

SOUTH ASIA

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INSIDE:

ISAS Interview
with India's External
Affairs Minister



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Prime Ministers of Pakistan and India – Mr Nawaz Sharif (left) and Dr Manmohan Singh – met in New York on 29 September 2013 on the occasion of the annual session of United Nations General Assembly.

Photo: Courtesy MEAphotogallery (India's Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi). Photo by SHAHBAZ KHAN, Press Trust of India.

Editorial Information

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From the DIRECTOR'S DESK



Dear Readers

This is the season of elections in South Asia. At the beginning of November 2013, India is bracing for a period of political fireworks and serious debate ahead of a general election. Pakistan, long used to military dominance and praetorian politics, is now busy in trying to soft-land as a born-again democracy. In Bangladesh, it is apparent that an existential battle for democracy is being waged in an atmosphere of heated passions. Sri Lanka, still seeking to leave the worse of its long civil war behind, does have an opportunity to begin a challenging process of putting the house in order. Afghanistan, caught in the contentions of a long countdown for the withdrawal of US troops and a coming presidential election, faces an unpredictable future.

As an autonomous research centre in Singapore, a city-state with close historical and contemporary links to South Asia, the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) is keenly observing these developments. Research on some of these aspects is apace at ISAS now.

With this preamble, I draw your attention to the scope of the articles in the FOCUS section of this issue of *South Asia* (December 2013). A senior researcher at ISAS looks at the current macroeconomic imbalances in India, while another senior scholar analyses Pakistan's economic prospects in the specific context of the return of Mr Nawaz Sharif as the country's Prime

Minister for an unprecedented third term. As for Bangladesh, its undoubted success in meeting some of the key Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations is traced by an enthusiastic junior researcher. The emergence and evolution of what may be described as a "neo-liberal generation" in India is the theme of another article. Interestingly, ISAS had recently organised an interactive session with a group of young parliamentarians from India. In this issue, another young ISAS researcher has tried to keep alive the chorus against corruption that he constantly heard during his recent visit to Bihar.

The topical theme of Islam and politics in Pakistan, with particular reference to the spiritual and popular versions of this religion is briefly but intimately explored by a sociologist who is also a senior ISAS scholar. In such a social context of the interplay of religion and politics, the prospects of a new Pakistan have brightened following the rise of an indomitable teenager who is known to the world by the name of Malala. Her face is recognised by millions thanks to the video-culture of today's social media. So, *South Asia* has chosen to profile her in words and not images. The result is a deeply empathetic portrait, done by our principal research fellow. Turning to Pakistan's neighbour, Afghanistan, we have an article with a somewhat intriguing, if not provocative, headline of A Neo-Taliban Triumph? And, on a different note, Sri Lanka's new

opportunity in ethnic politics, arising out of a provincial election, is portrayed as a power-sharing challenge.

Although India is gearing up for its next national elections, there has been no pause at all in its foreign policy forays. An interview with India's External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid, featured in this issue, covers some ground in this regard.

For some time now, ISAS has been leveraging its location to study India's links with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. We have a report on a workshop that ISAS and its partners organised in Jakarta in August on the theme of India-ASEAN connectivity.

In the context of the second South Asian Diaspora Convention (SADC-2013), an ISAS flagship event to be held in Singapore on 21 and 22 November, we have an article on a newly-emerging focus area: the rise of Diaspora middle class and its synergy with the emerging economies of the countries of Diaspora-origin.

I hope you will enjoy reading this issue and wish you all the best in the year ahead.

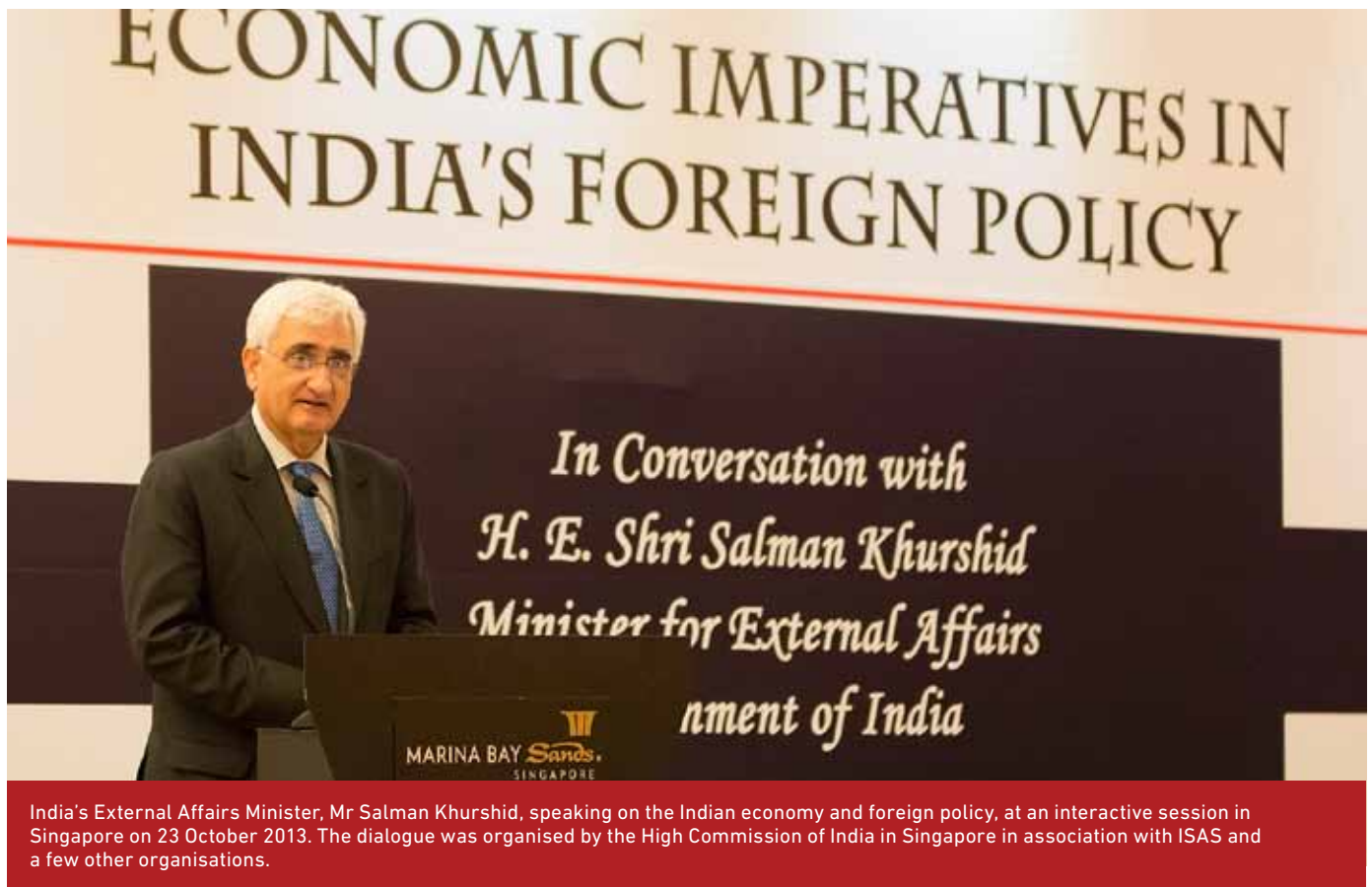
TAN TAI YONG

INDIA'S ECONOMY

Riding the CRISIS WAVES

AMITENDU PALIT

The Indian economy is passing through one of the most difficult phases in recent years. Questions are being raised over the country's ability to correct macroeconomic imbalances and restore confidence in its economic fundamentals for drawing back investors.



India's External Affairs Minister, Mr Salman Khurshid, speaking on the Indian economy and foreign policy, at an interactive session in Singapore on 23 October 2013. The dialogue was organised by the High Commission of India in Singapore in association with ISAS and a few other organisations.

The current phase of economic downturn can be explained by both cyclical and systemic factors. The cyclical aspect can be gauged from the overall economic depression across the world. Global economic recovery prospects continue to remain weak, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) downgrading global growth for 2013 to 3.1 per cent from 3.3 per cent predicted earlier. A noticeable aspect of the current global growth is the slowdown expected in several major emerging markets of the world including China, India and Brazil. Along with the overall weak economic

conditions created by a depressed world economy, emerging markets like India have suffered from excessive financial volatility in recent months.

The volatility has been induced by investor expectations of the US withdrawing from the quantitative easing (QE) programme given the 'green shoots' of recovery noticed in the US economy. The expectations have led to large outflows of funds from capital markets of emerging economies. India has been one of the worst-hit. The biggest casualty of the pull-out of funds has been the sharp

depreciation in the value of the Indian rupee. The rupee has plunged to new lows against the US dollar and other major global currencies. The volatility has occasionally been rather disturbing, forcing the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to step in for protecting the rupee.

Cyclical downturns and exogenous shocks wear out over time. Watchers of the Indian economy would not have been particularly worried if India's current problems had been entirely on account of cyclical factors. They are worried over

the systemic imbalances that have built up in the economy over time. These particularly refer to the high current account and fiscal deficits.

The current account deficit, reflecting the country's reliance on imports, has shot up to as much as 6.5 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Imports have been mounting due to high absorption of crude oil and gold imports. While the former are unavoidable, the latter have been stressful for the current account, forcing the government to come out with gold import curbs. The current account deficit, though, is not expected to improve substantially unless exports recover. While India has been managing the current account deficit through surplus capital inflows, reversal of the latter has led to a sharp drop in dollar holdings in the Indian economy, leading to decline in the value of the rupee.

The second worrying imbalance is the fiscal deficit. Projected to be brought down to below five per cent of GDP in the Union budget, doubts have arisen over whether it can indeed be curbed, given the government's commitment to funding an ambitious food security programme and prospects of low revenues in a year

of industrial slowdown. Fiscal disciplining, which had gone haywire after the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008, is a top priority for the country now.

Much hopes rest on the recommendations of the Finance Commission, which is examining the fiscal transfers between the Centre and the states. While these recommendations will try to address a long-term issue, the immediate priority is improving Central Government finances. The efforts in this regard have to be on rationalising subsidies for reducing expenditure. Indeed, fiscal profligacy of the Indian economy has been a sore point with the credit-rating agencies. Inability to reflect better fiscal marksmanship might invite unwarranted downgrades of India's credit ratings.

Overall prospects for the economy are not particularly bright, given the weakness of the fundamentals. GDP growth in the current year is expected to be around five per cent. With elections to various Indian states and the Parliament drawing close (as this is written), the government's focus will be on keeping prices in check. Retail price inflation has not moderated by as much as

it was expected to, given the downturn in the economy, and draws attention to the perennial problem of supply shortages.

Controlling retail inflation will not be easy, as prudent fiscal management demands a reduction of subsidies and an increase in some retail prices, particularly petroleum products. These have been happening in a synchronised fashion over quite a few months now and might increase as the economy heads into the last quarter of the financial year. However, the onset of the festival season, a good harvest and the upcoming elections are expected to impart fresh demand and generate new momentum for economic activity. If more exogenous shocks do not manifest over the next few months, then macroeconomic imbalances should be corrected at least partially, and the economy can hopefully move on to a relatively higher growth path from the next financial year.

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Expressing views on 'What is wrong with the Indian Economy?' at an ISAS Panel Discussion in Singapore on 16 August 2013: ISAS Head (Partnerships & Programmes) and Senior Research Fellow, Dr Amitendu Palit, (author of this article) is flanked by India Development Foundation's Managing Trustee and Research Director, Professor Shubhashis Gangopadhyay, (left) and Officer on Special Duty to the Chief Economic Adviser in the Department of Economic Affairs at India's Ministry of Finance, Dr Supriyo De, (right).

PAKISTAN'S ECONOMY

Slow RECOVERY PATH

 SHAHID JAVED BURKI

It is fair-time to raise a question about the performance of Pakistan's relatively new Government headed by Nawaz Sharif. This question has many answers which can be provided in several ways. We could measure the new government's performance by comparing it with that of the administration it has replaced. We could judge it by the promises it made in the manifesto it used to contest the election and win the reins of power. We could assess its days in office by projecting what the future could bring as the direct result of the various policies it has adopted since it took office over several months ago, as this is written.

Some analysts have already concluded that Mr Sharif and his administration have fallen short of what was expected of them. That would be an unfair assessment without an examination of what the current government inherited from the one that preceded it. While the previous government, headed by Asif Ali Zardari of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), had totally failed in the field of economics, it succeeded in moving forward the evolution of the political order. This process began after 2008 when a free and fair election brought two parties to power that had opposed the military rule. The shared views of the PPP and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz about the military's role in politics were enshrined in the Charter of Democracy signed by Benazir Bhutto of PPP and Mr Sharif of PML-N on 14 May 2006 in London.

That document contained the promise to return Pakistan to a parliamentary form of democracy and create the conditions that will keep its military out of politics. When the PPP took command of the government in Islamabad it did not fulfil all the promises it had made in the Charter. For instance, President Zardari continued to exercise powers that were not in his domain after the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution. He was also slow in restoring to their respective benches the dozens of senior judges whom the previous military ruler, President Pervez Musharraf, had removed on purely political grounds. However, Zardari did sign the Amendment into law, granted full autonomy to the judiciary after the dismissed judges were back in their courts, and created an Election Commission

that acted independently of the executive branch.

It would be fair to claim that, with all the political turmoil in the Muslim world, only two countries have made progress in moving towards the establishment of viable and durable political order. They are Turkey and Pakistan. This is important since economists now recognise that there is close interface between their discipline and that of politics. In fact, it is only when a workable political system has been established that sustained and inclusive economic development becomes possible. That brings us to the subject of economic performance of the Sharif government in the few months it has been in office. But, for that, we must begin with what his government inherited.

The Zardari government was utterly indifferent towards developing the economy or creating and sustaining institutions of government that would serve the people or managing the large number of enterprises controlled by the state or managing with responsibility government finances or developing the country's foreign relations to help the national economy. It will take time and effort to know fully the extent of the economic damage and to repair it.

Pakistan's economic performance touched a number of new lows during the five-year period of Zardari's rule. Right now, the economy is in deep recession. For the last six years the rate of growth of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has averaged three per cent, not high enough to provide productive employment to the work force that is also growing at three per cent a year. The International Monetary Fund has estimated that the economy must expand by at least seven per cent a year to fully absorb



the new entrants into the workforce. Not being able to accommodate the newcomers will create more stresses in an already-fragile society. The tax-to-GDP ratio has fallen to a record low, at less than nine per cent of GDP. It is one of the lowest among emerging nations. With such a low rate the government is unable to invest in creating the needed-infrastructure and improving the state of human development.

Most worrying is the sharp decline in both public and private investment. With the incremental capital ratio of about four per cent – the proportion of GDP that needs to be invested to produce one percentage point increase in national output – Pakistan can't have a GDP increase of more than 2.5-3 per cent. Also troubling is the continuous decline in the country's share in international trade. In other words, Pakistan faces a grim economic future unless the many structural problems the country faces are addressed with some seriousness. It is from this perspective that the performance of the Sharif government needs to be viewed.

The manifesto issued by the PML-N for the electoral contest of May 2013 promised to

set the economy on a growth trajectory that would begin to match that of the more rapidly growing Asian economies. It set its sights on a rate of growth of 6-7 per cent to be reached by the year 2018 when it would have to seek a fresh electoral mandate in the normal course. To achieve that target, the party promised to deal with both the short-term problems faced by the economy and also to address the long-enduring structural problems. Both were well-known to the students of Pakistani economy, including some of the people who were assigned senior positions in the new Sharif administration. Energy shortages of both electricity and natural gas were taking a heavy toll on the economy. The government has announced some measures to improve the energy supply situation over the short-term. The continuing activities of the forces of extremism had discouraged foreign capital from flowing into the country, while the persistent low rates of domestic savings had increased the country's dependence on external capital.

The new government turned to the International Monetary Fund and quickly concluded an agreement that would

provide US\$ 6.5 billion of capital along with another US\$ 5.5 billion to be received from other donors. The total amount of US\$ 12 billion would be disbursed over a three-year period provided Islamabad adopts a whole series of reforms. For the long-term, the government has requisitioned a development programme to cover all sectors of the economy and also put in place the relationship between the public and the private sectors. This will be prepared by the Planning Commission in the form of what it calls the "Vision 2030".

Overall, the new administration has made a beginning in moving a stalled economy. But it is only the start of a process that will prove to be long and arduous. However, there is much greater commitment to improve the state of the economy than before.

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INDIAN SOCIETY

‘NEO-LIBERAL Generation’

JOHN HARRISS

Roughly one of every three people whom one might meet in an Indian city today can be described as a ‘youth’. This is very far from being a precise category, and there is no standard definition of it. If we take it, however, as referring to those aged between 13 years and 35 years, then we know from the 2001 Census that rather more than 40 per cent of the Indian population is made up by youth, with their share ranging – amongst the major states – between 37 per cent in Bihar and upwards of 43 per cent in Karnataka (or even more in the Northeast). This is the part of the population that is expected to deliver on India’s potential ‘demographic dividend’.

In the period in which, as the country moves from the stage of high birth rates to one of much lower fertility, there is expected to be an unusually large young adult labour force, in relation to the numbers of children and of the elderly who are outside the labour force and dependent upon them. In these circumstances it is expected that there will be higher levels of savings and consequently high levels of investment and growth. This is only one marker of the importance of young people in India today.

The part they have played, as well, in recent political events, such as in the movement against corruption led by the Gandhian activist Anna Hazare, and in demonstrations over the treatment of women, following the terrible incident of the gang rape of a young woman in Delhi in December 2012, is a further indication of the significance of youth in India today. It has seemed to some observers that India’s youth might well come to play a political role comparable with that of young people in Tunisia and Egypt, whose activism in the ‘Arab Spring’ finally resulted in regime change in these countries.

There is no doubt about the significance of youth in Indian society. Yet there is probably no section of the population about which less is known. It has generally been thought that youth are relatively uninterested in politics, an idea which is



Five young parliamentarians from India sharing their thoughts at an ISAS Panel Discussion in Singapore on the ‘Outlook for India’ on 5 July 2013: ISAS Chairman, Ambassador Gopinath Pillai, (third from left at the main table) presided.

based on the observation that the voter turnout amongst youth has consistently been lower – especially in urban India – than that amongst their elders. How then are we to judge the evidence, for example from their participation in the Hazare movement, that young people may be becoming more politically engaged? For some, the worrying aspect of this engagement is that it has been in an avowedly anti-political movement, which articulates mistrust not just of politicians but of the processes of democracy. Little is known, in fact, about where youth from different backgrounds

and social classes stand on major matters of public policy.

Little is known, as well, about how young people of what we might call ‘the neo-liberal generation’ – those who have been growing up since the beginnings of India’s liberalising economic reforms – view their own prospects in life, or of how these perceptions influence their attitudes towards politics. For some, this, no doubt, is an era of great opportunity, for leading a life that would have been unimaginable for their parents. This is the case, certainly, for those young people who have made

their way successfully through higher education in information technology and other technical subjects, from the mofussil to highly-paid jobs in the IT sector in cities such as Bangalore and Hyderabad – perhaps via a stage of studying or of working in the United States.

But the share of the labour force that is employed in these sorts of jobs is tiny, and the numbers of jobs that are being generated – directly and indirectly - in the most productive, dynamic sectors of the economy are nothing like enough to absorb more than a very small fraction of the more than ten million new entrants to the labour force each year.

What are the world-views and the expectations of those who don't make it into 'good jobs', and who must try to find their way through employment in the informal sector? What are the views and the hopes of those, for example, who are employed as contract workers in big factories alongside others who enjoy the benefits of permanent employment? What of those whose education has encouraged high aspirations but whose hard-sought-for qualifications in computing or in some branch of engineering haven't actually qualified them for the kinds of jobs that they expected? What are the views and the attitudes of those who have experienced long periods of unemployment, or of only partial employment and who have had to occupy themselves in what is known as 'time-pass' – activities to while away the time? Little is known about how young people assess the changes that are taking place in Indian society and that they experience primarily through the positions that they occupy in labour markets.

There have been some studies by anthropologists and others of different groups of young people in different sorts of jobs. These do not allow us to arrive at any very firm general conclusions, but it seems possible that the insecurity

and the vulnerability that many young people experience, and the sense of alienation that they feel, can encourage highly individualistic attitudes. It is up to the individual to look after him or herself – individuals' fortunes will depend on their abilities and their application, their willingness to work hard.

Other young people, however, seek affirmation of their identities in participation in collective activities, such as in social work in their communities. Some seek affirmation of their identities and of their masculinity, on the other hand, through their participation in violence – though the gang phenomenon that is a very significant aspect of youth society across Latin America, does not appear to be nearly so much in evidence in India.

Participation in regular party politics is for a minority a way of finding purpose in life, and a counter to boredom and alienation. It seems possible, however, that, for those who have made it into highly paid jobs and who really do have a 'career', there is a turning away from involvement in politics or in activities in civil society. There is a lot of research which shows that the positive correlation that is observed in other democracies, between levels of education and of social standing, and participation both in electoral politics, and in problem-solving through community action, is reversed in India, where poorer people are more likely to vote, and more likely to mobilise to try to tackle local public problems.

The Institute of South Asian Studies is now taking up research to try to address the questions that have been raised here, in this short article. ISAS is working in partnership with colleagues from Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, from the Asia Development Research Institute in Patna, and from the Madras Institute of Development Studies, in a comparative study that will examine the political

activities, values and attitudes of young people in different sorts of jobs, and in different kinds of educational institutions, in the city of Delhi, and in towns and cities in Bihar and Tamil Nadu. We have chosen these two states because they seem to stand at opposite ends of the scale with regard to both educational and employment opportunity.

Tamil Nadu, as well as being one of the centres of the IT industry and a major player in India's successful automotive industries, has a huge number of engineering colleges, public and private, of varying levels of distinction. Bihar, even though it has been experiencing exceptionally high growth rates (starting from a very low base), still has had very little investment in industry or in modern service industries, and the state has few colleges where young people can expect to gain an education that will help them to enter good jobs with real career prospects.

The ISAS research will include both large-scale surveys and some qualitative and ethnographic research, and it is expected to cast more light upon those young people on whom India's future rests.

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PAKISTANI SOCIETY

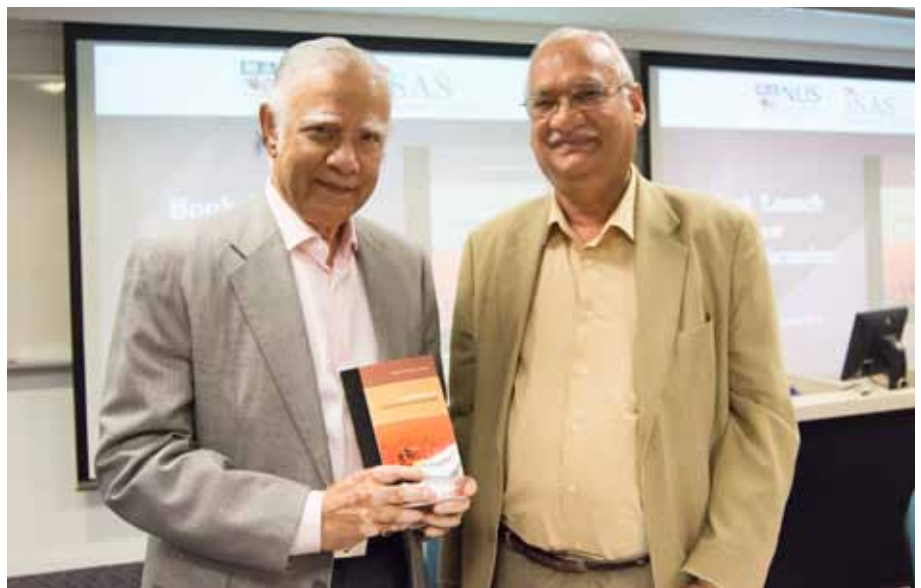
ISLAM and POLITICS

RIAZ HASSAN

*Muslim society in Pakistan has two major spatial divisions — rural and urban. The city is the centre of government and the home of professional and business elites, merchants and the urban working class. It is also the home of the **ulema** (scholars) of Islamic jurisprudence (**sharia**) and scripture (**Quran**). Historically **ulema** have been at the centre of various Islamic reform movements in the Indian subcontinent and now in Pakistan. Perhaps the best examples of **ulema**-led reform movements in recent history are the **Deobandi** movement and the **Jamaat-i-Islami** of Pakistan. One of the central concerns of these movements is to purge Islamic culture of extravagant customs such as lavish weddings, dowries and other ritual celebrations, which they regard as un-Islamic.*

These movements, which are also anti-*pir* (spiritual guide), anti-shrine and anti-saintly cults, downplay these institutions in favour of individual responsibility to uphold scriptural norms. They urge their followers to be guided by a high degree of internal discipline and to forego immediate material pleasures. They deny the importance of carefully graded social ranking, advocating instead a broad definition of respectability as a basis for social relations, based in part on shared religious style. The **ulema** see themselves as teaching Muslims to be pious believers by following the teachings of great past reformers, including the Prophet himself, for whom the ending of false customs and the creation of religiously responsible individuals were central. The **ulema** and their movements, in short, have been engaged in a renewal of the teachings of the *Quran* and the Prophet. They are the ideologues of scriptural Islam from which contemporary radical Islamic movements derive ideological inspiration.

In their orientations, most of these movements have been highly modernistic. They seek the renaissance of Muslim society by emphasising values of equality, asceticism,



ISAS Chairman, Ambassador Gopinath Pillai, (left) releasing a book, *Islam and Society Sociological Explorations*, by Professor Riaz Hassan (who is also the author of this article), at an ISAS event in Singapore on 10 October 2013.

individual responsibility, education, and economic change. This ideological orientation paradoxically brought **ulema**-led movements into sharp conflict with the British colonial rulers and, subsequently, with the rulers of Pakistan as well as traditional *pirs*, because they were perceived as socially and politically destabilising forces. The **Jamaat-i-Islami** of Pakistan is essentially an

ulema-led political movement, committed to the establishment of an Islamic state in Pakistan. It is a tightly organised cadre-based party with a membership estimated at about 10,000, which sees itself as the vanguard of Islamic revolution.

The **ulema represent the scriptural tradition of Islam. They perceive popular**

Islam based on the **pir-murid** (spiritual guide-followers) paradigm as misleading, superstitious and vulgar, and believe it needs to be replaced by a scriptural Islam based on the **Quran** and **sharia**, and for which they are the principal spokesmen. But historically, popular Islam has been the dominant religious tradition in Pakistani society and as such it permeates the social and cultural life of ordinary Muslims. The evolution of the state in Pakistan has been profoundly affected by the predominance of popular Islam.

Historically, a relatively weak central state has been able to extend its political jurisdiction over a vast countryside with the help of leaders of the popular Islamic tradition and the landed gentry – *zamindars*. The popular Islam, therefore, has been an integral part of the state, whereas the scriptural Islamic tradition existed only at its periphery. In the post-independence period, the alliance between the central rulers (military and bureaucracy) and the *pirs-zamindars* – the traditional rural elite – has remained essentially intact. The emergence of a military bureaucratic state in Pakistan from 1959 onwards has, in significant ways, strengthened the state by bringing shrine management under state bureaucratic control.

During the regime of General Mohammad Ayub Khan, the control and management of shrines was brought under state control through the *waqf* ordinances of 1959 and 1996. These ordinances sought to change the religious significance of the *pir*, but not his religious hold, by invoking a new ideology of the *pir* that emphasised their piety and spirituality in the eyes of common people. The *waqf* ordinances sought to create a sense of unanimity between government policy direction, religious values and the reformist ideals of the *pirs*. Under the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto during 1972-77, some of the traditional functions of shrine management, such as

celebration of *urs* (death anniversaries) of the major saints, were taken over by the new *Auqf* bureaucracy.

In keeping with the ancient function of *khanqahs* and the *tariqa* phases of Sufism, the Ayub Khan and Bhutto governments revived the idea of shrines as welfare centres. But under the regime of General Zia-ul-Haq from 1977 to 1988, affinity between the shrine and government values and purposes diminished, in that shrine celebrations did not occur with government backing. But shrines were not disavowed, and relatives of Sufi saints continue to enjoy government support.

The social structure of Muslim society in Pakistan has been profoundly influenced and shaped by the popular Islam, which has played a pivotal role in the evolution of the rural elite – the *pirs* and *zamindars* who together have been pillars of the Pakistani state. The emergence of a military bureaucratic state tended to further reinforce its position by bringing some aspects of popular Islam under state bureaucratic control, ostensibly for the benefit of the larger community and not to end its spiritual links with popular Islam's traditional leaders. This state intervention, to some extent, is also indicative of the reformist tendencies within the popular Islamic tradition.

The *pirs* as a group, however, have remained the symbols of this dominant religious and cultural tradition, and the Pakistani state has both relied on their political support and, in its functioning, reflected and served their class interest. On the other hand, the scriptural Islamic tradition and its *ulema* leaders have remained at the periphery of the state. The *ulema* are committed to breaking the nexus between the state and popular Islam and replacing it with scriptural Islam. They made several attempts to do this but until the 1980s they were unsuccessful because the ruling elite was able to exercise

its power to contain their agitation and struggle for political power.

But the social change that Pakistani society has undergone in the past six decades has created social and political conditions conducive to mass mobilisation in support of *ulema*-led scriptural Islamic tradition, which I have elsewhere called Islamisation. Urbanisation, increasing literacy, and industrialisation have created an urban environment which is sufficiently socially-differentiated to provide the *ulema* and the scriptural Islamic tradition with an important and strategically located constituency.

One can tentatively conclude that urban residence and an increasing educational level are expanding the constituency that is supportive of *ulema*-led scriptural Islam and reformist movements. These trends are now contributing to religious fissures and sectarian conflict in Pakistan. This is reflected in the rise of several militant Islamic groups such as *Jaish-e-Mohammad*, *Sipah-e-Sahaba*, *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*, *Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan*, *Lashkar-e-Taiba* and *Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan* and *Sunni Tehrik*. These groups trace their origins to the Sunni Islamisation programme launched by General Zia's regime which privileged the orthodox *Deobandi* Islam and Iran's Islamic Revolution. These groups compete with each other over their ideological principles, resources and followers. This competition has intensified sectarian conflicts and militancy in Pakistan which the state is now trying to combat with uncertain results.

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INDIA'S YOUTH

CHORUS against Corruption

RAHUL ADVANI

During a recent research-related visit to Muzaffarpur and Patna in Bihar (India) for several weeks, inescapable was the first impression that the majority of youth were neither actively participating in politics nor helping to create social change. A fair number of youth had participated in a demonstration or a strike but did little else beyond that.



A group of students at a college in Muzaffarpur (Bihar, India) discussing a 'political development', in August 2013.

Clear, however, was the extent to which many of them were emotionally engaged in and also affected by politics. Most were well aware of political issues and indeed highly vocal when it came to expressing their thoughts on both their local and national politics. When asked about the largest political problem they faced, everyone singled out corruption as the most pressing issue. The fact that corruption, rather than terrorism or politicisation of caste or poverty, was the most frequently-cited problem highlights an important point. It indicates the extent to which the political system itself is viewed as problematic and that the nature of India's politics, rather than the barriers to accessing politics such as one's caste background or socio-economic position, is seen as the biggest obstacle to contributing to politics in any effective or meaningful way.

The field trip was undertaken by this writer as part of the ISAS project on India's "Youth, Politics and Social Change". The project is led by Head of Research, S Narayan and Visiting Research Professor John Harriss. The field visit entailed working with the Asian Development Research Institute (ADRI). The process of helping to gather data on the political perceptions and political participation of young people included visits to colleges, offices and villages to interview young people. Much of this work took place in the cities of Muzaffarpur and Patna.

It came as a surprise that every single respondent was connected to the internet and was indeed active on Facebook. There have been numerous reports on the popularity of Facebook in India, where, in February 2012, there was a “total of 43,497,980 Facebook users”. According to Lim Yung-Hui, India is now Facebook Nation No. 2, behind the United States [Forbes (online)]. This tips India “to become the planet’s largest collection of Facebook users by 2015”, according to J Russell [The Next Web (online)]. Nonetheless, it was surprising to know that the usage of Facebook extended widely beyond the upper and upper-middle class demographic. Most of the respondents, the majority of whom were from the middle and lower-middle class backgrounds, admitted to accessing Facebook on a daily basis. Revealing is the integral part that social media plays in their everyday lives. Many would have thought that the level of access to events, various platforms, types of information and even different types of individuals through Facebook was most likely impossible in the day-to-day reality of most young Indians’ lives. Surely, however, the impact that such possibilities within the online world has on India’s young generation must be both powerful and wide-ranging.

Facebook also seemed to be a space for the political expression of youthful views. Several young respondents noted that they had ‘liked’ pages for Damini, the victim of the Delhi rape case in December 2012, and Anna Hazare. This was revealing of an insight into their positions on political issues and their desire for supporting political and social change. One student had in fact taken part in the anti-rape protests in Delhi during 2012, though he was by far the most-politically active student among the respondents, as he had undertaken social work and written and spoken to officials about local issues. However, the fact that the political activity

of most youth on Facebook was limited to ‘liking’ pages, a highly passive activity, and, in some cases, to commenting on pages and posting comments on their own page, suggests the lack of a certain degree of serious political engagement.

Another interesting observation during the fieldwork was that there seemed to be a pre-occupation with studies and achieving top results in Bihar. Similar to the advertisements featuring high-achieving PSLE and A Level students, plastered all over bus stops in Singapore, noticeable in Patna and Muzaffarpur was a barrage of billboards with the faces of IIT-entrance-examination toppers in Patna and Muzaffarpur.

One of the researchers at ADRI spoke about how the focus on studying and achieving educational success kept many young Biharis away from straying into politics. “Because of studies, they have no time for politics”, he said, suggesting the societal pressures on youth to channel their time and resources into a system that is seen as much safer, both economically and physically, than entering the world of politics. His comments also revealed the sense of aspiration that the youth have, though this seems to be more in terms of increasing their own economic mobility rather than improving the country through political participation.

Another respondent mentioned that most youth in Bihar do not plan to enter politics. Instead, they “only want to become engineers, doctors, IAS officers and businessmen”. One respondent in particular attributed the general lack of politically active youth to the attitude of teachers and parents who steer their students and children away from the world of politics and towards more ‘useful’ activities.

When asked about issues such as inter-caste marriage and gender equality, most

respondents stated their support. While it is difficult to conclude whether these responses are in fact indicative of a real progress in social attitudes, compared to the earlier generations, there is certainly a sense of change that is felt the moment one enters Patna. At present, the transitional period in Bihar, as a fast-developing state, has undoubtedly influenced the thinking of some of the young people interviewed during this field visit. The idea of ‘change’ was voiced by several of the study’s participants, including one who mentioned that “over the last eight years, Bihar has changed, and for the better”. “The perceptions of youth, and even of politicians’ sons”, he said, “are different from what it used to be. Now they want to do [something] good”. Another participant said that “eight years ago, Patna was an almost dead city, frozen in time. Now, it is changing”.

The fieldwork trip was a highly fulfilling and intellectually stimulating experience. What was especially interesting was how differently the interviewer-interviewee dynamic could change according to the interviewer’s gaze. Some respondents seemed excited at the prospect of speaking about Bihar and learning about Singapore.

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PAKISTAN'S YOUTH

Malala: A Feminine Profile IN COURAGE AND CONVICTION

IFTEKHAR AHMED CHOWDHURY

The Pakistani society generally places great store by qualities of courage and manliness. Unsurprisingly, this leads to a modicum of admiration for war-fighting. An abiding image of heroic Pakistani from the Frontiers of legends and literature has been that of a man, a grizzled warrior, roughened by the rigours of life's myriad challenges, with a turban for his headgear, clothed in a loose shirt and baggy trousers, with a rifle slung around his shoulders and a belt of bullets around his middle, trudging the rocky hills of an inhospitable terrain. The concession to modernity is perhaps a change in rifle, from a three-naught-three to a Kalashnikov.

But he is not the symbol of courage projecting from Pakistan today. It is a girl rather than a man, very young rather than weather-beaten with age, wearing a scarf rather than a turban. There is no gun in her hand but perhaps a book. It is entitled 'I am Malala', which is her name, containing the story of bravery earned not in battles but in 'bustees' (bustling habitats). Few stories of good news seem to appear from Pakistan these days. Malala Yusufzai's is one, and her story will be told and retold around campfires of the rugged mountains of her beloved Swat for a long, long time to come. The sixteen-year-old has altered the perception of what a hero is like for millions, not just in her country but around the world.

Who is this Malala? Where does she come from? What is she about? And why is she on way to becoming, as Deutsche Welle predicted, 'the world's most famous teenager'. Malala Yusufzai was born in the romantic Swat Valley of Pakistan's North West Frontier region in 1997. One can easily mistake Swat for 'Paradise' on earth. Its snow-capped hills, lush-green forests, gushing mountain streams, its overall scenic beauty could easily render one

breathless. It was here in Mingora, the twin town of Saidu Sharif, that Malala began her life. Then in the early 2000s came the Taliban. A wave of atrocities followed, forcing conformity to their perceptions of Islam. The Army action began. The 'Paradise' was lost in the battlefield. Still a child, Malala and some others of her ilk began to strive to regain the 'Paradise'.

In 2009, Malala was over 11. She saw people of her sex being oppressed and deprived. She saw Swati women being denied the main tool of advancement, education. Girls-only schools were being bombed. Women were prevented from working. Malala, whose father was a teacher, became a child-activist for girls' education. She began to speak to the media. She was awarded the International Peace Prize by South Africa's Desmond Tutu. On 9 October 2012, the Taliban shot her. The world gasped in despair. She was severely injured; but with treatment in the United Kingdom, the world felt a sigh of relief.

Malala renewed her struggle to spread the light of education and wisdom. She became the modern Minerva of the Classical Roman

mythology. She saw education as the simple solution to the problems she experienced; Madonna dedicated a song to her, Laura Bush compared her to Anne Frank of the Holocaust. President Barack Obama received her in the White House as an honoured guest. *Time* named her among the 100 Most Influential People in the world. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh, the Muslim-majority nation known for women's empowerment, called her a role model. Malala is surely the kite that rose against the wind.

Not everyone was happy, particularly the Taliban who didn't think Malala deserved the Nobel Peace Prize and were pleased she did not receive it this year. To them she was a cultural anathema. But in a long while, most Pakistanis had something to cheer about. Pakistan had just seen a democratic and peaceful transition that ushered in a new Prime Minister – Nawaz Sharif. Immediately he set about addressing the issues of terrorism, corruption, energy-deficiency, poverty, and relations with key global protagonists. He needs to have women on his side.

Malala would be an ideal instrument to bring about the desired social changes. She should not, must not be exploited – but simply held out as an example of responsible youth in a chaotic time. As for Malala herself, like Thomas Carlyle's 'heroes', she has become the embodiment of how a single person can help change the world.

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BANGLADESHI SOCIAL ECONOMY

A SUCCESS STORY

ZAARA ZAIN HUSSAIN

Bangladesh faces many economic and social challenges, and is listed by the United Nations as a least developed country (LDC). It has, however, displayed commitment towards prioritising human development and achieving the MDGs. Its success is evident from poverty rates falling from 56.6 per cent in 1991-92 to 31.5 per cent in 2010. Indeed, many have come to recognise Bangladesh as a role-model for the LDCs. As Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has said “human development is about advancing the richness of human life, rather than that of the economy in which humans live”.

Beating all the odds, Bangladesh has achieved tremendous success in reaching the UN's Millennium Development Goals. It has already met the target for nine indicators, and is on track to realise the goals for eleven more. According to the 2013 UNDP Human Development Report, Bangladesh has ranked 146 out of 187 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI), achieving an HDI of 0.515 which is well above the average of 0.466. The nine indicators where Bangladesh has already met the target include, broadly, poverty reduction, attaining gender parity at primary and secondary level education, and reduction in the prevalence of malaria and mortality rate under the age of five.

Bangladesh has progressed far ahead from the days when a top United States diplomat, Henry Kissinger, had referred to it as a ‘basket case’. Bangladesh’s success can be attributed to its localised approach towards the MDGs – one of merging it with the national needs and public policy. The government successfully matched the national development objectives with the framework of the UN development goals.

Even before the MDGs were spelled out in 2000, Bangladesh had taken some initiatives as far back as in the 1970s – Food-for-Work (FFW), Food-for-Education (FFE), Vulnerable

Group Development (VGD), Gratuitous Relief (GR) etc. Primary schooling had been made mandatory for all targeted groups by the government since 1990, while many income-assistance programmes are in place to encourage children, especially girls, to remain in school and complete secondary education.

Bangladesh had made exceptional progress in achieving gender parity in both primary and secondary school enrolment – 30.8 per cent girls receive secondary education, with the number of enrolment of girls being higher than that for the boys (compared to 26.6 per cent in India and 18.3 per cent in Pakistan). From 94 deaths per 1000, the under-five mortality rate in Bangladesh has come down to 46. This rapid decline has been made possible through the successful family planning and child immunisation drives.

In all walks of life, women have gained astounding financial and social empowerment. Microfinance institutions, NGOs and the garments industry have been three of the biggest contributors in providing paid-employment to women from the lower income groups and rural areas. This has given financial empowerment and freedom to a large number of women across the country.

Better access to education has enabled women and girls to have a greater say in decisions on marriage, use of contraception, children’s health and education, and mobility outside the home. Women’s empowerment has also been a key driving force for the overall development in society.

Bangladesh has surpassed wealthier neighbours such as India and Pakistan on many development indicators. The GDP per capita of Bangladesh was US\$ 747.34 in 2012 compared to US\$ 1,489.24 for India and US\$ 1,290.36 for Pakistan. Yet, in Bangladesh the average life expectancy is 69 years, compared to 65 years in India and 65.7 years in Pakistan. The literacy rate for females aged 15-24 in Bangladesh is 78 per cent, compared to 74 per cent in India and 61 per cent in Pakistan. The female labour participation rate is much higher in Bangladesh, at 36 per cent compared to 22.3 per cent in India and 21.5 per cent in Pakistan.

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New IDEAS and New MIDDLE CLASSES

SHAHID JAVED BURKI

The Second South Asian Diaspora Convention (SADC), in Singapore on 21 and 22 November 2013, is an ISAS project, as was the first SADC held in July 2011. Two aspects of the continuing role of South Asian Diaspora communities in creating a new economic class in South Asia merit the attention of policy makers and researchers.

SOUTH ASIAN
DIASPORA
CONVENTION 2013



Photo: By Special Arrangement.

ISAS Visiting Senior Research Fellow, Mr Shahid Javed Burki, speaking at the ISAS-organised South Asian Diaspora Convention 2011, held in Singapore on 21 July 2011.

Mr Burki is the author of this article, designed to spell out themes ahead of ISAS' South Asian Diaspora Convention 2013 (on 21 and 22 November 2013).

The impact of Diaspora remittances on the poor in South Asian countries has received some academic and policy attention. What has been totally ignored, though, in both academic and policy research, is the nature and consequences of the interaction between two middle classes, one in the South Asian Diaspora communities and the other in the countries of their origin. Both these aspects are of particular concern as the South Asians begin to re-examine

their development paradigm in light of the significant slowdown in their rates of economic growth in the last few months.

The middle class has risen as an important economic, political and social player in both places – where the South Asian Diasporas currently reside and where they trace their origin. This middle class is asserting itself in a number of different ways. Of equal importance

but an overlooked fact is that, while the middle class in several Western societies – in particular in the United States – is shrinking and losing economic ground to the rich in terms of their share in national income, the South Asians have improved their situation. Their situation has improved in terms of their position in the host population as well as within the Diaspora communities.

The middle class has increased in size in South Asian countries. There is no consensus among scholars about how many people fall in this economic and social category.

The estimates range between 400 million to 800 million people, collectively, in South Asia's three largest countries – India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The lower figure suggests that 25 per cent of the South Asian populations can be regarded as belonging to the middle class; the larger number is twice that proportion.

The larger figure includes what economists call the near-poor. While these people are no longer living in absolute poverty, they remain exceptionally vulnerable to the changes in their economic environment. A significant number of them have migrated from poverty to the lower middle class

because of the remittances they have received from the members of their families living and working abroad.

While the countries that receive large amounts of remittances can only marginally influence the quantum of flow, they must be prepared to intervene meaningfully to protect those who would be hurt if the flow suddenly declines. This can happen if the price of oil falls or if the labour-importing countries change their preferences about the places from which the workers would be allowed to come. The needed safety-net will

be an entirely new area of state activity for the governments in South Asia.

The upper middle class – those with an estimated 200 million people – has also benefitted from having some families and friends working abroad; but their help has been and will continue to be of a different nature. In the new age of rapid – almost instantaneous flow of information – ideas are transmitted fast. One particular area where the upper middle class in the South Asian expatriate communities will profoundly influence those who live and work in the

home countries is the appropriate role of the state.

When the first ISAS-sponsored South Asian Diaspora Convention was held, the South Asian economies had come out of the global slowdown almost unscratched. India, the sub-continent's premier economy, saw some slowdown but it was not as significant as was the case for its partners in the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) club. The situation is very different two years later. There is a loss of momentum that was built up over a period of couple of decades. In the two-year period between 2011 and 2013, the South Asian rate of GDP growth has declined by as much as three percentage points. This slowdown has little to do with the world outside the sub-continent.

It was India that led the way up; it is India that is leading the way down. To reverse the new trend, South Asians will have to rethink the growth model that has guided their policy makers for more than two decades. At the centre of this model were "three emphases": greater role for the private sector; greater integration of the sub-continent's economies with the industrial world; and rapid industrialisation as the driver of growth. All these need to be rethought and possibly reversed. In all three the members of the South Asian Diasporas played active roles.

By pushing the state off the commanding heights of the economy, the South Asians, starting with both India and Pakistan in 1991, and followed soon after by Bangladesh, gave private enterprise a freer hand than it ever had in their economies. Not unexpectedly, this change in the orientation of public policy quickened the pace of development. In the words of Gurucharan Das, the most articulate advocate of "new India", the series of reforms aimed at doing away with what was called the "license raj" – an excessive

FEATHERS IN THEIR CAPS

"Indian-Americans make extraordinary contributions to the United States every single day – businessmen, scientists, academics, now Miss America is of Indian-American descent, and I think it's a signal of how close our countries are". This is a tribute that US President Barack Obama paid to the Indian Diaspora in America, in the presence of India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, after their bilateral meeting at the Oval Office on 27 September 2013.

Male Indian-American scientists like Har Gobind Khorana (Physiology or Medicine), S Chandrasekhar (Physics) and Raj Reddy (Computer Science), all global winners, are well-known.

However, Mr Obama made a rare gesture of referring, in particular, to a female Indian-American Graduate in Brain Behaviour and Cognitive Science – Nina Davuluri – who had just then won the Miss America 2014 Crown and the support of many Americans in the face of a chorus of racist slur against her.

Over the years, a number of women from South Asian Diaspora (not just the Indian Diaspora) have distinguished themselves in different fields and in different countries. Here is a brief, non-hierarchical, and illustrative list (not at all a comprehensive compilation) of South Asian Diaspora women-achievers. Their citizenship, specialisation, and ethnicity/or country of birth/or origin are mentioned in brackets.

Nikki Haley (American, State Governor, Indian); Kalpana Chawla (American, Astronaut, India); Indra Nooyi (American, Business, India); Baroness Warsi (British, Politics and Governance, Pakistani); Mira Nair (American, Director of films, India); Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (American, Literature, India); Jhumpa Lahiri (American, Literature, Indian); Kiran Desai (American, Literature, India); Monica Ali (British, Literature, Bangladesh); Yasmine Gooneratne (Australian, Literature, Sri Lanka); Shahida Ahmed (British, Artist, Pakistani); Baroness Verma (British, Business and Governance, India); and Baroness Vadera (British, Corporate Finance and Governance, Uganda – Indian origin).

(Mr P S Suryanarayana, Editor (Current Affairs) at ISAS – with inputs from Mr Rahul Advani, Research Assistant at ISAS.)



Photo: By Special Arrangement.

A section of the delegates at the ISAS-organised South Asian Diaspora Convention (SADC) in Singapore in July 2011. The second edition of this Convention – South Asian Diaspora Convention 2013 – is being held in Singapore on 21 and 22 November.

control by the state in most economic matters – awakened India. (Gurucharan Das, *India Unbound: The Social and Economic Revolution from Independence to the Global Age*, New Anchor, 2002).

The rate of growth of the Indian economy jumped from 3-3.5 per cent – the rate the Indian economist K N Raj had labelled the Hindu rate of growth – to 9-9.5 per cent. In terms of the increase in GDP, India began to resemble China. In the famous words of United States President Barack Obama during his visit to India in November 2010, India was not a rising power any more, it had already risen. This euphoria had lasted for about a decade, and then the Indian economy began to stumble.

By allowing private enterprise to lead the way, the Indian leadership lost sight of the main objective of economic development: to relieve human misery and alleviate mass poverty. As a result of the model adopted by the Indian government in the early-1990s, income disparities have widened. Some people have benefitted a great deal while many others have fallen way behind.

The same situation can be seen in other countries of South Asia.

The new paradigm that is needed is the one that provides care for the poor, the dispossessed and the vulnerable. Attempts are being made in many parts of South Asia to use the state for that purpose. But the schemes that are being funded with generous amounts are borrowed from colonial times when a highly rule-bound bureaucracy was meant to aid the poor without involving the intended beneficiaries in the process.

Other approaches have been developed that produce greater success, and some of these were the outcome of the work of South Asians [especially those from their Diasporas] working in several multilateral and bilateral development agencies and think tanks. One example of this is the income support fund that identifies the deserving by mapping – identifying from censuses and surveys the attributes that make so many people vulnerable to circumstances over which they have no control. With this information at hand,

the state makes direct deposits in the bank accounts maintained by the poor. In most cases these happen to be poor women.

In a concept paper for the first SADC, this author had argued for a role for the city of Singapore to mobilise the South Asian Diaspora community to invest in the regional projects that would bring the countries of the area closer together economically. (Shahid Javed Burki, *South Asian Diasporas: Agents of Change in a Poorly Integrated World*, ISAS Special Report No. 03, 19 July 2011). That paper recommended the pooling of ideas on development by the Diasporas to help their countries of origin develop a new paradigm or paradigms aimed at reviving the economy of the area while raising the living standards of the poor. Such a task could be undertaken by an institution such as the ISAS.

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THE COLLECTIVE 'INDIAN'

A Heritage HALLMARK

GURDIP SINGH

Singapore is building an Indian Heritage Centre (IHC) as part of the government's programmes to link the city-state to South Asia through economic, cultural and heritage connectivity.

The S\$ 27-million IHC will be opened in 2015, showcasing the richness and diversity of Singapore's Indian heritage. The IHC is the third of the heritage centres in Singapore. The other two are the Malay Heritage Centre and the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall covering Chinese heritage.

In tracing the genesis of the IHC to some significant discussions in 2007, it must be noted that the-then President of Singapore, S R Nathan, had expressed hope that the proposed heritage centre would be "a beacon for the Indian communities in Singapore and an ally of education in the area of Indian arts, culture and heritage".

Emphasising the progress made in translating Mr Nathan's initiative into a reality, Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam underlines the importance of IHC to Singaporeans. "The IHC will not only serve as a focal point for the Indian community in Singapore, but [it will] welcome all who wish to know about its heritage and cultures, that have been intrinsic to Singapore's unique, multicultural identity". Mr Tharman has noted the contribution of the Indian community to the building of the centre and called on Singaporeans to step forward and support the wide range of the IHC's planned activities and programmes.

S Iswaran, Minister in the Singapore Prime Minister's Office and Chairman of the IHC

Steering Committee, says the iconic IHC will inspire the Indian community and all Singaporeans. It will serve as a springboard and seamlessly connect the visitors' experience of Indian heritage to the larger 'Little India' precinct in the city. It will also encourage visitors to further explore the precinct's rich history, says Mr Iswaran.

Singapore has affectionately named the Indian shopping precinct on the outskirts of the Central Business District, as 'Little India', a tribute to the Indian community and the work of migrant Indians in the early-1800s.

The four-storey IHC building, taking shape now, will feature a mixture of modern and traditional Indian architectural elements. It will be home to five permanent galleries, small-scale museum facilities, activity spaces, a rooftop garden and other amenities. As its galleries spread across two levels, visitors will be able to explore the origins and heritage of Singapore's Indian community as well as its links with the global Indian Diaspora, which will be presented through rare artefacts, maps, multimedia showcases and archival footage, explains Minister Iswaran. The visitors will be able to learn more about pioneers of the Indian community and their contributions to Singapore, he adds.

Gauri Krishnan, Centre Director, Heritage Institutions at the Indian Heritage Centre, says. "The IHC will have the entire

chronology" of the evolution of the Indian community in Singapore. The IHC's objectives are to promote cultural and economic ties between South Asia, with special focus on India, and Southeast Asia. Culturally and economically, links between the two regions go back to the early-18th century.

"As for the present times, we would like to feature all the communities. We are trying to capture all histories and memories on videos by getting the pioneers to narrate the past events", she explains. Furthermore, the attempt is to make the IHC as inclusive as possible with reference to the South Asian communities – from Pakistan, Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

"The role of the IHC is to create a neutral platform where everyone can come together and showcase their cultural activities and invaluable heritage pieces. The non-Indian communities in Singapore, including the Chinese and Malays, will also be welcome to participate in these activities", Dr Gauri Krishnan emphasises.

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ASEAN-INDIA LINKS

Exploring **NEW IDEAS**

SINDERPAL SINGH

ISAS has, in recent years, identified the India-ASEAN relationship as one of its core research agendas. More specifically, ISAS has been at the forefront of multi-disciplinary research, analysing the prospects for enhanced India-ASEAN connectivity. In association with two other leading organisations that have made important contributions to the debate on India-ASEAN connectivity, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and the EAS, ISAS organised in Jakarta a half-day workshop on 27 August 2013 – on the theme of India-ASEAN connectivity.



ISAS Director, Professor Tan Tai Yong, (second from left) and FICCI Secretary General, Mr Alwyn Didar Singh, (second from right) after signing an ISAS-FICCI MOU in Jakarta on 27 August 2013. Singapore's Ambassador to Indonesia, Ambassador Anil Kumar Nayar (first from left) and India's Ambassador to Indonesia, ASEAN & Timor Leste, Ambassador Gurjit Singh (first from right) witnessed the signing.

Photo: By Special Arrangement.

The main aim of this workshop was to provide a platform for academics, diplomats and the business community in Jakarta to engage in a discussion on two major facets of the India-ASEAN connectivity theme. The first concerned the economic dimension of this interface, with a specific focus on the opportunities and challenges faced by the businesses in both India and the ASEAN countries. The second concerned the character of India-ASEAN maritime

cooperation. Ambassador Anil Kumar Nayar, Singapore's Ambassador to Indonesia; Ms Naina Lal Kidwai, FICCI President; and Ambassador Gurjit Singh, India's Ambassador to Indonesia, delivered their respective remarks, welcoming both the speakers and the participants of the workshop as well as commenting on the importance and contemporary relevance of the workshop themes.

Professor Tan Tai Yong, ISAS Director, in delivering the second keynote address, provided a broad historical overview of India-Indonesia relations. He traced how as newly sovereign states, both countries shared several similar aspirations and goals. However, from the time of the 1955 Bandung Conference, their differences became more pronounced, and these differences were magnified when it came to perceptions of China and Malaysia in the late-1950s and early-1960s. Bilateral relations did not improve throughout the rest of the Cold War era as Indonesia, one of the founding members of ASEAN, and India found themselves on opposing sides on several issues. In addition, in the 1980s India's perceived maritime ambitions caused considerable concern in Indonesia. However, the post-Cold War era has allowed for a fresh start to rebuilding relations between the two countries, as once again, India and Indonesia seem to share certain similar goals with respect to India's relationship with the Southeast Asia region and ASEAN as an institution.

The first panel examined the opportunities and challenges for businesses for India-ASEAN connectivity. The panel represented perspectives from both academia and the business community. The speakers discussed the evolution of the ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement (AIFTA) and

some of the disparities between the initial expectations and the actual benefits this agreement has spawned. In sum, it was agreed that there is much room for improving trade volumes between India and ASEAN via the AIFTA and that some amount of political will needs to be expended to bridge the gap between expectations and contemporary reality in order to increase trade volumes between India and ASEAN. The speakers also discussed the impact of more recent trading agreements currently being negotiated, specifically the RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) and the TPP (Trans Pacific Partnership). Specifically, the discussion revolved around the differences between these relatively new trading arrangements and the AIFTA. In addition, there were several questions raised about the future of earlier formal bilateral trade linkages between India and the various ASEAN countries with the likely advent of RCEP.

The second panel of the workshop examined the nature of ASEAN-India maritime cooperation. This panel consisted of speakers from ISAS as well as academics based in Indonesia. The four speakers dealt with various facets of this topic. One theme included analysing how expanded definitions of 'security' beyond purely military security, now in vogue in both academic and policy circles, have impacted the complexion of India-ASEAN maritime cooperation, as cooperation now needs to extend beyond the mere military dimension to the non-traditional realms. The history of India-ASEAN maritime relations, especially during the Cold War era, was another subject that came up for discussion. Lastly, the discussion revolved around the relatively recent notion of the 'Indo-Pacific' and the manner in which India-ASEAN maritime relations will be increasingly significant for the evolution of this wider Indo-Pacific maritime space.

Overall, as ISAS's first joint workshop in an ASEAN member-state, this particular event helped to highlight two major issues. The first is the need for multi-disciplinary research on India-ASEAN connectivity issues. India-ASEAN connectivity issues are informed by a range of various economic, domestic politics and strategic issues; and it is crucial to appreciate the manner in which these different factors relate to each other. The second issue is the urgent need to develop keener knowledge about India within the academic and policy communities in the various ASEAN member-states. By understanding India much more accurately, ASEAN member-states would be in a better position to appreciate and navigate around some of the hurdles facing enhanced India-ASEAN connectivity. Knowledge, in this particular context, is power.

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Speakers and moderators at the ISAS-FICCI-EAS workshop on 'India-ASEAN Connectivity', held in Jakarta on 27 August 2013.

Photo: By Special Arrangement.

SOFT POWER

Talking COUNTER-TERROR

NAUREEN CHOWDHURY FINK

The increasingly diffuse and unpredictable nature of contemporary terrorism has prompted an evolution in the response by international actors towards a more multidimensional approach including elements of both “hard” and “soft” power. This approach is uniquely captured in the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, adopted by the General Assembly in 2006, which focuses on 1) addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism; 2) preventing and combating terrorism; 3) strengthening counter-terrorism capacities of member-states; and 4) promoting and upholding human rights in all counter-terrorism efforts. The Strategy builds on the global approach encapsulated in Security Council Resolution 1373, passed in the aftermath of the attacks on 11 September 2001. The approach was amended in subsequent resolutions and debates in the Council, which has seen Bangladesh (2000-2001), India (2010-2012) and Pakistan (2011-2013) as elected members since then.

Of particular note in recent years has been the uptick of interest in taking a preventive approach to terrorism and addressing the underlying grievances and extremist narratives that underpin support and recruitment for terrorist groups. This focus on countering violent extremism or “CVE” has also broadened the scope of practitioners beyond the law enforcement actors traditionally associated with counter-terrorism. Development experts, education specialists, practitioners focusing on conflict prevention, resolution and peace-building, and the media, for example, have increasingly been engaged in international “CVE” efforts.

Transnational terrorist groups have excelled at exploiting local and regional grievances and connecting them to a master narrative to inspire and inform individuals or small “self-starter” groups wishing to carry out terrorist attacks. Thus, while it appears that a globalised master narrative governs the actions of extremists and terrorists, there are often clearly local and regional permutations that require a tailored response. Lessons learned from counter-terrorism and CVE efforts have repeatedly underscored the value of context-specific initiatives developed in partnership with those most familiar with the communities affected and issues discussed. Reflecting these experiences, the importance of regional and sub-regional cooperation has been underscored in international protocols, such as those emerging from the United Nations and the newly established Global Counter-Terrorism Forum.



Panellists from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Norway and Pakistan (from left) at a session of the workshop on the roles of women and civil society in combating terrorism and violent extremism in South Asia – organised by ISAS and the New York-based Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation (CGCC) in Singapore on 5 September 2013.

Recognising the importance of regional cooperation at the political as well as the operational levels, the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation (CGCC) has partnered with the United Nations on a series of workshops to support regional counter-terrorism cooperation in South Asia. These meetings bring together law enforcement officials – police officers, prosecutors, judges – from the SAARC region and offer opportunities for training and the exchange of good practices and lessons learned. However, in recognition of the need to also engage experts and practitioners in the development of collaborative regional responses to the threat, a parallel series of workshops was established to focus on common regional challenges and develop cooperative responses.

Two initial exploratory roundtables, one in New York and one in Singapore, brought together regional experts, UN officials and member-state representatives to identify key issues relating to countering terrorism and violent extremism in South Asia. A number of themes emerged from the discussion, and these have formed the basis for a series of CGCC-ISAS workshops.

In December 2012, one such workshop explored the role of the media in addressing terrorism and violent extremism in South Asia. Participants represented all countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and brought to the table experiences in print and broadcast journalism, professional media associations, non-governmental actors focusing on these issues, and the United Nations. This informal workshop provided an important forum for dialogue – and also to raise greater awareness about UN conventions, resources, and activities that may support relevant efforts and foster a collaborative network among regional practitioners. Some key themes of the workshop included the importance of an independent and credible media in providing non-partisan information, particularly regarding violence and conflict;



ISAS Principal Research Fellow, Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, (centre) leading a panel discussion at the ISAS-CGCC workshop on 6 September 2013.

the need for professional development opportunities for media practitioners; and the value of opportunities for regional practitioners to meet and share good practices. An outcome report produced by CGCC, *Mightier than the Sword? The Role of the Media in Addressing Violence and Terrorism in South Asia* (forthcoming), draws on these discussions and offers some policy and programme recommendations for regional and international actors.

In September 2013, CGCC and ISAS co-hosted a workshop to explore the roles of women in addressing violence and extremism in South Asia, with a particular focus on strengthening community resilience. Participants representing all but one SAARC country – as well as representatives from the UN Counter – Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED) and the Hedayah International Center of Excellence on Countering Violent Extremism (established through the GCTF) – offered perspectives from the realms of development, education, the rule of law, and conflict resolution, and considered how the roles of women in these areas could contribute to challenging violent extremist groups and narratives. Moreover, the discussions addressed the potential

role of women in supporting and facilitating radicalisation and violence and further addressed how counter-terror programmes could reach out (and already had reached out) to them.

The notable achievements of women and civil society in South Asia were highlighted. Also in focus were the valuable lessons in the responses to violence and extremism in other parts of the world with similar challenges. Participants considered the international framework for countering violent extremism (CVE) and offered recommendations and insights on how the development of policy and practice might be determined by some of the particular regional challenges in South Asia as well as by the opportunities for engagement in the communities and countries of this region.

With generous support from the Government of Norway, this series of workshops is planned to continue through 2014.

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'NEW EXPECTATIONS Of India's Leadership Role'



Mr Salman Khurshid

India has established "a good working relationship" with China now, and the Indians "will be friends, strategic partners, not allies," of the United States, according to India's External Affairs Minister, MR SALMAN KHURSHID, who answered a range of questions in an exclusive interview to P S SURYANARAYANA of ISAS in Singapore on 24 October 2013.

What is the new gravitational pull between the United States and India, on one side, and even between China and India, which is quite a pleasant surprise?

If you go back to the roots of India's philosophical position of non-alignment, it was essentially saying that "we're in nobody's camp. We deal with everybody on merit. We have an autonomous and independent foreign policy and, on merit, we have friendships". There are countries with which we share fundamental values of democracy; there are countries which are important partners for us in terms of our strategic concerns; there are countries that are in our neighbourhood and therefore ... we have our own reasons for reaching out to them. ... There were one kind of expectations that the world had of India – one kind of leadership [for that] soon after [India's] Independence, you know, [in the context of] the Afro-Asian stirring for emancipation, independence; and the ability [of India] to take your own decisions about your own national interests.

And, now, in another phase, there is the other expectation of India. And, I think, that expectation of India is reflected in people supporting India for a Permanent Seat in the [United Nations] Security Council, [whenever] a reformed Security Council and reformed UN system [is formed]. Because, they think that we provide intrinsic and important link between the developing world and the developed world – which is

really where we are when we are in the G20 [Group of Twenty] [given] our relationship with Brazil, Russia [and] China in BRICS or with South Africa and Brazil and ourselves in IBSA. This is the reflection of a current, contemporary situation in which there are different expectations from India, but still expectations of leadership. And, we are trying to fulfil those. And in doing this, we have something to do with China, something to do with Russia. ... We have something to do with the US and we have something to do with other parts of the world, Africa, Southeast Asia, Latin America. I have tried to find a balanced approach.

You have given a panoramic perspective of India's foreign policy in the present times. But this being a globalised world and there is a lot of *realpolitik* – I don't have to say that to you – there should surely be some factor which is galvanising the relations, on one side, between the US and India and also at the same time between China and India. Is there not some kind of a linkage? Is there a China factor in the US-India relations and, therefore, an India factor in China-US relations?

We have very specifically said this and we are very clear: China-India [equation] on its own, US-India on its own. We will never be allies of the US; we will be friends, strategic partners, not allies. And similarly we will be strategic partners with China; hopefully, we will become friends with China when all our

issues are resolved; we have a very good working relationship with them, but we have things to resolve with them.

As far as the US is concerned, I think, it is very, very important that we deal with them, because US is a driving force in [the US-India] '123 civil nuclear agreement'; US is a driving force – in a landscape [of

Do you think [India's] new Border Defence Cooperation Agreement with China will be something like a game-changer?

I think it's incremental. We have understood, and I think China understands this as well, there will not be any dramatic changes in our positions; but incrementally we have to improve, and incrementally we have improved. This is the latest version of cooperation on the border to prevent any untoward incident becoming an issue between us. So, at the same time, in parallel, we are actually talking in the Special Representatives [forum]; we have done 16 rounds. We are talking about the basic principles followed by the basic format by which we will be able to find a resolution. We know that it can't be done in a hurry. China knows it can't be done in a hurry. But nothing about this will prevent rapid engagement with China in any of the other fields in which we don't have differences.

global nuclear commerce] where India was excluded – on our terms, on our terms, to give us inclusion. I think the US played a very major role. And, of course, when this happens, it can't be a one-way street, there is an interaction; there is give-and-take. And there are expectations which the US has of India; there are expectations which we have of the US.

What could be the US expectations of India?

The US expectation is market access. Simple

Will that be the be-all and end-all of the relationship?

I think, in all fairness, US has not imposed upon us in terms of strategic choice. We have taken a position on Iraq, we have taken a position on Iran; we have taken a position on Syria. We can talk to US about everything. We have a communication level with US, which is very good. We consult, we talk but we don't necessarily always align our positions. We may not be hostile to a US position, but we certainly are not subservient to a US position. We understand their concerns, we understand their concerns in Afghanistan; we understand their concerns about Pakistan, but we can't necessarily agree. So, we often can agree to disagree. But in the larger context, we converge on many positions; and, critically, those positions that really matter.

What are the US expectations, as you would have discerned them, of India with respect to China? Surely there must be some.

They never told us this is what you need to do with China. People speculate in this part of the world about US position on pivot, US position on rebalancing towards Asia; ... and there are, obviously, methodologies of and connectivity that this part of the world has with China despite differences on certain dimensions. But we are, I think, lucky in that our position is that we will not be part of anybody else's scheme of things; and, therefore, we are not. We have told China "we want to be friends with you and we don't demand that you give up your other

A question about the Russian Prime Minister being in China at the same time as the Indian Prime Minister [22-24 October 2013]: Is China telling India that there is a Russian card?

Russia is also their neighbour and we are their neighbour. They have had an unsettled relationship with Russia, which they have largely resolved. We have had an unsettled relationship with them, which we are in the process of resolving. We have no problem about anybody else. We would want a relationship which is one-to-one between China and India; we may collaborate, cooperate somewhere, if it works; but one-to-one our relationship should be honest, transparent and meaningful.

friendships in this region. But, all we expect is: don't make your friendships at the cost of India. That's all we ask, not at our cost". That's all we say to Turkey, that's all we say to any country that has a position that we may not be completely aligned with. ... If we believe that we have a right to an autonomous foreign policy, we must respect the right of other people to have an autonomous foreign policy.

Two specifics in relation to China, because China is the overwhelming presence in East Asia: So, with reference to Pakistan as China's old "all-weather friend" and with reference to China's position on India's permanent membership [of a reformed UN Security Council]. What are the updates you have?

Well, you see, obviously, China, as I said, has an important relationship with Pakistan; and we have made it known they can have an important relationship with Pakistan, which is not our concern. Our concern is limited to two things: one is China's cooperation with Pakistan as far as the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir is concerned – obviously, I mean, that's adverse to our interest. And, the second one is issues of proliferation – that is, helping Pakistan with their nuclear programme – that is a matter of concern to us. We make it known to China at every

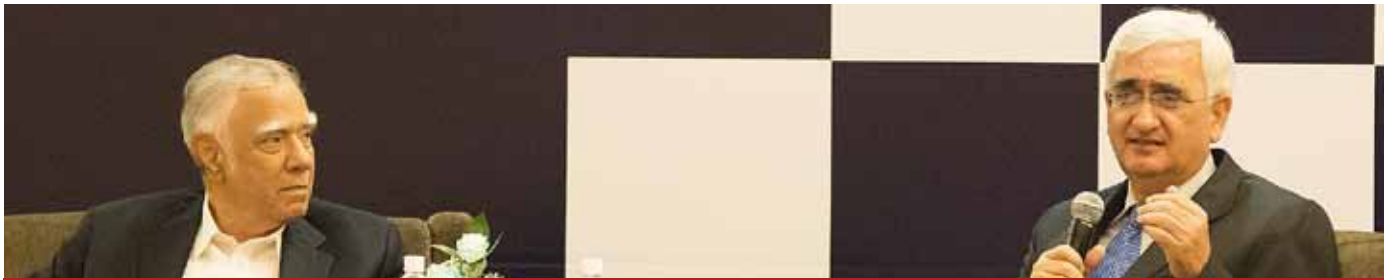
interaction that we have with China. But beyond that we have no problem if they are friends with Pakistan. We are happy to work with them on many other fields; we will continue to work with them in many fields. They now have to decide – their friendship with Pakistan entails what kind of positions that they take in the world.

Now, we actually advocated China's entry into WTO [the World Trade Organization] ... because, that allowed China to participate in a larger frame of things, in which India was a willing partner. So, there will obviously be both give and take when something like this happens. It's for China to decide and categorically take a position on what is going to happen with the Security Council; but there is a huge number of countries [supporting India] ...

Does India have a comfort level with China on these issues?

It's a working level. I don't know if I would describe it as comfort level. We have a working level. We have a good working relationship with China. We are working closely with them in many fields, including field of economics. We look forward to China's investment in our country. We want to balance trade with China; and one way to compensate for the imbalance is to have greater Chinese investment in India. We are willing to have them put up industries, to invest in industrial townships.

Now, you may describe that as comfort level, you may describe that as an interest, you may describe that as cooperation, you may describe that as collaboration; but all this is open with China. We have ring-fenced (re-fenced) our differences with China. And our differences are of perception – basically the border. The good news is that there are no casualties [along the disputed Sino-Indian border]; the good news is that our differences don't blow up; there are natural barricades that prevent any spill-over of those into other areas of cooperation. And, I think, this is a good example of working step by step to resolve an issue peacefully through dialogue and with the



ISAS Chairman, Ambassador Gopinath Pillai, (left) conducting a town-hall-like Conversation with India's External Affairs Minister, Mr Salman Khurshid, at a function organised by the High Commission of India in Singapore, in association with ISAS and a few other organisations, on 23 October 2013.

conviction that, in the long term, we really need to work together rather than remain aloof and remain estranged.

[On a different front] there are once again reports of LOC [Line of Control] firings from Pakistan. What is the situation? Do you think that some sections in the Pakistani establishment are still trying to “sabotage” India-Pakistan relations?

I don't know if it's sabotage, or prevent, or interfere, or obstruct – use any word you like. But if there is firing on the Line of Control and firing on the [India-Pakistan] border, somebody, somebody is doing it. And we believe that something on such a large scale can't be done without the consent, participation, or at least connivance, or at least indulgence of the [Pakistan] Army. Now, when we say this, our Pakistani counterparts get very upset: “Why are you blaming the Army?”

But, you know, we can only go by field reports that we get from our own armed forces. And the field reports from our own armed forces indicate that that there is involvement of regular Army units from the other side. The kind of firing; that is, the nature of violations that happen, and so on. Then, of course, there is this issue of infiltration [into India from Pakistan], infiltration by terrorist elements. That, we have – because of fencing, and because of vigilance – we have controlled considerably; but sometimes they try concerted effort, as they did recently – concerted effort when a large number of people tried to get through either under protection of darkness or under protection of firing from across the

border. So, it's a harsh and bitter reality that we live with.

But, in the long run, we believe it's important not to get provoked. We hold our line, we don't let our defence to be breached, and we make our point very clearly across to counterparts in Pakistan that this is unacceptable. Of course, a lot of people say, “how can you keep saying, ‘unacceptable’ and do nothing about it, to which we say: ‘What do you do about it? You don't have a war with another nuclear power because they are firing with small weapons across the border’”. It's hurtful; it's irritating; it's unacceptable; but, as a responsible power, as a responsible country that is being considered as a serious candidate for permanent membership of the Security Council – which is not the case with Pakistan – I think we know what we should be doing.

About [India's] Prime Minister Manmohan Singh asking [Pakistan's] Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif whether he could show leadership: what exactly was ‘leadership’ in that particular context? Did Dr Singh mean that Pakistani Prime Minister should be independent of their Army? You were privy....

Well, we don't know. Yes, when we say “we want peace” we must deliver peace. When they say they want peace, they must deliver peace. We [India] can't talk to the [Pakistan] Army. We can't talk to the various sections of their government. We can only talk to the elected leaders [in Pakistan]. And the elected leaders have consistently said, during the [recent] election campaign and thereafter, that they want peace with India. And, they want peace on reasonable terms. ...

Like we have with China, they [the Pakistanis] also have some issues with us. And we said “we are not afraid to talk about those issues”. We have talked about them in the past; we can talk about them again, but we can do so only when you can carry conviction with the people of your country. The people of our country must be able to see that there is *bona fide* and honest effort from across the border to reach out to India. And then we can talk. That's what leadership is about: leadership is that you have to take responsibility for what your people want to do. And we are asking for responsibility for 26/11 [the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in 2008]; we are asking for accountability, we are asking for dismantling of the infrastructure of terrorism [in Pakistan]. We do understand it's not easy. None of these things are easy if they have gone on for years. It's not easy. But that's where leadership comes in.

What's your sense? Is Mr Sharif displaying this kind of leadership?

I think you can't judge. [Recently] he has been elected, settling down. His stated position is very clear. We appreciate it. But you have got to put your money where the mouth is. [In the meeting between Dr Singh and Mr Sharif in New York on 29 September 2013, the Pakistani leader did highlight his leadership qualities, it is understood.]

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SRI LANKA

A POWER-SHARING CHALLENGE

P S SURYANARAYANA

Well-known are the ethnic contours of Sri Lanka. As an island-republic to the south of an emerging 'powerhouse' called India, Sri Lanka is now attaining strategic importance in Asian and global affairs. Not lost on China, the premier Asian power, and also on Japan and, more importantly the United States, is Sri Lanka's access to a vital lane of international communications in a zone of the Indian Ocean.

Not surprisingly, Sri Lanka's President Mahinda Rajapaksa has begun to "internationalise" his latest "success" in addressing the country's prolonged ethnic crisis. However, his inveterate opponents from the principal minority, the Sri Lankan Tamils, and their supporters in the island's Diaspora are relentless in propagating a counter-narrative.

The struggle between Sri Lanka's Sinhala-majority and Tamil-minority for sharing power, dating from the country's independence 65 years ago, has already taken several turns. From the parliamentary portals in Colombo, the Sri Lankan Tamils' narrative of their 'second-class status and worse' has often spilled over into neighbouring India and sometimes spiralled into terrorist violence in both countries.

Mr Rajapaksa's decisive military victory over the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in 2009, complete with the killing of LTTE's leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, was arguably the first state-level triumph over a decades-long saga of anti-government terrorism anywhere. There is near-universal consensus that terrorism had become an integral ingredient of the LTTE's political DNA over a period of time. After rising for the 'rights' of Sri Lankan Tamils over three decades ago, the LTTE gradually decimated its rivals within its own ethnic constituency. Along an upward trajectory, the LTTE waged a guerrilla-plus war against successive Sinhala-majority governments and turned against India, which was at one stage a major 'benefactor' of the Tigers.

Despite the LTTE's dismal profile on the world stage, Mr Rajapaksa could hardly gain

international recognition as an anti-terror statesman. Going against him has been his perceived failure to address the post-LTTE misery of the Sri Lankan Tamils to their satisfaction. Strictures were passed against his administration by the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2012 and 2013.

Notable among his critics is India, which has allowed itself to sway to its domestic political considerations and foreign policy compulsions. Not widely known is a piece of folklore that the Sri Lankan Tamils share their ethnic identity with not just Tamil Nadu in India but indeed with the other southern states like Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and Karnataka.

On the geopolitical front, India does not want Sri Lanka to slip into a geostationary orbit around China. Interestingly, China, has in recent years gained access to Sri Lanka's Hambantota, a dot on a narrow strip of the Indian Ocean coastline. And, China has consistently recognised Mr Rajapaksa's anti-terror credentials.

It is in this overall ambience of pluses and minuses for him that Mr Rajapaksa scored his latest "success". On 21 September 2013, elections to Sri Lanka's Northern Provincial Council, in a conflict-scarred area which is also the emblematic home of the country's Tamil-minority, were held, breaking a nearly-25-year hiatus. A government led by C V Wigneswaran, a nominee of the non-militant Tamil National Alliance (TNA), assumed office thereafter. A former judge of Sri Lanka's Supreme Court, Mr Wigneswaran appointed an essentially apolitical government of professionals, at once winning praise and criticism from opposing camps.

As we go to press as of early-November 2013, the LTTE-'remnants' inside Sri Lanka have not rocked his boat, although he has been accused of accepting or acquiescing in the 'suzerainty' of Sinhala-majority. Some knowledgeable Tamil 'insiders' say there is a feeling in Jaffna that the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora leaders, rather than their counterparts at home, are not willing to give up a maximalist position.

Relevant to the new challenge of sharing power across the Sinhala-Tamil divide are the ideas already floated by Mr Rajapaksa and the TNA. These ideas can promote a new debate which can be joined by many others, including the political votaries of the LTTE's realpolitik line. India too wants to see the Sri Lankan parties build on its own ideas that had, at one time, led to the passage of the 13th Amendment on devolution of some powers to the provinces.

Mr Wigneswaran has advocated a solution based on "parity within the framework of a united Sri Lanka". The TNA, after its poll victory, demanded security, self-respect, and self-rule in adequate proportions. Mr Rajapaksa has told the United Nations that he favours political empowerment of all Sri Lankans through reconciliation. And he insists that it is the responsibility of the international community to assist the Sri Lankan state rather than taking sides in its internal affairs. In all, the issues resonate both within and outside Sri Lanka.

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AFGHANISTAN

A NEO-TALIBAN TRIUMPH?

RIAZ HASSAN

The decision by the United States to end its combat mission and withdraw its troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2014 will no doubt be claimed as victory by the neo-Taliban insurgents in their decade-long war against the US-NATO partner- forces. But the decision does not signify defeat because the US has the resources to continue its mission. The decision simply reflects the reality that Afghanistan is no longer on the US' security or strategic agenda. After 13 years and having spent over US\$ 500 billion and lost the lives of thousands of soldiers, America has lost the appetite for continuing its military mission and presence in Afghanistan. Many NATO allies have already withdrawn their troops.

The tenacity and ferocity of the neo-Taliban insurgency has certainly played a large part in the US decision. But it can also be argued that the US policies in Afghanistan from 2002 onwards fostered conditions that re-energised the civil war of 1980s and 1990s and gave it a new direction. In the post-original-Taliban period, Afghanistan served as a workshop for a new model of American hegemony – one defined by its extreme minimalism which sought to do much with little.



A file photo of former President of the United States, Ronald Reagan, (first from left in the fireside background) with a group of Afghan Mujahideen/Taliban leaders at the White House in Washington.

One of the hallmarks of this approach was the re-militarisation of post-war politics. The United States preferred militarised solutions to Afghan problems. Rather than building up the capacity of civilian institutions to provide security and social services, the US-backed Karzai government in Kabul and Washington relied on proxy warriors and their own forces to pursue a wide range of military aims. Perhaps the most consequential was the US counter-insurgency policy of resorting to airpower that demonstrated the coalition's military superiority against the insurgents but caused numerous civilian casualties. Along with house-to-house searches, air strikes that failed to distinguish friend from foe turned many Afghans against the foreign troops and Afghan leaders and government.

The sovereignty of Afghanistan was undermined by numerous international actors who acted independently to provide reconstruction and humanitarian aid; and, above all, the agencies in Washington rather than the Afghan Government largely controlled the allocations of public expenditure. Following the defeat of the original-Taliban, Afghanistan emerged as an American protectorate in which the US exercised almost autocratic authority over local affairs as well over the Afghan people. The irony was that the pledges made by the US and its international partners have largely remained unfulfilled, to the detriment of ordinary Afghans. In fact, the policies of arming militias to support the American forces undermined the building of Afghan National

Army (ANA) because the militia fighters were paid twice the salary of the ANA recruits in the mid-2000s. This increased the desertion of ANA recruits to the militias.

These and a range of similar policies and practices prevented the Afghan Government from providing security and stability outside of the big cities. All these factors helped increase support for the insurgents among Afghans especially the *Pashtun* population, because 85 per cent of American military operations were carried out in the *Pashtun* areas. The US troops shelled villages, pounded mosques, installed numerous check points, searched homes and detained *Pashtun* leaders. These policies turned the *Pashtun* public opinion against the US-NATO forces, and the *Pashtuns* were urged to resist 'American occupation' which [in this narrative] was dishonouring the Afghan culture and Islam.

In 2007 the original-Taliban leader, Mullah Omar who remains relevant to the neo-Taliban, echoed these sentiments. "Nobody can tolerate this kind of subjugation and sacrilege of their culture and religion. No nation can accept the dictate of handful of dollar-greedy and treacherous people".

As the neo-Taliban insurgency intensified throughout Afghanistan, it led to a surge of US bombings. In the second half of 2006, the US Air Force dropped more bombs than the total number dropped between 2001 and 2004. All these actions and policies increased the public's alienation from the Afghan Government, ratcheted up the resentment against US and NATO forces and intensified insurgency. Most of the insurgents are not the Taliban fighters. They are fighting for what they see as the defence of their country and their honour, and in remembrance of their relatives killed by the Western forces.

Besides the disastrous aspects of the Western strategy and the 'awful' character of the Karzai regime, the US-NATO forces are seen by most Afghans as occupying forces. This has fed into a central premise of *Pashtun* culture, which is imparted to every *Pashtun* from his cradle, that to resist foreign occupation is an integral part of what it means to be a *Pashtun*.

A soon-to-be published book on poetry of the Taliban shows how the neo-Taliban have been able to draw on **Pashtun** culture to motivate people to fight against the US and its allies. The neo-Taliban spread their message to the mainly-illiterate rural

Pashtun population through oral poetry, stories and songs. This is a departure from the previous-Taliban policy of strong disapproval of such Afghan cultural expressions – after the neo-Taliban realised how much the original-Taliban's hostility to local traditions damaged their cause and how useful indeed such cultural traditions are for propaganda purposes. The neo-Taliban have taken advantage of the Friday sermons by sympathetic mullahs and also the internet to spread their message to the literate people who may be receptive. (Lieven, Anatol. *Afghanistan: The War after the War*, *The New York Review of Books*, June 14, 2013).

Instead of helping to create a viable state that would gain legitimacy among a wide variety of Afghan social groups, the Karzai government's backers undermined its authority and legitimacy by continuing to wield military power through punitive expeditions that turned communities against the post-Taliban government but failed to provide security. "The *Pax Americana* promised development but only expanded the wide fissures cutting through Afghan society and [succeeded] in mobilising diverse foes against the centre, rekindled memories of grievances feeding thirty years of war". (Sarwari and Crewes in Crewes, Robert D. and Tarzi, Amin. Eds. *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 2008, p. 355).

It is not, therefore, correct that the neo-Taliban insurgency has defeated the US mission in Afghanistan. The failure of the military and the state-building policies of the United States and the Afghan Government it supported have contributed significantly to the US decision to end its nation-building and military missions and to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan in 2014. The American decision is also influenced by other factors including the economics of this Afghan war and the declining public support in the US for the war.

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Photographs of KEY EVENTS



(Left)

India's External Affairs Minister, Mr Salman Khurshid, (right) at a dialogue session following his ISAS Public Lecture in Singapore on 3 July 2013.

(Bottom Right)

ISAS Head of Research and Visiting Senior Research Fellow, Dr S Narayan, addressing a seminar organised, on 18 July 2013, by the Singapore Management University in association with ISAS.



(Top Left)

ISAS Visiting Research Professor, Professor Sukh Deo Muni, chaired an ISAS Book Talk in Singapore on 26 September 2013. Dr Arndt Michael spoke about his book, *India's Foreign Policy and Regional Multilateralism*.

(Right)

A panoramic view of an ISAS panel discussion on 'Changing Films, Filming Change: Cinema as a social change maker', held in Singapore on 6 September 2013. ISAS Visiting Research Professor, Professor Robin Jeffrey, (from left, seated second at the main table) and ISAS Senior Research Fellow, Dr Ronojoy Sen (seated next) led the discussion.





National University of Singapore (NUS) President, Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, addressing the Fourth China-India-Singapore Dialogue for Higher Education, held in Singapore on 30 October 2013.



India's High Commissioner to Singapore, Ms Vijay Thakur Singh, (right) releasing the novel, *Jorasanko*, at the ISAS Book Launch, organised in partnership with Tagore Society, in Singapore on 13 September 2013. The author, Ms Aruna Chakravarti (left) receives a copy.



Participants at a workshop organised by ISAS, in association with New York-based Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation, in Singapore on 5 & 6 September 2013. The theme related to the role of women in combating violence and extremism in South Asia.



Former Representative of the United Nations Secretary General in various conflict zones, Mr Ian Martin, and ISAS Principal Research Fellow, Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, at the ISAS Public Lecture by the former in Singapore on 21 August 2013.



A session in progress at the ISAS-Routledge Research Seminar on South Asian Studies, held in Singapore on 28 October 2013.



ISAS Head of Research and Visiting Senior Research Fellow, Dr S Narayan, (left) and other panellists at a workshop on 'Federalism in China and India' organised by ISAS and the East Asian Institute in Singapore on 15 & 16 August 2013.

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