

1870

The First Vatican Council decrees the dogma of papal infallibility.

1872

The Ballot Act 1872 in the United Kingdom introduced the requirement that parliamentary and local government elections be held by secret ballot.

1914

The **U.S. Congress** forms the Aviation Section, U.S. Signal Corps, giving official status to aircraft within the U.S. Army for the first time.



1925

Adolf Hitler publishes Mein Kampf.

New Afghanistan should protect the future of women

The Taliban is showing signs of unprecedented openness, but is this position wholly genuine?

RASHMEE ROSHAN LALL

In 2012, a novel titled *The Taliban Cricket Club*, by the writer Timeri N Murari, was published worldwide. Set in Kabul, its main protagonist was Rukhsana, a young journalist who chafed at the restrictions placed by the Taliban regime on Afghan women. Fired from her job at the fictional Kabul Daily, Rukhsana uses a pseudonym to file news stories for an Indian newspaper on life under Taliban rule.

Eventually, she employs her unique skillset – knowledge of cricket – to outwit the Taliban’s attempt at complete control. Rukhsana coaches her brother and male cousins in order for them to win a government-organised cricket tournament. In this way, she is able to secretly challenge the Taliban’s stark injunction as described in the book: “Women must be seen only in the home and in the grave”. She makes her mark as an educated Afghan woman and “a good off-spinner”.

The Taliban Cricket Club is not a great literary work, but it does accomplish something few other books on Afghan women had managed until then. It makes the dreadful reality of Taliban rule easier to imagine and comprehend. Humans, as the philosopher Yuval Noah Harari says, “think in stories”.

Events in recent days suggest that Rukhsana’s resistance to the severe constraints imposed by the Taliban are becoming relevant once again. The US is talking to the Taliban about withdrawing troops. Intra-Afghan talks have been held in Doha, jointly organised by Qatar and Germany. Recently, the Taliban delegation indicated a new willingness to acknowledge women’s rights. The Taliban representatives were in the same room as Afghan women who weren’t related to them. They talked to the women and ate with them.

All of this has fed a new hopeful sense of coming change in Afghanistan. A new narrative is said to be taking shape, with the conflict-scarred country mov-



Suhhail Shaheen, a spokesman for the Taliban, meets a group of women at the Intra Afghan Dialogue talks in Doha.

ing forward towards a brighter future, which is to be based on an intra-Afghan consensus. The US administration, which is understood to want a deal with the Taliban by September, has already been talking up the real and symbolic importance of what is under way.

Zalmay Khalilzad, US President Donald Trump’s special envoy for Afghanistan reconciliation, has denied the US wants to cut and run, abruptly ending the 18-year war it has prosecuted there. Instead, he insists, “We would like to leave a very positive legacy here”. And Alice Wells, acting US assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asia, has warned that Afghanistan’s future relationship with the US will “depend heavily” on preserving the gains made by women. “No current or future Afghan government should count on international donor support if that government restricts, represses or relegates Afghan women to second-class status,” she said.

This is tough talk but the

There are bound to be theological differences about Islam’s view of women’s rights. The Taliban do not have political positions so much as religious ones.

Americans may withdraw anyway, pronouncing themselves satisfied that Afghanistan is at peace. That may mean an unenforceable agreement with the Taliban both with respect to power sharing and gender rights. Many difficulties lie ahead.

First, there are the discrepancies in various translations of the declaration agreed in Doha. The Pashtu version, the only one likely to be read by the majority of the Taliban’s supporters, re-

portedly had no mention of protecting women’s rights. Was this mendacity or merely a mistake? Is the Taliban pretending it will safeguard women’s rights while reasserting its core constituency there will be no compromise on ideological positions with respect to gender?

Second, consider the Associated Press report on an exchange from the Doha conference. It might have been either playful or ominous, depending on who you ask. The news agency quoted Asila Wardack, a female member of the Afghan peace council. She said two of the Taliban approached her and other female conference participants. The Taliban said they had heard a group of “dangerous women” were going to be at the meeting. One of the men added: “Please don’t give us a hard time.”

What could that possibly mean? Was it a jocular way for the Taliban to acknowledge women had a right to be angry? Is the Taliban now willing to accept their five years in power, from 1996, were horrific for

women, who were barred from schools, colleges, offices and from any public presence except as veiled figures? Or did those two Taliban men speak in that way to Ms Wardack and other women because they honestly believe the female sex comprises harridans and termagants?

Finally, consider the “roadmap to peace” agreed between the Taliban and Afghan government representatives in Doha. The Taliban insisted the government representatives attend in a personal capacity, which means the roadmap doesn’t really have any official sanction. And the promised protections for women’s rights are to be within the vague and unspecified parameters of an “Islamic framework”. The Taliban could quite easily define the “framework” in terms of their past misogyny. There are bound to be theological differences about Islam’s view of women’s rights. The Taliban do not have political positions so much as religious ones. Political positions allow for compromise; moral ones do not.



TOP
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TWEETS

01



After a ten year search, the so-called “mastermind” of the Mumbai Terror attacks has been arrested in Pakistan. Great pressure has been exerted over the last two years to find him!

@realDonaldTrump

02



Rep. Ayanna Pressley on calling Trump the “occupant” of the White House: “He is only occupying the space. He does not embody the principles, the responsibility, the grace, the integrity of a true president ... I’m not dishonoring the office. He does everyday.”

@kylegriffin1

03



In a major legal & diplomatic victory for India, the ICJ vindicates our stand & puts the death sentence of #KulbhushanJadhav on hold. It instructs Pakistan to “effectively review & reconsider” his conviction. The 15-1 verdict also allows consular access to India.

@HardeepSPuri

04



My mom was a domestic worker - she cleaned houses to support our family. As a little girl, I grew up reading books on other people’s staircases. I did homework on other people’s dinner tables. Today, as a Congresswoman, I’m proud to cosponsor the Domestic Worker Bill of Rights.

@AOC

Disclaimer: (Views expressed by columnists are personal and need not necessarily reflect our editorial stances)

will set out the facts about encounters with radical individuals.

2014 Bahrain’s Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed made a number of media announcements announcing Bahrain’s role in the coalition against ISIS, emphasised the need to rid the world of this “deviated cult”.

In 2015 the Bahraini government evoked the citizenship of individuals associated with

terrorist entities; including many of those who had gone to fight with ISIS. The majority of those who had their citizenship revoked were based overseas, but have the right to appeal through legal channels.

It is understood that around 20 of these figures are associated with foreign terrorist groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda. Many of the names on this list come from well-known Bahraini families: Turkial-Binali is a prominent extremist preacher and

propagandist from ISIS. Mohammed Mubarak al-Binali, Mohammed Isa al-Binali and Ayoub al-Murbati all featured in the notorious Youtube video which threatened attacks against Bahrain. Abdulaziz al-Jowdar was reportedly involved in a suicide operation just a few days previously in Diyala in Iraq.

The Bahraini Government is right to use the powers available to it to prevent the return of terrorists who have travelled abroad, to target those

who plan to engage in acts of terrorism inside Bahrain and other states, and to dissuade others from associating themselves with ISIS and other terrorist groups.

These are all charges of a highly serious nature and few would disagree that those guilty of such charges are highly dangerous individuals who pose a severe threat to the safety of the public.

However, it is the authorities’ responsibility to demonstrate that

tangible evidence exists for each of these individuals and that the charges are justified, particularly as many are likely to appeal.

In April 2016 the Bahrain Government designated 68 groups as being terrorist entities; this included both groupings associated with Al-Qaeda, and Hezbollah. Also on the list were other entities active in Bahrain, like Al-Ashtar Brigades and the Resistance Brigades.

Citizens for Bahrain