

APRIL 2018

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Vol. 117, No. 798

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“While Sharif’s disqualification was certainly not as egregious as an outright coup or any other extraconstitutional intervention, the nature and process of his removal amounts to another setback for democracy in Pakistan.”

The Struggle for Control of Pakistan’s Fragile Democracy

UMAIR JAVED

On July 28, 2017, a Supreme Court verdict put Nawaz Sharif’s name on the long list of deposed Pakistani prime ministers for a third time. Having returned to power after his party, the eponymously named Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML-N), swept to victory in the 2013 general elections, Sharif fell 10 months short of becoming only the second prime minister in the country’s history to see through a full five-year term in office. Thwarted twice before by untimely dismissals of his governments in 1993 and 1999, it is now almost impossible that he will be allowed a fourth attempt.

The technical hinge of the unanimous and verbosely moralizing judgment was that Sharif had deliberately failed to disclose a sum of 10,000 dirhams (\$2,700) on his election nomination form. He had been paid the money as chairman of his son’s business venture in Dubai, a position he had held during his first year in office. In the eyes of the five Supreme Court justices who ruled on the case, Sharif no longer met the Islamic morality standards for an elected member of Parliament, as enshrined in Article 62 (1-f) of the Constitution. Thus he was immediately disqualified from Parliament and from his position as prime minister.

Following this verdict, in late February 2018 the Supreme Court delivered another blow to Sharif’s political fortunes by ruling that a person who failed to meet the standards for holding elected office was also unfit to lead a political party. In the space of eight turbulent months, Sharif lost

both the premiership of the country and the presidency of the PML-N.

Since his removal from office, Sharif and his daughter (and anointed political heir) Maryam have embarked on a populist campaign under the slogan *“mujhe kyun nikala?”* (“Why was I ousted?”). Their answer is one familiar to anyone with even a cursory understanding of Pakistan’s political history: his removal was the result of yet another conspiracy against elected civilian supremacy by the country’s “establishment”—the moniker long used to describe the powerful military high command. In speeches to large crowds across the country, Sharif’s lament boils down to the assertion that the generals and their pliant partners in the judiciary cannot tolerate democracy and fear a popular elected leader. Given that the PML-N had looked set for another strong showing in the next general election, Sharif has argued that disqualifying him on a minor technicality was the only way to cut the ruling party, and thus democracy, down to size.

This sloganeering is designed to evoke sympathy and solidarity among the 14 million or so voters who brought the party to power in 2013. It is also intended to cultivate a sense of indignation at the way Sharif has been sidelined by unelected judges and generals. Like all campaign messages it is a simplistic one, but it does touch on several core truths about this latest period of tumult.

A more dispassionate reading of events over the past eight months would suggest greater complexity, much of which emanates from changes that have unfolded over a longer period of time. But subversive machinations by the army are certainly one ingredient. As seen repeatedly over the past

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“Bangladesh has neither the military nor the diplomatic power to force a solution on Myanmar.”

Bangladesh Copes With the Rohingya Crisis By Itself

NAVINE MURSHID

Growing up in Bangladesh in the 1980s, I knew only one thing about the country that bordered us to the east: it produced mouthwatering pickles and floral sarongs (as opposed to the checkered sarongs typical of Bangladesh) that could be purchased at the Burmese Market in Cox’s Bazar, a popular tourist destination on the border. I daresay this ignorance was not uncommon among middle-class urbanites of my generation. It was only much later that I would come to understand how governments in South Asia carefully protected their people from those of neighboring states, and how we were encouraged to accept the West’s view of Burma as an odd, backward place. Today, Bangladeshis suddenly have become more aware of the politics and culture of their eastern neighbor, now known as Myanmar. Cox’s Bazar is home to hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees who have fled ethnic cleansing in their home state of Rakhine on Myanmar’s western coast.

For more than forty years, backed by China and North Korea, Myanmar repressed its minority groups with impunity. The persecution of the Rohingya began in 1974, and the first wave of refugees entered Bangladesh in 1978. Despite periodic repatriation, the refugees have become a permanent presence in Bangladesh. Yet it is only now that the persecution of the Rohingya has shocked the world. The cumulative number of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh today is estimated to be around 800,000. The scale of the crisis becomes particularly shocking when one realizes that the Rohingya population in Myanmar was about 1 million before the 2017 exodus.

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The roots of the crisis—why the Rohingya have been cleared out of Myanmar—remain obscured. Mainstream media accounts often frame the situation as a Buddhist-Muslim conflict. By highlighting alleged attacks by Rohingya militants on Myanmar security forces, some reports may boost an Islamophobic narrative of violent Muslims attacking peace-loving Buddhists. To see the crisis as a religious conflict is not only simplistic but inaccurate; after all, the Myanmar military is not targeting all Muslims—only the Rohingya.

The persecution of the Rohingya has evolved over the decades. In the 1970s, it was seen as part of a local ethnic conflict between the Rohingya and the Rakhine, the majority ethnic group in Rakhine state. The Rakhine complained about the Rohingya’s high birth rate and their foreign (Bengali) heritage, claiming that the *kala* (dark-skinned people) did not belong there. While there were military attacks on the Rohingya then as well, it would take another decade for this violence to have national significance. The current crisis has several added dimensions, not least of which are the new economic and geopolitical interests of Myanmar and its backers.

Mass refugee crises are not new to the region: consider the millions forced to flee across newly created borders in the wake of the partition of British India in 1947, or the 10 million Bengalis from what was then East Pakistan who took refuge in India in 1971 following a genocidal campaign against them launched by the (West) Pakistani military. In the latter instance, India found its solution to the refugee crisis by intervening militarily to “liberate Bangladesh.” But Bangladesh today has neither the military nor the diplomatic power to force a solution on Myanmar. Instead, it engages in “quiet diplomacy” with the Myanmar government, while it has done little to support the Ro-

“Clearly, Nepalis have to adapt to climate change. It is less clear what precisely the challenges are and who is best positioned to lead the response.”

Nepal’s Towering Climate Adaptation Challenges

ANDREA J. NIGHTINGALE

Nepal is on the front line of climate change adaptation. Most people know of the country as the home of the Himalayas, the highest mountain range on earth, covered in large glaciers. In the Nepali language, *himal* means “snow-covered mountain.” The Himalayas have been called the “Third Pole” because their glaciers contain the largest reserve of fresh water outside the North and South Poles.

**Changing with
the Climate**

Seventh in a series

Nepal’s largely rural, agricultural population continues to be one of the poorest in the world. Local livelihood systems are highly vulnerable to variations in rainfall and temperature, which are becoming more severe due to climate change. Opportunities for non-agricultural occupations remain limited in rural areas.

That encapsulates one story about vulnerabilities and capabilities linked to climate change adaptation in Nepal. It is the one most often told and the one that informs the vast majority of nationally and internationally supported efforts to help Nepal adapt. But there is another story that is less well known yet equally worth telling.

Nepal’s rural, agricultural population is indeed highly vulnerable to changes in rainfall, but it is also highly mobile and innovative. People move up and down steep mountain slopes, taking advantage of variations in microclimates for cultivating crops and grazing animals. Many are quick to adopt new technologies and new crops, and experiment with other ways of coping with a variable climate.

Their mobility is not confined to Nepal. The World Bank estimated that in 2009, 2.1 million Nepalis between the ages of 20 and 40 were living abroad, and the government of Nepal estimated that 27.7 percent of gross domestic product came from remittances in 2014–15. The remittances sent home by expatriates have become one of the most important sources of household income in rural areas. The vast majority of households have at least one family member working abroad, significantly reducing their dependence on agriculture.

In the high Himalayas, considered the most vulnerable region in the country, another source of income is the collection of medicinal herbs for sale in lucrative markets in India and China. Selling herbs has further reduced dependence on agriculture and livestock. The herbs are also vulnerable to climate variability and overexploitation, but at least for now they have enriched people who were historically quite poor.

These two stories offer rather different pictures of climate change adaptation. The first presents rural Nepalis as poorly prepared to respond and highly vulnerable to a changing climate. The second frames the same people as resourceful, capable, globally mobile, and not afraid to take risks in order to improve their chances for a decent livelihood. While these pictures are not mutually exclusive, and both are largely accurate, the difference highlights the huge gaps in our knowledge of how rural livelihoods are changing and what challenges Nepalis face.

Both of these stories acknowledge the profound ongoing biophysical changes that make agricultural livelihoods in the Himalayas vulnerable. And rural areas in Nepal are in a state of rapid social, economic, political, and cultural change. Migration and exploitation of medicinal herbs are not necessarily long-term solutions to adaptation

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“Beijing’s miscalculations regarding India have created conflict with a regional power that has the capability and desire to disrupt China’s outward push.”

China’s South Asian Miscalculation

RAFFAELLO PANTUCCI

At a conference in China a few years ago, I watched as a Chinese expert gave a presentation laying out Beijing’s view of the military conflict that it faced in nearby seas. It was largely a story about the United States and East Asian competitors, and China’s aggressive assertions of ownership of islands in the South China Sea. At the end of the presentation, a former Indian officer raised his hand and indignantly asked why India had not been mentioned as a competitor.

In a moment of surprising candor, the Chinese expert responded that he did not include India because, from his perspective, it did not pose much of a threat to China. The answer riled the Indian participant, but it reflected a fundamental calculation that exists in Beijing about India. It is a calculation that could cause serious complications for China’s broader South Asian vision, and ultimately provoke a clash between the two Asian giants.

At stake is China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a much-discussed and puzzled-over concept. It has been variously described as a Chinese power grab; an attempt by China to promote its companies’ overseas interests and build infrastructure to suit its own interests; an effort by Beijing to claim leadership of the international order; or, by Beijing’s own account, a project to bind together a “community of common destiny.” But it is really best understood as an umbrella concept that acts as a central organizing principle for China’s foreign policy.

The core of this scheme—building trade and economic corridors that emanate from China in every direction—strengthens China’s position in the global order and across the Eurasian landmass. The aim of these corridors is not only to help Chinese firms go out into the world and increase Chi-

na’s trade connections. Most importantly, they will help China develop domestically.

Ostensibly, this is a benign concept. By improving trade and transportation links through investments in infrastructure, China is enhancing the global commons. Few would say that more economic connectivity and prosperity is a bad thing. But the reality is of course very different. China is advancing its own national interests, and is doing so by offering a one-size-fits-all policy—which means that it can appear to be proffering the same opportunity to European powers and Southeast Asian neighbors alike. While this is a perfectly understandable self-interested approach, Beijing has been blind to geopolitical problems that it is exacerbating and which may in the long term disrupt its entire strategy.

FEARS OF ENCIRCLEMENT

Nowhere is this more evident than in South Asia, where Beijing’s miscalculations regarding India have created conflict with a regional power that has the capability and desire to disrupt China’s outward push. Chinese strategists see South Asia as a region of great potential opportunity where China can expand its influence. It is a region full of poor countries with large and growing young populations and governments that want access to Chinese investment—an arena where Beijing can expect to reap great rewards. The Chinese see few strategic competitors on the immediate horizon and worry more about nontraditional security threats like terrorism, insurgent groups, and criminal networks than they do about state-based ones.

In stark contrast, Indian strategists see an increasingly assertive China steadily encircling their country. China has developed important strategic investment relationships with all the countries that share a land border with India, while a growing Chinese presence in the Maldives and Sri Lanka has given it a string of island harbors connect-

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Rising Religious Intolerance in South Asia

NEETI NAIR

South Asia has historically been known for its plurality—of languages, religions, and cultures. To be a good ruler, in the lexicon of an earlier age, was to uphold the *dharma*, the social order, and protect both the dominant and the less dominant—in contemporary terms, the majority and the minority. The constitution of the great Mughal Emperor Akbar (who reigned from 1556 to 1605), *Ain-e-Akbari*, describes the role of the sovereign as enforcing *sulh-i-kul* (peace to all), with an emphasis on tolerance toward people of different religions and faiths.

Today, conversely, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the great hope of populist and corporate India, is better at upholding a kind of *adharma*—an uncivil, immoral order—with a silence so deafening that it has resulted in the unending harassment of religious minorities on public roads and in private homes across India. The murder of 16-year-old Junaid Khan on a train just outside Delhi in June 2017, allegedly because he refused to give up his seat to a gang of hoodlums who called themselves Hindu, did not garner even a token admonishment from Modi.

However, the callousness of the other passengers on the train, who failed to protect Khan and his brothers from being repeatedly stabbed, did lead to some soul-searching. In towns and cities nationwide, people marched in protests with signs declaring “Not in My Name.” They were proclaiming and defending India’s status as a secular country that protects its religious minorities.

Yet the targeting of religious minorities, especially Muslims like Khan, has become an increasingly acceptable pastime in India. Over the past couple of years, there have been repeated killings of Muslims by gangs of unemployed men who describe themselves as *gau rakshaks* (cow protectors). Few perpetrators have been convicted. (Contrary to commonly held belief,

cow consumption was not a practice in ancient India, and continue to be eaten by upper-caste Hindus, especially but not only in Bengal, Kerala, and Kashmir, and by Muslims, Christians, and Dalits across India.)

A “hate tracker” website intended to serve as a crowd-funded national database of crimes motivated by religion, caste, race, and other markers of difference was hosted by the *Hindustan Times*, one of India’s leading English-language newspapers, for two months, from July to September 2017. Then the newspaper’s editor was asked to resign and the “hate tracker” was taken offline, reportedly after a meeting between Modi and the owner of the *Hindustan Times*.

The Indian government’s anti-Muslim slant is also evident in the way it has dealt with the Rohingya crisis, the region’s worst humanitarian disaster in several decades. On the spurious ground that India is not a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention, ministers in Modi’s cabinet have called for the repatriation of 40,000 Rohingya who took refuge in India after fleeing from Myanmar. Criticized by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights for falling afoul of the universal principle of non-refoulement—which forbids forcing refugees to return to a country where they are likely to face persecution—the government’s position is spelled out in a case currently before the Supreme Court. One of the many prominent lawyers defending the Rohingya, Colin Gonsalves, has called the Modi government’s response to the crisis “part of the anti-Muslim sentiment that pervades the country.”

The Rohingya policy is at odds with India’s historical openness to refugees from Tibet and Afghanistan. But it is worth recalling that India had considerable difficulty accommodating Muslim refugees from Pakistan who wished to return to their original homes in the months and years following the partition of the subcontinent in 1947. Some were held in prison for years as alleged spies. The cold shoulder for Muslims was in stark contrast to the government’s welcoming stance toward Hindu refugees from Pakistan. Similarly, in 2016,

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India's Turbulent Ascent

SUMIT GANGULY

In the past decade or so, a spate of books has been published about India's rise in the global arena. The vast majority of these are journalistic accounts of varying quality, such as those by Edward Luce, Mira Kamdar, and Anand Giridharadas. A handful of academic works have also attempted to explain India's emergence and offered prescriptions for addressing the many socioeconomic ills that continue to sandbag the country's prospects. One of the most informed and cogent accounts is Vijay Joshi's *India's Long Road: The Search for Prosperity*, published in 2017. An earlier work that covers some of the same ground but is more sanguine about India's prospects is Arvind Panagariya's *India: The Emerging Giant*.

The growing popular and academic interest in India is hardly surprising. Since the end of the Cold War and an unprecedented economic crisis in 1991, the country has fitfully embraced more market-oriented policies, for all practical purposes discarded its hoary commitment to nonalignment in international relations, and ended its policy of nuclear ambiguity. Because of these policy changes, India has enjoyed robust economic growth, strengthened its military sinews, and increased its diplomatic clout. It is no longer an inconsequential player in global politics.

These important developments and significant achievements notwithstanding, India still faces great challenges both at home and abroad. Despite the economic expansion, according to some estimates more than a third of the population is still mired in abject poverty. The benefits of growth have been extremely skewed, exacerbating existing inequities. Ideologically driven political activists have seized on these economic disparities and launched a range of violent social movements across the country.

Our Time Has Come: How India Is Making Its Place in the World
by Alyssa Ayres
Oxford University Press, 2018

Although members of lower castes have made substantial political progress, even after seventy years of independence the country still has not been able to shed the pernicious legacy of the caste system. Caste violence remains practically endemic in certain parts of India. More recently, the country has witnessed a resurgence of the furies of Hindu nationalism, which threatens to further erode its secular foundations. Finally, even though India has seen its women rise to the highest political as well as corporate offices in the land, the overall status of women still leaves much to be desired.

Alyssa Ayres's new book, *Our Time Has Come*, adds to the growing body of literature on India's rise and challenges, making a useful but limited contribution. The book does not fall squarely into either the popular or academic genres. Instead it is based on both her academic training and her policy expertise on India. She served in the State Department during the Obama administration and is now a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Her book is invaluable in that it sketches out how India has jettisoned a number of shibboleths that had guided its foreign, economic, and security policies. She discusses critical turning points, providing evidence to account for how these changes came about and identifying the key players who made the crucial choices. She demonstrates a mostly sound knowledge of the complexities of Indian politics and society, and is optimistic about the country's trajectory:

Despite the hurdles India still has left to clear, [it] has already become a consequential global actor. As it continues to shed its past diffidence it will realize its ambitions as a global power, likely in its more cautious way, in the decades to come in a way that was unimaginable twenty-five years back.

Substantively, the book focuses on how India, after its long attachment to nonalignment and ob-

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Living the Pious Dream in Lahore

JOSHUA LUSTIG

Ammara Maqsood, a lecturer in social anthropology at the University of Manchester, has written a short book packed with subtle observations and insights that will challenge the assumptions of many readers. The title may suggest that her theme is the holy grail of Western foreign-policy types and investors: a middle class in their own image that will bring democracy and prosperity to less developed, unstable countries. Pakistan, which for years has been afflicted by Islamic extremists wreaking havoc in its cities, seems desperately in need of such a rescue. The country has acquired a bad reputation thanks to its powerful military's murky ties with many of those same terrorist groups, which it uses as proxy forces against its neighbors, Afghanistan and India.

According to classic theories of development, the ideal cure for such ills would be the emergence of a forward-looking middle class, whose aspirations for upward mobility would eventually lead it into politics to fix the country's problems by forming civil society organizations, demanding democratic reforms, and generally exercising a moderating influence on the public sphere. However, Maqsood explains why it is simplistic to imagine a generic middle class with a secular outlook becoming dominant in a country like Pakistan.

In fact, she says, there is such a secular middle class in Pakistan, but it is a small one, largely consisting of established "old money" families, some with roots in the Muslim elite of British India and others who held positions in the state sector of the new nation in the 1950s and 1960s, which included bureaucrats as well as doctors, lawyers, teachers, and other professionals. Today, the old middle class, in Maqsood's account, is consumed with nostalgia for that early era when Pakistan was ruled by General Ayub Khan, who saw himself as a modernizing leader in the mold of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the secular Turkish state.

The New Pakistani Middle Class
by Ammara Maqsood
Harvard University Press, 2017

Meanwhile, a new Pakistani middle class fits the generic profile up to a point—striving, upwardly mobile, business-minded, combining a reverence for education with aspirations for a secure, prosperous lifestyle—but it blends all of that with Islamic piety. This religiosity, visible in women's headscarves and other outward symbols, adds an edge to the expected rivalry between an established bourgeoisie and newcomers ascending from lower-status groups who want to claim its privileges for themselves. And that edge is razor-sharp in

Pakistan, given the disturbing context of extremist violence that has claimed tens of thousands of lives in the country over the past two decades.

Maqsood's book is based on ethnographic fieldwork in Lahore (most of it carried out in 2009–10), long known as Pakistan's most cosmopolitan city and now a sprawling metropolis with a population of over 10 million. Many of the new middle-class families in Lahore migrated from elsewhere in Punjab province, drawn to the city from small towns and rural areas. Often they began climbing into the middle class when family members went abroad to work in the Persian Gulf or North America and sent back remittances to build wealth at home.

Maqsood herself is a native of Lahore, which seems to have given her access and insights that may not have been available to a foreign observer. Her analysis is much more subtly textured than the stereotyped comparisons between a "secular elite" and "pious masses" that are all too common in reportage from the Muslim world. She shows how the old and new middle classes define themselves not only in opposition to each other, but also in relation to international influences. They feel themselves constantly under the critical scrutiny of Western eyes, and at the same time they have strong connections to the West. The new middle class sees itself as part of a global Islamic community yet much of its lifestyle is inspired by Western examples, especially the trends set by

India's Economic Liberalization: The Elephant Comes of Age

*Excerpted from an essay by Shalendra D. Sharma
in the December 1996 issue of Current History.*

When the Indian government unveiled its ambitious economic liberalization program in mid-1991, it was widely believed to be a nonstarter. Earlier attempts had not amounted to much, and scholarly paradigms held that a "developmental" authoritarian state of the East Asian variety (not India's weak democratic regime) was a sine qua non for the implementation of bold "market-friendly" macroeconomic policies. However, this time India has proved the pundits wrong. Not only has liberalization dismantled the command economy structure and ended decades of economic isolationism, it has also produced sustained economic growth and fostered a new self-confidence and optimism. Indeed, liberalization has become such an indelible part of contemporary India's developmental ethos that it is now considered irreversible.

While India's postliberalization economic growth has not been as spectacular as that of China and the newly industrializing countries of East and Southeast Asia, it has nevertheless been steady and respectable. Unlike the explosive "tiger economies" of East and Southeast Asia or China's overheated "dragon economy" that have captured the global imagination, the Indian economy has been more like a lumbering elephant slowly emerging from the shadows. Sooner or later the world will have to come to terms with its formidable presence and power. Indeed, as the world's sixth-largest economy (after the United States, Japan, China, Germany, and France), and endowed with a rapidly expanding middle class of some 250 million, a huge domestic market, a large pool of educated and skilled labor, and resilient democratic institutions, India has the potential to be an economic colossus by the early twenty-first century. . . .

India's remarkable economic turnaround is the result of a bold and carefully orchestrated macroeconomic liberalization program undertaken in the midst of the June 1991 crisis by the new government of Prime Minister P. V. Narashima Rao. In his maiden budget speech to Parliament, Finance Minister Manmohan Singh, the chief architect of liberalization, declared in his iconoclastic fashion that the fiscal crisis was symptomatic of a deeper economic malaise and that nothing short of a fundamental economic restructuring would stop the fiscal hemorrhage and release India's "unbound economic potential." More bluntly, he informed his fellow citizens that neither the government nor the economy could live beyond its means. He announced that the time had come to convert the regulated, inward-looking Indian economy to a more market-friendly, outwardly oriented model. . . .

As Kipling noted long ago, when the lumbering elephant begins to move at a measured gait, all sensible men and beasts get out of the way. The tigers must now contend with the elephant—and Kipling always placed his bets on the elephant. ■

Pakistan at Fifty: A Tenuous Democracy

*Excerpted from an essay by Samina Ahmed
in the December 1997 issue of Current History.*

When Pakistan gained independence after the dismemberment of the British Indian empire in 1947, the people of the newly independent state were hopeful that their own country would give them the rights and freedoms denied by a colonial order. For most of Pakistan's history, however, the rights of the people have been usurped by authoritarian rulers. Although Pakistan at 50 does have all the trappings of a democratic regime—an elected government, functioning representative institutions, and a formal adherence to constitutional rule—democratic norms and governance continue to elude a weak and fragile state. Not only is the legitimacy of state institutions contested, but linguistic, regional, ethnic, and sectarian divisions threaten Pakistan's fragile national cohesion. Moreover, with the economy in shambles, the managers of the state have proved themselves incapable of providing a better life for Pakistan's citizens.

Democracy was formally restored in 1988 after more than a decade of military rule that had seen state policies fuel ethno-regional and sectarian tensions and widen economic disparities. Nine years later, Pakistan's political leaders and parties have failed to establish a stable democratic order. Economic stagnation and underdevelopment, political infighting, corruption, and ineptitude have led to widespread popular disillusionment and even despair. . . .

The political leadership's lack of commitment to democratic politics is demonstrated by the [Nawaz] Sharif administration's deeply flawed policy of *ehesab*, or accountability, which is intended to end political corruption but is unmistakably partisan in nature, selectively targeting political opponents with little regard for legal due process. For her part, the main opposition leader, former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, has called for the dismissal of the elected leadership and the formation of a "national" government in which the bureaucracy, the armed forces, and the intelligence agencies are given representation. Sharif claims that "We have democracy and we should be thinking of strengthening" it; but unless the political leadership realizes that its very survival lies in collaborative efforts to consolidate a representative, pluralistic, and participatory system strong enough to withstand military intervention, democracy in Pakistan will remain vulnerable. ■