



THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■



South Asia Centre
Annual Report
2023/24



Our logo is a leaf from the *Ficus religiosa* (Sacred Fig), a tree found across the countries of South Asia. It symbolises social, cultural, religious, and ecological benevolence, embodying a shared geography. This intrinsic commonality, cutting across political boundaries and identitarian constructions, provokes intriguing curiosity about the ties that bind this complex region. In amplifying this, our logo ties the Centre to LSE's motto: *Rerum cognoscere causas*, 'to know the causes of things'.

The height and breadth of the *Ficus*, along with its dry season deciduous nature, gives it its innate popularity in South Asia — as provider of shade from the scorching sun in the summers, and warm, filtered sunshine in its cold winters. Its density and strength make it a nesting paradise for several kinds of birds, and its leaves provide fodder for two of South Asia's most important pack animals, the camel and the elephant.

The bark, leaves and figs of the *Ficus* have several medicinal attributes, and are used in Ayurvedic, Yunani and other alternative medical knowledge-systems, helping to treat open wounds, inflammations, ulcers, asthma, and digestive and heart ailments.

Its popular names include *arani*, *ashvattha*, *bo*, *bodhi*, *bodhidruma*, *beepul*, *esathu*, *pimpal*, *pipal*, *ragi*, and *shuchidruma*, among many others.

The logo has been designed by Oroon Das.

INTRODUCTION

Dr Nilanjan Sarkar, *Deputy Director*



South Asia is marked by challenges, inherited and cultivated; yet, its dynamism never ceases to surprise the world. Every year, something happens that stirs us to look at the countries, and the region, and wonder: could we have predicted this last year?

Four countries – Bangladesh, Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka – went to the polls in 2024, beseeching its citizens to elect them (back) to power. People's will manifest itself, via voting slips and electronic machines, reminding us how actions, not words, bring changes that shake power structures to the core, and demonstrated once again that it is ordinary people who bring real-life paradigm shifts most brutally.

Each national election produced dramatic results. Pakistan's elections were marred by widespread accusations of vote-rigging by its military establishment allegedly disallowing the winner to form a government, installing in place a compromised winner; in India, the hitherto majority government had to enter into a coalition arrangement with a regional political party to remain in power; and in Sri Lanka, for the first time since its independence in 1948, a non-'dynasty' candidate was elected President, a 'radical' in old currency, riding on the promise of transparency, development and change for the many. But it was Bangladesh that saw a true revolution: a student-led civic protest toppled the ruling government in August 2024, just 7 months after it was re-elected to power with a 'landslide' victory.

One mission of the Centre, and an important one, is to inform the public with specialist knowledge in accessible language. Our interest in the elections was immense for the impact they have on the respective countries, as well as the dynamics of the region. And so, we invited experts across generations, both from LSE and outside, to write about each national poll for our widely-read 'South Asia @ LSE' blog: between January–November 2024, we published a series of '[...] Goes to the Polls' blogposts that outlined the issues important to the electorate, and the political parties.

And since elections always generate intense interest at LSE, we were delighted to collaborate with colleagues – Zahid Mumtaz (Department of Social Policy) and Robin Archer (The Ralph Miliband Program, Department of Government) – to curate on-site events to discuss, post-facto, the elections in Pakistan and India respectively. Predictably, both events drew packed halls, and animated discussions.

As the Centre enters its 10th year, our mission of harnessing and publicising LSE expertise and student engagement on South Asia, presenting innovative ideas and work, and collaborating with other units within LSE to inform the world has remained central to our activities. Highlights of 2023/24 include

- A presentation by John Sidel titled 'South by Southeast? Burma/Myanmar through Indonesian & Indian Ocean Lenses, Darkly' in March 2024 in collaboration with the **LSE Saw Swee Hock Southeast Asia Centre** (see page 15).
- 'Inequalities in South Asian Advicescapes' with David Lewis, also in March 2024, was a fascinating discussion drawing upon an **AFSEE-funded project** led by David (along with collaborators within and outside LSE), expertly co-chaired by Centre Director Alnoor Bhimani (LSE Accounting) and Deborah James (LSE Anthropology) (see pages 6, 8).
- With Julia Corwin (Department of Government), we have started an **Early Career Academics Workshop** exclusively for LSE academics/doctorands – colleagues discuss a pre-circulated 'work-in-progress' paper, and provide feedback and suggestions along with discussions about publication strategies, research impact, etc. (see page 34).
- Now in its fourth year, the **Vera Anstey Essay Competition** is for all registered Masters students at LSE including those who may not be formally studying South Asia (see page 28).
- The Centre advised the annual **Future of Pakistan Conference** by LSESU Pakistan Development Society in February 2024 (see page 35).

But this year was also marked by a new initiative linking different activities of LSE engagement with South Asia, amplifying the innovative ways in which

we approach the region. Two examples stand out, unique to our Centre:

- In January 2024, LSE Doctorand Sarah Wong curated an exhibition in LSE's Atrium Gallery of artworks by Chuu Wai, a Burmese artist living in exile in Paris, titled '**Not Another Protest Exhibition: Myanmar in Revolt and Feminist Art Practice**'. The Centre decided to host the artist in an online discussion focused on her work and the wider issues of civilian opposition in Myanmar today. Alongside, we published twin blogposts – one by Sarah on the exhibition, and another on civic resistance to the military coup in Myanmar. Together, the event & the two blogposts joined up in a dotted line with the exhibition in Atrium Gallery, providing a more rounded understanding of the context of the art and the realities of civic resistance and lived life in Myanmar (see pages 15-16).
- The Centre has been working with **LSE Library** for several years, highlighting and publicising its underused archives on South Asia. This year we collaborated with the Library to publish two blogposts (one by a visiting researcher, the other an intern) to publicise Peter Shore's papers on the War of Liberation in Bangladesh, and *Mukti* (the British South Asian women's magazine of the 1980s) issues of which are held in LSE Library's Archives. Such blogposts draw precious attention to the collections considering its annual global readership of nearly 500,000 (see pages 30-31).

Last year, we decided that despite our limited resources, the Centre would launch an '**Occasional Papers**' series to highlight research conducted by Visiting Fellows during their visitorship at the LSE. We launched the series in October 2023 with Antonio Giustozzi's '**The Political Liability of Military Effectiveness: The CIA's Khost Protection Force in Afghanistan**', and in March 2024, we published Ratan Kumar Roy's '**Digitalisation, Online Activism and Civic Politics in Contemporary**

Bangladesh. Occasional Papers are made available through free-to-download PDFs on the Centre's website (see page 31).

Visiting Fellows bring their own ideas and thoughts, and engage with LSE faculty and students, participate in events, and contribute to the wider academic atmosphere at LSE. They also become loyal ambassadors of LSE's Library and collections, which they use for their research. As in earlier years, we welcomed a stream of Visiting Fellows this year: **Antonio Giustozzi** (Independent Scholar), **Aisha Jalil** (Charles Wallace Pakistan Trust Visiting Fellow), **Umair Javed** (British Academy Fellow), **Sang Hnin Lian** (Charles Wallace Myanmar Trust Visiting Fellow), and **Shafi M Mostofa** (Charles Wallace Bangladesh Trust Visiting Fellow) (see pages 32-33).

Earlier, from Autumn Term 2023, we continued our commemoration of the **75th anniversary of the independence of Myanmar and Sri Lanka**, ending in January and February 2024 respectively, with special blogposts and events. Our Centre remains singular in the world in marking these anniversaries continuously over a period of 12 months, and we are very proud of it. It has forefronted LSE as a torch-bearer of academic engagement with South Asia not only in the United Kingdom, but across the world.

But this leadership in academic thinking has also been evident in the topicality of events we did this year – on artificial intelligence and spiritualism, art as a form of protest, the burgeoning industry of entrepreneurship advice-giving, extremism and jihadism, private higher education, and the relationship between faith and finance. These events were alongside events on law, politics, nationalism, history, capitalism, economics, elections, and identity politics.

The year, though, started with two sad events.

In August 2023, we learnt that **The India Club** on The Strand was to finally close its doors after 70+ years.

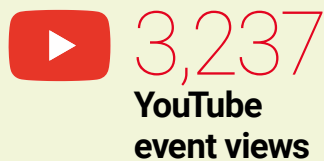
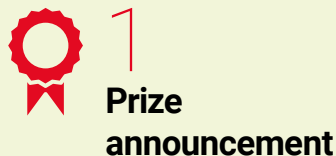
The Centre had been associated with it for some years, supporting its fight for survival (through letters to Westminster Council) – in its initial years the Club was patronised by several LSE students including V K Krishna Menon, who greatly influenced LSE Professor Harold Laski's views on India's struggle for independence. On 14 September 2023, the Centre organised a special event at the Club with Michael Cox (LSE IDEAS) speaking on '**London and a Club called India**', chaired by Mukulika Banerjee (LSE Anthropology). The owner of India Club, Yadgar Marker, also spoke at the event.

Earlier, on 5 September, we heard of the very sad and sudden passing of **Christopher Coker** (Co-Director of LSE IDEAS), member of the Centre's Faculty Advisory Group, participant-collaborator in events, an ardent supporter of the Centre's activities, and a true wit. He is deeply missed by all of us.

As this *Report* goes to print later than scheduled, I would like to thank Alnoor Bhimani (LSE Accounting), whose term as Director of the Centre ended on 31 July 2024, for his support from 2020–24; and I welcome our new Director Naufel Vilcassim (LSE Management), who has generously accepted this position during his sabbatical leave – you will hear from him next year!

“ As the Centre enters its 10th year, our mission of harnessing and publicising LSE expertise and student engagement on South Asia, presenting innovative ideas and work, and collaborating with other units within LSE to inform the world at large has remained central to our activities. ”

YEAR IN REVIEW





LEFT: MICHAEL COX SPEAKING AT THE INDIA CLUB (THE STRAND) ON 'LONDON & A CLUB CALLED INDIA', 14 SEPTEMBER 2023; RIGHT: ENTRANCE TO THE INDIA CLUB, 143 STRAND, LONDON WC2R 1JA.



MICHAEL COX WITH MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE IN THE NOW CLOSED INDIA CLUB, 14 SEPTEMBER 2023.

BANGLADESH

Bangladesh has had a revolutionary year, quite literally. With several positive economic metrics alongside concerns about political corruption and heavy-handedness, the country went to general elections in January 2024 that saw the return of the Awami League to power. In August 2024, a 'Gen Z'-led civic opposition (with wider support) saw Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina flee the country, and an interim government led by Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus instated.

The Centre has continued its engagement with the country in its activities and blogposts through all this. Part of the Centre's impact and engagement is to connect with academic platforms in countries of the region, especially those that are relevant and useful to academics and students interested in the country. This year the Centre collaborated with Banglar Pathshala Foundation in Dhaka to organise a special series of events focusing on the foundational principles of the country as articulated by founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The first event, **'Bangladesh since 1971: Economic Ideas and Contemporary Realities'** in November 2023 was a conversation between LSE academic Naila Kabeer (leading Bangladesh expert and Professor of Gender & Development) and LSE alumna (and currently Carl Marks Professor of International Studies at Cornell University) Kaushik Basu. It was a fascinating exploration of the economic ideas of Mujibur Rahman, their foundational values and if/how contemporary economic realities of Bangladesh have borne out these founding ideas.

The second event, in February 2024, was titled **'Cultural Nationalism and the Making of Bangladesh'** – and was an important discussion especially because of its relevance in today's world. Mujib's demand for Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) challenged the religious/Islamic nationalist discourse that had seen the birth of West & East Pakistan (from British India) in

1947. The case for Bengali (cultural) identity as the foundation for nationhood, trumping Islamic (religious) identity as a binding force, remains a unique case of nationalism in South Asia – as also the only one of a nation wresting independence from a non-European power. Fakrul Alam (formerly Professor at the University of Dhaka, and translator of Mujib's *The Unfinished Memoirs*) presented a summary of Mujib's ideas on cultural nationalism, followed by a conversation with Gurpreet Mahajan (formerly Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and an expert on multiculturalism and democracy) on different aspects of the debates surrounding cultural nationalism, identity and nationhood in Bangladesh and the wider world.

Both events were chaired by Deputy Director Nilanjan Sarkar.

In January 2024, shortly before the national elections, the Centre published a blog (**'Bangladesh Goes to the Polls'**) by David Lewis (LSE International Development, Bangladesh expert and member of the Centre's Faculty Advisory Group) which succinctly outlined the main issues in the upcoming national elections. Lewis' blogpost was widely read, and set the template for similar posts for other countries in the region going to the polls in 2024.

In March 2024, we were delighted to host a panel discussion on 'Ethnographic Solutions to Inequalities in South Asian Advicescapes',



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: NAILA KABEER, KAUSHIK BASU, AHMED JAVED CHOWDHURY & NILANJAN SARKAR AT 'BANGLADESH SINCE 1971: ECONOMIC IDEAS & CONTEMPORARY REALITIES' (IN COLLABORATION WITH BANGLAR PATHSHALA FOUNDATION, DHAKA), 16 NOVEMBER 2023.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: NILANJAN SARKAR, ALI RIAZ, JASMIN LORCH, TANIA AMIR, SHAFI M MOSTOFA & GEOFFREY MACDONALD AT 'BANGLADESH: RADICAL POLITICS, EXTREMISM & THE WAY FORWARD', 15 MAY 2024.

a project funded by the Atlantic Fellows for Social and Economic Equity (AFSEE) Program (part of the International Inequalities Institute) and led by David Lewis on **'Inequalities in South Asian Landscapes'**. The event presented a summary of the project's findings on entrepreneurship advice in Bangladesh (and Sri Lanka) – focusing on the growing importance of business advice (involving public and private bodies, and NGOs) – in the fast-changing economic landscape of South Asia, given its importance in the reproduction of inequalities at different levels, and in different contexts.

Rebecca Bowers (LSE) and Tasmiah Rahman (BRAC, Dhaka) spoke about their ethnographic data from Bangladesh, which has seen a boom in entrepreneurship advice-giving in various sectors. Deborah James (LSE Anthropology), who has worked on the same topic in South Africa, provided a fascinating account of her research, Anjali Sarker (Oxford) talked about the applied aspects of this research, and Centre Director Alnoor Bhimani put these issues in the wider context of entrepreneurship in South Asia. Luke Heslop (Brunel University) and Anushka Wijesinha (Centre for Smart Future, Colombo) spoke about findings in Sri Lanka.

This event was in collaboration with the Atlantic Fellows for Social and Economic Equity (AFSEE) Program, part of LSE International Inequalities Institute.

In May 2024, the Centre organised a fascinating discussion on **'Bangladesh: Radical Politics, Extremism and the Way Forward'**. We had just hosted the Charles Wallace Bangladesh Trust Fellow (see below) whose research interests were in newly emerging radical/terrorist groups in Bangladesh, so we decided to have a discussion on the ebb and flow of radical politics in recent times in Bangladesh. Our attempt always being to widen our network across the world, this event

presented us with a perfect opportunity to do so. Alongside Shafi M Mostofa (University of Dhaka) who was invited to initiate the discussion (as a Centre Fellow), we invited Barrister Tania Amir (Supreme Court of Bangladesh), Jasmin Lorch (German Institute of Development & Sustainability (IDOS), Bonn) and Ali Riaz (Illinois State University) as panelists, and Geoffrey Macdonald (Senior Advisor on Asia/Bangladesh, International Republican Institute, Washington DC) as Discussant. The ensuing discussion touched upon the reasons for the emergence of new terrorist groups (including women), and overall decline of terrorism in Bangladesh, and was expectedly animated and passionate.

Recordings of events are available on the Centre's website.

CHARLES WALLACE BANGLADESH TRUST VISITING FELLOW

We were delighted to welcome our next Bangladesh Fellow in Winter Term 2024. **Dr Shafi M Mostofa** (Associate Professor in the Department of World Religions, University of Dhaka) is a theologian and security studies scholar with particular interest in political Islam, authoritarianism, modern South Asian history and politics; his doctoral dissertation was on Islamic militancy in Bangladesh from 2009–19. He was selected for his proposal on violent extremism and counter-measures in Bangladesh, focusing especially on newly-formed groups like the Jama'atul Ansar fil Hindal Sharqiya. Shafi published a blog titled 'Bangladesh: Turmoil and Transition in a Fragile Democracy' on 26 February 2024 on the Centre's widely read 'South Asia @ LSE' blog, and was panelist in an online event in May 2024 on **'Bangladesh: Radical Politics, Extremism and the Way Forward'** (see above). His Working Paper will be published by the Centre in due course.

INDIA

India was another country in South Asia that had its national elections in 2024. As the world largest democracy conducted a spectacularly complicated and lengthy general election over 2+ months, we continued with our events and activities, as always with a rich and varied offering.

A very unique and saddening event started off our calendar of events this year. In August 2023, the **India Club** (143 Strand) announced its closure after 70+ years. Patronised by V K Krishna Menon in the 1950s (he was India's first High Commissioner to the United Kingdom after independence in 1947), the Club had hosted generations of India supporters and patrons, Indianists, Indophiles and several others, offering Indian food, Cobra beer and a warm and welcoming environment. The Centre decided to host a 'Thank You/Farewell' event at India Club on 14 September 2023 where Michael Cox (LSE IDEAS; also, author of a forthcoming history of LSE) spoke on **'London and a Club called India'**, LSE's association with Krishna Menon (who was a student of LSE Professor Harold Laski, a strong supporter of Indian independence), with Mukulika Banerjee (LSE Anthropology) as Chair — and a brief but special speech with the owner Yadgar Marker. As the photographs attest, it attracted a huge audience including a wide range of the Centre's well-wishers from across the academic and cultural cognoscenti in London. *This event was not recorded.*

South Asian student numbers in higher education today exceed 200 million, studying at over 90,000 institutions. About a third of them attend private institutions; the share in India and Bangladesh exceeds 50 per cent, with Pakistan at around 15 per cent. What explains these trends? In October 2023, the Centre organised an online discussion with the founders of leading institutions in India and Pakistan to discuss this. **'Private Higher Education: Does it Help or Hinder South Asia?'** invited Pramath Raj Sinha (Founder and Trustee,

Ashoka University, India) who discussed the moot question on the minds of many: are contributions of non-state actors (like private Higher Education institutions) positive for society notwithstanding their profit-making and business interests? There were related issues to discuss: is the quality of higher education in private institutions different from public universities? Are private institutions creating new education and skills development for new market demands? Do private institutions focus overly on 'market-friendly' courses, assuring employment? And are they filling gaps in the education sector in a globalised world? The other panelist was Nasreen Kasuri (Founder and Chairperson, Beaconhouse School System, Lahore), and the event was chaired by Centre Director Alnoor Bhimani.

In November 2023, Centre Director Alnoor Bhimani chaired an event on **'The South Asian Gaze: Aesthetics, Politics and the Social'** — to discuss how artists in South Asia create art to address the wider contextual frameworks in which their art is produced, seen and understood. Indian artist/sculptor Shilpa Gupta showed an incredible array of her works, and spoke about how her art overlaps with politics, activism and wider issues of nationhood, identity, community and related themes. The opportunity to see her amazing art was a delightful bonus — and deeply moving — art that speaks to the many challenges of modern nationhood and its making. Other panelists included the Pakistani artist Waqas Khan, and the Sri Lankan artist Anoma (Wijewardene). *This event was not recorded.*

Two online events, both in January 2024, drew particular interest from our audience. The first was an online panel discussion on **'Digitalisation and Financial Inclusion in India'**, which discussed the degree and success of financial inclusion across society as India – now the world's most populous country – has expanded its digital economy and financial services for the citizenry. Chaired by Centre Director Alnoor Bhmani, speakers included Jayshree Bajoria (Human Rights Watch), Mahmudul Hasan Laskar (University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya) and Aditya Singh (Athena School of Management, Mumbai).

The other event, part of our 'Fact & Fiction' series – **'Brands, Adverts and Capitalism in Colonial India'** – was a book discussion on Douglas Haynes' (Professor, Dartmouth College) *The Emergence of Brand-name Capitalism in Late Colonial India: Advertising and the Making of Modern Conjugality* (2022). Speakers David Arnold (University of Warwick), Ravinder Kaur (University of Copenhagen) and Prashant Kidambi (University of Leicester), with William T S Mazzarella (University of Chicago) as Discussant, engaged with Haynes from multiple perspectives of advertising, product publicity, social and societal exclusions, colonial capitalism and market forces. The event was chaired by Deputy Director Nilanjan Sarkar.

Recordings of events (unless mentioned otherwise) are available on the Centre's website.

The 'festival of democracy' – the largest general elections in the world – was conducted in India in April–June 2024. The Centre published two blogposts by keen, young, election observers in mid-April, themselves part of the electorate. **'India Goes to the Polls 1'** (by Pranav Gupta, UC Berkeley) and **'India Goes to the Polls 2'** (by Vignesh Rajahmani (KITLV, Lediem) and Raghunath Nageswaran (Geneva Graduate Institute)), looked at different issues and challenges for the national and regional political parties in the electionscape of India, possible outcomes and paths ahead.

In June 2024, the Centre – in collaboration with The Ralph Miliband Program at LSE – hosted a hybrid panel discussion on **'The Indian Election and the Future of Progressive Politics'**. Speakers Mukulika Banerjee (LSE Anthropology), Christophe Jaffrelot (Sciences Po, Paris; online) and Sanjay Kumar (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi) discussed, in a packed auditorium, the unexpected results of the elections which saw a greatly reduced majority for the ruling party. The event was moderated by Robin Archer (LSE Government) and chaired by Centre Director Alnoor Bhmani.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DOUGLAS HAYNES, PRASHANT KIDAMBI, WILLIAM MAZZARELLA, NILANJAN SARKAR, RAVINDER KAUR & DAVID ARNOLD AT 'BRANDS, ADVERTS & CAPITALISM IN COLONIAL INDIA' (PART OF OUR 'FACT & FICTION' SERIES), 31 JANUARY 2024.



LEFT: SANJAY KUMAR, MUKULIKA BANERJEE, ROBIN ARCHER & ALNOOR BHIMANI, AND (RIGHT) MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE AT 'THE INDIAN ELECTION & THE FUTURE OF PROGRESSIVE POLITICS' (IN COLLABORATION WITH THE RALPH MILIBAND PROGRAM, LSE GOVERNMENT), LSE, 11 JUNE 2024.

PAKISTAN

Pakistan was the second country in the region to go to elections – in February 2024. As it turned out, the elections were marred by accusations of interference and rigging by its powerful military establishment, and the installation of a chosen government. Set in a tenuous economy, a demonstrable denial of free and fair elections has led to enduring frictions.

The Centre hosted Umair Javed (LUMS, Lahore) as an Early Career British Academy Fellow from June–December 2023; part of the requirement of being Fellow was to organise/participate in an event. In October 2023, we hosted a panel discussion titled **'Pakistan: Future(s) of Democracy'**. Speakers Mahvish Ahmad (LSE Sociology), Asha Amirali (University of Bath), Yasser Kureshi (University of Oxford), and Ayyaz Mallick (University of Liverpool) discussed the future prospects of democracy in Pakistan beyond intra-élite power tussles and the current crises that afflicts the system. Umair Javed was Discussant and Deputy Director Nilanjan Sarkar was Chair.

In November 2023, Centre Director Alnoor Bhimani chaired an event on **'The South Asian Gaze: Aesthetics, Politics and the Social'** – to discuss meanings of art, and how artists in South Asia construct them to address the wider contextual frameworks in which their art is produced, seen and understood. Pakistani artist Waqas Khan spoke about his art, how it overlaps with politics, activism and issues of nationhood, identity, community and related themes. A bonus was to be able to see how some of his art speaks to the many challenges of modern nationhood. Other panelists included the Indian artist/sculptor Shilpa Gupta, and the Sri Lankan artist Anoma (Wijewardene). *This event was not recorded.*

South Asian student numbers in higher education today exceed 200 million, studying at over 90,000 institutions. About a third of them attend private institutions; the share in

India and Bangladesh exceeds 50 per cent, with Pakistan at around 15 per cent. What explains these trends? In October 2023, the Centre organised an online discussion titled **'Private Higher Education: Does it Help or Hinder South Asia?'**, and invited Nasreen Kasuri (Founder and Chairperson, Beaconhouse School System, Lahore) who discussed the moot question on the minds of many: are contributions of non-state actors (like private Higher Education institutions) positive for society notwithstanding their profit-making and business interests? There were related issues to discuss: is the quality of higher education in private institutions different from public universities? Are private institutions creating new education and skills development for new market demands? Do private institutions focus overly on 'market-friendly' courses, assuring employment? And are they filling gaps in the education sector in a globalised world? The other panellist (from India) was Pramath Raj Sinha (Founder and Trustee, Ashoka University, India), and the event was chaired by Centre Director Alnoor Bhimani.

At the end of January, shortly before the general elections, we published a blogpost on **'Pakistan Goes to the Polls'** by Tahir Kamran (Beaconhouse National University, Lahore). The blog laid out the several challenges confronting the upcoming elections in Pakistan, belied alas by the post-election controversies.

In March 2024, amidst the raging debates about electoral malpractice and interference by Pakistan's military establishment, we hosted a



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: NILANJAN SARKAR, ASHA AMIRALI, UMAIR JAVED, AYYAZ MALLICK, MAHVISH AHMAD & YASSER KURESHI AT 'PAKISTAN: FUTURE(S) OF DEMOCRACY', 5 OCTOBER 2023.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ALNOOR BHIMANI, NASREEN KASURI & PRAMATH RAJ SINHA AT 'PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION: DOES IT HELP OR HINDER SOUTH ASIA?', 18 OCTOBER 2023.

post-elections event (in collaboration with the Department of Social Policy) titled **'Pakistan Elections 2024: Navigating the Impact on Pakistan's Democracy'**. The prominent Pakistani lawyer Salman Akram Raja, who had contested the elections as an independent candidate (affiliated with Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf party) joined online despite the late hour, having just returned home after being briefly arrested following his protest to highlight vote-rigging, along with Ayesha Siddiq (King's College London) and Zahid Mumtaz (LSE Social Policy). The event was chaired by Deputy Director Nilanjan Sarkar.

Also in March, the Centre hosted an event on **'Dynamism of Jihadism in Pakistan'**, as part of our Fact & Fiction series. Focusing on Visiting Fellow Antonio Giustozzi's *Jihadism in Pakistan: Al-Qaeda, Islamic State and Local Militants* (2023), the discussion – with Abdul Basit (National University of Singapore), Farzana Shaikh (Chatham House, London) and Abubakr Siddique (Journalist) along with Antonio – focused on the connections, networks and overlaps in jihadist groups in Pakistan (and across the border in Afghanistan), and how the nature of such groups have mutated over time. The event was chaired by Deputy Director Nilanjan Sarkar.

One of the most exciting book discussions in June 2024 revolved around the legalese surrounding citizenship in Pakistan. Ali Usman Qasimi's recently published, award-winning *Qaum, Mulk, Sultanat: Citizenship and National Belonging in Pakistan* (2023) is a historical-sociological study that delves deep into archives in Pakistan and Bangladesh (East Pakistan, 1947–71) to study a critical, interlinked question: does legality alone determine citizenship in a newly-born nation state, and what sense of belonging does that create to bind the nation together. A fascinating

discussion, **'Being Pakistani, Becoming Pakistani'** included Zaib un Nisa Aziz (University of South Florida), Zehra Hashmi (University of Pennsylvania), and Tahir Kamran (Beaconhouse National University, Lahore) along with the author Ali Usman Qasmi (LUMS, Lahore). The conversation covered a lot of ground, especially regarding minorities, their 'citizenship' and their 'belonging'. The event was chaired by Deputy Director Nilanjan Sarkar.

Recordings of events (unless mentioned otherwise) are available on the Centre's website.

VISITING FELLOWS

Dr Ayesha Jalil was Charles Wallace Pakistan Trust Visiting Fellow, and spent 3 months at the Centre (January–April 2024). A sociologist by training, Aisha's doctoral research was on patient satisfaction in public clinics in Lahore. Whilst at the Centre, she worked on the violation of the constitutional rights of inheritance and legal protection of women against domestic violence in Pakistan, and published a blogpost ('Tackling Economic Violence against Women in Pakistan') on the Centre's widely-read 'South Asia @ LSE' blog on 11 March 2024. She will submit a Working Paper in due course.

Dr Umair Javed's British Academy Early Career Fellowship continued till December 2023, during which time he participated in an event on Future(s) of Democracy in Pakistan, published a blogpost ('Negotiating Informality: Bazaar Politics and the State in Pakistan', 23 October 2023) and has since submitted a Working Paper as part of his Fellowship requirements at LSE, which will be published in due course. Whilst at the Centre, Umair worked on his book manuscript on the politics & practices of accumulation, and labour relations in Pakistan's informal economy focusing specifically on wholesale bazaars.

MYANMAR

As the military coup and civil war in Myanmar blights the country and its people, the Centre has continued its academic engagement with the country as much as possible, reaching out to academics and others interested in the country and its future.

In January 2024, the Centre was approached by LSE Doctorand Sara Wong (LSE International Relations) about an exhibition she was curating in LSE's Atrium Gallery titled **'Not Another Protest Exhibition: Myanmar in Revolt and Feminist Art Practice'**, on the art of Burmese artist Chuu Wai which explored how art is, and can be, used to navigate repressive state practices in Myanmar, looking especially at the role played by women in resisting military rule in the country.

The Centre was delighted to work with Wong around the exhibition to organise a panel discussion that would further explore the artist's work in the context of the ongoing civilian resistance to the military coup in Myanmar. We were therefore delighted to be able to have artist Chuu Wai, currently in self-exile in Paris, in an event titled **'The Politics of Culture: Art & Resistance in Myanmar'** on 14 February 2024, in conversation with Minn Tent Bo (Independent Researcher/Analyst) and Gumring Hkangda (University of Manchester) with Sara Wong (LSE) moderating the discussion. It was a fascinating exploration of the aesthetic and subversive power of art, and its ability to unsettle even the state's military establishment. The event was chaired by Deputy Director Nilanjan Sarkar. *This event was not recorded.*

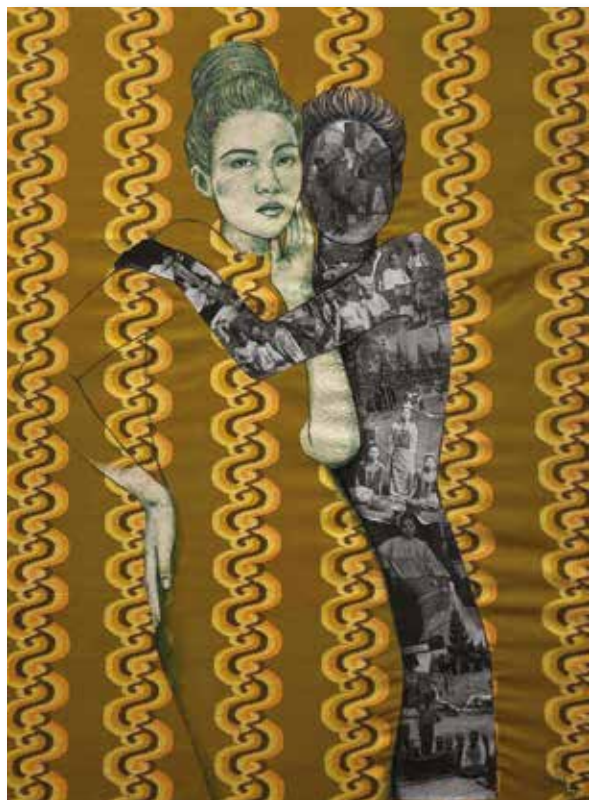
Central to this event were the challenges posed by Wai's artworks to traditional/patriarchal cultural mores of Burmese society – including the *htamain* (wrap-around skirt worn by Burmese women) which has become a potent

symbol of the younger generation in the ongoing civil war. We published a blog titled "Htamain" at the Front: Breaking Tradition, Resisting the Coup in Myanmar' by Htet Hlaing Win to complement Sara's blog on the exhibition titled 'Weaving Art and Resistance in Myanmar', both published on 12 February 2024 so that they could be read simultaneously.

Taken together, this interconnected set of exhibition, event and blogposts attracted a lot of academic attention, and we were delighted to have been able to participate in them.

The Centre collaborated with LSE Saw Swee Hock Southeast Asia Centre for a hybrid event titled **'South by Southeast? Burma/ Myanmar through Indonesian & Indian Ocean Lenses, Darkly'** on 6 March 2024. Director & Professor John Sidel spoke about the striking similarities and significant divergences in the politico-historical trajectories of Indonesia and Myanmar, and how Myanmar's strategic location – between South and Southeast Asia – has continued to impact the geopolitics of the Indian Ocean. Panelists at the event included modern Burma expert Michael Charney, and Avinash Paliwal who has recently authored a book on India's Near East (both from SOAS), and Anja Karlsson (University of Gothenburg; online) who has worked on refugees and border politics in Southeast Asia (including Burma). The event was chaired by Nilanjan Sarkar (LSE).

Recordings of events (unless mentioned otherwise) are available on the Centre's website.



'CHEW YOU UP OR SPIT YOU OUT',
120x90cms, ACRYLIC & COLLAGE ON
MYANMAR TEXTILE, 2024, EXHIBITED
AT 'NOT ANOTHER PROTEST
EXHIBITION: MYANMAR IN REVOLT
& FEMINIST ART PRACTICE', ATRIUM
GALLERY, LSE, 29 JANUARY
-23 FEBRUARY 2024 © CHUU WAI,
USED WITH PERMISSION.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: NILANJAN SARKAR, CHUU WAI, SARAH WONG, MINT TENT BO & GUMRING HKANGDA
AT 'THE POLITICS OF CULTURE: ART & RESISTANCE IN MYANMAR', 14 FEBRUARY 2024.

CHARLES WALLACE BURMA/ MYANMAR TRUST VISITING FELLOW

Sang Hnin Lian was selected as Visiting Fellow as part of the Charles Wallace Burma/Myanmar Trust Fellowship programme, and was at the Centre in the summer of 2024 (May-August). Lian studied Political Science in India and International Relations in Thailand before returning to Myanmar. During his time at the Centre, Lian worked on policy-oriented interventions on the needs of marginalised Burmese students in countries in South Asia, with a particular focus on improving their experience of being expatriates in neighbouring countries.

MYANMAR @ 75 BLOGS

The Centre continued to publish its series of specially commissioned blogposts to mark the 75th anniversary of Myanmar's independence. Amongst the most popular has been the personal,

moving blogpost on Burmese Punk Rock singer Sküm (Ko Thet Khine) by Tobiasz Targosz titled "Infernal Damnation": Sküm, Punk and the Political in Burma published on 18 September 2023. The blog has been widely read and reposted because of the uniqueness of the content, rarely available in the context of contemporary Burma.

Other blogposts in our 'Myanmar @ 75' series included one by Aye Mar Win (Visiting Fellow at the Centre, January–April 2023) on 'Legal Provisions for Pets and Other Animals in Myanmar' (October 2023), a special blog to accompany the 'Burma to Myanmar' exhibition at The British Museum by its curator Alexandra Green (November 2023), and the final one in December 2023 by London-based Independent Analyst Minn Tent Bo on 'Buddhist Majoritarian Nationalism in Myanmar', which looked at the long history of how Buddhist majoritarianism impacted, and was patronised by the military establishment, in maintaining power structures in place in post-independence Burma/Myanmar.

Tobiasz Targosz
September 18th, 2023

'Infernal Damnation': Sküm, Punk and the Political in Burma

Comments: 4 shares

Estimated reading time: 14 minutes




Punk rock is acknowledged globally as the in-the-face, anti-establishment music genre. Through this moving, first-person, and personal ethnography of Sküm, Burma's legendary punk rocker, Tobiasz Targosz tells a multi-layered story of Burma's society, politics, military rule and democracy in recent times, seen with defiance — 'Infernal Damnation' (title of this blog) is the title of one of the songs penned by Sküm — to all things wrong, from the margins of society.

BLOGPOST COMMEMORATING 'MYANMAR @ 75' BY TOBIASZ TARGOSZ (18 SEPTEMBER 2023), 'SOUTH ASIA @ LSE'. THIS POST IS AMONG THE MOST READ POSTS IN THE SERIES.

SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka's economy in particular, and politics more generally, continued to make headlines through 2023–24, as the country struggled with its debt amidst growing citizen dissatisfaction with the government. At the Centre, we continued our monthly blogposts to mark the 75th anniversary of its independence, publishing some unique points-of-view taking stock of the island country in this important year.

We were keen to not do events on Sri Lanka that were just about its current crises: the Centre had already done quite a few important events in 2022/23 looking at these issues. Two events – very different from one another – therefore looked at Sri Lanka in a comparative context, unconnected with its current crises.

In November 2023, Centre Director Alnoor Bhimani chaired an event on **'The South Asian Gaze: Aesthetics, Politics and the Social'**. The idea was to discuss different meanings in art, and how artists in South Asia construct them to address the wider contextual frameworks in which their art is produced, seen and understood. Sri Lankan artist Anoma (Wijewardene) spoke about questions of nationhood, identity, community and related themes in this event, presenting an overview of her own journey as an artist in Sri Lanka through its complex historical and later challenges. A bonus was to be able to see some of her amazing art that speaks to the many challenges of modern nationhood. Other panelists included the Indian artist/sculptor Shilpa Gupta, and the Pakistani artist Waqas Khan. *This event was not recorded.*

In March 2024, we were delighted to host a panel discussion on 'Ethnographic Solutions to Inequalities in South Asian Advicescapes', a project funded by the Atlantic Fellows for Social and Economic Equity (AFSEE) Program (part of the International Inequalities Institute) and led by David Lewis on **'Inequalities in South Asian**

Landscapes'. The event presented a summary of the project's findings on entrepreneurship advice in Sri Lanka (and Bangladesh) – focusing on the growing importance of business advice (involving public and private bodies, and NGOs) – in the fast-changing economic landscape of South Asia, given its importance in the reproduction of inequalities at different levels, and in different contexts.

Luke Heslop (Brunel University) and Anushka Wijesinha (Centre for Smart Future, Colombo) spoke about their findings in Sri Lanka which has seen a boom in entrepreneurship advice-giving in various sectors. Deborah James (LSE Anthropology), who has worked on the same topic in South Africa, provided a fascinating account of her research, Anjali Sarker (Oxford) talked about the applied aspects of this research, and Centre Director Alnoor Bhimani put these issues in the wider context of entrepreneurship in South Asia. Rebecca Bowers (LSE) and Tasmiah Rahman (BRAC, Dhaka) spoke about Bangladesh.

This event was in collaboration with the LSE Atlantic Fellows for Social and Economic Equity (AFSEE) Program, part of the LSE International Inequalities Institute.

A recording of this event is available on the Centre's website.

SRI LANKA @ 75 BLOGS

We continued publishing special blogposts to mark the 75th anniversary of Sri Lanka's independence till January 2024. Now consolidated on one page on the Centre's website, the posts – written by a diverse range of people across the generations – have addressed both historical and contemporary issues analytically and critically. Indrajit Coomaraswamy and Ganeshan Wignaraja's reflective post on Sri Lanka's debt crisis (October 2023) attracted considerable attention for the 'lessons' it offered to other fragile economies, while Shamara Wettimuny's timely post on 'truth' in history-writing (following the proposal of the Online Safety Bill in Parliament) in November 2023 discussed the potentially dangerous aspects of such a bill in the writing of history, amidst the global concern of determining 'true' from 'false' in the age of social media.

Two widely read blogposts by Ambika Satkunathan on (in)dependence for Sri Lankans of different hues (September 2023) and Anupama Ranawana on the Veddahs' right to their ancestral lands (December 2023) touched upon the varying ways in which communities in Sri Lanka have experienced independence in the last 75 years. Equally important was the nuanced photo essay by Dishani Senaratne ('Beyond the Slogans: How the "Aragalaya" was Characterised by Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism', 14 August 2023) which looked at how despite its all-encompassing populist appearance, the protests (*aragalaya*) that shook the country in August 2022 were, in fact, underlined by a steady and undeniable element of majoritarian nationalism, especially in its slogans; Farzana Haniffa's post which ended the series in January 2024 looked at the future, arguing how this may be the moment when Sri Lanka's electorate may, in fact, begin to look at new political beginnings led by civilian leaders outside the traditional core of political dynastic families that have held high office since independence in 1948.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ALNOOR BHIMANI, SHILPA GUPTA, WAQAS KHAN & ANOMA AT 'THE SOUTH ASIAN GAZE: AESTHETICS, POLITICS & THE SOCIAL', 23 NOVEMBER 2023.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DAVID LEWIS, REBECCA BOWERS, ANJALI SARKER, LUKE HESLOP, ALNOOR BHIMANI, DEBORAH JAMES, ANUSHKA WIJESINHA & TASMIAH RAHMAN (CENTRE) AT 'INEQUALITIES IN SOUTH ASIAN ADVICESCAPES' (IN COLLABORATION WITH THE AFSEE PROGRAM, PART OF THE INTERNATIONAL INEQUALITIES INSTITUTE), 13 MARCH 2024.

SOUTH ASIA

From the beginning, the Centre has worked consciously to represent all countries of South Asia through its events, blogposts, fellowships and research resources. Several events involve more than one country, highlighting shared or common concerns across the region as a whole.

The new academic year started off with a discussion on an important but rarely discussed topic, **'Competition Law in South Asia'**, focused on *Competition Law in South Asia: Policy Diffusion and Transfer* (2023) by Amber Darr (University of Manchester) in October 2023. Despite the specific nature of the topic, there was an animated discussion between the author and some panelists on the code and practices of competition law in countries in South Asia. Panelists included Joseph Wilson (McGill University, expert on Pakistan) and Dhanendra Kumar (former Chairman, Competition Advisory Services India) along with Hassan Qaqaya (expert on competition and consumer policies; University of Melbourne) and Eleanor Fox (expert on trade regulations at NYU), the latter two also being experts on competition law with a wider, global perspective. The Discussant at the event was Dina Waked (expert on comparative competition law, trade and regulations at Sciences Po, Paris), and it was chaired by Deputy Director Nilanjan Sarkar.

South Asian student numbers in higher education today exceed 200 million, studying at over 90,000 institutions. About a third of them attend private institutions; the share in India and Bangladesh exceeds 50 per cent, with Pakistan at around 15 per cent. What explains these trends? In October 2023, the Centre organised an online discussion with the founders of leading institutions in India and Pakistan to discuss this. **'Private Higher Education: Does it Help or Hinder South Asia?'** invited Pramath Raj Sinha (Founder and Trustee, Ashoka University, India) and Nasreen Kasuri (Founder and Chairperson,

Beaconhouse School System, Lahore) who discussed the moot question on the minds of many: are contributions of non-state actors (like private Higher Education institutions) positive for society notwithstanding their profit-making and business interests? There were related issues to discuss: is the quality of higher education in private institutions different from public universities? Are private institutions creating new education and skills development for new market demands? Do private institutions focus overly on 'market-friendly' courses, assuring employment? And are they private institutions filling gaps in the education sector in a globalised world? The event was chaired by Centre Director Alnoor Bhimani.

In November 2023, Centre Director Alnoor Bhimani chaired an event on **'The South Asian Gaze: Aesthetics, Politics and the Social'** – to discuss meanings of art, and how artists in South Asia construct them to address the wider contextual frameworks in which their art is produced, seen and understood. Indian artist/sculptor Shilpa Gupta, and artists Waqas Khan (Pakistan) and Anoma (Wijewardene) from Sri Lanka spoke about art, how it overlaps with politics, activism and issues of nationhood, identity, community and related themes. A delightful bonus was to be able to see some amazing – and deeply moving – art that speaks to the many challenges of modern nationhood. *This event was not recorded.*

We continued our engagement with the art world with a fantastic discussion titled **'Making Art History Global'** in December 2023. Monica Juneja's *Can Art History be*

Made Global? Meditations from the Periphery (2023) is a fascinating read, and the discussion focused on whether or not art history could become global through transculturation, rather than globalisation. Panelists included Annie Coombes (Birkbeck University of London), Deborah Hutton (The College of New Jersey) and Matthew Volgraff (University of Basel) in conversation with author Monica Juneja (Heidelberg University). The Discussant was Parul Dave Mukherjee (Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi), and the event was chaired by Deputy Director Nilanjan Sarkar.

In March 2024, we were delighted to host a panel discussion on 'Ethnographic Solutions to Inequalities in South Asian Advicescapes', a project funded by the Atlantic Fellows for Social and Economic Equity (AFSEE) Program (part of the International Inequalities Institute) and led by David Lewis titled '**Inequalities in South Asian Landscapes**'. The event presented a summary of the project's findings on entrepreneurship advice in Bangladesh (and Sri Lanka) – focusing on the growing importance of business advice (involving public and private bodies, and NGOs) – in the fast-changing economic landscape of South Asia, given its importance in the reproduction of inequalities at different levels, and in different contexts.

Luke Heslop (Brunel University) and Anushka Wijesinha (Centre for Smart Future, Colombo) spoke about Sri Lanka, and Rebecca Bowers (LSE) and Tasmiah Rahman (BRAC, Dhaka) discussed Bangladesh – both countries have seen a boom in entrepreneurship advice-giving in various sectors. Deborah James (LSE Anthropology), who has worked on the same topic in South Africa, provided a fascinating

account of her research, Anjali Sarker (Oxford) talked about the applied aspects of this research, and Centre Director Alnoor Bhimani put these issues in the wider context of entrepreneurship in South Asia.

This event was in collaboration with the LSE Atlantic Fellows for Social and Economic Equity (AFSEE) Program, part of the LSE International Inequalities Institute.

In May 2024, **Faith, Finance and Ethics in South Asia: Are they Connected?** considered if there is a link between religion and financial well-being, and if faith influences financial investment and economic decisions? Over half of millionaires in the world are Christians while those who see themselves as irreligious hold three times more wealth than the wealth of Muslims, Hindus and Jews combined. Financial crises have been associated with institutionalised moral failures so economic activities perhaps ought not to be separated from faith-based moral rules grounded in their regulatory frameworks? Christianity and Judaism warn people to be careful about their relationship with money; Buddhism regards greed as poison while Islam condemns usury. So, can we achieve more sustainable finance infrastructures by intertwining the two? Or are finance and faith best left independent of one another? Panelists Adeel Malik (University of Oxford) and Atul Shah (City, University of London) were in conversation with Centre Director Alnoor Bhimani to discuss all this and more in a fascinating discussion.

Recordings of events (unless mentioned otherwise) are available on the Centre's website.

TOUGH TALK

Since 2020, when we started the 'Tough Talk' series, it has consistently remained one of our most successful events at the Centre. Each event title is presented as a question, focusing on a wide-angled issue of concern to the world at large, and those in South Asia. The conversations are frank, without frills, and asks panelists to tackle the theme head on.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the new global buzzword. It is also unique in that rarely has a technological innovation presumed to have such dramatic impact on all aspects of our life, including Higher Education institutions where students regularly use ChatGPT and other AI softwares to write essays, complete assignments and 'think through' hitherto academic questions.

In June 2024 the Centre hosted a panel discussion on spirituality, people's engagement with it in different cultural contexts and whether or not AI and digital technologies impeded or enhanced spirituality. We were delighted to find the perfect panel for the discussion on **'Does Artificial Intelligence Enhance or Impede Spirituality?'** – with Signe M Cohen (University of Missouri) who has worked on mechanical instruments and automatons in ancient India, Muhammad U Faruque (University of Cincinnati) who has looked at the impact of digitalisation in the Islamic context, and Jenna Supp-Montgomerie (University of Iowa) who came to the discussion from a non-South Asian, Western-Christian perspective.

Chaired by Centre Director Alnoor Bhimani, the discussion was based on current trends where online platforms connect individuals in forums where spiritual experiences can be discussed, and digital applications are making religious resources like scriptures, sermons and educational materials accessible. AI and digital data appear to shape self-understanding and (re)-orient peoples' spiritual development.

Panelists discussed if and how mechanical/AI advances contribute to spiritual explorations and impact individuals' relationships with God; if machines affect divine experiences; did they limit or expand notions of the sacred; and could they become a substitute for established ideals of human spirituality? What made the discussion fascinating was that different speakers looked at the questions in historical and contemporary contexts, discussing the impact of 'mechanics' in human belief and spirituality.

A recording of this event is available on the Centre's website.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ATUL K SHAH, ALNOOR BHIMANI & ADEEL MALIK AT 'FAITH, FINANCE & ETHICS IN SOUTH ASIA: ARE THEY CONNECTED?', 29 MAY 2024.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SIGNE M COHEN, JENNA SUPP-MONTGOMERIE, ALNOOR BHIMANI & MUHAMMAD U FARUQUE AT 'DOES ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ENHANCE OR IMPEDE SPIRITUALITY?' (PART OF OUR 'TOUGH TALK' SERIES), 5 JUNE 2024.

FACT AND FICTION

The Centre's online book discussion series is now a staple component of our annual events calendar and attracts a loyal audience for all discussions. 'Fact and Fiction' has also allowed us to provide a platform for recently published titles to be discussed with authors and panelists from a variety of perspectives.

The new academic year started off with a discussion on an important but rarely discussed topic, '**Competition Law in South Asia**', focused on *Competition Law in South Asia: Policy Diffusion and Transfer* (2023) by Amber Darr (University of Manchester) in October 2023. Despite the specific nature of the topic, there was an animated discussion between the author and some panelists on the code and practices of competition law in countries in South Asia. Panelists included Joseph Wilson (McGill University, expert on Pakistan) and Dhanendra Kumar (former Chairman, Competition Advisory Services India) along with Hassan Qaqaya (expert on competition and consumer policies; University of Melbourne) and Eleanor Fox (expert on trade regulations at NYU), the latter two also being experts on competition law with a wider, global perspective. The Discussant at the event was Dina Waked (expert on comparative competition law, trade and regulations at Sciences Po, Paris), and it was chaired by Deputy Director Nilanjan Sarkar.

We continued our engagement with the art world with a fantastic discussion titled '**Making Art History Global**' in December 2023. Monica Juneja's *Can Art History be Made Global? Meditations from the Periphery* (2023) is a fascinating read, and the discussion focused on whether or not art history could become global through transculturation, rather than globalisation. Panelists included Annie Coombes (Birkbeck University of London), Deborah Hutton (The College of New Jersey) and Matthew Volgraaf (University of Basel) in conversation with author Monica Juneja

(Heidelberg University). The Discussant was Parul Dave Mukherjee (Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi), and the event was chaired by Deputy Director Nilanjan Sarkar.

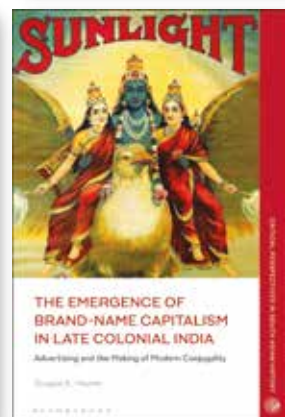
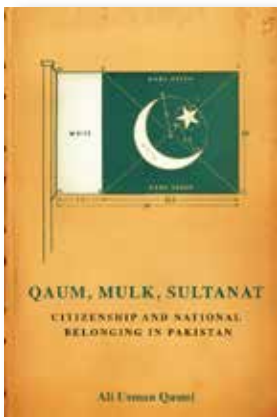
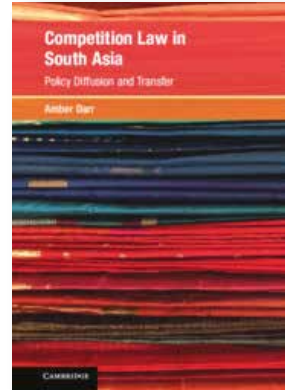
In Winter Term, we had 3 further book discussions: in January 2024, '**Brands, Adverts and Capitalism in Colonial India**' focused on Douglas Haynes' (Dartmouth College) *The Emergence of Brand-name Capitalism in Late Colonial India: Advertising and the Making of Modern Conjuality* (2022). Speakers David Arnold (University of Warwick), Ravinder Kaur (University of Copenhagen) and Prashant Kidambi (University of Leicester), with William T S Mazzarella (University of Chicago) as Discussant engaged with Haynes from multiple perspectives of advertising, product publicity, social and societal exclusions, colonial capitalism, market forces and – very importantly – gender. The event was chaired by Deputy Director Nilanjan Sarkar.

In March 2024, the Centre hosted '**Dynamism of Jihadism in Pakistan**', on Visiting Fellow Antonio Giustozzi's *Jihadism in Pakistan: Al-Qaeda, Islamic State and Local Militants* (2023). The discussion – with Abdul Basit (National University of Singapore), Farzana Shaikh (Chatham House, London) and Abubakr Siddique (Journalist) along with Antonio – focused on the connections, networks and overlaps in jihadist groups in Pakistan (and across the border in Afghanistan), how the nature of such groups have mutated over time and how they continue to operate by entrenching themselves in different

configurations on the margins of governed societies. The event was chaired by Deputy Director Nilanjan Sarkar.

Finally, in June 2024, in **'Being Pakistani, Becoming Pakistani'** we discussed Ali Usman Qasimi's recently published, award-winning *Qaum, Mulk, Sultanat: Citizenship and National Belonging in Pakistan* (2023), a historical-sociological study that delves deep into archives in Pakistan and Bangladesh (East Pakistan, 1947–71) to study a critical, interlinked question: does legality alone determine citizenship in a newly-born nation state, and what sense of belonging does that create to bind the nation together. Panelists included Zaib un Nisa Aziz (University of South Florida), Zehra Hashmi (University of Pennsylvania) and Tahir Kamran (Beaconhouse National University, Lahore) along with the author Ali Usman Qasmi (LUMS, Lahore). The conversation covered a lot of ground, including minorities and marginal groups, their 'citizenship' and their 'belonging'. The event was chaired by Deputy Director Nilanjan Sarkar.

Recordings of events (unless mentioned otherwise) are available on the Centre's website.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: NILANJAN SARKAR, DEBORAH HUTTON, MONICA JUNEJA, ANNIE COOMBES, MATTHEW VOLGRAFF & PARUL DAVE MUKHERJEE AT 'MAKING ART HISTORY GLOBAL' (PART OF OUR 'FACT & FICTION' SERIES), 1 DECEMBER 2023.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: NILANJAN SARKAR, TAHIR KAMRAN, ALI USMAN QASMI, ZEHRA HASHMI & ZAIB UN NISA AZIZ AT 'BEING PAKISTANI, BECOMING PAKISTANI' (PART OF OUR 'FACT & FICTION' SERIES), 12 JUNE 2024.

VERA ANSTEY STUDENT ESSAY COMPETITION

“ She was very good at games and very good in the social life of the School. What she saw in that fool Anstey I never could make out! She could buy and sell him & live by the profit in two seconds. Someone who came back — I can't remember the name — told me that she was running the whole economic department there in Bombay which I quite believe. ”

Lilian Knowles, Professor of Economic History to Director Professor William Beveridge, recommending Vera's hire at LSE in 1921.

This student essay competition was established in honour of Vera Anstey (1889–1976), alumnus and Reader in Economics at LSE. Vera had a lifelong interest in and association with South Asia, having lived in Bombay for several years, and upon her retirement from LSE in 1954, published *Introduction to Economics for Students in India and Pakistan* (1964).

The competition is open to all registered, full-time LSE Masters students in any course/department (they do not need to be studying South Asia-related courses/modules to enter the competition), including MRes, One-year Executive Masters & Joint Masters students.

Zaid Ahmed Abro (MSc in International Social and Public Policy) won the first prize (£250 Book Vouchers from Waterstones) for his winning essay titled '**Polling Agents: An Unlikely Agent**

for Development in South Asia' (for the topic '**Politics is a Barrier to Social Change in South Asia'**) drawing attention to the yeoman's duty that unsung common citizens (mostly government employees in various sectors) play in conducting elections at the grassroots level in countries like Pakistan and India, on the success of which rides the destiny of nations.

Commenting on the winning essay, the jury said:

'This essay stood out in its originality and focus. ... it emphasised the positive role an agonistic institution of partisan "polling agents" can play in ensuring free and fair elections. There are only two decision-making options for most societies — politics or violence. Rigged elections often result in large-scale violence in South Asia. The essay thoughtfully crafts a political solution to a problem in doing politics.'

The essay was published on the Centre's 'South Asia @ LSE' blog on 17 June 2024.



ZAID AHMED ABRO (MSc INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL & PUBLIC POLICY, 2023–24), WINNER OF THE VERA ANSTEY STUDENT ESSAY COMPETITION.



VERA ANSTEY (1889–1976), ALUMNUS & READER IN ECONOMICS, LSE.

 A screenshot of a blogpost from LSE. The header features the LSE logo and the title "Polling Agents: An Unlikely Agent of Development in South Asia" by Zaid Ahmed Abro, dated June 17th, 2024. The main text discusses the role of polling agents in South Asia, mentioning the Vera Anstey South Asia Essay Competition 2024. The post includes social media sharing icons (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn) and a "6 Shares" indicator. The text is set against a dark background with a white text box for the main content.

LSE

Zaid Ahmed Abro
June 17th, 2024

Polling Agents: An Unlikely Agent of Development in South Asia

Comments & sharing

Comments reading time: 10 minutes

For the topic 'Politics is a Barrier to Societal Development in South Asia' – Zaid Ahmed Abro, winner of the LSE South Asia Centre's *Vera Anstey South Asia Essay Competition 2024* – argues that polling agents in South Asia should be seen as agents of development, providing crucial transparency and voting education for the electorate at polling booths across the country on the day of the elections.

[Editor: Editorial interventions are marked with [square brackets]. Essays for the Vera Anstey Essay Competition were submitted in March 2024, prior to the start of the general elections in India.]

6 Shares

WINNING VERA ANSTEY STUDENT ESSAY COMPETITION BLOGPOST BY ZAID AHMED ABRO (MSC INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL & PUBLIC POLICY, 2023–24), 17 JUNE 2024, 'SOUTH ASIA @ LSE'.

RESEARCH RESOURCES

The Centre's commitment to providing free-to-use research resources for the academic community continued with our 'States of South Asia' digital maps, and additions to LSE Library's 'Traces of South Asia' online project. Very importantly, we were able to launch the Centre's 'Occasional Papers' series, showcasing recent research undertaken by Visiting Fellows to the Centre.

STATES OF SOUTH ASIA

With elections in Bangladesh, Pakistan and India between January–June 2024 (and Sri Lanka slated for later in the year), the Centre's Research Assistant Muhammad Usman Khan has been busy ensuring that all Big Data available on the 'States of South Asia' digital maps were updated as soon as possible once new official data was available. It was done in record time, scouring websites for official data, and ensuring that all updates were incorporated carefully and accurately.

But there's never a dull political moment in South Asia. As this *Report* goes to press, there has been tumultuous political change in Bangladesh, with the government elected in January 2024 overthrown by revolutionary civil protest and an interim government instated; we will need to update the Bangladesh map in due course with relevant data to reflect this change, depending on the availability of official data.

Updating the digital map of India is always a challenge given the volume of data that becomes available with each passing election. Once again, as we go to press with this *Report*, elections in 3 states are forthcoming later this year; these too will be updated in due course, as elections are concluded and official data is made available.

'TRACES OF SOUTH ASIA' WITH LSE LIBRARY

The 'Traces of South Asia' project is a unique, living (constant growing) online exhibition by LSE Library which aims to publicise LSE's archival collections relating to South Asia. Over the years, Deputy Director Dr Nilanjan Sarkar has worked with LSE Library, publishing blogposts from users of the archives on the Centre's 'South Asia @ LSE' blog to help publicise its collections. This year, two that deserve particular mention are Michele Benazzo's **'The East End, Local Archives and Global Histories: British Bangladeshi Political Activism in London'** (published 1 April 2024) which looked at the papers of the former Labour MP Peter Shore while researching the role of Bangladeshi diasporic politics in the United Kingdom especially around the time of its War of Liberation from (West) Pakistan in 1971, how they lobbied politicians and organised themselves to become a coherent voice demanding independence for Bangladesh.

The other blogpost, by intern Ayisha Uddin on **'Afia Begum, the "Sari Squad", Brick Lane and South Asian Women's Rights in the UK'** (published 22 July 2024), looked at the women's magazine *Mukti* which became the rallying voice for South Asian women in the 1970s–80s as a movement gradually emerged in response to the deportation of Afia Begum, a recently-widowed Bangladeshi woman, when her husband died

unexpectedly. This event triggered a wider movement by South Asian women fighting for fair and equal rights against the rising wave of anti-immigrant conservatism, especially in the Thatcher era.

OCCASIONAL PAPERS

As mentioned in last year's *Annual Report*, even with its extremely limited resources and labour, the Centre had decided to launch its 'Occasional Paper' series to make available the research conducted by Visiting Fellows at the Centre for LSE's academic community.

In October 2023, the Centre launched this series with Antonio Giustozzi's '**The Political Liability of Military Effectiveness: The CIA's Khost Protection Force in Afghanistan**' which looked in particular at this local militia group (one amongst many) who were infamous for the ruthlessness with which they pursued insurgents in southeast Afghanistan. Antonio, an LSE alumnus (PhD 1997), was Visiting Fellow at the Centre from 2022–24; he is an independent researcher and analyst with a special interest in conflicts, war, security, and strategic issues in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the region.

In June 2024, we published the second Occasional Paper, Ratan Kumar Roy's '**Digitalisation, Online Activism and Civic Politics in Contemporary Bangladesh**', based on research conducted by him as Charles Wallace Bangladesh Trust Visiting Fellow (January–April 2023) at the Centre.

As student-led 'Gen Z' protests have toppled the government of the Awami League in Bangladesh in August 2024, Ratan's paper gains increased importance, looking as it does on how interactive social media platforms have created a new landscape for alternative civic politics by enabling non-élite (especially youth) civic participation in everyday politics and political activism. During his fellowship, Ratan worked on online activism and civic politics in Bangladesh.

Occasional/Working Papers are available as free-to-download PDFs on the Centre's website.

VISITING FELLOWS

Visiting Fellows are selected on the basis of the relevance of their research to LSE, and how their Visitorship may benefit from being here. Whilst at the Centre, all Visitors participate in the Centre's and LSE's activities, write a post for the Centre's flagship 'South Asia @ LSE' blog and a Working Paper based on their research during their time here.

Dr Antonio Giustozzi, an LSE alumnus (PhD 1997) is an independent researcher and analyst with a special interest in conflicts, war, security, and strategic issues in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the region. As Visiting Fellow at the Centre from 2022–24, Antonio worked on jihadism in the subcontinent, and on the transition from jihadism to government in Afghanistan. He is the author of several books and edited volumes including, most recently, *Jihadism in Pakistan: Al-Qaeda, Islamic State and Local Militants* (2023). Antonio has participated in several events at the Centre, including an online Roundtable on 'The Future of Jihadism in Afghanistan'; he has also published two posts (on the Centre's 'South Asia @ LSE' blog) based on his research at the Centre: 'Taliban and the Future of the State in Afghanistan' (December 2022) and 'The Islamic State and the Taliban's Counter-terrorism' (June 2023), and an Occasional Paper titled 'The Political Liability of Military Effectiveness: The CIA's Khost Protection Force in Afghanistan' (October 2023); a second Paper is forthcoming.

THE CHARLES WALLACE BANGLADESH TRUST VISITING FELLOW

Dr Shafi M Mostofa (Associate Professor in the Department of World Religions, University of Dhaka) is a theologian and security studies scholar with particular interest in political Islam, authoritarianism, modern South Asian history and politics; his doctoral dissertation

was on Islamic militancy in Bangladesh from 2009–19. He was selected for his proposal on violent extremism and counter-measures in Bangladesh, focusing especially on newly-formed groups like the Jama'atul Ansar fil Hindal Sharqiya. As part of his Visiting Fellowship (January–April 2024), Shafi published a blog titled 'Bangladesh: Turmoil and Transition in a Fragile Democracy' on 26 February 2024 on the Centre's widely read 'South Asia @ LSE' blog, and was panelist in an online event in May 2024 on '**Bangladesh: Radical Politics, Extremism and the Way Forward**'. An Occasional Paper based on his research here will be published in due course.

THE CHARLES WALLACE MYANMAR TRUST VISITING FELLOW

Sang Hnin Lian was selected as Visiting Fellow under the auspices of the Charles Wallace Burma/Myanmar Trust, and was at the Centre in the summer of 2024 (May–August). Lian studied Political Science in India and International Relations in Thailand before returning to Myanmar. During his time at the Centre, Lian worked on policy-oriented interventions on the needs of marginalised Burmese students in countries in South Asia, with a particular focus on improving their experience of being expatriates in neighbouring countries.

THE CHARLES WALLACE PAKISTAN TRUST VISITING FELLOW

Dr Ayesha Jalil was Charles Wallace Pakistan Trust Visiting Fellow, and spent 3 months at the Centre (Jan–Apr 2024). A sociologist by training, Aisha's doctoral research was on patient satisfaction in public clinics in Lahore. Whilst at the Centre, she worked on the violation of the constitutional rights of inheritance and legal protection of women against domestic violence in Pakistan, and published a blogpost ('Tackling Economic Violence against Women in Pakistan') on the Centre's widely-read 'South Asia @ LSE' blog on 11 March 2024. Aisha will be participating in an event on paternalism in public health in South Asia in Winter Term 2024, and will submit a Working Paper in due course.

“ ... my Fellowship time at the Centre has greatly enhanced my research skills and knowledge with the help of different people I met and the discussions I had. ”

Sang Hnin Lian



FROM LEFT: AISHA JALIL, TIM BUTCHARD (CHARLES WALLACE TRUST) & SHAFI M MOSTOFA AT THE GARRICK CAFE, LSE, 5 MARCH 2023.

WORKING WITH LSE

As the Centre enters its 10th year, we are proud to have worked with several LSE academics and researchers, showcasing their expertise (whether direct, applied or comparative) across a wide range of topics. We have also worked very closely with LSE Library, publicising its archives relating to South Asia, and with generations of students, helping them in their activities and providing in-house training especially in Big Data research.

LSE EARLY CAREER ACADEMICS WORKSHOP

This year the Centre collaborated with Dr Julia Corwin (LSE Geography and Environment) for a series of termly workshops – for researchers and early career academics at LSE – where papers were pre-circulated, and then discussed in depth at each meeting, providing valuable peer feedback on current/ongoing research within a closed group.

In Autumn Term 2023, Doctorand Fizzah Sajjad (LSE Geography and Environment) spoke on **‘Real Estate Brokers, Remittance Capital, and the Transformation of Land and Housing Markets “Back Home”: The Case of Pakistan’**, based on her fieldwork and research for her PhD. Of particular interest to all of us was the use of social media in the real estate sector in Pakistan, and the role it plays in the transformation of land ownership especially in the diaspora, who are always looking to buy a piece of land back home.

Martin Bayly (LSE International Relations) spoke on his ongoing research with a draft paper titled **‘Pan-Asianism in Practice: Mahendra Pratap Singh and the Relational Sociology of Empire and Anti-Imperialism’** in Winter Term 2024, focusing on an Indian anti-imperialist crusader who travelled the globe, remaining under the radar of the British (and occasionally appearing

on the radar as well), part of the wide and successful network of internationalists across Europe and Asia who were fighting to overthrow colonial rule.

Julia Corwin’s forthcoming monograph ***Analog Labour in a Digital World*** (contracted for publication) was the focus of discussion in Spring Term 2024. Julia’s doctoral research focused on the relationship between commodities, labour and the environment, particularly on economies and cultures of waste and repair of commodities in contemporary India.

These events were not recorded.

‘TRACES OF SOUTH ASIA’

Over the last decade, Deputy Director Dr Nilanjan Sarkar has worked with LSE Library to publicise its South Asia archives – via exhibitions, online events, and blogposts – adding regularly to the ‘Traces of South Asia’ project.

This year, Michele Benazzo’s blog **‘The East End, Local Archives and Global Histories: British Bangladeshi Political Activism in London’** (published 1 April 2024) looked at the papers of the former Labour MP Peter Shore while researching the role of Bangladeshi diasporic politics in the United

Kingdom especially around the time of its War of Liberation from (West) Pakistan in 1971, how they lobbied politicians and organised themselves to become a coherent voice demanding independence for Bangladesh.

Another blogpost in July 2024 by intern Ayisha Uddin on **'Afia Begum, the "Sari Squad", Brick Lane and South Asian Women's Rights in the UK'** (published 22 July 2024) looked at the women's magazine *Mukti* which became the rallying voice for South Asian women in the 1970s–80s as a movement gradually emerged in response to the deportation of Afia Begum, a recently-widowed Bangladeshi woman, when her husband died unexpectedly, triggering a wider movement by South Asian women fighting for fair and equal rights against the rising wave of anti-immigrant conservatism.

LSESU PAKISTAN DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY

Every year, the Centre has advised the LSESU Pakistan Development Society on their flagship, and highly impressive, 'Future of Pakistan' conference, undoubtedly the most important students-led annual conference on Pakistan in the United Kingdom. This year's day-long conference – organised by President Ahmad Zeerak Rana and his team – was no less intense than earlier years, held at the iconic Old Theatre of LSE on 3 February 2024.

The conference had 2 panel discussions, and an 'In Conversation', starting off with a discussion on the fraught relationship between democratic forces and the military (which holds an iron grip on democratic processes) in Pakistan. The discussion had an especial relevance because the national elections in Pakistan were scheduled for later in the same week. With Chatham House South Asia expert

Farzana Shaikh as Moderator, **'Dilemma of Pakistan's Democracy: Accountability or Reconciliation?'** heard from Zubair Umar (former Governor of Sindh) and Raza Rumi (NYU & Ithaca College, editor of *Naya Daur*) on the complex, and chronic, challenges that Pakistan faces in its struggle to establish a democratic political order.

The second panel, titled **'Pakistan's Economic Growth Agenda: The Way Forward'**, focused on Pakistan's fragile economy and what may be ways forward for the country to stabilise itself and attract external start-ups/investment, whether from foreigners, diaspora or returnees. Moderated by LSE alumnus Ahmad Nauraz Rana (currently at The World Bank), entrepreneur Humza Jawaid (Founder, 'Bazaar Technologies') and economist Adeel Malik (Oxford) discussed practical issues as well as the policy interventions that would put Pakistan on the path of growth, making it more self-reliant and economically stable.

The conference ended with a conversation between Hon'ble Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan Mr Justice Athar Minallah and LSE alumnus Mustafa Yar Hiraj. Justice Minallah spoke on **'Unpacking Pakistan's Constitutional Crises: The Role of the Supreme Court'** (published on the 'South Asia @ LSE' blog on 22 April 2024) followed by a conversation with Mustafa Yar Hiraj (LSE alumnus) which dwelt on the contested identity of Pakistan's Constitution, and how and why its ethos and guarantees have been compromised over decades by several of its keepers, stifling a true spirit of democracy and the rule of law to prosper in modern Pakistan.



BLOGPOST ON PETER SHORE'S PAPERS, LSE LIBRARY (PART OF THE 'TRACES OF SOUTH ASIA' PROJECT) BY MICHELE BENAZZO (1 APRIL 2024), 'SOUTH ASIA @ LSE'.



FROM LEFT: AHMED NAURAZ RANA, HAMZA JAWAID, ADEEL MALIK, FAWAD HASAN FAWAD & ALIZ TÓTH AT A PANEL DISCUSSION ON 'PAKISTAN'S ECONOMIC GROWTH AGENDA: THE WAY FORWARD', FUTURE OF PAKISTAN CONFERENCE (ORGANISED BY LSESU PAKISTAN DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY), LSE, 3 FEBRUARY 2024.

MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

The Centre's success in making an impact is measured by the increasing number of followers on social media, the submission of posts for publication on 'South Asia @ LSE', and the number of readers of our blogposts each year. We have maintained a loyal audience, and the steady increase of numbers shows the success of the strategic streamlining of our outputs.

Our tagline – 'Unravelling South Asia to the World' – continues to be our most successful branding, creating a constant focus on the conscious intention of all our activities in the minds of our audiences. Alongside, our commissioning of special logos of national flowers to mark the 75th anniversary of the independence of various countries in South Asia (published in last year's *Annual Report*), which were used in all relevant communications drew special praise and attention for their uniqueness, attractiveness and novelty. No other Higher Education Institute/Centre in the world commissioned special logos for this landmark anniversary for five countries in South Asia – Bangladesh (2021), India and Pakistan (2022/23), Myanmar (2023) and Sri Lanka (2023/24).

'SOUTH ASIA @ LSE'

'South Asia @ LSE' remains the Centre's principal, free-to-use, online platform to make the latest research ideas on South Asia available globally. This year has been no different than earlier years, and no less exciting either.

We continued with the specially commissioned @75 blogposts for Myanmar and Sri Lanka in 2023/24, completing the cycle of 12 blogposts for each country. As always, some posts attracted more attention than others. We were also able to include a wide range of themes, and crucially, tie blogposts to events, which gave audiences a more connected, fuller picture of topics.

Our 'Myanmar @ 75' series was marked especially by an on-site exhibition in LSE's Atrium Gallery by LSE Doctorand Sara Wong (LSE international Relations) on the art of Chuu Wai, a Burmese artist in exile in Paris. Titled '**Not Another Protest Exhibition: Myanmar in Revolt and Feminist Art Practice**', the exhibition explored how art is and can be used to navigate repressive state practices in Myanmar, looking especially at the role played by women in resisting military rule in the country.

The Centre worked with Wong to organise a panel discussion ('**The Politics of Culture: Art & Resistance in Myanmar**' on 14 February 2024; *event not recorded*) that further explored the artist's work in the context of the ongoing civilian resistance to the military coup in Myanmar. Central to both the exhibition and panel discussion were the challenges posed by Wai's artworks to traditional/patriarchal cultural mores of Burmese society – including the *htamain* (wrap-around skirt worn by Burmese women) which has become a potent symbol of resistance of the younger generation in the ongoing civil war. So, we also published a blog titled "**Htamain at the Front: Breaking Tradition, Resisting the Coup in Myanmar**" by Htet Hlaing Win to complement Sara's blog on the exhibition titled '**Weaving Art and Resistance in Myanmar**', both published on 12 February 2024, to be read simultaneously.

This interconnected set of exhibition, event and blogposts attracted a lot of academic attention, and we were delighted to have been able to participate in them. Alongside, among the most

popular posts has been the personal, moving blogpost on Burmese Punk Rock singer Sküm (Ko Thet Khine) by Tobiasz Targosz titled **“Infernal Damnation”: Sküm, Punk and the Political in Burma**, published on 18 September 2023. The blog has been widely read and reposted because of the uniqueness of the content, rarely read in the context of contemporary Burma.

Our special blogposts to mark the 75th anniversary of Sri Lanka’s independence continued till January 2024 — addressing both historical and contemporary issues analytically and critically. Posts on lessons from Sri Lanka’s debt crisis (Coomaraswamy and Wignaraja, October 2023), on ‘truth’ in history-writing (following the proposal of the Online Safety Bill in Parliament) by Wettimuny in November 2023 discussed the potentially dangerous aspects of such a bill on history-writing, amidst the global statist tendency to try to determine ‘true’ and ‘false’.

Some blogposts hit a chord with readers more than others: on (in)dependence for Sri Lankans of different hues (Satkunanathan, September 2023), on the Veddahs’ right to their ancestral lands (Ranawana, December 2023) which touched upon the varying ways in which communities in Sri Lanka have experienced independence in the last 75 years, and Senaratne’s nuanced photo essay (14 August 2023) which looked at how the protests (*aragalaya*) that shook the country in August 2022 were, in fact, underlined by a steady and undeniable element of majoritarian nationalism, especially in its slogans.

The Centre takes care to ensure coverage of all countries in the region, and makes a special effort to acquire posts on Maldives, Myanmar and Nepal. This year, we were lucky to be able to publish a now widely-read post on Maldives’ foreign policy, and we published quite a few posts on Myanmar and Nepal. The list below represents the breadth of topics and countries

on which we publish academic blogposts, making ‘South Asia @ LSE’ rank amongst the top 10 (out of 40+) LSE blogposts.

- Surya Subedi, ‘Nepal-Britain Treaty of Friendship 1923: An International Legal Perspective’ (28 August 2023)
- Obaidullah Baheer, ‘The Unseen Emir of the Taliban’ (11 September 2023)
- Navjotpal Kaur, ‘Unveiling the Urgency: Solastalgia in Climate Change Studies in South Asia’ (30 October 2023)
- Elizabeth Colton, ‘Maldives’ Dexterous Diplomacy: Global Multilateralism as Foreign Policy’ (26 December 2023)
- Abdul Waheed and Tahir Naeem Malik, ‘Circular Causation of Modern Slavery in Pakistan’ (27 March 2024)
- Alexander Bubb, ‘The Imperial Press in Majuli and a Story of Northeast India’ (20 May 2024)
- Tharindu Udayanga Kamburawala, ‘Sri Lanka, the IMF and Pathways to Economic Stability’ (3 June 2024)
- Tluang Kip Thang, ‘The Coup d’état in Myanmar and Collective Punishment of Minorities’ (24 June 2024)

The Centre published a total of 54 blogposts in 2023/24, with a total readership of almost 400,000. ‘South Asia @ LSE’ remains our most far-reaching platform for knowledge exchange and impact, being available free to readers across the world.

See back cover for details to access the ‘South Asia @ LSE’ blog.

LSE

Navjotpal Kaur
October 30th, 2023

Unveiling the Urgency: Solastalgia in Climate Change Studies in South Asia

2 comments | 10 minutes

Estimated reading time: 10 minutes

As global climate emergency becomes real, academia is engaging with less known impacts of this crisis on vulnerable peoples. 'Solastalgia' looks at the emotional impact of climate induced displacement on people who have 'lost' their home as they knew it because of the climate crisis. Navjotpal Kaur considers the absence, and need, for this concept in South Asia – a region increasingly impacted by climate emergencies.

BLOGPOST ON SOLASTALGIA BY NAVJOTPAL KAUR (30 OCTOBER 2023), 'SOUTH ASIA @ LSE'.

LSE

Elizabeth Colton
December 26th, 2023

Maldives' Dexterous Diplomacy: Global Multilateralism as Foreign Policy

2 comments | 10 minutes

Estimated reading time: 10 minutes

As Cop28 ends in Dubai, Maldives is once again at the forefront of climate diplomacy with former President Nasheed being appointed as Secretary-General of the Climate Vulnerable Forum. Elizabeth Colton has been researching and writing on Maldives for a long time; in this post, she looks at Maldives' tactful and self-invested diplomacy in maintaining foreign relations across the globe over the decades, surrounded as it is by the growing interests of China and India – and being amongst the earliest nations to raise the threat of global warming and climate change.

BLOGPOST ON MALDIVES' DIPLOMACY BY ELIZABETH COLTON (26 DECEMBER 2023), 'SOUTH ASIA @ LSE'.

SENIOR ADVISORY BOARD

Nasser M MUNJEE (Chair, Advisory Board) (LSE BSc Economics 1974; MSc Economics 1975) is Chairman of Development Credit Bank, and Tata Motor Finance Ltd, both in India. Nasser is also on the Board of several public companies, and is involved with many others as Chairman, Member of the Board or Trustee including ABB Ltd, HDFC Ltd, Britannia Industries, Jaguar Land Rover plc, and the City of London.

Kaushik BASU (LSE PhD Economics 1976) is Professor of Economics and C. Marks Professor of International Studies at Cornell University. Basu has served as the Senior Vice-President and Chief Economist of the World Bank, and as Chief Economic Advisor to the Government of India (2009–12). He has taught at the Delhi School of Economics and has been Visiting Professor at various universities across the world.

Craig J CALHOUN is University Professor of Social Sciences at Arizona State University. Prior to this, he was President of the Berggruen Institute in Los Angeles (2016–19); Director & President of LSE (2012–16) where he remains Centennial Professor. He has also been President of the Social Science Research Council in New York (1999–2012), and University Professor at NYU (2004–12).

A Mushtaque R CHOWDHURY (LSE MSc Demography 1979) was until recently Vice Chairperson of BRAC, Dhaka where he started his career more than 40 years ago. He was the Founding Director of BRAC's Research & Evaluation Division, and was previously its Executive Director, alongside serving in several international organisations.

M Ali JAMEEL (LSE BSc Econ. 1991) is CEO of TPL Corp Limited, a leading conglomerate with operations in Pakistan and MENA. Six TPL Group companies are listed on the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX), one of which is the largest REIT in the country. He is also CEO of TPL Properties, and Sponsor Director of TPL IM, which is regulated by Abu Dhabi Global Market (ADGM). Ali has served on the Board of the State Bank of Pakistan, and is currently on the Board of Patients' Aid Foundation of Jinnah hospital, Karachi. He is a Fellow Member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of England and Wales.

Lata KRISHNAN (LSE BSc Economics 1981) is Founding Partner and Chief Financial Officer of Shah Capital Partners, USA. Krishnan co-founded SMART Modular Technologies (WWH) Inc. in 1989, and has also held corporate accounting and finance positions at Montgomery Securities, Arthur Andersen & Company LLP, and Hill Vellacott & Company in London, England. She is the Founder and current Co-Chair of the American India Foundation, and has held Director and Advisor posts on several Boards in the Finance and Accounts sectors.

Ratan N TATA is a businessman, philanthropist, investor and Chairman Emeritus of Tata Sons (holding company of the Tata Group), the Mumbai-based global business conglomerate. He has been awarded the Padma Bhushan (2000) and Padma Vibhushan (2008) by the Government of India, and The Honorary Knight Cross of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (2014) by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for his lifelong services to business and community. He was made Honorary Fellow of LSE in 2006.



THE IMPERIAL PRESS IN MAJULI, THE WORLD'S LARGEST RIVER ISLAND IN INDIA. THE INSCRIPTION ON IT READS: 'IMPERIAL PRESS – 1869 – B GARRETT – MAIDSTONE – BENJN. WINSTONE – 100 Shoe Lane – LONDON – ENGLAND'; PHOTOGRAPH © ALEXANDER BUBB; USED WITH PERMISSION.

LSE

Alexander Bubb
May 20th, 2024

The 'Imperial Press' in Majuli and a Story of Northeast India

1 comment | 4 shares | Estimated reading time: 10 minutes

A colonial era printing machine in the museum in Majuli – the world's largest river island – in India is the subject of this post by Alexander Bubb, who saw it on his visit to the museum earlier this year. How did it get there, what role did it play in Assam's identity, and the anti-colonial nationalist struggle in northeastern India?

FACULTY ADVISORY GROUP

The Faculty Advisory Group are current academic faculty at LSE; some are alumni as well. They serve as everyday Advisors to the Centre, meet annually, and advise on important issues concerning the Centre. They have also been actively involved in several of the Centre's events.

Mahvish AHMAD (Assistant Professor in Sociology) teaches Human Rights and Politics at LSE. Prior to this, she has been Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Western Cape, and earlier was a journalist covering military and insurgent violence in the Pakistan-Afghanistan region. Mahvish has a PhD in Sociology from the University of Cambridge, has co-founded the bilingual English-Urdu magazine *Tanqeed*, and co-convenes 'Archives of the Disappeared', a research initiative investigating the archiving and documentation of communities destroyed in acts of mass violence. She is currently completing a book manuscript on state violence in Pakistan's Balochistan province.

Chris ALDEN (Co-Director, LSE IDEAS; Professor of International Relations) has published, most recently, *Foreign Policy Analysis: New Approaches* (2017; co-authored), and *New Directions in Africa-China Studies* (2019; co-edited). He has held Visiting Fellowships at the universities of Cambridge, Tokyo and Pretoria, and at the Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, the École normale supérieure (Cachan), and Centre d'études et de recherches internationales, both in Paris. LSE IDEAS is LSE's foreign policy think tank which was voted the best university-affiliated think tank in the world by the 'Global Go to Think Tank Index' in 2019.

Christopher COKER (†5 September 2023 (Co-Director, LSE IDEAS) was Professor of International Relations at LSE till 2019, with a particular interest in military, defence and strategic studies, terrorism, and the US security policy; his last monograph was *Why War?* (2021). LSE IDEAS is LSE's foreign policy think tank which has been voted the best university-affiliated think tank in the world by the 'Global Go to Think Tank Index' in 2019.

Swati DHINGRA (Associate Professor of Economics) is an expert in international economics, trade policy, industrial organisation, and Brexit; she is also an Associate at the Centre for Economic Performance at LSE. Swati was awarded her PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and has been Fellow at Princeton University prior to joining LSE. Her research interests are in international economics, globalisation, industrial policy, firms in international trade, impact of trade agreements, and industrial development in India.

David LEWIS (Professor of Anthropology and Development) focuses on Bangladesh's politics and society, particularly on how the country has been impacted by decades of international development policies. He has worked extensively on the roles of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society actors in South Asia – mainly in Bangladesh but also in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. More recently, David has published on the Rohingya humanitarian refugee crisis in Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh.

Romola SANYAL (Associate Professor of Urban Geography) is interested in architecture, urban geopolitics, urban theory, housing and citizenship rights. She has written on the politics of space in refugee settlements in the global South with a particular focus on Lebanon and India, and is interested in the relationship between forced migration and urbanisation.

Naufel VILCASSIM (Professor of Marketing) is an expert on the use of economic theory and econometric techniques to analyse substantive marketing problems. His research has focused on problems in the areas of the marketing mix, competitive interactions and market structure. Naufel is also involved in a research project in India on evaluating the efficacy of mobile video training of health care workers assisting patients of Tuberculosis in completing their treatment of drugs.



CHRISTOPHER COKER (1953–2023), , PROFESSOR OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & CO-DIRECTOR, LSE IDEAS.

EVENTS

14 September 2023

Special Event

London and a Club called India

Speaker: Michael Cox (LSE)

Chair: Mukulika Banerjee (LSE)

Special on-site event at the India Club, 143 Strand, London WC2. This event was not recorded.

5 October 2023

Panel Discussion

Pakistan: Future(s) of Democracy

Speakers: Mahvish Ahmad (LSE), Asha Amirali (University of Bath), Yasser Kureshi (University of Oxford), Ayyaz Mallick (University of Liverpool)

Discussant: Umair Javed (Visiting Fellow; Lahore University of Management Sciences)

Chair: Nilanjan Sarkar (LSE)

12 October 2023

FACT & FICTION

Competition Law in South Asia

Speakers: Amber Darr (University of Manchester), Eleanor Fox (NYU School of Law), Dhanendra Kumar (former Chairman, Competition Advisory Services India), Hassan Qaqaya (University of Melbourne), Joseph Wilson (McGill University)

Discussant: Dina Waked (Sciences Po Law School, Paris)

Chair: Nilanjan Sarkar (LSE)

18 October 2023

Panel Discussion

Private Higher Education: Does it Help or Hinder South Asia?

Speakers: Nasreen M Kasuri (Founder & Chairperson, Beaconhouse School System, Lahore), Pramath Raj Sinha (Founder & Trustee, Ashoka University)

Chair: Alnoor Bhimani (LSE)

16 November 2023

In Conversation

Bangladesh since 1971: Economic Ideas and Contemporary Realities

Speaker: Kaushik Basu (Cornell University)

Discussant: Naila Kabeer (LSE)

Chair: Nilanjan Sarkar (LSE)

This event was in collaboration with Banglar Pathshala Foundation, Dhaka.

23 November 2023

Panel Discussion

The South Asian Gaze: Aesthetics, Politics and the Social

Speakers: Anoma (artist), Shilpa Gupta (sculptor), Waqas Khan (artist)

Chair: Alnoor Bhimani (LSE)

1 December 2023

FACT & FICTION

Making Art History Global

Speakers: Annie Coombes (Birkbeck University of London), Deborah Hutton (The College of New Jersey), Monica Juneja (Heidelberg University), Matthew Volgraff (University of Basel)

Discussant: Parul Dave Mukherjee (Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi)

Chair: Nilanjan Sarkar (LSE)

24 January 2024

Panel Discussion

Digitalisation and Financial Inclusion in India

Speakers: Jayshree Bajoria (Human Rights Watch), Mahmudul Hasan Laskar (University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya), Aditya Singh (Athena School of Management, Mumbai)

Chair: Alnoor Bhimani (LSE)

31 January 2024

FACT & FICTION

Brands, Adverts & Capitalism in Colonial India
 Speakers: David Arnold (University of Warwick), Douglas Haynes (Dartmouth College), Ravinder Kaur (University of Copenhagen), Prashant Kidambi (University of Leicester)
 Discussant: William T S Mazzarella (University of Chicago)
 Chair: Nilanjan Sarkar (LSE)

14 February 2024

Panel Discussion

The Politics of Culture: Art & Resistance in Myanmar
 Speaker: Chuu Wai (Burmese Artist)
 Discussants: Minn Tent Bo (Independent Researcher/Analyst), Gumring Hkangda (University of Manchester), Sara Wong (LSE)
 Chair: Nilanjan Sarkar (LSE)

This event was not recorded.

28 February 2024

In Conversation

Cultural Nationalism and the Making of Bangladesh
 Speaker: Fakrul Alam (University of Dhaka)
 Discussant: Gurpreet Mahajan (Jawaharlal Nehru University)
 Chair: Nilanjan Sarkar (LSE)

This event was in collaboration with Banglar Pathshala Foundation, Dhaka.

6 March 2024

Hybrid Lecture & Discussion

South by Southeast? Burma/Myanmar through Indonesian & Indian Ocean Lenses, Darkly
 Speaker: John Sidel (LSE)
 Discussants: Michael Charney (SOAS), Anja Karlsson (University of Gothenburg; online), Avinash Paliwal (SOAS)
 Chair: Nilanjan Sarkar (LSE)

This event was in collaboration with LSE Saw Swee Hock Southeast Asia Centre.

13 March 2024

Panel Discussion

Inequalities in South Asian Advicescapes
 Speakers: Rebecca Bowers (LSE), Luke Heslop (Brunel University London), David Lewis (LSE), Tasmiah Rahman (BRAC, Dhaka), Anjali Sarker (University of Oxford), Anushka Wijesinha (Centre for a Smart Future, Colombo)
 Co-Chairs: Alnoor Bhimani (LSE), Deborah James FBA (LSE)

This event was in collaboration with the LSE Atlantic Fellows for Social and Economic Equity (AFSEE) Program, part of the LSE International Inequalities Institute.

20 March 2024

FACT & FICTION

Dynamics of Jihadism in Pakistan
 Speakers: Abdul Basit (National University of Singapore), Antonio Giustozzi (LSE), Farzana Shaikh (Chatham House, London), Abubakr Siddique (Journalist)
 Chair: Nilanjan Sarkar (LSE)

LSE SOUTH ASIA CENTRE

**CULTURAL NATIONALISM
& THE MAKING OF BANGLADESH**

Fakrul Alam
Gurpreet Mahajan
Ahmed Javed Chowdhury
Nilanjan Sarkar

Wednesday, 28 February
3pm UK | 9pm Bangladesh

LSE SOUTH ASIA CENTRE

**SOUTH BY SOUTHEAST?
Burma/Myanmar through Indonesian &
Indian Ocean Lenses, Darkly**

Michael Charney
Anja Karlsson Franck
Avinash Paliwal
John Sidel
Nilanjan Sarkar

Wednesday, 6 March, 12noon
Pankhurst House (LSE) 2.01

SOUTHEAST ASIA



LSE **SOUTH ASIA CENTRE**

INEQUALITIES IN SOUTH ASIAN ADVICESCAPES

Rebecca Bowers / Luke Heslop
David Lewis / Tasmiah Rahman
Anjali Sarker / Anushka Wijesinha
Alnoor Bhimani / Deborah James

Atlantic Fellows FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EQUITY

LSE International Inequalities Institute

Wednesday, 13 March
3pm UK | 8.30pm Sri Lanka
9pm Bangladesh



LSE **SOUTH ASIA CENTRE**

PAKISTAN ELECTIONS 2024

Navigating the Impact on Pakistan's Democracy

Salman Akram Raja
Ayesha Siddiq
Zahid Mumtaz
Nilanjan Sarkar

LSE Department of Social Policy

Tuesday, 26 March
6.15pm UK | 11.15pm Pakistan
LSE CLEMENT HOUSE 3.02

26 March 2024

Hybrid Panel Discussion

Pakistan Elections 2024: Navigating the Impact on Pakistan's Democracy

Speakers: Salman Akram Raja (Lawyer and Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf Election Candidate; online), Ayesha Siddiqa (King's College London)
Discussant: Zahid Mumtaz (LSE)

Chair: Nilanjan Sarkar (LSE)

This event was in collaboration with LSE Department of Social Policy.

15 May 2024

Panel Discussion

Bangladesh: Radical Politics, Extremism and the Way Forward

Speakers: Barrister Tania Amir (Rights Activist and Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh), Jasmin Lorch (IDOS, Bonn), Shafi M Mostofa (Visiting Fellow; University of Dhaka), Ali Riaz (Illinois State University)

Discussant: Geoffrey Macdonald (Senior Advisor on Asia/Bangladesh, International Republican Institute, Washington DC)

Chair: Nilanjan Sarkar (LSE)

29 May 2024

Panel Discussion

Faith, Finance and Ethics in South Asia: Are they Connected?

Speakers: Adeel Malik (University of Oxford), Atul Shah (City, University of London)

Chair: Alnoor Bhimani (LSE)

5 June 2024

TOUGH TALK

Does Artificial Intelligence Enhance or Impede Spirituality?

Speakers: Signe M Cohen (University of Missouri), Muhammad U Faruque (University of Cincinnati), Jenna Supp-Montgomerie (University of Iowa)

Chair: Alnoor Bhimani (LSE)

11 June 2024

Hybrid Panel Discussion

The Indian Election & the Future of Progressive Politics

Speakers: Mukulika Banerjee (LSE), Christophe Jaffrelot (Sciences Po, Paris; online), Sanjay Kumar (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi)

Moderator: Robin Archer (LSE)

Chair: Alnoor Bhimani (LSE)

This event was in collaboration with The Ralph Miliband Programme at LSE.

12 June 2024

FACT & FICTION

Being Pakistani, Becoming Pakistani

Speakers: Zaib un Nisa Aziz (University of South Florida), Zehra Hashmi (University of Pennsylvania), Tahir Kamran (Beaconhouse National University, Lahore), Ali Usman Qasmi (Lahore University of Management Sciences)

Chair: Nilanjan Sarkar (LSE)

Recordings of events (unless mentioned otherwise) are available on the Centre's website.

THE TEAM



Alnoor Bhimani

Director



Nilanjan Sarkar

Deputy Director



Muhammad Usman Khan

Research Assistant
(LSE BSc Politics &
Economics, 2024)





THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■



**SOUTH ASIA
CENTRE**

Research at LSE ■

South Asia Centre

The London School of Economics
and Political Science
Houghton Street
London WC2A 2AE
United Kingdom

lse.ac.uk/south-asia-centre

+44 (0)20 7107 5330

southasiacentre@lse.ac.uk



@SAsiaLSE

BLOG

blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia



[facebook/SAsiaLSE](https://facebook.com/SAsiaLSE)



[@southasia_lse](https://twitter.com/southasia_lse)



YouTube [South Asia Centre LSE](https://www.youtube.com/SouthAsiaCentreLSE)

LSE South Asia Centre is part of LSE IDEAS. LSE IDEAS is LSE's Foreign Policy Think Tank which provides a forum that informs policy debate and connects academic research with the practice of diplomacy and strategy. LSE South Asia Centre and LSE IDEAS jointly work towards realising LSE Vision 2030 through their projects, working papers, reports, public and off-the-record events, and cutting-edge training programmes for government, business, and third-sector organisations.

lse.ac.uk/ideas