



THINK SOUTH ASIA

EDITORIAL



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“A special summer edition of the Think South Asia magazine, which is also my last as editor.”

As this is a summer special edition of Think South Asia, we suggest a travel by some of the South Asian countries, as the Maldives, India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. As I am moving to new projects, this is also my last edition as editor but, before I get there, let me call your attention for the contents you can find in the next pages: an article about the rising religious extremism in the Maldives by the future editor of Think South Asia, Mr Djan Sauerborn; a very good business profile of the Indian building market, by the civil engineer Mr Pedro Baptista Pinto; and an informative update of the situation in Nepal, by Mr Narayan Guimire.

Then, we have an outstanding article about the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh “Our conscience in an Iron Cage” and its consequences, from our esteemed adviser, Dr M. A. Hasan from Bangladesh. You should

not miss his article for several reasons: Dr Hasan is well-known as a fighter for independence, as a physician, as a scientist, as a philosopher, as a poet, as a human rights activist and much more. From Afghanistan we received and publish a very important article about “eliminating prejudices in school curricula and materials”, by our well-known Doctor Massouda Jalal, who is a former Minister of Women’ Affairs in Afghanistan and currently working on women rights as Head of the Jalal Foundation.

Last but not least, we interviewed the Executive Director of the South Asia Democratic Forum, Mr Paulo Casaca. He made some very important statements we should write on the rock for future memories:

- “We are now in a global era with much more powerful destruction devices than the ones we had some decades ago.”

“As Malala said, education is the only solution.”



- “In order to prevent a catastrophic scenario it is absolutely imperative to stop terrorism, especially the export of terrorism.”
- “Europe learned the hard way that cooperation is the only way to succeed.”
- “The full respect of cultures, languages and histories within Southern Asia and the full understanding of the values of co-operation, respect and tolerance is the only way to overcome existing conflicts rooted in the region.”
- “The European Union should stop to appease totalitarian ideologies.”

Mr Paulo Casaca also makes some questions and recommendations, and remembers the young 16 years old Pakistani girl Malala Yousafzai, who on the 12th of July made a remarkable speech in the United Nations. She quoted Mohamed, Jesus Christ, Buddha, and Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Gandhi, Bacha Khan and Mother Teresa. She quoted them to

ask for the right of every child, boys and girls, to education. As Malala said, “education is the only solution.” We fully support this idea that you can see developed in Doctor Jalal’s above mentioned article.

Finally, I must say it is with mixed feelings of nostalgia and confidence that I write my last Editorial here. On one hand, there is nostalgia for this fantastic year of 2012/2013, which was the beginning of this beautiful project called Think South Asia. Wonderful moments of discovery and big debates happened in this platform between very important politicians, distinguished diplomats, eminent academics and representatives of NGO’s. This fruitful debate constantly informed all those who read and make this magazine each month: policy makers in Europe, North-America and South Asia, our dear general readers all over the world, esteemed authors and, of course, myself. I learned a lot with you about South Asia, Europe, politics, business and culture. I was also able to receive lots of congratulation notes and critics for the

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quality of this magazine, but in fact the credits are all to be shared between the guest contributors who made from this magazine a successful reference among the periodic publications about South Asia, and you, dear reader, because as you know, this magazine is specially made for you. My deep thanks to all the guests who wrote, were interviewed or contributed in other ways for the success of this magazine. But I must personally thank to Mr Paulo Casaca from the South Asia Democratic Forum (www.sadf.eu) for all the invaluable support and expertise he gave to this project; and also to Mr Hugo Almeida and Mr Diogo Alves from Popular Jump (www.popularjump.com), who were the responsible for this fantastic design you are used to see here.

On the other hand, I would like to leave here a word of trust and confidence. I am very much confident than my successor as Editor will keep improving the Think South Asia magazine and letting it reach more and more people. I hereby present to you Mr Djan Sauerborn, who is writing here for the second time about the situation in the Maldives (for his first article, please check the October 2012 edition). Mr Sauerborn is an expert on South Asia from the University of Heidelberg, and so he is the right captain to take this ship into deeper waters and discover new horizons. The Think South Asia magazine is in very good hands and I wish all the best to Mr Djan Sauerborn in this endeavor. I am sure we will keep and develop this contact and cooperation, so that we can always Think (in, about and with) South Asia.

Thank you very much!
And feel free to contact me:
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The Perils of rising religious Fundamentalism in the Maldives



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***“Moderate, peaceful
and inclusive forms of
religious expression are
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fundamentalism.”***

In recent months several newspapers, blogs and academic outlets have highlighted the tumultuous domestic skirmish between Nasheed and Gayoom in the Maldives as well as the strategic balancing act of the Archipelago State between India and China. Surprisingly however the troubling rise of religious fundamentalism within the Maldives has not fully moved into the limelight of international media and organizations. This is especially astonishing, because the battle between moderate and extremist forces within the country not only has a strong impact on the upcoming elections in September but also on civil society as a whole. Islam, which only decades ago did not play a major role within the public sociopolitical sphere, has turned into a divisive “game changer”. Moderate, peaceful and inclusive forms of religious expression are being violently pushed aside by adherents of fundamentalism.

On April 19th a protest movement aimed at implementing Sharia as the sole source of legal guidance within the archipelago state manifested itself as hundreds of men and women took to the street calling for the full enactment of Islamic Sharia. Today the judiciary of the island state under article 142 of

the constitution is required to turn to Sharia regarding matters where codified law is silent. Since judicial competency is at best inadequate, and judges in the past have predominantly been chosen along party affiliation and not expertise, they have become easy targets for forces within the country advocating a hard-line implementation of Sharia. Australia and India have offered assistance in form of legal training, but more needs to be done to ensure the establishment of an unbiased, independent judiciary. One crucial step in the right direction would be a full-fledged translation of legal texts and documents from English into Dhivehi, the national language of the Maldives. If the judiciary remains incapable of fulfilling its role within the state, principles of good governance and democratic values will continue to suffer from erosion. In addition, changes to the constitution should be made, if the Maldives wants to be regarded as a pluralistic and liberal society. Under the current constitution non-Muslims are not allowed to become citizens which is a strong violation of article 18 of the Human Rights Charter (Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion). Furthermore the line between codified law and Sharia is becoming increasingly blurry. On March 28th

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the parliament drafted a penal code bill which includes “Hudud” punishments, such as amputation for theft or flogging for fornication.

The danger of radicalization is not a mere “de jure” threat. There have been several examples in the past months which exemplify a rise in extremist attitudes and actions. Maybe the most shocking incidence occurred in February of this year when a 15 year old traumatized teenage girl who was raped several times by her stepfather was sentenced to 100 lashes for having engaged in pre-marital sex and fornication. Although President Mohammed Waheed condemned the sentence saying that the country had to “set up a commission” and that this “case should not have come to the courts at all”, these statements seem shady. Waheed’s comments are not in line with his decision to form a coalition with the “Adhaalath Party”(Justice Party), which backed the flogging, saying “the purpose of penalties like these in Islamic Sharia is to maintain order in society and to save it from sinful acts. We must turn a deaf ear to the international organization which are calling to abolish these penalties”. The “Adhaalath Party” is one of the major forces actively lobbying for a rigid and strict implementation of Sharia. The key proponent for more austere religious practices is the current Minister of Islamic Affairs, Shaykh Shaheem Ali Saeed, who has been quoted saying that music and singing are “haram” (forbidden) and that Christians on the

island who he calls “freemasons” are “out to wipe out Islam from the Island”. Another troubling phenomenon is the education of many young Maldivians in madrasas abroad, especially in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Students who unknowingly attended more radical madrasas often return home to the Maldives, expressing their newly acquired fundamentalist views. Many link this new strand of radicalization to the increasing degradation of women, who in some cases are told to stay home and drop out of the labor market. The International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics voiced their concern in November 2011 over potential female genital mutilation occurring in the Maldives.

Democracy is above all the constructive interaction between differently minded sections of society. If certain opinions or beliefs are aggressively suppressed, and individuals or interest groups have to fear persecution and punishment for their views, democratic and pluralistic values cannot flourish. If instilling terror becomes an accepted “modus operandi” in everyday Maldivian politics and political forces turn a blind eye or even encourage discriminatory atrocities, the young democracy will not make it out of adolescence. The European External Action Service should help direct the issue of the increasing religious extremism in the Maldives into the limelight of the international community. ■

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Our Conscience in an Iron Cage



Dr. M A. Hasan
Advisor of South Asia
Democratic Forum

“The international crimes tribunal in Bangladesh is in essence a national tribunal, empowered to address international crimes as per global norms.”

Many, purchasing the blatant lies propagated by the Jamat-e-Islami and its lobby in the west, believe that the international crimes tribunal in Bangladesh is not following any international norms, rather it is a kangaroo court set up to quell the government’s political opponents. Let us look at the facts. The international crimes tribunal in Bangladesh is in essence a national tribunal, empowered to address international crimes as per global norms. Though constituted recently, in 2010, it is backed by a people’s mandate and the constitution, where the international crimes tribunal act 19/73 has been incorporated as an irrevocable law, and by article 47/4 of the constitution.

The law not only upheld the spirit of the Geneva convention and the genocide convention but also set an example for the UN preparatory commission for the ICC where the nomenclature of different crimes under different articles singled out all those elements of crimes that are to be addressed in civil and military conflicts where IHL is to be focused on in detail. The law endorsed by the constitution of Bangladesh was unanimously approved by Parliament in 2009, thus setting it in motion. It is no less equipped and important than

ICTR supported by resolution 955 of November 94 and ICTY backed by resolution 827 of 1993. Indeed, the laws of ICT of Bangladesh, reflecting the principles of the UN charter, allows the state to bring charges against the accused and provides a space to both parties for pleading, oral arguments and the placing of relevant documents. The accused can appeal, and employ lawyers to defend him as per the law of the land. They can avail themselves of all necessary medical support including the facilities of hospitals and safe homes and so can the witnesses. To make the law more palatable and acceptable by all corners it was amended on 14th July 2009.

When Samatha Purdy of the War crimes section of the United Nations Department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London wrote to me on 1st September 2000 that “the best place for crimes of this sort to be investigated is the domestic jurisdiction, and that the court will only step in where a state is unwilling or unable genuinely to prosecute,” then where is the wrong in setting up such a national tribunal in conformity with international laws. I am sure the jurists of ICC shall agree with me in this matter.

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When Late Maj. Gen. (Ret) K. H. Raja of Pakistan reiterates in his recently published book 'A Stranger in my country- East Pakistan 1969-1971' that Gen. Niazi told his officers to let loose their soldiers on the women of East Pakistan till the ethnicity of the Bengalis was changed, the global conscience cannot remain unperturbed.

Similarly Maj Gen (Retd) Tajammal Hussain Malik wrote in the Defence Journal of Pakistan on August 2001: "I took over the command of 205 Brigade on 17th of November 1971 and about 4 days later the Indians had started the attack on our position. During the period of my command, on one occasion, it was reported to me that one of my units 8 Baluch had captured about 8 civilians. The brigade headquarter was informed for their disposal. I was told that as a routine all such persons who were captured were to be shot without any investigation..... I learnt through many other officers that during the earlier operations against the Mukti Bahinis thousands of innocent people were killed. In one of my defensive position at Santahar, large numbers of people were massacred. General Tikka Khan & Lieutenant General Jahanzeb Arbab had earned their reputation of being Butchers of East Pakistan. So were many other Brigadiers and Generals. Mukti Bahinis too, may also have done so in retaliation but it was very negligible as compared to the atrocities committed by the West Pakistani troops against the East Pakistanis." It is regrettable that the Bangladesh government did not get enough assistance from the international community to try the

heinous perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity just after its liberation.

Mr. D.N. Dixit quite candidly mentioned in his book Liberation and Beyond that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was very much concerned regarding difficulties about collecting evidence in connection with war crimes trials. At that juncture, the pro-liberation forces of Bangladesh were not ready to offer impunity to the perpetrators of war crimes. So the international crimes tribunal act was enacted after much thought and was incorporated in the constitution of the country on 15th July 1973. The lawmakers taking note of the equivocal human rights law sought an extra umbrella clause in the constitution, which was article 47(3).

The will of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to try the perpetrators under the collaborators act slackened as the majority of the perpetrators were escaping by taking advantage of loopholes in the criminal law and a weak evidence act. Besides, many international players remained as inert as before and Mr. Bhutto unabashedly declared that he would try all stranded Bengalis in Pakistan (nearly four hundred thousand) if Mujib took any step towards a war crimes trial. Global pressure, particularly from the West and Arabs, was also mounting on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Probably many dramas were played out behind the scenes before Mr. Bhutto offered formal recognition to Bangladesh on 24 February 1974. As an inevitable consequence Sheikh Mujibur Rahman endorsed the tripartite agreement on

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MAIN ARTICLE

“Mr. Bhutto, being himself the kingpin of the 1971 genocide, cleverly dodged Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and pretended to be a clean man.”

10 April 1974 at Delhi declaring a conditional clemency to some POWs held in India. He made the mistakes of trusting Mr. Bhutto who promised him to try the real perpetrators of war crimes in his country as per international law. Mr. Bhutto, being himself the kingpin of the 1971 genocide, cleverly dodged Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and pretended to be a clean man.

However, offering clemency of any sort or impunity to any perpetrators of genocide and crimes against humanity is not accepted by international human rights law and the genocide convention. The trial of the most notorious 369 of the Pakistani perpetrators of genocide and crimes against humanity consequently becomes more urgent. Indeed, that intention does not weaken the basis of the trial of collaborators

like Mr. Golam Azam, Mr. Nizami and others related to the Jamat and other parties, who as party members and as individuals perpetrated heinous crimes. During and after the war the activities of Al Badar members surpassed those of the Taliban and the Tayyeba. Right after orchestrating the worst genocide in the subcontinent's history, the Pakistan military machine adopted the misguided philosophy of all fundamentalist groups and political parties like the Jamaat, Nizam-e-Islam, Jamat-e-Ulama, Muslim League, etc. Besides, political and personal aspirations, lust and greed drove a group of people to support the notorious Pakistan army in a mission to kill, rape and ruin. General Farman Ali was the mastermind behind organizing the Al Badar. Again, it was he who arranged the meeting of political heads with

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Gen. Tikka Khan from 4th to 13th April in 1971 and with Yahya at Pindi at later date.

Razakars were a quasi-paramilitary force working under Gen. Jamshid, head of the East Pakistan Civil Armed Forces. Al Badar members were recruited primarily from the student wing of the Jamat and were trained and armed by the Pakistan army. Gen. Rahim was the chief. Brig. Bashir, the notorious leader of the Jinjira genocide, was the head of Al Badar in Dhaka division. Ashrafuzzaman Khan, now living in Manhattan, New York was the head of the Salauddin wing of Al Badar. Very recently the ICT of Bangladesh has formed charges against this alleged perpetrator of crimes against humanity who is said to have annihilated many intellectuals.

Mr. Nizami has been depicted as Nazim-e-Ala; the supreme head of the student wing of Jamat, as well as the civil head of Al Badar by Mr. Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, the author of "The Vanguard of Islamic Revolution: Jamaat-e-Islami of Pakistan. Ashrafuzzaman Khan and a few other Al Badar were received at Lahore by Prof. Mohiuddin, a close associate of Prof. Golam Azam. Mr. Mohiuddin described himself as the former district Amir of Jamat and narrated his story in his Autobiography entitled 'Sunset At Midday'. Mr. Mohiuddin was one of the alleged perpetrators of genocide in Noakhali. His role was as dark as that of Maoulana

Abdul Kaium, another leader of Jamat who got deeply involved in a classical case of genocide by killing Marwari minorities at Syedpur- a small town in north Bengal. Mr. Kaium along with the Pakistani army officer Major Gul, Habilder Fate Khan and a few bihari Mujahid eliminated nearly 413 man, woman and children on a single carnage. Unfortunately, the perpetrators of those gruesome war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity have not been brought to book.

More unfortunate and regrettable is that the Pakistani army and their allies could successfully bury the horrendous crimes for some time. They portrayed those events as a matter of internal conflicts, civil war, rightful reprisal actions, 'little bit of excess in brotherly quarrels' etc. As a result the hue and cry about the atrocities raised by the human rights activists in 1971 and later died in the vicious political rows and ugly international diplomacy that followed. Following that, the brutal episode of preplanned pogroms and violence against women got lost in an abyss of ignorance, despair, loneliness and silence.

Those victims of crimes against humanity ultimately failed to register their pain, grievances and serious allegations in the right place. Hundreds of raped women had to accept a wretched life. Can something be done to ensure justice? Or do we remain imprisoned in our own cage, as deaf-mutes? ■

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Paulo Casaca

Founder and Executive Director of the South Asia Democratic Forum

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Think South Asia (TSA): During the course of this year SADF has organized and promoted two major conferences on the merits of regional cooperation. What are your thoughts on SAARC and how important is its role in the economic development of South Asia?

Paulo Casaca (PC): Thank you very much for the opportunity to address these crucial issues, that are not only relevant to South Asia but also to us to the growing number of readers of “Think South Asia”. SAARC co-operation has been SADF’s core theme since its birth in March 2011. SAARC was the central issue in the two major studies regarding Nepal and Bangladesh we undertook in co-operation with Gallup.

Both these studies confirmed the huge support in these countries to reinforce and institutionalize cooperation in South Asia.

In addition to our two revealing surveys we also organized three conferences dedicated to co-operation in South Asia; the last one taking place in October 2012. The key findings regarding the path towards increased cooperation will be published in a book. This publication will pull together interdisciplinary academic insight from high profile experts. The backbone of our think tank in a nutshell is: “How

do we keep cooperation in South Asia moving forward?”

South Asia is a giant –it is in fact the most populated region in the World, with a very rich and ancient history – but it is politically a non-entity and it scores low on development standards. Instead of thinking on how to enhance co-operation, its major members seem to be obsessed with their rivalries.

We are now in a global era with much more powerful destruction devices than the ones we had some decades ago. A nuclear tragedy promoted by old fashion fanatic ideas of national, ethnic or religious superiority would certainly be more devastating than what we have seen in the past.

In order to prevent a catastrophic scenario it is absolutely imperative to stop terrorism, especially the export of terrorism. We must promote knowledge and understanding on the past and the present, on all sorts of “others”, starting with neighbouring realities.

Europe learned the hard way that cooperation is the only way to succeed. Unfortunately we had to go through numerous national and religious wars including two wars of global proportions that nearly turned Europe into an irrelevant “actor” for good. The European road has been bumpy and is

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far from being a perfect example for everyone else to follow, but still, I think there is much the rest of the world can learn from our experiences.

Europe's intentions are not purely altruistic. It has a vital interest in promoting peace and co-operation in South Asia. The problems as well as the potential of South Asia have a global reach and we have to accompany and support them.

TSA: Which are the main challenges and security threats to the SAARC region?

PC: The propagation of terrorism and terrorist groups, the development of a culture of radicalisation, violence and intolerance as well as nuclear proliferation are the main concerns South Asia has to deal with. The latter is very concerning since India, China and Pakistan are the three countries which have a growing nuclear arsenal. The two most important "rogue" nuclear arms programmes, the ones of Iran and North Korea, are also related with this Asian dynamic of nuclear proliferation.

The President of our Board of Advisors, Professor Subrata Mitra, promoted a very important conference in the European Parliament he called "the strategic triangle" where he demonstrated how this dangerous

nuclear build-up relates to these three countries.

I hope that the World's major powers all understand how peace and co-operation in South Asia will be a tremendous boost for peace, co-operation and development all over the World. We are very happy if we are able to contribute, however modestly, to this desideratum.

The full respect of cultures, languages and histories within Southern Asia and the full understanding of the values of co-operation, respect and tolerance is the only way to overcome existing conflicts rooted in the region.

TSA: Today (12.07.2013) is Malala Yousafzai's 16th birthday. Education for peace is seen as one of the best ways to tackle extremism and terrorism. How could this idea be effectively implemented in the SAARC countries?

PC: The war of religious fanaticism against knowledge and education knows no boundaries or limits. The attempted murder of Malala Yousafzai initiated a chorus of anger around the World, but this wave of indignation ebbed away rather quickly. Religious fanatic groups have continued to destroy feminine schools, murder guards, teachers and children not only in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but also in the Federally

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Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan, in Afghanistan and most recently in Baluchistan. Here the terrorist group responsible for the butchery decided to continue assassinations in the hospital to insure the completion of their unfinished business of slaughtering young girls whose only crime was studying, trying to improve their livelihood as well as the livelihoods of their friends and family.

We are very puzzled that international authorities seem to pay so little attention to these fundamental issues. High profile initiatives, funds and declarations have no adherence to the real policy that has been pursued on the ground regarding these crimes against humanity, their perpetrators, their supporters and most fundamentally the ideology that justifies these atrocities. Education for peace, tolerance and understanding should be a major issue addressed by all the countries of South Asia, SAARC, the international community and in particular by the United Nations, and within the UN agencies such as UNESCO or UNHCR. Why don’t the United States include the Afghan Taliban on its list of terrorist organisations? Why don’t they press the Afghan authorities to include these terrorists in the governmental structures in the name of “reconciliation”? Couldn’t we expect at least simple conditions for negotiations as a moratorium for the execution of women and young girls?

TSA: How important are Women Rights for the South Asia Democratic Forum and why? Knowing that the NATO troops will leave Afghanistan next year, do you think it is realistic these rights can be maintained?

PC: The cornerstone of the religious fanatic ideology that has been ravaging Pakistan and Afghanistan is its misogyny. The defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan led to major advances on the situation of women that are now under threat by the pressure to include Taliban in the power structures of the country. Otherwise, as we know, the Taliban-minded terrorist nebula influence in Pakistan is growing unabatedly. The most important issue here is not the role of the military, and within the military question, it is not confined to the presence of NATO troops.

I would like to use this opportunity to state my full understanding and support for President Karzai’s outrage on the way Afghanistan was pressed into accepting Taliban rule. I fully understand that he considers a Western military presence to be useless or counterproductive if it is partly based on the rule of the Taliban in the region. We have witnessed a similar trajectory elsewhere. In Lebanon, the international military presence was supposed to guarantee peace. As the European countries embarked on a strategy of appeasement of the main

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local terrorist force – Hezbollah – the local military presence guaranteed no peace for the Lebanese or even for several other countries, as we have seen through the aggression of this terrorist group against the Syrian people. To a large extent the European military presence in Lebanon gives leverage to Hezbollah and allows it to pursue with impunity its terrorist attacks on European soil – as was recently the case in Bulgaria – the European Union is afraid of reprisals on its armed forces in Lebanon in case it decides to confront Hezbollah terrorism.

So the Lebanese example shows how the Western way of equating the issue reflected in the question is ineffective or even counterproductive. If the Western policy is to appease the Taliban, for the sake of what used to be called “Western values” it is better for Western troops to leave and not give extra leverage to terrorist forces. The West continues to be a prisoner of old geopolitical logics that tend to ignore or to minimize the most relevant factors such as the ideological ones. SADF is trying to breathe some fresh air into the Western debates that most of the time revolve around small closed circles, jargon and dogmas. In sponsoring the presence of the former Afghan Presidential candidate Doctor Massouda Jalal for example, a woman that speaks out of her knowledge, of her mind, we are seeking to provide new and much needed impetus to aforementioned issues. We

at SADF are firmly convinced women will be the main actors in transforming South Asia. The popular outrage of the Indian people on the rape and murder of a young girl in a public transport in Delhi and the clear rejection of the male chauvinist mentality coming with it is a clear sign South Asian women are on the forefront of social transformation. We just have to make an effort to help them being heard here in the West where in spite of all the proclaimed respect for women rights the main institutions did not seriously take their interests in consideration when they decided to give respectability to the Taliban.

TSA: The South Asia Democratic Forum (SADF) was founded by you two and a half years ago and has proven to be an important think tank for academics and policy makers who are interested and intrigued by South Asia. Which were the SADF achievements up until now?

PC: I think we already covered the most important goals and achievements. To place co-operation in South Asia in the centre of the European political map, to give independent South Asian voices, like the one of Massouda Jalal who is uncompromisingly against all forms and manifestations of the Taliban, a platform in Europe as well as discussing and covering relevant and recent developments in a magazine like “Think South Asia” so that the scope of debates is not only limited to experts,

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but also open to the public are the pillar stones of SADF. In addition we seek to establish a regular presence within the European institutions in Brussels or Strasbourg, and an occasional one in Geneva and to start an approach towards the US, where we want to develop links with like-minded associations.

In 2013 we have been focussing most of our attention on Bangladesh and the plight of its people to end impunity by trying the perpetrators of the Genocide of 1971. In co-operation with the South Asia Institute of the University of Heidelberg and the Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh we recently promoted an international conference on this issue in Heidelberg.

Here, as in other domains, the pressure of those who want to appease religious fanaticism at any cost, those who think that forgetting the crimes will soften the heart of the perpetrators, has been powerful, but I think we contributed decisively to allow those who favour secular, free and democratic institutions and cultures in South Asia, those who defend the rights and dignity of women, who defend education, knowledge and tolerance over fanaticism to make themselves heard.

TSA: What are the next projects for the South Asia Democratic Forum?

PC: To celebrate the century of Rabindranath Tagore Nobel prize is the main objective for the current

year. Europe is very ignorant of the immense impact other cultures had in shaping our common civilization. Remembering Tagore and his message is the best way to start combating this lack of knowledge regarding South Asia. We expect to have our first book on the market for this occasion. We are also working together with the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in the preparation of a reference conference on cooperation regarding water in South Asia, and this should set the tone for other initiatives on crucial issues in the region. We intend to continue following elections and political developments in the region as we have done up until now, and to strengthen links with other parts of the World regarding our relation with South Asia, starting with our Western neighbours in the American continent.

The issue of education for tolerance and peace has been selected as the most crucial political issue in 2013 and I think it will continue to be in 2014.

TSA: Last but not the least, a message to the European policy makers.

PC: Europe is facing a major crisis that is far from over and I believe it will have to implement serious reforms that will correct some of the mistakes it did in its development process and it still refuses to acknowledge. Absence of reforms will convey the message to some political quarters that it is possible to go back in history, to a romanticised past where global competition and pressures

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did not exist. I believe that these tendencies are already quite obvious in key countries of the EU such as the United Kingdom or France. European policy makers must have the courage to go ahead with serious reforms, not the usual type of occasional summit declarations that remain in the rhetoric and cosmetic domain, but substantial ones, where the place of Europe in the World will be rightly understood and where substantive structural issues are dealt with.

Europe has to think of real reform on its model of free reign of the financial institutions and interests on its economic and political realities, submitting them to truly independent regulatory authorities that are bounded

by the public interest not by particular interests. This implies a radical reform of the Maastricht Treaty encompassing the monetary and fiscal dimensions, and it should be at the core of any transatlantic initiative.

Within the economic sphere, I believe a World level bet on a sustainable economy that will encompass the issue of emissions with hazardous impact on the atmosphere and climate could constitute the key to reanimating the World economy.

Politically, I think the European Union should stop to appease totalitarian ideologies and practices and it should wholeheartedly support secularism, democracy and freedom. ■

“Politically, the European Union should stop to appease totalitarian ideologies and practices.”

India's Building Construction Market



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“The market for real estate construction segment in India is likely to aggregate approximately US\$380 billion over the five year period from 2012 to 2016.”

India has a huge surface, with an area of 3.287.263Km², and it is the second most populous country in the world, where more than 1,27 billion people live, behind its neighborhood China, with over 1,36 billion people. India's population growth rate was 1.4% in 2011. Currently, there are about 51 births in India in a minute. In the last decade, this country had a tremendous housing boom and from 2012 to 2016 the real estate sector is expected to account for 43% of the construction spending in India. A PwC report estimates that the market for real estate construction segment in India is likely to aggregate approximately US\$ 380 billion over the five year period, 2012 to 2016. In 2012, the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) decided to build about 4.375Km of roads, number of km similar awarded in 2011 (4.553Km) and in 2010 (3.338 Km). In fact, this growth was supported by the country's expanding economy, increased government spending on public infrastructure and supportive foreign direct investment (FDI) system (4). The Road Construction Projects were conceded under public-private partnership programs, via flow of funds and EPC (engineering, procurement

and construction) contracts in 2012. In India, construction is the second largest economic activity after agriculture. Construction accounts for nearly 65 per cent of the total investment in infrastructure and is expected to be the biggest beneficiary of the surge in infrastructure investment over the next five years.

Taking into account this unprecedented growth and with the intention to give opportunities for suppliers of construction products offered by the Indian market, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), Government of India, Ministry of Urban Development and dmg events are jointly organizing The Big 5 Construct India 2013, an international building and construction show to be held at the Bombay Exhibition Centre in Mumbai from the 2nd to the 4th of September 2013. The Big 5 is the largest event in the building and construction industry in the Middle East, South East and Central Asia which last year attracted over 60,000 audited buyers of construction products and it is now being launched in India.

According to a PwC report done for the organizers of The Big 5 Construct

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India, India is expected to emerge as the world's 3rd largest construction market by 2020. There are many authors that affirm that the India Market Construction that the global construction industry represents about 13% of global GDP in nowadays and it will increase to 15% in 2020. Many companies related to construction have a special focus in India and also are investing in it. For example, from the 5th to the 8th of March 2013 it happened a Congress named "Innovations in Concrete Construction", honored by seven distinguished persons from world over who have made outstanding contributions in the area of Cement and Concrete Science. "Building Information Modelling" (BIM) also developed a conference programme from the 13th to the 14th of June this year, in Mumbai, India. From the 1st to the 3rd of October 2013, also in Mumbai, there will be the 15th World Innovation Summit & Expo CONSTRUTECH. There will be also a conference from the 24th to the 26th of October 2013 in Hyderabad, India, which theme will be World of Concrete India.

The Indian construction industry is constituted by 200 major firms in the corporate sector. In addition to these firms, there are many class A contractors registered with various

government construction bodies. There are thousands of small contractors, which compete for small jobs or work as sub-contractors of prime or other contractors. Places like Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Pune will be among the major contributors to this increase, with a 53% share of the country's overall mall supply for 2013. India's major cities like Mumbai, NCR-Delhi, Bangalore, Chennai, Pune, Hyderabad and Kolkata will see the addition of close to 9.5 million square feet of mall space in 2013. Mumbai, NCR-Delhi, Bangalore and Chennai will together contribute 70% of the total retail space absorption. Other cities like Pune, Hyderabad and Kolkata will account for the remaining 30%. From the 13th to the 14th of February 2014 it is scheduled another conference named "Constro", which is an International Fair on Construction Machinery, Materials, Methods and Projects. According to the "Citi Investment Research and Analysis", India will be the highest economy in 2050, higher than China and US. As India's population is about one sixth of the total Earth population, it is important to carefully dimensionate the public infrastructures, so that it may serve the Indian people peaceful and comfortably. ■

"India is expected to emerge as the world's 3rd largest construction market by 2020."

"Many international companies related to construction have a special focus in India and also are investing in it."



Doctor Massouda Jalal

Minister of Women's Affairs from October 2004 to July 2006. The only woman candidate in the Afghan presidential election, 2004. Doctor Jalal is a pediatrician, teacher at Kabul University, and a UN World Food Programme worker. She also is the head of the Jalal Foundation.

“Afghan women are fighting a fierce battle to protect the gains that they had won during the last decade.”

Eliminating prejudices in school curricula and materials

Democracy, human rights and gender equality are the cornerstones of enduring peace and progress in Afghanistan. However, in such a context where peoples' lives continue to hang in the balance of a harsh fundamentalist culture and complex socio-economic and political challenges, attaining them has been an onerous all-time struggle.

Afghans of today inherited patterns of thoughts and behaviors that sharply distinguish status, roles, social claims, entitlements, rights, opportunities and many other things in life on the basis of gender, cultural, and religious stereotypes. It has perpetuated divisions among people, resulting in the subordination and oppression of the weak and the dominance and atrocity against them by the strong. The aftermaths have been disastrous to the powerless including the women, the poor, the ethnic minorities, and those who are victimized by perverse interpretation of Islam and religious teachings.

For Afghan women, it is particularly disastrous. The combined impacts of cultural, religious and gender prejudices have reduced their status into worthless human beings, without rights, and

could be exploited and oppressed, especially by family members who are supposed to be their sources of strength and protection. Nowadays, with the anticipated departure of international supporters by the end of 2014, Afghan women are fighting a fierce battle to protect the gains that they had won during the last decade. Foremost in our agenda is the preservation of the 2009 Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women which serves as its main source of protection against 22 acts of violence that are now punishable under the law. The recent resurgence of Taliban influence in the country's governance institutions threatens to abrogate this law and leave Afghan women defenseless against extreme cruelties committed towards them. In such a situation, women could only hope for a better future if the next generation of Afghans would be taught to unlearn religious, cultural, and gender prejudices that are instrumental for their oppression.

On the whole, our inability to advance economically and politically is rooted on this malady. We need to overhaul our social structure in a way that would render inequalities, religious extremism, and lawlessness an

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anachronism. Afghanistan should breed a fresh generation of people who would unequivocally stand for freedom, peace, good governance and social justice. We need to breed an army of young women and men who would put a stop to the inter-generational transmission of ideologies that make religion, gender, and culture a justification for terrorism, violence, banditry, suppression of rights, social inequity and all forms of injustices that make the lives of Afghans regressive and miserable. We need non-traditional leaders who could bring unity to our people, heal the wounds of our battered past, and bring everybody into a collective journey forward.

Education is pivotal to this vision. If there is any country in the world whose need for non-stereotyped learning is most profound, that is Afghanistan. Removing cultural, religious and gender prejudices in the curricula and educational materials is a strategic entry point towards a meaningful life. There are no available studies on the extent of religious and cultural prejudices in Afghan schools. With regard to gender, however, a study conducted in 2010 by Khalid Fahim, entitled “Gender Issues and Textbooks: Gender Bias in Phasto Primary School Textbooks

in Afghanistan” showed that the roles depicted for women in our school textbooks continue to be stereotyped, less active, and confined to reproductive, non-decision making spheres of life. There were disproportionately less portrayals of women and whenever they were depicted in public spheres of life, they were shown in traditionally-females roles as teachers and vaccinators. Concepts and languages were male-centered, resulting in female invisibility in many subjects, including in the message of the Minister for Education. Worse, school authorities and personnel believe that the roles of women in the textbooks need to reflect the values of a conservative Islam society, an indication that Afghan schools serve the purpose of reproducing patriarchy, gender conservatism, and female marginalization.

In the last decade, the removal of stereotypes in educational materials and curricula had received attention from certain donors, NGOs and international organizations. However, such effort is too minimal to generate a transformative potential to society, particularly on the generations to come. Some essential requisites appear to have been missed, such as:

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“In Afghanistan, it is the religious sector which has a very strong commanding influence in the minds and behavior of people.”

“Breaking away from stereotypes within school settings requires a solid teacher-student partnership.”

- **Commitment to the principles of democracy and human rights**

The elimination of prejudices in school curricula and learning materials must be predicated upon a strong commitment to the principles of democracy and human rights. Respect for rights and human life, equality, non-discrimination, individual freedom, empowerment of the disadvantaged, tolerance, inclusiveness, non-discrimination, and similar philosophies are vital to the framing of principles and initiatives around non-prejudice in the schools and in all aspects of life. The elimination of religious, cultural, and gender-based stereotypes in curricula and learning materials will have a stronger chance of being sustained if it is founded upon the commitment of school officials, personnel, students, parents, and citizens to democratic and human rights values, making it both a political and personal exercise rather than a mere official task or responsibility of some civil servants and professionals, who, after a while, may no longer be in the position to support non-stereotyping in the school system.

- **Comprehensive approach**

Because of the above, elimination of stereotypes in school curricula and learning materials may never succeed if pursued as a stand-alone approach. Rather, it has to be positioned within a broad strategy to address the very roots of prejudices in all walks of life. This requires collaborative efforts, especially among institutions that set the framework on what is acceptable

or not in a given society. Foremost among these, in Afghanistan, is the religious sector which has a very strong commanding influence in the minds and behavior of people. Religious leaders should echo what the schools teach and vice versa. Any dissonance would likely lead to confusion, tension, and struggle among institutions and people.

Thus, to be meaningful and sustainable, interventions to rid schools of stereotypes need to begin with multi-sectoral consensus building about the path of transformation that has to be pursued at the broadest level. Collective commitments have to be generated and responsibilities within all institutions have to be clarified and provided with attention and support.

- **A teacher-student partnership**

Breaking away from stereotypes within school settings requires a solid teacher-student partnership. Teachers and students usually come to school with their own deep-seated stereotypes – learned through years of upbringing and socialization from family, media, peers, and society. Because of this, the actual interactions between and among them are loaded with stereotypes that are not seen in curricula and learning materials. It is very important, therefore, for teachers to have the proper training to teach in a way that manifestations of stereotypes are constantly dealt with as they arise in the school setting and classroom interactions. Training for this purpose has to be incorporated into teachers' education and refresher

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training curricula. Likewise, it is an imperative for students to acquire skills in determining and questioning stereotypes whenever and wherever they occur, regardless of whether they are exhibited by fellow students or by school authorities. Thus, teaching materials should incorporate practical exercises in actually detecting religious, cultural, and gender stereotypes, as well as skills in offering alternatives to such stereotypes.

- **Participatory monitoring of biases and stereotypes**

Although certain State instrumentalities are given the official responsibility to ensure that textbooks and school materials are free from cultural, religious, and gender stereotypes, this responsibility is actually shared by everybody. Parents, students, media, civic organizations and other sectors of society must be encouraged to participate in ridding school materials and textbooks of such kinds of stereotypes through reporting, critiquing, and providing alternatives that will promote equality between boys/men and girls/women. Accessible mechanisms through which such sectors could coordinate and send report on the presence of stereotypes in school materials, curricula and practices must be set in place. Parents and teachers associations should consider including the elimination of prejudices in schools as one of their active areas of concern.

- **Ensuring consistency and harmony with practices**

Although it is very important that

teaching materials and textbooks are free from stereotypes, this is not enough. It is equally important for school institutions, authorities and personnel to demonstrate their commitment against such stereotypes through policies, practices, statements and activities. For example, schools should strive for at least 30 percent representation of women/men in school decision making. School authorities should also constantly pronounce their commitment to eliminate stereotypes in the campuses/school environments. Teaching practices, school infrastructures, languages, and everything else in the school must reflect the absence of religious, cultural and gender stereotypes. Any message or act suggesting tolerance of violence against women must be nipped in the bud. Otherwise, it will confuse the students and the impacts of removing stereotypes from textbooks and school materials could get neutralized.

Simple guidelines and indicators may be promoted to aid teachers in enabling students to determine religious, cultural and gender stereotypes in teaching materials/curricula and other school based events or activities. Examples of gender stereotypes are: (i) assignment of roles or responsibilities based on sex; (ii) exclusion of female or male from an activity on account of sex; and (iii) discouraging girls or boys from making free choices and encouraging them to make choices based on what society dictates. A mechanism should also be designed to enable students and teachers to immediately report continuing

“School authorities should constantly pronounce their commitment to eliminate stereotypes in the campuses/school environments.”

“Any message or act suggesting tolerance of violence against women must be nipped in the bud.”

“Pictures should not depict women and girls or ethnic/religious groups in weak, subordinate, or traditional roles.”



presence or practice of stereotypes in school lessons and activities.

All sexist and culturally offensive languages should be removed. For example, terminologies like “mankind” should be replaced with “humankind”; generic use of he and him to assume the inclusion of females and putting the male terms ahead of female terms at all times, such as “men and women” instead of “women and men” or “boys and girls” instead of “girls and boys” should be challenged. Language comes with mental images and putting “boys and men” ahead of “girls and women” all the time will reinforce the subliminal message that men and boys are more important and should always come first.

Pictures should not depict women and girls or ethnic/religious groups in weak, subordinate, or traditional roles. Rather, they should be shown in

empowered and non-traditional roles such as decision makers and holders of non-traditional jobs such as lawyers, doctors, engineers, etc. When shown in pictures, they should not always be behind, small, and innocuous. Pictures commercializing women’s body, depicting women as sex objects, or portraying them under abusive relationships should be altogether banned.

Songs/messages that affirm traditional roles of women and men and the inferiority of either woman/girl or men/boy or any religious, ethnic or cultural group should be replaced with messages that promote equality and non-stereotyping. Songs that romanticizes emotional battering, martyrdom, or suffering of women and other religious or cultural groups should be critiqued from an enlightened perspective and removed from curricula and teaching materials. These approaches should also

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“Pictures commercializing women’s body, depicting women as sex objects, or portraying them under abusive relationships should be altogether banned.”

be applied to jokes, examples, and other forms of written, verbal, and visual communications. Games that reinforce sexual, ethnic or religious stereotypes should be prohibited. Assignment of games should be based on preferences and potentials of the students. Girls and minorities must be given coaching or leadership roles in sports teams and other extra-curricular activities and their numerical participation should not be lower than 30 percent of the total. Sexual harassment committed against girls, women and minorities must be eliminated.

Use of blue/green/brown for boys and pink/yellow/red for girls should be discouraged. Assigning of colors should be based on random choices or reasons other than their association with gender or religion. Selection of colors in school setting based on religious, cultural or gender prescriptions should never be encouraged.

A relevant question at this point is, “where do we begin?”. A holistic, systematic approach is not always possible, especially in a messy context like Afghanistan. However, a good starting point would be to bring together related initiatives, identify achievements and strengths, point out obstacles and corresponding ways to address them, and draw up a holistic strategy based on the given situation. It is an imperative that such strategy includes advocacy at the highest levels and the engagement of progressive-

thinking religious leaders. They are a rare breed and are likely to face serious antagonism from their colleagues. For this reason, broader support will have to be solicited, such as from the Organization of Islamic Countries.

Transforming a society is always a difficult, arduous journey that takes several generations to achieve. But we can, and we should begin now. With the resurgence of fundamentalism in Afghanistan, the educational system should stand as an incorruptible frontier for non-prejudiced behavior, thought patterns, and culture. The situation of our country cannot change by waging only a physical war against the enemies of our people. More than this, the real war should be fought in the minds of our people, especially the next generation. It is the single attainable factor that keeps the hope of our women alive.

In the meantime, I take this opportunity to appeal to the international community to continue to support the Afghan women’s struggle to protect their rights and well being. Help us secure the ERAW Law from manipulations and possible abrogation by fundamentalist supporters in our Parliament. Send a letter of appeal to each of them and to the Afghan President and officials of government. Let the light of hope visit our land again and bring wisdom to our leaders and decision makers. Let optimism lives on, especially in these most trying times in the life of Afghans.

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“A relevant question at this point is, “where do we begin?””

“Let the light of hope visit our land again and bring wisdom to our leaders and decision makers.”



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*Views are personal. So, the article does not reflect the views of the organization I work at.

“With the lack of constitution, political stability and economic prosperity have been a dream here. Nepal is undergoing transition since 2006.”

Time to be Honest

Periodic elections are essential to any democracy. Election is not only for transferring authority but also for legitimizing political power. Nepal is also heading for holding the elections to the Constituent Assembly (CA) slated for November 19, 2013. Major political parties seem almost prepared for the election. The government led by the Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi is also making atmosphere for the elections by forming the constituency delimitation commission and bringing electoral laws. Similarly, the Election Commission has nearly finalized the voter registration. However, suspicions are rife whether the CA election being held for the second time brings constitution that accommodates the aspiration of diverse communities with due address to their demands. At the same time, more than two dozens of fringe political parties are demanding the resignation of the present government to pave the way for the second CA election, reasoning the process of the formation of this government was illegitimate. They are for the government led by the political parties. They are even warning of disrupting the election. With this on the one hand and the failure of the first CA elections of 2008 to deliver constitution on the other, the suspicion

of new constitution through the second CA election is not baseless.

With the lack of constitution, political stability and economic prosperity have been a dream here. Nepal is undergoing transition since 2006. The 2008 Constituent Assembly election, despite, having broader representation failed to address people’s mandate. Main reason behind its failure to bring constitution was the dispute on federalism among the political parties. The political parties were vertically split on federalizing country. Some, including the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (UML) were for federalizing the country based on multiple identities and viability (capacity). But, the largest political party, Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and its ally insisted on devising provinces based on ethnic identity. It finally led to the unceremonious demise of the CA in May 27, 2012. The sudden demise of the CA obviously shrank the people’s confidence on political parties.

In a way, people placed hope on political parties, especially on the former insurgent UCPN-Maoist party, because of the dream it sold among them during the decade long insurgency from 1996-2006 and during the first CA election campaign. It continuously

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advocated for equality to all citizens in terms of class, caste, region and gender. But it's campaigning for equality and freedom was focused more on rights than on duty. There was no denying that the unguided and directionless political socialization by the UCPN-Maoist resulted in partisan, ethnicity-based and region-centric protests and demands. The incompetence of the parties to integrate and manage diverse demands and aspirations before May 27, 2012 was to blame. And, more importantly, the priority to partisan issues was detestable one. It was one of the reasons behind the growing trust deficit among the political parties. Reasoning the incompetence of the parliamentarians, and excessive economic expense, voices have been raised to massively downsize the coming CA. It is logical in a sense that many CA members (there were a total of 601 CA members) were illiterate while many others involved in the illegal activities thereby being a burden at the CA. It clearly gave lesson to the people and the political parties that only diverse representation does not carry meaning. Only meaningful participation of the people's representatives in the CA can mull over the actual needs of the people and country.

Now, the political parties need to learn that it is not time to sell the cheap dreams again but to realize the past mistakes and feel the real need of the day- constitution, peace, rule of law, and economic prosperity. The bitter reality of the political struggles and movements in Nepal, though many, and said to have waged for the sake of democracy failed to incorporate the socio-economic needs of the country and centered only on political gains, that too the partisan politics. Now the time has come to decide what sort of federalism we are adopting. It is a striking issue because the discussion about federalism after the CA election would consume time and may be guided by some political interest as it was in the first CA. All parties need to rise above partisan interest and decide the federal setup and restructuring of state. Holding CA election after deciding fully about federalism and state restructuring may be more meaningful for us, as the past has shown us. For this, political parties need honesty and responsibility to the people and country. Nepal needs a sustained democracy that is an inclusive, all-acceptable and equitable system. ■

“Now the time has come to decide what sort of federalism we are adopting.”

“Nepal needs a sustained democracy that is an inclusive, all-acceptable and equitable system.”



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