

## Lahore Literary Festival

25 February 2014

By Ahmed Rashid.

The Lahore Literary Festival was a huge success with some 45000 people attending sessions on literature, non-fiction, poetry, art and political developments. With nearly 100 delegates, many of them foreigners from eight countries the sessions evoked enthusiastic response from a constantly packed halls. This was only the second year of the festival but experts and those running other festivals have already called it one of the best festival in South Asia.

Lahore Literary Festival.

LLF 2014: From Kabul to Islamabad and back <<http://tribune.com.pk/story/675054/llf-2014-from-kabul-to-islamabad-and-back/>>

By MiraKhan<<http://tribune.com.pk/author/4687/mira-khan/>>

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LAHORE:

It was inevitable. A talk about Afghanistan at the brink of transition, in more than one ways, started off with Kabul's significance for Islamabad and turned into one about how much responsibility lies with Pakistan.

The panelists, Hina Rabbani Khar, Vali Nasr, Maleeha Lodhi and Ahmad Rashid, agreed that the degree of success or failure of the Afghan elections as well as the American withdrawal from the country will have repercussions for Pakistan. Their collective advice: Pakistan as well as other neighbours should stay out of Afghan elections. Rashed Rahman moderated the talk.

Lodhi said that Allama Iqbal had termed Afghanistan the "heart of Asia" and said that conflict in Afghanistan would mean turmoil for Asia. "There are more unknowns about the transition than 'knowns'. Pakistan must prepare for the worst." She said it was a tragedy that "a promising peace process" that could have taken place in Doha was thwarted by Karzai, leading to the US abandoning it.

Ahmed Rashid said the "real tragedy" was that after spending \$1 trillion in Afghanistan, no one, including the US, knows what was going to happen. Transitions in Afghanistan are worse than Pakistan, he said, adding that if there is a "crisis of confidence" in the elections "all bets are off."

When Rahman asked what Pakistan could do to make the transition smooth, Lodhi suggested that it contain militancy within its own borders and break the nexus between the TTP and Afghan Taliban. "Hope is not a policy or strategy," she said while stressing the need for action.

Nasr said that Pakistan had more to lose now than it did in 1989. While commenting on the Doha peace talks, he said that he had never been convinced that the Afghan Taliban had any inclination to negotiate with the US. They wanted to negotiate when there was a threat that the US could destroy them, but when America gave a date of exit "why would they?". The Afghan Taliban knew that the Afghan security forces lack the capability to destroy them. The TTP case is similar, he said later in the discussion. They will only negotiate if they see a danger that they they would be wiped out.

Rashid said the biggest failure of the Pakistani government was not having a strategy for national security. He also said that Pakistan has a responsibility towards Afghanistan.

Lodhi said the "tyranny of geography" bound Pakistan and Afghanistan. "We can influence but cannot ensure a result," she said. She said Pakistan had played its part in bringing the Afghan Taliban to the table but Afghanistan and the US hadn't kept their end of the bargain.

Khar said the "onus of responsibility" lay with Afghanistan, whose "terrible leadership" hadn't helped matters. The ideal scenario, she said, would be one where the Afghan government would allow all entities that make up the Afghan nation to be part of the electoral process. When non-state elements are allowed to act like the state, things don't pan out well, she said.

The discussion then moved towards what Pakistani government could do about the TTP (choke their funding and contain them) and whether or not negotiations with the TTP were the right way forward. Nasr repeated that the TTP would not negotiate until threatened with extinction. When an audience member questioned the effectiveness of force, Lodhi said that military action had worked in Swat, adding that she believed that talks and force were two tools that have to be used together.

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**'Take tough measures against Taliban'** The News, February 23, 2014 Lahore

Participants in a discussion on 'Afghanistan on the Brink', held under the Lahore Literary Festival at Alhamra on Saturday, had a consensus that Pakistan needed to adopt tougher measures on the porous Afghan border and evolve a consensus national policy through National Security Council to counter growing threat of militancy.

The discussion was hosted by renowned journalists Rashed Rehman and participated in by former foreign minister Hina Rabbani Khar, known author and journalist Ahmed Rashid, former ambassador to US Maleeha Lodhi and academician and author specializing in the Middle East and the Islamic world Vali Nasr.

Rashed Rehman opened the discussion. Highlighting the emerging situation in Afghanistan, he asked the guests to throw light on the future of Afghanistan in the wake of withdrawal of the US troops and forthcoming presidential elections. Hina Rubbani Khar stressed the need for holding regional conferences after taking all stakeholders onboard. She said that Pakistan's stakes were very high in the post US troop's withdrawal scenario from Afghanistan. She cautioned that Pakistan should avoid fiddling with forthcoming Afghan elections, saying that the people of Afghanistan should be given the responsibility to determine their future political course in elections, keeping in view the internal dynamics.

She regretted the cancellation of Doha Peace Conference wasted an opportunity for all the stakeholders to sit together and find a possible peace scenario in the region.

She urged Pakistan government for playing role in holding the Doha or any such conference, bringing in all stakeholders including Pakistan, Iran, India, Afghanistan and the US for discussing peace process. She claimed that Pakistan needed to have theoretical and intellectual clarity. She urged the need to establish National Security Council for taking such vital decision involving Pakistan's interest. She stated that around 1200 people were traveling across the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan on daily basis without visa and nobody knew about their identity. She said that the Pakistan government had not learnt from the past and was repeating the same mistakes.

Ahmed Rasheed claimed that the US and the Nato forces had spent over one trillion dollars in Afghanistan during the past ten years but the region was still having poverty and growing Talibanisation. He was of the view that no one knew as to what was going to be the future of Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the US.

The 2009 presidential elections in Afghanistan had witnessed crises and turmoil in Afghanistan amidst huge allegations of massive rigging, he said. It was still uncertain whether or not Karzai would be the winner in the next elections, he said. If anything worst took place after the elections in the shape of turmoil it would definitely benefit Talibans, he observed. He said the elections were being held without the presence of any international observers to monitor the elections. He said the decision making process in Pakistan to counter such things was very vague and recent decision of holding dialogues was neither having objectivity nor was it in accordance with the facts. He stressed the need for establishing National Security Council containing experienced people to deal with such sensitive issues.

Maliha Lodhi opined that Pakistan had strategically overwhelming role in the region. She claimed the Pakistan government would have to contain the mobilization of Taliban on the borders.

Vali Nasr said former US diplomat Richard Holbrook believed that if Afghanistan collapsed it would cause greater problems for the Pakistan. The US and the Pakistan military could not defeat Taliban who were posing threats to Kabul and Islamabad. Talibans had no interest in talks with Karzai, particularly at a time when they considered themselves as winners and the US had decided to withdraw from the region. Besides, they have strategic depth in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Under such grim scenario, Vali doubted if the Pakistan military had the capacity to defeat them in case of operation. He was of the view that the US, despite spending one trillion dollars could not dislodge or crush Taliban, and while it was withdrawing from the region, it was a big challenge for Pakistan. He also stressed the need for evolving National Security Council to build national strategy. He claimed that Pakistan had to cut the economic supply line of the TTP before initiating action against it.

Deploring destruction of culture <<http://www.dawn.com/news/1089097/deploring-destruction-of-culture>>  
<<http://www.dawn.com/authors/384/from-the-newspaper>>

DAWN.

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Culture, its destruction across the world and various approaches towards it were some of the ideas brought up during one of the concluding sessions on the last day of the Lahore Literary Festival.

Moderator Mishal Husain began the discussion with examples of destruction of Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban and controversies surrounding paintings of late Indian artist M.F. Hussain that also forced him to go in exile. Author, journalist and writer Ahmed Rashid viewed destruction of culture as degradation of human rights.

"This highlights the failure of governments and organisations responsible for safeguarding people and culture. Destroying artefacts and statues and censorship becomes easier if no one's looking. We deserve better," he added. Senior US journalist Hugh Eakin focused on physical destruction of culture but said it was "intensely linked" with destruction of society.

“Just a few weeks ago Cairo’s Museum of Islamic Art was truck-bombed which manifests destruction of cultural institutions by various forces. One feels defensive to talk about culture when the humanitarian situation is appalling. Also, six World Heritage Sites in Syria have been damaged over the last few years,” he elaborated. According to Naman Ahuja, teaching art and architecture at Jawaharlal Nehru University, “we all live a hair’s breath away from being censored”.

But he questioned how “are we fighting for our right to speak? What are you going to do to instil in someone you need to be able to fight this war against culture? We need to be able to ponder over how much we can make that policy part of our daily lives to spread a message, to be able to protect culture.

How much can we fight for space for such festivals, to be able to write books or say what we want?” Ahuja said his main concern was how much one can do to protect culture. “It’s contingent on all of us. We all have some responsibility. If you’re not doing anything about it, you’re complicit.”

Renowned author Vikram Seth said: “Culture is also a way of being, how we treat each other.” He then quoted examples of destruction of marshes of Iraq, Penguin India withdrawing a book and a library being destroyed in India because of a book as suppression of freedom of culture.

Asked if this could create frightening prospects, Rashid said if governments and societies bow down to small group of extremists, that society is going to come to an end.

“It would cease to function as a modern society should. That is destructive, a terrible blow to society, writing,” he added. — Sheharyar Rizwan.