

Ata Mohammad Noor

I want to respond to your article on the attempt by the president of Afghanistan to dismiss me as governor of the province of Balkh ("Power-shedding", March 3rd). President Ashraf Ghani derives his legitimacy from a power-sharing agreement with Abdullah Abdullah, the Jamiat-e Islami party's candidate for the presidential election in 2014, to form a national unity government. Under this agreement President Ghani is bound to consult Jamiat-e Islami's leadership council on all key government appointments, but he unilaterally attempted to sack me as governor, triggering a stand-off between Jamiat-e Islami and the presidency.

Under my leadership over the past decade, Balkh has turned into an oasis of peace, security and development, despite receiving less foreign aid per person than the rest of the country. Balkh stands out as a successful case of development in the post-Taliban era where every dollar of aid has improved the delivery of services, basic infrastructure, good governance, the rule of law and has attracted private-sector investment.

There have been concerted efforts to discredit me and my legacy, as was the case with the allegations made against me in your article. Balkh raises nearly \$200m a year in direct taxes and customs duties that is paid into the central government's coffers. Revenue from Hairatan, a border crossing with Uzbekistan, constituted \$80m of the amount generated in the most recent fiscal year. Revenues from Hairatan port have nearly doubled in the past three years, as trade with our Central Asian neighbours increased to compensate for a drop in imports from Pakistan because of the deterioration of our bilateral relationship with Islamabad.

I would like to reiterate that every dollar of public money is accounted for, as it is my duty before God and the nation.

ATA MOHAMMAD NOOR
Governor of Balkh province
Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan

When King met Graham



Your obituary on Billy Graham stated that he had once bailed out Martin Luther King from jail (March 3rd). This has been widely reported recently, but it never happened. Whatever misinformation about this that is out there on the web can probably be traced back to an "authorised" biography of Graham.

I might add that while King was invited to appear at one of Graham's crusades in the summer of 1957 the two men were never close personal friends nor political collaborators. Veterans of the civil-rights movement do not view Graham as an active or visible supporter of their efforts during the 1960s.

DAVID J. GARROW
Pittsburgh

Malaysian politics

Your recent articles on Malaysia contained serious errors and reeked of an arrogant colonial mindset, disparaging our prime minister, government, police, judiciary, election commission, media and even our voters ("Stop, thief!", "Tilting the playing field", March 10th).

For example, America's Department of Justice never accused Najib Razak, the prime minister, of "siphoning" off funds, nor has Mr Najib ever suggested that the funds were a "gift from an unnamed admirer". In fact, the prime minister and numerous officials have stated that the funds—the vast majority of which were returned—were a donation from the royal family of Saudi Arabia. This has been confirmed by the Saudi foreign minister, who has publicly

stated that the funds were "a genuine donation with nothing expected in return" and that the Saudi authorities consider the matter closed.

Separately, to suggest that the redrawing of electoral boundaries to account for population growth is somehow "rigging the system" reveals your double standards for Western countries and the rest of the world. Your allegation would imply that numerous democracies are guilty of the same charge, not least Britain, where significant constituency changes are expected in advance of the next election. In Malaysia these changes were proposed and implemented by the independent Election Commission and subsequently approved by the judiciary, whose impartiality is evidenced by the fact that it frequently rules against the government and senior ministers.

Since Najib Razak took office in 2009, Malaysia's gross national income has increased by more than 50%, 2.3m jobs have been created, unemployment and inflation have been kept low and poverty reduced significantly. Indeed, the Malaysian economy is growing at such a fast rate that the World Bank had to increase its estimates for our growth three times over 2017, to 5.8%. The government's plan for the economic well-being and security of Malaysia and its people is delivering.

This is the true story of Malaysia. Your reporting appears to have been based exclusively on falsehoods pushed by opposition parties and their sympathisers for political gain ahead of the coming election.

DATO' AHMAD RASIDI HAZIZI
High commissioner of Malaysia
London

Who's counting?

The problem with saying that the American taxpayers' exposure to housing is "hidden off the government's balance-sheet" is that if the federal government actually had a balance-sheet then this and other liabilities would doubt-

less appear on it ("Tackling Fannie and Freddie", February 24th). The real problem is that unlike some other countries, the American government still keeps its public accounts on a purely cash basis. In New Zealand, the Public Finance Act of 1989 requires its government's accounts to be prepared according to generally accepted (private-sector) accounting practice, so that its annual accounts now include a balance-sheet that consolidates the government's financial position, including even contingent liabilities.

Almost immediately this drew attention to such unfunded liabilities as the defined-benefit public superannuation obligations in respect of public-sector employees and the government's housing liability in the event of a severe earthquake. Both led to prompt policy changes.

Although far from straightforward to implement, the seemingly simple step of adopting private-sector accounting standards would shed light on many public liabilities, including those for American housing.

DAVID CAYGILL
Former minister of finance
Christchurch, New Zealand

Oh my darling...

Johnson suggests that it is not possible to say to one's beau "I love she and she loves I" (March 3rd). Fortunately, Tom Lehrer did not consider this a restriction when he penned his reimagining of the folk song "Clementine". His last stanza culminated in:

"But I love she, and she loves me
Enraptured are the both of we
Yes, I love she and she loves I...
And will through all eternity!"

DAVID MAERZ
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