a regime that regulates the export of all its higheend technologies, including nuclear and other strategic weapons.

Notwithstanding all this, peace-loving idealists still prevail in India and resist the country's arms buildup. The Indian diplomatic corps has been tasked to portray the country's act of acquiring space weapons as weapons of peace. They forward the claim that with security measures in hand, for instance ASATs, rogue states will not dare fiddle with costly outer space platforms. Indian diplomats, while speaking at the Arms Control forums, take positions that the missiles and space weapons are to maintain stability and peace through a position of strength - a political and diplomatic position which the US diplomats also hold while defending their arms buildup.

However, the fact remains that the security of one state results in the insecurity for its competitor. A security dilemma emerges and, as a result, the insecure state indulges in the action-reaction syndrome, i.e. an arms race. One can infer from the argument that India's ASAT capability would introduce a new kind of security-insecurity paradox in the South Asian strategic realm.

Pakistan, which has been subjected to strategic coercion by the Indian side, may not sit idle to the evolving strategic threat. It is a responsible nuclear weapons state and had never opted to even become a nuclear power but was forced to do so. Subsequently, it has been offering multiple Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) to India but in vain.

Pakistan's Space Vision-2047, under which Pakistan will be pursuing goals of multiple space assets, has been put under security risks after India developed its ASAT capability. Pakistan may not be developing its own ASAT capability but could surely resort to speeding up its efforts to contain the trend of space weapons development. The world community has to act fast to prevent outer space from being weaponized.

Treaties like Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) or Prevention of Placement of Weapons in Outer Space (PPWT) must now be enacted. The Outer Space Treaty, which is also known as the mother of space treaties, has to be amended in order to clearly define space weapons categorization or at least forbid use of any kind of weapon in outer space. This would be unlike its current restricted domain of deployment of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) on heavenly bodies only.

In a nutshell, India becoming an outer-space super power is detrimental to South Asian peace and stability. Such technologies in the Indian strategic military inventory with hardliners in the driving seat could make India more dismissive of peace. Its arrogance will be further strengthened and it would continue to avoid entering into dialogue to settle outstanding territorial disputes. The Indo-Pakistan composite dialogue process has been in a deadlock since December 2012. India's current act of abrogating Articles 370 and 35-A have been followed by a continued military siege of Kashmir. This amply reflects Indian arrogance that it has developed through a wrong sense of security by acquiring nuclear and space weapons.

The US and its allies have shown discrimination and have favoured India. This has further contributed to the already bleak view of paradigms that conform to the Mearsheimer notion of anarchy based on real-politic. Big power politics are tragic because the anarchy of the international system requires states to seek dominance at one another's expense. Space laws must be made more stringent. They should be devoid of bias and not have loopholes so that outer space weaponization can be discouraged. India needs to be prevented from further advancing in developing its capability in space weapons. The choice really lies with the big powers to opt for peace or anarchy. 

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BY JAVED ANSARI

Back in 2001, following the 9/11 attacks in America, the United States and its allies went gunning for Osama bin Laden, the Al Qaeda leader, and his Afghan hosts, the Taliban, for having attacked mainland America. They wanted to attack Afghanistan with all their military might because, in their own wisdom, they had concluded that Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda were behind the 9/11 attacks. The military force of the U.S., the world's sole superpower with a highly advanced military machine, and the crumbs thrown in by its allies, spurred President George W. Bush, to term the campaign as a 'War on Terror'. Nineteen years later, at the cost of thousands of lives (the US and its allies have had much less human casualties in the confrontation but have spent trillions of dollars), there is no clear winner. The US has not been able to cow down the Taliban and they are today said to be controlling some 55% percent of Afghan territory. First Hamid Karzai and later Ashraf Ghani were propped up as Presidents of Afghanistan by the U.S. and its friends but their writs never extended much beyond the capital Kabul.

If power-sharing does occur with an Afghan government and the Taliban, the latter would have to abandon many of their old and harsh practices of ruling Afghanistan and will, for once, have a chance to join a coalition of progress and take Afghanistan towards an era of peace and development that its people have always been deprived of. If Afghanistan becomes a peaceful country and has a government that is accepted by its entire population, it will move into an era of prosperity. This could also encourage other countries in the region to start commercially viable projects that bring stability to this part of Asia.

President Donald Trump, in his bid to get re-elected, had the bright idea that if he could get U.S. troops out of Afghanistan,

KABUL



An Elusive Goal

President Donald Trump would like to be recognized by history as a man of peace. He wants the U.S. troops out of Afghanistan because the war there is leading nowhere.



this would save the Americans all the precious dollars they were simply wasting in Afghanistan and not getting anywhere. He would then have a convincing story to tell the American public and would thus have better chances of winning the Presidential elections again in 2020. In his excitement, he probably forgot that the U.S. had initially worked very hard and had spent a great deal all through the nineties before it got a chance to set foot on Afghan territory again, on the pretext of avenging the 9/11 attacks.

Interestingly, the Taliban have never categorically admitted to having been behind

the 9/11 attacks. The way those attacks were conducted, it has always seemed impossible for independent aviation experts to accept that flying novices with minimal training on much less sophisticated aircraft could have carried out precision suicide attacks flying advanced aircraft. They zoomed in on the Twin Towers in New York or the Pentagon in Washington D.C. like they had done several practice runs on these targets before doing the actual thing. Both the North and South Towers in New York's World Trade Centre were struck by Boeing 767s while a Boeing 757 crashed into the Pentagon in Washington DC. The same type of aircraft crashed in a field in Pennsylvania near Shanksville. Now, these are advanced fly-by-wire planes while, reportedly, the only jet aircraft the alleged attackers are said to have trained on were simulators of much less sophisticated and older version aircraft.

While the U.S. air traffic picture at any

time of the day or night presents a sight of the main aviation hubs being over-crowded by aircraft, it is also true that more than one air traffic controller on the ground is following the movement of only a few aircraft assigned to him or her in the seemingly crowded clusters of aircraft and giving them necessary instructions. It would therefore be impossible for them not to notice that four aircraft had deviated from their routes and were headed in directions they had not filed their flight plans for.


To avenge 9/11, the Taliban, and especially their leader Osama bin Laden, were declared pariahs by the U.S. They were the targets of the War on Terror that the U.S. continued fighting and pumping U.S. taxpayer money into for 19 years. This happened first under George Bush and then under Barack Obama's watch. Suddenly, after U.S. President Trump came into the saddle, he surveyed the situation and had a change of heart, probably under his 'America First' policy. He wanted the U.S. troops to get out of Afghanistan so that he could tell his people that he was one president who

would rather spend American money on the country's peaceful objectives rather than on pointless wars being fought thousands of miles away. He had realized that even after killing Osama bin Laden at his hiding place in the Pakistani city of Abbottabad, the Taliban were multiplying their forces in Afghanistan and the Ashraf Ghani/Abdullah Abdullah government was simply a puppet that could not stand on its own two feet.

In the long-term interest of a re-election, he started what were called 'Peace Talks' with the Taliban after he became convinced that the only solution to bringing normalcy to Afghanistan was talk and not war. Neighbouring Pakistan had suffered tremendous losses due to America's foray into Afghanistan. Over some two decades, it first served as America's 'front-line' state against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In return, all it got were over 300,000 Afghan refugees plus the Kalashnikov and drug culture. It lost more than 70,000 military and civilian lives during these years and the loss to its

economy was tremendous. In the process, it also became a beehive for all kinds of terrorists – a narrative that India still takes advantage of to direct its enmity towards Pakistan. The fact that Afghanistan is a land-locked country also means that all its trade is transited through Pakistan's Karachi port – and will be in future.

In the US-led Afghan Peace Talks, other regional nations, such as China and Russia, were also pulled into the equation. It was planned to bring in the Afghan government later in the talks when everything had been settled with the Taliban. It was this stage that the Peace Talks were leading to. President Trump had even invited the Taliban to a secret meeting at Camp David for the final round of the talks. This is when an attack, reportedly engineered by the Taliban, occurred in Kabul in which 12 people were killed, including an American and a Romanian soldier. This was when President Trump, in his signature impulsive manner, tweeted to call the entire process of Peace

Talks off. Trump may have been sincere in ending the war in Afghanistan and the involvement of the U.S and its allies in the imbroglio. At the back of his mind must also have been the fact that no mighty power had ever succeeded in cowing down the Afghans. They had earlier driven out the British Empire and later the mighty Soviets. For his part, he wanted to be recognized by history as a peace-maker – and even contend for the Nobel Peace Prize. After all, Barack Obama had won the prize too. It is now clear that President Trump's role as a man of peace is not an easy one. It is difficult and complex and littered with thorns of all kinds. The big question also is that is the US Deep State willing to exit from Afghanistan altogether? 

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COLOMBO

Decoding Dangerous Trends

It is strange that the Buddhist monk Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero is being allowed to stir up hatred in Sri Lankan society as the principle of non-violence is central to Buddhist religious teachings.

BY DR. MUHAMMAD ALI EHSAN

Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero is well-known for his hardline views against the Muslims. He was serving a six-year jail term for contempt of court and was also convicted and given a six month jail term for threatening the wife of a missing cartoonist. He was found guilty of criminally intimidating the wife of the missing cartoonist in the court in 2016. The monk famously leads the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) translated as the 'Buddhist Power Force'. The importance of this six years jail-term was that the missing



cartoonist was a great critic of the government and the monk had created conditions and interrupted the court hearing in which the military intelligence was being accused of having abducted the cartoonist.

Sri Lanka hardly ever convicts Buddhist monks. The monks in fact represent the non-violent aspect of Buddhist teachings and are considered as the role models of peace. Not so with Gnanasara who has been continuously accused of spreading hate against the other faiths. It is in this context that the presidential pardon seems to have done a mockery of the principle of justice and rule of law. His incarnation behind the bars meant that the law of the land could not be violated and if you were a propagator and facilitator of creating hatred between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Muslim community of the country, then you deserved to be punished instead of being pardoned.

This is actually not just a problem in Sri Lanka. Nationalism, populism, protectionism and religiosity are new trends that are being supported by populist leaders and the governments that they lead. The current leadership in countries such as India, Myanmar, Poland, Hungary, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Turkey, etc. all show the resurgence of the rights of the majority and the tendency of taking harsh actions against the immigrants or minorities. In the context of Sri Lanka, it is strange that such a person can be allowed to stir up hatred in a society because the principle of non-violence is central to Buddhist religious teachings.

Ganasara only stirs up hatred when he claims that the country was destroyed because of the British colonists as the problems that the country faces today are because of the 'outsiders'. The term 'outsiders' used by Ganasara is dangerous as the Tamils and the Muslims (who are being referred to as outsiders) are an integral part of Sri Lankan society that becomes



more diverse, integrated and homogenous with their presence and participation.

It is only a very small minority of Tamils who came from India as tree plantation workers. The rest of the Tamils and Muslims in Sri Lanka have been there for centuries as are the majority Sinhalese. With this deep-rooted history showcasing centuries old roots of the minorities in Sri Lanka, it is a great folly to pardon a war-mongering monk who claims to re-create Sri Lanka by 'trying to go back to the country of Sinhalese' and vouches to 'continue to fight until he corrects that'.

The government of Sri Lanka holds the responsibility to protect its minorities. Ganasara plays a dangerous game and, like some of the other populist leaders that cash in on the feeling of 'resentment of majority', he is also spreading hate in a society that can fall apart under an uncontrolled spell of violence. Conducting the politics of identity and utilizing religious ideology to undermine the status of minorities can polarize and divide the society on ethnic and religious lines. The sooner such leadership is prevented from doing so, the better.

It is notable that Muslims in two Buddhist countries – Myanmar and Sri Lanka – are being victimized and their rights trampled. The killing of the people and the forced exodus from their places of living is a great reminder to the world that Muslims are persecuted regardless of the coun-

try they live in, facing the threat of being Islamic militants. The way forward is not to persecute the Muslims or let loose on them characters like Ganasara, who only propagate and execute violence. It is to ensure that the rights of the minorities are protected, that their lives, businesses and properties are secured and they are provided equal opportunities, along with the majority, to live their lives with honour and dignity.

Fascism is an ideology of hate. In fact, it translates into 'tyranny of majority'. All those who want to impose their will on the people are believers in fascism. If not fascist, their acts like those of Ganasara, make them racists. Such political and religious leaders are the destroyers of a diverse and a pluralist society that can never be at peace with itself.

It is generally believed that a conflict or dispute is guided by either of three factors: fear, competition and glory. The Sri Lankan government would do well to correctly read the causes of this dispute. If it is based on the fear of the majority Sinhalese that the Muslim population is growing fast and will become a power in its own right. The government in Sri Lanka needs to address this fear through logic and public information campaigns. If the persecution of the minorities is based on the feelings of 'Buddhist glory', then it casts a deep racist shadow on a society that needs to be more tolerant in treating its minorities. Only just and fair competition should guide political rivalries. The onus to promote and sustain such a culture lies squarely on the shoulders of the government. **S**

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BY SABRIA CHOWDHURY BALLAND

The quote here states an obvious and natural component and right, undoubtedly, the most important one in any republic. A curtailment or menace to this right negates everything democratic republics stand for. What we are seeing in the People's Republic of Bangladesh (the obvious irony in its name) is not only a negation of man's innate right to liberty but a complete abuse of such a concept and the practice of it.

Gruesome violence on free thinkers, speakers, political opponents and their supporters has been the norm in Bangladesh for over a decade but has risen exponentially in recent years. Anyone who dares to speak up unfavorably about government policies is a target for persecution and death. Social media accounts are rigorously monitored and statuses or even likes on comments which question Sheikh Hasina's government are targeted.

This was manifested for the entire world to witness with the brutal murder of Abrar Fahad, a 21 year old engineering student at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, more commonly known as BUET, the most prestigious engineering university in Bangladesh. In his Facebook posts, he had shown support for the autonomy of Kashmir and against Indian oppression and human rights abuses, like millions of people globally. However, this is considered a crime in present day Bangladesh.

At around the same time as the lockdown in Kashmir, the Director General of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), an organization described as "the elite anti-crime and anti-terrorism unit of the Bangladesh Police," declared on national television that no protests about the Kashmir lockdown will be tolerated and will lead to arrests. Thus, Abrar was undoubtedly already on the radar.

The Awami League does not just restrict itself to online activities of Bangladeshis. When international analyses exposing the truth about Sheikh Hasina's blatant authoritarianism results in her top diplomats to issue public responses defending what is known to be false, we know that the understanding of a democracy, freedom of thought and speech are willfully ignored. It is as though the Awami League is ready at all times with fire extinguishers to negate and refute each and every fire of truth



DHAKA

Second Liberation?

Liberty must at all hazards be supported. We have a right to it, derived from our Maker. But if we had not, our fathers have earned and bought it for us, at the expense of our ease, their estates, their pleasure and their blood. - John Adams, 2nd US President, 1765.

that is exposed regarding its breaches of democratic governance.

The Facebook post which ultimately cost Abrar his life was made shortly after Sheikh Hasina's return from India at the beginning of October, a trip in which she and Narendra Modi signed 7 treaties. In this post, Abrar expressed his critical views. He wrote about the issues of allowing India to use the Mongla Port, withdrawing water from the Feni River and importing LPG from Bangladesh. The big question mark here is: what did Bangladesh get from these treaties which are only "bilateral in name"?

By definition, a bilateral agreement refers to an agreement between parties or states that aim to keep trade deficits to a minimum. Therefore, the question which Abrar and 163 million Bangladeshis wondered about was: how do treaties which benefit only one party, in this case, India, benefit Bangladesh? Furthermore, how do treaties which tip the balance in favour of India even more than was already the case, benefit Bangladesh in any way? To take the point even further, how can a bilateral treaty between two leaders be signed when one of them has not even been democratically elected by the people? Does this point not nullify all agreements signed by unelected members of parliament? The Bangladesh election, for lack of a better word, is widely known as a farcical means in which Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League forced themselves to power once again

in December 2018. Bangladeshis were not allowed to vote and choose their government and exercise their constitutional rights. Thus, Bangladeshis have every right to know on what grounds treaties, which are completely detrimental to their nation, were signed by an unelected Prime Minister.

Student Wing of the Awami League

The Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student wing of the Awami League, has been described as the ruling party's ground force, its goons. It is present in all violent riots or altercations with the general public. An organization which is disreputable enough for Bangladeshis to circulate petitions to have it enlisted as a terrorist organization, the BCL is indispensable to the Awami League and is not going anywhere. The illicit nature of the BCL's crimes was seen yet again in the merciless and brutal beating which led to Abrar's death. Difficult to fathom that the culprits were also engineering students at BUET and had the highest test scores and impeccable grades in order to be admitted. How brilliant students from very modest homes have been transformed into ruthless murderers for the Awami League is yet another worrisome factor for the society as a whole. During police questioning, the perpetrators admitted to their crimes and unanimously stated that they were following orders.

The Legacy of Abrar Fahad

Abrar Fahad has become a hero and is

known as the first martyr of the second liberation of Bangladesh from tyranny and the loss of sovereignty to India. With the eloquence of his words which led to his death, he has sparked a revolution which will undoubtedly come to fruition.


Moving Forward

The Awami League government was categorical in its position that although educational institutions would be free to choose whether to ban the BCL or not, it would not be banned as a whole throughout the country. What is even more shocking is the apathy displayed by the government in the aftermath of such a heinous crime, committed by its student wing, for comments which were critical of its actions. No one condemned the BCL nor its actions, not a single member of the ruling party attended Abrar's funeral and not a single word of empathy was uttered, nor an address to the nation given.

Yes, the traditional meeting of the victim's families at Sheikh Hasina's residence was called. The privacy of the victim's family was not respected, judging from the amount of photos that were released. Financial help and employment, if needed, was usually offered to the families, as a matter of routine. Abrar's mother, who was understandably inconsolable, was told to consider how Sheikh Hasina too lost her family. This attitude of "enough about you, now let's talk about me" has become a very common theme in Bangladeshi governance and the lack of empathy it demonstrates has not gone unnoticed to Bangladeshis.

What value do economic growth figures have when human lives are systematically exterminated due to state sponsored violence?

It is said that before handing Jesus over to the Jewish people which led to his crucifixion, the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, washed his hands and said, "I am innocent of this man's blood." In distancing herself from all the murders, rapes, extra judicial killings, falsified election results and other atrocious crimes committed on behalf of latching on to power, Sheikh Hasina resembles Pontius Pilate. She washes her hands off of any responsibilities of ensuring a democratic society, because she knows that in a democratic electoral process, no one in their right mind among Bangladeshi voters would willingly vote for the Awami League.

Given a choice, it is clear that the people of Bangladesh will also wash their hands of the dictatorship they have been subjected to for over a decade. 

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KATHMANDU

Shaking Up The Status Quo

Prime Minister Oli of Nepal is making compromises to stay in power and this includes shaking up the entire governance system, if required.

BY S. MUBASHIR NOOR

Oli's government in early May announced the "Guthi Bill" that irked Nepal's Santana Hindu majority barely weeks after free speech defenders had risen up in arms over proposed media legislation that would slash press freedom in the country.

Pressured by a series of massive protest by the Newar community in the Kathmandu Valley, the government officially "withdrew" the bill from parliament in late June without promising to permanently shelve it.

"Guthi" are a cross between religious trusts and socio-economic non-profits that, for the most part, are privately owned by families. They organize the religious rituals and major cultural festivals across Nepal, funding them with revenue from collective land that is tilled by local labour.

They also invest in their communities and have historically been managed by the autonomous "Guthi Sansthan" umbrella body. This tradition dates back centuries that some claim is the very essence of Nepali society.

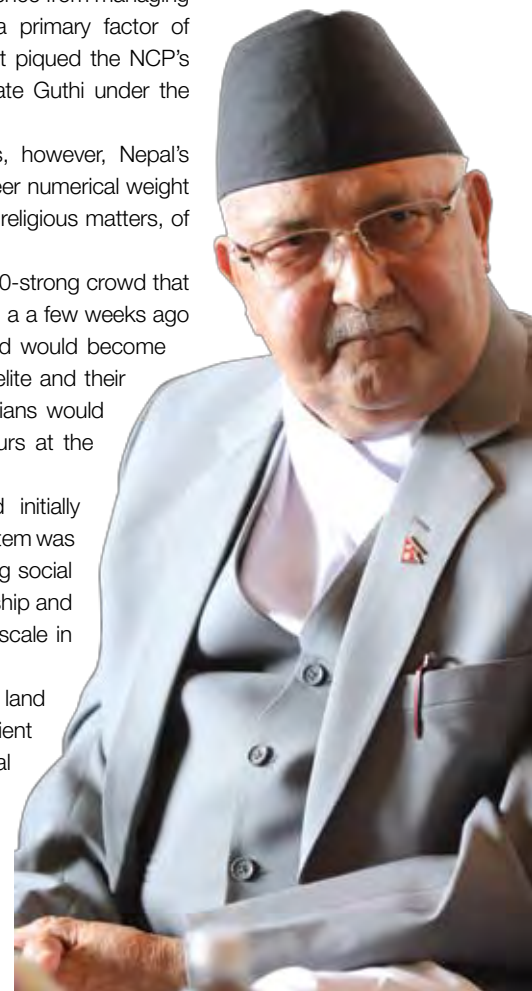
Yet behind the scenes, the 2000-strong Guthi of Nepal theoretically wield enormous political and economic influence from managing roughly 150,000 hectares of land, a primary factor of production. This statistic is likely what piqued the NCP's interest in placing all public and private Guthi under the oversight of a federal agency.

Unlike its beleaguered journalists, however, Nepal's 80 percent Hindu majority has the sheer numerical weight to force the government to retreat on religious matters, of which the Guthi occupy a central role.

More vocal members of the 50,000-strong crowd that picketed against the bill in Kathmandu a few weeks ago told local press they feared Guthi land would become a "playground" for the corrupt ruling elite and their corporate cronies. They feared politicians would parcel out land to win or retain favours at the expense of Nepal's cultural heritage.

Government spokespersons had initially defended the bill claiming the Guthi system was feudalistic and a key culprit in widening social inequality by concentrating the ownership and management of land on such a vast scale in the hands of a few "Guthiyars."

Moreover, that the productivity of land held by the Guthi was highly inefficient and geared only toward meeting local needs as opposed to providing for all of Nepal. Consequently, without



bringing the trusts under federal oversight, alleviating poverty would forever remain a pipedream while the Guthiyars prospered in the guise of philanthropy and tradition.

Taking on religious orthodoxy is a self-destruct button for most politicians, but the NCP cannot afford to be complacent. While many in civil society have bemoaned the government's penchant for successively rolling out ill-thought legislation that targets sensitive issues, the ruling party is simply trying to fulfill campaign promises.

It is worth noting that the NCP is radical by nature. It emerged from the ashes of a bloody Maoist insurgency that technically ended in 2006, but in reality dragged on for another decade.

After citizens rejected the plutocrats and military dictators backed by the now defunct monarchy, a new constitution emerged in 2015 that promised greater socio-economic equality. And an initially uncomfortable alliance between the Maoists and mainstream communist politicians powered them to a comprehensive victory in polls two years later.

The key NCP plank was campaigning for federalism, secularism and uprooting corruption. The former Kingdom of Nepal had been a unitary state where the central government in Kathmandu ran the country without local decision-making. Naturally, it

was slow to respond, if not oblivious, to local situations and challenges.

Federalism, the new state structure, meanwhile devolves power to local governments who can then serve their constituents more efficiently and in a transparent manner. This shakeup of the status quo greatly appealed to the more marginalized communities of Nepal, especially those in the southern Terai region, who were unable to rule themselves despite being the regional majority.

Progress on secularism and corruption has, however, yielded mixed results at best. While preaching religious equality, the authors of the 2015 constitution were sensitive to Nepal's Hindu majority and sizeable Buddhist minority and were therefore compelled to include special protections for "religion and custom practiced from ancient times" which plainly did not extend to Christians or Muslims.


Likewise, the fight against corruption has fared poorly given a deep-set culture of nepotism and kickbacks that afflicts the entire bureaucratic chain. Substantive progress, for that matter, will remain elusive until Nepal's economy climbs out of the doldrums.

Perhaps the more troubling question is how the NCP's super-majority win in the 2017 polls has impacted Nepal's political climate. Long used to fragile coalitions, citizens now

find themselves being ruled by a single political party that instinctively wields the state apparatus to consolidate power in a way that reeks of tyranny. It is, in a sense, perpetuating monarchy in the guise of elected leadership.

Oli's critics also claim he aspires to imitate neighbour China's method of state management, specifically President Xi Jinping's increasingly authoritarian style. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi too has deftly used religious nationalism to strengthen his grip on the top seat, and thereby forced the media to align itself with his administration or risk appearing unpatriotic.

That said, the Nepali premier's challenge is to rebrand the communists, long portrayed as foreign agents bleeding the country, into unimpeachable patriots. And, to that end, it may be necessary to embrace some potent totem of nationalism which is likely to be ethno-religious in nature.

While this may seem unthinkable today, power does strange things to people. Oli and his NCP comrades will at some point be forced to decide on their threshold of compromise if they desire to rule Nepal beyond 2022. 

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AYODHYA

Waiting for the Verdict

The much awaited judgement on the Ayodhya Ram Mandir - Babri Masjid case will be very important for the future of India. If handled well, it could work for a better India.

BY MERIAM SABIH

On Wednesday, October 16, 2019, the verdict in the Ayodhya Ram Mandir - Babri Masjid case was reserved by the Supreme Court of India. It is expected to be announced in mid-November, just before the Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi is set to retire. The case was the second longest consecutive hearing of the Indian Supreme Court, lasting 40 days. A five-judge Constitutional bench comprising senior judges heard the proceedings. Some



of the judges included Justice Arvind Bobde, Justice NV Ramana, Justice Chandrachud; they are to be future Chief Justices of India.

Each side on October 19, submitted written statements as to what relief they were seeking. The Sunni Waqf Board has called for the reconstruction of the Babri Masjid to its condition prior to December 6, 1992. The Ram Janmabhoomi, Gopal Singh Vishard, Hindu Mahasabha, and Nirmohi Akhara are asking for the Ram temple to be reconstructed and no part be divided or given to the Muslims. Ram Lalla Virajman is asking for the entire disputed land to be given to Ram Lalla and no part given to the Muslims or Nirmohi Akhara, a group of Hindu ascetics. The Shia Waqf Board has claimed to be the rightful owners of the property and have asked for the land to be given to the Hindu parties. In 2010, an Allahabad High Court had divided the land into one part for Muslims and two parts for Hindus in a complex judgement which allotted one part of the land to the Sunni Waqf, one part to Ram Lalla, and one part to the Nirmohi Akhara.

Now the Supreme Court judgement to be announced is much awaited for various reasons. When the Indian Supreme Court took up the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi case, the case was to be treated 'only as a land dispute.' But, far from just a pure property dispute, what is essentially also on trial are issues of religion, tradition, history, politics, minorities, archeology, and so much more. The case has long brought out emotions and passions which had lasted over the decades. Inside the court were quotes from Allama Iqbal on the protection of minorities. Maps were torn up by the lawyer representing Muslims after which the Chief Justice threatened to walk out. These are just some of the dramatic moments during the 40 consecutive days of impassioned hearings.

Will the final judgement by the Supreme Court of India resolve the conflict which is decades old? Hindus believe it to be the birthplace of Ram. It is believed that the original temple devoted to Ram was destroyed and a Masjid built as part of the



conquest by Babar. Mughal Emperor Babar is seen as a brutal foreign conqueror by some and, in this case, even the Lord Ram is party to the case as a young boy asking for his rights.

The site has been at the center of much controversy. Riots in 1992 claimed the lives of over 2,000 innocent people, mostly Muslims, when a mob of Hindu zealots destroyed the Babri Masjid. Due compensation for lives and livelihoods lost should be provided for this. In 1949, idols were placed inside the Masjid and Hindus were allowed to pray only once a year. In 1986, the temple was unlocked so that Hindus could go regularly and not only once a year. The BJP had politicized the issue when they decided to march to Ayodhya to free the mosque. Hardliners are even now calling on the Modi government to pass an ordinance for the early construction of the Ram Temple but for now the Modi government has called for the legal system to run its course.

The idea of how religion and secular society coincide is an issue India has grappled with for some time. After the Shah Bano, case a legal milestone from 1978, India grappled with how personal religious law would coincide with the constitution of the land. India was also one of the first to ban Salman Rushdie's book so as not to stir the emotions of its large Muslim minority population. Now it is at a turning point on how to handle this dispute between the two religious communities.

Article 142 gives the Supreme Court the prerogative to do "complete justice" and even use innovation where the executive is failing. And it is important in this matter that not only should justice be done but it should be seen to be done. The best judgement would be one which allows it to be a win-win situation for both parties. At the same time, it

should be one where both sides are also seen and feel that they are giving up something. In other words, it will be a judgement that will give both sides something to celebrate and to save face, while sacrificing something in return.

Is there a way both sides can feel they have won without dividing up the land which many do not see as a viable solution?

Such a deal may comprise a trade-off of the Muslim side giving up that piece of land since it is a special place for Hindus, which many have described as a holy site like what Makkah would be for the Muslims. In return they should be compensated in many ways suitable and just which should include financial restitution as well as the rebuilding and reconstruction of various other Masjids in the area to better conditions than before. In return, the Hindu side should agree to let go of other disputed sites. In this way, both sides would have been made to give up some of what they want and given compensation which they would be happy to receive. Another possible solution would be to build a Babri Masjid and Ram Temple side by side but that may be looked upon as dividing the land once again.

The Sunni Waqf Board, one of the key parties, can consider such a trade-off as part of mediation as well. Mediation continued while the hearings proceeded. A sealed envelope of the mediated settlement was given to the judges that not all had agreed upon yet but one that could nonetheless be used to guide the Court. The Court will also be taking that into consideration. The much awaited judgement will certainly be very important for the future of India. It will be looked upon in history as an important turning point which, if handled well, can be for the betterment of India's future or, if mishandled, can prove to foster further unrest. **S**

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Anatomy of an Attack

The mid-September drone attack on Saudi Arabia's Abqaiq oilfield is a serious affair that calls for careful thought.

BY S.G. JILANEE

The September 14 drone attack on Saudi Arabia's Abqaiq oilfield was not an ordinary incident, because, Abqaiq is the world's largest petroleum processing plant. No wonder, the attack gave a serious jolt to the world's oil market. Though, Saudi Arabia's oilfields and pipelines have been targeted by rebels over the past year but never on such a large scale and causing such disruption. Responsibility for the assault was claimed by the Houthis of Yemen, with whom KSA has been at war since March 2015. Yet, Saudi Arabia began flogging its pet whipping boy, Iran, in a knee-jerk reaction. Later, though the Saudis scaled back their rhetoric blaming Tehran directly, instead of saying the attack was "unquestionably sponsored by Iran." But, nobody paused to ponder why Iran, with its back already to the wall under maximum pressure from the U.S., would undertake any reckless adventure.

Nonetheless, before the blame game, the mother of all questions the Kingdom and its patron, the U.S., must answer, is: how could the attack have happened? How, a handful of drones and cruise missiles had slipped through the Saudi radar and devastated Riyadh's oil processing plant, despite all those \$18 million fighter planes and \$3 million a pop Patriot anti-aircraft missiles. Notably, the attack happened in spite of a \$69 million defence budget, the third highest spending of any country in the world — with a world-class air force and state-of-the-art anti-aircraft system.

Iran has denied being responsible and has warned any retaliatory attack targeting it will result in an "all-out war." Iranian officials have also warned that US military assets in the region are within range of its missiles.

Yet, with typical American hubris and



Pompeian pomposity, the US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo claimed, in the immediate aftermath of the attack, that Iran was responsible for the incident, in spite of the fact that it was claimed by Yemen's Houthi rebel group. Pompeo arbitrarily accused Iran of "an unprecedented attack on the world's energy supply," without any evidence.

Referring to Pompeo's bluster, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said that "such fruitless and blind accusations and remarks are incomprehensible and meaningless."

Iranian officials have also warned that US military assets in the region are within range of its missiles.

Iran's President, Hassan Rouhani also urged the US to "cease this policy of maximum pressure" in favour of "dialogue, and logic and reason".

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi called Saudi accusations "baseless," adding that Iran supports the Houthis through "spiritual and political" means. He added that "cease-fire and dialogue" was the only face-saving solution

for Saudi Arabia.

In fact, Saudi Arabia has invited trouble on itself by going to war with the Houthis since 2015, though they are, basically, Yemen's internal problem.

Meanwhile, though, the U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tweeted: "Iran has now launched an unprecedented attack on the world's energy supply." And he added: "There is no evidence the attacks came from Yemen."

In response, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif accused Pompeo of engaging in deception. He wrote on twitter, "Having failed at 'max pressure', Secretary Pompeo is turning to 'max deceit.' US & its clients are stuck in Yemen because of illusion that weapon superiority will lead to military victory. Blaming Iran won't end disaster."

The U.S. president also weighed in, rattling his sabre and saying, "[We] are locked and loaded depending on verification, but are waiting to hear from the Kingdom [of Saudi Arabia] as to who they believe was the cause of this attack and under what terms we would proceed!" He did not indulge in any gung-ho rhetoric

pointing the finger at Iran. Trump's statement was quite reassuring, because, he said he was waiting to hear from Saudi Arabia as to who they suspect as the culprit, instead of accusing Iran straight away, like Pompeo.

Trump did not mention Iran, but wrote on Twitter that he had "reason to believe that we know the culprit" behind the attacks on the Abqaiq facility.

So, there the issue must rest until a thorough investigation reveals the real culprit. Yet, in any case it will hardly be possible to fix the blame squarely on Iran.

But, no matter what, the Abqaiq attack calls for some serious thinking on the part of Saudi Arabia, since this incident was neither the first, nor would it be the last of its kind. More such attacks may happen in the future. Vilifying Iran every time such incident occurs is no answer to the problem. In fact, what is to be prevented at all costs is a slide in the situation from verbal exchange to an armed clash between Tehran and Riyadh.



The Kingdom needs to realize that the key to its security lies in making peace with the Houthis. It should, therefore, cease interfering in Yemen, to avoid any future Abqaiq-like attack by the Houthis in retaliation. **S**

The writer is a senior political analyst and former editor of SouthAsia. He can be reached at ghulamjil@outlook.com



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ECONOMIC WARFARE

The China-United States trade relationship is beginning to decay, raising vital questions. The world is entering a period of new alliances and trading blocs. If China plays its cards right, the Asian Century is not far – under China's leadership.

BY SIKANDAR TAIMOOR

The struggle for wealth, dominance and power has been shaping country narratives for centuries, often resulting in outcomes that go down as dark periods in human history. Lessons learned from World War II replaced that struggle with economic warfare. Countries now engage in maneuvering their economic policies such as interest rates, trade tariffs and national bonds and currencies to achieve their national agendas. This weaponization of economics marks one of the modern world's defining hallmarks where increased globalization, interdependence and connectivity have added to the complex milieu of strategic and diplomatic relations between countries. Entire fields of study, such as the global political economy, have emerged to testify to the growing importance of this phenomenon. Based on these dynamics, perhaps the most influential and far-reaching example of such modern-day economic warfare is the ongoing rivalry between China and the United States.

A story of a fast-rising power, challenging the dominance and decades-old supremacy of a unilateral superpower, primarily through its economic might, the rise of China testifies to the strategic importance of developing strong economies in today's world. By emphasizing a pragmatic, adaptable and yet more development-oriented

economic policy, China has, over the last three decades, been able to ensure the strengthening of its macroeconomic basics, while tapping into lucrative markets such as those of the US. China's growth can significantly be attributed to the US as its major trading partner over the last thirty years.

USD-denominated debt offers the safest haven for Chinese forex reserves, meaning that China offers loans to the US to buy Chinese goods. This makes it a mutually beneficial relationship, in which China gets a huge market for its products and the US benefits from the economical prices of Chinese manufactured products. Therefore, as long as China continues to have an export-driven economy with a huge trade surplus with the US, it will keep

piling up USDs and debt, through purchase of US treasuries, enabling the US to buy Chinese products. This mutually beneficial relationship has locked both the nations in a state of interdependency. However, as we approach the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, this relationship that has lasted 30 years, seems to be decaying with trade tensions between the two countries escalating. China, that relied on US support to develop its growth, is now placed to become the world's largest economy.

From this position of strength, if China begins to sell its holdings and buy Yuans, it would initiate a sell-off of the USD, resulting in an avalanche effect that would initiate a conversion of USD-holdings into other currencies and assets across global markets and eventually result in a depreciating USD. Such leverage poses a vital question with regard to how China will use the accumulated USD-denominated debt it currently holds from an economic warfare standpoint as it can be used as a tool to impact the USD exchange rate. To determine how and when China will use this leverage, it is important to understand how it is placed at the moment and why a depreciating USD is not in their interest in the current circumstances. It could have adverse implications, making the timing of this move important.

As the largest holder of a USD-denominated debt, a decreasing USD rate reduces the profit and the total value



The best possible way forward for China would be to be patient and wait for the right time.

of China's holdings. A decreasing interest rate environment adds to capital gains on bond holdings and an appreciating Yuan at this stage could further hamper their GDP growth - repercussions that they are not prepared to handle in the medium term. China should wisely accept that it cannot win a trade war with high debt, capital controls and US exports dependence. The best possible way forward for China would be to be patient and wait for the right time which would be when the capital gains on the current US-denominated debt have reached peak profitability and US monetary policy executions are well underway. China's transition into a market-driven, service-based economy has enabled it to act as a manufacturing hub across Asia. When the Yuan is appreciating against the USD, China could start selling USD debt holdings and buy Yuns to achieve its objectives.

The timing of these circumstances is dependent on various developments as we find ourselves in the last quarter of 2019. It is important to see how economic circumstances shape from this point onwards. It is important to note the pace at which the Federal Reserve implements its expansionary monetary policy, whether trade tensions between the two superpowers further escalate or a deal takes place. China's Belt & Road Initiative and its progress through South and Central Asia would be key to determining the success of the country's strategic vision. This is a struggle for wealth, dominance and power through economic warfare and, if successful, it could also lead to the USD being replaced as the global reserve currency and the making of a strong foundation for an Asian Century. 

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KHARTOUM



A NATION IN TRANSITION

After Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir was ousted in a military coup d'état last April, economist Abdalla Hamdok brought in new hope for the country as its new Prime Minister.

BY ANEELA SHAHZAD

After eight months of relentless protests in Sudan, a power-sharing deal has finally been struck between the Transitional Military Council and the Alliance for Freedom and Change - an umbrella group of the protestors. The Sovereign Council thus formed, includes 5 TMC members, 6 AFC nominated members while Abdalla Hamdok, who is a public administrator, will serve as the country's 15th Prime Minister.

Under Hamdok, there will be a 20-member cabinet, while the two ministries of interior and defence will be chosen by the TMC. The sovereign council will also be responsible for making a government and a 300-member legislative body.

The question is, will Hamdok be able to bring in democratic reforms and pull the country out of its economic crisis - a crisis Sudan has faced under US sanctions since 1997. Eventually when the sanctions were lifted in 2016, drastic inflation hit the Sudanese economy that was deemed as part of IMF's austerity project for the country.

In early February 2018, a wave of street demonstrations spread across major cities in Sudan against new austerity measures by President Omar al-Bashir at the behest of the IMF, wherein state subsidies for basic commodities, including wheat and flour, were removed; the currency was devalued to half; and public import of wheat was disallowed. This was added to the 2011 secession of South Sudan which meant Sudan's loss of 75% of its oil production fields, its main source of revenue. All



this resulted in a staggering accumulation of debt, stunted economic growth and destabilization of the social and political scene of the country.

The protests were somewhat suppressed at that time, but news of starvation and shortages of medicine and basic supplies kept coming. Meanwhile, many youth and professionals began organizing their groups against the al-Bashir regime – and protest were reignited in December 2018. The protests were marked by the July Massacre in which 128 protesters were killed and many more injured.

Now that a peace agreement has been implemented, many protestors feel that their revolution was hijacked by al-Bashir's military setup, and that they have doubts the interim setup, which is being overseen by the TMC, will be allowed to carry on the transition in a true democratic manner. The objectives of removing al-Bashir's junta and the formation of a civilian government are both unfulfilled as yet. The road to economic stability seems like being a long one.

Within a week of taking over power, Abdalla Hamdok told the media that Sudan needed \$8 billion to rebuild its damaged economy – and an additional \$2bn of foreign reserves deposits in the next three months to halt the fall in currency.

The painful truth is that Hamdok again has to fall back to the US, the World Bank and the IMF for help and for ending Sudan's international financial isolation. But this is not a surprise as Hamdok, an economist, along with an illustrious international career, was previously with the African Development Bank and on the UNEconomic Commission for Africa panel and is, thus, a favourite.

Sara Abdeljalil, spokesperson of the Sudan Professional Association said there is a mixture of hope and fear with regard



to Dr Hamdok's ability to steer Sudan towards democratic and civilian rule. The reason is that the military still holds veto


power over decisions in the country's top body. People like General Hemedti still have de facto power in the council. He is a former warlord of the Janjaweed, that has been fighting in Darfur on behalf of the government since 2003 and he is someone who would not want a strong justice system in the country.

A USAID 2019 report has estimated that 5.76 million people are facing severe levels of food insecurity, especially in Khartoum,

the Red Sea, Blue Nile, White Nile, South Kordofan, Kassala, Gedaref and Darfur states. Professor Hamid Eltigani, Head of the Department of Public Policy and Administration at the American University in Cairo has warned of 'the structural problems of the country's economy, related to a very weak production sector, the bankruptcy of most factories, a lack of liquidity, and almost no access to loans' in 2018.

Sadly, Hamdok has to make a start

from the same abject conditions of a huge external debts; high inflation; low salaries; high unemployment rates; rise of poverty; and a shrinking economy – and from there to the colossal work of bringing a war-prone country together and putting it on the path of nation-building. A work more mammoth in proportions when one considers the stakes and interventions of global stakeholders in the politics of the country.

The prospects of Hamdok's success in fulfilling the aspirations of the pro-democracy protestors are not very bright, but his failure may put the fate of over 40 million Sudanese again in the hands of a corrupt junta that loves infighting, takes bribes from global players and sells the peace and prosperity of its people for small personal returns. So, Hamdok may be a last chance for saving Sudan from the dire poverty and economic standstill that it has been mired in for the last four decades. He is the one who can save Sudan from the potential disintegration that haunts it for being a pivot in regional conflicts. 

The writer is a geopolitical analyst with interest in history, philosophy and anthropology. She can be reached at aneela.pathfinder@gmail.com



JAKARTA

Freedom Flare-up

The simmering struggle of the Papuans seems to be developing into a separatist movement.

BY S.G. JILANEE

The Free Papua Movement has been fighting for independence from Indonesia for 50 years, without any result. But, this time, there is a difference, as a wave of protests by the Papuans, has swept across the region. Nonetheless, it would be too early at this stage to predict Indonesia's division.

In fact, ever since Papua was formally annexed by Indonesia in 1969, a low-intensity insurgency has simmered across the region. There has been an eruption of

protests since 15 August this year, when protests by Papuans were held across several cities in Indonesia. They were joined by various Papuan student groups and the protests proceeded peacefully in Yogyakarta and Jakarta but authorities dispersed them with force and arrested some of them, igniting further tension.

A series of protests by Papuans in Indonesia, begun on 19 August, mainly took place across Indonesian Papua as a response to the arrest of 43 Papuan students in Surabaya for allegedly disrespecting and damaging the Indonesian flag during the celebration of

Indonesia's Independence Day. The flag was damaged outside the building they lived. Meanwhile, it was also alleged that a mob had attacked the students verbally and physically, yelling, "Monkeys, get out."

It was this racist (monkey) slur that ignited a prairie fire of protests by the Papuans. The protests involved thousands of participants. In fact, the Surabaya incident became a flashpoint for the demand of an independence referendum. In several places, the protests turned into general riots, resulting in the destruction of government buildings. Clashes between



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violent protesters and police left more than 30 people killed.

On 19 August, a crowd of around "several thousand" began protesting in Manokwari, the capital of the West Papua province. The protest turned into a riot, in which the local parliament building and some private property was torched.

Some of the protesters were carrying the Morning Star flag, the old flag of the Netherlands New Guinea, used by the West Papuan Separatist Movement, while shouting pro-independence slogans.

In Jayapura, the region's largest city and the provincial capital of Papua, hundreds of protesters forcefully took down the Indonesian flag in front of the Governor's office.

Protests also occurred in the city of Sorong. In response to the "monkey" slur in Surabaya, some of the protesters dressed as monkeys. A mob threw rocks at the airport's glass windows, damaging the terminal building. Another torched the city's prison, resulting in the escape of many convicts.

Around 4,000-5,000 protesters rallied in the mining town of Timika and damaged a hotel. Further clashes between protesters and police occurred in front of the parliament building, leading to dozens of arrests.

Thousands of protesters also rallied in the town of Fakfak on 21 August, and set fire to a local market and office building, while blocking the road to the airport.

Meanwhile, Papuan students in Jakarta held a rally in front of the Ministry of Home Affairs on 22 August, followed by peaceful protests, with a "long march" in Sarmi Regency on 23 August and pro-independence rallies in Semarang, Denpasar and some other cities the next day.

Protests continued on 26 August, with the West Papuan flag being flown by peaceful protesters in Deiyai Regency, numbering 5,000 according to organizers, alongside simultaneous rallies in the Papuan towns of Wamena, Panial, Yahukimo, and Dogiyai, in addition to off-Papua cities such as Makassar. The protest later grew to over 7,000 participants.

On 29 August, protesters torched

several government buildings and a shopping centre. On the morning of 30 August, violent protesters set fire to the General Elections branch office in Jayapura.

As protests spread outside the regions of Papua and West Papua, pro-independence protesters occupied the provincial governor's buildings.

On 1 September, three Papuan students were shot in their university dormitories by pro-government militia groups. Evidence also emerged of Indonesian soldiers firing live rounds into nonviolent protesting crowds, killing 6 to 8 demonstrators.

One student was reported to have been killed during fresh protests on September 23, with the Indonesian military claiming that protesters had burned down a government office in Wamena.

On 19 August, President Joko Widodo released a statement urging calm and telling the Papuans that "it's OK to be emotional, but it's better to be forgiving. Patience is also better."

Simultaneously, the government announced thorough investigation into the Surabaya incident that had ignited passions. It called for peaceful protests and said that Papuans "should not be savage like those who spout racism."

But, the "monkey" slur has stuck. It has deeply wounded the sentiments of the Papuans. As Papuan independence leader, Benny Wenda observed, the incident in Surabaya had "lit the bonfire of nearly 60 years of racism, discrimination and torture of the people of West Papua by Indonesia."

Yet, the goal of independence still seems to be far, though not altogether out of reach. If, they pursue their cause with the same tenacity as they have displayed so far, and sustain the momentum their movement has gathered, it is possible they may achieve their goal of a "Free West Papua," sooner than later. ■

The writer is a senior political analyst and former editor of SouthAsia. He can be reached at ghulamjil@outlook.com



A Celebration of Erudition and the Written Word

BY FAIZAN USMANI

The 6th Islamabad Literature Festival (ILF) was held at the Margala Hotel in Islamabad from 27 to 29 September.

The Festival was launched in 2013 by Oxford University Press (OUP) and like the Karachi Literature Festival, which pioneered the trend of literature festivals in Pakistan, it has also championed the battle against the forces of bigotry and repression that have threatened literary and cultural expression in the country. The ILF is not just an event but a social movement as it has been successful in spreading the light of knowledge, creativity, and tolerance nationwide.

The theme of the 6th ILF was 'Focus on Tomorrow: Reflecting on the Past.' The festival sought to explore new directions and emerging trends and to examine the impact of social media and technology on literature, books, publishing, reading, and thinking in general. While the roots of events such as the ILF are steeped in Pakistan's rich literary heritage, the event also presents insights into the future to further explore new writings, new trends, and new technologies and to provide platforms to younger authors and scholars.

Some right wing fascist movements around the world have also raised their ugly heads over the last few years and have attained positions of power and influence. In this backdrop, there is again a need for

illumination and hope, and for this reason, at the 6th ILF, a panel discussion took place which took an in-depth look at the Kashmir conflict. The violence and repression in Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir has acquired new dimensions over the past few months. The fundamental rights of the people have been destroyed and there is continued and blatant violation of their human rights. Free speech is being openly

suppressed and a process of ethnic cleansing against the Muslims has started in the state. Events like the ILF promote among people the desire to fight such tyranny with the power of the written word as well as through cultural expression. They bring people together in a mutual search for dialogue and discourse over important issues. The power of prose and other forms of literature along with the creative arts, influence and shape new ideas, new concepts, and new ways of looking at things and confronting the issues that surround us.

It was heartening to see that at the 6th Islamabad Literature Festival, scholarly and creative minds gathered together to deliberate on many topical issues. While there were many sessions on literary subjects, there were also panel discussions on the current



Arshad Saeed Husain
Managing Director, OUP

economic challenges and the country's geopolitical positioning. Discussions were also held on the educational issues of today and the emerging classrooms of tomorrow. There were screenings of documentary films and sessions featuring the fine arts, theatre, music, and satire. And, of course, there were sessions about novels, short stories, poetry, book launches, book discussions, mushairas in Urdu and English and regional literature.

The ILF is an important event as it has now come to occupy a distinctive position in the cultural, educational, and literary landscape of Pakistan. Like other cities of the country, Islamabad too vibrates with creative energy and cultural verve. Its beautiful location also makes it an ideal locale for literary, cultural, and creative inspiration to flourish and for the formation of new ideas.

At the Festival, there was immense interaction between the writers, intellectuals, and artists present. They represented original thoughts and endeavours that transcended the barriers of language and cultural backgrounds. The diplomatic community in the capital also participated in the ILF with great enthusiasm and was instrumental in adding force to Pakistan's effort to emerge prominently on the cultural map of the world and build for the country a soft image that it so richly deserves.

The Islamabad Literature Festival amply conveyed that whereas people from diverse backgrounds may have entirely different opinions and outlooks, there is a platform where they can mingle freely and exchange thoughts and ideas in an inclusive and participatory manner to learn from each other. The 6th Islamabad Literature Festival, as in previous years, proved to be a celebration of erudition and the written word as it promoted a vital blend of ideas and concepts. **S**





QUETTA

Dying in the Darkness

Balochistan is a province rich in minerals and other resources but the province's people do not benefit from this wealth.

BY KELTON HIGH

January 2, 2019. Four miners burnt alive. A common occurrence in Balochistan.

The province of Balochistan is of great geo-strategic importance to Pakistan and possesses valuable natural resources but it has suffered at the hands of serious political and administrative negligence. The most vulnerable stakeholders in this tragedy are the coal mine workers.

In less than one year, more than 200 coal miners are reported to have lost their lives and 300 more have faced grave injuries. Around 3 lakh labourers are employed in coal mines across Balochistan. These miners have no other employment opportunities. Working in mines affects their health as this is a very hazardous activity.

The labour federation has urged the Balochistan authorities to treat the plight of miners as a serious issue that requires immediate legislation. However, there is complete ignorance on part of the government and the media also does not pay much attention. After all, the miners are an underprivileged lot. Coal-mining, however, does contribute substantial

revenue to the provincial exchequer – and the mine owners, belonging to Balochistan and other parts of Pakistan – make good money. The coal mines only benefit the wealthy owners while the hardships of those who work in the mines never end.

Most coal mine workers suffer from respiratory diseases as well as liver and kidney issues. Fundamental medical services are lacking in the mining areas as well as in urban centres like Quetta and Sibi. Employment opportunities in other sectors in Balochistan are also limited as not much progress has been made on the industrial front. Working conditions in coal mines are simply deplorable. Mining workers die almost every day in areas like Mach, Harnai, Sharig, Degari, Duki, Abegum, Ziarat, etc. The mining accidents often go unreported or, if reports are made to the relevant authorities, the benefits never trickle down to the victims. In this situation, there is a dire need to prevent the accidents, safeguard the social and economic well-being of the mine workers and take measures to ensure their safety and health.

There are huge reserves of coal around Quetta and in Harnai, Ziarat and Mach regions and greedy entrepreneurs are

always keen to exploit them. The mine owners employ labour illegally and do not follow even basic regulations in order to minimize their costs. The miners work with outdated equipment and are not governed by any checks or protection protocols.


The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) offers a distant hope. Perhaps there will come a time when basic standards for mining labour would improve in Balochistan and there would be opportunities for employment in other industries as well. It looks like that the media, the government and the people in general hardly consider Balochistan and its problems important enough. There is so much talk of economic prosperity coming to Pakistan under CPEC, of which the Gwadar Port is a central feature. The port is located on the coast of Mekran in Balochistan and it is expected that once it gets going full throttle, it will bring great wealth to the people of Pakistan. However, no talk is ever heard of prosperity and progress coming to Balochistan through CPEC.

The Reko Diq copper deposit is also located in Balochistan in the Chaghi district. The economic advantages that could have come to the people of Balochistan had

In less than one year, more than 200 coal miners are reported to have lost their lives and 300 more have faced grave injuries.

the copper deposit been exploited, were lost when a dispute arose between the Pakistan Government and TCC, the company that was supposed to mine the copper and the accompanying gold deposits. Eventually, Pakistan lost its legal battle against TCC in the International Court of Justice and is now required to cough up a penalty of some 6 billion dollars. There is now an impression that China has agreed to develop the Reko Diq copper mines. The possibility is that China will make a bid to take over the Reko Diq project and offer to pay the penalty in return for a long-term lease and exclusive ownership rights.

The people of Balochistan have been deprived of other opportunities as well, such as Saindak which is another copper mine site in the same region and was developed much before Reko Diq. The site is not very productive anymore. More industries could have been set up in Hub and Lasbela and more benefits should have accrued to the people of Balochistan from the gas that was discovered at Sui in 1954. The unfortunate part is this gas came to the city of Quetta only in 1983 while it greatly benefited other parts of Pakistan as a cheap and environment-friendly fuel both for domestic and industrial use.

Why the miners of Balochistan are not given attention is because the coal mines in the province will be exhausted one day. When that happens, the coal-mining sector will become a part of history, the owners will find other investment realms – and the workers will either die of disease or continue to live a life of penury. 

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LARKANA



Classroom Disaster

Education is perhaps one area which has been pushed down the priority ladder in Sindh – and left there.

BY MURTAZA TALPUR

Education is the constitutional right of all children from the age of five to 16. In Sindh, everyone is busy in getting their vested interests fulfilled and protecting their reputations while education of children is put on the back-burner.

Sindh has now fallen far behind the world in terms of quality education, as the demand for better schools is growing rapidly while the supply of good schools is just not keeping pace. It seems that neither the government nor the public seem interested. The funds allocated for improvement of education either multiply bank balances of high-ups or are spent paying salaries of teachers who are mostly dysfunctional.

A government school teacher mockingly said, “I have been teaching for decades and have seen education ministers, officers and different provincial government come and go. They make promises to bring quality education but nothing happens.”

There is a government primary school in Andhalo in Union Council Luari Sharif of district Badin, where a single teacher is assigned to 150 students from class 1 to 5. How can this teacher handle 150 students? There are thousands of such schools in Sindh but the government education department does not bother. They also do not have the capacity and skills to make the education system better.

One parent said, “It is better not to send my children to school because there is no teacher and no education. I motivate my children to work with me in farming to earn a livelihood.”

Statistics also give a miserable picture of Sindh’s overall education system.



According to the Pakistan Survey 2017-2018, the male and female literacy rate in Sindh is 70% and 46%, respectively. There are 6 million children in Sindh out of school. There are 9,600 shelter-less schools in the province. It is more than an alarming disclosure that has caught everyone's eye that among 150,000 teachers in the province; only 9% are qualified enough or capable of teaching mathematics or science subjects.

Besides, in 2015, enrollment of class one was 19% and in 2016 and 2018 it remained stagnant at 18% which was less than the previous years. Also, the second and third standard enrollment deteriorated at 18%. The enrollment of fourth standard declined 6 percent from 2015 and 2016 and was 10%. The enrollment from six to tenth standards has remained 6%. Moreover, in 2015, three year old children admitted were 71% and in 2016 and 2018 it was the same.

It is shocking to know that 1.7% of teachers are selected only on Matriculation basis, 11.1% teachers on intermediate

basis and 57.1% teachers on graduation basis. Only 29.3% teachers for their Masters education.

Of the 42,000 public schools in the Sindh province, 39,000 schools are only limited to providing primary-level education.

Students at the secondary level is much higher than primary. Only 78.6% have drinking water facility though it is functional in very few schools. Washrooms is a huge concern as only 45.7% of primary schools have washroom facilities and, because of this, the enrollment ratio of girl students is much smaller. For cognitive, emotional and physical growth, sports play a significant role but in Sindh, 47.1% schools do not have playgrounds and those that have such grounds do not have sports material and physical education teachers.

A proper security system is not provided in any public school in Sindh as 26.2% of these schools do not have boundary walls. More than 23,000 out of 42,383 government schools are also functioning without electricity and only 734 schools have libraries. In the remote areas, school

buildings were built decades ago and have not been repaired. They are decrepit and cement blocks usually fall over students.

The government reportedly allocates billions of rupees each year for education but where the money goes is anybody's guess. In 2019-20, the allocation has been increased from Rs170.832 billion to Rs178.618 billion. On the development side, Rs15.15 billion have been allocated in ADP 2019-20.

The government needs to focus seriously on raising education standards and amenities in Sindh. There is also a need to implement new technology to change conventional modes of teaching and learning. Regular coordination and communication between parents and teachers also needs to be strengthened. **S**

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KARACHI

Fighting World Hunger

The Dawoodi Bohras are committed to abolishing hunger on World Food Day – and everyday.

BY MARYAM SADRIWALA

As a community, the Dawoodi Bohras take food very seriously. It's not just the unique manner in which they relish food, gathered in groups of eight around a thaal. It's not merely the fact that they begin and end their meal with a pinch of salt or that they enjoy dessert first. It's not just their distinctive set of dishes which find their origin in Arabia, India or Yemen which makes their culinary habits stand out. Rather, the reverence and significance they attach to food stems from a deep rooted tradition initiated by their leaders



who take the problem of world hunger very seriously.

The Dawoodi Bohras are perhaps the only community in the world where a community kitchen by the name of Faiz ul Mawaid ul Burhaniyah provides food to 93,410 households worldwide, including 7709 homes in Pakistan alone.

World Food Day is one of the occasions when the community joins the global society at large to play its part in something it truly believes in and which it works towards every single day -- that is, to make zero hunger a reality, reflecting the pledge made by the Food and Agriculture Organization and joining hands with the United Nations to make healthy and sustainable food accessible to everyone.

This year too, on 16th October 2019 and for the rest of the week, the Dawoodi Bohra community kitchens in Karachi, set up a series of camps and food banks which distributed provisions to local charities and the needy.

Community administered schools in the city participated in a series of activities that encouraged a healthy diet, food sharing and brainstormed ideas to attain zero hunger. Badri High School held an activity of persuasive poster-making, brochure-making and pamphlets, exhorting people to share food and lend a hand to the hungry. With project-based learning as their prime pedagogy, students sat in circles like they do around a thaal, sharing their lunch boxes with each other and invited the teachers to sit with them. They also lovingly prepared a plate of food for each peon and maid in the school and offered it to them with respect.

"We want to teach the students that even a single individual can make a difference in this fight to abolish hunger. We want to make them realize that by sharing your plate of food, or giving leftovers to the deserving, or doing something as simple as ordering smaller portions can help feed another mouth," says Sh. Hashim Saifuddin, principal of Badri High School.



Through the year, every community member plays his/her role in putting an end to hunger.

Al Madrasa tus Saifiyah tul Burhaniyah, Haidry campus, one of the 22 branches of a chain of community-led schools spread across the globe, set up a food bank where students collected non-perishable items and distributed them to those in need in the Azam Old Homes and Aaghosh Trust Shelter Home. The students were moved beyond measure when they met children, as young as them, who could not eat till their hearts content. Furthermore, nutritionists were invited to conduct an interactive talk on 'How to make healthy, affordable and sustainable diet for all'.

Like his predecessor, His Holiness the late Dr. Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin, the 53rd Dai al Mutlaq, His Holiness Dr. Syedna Muffadal Saifuddin guides us to feed anyone who may be hungry. When hunger is appeased, a spontaneous prayer arises from the bowels of the one who has been fed.

"It is this prayer that is precious; it is this prayer that alleviates our hardships. Our reward is a believer's prayer," says Fatema who actively participates in making rotis in the community kitchen.

Ramla Shabbir, one of the women overlooking the community kitchen in Shabbirabad, says, "To ensure that hygienic


food is prepared every single day, the kitchen is cleaned in and out with warm and cold water. Provisions meet the food safety standards and a menu committee makes sure that a balanced, healthy, recommended proportion of food, including meat, chicken, pulses and vegetables, as per the season and climate, are prepared through the week."

She reveals that families receive a 'thaali' as per their family member count and when someone is travelling they inform their area kitchen office to discontinue the thaali for their travel period to avoid food wastage.

The Dana (grain) Committee is another organization in which dedicated volunteers

endeavour to painstakingly go and collect leftover food after every event, be it religious or social, and distribute it in an organized manner to the needy in a solicitous way. Even in major events which may result in congregations of 100, 000 in one place, the community has been lauded for achieving zero wastage.

Referring to the recent Moharram congregation which took place in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in September 2019, Ramla mentions how the good leftover food was carefully packed in boxes and given to the needy; leftovers were separated and fed to animals and other waste used to make compost.

Through the year, every community member plays his/her role in putting an end to hunger which is a problem faced by a staggering 820 million people around the world. The community's food initiatives are a micro version of what the FAO wishes to achieve - zero hunger and the accessibility of nutritious sustenance to one and all. 

The writer is co-author of the book 'A History of Dawn' and is actively involved in the field of education. She can be reached at maryamsadriwala@gmail.com

LAHORE

QUEST FOR CREATIVE JUICE

BY SYEDA AREEBA RASHEED

Hosting AdAsia for the second time is no doubt a tremendous achievement for Pakistan. It will be held again in Lahore, from December 3 to 5. It is unfortunate though that advertising in the country has not made much progress over the years. It is the creativity of the advertising message that attracts the consumer's attention to a product and makes it stand out in the competition. A lot of thinking goes behind the making of an advertisement, whatever the medium. This is not happening in Pakistan anymore.

The country has come a long way since 1989 when it hosted AdAsia for the first time. The event is held every two years by the Asian Federation of Advertising Associations (AFAA) and each time the venue is a different Asian country.

Lahore has probably been chosen again because it is a culturally-rich city and will more effectively promote the soft image of Pakistan. This will be the 31st edition of the conference.

The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Imran Khan will open the conference at the historic Hazuri Bagh where an especially commissioned musical play 'Lahore, Lahore Ae' is to be performed. The play is a collaboration by Pakistan's top actors, directors and choreographers. Other cultural activities include a Gala Night at the historical Asif Jha Haveli, a Sufi Night in the Walled City and a farewell closing dinner at the Governor's House, which will be attended by the President of Pakistan, Dr. Arif Alvi. Arif Lohar might also perform at one of the events.

There will be a Macau Night as well where the next host country, Macau, will be introduced for AdAsia 2021.

Sarmad Ali is the Chairman of the organizing committee of AdAsia 2019 while Sohail Kissat is the Vice Chairman. The managing committee has professionals like Ali Mandivala who is the official host for AdAsia'19, Jawwad Humayun (former

Chairman), Fouad Husain (CEO, Group M) and Seema Jaffer (CEO and Creative Director, Bond Advertising).

Asad-ur-Rehman is Chairman of the content and speakers committee and is working with Ali Rez (Regional Creative Director for Middle East & Pakistan, BBDO). There is also a special advisory committee which includes Hameed Haroon (CEO, DAWN Media Group), Javed Jabbar (head of the organising committee of the 1989 edition) and Jamshed Qureshi (founding member of the PAA). Since PAA is organising it, all member advertising agencies are participating along with leaders from the client side, such as EBM, Coca-Cola, Nishat, MCB and others.

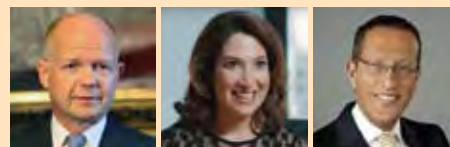
Designer Shahzad Nawaz is the creative consultant for AdAsia'19. He has designed the logo which depicts a peacock rendered in truck art. The inspiration behind the logo was the tradition of eastern calligraphic arts in which animals and birds are drawn with alphabets. The logo features the Pakistani truck art colour palette and represents the diversity and harmony of the Asian continent, celebrating the beauty and spirituality of different Asian cultures. The logo has, for the first time, been made in the national language of the host country - Urdu. It is also a tribute to the AFAA as the 15 feathers of the peacock represent the fifteen members of AFAA, along with their respective country flags.

The theme for this year's AdAsia is 'Celebrasion' – a celebration of advertising and creativity in Asia. This means that the billions of people who live in Asia share common interests, likes and joys and are connected digitally. The theme reflects this spirit. From advertising to creativity and from entrepreneurship and leadership to the changing global dynamics, everything will be Asian at AdAsia 2019.

Some 800 delegates will attend AdAsia 2019. They will come from as diverse countries and cultures as South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia, China, Vietnam, Singapore, Japan, Macau, etc.



The speakers are expected to include Lord William Hague (former UK Secretary of State), Randi Zuckerberg (founder & CEO, Zuckerberg Media), Richard Quest (chief business correspondent, CNN), Peter Draper (former marketing director, Manchester



Lord William Hague Randi Zuckerberg Richard Quest

United), Sir Martin Sorrell (founder, WPP plc), Fernando Machado (global CMO, Burger King), Tom Goodwin (head of innovation, Zenith Media), William Dalrymple (historian and author), Tay Guan Hin (creative change catalyst, APAC Global Advisory), Tasuharu Sasaki (executive creative director, Dentsu Network), Atifa Silk (brand director, Campaign – Asia), Zainab Salbi (humanitarian, author and media host), Musharaf Hai (managing director, L'Oreal Pakistan), Hameed Haroon (CEO, Dawn Media Group), Javed Jabbar (media expert), Seema Kamil (president and CEO, UBL), Taher Khan (founder and chairman, Interflow Communications), Ali Rez (regional CD, Middle East & Pakistan, BBDO Worldwide), Shazia Syed (CEO, Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited), Dr Zeelaf Munir (managing director and CEO, EBM), Waseem Akram (former cricketer, coach and cricket commentator) and Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy (film-maker), etc.

The list of people who will attend AdAsia 2019 is impressive – and they will certainly have a lot to talk about on the subject. Let's hope the event will serve to bring the creative juice in Pakistan's advertising mind back to a boil. **S**

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Tensions in Diversity

Religious tensions exist below the surface in Bangladesh which is predominantly a Muslim country.

BY SAMIA SHAH

Bangladesh emerged on the map of the world in 1971 on the basis of Bengali nationalism that advocates harmony between various sections of the Bengali nation without any regard to their religion, caste and creed. The Bengali nationalists who led the freedom movement were ardent supporters of secularism. The colour of the liberation movement was very much secular in its outlook but the spectre of divide along religious lines started haunting the Bengali nation soon after its creation. A few years after independence, the founder of the nation, Shaikh Mujib ur Rehman, along with most of his family members, was assassinated. This was not the death of the pioneer of the newly-created state but also of the secular values of the country.

Soon after, the ruling elite started exploiting religion for political purposes, removing secularism as a state principle in 1977 and declaring Islam as the state religion in 1988, disregarding the demands of the Hindus to repeal such amendments.

Unfortunately, they were following the footsteps of their tormentors who oppressed them before the independence of the country. The pernicious tentacles of the religious right started gripping the entire society. Jamaat e Islami and other religious outfits seized upon this opportunity, indoctrinating the Bengali youth and propagating religious and sectarian ideas on a massive scale through various educational and other institutions. Now, the past bastion of secularism houses one of the biggest religious gatherings of an ultra-conservative religious preaching group that spreads retrogressive ideas, advocating limited rights for women and religious minorities.

The rising religiosity created immense difficulties for Bengali Hindus, Christians and other religious minorities. The Hindus constituted one third of erstwhile East Pakistan in 1947, which was reduced to



one fifth in 1971 and today this religious minority is one tenth of the population of more than 150 million people. The daily Hindu reported that the Hindus comprised 22 percent in East Pakistan in 1951, 14 percent in 1974 and 8.4 percent in 2011. Hindus complain that they were deliberately under-numbered.

Some ascribe this reduction to the trend among the Bengali Hindus who, they assert, left the country for greener pastures or shifted to Indian Bengal to get better marriage matches for their daughters. But critics believe the reality is much bitter and sad. The discrimination against the minority always existed at some level but the tension between Muslim and Hindu extremist over the issue of the Babri Mosque further fueled the anti-Hindu feelings. Fanatical bands seized upon this opportunity by attacking Hindu homes, businesses and temples. The book by feminist author Taslima Nasrin in the 1990s further infuriated the radical elements who used religion for political purposes.

The rising religiosity not only provided an opportunity to religious political parties to exploit religion but it also prompted the Bengali veterans of the Afghan war to form various militant groups like the Harkat-ul Jihad al-Islami Bangladesh and Jamiat e Mujahideen Bangladesh and their splinter


groups that included secularists and minorities among its targets. The remnants of these groups even established contacts with Al Qaeda and ISIS setting, up their branches in the secular state.

The 1990s is also remembered as a decade of rising religious tension. In the aftermath of Babri Mosque's demolition, the country's Hindus faced the brunt with fanatical mobs attacking Hindu properties, businesses and religious worshipping places. Taslima Nasrin has chronicled these incidents in her famous book *Lajja*. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 further fueled militancy which in some ways also affected the security of minorities in the country but the victory of Shaikh Hasina Wajid and the subsequent war crimes tribunal acted as a catalyst. The treatment of Rohingya Muslims also strengthened the narrative of radical elements who vented their anger against various sections of Bengali society, including the minorities. In 2013, the goons of Jamaat e Islami destroyed 1500 houses of the Hindus in 20 districts besides vandalizing 50 temples. Attacks on Christians, Ahmedis, Buddhists and other religious minorities were also reported in the last ten years.

It is not only the JI that is accused of attacking minorities; in some cases local

Ethnic and religious minorities are the most persecuted and oppressed people in Bangladesh.

leaders of the Awami League have also been accused of orchestrating such assaults. According to the International Religion Freedom Report 2018 of the US government, in one attack on the Ahmedis in 2016, 80 armed members of the Muslim community in Jamalpur District attacked members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community at an Ahmadiyya mosque, injuring 22 Ahmadis. The report also talked about the condition of the 70 Santal Christian families who were victims of attacks, arson and gunshot wounds allegedly involving local authorities and law enforcement agencies in 2016.

The same report also gives details of the discrimination that minorities face in property matters. It claims that the Hindus had filed thousands of property restitution cases but the handover of these properties turned out to be extremely slow. Hindus and other minorities complain about land confiscation. Community leader, advocate Rana Dasgupta blamed the Vested Property Act as the root of the land confiscation epidemic. He claims five million Hindus - almost 40 percent of Hindu households in Bangladesh - lost 2.6 million acres of land since independence. Around 10 million Hindus have already left Bangladesh since 1964, meaning some 632 Hindu people on average have been forced to leave the country every day due to law-induced discrimination. The National Human Rights Commission of the country has aptly summarized the state of minorities in its 2017 report which said, " Ethnic and religious minorities are the most persecuted and oppressed people in Bangladesh. The minorities have been consistently denied their rights and evicted from their own land." 

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SWAT



A Lop-sided Approach

The West pounced upon the shooting of a schoolgirl in Swat simply to support its anti-terrorism narrative. In the process, they went a little too far in glorifying just one girl while scores of others also suffered but were never recognized.

BY MUHAMMAD ATIF ILYAS

Carl Jung, the Swedish psychoanalyst, and founder of analytical psychology states that 'a complex can be imagined as a knot of unconscious feelings, memories and perceptions organized around a common theme such as power or status'. This common theme varies from situation to situation and can be applied to multiple developments across the world. In the same vein, this piece will look to argue that the idea of Malala serves to satisfy complexes on two fronts. One is the Western front and the other is the Pakistan front. Together, I call it the Malala complex.

Let's get two things very clear right from the outset. Firstly, not all Pakistanis hate Malala. In fact, according to Pew Survey in 2014, 30 percent of respondents gave favourable views about Malala and only 20 percent dismissed her as a legitimate hero. Secondly, as Asad Hashim states, hatred is rarely stupid as it is informed by ideology and politics and in, the process, the object of hatred becomes irrelevant. In fact, the pertinent question becomes 'Why do a section of Pakistanis hate Malala?'

The answer to this question can be posited on two ingrained complexes which are inherently connected; lack of social mobility and innocent victimization. Talking about social mobility, a 2015 study by Oxfam and Lahore University of Management Sciences states that '40 percent of the Pakistani children in the lowest economic quintile are expected to remain there for the rest of their lives. Therefore, in the face of social stagnancy, when the masses saw Malala escalating on the social ladder so rapidly, and that too without any visible reason or career, suspicions started to stew and the broth was spoiled with rotten ingredients like jealousy and conspiracy theories. The adversaries of Malala often come up with stale arguments like 'Why only Malala?' that reek of jealousy, skepticism or may be sheer helplessness but desperation and misery leads to damning measures.

Talking about the second complex, it is understandable that when the masses neither have the agency nor the resources to change their conditions, they start dwelling on ideas like innocent victimization and conspiracy theories that take the matter out of their own hands, therefore relieving them of any responsibility and making them feel better about themselves. Therefore, when Pakistani masses, the champions of conspiracy theories, the believers of a foreign hand, saw the United States and the West massively glorifying a girl from Swat and they failed to pinpoint the rational reasons behind it, they resorted to their sole consoler, 'conspiracy theories'.

If we think about it, this whole exercise is not about Malala, it is about the distrust Pakistanis have about the West because they believe that the West is always selfish and has its own agenda behind each of its actions. Although, Pakistanis might cry foul to the referee more often than required and they go




to unreasonable extents to state that the Malala shooting was staged, but the truth of the matter is that at least in case of Malala, US actions can be reasonably argued to be biased and selfish.

Even after flooding around \$2.4 trillion dollars on the supposed 'war on terror', the US has only heard labels like 'terrorists in uniform' internationally, as their backers have slimmed over the years, and they are absolutely eager for some vindication. Therefore, it must not be surprising that the Malala story corroborated the United States' vindication complex, as the perpetrators were the Taliban. In the process, the US and the West went too far and awarded her with the Nobel Peace Prize and further validated what the Pakistanis had already sketched out. This glorification was never about the girl who survived a barbaric terrorist attack; it was about lionizing thousands of Western soldiers fighting against a force that the West labelled as evil.

American hypocrisy further came to the fore when Nabeela Rehman, a mere nine years old Afghani girl, devastated by American drones, came to the US to present her case with her father, and at the congressional hearing, only five out of

430 representatives appeared. Therefore, it became crystal clear that the Americans were not glorifying those who survived terrorist attacks in general. In fact they only glorified people who were oppressed by those who they thought were terrorists and who furthered their own agenda.

It is rather sad that both fronts have milked the Malala story left, right and center, and in their reluctance to identify their own complexes, they have forgotten a simple fact that behind this 'story', exists a girl of minor age, who raised her voice for women education in a hostile environment and who battled through a horrendous act of violence.

You can bash the idea of Malala all you want, but you cannot bash Malala the girl, who is simply trying to live her life normally and work for the good of mankind under the burdening canopy of self-serving agendas and high powered complexes. 

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Another Burger Joint

Famous for offering America's number one fries, Boardwalk opened its doors in Pakistan with the launch of an outlet at the Jinnah Super, College Road, F-7 Markaz in the heart of Islamabad.

Boardwalk came into being when in the summer of 1980 brothers Dave and Fran DiFerdinando were strolling down the world-famous Boardwalk in Ocean City, Maryland. They, like many other vacationers, had been there as children and would come every summer to enjoy the rides and the legendary fries. They had an idea to make those famous fries accessible to everyone around the country, not just those at the beach.

They opened the first Boardwalk Fries in White Marsh Mall, a shopping mall in White Marsh Maryland, in 1981 and by 1987 they had franchises from coast to coast. These fries were cooked many times with a special recipe, lightly salted, served piping hot and made to order. As time passed, customers began asking for a burger to go with their famous Boardwalk Fries. This could be a fresh product - a never frozen, hand-made burger that was prepared every morning and made to order. Hence, the Boardwalk Fries Burgers Shakes was born.

The new eatery in Islamabad has a tender, inviting roadside view that would be perfect to put you in an urban vacation frame of mind. The sights, sounds and especially the taste from the world's delicious Boardwalk Fries, juicy and made-to-order burgers and creamy shakes, have your hunger covered. **S**



J. Expands

J. (J Dot) has opened a new and bigger store at Karachi's Clifton Dolmen Mall.

With 4,200 sq. feet, the store stocks clothing for men, women and kids as well as accessories, fragrances and cosmetics.

The original J. store was established in 2002 with the unique philosophy of reviv-

ing Pakistan's cultural heritage. The store chain has expanded to more than 100 outlets nationwide, plus 20 outlets in the UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UAE and Qatar.

How the chain portrays a positive cultural image of Pakistan is not clear. **S**



BOOK

INTERPRETATION OF JIHAD IN SOUTH ASIA

Understanding Jihad

BY PROFESSOR ARSHAD SYED KARIM

In contemporary world politics, the changing meanings of jihad and its interpretation through the Quran and Sunnah have almost deviated from the actual meaning and are narrated based on the own understanding of the persons dealing with the sensitive subject. This is how narrative evolves in response to historical, social and other pressures and how it is used to promote jihad. The constant interpretation of different scholars on the subject has ultimately established the prescribed narratives which are used appropriately at the time of necessity and for political gains. The concept of jihad is used in South Asia to evolve hostility through misunderstanding of the concept.

The book *Interpretation of Jihad in South Asia* by Tariq Rehman is based on lines that are within the discipline of the history of ideas. It has a connection with intellectual framework, impact of modernity and interaction of political forces with cultural trends.

The book is in fact a very thought-provoking endeavour on jihad and the way it has affected society and militant movements, using this idiom in the contemporary context and answers raised by different scholars at different times either in history or in a contemporary scenario such as internal criticism in the Islamic tradition.

According to the book, modernity is a way of thinking and a belief in progress. The new and changing dynamics of the society, instead of only modernity, take a holistic approach and must use multiple tools to replace the hegemonic version of modernity conceived many years back. Modernity is secularized in the West but in South Asia, it is spiritual. The contemporary construction of modernity is not related to the classical teaching of Islam. It is actually a reality that pertains to modernity with enlightenment, naturalism and egalitarianism. The historical interpretation of Shah Waliullah and his son Shah Abdul Aziz have great influence on Indian Islam and Muslims, divided between

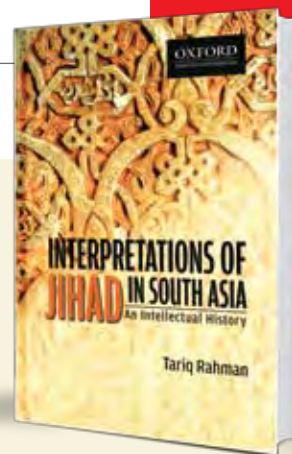
Dar ul Herb and Dar ul Islam for more than a century.

Jihad is a part of doing good and stopping evil. It is the desire to live in peace and harmony with the world. The modern day interpretation of jihad is not in consonance with the classical interpretation that promotes militancy.

In Pakistani society, the narrative of jihad is penetrated by social service under social and financial pressures. The organizations involved in militant activism use this huge gap of haves and havenots and their disconnection with the true guideline and interpretation of religion.

The author further discusses the history of jihad or how it is traced in Middle Eastern movements in modern times. Francois Bugat divided the Arab response to colonialism in three phases in which he said Arabs always resent Westerners and rescinded Westernization. Their people always criticized them for following Western norms and culture and getting influenced by them. The author also mentions how Muslims were affected around the world through ethnic cleansing and facing conflicts and issues in the name of jihad. Under these circumstances, a group emerged called the neo-Khawarij.

The author also discusses Muhammad-ul-Banna, who is a political theorist and emphasizes that Muslims are the ones who have been chosen for jihad. He also emphasizes on that kind of jihad that is permitted by the state or declared by the state. He points out the importance of jihad in the particular sense when non-Muslims become the custodians of the land of Muslims. They thus acquire supremacy and hegemony. Then the Muslims have a responsibility to declare jihad against them. After the death of al-Banna Sayyid Qutb, Muhammad-ul-Banna continued his teachings. He believed that people are not free and they live in ignorance and in a kind of system that has to be abolished. He said that people who are not living under the teachings of Islam and are not obeying Islamic rules are facing difficulties in their




Book Title : Interpretation of Jihad in South Asia: An Intellectual History
Author : Tariq Rehman
Publisher : Oxford University Press (OUP)
Pages : 323 pp.
ISBN : 9780190701833

lives. He mentions how Muslims were brutally killed by the Mongol conqueror Halaku Khan. Qutb's work was inspired by Maulana Moudoodi's modern jihadiyya doctrine.

In the 1970s, the political situation in Egypt changed. The youth were frustrated as they had no jobs and there were no improvement in the infrastructure. When Anwar Sadat recognized Israel the situation worsened and the people who were radical minded became more active. Sadat Abd-al-Salon Foroj murdered Anwar Sadat. He advocated the idea of extremism in the name of jihad. Foroj quoted the Hadith and claimed that this was all in the Shari'ah.

Foroj only accepted those traditions that emphasized aggressive warfare while dismissing those that defined jihad as an endeavour leading to spiritual or moral excellence as the greatest jihad is basically self-improvement.

The author also discusses suicide attacks and how they are responsible for the deaths of many innocent people. The countries that have suffered the most are Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Palestine, etc. Some important radicals are Abdullah Yousuf Azam, Osama bin Laden and Ayman-al-Zawahiri. Their radical views reached Pakistan, especially when the Afghan War began and Arab fighters came to Pakistan and transferred their views.

To sum up, jihad does not exist in its original form and is thus made to look negative. The real purpose of jihad is not visible in the contemporary world anymore. In this backdrop, *Interpretation of Jihad in South Asia* is a must read. 

BOOK

REVISITING ISLAM: THE REFORMIST THOUGHT OF WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

Reformation Horizons

BY KHALID HUSSAIN MIR

Revival and reform in Islam represents a continuation of the prophetic mission to implement the religion and to perceive the worsening conditions of the Muslims. Reform and revival have both internal and external dimensions and both should be approached simultaneously. Revival of the Muslim Ummah is seen as a total way towards the establishment of a new society based on the laws of Shariah, while renewal is a mandatory tool for the Islamization of all aspects of life. Islamic revival doesn't mean compromising with the un-Islamic, nor does it mean preparing for new blends of Islam and non-Islam, but it means and demands cleaning Islam from all the un-Islamic elements or presenting them in their original pure form.

In English literature significant writing has been done by many Muslims scholars over the past few decades on the theme of revival and reform both in the subcontinent as well as in other parts of the world. Dr. Rafique Anjum (b. 1962), a well-known linguist, poet and a doctor of medicine and philosophy, besides being a multifaceted litterateur, has earned recognition for his creative, analytical and critical literary works.

He is working at present as an assistant professor of Islamic Studies and coordinator of the Centre for Research in Gojri, Pahari and Kashmiri languages (CRGPKL) in the school of Islamic Studies & Languages at BGSB University, Rajouri. Dr. Anjum has extensively written on the fields of his expertise. Some of his significant works include: *Sunehri Tareekh* (2000); *Gojri-English Dictionary* (2004); *Anjum Shanasi* (Biography, 2007); *Gojri-Urdu Dictionary* (2008); *Gojri-Kashmiri Dictionary* (2018); *Zanbeel on Poetry* (2018).

The book under review, which is titled "Revisiting Islam: The Reformist Thought of Wahiduddin Khan" is divided into seven main chapters. It begins with a foreword by Prof. Akhtar ul Wasey, followed by an introduction which is very informative as it provides the gist

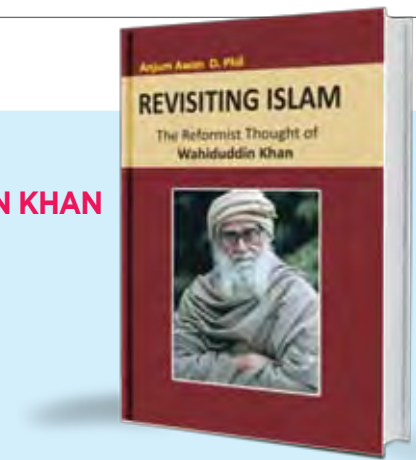
of reformatory thought and admirable scholarship of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan towards various Islamic sciences. The book attempts to classify and summarize the religious thought of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, expressed in his over 200 works on the different aspects and themes of Islam.

The author has made an effort to present an overview of the history of revival and reform in Islam and offers an account of the earlier revivalists with their response to modern challenges and changes. While highlighting the challenges faced by the Muslim world, the author quotes Shireen T. Hunter who has said that "Historically, reform movements in the Islamic World have emerged in response to two challenges or in combination of them such as external threats especially foreign conquest and departure from moral and religious observance, often followed by a period of overall decline of Muslim societies".

According to the author, "The revelation of the Quran, as embodied in the figure of the Prophet (PBUH), intervened to mend, resolve, and reform that disorder which was prevalent in the society" and "the concept of reform in Islam therefore means that reform in the sense of application of Islam in society, revitalizing the Muslim community and making an endeavour to return to the path of Islam afresh".

Under "Islamic Thought in India in Early 20th Century", the author has shown the declining background scenario of Islamic political and intellectual thought of the early 20th century and the approaches and efforts of Indian Muslim scholars like Sir Syed, Mohammad Iqbal, Shibli Nomani, Maulana Maududi, Ali Miyan Nadwi, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan and others who worked to regenerate the intellectual hegemony of Muslims in their times.

The author has also presented a brief account of some prominent contemporaries of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan like Badiuzzaman Nursi, Maulana Maududi, Ali Miyan Nadwi, Fazlur Rahman and others. In "Contribution of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan to The Modern Islamic Thought" there is a detailed introduction of some of his selected works related to



Title: Revisiting Islam: The Reformist Thought of Wahiduddin Khan
 Author : Dr Muhammad Rafique Anjum Awan
 Publisher : Adam Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi
 ISBN : 978-81-7435-772-4

contemporary Islamic thought. On his Peace Theory, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan has been awarded with a number of prestigious awards around the world including Demiurgus Peace International Award, National Amity Award and Padma Bhushan.

There always remain possibilities of contradiction among scholars and everyone attempts to make clarify his arguments and notions. In "Critique of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan", the author deals with criticism of the Maulana's works made by different scholars around the globe. The author highlights the views of the Maulana's opponents taking into account the counter-arguments of the Maulana and making a fair assessment of both the viewpoints.

According to the author "Maulana Wahiduddin Khan has divided the Muslim response movements to western dominance in four categories: independence movements, conservative movements, revivalist movements and reconstruction or positivism" (p. 201). The author further says that "Maulana Wahiduddin Khan analyzed the causes of Muslim decline and could very well visualize the future situation" (p. 279) and "He has made monumental efforts to resolve a universal and profound dilemma-'the conflict between science and religion'." (p.281)

Instead of being rigid, Dr. Rafique Anjum has adopted a balanced approach and has realistically presented the Maulana's thoughts as reflected in his works. This makes his research worthy and deserves appreciation. One hopes the work will be beneficial and serve as an updated source of information for scholars. [S](#)

FILM

IT ENDS

A Haunting Sequel

BY SYEDA AREEBA RASHEED

Twenty-seven years ago, seven adolescents who called themselves the 'Losers Club' escaped the villainous grasp and defeated the murderous clown Pennywise (Bill Skarsgård). The Losers Club made Pennywise go back to whatever parallel dimension it came from. In the last moments of the first 'IT', they made an oath to return if the evil resurfaced. 'If it ever comes back, we'll come back too'. The moment reaffirmed their friendship and the bond they shared over the summer. Much like the first instalment of the film, 'IT: Chapter Two' reminds us of how good Stephen King is at whatever he does.

The film starts with a quick recap of the summer of 1989, with voiceover from the adult Mike (Isaiah Mustafa) who says, 'Sometimes, we are what we wish we could forget.' Of all, only Mike remains in his hometown working at a library where he searches the monster's origins and finds ways to defeat it, should it ever return. Now people are again disappearing in Derry, Maine and this assures Mike that Pennywise is back. He calls the rest of the Losers Club to come back and face the otherworldly creature, as they had done in their childhood.

The Losers Club reconnects at a Chinese restaurant and recalls the memories of the past that still haunt them. Bill (James McAvoy) is now a novelist whose latest book is being adapted into a film, Richie (Bill Hader) is a hard-drinking stand-up comic who's as bitter as ever, Eddie (James Ransone) remains a neurotic hypochondriac, Stanley (Andy Bean) lives in terror of his childhood nightmare returning, Beverly (Jessica Chastain) who had a controlling and abusive relationship with her father, now has an equally toxic husband while Ben (Jay Ryan) is a wealthy architect who still has a crush on Beverly even after three decades. But before uniting them, the film initially shows a brutal and bone-crunching homophobic attack that will leave you shaking



and this goes on throughout the film.

Director Andy Muschietti and screenwriter Gary Dauberman have set great intros for the cast. Muschietti especially makes some amazing transitions that are smooth and inventive as every person depicts their character from the first instalment of the film in a remarkable way, making 'IT Ends' a masterpiece. Bill Hader's performance, in particular, is the highlight as he shows his perfect comic timing as well as his deep dramatic chops. Pennywise, however, remains the same with his oblong skull, fearful eyes and shark-like grin. Skarsgård as Pennywise very cleverly manages to be both terrifying and hilarious. He is the iconic villain that will haunt people for ages. Credit also goes to the hair and wardrobe team for an uncanny job in matching the kids' earlier look with the grown-ups.

There are some spectacular scenes in the film like a number of ominous red balloons floating across a New England summer sky and the startlingly graphic nature of their execution. There is a scene where the group individually confronts their inner fears and insecurities whilst conveying both their weaknesses and the power that Pennywise still maintains over them in adulthood. This part of the film particularly devolves into a simple jump-scare fest.

The film lacks details as to how Derry has been in the absence of the Losers Club. Were

there any murders? Were children disappearing during the time? Do the sewers smell only of roses? Depriving us of answers, Muschietti opens the film with an attack which makes us question, was it the sheer evil of this attack that brought Pennywise back or did the clown somehow cause the incident?

Muschietti recognizes the value of closure and closure is what 'IT' is all about: You start something as kids and then life happens. It's as if he's daring you to come back and see how much worse it can get. Either way, director Andy Muschietti has gone for it with this sequel to his 2017 smashing hit 'IT', taking big swings and giving both muscularity and elegance to his craft.

'IT' explores childhood fears with the first film but the sequel steps things up as there are now years of trauma for Pennywise to poke at. From unsettling background spine-chillers to full-force fright mare, the creature design is extremely inventive with the sole purpose of scaring you. There is more meanness to his tapping into the Losers' troubles and their nightmarish excursions feel much more relevant to the story. Pennywise preys on these personal demons in ways that are much more elemental than before. He knows what scares these characters, even as adults. It's the stuff of nightmares, even when you're wide awake in broad daylight. He is much more violent, more overtly involved in it all. [S](#)

FILM

RAMBO: LAST BLOOD

Revenge Saga

BY FAIZAN USMANI

'M'y name is Rambo, John Rambo, the cockroach killer.' The famous line belongs to Afzal Khan, a Pakistani TV and film actor whose first appearance in a PTV drama serial 'Guest House' in 1992 made him famous at a stroke, chiefly by virtue of his resemblance to Sylvester Stallone, an American actor who happens to be the protagonist of the 'Rambo' film series.

In the action genre, Rambo is recognized as one of the most influential film sequels of all time. Particularly for those who were born or raised during the 1980s and 1990s, Rambo happens to be the most entertaining name that is remembered for its action-packed performance, full of adventure, aggression, suspense, chases, escapes and, of course, ruthless violence. Released in 1982, 'First Blood,' was the first film of the Rambo franchise and until now four more instalments of the series have been released.

A fictional character, John James Rambo is an American Vietnam War veteran plagued by post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He first appeared in the 1972 novel 'First Blood' by David Morrell and the novel was turned into a blockbuster film in 1982 by Ted Kotcheff.

The latest and probably the last sequel, 'Rambo: Last Blood' has recently been released. It is directed by Adrian Grunberg and co-written by Matthew Cirulnick and Sylvester Stallone. The film features Paz Vega (as Carmen Delgado), Sergio Peris-Mencheta (as Hugo Martinez), Adriana Barraza (as Maria Beltran), Yvette Monreal (as Gabriela), Pascacio Lopez (as El Flaco), Joaquín Cosío (as Don Manuel) and Oscar Jaenada (as Victor Martinez).

In this latest film, Rambo embarks on a new mission when he travels from Arizona to Mexico to rescue and bring his adopted daughter Gabriela home.

Some eleven years after his Burma mission, as the story goes, John Rambo is living a peaceful life in his father's horse ranch in Bowie,

a remote town in Arizona. He is living with Maria Beltran, his old friend, and Gabriela, Beltran's granddaughter. One day, Gizelle, a friend of Gabriela, informs Gabriela that her biological father, Miguel, is alive and is living a solitary life somewhere in Mexico.

Gabriela and Gizelle decide to go to Mexico to meet Miguel and they do it quite secretly, despite the fact that both Rambo and Maria are not in favour of this idea as it could land them in some unforeseen trouble. However, Gabriele is desperate to meet her father to know the reason why he left her and her mother in the lurch nearly a couple of decades earlier. Gizelle and Gabriela go to Mexico and successfully find Miguel, who is miserably ill and seems to be living his last days in a cluttered apartment. Miguel says he always wanted to lead a lone life and left Gabriele and her mother because he had no interest in living with them.

Feeling sad and dejected, Gabriela goes to a local pub with Gizelle to have some relief from the painful shock. The story takes a sudden twist when the enforcers of a Mexican cartel kidnap a drugged Gabriela and take her to some unknown place.

When Rambo is informed about Gabriela's kidnapping, he immediately leaves for Mexico and interrogates Gizelle and Miguel about Gabriela's possible whereabouts. Led by Gizelle, Rambo visits the pub where from Gabriela was kidnapped and comes across El Flaco, a middle-aged man who last spoke to Gabriela. After a bitter exchange of words and nasty blows, he leads Rambo to Gabriela's location, but Carmen Delgado, a mysterious woman at the pub, follows Rambo throughout the hunt.

Before reaching Gabriela, Rambo confronts the armed members of the Mexican cartel, led by Victor Martinez and Hugo Martinez. They beat Rambo to the point of unconsciousness, take his driving licence as well as a photo of Gabriela. Victor recognizes her and decides to mistreat her further to inflict more pain on Rambo.

Carmen Delgado takes Rambo to her



home and takes care of him until he recovers from the injuries. To him, she introduces herself as an independent journalist whose sister was kidnapped and murdered a few years earlier, allegedly by the Martinez brothers. After his recovery, Rambo re-starts his mission by raiding a brothel, where he finds a drugged Gabriela lying in a pitiable state. He takes her home back to Bowie, but she dies in the middle of the journey from the forced overdose administered by the cartel.

Bent out of shape, Rambo sends Maria away from the home, rigs the horse ranch with booby-traps, and returns to Mexico to find Victor Martinez with the help of Carmen. She initially shows some hesitation, but finally agrees to help out Rambo who seems to be on a killing spree to avenge Gabriela's death.

Raiding Victor's home, Rambo decapitates his head and kills his several bodyguards in one go. Hugo Martinez attacks Rambo's ranch to avenge his brother's brutal murder, but he, along with his group of hit-man, ends up falling victim to the rigged traps. The film's happy ending is too scary to viewers when Rambo mutilates Hugo, ripping his heart out.

The gory revenge saga comes to an end when Rambo, in his trademark style, saddles up his horse, raises his cowboy hat and rides off into the sunset, while promising himself to continue fighting as for him it is the only way that helps him keep the memories of his loved ones alive.

As is rightly suggested by the film's title, 'Rambo: Last Blood' looks to be and must be the last blood spree by Sylvester Stallone in his 47-year long acting career being Rambo. **S**



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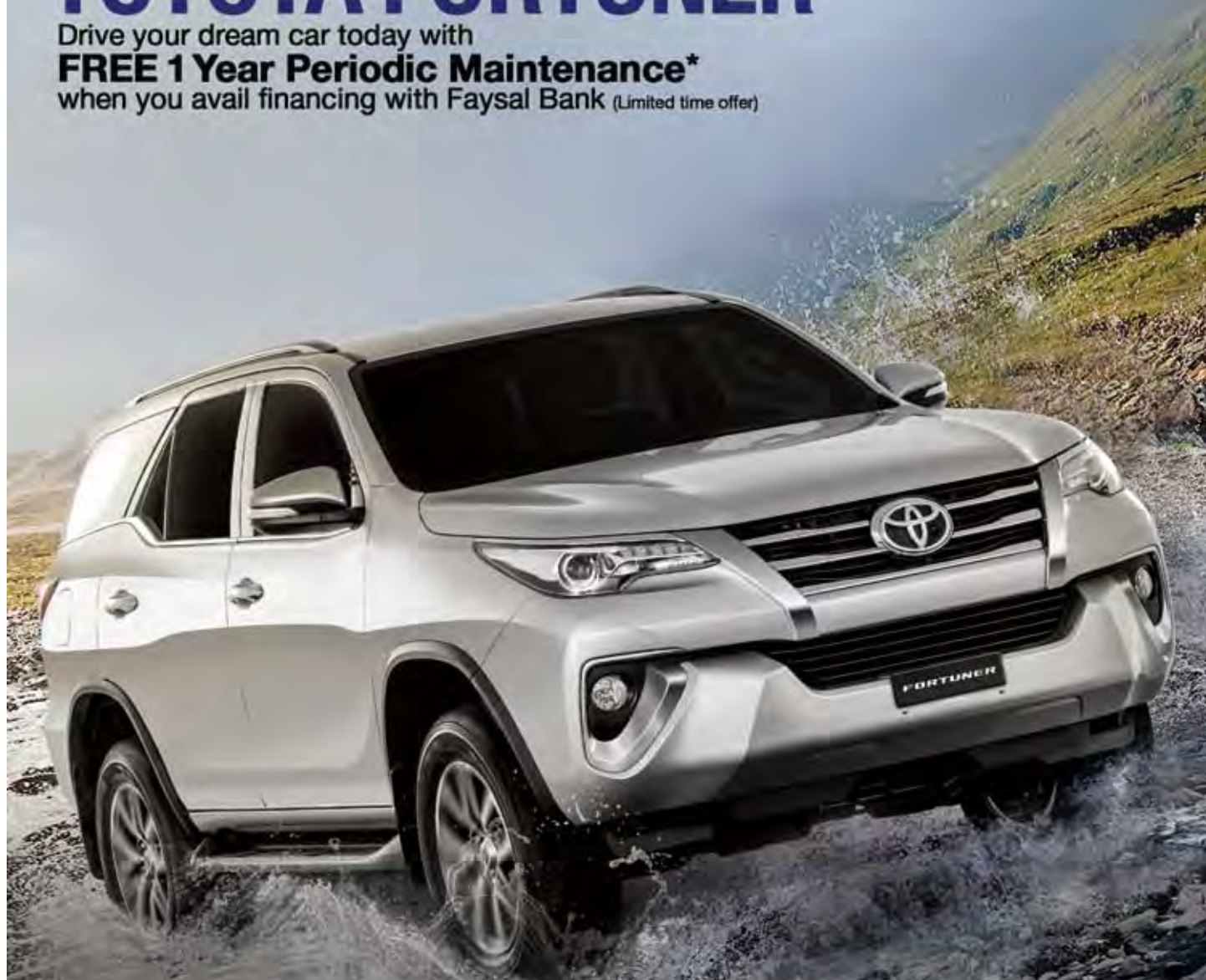


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