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EDITORIAL

Modi's Outreach to Pakistan

The 25th of December 2015 was a remarkable day for South Asia: Christmas, Birthday of Mohammad Ali Jinnah father of Pakistani nation and a surprise two hours or so visit to Pakistan on an apparently short notice by the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Surprise it was as Mr Modi has persistently and vociferously insisted on a one-point agenda (terrorism) in talks with Pakistan and nothing else. Do we take his visit as reversal of his policy and a new found willingness to engage Pakistan constructively?

There are many questions that Mr Modi's short trip to Lahore is not in sync with the norms of diplomacy and the prevailing environments as it is hard to see it as a meaningful result oriented diplomacy. India Pakistan relationship is too serious a business to be trivialised It is not at all clear at this moment if what transpired in Lahore was part of a coherent, well-thought-out diplomatic strategy on the part of the Indian and Pakistani governments or a typical Hindi Bollywood Masala/drama.

Pakistani government has further added to the mystery of Modi's visit with critics hinting conflict of interest for Nawaz Sharif's invitation to his private home in Lahore. The government must demystify the Lahore visit and disclose all that was discussed and importantly what was not discussed. (Bharat Kumar)

Ambassador M K Bhadrakumar says, "Would the heavens come down if it really ensued from a brilliant brain wave on Modi's mind on a wintry morning while in Kabul, or was the outcome of a carefully choreographed diplomatic event? Clearly, the Modi government is proving to be far more willing than any previous government in Delhi to hitch India's wagons with the US' regional strategies,'

Contrast the visit to Lahore with the earlier legs of Mr Modi's trip to Russia and then Afghanistan. In those two countries, there were a range of substantive meetings and initiatives launched or inaugurated. In Lahore, neither the

Pakistani nor the Indian prime minister announced anything meaningful. The news conference of Foreign Secretary Aizaz Chaudhry was also devoid of any details or the steps to come raising public expectations — and putting hostile lobbies on alert in both countries — while keeping the details to a minimum can be a dangerous approach in the subcontinent.

.Mr Sharif's trip to Delhi in May 2014 ought to be a reminder of what meetings without clear strategies for dialogue can lead to, i.e. nothing.

There is also the issue of how Mr Modi and his government will handle domestic elements hostile to the idea of talks with Pakistan. While Mr Modi's solid poll numbers and his secure majority in parliament give him some room to manoeuvre, history suggests that even the most secure of political leaders can be thwarted by anti-peace hawks. Already there are voices — including, grimly, in the Congress itself — castigating Mr Modi for his outreach to Pakistan. The Indian public, the media and national-security institutions, will all have to be brought aboard. Similarly Mr Nawaz Sharif is being criticised and many in Pakistan though a bit relieved with the thaw in relationship but are very concerned about the real intent. Many suspect a conflict of interest and view the entire proceedings with suspicion and scepticism.

Pakistan-India relations, however, continue to be plagued by the Kashmir dispute, an active Kashmir dispute, an active nuclear arms race, allegations of proxy wars against each other and of course the perennial border tensions. Add to this the recent attack on the Pathankot air base in India, which has the potential of nullifying gains made by Narendra Modi's surprise visit to Lahore.

The attack on Indian air base has a clear message -- to derail New Delhi's normalization process with Pakistan. But thankfully unlike in the past, the two sides, are so far playing it cool. And the media in the two countries is also advising caution and continued engagement.

The two states owe it to their peoples to work on normalising relationship and solving all outstanding issues particularly Kashmir through structured dialogue. The previously planned Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue may be fleshed out in an anticipated meeting between the foreign secretaries next month — a deadline that should be adhered to

Bangladesh Abyss

The existing state of human rights in Bangladesh has been the lowest in the past three years. In fact the second tenure of Sheikh Hasina as prime minister of Bangladesh has turned out to be nightmare in terms of human rights violations and persecution of political dissidents and civil society.

As reported by the Human Rights Watch political violence is on the rise in a country and there has been excessive use of brutal force by the security forces, carrying out extra judicial killings, hangings through kangaroo courts and enforced disappearances of political leaders.

For the first time in the nation's history, Bangladeshi civil society is under pressure not to speak against the legitimacy of existing labour laws and poor working conditions. There is not a single institution in the country that has not been corrupted or politicised. Judiciary has become a farce and the military has been put to slumber by giving them lucrative incentives and UN peacekeeping jobs. Bangladesh ranks on the top for contributing peacekeepers to the UN while the peace at home remains a flight of fancy.

India and Hindu Fundamentalism

It is sad for those who had watched India under Jawaharlal Nehru and even under the BJP government headed by Atal Bihari Vajpayee to see the country veering away from the trail blazed by them and sliding from democracy and secularism to fascism, fanaticism and theocracy writes S.G Jilanee:

“A sea change has occurred. For people like Jaswant Singh or L.K. Advani. Now you have Arun Jaitley, Rajnath Singh and Amit Shah et al, each reported a rabid extremist and an utter bigot. Dissent is stifled, intolerance is at an all-time high and people are killed for attempting free expression. And Narendra Modi as prime minister remains as silent and nonchalant as he was as chief minister of Gujarat when Muslims were wantonly massacred. Even when he opens his mouth to speak, it is not to condemn a killing or denounce the killers, but to philosophize on the blessings of communal harmony, as when he spoke after the countrywide furore over the lynching of an innocent Muslim in Dadri (U.P.)

Scientists as well as historians have said they are increasingly alarmed by the

government's attempts to rewrite Indian history by distorting facts about a glorious Hindu past. Initially, as many as 40 Sahitya Akademi award-winners announced their decision to return the awards as part of strengthening the protest against attacks on writers and rising intolerance in India at large.

A group of about a dozen filmmakers, including Dibakar Banerjee and Paresh Kamdar returned their national awards to protest against the 'rising intolerance' in the country. 'Meanwhile, 135 scientists from across the country signed an online petition addressed to President Pranab Mukherjee against "the systematic spread of intolerance and communal hatred in the country."

Afghanistan – India - Pakistan

It is now more than clear that it was probably a mistake to invade Afghanistan in the first place. Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda terrorists could have been dealt with without invading an entire country, and there was never any evidence that the Taliban government of the day knew about his 9/11 attacks on the United States in advance

The attempts to create a Western-style liberal democracy in Afghanistan was even more naive than the previous Soviet project to build a modern, secular, "socialist" one-party state in the country. It is beyond reason to think that the Afghan National army can control the situation, far from it; in fact the army high command is profoundly corrupt. For example, up to a quarter of the army's troops are "ghost soldiers" who only exist on paper, so that officers can draw their pay. It is currently suffering the highest desertion rate since its inception,

The civil and military leadership is so inept and corrupt that it relishes blaming Pakistan for all the ills and India taking full advantage of the situation. But does India have a realistic role in the Afghanistan. Yes it can have a big role should Pakistan agree to provide a transit route to India through its territory. But is Pakistan so naive to agree to this without a quid pro quo?

One thing is clear that there are no signs of a clear military victory over the Taliban. Gwynne Dyer writes that Afghanistan and the US have realised that for any political settlement with Taliban, Pakistan's role is central. However, the Taliban have no reason to agree to a power-sharing peace settlement, since

they can still hope for an outright military victory. And Pakistan doesn't really control the Taliban and can perhaps manipulate them to a limited extent.

There were preliminary peace talks early this year, but there has been nothing since July. We think India has also realised the importance of Pakistan in the Afghan problem and perhaps the surprise visit to Pakistan by Mr Modi was in fact part of the plan to lure Nawaz Sharif to agree to provide a land route to India to connect with Afghanistan and the rest of Central Asian states. Will the establishment in Pakistan not see through this Great Game- that remains a big question?

Nepal - India - China

“China has all along believed that countries irrespective of their size are equal. China and Nepal have always treated each other with sincerity and as equals. We hope that the same policy and practices will also be adopted by India. India needs to realize that it pays to have stable and equal relations with its neighbours”, Chinas' Foreign Minister Wang Yi Friday said.

Why does India have to go across Pakistan to have good relations with Afghanistan when it has persistently followed a policy of antagonism and intimidation with all its neighbours?

The proposed China visit of K P Sharma Oli, who took over as prime minister in October, is in marked contrast to the usual practice the new prime ministers of Nepal follow. Most of the Nepalese premiers have visited India, ahead of visit to any other country. Indian officials have taken this as an official snub from Nepal.

China has in principle agreed to enhance road and air connectivity and infrastructure development with Nepal. China policy of open ended diplomacy with its neighbours big or small should not be seen as strategic encirclement of India by India or US. On the contrary this policy aims at stabilising Indias' neighbours and thus promotes regional stability of South Asian nations. It is in Indian interest to follow and support this policy as well and take a cue for the right way to improve relations with its small and weak neighbours.

Lahore stopover: Modi heeds Washington's wishes

Ambassador M K Bhadrakumar.

The weekend show was like the typical Hindi masala Bollywood movie complete with the zanjeer dialog and a munnabhai jhappi. We have deeper and more urgent economic problems than Pakistan.

Modi would be living in a fool's paradise to think Pakistan will distance itself from China. If it does, the price it will have to pay will be huge i.e. no country will be left on the globe which will trust Pakistan again.

Pakistani government has further added to the mystery of Modi's visit with critics hinting conflict of interest for Nawaz Sharif's invitation to his home. The government must demystify the Lahore visit and disclose all that was discussed and importantly what was not discussed. (Bharat Kumar)

Would the heavens come down if it really ensued from a brilliant brain wave on Modi's mind on a wintry morning while in Kabul, or was the outcome of a carefully choreographed diplomatic event?

'Clearly, the Modi government is proving to be far more willing than any previous government in Delhi to hitch India's wagons with the US' regional strategies,' says Ambassador M K Bhadrakumar

The letter to Bharatiya Janata Party President Amit Shah by the party's 3-time MP Kirti Azad, questioning the move to initiate disciplinary action against him would have been, normally speaking, assured of media headlines, since it is invested with huge political symbolism. Shah derives his halo from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, but is no longer an awe-inspiring figure, and Azad is reputed to be a wily off-spinner.

But Modi elbowed out Azad, hogging media headlines with his impulsive decision to 'drop by' in Lahore en route to Delhi from Kabul. How enduring would be Modi's achievement?

A comparison between the Indian and Pakistani media is in order. The Indian media has gone euphoric, savouring the bits of information falling from the high table. But Pakistani dailies offer a study in contrast, exercising a due sense

of proportions. The Pakistan foreign ministry statement was notably restrained and all but hinted at the hospitality that Lahore is famous for.

The Indian establishment attributes entirely to Modi the credit for Friday's 'historic' happening -- as if a brilliant thought occurred so very casually to our prime minister.

The spin doctors scrambled to get the tale across. There are different versions as to how the Indian high commissioner managed to reach Lahore in time. Some say he chartered an aircraft and flew, others say he drove at breakneck speed in his Merc down the highway to Lahore.

But senior Pakistani officials were not that lucky. Those who couldn't make it included Pakistan's Foreign Policy Advisor (and *de facto* foreign minister) Sartaj Aziz, National Security Advisor Lieutenant General Nasser Khan Janjua and the special assistant to the prime minister on foreign affairs, Syed Tariq Fatemi. *None of the key figures in the Pakistani foreign and security policy establishment was present in Lahore.*

Perhaps, Washington knows something more than the Pakistani establishment or what the Indian spin doctors revealed. The comments in real time by the US State Department spokesman John Kirby that Modi's overture would 'benefit the entire region' hits the nail on the head.

The United States is appropriately casting Modi's bonhomie with Sharif against the grand backdrop of regional politics rather than vainly looking for substantive results in the India-Pakistan relationship.

From such a perspective, the Lahore stopover came at the fag-end of a foreign tour to Moscow and Kabul. These were destinations where Modi got an irresistible opportunity to indulge in some Pakistan bashing under the garb of the fight against terrorism (which is a common cause for India, Russia and Afghanistan.)

But Modi instead opted not to exercise that option. Run a fine comb through the India-Russia joint statement issued in Moscow or the text of the magnificent speech Modi made in Kabul at the inaugural of the Afghan parliament in Kabul, and it almost seems that he was acutely conscious of the importance of not causing embarrassment to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif by harping on

Pakistan's support of the Taliban, despite that being a major factor undermining regional security and stability.

The Kabul speech, made just before Modi dialled Sharif's number in Lahore, is particularly conspicuous for its great reticence, notwithstanding the tsunami of anti-Pakistan sentiments sweeping over the Hindu Kush. *Modi disappointed his Afghan audience by instead visualising Pakistan as a potential 'bridge' of regional cooperation between India and Afghanistan.*

Suffice it to say, Modi's tour hints at a major course correction by India. This is precisely what Kirby alluded to. The US has been exerting sustained pressure on India to normalise with Pakistan by rolling back its Great Game impulses on Afghan turf.

And there is evidence, finally, that Modi is paying heed to Washington's wishes. His stopover in Lahore after a visit to Kabul by itself carried immense symbolism -- signalling that Delhi no longer harbours a zero-sum mindset over the Afghan situation.

Hopefully, this policy shift will register not only on Sharif, but also on the GHQ of the Pakistani military in Rawalpindi. Rawalpindi has made India's perceived activities from Afghan soil as the litmus test of the Modi government's intentions toward Pakistan. Modi has now put his personal imprimatur on the policy shift.

For Washington, on the other hand, India-Pakistan normalisation is highly desirable for the furtherance of its regional strategies in terms of the 'rebalance' in Asia and the containment policies toward Russia -- one may say it has become an imperative need.

Clearly, the Modi government is proving to be far more willing than any previous government in Delhi to hitch India's wagons with the US' regional strategies. The Modi government has even begun flaunting this willingness, casting aside the lingering residues of strategic ambiguity, as is apparent from the huge upswing in the military cooperation and, most important, the near-certainty of acceding to the Pentagon's long-standing demand to conclude the Logistic Support Agreement, LSA, which would give free access for the US forces to Indian bases.

The LSA is a force multiplier for the US in the region and the utility of the US-Indian congruence is simply seamless if the US chooses to confront China militarily anytime.

The Indian establishment has begun selectively briefing the media lately with a view to sensitising public opinion that India is inching close to concluding the LSA, which signifies a paradigm shift in the country's policy of non-alignment and its adherence to strategic autonomy in a volatile regional and international milieu.

Enter Pakistan. In order for US regional strategies to be effective, Pakistan's steady build-up as China's strategic partner needs to be arrested. And this is best done by reducing Pakistan's threat perceptions from India, which can only be achieved by persuading Delhi to abandon the Great Game in Afghanistan and improving the climate of relations with Islamabad.

The US estimates that a propitious moment has come with an unabashedly pro-American government in power in India under a strong-willed leader who can be trusted to take controversial decisions (such as the LSA) and an incumbent Pakistani military leadership, which, unlike the previous one, would share the Pakistani civilian elites' traditional 'Westernism.'

Can Washington swing this audacious attempt to bury India-Pakistan tensions? The good thing is that Modi is a willing torch-bearer and the ultra-nationalistic Sangh Parivar is in reality quite amenable to American influence.

But is that enough? The point is, Modi and the Sangh Parivar do not make even anywhere near one half of India. Again, Pakistan will forever continue to suspect that the leopard cannot change its spots.

It is going to be a Herculean effort for Washington to shake up and loosen the tight Sino-Pakistan embrace. Make no mistake, China and Russia (and Iran) won't let go Pakistan and the Pakistani elites themselves know the relative worth of their country's strategic choices.

That is to say, there is going to be severe limits to what the US can offer as recompense to Pakistan either bilaterally or by way of getting Modi to act quickly on what some of the starry-eyed Indian pundits call the 'low-hanging fruits.'

Not only are there formidable backlogs of mutual suspicions and hardened mindset of mutual animosities on both sides of the flawed India-Pakistan relationship that need to be cleared (in systemic as well as in political terms), but Modi is no longer as strong as he used to be 19 months ago when he became prime minister.

Meanwhile, Azad's letter to Shah testifies to gathering storms. Such a daredevil act by a BJP MP with political lineage from the Hindi heartland to question the judgment of his party leader whose real heft lies in him being Modi's Man Friday would have been unthinkable even a couple of months ago.

It only shows that Shah no longer inspires shock and awe and the ground beneath his feet is shifting. Arguably, it is a reflection on Modi himself.

The problem with Modi's evening in Lahore is that it is a one-act play. It is a law of nature that hype becomes unsustainable for long once the climax is through. Whereas, Azad's letter is only Scene 1 of Act one in what may turn out to be a Five-Act Play.

Ambassador M K Bhadrakumar is arguably India's leading expert on Afghanistan and Pakistan.

India's "Untouchables" Face Violence, Discrimination

Hillary Mayell

For National Geographic News

More than 160 million people in India are considered "Untouchable"—people tainted by their birth into a caste system that deems them impure, less than human.

Human rights abuses against these people, known as Dalits, are legion. A random sampling of headlines in mainstream Indian newspapers tells their story: "Dalit boy beaten to death for plucking flowers"; "Dalit tortured by cops for three days"; "Dalit 'witch' paraded naked in Bihar"; "Dalit killed in lock-up at Kurnool"; "7 Dalits burnt alive in caste clash"; "5 Dalits lynched in Haryana"; "Dalit woman gang-raped, paraded naked"; "Police egged on mob to lynch Dalits".

Dalits are not allowed to drink from the same wells, attend the same temples, wear shoes in the presence of an upper caste, or drink from the same cups in tea stalls," said Smita Narula, a senior researcher with Human Rights Watch, and author of *Broken People: Caste Violence Against India's "Untouchables."* Human Rights Watch is a worldwide activist organization based in New York.

India's Untouchables are relegated to the lowest jobs, and live in constant fear of being publicly humiliated, paraded naked, beaten, and raped with impunity by upper-caste Hindus seeking to keep them in their place. Merely walking through an upper-caste neighbourhood is a life-threatening offense.

Nearly 90 percent of all the poor Indians and 95 percent of all the illiterate Indians are Dalits, according to figures presented at the International Dalit Conference that took place May 16 to 18 in Vancouver, Canada.

Crime against Dalits

Statistics compiled by India's National Crime Records Bureau indicate that in the year 2000, the last year for which figures are available, 25,455 crimes were committed against Dalits. Every hour two Dalits are assaulted; every day three Dalit women are raped, two Dalits are murdered, and two Dalit homes are torched.

No one believes these numbers are anywhere close to the reality of crimes committed against Dalits. Because the police, village councils, and government officials often support the caste system, which is based on the religious teachings of Hinduism, many crimes go unreported due to fear of reprisal, intimidation by police, inability to pay bribes demanded by police, or simply the knowledge that the police will do nothing.

"There have been large-scale abuses by the police, acting in collusion with upper castes, including raids, beatings in custody, failure to charge offenders or investigate reported crimes," said Narula.

That same year, 68,160 complaints were filed against the police for activities ranging from murder, torture, and collusion in acts of atrocity, to refusal to file a complaint. Sixty two percent of the cases were dismissed as unsubstantiated; 26 police officers were convicted in court.

Despite the fact that untouchability was officially banned when India adopted its constitution in 1950, discrimination against Dalits remained so pervasive that in 1989 the government passed legislation known as The Prevention of Atrocities Act. The act specifically made it illegal to parade people naked through the streets, force them to eat faeces, take away their land, foul their water, interfere with their right to vote, and burn down their homes.

Since then, the violence has escalated, largely as a result of the emergence of a grassroots human rights movement among Dalits to demand their rights and resist the dictates of untouchability, said Narula.

Lack of Enforcement, Not Laws

Enforcement of laws designed to protect Dalits is lax if not non-existent in many regions of India. The practice of untouchability is strongest in rural areas, where 80 percent of the country's population resides. There, the underlying religious principles of Hinduism dominate.

Hindus believe a person is born into one of four castes based on karma and "purity"—how he or she lived their past lives. Those born as Brahmins are priests and teachers; Kshatriyas are rulers and soldiers; Vaisyas are merchants and traders; and Sudras are labourers. Within the four castes, there are thousands of sub-castes, defined by profession, region, dialect, and other factors.

Untouchables are literally outcasts; a fifth group that is so unworthy it doesn't fall within the caste system.

Although based on religious principles practiced for some 1,500 years, the system persists today for economic as much as religious reasons.

Because they are considered impure from birth, Untouchables perform jobs that are traditionally considered "unclean" or exceedingly menial, and for very little pay. One million Dalits work as manual scavengers, cleaning latrines and sewers by hand and clearing away dead animals. Millions more are agricultural workers trapped in an inescapable cycle of extreme poverty, illiteracy, and oppression.

Although illegal, 40 million people in India, most of them Dalits, are bonded workers, many working to pay off debts that were incurred generations ago, according to a report by Human Rights Watch published in 1999. These people, 15 million of whom are children, work under slave-like conditions hauling rocks, or working in fields or factories for less than U.S. \$1 day.

Crimes against Women

Dalit women are particularly hard hit. They are frequently raped or beaten as a means of reprisal against male relatives who are thought to have committed

some act worthy of upper-caste vengeance. They are also subject to arrest if they have male relatives hiding from the authorities.

A case reported in 1999 illustrates the toxic mix of gender and caste.

A 42-year-old Dalit woman was gang-raped and then burnt alive after she, her husband, and two sons had been held in captivity and tortured for eight days. Her crime? Another son had eloped with the daughter of the higher-caste family doing the torturing. The local police knew the Dalit family was being held, but did nothing because of the higher-caste family's local influence.

There is very little recourse available to victims.

A report released by Amnesty International in 2001 found an "extremely high" number of sexual assaults on Dalit women, frequently perpetrated by landlords, upper-caste villagers, and police officers. The study estimates that only about 5 percent of attacks are registered, and that police officers dismissed at least 30 percent of rape complaints as false.

The study also found that the police routinely demand bribes, intimidate witnesses, cover up evidence, and beat up the women's husbands. Little or nothing is done to prevent attacks on rape victims by gangs of upper-caste villagers seeking to prevent a case from being pursued. Sometimes the policemen even join in, the study suggests. Rape victims have also been murdered. Such crimes often go unpunished.

Thousands of pre-teen Dalit girls are forced into prostitution under cover of a religious practice known as *Devadasi*, which means "female servant of god." The girls are dedicated or "married" to a deity or a temple. Once dedicated, they are unable to marry, forced to have sex with upper-caste community members, and eventually sold to an urban brothel.

Resistance and Progress

Within India, grassroots efforts to change are emerging, despite retaliation and intimidation by local officials and upper-caste villagers. In some states, caste conflict has escalated to caste warfare, and militia-like vigilante groups have

conducted raids on villages, burning homes, raping, and massacring the people. These raids are sometimes conducted with the tacit approval of the police.

In the province Bihar, local Dalits are retaliating, committing atrocities also. Non-aligned Dalits are frequently caught in the middle, victims of both groups.

"There is a growing grassroots movement of activists, trade unions, and other NGOs that are organizing to democratically and peacefully demand their rights, higher wages, and more equitable land distribution," said Narula. "There has been progress in terms of building a human rights movement within India, and in drawing international attention to the issue."

In August 2002, the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UN CERD) approved a resolution condemning caste or descent-based discrimination.

"But at the national level, very little is being done to implement or enforce the laws," said Narula.

Hillary Mayell wrote this for National Geographic News

Indian State “orchestrated” Islamist terror

NafeezAhmed

A senior Indian police officer and anti-corruption investigator accused the Indian government of orchestrating the Mumbai terror attacks which occurred nearly seven years ago, according to an Indian government official.

R. V. S. Mani, a former undersecretary in India’s home ministry now in the urban development ministry, testified in July that a senior police officer who investigated the 2004 ‘encounter killings’ of four Indian Muslims in Gujarat by the Ahmadabad Police Crime Branch, had told him that the 2008 Mumbai attacks were “set up” by the Indian government.

The police officer, Satish Verma—currently Principal at the Police Training College in Junagadh—is well-known for his secondment to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), India’s elite anti-corruption law enforcement agency, to lead the probe into the 2004 ‘encounter killings.’

The 2004 victims were Ishrat Jahan Raza, a 19-year-old girl from Mumbra, Maharashtra, and three men—Pranesh Pillai (alias Javed Gulam Sheikh), Amjad Ali Rana and Zeeshan Johar. Gujarat police authorities with the support of Indian government officials claimed that the killings were justified due to credible intelligence linking the four to Islamist terrorists.

Anti-corruption investigator blames government for terror

According to Mani, who has signed affidavits submitted to court on the encounter killings, Satish Verma privately accused successive Indian governments of “orchestrating” not only the Mumbai terror attacks, but also the December 2001 terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament in New Delhi.

Verma made the allegations while questioning Mani on Indian government claims that intelligence proved Ishrat Jahan’s links to Islamist terrorists. According to the *Times of India*, the former home ministry official revealed in his affidavits that Verma had said the terror attacks were set up by the government “with the objective of strengthening the counter-terror legislation.”

Verma allegedly claimed that:

“... the 13.12. 2001(attack on Parliament) was followed by Pota (Prevention of Terrorist Activities Act) and 26/11 2008 (terrorists’ siege of Mumbai) was followed by amendment to the UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act).”

According to the *Times*, Verma refused to confirm or deny Mani’s account of his allegations. “I cannot speak to the media on such matters. Ask the CBI,” he said.

Neither Verma nor Mani could be reached for comment.

The allegations have been used by the Indian government to cast doubt on Verma’s role in the CBI investigation

This is not the first time that the Indian government has attempted to use Verma’s work against him. In April last year, Verma complained before India’s Central Administrative Tribunal that he was a target of government harassment due to its “intense dislike” of his work investigating the Israt Jahan fake encounter case, and the Gujarat government’s role in it.

Staged counter-terror operation

All three incidents—the 2001 attack on Parliament, 2004 ‘encounter killings’ and the 2011 Mumbai attacks—have been linked to terrorists from the al-Qaeda affiliated Pakistan-based group Lashkar-e-Taiba, which also has close ties to Pakistan’s Inter Services Intelligence (ISI).

The CBI’s investigation into the controversial 2004 ‘encounter killings’ found that they had been “staged” by Gujarat police forces, concluding there was no evidence justifying claims that Ishrat Jahan and her fellow victims were members of Lashkar-e-Taiba.

The verdict, outlined in the CBI’s 2013 charge sheet, stated that the police attacks were carried out in cold blood, and “staged” by Gujarat police and the government’s Intelligence Bureau (IB):

“The above mentioned fake encounter was a result of Joint operation of Gujarat Police and SIB [State Intelligence Bureau], Ahmadabad. In this operation the overt acts committed by the accused Gujarat Police officers have been established by the evidence on record.”

The CBI charge sheet corroborated the conclusions of an earlier investigation by an Ahmadabad Metropolitan court, which in 2009 had determined the killings were staged Gujarat intelligence and police officials.

Gujarat authorities claim that IB intelligence showed that Ishrat and the other men were planning to assassinate Modi on behalf of Lashkar-e-Taiba.

But according to the CBI probe, “the four people were illegally confined at three different farmhouses for days before the encounter on June 15, 2004.” India’s NDTV reported that the CBI probe had confirmed that weapons found near their bodies, including an AK-56, “were supplied by the Intelligence Bureau.”

India’s Intelligence Bureau: creating terror to fight terror

The Indian state of Gujarat, where incumbent Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was chief minister during this period, is home to a sizeable Muslim minority.

Reviewing the CBI charge sheet and related evidence, Indian journalists Hartosh Singh Bal and Mihir Srivastava noted that the CBI probe had confirmed the role of senior Indian IB officials, “including at least in one case the then IB head in Gujarat, Rajinder Kumar,” who is close to Narendra Modi.

Bal and Srivastava interviewed several senior IB officials who confirmed that “the Ishrat Jahan case was a successful IB operation,” but denied that the encounter victims were disassociated from terrorism.

“The encounter was fake no doubt, according to them, but the information that Ishrat and the other three were part of a larger terror network was true. They went on to say that this was a successful intelligence operation, as the IB was able to infiltrate their sleeper cell and plant informers.”

Bal and Srivastava account of one of these interviews provides further alarming evidence of the extent to which counter-terrorism intelligence operations can facilitate terrorism. One high-level Intelligence Bureau executive told the pair:

“... there are hundreds of operations underway at any point of time where an informer has been planted in a sleeper network. This involves being in the company of drug and arms dealers, fake currency smugglers, explosive experts and contract killers. Some operations involve working with the mafia and dealing in and supplying arms. There are safe houses in which certain terrorists are kept, briefed and debriefed, then pushed back into the terror network to extricate information.”

In one particularly alarming passage, the journalists recount that IB officials confirm about 5,000 telephone numbers are being monitored in Delhi. On “special occasions” Indian intelligence services make bespoke IB filmcards “available to terror networks and sleeper cells to monitor their activities...”

“There have been a few cases where attacks were carried out by terrorists using IB filmcards. ‘If these cases were to be investigated, the CBI would say the IB carried out terror attacks. We have a job at hand,’ says the IB official.”

In this context, the revelation that CBI Israt Jahan probe member Satish Verma reportedly accuses the Indian government of facilitating other terrorist attacks linked to Lashkar-e-Taiba raises fundamental questions about the extent to which the lack of democratic oversight over intelligence methods is compromising national security.

The triple cross behind the Mumbai atrocity

Those questions are also relevant in light of the fact that alleged Mumbai attack terror mastermind, David Coleman Headley, was a long time CIA asset and triple agent.

A previous *Times of India* investigation in late 2013 found that Headley, who had worked for the CIA for eleven years, had penetrated Lashkar-e-Taiba on behalf of the US intelligence agency and collaborated closely with senior Pakistani ISI officials in planning the Mumbai attacks, which killed 166 people and wounded 304.

Senior intelligence officials from a US Joint Terrorism Task Force described Headley as a “prized counter-terrorism asset,” whose “proximity” to the attack plans allowed the CIA to repeatedly tip off their Indian counterparts. But, the report revealed, despite his instrumental role in creating and executing those plans, Headley “was allowed to remain in place even as the attack was realized.”

A US intelligence official with expertise on Afghanistan and Pakistan denied that Headley was ever connected to the CIA on condition of anonymity.

Yet Headley’s intimate ties to the US intelligence community emerged in the 2011 Chicago terror trial of Headley’s alleged co-conspirator in the 2008 Mumbai attacks, Tahawwur Rana, during which Rana’s attorney Charlie Swift described Headley as a “master manipulator” who worked simultaneously for the US Drugs Enforcement Agency (DEA), the CIA and Pakistan’s ISI.

Those allegations raised in court were vindicated when Swift obtained a ‘not guilty’ verdict for Rana for the Mumbai attacks, although Rana was instead convicted of providing support to Lashkar-e-Taiba.

According to the *Times of India* investigation by British journalists Adrian Levy and Cathy Scott-Clark, the Americans wanted to keep Headley running due to how he had gained the trust of a senior al-Qaeda operative, who was close to Osama bin Laden and among the al-Qaeda chief’s potential successors:

“Indian intelligence agents accused their US counterparts of protecting Headley and leaving him in the field, despite the imminent threat to Mumbai.irate Indian officials claimed that Headley’s Mumbai plot was allowed to run on by his US controllers, as to spool it in would have jeopardized his involvement in another critical US operation.”

The CIA, on the other hand, pointed the finger straight back at India. One senior CIA official accused Indian intelligence of “incompetence” for failing to act on the US agency’s multiple detailed warnings of an impending Islamist assault on Mumbai.

Although many of the US bulletins even reached police authorities patrolling Mumbai, the intelligence warnings were “ignored or downplayed” by Indian officials according to the *Times*.

Ironically, both the CIA and Indian accusations and counter-accusations all appear to bear significant merit. US officials have maintained a studious silence on David Headley and his CIA patronage to this day, refusing to throw light on the conflict of interest that enabled the Mumbai terror mastermind to “run amok in the field,” in the words of the *Times*.

Simultaneously, the lack of an in-depth Indian government post-mortem into the Mumbai attacks has permitted Indian intelligence agencies to evade awkward questions about their failure to pursue the CIA’s leads on the unfolding plot.

Cover-up

It is not just the Pakistani ISI, then, that has scrambled to cover-up its complicity in the Mumbai attacks. American and Indian intelligence agencies are also busy playing the blame game while manoeuvring to conceal their own dubious roles in running ill-conceived intelligence operations enabling the terror attacks.

When under interrogation by Indian police, Headley was under the supervision of FBI officials at all times. Under his plea bargain with US authorities, he agreed to say no more than what he first confessed to the FBI, and in return will avoid the death penalty in the US, as well as extradition to India or Pakistan.

Confidential Indian intelligence records show that Headley had three local contacts on the ground in Mumbai who assisted him with his surveillance and reconnaissance activities in preparation for the terror plot. Yet for reasons unknown, Indian authorities chose not to investigate Headley’s local connections as identified in these files.

This has not stopped US and Indian intelligence agencies from giving each other a helping hand where it counts, while still pointing fingers.

Under US supervision and constrained by the terms of his plea bargain, Headley told Indian intelligence officers who had flown to Chicago in July 2010 that Israt Jahan was a member of Lashkar-e-Taiba's suicide bomb squad.

Yet Headley's reconnaissance missions for Lashkar began two years after Jahan and three other men were killed in the 'fake encounter', staged by Indian authorities according to a CBI investigation.

Headley's claim was leapt on by Gujarat authorities to justify their story of the 2004 encounter killings.

Both US and Indian authorities, it seems, are keen to discredit the shocking conclusions of the CBI's anti-corruption investigators.

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Pakistan – Iran: a Betrayal of National Interests or a Cold Calculation

Alexei Abramov

The lifting of sanctions from Iran was the latest challenge for the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, after the signing by Tehran on July 14, 2015 of the nuclear deal by the P5+1 countries. In these conditions, Pakistan was finally forced to make a final decision about the gas issue. Which project will Islamabad give preference to: the Iran-Pakistan (IP) Gas Pipeline or the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) Pipeline?

Pakistan welcomed the lifting of political and economic barriers against Iran and expressed its confidence that after the sanctions are removed, Iran will once again be integrated into the regional and global economic markets.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamabad is tying the commencement of the Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline's construction in with plans to reinforce their own energy security. The chronic deficit of gas in the country is one of the main reasons for the low economic growth rate. A day after the signing of the deal in Vienna, Pakistan's Minister of Petroleum & Natural Resources Shahid Khaqan Abbasi confirmed that gas supplies from Iran will be possible within the next two years.

The 1,800 km-long project was first talked about as far back as 1955; negotiations then gained pace in the early 1990s; a feasibility study put the cost of the project at 1.25 billion dollars.

Pakistan has officially announced the start of the gas pipeline's construction several times over the last few years but owing to a number of reasons, the project has thus far failed to materialise. Technical documentation was updated, the tariff policy was reviewed. The political administrations of Islamabad replaced each other, their position changed, but each one declared there would be an energy "breakthrough" in relations with Tehran.

At the peak of international sanctions against Iran, on March 11, 2013, as part of its program of restructuring its energy sector, Islamabad signed an agreement with Tehran about the construction of a gas pipeline on its territory. The then Foreign Affairs Minister of Pakistan, Hina Rabbani Khar, announced that “US sanctions against Iran were connected to oil resources, not gas. Therefore, these sanctions do not hinder the gas pipeline project...”

“Pakistan will import 21.5 million cubic metres of Iranian natural gas on a daily basis,” declared the then President, Asif Ali Zardari. Pakistan’s leader made an official visit to Iran to attend a ceremony marking the laying of the first stone in the project’s foundation in the Iranian town of Chahbahar, at the Gabd border crossing which is the central point between the two states. The terms of the agreement foresee 20 years of work with a possible future 5-year prolongation. Iranian gas was planned to produce a 4,000 Megawatt yield of electrical energy for use by the internal market of Pakistan. According to the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Resources, “the completion of construction and the commencement of operation of the gas pipeline will facilitate a rise of up to 5% in Pakistan’s GDP.” In 2013, the Iranian part of the gas pipeline had practically been finished.

The flow of crude hydrocarbons was to be conducted from South Pars gas field, piped onwards along the gas distribution system through Iranian territory to the crossing point on the Iranian-Pakistani border, then the 781 km flow would continue into Pakistani territory through the Western Province of Balochistan into the Sindh Province to the town of Nawabshah to the North of the metropolitan city and seaport Karachi. The cost of constructing the Pakistani part of the gas pipeline was estimated at 1.5 billion dollars, which proved unaffordable for Islamabad. Tehran provided one of the loans (500 million dollars) in 2013, which Islamabad was obliged to repay after the gas pipeline would begin operations.

In 2013, Washington strongly opposed the planned deal to buy liquefied gas from Iran, threatened Pakistan with economic sanctions, offered gas supplies from the USA and simultaneously supported the TAPI project.

In May 2013, the Pakistan Muslim League (N) (PML N) came to power with the Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif (a long time political opponent of the Bhutto / Zardari clan). Under pressure, mainly from the USA

and Saudi Arabia, N. Sharif took a “keep silent” position on the gas pipeline project, despite the strict fixed penalties outlined in the agreement (3 million dollars a day in case of a breach of contract.) *The country’s opposition took the reversal of the foreign policy regarding Iran as submission to Washington and as a crippling blow to the country’s energy security.*

Trade between the two countries started to dramatically decline in 2013. Until the UN introduced sanctions against Iran in 2012, *the volume of bilateral trade between Islamabad and Tehran had reached 2 billion dollars, by mid-2015 it had decreased to 300 million dollars.*

In May 2014, Prime Minister N. Sharif asserted his official visit to Tehran would mark a new era in bilateral relations. In fact, the Cabinet Head inquired about another postponement in the construction of the pipeline and requested that the regime’s financial penalties be dropped. Tehran once again met them halfway.

Pakistan, taking advantage of its neighbour’s loyalty, put together another package of “requests” as part of their updated negotiation process, of which one of the priorities remained the reviewing of the gas tariffs. “In accordance with the contractual clause, the gas tariff can be reviewed a second time once a year before the recommencement of gas supplies. Thus we are determined,” announced the Federal Minister of Petroleum and Natural Resources, S. Abbasi, “to discuss the contractual clause about the gas tariff again.”

The Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline also has a Chinese component. The Pakistani part of the project is connected to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Beijing is currently financing the construction of the gas pipeline from Nawabshah (Sindh Province) to the deep-sea-port of Gwadar, not far from the Iranian border. As soon as this part is built, Pakistan should build a further 80km of pipeline to connect it with Iran’s gas distribution system. In turn, the gas flow from Nawabshah is to be extended to the Northern border with China.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif completed a Central-Asian tour in May 2015. Alongside a large number of memorandums of mutual collaboration, talks were held about the most important thing – energy sources. In August, diplomatic-level negotiations between the Ministries of Oil and Gas took place in Ashgabat.

Four countries (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India) decided to resume work on the project and announce their joint-ownership of the project. The State Company of Turkmenistan, TurkmenGaz looks set to become the main investor, as it is already the consortium leader of TAPI. (*Opening ceremony of the TAPI project was performed by the Prime Minister of Pakistan last month*)

The 1,800 km of pipeline, will transport natural gas from Turkmenistan's Galkynysh Gas Field, more famously known as the South Yolotan-Osman Field. The pipeline will then continue through Afghanistan's Herat and Kandahar Provinces, cross the Afghanistan Pakistan border, onwards to Quetta, then through inland areas to Multan, cross the border again and travel onwards to the Indian town of Fazilka in the Punjab Region. (*One does not have to be a brilliant student of geopolitics that this project is a non starter as it is contingent upon the obtaining situation in Afghanistan that remains highly uncertain in the foreseeable future*)

However, let's go back to Iran. After the sanctions are lifted, Tehran will not only reinstate the export of crude oil and get access to its assets in foreign banks, but it will rebuild its partnerships with the region's countries afresh. President Hassan Rouhani approached Indian Prime Minister, N. Modi, requesting an investment of 8 billion dollars in infrastructure projects and most importantly, in the strategic development of the port of Chahbahar. New Delhi has long set its sights on the port with the aim of circumventing its main competitor (Pakistan) and opening a sea-land access route to Afghanistan.

The Iranian-Indian project in Chahbahar on the Gulf of Oman near the Pakistani border will be a serious competition to the Pakistani-Chinese project in Gwadar (Strait of Hormuz). On Prime minister Nawaz Sharif's political decision – which project he will give preference to – IP or TAPI – hinges not only Pakistan's energy security, but also his fate as a politician (after all, he had sworn under oath to solve the country's energy problems) and also Islamabad's general foreign policy direction in the near future. (*It is now apparent that he has gone for TAPI under India-US pressure*)

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Modi's Worrying Pakistan Policy

Saira Bano

A lack of coherence allied with tough talk could prove self-defeating. India has been involved in fomenting trouble for its neighbours like Sri Lanka, Nepal Pakistan etc. using military as its foreign policy element and pouring billions to maintain huge military syndicate to run NE and J&K states which doesn't want to be part of India, it will be better for India to change its forward policy and look inwards!

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has yet to craft a coherent policy on Pakistan. He was outspoken in criticizing the government of his predecessor Manmohan Singh for being soft on Pakistan, but tempered his rhetoric after coming to power, inviting Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to his inauguration ceremony, before using a pretext to cancel talks. Recognizing that disengagement with Pakistan creates more problems for India, Modi allowed a resumption of talks at the secretary level in March 2015. Modi and Sharif themselves met on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit in Russia on July 10, 2015. Modi is opening talks at a time when the Sharif government is weak and the balance of power has decisively tilted in favour of the Pakistani military establishment.

Nawaz Sharif went to Modi's inauguration ceremony despite resistance from Pakistan's powerful army and refused to meet Hurriyat leaders. Instead of capitalizing on this gesture, Modi cancelled secretary-level talks with Islamabad on the grounds that the Pakistani ambassador to India had continued with the longstanding practice of meeting with Kashmiri separatists. This weakened Nawaz's ability to improve relations with India. Increased tensions at the Line of Control and Kashmir, in which Modi responded to cease-fire violations in a way that went beyond tit-for-tat thus worsened the situation.

Islamabad, however, was confident that apart from these ceasefire violations, New Delhi will not risk actual conflict, because of the risk it will turn nuclear. But the Indian army's raid in Myanmar against militants has Islamabad worried that India might pursue the same option against Pakistan. The latter's tactical

nuclear weapons are meant to counter India's "Cold Start" strategy of an offensive strike within Pakistan in order to punish terrorist elements. India, for its part, has made clear that it would deploy strategic nuclear weapons in response to Pakistan's use of short-range nukes. There is no clarity on how to prevent an escalation in the event of conflict and Modi is taking a risk in raising public expectations of an aggressive response to Pakistan.

Some argue that Modi should rely on robust anti-Pakistan rhetoric to retain his domestic support in case he fails to fulfil his election promises of economic growth and good governance. For its part, Islamabad is highly aware of the Modi's administration's penchant for provocative statements. Statements by senior Indian officials on sub-conventional warfare strengthen Islamabad's long-held view that India has not accepted Pakistan's independence and is working hard to destabilize it by supporting belligerent groups. Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval warned in February 2014 that, "you can do one Mumbai and you may lose Baluchistan." Similarly, Indian defense Minister, Manohar Parrikar, stated that, "we should neutralize terrorists through terrorists only." Modi's remarks in Dhaka that Pakistan "promotes terrorism" were seen as further confirmation of his hawkish policy.

Nuclear Weapons

In addition, a BBC report on links between India's Research and Analysis Wing and the Karachi-based political party MQM (Muttahida Quami Movement) provided Islamabad with evidence that India is encouraging subversion itself, to balance Pakistan's involvement in Kashmir. This reopens old wounds from India's role in the creation of Bangladesh, and confirms Islamabad's fear that New Delhi is willing to do anything to break up Pakistan. Pakistan accuses India of supporting anti-Pakistan terrorist groups, including the Pakistani Taliban and Baloch separatists. Pakistani Defence Minister Khawaja Asif, warned that Pakistan would use nuclear weapons if its survival were at stake. Lieutenant General Khalid Kidwai, still an advisor to Pakistan's National Command Authority and former Director General of Pakistan's Strategic Plans Division, has described four conditions for nuclear use: a) space threshold (India attacks Pakistan and conquers a large part of its territory); b) military threshold (India deploys a large part of its land or air forces); c) economic strangling; and d) domestic destabilization. India's support of anti-Pakistan elements would seem to meet that last condition.

India, on the other hand, blames Pakistan for terrorist activities in Kashmir and within India, ranging from the Twin Peak Crisis (2001-2002) to the Mumbai attacks in 2008 and the attack on the Indian embassy and consulate in Afghanistan. New Delhi protested the release of Zaki-ur- Rehman Lakhvi, the mastermind behind the Mumbai attack, from prison, with Pakistani authorities claiming India had provided insufficient evidence to prosecute him in Pakistani courts. India tried to raise the matter of Lakhvi's release at the United Nations Sanctions Committee, under resolution 1267, but China used its veto to block. China's veto shows that Beijing is willing to shield Islamabad from international scrutiny despite New Delhi's sensitivities.

China and Pakistan are also expanding their influence in Afghanistan. After taking office, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani chose Saudi Arabia, China, and Pakistan for his first overseas visits. Ghani cancelled an arms deal with New Delhi before visiting India in April 2015. The Afghan president is also reaching out to Afghan Taliban for talks facilitated by Islamabad and Beijing. After U.S. forces withdraw, New Delhi's influence in Afghanistan is likely to weaken.

Beijing is meanwhile investing \$46 billion in Pakistan-China Economic Corridor (CPEC) to link its underdeveloped western frontier with the Persian Gulf and Middle East through Pakistan. The CPEC would provide infrastructure within Pakistan in support of Beijing's plan of storing Middle Eastern oil in refineries at Gwadar and sending it to China via road or pipeline. Gwadar port is already operational, and has strategic significance for both Beijing and Islamabad. In September 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping invited India to join the economic corridor, but Modi balked because of fears of a growing Chinese foothold in the Indian Ocean. India is developing the Iranian port of Chahbahar as a competitor to Gwadar, but construction will take some time.

Indian attempts to isolate or ignore Pakistan will not yield the desired results and are counter-productive given Islamabad's position as the second largest country in South Asia and its strong links with China. Militarily India cannot afford to be confrontational with Pakistan, because of the latter's nuclear weapons. Politically and economically New Delhi cannot isolate Pakistan, which enjoys strong ties with China. New Delhi has no option but to engage Islamabad constructively by opening dialogue. It is in India's interest to reduce Pakistan's sense of insecurity by initiating negotiations and using confidence

building measures to reduce Islamabad's reliance on nuclear weapons. India's dream of great power status will be hard to achieve without a solution to the "Pakistan problem."

Modi may want to talk tough for domestic political reasons, but it is self-defeating in a number of ways. First, it constrains India's options in a future conflict, as he would be under tremendous option to respond aggressively, a highly dangerous move given the presence of nuclear weapons. Second, it is unnecessarily provocative and gives strength to anti-India elements in Pakistan. Third, it raises international concerns that are not only damaging to the Indian economy but also pairs India with Pakistan, something that New Delhi has long abhorred.

For India, the only way to de-hyphenate itself from Pakistan is to improve relations with Islamabad through bold initiatives. Modi, who has always advocated a more muscular approach to national security, cannot ignore Pakistan, but must also recognize that a hard-line approach will create problems for New Delhi. His huge victory gave Modi the political space to reach out to Pakistan in ways his predecessor could not. South Asia expert Stephen P. Cohen, once said, "India cannot make peace. Pakistan cannot make war." It is time for Modi to engage Pakistan directly and initiate a peace process.

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Nepal not a boxing arena

Press Trust of India (PTI)

India needs to realize that it pays to have stable and equal relations with its neighbours. Why does India have to go across Pakistan to have good relations with Afghanistan when it has persistently followed a policy of antagonism and intimidation with neighbouring Pakistan?

The proposed China visit of K P Sharma Oli, who took over as prime minister in October, is in marked contrast to the usual practice the new prime ministers of Nepal follow. Most of the Nepalese premiers have visited India, ahead of visit to any other country. Indian officials have taken this as an official snub from Nepal.

China has in principle agreed to enhance road and air connectivity and infrastructure development with Nepal. China policy of open ended diplomacy with its neighbours big or small should not be seen as strategic encirclement of India by India or US. On the contrary this policy aims at stabilising Indias' neighbours and thus promotes regional stability of South Asian nations. It is in Indian interest to follow and support this policy as well and take a cue for the right way to improve relations with its small and weak neighbours.

Beijing (PTI): Chinas' Foreign Minister Wang Yi Friday said Nepal should not become a "boxing arena" between India and China vying for influence in the Himalayan nation even as it called on New Delhi to treat Kathmandu as an equal partner.

Top diplomats of China and Nepal met in Beijing and discussed plans to open more border points for transit trade, a permanent arrangement for petroleum supplies from China and transit treaty to enable Nepal to access Chinese ports for travel and trade to reduce dependence on India. China has all along believed that countries irrespective of their size are equal. China and Nepal have always treated each other with sincerity and as equals. We hope that the same policy and practices will also be adopted by India. Chinas' Foreign Minister Wang Yi said at après conference with his Nepalese counterpart Kamal Thapa.

"A stable Nepal enjoying development fully serves the interests of both China and India. So in other words I would like to say that Nepal is a great place for mutually beneficial cooperation between China and India, not a boxing arena for China and India," he said.

Wang made the remarks while answering a question on India-China competition over Nepal. "China, India and Nepal are close neighbours connected by the same mountains and rivers. This makes three of us a natural community of shared interest. This is why China has proposed the development of a China-India-Nepal Economic Corridor. It is all about common development and prosperity. Ultimate goal is to form community of shared future of the three of us he said.

Both Wang and Thapa avoided any references to the Madhesi agitation while praising the new Constitution which has led to a major internal political crisis in Nepal.

On India-Nepal relations, Thapa said "immediately after the promulgation of the constitution there has been some misunderstanding between Nepal and India. Because of that India imposed unofficial obstruction on transit and supply of fuel and other essential commodities," he said referring to the transport blockade that Nepal alleged had been imposed by India but which has been strongly refuted by New Delhi.

"That caused a severe impact on the Nepalese society. It also had a negative impact on our economic growth. But I am very happy to say at this point of time that things are moving and improving," said Thapa who is also Deputy Prime Minister.

Referring to his two visits to India recently, he said "it seems that we are now able to clear the air of mistrust and misunderstanding and slowly things are moving and coming back to normal".

"Nepal has two big neighbours, China and India. We are very proud of that. Both countries are prospering. They are doing fantastic work on the economic development. That has always remained an inspiration to us," he said.

Thapa is the first high-level minister of the new Nepalese government to visit China.

During their talks, both the foreign ministers announced a series of measures to increase connectivity between their two countries including a transit treaty to overcome the blockade due to the Madhesi agitation over the new Nepalese constitution that led to severe fuel shortages in Nepal.

Thapa also said besides agreeing to open new border points, China is willing to consider Nepal's request for long term supply of petroleum products through Tibet at concessional rates due to high altitude transportation and taxation costs. He thanked China for supplying 1,000 MT of petroleum products at the height of the Madhesi agitation.

Thapa said Nepal's new government is looking to diversify the procurement of petroleum products and urged China to open more trade routes along its Tibetan border.

Currently one border point has been opened and they are working to open few others. Significantly, both Wang and Thapa spoke of talks on a transit treaty for Nepal to reduce its dependence on India.

Thapa said the treaty would enable Nepalese to access travel and goods from other countries through Chinese ports and a joint working group will identify the transit points.

He also announced free visa facility for Chinese tourists saying that over 120,000 tourists visited Nepal before the devastating earthquake in April. For its part, China removed travel warning to Nepal clamped after the quake, declaring it as safe for travel.

Thapa also assured that Nepal will continue to crackdown on Tibetans crossing from Tibet to Dharmasala to meet Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama. "We have consistently followed the one-China policy. I would like to reiterate once again that Nepal will not allow any activities that infringe on China's sensitivities on Tibet," he said.

On India, Thapa said, "Nepal has unique relations with both the countries. With India also we have excellent relations, social, cultural religious affinity and proximity has strengthened bilateral relations with India".

The Indian media at the event was not given an opportunity to ask questions. "Similarly with China we have so many common areas socially, culturally also we are bound together. The peace harmony, compassion, philosophy propounded by Lord Buddha has always remained as a cementing factor in our relations.

"For Nepal there is no need to play each other. We have our own type of relations with India. Similarly we have special relations with China. So we are very happy with that and will continue in future with strengthening relations with both the countries. That is the density that we have to live with," Thapa said.

"Nepal is situated between India and China. India and China, the large countries are the only neighbours of Nepal. That is not a shortcoming for Nepal. It is a geographical advantage for Nepal. I certainly hope that Nepal will maintain sound relations with both countries and I also believe that China and India should work together to tap our respective strengths to help Nepal accelerate its development," he said.

China also expressed its strong desire to see a peaceful, stable and prosperous Nepal, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told his visiting Nepal counterpart Kamal Thapa in Beijing.

"China would continue assisting Nepal in her development endeavours," Wang said during a bilateral meeting, according to a press release by Nepal's Foreign Ministry.

Thapa is currently in Beijing on a five-day official visit to seek assistance from its northern neighbour at a time then the Himalayan nation is facing acute fuel shortage due to blockade on the Nepal-India border for months.

The entire gamut of bilateral relations and cooperation between Nepal and China were covered during the bilateral talks held between the two foreign ministers.

The two sides discussed the importance of exchanging high level visits between the two countries," the release said.

"The Chinese side has conveyed the invitation to the Prime Minister of Nepal to visit China at an early date. There will be a high-level visit from China to Nepal as well next year," it said.

"Expressing happiness over the development of bilateral relations and cooperation over the last 60 years, the two sides agreed to expand and consolidate bilateral cooperation focusing mainly on trade, transit, investment, energy, tourism and infrastructure development," the press release said.

The Chinese side informed that it would soon take up agreed projects for post-disaster reconstruction as per its pledged assistance during the International Conference on Nepal's Reconstruction.

China has announced its willingness to support Nepal's industrialisation process through reconstruction as well.

Thapa thanked the Chinese government for extending generous support to Nepal's socioeconomic development. He also appreciated the spontaneous and prompt support received from China in the aftermath of the 25 April earthquake.

During the visit, Nepal's Finance Secretary Lok Darshan Regmi and Chinese Vice Minister of Commerce Zhang Xiangchen signed the Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation under which China would give 900 million Yuan as grant assistance for repair and maintenance of Araniko Highway and other projects of interconnection and interlinking.

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India a secular democracy?

Shabbir Kazmi

Without digging too deep into the history of Hindustan, it may be said very conveniently that the rulers have always been hiding their real face behind two strong veils i.e. democracy and secularism. Both these terms have been used to deceive the international community. If one probes the events taking place with the beginning of the division of the subcontinent into Pakistan and Hindustan and particularly over the last two decades, it becomes evident that democracy is a hoax and secularism is the name given to vandalism.

For a considerably long time, Hindustan has remained under the rule of 'foreign invaders' because local rulers were not only brutal but also staunch believers in a 'cast system' that gave authority to people in upper casts and negated the rights of the lower casts. The country has often remained under the thumb of the Brahmans. In the post-independence era, commoners have not enjoyed any 'dignity' as the masses have been pushed into the polling booths in herds to cast their votes in favour of the 'elite' or face deadly consequences.

In the post-independence era, Hindustan has always been ruled by the staunch 'religious parties' but Modi is the name of an extremist who is also the worst enemy of the largest minority, namely the Muslims. He is blamed for the worst modern-day massacre of Muslims in Indian Gujarat. His arrogance is naked because he has never accepted that he was wrong. He always misleads his domestic constituency by saying that he was right and Muslims deserve an even worse treatment, because they have ruled the Hindus for centuries.

Some people say that this was also a cover to get military aid, to ultimately establish the country's hegemony in South Asia. Hindustan solicited military aid from the US to fight against China and Pakistan. The US also supported Hindustan for containing the spread of communism. India had solicited military aid from the now defunct USSR to subjugate Pakistan and to get a foothold in Afghanistan. Now the US is fully supporting India in establishing its hegemony in South Asia.

The US has assigned a key role to Hindustan in Afghanistan and has also encouraged it to help construct the Chahbahar Port in Iran. The port is aimed at making Hindustan a watchman sitting at the entry of the Strait of Hormuz, through which millions of barrels of crude oil pass every day. A huge quantity of oil going to China also passes through this potential chokepoint. Hindustan often accuses Pakistan of cross-border terrorism but it supports insurgency groups in Balochistan.

An unofficial trade blockade by India is causing heartaches in Nepal.

Former Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee once said, "You can change friends, but not neighbours." The quote may be a wise saying for others, but for a small and landlocked country like Nepal, it is a harsh reality.

This is because Nepal has been facing its worst ever energy crisis owing to an "unofficial trade blockade," which has been imposed by neighbouring India from where Nepal gets its essential supplies like oil, diesel, aviation fuel, kerosene and liquid petroleum gas (LPG). The Nepalese government has declared an energy emergency in the country.

The reason behind the blockade is the new constitution in Nepal, which India perceives as discriminatory to the Madhesi community, an ethnic Indian minority living in the southern regions of Nepal bordering India. A large number of minorities, mostly from the Madhesi community, have shown their concerns over the new federal constitution.

Prior to the constitution's enactment, over 45 people died and several others were injured in clashes with security forces during protests. Soon after the constitution was promulgated on September 20, India disallowed its cargo trucks and fuel tankers to cross the border, which suddenly led to a fuel crisis throughout Nepal and since then oil supplies to the country have been put on a halt.

The Indian Ministry of External Affairs issued a statement a day after the constitution came, saying that India was deeply concerned over the violent incidents that resulted in many deaths and injuries to civilians in the India-Nepal border regions.

“We had repeatedly cautioned the political leadership of Nepal to take urgent steps to defuse the tension in these regions. This, if done in a timely manner, could have avoided these serious developments,” an Indian statement said.

It further said, “We have consistently argued that all sections of Nepal must reach a consensus on the political challenges confronting them. The issues facing Nepal are political in nature and cannot be resolved through force.” India says its transporters and freight companies have already raised their deep concerns over the security issues and they are facing several difficulties during their movement within Nepal, owing to the ongoing turbulence.

On September 25, five days after the promulgation of the constitution, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs issued a statement, saying, “We have seen reports of obstructions at various entry-exit points at the India-Nepal border. The reported obstructions are due to unrest, protests and demonstrations on the Nepalese side, by sections of their population. As was already said on 21 September 2015, our freight forwarders and transporters had voiced complaints about the difficulties they are facing in movement within Nepal and their security fears, due to the prevailing unrest.”

However, Nepal’s stand over the ongoing supply blockage is quite the opposite, as the spokesperson for Nepal’s Ministry of Home Affairs, Laxmi Prasad Dhakal clearly denies India’s stance and believes there are no security concerns for the Nepal-bound cargo vehicles to pass through the border checkpoint.

“Just after the constitution was put into effect, India stopped the trucks at the border citing security issues. Our stand is this is a vengeance from India as they are not happy with Nepal's new constitution. This is a trade blockade, just not officially announced,” says Dhakal.

Narayan Man Bijukchhe, the president of the Nepal Workers and Peasants Party, says India has now declared a communal war with Nepal. Former Attorney General, Dr Yubaraj Sangraula says, “As per the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982, a landlocked country gets an unrestricted right of access to and from the sea of the nearby coastal state. A transit country also should provide good infrastructure to enable the landlocked country to get access to the sea.” Sangraula believes the Indian trade blockade is simply “an act of aggression.”

On one side, Madhesi protesters have blocked the Nepal-India border for weeks and, on the other, India does not allow its fuel trucks to cross those checkpoints that are free of protestors. According to the Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC), a state-owned oil trading enterprise, Indian customs and the Indian Oil Corporation have not allowed their fuel tankers to enter Nepal.

To address the fuel shortages, the Nepali government has introduced an 'odd/even vehicle rotation system' and has asked its citizens to use firewood and charcoal for cooking, instead of LPG. Following the odd-even system, vehicles with even registration numbers can only operate on even dates, while those with odd number plates may ply on odd dates.

According to NOC spokesman Deepak Baral, fuel-starved Nepal faces a crisis-like situation since hundreds of fuel trucks are waiting for clearance inside the Indian border while the country's current oil stocks will end soon.

To overcome the fuel crisis, Nepal has now turned towards China, which is another neighbouring country. Since the Nepal-China border has the world's highest mountains, reopening the trading routes with China is not viable due to logistical constraints.

In addition, two border crossings between both countries were largely blocked by landslides after a series of devastating earthquake which hit Nepal in April this year.

One of the crossings has been reopened recently and it is the first occasion when China, in place of India, would be supplying fuel to Nepal. A spokesperson of the National Oil Corporation says China will provide 340,000 gallons (1.3 million litres) of gasoline to Nepal, which will be first brought to a town near the Nepal-China border, and then nearly 100 fuel tankers will transport the gasoline to Kathmandu, which is the capital and largest city in Nepal.

Anti-India protests have erupted throughout the Nepal. The Nepalese people accuse India of imposing a trade blockade and of meddling in Nepal's domestic politics.

"If protestors wanted to blockade Kathmandu, they'd close it where you enter the Valley. Why would they do it at the border? This is a blockade done through official connivance of the Indian government. The Indian customs officials, Indian border police, and the Indian Oil Corporation, the monopoly supplier to Nepal, have all worked together to block the border, citing orders from New Delhi," says Kanak Mani Dixit, a publisher of a local news magazine called Himal Southasian.

Dixit says India is aggrieved because it was not consulted about the new constitutional changes, and it is the process, not the content of Nepal's new constitution, which lets the neighbours down. "Indian bureaucrats and intelligence officials, on whose hands Nepal policy is by and large left by New Delhi, feel irritated by Nepal's self-driven adoption of its own charter," says Dixit.

The former secretary of Nepal's ministry of commerce and supplies, Prushottam Ojha believes both countries should find a diplomatic solution to resolve their disputes instead of going to the international court. "We have to take measures to reduce trade dependency on India," says Ojha.

This is not the first time India has imposed an economic blockade against Nepal. In 1989, the then Indian government had caused the same misery when a trade dispute surfaced between both countries. At that time, India cut off its trade links with Nepal and shut down its border crossings for more than a year. A blockade-induced fuel crisis is at its peak in Nepal and so is India's obstinacy to hold its neighbours under its thumb.

The writer is an economic analyst. He writes for various local and foreign publications including South Asia.

Post-Hindu India – What’s Gone Wrong

A report by Dalitnation

A few years ago the revolutionary thinker Professor Kancha Ilaiah proposed that we are going to be in a post-Hindu India from 2010. Dalits including ourselves had gotten into a celebratory mode on Prof Kancha’s forecast. We have been waiting for this post-Hindu world since hundreds of years. We are waiting for our chains to be broken and the ugly caste system dismantled.

After researching and reviewing this with several of our friends who are social and political scientists, media personnel, social psychologists and literary luminaries we get is a bleak picture.

The regional TV channels, movies and newspapers all promote a Brahmanical worldview which the Dalit people have internalized. There are programs on Astrology, Vastu, Ayurveda and Brahmin Classical music which educated Dalit people have taken to them as their culture. Our people in hordes go to pilgrimage to Tirupati, Vaishnavo Devi, Mantralaya, Sabri-Malai, Shiridi Sai Baba and other Hindu holy places. Brahmins have even appropriated the Ganja Smoking Muslim fakir Sai Baba into the Brahmanical fold. Vedas are recited in Shirdi as a form of puja by Brahmin priests who control the whole of the economy in this pilgrim city.

The wily Brahmins have been doing their usual tricks and opened up these places for Dalits to visit. Dalits now do Puja to placate planets and remove their so called negative effects. The Brahmin priests are having a field day and their business is booming more than ever before. Earlier only their jatwallahs used to do this. Now they have Dalits getting their services and paying for it. We know several educated Dalit IAS officers and scientists doing homa, havans and visiting temples for their promotion. Many of these neo-rich Dalits practice yoga and meditation and have no revolutionary spirit left in them. The poorer people are all influenced by TV and media and watch patriarchal soap operas like the ones created by Balaji Telefilms. All this makes us sad.

Is this what Babasaheb wanted us to do. What happened to the conversion to Buddhism? What happened to Buddha and his Dhamma of rationality and

equality? Why are our brethren sucked into the superstition of Brahmanism? We have seen Navayana Buddhists worshipping the violent Hindu gods and goddesses like Vishnu, Shiva, Laksmi and Kali alongside the Buddha and not seeing the obvious contradiction. We see even Dalit labourers having pictures of the elephant Ganesha and the servant monkey god of slaves Hanuman. Dalits do house warming and marriage ceremonies the Brahmanical way. What happened to the ten vows that Babasaheb gave us.

This is a warning to all the Dalits. Unless Dalits wake up and fight this monster of Brahmanism there will be no reprieve for them from the slavery of the caste system. We should throw the whole of Brahmanism in the gutter – lock, stock and barrel, baby with the bathwater.

WAKE UP DALITS AND LET US MAKE THE POST HINDU INDIA A REALITY EDUCATE ORGANIZE AND AGITATE-JAI BHIM

This is a report published by Dalitnation.

Is Pakistan safer?

Imtiaz Gul

Pakistan could be safer in 2016 and beyond only if it uses geo-economics as its survival tool, instead of making geo-strategic arguments.

One year later, it seems that the dastardly attack on the Army Public School (APS) in Peshawar finally provided the trigger that the country had badly needed all these years to forcefully take on all those who had been challenging the writ of the state of Pakistan. It also brought about a visible change in the state's views on counter-terrorism and extremism. The massacre galvanized the civilian and military leadership into reviewing the security paradigm that had been pursued until then. The result was Prime Minister's 20-point counter-terrorism program – the National Action Plan (NAP).

This convergence became visible at the APS commemoration event, where Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and army chief Raheel Sharif were both present, along with key members of the federal cabinet, PTI chief Imran Khan, provincial chief ministers and several foreign dignitaries.

The NAP – effectively the country's first formal counter-terror framework – included the creation of speedy trial military courts, measures to end all private militias, activation and reinforcement of the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), rigorous enforcement of existing laws against sectarian hate speech, extremism, minority rights and immediate madrassas reforms. These steps became part of the 21st Amendment to the Constitution, passed unanimously by the parliament on January 6, 2015.

The Peshawar attack generated an unprecedented momentum. After a very long time, Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar and opposition legislators such as Aitzaz Ahsan began a conversation that centered on critical themes like peace through rule of law, respect for diversity, rejection of hate speech and respect for others through a rights-based narrative embedded in the constitution.

As a consequence, by November this year, the Interior Ministry sealed 102 seminaries for fanning extremism or sponsoring terrorism. It also froze over Rs

1 billion worth of funds sitting in 126 accounts of proscribed militant groups. As many as 7,000 cases were filed against hate speech, 6,855 suspects were arrested, and about 1,482 were convicted of hatemongering on loudspeakers.

The army set up 11 military courts, which have heard 142 cases so far, of which 55 were decided, 31 militants were convicted, and 87 cases are in process. The lifting of a moratorium on death penalty – although a questionable knee-jerk reaction – led to nearly 300 executions.

The elimination of Malik Ishaq and several others in “police encounters” also seemed to stem from the NAP. The Securities Exchange Commission of Pakistan cancelled licenses of several international NGOs and the government asked them all to apply for fresh registration with the Interior Ministry.

Regardless of the numbers of fatalities being released by the ISPR, the Operation Zarb-e-Azb launched in June 2014 has certainly considerably changed the national landscape.

“One of the biggest achievements of the plan was the physical operations in FATA, which allowed the army to establish the government’s writ in the thus far ‘ungoverned’ and ‘no-go’ areas,” says Gen Asim Bajwa, the ISPR chief.

Disruption, degradation, and dismantling of the physical infrastructure in the mountains of Waziristan and Khyber forced them to take refuge across the Durand Line. A number of Pakistani Taliban leaders, such as Shahidullah Shahid and Saeed Khan Orakzai, were killed in US drone strikes in eastern Afghanistan. Most of them are reportedly operating out of safe havens in Afghanistan’s Nangarhar, Kunar, Paktia, Paktika and Khost provinces.

Nationwide incidents of terrorism, which had peaked at 2,061 in 2010, are down to 1,109, showing a little over 50 percent reduction, according to NACTA figures. Open-source data on violence being compiled by the Center for Research and Security Studies also corroborates official claims about the decline in terror incidents.

But have the militants been defeated? Certainly not, if our yardstick is the religious ideology that the terrorists use to justify their violent actions. Neither should the government make such claims.

It is difficult to defeat an ideology, former UK army chief General David Richards had once said. We should however try to deny it the socio-political space through good governance. And herein lies the challenge for Pakistani leaders. As long as there are even a handful of such terrorists they can always execute attacks any time.

NAP has also created an unprecedented space for a more critical and bolder discourse on some fundamental issues. Recent observations by the Supreme Court in blasphemy related cases are a case in point. While the court, in a courageous move, upheld the death sentence awarded to Mumtaz Qadri, the murderer of Punjab governor Salman Taseer in January 2011, it also supported calls for reforming the country's blasphemy laws, which it said were often misused for personal motives.

The pace of implementation of the NAP, however, remains a continuous subject of discord between the civilian government and the military high command. They led to what seemed like a spat following a corps commanders' conference where the military expressed reservations about the implementation of the plan.

There are major capacity issues in the civilian governance structures. It was only after Gen Raheel Sharif's reservations in this regard, for instance, that the government moved to constitute a National Terrorists Financing Investigation Cell (NTFIC) under the joint vigil of the FIA, State Bank, FBR and intelligence agencies in November.

Only because of these reservations, Gen Sharif even decided to sit in a meeting that the government had convened to discuss the registration and accountability of seminaries with representatives of various religious education boards.

The political and financial way forward demands a strategic rethink, translated into some bold decisions. Off-setting the impact of the war on terror and the TTP-led terrorism is not going to be easy. But damage control is certainly possible. Mere administrative measures, however, will not suffice. The national leadership will have to prioritize rehabilitation and development of the tribal areas and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Police and prosecution will have to be revamped through a comprehensive reform of the Criminal Procedures Code.

The Heart of Asia conference at Islamabad on December 9 provided Pakistan with a golden opportunity to step up its counter-terrorism campaign, and also play a central role in stabilizing Afghanistan – both in terms of political support and leveraging its sway with the Afghan Taliban to create stability. But it also offered an opportunity to reset the contours of our foreign policy. If we are to pursue our larger dream of sustainable peace and stability in the region, normalizing relationships and improving trade with our neighbors is a paramount prerequisite. It is equally important to the China Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Pakistan could be safer in 2016 and beyond only if it uses geo-economics as its survival tool, instead of making geo-strategic arguments. Its tremendous leverage lies in its geography and not in outdated tactics centered on non-state actors. This will also work as a guarantee for China's continued engagement with Pakistan. It must seize the Chinese investment and cooperation as a God-sent opportunity by removing its administrative capacity gaps and through rigorous rule of law.

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India and Israel Start to See Enemies Within

Pankaj Mishra

It does not matter which religion you belong to. If a person gets so obsessed with his or her religion and gets fanatical about it to the point they are harming innocent people then he or she are a threat to peace. Such persons are the primary cause of all the mayhem we are experiencing recently around the world.

Cultural revolutions are underway in two nation-states -- India and Israel -- founded by secular nationalists in the late 1940s. Right-wing demagogues, emerging in both countries from among previously unrepresented masses, seek to forge a new national identity by stigmatizing particular religious and secular groups.

There are eerie similarities between the Hindu thugs who assault Muslim males marrying Hindu women and followers of the far-right Israeli group Lehava (Flame), who try to break up weddings between Muslims and Jews.

More importantly, religious-political chauvinism is now amplified by figures in power as well. Last week, Israel's minister of religious services claimed that Reform Jews were not Jews. A minister in Narendra Modi's government has described Indian Muslims and Christians in India as "bastards."

The new ruling classes seem obsessed with moral and patriotic education, reverence for national symbols and icons (mostly right-wing), and the uniqueness of national culture and history.

Smriti Irani, India's Minister for Human Resources and Development, has staffed top positions at prestigious cultural organizations such as the Indian Council of Historical Research with men whose only qualification seems to be their unapologetic Hindu nationalism.

Israeli Culture Minister Miri Regev has promoted a similarly unapologetic nationalism. Having watched Paul McCartney wave the Union Jack at one of

his concerts, she's proposed him as a role model: "That is what I want to happen here, too, for artists to wave Israeli flags."

The supremacism of these ethno-nationalists goes with a loathing of dissenters, who seem to be undermining collective unity and purpose. Regev has described Israel's culture scene as dominated by "arrogant, hypocritical, scheming, ungrateful" people.

Indeed, the most striking aspect of the right-wing upsurge in India and Israel is mob fury, sanctioned by the new ruling class, against anyone who can be labelled, plausibly or not, liberal, leftist or secularist.

The New Yorker's David Remnick reported last year from Israel that vigilantes "comb through Facebook looking for left-wing sentiment among Israeli Jews; when they find it, they send letters to their employers demanding that the lefties be fired." Hindu nationalists, among whom Rush Limbaugh's coinage "libtard" enjoys its widest currency, are in the middle of their own righteous war against liberals, leftists and "secularists."

A few Hindu nationalist writers and journalists are frantically trying to build up what one of them calls a "counter-establishment." That's already been accomplished in Israel by religious nationalists who, as Remnick wrote, "have long railed against what they see as the dominance of leftist élites in the media, academia, human-rights organizations."

The rhetoric heard today in Israel and India may elicit déjà vu among those familiar with culture wars in the U.S. and Europe. People frustrated by unfulfilled promises of equality or prosperity, or their own inability to advance, have always found it easy to aim their rage against an allegedly cosmopolitan and rootless cultural elite. In "The Revolt of the Masses" (1930) José Ortega y Gasset warned that the era of paternalist liberalism was giving way in Europe to a "raving, frenetic, exorbitant politics that claims to replace all knowledge."

It is now the fate of newer nation-states like India and Israel to undergo the massive shifts of class power and explosions of bitter know-nothingism that the conservative Spanish thinker feared.

The vengefulness of the freshly empowered is understandable. While pontificating on the virtues of socialism, secularism and liberalism, the old elites presided over a network of patronage that primarily benefited their relatives and friends. Artists and intellectuals connected to the state monopolized the best positions within the culture industry.

Many of the ancient regimes's certified liberals now look shocked and bewildered at their demotion by apparent upstarts and philistines. Indeed, a traditionally hegemonic class losing its hegemony can look pretty clueless, as the visionary Russian writers of the 19th century knew well. In "Fathers and Sons," Ivan Turgenev's classic novel of generational and class conflict, the resentful Bazarov, a ruthless man of science, taunts his upper-class friend, "You are nothing but a beautifully bred liberal boy."

Alexander Herzen, who despised the Russian ruling class as much as the techies of his time, was nevertheless moved to defend the ineffectual liberal intelligentsia in an essay titled "The Superfluous and the Bilibious."

Herzen -- and Dostoevsky, famously, in his novel "Demons" -- recognized that the seductive emotions of hatred and revenge, when not sublimated into fresh artistic and intellectual creativity, can only engender lynch mobs -- a prescient fear confirmed in the 20th century by demagogues offering collective vengeance to masses humiliated by the old social and political order.

It would be nice to hope that India and Israel's emboldened hotheads are different, and will lead their countries to stability, prosperity and peace through their special mix of right-wing economics and the politics of *resentment*. It is already clear, however, that they find more thrilling the prospect of perpetual warfare with their perceived enemies, especially the ones within.

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Awaiting India's Corbyn moment

Jawed Naqvi

LIBERAL politicians in India could speak like Jeremy Corbyn once, and, like him, believe in what they said. Take his speech at the refugees' rally in London moments after the brilliant win as Labour Party chief. He spoke with conviction about a man-made human plight because he could feel like an ordinary, caring person, a man of reason with a hundred selfless concerns. What he said, in fact, was so straightforward and untangled in its simplicity that he made one wonder why today's liberal leaders in India can't be like that.

Refugees are not illegal people, Corbyn said. They are men, women and children rendered homeless, searching for the dignity and warmth which we took away from them. Does it take too much to say it that way? Refugees are made by wars we wage, he said. Indian leaders have said all this, and with conviction too, but much of that is in the past.

A disturbing moment that failed to evince a sound response from Indian liberals came when Prime Minister Modi churlishly welcomed non-Muslim refugees from Pakistan and Bangladesh. He was in violation of the constitution, but his opponents were busy not heeding. A Corbyn moment would have found someone speaking up: 'Every community in India's neighbourhood, regardless of their faith, in need of refuge from oppressive regimes, or who face threats to their lives from vigilante groups or other terrorists, are welcome in India.' Indira Gandhi did open the doors to Gen Zia's Pakistani victims.

Did the Indian left turn a Nelson's eye to the communally fraught Modi musings because of its own past problems in West Bengal? Did the influx of Muslims from Bangladesh into West Bengal during its 30 years in office influence the left's silence?

How would a Corbyn-like approach pitch the mosque vs temple politics that has dominated much of liberal Indian politics?

The religious revival we are witnessing worldwide, riding on the upsurge in right-wing politics, has seen upright thinkers and liberal groups wilt under the blow. This luxury could not be allowed to the communists. For years, Indian followers of the dominant Marxist party were led to believe that the annual Durga Puja festival religiously staged by the comrades in West Bengal was a cultural rather than a religious event. Perhaps it was the same cultural quest that saw the comrades in Kerala this time celebrating ‘Krishna Lila’.

Reports say last week’s act of unprecedented public devotion was necessitated by the need to prevent families of communist comrades from joining similar celebrations to Lord Krishna organised by Hindutva groups who are hoping to ease out the left from its oldest bastion in Kerala. With close to half the West Bengal cadre having defected to the Bharatiya Janata Party in Bengal since the recent poll debacles, the left, it seems, has yet to learn the lessons of mixing religion (in the garb of culture) with politics.

How would a Corbyn-like approach pitch the mosque versus temple politics that has dominated much of liberal Indian politics in recent decades? Indian rationalists, including Marxists, have scurried to look for ideological compromises so as not to offend the majority Hindus nor unduly rile the Muslim groups. In playing it safe, India’s liberals are hiding away what would have been their attraction. The much-maligned Indian state offered to rescue the enlightened politicians out of the horrible mess, but they continued to wallow in it.

What did the Indian state do, which was so out of character with its known political inclination, for it to deserve kudos? In the midst of a political controversy over a mythical bridge three years ago, the Manmohan Singh government plainly told the Supreme Court that there was no historical evidence to establish the existence of Lord Ram or the other characters in Ramayana.

In an affidavit filed before the apex court, the Archaeological Survey of India rejected the claim of the existence of the Ram Sethu Bridge. It was a bold rejection of Hindutva’s claims.

Referring to the Ramayana, the Indian government’s affidavit said there is no “historical record” to incontrovertibly prove the existence of the character, or

the occurrences of the events, depicted therein. This should ideally have been the position of Indian Marxists, not in their closed study circles, but on public platforms. What harm could have befallen the left had they played it straight, instead of deflecting the argument to perhaps woo certain constituencies? They would have lost the polls, perhaps. Did they win by being less than forthright?

India-Pakistan ties were a major issue on which the left and liberal voices counted for much. In recent days, other than an uncharacteristic nationalistic statement about terrorism that came from the Communist Party of India, there was little by way of a nudge much less an argument for peace from the left. They were busy dethroning the foreign minister, unsuccessfully eventually, when they were needed on the streets to stop the consolidation of fascism. They could have put their foot down on the hounding of Teesta Setalvad, the freeing of the accused in Gujarat pogrom cases, the gagging of NGOs.

Now we are watching the left — all five or six communist parties — hurtling into a potentially disastrous election mode in Bihar. They claim they are jointly fighting (which they should have done in Jawaharlal Nehru University) on all the assembly seats to challenge Narendra Modi's quest to conquer Bihar. In reality, they will be cutting into the votes of Modi's secular opponents. What would Corbyn have reasoned? 'Granted that the secular alliance is tainted with corruption and deep-seated anti-Dalit prejudices. This needs to be corrected at the earliest. However, first we have to remove the fascist threat. Else we are all doomed.'

The writer is Dawn's correspondent in Delhi.

ISIS in Afghanistan: Proxy War against Iran and China

Eric Draitser

The nature of the war in Afghanistan has shifted dramatically in recent months. While the US and NATO continue to be actively involved in the country – their strategic objectives having changed very little since the Bush administration launched the war nearly a decade and a half ago – the complexion of the battlefield, and the parties actively engaged in the war, has changed significantly.

The emergence of ISIS in Afghanistan, along with the impending withdrawal of US-NATO troops from the country, has driven the Taliban into a marriage of convenience, if not an outright alliance, with Iran. What seemed like an unfathomable scenario just a few years ago, Shia Iran's support for the hardliner Sunni Taliban has become a reality due to the changing circumstances of the war. Though it may be hard to believe, such an alliance is now a critical element of the situation on the ground in Afghanistan. But its significance is far larger than just shifting the balance of power within the country.

Instead, Afghanistan is now in many ways a proxy conflict between the US and its western and Gulf allies on the one hand, and Iran and certain non-western countries, most notably China, on the other. If the contours of the conflict might not be immediately apparent, that is only because the western media, and all the alleged brainiacs of the corporate think tanks, have failed to present the conflict in its true context. The narrative of Afghanistan, to the extent that it's discussed at all, continues to be about terrorism and stability, nation-building and "support." But this is a fundamental misunderstanding and mischaracterization of the current war, and the agenda driving it.

And what is this new and dangerous agenda? It is about no less than the future of Afghanistan and Central Asia. It is about the US and its allies clinging to the country, a key foothold in the region, and wanting to find any pretext to maintain their presence. It is about Iran and China positioning themselves in the country for the inevitable moment of US withdrawal and the opening up of

Afghanistan's economy. At the most basic level, it is about access and influence. And, as usual in this part of the world, terrorism and extremism are the most potent weapons.

The New Afghan War: Enter ISIS

However, within a few weeks, ISIS militants committed a mass beheading in the strategically vital Ghazni province, an important region of the country that lies on the Kabul-Kandahar highway. This incident officially put ISIS on the map in Afghanistan, and marked a significant sea change in the nature of the conflict there.

While the western media was replete with stories of ISIS and Taliban factions fighting together under the Islamic State's banner, it has become clear since then that, rather than a collaboration between the groups, there has simply been a steady migration of fighters from the Taliban to ISIS which, if the stories are to be believed, pays much better. In fact, the last few months have demonstrated that, there is in fact competition between the two, and that Taliban and ISIS groups have fought each other in very intense battles. As Abdul Hai Akhondzada, deputy head of the Afghan parliament's national security commission told Deutsche Welle in June:

Local residents and security officials confirmed that "Islamic State" (IS) fighters killed between 10 and 15 Taliban members in Nangarhar province...The Taliban have been fighting for a long period of time in Afghanistan and they see their position threatened by the emergence of IS. Of course, they won't give up easily... While IS is fighting to increase its presence in the whole region – not only Afghanistan – the Taliban are fighting to overthrow the Afghan government.

Such skirmishes have now become a regular occurrence, pointing to a growing war between ISIS and Taliban factions. Increasingly, the war is being transformed from one waged by the Taliban against the Kabul government and its US and NATO patrons, into a war with competing groups fighting each other for supremacy on the battlefield and in the political life of the country.

But of course, the true nature of the conflict can only be understood through an examination of the key interests backing each side. And it is here where the

shadowy world of terror factions and proxy armies are brought into the light of day.

It is now no secret that ISIS is an asset of western intelligence agencies and governments. The group has been directly sponsored and facilitated and/or allowed to develop unhindered in order to serve a useful purpose in Syria and Iraq. As the now infamous secret 2012 US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) document obtained by Judicial Watch revealed, the US has knowingly promoted the spread of the Islamic State since at least 2012 in order to use it as a weapon against the Assad government. The document noted that, “... *there is the possibility of establishing a declared or undeclared Salafist Principality in eastern Syria...and this is exactly what the supporting powers to the opposition want, in order to isolate the Syrian regime, which is considered the strategic depth of the Shia expansion (Iraq and Iran).*”

Moreover, intelligence agencies such as Turkish intelligence agency (MIT) have been facilitating ISIS militants crossing the border into Syria, as well as supporting an international network of terrorists to as far away as the Xinjiang province of China. Even US Vice President Joe Biden has noted that:

Our allies in the region were our largest problem in Syria. The Turks were great friends... [and] the Saudis, the Emirates, etcetera. What were they doing?...They poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad — except that the people who were being supplied, [they] were al-Nusra, and al-Qaeda, and the extremist elements of jihadis who were coming from other parts of the world.

Given all of this information, it is beyond a shadow of a doubt that ISIS is to a large degree an asset of the US and its western allies. As if one needed further confirmation of this point, former Afghan President Hamid Karzai, himself no stranger to the machination of US intelligence, bluntly declared just last month that ISIS could not possibly have expanded into Afghanistan “*without a foreign hand, without foreign backing.*”

In Syria and Iraq, ISIS has essentially done the dirty work for the US and its Gulf and Israeli and Turkish allies. In Libya, ISIS has become a dominant terrorist force led by a documented US asset. In Yemen, ISIS has gained a foothold and carried out terrorist actions in support of the Saudi – and by

extension, US – mission against the Shia Houthi rebels and their allies. Taken in total then, ISIS has proven very effective in furthering the US-NATO-GCC-Israel agenda. So too in Afghanistan.

Iran and Taliban Ally to Counter ISIS and Its Patrons

And it is for this reason that the Taliban has turned to Iran for support. Though Tehran has officially denied providing any weapons or financial support to the Taliban, sources in the region have confirmed that indeed such support is given. A senior Afghan government official speaking to the Wall Street Journal explained succinctly that, *“At the beginning Iran was supporting [the] Taliban financially. But now they are training and equipping them, too.”* Afghan security officials have claimed that Iran is hosting Taliban militants at training camps in the cities of Tehran, Mashhad, and Zahedan, and in the province of Kerman. If true, it means that the level of cooperation between the two has moved to a whole new level.

While one might want to maintain some skepticism about all the claims made by US and Afghan officials regarding Iranian support for the Taliban, the alliance makes good strategic sense for Tehran. As Iran fights against ISIS in Syria and Iraq, so too must it check the spread of this terror group in neighboring Afghanistan.

Moreover, Iran understands that ISIS is, in effect, an arm of the power projection of its regional rivals Turkey and Saudi Arabia, both of whom have been primary instigators of the war in Syria and the attempt to break the alliance of Iran-Iraq-Syria-Hezbollah. Therefore, from the Iranian perspective, the Taliban’s war against ISIS in Afghanistan is essentially a new theater in the larger war against ISIS and its backers.

Additionally, there is still another important political rationale behind Tehran’s overtures to the Taliban: leverage and access. Iran is preparing for the impending departure of US-NATO forces from Afghanistan, and it desperately wants to make sure it has friends in the new government which will likely include some key members of the Taliban in important positions. And the recent moves by the Taliban to engage in peace talks only further this point; Iran wants to be part of a peace deal which could unite the non-ISIS forces in

Afghanistan thereby giving Tehran both access and, most importantly, influence over the decision-making apparatus in an independent Afghanistan.

China and the New Afghanistan

Iran certainly has partners in the charm offensive toward the Taliban, most notably China. The last few months have seen a flurry of rumours that China has played host to a Taliban delegation interested in engaging in substantive peace talks with the Kabul government, a move which threatens to fundamentally alter the balance of power in Afghanistan and the region. Assuming the reports are true – by all indications they are – China is positioning itself to become the single most important player in a post-occupation Afghanistan.

Earlier this month in fact, an Afghan delegation from Kabul met with Taliban representatives in Islamabad, Pakistan to begin the dialogue process. It is a virtual certainty that such talks would never have taken place had the Chinese not intervened and opened direct channels of communication with the Taliban earlier this year. In this way, Beijing has become the key intermediary in the peace process in Afghanistan, a development which is likely to cause a fair amount of consternation in Washington. China has a multitude of reasons for pushing so hard for this dialogue process.

First and foremost, China sees in Afghanistan one of the main keys to its entire regional, and indeed global, strategy, from the New Silk Roads to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Sitting in the middle of the strategically critical Central Asia region, Afghanistan represents for China both a bridge to its partner, Pakistan, and the key to the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia. Moreover, it represents a critical node in the potential pipeline networks, as well as trading routes.

Beijing also intends to be a major player in the exploitation of the mineral wealth of Afghanistan. The US Geological Survey has estimated that the mineral wealth of Afghanistan is worth roughly \$1 trillion, making it some of the most prized land in the world. Iron, copper, cobalt, gold, lithium, and many other minerals are to be found just underneath the surface of Afghanistan; clearly an enticing prospect for China. Indeed, China has already heavily invested in copper mining concessions among others.

It is in this arena where China and its longtime rival India have come into conflict, as Delhi has also been a major player competing for key mining concessions in Afghanistan, including the vast iron ore deposits. Iran also figures into this question as its port of Chahbahar, seen as an important prize for both India and China, is the likely destination for the iron ore extracted from Afghanistan, especially if it is to be shipped to India.

Not to be overlooked of course is the security issue. China's ongoing struggle against Islamic extremism in Xinjiang has led to fears in Beijing that any economic plans could be jeopardized by terrorism-related instability. Xinjiang has seen a number of deadly terrorist attacks in the last eighteen months, including the heinous drive-by bombings that killed dozens and injured over 100 people in May 2014, the mass stabbings and bombings of November 2014, and the deadly attack by Uighur terrorists on a traffic checkpoint just last month which left 18 people dead.

And it is here where all these issues converge. China needs Iran both for economic and counter-terrorism reasons. Beijing wants to see Iran act as the driving force in the battle against ISIS terrorism in Afghanistan, as well as in the Middle East, in order to destroy the Saudi-backed and Turkey-backed terror networks that support the Uighur extremists. China also wants to be an active player in Afghanistan in order to both buttress its own national security and to instigate itself as the central economic force in the region. Seen in this way, Afghanistan is at the very heart of both China's and Iran's regional plans. And this fact, more than any other, explains exactly the purpose that ISIS serves in Afghanistan. From the perspective of Washington, nothing could serve US imperial ambitions more effectively than a destabilization of Afghanistan both as justification for continued occupation, and to block Chinese penetration.

So, once again, we see ISIS as the convenient tool of western power projection. No doubt strategic planners in Tehran and Beijing see it too. The question is: will they be able to stop it?

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A Wave of ‘Quality Militancy’ in Indian Kashmir?

Uzma Falak

As the taxi drives through landscapes interrupted by vast Indian military garrisons and settlements in Shopian, south of Indian-controlled Kashmir, the driver remarks: “This is like Kandahar: the air is different.”

We drive by the Rambiar rivulet where 2 women were found raped and murdered by Indian troops in 2009. The old city market buzzes with life and with stories of oppression and resistance. While the ‘everyday’ continues, somewhere amid the encircling dense alpenes, young boys – the *mujahed* or *mujahedeen* – have taken up arms, declaring a war against India’s rule in Kashmir; marking a ‘new wave’ of armed rebellion with south Kashmir as the turf for an indigenous movement.

Desolate terrain unfurls as we drive towards Moghul Road through the mountainous Pir Panjal range. Later, Shopian’s residents reveal how a few days ago the Mujahideen had crossed this terrain, ‘miraculously escaping’ an attack from Indian forces.

The region is abuzz with stories of ‘miracles’ and valour. Incidents like young boys snatching guns from government forces are part of an evolving folklore. Strong support exists for the mujahedeen, their resistance rooted in faith and ideological commitment derived from the teachings of Islam. In an unprecedented act, they released via social media a video and photos in which they are donned in combat gear in the forests. The video and photos were widely shared and have garnered huge public support; sympathizers keep tabs on new releases. Audio recordings of the mujahedeen’s phone calls to family members have also been circulated widely. These recordings expressed strong commitment to the struggle, and the fact they have been shared so widely suggests a warm and strategic support from the people as well.

‘This new wave of armed struggle led by youth can be seen as a resistance to all hegemonies aimed at maintaining the status quo, even within the resistance

leadership,' says a Srinagar-based resistance lawyer. The police census of militants puts their strength at 142.

Reports are abuzz with how these young boys are well educated and from financially sound families, countering common perceptions of who takes part in resistance movements. In Kashmir schools, the state curriculum is strategically designed to erase people's history, and portrays militants and dissenters as 'uneducated' or 'unemployed'. The desire for liberation is labelled a 'problem' of a 'misguided' youth.

As part of its counter-insurgency tactics, India is pumping huge money into 'welfare' projects such as establishing 'goodwill' schools, which are set up and run by the Indian army. (Ironically, the army had previously occupied many local schools, turning them into garrisons.) However, such 'goodwill' projects have visibly failed to 'mould' its target youth. The state, which has also been boasting about its police and army recruits in the region, has attempted to hide the emerging rebellion within.

And the battle runs deeper. The state is creating new 'youth icons' to replace 'deviants in society' fighting for liberation, such as young Burhan, who heads south Kashmir's armed group. But even high-school children, of a politically astute generation, identify with Burhan. "He is our life, our light. I pray for him and his fellows every morning," says a 15-year-old high-schooler.

North Kashmir too hosts a 'splinter' armed group. The state believes there is a divide between 2 groups, north and south. However, many assert that there is no such divide. They argue that the rebels' motivation is rooted in faith, not group politics. Others believe the division is part of the local groups' strategy and that both are unified in their goal.

"The division should hinder any movement, but the opposite is happening here. More recruits. Increased activity," says a young scholar from south Kashmir. There is 'no perceived rift between the 2 groups on the ground. This movement is different from earlier phases and can be explained more as global phenomena of Muslim mobilizing against various hegemonies,' he explains.

Harmeet Singh, a senior police official hailing from Tral, calls this phase of armed insurgency ‘quality militancy’. “Their dedication is rich and [they] are highly radicalized,” he remarks.

“Before, people picked up guns in great numbers. This generation of militants is aware of how militancy was crushed, its huge social consequence. They have witnessed killings, militants’ surrender and how the families of militants suffered. Despite all these factors, they still take up arms, though in small numbers; so I would call it quality militancy,” Singh explains.

The mother of a 13-year-old boy killed by Indian troops in 2010 remarks that “we have seen enough. [The] gun is the only solution.” A Shopian entrepreneur says that a few teenagers had gone to join the militant ranks but were sent back “because they were too young”. “There are more people and few resources. We need more guns,” he remarks smilingly.

A young lawyer, pointing towards Shopian’s old graveyard of foreign militants who fought for Kashmir’s liberation in 1990s, says: “The first grave is of a Sudanese mujahid.”

Some histories refuse to settle as sediment. Dark begins to descend on surreal landscapes as we drive back and an uncertainty looms as thick black clouds gather in Kashmir skies.

Uzma Falak is a Kashmiri writer who reflects Kashmiri women in the humanitarian and political struggle. She has directed a film titled 'Till Then The Roads Carry Her'. Are new generations of armed youth challenging India’s dominance on Kashmir? This article first appeared at New Internationalist.

South Asia Needs to Face up to Water and Energy Dilemma

Beth Walker

South Asia's water and energy crises are deeply intertwined. Growing energy demand drives water shortages and lack of water fuels power outages. Regional cooperation – such as power trading between countries – could ease tightening resource constraints but such solutions have been largely scuppered by political suspicions.

India's annual water withdrawal is the highest in the world, but its water productivity is one of the lowest. But its water productivity (GDP per unit of water) is one of the lowest. This is largely due to inefficient agricultural practices

Lack of water and energy are the two biggest constraints to growth in South Asia, warned experts gathered at this year's Stockholm World Water Week.

Water and energy are crucial to drive economic growth and pull the 500 million remaining people out of poverty in South Asia, but governments do not recognize the growing confrontation between these two resources.

South Asia's water and energy crises are deeply intertwined. Growing energy demand drives water shortages and lack of water fuels power outages. Drought-induced power cuts plunged northern India into darkness in what was the largest blackout in the country's history in July 2012. The recent deadly floods in Nepal and northern India affected thousands of people and destroyed a number of hydropower plants.

The sub-continent is racked by energy shortages. Nepal – despite the country's bounteous hydropower potential – suffers 18-hours-a-day power cuts in the capital Kathmandu. Energy and water shortages have stunted Pakistan's development for decades and power shortages spark recurrent street protests.

Bhutan is the only energy sufficient country in South Asia. The isolated mountain state has also boosted its economy by exporting excess hydropower to India.

Spotlight on India

India's water-energy crisis is particularly stark, according to a new research report from HSBC launched at World Water Week. India's annual water withdrawal is the highest in the world, but its water productivity (GDP per unit of water) is one of the lowest. This is largely due to inefficient agricultural practices. The country's water storage capacity is also dangerously low (at 200 cubic metres per person, compared to 2,500 in China and almost 6,000 in the US).

The expanding energy sector exacerbates problems. Half of India's coal plants are in water stressed regions, and 40% of the over 200-megawatts of new capacity recently approved by the government is also in highly stressed regions.

"It's even harder to get data on water and energy in India than China," said Zoe Knight, head of HSBC's Climate Change Centre and co-author of the report on India's water crisis. Even the working group of India's Planning Commission for the 12th Five Year Plan failed to locate any estimates on water surface availability, the report claims.

The massive expansion of irrigated land in India and Pakistan over the last 30 years fuelled by diesel subsidies for farmers to pump groundwater has sucked aquifers dry in major grain-producing states. Eastern India has the opposite problem: in areas where groundwater is ample, replenished annually by flood waters in the Ganga basin, state governments have used permits and licensing rules to restrict groundwater use – cutting off poor farmer's access to water.

Himalayas at heart of energy water crisis

The Himalayas lie at the heart of the region's energy and water "nexus" (policy jargon for the links and interdependencies between these two resources). The rivers that drain these mountains provide water to most of Asia and the hydropower potential of its mountains is integral for national plans to meet energy demand. Some 150,000 megawatts of new projects are proposed over

the next 20 years, which if built will give the Himalayan region the highest concentration of dams in the world.

“But the Himalayas have been ignored in the nexus debate”, said Aditi Mukherji from the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) at the sidelines of the meeting. She argued mountain communities should be rewarded for the role they play protecting water supplies, ecosystems and providing energy for people downstream.

Governments need to step up

Governments across the world have failed to realize the need to integrate energy and water into policy planning.

This is not an issue only in South Asia. The International Energy Agency does not use models based on future water supplies, said Paul Faeth from CNA Corporation and contributor to a new book on the energy water nexus. The IEA’s 2014 global outlook report fails to mention water even once.

Faeth called for greater energy efficiency as the best way to save water, as well as deploying renewable and avoiding the installation of coal plants in water stressed regions.

Regional cooperation – such as power trading between countries – could ease tightening resource constraints, said William Rex from the World Bank’s central water unit. But in South Asia so far such solutions have been largely scuppered by political suspicions.

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Pakistan and Afghan Refugees

Dr Natalya Zamaraeva

The problem of Afghan refugees in Pakistan has lasted for several decades. For the first time, world media started talking loudly about three million Afghans who passed through the Hindu Kush to the territory of Pakistan in the early 1980s. In those years, Soviet troops were deployed in Afghanistan and the flow of Afghans to the south, to Pakistan, was increasing.

But the question of refugees dates back to the distant 1960s. Since then it has become one of the key hindrances to Pakistani – Afghan relations. Kabul insisted on signing and ratifying by Islamabad the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol. The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees is the main legal instrument in determining their status, civil rights and the legal obligations of States towards them. Otherwise, the Afghan side insists, they must adopt a national law on refugees, which ensures their long-term protection, and most importantly, the right to non-return.

Regional Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), trilateral agreement on voluntary repatriation, and the state policy of the Government of Pakistan for Afghan refugees are the main guidelines for promoting the issue for Islamabad.

In Pakistan, there are several groups of refugees. They can be divided into two sub-groups: foreign refugees and Pakistani citizens who left their homes (temporarily displaced persons) as a result of military operations and ethnic / religious conflicts in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

Refugees from other countries, who find themselves on the territory of Pakistan, include Afghans, Bengalis, Biharis, Rohingyas and others. All these years, the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has been actively involved in solving humanitarian issues.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, according to Islamabad, 2.7 million Afghan refugees stayed in the country on a permanent basis. Many people were leaving, but many returned. It is the largest group of refugees in the

world both in terms of their number and time of stay in a foreign country. Of these, according to UN High Commission for Refugees, about 1.5 million were officially registered. In reality, this meant that the National Database & Registration Authority of Pakistan issued them Proof of Registration cards, thus legalizing their stay in the country. The period of validity of the issued cards (extended several times) expires in December 2015.

Statistical data on unregistered Afghan refugees is contradictory. In March 2015, Pakistani authorities declared that they plan to register additional 1.4 million people.

Pashtun refugees live mainly in the northern areas of Pakistan bordering Afghanistan in the provinces of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (up to April 2010 – North-West Frontier Province). They move down into the central and southern parts of the country, in particular the metropolis of Karachi where you can always find some low-paid job.

In 2015, in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) alone, there were 639,073 registered refugees and 114,096 families residing in specially built camps. In total, there are 70 of these camps, of which only 29 are run by locals, others – by the federal government. In Peshawar, the provincial capital of KP province, the largest number of refugees from neighboring countries, 195,052 people, currently reside.

Over the years, Islamabad has repeatedly appealed to the international community to take collective action to provide material aid as well as to create conditions for the return of refugees to their homeland in Afghanistan.

The agreement of the UNHCR with the Government of Afghanistan on refugees expired in December 2014. According to the agreement, Kabul was obliged by the stated time to create conditions for their return to their homeland.

In September 2014 President Ashraf Ghani came to power by election; and a new coalition government showed willingness to return their citizens within the framework of a spurt of voluntary repatriation program. Islamabad welcomed these statements.

But at the beginning of March 2015, without seeing any positive results, Islamabad again initiated a meeting with representatives of the Afghan administration and the UNHCR in order to find new approaches to refugee return. Both sides reaffirmed the need to conclude the protracted situation, stressing adherence to the principle of voluntary repatriation of refugees. Decent repatriation provides security guarantees and respectful treatment of aliens, finding themselves in Pakistan due to a number of emergencies.

But if Islamabad in 2015 can no longer afford to “maintain” the Afghan refugees, Kabul cannot afford to accept them yet. In March in Islamabad the 25th meeting of the trilateral commission took place. It addressed the issue of full and effective reintegration of refugees in Afghan society, the complex and slow-moving process, requiring specific measures. These included: the allocation of funds in the form of a grant of 1,200 dollars for a family of 6 members within the framework of Enhanced Voluntary Return and Reintegration Package (EVRRP). The term of the pilot program is one year.

For its part, in response to the appeal of the UN and other international partners, the Government of Pakistan has extended the validity of the certificate of Proof of Registration (PoR) for Afghan refugees till the end of 2015; 800,000 birth certificates were additionally issued to Afghan children from refugee families, which guarantees their access to public primary schools and health facilities; the authorities apportioned some land free of charge for construction of several villages.

Not too loudly, but periodically, the Pakistani media stressed the “criminal” aspect of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

The insistence of the Pakistani authorities to return to their homeland is also dictated by the National Action Plan (NAP). Designed by the general officers and approved by the federal cabinet in December 2014, one of its final paragraphs provides a solution of the problem of Afghan refugees. Since January 2015 the NAP was adopted for implementation, and first of all unregistered refugees were deported, 3,416 people in total, from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and Islamabad, the capital administrative district. In April 2015, during the operation of the Frontier Constabulary (FC) 84 Afghan illegal immigrants were arrested and consequently sent home.

From time to time the interaction of governing authorities of Pakistan and Afghan refugees ends in bloodshed. On May 21, 2015, 1,500 families living in Azakhel refugee camp, after long resistance and negotiations with the authorities agreed to leave it. In case of refusal, it was planned to use heavy machinery to destroy buildings. Work on the repatriation of Afghan refugees will continue in all areas.

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