

Taliban takeover will have environmental impacts

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Afghanistan is again under Taliban's control. On 8 July 2021, President Biden defended the US pull-out of Afghanistan by focusing on the superiority of the 300,000 trained Afghan soldiers over only 75,000 Taliban fighters.

Internal and international conflicts are not new for this region. 1978-79 marked the beginning of modern hostilities in Afghanistan when Soviet forces sought to control this geopolitically strategic central Asian nation. In that war, the Soviet Union supported the Afghan communist government against the Mujahedeen militias. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) supplied monetary support and ammunitions to these Mujahedeen. Soviet troops tried to assert dominance until 1989.

In 1991-92, the Soviet Union collapsed, along with their efforts to control Afghanistan. This futile conflict impacted more than 1.5 million Afghans. The 'political vacuum' that followed the end of the cold war instigated the transformation of the initially 'freedom' fighting group of Mujahedeen to the radical Taliban.

Their idea of establishing pan Islamic nations across the globe and their role in numerous human right violations, made international bodies enforce strict economic-military sanctions on this regime. This pushed them closer to terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda. Ultimately, these strings of political events led to the 9/11 attack of 2001, the worst terrorist attack in the modern era. Again, it brought conflict back in the biodiversity-rich, climate change impacted Afghanistan.

Situated in the cross-roads of Central Asia - China and the Himalayas - Afghanistan has unique biodiversity and fragile ecosystems. This landlocked war-torn nation is part of the 'Central Asian Biodiversity hot spot' as per 'Conservation International'. This unique landscape is

home to approximately 5000 species of flora and fauna.

The 2009 census indicated around 4,000 native species of vascular plants, 515 species of birds, 150 species of mammals, 139 species of fish, 112 species of reptiles, and 6-8 species of amphibian found in this eco-region. The snow leopard - the shy, mountain dwelling predator - is on top of this alpine food chains.

Afghanistan is worst hit by the vagaries of climate change. The severe 2018 draught has impacted 13.5 million Afghans. Temperature rise has already been impacting the melting rate of glaciers. July 2018 saw the collapse of a dam due to rapid melting of glaciers near Herat, the third most important city.

These long conflicts have degraded the natural resources and biodiversity. Deforestation and land degradation goes unchecked across the nation. Afghanistan lost about 1.85 thousand hectare of tree cover between 2001 and 2020. Illegal wildlife hunting and timber trade also increased. The Taliban used the opium trade and mineral exports through illegal mining to accumulate funds for their campaigns. This accelerates deforestation.

Even during the NATO supported President Ashraf Ghani regime, the rural areas and important roadways were still held by Taliban that facilitated their trade and monetary influx. Political analysts aver that 'whoever held the roads rules Afghanistan'.

The groundwater level decreased through overexploitation in these years. About 80 per cent of the population of Afghanistan is dependent on the natural resources for its livelihood. Amidst the conflicts, in 2005, the ruling Government (Afghan president Hamid Karzai) established the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA). The basic aim of NEPA is to combat climate change, preserve natural heritage and resources, ensure sustainable development as per UN SDG goals and mitigate environmental pollution issues. All of these pro-environmental ventures are now in shadows.



When the international community is alarmed by the recent developments in Afghanistan, China, its largest neighbour, seemed not bothered by the events in its backyard. The 17 August statement of China made it clear that they are willing to work with the new government provided they revoke their support to the East Turkestan Islamic Movement. This movement advocates independence of Uyghur Muslims under Chinese dominance and allegedly has close

ties with the Taliban. China has been criticized extensively for its human rights violations against Islamic minorities including Uyghurs across the globe. This brings a new environmental perspective on Afghan instability. The 'Belt and Road' initiative of China requires support of the Afghan government. The international community is debating the alleged role of China in promoting the illegal wildlife trade resulting in poaching of several endangered species such

as Pangolin and Tigers. With the Chinese shadow looming large over the environmentally oblivious Taliban, the fate of the nation's environment is uncertain. Only time will tell whether the new government will support or ignore the environmental reforms initiated by its predecessor.

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Shadows of an attempted coup



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When the Red Army finally exited Afghanistan in February 1989, crossing the Friendship Bridge into Uzbekistan with somewhat more dignity than witnessed in this year's American exodus, the last in line was the commander of the occupying forces, Boris Gromov.

A little more than two years later, he was on the periphery of the attempted putsch that sought to preserve the old Soviet Union. Gromov was deputy interior minister in 1991, and his boss, Boris Yeltsin, was a key conspirator. Gromov and fellow general Pavel Grachev had drawn up

plans to storm the Russian parliament based in what was known as Moscow's White House.

However, both generals changed their minds on the day after the coup, earning the gratitude of Boris Yeltsin. The plot was masterminded by KGB chief Vladimir Kryuchkov, and the idea broadly was to either topple Mikhail Gorbachev or, preferably, compel him to capitulate, and to roll back most of the reforms instituted since 1985.

By that stage, the USSR was in a mess. Gorbachev's reforms had unleashed unanticipated forces. Glasnost had been a tremendous success — and it meant that all those critical of the government's direction

saw no reason to hold back. Perestroika though had floundered.

As Gorbachev laments in his various memoirs, local branches of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) decided they were no longer under any obligation to religiously abide by Moscow's diktat. So, where it interfered with their vested interests, they simply flouted the party line, knowing that the repercussions would not be drastic.

The Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, according to his son, described Gorbachev as "an idiot" for pursuing this path. In Deng's view, any meaningful economic reforms were doomed to failure without the Communist Party's coercive clout; polit-

ical reform could wait.

We have seen, though, how that has worked out in the context of China, where state-sanctioned capitalism has thrived whereas political deviations from the decreed party line entail various forms of punishment. Given his reformist predilections, this is not the kind of arrangement Gorbachev could have lived with.

In the run-up to 1991, he was struggling to maintain some kind of balance between the forces pushing him to speed up his reforms and the voices advising restraint, epitomised in the Soviet parliament by Yeltsin on the reformist flank and Yegor Ligachev on the opposing side.

Gorbachev valiantly strove for a compromise, but he was out of his depth by 1990, occasionally tacking to the right, sometimes shuffling to the left, broadly overwhelmed by the forces he had unleashed. Asked in late 1990 which side he was leaning towards, he responded that he was going around in circles.

The sense of humour eluded him when he was effectively imprisoned at his holiday home in Crimea in late August 1991, absorbing the betrayal by a wide range of his appointees, ranging from his chief of staff to deputy president Gennady Yanayev — whose inebriated visage and trembling hands betrayed the nervousness of the coup makers as they announced their takeover.

It was all over three days later, after Muscovites streamed on to the capital's streets, and crucial elements of the armed forces refused to shoot fellow citizens. In what was his finest hour, Yeltsin clambered atop a tank outside the White House to articulate his resistance to the coup. His deputy Alexander Rutskoi

was among those dispatched to the Crimea to rescue Gorbachev, who returned to Moscow in the early hours of August 22. The coup was over. Pugo and his wife committed suicide, but the rest of the leading plotters were imprisoned, only to be amnestied less than three years later. In the meanwhile, Russia's post-Soviet regime went where the coup conspirators had hesitated to go by bombarding the White House in 1993 to thwart an attempt to impeach Yeltsin.

What the Soviet Union's fate might have been minus the abortive coup is hard to say. Its disintegration had already been set in motion by the Baltic states — occupied in the wake of World War II — and may well have proceeded anyhow, albeit at a slower pace. Gorbachev had a union treaty, incorporating far greater autonomy than the Soviet Union previously permitted, up his sleeve in 1991. It was due to be signed by the remaining constituent republics, including Russia under Yeltsin, on Aug 20.

That was pushed back by the coup, and pre-empted early in December by an agreement between the USSR's Slav components — Russia, Ukraine and Belarus — to effectively dissolve the Soviet Union. The CPSU had been disbanded back in August, and Gorbachev, the head of a state that effectively no longer existed, resigned on Christmas Day.

The geopolitical repercussions continue to resonate 30 years later. Vladimir Putin's Russia has sought to resurrect some of the least desirable aspects of the Soviet entity, but most of its redeeming features have been irreversibly lost.

Dawn/ANN.

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

A small volume has been published containing the analysis of the records of some six thousand dreams as narrated by children between 8 and 14 years of age in elementary schools in London. In the case of younger children the plan adopted was to get them to narrate their dreams to skilled observers. One conclusion drawn from the investigation is that children in normal health delight in dreaming and talk about their dreams with evident pleasure. It is also noted that in recording their dreams children show a greater power of graphic description than they do in ordinary essay writing. The dream records show so much advance in the general standard of achievement as to suggest that some new element has come into play. Hard mental work promotes them and so does a change of environment, while sleeping in a stuffy bedroom diminishes their clearness. Persons of well developed intelligence dream more frequently than do those of low culture. Dreams of motion, falling and flying, are rare under 9 or 10; then they increase in frequency up to 17 or 18. It is suggested that a careful study of children's dreams may throw light on those elements that are conspicuously lacking in the life of the child and the lack of which may seriously interfere with the child's natural development. It may be possible, for example, to associate dreams of a certain kind with underfeeding, and others with excessive stress and strain.

NEWS ITEMS

POLICE FIRE ON MADRAS STRIKERS

There were a fresh development yesterday in Pulianthope in connection with the mill strike. Ever since the disturbance of last July the Pulianthope area has been patrolled by policemen from the moffusal in addition to the men of the Madras city reserve who had been told off for special duty in the locality. As a result of the Moplah outbreak in Malabar most of the moffusal reserve police had to be withdrawn from the mill area and despatched to Calicut two days ago. Yesterday the strikers collected in large numbers on the maidan opposite the Indian Military Hospital on Perambur road, and attacked a batch of 20 Adi-Dravadas' workpeople who were going to their homes. At one time there was a particularly strong fusillade of stones directed against the police, who thereupon immediately opened fire, which dispersed the strikers.

CONVENTION OF ROTARY CLUBS

The International convention of Rotary Clubs opened at Edinburgh today. There are three thousand delegates and half of them are American. Mr. Snedcott, the president, said that the movement, which had seventy thousand members, could serve the world which was groping for some associations of nations, for the destinies of the world were largely in the hands of business men. There were most enthusiastic scenes at the opening of the convention. Twenty-five standard-bearers, each carrying a national flag, followed by women in national costumes, marched up to the platform to the strains of their respective national anthems. The climax of enthusiasm was reached when the Lion of Scotland was unfurled, followed by the Stars and Stripes and the singing of the Battle Hymn of the Republic.

SWAMI PARMANAND'S APPEAL DISMISSED

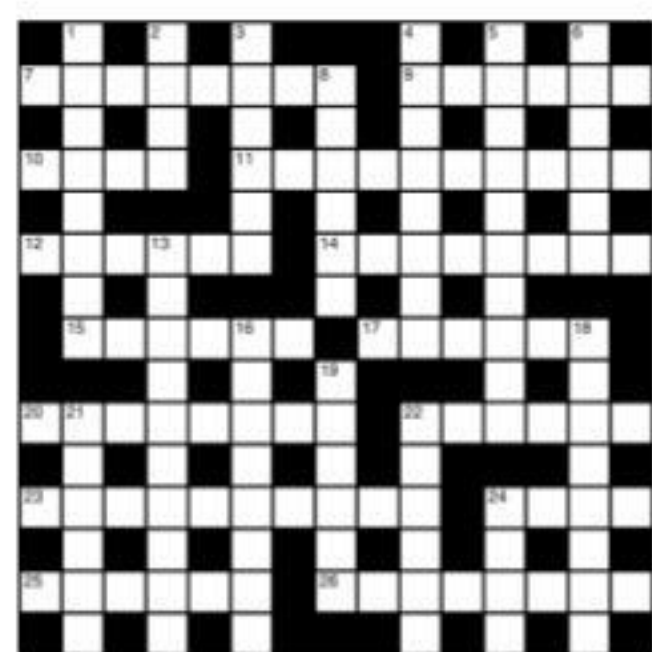
In the Chief Court today Mr. Justice Duckworth passed orders on the appeal of Swami Parmanand, a Hindustani Buddhist monk who was sentenced by the District Magistrate of Rangoon to two years' rigorous imprisonment on a charge of having been the leader of an unlawful assembly in connection with the anti-liquor movement, the common object of which assembly was to commit mischief and criminal trespass. His honour held without hesitation that there was an unlawful assembly and that the accused's identity in the crowd was made out by overwhelming evidence. Several defence witnesses had given false evidence and the evidence of the defence of an alibi was false. His honour also held that a deterrent sentence was necessary and saw no reason to interfere with the sentence passed. The appeal was dismissed.

O. AND R. RAILWAY EMPLOYEES

Lucknow, Aug 25
A largely attended meeting of the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway employees was addressed last evening by Mr. J.B. Miller, the chief organiser of the North-Western Railway Union. The speaker appealed to the men to take advantage of the facilities accorded them by the railway authorities and condemned the practice of frequent strikes. A resolution praying the Government for some relief in view of the prevailing high prices of foodstuffs, especially of wheat, was passed. As the question of a general increase of wages remains unsettled, Mr. C.E. Andrews is expected here shortly to confer with the railway authorities on the subject.

CROSSWORD

NO 29014



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

THICKSET RECUR
S A A T E E O E
IDLES UNNATURAL
G F E E D T U O O
NEWSBOY ACRYLIC
T O T N L A
PATHOGENIC NAIST
A R N V A E
RAMP ADVENTURES
A E V O T E
SIMPANS SPARISER
T O L G U C C T
TRANSITIONS MOUND
T R A P H E E B
CUSHY EMISSARY

ACROSS

- Close-fitting leotard modelled (8)
- American expelled from country for going without fare (6)
- Player worries when start of test is delayed (4)
- Unpalatable cases initially cause revulsion beyond belief (10)
- Taste is pretty much wasted on writer (6)
- Man pledged backing from French Resistance (8)
- Improve state of disturbed heartless children (6)
- This fish looks and sounds

- Flat? (6)
- Increase scope of criminal case and others under review (8)
- Messenger from wedding cycled round front of church (6)
- Ordered cadet that is controlling tank to turn off (10)
- Send out introduction to elite university (4)
- Reverse management's reshuffle after married man is dismissed (6)
- Support Harry meeting the Queen in person (8)

DOWN

- Soldier dies after dropping ecstasy in Heaven (8)
- Corporation has invested large surplus (4)
- Gangs said to go round looking for sex (6)
- Free lunch lacking core ingredient turned out to be pleasant (8)
- What reveals and, in a manner of speaking, inspires? (10)
- Play with retracting pencil or felt-tip pens (6)
- Half believed police department's tapped judge (6)

- Official pitch inexperienced reporter typed up about waste (10)
- What may have part to play in temperature falling in cold office? (8)
- Managed to get reference suspect lied about (8)
- Religious teaching is unable to deny earlier beliefs (6)
- Comparatively unbalanced means of presenting items for consumption (6)
- Wanted joint passed to the audience (6)
- Freelancer has vigour and style (4)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

