LAST SPEAKER? Koro, discovered in 2008, is spoken by about a thousand people in Arunachal Pradesh and belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family. A team, seen recording one of its speakers, has found that Koro, which has not been written down, is distinct from all other languages in its family.

Bid to document endangered languages

Lucy Tobin

Vou'll never again hear anyone I speaking Laghu, and anyone yearning to communicate in Old Kentish Sign Language is out of luck: it, too, has gone the way of the dodo. But there's still a chance to track down a conversation in Gamilaraay, or Southern Pomo — if you're prepared to trek to visit to one the few native Americans still speaking it in California. Of the 6,500 living languages currently being used around the world, around half are expected to be extinct by the end of this century.

Online project

It was concern about the cultural and historical losses that result from a language disappearing that inspired the World Oral Literature Project, an online collection of some of the 3,500-plus "endangered languages" struggling for survival in the world.

The heart of the project [http:// www.oralliterature.org], run by Cambridge University, is a large database listing thousands of languages alongside details such as where they are spoken and by whom, plus audio clips. On the site, surfers can discover that Laghu was a language spoken in the Solomon Islands until it disappeared in 1984, Old Kentish Sign Language was a precursor to the modern-day version, and Gamilaraay is still used by the Kamilaroi tribe of New South Wales.

The project is the brainchild of Mark Turin, a research associate at Cambridge University's Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. He grew up in London speaking Dutch and English and had planned to study linguistics at university, but on a gap year in Nepal realised he was interested in "what language unlocked, not just the nuts and bolts", and from the recordings because they switched to anthropology. He is fast didn't know what to do with them, becoming the Bear Grylls of his field, having trekked all over the world for

'Most are primarily oral'

"We know very little about most of the world's languages, and an incredible amount about the histories and changes of a handful of western European languages." Turin explains. And he has devoted his academic career to trying to open up little-known languages. "Most endangered languages are primarily oral, and are vehicles for the transmission of a great deal of oral culture," he says. "That's at risk of being lost when speakers abandon their languages in favour of regional, national or international tongues.

So the World Oral Literature Project aims to document vanishing languages — and everything about the culture and society they convey before they disappear. Its database used three major sources to collate the information about the disappearing languages, including Unesco's Atlas of the World's Languages in Limited, 2011

Danger [http://www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas/]. About 150 of its listed languages are in an "extremely critical" condition, where the number of known living speakers has slipped to single figures, or even just

"As soon as a scholar declares a language to be extinct, you get a phone call from someone furious who says 'my mother still speaks it'," Turin says. "But in a way, these corrections are all part of the process of drawing attention to the cause and the sense of urgency involved in careful documentation and description of endangered speech forms the world The project also provides funds for local fieldworkers in countries including Malawi, India, Mongolia and Colombia to collect data and recordings about little-spoken languages. In the past, Turin says, major collections of recordings were lost because they weren't deemed important. He sees the new site as a safe haven" for fieldwork on languages that might otherwise be lost. The vast majority of tapes are just kept in dusty boxes, but to put them on our database we digitise and hopefully future-proof them," he adds.

"All manner of people have been getting in touch to give us their colections, including missionaries, retired scholars and community activists." One early donor was Reverend John Whitehorn, a former missionary and Cambridge linguist who lived with an indigenous community in Taiwan in the 1950s. "When he came back to England, he walked into Cambridge's Museum of Anthropology and said, 'I've got books, textiles and tape recordings, are you interested?' The museum took it all apart Turin explains. "He went home and stored his collection around the house in carrier bags, where they staved until he walked into my office with the bags under his arm, and asked, 'do you want them now?' The tapes are brilliant, with songs and interviews and linguistic information that might otherwise have disappeared." The database is currently updated exclusively by academics (though users are encouraged to send in contributions), but Turin hopes that it will ultimately become a Wikipedia-style web 2.0 project "that people want to contribute to " with user uploads, recordings and discussion to help keep languages alive. To that aim, Turin organises lectures and workshops for linguists, librarians, academics and members of the public to discuss the best strategies for collecting and protecting languages and their research.

But he worries that, in academia, funding pressures mean the importance of languages is being overlooked. — © Guardian Newspapers

>> The fourth paragraph of an article "Hard questions about soft questions" (February 21, 2011) said: "There was in fact an auction of spectrum - a successful one. Only it was not conducted by the government but by its corporate sector cronies who gave it away for a pittance." It should have been "There was in fact an auction of spectrum - a successful one. Only it was not conducted by the government but by its corporate sector cronies who got it for

>>The second paragraph of the news item, "Report sought on status of shelters for homeless" (February 16, 2011) said: "...the Supreme Court has directed the Chief Secretaries of four States to submit a report to it by March 5 on the status of such shelters [for the homeless] and the amenities provided.' The same point was highlighted in the strapline. The Correspondent clarifies that the States concerned are Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.

>> The display, "Statistical Highlights," accompanying the Sport Page report, "Thumping 10-wkt. win for New Zealand, (February 21, 2011), erroneously gave the headline "NEW ZEALAND vs CANADA" for the highlights pertaining to the New Zealand vs Kenya cricket match.

It is the policy of *The Hindu* to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page.

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No longer a man the West can do deals with

His former university distances itself from Seif al-Islam el-Qadhafi — he had a role in nuclear talks and in Megrahi's release, convicted in the Lockerbie bombing case.

Ian Cobain, Amelia Hill and Kartik Mehta

ith his flawless English, his expensive Italian suits and his place at the London School of Economics (LSE), Seif al-Islam el-Qadhafi appeared to be a man with whom the West could do business: a man who could smooth access to his country's vast mineral resources while avoiding the need to deal with his famously capricious father.

As State security forces were reported to be firing relentlessly into crowds of civilian protesters on February 21, and with Qadhafi Jr appearing on television to threaten a civil war in which the regime "will fight to the last minute, until the last bullet," many of his erstwhile associates were questioning their friendships with him.

The LSE was quick to distance itself from Seif on February 21, issuing a statement in which it said the university had had a number of links with Libya, but that "in view of the highly distressing news from Libya over the weekend of February 19-20, the school has reconsidered those links as a matter of urgency".

Although the LSE had accepted £1.5m from the Qadhafi International Charity and Development Foundation, an organisation headed by Seif — some of which was to finance "a virtual democracy centre" — the university stressed that it was to be paid over five years, and only £3,00,000 has been received to date. "In current difficult circumstances across the region, the school has decided to stop new activities under that programme, the statement said. The LSE has also received scholarship funding in return for advice given to the Libyan Investment Authority in London. "No further receipts are anticipated," the university

Reactions

Professor David Held, an academic advisor to Seif Qadhafi during his four years at the LSE, said: "Watching Seif give that speech — looking so exhausted, nervous and, frankly, terrible — was the stuff of Shakespeare and of Freud: a young man torn by a struggle between loyalty to his father and his family, and the beliefs he had come to hold for reform, democracy and the rule of law. The man giving that speech wasn't the Seif I had got to know well over those years." The university's move to break its financial links to the regime in Tripoli did nothing to silence criticism, however. Raheem Kassam, director of the antiradicalisation group Student Rights, said: "LSE has the most market-driven fund-raising model there is in the U.K. Has that model reduced them into a sim-Qadhafi's arrival at the LSE in 2002 may in which a U.S. diplomat notes that "creating the appearance of useful employment for al-Qadhafi's offspring has been an important objective for the regime".

Shortly before he arrived, apparently with the blessing of the late Fred Halli-

day, professor of international relations, he startled some of the academic staff by insisting that it was his father, and not Anthony Giddens, emeritus professor at the university, who created the concept of the third way, then a pet philosophy of Tony Blair.

In the introduction to his doctoral dissertation on global governance, published in 2008, Qadhafi wrote: "I shall be primarily concerned with what I argue is the central failing of the current system of global governance in the new global environment: that it is highly undemocratic." The purpose of his dissertation. he added, was to analyse "how to create more just and democratic global governing institutions," focussing on the importance of the role of "civil society."

Approached MI6

Six months after arriving in the U.K., and with U.S.-led forces about to invade Iraq, he is said to have approached MI6 to inform the agency that his father's regime was prepared to abandon its nuclear weapons programme. The contact led to negotiations between Libya, Britain and the U.S. which saw the programme dismantled, and the Qadhafi regime begin to be allowed in from the

While studying for his PhD, Seif enjoyed a life of considerable luxury in one of London's wealthiest and most prestigious suburbs. In August 2009 Qadhafi bought his son a £10m house in north London. Inside the neo-Georgian eight bedroom mansion, Seif could relax in his own swimming pool sauna room, whirlpool bath and suede-lined cinema room.

On February 21, the entourage of blacked-out cars parked on Seif's driveway had disappeared and there was less need for the forest of CCTV cameras or the private security team who had been on hand to protect him at all times.

Lockerbie

During his time in London Qadhafi mixed socially with Lord Mandelson and the financier Nathaniel Rothschild, and was said to be on friendly terms with the Duke of York. He played a leading role in talks that led to the 2009 release of Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, the man convicted of the 1988 Lockerbie bombing in which 270 people died. While flying Megrahi home to Libya on a private jet, Qadhafi Jr gave a television interview in which he said the release had been linked to lucrative business deals

Mandelson later insisted any suggestion that the British government had struck a deal and then instructed the Scottish government to release Megrahi was wrong, implausible "and actually quite offensive."

A review of documentation relating to ple gun for hire?" An explanation for the release conducted by the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Gus O'Donnell, reported be found in one of the WikiLeaks cables, earlier this month that the British government had been anxious to avoiding harming the country's commercial interests, and that there would be "severe ramifications for U.K. interests" if Megrahi was to die in prison.— © **Guardian** Newspapers Limited, 2011



FOCUS: After his threat of civil war, associates of Seif al-Islam el-Qadhafi — son of Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi, seen in this 2010 file picture — have started distancing themselves from him. - PHOTO: REUTERS

U.S. cables' insights into Oadhafi's family

Ian Black

The leader of the Libyan revolution fractious" family that is powerful, wealthy, dysfunctional and marked by internecine struggles, according to U.S. diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks. The documents shed light on his eight children.

Muammar Qadhafi The patriarch, now 68, was described by U.S. ambassador to Tripoli, Gene Cretz, in 2009 as a "mercurial and eccentric figure who suffers from severe phobias, enjoys flamenco dancing and norseracing, acts on whims and irritates friends and enemies alike." Qadhafi has an intense dislike or fear of staying on upper floors, and prefers not to fly over water, the cables add.

Safiya (nee Farkash) Qadhafi's second wife travels by chartered jet in Libya, with a motorcade of Mercedes vehicles waiting to pick her up at the airport to take her to her destination, but her movements are limited and discreet. Hails from Benghazi, the centre of the rebellion.

Seif al-Islam Second-eldest son. Cables claim at odds with siblings Muatassim, Aisha, Hannibal, and

Sa'adi Third-eldest son. "Notoriously ill-behaved Sa'adi has a troubled past, including scuffles with police in Europe (especially Italy), abuse of drugs and alcohol, excessive partying, travel abroad in contravention of his father's wishes.

Former professional footballer (a single season with Perugia in Italy's Serie A league, he owns a significant share of al-Ahli, one of the two biggest soccer teams in Libva, and has run Libya's football federation). An engineer by training, Sa'adi was briefly an officer in a special forces unit. Used troops under his control to affect the outcome of business deals. Owns a film production company.

Reported to have been involved in crushing the protests in Benghazi.

Muatassim Fourth-eldest son. Father's national security adviser and until recently a rising star.

Hannibal Chequered history of unseemly behaviour and public scuffles with authorities in Europe and elsewhere. Arrest in Geneva over alleged beating his servants led to a bilateral spat, in which the Swiss were forced to back down under threat of withdrawal of Libyan investments. Is the fifth eldest son.

Khamis Qadhafi's sixth son and the "well-respected" commander of a special forces unit — 32nd battalion or Khamis brigade that effectively serves as a regime protection unit and was reportedly involved in suppressing unrest in Benghazi. Trained in Russia.

Aisha Daughter who mediates in family disputes ands runs NGO. Reported to have financial interests in a private clinic in Tripoli, one of two trustworthy facilities that supplement the unreliable healthcare available through public facilities.

Muhammad The eldest son, but by Qadhafi's first wife. Heads the Libyan Olympic committee that now owns 40 per cent of the Libyan Beverage Company, currently the Libyan joint venture Coca-Cola franchisee. Also runs general post and telecommunications committee.

Saif al-Arab Least publicly known of the eight children. Reportedly lives in Munich, where it is claimed he pursues ill-defined business interests and spends much time partying.

Like all the Qadhafi children and favourites is supposed to have income streams from the national oil company and oil services subsidiaries. A seventh son, Milad Abuztaia, is an adopted nephew. (Ian Black is the Guardian's $Middle\ East\ editor.) - ©$ **Guardian Newspapers Limited,**

In Libya, the succession question

There exists a recipe for instability and chaos, and civil society is virtually non-existent.

Ian Black

No obvious successors or opposition movements are waiting to take over Libya if Muammar Qadhafi is forced from power after four decades in which political dissent was crushed and society

Academics, analysts and diplomats agree that until recently his most likely heirs were his sons, primarily the reformist-minded Seif al-Islam. But that option appears to have disappeared after Seif's TV address warning of "civil war" while promising reforms late on February 20.

Benghazi a centre of dissent

"Seif was considered the most prowestern and most liberal of the family and most in touch with youth – and he blew it." said veteran Libva-watcher Charles Gurdon of Menas Associates. "Any idea that he could take over has now gone." Qadhafi destroyed any hope for his sons' succession by playing them off against each other, argued George Joffe, a Cambridge University Maghreb expert. "If he goes, the whole family goes." Opposition in Libya is fragmented regionally and there is little sign of organised anti-regime activity at the national level. Benghazi, in the impoverished east has long been a centre of dissent and calls for a constitution. Tripoli has traditionally been quiescent, if resentful of Qadhafi's orders to move government offices from the capital to his home town of

'Libya a special case'

But previously unknown individuals are now emerging to organise protests as unrest spreads in Tripoli. Exiled groups such as the National Front for the Salva-



DIFFERENT: In Egypt, Jordan or Bahrain, you can construct scenarios about what might happen after an uprising.' It is perceived to be different in Libya. Protesters outside the White House in Washington, calling for the ouster of the Libyan leader.- PHOTO: AP

tion of Libya are thought to enjoy little greeted with placards saying "Political support among the country's 6.5 million

Conventional politics was abolished by the leader's "Green Book" and replaced by people's committees and the general people's congress — a sort of parliament. When Hafez al-Assad, Syria's President and the Ba'ath party leader, visited Libya in the 1970s he was

parties are treason".

If the Qadhafi regime falls, anyone associated with it would be tainted. "There's no one whose face is known on TV who isn't associated with Qadhafi," said another old Libya hand. A possible exception could be Shukri Ghanem, a former Prime Minister and now head of the national oil corporation.

"Libva is a special case," said a former Tripoli-based diplomat. "In other countries - Egypt, Jordan or Bahrain - you can construct scenarios about what might happen after an uprising. In Libya you can see only instability, chaos and

Takeover by the army looks unlikely. Qadhafi, a military man himself when he seized power and overthrew the monarchy in 1969, deliberately kept the army weak and refused for long periods to issue it with ammunition. The regime is protected by special battalions like the one commanded by his son Khamis, said to have been crushing protests in Benghazi. Civil society is virtually non-existent and the business sector still young and weak though angry about the corruption of the Qadhafi family and their favourites.

Reformist activity was led by Seif al-Islam through his Qadhafi charitable foundation. He did some work promoting human rights and semi-independent media but met resistance from the old guard in the revolutionary committees and the security services.

No one seriously expects Islamists to play a big role in the post-Qadhafi era. The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, an al-Qaeda affiliate which sent many young men to fight in Afghanistan and Iraq, was defeated, its members now either in prison or freed and pardoned. The mosques are carefully monitored and generally tame.

Libya's once powerful tribes, experts predict, could become more significant players in a Qadhafi-free future. "The tribes will be important and there will be a combination of old secular opposition with an Islamist element," said Gurdon. © Guardian Newspapers Limited,

HY-RSTGHY