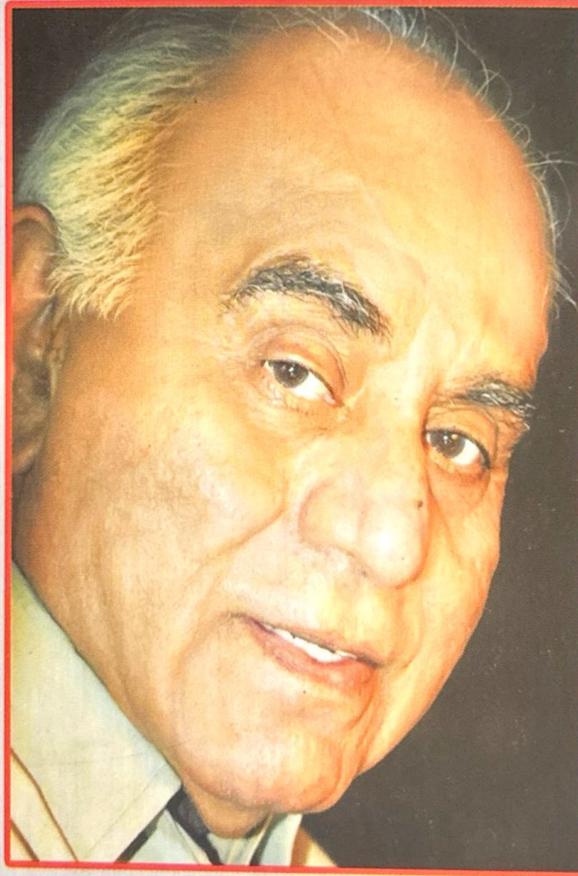


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Views and Comments

Vol 2



Naeem Tahir

In

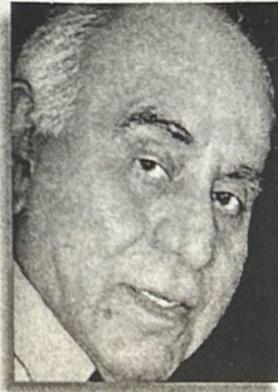
Daily Times

Foreword

Justice (R) Dr. Javed Iqbal

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Foreword



Naeem Tahir is a very well-known name. I knew him as the secretary, Pakistan Arts Council Alhamra, Lahore when he was appointed to this position after the departure of Mr. Faiz Ahmed Faiz. I was teaching in the Law College and was actively writing stage dramas. Naeem Tahir has continued in life very positively and distinguished himself in many fields. To start with, his development of Alhamra Art Centre Lahore, Development of National Art Gallery Islamabad (PNCA), his active

association with PTV as Principal Central Television Institute, his contribution to extend Pakistan Television reach to USA and his leadership in Cultural Exchanges and Cultural Diplomacy have been known. He is also Chairman of Unesco Theatre Institute for Pakistan. However Naeem Tahir has wider experience of life. He has been a successful exporter and Vice President of Pakistan Carpet Manufacturers Association, a successful Industrialist and Chairman of Pakistan Fruit Processors Association and in close contact with politics.

His passion for writing and research has continued all along. His most important research work is on the Pre-History of the People of Indus Valley and the epic stage play "Sail e Rawan" the struggle of freedom in the subcontinent. He continued to write for Radio, TV, and Newspapers/Magazines. He became a valuable contributor as a weekly columnist in *The Daily Times*.

This present collection primarily contains his articles written in the Daily Times since June 2011. I usually read his comments with interest. His writings are objective, constructively critical, and occasionally have a touch of humour and satire. His style makes his articles readable and enjoyable at the same time. With the wealth of experience and exposure to life, he brings a lot to the reader and it is good that at his mature age he has decided to share his experiences and thoughts with the readers in Pakistan and abroad. I also love listening to his rare recordings of the

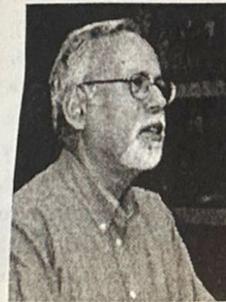
verses of Allama Iqbal in unique recitation and musical composition guided by distinguished men like Mr. Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Sufi Ghulam Mustafa Tabassum.

I am sure Naeem Tahir's writings will be read with interest and will be very useful as a chronicle of his times.

Jaidev
9th Sept. 2013

Preface

Naeem Tahir in his new avatar



To my and previous generations of Pakistanis, Naeem Tahir needs no introduction, although I am not equally confident of succeeding generations' 'memory'. So just in case, let me summarise. Naeem Tahir has been a central figure in the cultural life of Pakistan, stretching back to the 1950s, a period from which I too can trace his association with my family. When a pioneering group of intellectuals comprising Imtiaz Ali Taj, Mumtaz Daultana, Abdur Rehman Chughtai and my late father, Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice S. A. Rahman decided to set up Alhamra in Lahore in 1949 as an arts centre (currently called the Lahore Arts Council but popularly still remembered as Alhamra), they paved the way for succeeding generations of arts practitioners to enrich the cultural life of the city and the country, amongst whom Naeem Tahir's contributions over the decades to stage, radio, television and film as an actor, producer, director and trainer deserve pride of place.

Little did I know that I was destined to play a small part in helping Naeem Tahir, who was a familiar figure to me and my siblings when we were growing up, to emerge in yet another avatar – a newspaper columnist. Given his rich record in the cultural field (and subsequently his success as a businessman), it seemed to my ever curious mind, given to new and interesting departures, that the readers of Daily Times may have a lot to learn from Naeem Tahir's rich and varied life experience. I therefore, took opportunistic advantage of Naeem Tahir's visit to me not long after I took over as Editor, Daily Times, to invite him to write for us. Normally I would have been expected to suggest that he focus on cultural themes given his background, but I am always reluctant to confine writers to one or a few fields. I therefore gave him carte blanche to range over a universal array of subjects, following wherever the muse may take him.

Saturday, June 11, 2011

Radicalisation everywhere

Have we lost the distinction between a true peaceful Muslim and a Talibanised individual? Have we all gotten terribly confused? Do we not realise how different the Quranic message and the Salafis' extremist interpretation, followed by Osama bin Laden and his disciples, are?

You call the mobile number of an acquaintance and what may you hear is recitation from the Holy Quran or a naat (hymn). The first impression is that this person, having the recitation of the Holy Quran as his 'call tune', is very pious or religious because he/she is reminding us of the virtues of listening to the Quran. However, one wonders about the location of the phone when the bell rings. Could it be in a bathroom? Could the person be sitting on the toilet throne? Could the phone be lying at a place not suitable for the recitation of the Quran? Such caller tones — recitations from the Holy Quran — are an exploitation of public sentiments that hold Islam in reverence, and are commercially beneficial to the seller of the recording as a phone 'tune'. The person who buys it perhaps feels that he is doing a service to the religion by reminding others. In fact, he promotes commercial exploitation. By propagating this misplaced religiosity, the person prepares the bed of a radical nursery. Buying and playing the tune, both have negative connotations. There is a strong chance of disrespect to the recitation. Even when the phone is answered, the recitation is abruptly cut off — not a mark of respect. The person who opted to adopt such a tune is falsely relieved of his duty to religion. His primary duty is clear personal understanding and actions according to the message of the Quran, and not just making others listen to a tune. The only purpose it can serve is the strengthening of a radicalised mindset.

The attributes of God Almighty written on pieces of tin and nailed to trees is a common sight. Soon these were dotted with bird droppings. In a windstorm, some of these may well fall onto the roadside. Why did anyone think it necessary to display the attributes of the Almighty on trees? Two possible reasons: a) he obtains some sort of business benefit in manufacturing and installation because the person who is given the proposal will find it hard to refuse for fear of being labelled un-Islamic,

and b) to create a mindset by showing religious symbols and overwhelming passersby. Both these purposes serve the ruthless attempt of financial benefit and subtle radicalisation.

Several Urdu newspapers use Quranic verses in their texts somewhere or the other. Is it not exploitation to sanctify a commercial daily newspaper by sticking in Quranic verses? We all know the use these newspapers are put to later on. Mostly trampled, made into envelopes for eatables and then thrown into the wastepaper basket. Is it okay to let the name of the Almighty or a part of his message be treated in this way? The only thing achieved by the publisher is perhaps commercial advantage by appearing 'acceptable' to a public that holds religion dear to its heart. In a quiet way, such newspapers or magazines try to add 'sanctity' to their publications and influence the reader's mindset.

I have also seen posters carrying the 'Bismillah' phrase and lying on roadsides being trampled. It is a common sight for someone to stop beside your car at a road crossing and try to sell the Ayatul Kursee (Verse of the Throne) or other such material, and you buy it with a mixed feeling of charity and religious duty. In fact, it serves none of these purposes; the tablet only hangs on the rear view mirror, promotes a radicalised display and increases the profit margin of the manufacturer. These tablets are not thrown away because of 'fear'. Fear has always been an instrument of oppression used by the extremists. Islam is love. Let us not mix Islam with fear and serve someone else's purpose.

Some time ago, one of my friends claimed that now 97 percent of the people in our public have a Talibanised attitude. I laughed at his exaggeration. But, three days ago, I saw a photograph in an English daily of a person wearing a typical white cap and a beard, indulging in some wall chalking graffiti that read, "Talibanisation is the only way for the survival of this nation." I had to pause and think about my friend's estimate. Maybe he was right.

Have we lost the distinction between a true peaceful Muslim and a Talibanised individual? Have we all gotten terribly confused? Do we not realise how different the Quranic message and the Salafis' extremist interpretation, followed by Osama bin Laden and his disciples, are?

I say 'everywhere' in the title of this piece because radicalisation is deeply infested. In the courts, terror suspects are allowed to get away more often than not usually on the plea of lack of evidence! Would a trained terrorist leave a trail of evidence behind for the convenience of prosecutors? Consider also the fact that the known killer of Salmaan Taseer is still around despite all the evidence. Why has there been no progress? Is the radicalised element influencing the courts? Are suo motu notices also political and based on a radicalised mindset? As for the establishment, I need not say much. Radicalisation is dangerously entrenched and is evident. Educational institutions and syllabi, it exists 'everywhere'.

Finally, notice this. An English newspaper of June 7, said on its front page, "In Punjab, a Christian cannot present the provincial budget. Some PML-N MPAs object to the faith of fellow party member, Kamran Michael."

The promoters of extremism have gradually and schematically radicalised society in the last 60 years. The following of this faith is increasingly accompanied by the show of it. The show is meant to influence. Therefore, crowd psychology works and oppression is created. By and by, radicalisation spreads. From this nursery, the extremist takes birth. This is what my friend meant 97 percent of our society is a fertile nursery for radicals.

All of us who do not want to be part of a Taliban nursery need to ponder and take practical steps to stem the tide of radicalisation, by not being a part of it ourselves.

Saturday, June 18, 2011

Killings — a failure of the justice system

Impatience, intolerance, taking the law into one's own hands, and brutal expressions of anger are all generated by the lack of faith in the system of justice in Pakistan. The most perfect system to thwart justice exists in the machinery involved in the system.

Sarfraz Shah was killed in Karachi in cold blood. It was the height of brutality by men in uniform. He begged for his life, but he was shot. He begged to be taken to hospital, lying in a pool of blood, but he was denied hospital care. The obvious intent was to kill. A cameraman recorded the whole episode in its gruesome detail and the media brought it to public notice. Otherwise it would have gone into the press as a 'killed in encounter' story like hundreds have gone before. The media shocked a sleepy population, which lost its sleep for a few days. Regrettably, only for a few days, as usual. Remember the gory killings in Sialkot? There again the men in uniform and the bloodthirsty crowd committed the crime. Do we know what happened to the culprits? Has the media also decided to take a nap? What happened to the suo motu notice of the case? I hope some media anchors will take it upon themselves to follow up these cases. Just flashing it on thin air is not helping, a follow up may.

Many of us have seen the brutalities and killings carried out by the Taliban and al Qaeda terrorists. Some of us may even have seen the demonstrations by Taliban instructors how to sever heads. Taliban victims were tied up and the demonstrators chopped off the heads in different styles while the bodies were hanging, showing the throes of death. Gruesome sights to shatter anyone's nerves. Killings are not rare or isolated incidents. These continue every day and everywhere at the hands of those who have the power to kill. This is irrespective of which uniform they are wearing, are shaved or wear this kind of beard or the other. All are killers. They make their decisions and implement them. They have no regard for the 'law of the land' because they have not seen it work. But they have seen terrorists freed by the courts and murderers never brought to justice. The message is simple: if you keep the court under threat, you can get away with anything.

Then there are other kinds of killings. Rapes, honour killings, disfigurements, and naked marches in the streets. These cause a pain that lasts a lifetime. Mostly women are the targets. These cause the death of self-esteem, and in some cases the wounds are worse than straightforward death. There are many other crimes that are committed and get consigned to the piles of files in the record rooms of the courts and wait for the never-ending 'dates of hearings'. The impatience, intolerance, taking the law into one's own hands, and brutal expressions of anger are all generated by the lack of faith in the system of justice in Pakistan. The most perfect system to thwart justice exists in the machinery involved in the system. This machinery acts on the saying that 'everything is fair in love and war'. I would have put the author of this saying behind bars. No, 'everything' is not fair in any situation. Human beings have to justify their being 'human'. In the jungle also, there is some system. If some of us remember 'The Jungle Book' of Disney, there was a very interesting dialogue. The 'jungle boy', Mowgli, is shown swords and other weapons by a 'human lord' around the area. Mowgli watches these weapons and asks, "What do you do with these?" The lord responds, "These can kill many." Mowgli asks, "Do you then eat them?" The lord laughs and says, "No." Then Mowgli asks, "Then why do you kill? In the jungle animals kill only for hunger."

Our 'civilised' jungle has a written law but no one cares. We kill because we have anger, we want to settle scores, our egos to prevail, our sectarianism to overpower, and so on and so forth. The law has continuously, for decades, failed to control all this. There is no faith in the justice system; it is manipulated in favour of the powerful. In several cases, the favourite instrument to turn things in one's favour has been the requirement of 'witnesses'. Witnesses are bought and sold. Witnesses are threatened and killed to thwart the course of law. Circumstantial evidence, however clear and strong, is not admissible. In many countries it is.

I am no law expert, but I dare say that the experts have not delivered. Justice is either not available, or too expensive and cumbersome, or thwarted by corruption. The natural product is 'anger' in society. It is this anger that is growing with each passing day. I believe no amount of cosmetic 'suo motus' will work. These actions are admirable when there is a lapse by government agencies. But the respectability of the suo motu is lost when it is taken on minor and

frivolous matters. I would wish that it were used effectively where a large section of society can benefit by such action.

In conclusion, the laws and procedure need to be rationalised. The system of 'evidence' needs a second look. Why are our legislators in democratic assemblies not paying attention to make large-scale legal reforms? This is exactly what they are there for. Can the people's representatives focus on removing the core cause of the anger in society causing lawlessness? Are they really aware of the social problems? Can most of them rise above their feudal backgrounds? Are some of them beneficiaries of legal manipulations and want the corrupt system to continue?

There is in fact little hope from the legislators. They have shown their inability or helplessness or both. Most of them may be involved in getting from the government whatever they can before their term expires. The only hope seems media pressure. Media has done well in exposing the 'fault'; it now needs to 'hammer' away at it. I mean hammer to get the legislators to act. Otherwise more, and even worse, bloodshed may be seen.

Saturday, June 25, 2011

Punjab's oppression and a 'convention'

The only time when an ordinary person, a thinker, worker, or a labourer could contest an election and hope to win without access to bags of currency notes was in 1970. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto brought that change, but only once. When it comes to political rivalry, all claims to democracy, freedom of speech, and individual rights are conveniently forgotten and oppressive tactics are let loose. The Punjab 'lions' did exactly the same on June 18 at Ravi Town. All their claims stood exposed.

A local ex-naib nazim had announced support to the All Pakistan Muslim League (APML) and wanted to hold a workers' convention. So he applied to the district coordination officer (DCO), police, etc, for the required permissions about two weeks in advance. A week earlier, the DCO sent out letters to all concerned to report back before issuing the 'clearance'. It is said that all the reports were positive and the police contingents visited the site on Fort Road and showed no concern to the organiser. Now the 'upper' echelons came into action. The organisers kept running to the DCO's office to face a perpetual silence. However, whispers were heard that permission would be granted but only at the last moment so that the preparations are slowed down due to doubt. The cat, however, was out of the bag in the afternoon of June 18. Police contingents arrived at the site and ordered immediate removal of the preparatory materials. The chairs, tents, speakers, water stands, etc, were all stacked up. They were ordered not to set up any stage for the public addresses or the expected videoconference with Mr Pervez Musharraf. The organisers could not have undone the preparations done in good faith at such short notice. I was consulted and I suggested that they should not violate the law, shift arrangements inside the office and set up a small studio for the video conference, remove the speakers from the road and put them in the balcony along with the screen in case there was a larger attendance. They agreed and this is what was done. Every effort was made to stay within the legal limits. However, the participants were in a large number and as they walked in, the police dispersed them from the Fort Road. By 7:00 pm, a few hundred women

arrived and the police again tried to shove them off. The women stood on the footpath and joined several journalists and media men there. The police was impolite to the women, but refrained from confronting the press. The news of the oppression went around and of course the media rushed to cover it. It was a busy time on Fort Road and a lot of traffic was running. There were children playing cricket in the park on the south side of the Badshahi Mosque, the chairs were stacked on the side but no one was allowed to use these. It was noticed that the police was recording the registration numbers of all the contractors or visitors to use as an instrument of harassment. The police continued to disperse the crowds and the media continued to take note of the happenings, which were published a day later.

The rallies of workers started to arrive at about 8:00 pm and within a short time there were thousands. The police stepped back. Some pulled up chairs in the lawn, others stood on the road and heard their leader speak and saw him on the screen. Almost everyone dispersed in less than an hour, peacefully, and the traffic kept flowing as usual.

The police filed an FIR against anyone they could recognise and all others, about 400-500 unnamed. It is a harassment tool to start action at any time at any place. The unnamed are named as and when required. The police sword keeps hanging. One wonders what is this all about? Are we never going to change? The same old tactics by the party in power against their political opponents. How do the Mian sahibs claim to be the champions of upholding the law and constitution? They were groomed by a dictator and continue to be a worse kind of dictator. No tolerance is their style. What heavens would have fallen if the applicant were allowed the convention? In fact, it would have helped the Punjab government in improving its image if they had gracefully accorded the permission. They would have set a democratic tradition. But, alas, small minds prevailed. The DCO never got the 'nod' from the top and preferred to save his job by the use of power.

The politicians grumble that the armed forces have ruled the country and their oppression did not let democracy grow. The fact is that all politicians today have grown under the shade of armed rule! The so-called champions of democracy would not let anyone grow unless he/she was their rishtedar (relative) or zamindar (landlord) or maaldar (wealthy) or a deradar (camp follower), thanedar (police officer), etc, particularly by Mian sahiban who have successfully taken politics out of

the hands of the common man and safely landed it in the hands of the influential and the rich. In their style of politics, anyone who wants to express himself deserves another dar, the daar (gallows) that Faiz refers to.

The only time when an ordinary person, a thinker, worker, or a labourer could contest an election and hope to win without access to bags of currency notes was in 1970. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto brought that change, but only once. He was then overpowered and ultimately eliminated for the 'crime' he had committed. Now it is neither the Quaid-e-Azam's country that he envisaged in his August 11 speech to the Constituent Assembly, nor is it Bhutto's country who said, "People are the source of all power." It is not Musharraf's country either who says "Sab se pehley Pakistan" (Pakistan first). What Pakistan are we talking about? Whose Pakistan is this? What are we doing to our homeland? Is this how nations grow? Painful questions, but no answers.

Saturday, July 02, 2011

'Psy-war' against the armed forces

The terror 'psy-war' specialists made the majority of Pakistanis overlook the fact that 30,000 civilians and 5,000 army men were also killed because of the interference of the 'terrorist foreigners'. It is hard to give them a recognisable face like the 'Americans'.

The armed forces have been put under the weather recently. It is primarily a success of the perception management strategists of the Taliban. The Taliban and al Qaeda groups faced a decisive defeat in Swat and South Waziristan. The army saved the country from near devastation and subversion by al Qaeda/Taliban militants. It hurt them. It hurt them so hard that they did not know how to react for a while. The Pakistan army's soldiers had literally gone into a hand-to-hand fight, bullet for bullet and body for body. It was now or never. It is estimated that over 5,000 troops laid down their lives to save the country and their homeland from terrorists wearing the garb of a new 'Islam'. They gave the ultimate sacrifice. The terror network had to scramble, hide, and then hit wherever it could. But they had lost the massive terrorist onslaught capability that had killed over 30,000 Pakistani civilians. Terrorists destroyed happy homes and left bloodstains on the walls, and deep wounds in the psyche of the nation. Such wounds take a long time to heal. The families of the shuhada (martyrs) will courageously hold their heads high in pride and honour and move on with life as time passes. Of course time is a great healer.

All that the soldiers did was in the line of duty and for their homeland. But some 'friendly fire' accompanied. The 'friendly fire' came from 'drones'. They spotted the terror leaders with precision, mostly under protection of diehard companions, hit them and killed. In this way they eliminated most of the leadership of terror groups. But these 'drone' attacks by the US agency CIA had an inherent danger. It was managed and operated by a foreign power, the US, which is easily exploitable.

That the terror groups are heavily manned by foreigners...

groups. In the battle on the ground, the Pakistan Army did a great job and succeeded. Drones helped; they caused some collateral damage in life and property but caused potential damage to the terrorists in the public perception.

In this situation, the remaining terrorist and pro-Taliban groups devised an alternate strategy. What they had lost in the field, they wanted to win in perception. Very cleverly they started with the 'drones'. American drones hurt them a lot. So the focus of huge publicity was that a 'foreign' power was interfering and killing 'Pakistanis' through drones. Since the drones were not Pakistani, the label that 'Pakistanis' are being killed by 'foreigners' stuck. The Pakistanis are an emotional people and get easily carried away in the name of 'honour'. They kill their kith and kin and particularly their women if their 'honour' is perceived to be at stake. Therefore, a strong popular sentiment against drone strikes developed. The strategists of 'psy-war' were getting close to what they wanted. The usual gallery of rightists, plus Imran Khan and Mian sahib joined the chorus, because the rightists are part of their vote bank. The number of people 'soft' on the Taliban is large and if they are diverted from the memory of the killings by the terrorists, then they end up in supporting action. They feel that they are perhaps doing some 'service' to Islam, and in this particular case, also to the national honour.

In reality, the terrorists or no different from one another anywhere. They work for the hegemony of a group. Historically, the Aryans have done it, Christians have done it, Jews have done it and Hindus have done it, and Muslims have done it too. But all such people violated the peaceful teaching of their religion and exploited religious and national sentiments to expand their influence. Desire for money, sex, power — all human weaknesses are exploited, no holds barred.

In our case, the magic combination was 'honour', 'sovereignty', and 'religious sentiment'. It was fully exploited and funded by mysterious sources. Everyone suddenly became patriotic and did not want 'foreign interference'. On top of it, the Osama episode occurred. Osama was lost to the terrorists but the intrusion by American helicopters and the so-called inability of our armed forces to check them provided the 'psy-war' machine with a wealth of data to exploit. They used it against the army to the hilt. The Pakistan Army being the only real barrier against

terrorist onslaught is indeed the most significant of the terrorists' targets.

The terror 'psy-war' specialists made the majority of Pakistanis overlook the fact that 30,000 civilians and 5,000 army men were also killed because of the interference of the 'terrorist foreigners'. It is hard to give them a recognisable face like the 'Americans'. The 'terrorist foreigner' is a combination put together and made faceless except in cases where they grow unkempt beards to camouflage themselves. In this 'psy-war', all the sleeper cells have been activated even within the army and the rest of the establishment. The height of their achievement is that in the Mehran terror attack, the only thing that was highlighted was the air force-navy 'negligence', disregarding the efficacy of the Eurasian terrorists.

It is the 'psy-war' that we need to fight and make a counter-attack. We can win it; it is not too late if we plan now and use the real data. We have to recognise and expose the foreign hand convincingly; no use being modest or shy. After all, it is a war. We need to watch the enemy within, even those whose minds were influenced in Zia's regime of terror. Thinking people need to take a step back and introspect. Most importantly, politicians need to realise that this is not the time to buy votes at any price. I request them to please expose the terror framework and stop calling it somebody else's war. It has been our blood on the soil.

Saturday, July 09, 2011

Bad news is 'news', good news is nothing!

Why must we, as a nation, continue to dispense depression, dissatisfaction, and even hate for ourselves. We compare ourselves with the worst of our enemies and 'admire' them. This negativity has brought the nation to the level of 'zero' self-respect

From where has this mindset been inherited? Newspapers and media rush to collect the bad news and the worst of these hit the headlines. In the breaking news you mostly see a terrorist attack, a targeted killing, a bomb blast, murder, rape, and so on. Do you ever see a 'breaking news' saying, "Bumper crop this year of..." mango, or orange or something else, or "A doctor has saved a life in an amazing fight over x number of days," or "Economic situation seems to have stabilised..." or something, which is 'good'. It is obvious, very obvious, in our situation, but it is not limited to us alone. An international, 'prestigious' publishing house sends out weekly summaries. Here is a cursory look at its selections:

"Greece was again hit by strikes, protests and rioting, as parliament voted in favour of a crucial new round of austerity measures and economic reforms." "In Britain public-sector workers ranging from teachers to court officials to immigration officers went on strike against the government's proposed changes to their pensions." "More than 1,000 people were injured in clashes in Cairo's Tahrir Square between police and people protesting against the slow pace of reform."

"Nigeria's government imposed a curfew on Abuja, the capital, after a series of attacks by Boko Haram, an Islamist sect. On June 26th, 25 people were killed when a beer-garden was bombed in the city of Maiduguri in the state of Borno; another ten people died in another attack in the city on the same day."

You can find as many as you like because in all national and international 'sources', one finds plenty of such 'shockers'. You get more

successful effort of rescue? Has peace not been restored in Swat and South Waziristan?

The bad news takes precedence because the 'communicator', wherever he/she is, wants to shock you, like a spoilt child who cries and shrieks for attention. Mostly, the media czars shock you because they want your attention. That ensures sales and improves their financial well-being. It adds more palaces, land cruisers, flats, country houses to their inventory, and above all, improves their clout and power to blackmail.

What about the sense of social responsibility? This is the kind of response expected: "What? What did you say? Let us look it up in the dictionary. Oh! No such word in my dictionary please!"

This is the kind of reaction expected and perhaps I must replace my 'old' dictionary! Some people say it is in the British tradition of journalism. I do not know, maybe it is, but why do we not pause and think? Why must we, as a nation, continue to dispense depression, dissatisfaction, and even hate for ourselves. We compare ourselves with the worst of our enemies and 'admire' them. This negativity has brought the nation to the level of 'zero' self-respect. We hate ourselves and promote hate against each other. Because we have been told that everything is bad. For over 50 years I have heard "this country will break" or "the country is in danger". Consequently, all political exploiters come out saying that they will save the country. The other line is "Islam is in danger". Hence 'religious politics' creates room for itself. There is a competition going on to create insecurity, fear and shock.

Do we realise that this country has shown a great deal of resilience, in spite of all this propaganda? The worst incident to be quoted is the separation of East Pakistan and the making of Bangladesh. So? It still is a friendly entity. It is happy managing its affairs and doing well in many ways. Should we not be happy at their welfare? Think positively please. They took a mature decision and separated 'religion' from the 'state' and progressed as a nation state. This is no disaster.

I agree that improvement can be done in a million directions, but if we keep on promoting distrust, insecurity and cynicism, then we will make it hard for those who sincerely want to achieve good results. It is

capital. More significantly, it is this sense of insecurity, which causes the drain of valuable brains and skills.

The media and the public, all of us, must stop the constant 'bad mouthing' of the country we live in. This is the country you miss if you leave it, and it is nostalgia that makes you long to come back from abroad. I am not advocating that there should be no criticism. Nor am I advocating hierocracy. What I am advocating is objective realism and rejection of negativity. Cut off the negative propaganda channels; as long as you watch them they get higher 'ratings' and consider their approach justified. Hate will thus keep on breeding hate. We must clearly understand that the media Czars take decisions on 'ratings'. I would not be surprised if the 'ratings' are fudged. It is an effective tool to create discontent. Our enemies can use it. Any secret agency can do whatever it can to create discontent in a nation it targets. Notice what is happening in so many countries, particularly the Muslim countries.

So watch out and do not get carried away.

Saturday, July 16, 2011

Hizb-ut-Tahrir infiltration

On its website the Hizb-ut-Tahrir claims to be a political party. But it has not registered in Pakistan as a political party. Why? Because it does not believe in the constitution of Pakistan. It does not believe in change through the vote.

The first time I noticed this organisation was on October 3, 2010 in Birmingham, UK. The occasion was a follow up address of General (ret'd) Pervez Musharraf and several hundred yards away from the entrance stood about eight to ten persons with placards demanding khilafat (caliphate) in the world and condemning the US. Their presence was negligible; they were standing on a footpath and left a little after Pervez Musharraf entered the gate of the main area. Later, one person from the crowd shouted "we want khilafat" and this man was whisked away by the security personnel present. This was quite 'innocent', but I wondered why and how does this organisation work in the UK while it is banned in many countries. It seems, in some cases, we can be compared in 'efficiency' with the UK. After all, we have 'learnt' so much from their colonial rule. The British must have thought that they already have their khilafat, so why bother.

However, the recent appearance of Hizb-ut-Tahrir in Pakistan tells a totally different story. It has been found to be working systematically on the sources of 'power' to bring about a 'change'. This organisation works somewhat differently as compared to several aggressive 'terrorist' set ups.

Hizb offers a constitution aiming at achieving khilafat. It has detailed comments on religious practices, role of women, the economy, defence, etc. But it does not support the concept of 'democracy' as practised in Pakistan and many other countries. It believes in almost absolute powers for the khalifa (caliph) and bait (allegiance) on his hand. Women are not allowed to be a khalifa. In place of working on democratic systems and adult franchise, they work on change through

"Once public opinion is achieved in a target country through debate and persuasion, the group hopes to obtain support from army generals, leaders, and other influential figures or bodies to facilitate the change of the government."

This methodology must have been employed by Hizb, resulting in action by the Pakistan Army. On May 6, 2011, Brigadier Ali Khan of the Pakistan Army was detained, just four days after the US-led Abbottabad operation for his alleged links with Hizb-ut-Tahrir, official military sources said.

The Hizb has been active over a decade, and has effectively influenced politicians. It is well known that the leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) was interested in becoming a khalifa and even moved a resolution in the National Assembly to this effect. The symptoms of their preaching can also be seen in Imran Khan who constantly calls the struggle against terrorism an 'American war', ignoring the fact that the greatest damage by the terrorists is done to Pakistan and not the US, both in human lives as well as property.

In Pakistan, Hizb-ut-Tahrir was proscribed by General Musharraf in 2004, although it had the ban on it lifted after a legal challenge against its proscription in the Lahore High Court. According to "a senior Obama Administration official" interviewed by journalist Seymour Hersh in 2009, "Hizb-ut-Tahrir has penetrated the Pakistani military and now have cells in the Army." Hersh reports that the Pakistan Army denies this. The denial mode had to be changed as the action against Brigadier Ali Khan indicated. Hizb-ut-Tahrir was working in accordance with its plans and declared methods; why did the army not look into it instead of going into a denial mode? Denial seems to be the popular style. We had Osama in our midst and we kept denying it. Osama and his followers have done more harm to Islam than the US. Finally, when Osama was found next door to military establishments, we showed shock and instead of setting our house in order we started blaming the US for violating our sovereignty. Funny. Was our 'sovereignty' protected by Osama's presence? Also who would believe that the powers that be in Pakistan did not know about the operation? It was kept a tight secret because the authorities knew of the infiltration within the ranks and feared leakage.

On its website the Hizb-ut-Tahrir claims to be a political party. But it has not registered in Pakistan as a political party. Why? Because it does not believe in the constitution of Pakistan. It does not believe in change through the vote and, on the other hand, it endeavours to create indoctrinated power blocs in high positions, particularly in the army. Would it not be called a conspiracy to overthrow the government and abrogate the constitution? In simple words, this is what it is.

In short, it is another way of creating hegemony by subversion in the name of Islam. It is in line with the aspirations of the terrorists claiming to be doing jihad in the name of Islam. These are all pursuits of power by methods other than democratic ones. One would want to wish that they did not involve the fair name of Islam. Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) gave a message of peace for all from the Almighty. The Prophet's (PBUH) last sermon summarises all the priorities and is a guideline for all Muslims. We do not need new claimants to a superior understanding of Islam.

Please leave religion alone; it is not endangered. Nor is the country endangered externally. The danger is from these claimants to monopoly of jannat (paradise). By claiming championship and superiority and expansionist designs, such organisations are left with little difference from Hindutva or Zionist expansionists.

Saturday, July 23, 2011

A jubilant terrorist, supported by the PML-N—Naem Tahir

The nation has become a hostage to the Punjabi Taliban and their supporters. The PML-N will continue to support the extremists because it needs them to get votes in the next election.

On June 16, the newspapers carried his photographs with a big grin. His teeth showed prominently in a frame of black beard. He was profusely garlanded and was accompanied by another bearded supporter, equally happy. Both were riding an expensive car. That was Malik Ishaq, the key founding member of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (Lej) — a notorious terrorist organisation, a violent killer of Shias and a major ally of al Qaeda.

Malik Ishaq was accused of being the key planner of the attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team. His associate accused namely, Javed Anwar, Abdullah and Ubaidur Rehman had been arrested from Shadara. It was claimed that the men had confessed to their involvement in the cricket team attack.

Some officials informed the press on condition of anonymity that Malik Ishaq enjoyed the Punjab government's financial assistance ever since the Sharifs came to power in 2008. The accused terror kingpin belongs to the banned Sunni outfit Lej and has been nominated in 44 cases in which 70 people were killed. During imprisonment, he used to receive a monthly stipend from the Punjab government. He and his family have been well looked after. No wonder he had a big grin on his face.

Punjab Law Minister Rana Sanallah confirmed the disbursement but clarified that it was given to Ishaq's family, not him, as per the orders of the court. However, further investigations revealed that neither were there any such disbursements during General Musharraf's regime nor was there any court order pertaining to the matter. Rana Sanallah always looks very comfortable when telling lies and giving disinformation, which was proved once again. The Punjab

government's financial support to the terrorist was purely meant to protect the PML-N's vote bank and the street mafia in its favour.

Look at the audacious Malik Ishaq whose first terror attack took place 14 years ago when he targeted a 'Majlis' in which 12 people were killed. Unfortunately, eight among the complainants and witnesses of the incident have been killed so far. Now only one complainant and three witnesses are alive. One wonders if they are also awaiting their elimination; more so as the jubilant Malik Ishaq has been released on bail and has the blessings of the Punjab government. He can now eliminate the rest of the witnesses and get acquitted from the helpless courts.

Individuals, politicians, political parties, federal and provincial governments, and the establishment need to seriously introspect themselves in this regard. The point to ponder is: are we a country promoting terrorism or not? Thoughtless denials prove nothing except giving a hidden feeling of guilt. Here is Punjab government doing whatever it can to protect terrorists that support the PML-N. Please also recall that the same Punjab government had allocated financial support worth Rs 86 million to the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) from the Punjab budget last year. One wonders what the role of the federal government is in such a situation. One also wonders what should be the role of the judiciary, which is fond of taking suo motu notices.

That is how the Americans, Indians, and several others see us supporting the terrorists even if we vehemently deny this. But how do we explain the doings of the Punjab government? Also, how do we explain the tolerant stance of the emerging leader Imran Khan and his party? He does not consider the war on terror as our war. We also need to take into account the so-called 'rogue elements' in the establishment. The infiltration of the Hizb-ur-Tahrir is also there and of course millions of people at home and around vaguely think of Islam and follow all those who claim religious expertise.

If we are not supporters of terrorism, we must be able to distinguish between the messages of the Quran, teachings of the Prophet (PBUH) and their misinterpretation and misdirected use by the so-called religious experts whose agenda is to create a divide to exploit and rule. Apparently, there is a divide between the federal and the Punjab government. The Punjab government rules 60 percent of the populace

of Pakistan and can effectively defeat federal policies. The federal government, the three provincial governments, Gilgit-Baltistan and the tribal areas are definitely against terrorism. Therefore, the good news is that the majority of Pakistanis are in fact peace-loving and have suffered at the hands of the terrorists. Then why is the federal government not taking notice of the PML-N's activities supporting terror outfits? Are Mr Zardari and Mr Gilani too afraid to rock the boat? I am afraid if they do not 'rock the boat', the 'boat' may rock them. There is no doubt that Mr Zardari's political manoeuvring is superb. He has handled all internal threats to his power successfully. Now he even has the support of the PML-Q and the MQM. This is the time that he should cleanse Punjab of pro-terror elements. The armed forces have controlled FATA and it will also cleanse North Waziristan gradually but it is political action that is required in Punjab. This can be best handled by smart political moves of the president. He would know how to do it the best, but he must do it. The nation has become a hostage to the Punjabi Taliban and their supporters. The PML-N will continue to support the extremists because it needs them to get votes in the next election and to threaten those who would not want to vote for the PML-N. Would the country allow its major province to become a safe haven for the terrorists? There is less than 18 months' time left before the next election. It is not a very long time and a strategy to deal with it must be designed now. All anti-terror groups, parties and other elements need to join in on a single point agenda of cleansing Punjab of those who directly or indirectly support terror outfits.

Saturday, July 30, 2011

A 'suo motu' of suo motus —Naeem Tahir

The Greek symbol of the goddess of justice is a beautiful figure with a blindfold around her eyes and a weighing scale in her hands. Many people feel that the 'weighing scale' is not balanced and has some tilt in it. Justice may not 'appear to be served' several times.

Initially I thought 'suo motu' was some substance like 'ajinomoto', a food additive that is used in most Chinese and Japanese dishes. Recently, its use has been restricted due to its harmful effect on eyesight. Of course, thinking of suo motu as something like ajinomoto was an exposure of my ignorance. But how can one know everything? I got alarmed when the newspapers reported that a lot of suo motus were being taken. I was concerned that it could be something injurious to health. Then I consulted the dictionary. It said, "Suo motu means 'on its own motion' and it is a Latin legal term."

So these suo motus are meant to straighten society and not just to add spice to the edibles. If my understanding is correct then a suo motu can be taken by anyone. And it can be taken 'on its own motion'. In reality, it is a privilege to effectively control such happenings that have taken place unnoticed and suo motus are usually taken by the courts or heads of the state or people in such positions whom 'notice' would effectively redress a wrong.

But nobody stops you and me from taking suo motu action by its definition. However, whether our suo motu will have any effect in correcting a situation or not is uncertain. In any case there are several suo motus that you and I can take and I must say that these are urgent and ignoring them is almost unforgivable for us.

I would like to take notice of the meat that is being sold at double the control price, and the controlling authority is doing nothing about it. Are the household expenses so expandable and can a family stretch its income to accommodate further costs? When the protein in the meat gets completely out of reach of the lower income groups and the poor,

vegetables. These are already double while the incomes are more or less static. Inflation has increased 15 percent in Pakistan, which is the highest in the world while our income is the lowest in Asia. In my list of suo motu, this would be a priority item.

I would also take a suo motu notice of the allocation of Rs 86 million for Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) from the Punjab budget. JuD is a banned terrorist organisation across the world while the Punjab government gives financial support to it. I would like to investigate it under my suo motu, as the financing seems, on the face of it, a very anti-nation action, fraught with danger to society.

In the same continuity, a suo motu must be taken to ascertain the reasons of the release of a terrorist of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi who had been in jail for several years and given financial aid for several years by the Punjab government. This matter needs investigation in the national interest.

There is a long list of striking 'wrongs' that need suo motu actions from the authorities that have the capability of setting a wrong right and they must do it in the interest of the country.

However, I would avoid some suo motu. For instance, I would not take a suo motu against Atiqah Odho. I am told she was returning from Tajikistan with her husband after taking part in a trade delegation. In a gift package, two bottles of liquor were found. Atiqah Odho, a British passport holder, surrendered those bottles to the customs authorities as it was pointed out that the entry of that substance was against the law of the land. If we enter any other country with plants or food, it is usually objected to and the passengers surrender it and no offence is committed. I would think that Atiqah might not have committed an offence either. Therefore, I would avoid a suo motu against her, however pretty and endowed by the Almighty she may be. Also I would consider her standing as a show-business person and her personal seniority as a grandmother. I would resist the temptation of making her appear before me and seeing her for a closer look as a captive beauty. But I have no legal background and my understandings may be of no consequence. In fact, I most sincerely offer my apologies for even having such thoughts and hope to be forgiven.

The Greek symbol of the goddess of justice is a *h...*

Many people feel that the 'weighing scale' is not balanced and has some tilt in it. Justice may not 'appear to be served' several times. Most noticeable case is the hanging of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Sometimes justice is blind and sometimes half-blind. Whatever the situation is, justice needs to keep the balance. 'Tawazun' (balance) is the basis of universal existence as is said in the Holy Quran. But when humans are in charge, it is expected that 'justice should not only be done, it should also appear to be done'. If a tilt in the balance appears, then justice demands that the tilt be corrected. After all, we are all humans. We can make errors and we can also correct them. Correcting oneself is always graceful and adds to the stature of the person doing so. But it does require extraordinary courage.

Saturday, August 06, 2011

Why get after Ms Khar?

A handshake is no flirtation. It is a gesture of goodwill. Women politicians avoid even normal courtesies because men have scared them. It is the macho man who makes it hard to respect a woman in a position of authority. Such men see women as objects required for procreation only.

Pakistanis and Indians saw the recent goodwill visit of our foreign minister as a success generally. But a TV anchorperson in Pakistan got carried away. Some years ago, male chauvinists got after Ms Nilofar Bakhtiar in the same way. It seems to be Ms Khar's turn now. Is this a continuity of criticising efforts in building foreign relations or undermining women working on important assignments?

It was hard to believe the way a known anchorperson, Dr Danish, did everything possible to find fault with Ms Khar and prompted his programme participants to follow his thinking although Mr Mujeebur Rehman Shami, a very senior journalist and a sombre person also, did not oblige. Dr Danish has been conducting his programme for some years. He is loud, and sometimes waves papers in his hand at the audience to convince them that he has some sort of documentary evidence. Who knows?

In the case of Foreign Minister Ms Khar, he got carried away and repeatedly recalled that she represented the 'Islamic Republic of Pakistan'. What does this mean? Was he trying to say that the Islamic Republic of Pakistan forbids women to take positions of responsibility? Was he trying to appeal to and activate an extremist 'right' lobby? Does he believe in male superiority? Incidentally, the concept of male superiority comes from the Aryans. It is not Islamic. Our religion teaches respect for women.

Ms Khar is a well-educated, well-groomed and politically experienced person. She conducted herself with grace and received a good response from Indian diplomats. So what if Kashmir was not mentioned in the talks? What have those who have mentioned Kashmir

her Indian counterpart mentioned Kashmir and agreed with Pakistan's proposal.

In my experience, I have found Ms Khar to be very businesslike and efficient. Maybe she is a little too businesslike but that is an asset in a 'man's world'. She also has administrative know-how, which is why Mr Mujeebur Rehman Shami acknowledged her experience at the ministerial level. No fault could be found in her personal conduct. She dressed elegantly and also kept her head covered with a dupatta. Mr Shami found only the handshake with the Indian minister unusual because women politicians in Pakistan avoid shaking hands with men. So what? A handshake is no flirtation. It is a gesture of goodwill. Women politicians avoid even normal courtesies because men have scared them. It is the macho man who makes it hard to respect a woman in a position of authority. Such men see women as objects required for procreation only.

Also what is this hullabaloo over the cost of the apparel and accessories? Have a heart, how do you know the prices? Mr Shami rightly refused to venture a guess. It is irrelevant if the 'state' did not buy the dresses and accessories. In the present cabinet, Ms Khar is one of the few well groomed, educated and competent individuals. Irrespective of anyone's political alliances, we must learn to be fair. It is maturity that is needed, not just grey hair.

This attitude towards women needs to be seriously examined. More loose talk is carried on about women than men, particularly working women. Jokes about wives are always present. All this speaks of an unhealthy state of mind. Particularly, an anchorperson must bear the social responsibility of maintaining a balance. It would be fine if a person's work output were examined objectively but targeting the individuality of a person is totally unfair.

I hope that these comments are taken in good spirit and some introspection is done. It is a laudable attitude to look at one's own shortcomings and shed prejudices. Was Dr Danish pressurised by some lobby? He generally conducts his programme efficiently.

I hope Ms Khar has the strength to brush aside negative comments. The Indian lobbies did not sabotage the talks this time. Historically, Indian extremists have been sabotaging these talks by acts of terror. A Samjhota train-like blast or the Mumbai issue were not used this time

to block steps towards peace. Some concrete and positive measures have been agreed upon. These include improved trade facilities and people to people contact by reviewing visa regimes. We do need to support the just cause of Kashmir but our foreign policy cannot be so highly Kashmir-centric that it becomes a hostage. India and Pakistan must live as neighbours who respect each other and work for the welfare of their people. There are challenges for both countries, and perhaps more so for Pakistan.

This is the time when a serious review of our foreign policy should be made. Our traditional ally, the US, has been unhappy about some issues. Pakistan, too, has some reservations. The US's popularity in the masses is at its lowest and it is unfair because a lot of good is also being done by the support of the American people. Our relations with Iran, China, Afghanistan and other neighbouring countries are important and must be seen in correct perspective. Foreign relations are closely tied to economic strategy. Ms Khar has that background and hopefully she should be able to make a significant contribution.

Generally, it is a strange thing that the media gets after our foreign ministers. The former foreign minister was not spared either and the media enjoyed insinuating his intentions during his visit to the US. The foreign office has, indeed, a very serious responsibility towards the country. It needs support to improve our image. Their work is made hard when we, the people of Pakistan, belittle them or treat them as show persons. Mr Shami correctly said that we should not expect our foreign ministers to be dressed poorly. The key word is 'decently' not 'extravagantly'. Let us all try to create a good environment for the women and men who are contributing towards national well being and avoid pulling their legs.

Saturday, August 13, 2011

Where is the dream?

In the year 2011, almost 64 years after achieving independence, it appears that we are still short of achieving the kind of state that the Quaid envisaged. Why and how? When researched, these questions unfold many heartbreaking realities

Some 72 hours before the formal birth of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah was elected the president of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan. Pakistan was born as an independent state on midnight of August 15, 1947 and so was Bharat (India). According to the well-known book *Midnight's Children*, the two countries came into existence at the zero hour on August 15, 1947. Pakistan rejoiced in choosing the 14th as its independence day because it carried the sanctity of the 27th of Ramzan in the year 1368 Hijri.

On his election as the president of the Constituent Assembly, Quaid-e-Azam Mr Jinnah, wanted the democratic process of the Constituent Assembly to start proceedings without losing any time and to prepare a foundation for the state. The father of the nation at that time correctly chose August 11, 1947 to address the assembly and let everyone know the vision for which statehood had been won after huge sacrifices. This was the vision to be embodied in the constitution of the new state, and that is the vision on which the pillars of the state were to uphold its edifice.

In that background of sanctity, sacrifice, hope and determination, only Quaid-e-Azam could have led and shown a clear path for the future. This is exactly what he did on August 11, 1947.

In the year 2011, almost 64 years after achieving independence, it appears that we are still short of achieving the kind of state that the Quaid envisaged. Why and how? When researched, these questions unfold many heartbreaking realities. Was Mohammad Ali Jinnah to be 'used' only until some motives were served? Did all his followers understand and commit themselves to his vision? These are questions

belonging to Quaid-e-Azam. Here are some extracts from his historical address to the Constituent Assembly:

"The Constituent Assembly has two main functions to perform. The first is the very onerous and responsible task of framing the future constitution of Pakistan and the second of functioning as a full and complete sovereign body as the federal legislature of Pakistan... The first observation that I would like to make is this: You will no doubt agree with me that the first duty of a government is to maintain law and order so that the life, property and religious beliefs of its subjects are fully protected by the state.

"The second thing that occurs to me is this: one of the biggest curses from which India is suffering... is bribery and corruption. That really is a poison. We must put that down with an iron hand and I hope that you will take adequate measures as soon as it is possible for this assembly to do so.

"Black marketing is another curse. A citizen who does black marketing commits, I think, a greater crime than the biggest and most grievous of crimes. These black-marketers are really knowing, intelligent and ordinarily responsible people, and when they indulge in black marketing I think they ought to be very severely punished.

"The next thing that strikes me is this: here again it is a legacy, which has been passed on to us. Along with many other things, good and bad, has arrived this great evil — the evil of nepotism and jobbery. This evil must be crushed relentlessly.

"Now, if we want to make this great state of Pakistan happy and prosperous, we should wholly and solely concentrate on the well-being of the people and especially of the masses and the poor.

"If you change your past and work together in a spirit that everyone of you, no matter to what community he belongs, no matter what relations he had with you in the past, no matter what is his colour, caste or creed is first, second and last a citizen of this state with equal rights, privileges and obligations, there will be no end to the progress you will make.

"I cannot emphasise it too much. We should begin to work in that

community — because even as regards to Muslims you have Pathans, Punjabis, Shias, Sunnis and so on and among the Hindus you have Brahmans, Vaishnavas, Khattris, also Bengalis, Madrasis, and so on — will vanish. Indeed, if you ask me, this has been the biggest hindrance in the way of India to attain freedom and independence; but for this we would have been free people a long, long time ago... Therefore, we must learn a lesson from this. You are free, you are free to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any region or caste or creed — that has nothing to do with the business of the state.

"We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one state.

"Now, I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal and you will find that in the course of time, Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual but in the political sense as citizens of the state."

By bringing the extracts of the Quaid's speech to your notice, I have only tried to refresh your memory. This was the vision of an ideal country for which over one million men, women and children laid down their lives and lost their innocence and properties, relatives, friends and habitat. Still, when they arrived, shaken and bruised, through trains and caravans, drenched in blood, at the Walton camp they bowed and kissed the land of their dreams. Do we have the Pakistan of the Quaid's vision or our dreams today?

Saturday, August 20, 2011

A bull in an art gallery

How can one expect action from a government of the PML-N, which has consistently shown a soft corner for extremists, funded them and stood by them? This police functionary could very possibly have been briefed by the extremists and acted in cahoots with some segments of the PML-N to do what he did.

'A bull in a china shop' is a familiar phrase. We all know what havoc it denotes. Now a new standard has been created by the 'bull' that entered Nairang Art Gallery recently. Nairang Art Gallery is situated in front of Kinnaird College for Women on Jail Road in Lahore. It is set up in a town home where the famous architect Nayyar Ali Dada once lived, and is now dedicated to art. It is a location that is accessible and has a modest restaurant attached to it. It has gradually become a hub of thinkers, artists, writers and intellectuals who find the ambience conducive for creativity. It is a sort of replacement of the old teahouses and coffee houses of earlier, traditional Lahore. Lahore, like Paris, has a long tradition of intellectual ferment in teahouses and coffee houses. Before independence, such places were the hub of writers, artists, thinkers, journalists, philosophers, teachers, poets, film and drama personalities and so on. The momentum lasted a while and, with the shifting of the 'centre of gravity' of urban Lahore and the ageing of the old guard, the teahouses and coffee houses on the Mall strip between Plaza cinema and 'Bhangiyon ki Tope' (Kim's Gun) became less frequented by the 'intellectual' crowd. The last outposts still existing are the Old Mayo School of Arts (now NCA), and the Government College (now GCU). Both these outposts of intellectualism's walkway have gone through changes; so has the strip between the Plaza and Kim's Gun.

Lahore would have begun to lose its bohemian cultural aura if some new 'stops' had not been created to pause and think. Nayyar Ali Dada's contribution to the cause created such a 'stop', and frequent gatherings of writers, historians, thinkers and artists became a routine. Nairang Art Gallery was growing in the classical tradition of Lahore.

Into this fragile abode dedicated to the creative and peaceful segment of society walked a bull. It was a senior member of the chief minister's (CM's) police force from Punjab. The Shadman police station's SHO, Rana Zulfiqar, entered the gallery and manhandled and misbehaved with the female curator, staffers and customers at the Nairang Art Gallery! It was a few days before the beginning of Ramzan. The SHO entered the gallery and started abusing the customers, including women. He physically tortured the female curator for wearing a sleeveless shirt. He accused the gallery of spreading obscenity. The Punjab government promised to take strict action against the SHO. This has been nothing more than lip service as usual because nothing has happened and the SHO has 'lived happily ever after'. How can one expect action from a government of the PML-N, which has consistently shown a soft corner for extremists, funded them and stood by them? This police functionary could very possibly have been briefed by the extremists and acted in cahoots with some segments of the PML-N to do what he did. This incident has again exposed the presence of religious extremism in the police, something that led to the assassination of former Punjab Governor Salmaan Taseer. A senior lawyer, Ms Hina Jilani and several other human rights activists have demanded an impartial inquiry because they do not trust the Punjab government.

Most shocked is indeed Nayyar Ali Dada himself, whose son was also beaten up and his letters to the CM, IG, CCPO and others have had no effect. The Human Rights Commission has raised the most relevant question: excesses by policemen are hardly an anomaly in Pakistan but since when have the policemen assumed the responsibility of the Taliban?

The CM Punjab has had a good personal reputation concerning his attitude towards creative artists. He chose to recite verses from the works of poets. He is not shy to sing publicly as well. Then why are his policemen parading around harassing artists and art students? Why does he not take exception to it? The police in Punjab raid theatres and art galleries! How did they get the license to enter different premises to enforce their twisted versions of aesthetics and morality? Does this fit into the image of a CM who claims liberal thoughts and recites Habib Jalib? If nothing else, for his own image's sake and for his party's sake, he must take strict action and restrain such extremist police individuals.

He should not show any weakness to please some elements in his party who look down upon the arts. Unfortunately, there are such elements in the PML-N. The CM, who holds a high position in his party, needs to harness negative tendencies against creativity.

The artists are well within their right to protest. They are seeking support from the press and are demonstrating in front of the press club. Is the government trying to paint them in political colours to justify using its police for arm-twisting? Or are the police seeking a 'share' as usual? In either case, such actions are not going to win any friends. Such harassment can only germinate hate.

Artistic expression is mostly aesthetic. It adds to the 'beautiful' in any society. It is the "jamal" that the Quran itself recognises. It is an attribute of the Almighty Himself. A policeman, or anyone else, cannot claim a right to interfere in His will.

Saturday, September 10, 2011

The founding father and rays of hope in August

In a democratic set up, political parties promote public perceptions. They must think beyond the conspiracies and intrigues for personal power. The trend to own God and perpetuate religious thought that is exclusive must stop.

Let me make it clear at the outset: I am not talking about the recent explosive scandal in Karachi by a born again politician. That outburst raises many questions. I am, instead, trying to share some of my feelings about a few faint signs that make me think, and encourage me to continue with my eternal optimism. These signs relate to the country as a whole.

I have written on several occasions about the drift in the path of development of the character of Pakistan and its nation. I have repeatedly pointed out that the nation has ignored the great vision of its founder, the Quaid-e-Azam, Mohammad Ali Jinnah. I accept that the pace of life has increased, I also accept that the younger generation has not experienced the struggle for independence, it is also possible that many do not remember the breakup of the earlier Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh, and I also understand that many young people are unaware of how the nation suffered the lashes and oppression perpetrated by the Zia regime. The regime left a legacy of extremism, the Taliban and intolerance in general. We need to remember all this.

History is as much part of today as of the future. 'Now' is a transition, it is a moment between the 'past' and the 'future'. It is the past that shapes the now and the future. So, if we believe that we are a free nation and Pakistan is our first choice, then we need to know the 'good' and the 'not so good' of our history.

The best part, or at least the most significant part, was the struggle that led to independence and the creation of a new state in the comity of nations. No mean achievement. Mohammad Ali Jinnah is the only leader in world history who led a struggle for the creation of a new

country. He also gave a timely guideline to the constituent assembly for a progressive and fair country with equal opportunity for all.

The path of the nation continued to move away from what the Quaid had indicated. It happened slowly but surely. The perpetrators turned a tolerant country into a terrorist hub. One was losing all hope. But, this August, there came an indication that people have realised that enough is enough. This year, I read some well-written articles in support of Jinnah's concept of Pakistan. There were also some discussions and seminars on the subject. Most significant was the fact that a member of the Punjab Assembly moved the resolution that Jinnah's address to the constituent assembly on August 11 should be added as the preamble to the constitution.

So there seems to be an awakening! There seems to be a return of courage so to speak courage to shed the fear of oppressive extremists who brand anyone with different points of view as a 'danger' to Islam. The fact is that the greatest bad name to this fair religion has been brought about by the acts of terrorism by so-called 'Islamists'. It is now that the political parties should seriously work towards correcting the current trends and work for enlightenment. Knowledge will never be a danger to religion. The mindset needs to change. In a democratic set up, political parties promote public perceptions. They must think beyond the conspiracies and intrigues for personal power. The trend to own God and perpetuate religious thought that is exclusive must stop. So far, I notice that only one political party has placed Quaid's vision as its priority. Others, particularly those that do not support extremism, must all agree on a one-point agenda of following the vision of Quaid-e-Azam. It was Iqbal, the thinker, and the Quaid, the political visionary, who brought the nation together and met with the phenomenal success of creating a country. All politicians and political parties should reflect and draw strength from the vision of these great men. There is no other course for success. The minorities must be made to feel like an equal part of the nation and not oppressed by the majority. God belongs to all, He is 'Rab-ul-Alimeen' (God of all mankind) and He is not limited as He is beyond limitations. He is the creator of all and therefore His creation must be respected.

In a recent prayer, after Eid, I heard the imam praying for male issues for those who were in attendance! Why only male? Is such discrimination acceptable? Why could he not pray for 'saleh aulaad'

(pious offspring) and not limit it to male offspring? Discrimination seems to have become a habit and there is little sensitivity in such matters. This is not a true Muslim approach. It is therefore imperative that a concerted effort by all those who believe in equality and fairness should be persevered with and promote the thoughts of Iqbal and the Quaid. It may be 60 years late but it is never too late. The awakening must continue and hope should not be abandoned. It was this August that some ray of hope appeared and some with the courage of conviction spoke up. In a way I could even consider the outbursts of a Karachi politician a matter of courage to say what he believes in. If he is on his own and is not a puppet then he deserves respect. This country has the potential and natural wealth that can give it a leadership role and make people live respectably. It can be possible, by mutual respect, tolerance and hard work, in the way that our great leaders had visualised. So let us hold on to hope do not let hope abandon us, because the voices heard in August may be indicative of a turning point.

Saturday, September 17, 2011

Remembering the September 1965 war — I

The spirit of the people was amazing. Soon it was realised that Lahore was in extreme danger, but there was no panic. No panic at all! The mood was sombre. Each individual seemed determined to resist and protect their freedom in whatever way he/she could.

The 6th of September, 1965. The morning in Lahore started as usual for all city dwellers. Parents were going to schools to drop children, some buses were doing their rounds as usual, many were going to work, and some late-risers were taking breakfast.

In our family our second son was due to be born any time and we were keeping ourselves in readiness to move to the United Christian Hospital (UCH) for delivery by Dr Stella Jones. Life seemed normal; a page from the daily diaries.

At about 11 am, suddenly an explosion was heard in the skies! What was it? By this time very few had heard the announcement on the radio. The explosion alerted Lahoris and everyone wanted to know what had happened. Soon the word was that it was the breaking of the sound barrier by a Pakistani aircraft chasing an Indian aircraft. The Indian aircraft would have bombed Lahore. In a flash we knew that the Indian army had attacked Lahore. Many came out in the streets and saw the dogfight and the Indian planes leaving under threat of Pakistani fighter planes. Watchers did not know that a stray bullet from a plane could have killed someone.

Once Lahore knew it was under attack, the mood was different. It varied from one of sombre thought to almost violent expression of anger. Defiance and resolve to work for our freedom was the common factor.

Lahore had been attacked in the small hours of the morning, almost at midnight of 5th and 6th September, 1965. Pakistan was unaware. In hindsight it is incredible because Pakistan had already attacked the Chamb-Jorian sector in Kashmir in a blitzkrieg fashion to cut off Indian-held Kashmir's supply lines. Some naivety had prevailed in

believing that India will not be able to move its troops from its north-eastern borders facing China, and Pakistan will obtain its objectives. Obviously it was a miscalculation by the Pakistan government.

Whatever the background may be, the fact was that Lahore had been attacked and at some border points the Indian army had crossed the border into Pakistan. There is a story that an advance party crossed the Wagah border and drove up to Shalimar Gardens unchecked. They could not believe their success and rushed back thinking that they were walking into a trap!

A lot of army convoys were seen moving and the citizens enthusiastically cheered them. Many people were glued to Radio Pakistan Lahore as the only credible source of information. It was confirmed that Lahore had indeed been attacked by India, but they had been checked at the first defence line, the BRB canal, and the city was being protected. The convoys seen were hurriedly moved to provide support. Troops were moved in the shortest possible time, even if they were ill equipped. It was an emergency response.

The spirit of the people was amazing. Soon it was realised that Lahore was in extreme danger, but there was no panic. No panic at all! The mood was sombre. Each individual seemed determined to resist and protect their freedom in whatever way he/she could. No one wanted to leave the city. In short, everyone seemed to be saying to himself: "It is my city, I will protect it, by whatever it takes." Soon President Ayub addressed the nation; he also did that on the few months-old nascent TV. The TV, called the NEC TV after the Japanese Nippon Electric Company, was housed in the popularly known 'khokha' (tea shop) in the borrowed premises of Radio Pakistan.

Soon civil defence instructions were broadcast. We listened carefully and got to work. Trenches were dug in shapes like 'Z' or 'W'. I was at my house on Abbot Road opposite Radio Pakistan; I had a trench dug in the lawn. At the Alhambra, where I was the secretary, I had a couple of trenches dug. Civil defence instructors visited to teach methods of protection against air raids. Sirens were heard often announcing the air raids, which were followed by dogfights in the skies of Lahore or around. As soon as an air raid was announced most of the people rushed to the 'trenches' and stayed there until clearance. In the night sometimes one protected oneself by rushing under a staircase or

into a corner where glass splinters would not hit in case of a nearby explosion. In Alhamra, all colleagues — Nazir Zaigham, Masud Iqbal, Mukhtar, Ayub, Masud Akhter, Qavi, Samia Naz, Kamal Rizvi, Athar Shah Khan and many others made sure that civil defence precautions were being taken.

At home one major concern was the fact that our second son Mehran was due to be born any time. What would happen if there was an emergency while an air attack was on? The UCH was far away from Abbot Road! The house nearest to the UCH was of Mohsin Shirazi and Fauzia. They were almost next to the Qaddafi Stadium's Gulberg gate and about two minutes drive to UCH. Mohsin provided the hospitality and we moved over on September 7. Mehran was born on September 8! Such were the challenges.

The general mood of the public was amazing. No panic, just serene determination written on each face saying 'we will, all together, defeat the enemy'. The way to do that was to stick to your job, whatever it was, and do it well! Army to fight at the borders, civil defence to protect civilians, volunteers to offer a helping hand. Many women packed food stuffs and essentials for the frontline soldiers who had left in a hurry. One was reminded of World War II when all British women knitted socks for the soldiers fighting in the cold winters.

The ISPR office, with Captain Arshad in-charge, was the link between the civilians and the fighting forces. A historical combined effort was to follow. Indeed, artists were to make unforgettable contributions.

(To be continued)

Saturday, September 24, 2011

Remembering the September 1965 war — II

The war on the borders was being fought by the armed forces but that was not the only front; an equally important war was being fought on the psychological front by the artists

It has been 45 years since the country, particularly Lahore, faced the challenge of the 1965 war. There were fierce battles on the borders. Gunfire from a distance could be heard and our airspace resounded with the sound of Pakistan air force planes chasing the Indians who were on the run. No bombing from the air took place in Lahore. Mr Alam downed five Indian fighter planes during one single combat flight. Major Aziz Bhatti Shaheed wrote an entire chapter on extreme bravery. Appropriately, Lahore dedicated a main road to his name. One night, a rumour started making the rounds that Indian soldiers would land via parachutes. Thousands of civilians spent that night on their rooftops to shoot at these parachutes! It turned out to be a hoax. As a routine precaution, whenever air raid sirens sounded, we would take to shelters for days and nights, and would resume work afterwards.

The war was intensely fought. A Moazin (preacher) in Hudiara village resisted the Indian intruders and refused to reveal the whereabouts of the Pakistan Army; he was shot dead. The event touched me and I wrote a radio play the same evening.

No doubt, the war on the borders was being fought by the armed forces but that was not the only front; an equally important war was being fought on the psychological front by the artists, for which the artists of Lahore will always be remembered.

The centre of the artists' war effort was 'Radio Pakistan'. The announcement "Yeh Radio Pakistan Lahore hai" (This is Radio Pakistan Lahore) meant for the nation that Lahore was alive and defending itself. It provided moral strength to the people. The Indian dreams to interrupt the broadcast from this station and to have a party in the Gymkhana club were not to be realised. The morale of the nation

Saturday, October 08, 2011

Support for a killer — Naeem Tahir

The groups that are supporting Qadri, a murderer, need to be understood. Their mindset is causing the disintegration of this society and breaking it into pieces. Quite obviously, they do not believe in the law and the system of justice otherwise they would let the law take its course and respect its decision.

The court has convicted the killer, Malik Mumtaz Qadri, on two counts and imposed the death sentence. Mumtaz Qadri killed, in cold blood, the governor of Punjab province, Mr Salmaan Taseer, when he stepped out of a restaurant after lunch with a friend in Islamabad. Mumtaz Qadri, who was Taseer's on-duty guard and was expected to protect him, instead fired several bullets into Mr Taseer causing almost instantaneous death. There was no provocation at the time. The killer had planned for an opportune moment and acted accordingly. There was little confusion about the murderer as Qadri confessed to the killing and there was no shortage of evidence.

On the arrest of Qadri, and his subsequent appearances in court, he was supported by some lawyers and others, and even garlanded by them. If Salmaan Taseer's murder shocked the world, the public support for Qadri was no less shocking. Some religio-political parties continued to pressurise the case, making even hearing of the case difficult. However, the court saved its honour, examined the facts and sentenced the killer to death. Now the same political and so-called religious groups are taking to the streets to influence the courts where an appeal has been filed.

Should society remain silent and let whatever is happening happen? Do we have any conscience? Do we realise our social responsibility? Do we even realise moral and religious responsibility? Is our religion only of use to exploiters who can twist it for some political power and blackmail? How can anyone justify the killing of one person by another just because they have a difference of views?

Friday, October 7, was announced as a day of street protests by a group of extreme right groups like Sunni Tehreek, Sunni Ulema Council, Sunni Ittehad Council, Jamiat Ahle Hadith and Jamaat-e-Islami. They chose this day, Friday, because it is easy to collect people from their mosque networks, whip up the sentiments of those present and then encourage them to take to the streets, as if these namazis (worshippers) were doing a religious duty.

The groups that are supporting Qadri, a murderer, need to be understood. Their mindset is causing the disintegration of this society and breaking it into pieces. Quite obviously, they do not believe in the law and the system of justice otherwise they would let the law take its course and respect its decision. Is such intimidation of the court in itself not a cognisable offence? One wonders about the real purpose of these rallies. These rallies have a cost in time and money and the leaders of these groups are only trying to show off their strength. They are clearly supporters of terrorism. They would probably want to have their brand of justice administered in the streets, little different from the mob that lynched the two innocent boys in Sialkot. I do not know much about other groups but I doubt if Maulana Abul Ala Maududi would have ever allowed the stance adopted by the current 'Amir-e-Jamaat'. About the other groups, one can say that they are mostly the political wings of the terrorists in the country. They speak for the sections of society that have been brainwashed into twisted versions of Islam just like the Taliban and its young recruits have been. This is organised promotion of anger, taking the law into individual hands and making decisions on the streets. Seen in this perspective, it can be termed as an uprising against the country. It needs to be taken up seriously. Those sections of the provincial governments and political groups that enjoy destabilising the country must be dealt with according to the constitution. A government that turns a blind eye to these happenings is lacking in its duties. The government must ensure protection to the courts to enable them to uphold the law of this land.

The courts indeed have enhanced their prestige in recent days. Their decisions in the Sialkot lynching case, Malik Qadri case and their objective findings of the causes of the Karachi unrest have raised their respect in the public eye by several notches. At the moment, the judiciary is one institution that is functioning while all other pillars of state are subject to question. All persons, groups and institutions must

review and rationalise their style of covert actions. The street action to influence the courts is a 'covert' action to intimidate. I suppose it would be an appropriate issue for a suo motu.

Finally, staying silent is not helping the saner sections of society. Nor does it help in developing civil society. We all need to contribute, even in conversation, dialogue, lectures, all and any method of communication that an individual has access to and try to restore sanity. Let us not allow street decisions be the winning sentiment. Unfortunately, this is what has been happening so far. The most recent case is the restoration of electricity. We all know that electricity potential has always been present in Pakistan. Why did the government wait until the public took to the streets? Did anyone realise the cost of this power disruption? Please let us live in some peace. Have the grace to look at yourselves and analyse the consequences of your actions. Consider this country your own and treat it as such. Consider these people your people with equal rights, as you want for yourselves. Give yourselves some moments to think and bring about change; cynicism and lack of faith will not help but some decent effort will.

Saturday, October 15, 2011

Militancy and politics

Mian sahib's credibility would have enhanced if he had provided the lead by making a statement to volunteer complete severance of his ties with militants and condemned the Taliban's activities

Mian Nawaz Sharif, chief of his faction of the League, has come out with a very significant statement. He said recently that the militant groups in the political parties should be banned. There is no doubt that militancy has done an almost irreparable damage to the country. Mian sahib's statement, its credibility and implications need to be understood clearly.

Mian sahib was referring to the situation in Karachi and to the observations of the suo motu notice taken by the Supreme Court (SC). The SC had included several political parties in the list of those who support militant wings. Of course the MQM was included in the list and Mian sahib has no love lost for that party. The MQM works on a concept almost completely different from the PML-N. The MQM is a party of primarily middle class educated groups, it has generally a progressive stance, it developed from an entirely 'Muhajir' party to a national organisation. In its early days there were elements strongly suspected of militancy. Mian sahib has always regretted their control of Karachi and during his tenure did everything possible to demolish this party. Not much success was achieved and the MQM consolidated anyhow. However, there is no love lost between Mian sahib and the MQM. So one major reason that Mian sahib came out with this statement was his sour relationship with the MQM. He associates militancy primarily with this party and his statement is encouraging that impression. But of course the statement is applicable to all other parties included in the list of the SC's findings.

A major problem with Mian sahib's statement is its credibility. An element of militancy has been developing for a long time as an instrument of street power to intimidate the government of the time and also other political groups. The Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing was one of the earlier 'danda bardar' (stick-wielding) violence

mongering groups. Later, with the rise of the PPP, they developed a counter-force. Gradually, all parties developed some elements to fight out. Thus the rise in militancy. Mian sahib has taken another route. He has colluded with banned organisations and other militants to give him support. He has never condemned or openly spoken against the terror networks. At best he wants negotiations with the Taliban; negotiations that have been heavily conditional and one-sided. Even if an understanding was ever developed, it was never implemented or cared for by the militants. The negotiations in the case of Swat are an example. The PML-N's Punjab government openly, and covertly, supports extremists and vice versa. Some organisations like the Jamat-ud-Dawa (JuD) are given open financial support. A recently released leader of the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) was provided financial sustenance throughout his period of detention and he came out with beaming smiles. One of the Sharifs' favourite judges, who retired recently, is defending Mumtaz Qadri, a convict who openly killed Governor Punjab Salmaan Taseer. In this situation it suits Mian sahib that the other parties get rid of their covert powers and these elements be 'banned'. In fact, it would provide him an opportunity to build up relations with the newly banned outfits to his advantage. So the statement has many suspicions attached to it. Militancy is an instrument of intimidation and Mian sahib's record of intimidation is known. His people attacked the office of a newspaper, attacked the courts, tried to hijack a plane and so on and so forth. Mian sahib's current statement can be rated in credibility with his earlier claim, probably in fun, that he has never eaten Punjabi delicacies 'siri-paye' and 'khadd'. Mian sahib is known to be a gourmet and fond of Punjabi and Kashmiri dishes. He is even said to have missed 'burgers' and asked for them during his jail term! There is nothing wrong with it, so why deny?

However, Mian sahib's credibility would have enhanced if he had provided the lead by making a statement to volunteer complete severance of his ties with militants and condemned the Taliban's activities. Such a statement from the head of a leading political party would have comforted the public and then the other parties would have been encouraged to have cleaner outfits dedicated to political activity and hopefully some nation building agendas instead of obtaining power by hook or crook.

It is indeed in the best interest of the country that democracy be strengthened to ensure national progress, and voters are not compelled to cast their votes under fear. It can be done by offering a well considered programme of economic and social development. The methods of protest must be peaceful. All countries and their political parties in the civilised world have developed methods of protest without violence. If Mian Nawaz Sharif is to be believed then he should plan to provide leadership in such directions without seeking support from 'banned' outfits.

On the other hand, the government of the time must also have the sensitivity to act and respond to the people's problems before the masses lose patience. This is the way of democracy and our political parties, as well as the governments in power, need to recognise peaceful endeavours reflecting public needs. This could cement democracy and take the country forward.

Saturday, October 22, 2011

Shortcuts, intolerances, etc

Each individual needs to take responsibility in whichever capacity he or she can, and make a contribution however big or small

The traffic signal turns red. You stop. The car on one side swings past. The driver gives you a look, indicating you are no good or stupid, and he is real smart. The car behind you stops at a half inch distance, just short of kissing the 'behind' of the car. The car on your right needs to make a right turn just as the light is about to change, but does not want to lose a second. Later you find out that the person in a hurry has parked near a fruit vendor and is enjoying some cut fruit. The list goes on. What is all this? Is it competition, a sense of victory, thrill of violating the law, indiscipline or general anger? Maybe it is all of these and more, including poor upbringing. I do not consider myself an exception. Several years ago, when I was young, I was driving in a busy street in a foreign country, when the car in front of me stopped at the crossing and I blew the horn. The driver came out and with controlled temper said, "I cannot drive over them. If you can, then go ahead." I looked and realised that he had stopped at a zebra crossing for pedestrians. I apologised, and learnt a lesson.

On the subject of horn blowing, some time ago one of my sons who was studying at Berkeley visited us during his holidays. He was driving us on Canal Road when someone started to blow the horn from behind. I am used to such things, but my son checked if he was driving in the correct lane, and whether his speed was normal. He was very confused as to why he was constantly being harassed. Noting his anxiety I said, "Don't bother, the driver behind you thinks he is playing a musical instrument!" My son was very amused. In a few seconds the car behind overtook us triumphantly. Blowing the horn can be a nuisance. In my neighbourhood a car comes to pick up someone early in the morning. The driver blows the car horn incessantly until he has made sure that everyone in the street is wide awake. I wonder if he has ever considered getting out of his car and ringing the doorbell! It is thoughtlessness and

insensitivity of the highest order, and irritating as well. Could he just be showing off his presence?

Recently, I had the pleasure of riding with a politician friend in his 'Pajero' type of vehicle. He was driving himself and we drove to our destination as if in an ambulance, with no regard for traffic rules, signals, or road courtesies, etc. On top of it, the other passengers in the vehicle appreciated the 'skill' and smartness of my friend. This appreciation of the disregard for rule of law has become a culture in our society. You cannot get a job unless you find a sponsor who has the 'approach' to get you preference over others. In fact you cannot achieve anything if the process of law is followed. Perhaps NADRA is an exception because the human element is reduced and computers do most of the work. Standing in line and waiting your turn is considered almost below one's dignity. Working hard to get a good result in studies is old fashioned. I find working young men unable to divide or add three figure numbers without a calculator. What they did in their mathematics class is a mystery. I once had an employee who was drawing an additional allowance because she claimed to be a Ph.D. One day she asked for leave beyond her entitlement. So I asked her to write an application explaining the necessity of the requested leave. She could not do it to save her life! I wondered about her Ph.D and asked her to let me look at her thesis some time. Of course, I was never shown it. I wonder how, and from where, she obtained her Ph.D. Cases of 'fake degrees' are known to almost everyone. All this bears out the culture of finding short cuts, impatience and insensitivity to law and society's morals.

Many may have seen a line written on the back of rickshaws. The line reads, "Yeh sab meri maa ki dua hai" (this is all due to my mother's prayers). Indeed a mother's contribution is immense and should be acknowledged. What about the father who toils and makes sure his children get a position in society? The line rarely reads 'Meray waleedain ki dua' (prayers of my parents), which could compliment both mother and father. I wonder if this is because the male owner/driver of the rickshaw saw the 'father' as a disciplinarian? He hated the discipline and enjoyed the affection of the mother. We need to look at our attitudes at every level. Maybe fathers should be more affectionate and mothers should care a little more about discipline. This extends to every level of learning in schools, colleges and universities as

well as in society. Indiscipline has crept in and breaking the law is an achievement. This is now an element of our culture. It is a bigger killer than the 'dengue' mosquito. This new culture is not killing an individual; it is actually killing society, the nation and the country. It is time we showed sensitivity. Intellectuals and thinkers all need to feel responsible and not just watch in bewilderment, but find some way of checking it. Let us not believe that 'aavae ka aava hi biggar gaya hai' (the whole thing is messed up) and that nothing can be done. Any small step that a member of society takes is a contribution to improving social behaviour. Silence is not a solution; it never has been. Each individual needs to take responsibility in whichever capacity he or she can, and make a contribution however big or small. If an overseas Pakistani can learn, then so can mainland Pakistanis.

Saturday, October 29, 2011

Jaloos and jalsa

Just as the Mians will not succeed in dethroning the Zardari monarchy, the PTI will not ensure an election victory for itself. A big jalsa is no guarantee of election success. Getting voters to come to the polling booth and actually vote for you is another game

There are going to be two shows going on during the last week of October. By the time this article is published one of the shows would have been over, having been held on October 28, and after two days the next one will be on. The first show is fashionably called a 'rally'. Perhaps chotay (younger) Mian sahib has preferred to call it a 'rally' instead of a jaloos (procession), because of the old saying, 'uss ka tou jaloos nikal gaya' (an insult meaning failure). Of course Mian sahib would not want that. Most Lahoris must have noticed the posters of this 'rally' with both Mian sahibs in dramatic poses. Both like to point fingers. This is something special with them. In the old times, pointing fingers was considered bad manners but not anymore, thanks to fashionable leaders like the Mian sahibs. All these fingers are pointing at President Zardari, and diverting attention from their own doings.

The main purpose of the PML-N rally is to consolidate before Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Imran Khan pulls the supporters away. The call is for a hundred thousand persons in the rally. Normally, rally expenses that include the costs of transportation, refreshments, etc, amount to about Rs 500 per person. So the estimated cost of the rally is about Rs 500 million. Television cameras have already shown money being distributed by the N-League. Of course the publicity, promotion and campaigning is separately budgeted for. It is peanuts for the Mians and, of course, why should they be paying personally. It is 'in the national interest', so the nation will pay. Do they realise that the nation has been paying for these political extravaganzas and now it is bleeding? The main objective is not public welfare; it is a race, and a game to reduce the term of a democratic government.

Now the jalsa. Mr Imran Khan has announced with full confidence that his show of strength will be an eye-opener for the Mians and

perhaps for everyone else too. There is no doubt that the PTI has gained support, primarily from the right wing and the far right. Imran has built his popularity on anti-US sentiment and the colossal failure of the incumbent government. Everything has been going wrong and he has exploited it. Also, he is on the spot and offering to lead, while real alternatives are conspicuous by their absence. Therefore, it can be said that Imran will draw crowds. It is possible that people imported and brought to Lahore by Mian sahib may stay on and witness Imran's histrionics as well. As they say, 'Aik ticket maen do mazay' (two shows in one ticket). The central government is sitting pretty because Imran's moves will blunt the Mians' moves of 'go Zardari go'. Presently it is a local show more than a national show. Depending upon the size of the crowd in Imran's jalsa, the costs will be pretty high as they will be in the case of the 'rally'. I have stated an estimate of about Rs 200 million on television.

Just as the 'jaloos' is not likely to fully serve the Mians, so is the case of the 'jalsa' for Imran. The numbers attending will be exaggerated; news photographers will be covering from angles that show a full house and the kanaat (tent) arrangements will block empty spaces. The jalsa arrangers know the techniques perfectly. Just as the Mians will not succeed in dethroning the Zardari monarchy, the PTI will not ensure an election victory for itself. A big jalsa is no guarantee of election success. This is so simply because people gather from different areas, with different motives and they do not constitute voters of any particular constituency. Getting voters to come to the polling booth and actually vote for you is another game. Unfortunately, older parties have much more experience in this game, and for those in power, the government apparatus helps.

To sum up, there is no doubt that people want a change. But I am not sure if they are ready to work for a change. Or even if they know what change they need and how to bring it about. People are almost fed up and could not care less. They just want a change. This is where we always go wrong. It is time we work to know what change we want, who is capable of leading towards that change, and then rally behind that leader and his movement.

The two parties holding the jaloos and the jalsa have not much to offer unfortunately. The Mians are a spent force, aligned with the extreme right and violent religious groups, and actively supporting and

financing the mafia under the cover of religion. They are active partners of corruption.

The PTI has some edge but Imran stays quiet on the subject of the Taliban. He avoids the subject at times when the condemnation of terror is in focus, or diverts the argument. His criticism of corruption and incompetence is supported by the masses. People also share his call for a change. But is he the answer to the nation's requirements? This is indeed an important question. He lacks the experience of governance, and governance is not something you do just by instinct or good wishes. But he has plus points, including international recognition to some extent. This is a positive, but it is limited primarily to cricket and fund raising for the cancer hospital he built in his mother's name. If he has some other 'fame' then that is of no help to the nation. Imran is 'clean'; he is not known to be corrupt. He is presentable and well educated and well groomed. He talks well, but needs consistency in political philosophy. Imran and his party have shown commitment and energy, and do provide possible hope.

So the jaloos and jalsa may provide some fun, even a show of strength, but none of these are likely to herald the hope that the nation needs. Or provide the change or the leadership the country needs.

Saturday, November 12, 2011

Looking back at the 'jalsa'

PTI is known for its connections with an old party of the right wing. This party is attractive for some politicians for its disciplined work force, but its potential influence on the outlook of the PTI will change the concept of 'change' in public perception. So any such involvement needs to be very carefully thought over

The jalsa (rally) of October 30th is still talked about. There is good reason for it. It was the biggest gathering of people in Lahore since the return of Benazir Bhutto in the 80s. It was also a voluntary gathering and not prompted, bought or forced. Another plus, it was not a unisex collection — it was well represented by families and people who are more like leaders of thought and whose strength is not just as of one voter. It is irrelevant if there were one hundred thousand people or more or less. The important thing is that there was a large gathering, bigger than seen in recent years, and it conveyed a 'message'.

The 'message' it conveyed was that the nation is ready for a 'change'. It disapproves of the political mismanagement by the current setup. The nation may think of Imran as the harbinger of change, but it may not be its final decision. It may turn out to be a final decision of those exposed to the jalsa if the elements that have prompted the hope continue to exist. Some of the obvious elements of hope are Imran being free of corruption scandals so far, his track record as an achiever, however limited it might be, and, indeed, his personal appeal.

Achievement of success will need to be measured by assessing whether party members succeed in consolidating the advantage of getting serious attention or frittering it away. Do the party members realise what makes their party different from others? Unfortunately, not much evidence of that is available. Soon after the jalsa, an important office bearer of his party indulged in exactly the kind of mudslinging and shouting that members of other parties do. He narrowed the gap between the fresh look of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the rotten appearance of some of the old parties. While this gentleman accused another leader of being drunk all the time without any basis, he

himself definitely proved to be intoxicated by the success of the jalsa. The jalsa reflects determined hard work of years and it can take little time in losing the impression. So Imran will need to pay some attention to harness the colts. Overestimating the benefits of the turnout can hurt. The people who appear in jalsas are no guarantee of an election victory. Even Benazir, in spite of crowd cheering, did not win an absolute majority. Elections are a complicated affair; the process reflects voters' support in each constituency, and the old parties have deep rooted systems entrenched for manoeuvring. The results are often rigged and all kinds of temptations, personal exploitation, fear, peer pressure and arm-twisting, etc, are part of the corrupt election process. If a change is to come then work at this level is essential.

In addition to the caution against 'success intoxication', there are other matters to be dealt with carefully. Many splinter groups, particularly from the Right, would want to jump on to the bandwagon and try to get a share of power. If PTI wants to keep the 'hope' alive it must stay away from such infiltrations or alliances. PTI is known for its connections with an old party of the right wing. This party is attractive for some politicians for its disciplined work force, but its potential influence on the outlook of the PTI will change the concept of 'change' in public perception. So any such involvement needs to be very carefully thought over. Perhaps the best thing is to build your own disciplined work force of political volunteers. For political success on the ground, a huge amount of legwork is needed in addition to quality leadership. Imran says repeatedly that his is a party with an 'ideology'. However, it is not clear what ideology or programme he is referring to. He has created hope by convincing people that he is serious about changing things, but he has not convincingly enumerated how he is going to bring about that change. His speech in this jalsa was reasonably balanced, but lacked depth. He maintained grace, which was positive and needs to be followed by his party members.

One of the most interesting aftermaths is an article in an important English daily. It goes into great detail to establish commonalities between PTI and the PML-N. Almost convincing. If it is so, then God help us. People may be in for a huge shock. The PML-N jaloos was a washout and once again provided more of what people are fed up of.

Another article in another English daily talked about PTI's attraction for the progressive elements! Obviously the party line is not

dear and that is why such opposite claims are being made. Imran Khan has been talking about all political issues without much discrimination. He has gained by riding the crest of any and all popular issues and got the attention he needed. But this policy has also confused the direction of the party. Where does he take his party from here will be the real challenge. Imran must remember that his strongest plank is anti-corruption and that is what he should focus on. If he joins the 'corrupt' then his game is lost.

What kind of 'in-swinger' is needed here is a decision to be taken by the captain. If he does not do it right, the voters are quite capable of hitting the ball for a six and sending it out of the field.

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Saturday, November 19, 2011

UNESCO punished

In this situation, 'arm twisting' on the basis of financial strength cannot be called either ethical or democratic. It may be called coercion or corruption by the power of money. Unfortunately, the US is getting known for this approach in international politics.

On Monday, Oct 31, 2011, UNESCO general conference president Katalin Bogyay announced that the UN cultural organisation had voted strongly in favour of membership for the Palestinians — a move opposed by Israel and the US. Of 173 countries voting, 107 were in favour, Pakistan included.

A huge cheer erupted in UNESCO's General Assembly after the vote, which marks a symbolic victory for the Palestinians in the complex diplomacy that surrounds their collective status and relations with foreign powers.

"Today's victory at UNESCO is the beginning of a road that is difficult, but will lead to the freedom of our land and people from occupation," Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Malki said. Palestine has the right to a place on the map. Israel called the vote a 'tragedy' and the decision damaged relations between UNESCO and the US, an ally of Israel that provides about 22 percent of the body's funding. The US took no time in announcing cancellation of its funding to UNESCO.

Once again, US policy shocked a large segment of the world populace, but for those who have followed US policy tilts it contained no surprise. The people of the US have little say in the policies that its government follows. Said to be a 'great' democracy, one wonders if it respects democratic processes around the world. The people of the US exercise their vote and feel they have done what is required of them. They are hardly ever seen protesting against what happens within the country, or how their representatives shape their image in the rest of the world. The American people are one of the most submissive lots. Engaged in making two ends meet, they have little time for anything else. They are subjected to the propaganda machine, and their opinions

are formed by political parties at the time of elections. But what happens afterwards is a matter of trust and politicians' business. In the case of the second term election of Bush, third world tactics of manipulation of the electoral process was noticeable. Polling stations were interfered with, counting not allowed, and the Supreme Court delayed its decision to re-count the votes until the exercise became ineffective due to a constitutional provision. Bush became President and the late count showed that in fact Gore had won. The American public remained helpless. So much for respect of the democratic process by the influential in the US. So it is no surprise if the US government punishes UNESCO for having respected the majority vote!

The US did whatever it did. Surely, it caused disappointment to many around the world because of the impression that the US respects democratic values. Perhaps it is time to clarify thoughts. US policy for the rest of the world is different, and if need be, the internal situation can also be rigged. The lack of respect for the UNESCO vote is an obvious example. In the UN Security Council, the US holds, and often threatens to use its 'veto' power to overrule democratic vote. The 'veto' power was reserved for themselves by some of the founding members. What a farce! This fact reinforces that idea that all men are not equal, nor all nations. The more powerful are indeed those who have the right to overrule.

But there is some factual support for justifying inequality in some cases. It is God's truth that all humans are not born equal. Therefore different treatments can be justified except in basic human needs. However, those who attain the status of representing their country at UNESCO should possess a certain level of intellect and integrity. In this situation, 'arm twisting' on the basis of financial strength cannot be called either ethical or democratic. It may be called coercion or corruption by the power of money. Unfortunately, the US is getting known for this approach in international politics.

The major reason of the growing unpopularity of the US's policies is this approach in the international arena. Stick and carrot, money or threats, are at the base of most of its policies. Sometimes there is a 'human' cover-up, and quite often the US stands 'naked' in its covert or overt operations. It is time that the people of America realise that this policy is not bringing a good name for their country. The world is not limited to the US only, contrary to what several simple Americans may

believe. The world is a large community of states and US is one member of it.

The US has some remarkable traditions. In Abraham Lincoln, it had distinguished leadership of historical stature and respect. It has perhaps the best constitution in the world; it has huge resources and an amazing culture of tolerance and social justice within the country. But American policies around the world do not reflect the true American spirit. These policies betray prejudice and intolerance. Perhaps the most damaging to the American image is its dubious policy towards Palestine. No one in the right frame of mind should deny Israel a right to respectable existence, but by the same logic nobody should deny Palestine a right to respectable existence. In the case of Palestine, the US policy even smacks of religious bias and isolates itself from the Muslims around the world. Unfortunately, it is the US that insists on such discrimination in spite of its championship of human rights, democracy, and justice, etc. Personally, I believe that men like Bill Clinton who seemed genuinely interested in solving this chronic problem should play a more central role. The US has the power and the ability to bring cheer to the Palestinians and their supporters, and it is time the US reviewed its policies and earned a good name as a state and for its people.

Saturday Nov 26, 2011

Paperwork

The 'memo' includes not just direct acknowledgement that the current security establishment is in cahoots with terrorist outfits, but also asks for direct intervention from the US to set things 'right'

There is a much talked about, and speculated about, 'memo' that is making the rounds. This memo has reminded me of a cartoon in an old newspaper. The cartoon showed a man sitting on a toilet 'throne' and looking at the toilet roll saying, "No job is complete without paperwork!"

The 'memo' under reference is the centre of attention of so many, and it is also said to have done some real 'dirty work'. The memo has literally rocked the halls of power from the White House, Pakistan Army headquarters and the Presidency, to the homes of parliamentarians and political analysts. Everyone is talking about it. They are also waiting for the 'dirty work' expected to actually happen. What is going to be the ultimate result is not known. It can fizzle out, partially damage the government or its functionaries or grow into a 'Memogate' like the Watergate scandal in Nixon's time. Nixon had to leave as a consequence.

This memo was published in an international paper. There has been much speculation about the author. Was it an original work of Mansoor Ijaz? Probably not. Mansoor Ijaz claims that the content of the memo sent to Mullen was carefully crafted after discussions with a senior diplomat. His pointers are mostly towards Husain Haqqani, then Pakistani ambassador in the US. The buck does not stop here, it is also insinuated that the clearance came right from the top, i.e. from Mr Zardari.

How was this note delivered to Mike Mullen has been a mystery for some time but the courier has now identified himself. It was James Logan Jones, former US national security advisor and a retired general, obviously a very important person.

After the receipt of this memo, Mike Mullen took a complete u-turn in his retirement speech and criticised the Pakistan Army and the ISI in a scathing manner, which was not expected. He had been supportive of these institutions. So what made him change? This is where the 'paperwork' seems to have done the 'job'. When Mullen shocked everyone in Pakistan, particularly the army, a search for the reasons for this unexpected happening started. Gradually the mystery unfolded. In fact, the key middleman, Mansoor Ijaz, leaked it himself with all the sleaze it carried. The memo, finally said to have been delivered, is indeed shocking. Its contents make every Pakistani's head hang in thoughtful shame. One asks several questions. Most important: does the Pakistan government respect its sovereignty? Or are we 'subjects' under the complete influence of the US, and willingly want it to control us, and our army in particular? For once, even Mian Nawaz Sharif has raised a meaningful question.

He asked, "Is it patriotism to seek aliens' pressure on the army?"

Here are some relevant extracts for you to decide.

It requests Mullen to restrain Kayani and Pasha thus: "...In the event Washington's direct intervention behind the scenes can be secured through your personal communication with Kayani (he will likely listen to you only at this moment) to stand down the Pakistan military-intelligence establishment, the 'new national security team' is prepared, with full backing of the civilian apparatus, to do the following." Thereafter, six 'services' are listed.

In brief, support of the US was asked for to snub the army chief to deter him from acting against the 'civilian government'. It is hard to believe that a civilian government with an iota of self-respect and any concern for the dignity of the nation would request a foreign government, friendly or unfriendly, to 'snub' its own army chief! It is an insult to the most important single institution of the national government.

There is further stink in the memo. A deal is offered in return for the containment of the Pakistan Army. It is spread over six points, which ensure compliance to US desires by appointing a 'security set-up' with US approval, which would carry out all the US's instructions in investigations of its interest, including Osama's presence in Pakistan.

this memorandum for your consideration collectively as the 'members of the new security team' who will be inducted by the president of Pakistan with your support in this undertaking." The key word here is 'we'. Who are the 'we' making a commitment of subservience on behalf of the nation?

The 'memo' includes not just direct acknowledgement that the current security establishment is in cahoots with terrorist outfits, but also asks for direct intervention from the US to set things 'right'.

Sleuths are making all kinds of disclosures. It is said that the ISI chief had a one-to-one meeting with Mansoor Ijaz, who gave him the complete evidence and a lowdown on how the memo was prepared and delivered. The president of Pakistan and Husain Haqqani are put on the defensive. Mr Haqqani was called back. He went through confidential sessions with the president as well as the prime minister. It is said that he offered his resignation as well as his computer and phones to help the investigation, but finally had to resign. What is going to happen? If Haqqani is sacrificed, will the damage be controlled? Was someone after Haqqani's job in particular? Is the scandal going to blow up further? There has been speculation that it may bring the government down!

The 'memo' has definitely created a great gap of confidence between the civilian government and the army establishment. Investigations and explanations may continue but a lot of damage is already done. It will be good luck if the extent of the damage is contained at this level. Unfortunately, it does not seem likely. The paperwork has a lot of 'stink' and it may not go away easily. There may be a lot more to come, and to write about.

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Saturday, December 03, 2011

The NATO raid and reactions

We do not need an anti-Pakistan force to fill the vacuum. It is a time to respect emotions but also to respect logic and national interests

The reaction to the NATO raid on an army outpost near Kunar is widespread. There is little 'new' in the reaction except for the high intensity of it. There cannot be two opinions about the gravity of the 'mistake'. It is the most serious tragedy to date. May God bless the souls of the martyrs and give fortitude to their families to bear the loss.

Other than the grief that this matter has brought to the nation, it has unleashed intense anger. The energy generated by the anger needs sombre analysis. There are several serious factors to be considered. The incident has made the armed forces take up a no-nonsense approach with the US. This includes a hardened attitude towards support facilities to NATO, including stoppage of supplies and vacating of at least the Shamsi airbase. In the background of the 'Memogate' scandal, the uncompromising approach by the armed forces is completely understandable. Their faith in the political establishment has been shaken and they have no option but to assert themselves. It is also right that the government is supportive.

But the decision that may need more thought is the withdrawal from the meeting in Bonn. It needs to be carefully weighed whether the advantage is in participating and protesting, or in being conspicuous by our absence.

Having recognised the necessity of a firm response, we also need to look at some very relevant factors that will help us reach a clear understanding of the whole phenomenon. These include the covert 'permission' to use bases, the exploitation of anger, the effort to estrange a world power, i.e. the US to an extent that helps the extremists and the planned strategy to isolate Pakistan.

'lease'. Most likely, the conditions were recorded in 'non-paper' form, if at all. It should be particularly investigated as to what reciprocal advantages were available and to whom. Incidentally, the big campaign in the case of Memogate, launched by Mian Nawaz Sharif, is self-contradictory. Was he not the person who flew to the US and personally requested a rebuff to the Pakistan Army in the case of Kargil? In the present case, the notorious 'memo', if true, is meant for a similar purpose. If the request is ugly now, it was ugly then too.

As for the exploitation of anger, the extremists provide the worst example. Let us look at one example: The Jamat-ud-Dawa (JuD) has once again been in the forefront. A well known newspaper has reported the following: students aged 10 to 15 from Jhumra Sandal Islamic School, Faisalabad and Tameer-i-Seerat Model School Sharaqpur, Sheikhpura, said they thought they were going to a science exhibition in Al-Mizan School in Faisalabad. This is what parents were told when they signed the field trip permission. Instead, the children were brought to Lahore and were made to join a protest in front of the press club and in Nasir Bagh, Lahore.

This is one example of exploitation intended to whip up anger against the US and to make sure that the pressure on extremists and so called 'banned outfits' gets reduced. Another question to be answered is as to what does a 'ban' by the government mean? If they can carry out all activities including political protests and rallies, does the government's intention not become suspect? So, if the US and its allies lose confidence in the commitments of our government then what is strange about all this? Is this also a covert permission? Is it another form of 'corruption' of governmental actions? Or is it that the Punjab government follows its own policies with little consideration to the federation?

It is quite clear that the estrangement of a world power, which has been a 'partner' in the war against terror, may result in a decision to withdraw and abandon Pakistan as an unreliable partner. This is likely to help the agenda of the 'extreme' right and terrorists because it is easier for them to work with a more anti-US set up. It may be recalled that extremists have little love for our armed forces. They keep attacking them and have certainly killed more men in uniform than all US attacks combined. In no way does it justify the US attack but it does clearly expose the intentions of the extremists.

Finally, an even more serious matter: the army post near Kunar border was ruthlessly attacked, but who invited NATO forces on the pretext of the presence of terrorists in the area?

All factors must be considered before a final decision. This is a moment to redefine policies within the region and with the powers that be. We do not need an anti-Pakistan force to fill the vacuum. It is a time to respect emotions but also to respect logic and national interests.

The writer is a culture and media management specialist, a researcher, author, director and actor

Imran Khan emerged as a challenger to the status quo and also did everything to please the Balochistan province by making special announcements. Estimated attendance was over 100,000, which is large by any standards. The loud and clear message was that the public is fed up of the current political mismanagement of national affairs by the coalition government and they need change. If the hope for this change is provided by the PTI, then so be it.

The last jalsa was in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh, the PPP's hometown. All kinds of rumours prevailed before it. There were all kinds of vicious rumours about Mr Zardari's medical check-up, and the strains between institutional workings. Rumours are a favourite pastime of people and some sections of the press. These do little good to the country, occupy the attention of government functionaries and distract them from any good work they may have done. Perhaps the most significant question raised by President Zardari in the jalsa was about the investigation of Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto's shahaadat (martyrdom) case. What the truth is, is still unknown and may remain so for a long time if not forever. This jalsa marked the end of the campaigns. Other jalsas, if any, carried little significance.

There are new jalsas on the anvil including one in Sukkur by the MQM, and in Karachi by the APML. It seems that 2012 could be the election year and all parties are bracing up for participation.

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Saturday, January 14, 2012

The cat family and the 'lion'

The developing scenario presents a very sombre picture. It is a combination of rightist political parties, aggressive Taliban, pro-Taliban factions and a mainstream political force of the PML-N

In a detailed report published in a local English daily on January 5, 2012, some pieces of a jigsaw puzzle have been put in place. The jigsaw is that of the various extremist groups in the country and of their overt and covert supporters. These groups are working on a coordinated effort to dominate the political arena. These groups are like a ferocious bunch of wild cats ready to attack and scratch with their claws. From open terrorism and oppression, they are planning a less obvious but more effective mechanism of oppression.

In the briefing given by a well known religious leader to the correspondent of the newspaper under reference, he clarified that all groups are now gathering together and building alignments with some political parties and plan to 'defend' Pakistan. On reading this news, I was immediately reminded of the Difa-i-Pakistan Conference (Pakistan Defence Conference) on December 18 at the Minar-e-Pakistan, Lahore. I have not seen such complete support by the civil administration as I saw for this jalsa (rally). Neither did one expect the kind of financial backup that the jalsa had. By a conservative estimate the expense on the publicity, promotion and transport system could not have been less than Rs 50 million. What could have been the source is anybody's guess. This group for 'Difa-i-Pakistan' showed an even bigger presence than the Shahbaz Sharif show a few days earlier. As is usual, political parties work on cooperation, or alliances, after assessing each other's strength. The Difa-i-Pakistan jalsa was held to make the statement of its strength and the relevant quarters have taken notice of it and are now moving towards the next step.

A few days ago, Maulana Fazlur Rehman announced his support to the Difa-i-Pakistan Council (Pakistan Defence Council). The main promoter in Danish is the

support to the extreme right activists and even financial support was provided to the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) in the Punjab budget on some pretext. This financial aid was over Rs 80 million. Also noticeable has been the Punjab law minister associated with the banned outfits. It will not be surprising if the covert support of some elements of the 'agencies' is also forthcoming for them.

The developing scenario presents a very sombre picture. It is a combination of rightist political parties, aggressive Taliban, pro-Taliban factions and a mainstream political force of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). Many must have heard the slogans of 'Difa-i-Pakistan...Taliban Taliban'. It may be recalled that almost a similar combination managed the two-thirds majority in parliament in the early 90s, and the 'lion' made the move for a constitutional amendment to become the 'Amir-ul-Momineen'. Is history going to repeat itself?

The political leadership of this combo, headed by the 'lion', is already making strong moves to destabilise the country through clever moves through the judiciary. They have so far successfully covered their connection with Mansoor Ijaz. One hopes that the judiciary will be able to see through the whole game and live up to the reputation of justice and fairness in determining the facts. It is a very heavy responsibility. The noise for early elections is motivated by the feeling of strength and optimism by the 'cat family' and the politician in the garb of a 'lion'. Is the nation in danger of the destruction of its fabric by their claws and being devoured by the 'lion'? Does the common man realise the looming danger?

The man in the street is under so much pressure to make two ends meet that he has little time for these developments. The media is involved in chasing scandalous developments and measuring the Richter scale of the earthquakes rocking the government. A lot of media men are busy in using talkative political pigmies by prompting them to fight and make an interesting 'show', which gets high ratings to attract commercial advertisements. Indeed the media has a much more serious and critically important role to play. At this time the naughty looks of the anchorpersons and the intent to make and provide fun must take a backseat. If the country and the nation have to come out of the miserable state that they are in, then the intellectuals in the media have to take up the responsibility. They need to talk about serious issues, the way forward for the solution to problems and not just wait for a change

of face. It is time that distinguished thinkers, technocrats, forward looking politicians, intellectuals and all analysts and philosophers come forward and give up being couch potatoes. Those who have seen the Zia regime, the real dictatorship, its floggings, jails and hangings will remember that the 'cat family' is not going to be any different.

One of the worst things in our nation is adopting the role of the 'silent' spectator. Those who are silent need to realise that their so-called majority is fast turning into a minority that will be oppressed. They need to be counted, they need to fight for survival and understand the concept of the Quaid-e-Azam's Pakistan and Iqbal's concept of a Muslim nationhood. They also need to understand the strong elements of tolerance and equality enshrined in our constitution. Without understanding these and defending them actively we cannot retain our freedoms.

As for the institutions, they also need to do soul-searching and find ways to rise beyond seeking mechanisms for personal protection. They need to identify the enemy within and not just the enemy outside. They need to protect freedom of thought, and responsible expression, and take cognizance of the threats to the essence of a progressive country and a just and honourable nationhood.

Saturday, January 21, 2012

Realities of 'Laal Masjid' Islamabad – I

Many of the religious-minded civil and military bureaucrats based in Islamabad and Rawalpindi used to send their daughters to the women's Islamic seminary run by Aziz. Aziz had become a vital asset of the establishment, sitting right in the heart of Islamabad

"...and as for those who built a place of worship (masjid) out of opposition and disbelief, and in order to cause dissent among the believers, and as an outpost for those who warred against Allah and His Messenger aforetime. And they will surely swear: 'We purposed naught save good.' And Allah beareth witness that they were liars" (Surah At-Tauba, Verse 107).

The Laal Masjid (Red Mosque) of Islamabad and the action on it in July 2007 seems to be hardly understood. The realities have been unfolding gradually. These are unfolding even now. Most of the people do not realise the significance of what was happening in the Laal Masjid. There is a strong publicity and propaganda machine in motion to establish it as a massacre of innocents and put the blame on the government, or the army as a favourite target. Many others believe that the action was necessary much before, and although belated, it saved the country from an impending disaster of huge magnitude.

In order to understand the realities as they unfolded during the last four years, we need to look at several researched reports of which most may not have been seen by the general public. The general public usually retains the 'first' impression and sticks to it due to psychological inertia. This first impression phenomenon has been a favourite of organised propaganda agencies to cover up the truth. A recent example of it was the Indian propaganda machine's classical manoeuvre to make the Samjhota Express blast a handiwork of Pakistanis. The facts surfaced much later in the Nasik court decision in a case filed by late Hemant Karkare, the chief of the Mumbai Anti-Terror Squad. So the 'first impression' intentionally created is getting negated by the real facts. Therefore, to reach a fair perspective, the facts need careful review.

According to the Capital Development Authority (CDA) records, the Laal Masjid is one of the oldest mosques in Islamabad. 'Maulana' Muhammad Abdullah, a government lower rank employee, was appointed its first imam. Abdullah was critical of all governments except Zia's with whom he was very close. The brutal dictator, General Ziaul Haq, had a very close relationship with Muhammad Abdullah. Abdullah is said to have been a supporter of the sectarian outfit Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP). This outfit has been banned for involvement in sectarian killings of Shias.

The 'Laal Masjid' was built in 1965 and was named for its red walls and interiors. During the Soviet war in Afghanistan (1979-1989), the Red Mosque played a major role in recruiting and training 'local mujahideen' to fight along with the 'Afghan mujahideen'. The clerics managing the Laal Masjid enjoyed patronage from influential members of the government, prime ministers, army chiefs, and presidents. Several thousand male and female students lived in adjacent seminaries. The sources of funding had been mysterious. Abdullah was a veteran jihadi who had fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan, so his organisation had strong contacts with such radicals as Mullah Omar, Dr Ayman al-Zawahiri, Tahir Yaldochiv, and Osama bin Laden. He had a particular connection with Sheikh Essa who played a pivotal role at a later stage in the strategy of the Laal Masjid revolt. Sheikh Essa was based in North Waziristan. His full name was Abu Amr Abd al-Hakim of Egyptian origin. He was the most visible and accessible al Qaeda figure for the Punjabi, Pakistani Pashtuns, and Afghan militants.

Abdullah was assassinated in 1998 due to sectarian animosities. His sons, Abdul Aziz Ghazi and Abdul Rashid Ghazi, took over the mosque as if it was a right by 'inheritance'. Both the brothers turned the mosque into a centre of hardline teachings.

In 2001 the Taliban suffered defeat in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda struggled to survive. At the operational level Sheikh Essa pioneered the dialectical process in Pakistan in order to strategise the Asian theatre of war. That dialectical process aimed to orchestrate a clash between the secular forces and the so-called 'Islamists' in Pakistan, so as to arrive at a point where the Pakistani state apparatus would either remain completely neutral in the US war in Afghanistan or be forced to support al Qaeda. The first object was to gain complete control of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, both bordering Afghanistan, and from

there fight the NATO forces. Sheikh Essa, 70, had earlier taken part in the revolt against Anwar Sadat and was a scholar of theology. Sheikh Essa was also held in high esteem by the Punjabi militants. They listened to his interpretation of 'takfeer' (the practice of one Muslim declaring another Muslim an unbeliever) mesmerised. His teachings paved the way for the dialectical process in Pakistan, which urged a war between diverse segments of Muslim society. Soon, disgruntled elements of Pakistani jihadis, more especially the anti-Shia Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) became his followers. There were several others who have been named in detail by the distinguished journalist Syed Saleem Shahzad in his book. Shahzad was mysteriously murdered last year.

Many of the religious-minded civil and military bureaucrats based in Islamabad and Rawalpindi used to send their daughters to the women's Islamic seminary run by Aziz. Aziz had become a vital asset of the establishment, sitting right in the heart of Islamabad.

Sheikh Essa felt that a revolt by the Laal Masjid would be the beginning of his interpretation of an Islamic revolution in Pakistan. So Sheikh Essa focused on Aziz. Aziz was convinced to read Essa's book, *Al-Wala Wal Bara*. After reading the book, he was asked by Sheikh Essa: "Do you still believe that the Pakistan Army is a Muslim army?" He forcefully reminded Aziz of his duties as a Muslim scholar, "If you refuse the call of takfeer on the Pakistan Army, God will never forgive." In a typical way, Essa monopolised the will of God by saying this but succeeded in mesmerising Aziz. He decided to follow. It meant jeopardising his connections with and support of the establishment but on the other hand he thought that he will lose his faith.

Soon the beginning of the revolt was to take place when Aziz issued an edict (fatwa).

(To be continued)

Saturday, January 28, 2012

Realities of 'Laal Masjid' Islamabad — II

As the west was urging Pakistan for a coordinated strategy and an action against the militants, the game plan was somehow known to the al Qaeda operatives. So al Qaeda decided to take the initiative and strike before the Pakistani plan could be enforced

On the advice of al Qaeda, 'Maulana' Abdul Aziz of the Laal Masjid (Red Mosque) issued a religious decree in 2004, which declared the South Waziristan operation un-Islamic. The decree prohibited the burial of the soldiers in Muslim graveyards and funeral prayers for those who died in action against the militants in South Waziristan! The decree was circulated throughout the country and 500 clerics signed it. That was the spin needed to ignite anti-army feelings. The damage done by this decree was more than what all the guns combined in Waziristan could have done. It belittled Pakistan and its army. The damage was devastating.

As a result of this decree, some parents refused to accept the dead bodies of their sons who got killed fighting on the side of the armed forces. Religious clerics refused to say prayers over their dead bodies. The rank and file of the armed forces was demoralised. Several low ranking non-commissioned officers defied the commands of the officers to fight and were court-martialled. Several officers resigned on being posted in Waziristan. The Pakistan Army, which was in a clear situation to defeat the militants, was frustrated by the effects of this decree. Al Qaeda's timely spin by using the Laal Masjid clipped the army's wings. Pakistan tried to mount an even bigger operation than the ones before, but al Qaeda held the Laal Masjid trump card in the heart of Islamabad, which was prepared, armed and ready to create havoc. Pakistan had to make a ceasefire agreement.

The two brothers from the Laal Masjid, Aziz and Rashid, were in regular contact with al Qaeda leaders, particularly Tahir Yaldochiv and Sheikh Essa. They received a regular flow of directives on strategy. By 2007, Laal Masjid had become an al Qaeda powerhouse in the federal capital of Islamabad, directly in the face of the ISI and the GHQ.

The militants took advantage of the ceasefire and collected in South Waziristan, North Waziristan, Bajaur, Mohmand and Orakzai agencies. Their strength rose to over 50,000.

The government wanted to take action against the Laal Masjid but the establishment advised against it in view of widespread retaliation. Already wary of the soldiers' reaction over the tribal areas action, a new action could have caused an upheaval right in the Capital. The western powers, including the US, were increasingly concerned. It is said that it was at this time that the western powers brokered an understanding between Musharraf and Benazir Bhutto to ensure widespread political support of the masses to a potential, comprehensive action against the militants. Since then both these leaders remained the prime target of al Qaeda.

The full map of al Qaeda assets at that time started with the Laal Masjid and included Swat Valley with Mullah Fazlullah, plus Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM), and the connections in North/South Waziristan, Bajaur, etc.

As the west was urging Pakistan for a coordinated strategy and an action against the militants, the game plan was somehow known to the al Qaeda operatives. So al Qaeda decided to take the initiative and strike before the Pakistani plan could be enforced.

In January 2007, the Taliban in South Waziristan broke the ceasefire agreement and started sudden attacks on the Pakistan Army positions. The GHQ was taken aback and while counter-strategies were to be worked out, the Laal Masjid 'student' militants took to the streets. To create an issue they took up the demolition of the illegally constructed mosques on public land. To avoid conflagration, the government bowed and agreed to reconstruct the mosques! But the Laal Masjid militants would not want the issue to die; they insisted on the reconstruction on the same illegal locations. The Pakistan government was perplexed by the attitude of Maulanas Aziz and Rashid! They, apparently, had no idea that the 'maulanas' were playing games under the broader strategy of al Qaeda. The occupation of the Children's Library next to the mosque by the black burqa female 'brigade' evoked wide attention around the world. The students echoed the demand raised in Waziristan that they will not vacate the library unless and until the Taliban version of 'shariah' was enforced throughout the country.

As the news of Musharraf and Benazir Bhutto's secret meetings to make a new alliance hit the media, the Laal Masjid activists intensified their disturbing activities. They attacked video shops in the markets, burnt the stocks, threatened shopkeepers, particularly barbers, and ordered forcible closures on the pretext of prayer times. Some of the boys spread out to even the Margalla Road and asked female drivers to stop and that if they would not hide their faces in future, they could be victims of acid attacks. They attacked a Chinese parlour and accused them of prostitution. The female brigade of the Jamia Hafsa abducted an alleged female pimp. The Capital was threatened in every way and an acute law and order situation was fast developing. When the Laal Masjid vigilantes were arrested by the law enforcing agencies, the other members of the mosque's brigade abducted civil law enforcement personnel and used them for bargaining for the release of their men.

Muslim academia was stunned by the Laal Masjid affair. The spiritual guide of the Laal Masjid brothers, Mufti Taqi Usmani, flew to Islamabad from Karachi to discuss the violent reformist agenda of the brothers. The brothers could not answer questions in the light of Sunnah, they only mumbled that the steps taken were necessary for Islamisation! Taqi Usmani was very disappointed and annoyed with the attitude of the two clerics. He expelled them from his spiritual guidance circle and publically announced that spiritual ties with them are severed. The clerics were humiliated but chose to stick to their plan. The Masjid brigade's activities increased when the government got engaged in the lawyers' movement against it, and in support of Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry.

The 'crisis action' plan could not be delayed too far.

The first preference was to solve the crisis through negotiations by respectable political and religious personalities.

But would it work?

(To be continued)

Saturday, February 04, 2012

VIEW: Realities of 'Laal Masjid' Islamabad — III

The Aziz brothers had made the decision about which side they were on and obviously it was al Qaeda's. Al Qaeda strategy was to heighten the conflict, make 'sacrifices' and use those as a pretext for a larger uprising. They had gathered more than 20,000 men in Waziristan, ready for action

The government of Pakistan was left with little option except contemplating a serious action to control or remove the al Qaeda forward 'morchā' (battalion) in Islamabad. Al Qaeda associates and fighters were working on their own strategy. Thousands of students were kept as hostages in the Laal Masjid (Red Mosque) to serve the purpose of a human shield when need be. Holding cells had been constructed in the mosque and the Laal Masjid was abundantly armed. They were ready for initiatives.

A woman alleged to be the owner of a suspected 'brothel' was kidnapped by the women students of Jamia Hafsa — who were still in illegal occupation of a children's library.

The Aziz brothers declared the establishment of a 'Shariat Court' and vowed to enforce Islamic laws in the federal capital. "Our youth will commit suicide attacks if the government impedes the enforcement of the shariah and attacks Laal Masjid and its sister concerns," Maulana Abdul Aziz said in his Friday sermon.

The fresh suicide bombing threat intensified fears among Islamabad residents. They were reminded that the suicide bomber who had attacked Islamabad's Marriott Hotel in January 2007 had been seen near the mosque the same day.

Religious activists, wearing masks, also staged a demonstration before the Friday prayers. Burqa-clad girl students of the Hafsa madrasa kept a vigil atop the seminary's roof. The activists were chanting "Al Jihad, Al Jihad". Islamabad was besieged by terrorists, policemen were abducted, and elsewhere, foreign engineers and technicians, particularly the Chinese, were abducted and killed. Pakistan's tested friend China was being targeted to isolate Pakistan.

Then came the attack of Laal Masjid terrorists on a Chinese beauty parlour. The raiders beat up Chinese men and women and abducted them. The situation grew to international proportions.

Civil society and the media were pressing for some action. The government was even being accused of complicity by the media and civil society. The constraints of the government because of al Qaeda's possible reaction were not fully known.

Then the Chinese president directly approached the president of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf, and requested measures for the safety of the Chinese people.

The government machinery had to move with determination. However, every effort was to be made to reach a peaceful settlement, and if army action became inevitable, then minimum damage to life and property was to be ensured. President General Pervez Musharraf ordered ensuring the safety of the hostages at every cost. Facilities were also to be extended to the surrounding area inhabitants.

As the first step, the Laal Masjid was cordoned off and the movement of the occupants was restricted. Appeals were made to the occupants to vacate the mosque. Politicians including Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain and Ijazul Haq tried. The Imam-e-Ka'aba arrived to convince the mosque occupants to desist from militancy but all were shunned. Even the Eidhis made appeals. Hanif Jalandhari, the head of Wafaqul Madaris, tried his best to resolve the matter.

Nothing worked.

The Aziz brothers had made the decision about which side they were on and obviously it was al Qaeda's. Al Qaeda's strategy was to heighten the conflict, make 'sacrifices' and use those as a pretext for a larger uprising. They had gathered more than 20,000 men in Waziristan, ready for action.

Then the Laal Masjid militants attacked the Army Rangers who guarded it, the military responded, and the siege of the Laal Masjid intensified.

To avoid collateral loss, on July 4, 2007, the government offered amnesty to juvenile students if they surrendered and over 1,000 students accepted, and were allowed to leave. Abdul Aziz Ghazi tried to escape in a 'burqa', but he was spotted and arrested. Abdul Rashid was

repeatedly asked to surrender but he refused. Instead, he proposed that if the government would give him and his militant students a safe passage without surrendering arms, and allow him to live in his home village, he would hand over Laal Masjid, Jamia Hafsa and Jamia Faridia to the Wafaqul Madaris. This proposal was a trick and fraught with very dangerous consequences. A considerable number of trained militants with arms would have gone scot-free and brought havoc to the city of Islamabad. It was a trick to get out of the 'hole'. This proposal could not be acceptable for security considerations.

In retaliation to rejection, the Laal Masjid terrorists attacked the army personnel around the mosque. They went further to burn the building of the Environment Ministry adjacent to the mosque. A senior army officer was killed and huge damage to property occurred.

Immediate army 'action' was now inevitable but Chaudhry Shujaat wanted to make one last effort before the final operation started. His attempt failed.

The scheduled action very early in the morning was delayed by an hour due to Chaudhry Shujaat's presence in the mosque and when he left, some morning light revealed the commando positions; they were fired at and were killed. Other commandos successfully took positions. Colonel Haroon Islam made a bid to free the hostages locked up in a room. He risked his life and went to blow a hole in the wall of their cell. The wall was breached, all hostages escaped, but Colonel Haroon Islam lost his life in crossfire.

By this time a total of 97 militants were left in the mosque. They fought. Ninety-four of these got killed, three escaped. There were 94 dead bodies, including Rashid and four hostages killed by the militants and found locked in a basement.

The dead were buried in a graveyard in Islamabad. There were no women or children among the dead. Five or six male foreigners were among the dead.

Laal Masjid as the forward-post of al Qaeda was cleared.

However, most of those who were allowed to leave before the 'action' joined the uprising in Swat and Waziristan.

In the aftermath,; propoganda of a 'massacre of innocents' continues by the Taliban, pro-Taliban individuals, and ill-informed politicians keen to discredit the Pakistan Army and the government by twisting the facts. It needs to stop.

(Concluded)

Saturday, February 11, 2012

When Faiz was remembered

It was Noor Jahan's voice resounding all over the hall and each listening ear lapping it up in a trance. This was the first time Noor Jahan publicly sang Faiz's 'Mujh se pehli si mohabbat meray mehboob na maang...'

It was long ago but time has not faded my memory of the event. Some dates have got mixed up though. I am quite clear it was the period of the martial law imposed by General Ayub Khan, and it was a winter's evening. The location was Punjab University Hall on the Mall Road. Few people remember the details when the moments of history are actually in the process of being created but some witnesses corroborated and agreed on November of 1958 as the likely date. Faiz Ahmed Faiz was arrested after the imposition of Ayub's martial law without framing any charges. A precautionary step against the 'dangerous' Faiz!

I had left Government College in 1957 after my Master's in Psychology and was in search of a possible job and trying to discover myself, as most young men do. I had 'double trouble' because I was divided between choosing the life of an artist or a career in the sciences or end up in management. It all needed to be sorted out (I ended up with a bit of all these!).

My evenings usually included a round of the famous Pak Tea House, Coffee House, The Casino, The Alhamra, and sometimes the daily Civil and Military Gazette where Mr Hamid Sheikh sat in the editor's room. On the side of the entrance to the editor's room was an interesting tablet, which read: "Rudyard Kipling sat here."

During such an evening round, I heard of the imposition of 'martial law'. We were still wondering how to deal with this 'new thing'. Soon afterwards, we heard of a big music show to be held in the Punjab University Hall on the Mall. The news about this concert spread like wildfire because the organisers claimed that Noor Jahan will sing at the concert. Cynics would not believe it because Noor Jahan was a real big top star and never made an appearance in live concerts. Everyone in the country, in the subcontinent and beyond knew the star value of Noor

Jahan, so it was sensational news. Cynicism notwithstanding, a large number of Lahoris were willing to take a chance.

The organisers were the Public Relations Department of the government itself and its director Agha Shaukat Ali was well known in the city. In a situation when a martial law is imposed, the generals concerned look for popular support and the association of popular names with their government provides strength to their image. Agha Shaukat Ali must have thought of it as a big feather in his cap if he would succeed in getting Noor Jahan to sing.

In this perspective, lots of people wanted to ensure entry into the hall on the date of the concert and were looking for entry passes. Fortunately, our romance of the early days helped — Yasmin somehow arranged for an entry pass. I was to realise the value of that 'entry pass' and the enrichment from the experience of the concert for a long time.

On the day of the concert a large crowd gathered inside the hall. The house was full to capacity, humming with speculations about Noor Jahan.

On the stage, the organisers were busy setting up microphones, speakers, etc. Other artists and speakers were all waiting for Noor Jahan. Some youngsters could not resist the urge to 'whistle' and show their impatience. Very clearly the crowd was there only for Noor Jahan.

After a short while, a whisper went around that Noor Jahan had actually arrived at the outside gate. The 'reception officials' rushed to receive her. Those who know Noor Jahan would also know that in her public appearances she was always accompanied by a small entourage and that made her entry rather grandiose. So she entered the University Hall and the crowd clapped incessantly. Gradually things settled down, the members of the orchestra started to take their places. Noor Jahan was ready to sing and probably an announcer queried about the song she was about to sing. He was told, and then he walked up to the organisers. The organisers looked shocked.

The large crowd in the hall was watching and wondering about the delay!

Then the organisers walked up to Noor Jahan and an argument was noticeable. The people in the hall suddenly noticed Noor Jahan walking out of the hall!

The reaction of the people in the hall was violent. There were boos for the organisers, calls for Noor Jahan, and all sorts of noises. The government functionaries, assessing the situation, rushed towards the outer gate in an effort to bring back Noor Jahan. The huge crowd in the hall impatiently waited for the results; nobody knew what was actually going on. (It was much later that Noor Jahan told me that she wanted to sing Faiz's poem and the administration thought that will cause them embarrassment as Faiz had been arrested. But Noor Jahan could not care less. She wanted to sing Faiz, or nothing at all.)

A little later the crowd noticed Noor Jahan coming back along with her orchestra and her entourage. Obviously the Melody Queen had conquered! Then that magic was to spread, which I have not forgotten in over 50 years.

People clapped violently as she returned. Mostly a young crowd, they were overjoyed and noisy. Then Noor Jahan went up to the microphone. People were settling down when they heard a magical 'taan'. The house came to a pin-drop silence.

It was Noor Jahan's voice resounding all over the hall and each listening ear lapping it up in a trance. This was the first time Noor Jahan publicly sang Faiz's 'Mujh se pehli si mohabbat meray mehboob na maang...' She sang with passion and she added embellishments that I never heard again. The crowd was silent and mesmerised. Finally the magic came to a conclusion. The crowd was stunned for a few seconds and then broke into a thunderous applause, which never seemed to end. Faiz had been remembered.

The writer is a culture and media management specialist, a researcher, author, director and actor

Saturday, February 18, 2012

'Tea House', coffee house and 'Food Street' — I

There were also groups of youngsters who wanted to see the 'stars' of literature and listen to them and talk to them. It was the umbra and a big penumbra containing future 'stars' was around it. It was a source of guidance that you could not get in a school

Mian Shahbaz Sharif has shown interest in the restoration of the 'Pak Tea House'. If he does so, he may endear himself to those who are sensitive to the deterioration of the symbols of 'intellectual assets' in Lahore.

For those who do not know enough of Lahore, and of its history, the location is a 'shop' at the corner of the 'Tyre Market' in Neela Gumbad. Precisely, it is the 'shop' next to the YMCA complex but in the corner on the side of the Tyre Market.

This place provided a convenient access, primarily to writers, in the early 50s of the last century. It was close to the Punjab University and some of its affiliated colleges, it was close to the Pakistan Times and Imroze, the popular dailies of that time. It was close to the offices of some literary magazines, the Anarkali bazaar, and in general, the heart of Lahore's intellectual basis and other sophisticated activities. The proximity to the YMCA was also a great help due to its regular activities and the availability of a public hall in it. Most of the participants and visitors to the area drove bicycles and repair mechanics were available next to the Pak Tea House to fix faults in the cycles and the punctures in the tubes. The Anarkali bazaar also provided some attraction because one could stroll around and eye the girls busy shopping!

I do not have much knowledge of the status of the Tea House before 1947. I would guess that with the famous Mohkim Din Bakery, Anarkali and the Bank Square around, it must have been a popular area in the pre-independence days as well and is said to be a place where writers and artists frequented.

I got acquainted with the Tea House as 'Pak Tea House' in the early 50s when I had entered Government College and my curiosity

forced me to explore more than the books of science subjects that I was studying. Gradually a stroll to the nearby Zelin's Coffee House and the Tea House became a routine, especially when my late friend Zaffar Samdani was along. Zaffar was a prolific writer and very pleasant company. He was an arts student and he wanted to use his pen for the rest of his life and that is what he did. I was an interested explorer trying to find myself and my real interests.

Perhaps I was not the only one in an unsettled state of mind. There were also many writers and intellectuals in a similar state. Of course there were a large number of immigrants who had come from various parts of India and thought a new day has dawned in the shape of Pakistan and were full of hopes and expectations for the future, while desperately trying to settle down.

Looking at the Tea House with this perspective it is understandable that it became a meeting ground for those who did not have much money but had a lot of riches in ideas. Gradually it grew into a powerhouse of ideas, poetry, discussion, literature, political movements and progressive thought. The owner was not known to be a writer but he seemed to like it and continued with supplying tea at an affordable price and perhaps extended credit to those who hoped to get paid for their works someday. To identify some major groups, it may be recalled that it was a favourite place for the members of 'Halqa-e-Arbab-e-Zauq' and also the 'Anjuman Taraqqi Pasand Musannefin' (Progressive Writers Association). But indeed the place was not limited to these only. Nasir Kazmi, Intizar Hussain, Shamza, Qasmi, Safdar Mir, Faiz, Saifuddin Saif, Ijaz Batalvi, Shad Amritsari, Habib Jalib, Sufi Tabassum and so many others were part of an endless list. There were also groups of youngsters who wanted to see the 'stars' of literature and listen to them and talk to them. A history of creative effort was made there. It was the umbra and a big penumbra containing future 'stars' was around it. It was a source of guidance that you could not get in a school.

Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif has announced the revival of the Pak Tea House. He does sing Jalib in public meetings and one only hopes he understands the message! Irrespective of the fact whether he understands the progressive movement or Jalib, his decision to revive the Pak Tea House will indeed be hailed by many. If he has done it on his own, then he has done well and if it is some adviser making him do it then we must thank that adviser. Mr CM likes to call himself the

'Khadim-e-Ala', although it sounds a bit childish, but still if he does want to 'serve' the city, it is commendable. The CM should proudly highlight Lahore's Mughal and pre-Mughal heritage but the acknowledgement should not be limited to this. Old cities carry many remnants of their history, which need to be saved and passed on to the next generation. Paris still preserves the coffee house/bar where the great French Revolution germinated in the minds of philosophers like Voltaire, Rousseau and others. Those who have visited Boston in the US and walked the freedom trail may also have visited the coffee house that George Washington frequented. I have seen it and sat on the wooden bench that was marked as his place. Such things instill pride and love in the people of a country. Lahore is a city where a lot of history has been made. If our worthy Khadim-e-Ala is not just playing to the 'gallery', then he needs to recognise several other places and that will make people remember him for a longer time and even tolerate his singing! Who knows such acts may propel him to the greatness that politicians dream of. To earn the title seriously he needs to do a lot more. Hopefully, he will stay on track.

(To be continued)

Saturday, February 25, 2012

'Tea House', coffee house and 'Food Street' — II

It should be interesting if one combines a visit to the Fort, the Badshahi Mosque, even the Minar-e-Pakistan and then end up in the Food Street and enjoy the lights on the old buildings while having dinner

The Pak Tea House was a centre for writers to get together for at least three decades after independence. However, there are other places that got some attention in the same vicinity of Lahore. These were Zelin's Coffee House, the ice cream parlour in the Tollinton Market and a 'sandwich shop' inside the market. Fortunately for the 'Sandwich Shop' it has grown into a big business and has several branches in the city as departmental stores. The ice cream parlour and Zelin's Coffee House do not exist anymore.

Perhaps the most important other favourite was the canteen at the Alhamra. The Alhamra canteen was housed in a thatched hut and served all artists of Lahore. A visit to this place was almost a must for all painters, dramatists, singers, musicians, actors and the hopefuls. Moeen Najmi, Shamza, Sadequain, Murtaza, Rumi and even Shakir Ali and Anna Molka Ahmed were seen around. Feroze Nizami, Nazakat and Salamat Ali Khan, Fateh Ali Khan (Nusrat's father), Amanat and Fateh, Sharif Khan Poonchwala, even Mehdi Hassan could be found sometimes. Among the drama crowd, Nazir Zaigham, Jamil Bismil, Athar Shah Khan, myself, Kamal Ahmed Rizvi, Qavi Khan, Massod Akhter, Attiya Sharf, Najma Begum were almost regulars but frequent visitors included Rafi Peerzada, Khurshid Shahid and a host of others. This is where the theatre movement developed and TV started. This 'canteen', providing similar facilities like the Pak Tea House, i.e. low price tea and credit, still exists. But it is tucked up at the back of the new building. No doubt if the Pak Tea House has a history for writers, this 'canteen' has a history for the performing and visual artists and needs to be recognised and remembered.

Lahore, perhaps like some other cities, also has a tradition of popular street food. Some streets became famous for one product and other shops were opened around it. The earliest I remember...

'kebabs' in 'Chuna Mandi', then the 'nihari' at Lohari Gate and Kashmiri Tea at Abbot Road — the list is long and one can only mention a few like 'Payas' in Hira Mandi and 'machlee' (fish) in Gawalmandi. That reminds me of the role a particular shopkeeper played for a particular writer from Gawalmandi. This writer was struggling to survive on the meagre payments from his writings. A street food vendor noticed that sometimes he goes without food in the night. The good hearted vendor would save some food for the writer and wait, even if the writer would return late in the night, and extend credit to him. The writer felt embarrassed after a while and tried to sneak into his home quietly without food. The vendor noticed and realised the situation. So he called him in a friendly way and said, "Look the sale was not good today and I will have to throw away all this food because I do not want to serve stale food tomorrow. Could you have some of it?" The vendor made it easy for the writer without hurting his self-respect! From street food developed the 'Food Street' idea. Lahoris enjoy eating out and look for tasty specialties. This habit provides an opportunity for a market to develop. The 'Food Street', therefore, is the concept of developing a street with a collection of specialties around and creating an ambience for the customers. The latest food street has been inaugurated by Chief Minister (CM) Mian Shahbaz Sharif recently. The CM's new food street needs an acknowledgement. In all fairness, the first conversion of street food to 'Food Street' took place in Gawalmandi during ex-President Musharraf's time, and Kamran Lashari was the primary mover. It got fame and great popularity among the locals as well as visiting foreigners. There was also the Old Anarkali food street but that one was almost in a situation of 'also ran'! Mian sahib obviously felt uncomfortable with the creation during Musharraf's times and found a reason to get rid of it. He announced his own 'Food Street', which recently opened on Fort Road near Badshahi Mosque. I visited it. Differences with the CM apart, there is no doubt that a very commendable job has been done. The ambience cannot be matched and beats the Gawalmandi location hollow. However, the quality of food does not. But that should not matter as an outing for a family and friends is an experience that is not for just food. The remarkable thing is that it has clean washrooms! Amazing, because this human need is usually forgotten and the person in 'need' is left to the mercy of a dark corner. The aesthetics are also improved. One section, a little off the outer road and into an open space surrounded by the building with

jharokas is particularly attractive. It is also a better place in case there is a cold wind in the winters.

One can say that it is too far out of the city and one is hesitant to cross the busy streets and the huge traffic problems to reach it and therefore less attractive, but still a visit is worth it. It should be interesting if one combines a visit to the Fort, the Badshahi Mosque, even the Minar-e-Pakistan and then end up in the Food Street and enjoy the lights on the old buildings while having dinner.

Maintenance, cleanliness and the quality of food is a challenge for the future. The CM will need to be uncompromising in maintenance of standards and keep the persons responsible in check. This Food Street is around the well known Cuckoo's Cafe. It also provides an opportunity to the visitors to stroll around the areas that they normally know little about. If this effort succeeds, it is likely to enhance public interest in the Old City.

Considering the convenience of approach to Gawalmandi streets, it may be worth reviewing the decision to close the Food Street there. The CM can put his stamp on it by reopening it with better facilities and aesthetics, and not forget the washrooms!

(Concluded)

Saturday, March 03, 2012

Friendly visitors from India

While this visit will further the goodwill between the people of the two countries, some issues definitely need solutions

There is no shortage of friendly delegations as a routine. They come to Pakistan for business, religious occasions, and several other purposes. But this one was different. This delegation was different because it was led by a very special person, and the composition was remarkably representative. The leader of the delegation was Mrs Meira Kumar, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha (the Indian Parliament's lower house), and it was composed of: Syed Shahnawaz Hussain (BJP), Shri Birendra Prasad Baishya (Asom Gana Parishad), Shri Inder Singh Namdhari (Independent), Shri Madan Lal Sharma (Indian National Congress), Sheikh Saidul Haque (Communist Party of India-Marxist), Shri Tarun Vijay (BJP) (all Members of Parliament), Shri T K Viswanathan, Secretary General, Lok Sabha, and Shri U S Saxena, Joint-Secretary, Lok Sabha Secretariat.

It was the personality and warmth of Mrs Meira Kumar that made the difference. Mrs. Kumar is the daughter of Babu Jagjivan Ram, popularly known as Babuji, who was the Deputy Prime Minister of India from 1977 to 1979. Babuji was a freedom fighter and a social reformer hailing from the scheduled castes of Bihar in India. He was from the Chamar caste and was a leader of his community. He was instrumental in founding the 'All-India Depressed Classes League', an organisation dedicated to attaining equality for the untouchables. In 1946, he became the youngest minister in Jawaharlal Nehru's provisional government, the First Union Cabinet of India as a Labour minister, and also a member of the Constituent Assembly of India, where he ensured that social justice was enshrined in the Constitution. He went on to serve as a minister in the Indian parliament with various portfolios for more than forty years.

Mrs Meira Kumar is a lawyer with a wide experience of diplomatic assignments and politics. Mrs Kumar's personality has the humility and modesty symbolic of the manners of the original inhabitants of the

'Indus Valley', before the arrival of the Aryans. There was no 'show' of the office she holds in the parliament of the world's biggest democracy. Mrs Kumar's command of Urdu language and poetry was remarkable. She quoted verses freely and appropriately, charming the audience. In fact, several members of the delegation quoted verses from Urdu poets. It was a pleasant surprise for me that in spite of the extensive use of the Hindi script, the heritage of Urdu literature was very much alive.

The Indian High Commissioner was no less a charmer!

While this visit will further the goodwill between the people of the two countries, some issues definitely need solutions. In a meeting with some prominent people from the field of culture, two major concerns were voiced. These were:

- a) Need for a reasonable visa regime, and
- b) Control of terrorist activities in both countries.

The rationalisation of the visa regime relates to common people and, perhaps, a revision is less complicated than control of terrorism. If people to people interaction is to be improved, then this facility is necessary. I recall that in the early 1950s, travel between Lahore and Amritsar was quite easy. During my college days, my friends and I would walk into the Indian High Commission's office on the upper Mall, present our passports, and visas were stamped without much hassle. We could go and spend a weekend in Amritsar, watch some films, walk about in 'Hall Bazaar', eat some roadside food and return. Our frequent visits created friendships. A small hotel owner expected us and would give us discounted rates. All worked out fine. Later on, the visa and the visits became problematic. Visitors were required to report to police each time they moved out from one given address. Applicants needed to convince the related authorities about the purpose of visit. Letters from relatives were required. In other words, anyone who had a business interest or tourist interest or any professional study as a writer or journalist was filtered out effectively. India and Pakistan are two countries, they are indeed not 'one'. We do share a common history and a substantial heritage. The political realities have changed, but we still need to behave like civilised neighbours and not cast suspicion on every visitor. Both countries have more affinity with each other in the masses as compared to most of the countries in the world. The important fact to be remembered is that in spite of huge ethnic and religious

differences, the communities learnt to coexist peacefully in the past. The incidents of violence were few and were controlled. Indeed, the process of independence caused heightened emotions and violence, but now, after more than sixty years, the majority is of a younger generation that has not experienced the pain of migration. For the current generations, it is something that they have heard from elders, but then they would also have noticed the nostalgia of the times they lived together with their friends and neighbours before the division of India into two countries. So, overall, it should be possible for the two governments to ease the travel restrictions now.

The most important thing is the relaxation of issuance of multiple-visit visas for tourism, studies and business. The process of reporting to police should be done away with. The restrictions to exit from the port of entry should be discarded. In the present age, records can be accessed with one movement of fingers on the computer, and the return of the visitor to the original port of entry to check records is ludicrous. There needs to be a strong and credible political expression for peace supported by visible actions on ground by the two governments. Sport events should be restarted.

The issue of terrorism is more complicated and is supported by covert actions of each government. Primarily, it is embedded in the extremist religious elements. Deep-seated insecurities come into play. For the elimination of religious insecurities and expansionist phobia, a determined effort is required by both governments.

Saturday, March 17, 2012

Political change in UP, India

This nura kushti (fixed match) among the political parties must be washed down the drain as the UP electorate has done in India. Change must come in the next elections

A major change in the elections this month has occurred in Uttar Pradesh (UP) in India. UP is a state located in the northern part of India. With a population of over 200 million people, it is India's most populous state, as well as the world's most populous sub-national entity. Was it a nation in its own right, UP would be the world's fifth most populous country, 200 million strong and in size a little more than Pakistan!

The electorate in UP has rejected Congress (INC) as well as the BJP, the two major parties, and given an absolute majority to the Samajwadi Party (SP). On March 6, 2012, the results for the 16th legislative assembly elections were declared showing a clear majority to the SP, which won 224 seats out of a total of 403 in UP.

The incumbent Bahujan Samaj Party was routed with 80 seats. BJP and INC managed 47 and 28 seats respectively. In the 2007 elections, former chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav's SP stood second with 97 seats.

The significance and the story of change have such interesting facts that these merit sharing.

This state has a record of providing national leadership to India. Eight of the 14 prime ministers were elected from here. The most attractive tourist destination Taj Mahal and many others are located here. UP is a religiously mixed state. Hindus constitute 77.1 percent of the state's population and Islam is the faith of about 21.8 percent of the population; the rest (over 1 million people) belong to the Sikh, Buddhist, Christian, Jain, and other spiritual beliefs. UP continued to be central to Indian politics and was especially important in modern Indian history as a hotbed of both the Indian independence movement and the Pakistan movement.

The electoral campaign this year was headed by Akhilesh Yadav for the SP and by Rahul Gandhi for the INC. Both are foreign educated young men. While Akhilesh is the son of Mulayam Singh Yadav, Rahul is the son of Sonia Gandhi.

SP (literally, Socialist Party) is a powerful regional political party in India based in UP, founded on October 4, 1992. It describes itself as a democratic socialist party and mainly represents the interests of a caste grouping called Other Backward Classes (OBCs). It has strong support of the Muslims and lower castes. The well-known Phoolan Devi, a rebel, a symbol of oppression of the upper classes, and who was gang-raped by thakurs (feudal lords) was also elected from this party. Devi also symbolised a prehistoric vendetta dating back to the times of the Indus Valley Civilization. She belonged to the ancestry of the Malluhas of the Indus Valley. It was run over by the Aryans and the Malluhas were pushed out to south India and some scattered near riverbanks. It is the theory of the Collective Unconscious of Karl Jung that is seen active in the deep-rooted differences between the Dravidian, proto-Dravidian races in the south and the Aryans in the north of India.

Therefore, the electoral victory of the SP, supported by the oppressed classes, has an additional significance: it indicates that the religious bias in this state is not the deciding factor. The Hindus have also voted in support of reform and equality. The SP believes in creating a socialist society, which works on the principle of equality and it has a secular and democratic outlook. It believes in continuously working towards the uplift of the weaker sections of society and it stands against communal forces. Freedom fighter, socialist and a great parliamentarian, Ram Manohar Lohia is a guiding light for the SP. Lohia's integrity, selfless struggle for India's independence and his ability to unite people of all sections of society has greatly influenced the leaders, youth and workers in the party. Jailed by the British several times during the freedom struggle, he fought rigorously all his life for social equality. Mahatma Gandhi's ideas influenced Lohia. He also worked towards putting an end to capitalist-feudalistic tendencies.

The young Akhilesh Yadav, state president of the SP, started a three-day cycle march from Noida to Agra to protest unauthorised land acquisition by the Mayawati government. His first day journey was from Noida to Jewar and second day was Tappal to Mathura. During

his visit he assured the farmers that no one could acquire their land without their consent and the first right on land was of farmers.

Hundreds of cyclists and young people travelled with him from Noida to Agra. His cycle journey set the momentum of the election. Yadav started the Samajwadi Kranti Rath Yatra on September 12, 2011 from Lucknow. Tired of corruption in the State, the Yatra was a crowd puller.

While addressing huge crowds, Yadav said that this election was for development and against corruption. Appropriately, the cycle, a symbol of the lower middle classes, was also the electoral symbol of the SP.

The key parallel with our society is the struggle against corruption, oppression, injustice, discrimination and poverty. Doesn't it sound like home? We are crying hoarse against corruption at every level. Poverty is at its peak, and lip service is abundant and nauseating. Results: zero. The current power blocs, the so-called 'democratic' governments, have only achieved self-perpetuation. They do paperwork that ends up like toilet paper. 'Resolutions' and 'packages' have no use unless implemented. The whole nation is crying for 'change'. It is crying for an end to corruption and the corrupt. People need protection of their rights and surely want to fulfil their responsibilities, but the total insensitivity to the human populace in the current political parties is shocking. No. This nura kushti (fixed match) among the political parties must be washed down the drain as the UP electorate has done in India. Change must come in the next elections. Wake up Pakistani voters, you can do it.

Saturday, March 24, 2012

PM is no 'peon'!

I wonder if the PM will take the lead. He should apologise to the 'peon' as a symbol of the powerless, a symbol of the working class, a symbol of the common man

Mr. Yousaf Raza Gilani, the prime minister of Pakistan, elected on the votes of an overwhelmingly poor and lower middle-class, declared: "I am no 'peon'." Whatever he meant, it smacked of similar insensitivity as shown by Imran Khan when the Pakistan cricket team won the World Cup in 1992, and Khan, on the pedestal, declared that he had won the World Cup. "I", the haughty ego, was reflected in the statements of both. Maybe if this attitude and self-centeredness is the material that prime ministers are made of, then Khan also qualifies. The power of the moment rocks the balance of mind.

What could have the PM meant by separating himself from a 'peon'? To give the benefit of the doubt, the best possible meaning could be: 'I do not want to be tossed or pushed around like a peon.' Even this 'best scenario' doesn't help much. Does his office toss peons around? Is he not a public servant like a peon? Is his attitude towards peons insulting and hence he does not want to be insulted like a peon? What does he mean? Does he mean that a peon can be insulted or mistreated and it does not matter, but it does matter if His Haughtiness is asked to obey court orders? Seeing this statement by our prime minister elected by the votes of the poor, I notice many heads lowered in shame or sadness.

It is true that Mr. Gilani is a well-known landlord, and a pir. In certain environments, the workers, peasants, and murids even avoid raising their eyes to look at their big boss. Women are little more than kaneezes in their circle. These setups are decadent and they stink. In the landlord/pir setups, all humans are not really human. Insults, mistreatment, ego bashing, exploitation of all kinds are a routine for the lesser humans of such societies. The landlord/pir usurps all power. He usurps the worldly, financial power by taking over the lands, physical assets and resources, and the moral power by assuming the spiritual

gaddi. Thus, they hold absolute power over their people and, of course, all power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

In the case of Mr Gilani, he has additional political power of unlimited dimensions, so he is, consciously and unconsciously, living that power. Therefore, I cannot blame him for having betrayed his character in a moment of weakness. After all, he is what he is and one cannot stay on guard always and put up a facade. Under stress, some aspects of the personality get revealed, and in his case, his sense of superiority became obvious. He reminded us that he was no common human; he is 'special' and should not be equated with a peon. He forgot that a peon serves the government, and so does he! But of course he is a landlord and a pir and not a 'peon'. There lies the difference that our PM wants all of us, and especially the Supreme Court, to remember. He feels very, very special.

Someone told Churchill that he was "irreplaceable". Churchill smilingly said, "I am not." Then he pointed towards a graveyard from his window and said, "That graveyard is full of people who were thought to be irreplaceable. Remember no one is irreplaceable."

I don't know if the PM has pondered over his inadvertent remarks that hit the headlines. He has shown no remorse nor given an apology. He can get away from the people because people have no power, but one wonders how he plans to get away from the power of the Almighty who does not like haughtiness. As far as the courts are concerned, he has decided to hide behind the constitution and play a political martyr. 'Martyrdom' sells well with his electorate.

At this point, one is reminded of a larger issue: humanity and human conduct in society and the sense of equality and social responsibility. In our society, the painful facts are karo kari, murders, rapes, beating and breaking legs of teachers and others, slapping government functionaries, so on and so forth, and including the attitude towards the 'peon'. In this society, where you and I live, these elements become more and more jarring and painful to the sensitivities. Is there something that we can do about it? Or to suffer and die is destiny? I do not believe it should be so. All of us are members of a majority that commits the crime of silence. We need to promote quality education, and human behaviour must be a subject stressed upon from home to the classroom. We need to work for a social revolution if we have to build

up a decent nation. Starting from the driver who blows his horn unnecessarily, asserting that he has the right to the road more than others, any person who bullies the weaker, shows an oppressive temper. The one who monopolises the road by political power, and finally, those who have huge blow horns on mosques on the pretext of azaan (the call to prayer) are committing excesses and need to look into their conduct. We are answerable on the Day of Judgment, agreed, but does that mean that we can create hell for others before reaching the Day of Judgment? Neither religion nor the laws of society allow such conduct. If we don't contribute our share for betterment then we are letting injustice perpetuate. Indeed the politicians and the chosen representatives of the people bear the highest responsibility.

I wonder if the PM will take the lead. He should apologise to the 'peon' as a symbol of the powerless, a symbol of the working class, a symbol of the common man. Will he bow his head to the people? Whether he apologises to the Supreme Court or not is another matter, and the Supreme Court knows how to deal with it.

Saturday, March 31, 2012

Balochistan issues — I

It is surprising that even though the Indian Independence Act 1947 did not give the option of independence to any Indian state, Pakistan conceded such a status to Kalat

This week it was reported that a strike took place in Quetta against the decision of the Balochistan 'states' to accede to Pakistan in 1948.

For some it may have appeared as a surprise and some may have understood it as a campaign that is part of the nationalist movement in Baluchistan. So various reactions would emerge and culminate in stressing the inability of the current government to handle the issue. This may be correct but too simplistic. Therefore, it is worthwhile that the Balochistan perspective be refreshed and the history of Balochistan's annexation to Pakistan remembered.

While working on the run-up to the independence of the subcontinent, the British laid down some ground rules. In their statement of May 16, 1946, the Cabinet Mission pronounced that paramountcy would neither be retained by the British Crown nor transferred to any new government in India. The states, released from the obligations of paramountcy, would work out their own relationship with the successor states. The question of the political future of some 565 Indian states ruled by native princes, constituted about one fourth of India's population, and had engaged the serious attention of the British rulers and the Congress and Muslim League leadership. Unfortunately, the widely divergent policy approaches of the three major actors in respect of the states' future created a challenging situation for Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah. The manner in which the British implemented their laconic policies through Crown Representative Lord Mountbatten, who due to his open conflict with the Quaid and blatant commitment to the proto-Indian government's policy, made the Quaid's task difficult.

The policy of the All-India Muslim League, as clarified by Jinnah, was: "We do not wish to interfere with the internal affairs of any state..."

Such States as wish to enter the Pakistan Constituent Assembly of their free will and desire to negotiate with us shall find us ready and willing to do so. If they wish to remain independent and...to negotiate...any political or any other relationship...with Pakistan, we shall be glad to come to settlement which will be in the interest of both."

In the course of negotiations between the British government and the rulers of the states, the Congress leaders Nehru and Patel adopted a stance based on intimidation and coercion of the rulers as well as resorting to clandestine and crafty dealings. On April 9, 1947, speaking at Gwalior as President of the States' People's Conference, Nehru threatened the rulers to join the Indian Constituent Assembly or be treated as hostile. H V Hodson, Constitutional Advisor to Viceroy Linlithgow, in his book *The Great Divide* mentions the deal between Mountbatten and Sardar Patel on the states' accession to India at all costs. Patel is quoted to have told Mountbatten: "I will buy a basket of 565 apples (the computed number of states). But if there are even two or three apples missing, the deal is off." Mountbatten responded: "If I give you a basket with, say, 560 apples, will you buy it?" Patel replied, "I might." The bargain was struck and the ostensible reward was the assurance of the post of governor general of independent India for Mountbatten.

In open opposition to Jinnah, Mountbatten actively prevented the accession of five Kathiawar states, namely Dasuda, Vanod, Jainabad, Bajuna and Radha to Pakistan. Each of these states had a Muslim ruler who requested union with Pakistan. In the case of Junagadh, Manavadar and Mangrol, which had acceded to Pakistan, India ordered military action in September 1947, which culminated in their forceful annexation on November 9, 1947. Four months later, Mountbatten justified the illegal military action against Junagadh in an aide-memoire to the King of England.

Jinnah still stuck to his stated policy about accession of states, but faced some problems in the accession of Kalat to Pakistan. The British government had given extraordinary autonomy and independence to Kalat through their treaties of 1841, 1854 and 1876 after a series of inconclusive wars. Jinnah had to cope with that mindset of Kalat and it was not easy for him to topple the state and merge it with Pakistan with just a stroke of the pen. Therefore, tact was required and that was what Jinnah did.

Jinnah had problems in dealing with his friend the Khan of Kalat, who claimed independent sovereign status for his state. In the negotiations held on July 19, 1947, with Crown Representative Mountbatten in the chair, who stated that on the lapse of paramountcy, "states would de jure become independent; but de facto, very few were likely to benefit...that although Kalat would have gained freedom, no practical course other than some form of association with Pakistan was open to it." On August 11, 1947, Jinnah recognised Kalat as an independent sovereign state with a status different from that of other Indian states.

It is surprising that even though the Indian Independence Act 1947 did not give the option of independence to any Indian state, Pakistan conceded such a status to Kalat. Britain objected to this policy and advised against recognition to the state as a separate international entity. Jinnah had some understanding and was anxious to complete the formalities of accession, which the Khan of Kalat promised to complete shortly. However, the Khan seemed to waver. Jinnah took a dim view of his "most disappointing and unsatisfactory" attitude. The six-month delay in the completion of legal formalities taxed his patience, and on March 27, 1948, he instructed Foreign Secretary Ikramullah that "there should be no negotiations of any kind or any further discussion to create slightest impression that anything but accession is possible".

(To be continued)

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Saturday, April 07, 2012

Balochistan issues — II

There are several letters from the rulers of Kharan and Lasbela asking the Quaid to accept the accession of their states to Pakistan, irrespective of Kalat's decision

The Khan of Kalat's disappointing delays and the act of dragging his feet before the promised announcement of accession may have been in response to some internal conflicts. He had delayed the fulfillment of the promise of accession of the state to Pakistan with Mr. Jinnah by almost six months.

It is likely that some political games were being played and the players included the British, Indians, some tribal sardars and the 'Khan', who was the nominal head of the 'Balochistan States'. Kalat had been given a special status beyond the framework the British had worked out for all princely states, so the question was what else Khan wanted.

The six-month delay in the completion of legal formalities taxed Quaid e Azam's patience, and on March 27 1948, he instructed Foreign Secretary Ikramullah, "There should be no negotiations of any kind or any further discussion to create slightest impression that anything but accession is possible".

While these developments were going on, the All India Radio broadcasted accession of Kalat to India. The Khan of Kalat retaliated and somewhat dramatically decided to accede to Pakistan since Lasbela, Kharan and Makran had already acceded to Pakistan on March 17, 1948.

The last Khan of Kalat had the privilege of being the President of the Council of Rulers for the Balochistan States Union. The instrument of accession concluded as under:

"I hereby declare that I execute this Instrument on behalf of this State and that any reference in this Instrument to me or to the Ruler of the State is to be construed as including a reference to my heirs and successors. Given under my hand this 27th March 1948. Nineteen

hundred and forty-eight. Signed by: His Highness Baglar Begi Khan of Kalat (Ruler of Kalat State)"

"I do hereby accept this Instrument of Accession. Dated this 31st March 1948 (Nineteen hundred and forty eight) Signed by: M.A. Jinnah (Governor-General of Pakistan)"

On the night of May 16, 1948, Prince Abdul Karim Khan, the younger brother of the Khan, decided to lead a rebellion. The prince invited the leading members of the nationalist political parties — the Kalat State National Party, the Baloch League, and the Baloch National Workers Party — to join him in the struggle for the creation of an independent "Greater Balochistan."

He was captured in September and the jirga and the District Magistrate sentenced him to 10 years imprisonment. This is followed by a history of unrest.

Some of the events prior to Kalat's accession are relevant and indicate how the Khan of Kalat found it necessary to finally agree to accession.

What effected the situation was the desire of Kharan and Lasbela, two feudatories of Kalat, to accede to Pakistan, irrespective of Kalat's decision. Moreover, Makran, which was a district of Kalat, wanted to do the same. There are several letters from the rulers of Kharan and Lasbela asking the Quaid to accept the accession of their states to Pakistan, irrespective of Kalat's decision. Mir Mohammed Habibullah Khan, the ruler of Kharan, wrote to the Quaid on August 21, 1947: "I announce on behalf of myself and my subjects...and join Pakistan Dominion as its suzerain and promises to serve Pakistan up to its extent." In each successive letter, Habibullah Khan makes it apparent that the supremacy of Kalat is unacceptable to him.

He wrote to the Quaid in November 1947, by then the Governor-General of Pakistan saying, "My State will never submit to the dictates of the Kalat State and will continue to oppose any moves aimed at an interference of the State's freedom to act." A few days later writing again to the governor-general, he argued that it was not possible any longer for Kharan to bear the undue interference from the Kalat state and described the legal status of Kharan in these words, "Following the lapse of the British paramountcy, Kharan repudiated the supremacy of Kalat

and acceded to Pakistan." Kharan also complained that Kalat was arming the "mischief mongers" in Kharan with the purpose of creating law and order situation in Pakistan-controlled areas.

These correspondences make it quite clear that the Khan of Kalat was left with little options because of the overwhelming support to Pakistan within Balochistan and if he had not done so, his status could have come under question.

In 1952, the Balochistan States Union came into existence. The Balochistan States Union existed between October 4, 1952 and October 14, 1955 in southwest Pakistan. It was formed by the states of Kalat, Kharan, Lasbela and Makran with the capital at the town of Kalat. The area of the Union was roughly the western half of the modern province of Balochistan. The Union was separate from the Chief Commissioners Province of Balochistan, which comprised areas to the northeast of the Union. The Union did not include the enclave of Gawadar, which was part of the Sultanate of Oman.

The four state rulers continued in office but some matters became the responsibility of the Council of Rulers. The first head of the Union was the Khan of Kalat who held the title Khan e Azam. The main governing body was the Council of Rulers, which comprised of the Khan e Azam, the Jam of Lasbela and the nawabs of Kharan and Makran. Decisions on major issues could be taken by a jirga or council of all the nobles or sardars of the Union. This 'Union' was abolished on October 14, 1955 and then it became a part of the West Pakistan province and was administratively identified as Kalat Division. West Pakistan was dissolved in 1970 by the second military President, Yahya Khan. Kalat thereafter continued to be Kalat Division in Pakistan. Since the creation of West Pakistan, the status and authority of the 'Khan', sardars, nawabs et al diminished and they seemed less of the rulers, causing seeds of dissatisfaction among them.

With this perspective, we will look at the events and conflicts that followed. Ignoring the issue does not help, rather an understanding does help.

(To be continued)

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Saturday, April 14, 2012

Balochistan issues — III

Whatever the tribal leaders may say, the package is potentially good and may remove the feeling of deprivation in Balochistan to some extent. Its effect may make the Baloch people feel that the government and the country care for them

The Counterpunch article A Call to Resistance: The Khan of Kalat Gathers the Tribes by Annie Nocenti has interesting details of how the grandson of the Khan of Kalat, Mir Suleman Daud is operating from Pakistan and the UK. The known field rebels are the Marris, Bugtris and Mengals. The brain, raiser of funds and the one manoeuvring it all is Mir Suleman Daud. This is how he is introduced by the writer: "The Khan of Kalat, Mir Suleiman Daud, is speeding. He's a fast driver, but so expert a wheelman there's no fear in the wide black Hummer. 'Who drives American cars?' he says, mocking himself. 'But when I saw this one, I knew it was my toy.' Handsome and charismatic, Khan Suleiman enjoys hiding his eyes behind Gucci shades, and prefers a ball cap to a turban."

Nocenti spent some days with the grandson of the Khan of Kalat and toured around the UK with him. Her description of a part of the journey: "Add in the traditional long baggy shirts and baggy pants of the region, what sounds like Pakistani hip-hop blasting, the carload of his men packing pistols and Kalashnikovs that rides behind us, and it feels like quite the posse."

Khan Suleman had been longing to regain the dream of being the real Khan once again. So Mir Suleman was looking for an opportunity. He had not been able to collect the sardars and motivate them sufficiently. Bugtri's death provided him with that opportunity. He called a jirga of sardars. Khan Suleman's historic jirga was attended by 1,500 people, including 85 sardars and 300 tribal elders. Suleman builds upon this nucleus and proceeds with seeking support from all those countries and groups who are served by a weak Pakistan. He highlighted the human rights violations and underdevelopment of Balochistan and built up an international lobby from his UK abode. As

a result, Mr Dana Rohrabacher chose to champion their cause in the US Congress. Suleman's next move is likely to be in the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

Congressman Dana Rohrabacher's recent article published in The Washington Post (April 7, 2012, "Why I Support Balochistan") clearly indicated his perception. One hopes that an experienced politician like him would have a balanced understanding. His view is coloured by his perception of Pakistan as almost a rogue state. He talks of Osama and 9/11. I would not want to defend all the policies of the Pakistan government; indeed they are faulty, but not the way Rohrabacher perceives them.

The government of Pakistan definitely needs to do more for the Baloch people. The Balochistan package is a good step. But as per reports, the government has failed to create a trickledown effect to the grassroots level, as the common Baloch youth have not yet received benefits from these efforts, and the negative impression created by local ethnic parties, militant and separatist rebel groups, has not been dispelled.

The Balochistan package recognises some of the main issues and if speedily and effectively implemented, it is likely to improve the situation, irrespective of the negative comments of the so-called 'nationalists' who have rejected it.

Mir Suleman Daud Khan said the government failed to take all stakeholders on board and did not consult those it did not like. "Baloch nationalist parties were not consulted and only allies of the current government were informed," Hyrbyar Marri, the London-based leader of the resistance, remains staunchly opposed to any compromise with the government. He calls the Aghaz-e-Haqooq-e-Balochistan package a "mockery and a cruel joke" with the people of Balochistan and says it falls short of Baloch expectations.

Whatever the tribal leaders may say, the package is potentially good and may remove the feeling of deprivation in Balochistan to some extent. Its effect may make the Baloch people feel that the government and the country cares for them as Pakistanis and thus diffuse the sentiment of deprivation and oppression. There is no shortage of countries who would like to add oil to the fire, and get their way with a destabilised and weakened Pakistan. The package needs faster

implementation, and support of diplomatic and political moves. With determined efforts, success is likely.

(To be continued)

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Saturday, April 21, 2012

VIEW: Balochistan issue — IV

The government of Pakistan responded with armed action against the armed uprisings. It happened before and during Ayub Khan's times. Afterwards, the biggest army action took place during Bhutto's government and continued for five years

Tribal uprisings occurred after the accession of Balochistan to Pakistan. On the other hand, some sardars held high positions in the government.

The Mengal and Marri tribes remained in the forefront of such uprisings, until Nawab Akbar Bugti's assassination by the Musharraf regime forced the Bugtis into the rebel camp. The government of Pakistan responded with armed action against the armed uprisings. It happened before and during Ayub Khan's times. Afterwards, the biggest army action took place during Bhutto's government and continued for five years. General Rahimuddin in Zia's time dealt with them with a very firm hand. Rahimuddin's unprecedented long rule (1978-84) prevented any further armed uprisings within the province with an iron fist. His complete isolation of Baloch sardars from the formation of any provincial policy was a move that over time gained increasing controversy due to the unusual nature of Rahimuddin's style of governance. Rahimuddin went out of his way to isolate them from any position of provincial power, and tried to appease the common masses of the province by promoting economic growth.

This, in retrospect, ultimately led to the most 'stable' period Balochistan has ever witnessed after partition. In retrospect, however, it proved the lull before fresh storms. In Musharraf's tenure, armed action restarted. In an article recently published the retired general writes: "There is no doubt Balochistan is the most backward and deprived province of Pakistan. Successive governments since our independence are responsible for their share of neglect...An anti-Pakistan, anti-Army and anti-FC sentiment was planted and gradually nourished specially in the Bugtis, Marris and Mengals. Some effort that was made in the 1970s to open the area with communication infrastructure was strongly

opposed and denied by the Marris. What is the demand of Balochistan? Basically, they demand maximum autonomy and an appropriate share of earnings from their natural resources. Both demands are genuine...More could be and should be done. Their major requirement, however, is socio-economic development. My governance from 1999 started with a complete realisation of the sense of deprivation of Balochistan and a resolve to correct the situation."

The situation was somewhat different in Musharraf's time. Musharraf opted for massive developments in Balochistan, like the establishment of Gwadar port, the 750 km-long coastal highway linking Gwadar to Karachi, the 950 km-long road from Gwadar to Rato Dero in Sindh, linking the port to the Super Highway, RCD Highway and National Highway. He also made massive developments in education and provided Rs 10,000 to each graduate.

However, Akbar Bugti's death reversed all this. Bugti's death was quickly publicised as an assassination by Musharraf, and the tribes started to unite. The efforts were spearheaded by a descendant of the Khan of Kalat. A very interesting account of this effort is contained in an article (mentioned in the previous part of this series in Daily Times, April 14, 2012), published in the western press by Annie Nocenti, a journalist and screenwriter titled "A Call to Resistance: The Khan of Kalat Gathers the Tribes". In this article Nocenti gives an eyewitness account of how Mir Suleman Daud, the grandson of the Khan of Kalat, is busy developing a continuous uprising, and his connections with journalists like Selig Harrison and some American lobbyists.

(Concluded)

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Saturday, May 05, 2012

Youm-e-Shuhada and other headlines

The real issue here is that the attention of our lawmakers is on matters that do not matter to the public. It is lawmaking that is required, not bickering

It was the day to remember those who laid down their lives for us. Nevertheless the headlines were: "No PPP PM will write Swiss letter," Prime Minister Gilani. "Sharifs are robbers," Interior Minister Rehman Malik. "Malik is a swindler," Leader of the Opposition, Chaudary Nisar.

This is what our lawmakers were busy with. These are front-page news in Daily Times, Monday, April 30. There is also significant news about the Youm-e-Shuhada on page 3, but the telling story in this one is contained in the lines, "People will pay tribute to the armed forces and its agencies that rendered sacrifices in fighting terrorism. Due to lack of effective legislation regarding perpetrators of terrorism, over 1,000 hardcore terrorists have been acquitted by courts. If special laws are not made, courts may continue to ask agencies for substantial evidence against terrorists..." It also says that the UK, India and Sri Lanka have strengthened laws against terrorism.

Almost a year ago, in one of the major English daily newspapers on July 10, there was another headline saying: "90 pc district courts staff corrupt: CJ".

What do you make of it all?

This is the socio-political environment that we are living in. The first headline quoted is a symbol of the absolute 'defiance' of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) executive head. He also predicts identical behaviour by all subsequent prime ministers belonging to his party. Such a defiant attitude will probably earn him a few 'suspect' credentials of loyalty to the party (particularly to Mr Zardari) and consolidate his vote bank by becoming a symbol of defiance and courage. PM Gilani does not mind being convicted by the Supreme Court (SC) of Pakistan. He can sell the lack of credibility of the SC in the background of the Bhutto conviction, which indeed was a judicial

murder. Therefore, he knows that an anti-court stance will be popular with the PPP supporters.

The other two headlines are examples of shameless mudslinging between the two major political parties. The PML-N, as a 'friendly' opposition always takes the lead in protests, and then ensures that the issue fizzles out and the status quo is maintained by 'noora kushhi' (shadow boxing). This has been the PML-N strategy all along.

The real issue here is that the attention of our lawmakers is on matters that do not matter to the public. It is lawmaking that is required, not bickering. Most important is the issue of extremism and terrorism. Consider the 1,000 confirmed terrorists caught and freed. They must have been caught at a huge expense in money and human skill, and the sacrifice of over 30,000 lives. However, the existing courts cannot do justice because of the limitations of ineffective laws and corruption-infected procedures in the lower courts.

Terrorists can now go, kill some more civilians and stay free unless they provide an affidavit with witnesses to state: 'We are terrorists and killers and need to be dealt with according to the law, so please hang us.' Sounds ridiculous, but that is the real situation. Oppression, the Kalashnikov culture and terror are free to spread because no evidence is coming to the courts. Witnesses are no fools; they have their own lives and those of their families to take care of, rather than being mysteriously killed after appearing as witnesses.

The law needs to change but our lawmakers are too busy. The lawmakers, some of whom have fake degrees, and who do not require any educational qualifications now, try to make the most of the opportunity of being in power. Indeed, they need to make money, cover expenses of their previous election, make enough for at least one more election and of course, they need to take care of their family, biradari (clan), and the police station of their constituency! Indeed, if they have money for an adequate number of gun-bearing guards, then the law and order situation is no more their concern because they already feel safe.

The major burden of responsibility is on the shoulders of the PM. He has many legal mechanisms to take care of the rest of his tenure, and even longer, if he chooses to follow an alternate course. However unlikely it may be, we should expect some moments of honest introspection by the PM and the allied political parties. Their actions,

so far, are only a living proof of the saying 'power corrupts' and our representatives are making sure that this saying is proved right. Why does the PM not want to write the letter? What if he does? The president may be acquitted.

If the PM decides to rally his party and his coalition partners to pass adequate laws to apprehend and bring extremists and terrorists to justice, he may be able to improve the law and order situation. Lawmaking is what members of the National Assembly are chosen for Sir! Please make laws that protect the lives and property of this nation and your voters. Peace is also the key to economic development.

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Saturday, May 12, 2012

When there was music in the air

Politicians come and go — not all can be Jinnah — but it is the outstanding artistic creation that makes the identity of a nation unique

I wonder if there are survivors of the times when Tamara Khanam from the Soviet Union visited and performed in Lahore, or when the film Bhawani Junction was made at the Lahore Railway Station. When Stewart Granger and Ava Gardner were staying in the Fallettis Hotel, or when Gopi Krishna danced in the Open Air Theatre in Bagh-e-Jinnah.

These were events of the decade of the 1950s of the last century. In my memory, the vision is as fresh as if it was yesterday.

Presuming some would remember that unforgettable evening with Gopi Krishna in 1960. The continuity of those days is The All Pakistan Music Conference, which upholds the banner of music, particularly the classical genre, thanks to the efforts of Mr Hayat Ahmed Khan and his family and friends, in particular, Ms Ghazala Hayat Irfan and Mr Javed Ahmed Qureshi. I remember Mr Khan as a friend and a colleague, in charge of music functions at the then Pakistan Arts Council, Alhamra (now Lahore Arts Council). Mr Khan's love for classical music knew no bounds. He was the founder of the All Pakistan Music Conference (APMC). The members of the APMC included distinguished names like the greatest of classical singers Roshan Ara Begum. Mr Khan continued with this for as long as he lived. Once during a conversation, he said, "I am not going to die." Indeed, he is still with us, with his love of music. His music conference is hayat (alive).

It was a session of the APMC, in which I found Gopi Krishna's performance, among several others, unforgettable. Krishna was a dancer — not a classical singer or musician. But music is an integral part and basis of any dance and its magic shows in the work of a maestro, and Gopi Krishna indeed was a maestro.

I reached the Bagh-e-Jinnah Open Air Theatre early in the evening to be able to get a good seat. I was lucky to find a place in the middle

steps; soon after, there were no places left in the theatre and many spectators were standing. Classical dance was a rare occurrence for connoisseurs in those days; therefore, the city had responded enthusiastically. I had met Krishna a day earlier at a reception. He was a bit stout, of medium height, and longhaired, and not very impressive as a person. However, while talking to him, I asked him about the great Indian dancer Sitara, a legendary performer. Krishna responded that if one met Sitara Devi, who was probably advanced a age at that time, one would feel as if one was meeting a normal, ordinary, young person. Then he touched the lobe of his ear, as if saying *tauba* (God forbid) and said, "Jab woh stage par roop dhartee hain tou lagta hae asmaan say patee utree hae" (When she appears on stage, it seems as though a fairy has descended from the heavens). I wondered what magic a dancer could weave to ascend to human charm in this way. While sitting in the theatre, I remembered this and wondered what Krishna would do. Soon the stage lights went up. A beautiful female dancer appeared. Her dance was so fascinating that the audience almost forgot about Gopi Krishna. The dancer kept the audience spellbound for about five hours. That was the magic of the dancer. Nobody moved. One did not want to bat an eye, lest one missed something. This dancer was no woman — it was Gopi Krishna himself.

Krishna, assuming the personality of a woman, artistically had made that character perform with all the artistry and charms at the command of a beautiful woman. I recalled his words about Sitara Devi. Now I had seen what a performer could do when he or she assumed a 'character'.

The APMC did, and is continuing to do a service to the arts and the nation to which these arts belong. When some analysts look at the history of development of music, they will indeed find the role of the APMC significant.

Today, TV channels are there as major promoters of music. However, what they promote is 'popular' music as they are looking after their commercial interests, using it as an 'interesting' product. I do not condemn this because it provides opportunity to exponents of music and encourages others to learn. The APMC provided music lovers the opportunity to hear maestros like Roshan Ara Begum, Ustad Ummeed Ali Khan, Khan Sahib Mohammad Sharif, Qadir Bakhsh Pakhawaji, Munir Hussain, Shaukat Hussain, Rasulan Bai, Ghulam Ali Khan and

so many others in their prime. Those who heard them in person were fortunate, learning while enjoying it. With the near demise of a great institution like Radio Pakistan, the process of learning opportunities in classical music have diminished, even though it provides the base on which any musical expression can be built.

Nations are respected for their artistic accomplishments. Politicians come and go — not all can be Jinnah — but it is the outstanding artistic creation that makes the identity of a nation unique. The fact is that art forms, and particularly music, are also big business, if properly developed, without shortcuts. In the classical genre particularly, there are no shortcuts.

With the disappearance of Nawabs and Maharajas, the role of the patrons of music needs to be assumed by big businesses and specialised institutions. An example to be considered is 'Coke Studio', but much more needs to be done on the training and educational sides. Of course, the government has a significant role to play, but the persons at the helm of affairs need to have the sensitivity and ability to see the potential. Some of them enjoy and listen with interest, but perhaps they do not realise that they have a responsibility to promote music as well. All arts — visual as well as performing — are the most effective asset of a nation for cultural understanding and diplomacy. Culture should no more be the last priority on the national level.

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Saturday, May 19, 2012

Zero hour and Radio Pakistan

Radio was the only source of information, entertainment and education. If your voice was broadcast over the radio, you became known

It was the zero hour between the night of August 14 and August 15, 1947, which is the most significant moment in the history of this subcontinent. Those who have lived in those times would remember that the suspense of the partition of the Indian subcontinent and the consequences of it were already occupying everyone's mind months earlier. An announcement by the British was expected any time. It ultimately came on June 3, 1947. The promised independence to Pakistan and India was to be effective at the zero hour between August 14 and 15, 1947. All India Radio being the only means of communication, millions of people were glued to their radio sets. Then midnight...12 o'clock...the zero hour arrived, and we heard the announcement. "Yeh Radio Pakistan hae....." It was the voice of Syed Mustafa Ali Hamadani, the duty announcer at the Radio Station in Lahore. Mustafa Ali Hamadani's announcement immortalised him and sent an electric wave through all the people who officially heard the name 'Pakistan' for the first time.

Radio Pakistan was located in a bungalow owned by Sir Fazle Hussain near Simla Hill on the road turning towards the Governor's House in Lahore. The radio station at Lahore and the radio station at Peshawar were the oldest stations and existed before independence. A word broadcast from these was the standard of diction and pronunciation. A great deal of research and training preceded any broadcaster before he reached the microphone. Almost all great broadcasters from India, particularly from All India Radio, Delhi, arrived in Lahore and worked for some time here. These included Akhlaq Ahmed Dehlvi, S M Salim, Amir Khan and others. The most distinguished broadcaster of those times, Syed Imtiaz Ali Taj, was indeed in Lahore and that all time resonant voice of Mohini Das (later Mohini Hamid) kept audiences glued to radio. At the time of partition, there was a huge influx of refugees coming to Walton Camp. When

their needs went beyond the resources of the district administration, Syed Imtiaz Ali Taj was requested by the deputy commissioner to make a public appeal for contribution of materials. Mr Taj at that time was writing and broadcasting a daily programme called 'Pakistan Hamara Hae' (Pakistan is ours). He made an impassioned appeal to the people of Lahore for contributions for the refugees. Within 24 hours, he had to appeal again to thank them and to stop further contributions. The contributions were much beyond the expectations of the administration and they were finding it hard to deal with piles of household items, jewelry, cash and a host of other things. Such was the power in the appeal that across the border, Mr Gandhi wished he had a person like Mr Taj on his side.

On the other hand, the creative side of broadcasting kept the audience attached to their radio sets on daily basis. Drama, music, and the news were the most important. Radio was the only source of information, entertainment and education. If your voice was broadcast over the radio, you became known. The range of the radio listeners was not limited to only Pakistan; our radio was regularly listened to in India and many other countries where Urdu or other vernacular languages were understood.

Unforgettable 'drama' voices appeared on radio. I became a broadcaster in 1956 through a humorous short story that I had written titled, Akhbar Main Tasveer Chapne Key Baad for the university magazine. I read it and almost immediately afterwards, I was taken as a writer, actor and general broadcaster. I tasted the fruits of overnight stardom! I had the good fortune of working with M Rafi Peer, Syed Imtiaz Ali Taj, Mohini Hamid, Mohammad Hussain, Sheikh Iqbal, Sultan Khoosat, Shaukat Thanvi, Amir Khan, and later on with Iffat Mukhtar, Mahnaz Rafi, Yasmin Tahir and other distinguished voices who made their mark. I was lucky to have been invited to all major radio stations in Pakistan.

Then there were great producers around. Syed Razi Tirmazi, Salim Gilani, Izhar Kazimi, Raja Farooq Ali Khan, Shaad Amritsari, Amin ur Rehman, Kalimullah, Chaudhry Bashir, Soofi Tabassum and Ashfaq Ahmed. I had the good fortune of working with all of them. The persons working for radio were conscious of their noble role as trainers and educators.

A very important tradition in the radio was that all authors had to submit their handwritten manuscripts before they could be accepted for broadcast and payments. Therefore, radio stations became the biggest repository of handwritten manuscripts. All great names in literature or any other field, particularly drama and the short story, contributed. I did the same, and felt that 'I am safe' and could ask for a copy of my accepted scripts anytime in the future. But alas, this was not to be. In 1962, a new broadcasting house was built where it now exists. All records were shifted in gunny bags to this new centre and put in the basement. Hardly anybody knew after that what went where.

In 1965, the war started and radio assumed a new and key role of keeping the national morale high. Some amazing written work was produced in dramas and tarānas (anthems), and of course who can forget Noor Jehan's scintillating voice.

Life moved on and the archives were forgotten. I needed some scripts for publication, but nobody could trace them in the innumerable piles of bags. Imagine the manuscripts of over 100 years gone. As the director general of the National Council of the Arts, I discussed the problem with the DG Radio. He expressed his inability to do anything as he had no funds. I immediately funded all requirements of computers, etc, to prepare a catalogue of the works with Lahore Radio Station. The work started, but I do not think it continued for long. I only hope it did. However, the most important part of preserving these scripts has certainly not happened. I hope that someone now at the helm of affairs will realise the importance of manuscripts as national assets, find and retrieve them.

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Saturday, June 02, 2012

Where are we going?

Government representatives cannot stop saying that the previous government is responsible for all the wrongs and that is why everything is beyond their control now. How long can they sell this theory?

The prime minister of Pakistan does not want to leave, happen what may! There is load shedding almost 24 hours a day, with short intervals of surprise availability of electricity. Pressure of gas supply varies from zero to 60 percent. Petroleum prices fluctuate frequently, going up by leaps and bounds and coming down by fractions. From Rs 50 per litre, the price of petrol is now over Rs 100 per litre, and one does not know what the price will be tomorrow. Railways is more like junk.

While I am writing this article, the Awami Express is reported to be 16 hours delayed and with no water to drink and fans to cool off, a 60-year-old man, Yaseen, passed away. One of the largest railway workshops of the subcontinent situated in Lahore is almost closed. Railways' 'cash cow' and profitable cargo 'goods' are given to trucking mafias. The maal garri (cargo train) is almost off the tracks.

The Lahore College for Women University has a fear of student suicides, thus is closing its roofs to students. Government functionaries beat a Saudi diplomat at the Islamabad airport and his bloodstained pictures are prominently placed on newspaper pages. The rupee has fallen by 50 percent in four years. Look at the comparison of prices four years ago and now (these are of items of daily use). Diesel from Rs 35 to over Rs 100, CNG Rs 25 to Rs 64, flour Rs 13 to Rs 36, sugar Rs 21 to Rs 55, ghee Rs 80 to Rs 190, milk Rs 32 to 60, meat Rs 280 to 550, chicken Rs 80 to Rs 200, motorcycle Rs 34,000 to Rs 70,000, AC Rs 20,000 to Rs 45,000 and the dollar exchange rate from Rs 60 to Rs 93. Mind you, these are the approximate prices of today; they may be much higher by the time I finish writing this article.

The hardest hits are the lower income groups: the salaried classes, white collar individuals and senior citizens.

As for senior citizens, who cares about them? They have little utility now. After all, they have given their best in bringing up the young, contributing to the economy and workforce, hence for Pakistan; they had better not exist anymore. There has always been a 'choocha (youth) culture' of strong bias against 'seniors' and for the younger 'choocha' in every age bracket. Some countries support seniors because of their experience and use their abilities up to 80 years of age, subject to health and their desire to work; otherwise, the state provides financial support for them. That is not the case in Pakistan; here they are not even the last priority.

The typical Pakistani mentality rejects the past and goes for the new. Whatever that was done in the past was wrong. Government representatives cannot stop saying that the previous government is responsible for all the wrongs and that is why everything is beyond their control now. How long can they sell this theory? Is there any credibility left in such statements?

Then comes the second slogan: 'our sacrifices'. Party members harp on their sacrifices. Remember, someone who stood for some principles, gave sacrifices. The current leaders are enjoying the windfall. They have no right to keep selling the 'sacrifice' of those leaders and reaping every benefit.

Now, a new budget of gloom is almost ready to be passed by the lawmakers. They are ready to sign on the dotted line even if it was a blank paper. They have no value for the public anyway. They may have encashed their value in some other way through some other manoeuvre. This is democracy and thank God we have democracy. We have all been told that the worst form of 'democracy' is better than dictatorship. Indeed, we have been given the 'worst form' but of course it is better than any other form like that of a 'dictatorship'. What is dictatorship? Simple. A person who has ever worn a uniform is a dictator. If he brings in democracy at all levels and improves the lot of the poor, it does not matter — it is still dictatorship and his democracy is 'rubber stamp' democracy. So forget it. Accept the misery and live happily because the 'worst form' of democracy is better than dictatorship. Enjoy drones. Bear starvation and smile. Don't commit suicide, circumstances will relieve you soon. If you want to leave the country, go, please go. Who is stopping you? Haven't you heard this from the highest quarter? Ha ha, you have nowhere to go. So stay here, and if you find an opportunity to

slog in another country, then collect your wages in dollars. Hole yourselves in dungeons as a group. Save dollars and send those to Pakistan because we need to sustain our worst democracy; after all, it is better than dictatorship. We need those dollars because the caravan must keep moving and because we need oil to fill the tanks of our vehicles in our motorcades. Burn your midnight oil and send us money to make our entourage move. We need security, don't we?

Do I sound cynical? Depressed? Me, the eternal optimist! Why? Is it because of the 46-degree temperature? Is it because I could not take a bath in the morning, as there was no water? Or is it because I had to wait for my breakfast due to low supply of gas? Maybe, but it could not be because of my crinkled suit; I have adopted this style to avoid using an iron to press.

I need to change the scene. Let us switch on the TV. Oh no, there are the same tales of misery. Change the channel. Yes, yes, this is better. There is a caravan of glittering lights on cars — big cars — Mercedes, Pajero, Land Cruiser, double-cabin, hundreds of shining vehicles. Wow, looks good. An aristocratic black vehicle leads it with a VIP in it. Let us all cheer. Long live our PM, CM and all others who have these entourage. Long live democracy.

What is this jarring sound of a siren? An ambulance stuck on the road? Oh forget it.

That is the way to go.

Saturday, June 16, 2012

So what!

We have a very powerful government. It will survive and complete its tenure. To complete the tenure has been the prime objective

In an interview conducted by a British television network, our longest serving prime minister (PM) responded with remarkable control. He was asked a very irrelevant and almost silly question "Why do 30 percent of Pakistanis want to leave the country?" Is it not a silly question? How does he not know? However, he kept his bearing with his face tilted up and said, "Why don't they go then?" Of course!

In fact, he is a farsighted man, who is looking at the benefit to the nation if these people were to go. Indeed, he keeps the 'national interest' supreme in his mind. The overseas Pakistanis have remitted \$ 20 billion to Pakistan as revealed in the budget estimates for the next financial year. Now if another 30 percent Pakistanis — which is 54 million people — also go away, then it is simple that they will have to make money and send remittances to their families. These remittances will be at least \$ 10 billion and perhaps much more. All problems will be solved (for the elite). The additional remittances may still not be adequate for power generation or the loan paybacks, things that help the poor masses, naturally, because some quantity has to stick with the fingers. Trickle down is more and more difficult, and it is a trickle anyway. However, there will be at least 20 percent less mouths to feed. What a great advantage! (Only for a few years; later on we will fill the gap.) There may be some split family issues, like children getting out of control and becoming terrorists, or some morality issues if wives are left behind, but so what?

The current prime minister is the longest surviving chief executive of Pakistan. There has to be something extraordinary about him. I mean other than physical attributes. Look at the talented family — his two sons are already 'famous'! He has provided us with another ruling dynasty option. He has survived tenaciously in the face of opposition and the court actions, contempt, etc. It is because his legislators back him up. He believes in the Constitution of Pakistan, even more than the

Supreme Court. So long live the PM, long live 'dummicracy'. (What? There is no such word? Please understand, there is no system like this either!) So far so good.

Now more has happened. The 'memogate' thing is back. It created a huge ruckus in January this year. The media as usual went wild with speculations; more sensations, more ratings, and higher the ratings, more advertisements, and more money to the owners of the channels. It was good for all who could make money out of it. However, people in general, those who watch current affairs programmes and not the 'soaps', were tense. They think there is a dangerous scandal about the army, the president's house, a diplomat, and a rich scandalous American of Pakistani origin. As usual, the matter landed at the door of the Supreme Court to take care of the baby. The Commission appointed by the Supreme Court has now clearly reported that the 'memo' was real, and a deal to compromise the sovereignty of Pakistan was attempted. The apprehensions of the army were well founded.

Nothing could be more shocking. Not even the price of petrol or load shedding was so shocking. However, we have a very powerful government. It will survive and complete its tenure. To complete the tenure has been the prime objective. What was achieved in that tenure is a secondary matter. If the tenure is completed, it matters. If there have been scandals, so what?

Even more is happening. A big real estate giant has realised that he has had enough. He is a businessman. For businessmen, some deals are highly profitable, some are less profitable and some end up in loss. Businessmen also make investments. Some are short term and some are long term. Some are for 'lobbying'. Lobbying is a nice word used by the US and other westerners. It covers what we erroneously call 'corruption' or 'influencing by sifarish (influence), etc. For businessmen, everything is money-based, naturally. Therefore, lobbying has also to be money-based and all work that requires to be done through official channels needs 'speed money'. Is it not true? Has everyone not realised that vehicles move faster if pahias (wheels) are provided. Riaz Malik has also been doing it; so what?

However, things went wrong for Riaz Malik when the wheels became too expensive and still did not move. Expensive like Rs 340 million. Then he lost patience. When the wheels were not working, he

decided to push the cart. He did not care whoever was trampled in the process. It was a very 'big' loss so his cart may hurt big, and even if it hurts the PM or the Chief Justice or the Ns. or Qs or any other alphabet, so what? But if it hurts too hard then the final pillar of democracy will be hurt.

Our worthy chief minister (CM) of Punjab has already said that dictatorship is preferable to the current democracy. Incidentally, CM Shahbaz Sharif is being termed as 'Showbiz' Sharif. This label is very wrong even if said as a pun, because the only show business Sharif is Babra Sharif. Period.

Therefore, all pillars of democracy are being hurt. Even if it is the worst democracy, we are told it is better than dictatorship. We cannot get away by saying 'so what' to everything. We need to protect the democratic tradition and it is time we did that. It is time that we go back to the people. The present democracy has almost completed its term; now it needs to consult those who elected them — the people of this country. It is time that preparations are made, as fast as possible, for a countrywide election and to give a chance to the people of this country and to hear their voices. It is time that the hope is kept alive. Hopefully, people will make the right choices. Let us hope for the best.

The writer is a culture and media management specialist, a researcher, director and author

Saturday, June 23, 2012

Bye bye, Mr Gilani, it's over

Gilani will be remembered for his incapability to handle government affairs or manage these. He lived on public relations and 'obedience' to the boss, and prospered

The PPP has decided to lump it. Of course, it is in the 'greater national interest and in the interest of democracy'. There was no real option left with the PPP after the Supreme Court decision. Other sacrificial PMs will be no solution either.

To start with, the Prime Minister (PM) of Pakistan, Mr Yousaf Raza Gilani, has been removed from the prime ministership, and from membership of the National Assembly, effective April 26, 2012, because he was convicted of contempt of court. His dreams of a prime minister who held the position for the longest time have perished. Liaquat Ali Khan held the longest term as per the historical record.

Mr Gilani showed total loyalty to Mr Zardari and laid down his position. It was his refusal to write the required letter that removed him as prime minister as well as from the membership of the National Assembly. He succeeded in becoming the most powerful prime minister after the 18th Amendment. Therefore he had the support of the president as well as the National Assembly. But what did he achieve for the people at large? The answer is: nothing.

Gilani's period will be remembered as the darkest period, literally. Homes lost light, and industry and the masses suffered day and night. One felt like an egg kept for boiling in the heat pan of the city. You were poached, half-boiled or full-boiled, depending on the period of load shedding. In Lahore, it went up to a total of 22 hours a day, while the temperature was 40 to 45 degrees. He was unpopular and incompetent. The Supreme Court has helped him with an exit before a public uprising.

Moreover, Gilani will be remembered for his incapability to handle government affairs or manage these. Born of a makhdoom family and being a landlord, he never had the experience of management of an

institution. He lived on public relations and 'obedience' to the boss, and prospered. This is the only relationship he understood with a feudal mindset, not caring if people lived in the country or left it.

Gilani is also known for favouritism in appointments in public office. He was jailed for this reason in his previous term and snubbed by the Supreme Court this time when he made promotion of several government officers at his pleasure.

Mr Gilani stood firm on the issue of the writing of the letter to the Swiss authorities. This was his strength. He did not want that investigation to go on, took the cover of immunity for the president and then further glorified it by declaring himself to be a protector of the constitution.

Now there are many surprises in store. Would he be remembered kindly by those whom he served? Probably not. He has outlived his utility for now. Someone else from South Punjab will be better for support. Maybe he thinks he has joined the list of martyrs. He may be thinking, 'I have laid down my PM assignment, I am a martyr and the party will never forget it.' I hope for him that it happens so, but I have my doubts. While gathering the 'wool' for his master, if he had thought of the 'boy down the lane,' then the boy representing the public, may have had some consideration. With his record tainted with alleged corruption, favouritism, audacity, family promotion and total incompetence, leave alone remembering him, he will be lucky if people forget what he has done to them. The media is having a great time.

If Gilani had any sensitivity for the public then he could have controlled load shedding. It is doable, but he did not bother. He was comfortable securing himself only with the boss. The power supply can improve by paying the power plants, rescheduling the circular debt, and by taking the bold step of limiting availability of CNG to public vehicles only. But all this needed the will, which was not there. He is gone for the time being, and as it is said, tamasha dikha kar madari gaya (the showman has departed after displaying his wares).

Now the elements of our democracy are looking at new possibilities. The PPP has lined up three for the altar. Shahabuddin from South Punjab, not supported by the ex-PM, heads the list and two others, Raja Pervez Ashraf of the rental power fame, and Qamar-uz Zaman Kaira follow. Kaira is the only one who has no charges of

corruption, so he is at number three! If they are all there on the promise of not writing the letter to the Swiss authorities, then heads will roll soon and the National Assembly may as well stay in session to hold the heads and elect the next.

Hold it. Breaking news while writing this article: Shahabuddin dropped, arrest warrant issued on charges by anti-narcotics agencies.

However, there are two more candidates from PPP available, and one from the PML-N and of course, the evergreen Maulana Fazlur Rehman is also a candidate. If any of the latter two is elected then there will be a wholly new scenario. The controversial letter may be sent. Or the president may have to take steps for a new election as soon as possible. The political turmoil will not end with Gilani's removal. It seems only to be the beginning. By the time this article is published, a decision on the new prime minister may have been taken and a new show will start. Keep watching, don't go away!

Saturday, July 07, 2012

Pakistan and its Diaspora

Then where is the opposition coming from? Is it a sense of insecurity, because a Diaspora candidate is likely to be more competent?

The Pakistani Diaspora refers to overseas Pakistanis, who, as Pakistani citizens, migrated to another country. According to Pakistan government, there are around seven million Pakistanis living abroad, with a vast majority of them residing in the Middle East, Europe and North America. Pakistani Diaspora sent remittances to Pakistan of over 13 billion dollars in 2012. That money was welcomed.

Who are these people and why do they leave the country of birth? A majority of these are young persons, but some are of mature age, and some seniors. The young are those who have some qualification, succeed in obtaining respectable jobs in a competitive job market and were found to be an asset by the employers in a developed country. Several of these have made a name for themselves, contributed to the business of their employers and to the economy of the country of their residence. Some have reached top positions. There are others who have established themselves as entrepreneurs and run successful businesses. Few of these flow in the mainstream of the foreign society, and some create a small island for themselves and survive. However, most of them dream of their country and regret that their talent could not be absorbed in their own country. Many of these are doctors, engineers, attorneys, economists, accountants, finance managers and developers. Almost all are nostalgic about Pakistan and given an equal or near equal environment of work and they may prefer their country of birth to work, for its development and for their own fulfilment.

There is another group of persons that is, in fact, larger in number. These people are hardworking individuals who generally hold lower or middle positions or work as labour force. Almost all of these people send remittances to their parent country and hope to return one day. The foreign currency they send is the backbone of Pakistan's economy. Every year \$ 13 billion is a large amount. Without these remittances, the economy of Pakistan will face even more hardship. We gladly accept

their money. If they come back to the country and invest here, then they are also welcome.

But if they feel that they can contribute in the management of national affairs and contest elections, then eyebrows are raised. Suddenly, their 'loyalty' becomes suspect. What about all those who do not take dual nationalities but still keep their assets in other countries? Are the millionaires who have taken Pakistan's money out and kept it out more patriotic? The Diaspora works and sends its very hard-earned money at the cost of their comfort to look after the needs of their compatriots. Who is more patriotic? Do the so-called patriotic legislators not take an oath and do not remember a word of it a few minutes later? Are they all serving national interest over and above their personal interests?

The worst situation that can be labelled against the oath taking of a dual national is in the case of a conflict of interest between the two countries. Let us look at the reality. Most of the Diaspora is in the countries that are friendly to Pakistan and boast of commonality of interest. Even in case of a strong conflict, the situations are resolved in the best interest of both countries. Where is the conflict? Are we afraid of the Indians coming and sabotaging Pakistan's interest? So let it be clarified: India does not allow dual nationality, so there is no case of concern on this count.

Let us look from the point of view that the individuals of Diaspora who may want to contest an election in Pakistan would bring with them the experience and exposure of the system of more developed countries. Therefore, they are likely to contribute positively in decision-making. They can also be of help with their contacts in the other country. This influence can help in trade as well as political understanding. It also needs to be remembered that if such persons enter the country by invoking their rights under NICOP, and not on a 'visa', then, they acquire the 'resident' right in Pakistan. Therefore, they should enjoy all rights without suspicion.

What do other countries do with their Diaspora? Most of the other countries lay down no restrictions. The reasons are obvious. Then where is the opposition coming from? Is it a sense of insecurity, because a Diaspora candidate is likely to be more competent? The Diaspora candidate is very likely to be more educated and with a better

understanding of how more developed countries manage their affairs, while some traditional candidate does not even want to graduate from a university. This is a strange contradiction. How many times have the elected really cared about the basic individual rights as guaranteed by the constitution? Have they really protected these rights for the masses? They have hardly ever done so. But, when it comes to entering a legislative body by the Diaspora, they are reminded of this right. And how do the illiterate 'legislators' consider themselves competent to make laws? With no or little education, the best they can claim to understand are the wishes of a certain portion of the voters of their constituency. I say a 'portion', because generally, the winner does not have the majority votes unless it was a one-on-one contest and a 100 percent turnout of voters happened. Impossible. Let us face it: most of those elected are representative of a minority and in many cases, they owe their success to strong-arm tactics. In my opinion, the restriction on the Diaspora to participate in politics and contest election is neither justified nor fair. In fact, it could be harmful.

A ray of hope does exist though. In a recent press report, Mr Zardari and Altaf Hussain have agreed to support equal rights for the Diaspora. These two leaders have the track record of getting things done. Political differences apart, one would wish them success in making the appropriate change in the constitution.

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Saturday, August 04, 2012

Olympics in London and the opening ceremony

Among the least glamorous or noticeable was Pakistan, dominated by hockey players

I arrived in London on July 20, but it was not as a spectator of the Olympics. There were other personal reasons. But one cannot stay away from such an event entirely, especially because of my interest in sports, and, in particular, the inaugural ceremony of significant international events. I watch sports as an interested viewer but I look at the opening ceremonies as a professional who has the creation of inaugurals of two Asian Games to his credit.

In London at this time, it would have been useless to even try for any tickets in the arena of the inaugural event. The capacity of 60,000 persons had been pre-sold for months. However, now the viewers of sports events have changed into a larger audience, including those watching on TV screens. In this particular case, the estimated TV viewers were estimated at 80 million around the world! Since the number glued to the screens is so large, the organisers have to find ways of making the ceremony suitable for the camera. Of course, such events provide a huge source of funding through commercial advertisements and therefore need the best possible production. I watched the first two days of proceedings on the screen before I began writing this article.

The inaugural ceremony is watched by everyone irrespective of the fact that one is in the arena or in front of the screen. The individual games and competitions may not be seen by all due to specialised interests. Therefore, the inaugural ceremonies are the real prestige thing for the host country. Casual, as well as professional viewers, make comparisons with the inaugural ceremonies planned by other countries earlier. In the present case, most people compared the UK ceremony with the ceremony of the Beijing Olympics a few years ago. Thus the UK organisers were up against very tough competition. The Chinese and Koreans are awesome. They are the inventors of mass calisthenics. I learnt this technique due to my personal curiosity and with months of round-the-clock study and experiments. Still, I was only satisfied with

my work when, in 1989, the Chinese ambassador graciously walked up to me at the Jinnah Stadium, Islamabad, after watching my presentations at the inaugural of the SAF games and complimented me for creating a successful show of calisthenics 'outside of China'. I had created the show after training more than 5,000 children for months. Therefore, I recognise the extent of the effort, creative genius, and teamwork involved. It was in the background of this experience that I was commissioned to do the Asian Games later in 2004 and interpret the most challenging theme, 'Rising above'. In all honesty, I still consider the Chinese and the Koreans the greatest in this art form but the Chinese have the edge because they do it on a larger scale than anyone else in the world. Therefore it is better to comment on the UK inaugural on its own merit only, without making any comparisons.

In planning an inaugural, there are several considerations. For instance, it comprises of introduction to the heritage of the host country, tribute to the Olympic spirit and sportsmanship, and the acknowledgement of the physical achievement of human beings. Each host country creates its own balance among these preferences. The British organisers chose to start from the industrial revolution and carried on to show everything, endlessly, that Britain has. They did it with technical perfection. A virtual jump by parachute by the queen was included; Mr Bean, J K Rowling, other show business personalities, roads, policemen, nurses, handicapped people, hospitals — everything one can think of being British. Perhaps the only thing forgotten was a British bed-pan! The self-indulgence seemed overdone at the cost of projecting the Olympic spirit.

To be fair, the use of production techniques and technologies was superb. This alone could have spoken a great deal of the British supremacy in the area of presentation.

The sports indeed are varied and it is almost impossible not to get involved. The largest contingent was perhaps from the United States, some 519 participants. Out of those, 400 were women athletes! The Chinese and Russians were next and among the least glamorous or noticeable was Pakistan, dominated by hockey players.

All sports are interesting but gymnastics is thrilling. Dominated by women participants, it adds some aesthetics as well. There are several

other events that have been recently introduced, like sand volleyball and others. Swimming events are also popular.

The Pakistani sport managers need to think as to why they limit themselves to primarily one item. The participation needs to be expanded. As far as medals are concerned, it is one medal for the winner, no matter if it is an individual performance or a performance by a team of 11. There is definitely room to work here. I am not pleading for the replacement of hockey; certainly, Pakistan has won honours in the past but their performance needs improvement now. If Pakistan concentrates on other games, we could find champion material in single athlete competitions like boxing, archery, races, and others. This could possibly bring more medals for the country.

A notable fact was participation by some very small countries. Some countries had as few as one participant, but stood proudly in the comity of nations. Another notable thing was the colourful dresses of the participating athletes in the parade. The contingents are always led by a carrier of the national flag of the country, therefore the members of the Pakistan contingent could design an attractive outfit, perhaps with an ethnic inspiration that would add colour to the procession and not look drab as the Pakistanis did. Pakistan has a rising fashion industry. Outfits could have been designed better and attention could have been drawn to the great cotton and apparel industry of Pakistan.

Saturday, August 11, 2012

Why look up to others every time?

We generally do not value our heroes in different fields, and when compared, most of the people eulogise others

I am referring to the mindset of trusting other nations, or governments, or countries more than trusting ourselves. Instead of a planned move towards self-confidence and self-respect, Pakistanis seem to move in the opposite direction and the government institutions seem to be part of it.

Let us look back to recall some relevant events.

Soon after independence, the Kashmir 'war' irrupted. Many people believe that was a golden chance for Pakistan, but the government of that time chose to seek interference of 'others' and made a mess, and the masses in general were made to believe that what others did was perhaps right. In the case of the East Pakistan debacle, we messed up, telling people that a 'fleet' was on the way and everything would be under control. It never happened but people's attention was diverted; they were fooled to believe and entertain hope, only to be shocked when the reality dawned upon them.

In recent times, Benazir was assassinated. Baitullah Mehsud is on record to have declared that he had sent people to do the job. Local investigating authorities had made their investigation. Bu government chose to involve the Scotland Yard and even the United Nations at huge cost to the national exchequer. Why? What was achieved? Nothing was achieved except trying to say that the best credibility is of others not ours. Same is the case with the late Nawab Bugti's case. Involvement of others has become a ploy to dodge people and show that government is doing its best. To continue hype, Interpol is referred to as the source to apprehend the accused. It is a completely diversionary tactic. Interpol has little to do with domestic affairs of a country.

Neutrality is, and always has been, paramount to INTERPOL. As an international organisation with a unique mandate, namely to prevent and fight crime through enhanced international police cooperation, it is

of the utmost importance that INTERPOL's activities transcend domestic and international politics.

Article 3 of INTERPOL's Constitution enshrines this guiding principle of neutrality by explicitly forbidding INTERPOL from engaging in matters of political, military, religious and racial character. This principle was first introduced in INTERPOL's Statute in 1948, when the phrase 'to the strict exclusion of all matters having a political, religious or racial character' was added to the end of Article 1(1) of the Organisation's Statute, which defined the organisation's purposes. Upon the adoption of INTERPOL's constitution in 1956, this principle was inscribed in Article three, and was extended to also include activities of a military nature. Article three therefore remains a dynamic and living provision in INTERPOL's practice.

The references to INTERPOL and publicity to having requested the INTERPOL for apprehending the so-called offenders is primarily a ploy by government agencies to show that they are really leaving no stone unturned. While in fact, it is least effective and is only an effort to shift the onus of responsibility or delay to an 'outsider' and duck the national responsibility.

There is another, very highly controversial and talked-about matter. This is the letter to the Swiss authorities about money-laundering. This issue has shaken the pillars of state. But I would like to pause and think why are we so helpless? How important is it to get the investigation done by the 'other', namely the Swiss authorities. Is there no way to determine the nature of crime and apprehend the culprits on the basis of the evidence available in the country? Is the crime not committed against the people of Pakistan? Has the law of Pakistan not been violated? Are the local authorities so incompetent or undependable that they can produce credible evidence? And that such evidence can only be provided by others? Do we not know that accounts of some persons of Pakistani nationality or origin have huge quantities of funds outside the country and under no stretch of imagination, the process could have been legal or routed through proper channels. Then why can the local institutions, including the Supreme Court, not take decisions here and not show total dependence on the support of others? Is this also a way to fool people at large and merely a pretense to show that a great deal is being done?

There are many actions taken to show the public that some major effort is being done, but in reality, there are no results. Is the public only interested in a show of effort? If this is so then no crime can ever be stopped. But this is a reality that there is more show than anything else and therefore crime increases and the criminal flourishes.

Among several other things that Pakistanis as a nation need to do, a very important thing is to change the mindset of the superiority of others. We generally do not value our heroes in different fields, and when compared, most of the people eulogise others. Imported goods, foreign fashions, foreign languages and gestures all need to be consciously evaluated before rushing to a blind following. People must recognise their own institutions and demand performance from them. No nation can progress with the attitude of expecting others to do everything for them.

Saturday, August 18, 2012

65 years, an age of maturity

Do we realise that love, and not fear, is the core of the message of Islam? Do we project religion as a system of graces, forgiveness, justice and human dignity?

A friend received a message for August 14, which said, "Happy Independence Day, it is a year of maturity!" The message was sent by a very young person. His maturity of thought impressed me.

Yes, now it is the 65th year of independence. It is time for some maturity in thinking. The generation in charge of the affairs in all fields is now of post-independence birth. People in the age bracket of 40-60 are the ones in the mainstream national activity. Whether in the private or government sector, the major portion of activity is in the hands of this age group. Some influence is exerted by the higher age persons, and by the youth. However, the middle age group has to carry the burden of managing national activity, including law and order, commerce, politics, international relations, culture, food, development, etc. In other words, almost all responsibility of shaping the country and its future is now in the hands of those who were born, bred and educated after 1947, including the youth of today.

One would like to presume that this generation is aware of the national history, of the challenges and of the opportunities. The call for maturity is relevant particularly for this age group of decision makers and implementers. They are expected not to just drift along but in fact make conscious efforts, at every stage, to shape the nation and the country. Other age groups are not absolved of the responsibility; they also need to make contributions but indeed most of the responsibility rests with the mainstream decision makers. In every country, this age group is the engine of change and progress, moving the nation to its destination. This group needs to develop consensus on the minimum national goals to be achieved.

What are the specific areas that need to be given thought?

In a country claiming belief in a 'democratic system', the first thought needs to be given to the democratic system itself. Does our system reflect a true and appropriate spirit of democracy suitable to our genre? One major flaw is that our system has little room for people of high intellect, education, and track record or expertise. Our system is based on a popular vote and 'winner takes all' method. The system has repeatedly failed to deliver. Still, it is romanticised as 'democracy' and praised. Many countries have democracies as a system for political power but almost all successful nations have modified it to their needs. In our system, there is little room for the outstanding talent to get into the National Assembly where laws are made. The few protected seats in the Senate mean very little. Popularity is the main base to enter the august house of lawmakers. The result is what we see: ineffective laws and little implementation or respect for the process. Murderers, terrorists, the corrupt and the oppressive roam about free and force their own laws on the poor and weak. We must find a way to induct people of integrity, sincerity, character and capability to dominate the institution of law making. This is perhaps the most important matter to resolve for our core group of 40-60 years of age. I repeat, other adults are not absolved of the responsibility and must join in the contribution.

What are our national aspirations?

Beyond the struggle of making both ends meet, serious thinking and effort is required to identify larger goals. Do we need to keep on drifting in several directions that the religious mafia wants us to follow? Not meaning to hurt anyone's feelings, but how many of us have made a serious effort to understand the 'message' and its practical manifestations as exemplified by the Prophet (PBUH)? Do we realise that love, and not fear and punishment, is the core of the message of Islam? Do we project religion as a system of graces, forgiveness, justice and human dignity? I am afraid not, and the failure to do so damages the name of the religion as well as the nation associated with it. It is again a responsibility we need to carry out. Blind following and aggression is not the spirit of Islam. This country is often associated with the principles of Islam, therefore we must understand its spirit and try to promote it the way our Prophet (PBUH) conducted himself.

There are several other issues that our core leadership group needs to think about. But the one that needs to be mentioned here is the economy. Our economy is hurt by shortsighted decisions prompted by political exigencies. We did not make Kalabagh Dam because people were persuaded against it. The irritants should have been removed and today, the whole nation would have been better off in terms of supply of electricity and control of floods. Our trading partnerships with China and India need to be reviewed as these are the fastest growing economies and our trade relations could be beneficial. Regional relations with all geographical neighbours as well as within the provincial entities must be considered with an effort to bring betterment for all and a reduction of conflicts.

Finally, we need to assert our cultural identity and heritage. Pakistan has an unmatched history and pre-history. We are the recipients of humanity's first civilisation and its character of peace, modesty, hospitality and creativity.

To sum up: Pakistan came into being on the 27th of Ramazan, which happened to be the midnight between the 14th and 15th of August. The 27th of Ramazan is close again to August 14 this year. Let us consider this as an indication to do some serious thinking. Sober decisions and their implementations will shape Pakistan's future. Can we correct the course of events to make a better country and a respected nation? The onus is on all of us, particularly the core age group. A resolution to do so will be an appropriate Eid gift for all.

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Saturday, August 25, 2012

Thoughts about the workforce

If Pakistan can absorb its future workforce and utilise it according to its potential it will be a real huge asset for it

A senior business executive-turned-lecturer/researcher informed me of some very interesting findings. He gets carried away with the findings of his research and talks at length. I do not have that kind of time hence I will be brief. This is about the workforce in Pakistan, looking at the present, and, say, 20 years from now. This study is done by Mr Kausar Hamid, a former member of the board of directors of the National Bank of Pakistan.

On the other hand, the former president of Pakistan, Syed Pervez Musharraf has recently written an article in a popular Urdu daily, which concerns development and enabling of the workforce in Pakistan to deliver and contribute effectively in the economic sector. Both these works are critically important and need attention.

Hamid has looked at the population growth trends of different world economies and reached the conclusion that in the coming decades the developed economies will seriously run short of a young workforce because of their population control attitudes. On the other hand, Pakistan, with little or no concern for population growth, will have a large workforce between the age of 20 and 40 available in the following two decades. I do not recollect the exact estimate but it could be close to 250 million. If Pakistan can absorb its future workforce and utilise it according to its potential it will be a real huge asset for it. If not, then it can be a huge liability and cause of social unrest because of unemployed and restless youth.

For the planners of human resources, there is a big challenge. It is so serious a challenge that it can affect the existence of the country and its stature in the world. Therefore, the issue cannot be ignored unless the nation wants to go down a suicidal path.

Syed Pervez Musharraf in his article *Mehnatkash aur Rozgar* (Workers and Employment) looks at this issue. Although he does not

refer to the population growth patterns, he does propose the manner in which the workforce can be turned into a national asset. He proposes to enhance facilities for vocational training. Such facilities of training need to recognise the current expanded range of professions. In Pakistan presently, a lot of so-called 'technicians' could only be good in the Indus Valley period, and perhaps not even there because the Melluhans of the Indus Valley were highly skilled. Today, a visiting electrician at my house finds his favourite solution in stripping a cable of the rubber coating and pushing the naked wires into the plug source to get power for the required equipment. Such an electrician does not feel the need of safety of using a shoe. Because he, as a 'chota' (assistant) under training, has only been taught this solution by his *ustad* (teacher). There exists a *chota* in every profession who deals with issues like plumbing, electrification, construction work, car repairs, tilling fields, gardening, tailoring, and so on and so forth. There is some vocational training on scientific basis but it is so limited that it has no relationship with the actual realities. Therefore, the only option is the *chota*, and ultimately the *chota* will become the *ustad* and promote new *chotas* in the workforce. This conventional system of training cannot meet the needs of the future. The only worthwhile element may be the care and affection that some *ustads* may be providing to their pupils. There is no doubt a teacher, in the good eastern tradition, should not only be delivering training and education but should also be a mentor. But this is not guaranteed.

Mr Musharraf in his article suggests vocational training institutes on an extensive scale in all disciplines like construction, carpentry, motor mechanics, electricians, digital technologies and communication, composing, new areas like social media, and computers to produce quality results in each. He even proposes land reforms and ownership to the actual trained tiller as an incentive to produce more effectively. There is no doubt that he has given thought to the problem and come up with some proposals for the good of the nation and in particular of the youth. He also suggests finding ways to ensure job opportunity and security.

What is desired and proposed by the former president is indeed in line with the needs of the country. However, the absorption of the workforce within the country can take place only if there is an equivalent economic growth that has the capacity to absorb it all. This

has not happened in the last 65 years and there are no signs of it on the national political scene. Therefore, some of the skilled workers will seek opportunities in a global market. This will also bring benefit to Pakistan. As a current example, the Pakistani workers of the Diaspora sent over \$ 13 billion to Pakistan through official channels and almost an equal amount through informal channels this year. This money, approximately \$ 25 billion, is the backbone of the country's economy. If an even larger workforce, which is vocationally trained, finds its way to other parts of the world, it can be a great financial power for Pakistan. It may also have influence in other economies. This can happen only if adequate vocational training is ensured. Our chotas are not going to help the world.

Sometimes I wonder if my voice, and of others, who have serious concerns about the people in Pakistan, is ever heard? Does it move any decision-maker even a little? Generally, what I experience is 'silence'. Often, a reader may feel that okay it is a good idea, but thinks that there is not much he can do. This attitude implies silence and helplessness. In fact, you do not need to feel helpless; even if you just talk about it, even if you give the idea to one decision-maker, it starts to make a difference. As a starter, the syllabi in schools could be modified to teach more practical training in some vocations. Something can be done if the silence is broken. Silence is a common killer. Can you break your silence?

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Saturday, September 08, 2012

Election time

The people have seen the two parties, the Democrats and the Republicans, at times very close to each other's agenda

It is election time in the USA. It may soon be election time in Pakistan. The elections in the USA are fixed on some dates and there is no speculation. In the USA a term finishes at the scheduled time and a new government takes over in the following January. We are different in Pakistan as far as the schedule is concerned. It is very flexible, unpredictable and sometimes even nonexistent here. The voting for the US election takes place in the first week of November every time and the president takes over in January. It is a system with little speculation about it; the speculations are limited to the contestants, not the system.

In Pakistan, everything is a guessing game. Recently Manzoor Wassan made an announcement of the 'schedule' of elections for the National Assembly in 2013. He announced that the existing assemblies would be dissolved on January 18, 2013 and the elections would take place on April 4, 2013. Wassan's schedule could be a 'feeler'. It is coated with the 'good news' of the election but loaded in favour of the PPP as April 4 is a date when emotional voters think of late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The feeler is intended to assess the reaction from other political parties. If there is none then it will work for the PPP.

Why do we not take a step to get rid of the speculation about the election dates? We should consider the dates of the previous election schedule for this time as well. The new assembly was in place in March and it is very suitable as a month of the Pakistan Resolution. In any case, an announcement should be formally made by the authorities empowered by the constitution, not by individuals.

In the USA, there has been practically a two-party system forever. The people have seen the two parties, the Democrats and the Republicans, at times very close to each other's agenda, and whenever this has happened, the country has progressed and the working relationships have been good. In recent times, President Clinton's

governance brought well being to the nation. As the agendas and attitudes of the parties drift apart, problems appear and the people suffer. This particularly happens when the worldwide policy changes from 'deterrence' to aggressive proactive action. The policy of deterrence avoided wars with the Soviet Union and wars between Pakistan and India. The policy of aggression involved wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. Basically, Democrats are inclined towards a policy of deterrence but the Republicans like more aggressive solutions and one heard words like 'Crusades' from the Republican president from Texas. Reacting to 9/11's destruction in which some 3,000 people died, the effort to avoid the recurrence of such a tragedy has seen over 50,000 dead bodies in the 'war on terror'. The wars initiated by the Republican Party were inherited by Obama. So in the current political scenario he is being blamed for not having achieved much. The Obama administration has been practically incapacitated by the fallout and debris of the previous policies. In the interests of the people of the US, it will be helpful and even healing if there is greater understanding between the two parties and they design policies for the common people and not just influence groups. Pakistani politicians have made people suffer ruthlessly, favouring the influential, with the result of the downfall of the country. It is time that the USA stops imitating the third world! It started with the suspect election victory of Bush. If the trend continues, the USA will keep going downwards because the politicians and their parties have not succeeded in keeping national interest above party or personal interest in many cases.

The Democrats will be content with nominating the current team headed by Obama while the Republicans have nominated Romney as their candidate. Romney is a multimillionaire, accused of not paying his taxes correctly, and keeping his wealth in off-shore islands. This sounds familiar to Pakistanis as something common with their political big wigs. Romney's wife Ann and Romney's running mate Paul Ryan are very vocal and popular in their party. Romney will rely very heavily on these two. Republicans are accusing the Obama administration of non-performance and for not being able to keep their promises. This again sounds familiar in Pakistan's context. Obama's defence is that he inherited two wars and a high level of inflation and borrowing. Pakistani politicians are also blaming the previous government for getting a poor inheritance. It seems like a blind imitation by Pakistanis. While Obama actually inherited huge problems, Pakistani politicians got the country

in a good condition economically as well as with over 19,000 megawatts electricity potential. Obama's performance falling short can be understood because of inheritance but Pakistani politicians' failure can only be understood due to incompetence, corruption and poor governance.

As I watched the Republican Convention, it seemed that there is only a faint hope of the two parties rising above themselves and operating for the betterment of the people. Republicans openly support the rich, and believe that the private sector can solve all problems. The Democrats are traditionally known as the friends of the middle class and the poor and therefore they support state help. This is interpreted by some extremists as communistic credentials of the Democrats. Nothing new, this happens everywhere.

All countries have the very rich, the rich, the middle classes, the poor and the weak. The state needs to look after all of them. The law-abiding rich are a great asset, others can be turned into national assets with long term policies. The US is likely to be better off giving Obama another term. Four years are not enough to clear the mess he inherited. The next four years may see the country taking a turn towards improvement. The situation in the US can be redeemed. But it is difficult to make this statement for Pakistan. Pakistan needs a major change to get back on track.

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Saturday, September 15, 2012

The Clinton charisma

Clinton defined the future policies clearly and provided undeniable logic for the necessity of a second term for Obama

The US election is important for the people in the US but it also affects the rest of the world. It is a country that still tries to stay within constitutional limits and abide by the law but the first Bush election was a shocking exception. Counting of ballots in that election reminded one of the rigging practices in Third World countries. Some friend has put on YouTube an old telecast of the Bush election covered by me for TV viewers on a US network. It refreshed my memory how the state machinery was slowed to avoid the recount of votes and how delays were accepted by the US Supreme Court, and George W Bush was declared successful. Much later, the count indicated that Gore should have won. What happened in the Bush administration included the horrors like 9/11 and the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and the rest of the world. These decisions brought the US to the brink of bankruptcy. The policy of deterrence was set aside and the policy of aggression adopted. The fallout was left to be managed by the successor.

Obama, faced with the disastrous situation left behind for him, has been busy with repairs and repairs do not give spectacular results. Therefore, some disappointment in his performance set in and his ratings came down to 44 percent. Such ratings are not good for an incumbent president who is to contest for the next term.

The drop in Obama's popularity is exactly what the Republican Party and their candidate, Mitt Romney, would want to see. Romney is a Christian Mormon by belief, and he has some positives to his credit as the governor of a state. His choice of vice-president is very popular. Working on the 'negatives' of the Obama term, the Republicans appeared to be presenting a better alternative, although historically, an incumbent president is rarely denied the second term. The American public mostly realises that to achieve some progress on a national level a president needs eight years to plan and achieve.

In their campaign, the Republicans have perhaps chosen to distance themselves from George W Bush as he has not yet been invited to speak in the campaign. On the other hand, the Democratic Party is making full use of the great asset it has in the former president, Bill Clinton. He has the credit of bringing extraordinary prosperity to the people. He was people-friendly and avoided conflict in arms. He tried earnestly to bring peace to Palestine. He is a thinker and an orator. Clinton is a rare combination of being a philosopher and a pragmatic political leader. His sincerity, charm and charisma are incomparable.

Michelle Obama had also spoken very well on the first day of the Democratic Convention. The second day started with a comparatively lesser known speaker, Ms Elizabeth Warren, a senate hopeful. Ms Warren's address brought a most pleasant surprise for those who did not know her enough. She proved to be a great speaker to set the tone for the convention on that day. Then Clinton appeared to address and the delegates were electrified. Of course, Clinton carried the day. His smile, personal charm and the deep study of events match his exceptional personality. Clinton spoke for about 45 minutes and kept the viewers spellbound with his deep analysis. Clinton had studied the 'objections' and 'weaknesses' that the opposition was trying to exploit against Obama's performance. Clinton analysed each point logically and supported the actions that Obama had taken to improve the situation. He went at length to elaborate the effects of the unnecessary wars that the USA had committed itself to. He convincingly stated the effects of the drain on the economy and the consequent hardships to the people in the US. He strongly defended the right of the people to medical attention and the support to senior citizens. He committed to the continuance of the Medicare system. In short, he established the fact that all appropriate steps were being taken for the betterment of the people, especially the middle class and the poor. He objected to the extra facilities promised to the super rich by the Republicans. This is where the difference lies between the two political parties. The Democrats believe that government has a role to ensure implementation of policies that improve the living conditions of the people in general and, particularly, in the lower and the middle-income groups. Therefore, they ensure improvement of facilities for better education for all by funding scholarships, healthcare, housing, etc. The Democrats believe that the tax contribution should be essential for all, including big business and the super rich. On the other hand, the Republicans believe

that big business and the super rich should enjoy tax cuts and, consequently, it will be in their interest to expand and provide jobs, and improve conditions for the workforce. The Republicans hope that individuals will help society in their own interest while the Democrats believe that government should have a role to ensure the public interest. Historically, the masses have benefitted more when the Democrats ruled. Clinton defined the future policies clearly and provided undeniable logic for the necessity of a second term for Obama to ensure success of the policies put in place during the last four years.

After Clinton's charismatic speech, Obama's ratings started to improve. Bill Clinton is a campaigner. He has not stopped at the Democratic Convention. He is continuing to campaign. Obama's ratings have gone up to 51 percent after a long time. Clinton has contributed and felt responsible for the party and its philosophy.

Will the Pakistani political parties show such commitment to the welfare of the masses? If they do so in the next elections, whenever held, it would herald a change towards responsible democracy.

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Saturday, September 29, 2012

Blasphemous rag of a film and the world reaction

Damage in all cities was the handiwork of the motivators who wanted to prove their street power more than the protest against the film

A mentally sick person earned the curse of the Almighty by making a rag of a celluloid piece, of which he and his companions should be ashamed. It is said that even the actors did not know the intent and the objectionable pieces were dubbed in. One of the actresses of the film has filed a case. It is also said that the film maker made it on a shoestring budget on a few million financing — a crook, an immoral person all along. His name should be marked as a symbol of utter degradation and shame.

Nakoula Basseley Nakoula (born 1957) is an Egyptian-born US resident who is thought to be the writer, producer and promoter of Innocence of Muslims. He is a Coptic Christian with past criminal convictions and a history of using aliases. On July 2, 2012, a Sam Bacile, who was later identified as Nakoula, posted English-language promotional trailers for Innocence of Muslims on YouTube. After the trailers were dubbed into Arabic and posted on the Internet in September 2012, riots and protests erupted in many countries.

The Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria is the official name for a large Christian church in Egypt and the Middle East. It may be noted that many churches call themselves 'religions' and should not be included in the general category of 'Christians'.

Nakoula has been convicted several times and served jail terms. The script of this rag was said to have been written in jail and mostly shot in his house. He is now absconding and his house has been put on sale.

This is not the first time that a criminal has committed conscious blasphemy. Nor can it be assured that it is the last time. This raises the most important question of how should the ummah behave or react in such situations. Protests were held throughout the world, wherever Muslims inhabit and people with a fair sense of respect for each other's beliefs. Let us look at how widespread it was. Here are some of the places:

Mombasa, Mauritius, Nigeria, Niger, Somalia, Sudan, Sao Palo, Rio de Janeiro, Canada, United States, Brazil, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Macedonia, Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Serbia, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, UAE, Australia, and a few others. These are 59 countries and innumerable cities and the extent of protest and expression of anger is wide. In Pakistan, many Christians took out protest rallies.

Here are some reports indicating the nature of action by the protesters, which is similar in most places except Pakistan.

"Several hundred Muslims, many waving banners and shouting execute people who mock Islam, rallied outside the US embassy and Google offices in Bangkok. The demonstration saw a brief scuffle as protesters tried to surge towards the US embassy, but police said it passed largely peacefully with no one seriously injured."

"Thousands of angry Muslims have marched in Kolkata to protest an anti-Islam film produced in the United States. Police officer Rajashri Roy says the protesters chanted 'Down with America'."

"Demonstrations and violent protests against the film broke out on September 11 in Egypt and Libya, and spread to other Arab and Muslim nations and some western countries."

"In Libya, the demonstration was infiltrated by extremists with pre-planning and resulted in damage and the killing of the US ambassador."

Generally, the mobs showed their anger within a degree of discipline in the rest of the world, but Pakistanis made an exception of themselves. Here is the report of Daily Times of September 22, 2012:

"Angry and violent protests plunged the country into chaos on Youm-e-Ishq-e-Rasool (PBUH) on Friday as at least 25 people were killed and hundreds injured in addition to widespread damage to private and public property in nationwide protests against a blasphemous, anti-Islam film. Fuming protesters fought pitched battles with police and law enforcement agencies in Peshawar, Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore and several other cities. At least 20 people, including three policemen, were

killed and more than 130 injured as violent protests erupted in Karachi after Friday prayers. The angry mobs also set ablaze four cinema houses on MA Jinnah Road, six banks, four police mobiles, two armoured personnel carriers, two restaurants and various automobiles in different areas of the city. Reports said that people continued looting the banks and other establishments for several hours. Two fire brigades engines were also set ablaze. Thousands of people were part of the rallies, which headed towards the US consulate to lodge a protest against the blasphemous movie.

"Demonstrations were held outside Memon Mosque in Bolton Market, Preedy Street, Banori Town and Golimar. Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Pakistan took out a rally from Regal Chowk; Jamiat-i-Ulema-e-Islam from Banori Town; Majlis-e-Wahdat-e-Muslimeen from Nomaish Chowrangi and Jamaat-e-Islami from Masjid-e-Rizwan in Federal B Area. The stone-pelting agitators smashed windowpanes of several vehicles and blocked Shahrah-e-Faisal for traffic by setting tyres on fire.

"In Peshawar, five people, including an employee of a private TV channel, were killed as several hundred protesters set ablaze four cinemas and the city's Chamber of Commerce, and damaged plazas, shops and vehicles.

"Clashes between police and stone-throwing protesters also occurred in Islamabad. At least 55 people, including nine policemen, were injured in the unrest. The crowd included a 5,000 strong contingent of Jamaat-ud-Dawa, Jamiat-ul-Islam and Sipah-e-Sahaba. Police clashed with demonstrators in several areas of the capital, including in front of a five-star hotel near the diplomatic enclave.

"In Lahore, demonstrators gathered on major roads, including Circular Road and The Mall, and burnt tires, shouted anti-US slogans and demanded hanging of the film producer. Protest demonstrations were also held in Faisalabad, Multan, Bahawalpur, Chakwal, Jhelum, Hyderabad and many other cities."

The serious matter is that the extreme parties have singled themselves out as the most irresponsible. Damage in all cities was the handiwork of the motivators who wanted to prove their street power more than the protest against the film. These parties need to understand that their supporters have neither served the cause of Islam

nor served their country by killing their own countrymen and damaging national assets.

Saturday, October 13, 2012

Women's vote

The general attitude of the right and male-dominated society is to keep women suppressed and not to let them have power or a sense of equality

The election commission is said to have made it mandatory that a 10 percent women's vote must be cast in every constituency; otherwise the election from that constituency will be invalid. To begin with, I want to welcome this decision. The newly appointed Election Commissioner has shown a sense of responsibility to the voters and this step, if implemented, would make democracy healthier.

Now let me analyse for my readers as to what it means in term of elections. The best turnout of voters who actually cast their votes is usually 40 percent of the registered voters. There is no hard and fast rule but the assumption is based on historical data. This percentage includes genuine and/or rigged casting of votes. If we take the number of 40 percent as the votes cast in the coming elections in a particular constituency of 200,000 registered voters, then the requirement of 10 percent of the registered women's vote to be cast would actually mean that there would be 20,000 women's votes in the ballot boxes. Let me explain. Take an example that in constituency X the number of registered voters is 200,000. The numerical 10 percent of this number will be 20,000 votes. Now if 40 percent votes are cast, the number of total votes cast will be 80,000. If in these votes cast is included the 20,000 women's votes, the actual percentage of the women's votes in the total votes cast will be 25 percent, simply because 20,000 is 25 percent of 80,000.

If this principle is strictly followed, any candidate elected to the assembly will have an approximate support of 25 percent female voters, otherwise the election will be null and void. This decision of the Election Commission adds a measure of credibility to our 'sham' democracy plagued with all kinds of rigging. This decision of the Election Commission ensures that about 25 percent of the women, who have equal rights according to the constitution as well as the holy book, have been heard in the election process.

However, although I appreciate the decision, I wonder why the Election Commission could not make women's voting compulsory in the proportion that is registered in the constituency. In case a constituency has 35 percent of registered voters as women, why could this percentage not be the proportion to validate the election in that constituency? Maybe I am expecting too much for starters, although such a decision would have been fair and the independence of the Election Commission against the pressures of vested interests would have been established beyond doubt.

My experience is that mostly it is the so-called 'rightist' element that lacks faith in the power of decision making by women. It is generally the rightist element that is infected with the curse of male chauvinism and considers itself superior to women in intellect as well as physique. History has proved both these assumptions wrong. Women are capable of greater physical endurance than men and have proved to be intellectually competent in many fields of life.

I am not here to establish the superiority of one over the other, but to consider women inferior in general is almost criminal. Therefore, if democracy of sorts is to be practised in Pakistan, many kinds of revolutions need to take place and one of these is to recognise equal status for women in the electoral process.

I understand that some political parties resisted the decision of the election commission and they are still against it. I would like to comment on their attitude briefly. On the surface, there seems no reason to be against the decision of the Election Commission, but the seekers of political power have their own preferences. The political parties of the 'right' are generally composed of people who are sceptical about women being equal to men! In their domestic behaviour, most of these people prefer their women to be subservient. This attitude is common with landlords, and they dominate the political horizon. The general attitude of the right and male-dominated society is to keep women suppressed and not to let them have power or a sense of equality. If women vote, then such politicians fear that their vote will be cast in favour of more enlightened candidates who understand the correct social status of women. Therefore the women's vote is not welcome for them. If the history of the polling booths being disturbed is analysed, it will be quite evident that the usual target is female polling booths. The idea behind attacks is to scare them away, particularly so in

constituencies where contests are close. I have personal experience of trying to salvage women voters and candidates' representatives in the only election of local governments allowed by the tyrant Ziaul Haq. I had to rescue women holed up in a polling station in Model Town, Lahore, and surrounded by belligerent, gun-toting youth of a religious-political party.

The recognition of the women's vote and ensuring its casting to validate the election in a constituency will have a restraining effect against strong-arm tactics and will force the candidates to respect the views of the female population. However, I believe that the beginning is smaller than desirable. At least 15 percent of the vote cast would have been a good beginning. Anyway, I hope that the Election Commission holds its own and does not succumb to the pressure of some parties.

Saturday, October 20, 2012

Malala, father, family, friends and the people of Swat

Malala, with her family, has shown the way to change and almost a revolution. The world has been shaken up

Hats off to Malala and to those who are the real symbol of a people's struggle against the tyranny of misdirected clergy. Many may not know the role of the people of Swat in fighting the forces of terrorism, but it is something each Pakistani can be proud of.

When al Qaeda and its supporters sneaked in from the Kunar province in Afghanistan several years ago, they made their secret camps in Puchar. Puchar is an uninhabited valley in Swat. It was connected with the rest of the world by an ancient, rusted, 'temporary' connection between two hills called a bridge. The place suited the secret activities of al Qaeda because they could blow up the bridge whenever they needed to, and hence, remained safe. Al Qaeda needed a place of 'safety' because the international forces against it had entered the Kunar province and its presence there could have been spotted.

In Puchar, al Qaeda tried to promote their brand of religion they called Islam. It was the most aggressive version developed on the thinking of the Salafis and Tayyabis. It was not in the spirit of the teachings of our Prophet (PBUH). When the word went around that there were forces getting organised to 'protect' Islam, the al Qaeda/Taliban ploy, the religious leaders were contacted. In the Swat area. One tribe was known as the learned tribe in matters of religion. The thinking of this tribe was true to the peaceful spirit of Islam, and it was generally followed in Swat. The tribe travelled through the unkind mountain trails, jungles and camped with al Qaeda preachers for some days. They had discussions, and finally decided to return because they could not accept the al Qaeda version of brutal killings, falsely called 'jihad', and its accompanying means of destruction. That was the beginning of the conflict in the territory of Swat and for its people.

Al Qaeda built up its biggest forts in Puchar. They had several kilometers long tunnels full of explosives. They built tunnels as hospitals to treat the wounded in their future war with Pakistan's

peacekeepers. They built training camps and suicide schools, and adopted the practice of beheading people.

All that was being done while the political front of the group became active with the support of some militant elements. For a long time, the people of Swat were alone in their resistance. They suffered individually and collectively, but they followed their beliefs and fought for their right of freedom of thinking for themselves. The struggle began much before the rest of Pakistan woke up and realised what was happening to a part of their country in the name of 'Islam'. Those terrorists were against education and establishment of law and order. Their main targets were centres of education, particularly education for girls, and the law enforcing agencies.

The situation deteriorated to such an extent that the biggest 'Heliborne Operation' after WWII had to take place to clear Puchar even partially. The army had to move in; the people of Swat had to be evacuated for the fight and were brought back only when the army had defeated the enemy.

The army action happened much later. Time was lost in fruitless negotiations by some politicians. Then militants from Laal Masjid, Islamabad joined the Taliban. The people of Swat — men, women and children — continued resistance.

Malala stands out as the symbol of the great fight of the people of Swat against the tyranny of the Taliban. We know this great individual and her family now, but there must have been many that the world did not recognise or who have not been able to live to this day. Malala has been inspired by her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai — an educationist and a poet — who in turn had been inspired by Khushal Khan Khattak, the great poet. It is interesting that these revolutionaries have something common with Mao who was a poet himself. Malala was shaped in large part by her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai, who is a school owner and an educational activist himself, running a chain of schools known as the Khushal Public School, named after the famous Pashtun poet, Khushal Khan Khattak. Malala stated to an interviewer once that she would like to become a doctor but her father encouraged her to become a politician instead. Ziauddin referred to his daughter as someone very special, permitting her to stay up at night and talk about politics after her two brothers had been sent to bed.

At the beginning of 2009, Malala had a chance to write for BBC Urdu when her father, Ziauddin was asked by Abdul Hai Kakkar, a BBC reporter out of Pakistan, if any girls at his school would write about life under the Taliban. At the time, Taliban militants led by Maulana Fazlullah were taking over the Swat valley, banning TV, music, girls' education, and women from going for shopping. Bodies of beheaded policemen were hanging from town squares. At first, a girl named Aisha from her father's school agreed to write a diary, but then the girl's parents stopped her from doing it in the fear of a Taliban reprisal. The only alternative was Malala — four years younger than the original volunteer — and a student of class seven at the time. Malala wrote often while many schools were destroyed; and finally, Pakistan army took action. She wrote, "It is only when dozens of schools have been destroyed and hundreds others closed down that the army thinks about protecting them. Had they conducted their operations here properly, this situation would not have arisen."

Malala, with her family, has shown the way to change and almost a revolution. The world has been shaken up. By shooting at her, Taliban have shot themselves in the foot. Her blood has woken up the conscience of the people in Pakistan. But beware: the Taliban supporters are already busy in damage control. Some of Taliban supporters, like Maulana Fazlur Rehman, are shamefully trying to underplay her sacrifice. Pakistan needs the courage shown by Malala to save the country from destruction by Taliban.

Saturday, January 12, 2013

The New Year and 'change'

It is my guess that Allama Qadri may seek an electoral reform favouring 'Proportional Representation' as against the winner take all approach

The New Year 2013 is here for all those fortunate individuals who have survived so far. Good luck to you. As the calendar has changed so has the political atmosphere. This year is special for Pakistan. It is, therefore, necessary to look at the possible future scenarios.

At the time of writing this article, a large movement is building up for 'change'. Allama Tahirul Qadri held a mammoth congregation at the Minar-e-Pakistan and demanded electoral reforms before the next elections. The size of the congregation was so large that it was thought to be in millions. In his speech, he gave a deadline and announced a 'long march' to Islamabad if his demands were not accepted. The 'long march' is scheduled for January 14.

There are several reasons for the massive response Allama Qadri received. The public is so disappointed by the mismanagement of the present federal and provincial governments that it just cannot tolerate them anymore. An effort to bring a change is felt to be desperately needed.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf had been using the slogan of 'change', and it got some public support as well, but as it moved on, its ability to change kept losing its credibility. The last straw on the camel's back was the declaration by the Taliban that they find Imran Khan acceptable with some others like the Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam, Jamaat-e-Islami and the PML-N. The populace of Pakistan, already wary of the Taliban, started to move away after this information.

The APML of General (Retd) Pervez Musharraf started to fit the bill as his condemnation of the attack on Malala was clear. He does not support the Taliban at all and he has an analytical, nationalistic, and enlightened approach. Many Pakistanis thought that Pakistan could do better under good leadership. Some started to move towards the APML. The period of Musharraf's governance left nostalgic memories

and some people felt that they would be better off under a different leadership. People hoped that the change would be for the better.

These were some of the factors that worked in Allama Qadri's favour. However, the resources, the skill in political management and media handling by his party cannot be underestimated. Such a well-organised publicity campaign and management has rarely been seen.

Allama Qadri's sudden appearance after a long time gave some people the impression that it was 'God sent' help for the miserable people of Pakistan. For some time, the federal and provincial governments seemed stunned. They could not believe the extent of discontent. If they were aware of the public frustration, they did not expect that someone could rally the masses together. They thought that they could keep Musharraf away by political manoeuvrings and underhand tactics of typical old-fashioned FIRs and mudslinging. They had assessed Imran Khan, prepared a counter-offensive and hoped to control the elections to govern for another term. But the thrust by Allama Qadri, until then unknown, changed the scenario completely.

What does Allama Qadri stand for? He is known to have an 'inclusive' approach in religious matters rather than an exclusive one. He supports harmony in different religious segments against discord and animosity perpetuated by the Taliban and pro-Taliban political and religious segments. He definitely wants a change in the electoral system to free people from the stranglehold of the landlords and wealthy politicians. What he has not spelled out so far is how he wants to do it.

It is my guess that Allama Qadri may seek an electoral reform favouring 'Proportional Representation' as against the winner take all approach. In proportional representation, every vote matters and is reflected in the National Assembly. The highest recipient of votes gets the votes for the party. The others also get the vote for their parties and seats in the assembly are divided in proportion to the overall votes received by a party. Allama Qadri may demand the armed forces and judiciary to supervise the voting to avoid extortion. He may also demand an interim government of consensus at a wider level and not limited to only an agreement between the ruling parties and the opposition. If my guess is right and he succeeds in achieving these things, then we may even see a new era of change.

The Tehrik Minhaj-ul-Quran of Allama Qadri has so far received unconditional support from the MQM, which is the most disciplined and organised party of the country. Its support lends a great deal of strength to Allama Qadri's narrative. The APML is the other party that has announced its clear support to reforms. Both these parties are contributing manpower to the march. The PML-Q announced its support, but it is not participating in the march.

Surprisingly, some sectors of the media are busy finding fault with the movement generated by Allama Qadri. They harp on minor things like his dual nationality, prolonged absence from the country, etc. What do all these objections matter if his movement does good to the country?

As I am writing this article, the MQM chief, Altaf Hussain has raised an interesting point. He has reminded people that in 1947, Quaid-e-Azam took over as the Governor-General of Pakistan, a 'Dominion', and his oath contained allegiance to the British Crown. Does this mean that he was not loyal to Pakistan? Nothing could be more ridiculous. The dual nationality issue is ridiculous in any case. Pakistan survives on the billions of dollars sent by expatriates and the insecure members of the National Assembly do not want them to compete in higher political positions! It is only a ploy to keep persons who are more competent out of power.

Mass movements start unexpectedly. The basic requirement is intolerable conditions when the masses believe there is nothing left to lose. This is the reality now. Pakistanis have lost electricity, gas, income, security of life, jobs, education, the environment and so on. They are losing self-respect and the image of a workable nation. What more is there to lose?

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Saturday, January 19, 2013

Media issues again

There are about 50 plus networks in Pakistan, perhaps more than any country! The owners have the profit motive as the top consideration, as in any other business

A two-member commission has been appointed to look into the various matters relating to the media. One of the members is Mr Javed Jabbar who has had a long association with the media and is a good choice. It is not yet clear if this commission is going to look into the issues related to the entertainment industry and TV channels. If these are not included then it is urgently necessary that these are included. In the last decade, the opening up of electronic media has had positive as well as negative effects on society. The reach of the new crop of networks primarily hits the urban areas and overseas Pakistanis. In other words, it is communicating with comparatively educated, affluent decision-makers.

When cross-media ownership was permitted and the newspaper groups started to own TV networks, these networks yielded huge political influence and enjoyed coercive and blackmailing power. Big business owns the networks. There are about 50 plus networks in Pakistan, perhaps more than any country! The owners have the profit motive as the top consideration, as in any other business. Drawing on a business advertising pool of a small economy, these networks have cutthroat competition so the advertising rates keep going down. This results in more advertisements than the programme content in a given slot. The situation deteriorates further because of the faulty input by 'rating' agencies. The rating agencies have set up response measurement systems in a very small number of houses in three or four cities and the popularity index shown by them is the major decision-maker for TV managements and advertisers. The results by the rating agencies are not a true and reliable reflection because of the limited database. In addition, this database reflects the likes and dislikes of only the urban areas. TV networks try to play to the gallery and encourage programmes that increase their ratings and attract more advertisements that become its source of revenue. Since the advertising rates keep going

down because of the competition and advertisers' self-interest, the income stream for the TV network owner is facing challenges. In this situation, the TV programmer serves the owners by playing to the gallery without any scruples. The buying price of entertainment software, like drama, is constantly reduced and the creative artists and software producers are pushed back to basic survival payments, if they are lucky.

However, recently, that 'luck' is not with them. The entertainment sections were fascinated by the TV channel URDU 1's selection of serial *Ishq-e-Mamnun*. It was dubbed into Urdu, originally produced by a Turkish company. The content was close to *The Bold and the Beautiful*, an American soap opera, but the faces, being a little more 'eastern', helped people to feel an affinity. The actor playing Bahlool became the heartthrob of every woman. Since the combination of good looks and affluence of characters; intriguing family romances; and the risk in 'forbidden relationships' made the ideal recipe for the households being measured by the rating agencies, the serial became an all time hit and a 'role model' for other networks. Other networks threw away their scheduled programmes of Pakistani origin and started showing secondhand, imported, dubbed, Turkish productions, particularly if they could find Bahlool in the cast. Therefore, the entertainment fare of the private channels started to resemble the landa bazaar of entertainment. The programmes are 'second hand', not communicating Pakistani values or characters. But these cost less. The most serious effect of this policy of private channels is on the local entertainment industry. The producers, actors and technicians are stuck and some companies are near insolvency. The serials produced by local talent are shelved or discontinued. The industry is in shock and if nothing is done quickly, it may face annihilation. Over 100,000 persons of various creative and technical expertise have been laid off. Their collective associations have knocked on all doors in the government. However, the government is helpless because of the blackmailing power of the networks at this time when elections are around the corner. What is PEMRA doing other than collecting licence fees? Are we going to close our eyes to whatever goes on and see another colossal destruction? Was Pakistani drama not the only competitor to Indian films in the region? Do we realise that we are on the verge of killing our major ambassador of cultural goodwill?

The media commission has a major and extremely important task ahead. It needs to look at the whole policy. The policy of the government to allow so many channels to be formed was wrong. The environment of cutthroat competition is wrong. Relying on the small database of rating agencies is wrong. Insensitivity to the factor of social responsibility of media towards society is wrong. Blackmail through current affairs and news programmes is wrong. I can continue to list the wrongs as seen by me in my over 50 years of association with the media, but it is something which Mr Jabbar should be looking into at this time. Governments generally set up commissions to cool down protests. The media commission could be a similar tactic but one hopes that the Honourable Chief Justice and Mr Jabbar will ensure that this commission addresses the issues and does it quickly. The terms of reference of the commission must be made public and it should start to address the issues without delay. Delay can only be interpreted as collusion with those who are insensitive to national needs and work for short cuts and short-term advantages at the cost of a huge national sacrifice. I do not have the honour of knowing the other members of the media commission but I hope Mr Jabbar has heard my voice and the sentiments of the large community involved in creativity and struggling to make ends meet.

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Saturday, February 02, 2013

Long March' aftermath

In my opinion, it is a tribute to Dr Qadri, and the ruling alliance that some issues of serious public concern were settled

Allama Dr Tahirul Qadri started the 'Long March' to Islamabad from Lahore on January 13 and arrived in Islamabad the next night. There are different figures about the number of people in the march that are being circulated. In a conservative estimate, the actual number of men, women and children, braving the weather at the D square and on Jinnah Avenue, was not less than 150,000. It is also noteworthy that the numbers did not reduce with the passage of time and actually increased because new groups joined in. People were determined to stay until their demands were met; they were in high spirits and knew that 'change' was the only answer to the miserable quality of life they had been pushed into in the last five years.

The crowd was composed of many individuals who were not part of the Minhaj-ul-Quran set up. However, they were there because the demands made by Dr Qadri reflected their feelings and experiences. His speeches and histrionics may have not impressed all but his demands did.

The unfortunate thing in the aftermath is that most of the TV anchorpersons, columnists and his opponents criticised the person and personality of Dr Qadri. They hit the messenger carrying the message of the people but ignored the importance of the message. I feel this is low calibre criticism. The message is the most important. If the demands were not fair, constitutional, and truly reflective of the sentiments of the people, then the political parties in government would not have bowed down. They delayed and hoped that the long march would fizzle out, but there were no signs of that. People in the sit-in were determined, resolute and peaceful but ready to face all eventualities. The message finally went 'home' only on Dr Qadri's final ultimatum when the risk of a physical conflict arose.

At that point, the 'democratic' spirit of the parties in government woke up, thanks to Chaudary Shujaat Hussain's efforts. Ultimately, the

ruling parties agreed to the demands. What were the demands? Here are these briefly:

- 1) The National Assembly shall be dissolved at any time before March 16, 2013, (due date), so that the elections may take place within 90 days. One month will be given for the scrutiny of nomination papers for the purpose of the pre-clearance of the candidates under Articles 62 and 63 of the Constitution so that the eligibility of the candidates is determined by the Election Commission of Pakistan. No candidate would be allowed to start the election campaign until pre-clearance on his/her eligibility is given by the Election Commission of Pakistan. (This demand was agreed and accepted as it is.)
- 2) The treasury benches in complete consensus with the Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) will propose names of two honest and impartial persons for appointment as the caretaker prime minister. And that the proposed names will be forwarded after consultation with all stakeholders, and not by just the PPP and PML-N. (It was agreed that the caretaker prime minister would be proposed after consultation with all parties and finalised in consultation with Dr Qadri; thus, this demand was also agreed upon.)
- 3) Issue of composition of the Election Commission of Pakistan will be discussed at the next meeting on Sunday, January 27, 2013, 12 noon at the Minhaj-ul-Quran Secretariat. Subsequent meetings, if any, in this regard will also be held at the Central Secretariat of Minhaj-ul-Quran in Lahore. In pursuance to the agreement, the Law Minister will convene a meeting of the following lawyers: S M Zafar, Waseem Sajjad, Aitzaz Ahsan, Farough Naseem, Latif Afridi, Dr Khalid Ranjha and Humayun Ahsan to discuss these issues. Prior to the meeting of January 27, the Law Minister, Mr Farooq H Naek, will report the results of this legal consultation to the January 27 meeting.
- 4) Electoral Reforms: It was agreed upon that the focus would be on the enforcement of electoral reforms prior to the polls on:
 - A. Articles 62, 63 and 218 (3) of the Constitution

- B. Section 77 to 82 of the Representation of Peoples' Act 1976 and other relevant provisions relating to conducting free, fair, just and honest elections guarded against all corrupt practices.
 - C. The Supreme Court judgment of June 8, 2012 on the constitutional petition of 2011 must be implemented in toto and in true letter and spirit.
- 5) With the end of the long march and sit-in, all cases registered against each other shall be withdrawn immediately and there will be no act of victimisation and vendetta against either party, or the participants of the march.

In my opinion, it is a tribute to Dr Qadri, and the ruling alliance that some issues of serious public concern were settled, and a hope of a more credible democratic government in the future could be entertained after the next elections.

The most disappointing reactions were the targeting of the person of Dr Qadri. The hate campaign was led by the PML-N and its satellites. They found fault with his dual nationality, mannerisms, past contradictions, sources of funding, even his looks and gestures. I find such reactions very petty. Let us look at the message, not just the messenger. The message is beneficial to the country. The message is supported by millions who do not want to suffer the painful outcome of the previous elections: no power, no gas, no employment, no law and order and so on and so forth. Dr Qadri showed the resolve to lead a strenuous, unparalleled long march, and achieved the result without the loss of one drop of blood or damage to property. What does it matter if anyone finds fault with his mannerisms or looks? He may not even contest the elections! I believe that he accomplished something that other political leaders could not, and that is bothering his opponents. He did not lead the long march to set up power plants or gas pipe lines; in my opinion, he went there to create 'hope' and that he did.

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Saturday, February 09, 2013

Flyovers, underpasses and the mess

Citizens are advised by advertisements to be patient, praise the chief minister, watch hundreds of his cheerful photos and hope for the 'best'

Smooth flow of traffic is a story of the past. The province of Punjab is in the grip of roads, flyovers and underpass construction mania. Almost all major cities, and in particular, Lahore and Rawalpindi are going through a phase of such extensive re-routing that one does not know how to reach one's destination. To top it all, there is a recent announcement that preparations to help people go from one point to the other are not going to serve all objectives. For example, the well-known Kalma Chowk in Lahore, which has construction going on all around it, is likely to create new problems. The planners overlooked the fact that the two major towns, Model Town and Gulberg, need a reasonable link. Now more underpasses and flyovers need to be constructed in this area to link the two towns.

It is also being said that Chief Minister (CM) Shahbaz Sharif in his habitual frenzy ordered the PC-1 for his 'development concept' to be prepared practically overnight, and it was approved literally first thing in the morning. When the Sharifs want to do something they go after it and have it done. There is no doubt the project was going to need a colossal amount of steel. But the steel supply could not have posed a problem because the chief minister has industrial connections with groups that can meet all these needs.

Citizens are advised by advertisements to be patient, praise the chief minister, watch hundreds of his cheerful photos and hope for the 'best'. The best keeps on slipping from the target dates. In the meantime, people's vehicles have started to rattle because they have to cover distances on bumpy under-construction roads. These vehicles are contributing massively to air pollution. Journeys have become longer and longer due to traffic congestion, incurring more waste of petrol or diesel. More fumes mean more health hazards. Of course, the most important is the huge waste of valuable time.

I do not know about others, but I have seriously thought about my personal financial situation. There was a time five years ago that I could drive a reasonable 1800 cc car and fill up the tank in under Rs 2,000. Then, the price kept on rising but my income did not. Therefore, I decided to get a 1600 cc car and still felt that my social status was not devastated, but the cost of fuel stayed nearly within my limits. Then came the phenomenal rise in prices and the detours required by the obsessive road developments, further complicated by hours of being stuck in the congestion of traffic. I reviewed my financial situation and bought an 800 cc small car. This is now my means of transportation, which stays within my means. The income has not tripled, expenses have. I am moving from a middle class 'sufaid posh' (white collar) to someone struggling to survive. I may have to seriously consider the motorbike or scooter option soon. In fact, a two-wheeler has great advantages in mobility through traffic, like the economy of fuel, and of course, one can load the whole family on it and go for a picnic.

Returning to the transport facilities planned by Mr Shahbaz Sharif, I must gratefully recognise the additional option after the two-wheeler option. Of course, the Metro Bus! So, this is the futuristic idea of the CM. He has foreseen that with the rising prices the population will have to consider the metro bus to go anywhere. He has also shown great foresight in connection with the coming elections. The project will leave with him massive funds to prepare for the next elections. Contractors can be also given the good advice to show their support for the PML-N. This will be all in the larger interest of the country. It is so because all great politicians have amassed millions of dollars to make sure they continue to serve the poor masses. They even stack up huge assets overseas to ensure their continuance of service. They also make every effort to keep those overseas Pakistani out of the loop of power in the country because who knows what devastation to the system may be brought by the dual nationality status. However, the money they sent amounting to several billion dollars is okay and acceptable, but not the sender of the money.

I digress again. It seems my mind has been deeply affected by the twists and turns I have been taking on the roads to go anywhere. Living in Model Town, I need to enquire every morning about the changes in the routes. Sometimes, one has to travel a few miles in the opposite direction and then make a U-turn. This is simple, but when you also

have to go through the potholes, and your vehicle gets ready to be sent to the workshop, the development work starts to hurt.

The development work has also changed the face of the traditional city of Lahore. This city has had a character known for several centuries. The Central Model School, the Government College Lahore, the lower courts and several such buildings have archival value and symbolise an era in history. I am sure a way could have been found in planning the Metro Bus that minimised the damage to the classical ambience. The old cities in the world are protectively preserved for tourism, nostalgia and to keep the memories alive. The city of Berkeley in California does not allow any change in the exterior because hundreds of thousands of students return to the familiar surroundings of their youth. Will Lahore retain its character in future? This is a question that must be answered.

I can only hope that the ambitious Metro Bus and the new road layout will make some ultimate sense and be of use to the people. The traffic problems needed to be addressed, and I hope the solution sought by the CM works.

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Saturday, February 16, 2013

Samjhota tragedy remembered

The Samjhota Express tragedy was timed to blow up the efforts of the two governments to defuse conflicts and reach some understandings

On February 18, 2007, at midnight, the Samjhota Express was burnt. The train had passed the Panipat railway station and was heading towards Attari with a large number of passengers. When it approached Diwana station, two of its bogies suddenly caught fire. The fire was so intense that even the steel structure of the bogies melted. That day 68 people died in the fire and dozens were injured.

Of the 68 fatalities, most were Pakistanis, but the victims included a few Indian civilians and the military personnel guarding the train. The train was sealed because of immigration security, thus, there was no chance of anyone escaping. It was the most painful death being burnt helplessly. Hardly anyone escaped when the doors were opened. Most of the injured also expired. The passengers who perished were those who were returning to Pakistan after meeting with their Indian relatives or friends. Many of them were from the age group that had nostalgic memories of the pre-independence relationships. The pre-partition generation would be the happiest if relations between the two countries normalised.

Most significant was the timing of this horrible act of terrorism. The Samjhota Express tragedy was timed to blow up the efforts of the two governments to defuse conflicts and reach some understanding. This was not the first time that normalisation efforts were sabotaged. It had happened before, including the attack on the Indian parliament building. Each time the pattern has been to commit an act of terror and blame it on Pakistan at a time when negotiations seem to approach success. This strategy serves two purposes: 1) The consolidation of the extremist Hindutva lobby and 2) Defeating the policy of the Congress secularists.

The Samjhota terrorists' act was planned on the standard operating procedure (SOP) of the Hindutva associates and their terror wings. The 'SOP' is to plan a terror attack on the selected target and to put the

responsibility on 'Pakistani terrorists' by wide publicity. In the case of the Samjhota tragedy, news releases put the responsibility on two 'Pakistani terrorists', but this time it started to backfire in a big way. Here is the full story:

The first and very widely propagated news was that two Muslims were involved in carrying out the sabotage. One of these was of Kashmiri origin and the other had crossed the border from Pakistan and belonged to a Pakistani (suspect) jihadist group. Initially, the scheme worked well and the matter was accordingly reported by the Indian intelligence organisation to the political top brass. The perception of Pakistan as a promoter of terror was strengthened. The obvious purpose was to get the Indian government entangled in this matter and put the ensuing peace talks on the backburner. The peace process was 'derailed'. However, the plan started to backfire soon.

Since the tragedy had happened in the area of the jurisdiction of the Haryana police, it decided to take an immediate action against the two persons indicated by the first news flash. The house of the so-called Kashmiri terrorist was raided and they were shocked to find that the person had died five years ago! The second person, when traced, was found to be a Pakistani who had been in police custody for the previous one month because he boarded a train from Amritsar to Delhi without a ticket. Obviously, none of the two could be a part of the terrorist act. The Haryana police discarded the leads in the press and started professional investigation independently. They discovered one of the suitcases that were thrown out of the train compartment for some reason and also the remains of the other suitcases that carried the explosives. All of these had the explosive RDX. RDX was traced to be of the type being used by the Indian army in Kashmir. Next, the Haryana police tried to find out how this material got to the terrorists. The forensic reports indicated that some of the explosive materials were bought from a chemical company in Mumbai. Gradually, the Haryana police zeroed in on an army person named Colonel Prohit as the provider. At this point, the higher intelligence authorities close to the Indian government were alerted, and they considered it essential that the Haryana police be stopped from further investigation. If the Haryana police had continued their investigation and unearthed the real terrorist mechanism then the whole scheme could backfire. Thus, government was briefed that the matter of the Samjhota Tragedy had

'international implications' and so, being very sensitive, the investigation should be taken away from the Haryana provincial police and handed over to a 'central' authority. That is the reason the Haryana police was stopped from carrying out its investigation.

But the cover up effort got a huge setback again. A competent and conscientious officer, Hemant Karkare, was appointed the head of the Anti Terror Squad in Mumbai. He started investigating various acts of terror within India and refused to bow to political pressures from the rightwing extremist politicians. During his investigation, an act of terror occurred at the Malegaon Mosque on Jumat-ul-Vida. Malegaon is a suburb of Mumbai. In his investigation, Karkare found the main planner to be a VHP activist, Ms Pragiya Singh Sidhvi, whose motorcycle was found with explosives at the mosque. Soon Hemant Karkare's team established a connection between Sidhvi and Colonel Prohit who provided the RDX for explosion. Karkare then found the link between Colonel Prohit and the Samjhota Express fire. Karkare's life was threatened by the Hindutva and the Sangh Privar groups like the VHP, Jan Sangh, Abhinav Bharat, Jagran Munch and several others. But the courageous Indian officer refused to bow down. He followed his conscience and the call of duty. He completed his investigation and filed the case with the Nasik court in Mumbai. His report contained the details in over 4,000 pages and exposed the terror network of the Hindu extremists. The terrorists responsible for Samjhota tragedy were convicted and jailed. The cover up finally failed.

Later, Hemant Karkare became the target of revenge by Hindutva terrorists.

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Saturday, February 23, 2013

Negotiating with terrorists

Who is the authorised leader of the terrorists? What authority does he have from so many independent operators? What is their relationship with the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ)?

Once again, some political parties have offered 'peace' negotiations to the terrorists, and once again, they have received a slap in the face. In fact more than a slap, a bloody gift of dead bodies.

The Awami National Party (ANP) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa held an All Parties Conference (ANP) and decided to invite the Taliban to negotiate. It may be remembered that the veil of Islam that the Taliban wore to deceive the simple, religious-leaning people of Pakistan has been shredded to pieces by the combined statements of the country's ulema and mashaikh. The true face of the terrorists is thus exposed.

The so-called 'peace negotiations' offer led by the ANP was the most disappointing act of opportunism. The ANP has, for a long time, bravely confronted terrorists and earned the respect of the nation. This sudden U-turn could only be opportunism before elections. And who is the one receiving this offer? Who is the authorised leader of the terrorists? What authority does he have from so many independent operators? What is their relationship with the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ)? These are not the only questions, there are many more:

- a. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has called for the top three politicians of the country, namely Mian Nawaz Sharif (PML-N), Maulana Fazlur Rehman (JUI-F) and Syed Munawar Hasan (JI), as guarantors from the government. Who is going to be the guarantor for the TTP?

The offer of talks has come from Ehsanullah Ehsan, who has always accepted responsibility for various terrorist attacks, including attacks on the security installations of Pakistan on behalf of the TTP, slaughtering soldiers and killing high-profile politicians. Will Ehsan and other TTP leaders face the courts for gruesome acts they have been committing/accepting?

Presence of a convicted murderer Adnan Rashid with Ehsanullah Ehsan, while the latter offered talks, speaks volumes about the seriousness of their offer. Would Rashid be handed over to the government to fulfil judicial/legal requirements?

In their 'message for peace', the TTP vowed to attack another political party (MQM), besides labelling Pakistani soldiers as 'murtaad'. This probably conveys that they would continue deciding who is right and who is wrong and violence would continue. In such circumstances, would negotiations be successful?

Who was responsible for the failure of earlier peace agreements? Did the TTP ever fulfil its obligations in accordance with various clauses of former agreements?

What is the TTP's mind on compensation for loss of life and property that occurred during the decade-long terrorism?

Will the TTP still attack girls schools in FATA/PATA or try to kill Malala Yousafzai when she comes back?

Does the TTP look for some policy by the government of Pakistan for seeking state amnesty?

Will the TTP be ready to disband their outfit if the negotiations are successful?

There are several other points to be seriously thought about:

1. Would dialogue with militants who have killed thousands of Pakistanis in suicide bombings, beheaded soldiers and bombed schools not amount to surrender by the state to them? Wouldn't it amount to selling the blood of thousands of men, women and children who have fallen victim to the insane violence?

Has the objective of the TTP, i.e. enforcing their brand of Islam, been achieved? If not, how do they intend perusing their agenda in future? What is the real agenda behind their offer?

The TTP has not announced to renounce violence or lay down arms against the state. They have not announced to accept a democratic form of government. In such circumstances, what will be the outcome of such negotiations?

If assuming that all terms of the TTP are accepted by the government of Pakistan, would the TTP wholeheartedly accept the constitution of Pakistan and the writ of the government and renounce violence against the citizens of Pakistan? If not, would a compromise not amount to legitimising violence?

What is the basic motive behind calling for the top three politicians of the country as guarantors?

What formula do the political parties supporting negotiations have in their mind? What will be the role of the TTP in future decision-making? Who will compensate/give justice to the relatives of those who have been killed by the TTP?

Will society at large accept murderers, convicts and terrorists going scot-free as a result of conciliation or dialogue?

What will be the effect of dialogue on the anti-TTP militant groups like Ansar-ul-Islam? Would it lead to infighting between various groups in order to prove their superiority?

How can the people of FATA, who have been the worst affected, be included in such negotiations as stakeholders?

In the last few weeks, the nation has gone through a renewed scene of horror and killings of the Hazara community. Terrorists strongly tried to fulfil the age-old dream of Pakistan's enemies by creating communal animosity.

The Hazara Shias acted peacefully, but firmly, in demanding justice. One takes the hat off to their discipline and patience in extremely trying and provocative circumstances. Even the spineless government of Pakistan was forced to take some measures. If this government does not succeed in stopping the atrocities committed by the LeJ, then this government has no moral or legal justification to rule the country. In such a case, this government must resign. It has failed in every field — the economy, law and order, welfare of the people and other matters related to it. It is known that the terrorists are clearly identified. Then why is there delay? Why is the political elite not ready to give full support to the armed forces to confront the terrorists? They want to cling on to their vested interests. They want to cling on to their benefits and comforts. It must be clearly understood that it is not only the ruling political parties who are guilty, the so-called 'opposition' and

the 'guarantor' parties, in particular, are equal partners in crime. If they do not understand then they will not be clinging to their power base; they will only be clinging on to the mass of dead bodies of innocent citizens.

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Saturday, March 02, 2013

TV 'ratings' and 'decision making'

Advertising revenue is the main source of income for TV channel owners and they would want their programmes to be considered popular to get advertising revenues

There are said to be 87 TV licences given by the government in the past. Countless TV networks came into being.

Private TV channels are revenue based. This revenue comes from advertisements they get for their different programmes. Advertisers run their ads in programmes most watched by viewers. The data as to which programme is the most watched one is provided in Pakistan by Television Ratings Agency Medialogic in collaboration with Gallup. The rating agency uses a device called 'People Meter' for monitoring viewership of different programmes in different time slots. These people meters are connected with TV sets in selected households and record television viewing data on the basis of which 'Television Rating Points (TRPs)' are determined for different programmes on a daily basis. This data is used by TV channels as well as advertisers to keep tabs on the programmes being watched/not watched by audiences. The most watched programmes get the maximum ads while the not-so-popular ones see a change in their time slot or get dropped.

While a system of TV ratings is required, it is also necessary to make a check on its reliability. The present system is based on 675 households in the whole of Pakistan! Each of these households is equipped with 'people meters' that record the clicks on a programme during its telecast. These 675 households are divided about 50 percent in Karachi, and others are in nine cities like Lahore, Rawalpindi, Faisalabad, Hyderabad, Islamabad, Peshawar, etc. So it is clear that the responses are from urban areas and heavily loaded by Karachi responses. This sampling has been taken from a country of over 18 million. However large the number of each selected household may be, it cannot represent even 1 percent of the people. It is also to be noted that rural Pakistan is not a part of this 'people meter' system. Obviously the results are far from reality and should not be the sole factor in

decision making by the advertisers or media managers. There is also potential danger of these 'clicks' being rigged or managed by powerful media owners who would want to make their programme ratings attractive for the advertisers. Advertising revenue is the main source of income for the TV channel owners and they would want their programmes to be considered popular to get advertising revenues. There are also jokes around. It is rumoured that in an anchorperson's programme some political party representatives crossed the borders of civilized behavior and ended up fighting. While the fight was going on the controller of the programme sent a message to the anchor to stretch the fight longer because it was helping the 'ratings' to go up! Obviously, uncivilized behavior is not something to be encouraged, but if it helps the 'ratings' and brings in revenue and keeps the bosses happy then it is fine! Clearly the fighting politicians do no service to their community; they make a joke of politics and democracy.

On the other hand in the entertainment sector also the 'soaps' and the petty squabbles between the mother and daughter-in-law are promoted. It started with the showing of Indian programmes that reported 'higher ratings'. The cable operators and the TV channels all competed in bringing in Indian programmes to get 'ratings'. It is important to know that PEMRA has found the matter completely out of its control. The limitations on the foreign content in programmes as a condition of licences are openly violated. Checks are not imposed because the government of the day does not want to displease the TV channels! The TV channel owners therefore play to the gallery, they show no consideration to the factor of social responsibility. They forget, or choose to ignore, that as communicators they have a responsibility to broaden the vision of its viewers by giving them better insight and understanding of social and political issues. The net result is that Pakistani TV drama, which was respected all over the world and which strongly competed with the Indian film overseas, is losing its standing.

Matters have not stopped here. Recently there has been a flood of second hand or even third and fourth hand plays from Turkey and other countries. These are dubbed in Urdu, purchased at a very low price as used serials and shown on the TV networks in prime time, cancelling local quality products. One channel scheduled and publicized a very significant serial of national interest, showed one episode and then suddenly replaced it with a used and dubbed cheap imported

serial! Where is the moral or ethical justification for such behavior? Prime time should be treated as a trust of the nation. People should get the opportunity to look at the works of national origin.

There is a moral, ethical and qualitative downfall. The owners of TV channels must shoulder the responsibility; the responsibility also is to be shared by the decision makers who release the advertisements. Ad managers need to do more work to help advertisers reach the actual consumers and not base their decisions on the limited 'ratings'. There was a time, prior to the dependence on 'ratings', when critics in the newspapers reviewed the programmes. Many of the intellectual groups held discussions and advertisement decision makers got exposed to mature professional assessments. This helped the software makers as well as advertisers. I feel the advertiser can change the trend and bring some maturity and social relevance if they attach due weightage to the expert opinions and not rely just on 'ratings'. The indiscriminate showing of the foreign content is depriving the local artists, technicians and producers of their livelihood.

Finally the burden of this chaos is to be borne by the government agency PEMRA who has lost all control. The responsibility also lies on government policy makers who issued too many licences and started a rat race. They also should take responsibility for cross-media licencing which gave tremendous power to the TV channel owners.

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Saturday, March 09, 2013

Musharraf is coming home

For Musharraf, this is almost the only chance to play a democratic role. He is boarding the last bus

Pervez Musharraf in his press conference in Dubai announced that he would arrive in Pakistan within one week of the installation of the interim government set up. He has tried to clear the mist of incredibility about his return to Pakistan. Answering a representative of the media he said that his earlier dates were postponed on the advice of his party members and now they have unanimously asked him to return soon after the swearing in of the interim government. The logic seems clear. It is hoped that the interim government will not have its own axe to grind and it will treat him neutrally. His party, the All Pakistan Muslim League (APML), expects to have a level playing field during elections. Prior to that, all kinds of political arm twisting has been going on. Such tactics are not new, like registration of criminal and civil cases, confiscation of properties, mudslinging, discounting the good work of the predecessors, etc. The polity overloaded by landlords, power barons, and other such individuals have always used tactics to discourage and keep genuine and educated persons out of the political fray. Musharraf, in his press conference, expressed confidence in the courts and hoped for justice.

The real threat is to Musharraf's life from terrorists. However, he believes that life and death is in the hands of the Almighty and as long as he lives he wants to serve the country and its people. For Musharraf, this is almost the only chance to play a democratic role. He is boarding the last bus. Some may consider it already late but it is a 'now or never' situation. The people and the country have suffered too much and for too long. A change for the better has to happen, and Musharraf believes he can turn the country around as he did a decade ago. One would like to wish that the change for betterment does occur sooner rather than later.

It is also true that in spite of the announcement the doubts about his return still exist. The mist has not entirely cleared. It will only clear

when he is actually here and steps onto the soil of Pakistan. It will be fair to expect that as a former president and a former Chief of the Army Staff, he will be provided appropriate security on and after his arrival and will remain free to run his election campaign. This is the only way that will ensure the free expression of the will of the people.

The Election Commission of Pakistan is expected to ensure a free and fair election and it must succeed in doing so. All forces, armed or civilian, need to help and support this effort. We as a nation must mature and entrench the democratic traditions. The faults in the current democratic system notwithstanding, this is the only system for change and it should be protected. There are, no doubt, challenges to the system and many feel that it has failed. But is it the system or governance that has failed? Primarily, it seems to be governance. Law and order and the economy are the biggest casualties. There is very little to commend. Perhaps the handing over of Gwadar port for management to China, the agreement of gas supply with Iran are the few things that give hope. Some provincial governments, particularly Punjab, have tried to alleviate a few problems. Punjab has concentrated on resolving traffic and transport issues in the urban centres, which is good. However, much more needs to be done in all other areas like health, poverty alleviation, power generation, law and order, education and so on.

On a national level the role of the overseas Pakistanis needs to be treated fairly. The Pakistani Diaspora is in a large number. Away from home their attachment with the homeland becomes extremely strong. They save every penny and send it to Pakistan. Last year's figure was an astounding \$ 31 billion. This flow of funds has been the mainstay of Pakistan's economy. What do these individuals feel when they are told that they cannot participate in serious decision making in the country? Even a system to help them vote is not well organised. Why is it so? Why do we suspect their loyalty? Are we slaves to the systems in India? In the United States, the Governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger, once an Austrian citizen, served a full term.

Why are we shy of using our experts? If a distinguished doctor, engineer, economist, researcher, diplomat or any other expert can help the country, why should he be deprived of holding a position of high responsibility? Are we so insecure to feel that a member of the Diaspora will run away with the country's assets? Then why is their financial

contribution acceptable? Are we trying to keep internationally recognised expertise away and live in our pool of mess? Also look at it from the perspective that a large number of our 'law makers' are ill-educated and some even have fake degrees. Do we want to perpetuate this situation and shy away from contemporary knowledge and expertise? Pervez Musharraf supports the rights of the Diaspora to the fullest extent and has proposed even reserved seats for them, which is a good step.

I think it is time that we grow out of phobias, stop mudslinging and covert activities, shed the clichés of 'dictatorship' and try to bridge the divide. The country has suffered because of 'exclusivist' attitudes. There is a divide in religious sects, regions, colour, young and old, languages, biradaris and so on. A nation is built by inclusive attitudes, by taking pride in human and material assets, and their optimum use.

It is time we broadened our perspective and if Musharraf can contribute to the betterment of the people and the country, it should be encouraged, and the same goes for anybody who is sincere, capable and honest.

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Saturday, March 16, 2013

Interim government, before and after

Once the interim government is in place its prime responsibility is to hold 'free and fair' elections according to the constitution of Pakistan

By the time this article is published, it is possible that an interim government of Pakistan may have been sworn in. It is also possible that it may not have happened! It is interesting to know as to what has been rumoured before the 'interim government' and what can take place afterwards.

At the time of writing of this article, a host of names is cropping up as potential prime ministers of the interim set-up. The list started with the name of Honourable Justice Nasir Aslam Zahid and two others. Mr Mehmood Khan Achakzai's name also appeared. It was followed by a host of other names. Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan volunteered to become the interim prime minister and solve all problems facing the country in a very short while! Recently, some lesser known names have been coming up. Finally, six names were under consideration. It is also said that Mr Tahirul Qadri will have to make a nod. This was an arrangement agreed upon after the 'Long March'. There is not much talk about it anymore. The consent and agreement of all political parties, the opposition, and government seems like a very tall order. These parties are known for only agreeing to disagree! However, the only compulsion that may keep them together will be that if they do not arrive at consensus then they lose their right at midnight of March 16, 2013, and the responsibility of nominating an interim prime minister passes on to the Chief Election Commissioner via first the parliamentary committee.

In such a situation, some legal experts think that a prime minister will need to be there without any gap as a constitutional requirement. Now either the parliamentary committee does it or the Chief Election Commissioner does it. Some legal minds say that the election commission can take up to a maximum six days to nominate the prime minister. So there are options and complications and the matter is not as simple as some may have thought.

Once the interim government is in place its prime responsibility is to hold 'free and fair' elections according to the constitution of Pakistan, which is again a very tall order, and there will be very few lucky candidates who pass the test of Article 62 and 63. However, the interim government will need to take care of the 'day to day' affairs as well. This includes law and order and the economy. They will also need to pass the budget, which is to be presented in the month of May. These are no small tasks. In reality, the interim government will need to shoulder all the responsibilities of a regular government and also extend full support to the election procedure. Can all this be done within the time available to the interim government?

If the interim government needs more time, then what? The requirement that elections should be held within 60 days, poses another problem. The month of May is most important for the agriculturist community, which forms over 65 percent of the population. May is the month when crops are to be cut and saved. It is a very busy month for agriculturists, and it is very challenging for them to give preference to election campaigns. Again a case for the postponement of elections to a later date revolves in several minds.

There are also talks about an 'arrangement' between the two major parties to manoeuvre matters in a way that they retain power. It is said that in the post-election scenario there is some understanding to give the prime minister's slot to the PML-N and let Mr Asif Zardari continue as president. This will indeed be far from the 'change' that many political parties like the PTI, APML and Awami Tehrik of Mr Qadri are looking for. This will mean more of the same thing as in the past five years. Generally, it is felt that the people of Pakistan have been disappointed by the performance of the current national and provincial governments and they want a change for the better.

In short, uncertainty and even turbulent times may be ahead. The people of Pakistan have been disappointed by the performance of the governments in the democracy of the last five years. Many have doubts about the suitability of the present democratic system. Maybe it does need to evolve. The fact that it is overburdened by influential landlords, Waderas, Khans and Sardars, money mafias and gun mafias is hard to deny. A free and fair election will mean that these influences be controlled and competent candidates come forward. Also to be considered is the very high cost of electioneering, which has become far

beyond the means of an average individual. Further strangely, the Diaspora is deprived of meaningful participation in the electoral process. Given all these facts, what results can we expect?

People expect clean and capable persons to run the country and make it move forward. They want an end to the ethnic and religious divide. A religious state is a phenomenon under question. Corruption and compromise of sovereign rights are not acceptable. Terrorism is being understood as having no religious sanction at all. It is a game played by foreign and local mafias for destabilisation and to prevent development and progress of the nation. There is wide awareness in the public and they can see through things. The Election Commission and interim government will be at a crossroads. They may lead to an era of prosperity or chaos and gloom. Let them not underestimate the importance of the task ahead.

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Saturday, March 23, 2013

The interim government awaited!

For some reason, there is prevailing cynicism about the actual holding of the elections. Several people for some reason doubt if elections will be held at all

In my article last week, I looked at the options for the appointment of the interim prime minister and his cabinet. An interim government could have been in place on March 16 or 17 if sharp differences in the opinions of the treasury and opposition had not taken place. But a consensus was not to be! While this article is being written all constitutional options are being exhausted and it is possible that by the time it is published, at least an interim prime minister may be finally in place. It is generally believed that political parties are not likely to reach an agreement and the Election Commission of Pakistan will need to pick up a name from the list considered by the Parliamentary Committee. Whether there are real differences or it is a 'nura kushti' for public consumption is part of the buzz around. Openly only one deal has been talked about; that if the Pakistan People's Party gets its choice as the Punjab interim chief minister then the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz can have its choice of the federal position of the interim prime minister or vice versa. There are other rumours to add to the spice in the menu.

It is also said that the delay has been caused because the current political powers want to hold on to their positions until after March 24. This is interpreted by some as the desire to control the March 23, 2013 jalsa scheduled at the Minar-e-Pakistan by Imran Khan of the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf. The other desire is to create maximum hurdles at the time of the arrival of the former president Syed Pervez Musharraf in Karachi on March 24. This is the way of politics here! How can the Election Commission control these kinds of riggings? Neither Khan nor Musharraf will change their programmes. Musharraf has already proceeded for Umra and he will catch his flight on the 24th to Karachi. Musharraf's visit to Saudi Arabia is also interpreted as an assurance from one of the most powerful supporters and friends of Pakistan. It

may result in committing safe passage and freedom to Musharraf on his return. He also plans to visit the Mazar-e-Quaid the same day. As he has been granted bail in the cases he will be free to move about. Khan is holding his major gathering after the intra-party elections at Minar-e-Pakistan Lahore, and he will not change his plans. Any attempt to disrupt these programmes will be an obvious interference and reflective of the insecurities of the men in power. If we want democracy to flourish then the politicians in power and in opposition have to learn to ensure a level playing field for all. The Election Commission has also given the schedule for filing of papers by candidates. The date of polling has been announced as May 11, 2013. The only remaining decision is the interim prime minister! If the interim prime minister takes over by the publication of this article then the stage is set.

As far as the people at large are concerned they have hopes for 'change'. They want change and any effort to force a status quo will take that 'hope' away and nations cannot survive without hope. For some reason, there is prevailing cynicism about the actual holding of the elections. Several people for some reason doubt if elections will be held at all. Could there be any solid reason?

One factor is mentioned that the law and order situation will deteriorate fast during the interim government because of its limited powers. It is yet to be seen as to what will be the effect of the boycott and 'sit in' by the Pakistan Awami Tehrik of Dr Tahirul Qadri. There is no doubt that Dr Qadri has the following to make his protest visible and impressive. This time he may not rely on assurances by the government of the time. The credibility is lost.

The latest case filed in the court by the veteran politician Dr Mubashar Hassan points at huge funding intended to rig the elections.

Could these factors create an effect that postpones the elections? So far it is anybody's guess. Can a constitutional way be found to justify postponement of elections and extension in time? If it happens at all then it will open a whole new Pandora's Box. Extensions or postponements will then be expected for a fairly long time. The logic will be that the country's economy and law and order is in such a dire state that actions to correct this situation must take priority over elections. The fact is that the majority of the people may even show little love for elections if their life continues to be miserable. Any

government that helps them survive, or alleviates their miseries will be more acceptable than an unpredictable election result.

While one hopes for the nice things like the strengthening of democracy to happen, it is also necessary to look at the ground realities of the conditions prevailing in the country and the challenges faced by its populace. The sailing may not be as smooth as it appears on the surface. There can be turbulences ahead.

As I reach the closing of this article, there are strong rumours circulating that on Saturday an interim prime minister will be nominated and it could be Mr Ishrat Hussain, the former Governor State Bank of Pakistan or Justice Khosa. The readers are likely to know the selection this Saturday. Que sera sera...whatever will be, will be!

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Monday, April 01, 2013

Musharraf is here, believe it or not!

Musharraf's priorities as he declared to the media are: improvement in law and order, and in the economy

It was flight EK 606 of Emirate Airlines that took off from Dubai and reached Karachi on time on March 24. Pervez Musharraf was on time in another way too. He had promised his supporters that he would arrive within a week of the interim government. He fulfilled his promise. At the time of departure from Dubai, it was a scene to witness. Hundreds of people gathered to bid farewell and to shout slogans for his long life. About a 100 bought tickets to fly with him. Musharraf individually met all. All persons accompanying, as well as Musharraf himself, wore the Imam Zamin for good luck and protection. Begum Sehba Musharraf saw him off. One wonders what sentiments she must have had and how much she must have prayed for his safety. On the other hand, Musharraf was relaxed.

Musharraf arrived among many concerns of his well-wishers. He had threats to his personal security, as the Taliban had issued a fresh threat, stating that several hundred had been deputed, including sharp shooters and suicide bombers to kill Musharraf. He had legal cases and warrants of arrest, all waiting for him. His supporters at airport were restricted by security agencies, yet about 10,000 were present, and he addressed them. The crowd was demanding a show of 'fist' as power. He prayed for Pakistan and moved to his hotel. An interim bail had been granted by the Sindh High Court and that gave him a breather. Soon the TV showed that Musharraf was travelling to his hotel with full security and protocol. He is entitled to the security as a former president and chief of the army staff; government fulfilled its responsibility.

But the task ahead of Musharraf is not easy. His party is only two years old, and the its organisation is not tested. He still has to deal with court cases, and he also has to finalise the APML candidates for elections. A challenge is presented by the election commission's strict regulations. Will the APML be able to contest in a substantial number

of National and Provincial constituencies? *This is yet to be seen. The chances of emerging as a party with a substantial number can only be through some miracle. However, he may align with some other parties that are convinced that a change of leadership is essential for Pakistan. He may also have some understanding with such parties that believe in the betterment of the middle class and working classes. He is not likely to have anything to do with the feudal or dynastic parties.*

Musharraf's priorities as he declared to the media are: improvement in law and order, and in the economy. There is credibility to his plan due to his past performance. He took over when the country was on the verge of bankruptcy and on becoming a failed state. He successfully turned it around. A large number of people still remember that and consider him their 'saviour' to be.

Musharraf has declared his intention to contest for the National Election from Chitral where he built the Lowari Tunnel and connected it directly with Pakistan. He may also contest from Karachi. There are other options under consideration. He lodged at the Avari Hotel under heavy security, but he did walk around in the lawns and lobby, and could freely be seen by people in the breakfast lounge.

I had decided to stay until the confirmation of his bail on the 29th. There were all kinds of apprehensions; he could be denied extensions, he could be arrested. He had declared that he was ready for all situations. On the 28th, I got a viral infection in the lungs and I was in a bad shape. My desire to watch the court proceedings, and the consequent drama appeared jeopardised. Thanks to my doctor I improved but still had very low energy. But soon my desire to be a witness to a momentous event took the better of me. I got up and left for the Sindh High Court minutes before Musharraf's departure. His security vehicles were arriving and soon the route would have been closed.

The entrance to the Sindh High Court was crowded by the supporters of the APML. Banners and slogans of 'jeevay (long live) Musharraf' were noticeable. The hearing of cases was scheduled in court number one and four on the second floor. Both these courts are at each end of the corridor, and the corridors were packed with people and many 'black coats'. The buzz was around that the Chief Justice was in Karachi and a guessing game about results started. Suddenly, the black coats in the corridor rushed to court number one as the case was to start there. I could not match the pushing and pulling and was left behind while the door was closed. But I was able to be at a vantage point to observe. As Syed Pervez Musharraf was taken into the court through a secret doorway, some black coats started shouting against him. I could hardly believe that these sober looking men had so much lung power in them. They were shouting 'Bail naheen jail' and some other derogatory slogans. As they

scopped for a breath the other parts of the crowd started shouting in favour of Musharraf. It was quite a scene, which continued for a while. Black coats making such rowdy noises in a court area seemed strange. Anyway, as soon as the bail was extended, the shouting black coats disappeared! A similar show later occurred in front of the court No.4, and silence followed once again as the extension of bail in Akbar Bugti and Benazir Bhutto cases was granted. After this the suspense was over, the APML and Musharraf were on their way to contest elections.

By the time I was concluding this article it was reported that the APML candidates were filing nomination papers for every National and Provincial constituency. Meanwhile, government in Islamabad became restrictive and placed Musharraf on the ECL. It seems like a tug of war between the former president and the 'neutral' government has started.

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Saturday, April 06, 2013

Is it CEC's sense of humor?

For the CEC I can only say that their task is no joke, it is a very serious challenge and so it is for the 40 day interim governments

Recently, the personality of the CEC has become a subject of some TV shows. At least one anchor is most concerned. But there are others also. Some of the things quoted are funny.

In a TV programme this week a very senior journalist on phone from the USA mentioned an interesting story. It goes like this: our wise journalist of 'chirya' fame was in a book show in Karachi some weeks ago and there he met with the CEC. This is of course before Mr Najam Sethi assumed the charge of Punjab chief minister for about 40 days. In the show under reference, it was narrated by a distinguished journalist, Mr. Sehbai that Mr Fakhruddin G Ibrahim, the CEC, asked Mr Sethi, "Are the General Elections actually going to be held?"

Watching the TV show the anchor person, and Mr. Babar Awan the other participant, appeared to be taken aback and so was I. But later I wondered if the CEC's question could be treated as a joke. I don't know what response Mr Sethi gave in response, or what his chirya reported, but I think the question is not just a joke. It is a reflection of the state of cynicism in our nation. Even the Chief Election Commissioner who is bound by the Constitution of Pakistan, and who has accepted the responsibility to do so is so uncertain that he has to ask someone else about the situation of his own assignment. Unfortunately, it also reveals a lack of confidence of the Chief in himself. It is he who should be dispelling the doubts and make people confident of the application of the system. Why is he in doubt? If the story narrated by Mr Sehbai is true then our respected retired jurist needs to ponder a bit.

Another story is taking rounds. This time again it is the CEC. It is said that the CEC was in a reception where, on his way out, he met a very impressive army general. So the CEC met him with courtesy and

asked him to convey his best wishes to General Kiyani. The CEC did not realise that he was giving this message to General Kiyani himself!

All such buzz is around because of the advanced age of the Mr Fakhruddin G Ibrahim, fondly known as Fakhru Bhai. I hate discrimination on the basis of age. In fact, I am against any kind of discrimination, but unfortunately age discrimination and gender discrimination are most prevalent. This is particularly so in jokes. There are many jokes at the expense of female gender, old age etc. However, the fact is that our CEC is advanced in age, perhaps 87 years of age. It is not the ideal age to take big challenges, and, holding 'fair and free' elections is the biggest ever challenge. One wonders if he actually realises how serious this assignment is!

Unfortunately, Mr Ibrahim came across as a very frail person when he found it difficult even to read the name of the interim prime minister in front of the TV cameras. He struggled. He was prompted and still he did not know if the name was Khosa or Khussa or Khoso. On help from his staff he settled on Khoso and so the name of the interim prime minister became known. The interim prime minister wouldn't be complaining, and must have understood. He himself is said to be 84 and highly experienced.

One wishes the interim set up and the CEC the best of everything. We wish them success for their good, and more so for the good of the country. But I cannot help saying that these choices are, once again, a failure of our politicians. The seasoned politicians take pride in having completed the full constitutional term of five years, but they could not locate a few capable and competent middle aged people out of the whole 200 million of population who could conduct the elections? No technocrats, businessmen, professionals, scholars, management specialists etc.? There are several, civil or military, retired persons of recent years also. There must be some lawmakers, attorneys of character. Someone could be trusted. Even the names suggested by the politicians could not acquire consensus and the good old Fakhru Bhai had to intervene. All this speaks of the distrust, and cynicism rooted in the national polity. Politicians are allergic to the armed forces, but still they need their help to conduct the elections. In fact, the only guarantor of the polling booth safety can be the armed forces. What goes on prior to the voter entering the booth and afterwards is not what the armed forces can take care off. In fact, all rigging happens before or after. The

Chief Election Commissioner promises 'free and fair' elections and I would like to hope that he knows what he is talking about. He needs to understand that it is not only the polling day, the dye for rigging gets cast much earlier. Lot of people believe that a dye in favour of the 'status quo' has already been cast. It is very likely that the people of Pakistan will have more of the same thing again. The parties of 'change' like the APMML, TL, MQM are trying their best, but so are the 'status Quo' parties. My perception is that no one in this country is satisfied with the performance of the outgoing national and provincial governments. In fact, people are completely fed up. But they will not see a 'change'. Fakhru Bhai or the new set up may prove irrelevant.

People will have to be pro-active now without delay; watch their interest; recognise the tools of rigging, and destroy them. If the people for 'change' are late this time then they may be 'late' forever.

For the CEC I can only say that its task is no joke, it is a very serious challenge and so it is for the 40 day interim governments.

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Saturday, April 13, 2013

Of Returning Officers and the blank

If a large section of the electorate puts its stamp on the blank, it is a comment on the system of selection of candidates and the matter assumes an importance of vital significance

Two surprising things have happened in the ongoing election process. One, the controversial conduct of the Returning Officers, and, the proposed addition of a 'blank' space on the ballot paper for those voters to stamp who have no confidence in any of the contestants listed therein. The Returning Officers (ROs) have been appointed by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). The ECP has wide powers supported by the constitution of Pakistan, and it chose to appoint the ROs from the judiciary as the judiciary is expected to be fair. So the judges from various status and seniority were assigned the task. Unfortunately, the conduct of some of these ROs from the judiciary has been shocking. Many of these ROs have faltered and exposed the stuff of which some 'judges' are made!

There are weird stories in circulation about the questions asked by these ROs (otherwise judges) to determine the suitability of the candidates under Articles 62 and 63 of the Constitution of Pakistan. One lady applicant for a seat in the assembly was asked her age. To start with, a gentleman should not ask a lady's age in good grace! But instead of relying on the ID card, he asked her age. She said she was 35 years old. He did not believe her and asked her to turn around and show her face to all present in the room and asked them if she looked 35! Regrettable. Then another RO asked a candidate as to how many wives he had. This is a completely irrelevant question, to which the candidate said he had three wives. Our RO did not stop here. He further asked which one was his favorite wife and if he actually spent more time with her! Unbelievable. Perhaps the worst and most shameful question was asked by another RO who asked a lady applicant this question: "What are the days in a month for a woman when she is exempted from saying prayers?" Absolutely shameful question. The lady appropriately retorted and said, "You ask your mother this question." Such ROs have

no business to be there. Another Returning Officer rejected the papers of Mr Amir Ayaz because he could not understand the article written by Ayaz and interpreted it against the 'ideology of Pakistan'.

The questionable conduct of such ROs continues. Some of them, in fact, several of them, have appointed themselves as guardians of religion and morality! They ask questions about Islam and individual's religious practices as if they were teachers in a madrassa. Such officers ask for recitation of several Quranic verses and details of religious principles, which should be none of the business of an RO. The EC would have done better if a standard set of questions was provided and the questioning was not left to the discretion of individuals. These Returning Officers are, after all, human, who get swayed by their mindsets. Let us also not forget that several of these are those who have let almost all terrorists under trial free for one reason or the other. I regret to say that the choice is one of the glaring oversights of the EC. There is good justification for the protests being launched by major political parties against the behaviour of the ROs. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) is reported to have stated, "...the latest process of scrutiny is a witch-hunt aimed at harassing and humiliating candidates..." HRCP further says, "...this deliberate and planned abuse of the process appears to be a bid to complete Ziaul Haq's agenda to accommodate extremism into the mainstream of politics..."

If this time the EC fails then the major onus will be on the misconduct of the ROs.

The other controversy is about the blank square or box in the ballot papers. I understand the move was made by a registered political party for the inclusion of such a box in the ballot paper. Initially the application was accepted but soon afterwards the idea was dropped. No open debate took place for inclusion or exclusion. It is said that such blanks are included in the ballot papers in several countries like Canada and Bangladesh. What does a blank do? A blank provides the opportunity to a registered voter to express his decision not to support any of the listed candidates. This expression can be limited to a constituency, but if a large section of the electorate puts its stamp on the blank, it is a comment on the system of selection of candidates and the matter assumes an importance of vital significance. The election loses its credibility and validity.

The blank records the opinion of the so-called 'silent majority' as long as this category takes the trouble to go and stamp the blank. I thought, and considered, the provision of the blank a good, constructive decision. But I noticed that some thinkers, whom I respect, had reservations and they seemed happy that the implementation had been withheld. The logic put forward was that the blank may be used to sabotage the electoral process. They fear that militants and extremists may flock to stamp the blank, and thus sabotage the electoral process. This may be true, but then how does the majority express its dissatisfaction with the current exploitable electoral system, a system that is open to rigging and control by the landlord, the super-rich, the corrupt and the influential? A system that has no provision for the distinguished persons of the soil who cannot run a campaign, but can contribute immensely for the betterment of the country and people, of which scientists, educationists, economic specialists, intellectuals, researchers, writers and so on are examples. The present system elects 'lawmakers' with little educational qualifications, or with forged documents. Can it be relied upon? The elected become the lawmakers! What kind of joke is that with the nation?

Doesn't this system need an overhaul? An appropriate legal/constitutional cover needs to be provided to the blank.

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Saturday, April 20, 2013

The 'Black Brigade'

The appearance of the Black Brigade needs serious notice. Is it there to show its power to the political parties and to get their support?

They may have some resemblance to the Ninja Turtle cartoons, but they are not harmless like them. These are persons clad in black, holding large batons (danda) and daggers, and they attack at will. They are aggressive and programmed into a ruthless warrior mode. They kill and get killed. It is said that these are females from the Laal Masjid, Islamabad, but it is possible that some males may have donned that attire as one of their leaders did in July 2007 to escape from the mosque.

They reappeared last week well-equipped and 'supported'. There were pickups and ladders to support their action, the action being the destruction of the election campaign banners of two candidates, Dr Amjad and Syed Pervez Musharraf. They remained unchecked and the TV networks, particularly the new Capital TV network covered them at length. They were climbing the poles, they were supported by pick up vans, and they had large batons in their hands. They were beating the posters and the photographs, they were trying to pull these down and cut the ropes with the help of large daggers.

The black burqa brigade is not unfamiliar to Islamabad. It is also familiar to many outside Islamabad. A famous sculptor made life size sculptures of a group of these danda-bardar (baton-carrying) brigades at the inauguration of the National Art Gallery in Islamabad. These black burqa-clad persons played a prominent and very visible role in the support of the famous terrorist action from the Laal Masjid in 2007. These black brigades stood on the top of the roofs of the Laal Masjid and the adjacent Children Library. This black brigade had unlawfully captured the Children Library and refused to vacate it. They made it a part of the Laal Masjid terror camp. Said to be students, they were well-trained in combat.

In the month of July 2007, the Laal Masjid occupants had worked out their strategy against the government of Pakistan. The two brothers

from the Laal Masjid, Aziz and Rashid, were in regular contact with al Qaeda leaders, particularly Tahir Yaldochiv and Sheikh Essa. Sheikh Essa was an Arab member of the al Qaeda who was fluent in Urdu and Pashto. The two brothers regularly received a flow of directives on strategy. By 2007, Laal Masjid had become an al Qaeda powerhouse in the federal capital of Islamabad, directly in the face of the ISI and the GHQ. All appeals to vacate or surrender met with deaf ears. The strategy of attacking video shops, Chinese workers, kidnapping of policemen, burning of video shops were all actions to test waters. "...Pakistani intelligence sources were reporting to the Presidency that Laal Masjid was demanding the enforcement of the Islamic Sharia but in fact it was playing mind games under instruction from al Qaeda..." (Inside Al Qaeda, Salim Shehzad, Page 161).

By the time the Laal Masjid 'Operation Sunrise' started, the two brothers had severed relations with their spiritual head. They had refused to accept the appeals of the Imam Kaaba, Mr and Mrs Abdul Sattar Edhi; the head of the Wafaq-ul-Madaris, politicians like Chaudhary Shujaat Hussain, and of course, repeated appeals from the government, and particularly from President Musharraf. The occupants inside included members of the Jamaat-ud-Dawa, formerly known as the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, and Harkat-e-Jihad-e-Islami of the controversial jihadi leader, Qari Saifullah. The biggest grouping of militants belonged to the banned Jaish-e-Mohammed. The complex always had close affiliation with Jaish, but the first sign of its physical presence came when on the third day of the conflict the militants handed over the body of a man described as a journalist from a local newspaper. It was later revealed that he had been carrying a fake identity card and was identified as Maqsood-ul-Mehmood, who used to work for a Jasih-e-Mohammed publication and was the cousin of the banned outfit's supreme leader, Maulana Masood Azhar.

The plan was to hold as many as possible from leaving the Laal Masjid complex in response to the government appeals and keep them as human shields. The Black Brigade was assisting ferociously. What happened during and after the operation is well known. Even Benazir Bhutto and the Afghan president Hamid Karzai supported the operation. The escapees joined the terrorists in Swat and the larger uprising as per the plans of the al Qaeda started.

Some years have passed and the memories are getting muddled. The actual newspaper archives still keep the records and are the source of many truths. But politics has changed and it is found useful by several politicians to back off from their stands in July 2007. They are trying to gain sympathies of the rightists, the extremists, and the terrorists. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, and the religious parties are all in the good books of the Taliban. Now it is election time and the right moment to re-visit the pledges of the Laal Masjid. Therefore, the appearance of the Black Brigade, the Danda Brigade or Ninjas, whatever you like to call them, is no co-incidence. It is very likely a planned strategy. They hated the Pakistan People's Party government as they hated Musharraf. Both resisted terror as best as they could. They also resisted the enforcement of the Salafi brand of Islam and the schools akin to it. No doubt there is a majority of Muslims in this country but they believe in the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and do not believe in sectarian divide and conflict.

The appearance of the Black Brigade needs serious notice. Is it there to show its power to the political parties and to get their support? Are they testing the strength of the government and its will to control? Are they building, and regrouping, in the time available during the interim government with a limited mandate?

The reason can be any of these or all of these. Whatever the reason, the people of Pakistan and their law enforcement agencies will be committing a blunder if they do not watch carefully and act before the malady, symbolised by Black Brigade becomes fatal this time.

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Saturday, April 27, 2013

Black coats, black robes and a vendetta

Musharraf returned to Pakistan of his own volition, he declared that he would present himself in all cases filed against him and prove his innocence

Do you remember Justice Cornelius, or Justice Kayani, or Justice Samdani? Or do you remember Justice Shahabuddin who lived and died with his wife and cut himself off from all society, friends or relatives, because he wanted not the slightest influence in his judgments? Or even Mr A K Brohi or Mr Manzoor Qadir? Probably not! Maybe some, very few, remember the days when people lived by the image of Quaid-e-Azam, believed in his values, and struggled to make a 'nation' and a country. These generations of people, along with their values, are extinct. Some of the distinguished jurists recalled here are amongst the few who did 'justice' and justice also 'seemed to be done'. Such people who believed in human dignity and the role of justice have gone and so is the dream.

Now neither the Quaid is there nor is his message respected. Nor do we have the country that was dreamt and obtained after giving sacrifices of life, property, honour, and friendly surroundings. The painful fact is that today there is neither a nation nor the country of Jinnah. The deterioration of the justice system is at the core of this destruction.

The black coats, the black robes and the courtroom used to be symbols of honour. Today, these are symbols of hooliganism and street justice. The deterioration was going on for a long time but perhaps the little resistance that jurists are showing collapsed under the attack of the hooligan politicians of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz when they mobbed and attacked the Supreme Court in Islamabad. If the Pakistan People's Party had done such a thing it could be understood in the background of the sheer injustice done to Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. But the attack was carried out by the violent activists of the Nawaz league who only wanted to send a clear message: 'Submit or else...' This legacy is in shameful 'full bloom' in every court in Pakistan where a case of political

nature is presented. Other cases are said to be taken care of by the powers of corruption, intimidation and money.

The latest and very shameful example is continuing unethical wherever the former president and chief of army staff. Syed Pervez Musharraf is presented. A fair treatment and application of true justice is something no honourable person will object to. Musharraf returned to Pakistan of his own volition, he declared that he would present himself in all cases filed against him and prove his innocence. He wanted to contest the elections and respect the democratic process. What happened afterwards? He was disqualified from contesting elections from all constituencies that he applied for. The basis of disqualification was quoted to be the cases under Article 63 of the constitution. These are cases that have not even been heard and even a trial has not started. Further, the only authority to file the treason case is the government of Pakistan and it has presently refused to file a complainant. The GOP has informed in writing the Supreme Court that it does not wish to do so and, instead, wants to concentrate on holding the elections. When there is no case then why has Musharraf been disqualified? Could it be vendetta? Are not the courts and the returning officers taking an extrajudicial action?

The scene at the Karachi courts was stunning. A group of black coats, probably supported by a political party, created scenes of aggression and shouting that were shameful even if held in a street. In Rawalpindi/Islamabad it was even worse. The Rawalpindi bar members known for their aggression and activism shouted, pushed, brick-batted and even tried to attack Musharraf when he came for a court hearing. He had to be saved by the security personnel. Is this how justice can be administered?

A judge who is known to be a political activist, had contested elections on a Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal ticket, and who earlier represented Maulana Aziz in the Laal Masjid case, added a terrorism clause and ordered Musharraf's arrest! Otherwise Musharraf's bail had to be confirmed according to the law.

A judge should and must have a conscience. If a judge looks at himself and finds the slightest prejudice he must not sit on the bench. Judges must remember the standards set by Islam. They need to remember that Hazrat Ali (RA) forgave a non-Muslim who had fought

against Islam and could have been killed by him as he had abused Hazrat Ali, and the great man did not act against him because he felt killing him may have an element of motivation due to anger at his personal insult. While we are forgetting the traditions of Jinnah are we deprecating to the extent of forgetting the values of our religion?

How many of those on the bench have not been under so-called arrest by Musharraf? They were mishandled but there was no order from Musharraf to do so. If there was such an order it should be presented in the court. Civil administration is known to commit excesses on its own. Is Musharraf responsible for everything that happened in the past? Only the judges who have an unbiased mind should hear the cases so justice can be done. Unfortunately, neither justice is being done nor does it 'appear' to be done. It is more like a great vendetta, reminding us of the Sialkot incident in the near past when two young innocent boys were beaten, killed, and their bodies were insulted by the maniacs in the crowd.

Judges must be different. They must rise beyond personal grudges or beliefs. They must honour their profession and legal traditions if this country has to have an iota of respect in the world. Can they rise to the occasion and not be subject to personal vendettas? This is the question that may decide if we are a fair society, a nation, or we live in a 'jungle'.

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Saturday, May 04, 2013

'Terrorist' candidates in elections 2013

The Code of Conduct issued by the ECP for the general elections lacked a particular clause to disqualify the sectarian elements

A leading English Daily has published the list of known terrorists contesting elections 2013. In its issue of April 24, the researcher Amir Mir reports: "The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has failed to prevent 55 candidates from the Punjab, belonging to 10 different sectarian groups, from contesting the general elections despite the fact that intelligence agencies had warned the ECP that they were on terrorist lists and had provided all the names." He has substantiated his report by giving actual names and the constituencies as well as the parties. Here is the extract:

These names are also listed on the 4th Schedule of the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997 for their alleged involvement in terrorist activities. This report has been confirmed by the Ministry of Interior.

The ECP was further requested not to allow these candidates to contest the elections because they had been involved in terrorist activities due to which their names were placed on the 4th Schedule of the Anti-Terrorism Act.

Under this 4th Schedule of Section 11-EE of the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997, persons charged with terrorist activities, after being released from jail, are kept under observation and they have to inform their respective police stations before leaving their hometowns and upon their return. The ECP subsequently forwarded the list of 55 sectarian offenders to the respective returning officers, with the direction to proceed against them. However, the ECP was informed that the returning officers were not legally empowered to impede these candidates from contesting the elections because the Code of Conduct issued by the ECP for the general elections lacked a particular clause to disqualify the sectarian elements.

According to the list of the sectarian elements running for the coming elections despite being listed under the 4th schedule 40 of the

55 candidates who have been allowed to run for the polls, belong to the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), which has already been renamed as Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ), led by Maulana Mohammad Ahmed Ludhianvi. His second in command in the ASWJ is the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi fame, Malik Mohammad Ishaq. However, since the ASWJ did not register itself with the ECP, it has fielded candidates on Muttahida Deeni Mahaz platform. Ishaq was garlanded on his release from jail by the PML-N.

Of the remaining 15 candidates, four belong to the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Fazl), three each belong to the Tehrik-e-Jafria Pakistan (TJP) and Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan (JI), two belong to the Jamiat Ahle Hadith (JAH) and one each belong to the defunct Harkatul Mujahideen (HuM), Majlis-e-Wahdat-e-Muslimeen (MWM) and the Sipah-e-Mohammad Pakistan (SMP).

Of the 55 candidates who are listed under the 4th schedule and are contesting the elections from Punjab, ten belong to Muzaffargarh, five each belong to Jhang, Faisalabad, and Rawalpindi districts, four each belong to Jhelum and Rajanpur districts, three each belong to the Bahawalpur and Chiniot districts, two each belong to Sheikhpura, Khanewal and Dera Ghazi Khan districts while one each belong to Lahore, Sialkot, Attock, Sargodha, Toba Tek Singh, Bhakkar, Okara, Layyah, Lodhran and Rahim Yar Khan districts of Punjab.

The following is a constituency-wise list of the sectarian elements along with the names of their organisations who have been allowed by the Election Commission to contest the coming polls: Umar Farooq of SSP/ASWJ (NA-86 Chiniot), Syed Ali Raza of TJP (NA-88 Chiniot), Intizar Hussain of SSP-ASWJ (PP-73 Chiniot), Qari Shabbir Ahmed Usmani of SSP/ASWJ (PP-75 Chiniot), Rana Mohammad Arshad of SSP/ASWJ (NA-94 Toba Tek Singh), Malik Mohammad Bashir of JI (PP-33 Sargodha), Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haqqani of SSP/ASWJ (PP-50 Bhakkar), Maulana Abdul Khaliq Rehmani of SSP/ASWJ (NA-156 and PP-213 Khanewal), Qari Rahimullah Mithu of SSP/ASWJ (PP-149 Lahore), Iftikhar Ahmed (NA-144 Okara), Hafiz Mohammad Ishfaq Gujjar of SSP/ASWJ (PP-167 Sheikhpura), Syed Raza Hasan Babar of TJP (NA-133 and PP-167 Sheikhpura), Qari Saifullah Saifi of JUI-F (NA-50 Sialkot), Khalid Mehmood Butt of SSP/ASWJ (NA-113 Sialkot), Mohammad Ishfaq Abbasi of SSP/ASWJ (PP-1 Rawalpindi), Ansar Manzoor of

SSP/ASWJ (PP-1 Rawalpindi), Abdul Shakoor of JUF (PP-2 Rawalpindi), Zahid Iqbal Bakhtavri (NA-54), Irqar Ahmed Abbasi (PP-15 Rawalpindi), Umar Farooq of MDM (NA-59 Attock), Sikandar Hayat of JAH (PP-54 Jaranwala), Maulana Sajid Farooqi of SSP/ASWJ (PP-56 Jaranwala), Hafiz Suhail of SSP/ASWJ (PP-72 Faisalabad), Iftikhar Hussain Naqvi of TJP (PP-66 Faisalabad), Maulana Suleman Jhangvi of SSP/ASWJ (PP-70 Faisalabad), Maulana Mohammad Ahmed Ludhianvi, Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Jhangvi, Mohammad Moavia, Masroor Nawaz and Hakim Ali of SSP/ASWJ (NA-89 Faisalabad), Maulana Mohammad Asif and Ikhlaq Ahmed of SSP/ASWJ (NA-90 Jhang), Azhar Husain Kazmi of MWM (PP-42 Jhang), Malik Saeed Ahmed of SSP/ASWJ (PP78), Qari Sanaullah of SSP/ASWJ (PP-266 Layyah), Saifullah Khalid of SSP/ASWJ (NA-184), Malik Mohammad Aleem of SSP/ASWJ (PP-268 Bahawalpur), Rao Javed Iqbal of SSP/ASWJ (NA-186 and PP-269), Mohammad Ismail of SSP/ASWJ (PP-285 Rahim Yar Khan), Kazim Ali Haider of TJP (NA-180 Muzaffargarh), Ans Bin Malik of SSP/ASWJ (NA-180 and PP-260 Muzaffargarh), Arshad Siddiqi of SSP/ASWJ (NA-176 and PP-251 Muzaffargarh), Tayyab Farooqi of SSP/ASWJ (PP-252 Muzaffargarh), Qari Taj Saqib of SSP/ASWJ (NA-177 Muzaffargarh), Ashiq Hussain Bhoor of SSP/ASWJ (PP-261 Muzaffargarh), Arshad Leghari of JI (NA-177 and PP-255 Muzaffargarh), Syed Ali Haider Zaidi of SMP (NA-178 Muzaffargarh), Sabir Hussain of SSP/ASWJ (PP-225 Muzaffargarh), Mohammad Tayab of SSP/ASWJ (PP-259 Muzaffargarh), Mohammad Anwarul Haq of SSP/ASWJ (PP-247 Rajanpur), Dr Abdul Rauf of SSP/ASWJ (PP-248 Rajanpur), Tariq Mahmood of SSP/ASWJ (PP-249 Rajanpur), and Mohammad Tahir of SSP/ASWJ (PP-250 Rajanpur). The PML-N has issued a party ticket to Sardar Ebad Dogar, of the banned Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, for NA-178 constituency.

Approached for comments, a spokesman of the Election Commission of Pakistan clarified that the scrutiny of the candidates was the job of the returning officers who represent the judiciary

The responsibility is clearly indicated. Shouldn't there be a Sao Moto in this case? OR the intent is to let it happen?

The liberal parties ANP, MQM, PPP and APML are terrorized while the PML(N) and Tehrik are acceptable to Taliban. Watch out,

unknowingly, your vote could lead to a terrorist infested Parliament or even, the Government.

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Saturday, May 11, 2013

Election between pro- or anti-Taliban forces

The centrist/liberal are attacked and harassed, candidates killed, justice made a joke and revenge is prevalent

As this article appears you may be preparing to cast your vote. As I sat down to collect my thoughts for this article I noticed a headline on the front page of a newspaper: "ANP candidate and son shot dead in Karachi." A lot of blood continued to be shed afterwards.

Terrorist actions continued. The Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and even the All Pakistan Muslim League (APML) have been targets of terror and injustice in every possible way. These centrist political parties are traditionally tolerant, progressive and hail from the middle classes. The Awami National Party (ANP) has lost most lives, the MQM is a close second followed by the PPP and APML. While the APML has not yet lost lives but its office bearers have been kidnapped, offices attacked, women harassed and workers jailed and injured. Above all, the treatment meted out to the APML chief, Syed Pervez Musharraf, makes fair-minded people hang their heads in shame, even if they had differences with him. The so-called 'justice' appears more like 'revenge'.

The ANP, MQM and PPP have lost lives and property; they are old parties and have the resilience to continue and contest elections, but the APML, not even three years old, found it impossible with their leader in Adiala Jail and cut off from all public contact. He is restrained from contesting elections and from public access. One judge in Peshawar has gone beyond his legal jurisdiction and powers to declare Musharraf disqualified for life! When a judge goes beyond his powers he is only showing an inclination for revenge and one is reminded of the expression 'kangaroo courts'. Therefore, the APML has announced its decision to boycott the elections 2013, although it had over 100 candidates for the National Assembly and some 300 for the Provincial Assemblies. The Awami Tehrik of Dr Tahirul Qadri also announced a boycott a long time ago.

Only two parties have been able to campaign peacefully. It seems they have a clear understanding with the Taliban, their associates and terror outfits. Seemingly, a part of the Taliban system is the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), and its support of the Taliban has been continuous for over 15 years. It funded Jamat ud Dawa, a banned outfit, with the Punjab government budget; it greets the terrorists when they are released from jails, supports their families, and has given a party ticket to one of them.

I am reminded of the experience of a very distinguished barrister who was asked by a terrorist to take up his cases. Here is the story: a heavily built, and heavily bearded man walked into the office of the barrister and wanted to engage him for defence against any objections to his candidature. The barrister asked the 'candidate' if he had ever been convicted. The candidate denied that. The barrister asked if there were any cases, past or present. The candidate said, "Yes, but no conviction." The barrister took notes and took some time for deliberation. The candidate went away with his formidable entourage of SUVs and lethal weapon bearers. The barrister investigated and found out that the candidate had never been convicted because there were no witnesses. He also found out that over 10 witnesses against the candidate had been murdered before they could record evidence. The barrister decided not to take this case.

The PML-N has support of such powerful elements so that it carries its campaign peacefully. The PPP seems bent to expose this party with published evidence but the PPP itself is under attack and handicapped by its extremely poor performance, internal split, and lack of unifying leadership.

The other party carrying out its campaign energetically is Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). The PTI is safe from terrorists because it sympathises with the Taliban thinking and Taliban issues. At this time he needs power and can promise anything to get it. He also has the advantage of minimum baggage from the past. Intermittently, he keeps issuing statements to appease the Taliban outfits. He speaks against drones, and the war on terror. He has also included his prayer pictures in publicity, to reinforce a 'rightist' image. He has built up a campaign and motivated the urban voter. His accidental fall was unfortunate; it hurt him but not his vote bank.

Therefore, the fight is symbolically between the 'bat' and the 'cat' (the lion belongs to the cat family), or in Urdu 'balla vs billi'. The two parties of the 'right' on one side, and the centrist, liberal, and tolerant parties on the other. The latter group are a target of terror, oppression, and suppression. The rightists and pro-Taliban have a complete free hand.

The centrist/liberal are attacked and harassed, candidates killed, justice made a joke and revenge is prevalent! Rightists and extremists have full freedom in electoral campaigns, and recorded terrorists are allowed to contest. This is the reality of the 'free and fair' elections promised to us by the Election Commission and the interim government for 2013.

Still, go and vote. Take your best choice. If that is not available then take the second best and if you do not even find that then put your vote in the cancelled vote list! Even that is one way of expressing your will but vote one should. A cancelled vote will show your lack of confidence in the system or support of the boycotting parties, i.e. the APML and Awami Tehrik.

In any case, the listed and recorded terrorists who are contesting elections must be noted. I gave that list in my article last week. Do not vote for them, unless you support them or share their thinking and want them to win.

At the end of the day, when the result comes in, it may indicate a hung parliament. No one party with a clear mandate. If the PTI succeeds and gets more seats than the others, it can claim a share in the government. However the 'change' so heavily publicised may only be towards 'Talibanisation'. The best part could be if a new government with PTI can check the massive syndicate of the corruption mafia, and control revengeful courts to ensure justice.

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Saturday, May 18, 2013

Elections, neither fair nor free!

Remember: It was a smaller allegation of rigging in 1977 when the PNA movement brought Bhutto's government down and martial law was imposed

Elections 2013 are over but there are many open questions to be answered. The voters had a 'hope' this time, hope in the eyes and hope in the body language. Hope that had not been seen since 1970. It was Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's campaign in 1970 for the then Pakistan People's Party that brought hope to the poor masses of the country and they voted for 'change'. The change occurred. Whether that change was consolidated or used for betterment is a matter that can be debated, but the undeniable fact is that Bhutto's campaign raised a hope that was not seen in the masses for four decades, until this year, 2013. This time there was hope in the eyes of the young voters, in the eyes of women, and in the eyes of the urban middle class, which hardly ever voted before. This hope was generated by Imran Khan and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf. It was a sterling contribution because the people must have hope of fairness in the system and in their country to become a 'nation'.

On the morning of the May 11, 2013, it was refreshing to see young people dressed up, smiles on their faces, headed towards the polling stations with twinkling eyes. They knew they were going to bring a change in the country and make it a better place to inhabit. The queues of voters started to form well before the polling time and hundreds of voters — men and women, young and old, healthy and sick on wheel chairs — waited with hope to change their country's system for betterment. These were mostly the 'new voters' who had rushed early. The conventional voter comes late. The new voter had raised the percentage of the turnout from the previous 40 percent to about 60 percent of votes cast.

But the disappointments were to set in, deeper as the night set in. By the next morning a lot of hope of the new voter was shattered. Credible stories of rigging, mismanagement, and highhandedness prevailed. Several candidates who seemed to be winning as the results

came in on TV in the evening were found to be *unsuccessful* when voters woke up in the morning. What happened is the question to which an answer is to be found.

The allegations of rigging and mismanagement are *easily believed* because people know from experience that this happens. But in *modern* day and time proofs are also available. If readers are interested then look at the social media and the internet. In particular the *internet link* <http://propakistani.pk/2013/05/11/election-rigging-videos-and-images-go-viral-on-social-media/>

This link has several titles, photographs and videos: 1. Man Opening, Rigging the Ballot Box in NA-251. 2. Clear Video of Election Rigging from NA-219 (Hyderabad) 3. Female Voters Presenting Bangles to Police 4. Fake Voter Caught in Lahore 5. Election Rigging Caught by Rangers 6. Poll Rigging in NA251 (Karachi) 7. Ballot Boxes Kicked and Falling Apart On Roads. 8. Election Rigging in Punjab. 9. Lady Protesting and Shouting over Rigging Incidents in Karachi. 10. Rigging Exposed. 11. Karachi Police sleeping during Polling. 12. Election Rigging Video from NA-253 (Karachi). 13. Another Election Rigging Video from Karachi. 14. Ballot Books Found on Karachi Roads. 15. Ballot Papers Spread on Roads in Karachi. 16. Ballot Box and Papers in the fields.

These are mostly from Karachi but in the following days the reports of incidents in Punjab and other provinces including Waziristan have taken over. A demand has been made for re-polling or recounting in almost 40 constituencies; whereas 49 polling stations had more than 100 percent turnout!

The claim to the fairness of the polls is exposed. Free polls! How can any poll be called distantly free if the applicants are disqualified or qualified arbitrarily? There are instances of glaring discrimination in the application of article 62 and 63 of the constitution. It has been clearly demonstrated that the returning officers, who were members of the judiciary, let 56 identified terrorists pass the test of scrutiny under clause 62/63 of the constitution, while the APML chief Syed Pervez Musharraf was disqualified under the same clauses. The judge in Peshawar was so overridden by prejudice that he declared a ban on Musharraf for life, a decision completely beyond his scope and reflective of the prejudice that he and some of his colleagues hold. Arbitrarily,

many returning officers asked irrelevant, frivolous, prejudiced and embarrassing questions to female candidates who wished to contest.

There were hundreds of workers killed in bomb blasts on different political parties' rallies. Some workers, even candidates, were killed or abducted. Threats to candidates and workers were given by the Taliban and other extreme groups. So where was the claimed 'freedom' of elections or electorate or the candidates? And what happened to the condition of 25 percent mandatory vote by women?

There is now a growing protest across the country. The Election Commission (EC) must wake up and stop behaving like an ostrich. The EC has so far only taken minimum cognizance, like re-polling in 42 polling stations of NA 250 Karachi. But there are about 40 constituencies that have been disputed by one party or the other.

Remember: It was a smaller allegation of rigging in 1977 when the PNA movement brought Bhutto's government down and martial law was imposed. The movement was launched by the danda bardar parties of the rightwing who demonstrated support to Ziaul Haq. The protest was followed by the darkest period in the history of Pakistan.

It is a wakeup call for the EC. Wake up please. The hope of change and betterment when taken away from the voters is not just sad, it deeply damages one's faith. The EC must redress the grievances. If a candidate genuinely loses, then the supporters are mature enough to understand, and realise that there is more work to be done. But they cannot accept rigging as a part of life. Corruption is exactly what the people of Pakistan are fighting against. Their patience should not be tested for too long. Protests can get ugly and destructive.

If necessary let the army conduct elections in the disputed constituencies.

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Saturday, May 25, 2013

Taliban have got it

The Taliban are not willing to lay down arms; they do not accept Pakistan's constitution and they do not believe in democracy!

A couple of weeks before elections I had written that this election seemed to be between the pro-Taliban political parties and the anti-Taliban political parties. Those in the good books of the Taliban were able to run their election campaign freely and the ones who opposed them were harassed, bombed and even killed. Neither the interim government could make it a level playing field for all nor could the election commission and its support system do anything. Thus we got an election that was neither 'free' nor 'fair', and now it needs 'repair'.

Here are some realities.

Sometime ago, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan agreed to conditional negotiations. However, they needed the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the Jamaat-e-Islami as the guarantors for any possible agreement. So these are the three chosen political parties in Pakistan that have the confidence of the Taliban. Why are these the 'chosen' ones? The reason is not hard to find.

The PML-N has never spoken against the Taliban; on the contrary it supported the Taliban branches, including the banned Jamaat-ud-Dawa openly, and also financially through one of the budgets of Punjab. The PML-N also gave a ticket for the National Assembly election to a Taliban leader.

The PTI has never spoken against the Taliban or their activities, and instead have always justified their actions by saying that it is 'not our war', although 40,000 men and women who died were all Pakistanis. The PTI sidelined the issue by condemning drone attacks, and thus toeing the line of the Taliban.

The Jamaat-e-Islami did all of the above and cried hoarse demanding more negotiations, knowing fully well that each time

negotiations were carried out there was no result and the ensuing time was used by the Taliban commanders for regrouping and mounting fresh attacks.

Now that the PML-N, PTI and Jamaat-e-Islami are firmly entrenched, there should be every possibility of successful peace negotiations between the Taliban/terrorists and the chosen guarantors.

How will this work is something tricky. The Taliban are not willing to lay down arms; they do not accept Pakistan's constitution and they do not believe in democracy! So is this going to be a negotiation between one armed group and the other unarmed? It is just like surrender. Then are we going to give up democracy and adopt a 'caliphate' monarchy? This is not entirely a farfetched idea because Mr Nawaz Sharif was ready to move constitutional changes when he had the two-thirds majority in the National Assembly. This time it may not be that easy because he has only a simple majority, but if all the three parties mentioned above agree then the possibility cannot be ignored. If, in the worst case scenario, this happens then Mr Sharif must realise that there will be no guarantee of his being the 'caliph'. That 'throne' can very well be taken over by the Taliban!

In all seriousness how can these parties that are soft on the Taliban and terrorism accept the fact that most attacks target mosques? How can they reconcile with the fact that most of the persons who die are kalima-reciting Muslims? How can they reconcile with the fact that the lethal attacks are on Pakistan's armed forces that are the backbone of national defence? And how do they reconcile with the fact that children are turned into suicide bombers by the Taliban trainers?

Terrorism has nothing to do with religion, and least of all with Islam. Terrorists 'use' religion and promote the drug and gun mafia. Lawlessness helps in their objectives so they create law and order situations. Then they play the bigger game of serving the enemy countries, such countries whose interest is served by keeping Pakistan unstable and unable to take advantage of its strategic location and natural resources.

If the three political parties and also the other MMA constituents made their dubious statements for elections only to pacify the terrorists and run their campaigns peacefully, then they have achieved their goal. Now it is time to be honest with themselves, and the nation. The only

terms of negotiations can be total stoppage of terrorist activity, and laying down of arms by all Taliban and associates. In return their genuine grievances should be speedily addressed. Speedy system of justice must be provided. The areas where development has been denied over decades, like Waziristan and parts of Balochistan, should be developed on a war footing. These are only a few remedies, surely there will be more. Can these parties in the government rise to the occasion and achieve an understanding for peace?

If one remembers the pre-election days a jarring statement appeared from a party of the extreme right saying that all Shias should be declared a 'minority'! Subsequent to that, the ameer of the Jamaat-e-Islami took a big leap and said all persons of 'liberal' thinking should be declared a 'minority'. If such mindsets are carried over to governance then one cannot expect any good. For a national approach these parties will need to learn to be inclusive rather than exclusive.

Recently, the Chief of Army Staff has spent over three hours with Mr Sharif. There must have been very important issues to be understood, particularly the understanding on the law and order situation. General Kayani has owned the war on terror as Pakistan's war. Would the third time PM understand it and revise his stand? He is known for confrontational attitudes. His men attacked the Supreme Court and tried to destroy the discipline of the armed forces. He confronted every institution domestically including the presidency, although he bowed down to the then president of the US, Bill Clinton. Much time has passed since his last stint in power and one would like to hope that he has used this time for some soul searching and to attain maturity in political attitudes. One can only hope that he shows growth from the style of Gawalmandi 'turf' wars to political sagacity, show statesmanship, graciousness and honesty beyond any personal agenda. If this happens, then he may succeed in leading this troubled nation to peace and even prosperity.

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Saturday, June 01, 2013

'Change', is it there? Or will it be there? — I

The new voters were different from the conventional voters who had only expected a change of face, continuance of the status quo, and of the miseries as always

On May 11, 2013, the Election Day, an important change was noticed all over Pakistan. This 'change' was the fact that a large number of voters from all segments of society came out to vote. The voting percentage went to an all-time high of 55 percent. The new voters were young, old, literate, illiterate, urban, rural, male, female, and even the sick and invalids. This was something extraordinary and good for 'democracy'. The voters believed that the power of their vote could bring change. The new voters were different from the conventional voters who had only expected a change of face, continuance of the status quo, and of the miseries as always. The new voter had hope of more and significant change unlike the conventional voter.

Elections are now over and the governments will be formed soon. It is time to think if the change was only a romantic idea or could there be something real as well in play here.

What are the changes that the voters would like to see in the governance of the newly-elected governments?

Regular people would want regular power supply to be available to all at reasonable rates. This is the change that almost everyone wants. The previous government had miserably failed to provide electricity and it became the major reason for its downfall. Although some Pakistan People's Party stalwarts did a lot of development work in their constituencies and hoped to win because of that performance. It did not happen. Yousaf Raza Gilani, Raja Pervez Ashraf, and Firdaus Ashiq Awan are some of the examples. The voter showed more concern about the national plight caused by the power shortage than their local conveniences provided by the candidates. It is an evidence of a 'national' outlook instead of a 'local' one. This change in attitude is heartening. However, the expectation of any major change in power supply is

definitely going to be short of expectations. No government, however well-meaning it may be, whatever its promises may be, can provide full power supply according to the needs of the nation in less than 30 months. If they try to do that then they will burden the nation with a huge debt on adverse conditions, from lending agencies like the IMF, which will create even bigger problems later on.

At present the new government's best option seems to be a combination of several actions if it really wants lasting and adequate change in the power sector. For immediate relief, they should accept the Saudi offer of oil supply at deferred payment basis, provided the strings attached are tolerable. Let us be clear: all 'help' has a quid pro quo as the underlying factor. Would the Saudis expect some concessions on behalf of a world power? Would it want a change in our foreign policy towards Iran? There could be other factors but these two are the most tricky. If the Saudi help means that the delaying tactics be adopted in implementing China-Gawadar contracts or delay in the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline and supply, then the offer is too tricky and almost unacceptable. In our relations with other countries absolute priority must be given to our neighbouring countries. I also include India and Afghanistan in this list. It will depend on the negotiating skills of the Nawaz Sharif government as to how well it handles this issue. Presuming that this government succeeds in providing some other favours, and our regional priorities are not disturbed then it will be a laudable success. In this situation substantial power can be generated within six months by the full functioning of already installed capacity and supplemented by the existing potential of hydel power. The relief will make the nation happy. However, this arrangement must be supported by the speedy development of power-generation through the Iran-Pak gas pipeline, and improvements in the existing dams to increase generation. It should be done before the end of the three-year period when the payback to Saudi Arabia starts. Power generation by Iran gas and hydel resources will rationalise the per-unit cost and enable the country to pay for the Saudi oil.

To me this is the scenario. It will take the necessary time. In the meantime, fair and equitable distribution of electricity presently generated should bring some relief and the nation will have to live with it. One should not expect more change than that.

The next priority is change for better in the law and order situation. There is no doubt that the law and order situation in the country has deteriorated so much that a lot of people live in fear with a sense of insecurity. Some crime is present in every part of the world. But when life starts getting paralysed, more often than not, then the matter needs very serious attention and the strong will of the law enforcing agencies. A change in the deteriorated law and order situation is something that must be on the priority list of the expected change in the minds of voters when they went to cast their votes. Is it something that they should expect now? Surely, it should be expected but what is a realistic expectation? If some voters thought that Imran Khan will change everything because he had somehow become a symbol of change, even then in reality to achieve it to perfection would not have been possible. The fact is that the basic assumption of the 'tsunami' sweeping him into power was unrealistic. Assuming that the 25 national assembly seats where rigging is suspected could have been won by Khan, he still would not have been in majority in the National Assembly. So his contribution now will be primarily in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Considering the latest drone attack on Thursday and Taliban's withdrawal of the invitation for talks, little progress can be expected in the near future. However, the law and order question is not limited to the Taliban only. There are several other factors that need to be analysed.

(To be continued)

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Saturday, June 08, 2013

'Change': is it there? Or will it be there? — II

Returning to the law and order challenge, the current government subscribes to the logic of the necessity of negotiations

I have already talked about the expected 'change' in the power crisis. A major change is not possible immediately. However, some relief by equitable distribution of the available resources can be achieved. I would also want to add here that if the line losses and thefts can be controlled, the situation may further improve.

Now we continue with the question of change in the 'law and order' situation. The law and order situation has deteriorated due to several factors. However, generally in the public perception 'terrorism' is the main cause. Terrorism, as we have seen in the last decade, has become synonymous with the 'Taliban'. Most of the people in Pakistan are religiously-oriented. Therefore, they can be easily deceived in the name of religion. The situation further deteriorates because a majority does not have a direct understanding of the Holy Quran and the Sunnah. Their understanding is through some 'maulvi' (local priest) who claims to have a better knowledge and passes on his version and interpretation. Those who have perpetrated terrorism in Pakistan have propagated it as a service to religion. In fact, it is far from that and the resultant terrorism is serving the opposite intent. Obviously, massive killings by attacks on mosques, schools, bazaars and other popular places cannot be the purpose of any religion, leave alone Islam. Islam is a symbol of 'salamati' (wellbeing). It is not in the spirit of Islam to shed blood aimlessly. In fact, it is strictly forbidden. Terrorism progresses on the basis of the need of desperate adventurers. Such groups need lawlessness, freedom for illicit trade, ransom, subversion, and an atmosphere of fear. Terrorism is not to be mixed up with street crime. Street crime is different and may even be a byproduct of terrorism.

Terrorism has now become a generic name for the destruction originating from the Taliban. But if analysed carefully, one finds that even the 'Taliban' has become a 'cover name' and within the so-called 'Taliban' there are several factions with different intent. They all hide

under the name of Islam, but perpetuate only their favourite brand of what they call Islamic practice. Under this cover are those who promote the Salafi, Tayyabi, extremist Sunni, extremist Shia cults, paid saboteurs, paid mercenaries, drug and arms mafias and crime syndicates. All of them have one common purpose and that is to weaken the state control and get operational elbow room. They attack the law enforcing agencies as their favourite target. They attack religious institutions to threaten the free religious groups to keep them in line for political support. They attack businesses to show their power and seek submission to their extortion efforts.

Then there are also terrorists in the garb of the Taliban who assert their point of view or cult and attack schools. They use all tools of destruction, and the worst of these are suicide attacks. Suicide attacks were invented in the World War Two by maniac dictators to get out of desperate situations, and now these have been adopted by the Taliban. Suicide bombers are prepared by systematic brainwashing of the young who are procured by offering incentives. There is a system of procuring these young people; however, that is another subject.

Returning to the law and order challenge, the current government subscribes to the logic of the necessity of negotiations. This logic has been promoted by the pro-Taliban rightist political parties. In principle there is nothing wrong with negotiated settlements. A settlement by discussions is much better than an armed conflict. But is it realistic to expect a negotiated settlement with the factions of the so-called Taliban?

What are the stumbling blocks? These are: 1. How to identify the person or group with a following amongst all the groups? 2. Can the special interest Taliban who look for mafia-like gains subscribe to any agreement? 3. Would the talks be without preconditions? 4. Would the Taliban lay down arms as a goodwill gesture? 5. Would they accept Pakistan's constitution? So on and so forth. There are many difficulties in the way. However, considering the best scenario, a limited success can be achieved if those Taliban who are not breaking the law to extort money, and who are not part of the other mafias, and in fact misled by narrow interpretations of Islam, can be convinced that Islam is a peaceful religion and by involving themselves in bloodshed they are actually committing a sin. If they can be fully convinced that the power of Islam is in promoting love, in peace, and in knowledge, it will be a

great success. Religious scholars will need to fully support the political endeavour. If this is achieved, and the 'converts' come into the mainstream religion, it will bring some peace and improvement in law and order and it will be a credit to the government. It is also possible that the ethnic killing be reduced, and, most important, the 'cover' over atrocities in the name of Islam removed. Other groups who stay out of the possible negotiated settlements will be gangs of criminals who need to be dealt with the force of arms by the law enforcing agencies. In conclusion: 'some' improvement can be expected but major relief and a real change can occur only with successful negotiations and strong law enforcing activity.

Then the other big challenge that has eaten into the fabric of national morality is 'corruption'. In the very early days of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam, in his address to the Constituent Assembly, pointed out that the eradication of this menace is to be given top priority. Can the new government take up the challenge with some success? The challenge of corruption may, in fact, be at the root of all the bigger problems that we are confronted with today. A serious effort to understand the 'roots' and the 'need' of corruption must be understood to assess the possibility of change.

(To be continued)

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Saturday, June 15, 2013

'Change', is it there? Or will it be there? — III

Unfortunately, we have become a nation that wants short cuts. We do not want to wait for our turn

Corruption has a long history in the subcontinent. Now it has been stated by the new government that the eradication of corruption from the system is a top priority. Let us look at the history of corruption and the options available to this government.

It is said that institutional corruption was started by the British administration in the railways department. Part of the cargo in the trains used to be fresh vegetables and fruits. The senders gave about four annas per lot for transportation to the destination by the first available train. The 'charge' was known to the chain of all concerned, up to the top. The pool of money was discreetly divided among all at a pre-set percentage. At the time of independence the system had developed and spread all over. Corruption had become such a deeply rooted malaise that Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah took notice of it in his first speech as the president of the Constituent Assembly.

The Quaid said: "One of the biggest curses from which India is suffering — I do not say that other countries are free from it, but, I think our condition is much worse — is bribery and corruption. That really is a poison. We must put that down with an iron hand and I hope that you will take adequate measures as soon as it is possible for this Assembly to do so."

Since then all governments have promised to 'eliminate' corruption, but in reality, it has grown fast and big. It is no longer a matter of four annas, it is now a matter of millions and multi-millions in different forms of corruption. Corruption runs in the system as blood runs in our veins. Still the new Prime Minister promises to get rid of it! Almost certainly he will fail, good intentions notwithstanding.

I recall that some years ago I was planning to set up an industry and a very experienced chartered accountant advised me to allocate a certain

percentage as 'speed money'. Obviously, this was the money to get the project through and make the files move.

The 'need' for what we call 'bribery' in crude terms is actually 'speed money' for efficiency. Or it is used to get a favourable decision for the applicant, irrespective of him deserving it or not. If the stakes are high then huge amounts are involved. I do not need to say that huge amounts of money exchange hands in the process of getting lucrative contracts.

Another form is extortion by a person in authority in order to provide a legally valid or invalid relief, like letting a criminal get away, or putting your file on top. There are several other avenues like money-laundering, pursuit of justice, passing examinations, etc. Even human relations are less than honest now.

The maximum that the new, in fact, the third time prime minister can possibly do is to restrain his ministers and key bureaucrats. And even that would be an achievement.

Unfortunately, we have become a nation that wants short cuts. We do not want to wait for our turn. We do not trust the individuals in the system to give us our turn. We do not care if we edge out the deserving. We feel we are the only deserving ones. There is a combination of ego, insensitivity, selfishness and greed, and the desire to show off. The 'giver' and the 'taker' both suffer from this sickness. We are a greedy people. We are not poor, we think we are poor. Contentment is lost. For the rich, the more they get, the more they want! Finally, the perfected system of rigging in elections is large scale corruption to cheat the nation.

To control corruption, a long term strategy of social reform is needed. Salary structures for the functionaries in government should be rationalized, so that those who still have a conscience are not forced to compromise. The price of efficiency should be officially laid down as the 'urgent' fee, so that such fees go to the public exchequer. Some incentive should be given to those who put in extra effort to attain speedy work. Like in the US, paid 'lobbying' should be recognised. It should replace sifarash (endorsement). Lobbyists should be clearly known to be lobbying on a taxable payment. It is like lawyers presenting a case.

In the education system a new curriculum must be introduced up to class 10. It should focus on social responsibility; literacy; understanding

everyday technical work, like domestic electricity repair, plumbing, computers, particularly Urdu and English typing; understanding of Haqooq ullah (rights of God) and Haqooq-ul-Ibad (rights of people), hygiene and food. People should be encouraged to have qana'at instead of greed, and young people should understand right from wrong and be firm about the distinction. There is no doubt most of it needs to be learnt at home, but if the 'home' was doing its duty then society would not be so corrupt. If people experience that short cuts are not necessary, and if they take their turn they will get the reward, then the disorderliness and impatience will reduce. We need to learn to stand in the queue, and the queue needs to be respected.

The answer to reduction in corruption will only be found with patience and long term planning for a social and moral renaissance. I do not doubt the intent of the politicians in power but I am doubtful about their ability. Anyone who has power also has the ability for coercion, nepotism, favouritism and bribery. Corruption is required even to get your legitimate rights from those who have a measure of power. In our system all politics is for power and not genuinely for service to people.

A long time ago, late Justice S A Rahman while travelling with me in a car quoted: "All power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." This saying is a historical truth. Can Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif change it? He has almost absolute power. Let us see what he does with 'power' and what 'power' does to him.

(Concluded)

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Saturday, June 22, 2013

Painful messages from Balochistan

When groups pick up arms, kill human beings, challenge the writ of the nation and its government, then all security agencies are to be supported for a war for the elimination of such elements

The messages were definitely shocking. We read of blasts and terror attacks on a daily basis. The morbid routine has created a sort of numbness and insensitivity to the senseless killings every day. But the two incidents in one day in Balochistan, earlier this week, cannot be ignored and they call for action.

Most shocking to me in concept was the destruction of Mohammad Ali Jinnah's last abode in Ziarat. Why destroy a revered part of historical significance? Does the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) believe that by doing so they have 'liberated' Balochistan? By burning a graceful, classical building and priceless artifacts and memorabilia, have the separatists earned any respect? The answer to both these questions is a clear no. Then what was the purpose of this abominable act? Obviously, the message is to make a statement that they, the BLA, cannot tolerate a symbol of Pakistan on the soil of the province they have set out to 'liberate'. What is Hairbayer Marri setting himself to achieve? The BLA has by this act only earned the hate of millions. They have damaged their own cause. The BLA is said to have a total of 500 recruits. If they want to wage a war against Pakistan the result is written on the wall.

If Mr Nisar Ali Khan, the new Minister of Interior, wants to do more than a display of histrionics then he must confront the challenge courageously. I hope he has ideas but let me share a few suggestions.

The Interior Minister must take in hand the restoration of the Ziarat monument immediately. I want to clarify that I am asking for 'restoration' not renovation. Restoration requires special expertise, research, and full financial support of government as well as its archeology department. Restoration to the original condition has been done in other places. Particularly in the UK, monuments destroyed by

accident or malicious intent have been restored to the original with success. It can be done here also if there is a 'will'. I would like to hope that a 'Muslim League', of whatever faction, owes it to the Quaid-e-Azam. This is the action necessary for the physical renaissance of the monument. But there should be a moral statement as well. The Interior Minister and the Pakistan government should provide iron-clad security to the monument as well as the people living in the city of Ziarat. It is also Jinnah's city. It should be made a model of good living and lawfulness. The city should require all residents to hoist the Pakistan flag prominently at their houses. All public places should fly the Pakistan flag and display Quaid's portraits. There should be absolute security provisions and special tourism arrangements. It is a holiday resort and should become Pakistan's most popular and safe resort. Its development should be symbolic. The BLA burnt one flag, there should be thousands of flags all over Ziarat. The BLA burnt the physical residency; let us develop the city Ziarat in a way that the Quaid may reside in every heart.

The other painful message was physical brutality. It came from the killings of girl students in Quetta in a bus, and the killing of several others in the hospital, including government officials. This time the suicide bomber in the bus was a female. The terrorists had prepared fully and taken positions in the hospital to complete their criminal assignment. The responsibility for this mass murder was taken by the notorious Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), to its eternal shame. LeJ is a banned organisation that specialises in targeting the Shia Muslims. I often wonder what government means by 'ban'. Is it just file work that they complete? Is something to be done to eliminate the banned elements? When groups pick up arms, kill human beings, challenge the writ of the nation and its government, then all security agencies, including the armed forces and paramilitary set-ups are to be supported for a war for the elimination of such elements. No compromise. Sri Lanka has done it, Britain has done it, Russia has done it. There has to be no tolerance, repeat, no tolerance of such elements. In any case, government and its representative interior ministry will act as the most timid creatures if they fail in their responsibility to protect the people, and fall shy of giving hundred percent support to the law-enforcing arms of government. The interior minister promptly responded by visiting Quetta and fixing the responsibility on the law-enforcing agencies but

the situation needs more than rhetoric. Politicians' idea of 'negotiations' in this case has little value.

The bullets can only be negotiated with bullets Mr Prime Minister. So stand up and do what is needed at the moment.

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Saturday, June 29, 2013

Trial under Article Six and 25 of Constitution

If looked at carefully, PM Sharif will also need to stand in the dock as an abettor, supporter and beneficiary of the worst martial law in our history

Mr Nawaz Sharif announced in the National Assembly on June 24, 2013 that his government would support the trial of General (Retd) Syed Pervez Musharraf for treason. Sharif has very few options in the current scenario and it seems he desperately needs a diversion from the problems his government is facing right at the start. The massacre in Quetta, attack in Ziarat, foreign mountaineers' killings in Fairy Meadows, blast in a Shia Mosque in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and requesting the IMF for a loan are shockers for a bewildered nation. The third time PM does not know where to look. Then he found an escape: the Musharraf trial! He made the announcement, and bingo, it hit the bull's eye. All failures of the new government were, for the time being, washed off by the media. Hamid Mir and his like spew venom to their heart's content. They declared Musharraf guilty even before the trial. In short, all kinds of 'headlines' changed. Government failures, terror attacks, questionable budget, power breakdowns and everything else became secondary. The Finance Minister got a break to quietly extend the deadline for the IMF payment. IMF is no friend of Musharraf anyway because his government paid the loans and refused any new ones.

The work-style of the third time PM is no different from his two earlier terms. He must pick up a quarrel as a habit. His earlier terms are remembered for attacks on courts and army chiefs, and now the attack is on a former president. So there is no surprise, the third time 'new' PM is the same as before.

Now let us look at the substance of Sharif's announcement. He threw in words like 'constitutional requirement' and 'answerable for his deeds', etc. Everyone is answerable for their deeds in the eyes of the law of the country. So will be PM Sharif. But then 'everyone' means everyone, justice cannot be and should not be selective. This is what is clear in Article 25 of the constitution. Selective justice is neither justice

nor credible in the eyes of the world. So it has to be for all who have violated the constitution or abetted and supported the violation. The slate is to be cleaned from 1958 and every one of the 'abettors and supporters' have to be in the dock. Also, how can law be enforced only when the National Assembly members are sent home and not when thousands of innocent people are killed by terrorists and violations become a routine for the corrupt?

As for the analysis done by competent legal minds on TV networks, justice will demand that all those who violated the constitution in any way, including abrogation, should be tried along with supporters and abettors. In the National Assembly this was hinted at by Khursheed Shah, but he soon lost his point in the frivolous demand of removing photographs! Once again trying to punish all those they dislike before a trial! A very strange attitude from the so-called 'law makers'. The most hurtful act was the hanging of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and I hope that when Shah mentioned all dictators, he actually included the dictator who hanged Bhutto, and those who lost half the country and their abettors and supporters.

The real fact is that PM Sharif has earned a short-term escape from the realities of his early failures, but the trial of Musharraf is not as simple as some simpletons think. If looked at carefully, PM Sharif will also need to stand in the dock as an abettor, supporter and beneficiary of the worst martial law in our history. He owes his political career to Ziaul Haq and no one else. Also in the dock should be all those members of the judiciary who validated the suppression of the constitution at different times. Then there will be members of the armed forces to queue in the dock along with other civil servants and politicians. The list is long and may even include those who distributed sweets when politicians were gotten rid of and those who supported the referendum, including Imran Khan, several journalists and media men. If we are going back to 1958 for cleansing then shouldn't we recall the support given to General Ayub Khan by Bhutto? I personally remember Bhutto's powerful speeches supporting General Khan against Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah.

This cleansing, then, should be done thoroughly and completely. The law must be enforced in all areas. PM Sharif must immediately enforce the law and order, from traffic violations to millions of dollars corruption, billions of money laundering, the constant terror attacks,

and corruption in religious sects, the judiciary, journalists, civil servants and men in uniform. Law should be enforced on rapists, big-time thieves of electricity, blackmailers, kidnappers, holders of unexplained huge assets in foreign countries, tax evaders, land grabbers, smugglers, drug mafias, etc. This list is still not complete. It may never be complete because new avenues will be discovered by criminal minds, maybe like cyber crime.

There is a lot to do to become a 'born again' clean nation. The previous government must have taken stock of the complications and decided not to get involved in the trial exercise. PM Sharif had set out his priorities as provision of electricity to the public, enforcement of law and order and control of terrorism and improvement in economy. He has made no headway so far in these public interest matters except the issuance of 'statements' and 'condemnations'. The offers of oil supply and bonds to get rid of circular debt have vanished.

I evaluated the third term PM's chances of success as slim in my articles earlier. His slogans worked no more than election ploys. His priorities have changed now. 'Service to nation is abandoned, and personal vendetta in the garb of total cleansing has taken over.

One wonders how far it would take him!

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Saturday, July 06, 2013

What a budget!

What needs to be seen is that the house owners are already paying property tax on their houses. How can there be double taxation on the same property?

A good thing has happened! Mr Najam Sethi has emerged as the most suitable 'interim' something for everything! He can be an interim chief minister and bring luck to Mr Nawaz Sharif. He can be the interim chairman of cricket board and do something good to it. Mr Sethi clearly said that he had been a bowler and a batsman in school. There you go. He could have been an interim finance minister too. I am sure Mr Sethi has done some additions and subtractions in school. He could have been the interim finance minister and performed better in making the budget.

My real problem is the budget presented by the finance minister of the third time 'new' prime minister (PM). I have yet to meet a person who has liked this budget. Of course, it is laden with direct and indirect taxation. Life of the common man is increasingly difficult. All promises made pre-election of serving the 'people', bringing in law and order, providing electricity and improving economy are shamelessly forgotten, and, we have once again landed in the lap of the IMF with a begging bowl.

The circulating jokes in the SMS world sometimes reflect what the people think. A recent joke says: "Khoon Zardari pee gaya, gosht 'Sher' khaa gaya or khaal tou hae he Shaukat Khanum kae liyae!" (Blood was sucked by Zardari, flesh eaten by the 'Lion' and of course the skin is for Shaukat Khanum'). This is a true reflection of what masses feel about our set-up of governance. The silence of the people in general is more telling than the odd analysis and criticism here and there.

Perhaps the cruelest, and even ridiculous, imposition is the house tax on Zone A. It is almost unbelievable that the Zone A classified as luxury housing exists only in Lahore and only in Gulberg, Model Town and Garden Town in Lahore! A luxury house is defined as the one or

two kanal (1000 square yards) or more in these areas and nowhere else. Although there are areas where actual luxury houses exist from eight to 80-kanal, and the price of land is equal or more than the so-called Zone A. Houses on two-kanal plots are common in many areas like Cantonment, 'General's colony', DHA, Canal Bank, Johar Town, Valencia, Bahria Town and so on and so forth. A media giant owns an 80-kanal luxurious house in one of these areas in the heart of the city.

On top of all this the huge holdings and houses of the PM's family in Model Town, Lahore are said to be exempted because these are being used for the 'larger interest' of the nation, i.e. being the residence of the chief minister, visiting rest house of the PM etc. How considerate! I am sure Mr Sethi would have given them good advice to not be so blatantly shameless, and for this he needed no more than the simple knowledge of school mathematics. Most of the people living in this area believe that this is a revenge against the residents of the area for not voting for the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz candidate. This is the constituency from where the PML-N candidate lost.

The crown of this budget is worn by Mr Ishaq Dar, and the rubber stamp approval has been provided by the 'large mandate' of the PML-N lawmakers who are not obliged to have any educational qualification whatsoever to qualify to become a 'law maker'! As this is what people get from such democracy, so they joke feeling helplessness.

Have another look at this Zone A taxation. It is an act of blatant discrimination and violation of the spirit of constitution. In fact, it should be a cognizable offence for punishment. How can this tax be applied indiscriminately and a preferential treatment be accorded to those who live outside the 'zone'? In the whole of the country they find only Model Town, Gulberg and Garden Town in this category. What happened to Mr Dar? Has he not seen any other area in the whole of Pakistan? I cannot believe it. Mr Dar has only tried to satisfy the vindictive nature of the boss by imposing tax on the areas his boss lost elections in.

Another legally valid question is about those who inherited the properties in these areas and are living in these with the roof on their head provided by their late elders. In most cases, the earnings of the occupants are modest and they cannot cough up this huge tax in hundreds of thousands of rupees. What are they supposed to do? The

PM once tried to become the Ameer-ul-Mominin by amending the constitution; now does he want his subjects in the Zone A to fall at his feet and beg for mercy for the crime of not voting for his party?

Finally, what needs to be seen is that the house owners are already paying property tax on their houses. How can there be double taxation on the same property?

I felt that there was some cautious hope from the new government, and that people realised that the country was faced with serious issues. Most of the people were prepared to be patient and bear some suffering if sincere efforts were made to alleviate the problems. But unfortunately, the new government is falling short of expectations too much and too soon. It needs to put its act together instead of seeking diversion of attention by such obviously bad taxation or by following the article six of the constitution against Syed Pervez Musharraf, which will be an unproductive exercise from the point of view of people at large. There are much bigger issues and the masses have given a clear mandate to the PML-N to solve national problems. Maybe this is PML-N's last chance to prove its worth.

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Saturday, July 13, 2013

Women on the poles

The fact is that the life of common people is so difficult and so burdened by problems that perhaps staying alive stops mattering

This is not about electoral polls. It is actually about electric poles. Some readers might have seen the photographs of a woman who climbed an electric pole near the office/residence of the Chief Minister/Prime Minister in Model Town, Lahore. The police worked hard to bring her down and save the Khadim-e-Aala (as the chief minister likes to be called) from embarrassment as quickly as possible. Why she climbed the pole was not elaborated. In fact it was hushed up.

Subsequently, the pole was removed from the sight of the big bosses. Some days later another woman got on top of another pole. I don't know what happened to her. Some people I know moved around to watch the poles in the vicinity if there are women on top of the poles! This was the outcome of the little sense of humour left in the public. The sight is fun for some and only a matter of curiosity for others. Climbing the pole was no part of any circus, it was simply a show of desperation. I could have continued at length and perhaps written a satire in the style of Swift, but humour and satire are for sensitive people who can see the underlying pain of the satirist. A few are left of the breed who used to care. Therefore, I should be straightforward.

I wondered why a woman would go to the length of the ordeal of climbing up an electric pole, taking all the risks involved. I am certain she was confronted with some problem of great magnitude, which made her take the risk to be noticed in the hope of getting help from the 'boss'. The fact is that the life of common people is so difficult and so burdened by problems that perhaps staying alive stops mattering. One fears the day when more people take to the poles and protest. It may still not work because providing relief to a commoner is not on the agenda. The people in power are busy in other occupations like providing more money to those who have already made a lot.

Budget manipulation has been a favourite tool. The most recent scandal, disclosed by Mr Rauf Klasra on TV, is about allowing the import of 1,200 cc cars, worth millions of rupees, one day before the presentation of the national budget. So when the budget announces a tax on imports, the pre-budget importers get benefit. The post-budget imports earn much less as profit as compared to the beneficiaries of the pre-budget permission. What a clever way of enriching supporters and friends!

But this is not something new. It is a special style of the 'new' third time prime minister. His businesses benefited hugely in the past by such manipulations. Some people may still recall the imports of raw steel under different names like 'scrap' and 'billets'. In the earlier stints of governance, the categories of raw steel were alternatively exempted from government levies. If a favoured industry had placed huge import orders under the specification of billets, the import on those got relief and the import as scrap got taxed. Next time the procedure was reversed. Thus the favoured industry got the benefit each time and others found it hard to compete. The favoured industrial giants multiplied their wealth phenomenally. Such budgetary manipulations are on again. The masses are reeling under direct and indirect taxation while the sharp cookies multiply their wealth. For them governance is a business opportunity.

A glimpse of mixing work with pleasure is the recent family picnic to the People's Republic of China. China is a world power and a friend of Pakistan. It is also an economic giant. China has converted its huge population into its largest national asset. I recall that a long time ago a journalist asked Chairman Mao if he was against capitalism. He replied, "No, I am not. But we will be capitalists when each Chinese individual can become a Capitalist!" The Chinese are now at that stage of Mao's dream. The maintenance of good relations with its neighbours is China's state policy, and Pakistan is its neighbour and an old time friend since Ayub Khan's time. The Chinese have an eastern tradition of hospitality too and they must have extended it to all the members of the prime minister's (PM's) delegation. It is jarring to the sensitive people within Pakistan who wonder why it was necessary to have six or seven family members as part of an official delegation. The costs may be secondary. I am sure that our very affluent PM could easily afford the trip. One simply expects judicious use of public money.

The menu of Pakistan's problems has now been laid at the doorstep of the Chinese government. It has been proudly declared that China will look after our power generation needs, that China will make investments to improve our economy, that China will make the road from Kashghar to Gwadar and so on. China will do everything while we make money for ourselves and our friends!

But all this is not going to be easy. Terrorists' activities still need to be dealt with. The masses are disappointed in their newly elected representatives sooner than expected. Even the heavy 'mandate' may not help. Government needs to perform. Pakistan's biggest problem is terrorism and it has increased. A clear message has been sent by the repeated and horrible acts of terror since this government took over. The latest warning has been given at the Food Street in Old Anarkali in the hometown of the new PM.

Let it be clear that the present government needs to do more and much more, and quickly. People are desperate. A woman or two on the top of poles may just be the beginning. All streets may see people on electric poles in an extreme state of desperation. How many of those will you be able to remove, Sires?

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Saturday, July 20, 2013

Ajmal Kasab and witness elimination

Kasab is dead but the questions about him are not dead. Now an Indian home ministry official has stated in court that the Mumbai attack was engineered by the Indian authorities

Ajmal Kasab was hanged on November 21, 2012 at 7:30 am and buried in Yerwada Jail. Yerwada Central Jail is a noted high-security jail in Yerwada, Pune, in Maharashtra, India. On June 2, 2009, Kasab told the judge he also understood the Marathi language. Kasab's plea for clemency was rejected by President Pranab Mukherjee on November 5, 2012. On November 7, Minister of Home Affairs Sushilkumar Shinde confirmed the president's rejection of the petition. The following day, the Maharashtra state government was formally notified and requested to take action. The date of November 21 was then fixed for the execution.

Everything so far was on a secret basis. Kasab was formally informed of his execution on November 12, after which he requested government officials to inform his mother. On the night between November 18 and 19, a senior prison official at Arthur Road Jail in Mumbai read Kasab's death warrant to him, informing him at the same time that his petition for clemency had been rejected. Kasab was then asked to sign his death warrant. He was secretly transferred under heavy guard to Yerwada Jail in Pune, arriving in the early morning of November 19.

The death and funeral of Hindutva politician Bal Thackeray aided in diverting attention from Kasab. An officer at Arthur Road Jail stated anonymously: "Throughout the journey from Mumbai to Pune, he did not cause any trouble. Kasab's attitude was of resignation when he came to know that his mercy petition was rejected. Kasab did not shed a single tear during the last few days."

Only the jail superintendent at Yerwada was made aware of Kasab's identity, otherwise the affair was wrapped in secrecy. Kasab was placed in a special cell when he was at Yerwada and no other inmates were

informed of his presence. It was only a few minutes before Kasab's execution that the executioner was informed whom he would be hanging.

Guilty or not guilty is not the question. He was the lone witness of the Mumbai terror attack. How did he survive? Was his survival pre-planned? Why was it necessary to eliminate him immediately after the completion of 'legal procedures'? Was he a Pakistani? How did he understand Marathi? Why was not his name in the crew of the ship Kuber that carried the 'terrorists' to Mumbai? According to the dossier submitted by the Indian authorities, the name of each terrorist passenger of the Kuber who attacked Mumbai was given along with their daily duties. Why was Kasab not mentioned anywhere in that list?

Kasab is dead but the questions about him are not dead. Now an Indian home ministry official has stated in court that the Mumbai attack was engineered by the Indian authorities. It may be an eye-opener for many but the fact is there have been strong indications to that effect for a long time. I had also mentioned this in my articles earlier. In the book 'Who killed Karkare?' by an ex-IG Maharashtra, there is undeniable evidence that Hemant Karkare was on the hit list of the Hindutva-supported agencies. Karkare was an upright officer who had proved the Hindutva terrorists' involvement in the Samjhota Express, Malehgaon and other terror attacks. He had filed a case in the Nasik court as a result of which Colonel Prohit, Pragya Sidvi and others were convicted. These were all Hindutva committed terrorists and their supporters could not afford to let Karkare stay alive and as the chief of the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorist Squad, because he would have made more disclosures.

It is very likely Kasab was taken out of the jail, promised remission and assigned the job of directing the terrorists to Karkare's location to kill him and his team. Even before the statement of the Indian home ministry officer it was known that the Indian agencies had a hand in the Mumbai attack. They knew about it well in advance and let it happen. Now it seems that they not only turned a blind eye, they had actually planned it for political gains.

Just last week, The Times of India carried a tantalising news story that has gripped the attention of Pakistanis. According to the news story, Mr Mani, a home ministry official, on the testimony of a police

officer, Mr Satish Verma, submitted an affidavit in the Indian Supreme Court in the Ishrat Jahan case, revealing that the Indian government had orchestrated the 2001 attack on parliament and the 2008 Mumbai attacks in order to have a basis to legislate stringent anti-terrorist laws. The most sensational lines of the declaration are:

"13/12/2001 (attack on parliament) was followed by PoTA (Prevention of Terrorist Activities Act) and 26/11/2008 (terrorists' siege of Mumbai) was followed by amendment to the UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act)."

As the Indian officer has said, it was done to make it easier for the Government of India to pass stricter measures. Even the attack on parliament was engineered for this purpose. It was therefore necessary that the witnesses to the attacks on Mumbai and parliament be silenced lest the real story came out in full detail. Indian authorities silenced Kasab and Afzal Guru. In the case of Guru, the Supreme Court did not find conclusive evidence but upheld his conviction to please public perception! But the death of these two could not put a cover on the facts. If readers have an interest in political history, they would remember that the Mumbai terror attack was engineered at a time when India needed to discredit Pakistan and facilitate their civilian nuclear deal with the US. So there was a dual purpose.

The news of Kasab's secret hanging got drowned in the noise of Thackeray's death. Some facts have surfaced now. It could be a tribute to the integrity of the Indian officer who had the courage to record what could be the truth in an Indian court. Such officers are perhaps the real asset of a nation, and in this case of the Indian nation.

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Saturday, July 27, 2013

Ladies, go home please!

Why did the mullahs decide to issue such an 'order'? Have they fallen prey to male chauvinism and forgotten the real spirit of 'fasting'?

Ladies, please go home. And don't come out because that causes disturbance! It is so particularly in the month of Ramzan. My advice is solid and worth following. The reasons will unfold shortly.

When I was a student of masters in psychology at the Government College, Lahore, we were presented typical cases of abnormal psychology for study and to recognise proto-types. One of the cases was of a man who got uncontrollably excited, I mean sexually, at the sight of women's shoes or slippers lying anywhere. The relatives of the man got very concerned as it seemed abnormal and odd. So they consulted the doctors and decided to get this person's psychoanalysis done to help rid him of the 'malady'. Some thought otherwise. The 'different' people, who thought otherwise, would have knocked the patient's head with the ladies shoes so that he could come to his senses and his association with that particular article undergoes change. I wondered what that patient's imagination did to him. Did he unconsciously visualise a naked woman wearing the shoes? I mean shoes are articles that are exhibited in shops; what could be the excitement about that? I tend to agree with those who thought that the appropriate treatment for that patient would have been knocking his head with ladies' shoes. It would have helped him get out of the seductive imagination and remember the possibility of getting hit on the head!

The phenomenon of the psychological complex of that patient is surfacing in different ways in Pakistan, and particularly in Waziristan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Not that the infection is contained in those areas only; the germs are everywhere.

The latest news has come from the town of Karak. Karak is 123 kilometres from Peshawar on the main Indus Highway between Peshawar and Karachi. Karak is said to be the single district in Pakistan

that is inhabited by only one tribe: the Khattak. The Khattak is a large tribe and its members live in many parts of Pakistan.

The news from Karak has been reported in all major newspapers in Pakistan and also throughout the world. The mullahs there have ordered women not to go shopping unaccompanied by a male relative. This is not for the safety of women. Nor are these women proceeding for Hajj where a male companion is advised. The order of the mullahs is because "they (women) spread vulgarity and spoil men's fasting in Ramzan."

Where is the problem? Is it in the men of these brave Khattaks or in their women? The fasting in Ramzan is meant to teach self-restraint and control. Does the order by the mullahs mean that these men have such weak personalities that they have difficulty in maintaining their fast? Karak is a small community of about 14,000 persons. In small communities people know each other well and treat others with respect like their own families. Why did the mullahs decide to issue such an 'order'? Have they fallen prey to male chauvinism and forgotten the real spirit of 'fasting'? Islam teaches respect for women and equal treatment. It is not understandable that mullahs should order restrictions on a normal activity of women like shopping. Eid is approaching and this is a time when a lot of shopping is done to celebrate the happy occasion. Also, women are more interested in shopping, generally, than men. Many markets thrive because of the interest taken by women in buying things. For example, women buy clothes for children and other members of the family for special occasions, Eid being one of these.

I would also like to know what background these so-called mullahs have. From where did they obtain their religious education? Why don't they persuade the men to purify themselves of vulgar thoughts on sighting women? Actually, women in those areas are modestly clad and still the men find "they spread vulgarity and spoil men's fasting". The real fact is that the "vulgarity" referred to here is in the minds of men and probably in the minds of these mullahs. They need treatment if they cannot control themselves. They are more like the patient I mentioned earlier in this article and need one of the two treatment options.

It is unfortunate that whenever such half-baked mullahs think of applying 'Islam', they start oppressing women. They are obsessed by the

existence of females. They vigorously follow application of their brand of Islam on the womenfolk. In their enthusiasm they ignore the basic principles laid out by the Prophet (PBUH), forget to cleanse themselves and develop the moral discipline required of them.

Let there be no mistake: the oppressing mullah of the kind being referred to here is not only in Karak, he is also present in other places. It is the educated women of the country and the conscientious men who should make every effort to educate the mullah. Most mullahs are not given decent and comprehensive education. Even the school syllabus is most disappointing. We must work on improving that. If Imran Khan is in fact not the 'mullah' that some people accuse him of being, he must take the initiative in KP and develop a comprehensive curriculum of studies for anyone who wants to peruse religion as a career. It is now the prime responsibility of the KP government of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). KP has been the primary source of religious extremism and Khan and the PTI will do well if they can control it. Hopefully, this will save them from the stigma of being called 'Taliban Khan' or 'Pakistan Taliban Ittehad'. This is the real crusade they need to undertake. Promote the real spirit and understanding of tolerant Islam.

Such 'orders' cannot be ignored. Inside Pakistan people may ignore these as unimportant but the world press never forgets to take note and Pakistan's name is tainted.

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boycott. Later, he admitted his mistake. Earlier, he did not support Dr Tahirul Qadri and later admitted his mistake. He has the grace to admit a mistake but for how long? When will he start doing things right? If the opposition leaders had stood together then they could have got a president of their choice and succeeded in ensuring political checks and balances. Stark vacuum of leadership exists in the opposition.

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leadership is in complete disarray. The PPP is a follower of the Bhutto brand. It chose to become dynastic and shifted from its 'people' orientation. Now it does not have a credible Bhutto to 'ascend the throne'. What they have is a mix of Bhutto and Zardari and that may not work. Others like Khurshid Shah, Aitzaz Ahsan and Raza Rabbani fail the 'Bhutto' test.

Then the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM). It is a smaller party but known for its discipline and continuous vote bank among the Urdu speaking Pakistanis. There has always been a whisper of their 'mafia' gangs who ensure the implementation of the party requirements by hook or by crook. Now the issues are surfacing and drastic changes have occurred. Even its charismatic leader is under the examination of the British police. The MQM has increasingly shifted from some of its principled stands and embraced opportunism for power, the latest example being their marriage of convenience with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) to elect the president of Pakistan.

The ruling party, the PML-N, has a collection of the rich who have amassed wealth one way or the other. They have shown little capability in governance in the two earlier terms and now in their third term. The only bright spot is Mr Shahbaz Sharif's interest in urban development, particularly of Lahore. It is a dynastic party like the PPP. Now the dynasty members are taking over completely. They are freely using helicopters and official entourage, and enjoying government-paid foreign trips. The family property holdings in the United Kingdom are phenomenal. The PML-N's performance has exposed the poor quality of leadership much sooner than expected in its third term. Its expertise is in managing the election process to its advantage and that seems about all.

There are a host of other parties without a credible leader who can take the country out of the crisis. There is also the All Pakistan Muslim League (APML). The APML chief is the former president of Pakistan,

Saturday, August 03, 2013

Vacuum of leadership

More patience and determination and a sense of responsibility from people as well as their chosen leadership is required

Look at these clichés: "We strongly condemn...x atrocity..." "We have taken serious note...of Y disaster..." "We sympathise...with z sufferings..." "We cannot allow...xyz..."

No such utterance means anything.

The suffering of the public continues and leaders stay busy in 'completing' their elected terms rather than admitting failure and gracefully rendering resignations. To admit failure is a quality of true leadership. Statements are not enough; a leader needs to deliver to the people. Most of Pakistan's so called leaders only 'deliver' speeches and promises to people. (Some 'deliver' illicit cash to their kith and kin.)

This is the quality of leadership we have strengthened. Imran Khan is doing the same unfortunately. His party's performance in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) is disappointing. Oppression of women has increased to the ridiculous extent of restricting their freedom even from going to bazaars. It is followed by a very violent jail break by the very Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) that Khan cries hoarse to defend. He hides behind the excuse of drone attacks, and ducks any joint APC or deliberation to control terrorism. Now his dear, 'innocent' TTP have broken into the jail in Dera Ismail Khan. The worst part is that the KP Home Secretary had advance warning about the planned attack and yet the TTP succeeded in getting more than 200 convicts out, including members of the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and some of their own. At best what we will hear from the KP leadership will be that an enquiry has been ordered and some law enforcement personnel have been suspended. End of story. Nobody will hear anything more and the issue will get buried. The KP chief minister will move on to issuing the next statement.

A stark vacuum of leadership was evident in the election of the president of Pakistan. Imran Khan chose not to go along with the

Syed Pervez Musharraf. Musharraf is presently defending the plethora of legal cases instituted against him, and he was barred from contesting elections. Since the cases are sub judice, therefore it is not appropriate to comment on them. As such he is not available as a leader to fill the vacuum at present, but the fact is that a lot of people remember that they could buy a US dollar for rupees 60 as compared to Rs 105 now, petrol for Rs 50 a litre as compared to Rs 105 now and flour for Rs 30 as compared to Rs 40 and so on. The law and order situation was better, businesses were thriving, the public found living costs affordable, and the IMF loan was paid off.

This situation leaves the people of Pakistan with little choice. As a natural process, vacuums have to be filled. Who would emerge is a question the nation is faced with. Would the media, public, establishment, intellectuals, civil services, technocrats and specialists, all together, guide the present government to take the right decisions? Can they help the existing leadership to provide good governance and tide over the present crises? Of course we always need the help of the Almighty. The situation is serious and everyone has a role to play, and to keep the national interest above personal interests. In any case no miracle can be expected to change the situation overnight or in a short span of time. More patience and determination and a sense of responsibility from people as well as their chosen leadership is required. Rising above favouritism and personal loyalty factors and engaging competent individuals may provide a collective leadership to fill the vacuum at least partially.

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Friday, August 09, 2013

They could not reach home for Eid

It is killing, killing and killing everywhere. It is growing into the rule of lawlessness. Would the Supreme Court consider a 'suo motu'?

They had worked hard away from home, they had saved money to share with the family, they had fasted during the holy month of Ramzan and sought the blessings of the Almighty. They boarded the bus, but did not reach home. They were brutally murdered by target killers, who call themselves the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA).

Imagine the grief that the killers caused to the families. Killers absconded for the moment, thanking the ineffective law and order forces for their good luck. The death punishment given to 14 passengers of a bus bound for Punjab was only because they held Punjab-based Identity Cards. They were taken out of the bus, their ID cards were checked, and then they were shot in the head and their bodies abandoned. Two captives were spared because their ID cards were not from Punjab. These two narrated the tale of horror. This is how BLA presumes to succeed in its struggle.

The BLA had also destroyed Quaid-e-Azam's resting place in Ziarat earlier.

The BLA is sending this message to the prime minister who hails from Punjab. Is the prime minister getting the message? Can he hear the cries of the children, women and men of the bereaved families? The prime minister, at the time of this brutality, was in Saudi Arabia for his religious obligations. He said his prayers in the Masjid-e-Nabvi. Fine, but what about Haqooq-ul-Ibaad towards his people? He may, on his return, 'condemn' this atrocity, but more than a 'condemnation' is required.

In the absence of the prime minister the team investigating the Nanga Parbat tragedy has also been killed.

As I am writing these lines more killings are occurring. From Lyari 11 children will not be home for Eid. These children will be under the

dust, killed by a bomb. Their 'crime' was only playing football in the field.

Mr Azim, a Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) spokesperson and an ex-minister in Pervez Musharraf's time, said in a television programme that it is the interior minister who is responsible for the maintenance of law and order. He said that it is primarily the responsibility of the provinces. It is an amazing statement. Does he mean to say that the prime minister is only an onlooker? Does he mean to say that the prime minister's main interest is foreign visits with entourages? If he is right then there is little hope for improvement. The prime minister cannot leave critical situations to the 'second' in command. Law and order and the lives of nationals are the prime responsibility of the prime minister. It is he who has the responsibility and the authority to activate all relevant segments to perform. The major segments are the provincial governments and their police, constabularies, levies, spy agencies, and finally the armed forces. Their action needs full support from the central government as well as the courts. There are major gaps in coordination and the motivation is lacking.

There is a noticeable lack of support from the courts that keep releasing terrorists on the pretext of 'insufficient evidence'. Even if new laws are to be enforced for 'evidence' in such cases, these should be enacted by the Assembly. Terrorists have found the lack of evidence as the most convenient way of getting away. They threaten the judiciary and the investigators, and kill the witnesses who insist on appearing. So there are no convictions and there is freedom from the courts to kill more and more. Even if there are some convictions, the terrorists get their people out of jail by jailbreaks.

The Pakistani people expect the prime minister to pay immediate attention to the faulty system. If coordination between secret agencies and the leads provided is required, then such coordination must be ensured. If a force for rapid response is required, then it should be trained, recruited, equipped and deployed. If judges and witnesses are to be protected, then it should be done. Even the establishments of the armed forces are attacked. It is killing, killing and killing everywhere. It is growing into the rule of lawlessness. Would the Supreme Court consider a 'suo motu'?

While the major role is to be played by those who have been entrusted power, it is also true that we, the voters, have to watch if the power is adequately used for the general benefit. The spokespersons for the people are the media.

Today the media has an immense responsibility. The run of the mill bickering on the TV talk shows is out of date. It is time that national priorities be in sync with TV programming. Politicians are most concerned about their popularity graph and if they get convinced that if the law and order situation is not appropriately attended to, they can lose their seat of power, then they will be forced to take action. Unfortunately, our elected representatives reach the assemblies without the in-depth study of the issues, including the issue of law and order. There is no short cut for the media persons either. They need to bring responsible politicians to the screen, including the prime minister, and questions about the strategy that is to be evolved must be asked. Keep their commitments on record and follow up on what they do. The media must follow to the point that either a strategy is successfully adopted or the person in charge resigns. It may sound belligerent journalism but what would you prefer? More dead bodies at the time of Eid? More homes destroyed every day? Or some semblance of peace and secure life. Pakistan has been labelled as the most dangerous country to live in. I am sure the sensitive media controllers will take up the experiment to chase the non-performing leadership to the point that they are forced to act constructively. While the responsibility is of the prime minister, the media can convince him to defer foreign excursions and organise an effective anti-terror plan.

If he still does not do it then many more dead bodies will be sent home.

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Saturday, August 17, 2013

Contempt of 'court', and 'perceptions'

It is, therefore, desirable that the concept of 'contempt of court' does not conflict with the freedom of speech enshrined in the constitution

Nobody should utter words that hold the courts in contempt. Agreed. But what should we do about 'perceptions'? Perceptions are important. In matters of justice it is said that 'justice should not only be done, it should also appear to be done'. In other words the importance of justice 'appearing' to be done is equally important. In many cases the requirement of justice appearing to be done seems lacking.

It is also said that 'justice delayed is justice denied'. Is delay not a very frequent occurrence in our courts? Generations of litigating parties pass away in search of decisions and the court procedures do not end. Delay is used as a strategy. Can we also deny that a lot of money exchanges hands during litigation? And that it is used not as a bribe for judges but between lower functionaries for small favours? Can we deny that several Returning Officers in the recent elections passed comments and showed behaviour not in line with the expectations of an officer of the judiciary?

There is no doubt that the judiciary must be held in high esteem, but we must also look back and see why the negative perception is formed. Do the members of the judiciary need to change something to earn that high regard? Respect needs to come from the hearts of the people; it should not be shown out of fear or compulsion.

The American actress Mae West is remembered not as much for her histrionics as for her quotes. I am tempted to repeat a relevant dialogue of hers from a court appearance:

"Judge: Are you trying to show contempt for this court?"

Mae West: I was doin' my best to hide it."

I hope people in the country do not reach a point when they have to 'do their best to hide'. It is, therefore, desirable that the concept of 'contempt of court' does not conflict with the freedom of speech

enshrined in the constitution. Judges in that position have to be beyond anger, personal vendettas, likes or dislikes, greed, personal beliefs, and above all the weakness to seek personal popularity. It is a hard call and difficult for an average human being to sustain such a saintly existence. But to sit in the elevated position of a judge such sacrifice is a prerequisite and a national demand. A constant process of introspection and self-analysis has to go on within the person of a 'judge' to meet the perception of him and to deliver justice and nothing but justice.

It is a bit too much to expect perfect behaviour meriting honest respect for the courts from a society ridden with lawlessness. In a society ruled by lawlessness, the absence of law becomes the unwritten 'law'. It is a catch-22 situation, but somewhere a beginning has to be made.

It was heartening to notice that the Pakistan Supreme Court did take a suo motu notice of the recent killings in Balochistan. In my last article published on Eid day, I had raised the question if the Honourable Chief Justice would consider taking such notice. Most appropriately he did and it enhanced public confidence.

Speaking of lawlessness and 'suo motu', a strange occurrence was witnessed by almost all Pakistanis and many persons overseas on TV. It was the bizarre hold up at the Islamabad Jinnah Avenue on Thursday, August 15. A person with a woman and two children, holding two automatic weapons, parked his car in the middle of the road, waved his guns, fired, caused panic, and a traffic blockade followed. Half the city seemed to be held hostage. The area was surrounded by law enforcement agencies and non-cooperating public who wished to be 'eyewitnesses'. I do not need to describe any further as the eyes of all cameras from TV networks were ogling at the event for six hours.

During this show of lawlessness, viewers wondered why the police and others did not capture this terrorist named 'Sikandar' while visually it seemed possible. Funnily, the media anchors mentioned that the police is paralysed because they fear a suo motu action against them if the offender gets killed in action! The inaction for six hours was appalling. The high-level decision makers were absent from the scene. The interior minister passed a casual order from his car, driving towards Lahore!

No politician of the ruling party showed up on the scene. I do not think that this entire inaction flaw was due to the fear of suo motu. I

feel this transfer of responsibility and to put the onus on the court is an attempt to hold the suo motu provision in ridicule.

After about six hours of the nationally telecast 'show' by all TV networks, one single civilian Zamurad Khan emerged from the crowd, got close to the terrorist Sikandar, as if he wanted to enquire about the welfare of Sikandar's wife and children. He risked his life and pounced upon the terrorist to grab him. Suddenly, the law enforcers woke up, commandos ran and the terrorist was captured. It seemed simple and easy. For six long hours people wondered why such action could not be taken earlier while the terrorist was off guard and within easy reach several times. No it is not the 'fear of suo motu'. I do not stand with those who hint at the unreasonableness of court action, but still I have to accept that such a 'perception' exists.

If we have to live happily 'ever after' like the endings in fairy tales, then everyone and I mean every individual, inside the justice system and outside it, has to make an effort to respect the law and those who enforce it. The lawmakers, interpreters and enforcers will need to earn that respect. Mutual respect will not come easy. There is no short cut either. Consistent and persistent conscious effort is needed.

Can it be a reality? Or will it remain a fairy tale expectation?

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Saturday, August 24, 2013

The PM speaks

The PM practically promised no hope earlier than the end of the next five years. This is convenient. People are being advised to wait until the end of his term!

The Prime Minister (PM) has spoken. It was after a long wait that the third-time new PM decided to speak to the nation. What did he say? The general reaction is that he said very little, or nothing. Or at least he did not say what this nation wanted to hear. The nation wanted to hear of the concrete steps and plans he intends to implement for the solution of several huge problems faced by the country like terrorism and the power crisis.

I recall my first meeting with Mr Nawaz Sharif when the late General Jilani introduced his new finance minister of Punjab to me in the Lahore Governor's House. Mr Sharif seemed an amiable and unassuming young person. I invited him to inaugurate the exhibition of carpet manufacturers of which I was the Chairman. Mr Sharif, in a very unassuming way, said that he wanted to learn how to make speeches. Since then he has reached the political pinnacle and needs no coaching. In his address to the nation he did not seem to be in his element. He seemed bogged down with problems. He had probably underestimated the gravity of the multitude of problems existing for the nation. In the customary political manner he started to hold the previous governments responsible. He talked of the 14 previous years since he left. But he could only indicate a couple of negligent acts like that of the Nandipur project since 2007. So, in reality, he could only target the last five years or so.

As a matter of fact, people wanted to know what his strategy to control terrorism, and improvement in the supply of electricity was. About terrorism he said that he and his government are ready for negotiations as well as a war against terrorism. Promptly, the TTP responded in the most uncomplimentary way. The TTP spokesman, Shahidullah Shahid, was prominently reported in the press. Here are some poignant extracts from the Taliban's response: "We watched

Mian Nawaz Sharif while addressing the nation on TV channels. In his speech, he showed willingness to talk to us and then warned us of using force. First we don't see any indication on the ground, which can lead to negotiation between the government and us, as there is a visible division between the elected government and military authorities. And then he warned us of using force. We would like to ask him to take a lesson from General Pervez Musharraf, President Asif Zardari and Awami National Party leader Asfandiyar Wali who used force against us and suffered the consequences." And further:

"The Prime Minister was unable to clarify when he was going to negotiate and how he would do so? He didn't mention whom he was planning to talk to, and failed to state through which type of sources he would approach the Taliban?"

He further pointed out the split between decision making powers and then warned in the following manner:

"In case of force against us, Nawaz Sharif will see our response." The Taliban also carried out the threat of carrying out suicide attacks in case the government hanged their colleagues.

Quite clearly the Taliban are not impressed with the PM's speech. They have also shown some audacity and threatened consequences. If the PM continues to show weakness then they will feel even more encouraged. Perhaps the PM feels that this is the area of responsibility of Mr Nisar, but the impression is that Mr Nisar is better in making speeches than taking effective action.

Then Mr Sharif moved to the next point that the nation would have desired to know his plans for: the power crisis. The PM spent more time in lamenting the inaction of the previous governments, in fact of the outgoing PPP government. This repetition brought no news to the listeners. The masses have already rejected the PPP this time and this has happened primarily due to the inability to improve the power sector. The PM offered no early solution, although one needs to be fair and admit that there is a wee bit of improvement in Lahore, and hopefully in some other places. The credit may perhaps need to be given to Mr Shahbaz Sharif, who has always been focused and tries to deliver. Mr Sharif does better in action than in speeches and that is a welcome situation for the public. The public needs action more than words. The PM practically promised no hope earlier than the end of the next five

years. This is convenient. People are being advised to wait until the end of his term!

I am reminded of an old joke worth sharing. It is said that a ruler of some state was informed that his state is being attacked by the enemy and was asked to give instructions. The ruler ordered that halva (a sweet dessert) should be prepared immediately. The surprised staff obeyed the order and quantities of halva were prepared and everyone enjoyed eating it. Then again the ruler was informed that the enemy had advanced closer. He again ordered more halva and everyone ate it. Finally, the ruler was informed that the enemy was very near. He again ordered a large quantity of halva, ate it and said, "Now we must leave immediately, we have had enough 'Halva'!"

This is, of course, a joke and has no relevance to our government. Our government is trying to get its act together. It will not look for escape or whiling away time. Very soon an effective national security policy will be devised and vigorously implemented to check the spate of terrorism. The energy policy will also be speeded up and our homes and businesses will have the benefit. Businesses will turn the economy around and peace will prevail.

All this will happen because our new third-time PM is determined, concerned and resolute about 'doing more'. His team must support him and show its capability.

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Saturday, August 31, 2013

FIR against a TV channel

There is indeed no doubt about the fact that the freedom of press and freedom of information is the key to a healthy society as well as a healthy democracy

A First Information Report (FIR) is a written document prepared by police organisations in Pakistan when they receive information about the commission of a cognizable offence. An FIR is an important document because it sets the process of criminal justice in motion.

An FIR was registered in Balochistan against a major TV news network. Here are some details as given by The Asian Human Rights Organisation, based in Hong Kong: "An FIR against a leading channel covering news was filed in Balochistan. The Balochistan government has registered a case under the Anti-Terrorism Act against the chief executive and three other employees of a television channel, ARY Digital, for releasing a documentary about the attack on the former residency of the father of the nation. The three other employees are the Executive Director, Owais Tohid, the Quetta bureau chief, Shahid Hameed Rind and the Islamabad bureau chief Sabir Shakir."

The FIR was a shocker. Almost all media men vocally and emphatically denounced the move. Dr Danish of ARY digital was seen at the top of his histrionics, denouncing the Balochistan government, and in particular Chief Minister Malik Baloch for such an action. He almost clearly felt betrayed for having laid confidence on a 'commoner', Mr Malik on becoming the chief minister. Dr Danish found almost every reputed journalist standing firmly in his support and so did the majority of the civil society.

There is indeed no doubt about the fact that the freedom of press and freedom of information is the key to a healthy society as well as a healthy democracy. It is also true that both, particularly the media, have a very high responsibility on what they communicate and what perceptions they create. Unfortunately, the media in Pakistan is no less immature than the democracy. The media barons, and their wiz kids

often race for communication leadership trampling the flowers of decency, grace, sensitivities, moderation and ethics. In this perspective the role of the media has been barely adequate. However, the media built itself into a huge power. Some media persons reaped rich personal harvests as well. The ones who oblige are those who find themselves vulnerable, for example the politicians, businessmen, even crooks. This is where discretion only shows the moral integrity of the individual or his institution. Media is a formidable force, it yields huge power and in proportion to its power exist the possibilities of inherent corruption in it.

In the recent years the media in general and some specific journalists and channels had a rollicking honeymoon with the judiciary and the Supreme Court in particular. This affinity increased the power of both. This honeymoon was enjoyed by both and if anyone had a complaint, he or she, preferred to gulp it for fear of repercussions and even the 'contempt of court' proceedings.

This honeymoon bond between the two powerful institutions, the judiciary and media, continued for quite a long time, but some hairline fractures are becoming noticeable. Both are beginning to look at each other with caution. Journalists are compelled to associate with ground realities as these appear and one of these realities is the increasing criticism of the conduct of the Supreme Court, including the frequency and choice of its suo motu. A Supreme Court, which has been used to absolute praise, bordering on flattery, has been surprised at the criticisms, and the eyebrows have risen. One is now compelled to ask: is the honeymoon going to be over?

Let us look at the latter part of the newspaper reports: Dr Abdul Malik Baloch said he had been told that the case was registered on the directives of the Supreme Court, but the registrar of the apex court later clarified that the court had not issued any directive for filing a case against the private TV channel on charges of showing footage of the attack on the Quaid's residency at Ziarat in June.

The statement by CM Balochistan and some others indicates some sort of a go-ahead by the Supreme Court. It may be proved wrong in the investigation, but many would continue to believe that there is little love lost between the Supreme Court and the media community now.

In any case no honeymoon between powerful institutions is good. The judiciary and journalism are both extremely noble professions. Fortunately, the judiciary is more trained, even better educated, and groomed to maintain its bearings. Journalism has had a big burst in a short time in Pakistan. Most of the journalists are in the learning process as to how this power is to be handled and what their social responsibility is. A conscientious journalist will watch every word he writes and every second that he/she communicates from the screen. The business has to be much more than financial competition. It is about social responsibility, information, education and nationalism. There were lessons in the work of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Hamid Sheikh and men of that stature. There may still be some of my age group (really few I suppose) who have survived and could provide a lesson or two from their works. The political comments need even greater sense of responsibility. For the owners who are in for a buck and blackmail power that cannot be expected from them. The genuine media owners must make the decision as to what side they want to be. No honeymoon is proper in such noble professions as the judiciary and journalism. The relationship needs to be of mutual respect but not compromising on principles.

In any case apart from the philosophies or ethics, it is just not right that the police be sent after the media while more civil recourses are available. Whoever did it should not have done it and it was good that the journalist community stood by each other, but it will be wrong if this community gets intoxicated by its power.

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Saturday, September 07, 2013

That September of 1965

The challenge to the present generation of Pakistanis is to face the internal threats, sectarian threats, economy's manipulation, water wars and the war to break the confidence in the country and its nationhood

That September came at a time when the Pakistani nation was barely 18 years old. Many of the generation who had been the part of the struggle for freedom were alive. There were also those who had seen near and dear ones slaughtered before their eyes. Then there were those who had arrived at the Walton camp and kissed the ground of what meant 'Pakistan' to them. They believed they had arrived at a safe place, at a place where they believed there were going to be no rapes, no tortures, no looting, no terror and no oppression. They had left their properties, lands and friends, businesses, everything because they had that ultimate faith in the new country they had helped create. It was history's biggest sacrifice of life, property and personal dignity. They had paid the price and moved to the country they wanted. Admitted, the locals had paid much less a price but they surely shared the resolve to make a new beginning. This generation was still alive and had passed on a great deal of nationalism to the next generation.

It was the mix of the first generation who had given the great sacrifices and the second generation that grew up in the cradle of the first that was challenged by the enemy in the September of 1965. The enemy had knocked at the wrong door at the wrong time. This mix of generations was undefeatable in its spirit. The unity and resolve that was followed by this mix of generations was unheard of and perhaps never to be seen again. Every one fought that war. The soldiers were at the frontline, civilians were in the back up, the creative community of writers, poets, musicians, singers, painters, all dedicated themselves to defeat the enemy in the war at the front and in the war of nerves. Psychological warfare was equally important. Indian propaganda that Lahore was captured fell flat when Radio Pakistan from Lahore...

composers, radio staff and so many others proved themselves to be civilian veterans of the war.

In my articles in this newspaper two years ago I recounted the contributions of the creative community, which kept the morale of the nation high. They defeated the Indian propaganda that Lahore had capitulated. Their dream of having a party in the Gymkhana Club in the Jinnah Gardens never came true and, on the other hand, they lost the town of Khem Karan to Pakistan. Pakistanis were not a nation that could be defeated at that time. It was fresh in the memory of that mix of generations what it meant to be free and what did slavery mean.

But all this was almost half a century ago. That generation is either gone or on its way out. The memories are there. There will never be a September like the September of 1965.

Now is the time to learn from history. Now is the time to see the challenges that are being propped up, not in the hard war but in a soft war. This soft war is no less dangerous. It is destruction from within. The challenge to the present generation of Pakistanis is to face the internal threats, sectarian threats, economy's manipulation, water wars and the war to break the confidence in the country and its nationhood.

There are new technologies of waging war. The old-fashioned war is outdated. These are tough challenges. These can be faced only by the resolve and faith that was shown in September 1965.

I recall that the lazy hazy days of summer had passed. People had returned to their routine work. Children were back to school. Lahorites were moving to get their chores done and to run their businesses and suddenly an explosion in the air shocked them. It was an enemy plane breaking the sound barrier. Everyone looked at the skies and saw Pakistani planes chasing the enemy off. Then came the announcement on the radio that India had attacked. The whole mood of the city suddenly changed. Each person resolved to defend the country. Civil defence organisation had the whole populace as volunteers. Immediately instructions were being followed and trenches were being dug in homes. Noor Jehan volunteered to be present at the Radio Pakistan studios to sing patriotic songs to keep the morale high. I organised a group of volunteer artists who coordinated with the ISPR to actually take the risk of going to the frontlines, meet the soldiers, give them little luxuries of sweets, food, cigarettes, etc, but beyond all was the feeling that the

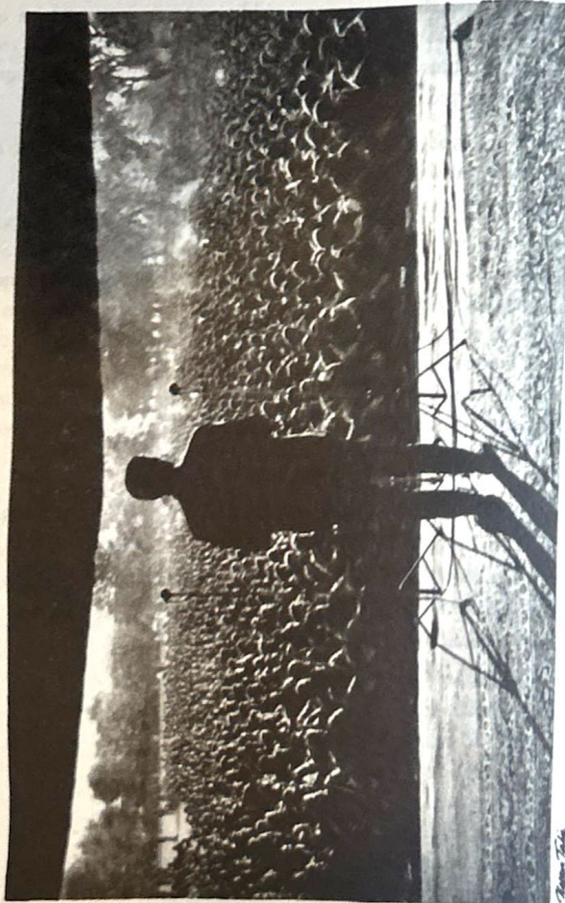
nation fully backed them, was prepared to share the risks, and fight at all costs along with the soldiers. In one day everyone in Lahore was a soldier. Then came the most memorable and inspiring address of President Ayub Khan on radio and the nascent TV. It united the nation further. Volunteers from NWFP, Sind, Balochistan and everywhere else started to arrive and were offering help.

The nation stood united as never before. It won because of its indomitable spirit, united effort and unwavering faith.

In the twilight of my life and as one of the millions who became 'civilian war veterans', I belong to that mix of the nation that existed at the time of that September of 1965. I long to see that spirit alive now again. I hope the present mix of generations will value its freedom as those who lived at the time of that September of 1965. If they do, this country will live and reach a position of honour, which is the rightful place for a united Pakistani nation. That nation chased a dream. Dreams make nations. Have that dream and you will make it a reality.

Do you have that dream?

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Naeem Tahir Addressing troops at Badiyan Border/1965

Saturday, September 14, 2013

Surrender? — Naeem Tahir

The TTP has gladly welcomed the APC decision. They are obviously happy. They know that they have bled the Pakistanis to zero resistance

The much awaited All Parties Conference (APC) is over. The 'reluctant debutante', Imran Khan, also participated and proved that his refusal was 'much ado about nothing'. This APC has so far achieved only a 'consensus', which is not much. I hate to repeat the saying that 'Fools never differ' because these wise men are no fools.

This is perhaps the sixth time a consensus has been reached about negotiations with those who have resorted to arms against the people of Pakistan and its defenders. In the past the resolutions to seek a negotiated settlement only resulted in allowing time to the terrorists to regroup, then reject the offers of the Pakistan government and continue with their terrorist activities. This time the consensus has been achieved with no preconditions in the offer. There is not even a commitment to the upholding of the Constitution of Pakistan!

Is it, therefore, an unconditional surrender?

The Chief of the Army Staff, General Pervez Kayani and DG ISI gave a detailed, 40-minute, briefing to all the 'wise men' in the APC. The APC was informed of the position of the armed forces in that region, its deployments and controls. The gist of the briefing was that the government first would have to figure out those factions within the TTP that were local and willing to hold talks under the Constitution of Pakistan.

A newspaper report says, "The conference paid tribute to the armed forces for their sacrifices in the war against terrorism. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of Pakistan are paramount and must be safeguarded at all costs."

The words about protecting the 'constitution of Pakistan' do not appear here!

The APC brief, as carried in the newspapers, does not indicate a critical element that the "consensus is on negotiations with TTP factions of Pakistan origin only, and those who uphold the Constitution of Pakistan." If the omission is an oversight then it is unforgivable, and if the consensus is meant to ignore the 'Constitution of Pakistan' then it is 'surrender'.

The TTP have gladly welcomed the APC decision. They are obviously happy. They know that they have bled the Pakistanis to zero resistance. The TTP was busy killing in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa while the APC was being held. The media rushed to toe the APC line and showed several glimpses of people who wanted 'peace' for various reasons.

No doubt, peace is something we all want. But do we want peace at any price? If so then we may have to pay the price of our freedom, our identity and nationhood, and that again is surrender.

There is no doubt that the menace of terrorism has bled the nation. We have lost about 50,000 lives, billions worth of property and business. Why have we paid this price? Why have we let our cities live under fear? Was it all to end up in surrender? Has our will to fight collapsed? Do the persons who are going hoarse in welcoming this consensus realise what it means to negotiate without the acceptance of Pakistan's Constitution?

Here are some consequences.

'Sovereignty and integrity' of a country is the responsibility of any government. It will be so even if the territory is ruled by the British or Indians or Sikhs or Saudis or anyone else. It is the constitution of a country that defines the 'raison d'etre' of a nation, a nation's aspirations and its logic of being. 'Constitution' cannot be replaced by the mere words 'sovereignty and integrity'. Our constitution sanctifies the teachings of the Holy Quran, which include the messages like in Surah Al-Imran, Verse 84:

"...Say (O Muhammad, SAW) We believe in Allah and what has been sent down to Ibrahim, Ismail, Ishaq, Yacub, and Al-Asbat [the off-springs of the 12 sons of Yacub] and what was given to Musa, Isa and the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between one another among them and to Him we have submitted (in Islam)..."

Our 'constitution' sanctifies the principles laid down by the Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Allama Mohammad Iqbal, and also other precious human values. Particularly, it sanctifies the democratic tradition. There cannot be any compromise on the constitution. A compromise will mean treachery. Any negotiations that have a change in the constitution as its hidden agenda are unacceptable.

The APC has to guard itself against such treachery and refuse any attempt to change the constitution, particularly any effort to open the door for monarchy or khilafat and appoint an 'Amir-ul-Mominin' to rule this country. Is Nawaz Sharif's old dream of 1999 for becoming an Amir-ul-Mominin being revived? Or is there someone else waiting in the wings?

I am reminded of a tragedy! What happened in East Pakistan? There was an armed conflict, a challenge to the writ of Pakistan, no negotiations on the basis of the constitution and Pakistan split.

The TTP was quick to express its happiness at the consensus arrived at by the APC. Why not! The TTP could not have gotten a better deal. On top of it the TTP said that they would indicate their conditions. Amazing! Pakistan makes a totally unconditional offer and in response the TTP will indicate its conditions! These are two completely different mindsets. Pakistani politicians, in spite of a great defence mechanism, in spite of one of the best trained armed forces in the world, are willing to make an unconditional offer that appears almost like surrender. On the other hand, the TTP is talking from a position of strength due to the success of its terrorism and will impose its conditions of acceptance of surrender!

In conclusion, I want to say clearly that the politicians have wrongly read the national sentiment. The people of Pakistan, however callously treated by successive governments, love their independence and are optimistic about improvement of conditions. They want peace with dignity or they will prefer to fight all aggressors, external saboteurs, terrorists or guerillas.

Some 50,000 have sacrificed their lives; Pakistanis will not let them down. Pakistanis have given sacrifices before and will do so again for their freedom, human rights, and their constitutional continuity.

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Saturday, September 19, 2013

VIEW: Yes, it is 'surrender' — Naeem Tahir

The martyrdom of the GOC Swat may be the last wake up call for the politicians as well as the heads of the establishment, including the armed forces

I questioned in my article on last Saturday (Daily Times, September 14, 2013) if the All Parties Conference's (APC's) unconditional offer to the Taliban was 'surrender' or not. I put a question mark after the word surrender, and then stated in some detail the conditions that will define the negotiations as surrender or not.

It is with grief and disappointment that I have reached the conclusion that the APC's offer of negotiations is an unconditional surrender! It has left no dignity for the nation. It is an absolutely disgraceful sell-out, with bowed head and hands together in forgiveness. Even more painful is the silent support of the army to this surrender.

This surrender is a slap on the face of all the parties. And even this extremely insulting agreement for negotiations is rebuffed by the Taliban, adding injury to insult. Who will now deny that the General Officer Commanding (GOC) Swat has not been killed along with a Lieutenant Colonel and his staff? We released the TTP criminals from jails, but paid Rs 25 million ransom for Wapda employees from Gomal Zam Dam!

Major General Sanaullah, GOC, Malakand Division, was martyred along with Lieutenant Colonel Tausif and Lance Naik Irfan Sattar, in an attack in Upper Dir on Sunday, September 15. May God bless their souls and give their families the fortitude to bear the loss. These martyrs laid down their lives in the service of the nation to protect the lives of Pakistanis; there can be no deaths nobler than these.

The murderers are the Taliban militants who have promptly accepted responsibility. They have done so after the unconditional offer of the APC had been made and 'accepted' by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Can it be called 'acceptance'? No. They actually 'welcomed' it. They must have welcomed it as a beginning to total

submission and surrender and preferred to send a strong message in response. The message they sent is to the armed forces as well as the politicians. I read their message like this:

"Good that you have understood that you are no match for the TTP resolve of brutality and its resources for militancy. Good that your will is broken. But we need to crush your willpower and self-respect completely and forever. So just see what we can do before we even think of talking to you."

The TTP has also laid down pre-conditions for talks, including release of all their prisoners. Remember: the TTP has not offered to release any Pakistani prisoner in return! They want confidence building measures before negotiations. It is a ploy to get concessions; the 'settlement' of the issues never happens.

The TTP is not ready for any negotiations. The negotiation bogey is a trap, and the first step towards total and actual surrender of Pakistan's defence mechanism, including the armed forces, and preparation for total control of Pakistan's assets including its nuclear arsenal.

Some readers may be shocked by my analysis. It only means they are waking up too late in the day. Please recall that if this shock does not wake up the nation then it will become its fate. Remember that the loss of life this Sunday is not the first one. The Pakistan army and its allied paramilitary forces, like the Rangers, have lost one serving Lieutenant General and three Major Generals and almost 30,000 soldiers earlier, in the line of duty. Some major army establishments have been under attack in Karachi and also the General Headquarters in Rawalpindi.

Have all the martyrs laid down their lives just to be included in the Yaum-e-Shuhada (Martyrs Day)?

Could it be true that the armed forces led by General Pervez Kayani are also a party to this surrender?

There is a nightmare for those who are sleeping. Hear the wakeup call. Wake up. Wake up. Wake up with a shriek... 'No...no...no...'

Say NO to negotiations now. Pick up the courage and face the militant threat with unity. Encourage the politicians and the armed forces to stand up and reflect the national resolve and sentiment. Politicians must stop hiding behind the slogan of the 'US war'.

Pakistani lives and nationhood are at stake. Go ahead and protest to the UN against drone attacks. But to surrender in front of militants against Pakistan is not acceptable. It is a war against the nation and the country. It is a war, and wars are always thrust on a nation in one way or the other. Nobody willingly invites war or the aggressor. Such invitations are only given by conspirators in history who align with the aggressor and extend support from inside and commit treachery. If Imran Khan and Mian Nawaz Sharif and their colleagues in the APC did not understand it before then they need to understand it now.

The martyrdom of the GOC Swat may be the last wake up call for the politicians as well as the heads of the establishment, including the armed forces. If they can come out of their slumber, depression, and the comfort of cosy offices, and stand united with the nation to fight the enemy inside, then they will succeed with the support of the Pakistani nation. Please do not take it lying down. Cowardice is not part of the history of this land and should not be a part of the history of this land. There will be loss of life in an honourable fight, and that sacrifice will raise the head of the nation with pride and fill hearts with gratitude. Stand up, say 'NO' to blackmail and make the nation proud of you.

Otherwise, it is simply surrender, not a negotiation.

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Saturday, September 21, 2013

Understanding 'Sharia'

Regressive way(s) of life and ideological extremism cannot be overcome until the 'people' stop having blind faith in the clergy and reject sectarianism

I recall, in my adolescent days, there was a raging controversy against 'loudspeakers'. Loudspeakers are now known as 'public address systems'. The maulvis were in the forefront against the use of the loudspeaker, labelling it as a 'satanic' invention, as it broadcast the 'voice of Satan!' So they prohibited the use of loudspeakers and some 'fatwa' was given against it.

Times changed. Maulvis realised that this invention by scientists had use for them. The use, good or bad, depends on the user; scientific advances cannot be criticised. Ultimately, those who called the invention 'satanic' became the biggest users of the loudspeakers! Life must go on.

Religion, particularly Islam, helps humanity to move forward in a decent and dignified way. Time cannot be frozen and nor do the words of God Almighty say that. God equips human beings with His message and gives them the wisdom to recognise the good from the bad and lead a peaceful life with others.

It is, therefore, necessary to have a good understanding and clarify one's beliefs and thoughts.

In the recent context of the enforcement of Sharia, there are differences in understanding. Sharia is an essential part of Pakistan's constitution but the Taliban have different views about Sharia.

I received an extract from a scholar, sent by a reader. It seems worth sharing. I, therefore, reproduce it here:

Islamic Shariah Versus Islamist shariah(s) (Excerpts from The Divine Version of Religion, by Dr A R Farooqui, professor of Comparative Religion, Scotland).

Islamic Shariah is the natural and rational way of life: The entire Islamic way of life or religion is known as the 'Islamic Shariah'. Its legal

part is called 'Law' of the Islamic Shariah. It should not be mixed up with its various manmade versions, known as the Islamist (sectarian) shariah(s).

Islamic Shariah or 'Islam': Religion (deen), as interpreted by the Qur'an, the Word of God, is known as Islam or the Islamic Shariah. The followers of Islam are known as Muslims. God is one. Therefore, Islamic Shariah is only one. 'Shariah' or, more precisely, the Divine Shariah (Shariat Ilahi) means a 'highway', the Path that leads the humankind straight to its destination, the very purpose of its creation [45:18]. It is also known as the straight path (suerat mustaqeem) [1:6, 6:153], the path that leads to light (from the darkness) [14:1], the path of Divine guidance [20:135 and 22:24, 23:74], the path that is guided to by the Qur'an [34:6], and the path of God [42:53]. Qur'an describes it as deen (Religion) or Islam [3:19/85].

Islam is the way of life of 'progresses' to socio-economic modernity. Qur'an guides the humankind 'to embrace religion in its entirety' (spiritual and the worldly affairs together) [2:208], 'to explore the universe for the natural resources' [45:12-13 and 14:32-33, 15:19-22, 16:5-18, 17:66-70, 22:65, 31:20, 80:26-32], to disperse in the land in search of the sustenance (rizq) as soon as fardh sualah is over [62:9-10]; and says, "Allah never changes status of the people until they struggle for it" [13:11 and 8:53, 53:39].

Qur'an also guides the humankind not to follow guidance of the people [2:135, 9:31/34 etc] or traditions of the forefathers [2:170 etc] blindly (taqleed), but to exploit 'reason' (own intellect, ijihad) [7:179, 8:22 etc] and to follow what has been 'sent down' (Divine Revelation, wahy) to them (from their Lord, Rabb) [2:136, 4:163-166 etc]. The Messengers of God never followed their forefathers blindly.

Islam is the way of life of 'peace'. Qur'an, the divine text of religion, guides the humankind 'not to divide' society into sects [3:103/105, 6:159], 'not to destabilise' society (fasaad) [7:56/85]; to fight jihad against those who destabilise the society [4:75 etc], and to punish the fasaadists (terrorists) by a painful death [5:33]. It prohibits compulsion in religion [2:256, 13:40, 88:21-22]; and emphasises 'freedom' of expression [18:29 etc] and interfaith harmony [3:64, 16:125, 29:46]. Qur'an authorises only the 'state rulers' to impose the Islamic Shariah [22:41]. It also guides the citizens to obey only their rulers [5:49] so as

to avoid anarchy in the society. Qur'an emphasises mutual consultations for solving controversies [3:159, 42:38]. Islamic Shariah is, thus, consistent with 'democracy'.

Islamist shariah(s) or 'Islamism': Religion, as interpreted largely by the theological (manmade) texts, is known as 'Islamism' or Islamist (sectarian) shariahs. Such interpretations of religion are peculiar to the Sunni Islam, Shia Islam and the Sufi Islam. Their adherents are known as 'Islamists' (maslaki Muslims).

Islamist shariahs are 'regressive' way(s) of life. Theologians (ulema, mullahs) guide the people to offer extra (nafal) worship and supplications (dua'ain), including camping for collective supplication (ijtimaee dua); and to leave the rest to Allah and luck. Mystics claim that asceticism and esotericism are solutions to all problems of the humankind. The clergy rigidly profess 'taqleed' (blind imitation) of the eighth century fiqahi thoughts since the 13th century CE. They regard the people with progressive and innovative thoughts (ijtihad) in the 'worldly affairs' as heretics or secular; and liable to be punished.

Islamist shariahs are the way(s) of life of 'radicalism'. Clergy deny the Sunni-Shiah division being 'sectarianism', and promote it through their madrassas. They justify extremism, calling it jihad, for establishing sectarian theocracies and a caliphate so as to promote their own nizam-e-adal or nizam-e-mustafa, but in the name of the Islamic Shariah. Islamist shariahs differ significantly with one another. Shariahs of the Sunni and Shiah maslaks urge political and legislative authority for the 'theologians' (ulema) of their own respective maslaks. They, thus, 'disapprove democracy'.

Conclusion: Islamic Shariah is the 'natural and/or rational' way of life. Regressive way(s) of life and ideological extremism cannot be overcome until the 'people' stop having blind faith in the clergy and reject sectarianism. Islam is the way of life of peace, freedom and progress to socio-economic modernity.

These are the views of a scholar; however, it will be worthwhile to make a wider study for full comprehension.

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Sunday, November 03, 2013

Terms of the 'surrender' to terrorists

Only those Taliban and the residents of Waziristan deserve some facilities that convince the nation of being law abiding

Leaked out in English daily are the terms offered to the Taliban for the so-called negotiations.

The information does not seem to have been carried by any other newspaper. The dateline was October 12, 2013, from Washington, reported by the editor himself! Since then the information seems to have been hushed up. Here I share with the readers what appeared in that paper as "The Blueprint of a package deal with Taliban".

"Without disclosing the names and contents, I can write the points of the package, which look like a huge big cake with cream all over it, which may cost Islamabad some billions for a few years, but in return, the peace that may come will bring back many more billions elsewhere in the economy, investment, industry, trade and other areas that have fallen on the sidelines because of the law and order situation.

These offers include:

1. A completely cost-free supply of electricity and gas in all of FATA.
2. Supply of petrol and food items at highly subsidised and reduced prices.
3. A total tax-free and duty-free status to FATA for setting up any industry for at least 10 years. This should include an incentive package for Pakistani entrepreneurs to build suitable industries in FATA.
4. Like many Arab countries, a local partner must be given free 15-20 percent shares in these industries, and in return, he should ensure a secure and workable environment for the industry to run.
5. Mandatory employment of locals with a minimum wage of Rs 20,000 on at least 50 percent jobs thus created. If locals are not available, outsiders may be given these jobs.

6. Free education for FATA children within FATA and in universities inside Pakistan, to be paid by the Government of Pakistan.
7. Free setting up of quality hospitals in these areas where local doctors should run the affairs.
8. All youth, over the age of 18, boys and girls, should be given an unemployment allowance of at least Rs 15, 000 a month until they find a job, within FATA or in Pakistan or abroad.
9. Generous no-interest loans be provided to locals for business, transport and economic activities in their areas including duty-free import of buses and vans registered in FATA.
10. All FATA residents, with valid ID cards, must get 30-50 percent discount in airlines, railways and other government transport systems. These subsidies should be picked up by the government.
11. At least 2,000 FATA residents should be sent on Hajj and Umra visits every year at no cost.
12. All FATA agencies should be restructured into smaller units where local leaders should be declared as nazims, mayors, ameers or whatever name they like, and local affairs should be allowed to be handled by them under shariah or local tribal laws, customs and traditions through jirgas and ulema councils.
13. The militants in these areas, with their arms, should be regularised as law enforcement forces of their respective areas. They should be given proper training and assistance by Pakistan where and when needed.

There are some other concessions and points in the package as well. This package comes to several billion rupees every year but it is a long-term investment in the future of FATA and Pakistan.

What the Taliban should give in return is an assurance that violence and fighting will stop everywhere; an environment of peace will be created for all this to be achieved; Pakistan's territorial sovereignty will be accepted and FATA people will continue to use the Pakistani passport as their travel document."

I have reproduced this 'offer' for the benefit of the readers who can form their own opinions. If these offers are true then some very critical questions arise:

Is this a reward?

- (a) For raising arms against the state?
- (b) For creating terrorism with the support of the enemies of Pakistan and killing peaceful citizens? And,
- (c) Are we sending a message to the people of all underdeveloped areas of Pakistan to follow suit and rebel against the state to achieve development targets?

Balochistan is already prepared to follow suit. So may be the Punjabi Taliban!

Offers 1, 2, 9, 10 are completely unacceptable and unfair to the nation, and number 13 is potentially very dangerous. Other offers need rationalisation.

Agreed, Waziristan needs development, but that is needed evenly in all areas of Pakistan. If the offer is made to the Waziristan terrorists, then the hope that there will be ultimate peace to compensate the 'investment cost' is far from reality. The example will be followed by other 'have-nots', including the Punjabi Taliban, as a successful blackmail tool. Terror will continue. All that the rebels need are guns, which will be supplied by Pakistan's enemies easily. If this continues then what else is a civil war? What will be the future of Pakistan?

Don't the peaceful citizens and those who subject themselves to the constitution of the country deserve these facilities before the Taliban do? Particularly, healthcare and quality education! The Taliban should in fact pay a price for the reign of terror they unleashed. Only those Taliban and the residents of Waziristan deserve some facilities that convince the nation of being law abiding.

Why only the born again ex-terrorists are rewarded? If they do not prove their loyalty beyond doubt, then the state should apply full force and clear the country of its enemies.

The COAS should ensure that the reward is only available to those who are peaceful, and who respect and adhere to the constitution of Pakistan. Otherwise, the COAS will risk being remembered as a major

player in this 'surrender'. The Pakistan armed forces cannot not let the country set an example for others to organise rebellions in blackmail for concessions.

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Selection from the 2011 Edition

Saturday, March 13, 2010

Prime minister's asset management

If all the millions, even billions, worth of properties stay in one name, then the risks are enormous. For example, an adversary in power may confiscate the assets, or an enquiry into the legitimacy of assets may be instituted. Such things are embarrassing and it is better to avoid such an occurrence

The prime minister provides the lead. It is a new concept of 'assets management'. However, he does need to learn a bit from the 'two time prime minister'. Prime Minister Gilani is upright; his physique and posture clearly give that impression. He was shown on the electronic media on March 1, 2010, saying that he transferred his properties to other people in the family because of the fear of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB). In the meantime, the prime minister's sleuths have done well and his statement about the fear of NAB has disappeared from the media mysteriously. In any case, at least he has some fear.

In fact, non-declaration or transfer is a great solution for the rich in politics. When in power, or in a strong political position, riches increase in mysterious ways. If all the millions, even billions, worth of properties stay in one name, then the risks are enormous. For example, an adversary in power may confiscate the assets, or an enquiry into the legitimacy of assets may be instituted. Such things are embarrassing and it is better to avoid such an occurrence, no matter how genuine such ownerships may be, for example from gifts, nazars, partnership shares, etc. So the best thing is to not involve your name directly. Such 'transfer' of assets ensures that the 'assets' do not get converted into...

But still our one time prime minister has more to learn from the two time prime minister. Our one time premier has not much in assets. Let us look at his record. Daily Times, March 21, 2009, quotes: "Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani may be one of the poorest Members of the National Assembly (MNAs), as his furniture, fittings and others items of personal use are worth only Rs 200,000, and he owns no other property." This is the reality and one wonders how can anyone believe the internet gossip saying that he gifted a watch worth \$ 50,000 to Sohail Ahmed as an appreciation of his TV appearances? There are so many 'nonsensical' stories doing the rounds! After all, he is the prime minister, and also a revered murshad. He will go a long way, and therefore once again the need to learn from the great and living twice elected premier.

Now let us look at a comparison between the one-timer and the two-timer. Our two-timer wields a lot of power. No, I am not referring to the electric power stolen for the election campaign of Lahore's NA-123 elections. This is absolutely inconsequential and all the ruckus about it is a waste of time. The amount of electric power gobbled before to run the steel mills may run into thousands of megawatts, so why worry about peanuts?

Let us look at the assets that allegedly belong to our two-timer: "The Raiwind estate spread over several thousand acres; Ittefaq Sugar Mills set up in 1982; Brothers Steel in 1983; Brothers Textile Mills in 1986; Brothers Sugar Mills Ltd in 1986; Ittefaq Textile Units in 1987; Khalid Siraj Textile Mills in 1988; Ramzan Buksh Textiles in 1987; and Farooq Barkat (Pvt) Ltd in 1985."

This is obvious and 'tangible', but there are said to be other 'intangible' but useful 'assets'. The examples are quoted: \$ 60 million from the famous road contract known as GT road (connecting Lahore-Islamabad); \$ 140 million in unsecured loans from Pakistan's State Bank to fund companies owned or controlled by the two-timer. He did not pay the loans back to the bank, instead got them pardoned from President Muhammad Rafiq Tarar. Rs 60 million from government rebates on sugar exported by mills controlled by him and his business associates, Rs 58 million from inflated prices paid for imported wheat from the US and Canada. There may be an endless list of gains by using authority, gains in taking over foreign exchange, levying of duties after

the Ittefaq Group imports and so on, and of course the prime properties in London and elsewhere.

If all the above-mentioned is true, then I do not actually have the accounting ability, or the accounting expertise to add up the total value of these assets. My calculator is non-professional and has digits only up to some billions, not as many as needed in this case. But still, on record or declared, there is almost nothing in the name of the great two time prime minister.

So, the one-timer has really a lot to learn. We should be glad that he frequents the two-timer often. There is a bright future ahead for him. The two-timer has handled the NAB extremely well, although it has been a pain in the neck, and elsewhere, for so many.

He does not hold a political office, not even the head of a political party on paper. But he wields power, and points his finger at everyone else. Money flows at his beck and call. It is like what Mao once said: "Power flows from the barrel of a gun". In this case, 'the barrel of the gun' is replaced by 'his lips'. This is the way to go Mr One-Timer. Learn from the two-timer how he manages, retains and uses assets. Should this advice not be taken seriously?

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Views and Comments by Naeem Tahir Vol. 2
Saturday, June 19, 2010

Who is David Headley?

In 2006, Daood Gilani changed his name to David Coleman Headley, borrowing the family's American name. The change was made to help Headley escape detection and travel easily between the US, India and Pakistan with his American identity

Indian investigators have now been allowed by authorities in the US to interrogate David Coleman Headley. This permission has been given after noticeable reluctance from the US.

The investigation under reference relates to the Mumbai terror attacks of 2008. Headley earned the grim distinction of being the American jihadist with the highest body count. He remains something of a cipher, quite literally an international man of mystery. One wonders if the Indians will find new facts. Will they be able to understand his mental makeup?

Who is David Headley? How did he end up being what he is?

He has one blue and one brown eye, a symbol of his mixed parentage. Some senior officers of Radio Pakistan may remember him as a fair looking boy hanging around the Lahore Radio Station. Others may remember him as a teenager living with his father near the Jamia Ashrafia off the Canal bank. His father was a bureaucrat and a poet. Within the broadcasting service he rose to become the director general, and served for some time in the Voice of America in Washington. Mr Salim Gilani is remembered for starting the transcription service in the broadcasting set-up, which is the only archive collection in the country. He was known to be comfortable with musicians, but otherwise "stand-offish" and strict.

It was during his stint with the Voice of America that he met Serrill Headley. She ran away from home when she was 15, eventually settling in Washington and finding work as a secretary. "She was very independent, very freewheeling," says her brother, William Headley. It was in Washington that she met Salim Gilani. They got married. Headley was born Daood Gilani on June 30, 1960 in Washington DC.

Later they moved to Pakistan, but the marriage did not last long due to cultural differences. Serrill eventually returned to Philadelphia — without Daood, and, in 1973, she enrolled in a bartending school.

"She was a stunner with snow-white skin," recalls Ronnie Horsman, 85, who ran the Philadelphia Bartending School. "After she took the course, she told me she was going to buy a bar on Second Street. She had her mind set." So she started her own joint called Khyber Pass.

Daood Gilani was sent to Hasanabdal Military School. Salim Gilani, meanwhile, probably married again. In 1977, Serrill returned to Pakistan and convinced the then teenage Daood to drop out of the military academy and live with her in Philadelphia. In the opinion of his maternal uncle William Headley, "Daood was shocked by his mother's libertine lifestyle: the drinking, the revealing clothes, the flirting with men. Serrill's romantic life was further cause for friction between Daood and his mother. When Serrill found a new love interest, it took precedence over everything else in her life, including Daood. She eventually turned her back on David and that was just unforgivable."

Eventually, Daood assimilated into American life. He enrolled in Valley Forge Military Academy, but lasted just one semester. Friends of his mother believe that it was there that Daood first developed a taste for illegal drugs. He lived in a room in the bar and met some people of questionable occupations.

In 1985, he married a woman he met at the bar. "When he would go to Pakistan he would get all riled up again," the woman told the Inquirer. "He would use words like 'infidel' when he would see an Indian person in the street. He used to spit in the street to make a point." Much like his parents' marriage, this union would not survive the cultural differences; two years later it ended in divorce. "I guess he was torn between two cultures," she told the Inquirer. "I think he liked both. He did not know how to blend them."

"He got involved with some bad people, which is not unusual when you live in a room above a bar," William says.

Returning from a trip to Pakistan in June 1988, he was arrested at the airport in Frankfurt, when customs agents discovered two kilogrammes of heroin hidden in the false bottom of his suitcase. Daood

was turned over to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and agreed to cooperate in return for a lighter sentence. Two days later, he was back at his apartment on New Street, which had been wired for sound and video, after which he ended up as a DEA agent and a drug addict. DEA also coordinates with the CIA in some matters. In 2006, Daood Gilani changed his name to David Coleman Headley, borrowing the family's American name. The change was made to help Headley escape detection and travel easily between the US, India and Pakistan with his American identity.

He visited Afghanistan several times to trap the drug mafia. He was in contact with jihadi networks as well. He was booked for his involvement in the Denmark terror plan but escaped the death sentence, once again by the 'plea bargain' strategy. By then, he was totally in the hands of the secret agencies.

He was the major facilitator in the Mumbai attack. He provided maps, photographs, even GPS systems to the attackers. He visited Pakistan, Afghanistan and India several times. How were his trips funded? Did he use his half brother Danyal Gilani, the PRO to the prime minister, in any way? Was the CIA, FBI, IB or some other agency involved in planning the Mumbai carnage? Did they suppress the information for covert motives and let the attack happen? Such questions need answers.

Headley is the product of a broken home, a split nationality, neglect by society, influence of the mafia and totally inhuman exploitation by secret agencies. No one fulfilled their social responsibility. Parents, friends and society all ignored him while he needed help. He ended up as what he is — a menace, with the prospect of spending the rest of his life in jail and further manipulation. The best that Indian investigators can achieve now is to identify the terror networks, share information and save future targets from destruction.

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Saturday, September 18, 2010

VIEW: Of 'revolution'

The most powerful element to start a revolution is a widespread dissatisfaction with the existing situation. Dissatisfaction is rapidly increasing and solutions are not forthcoming. It seems a credible leadership is missing

One has heard it before. We have heard of an impending revolution for at least 60 years if not more. In teahouses and coffee houses. In the afternoons and evenings and late into the nights. Every day, a dream of revolution was seen and believed in. In the famous Pak Tea House, where tea was served at six annas for a 'half set', i.e. two cups. However, an extra cup was provided to accommodate if a guest appeared. Tea for two was then shared by three in the 'comrade' spirit. In the nearby coffee house, a little richer 'revolutionaries' gathered, who could afford a whole one rupee for a coffee for two, and there they also talked of the revolution. Hopes ran high if Faiz walked in with his mysterious smile and suddenly the revolution enthusiasts felt that the 'revolution' was next door. They would go home in the ecstasy of Faiz's romantic promise and great poetic prowess. Habib Jalib stayed in the background and roughed it out in poverty. Jalib struggled for an awakening for the real revolution, which never happened. Like the play *Waiting for Godot*, the people, mostly youth, in the teahouse and coffee house, waited for the revolution to come.

The revolution, in those days, was to arrive from Russia via Faiz or from China with someone else. Students in and around universities and colleges of Lahore listened to the pipedreams of a revolution in restaurants and coffee houses. Then they left college and confronted life's realities. Perhaps some of them developed a sensitivity for the have-nots and carried it with them. Some used 'revolution' as a slogan for political popularity; some used it for social distinction and coupled it with verses from Faiz. Mostly the young joined the rat race of living and prospering and 'revolution' only survived as a romantic thought. Some completely forgot and engaged themselves in improving their personal

balance sheets at the cost of the poverty-stricken millions through the use of political or other influences.

The progressive parties in Pakistan were the targets of state oppression, and were suspected of planning 'unrest'. The elements of the establishment engaged in secret operations used this as a justification for their own existence and continued to blow the potential 'danger' out of proportion. People like Hassan Nasir were considered enemies and secretly killed. Others were hounded, arrested and dispersed. The establishment believed they were 'enemies' of the country and to further strengthen their claim, termed these people as a-religious. Let alone progressive thought, even creativity, arts, journalism and literature were all suspect. The status quo was strengthened, progressive thought and its proponents were demoralised, and the country continued on the path prescribed by retrogressive, pseudo-religious leaders. The true and peaceful spirit of religion was suppressed, and an aggressive version was taught and used for hegemony. The classical example of this approach was the rule of Ziaul Haq. The country suffered a counter-revolution well before the dream of the progressive revolution could ever become a reality. The rich and the influential continued to increase their power; the poor and the helpless saw a rise in their misery. Some, who could manage, migrated or joined the diaspora for a hope in life, and to support their families. With the Zia-led change, the nation unconsciously landed into the situation produced by al Qaeda and the Taliban who implemented the theory of *Edarat-al-Wahsh* (Governance of the Wilderness) by Abu Bakr Naji.

Why did the dream of revolution never come true? There are several reasons, and state oppression was one of them.

We will need to understand 'revolution' as well as the process and strategy of it, to understand the phenomenon. A revolution is a fundamental change in power or organisational structures that takes place in a relatively short period of time.

Aristotle described two types of political revolution: 1) complete change from one constitution to another; 2) modification of an existing constitution. Revolutions have occurred through human history and vary widely in terms of methods, duration, and motivating ideology. Their results include major changes in culture, economy, and socio-political institutions. These can be peaceful or violent. Whatever route it takes, the ideal is to build a cohesive nation, social justice and a welfare state.

The potential elements that call for a revolution are on the increase in our polity. I have listed these in an earlier article. What we do not have is a convincing and workable 'motivating ideology'. Nor do we have a unified leadership and a political organisation suited to revolution.

The most powerful element to start a revolution is a widespread dissatisfaction with the existing situation. Dissatisfaction is rapidly increasing and solutions are not forthcoming. It seems a credible leadership is missing. The most concerning fact is that if the potential elements of a revolution remain directionless, the outcome can be anarchy, lawlessness, and even indiscriminate bloodshed. The Sialkot lynching is an example. Some leaders of political parties have repeatedly called for a 'revolution', but do they realise what they are playing with? Is there a 'motivating ideology', education, and the desire of joining hands for a united and selfless struggle? A revolution needs more serious thought than has apparently been given to it. Revolution 'yes', anarchy 'no'. No one would want a dream of a revolution intended for betterment to end up in regrets. This is the challenge for all emerging political forces who feel the need of change. It is with these forces that hope is now associated. A very serious thought must be given to realities by Altaf bhai, Mr Imran Khan and Mr Pervez Musharraf. It is time to make a coordinated effort, build up a true 'national' spirit and then a great country. They can bring a peaceful revolution if they use the brains, muscle, and capabilities available to them, and, if they have a strong will to do it.

The writer is a culture and media management specialist, a researcher, author, director and actor

Sunday, October 03, 2010

Birth of a political party

It was in London that history was made once again. Or is it that history will repeat itself!

On Friday October 1, Mr Pervez Musharraf announced the activation of the political party named All Pakistan Muslim League worldwide. The name strikes a chord of familiarity because it is inspired from the name of the party that Muhammad Ali Jinnah successfully led and was called the All India Muslim League. Jinnah returned to India about 80 years ago and led the Muslims to achieve an independent state, are the people looking for a leader to consolidate that independence now?

London has been a centre of many things for centuries and now it is the first centre of the All Pakistan Muslim League (APML) to be officially declared so.

A large number of political figurers were seen around, but what is significant is that they were outnumbered by young and educated individuals who had not been in politics before. A preliminary meeting for organisation details had been held at 20 Old Street, the new office of the APML. Mr Musharraf presided. There were at least 80 workers from across over the world present there. They included workers from all over Pakistan, the US, Canada, the UK and other countries. Some recognisable were those of former ministers Shahbaz Chaudhry, Lala Nisar, Barrister Saif, Dr Amjad, Nasim Ashraf, Nisar Memon, Ehsan Ali Khan, Sher Afgan Niazi, and young politicians like Raza Anjum, a councillor of the Conservative Party from Cambridge. Also present were Mubin Fatima from Quetta, Nawab Saifuddin Laghari from Badin, Nadim Sheikh, the organiser, from London, Barrister Fawad Chaudhry from Lahore, Gen Rashid Qureshi from Islamabad, and many other devotees of Mr Pervez Musharraf.

Musharraf wanted to join the party as an ordinary member, however there was a unanimous decision that he be elected as the president at this point.

The event on October 1 was followed by a series of public addresses and meetings throughout the UK. During the October 1 event, Pervez Musharraf presented his 'vision' and answered questions from over 100 journalists present.

Saturday, December 11, 2010

Thinking of democracy — I

The governments of the PPP and PML-N were removed twice in the 1990s. The same two political forces are at work again. Is it the performance of elected governments and the appointed functionaries that are falling short of expectations? Or is there something deficient in the system that needs improvement?

It was not long ago that we appeared to long and pray for 'democracy'. Nor was it the first time that such a desire was expressed. But it is also known that, in the past, soon after the assumption of political power by some democratic governments, disappointments set in quite early, and overt and covert actions were taken to get rid of those democratic dispensations. The usual cause of disappointment has been corruption and inefficiency. This is the chequered history of democratic governments in this country.

Now, again, voices are being heard expressing dissatisfaction and seeking change. The timing is not different either, i.e. less than three years of a democratic set-up have gone by. Interestingly, the political parties, whose governance is found wanting, are also the same. The governments of the PPP and PML-N were removed twice in the 1990s. The same two political forces are at work again. Is it the performance of elected governments and the appointed functionaries that are falling short of expectations? Or is there something deficient in the system that needs improvement? Is it that, unless a system improvement is made, the result will always be the same and the result will be disappointments? Where is the problem?

In fact, there is not just one problem, there are several. These broadly cover four basic facts: the brand of democracy adopted by Pakistan, the political culture, incapability of the incumbents and poor judgment by the voters, most of whom may not comprehend the full importance of choosing a national leadership.

Let us look at these.

There are several kinds of democracies and systems of governance adopted in the world. Some are hybrid and similar and others are widely different. Different terms are used to describe them. Representative democracy involves the selection of government officials by the people being represented. If the head of state is also democratically elected, then it is called a democratic republic. The most common mechanisms involve the election of the candidate with a majority or a plurality of the votes.

Parliamentary democracy is a representative democracy where the government is appointed by parliamentary representatives as opposed to a presidential rule, wherein the president is both head of state and the head of government, and is elected by the voters. Under a parliamentary democracy, the government is exercised by delegation to an executive ministry and subject to ongoing review, checks and balances by the legislative parliament elected by the people.

A liberal or constitutional democracy is a representative democracy in which the ability of the elected representatives to exercise decision-making power is subject to the rule of law, and usually moderated by a constitution that emphasises the protection of the rights and freedoms of individuals, and which places constraints on the leaders and on the extent to which the will of the majority can be exercised against the rights of minorities.

There are several other forms. However, the ones mentioned are more common. Interestingly, no country seems to have applied the definition as it is in the book. Most countries have adapted, mixed or made a hybrid to suit their country's polity. The US is a 'full democracy', a federal constitutional republic. The United Kingdom is a full democracy, a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy. France is considered again a full democracy in the form of a semi-presidential system and bicameralism. India is termed as a 'flawed democracy' in the form of federalism, parliamentary democracy and bicameralism. Pakistan is termed as a 'hybrid' federal parliamentary republic, and Turkey a parliamentary republic. The encyclopaedia lists 30 full democracies, 50 flawed democracies, 36 hybrid regimes and 51 authoritarian regimes in the world. How this classification is done is not the subject of discussion here. But what I dare say is that there are as many varieties and colours of democracies as the varieties in our mangoes. Perhaps even more.

What is abundantly clear is that countries design their governance system suitable to the genre and tradition of a people and find a reliable way to ensure the incorporation of the people's will and civil liberties, as well as effective decision making. Pakistan could have set itself on the right course if Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah had lived long enough to put democracy on the right course, or even if his address to the Constituent Assembly on August 11, 1947 was followed in letter and spirit. The constitution of 1956 was discarded by Ayub Khan, who brought in the 1962 Constitution. Then again a constitution was passed in 1973. The constitution of 1973 has since gone through so many amendments that it is quite different from the original in some ways.

The process of elections, in particular, is what needs a careful review. The present system has lent itself to exploitation by the elite powerful lobbies of landlords, sardars, the moneyed class and other influentials. The lack of education and ignorance among the masses has also contributed to the distortion of the spirit of true representation respecting the will of the masses. In a constituency with five candidates, the highest vote getter wins a seat in the assemblies, while, in fact, he does not represent the majority because the votes cast in favour of the winner are usually far less than the combined votes of the opposing candidates.

The 20th century Italian thinkers Pareto and Mosca (independently) argued that "democracy is illusory, and serves only to mask the reality of elite rule". Indeed, they argued that elite oligarchy is the unbendable law of human nature, due largely to the apathy and division of the masses (as opposed to the drive, initiative and unity of the elites), and that democratic institutions would do no more than shift the exercise of power from oppression to manipulation. It seems mostly true in Pakistan, making democracy itself a system calling for renewed thinking.

(To be continued)

The writer is a culture and media management specialist, a researcher, author, director and actor

Friday, December 17, 2010

Thinking of democracy — II

We need a democratic system which ensures the participation of the distinguished achievers at the decision making level. The persons of known capabilities among technocrats, specialists, thinkers, artists, media men and philosophers must be associated with planning and implementation on a regular basis

Our democratic system was more or less copied from the British system. It needs a second look and should be adapted to our conditions, as many other countries like France have done. A study indicates that in practice it may not pay the incumbents to conduct fair elections in countries that have no history of democracy. This study showed that incumbents who rig elections stay in power 2.5 times more than those who permit fair elections. The same study shows that election misconduct is more likely in countries with low per capita incomes, rich in natural resources, and lacking institutional checks and balances. This appears familiar in our context.

Some economists criticise the efficiency of democracy. They premise this on the concept of the 'irrational voter'. Their argument is that voters are highly uninformed about many political issues, especially relating to economics, and have a strong bias for the few issues on which they are fairly knowledgeable. It is also stressed that democratic institutions work on consensus to decide an issue, which usually takes longer than unilateral decisions.

The time is ripe for the constitutional experts and political thinkers to do some serious homework and improve the prevalent systems. The institution of democracy itself be questioned and effort made to save it. The disillusionment of the masses calls for action, now.

We need a democratic system which ensures the participation of the distinguished achievers at the decision making level. The persons of known capabilities among technocrats, specialists, thinkers, artists, media men and philosophers must be associated with planning and implementation on a regular basis and must be provided with the

political and administrative support. This can enable our country to move forward in a planned manner. The present system sidelines this important group of people. As a result, the political leadership is decided by about 35 percent of the voters. Of these, the winner is usually an influential who has managed to get more votes than his rival, and almost certainly less than the total votes cast against him. The winner starts as a leader, commanding the confidence of only a minority in his/her constituency. He is thus handicapped. It should also be a matter of concern that such leadership, in the best situations, is only capable of communicating and convincing a few in electoral constituencies. Such leadership is not necessarily qualified as lawmakers or administrators. So the obvious result is what we have been experiencing in poor decision making and less-than-desirable governance. The result is a popular desire to change. It ends in a face change only because of the system. But a face change is not the solution. The solution is to be sought in developing a system through which the most capable individuals are enabled to exercise power in the interest of the country and its people.

We also need to discipline and educate the masses. There should, of course, be popular leaders who can understand the logic of the decisions at higher levels and use their rapport and communication skills to make the masses understand the logic and benefits of the decisions taken. This effort at communication needs to reach all levels of the masses. The system of local governments is an important factor in reaching the depths of society. Indeed the system of the local governments is the basic mechanism, which can, and should, deal with the immediate and local issues on a regular basis. The lawmakers in the assemblies must engage their attention with the macro issues. At the local level, micro issues are important.

At all levels, an adequate representation of the ethnic and minority groups needs to be ensured. Women must be important contributors in decision-making. In the presently defunct local bodies system of representatives, inclusion of the female population was ensured. It must continue and be made more effective. Everyone must understand that the two genders have different perceptions and issues, and in a healthy society both need to be fully respected. Therefore, an adequate representation of all genders needs to be ensured. I would even advocate some representation of the uncommon persons, i.e. special persons,

including khawaja saras. What right do we have to look down upon a human being? And what right do we have to consider ourselves 'normal' and superior? Just because we are in a larger number? Does that entitle us to do injustice?

To sum up, I believe it is high time that men of distinguished legal and political experience and credibility get together and do some serious thinking. There is no dearth of persons of known integrity and stature like Mr SM Zafar, Dr Javed Iqbal, Ms Asma Jahangir and others in various parts of the country. The system of a liberal/constitutional democracy may need serious consideration with some modifications.

The improved discipline and education of the masses must be ensured. The overtones that create ethnic and religious conflict will need control mechanisms to avoid naked oppression. Space must also be provided for the specialists and men of distinction in different fields to benefit the nation and to create worthwhile opportunities for them and thus to check the brain drain. Such persons need to be 'weighed' and not just counted. I would like to hope that such a democracy, suited to our conditions, will get the support of all the powers which matter in the country and elsewhere. Let me say it again, we need to start now and must not postpone it. We need to have the constitutional structure for progress and well being of the people and the country. When people want 'change', then this is the nature of change, reflected in our electoral system, that the country needs.

(Concluded)

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Saturday, December 25, 2010

Noor Jehan — the one and only

In desperation for work with some respectability, Noor Jehan decided to stand outside the gates of the Pancholi Studio and sing to attract attention. She knew she could do it. Of course when she sang, time froze and she was admitted into the Pancholi family

It was on December 23, 2000 — the 27th of Ramzan — when the melody queen Noor Jehan turned to eternal life. Her memory will remain green for a very long time.

She was born on September 21, 1926 into the family of Amman Hasso in Kasur. Amman Hasso was loved by the citizens for her voice and her magnanimous charity. The wife of Amma Hasso's son, Madad Ali, died leaving behind two daughters, Bharo and Umḍa. He then married Fateh Bibi who was of Kashmiri origin. The marriage produced five sons and two daughters, Eiden and Allah Wasai. The Punjabi expression Allah Wasai means "the one who is taken care of by God". Indeed she was blessed by Allah and was to be recognised by the world as Noor Jehan, the queen of melody. She was destined to rule the hearts of hundreds of millions of people in and outside the subcontinent. Her superb voice with unmatched singing skills would light up hearts and brighten faces. She shared her noor in her voice. No single person in the subcontinent ruled the hearts of the people longer than Noor Jehan. She was the singer of the millennium. Her voice had the power to stop the moving world and create pin drop silence. She was abundantly endowed by nature in beauty, charm, voice, expression, a brilliant mind and a sense of humour. Noor Jehan had a tireless will to work for perfection. She struggled with courage in an unkind world. She knew she was a woman and that her path would be difficult. But she should be remembered as one woman who could not be defeated. She was a role model for many.

In her early days, as 'Allah Wasai, she had seen much hardship. The family was forced to move out of Kasur in search of work. Noor Jehan told me of her journey from Kasur to Lahore on foot one very hot summer. She reached the house of a relative in Lahore and Allah Wasai

very thirsty, was offered water to drink in a cup. "I can never forget how nice and cool that water felt to me as it travelled down my throat."

At the age of five, on the advice of their relative Nazir Begum in Lahore, the two girls Eiden and Allah Wasai were made pupils of Ustad Fazal Hussain for music education. He in turn entrusted them to his disciple Ustad Ghulam Mohammad. Soon Ghulam Muhammad would be struck by the blessing of God endowed upon his youngest student. Her capability to understand the classical and her personal creativity amazed the teacher.

The economic recession after the First World War was telling and by 1932 Allah Wasai started singing in a theatre in Lahore along with her sister Eiden and a cousin, Hyder Bandi. The theatre was probably known as Parbhat Talkies. Traditionally, they appeared before the show and during the interval. Allah Wasai sang a naat (hymn) 'Hanste Hain Sitarey, Ya Shahe Madeena'. The audience loved the naat and the pretty little girl, so it showered money on them.

Soon this team of singers was to be discovered by the talent hunters of Karnani's theatre in Calcutta. The family moved to that centre of all show business. Noor Jehan told me of her experiences in Calcutta, which were good, bad, and even tragic. The best thing perhaps was being given the title of Noor Jehan by her favourite star, Seth Kulkarni.

But still she was baby Noor Jehan. She recalled that one evening she was sleeping in the theatre tent provided to them and her mother woke her up and said, "Get up quick. Some film people have come and they want to hear you sing." According to Noor Jehan, she was half asleep and hardly focused; rubbing her eyes she sang whatever came to mind. It could have been either the naat or 'Mera Sohna Shehr Kasur' (my beautiful city Kasur). This was the only 'audition' the girl had and she was on her way to such heights of stardom that no one would ever achieve.

In 1942, baby Noor Jehan was ready to be a star. The family had returned from Calcutta and was in dire financial straits. Syed Imtiaz Ali Taj at that time was the prime writer of film stories and worked with Pancholi. Pancholi had Shaukat Hussain Rizvi and Ghulam Hyder in his team as well. In desperation for work with some respectability, Noor Jehan decided to stand outside the gates of the Pancholi Studio and sing to attract attention. She knew she could do it. Of course when she sang,

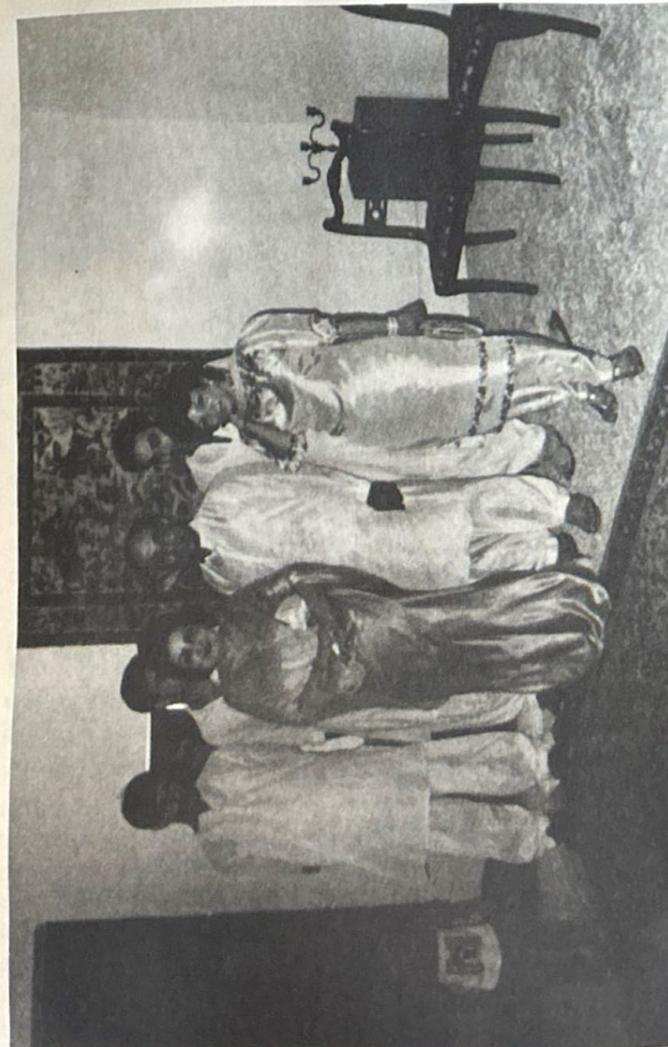
time froze and she was admitted into the Pancholi family. She was the star of Syed Imtiaz Ali Taj's 'Khandan', to be directed by Syed Shaukat Hussain Rizvi. The story of superstar Noor Jehan is no secret thereafter.

Her respect and attachment with the family of Mr Imtiaz Ali Taj is known. In all her trials and tribulations, the house of Taj was her haven. I met her in 1956 and for the following 44 years she was a very dear friend. She loved to be in the company of the educated and intellectuals, particularly Hijab Imtiaz Ali, Faiz and Taj. Her knowledge of classical and popular music was immense and she sang for hours at our house. Of course, Noor Jehan sang our sehra written by Faiz sahib, Yasmin and I could never thank her enough for this gesture, nor could we ever thank Faiz sahib enough.

In 1998, in Cleveland, she was struggling for life and her courage amazed her doctors. I was with her and she shocked me in a moment of consciousness saying that I should write the story of her life. Did she want to tell it all to the world? Maybe she did. She was honest, courageous and proud of her fight in life. Her personality and talent was bigger than what we know as yet.

The writer is a culture and media management specialist, a researcher, author, director and actor

Family and Noor Jehan



In hindsight one is inclined to believe that it has not happened in a day. The poisoning has been slow and over at least 60 years and has continued. One would like to hope, without the desire of blood but for gaining political power. Unfortunately, it has shed a lot of blood and shaken society.

Two groups involved in this activity can be identified. One is the determined self-righteous group of claimants to religious expertise who did not believe in Quaid-e-Azam's vision of an enlightened Pakistan. Second, equally responsible, is the 'silent majority' whose members did not study the Quran's message themselves and accepted anything given to them by persons in typical attitudes, to be the teachings of the Holy Quran. I have personally experienced that some individual quoted Arabic verses in support of an incorrect message, which were not actually from the Quran. May Allah forgive such proponents and also forgive those who are misled. The silent majority found it convenient to give up their responsibility of learning from the Quran and succumbed to the lethargy of letting someone else claim expertise. This was a critical mistake. Even today substantial amount of hate literature is being circulated by extremist sects in the name of Islam and misleading people.

Also responsible are some of those on the pulpit who misuse their privilege. Their hands were strengthened by the 'Objectives Resolution' being adopted in preference to the Quaid's guidelines in his speech of the August 11, 1947, to the Constituent Assembly. The aggressive sectarians looked for greater slice of support from the simple-minded and increased their street power and added an element of fear for those who did not comply with their views. So the story goes on.

The agitations of the mid-1950s were confronted but still these sent a message to political operatives that the effort had some potential. The radicals continued to monopolise the religious rituals, and found the 'elite' and so-called liberals compliant. The room for manipulation by the religious groups kept increasing. This created a more dangerous situation. Now the silent majority, instead of learning and acquiring the knowledge themselves, completely surrendered and preferred to side with one strong group or the other. A powerful monster of radicals came into existence that had a taste for power. The silent majority is now a hostage of aggressive religious-political groupings and mafias. These groupings are destroying peace by in-fighting for power. They

have no scruples; everything is acceptable including foreign help and coercion. The target is hegemony over the nation for their brand of religion. Killings, fatwas, rewards, head money are all going on. Members of the 'silent majority' think and hope that they will not be the targets but actually they are sitting ducks. If the so-called 'silent majority' does not get motivated to save its belief that Islam upholds peace and the finest human values, then it can only be interpreted to be 'silent partners' in crime and nothing else. I believe this is not what the majority of the people in this country can find acceptable. If my optimism is justified, then each member of society will stand up and should be counted. Each one will gain strength from the study of the Quran and reject anything that is concocted. Each member must raise his/her voice against the 'mortals' who assume the right to declare a 'kalima-goh' as non-Muslim. Society as a whole must insist on the sovereignty of the Almighty and refuse to accept the commands of the individuals who try to exercise His powers. The 'silent' must raise their voice now, prevail upon the media, government agencies, courts, educational institutions, civil bureaucrats, and everywhere else to deradicalise the nation. After the killing of Salmaan Taseer and the events thereafter, the message must be read loud and clear. The 'silent majority' must not stay silent anymore. Any more silence will be a criminal consent. The role of the 'silent majority' at this point is to restore the sanity in the people and uphold the values they believe in. They must speak loud and clear in voice and in action. If we all do so, there will be hope.

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Saturday, February 12, 2011

The truth behind the Samjhota tragedy

The Samjhota Express train of February 18, 2007 was to go on its journey of friendship just one day before the foreign ministers of India and Pakistan were to continue their dialogue in India to further the process of normalisation. From the point of view of the Hindutva terrorists, this was the appropriate time to act

The Samjhota Express started from Delhi's historic railway station on the night of February 18, 2007. It was brimming with people who had a reason to go to Pakistan. Some were returning after visiting relatives, some had come for marriages, some went sightseeing, some visited ancestral homes, some explored business opportunities and some had visited shrines. There was happiness, nostalgia, devotion and business interest. The journey from Delhi to Lahore is no ordinary journey — there are emotions attached to it. The Samjhota Express is no ordinary train either. It is the symbol of the ambivalent attitude of the people of two countries that keep playing 'hot' and 'cold' with each other. Relations turn good or bad because of vested interests. Some political parties, particularly Hindutva supporters, are not interested in peace between the two countries. The Hindutva sentiments are in line with the extreme right in Pakistan and those possessing the Taliban mindset. Both draw their strength from hate and fear and propagate these to keep their vote bank intact. The Hindutva wants a religious Hindu identity for India — one caste and one religion instead of a secular identity. Any effort for good relations with Pakistan is not acceptable because they want a larger India. The talks aimed at normalising relations between India and Pakistan in 2007 were against the Hindutva theme and needed to be stopped. Hence the plan to sabotage the very symbol of friendship and accord, the train called Samjhauta.

The Samjhota Express train of February 18, 2007 was to go on its journey of friendship just one day before the foreign ministers of India and Pakistan were to continue their dialogue in India to further the process of normalisation. From the point of view of the Hindutva

terrorists, this was the appropriate time to act. They planned to blow up the train and blow up the talks with it. But the sabotage had to be planned shrewdly and cleverly to hide the real face of the saboteurs.

Bombs were planted — packed in passenger suitcases — and the 'operators' left the train near Panipat. The bombs exploded soon after their departure. This could have been done by a timing device or remote controlled action. The bombs exploded in two bogies and an inferno of fire burnt 70 passengers alive. They could not jump out as the doors had been locked to meet immigration requirements. The passengers in bogies number 10 and 11 were reduced to mere ashes. The unfortunate victims included children, men, women, the young and the old — all Muslims. Five or six Hindus or Sikhs also perished. Among the survivors were a husband and wife whose five children were burnt alive. The terrorists celebrated their success. The talks of friendship received a setback but later the two governments showed remarkable determination to continue their parleys.

Hindutva associates in the Sangh Parivar, having immense clout in the media and Indian government, flashed the news worldwide that the act of terror had been committed by two Muslims, namely Ghulam Rasul Kashmiri and Azmat Ali, with the support of Pakistani terrorists. The headlines were seen by millions in India and elsewhere along with the 'finding' that the attack appeared to be the handiwork of "Islamic terrorists" from Pakistan. Many believed this because terrorism has been associated with Pakistan since 9/11.

This could have been the end of the story, but it was not to be. The Haryana police, in whose jurisdiction the terror attack had occurred, responded urgently and tried to follow the 'leads' provided by the Hindutva set up. The Haryana police looked for Azmat Ali at his address. They reached his house only to be ridiculed and snubbed by the inmates because Azmat Ali had been dead for the last five years! They searched for Ghulam Rasul Kashmiri and found out that he had already been jailed for over a month for travelling without a ticket! The Hindutva/Sangh Parivar story collapsed. The Haryana police then traced the explosives because they found some unexploded suitcases on the train. The analysis of the explosives found that they contained material used by the Indian Army in Kashmir. The Haryana police started getting closer to the truth. The truth could have blown up the whole façade and Hindutva's terrorist plans would have come to light

so something had to be done. The long arm of the Hindutva groups activated their supporters in the Indian intelligence and army and ordered the investigation to be taken away from the Haryana police. It was dumped for some time and they thought that they could live happily ever after.

This was not to be. Tired of inconclusive and suspicious investigations of these acts of terror, the Indian media started to raise its voice so much so that finally it was heard. The Indian government decided to appoint a distinguished, impartial and courageous officer as the chief of the Anti Terror Squad in Maharashtra, Mr Hemant Karkare. Karkare and his team started to study all the cases of terror that had taken place in the recent past in India. They looked at the Haryana police record, which pointed towards some Hindutva groups and, soon, evidence was provided by the explosions at the Malegaon mosque on the 27th of Ramzan in 2008. The bombs, in this case, were planted on the motorcycle used by Pragya Singh Sadvi, an activist of the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP).

Hemant Karkare's discoveries were shocking for the Saffron Brigade, Hindutva believers and the Sangh Parivar. Politicians, army men, business tycoons as well as the religious swamis all faced exposure. The survival of Karkare and his team meant disaster for these people; his death could be their saviour. So Karkare got killed during the Mumbai carnage. But he had previously filed his case in court. By now, the Indian government has verified that the Samjhota tragedy was the handiwork of Indian terrorists. Swami Asimanand, one of the accused, has spilled the beans. The names of Colonel Srikant Purohit and others have come to be known. Some facts of the Samjhota tragedy are now public knowledge.

Sooner or later, the facts behind the Mumbai terror attacks and Karkare's murder will surprise the world.

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Saturday, March 05, 2011

A pro-Taliban government in Punjab?

The support to the PML-N is strongly committed from the violent minority. Funds, muscle and street power are all made available by exploiting the fair name of 'Islam'. The future is incredibly depressing for those who believe in the vision of Allama Iqbal and the statesmanship of Quaid-e-Azam

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has been almost 'kicked out' from the Punjab government. The uncomfortable marriage between the PPP and the PML-N has come to an end with little grace. The end of the 'coalition confusion' will, hopefully, be good for the people. The game of good cop-bad cop is over and both can show their true character. But their true characters are also a matter of concern. The PPP has so far appeared very spineless, incompetent and ineffective. The PML-N has shown a pro-Taliban mindset and support for pro-Taliban activists. The PML-N is known to have provided over 50 million worth of financial assistance to Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), a banned network, in its provincial budget. Senior leaders of the PML-N are seen campaigning with extreme rightists and aggravating interfaith discord. The PML-N stands with them while inflammatory and hate speeches are delivered and ensures that the extremist, pro-Taliban vote bank continues supporting them. The PML-N leadership has shown little sensitivity to the damage they are doing to the social fabric by standing with the extremists. The PML-N has made no effort for inter-cultural harmony. It relies on 'Punjab support', and plays that 'card'. It has also diverted attention from its own corruption and incompetence.

The change has come according to the PML-N game plan. The much denied document of 'pardon' for Nawaz Sharif and others did actually exist and the Mian sahibs informed the Saudi authorities that they have completed the period of abstinence as per the contract and now they are entering the regular political scene. In the meantime, a flirting game to keep the political image was played and the contract was also violated by Chotey (lirtle) Mian sahib, Mr Shahbaz Sharif. Many somersaults were made; first the PML-N joined the federal government

and put up an erratic behaviour. Then they realised that being in the government will gradually erase their identity and the opposition will gain as usual. So they decided to move from the treasury benches to the opposition benches. The PML-N adopted the strategy to throw the bait of sharing the government in Punjab, which left the PPP neither here nor there.

The PML-N held 60 percent of Pakistan, but sat in the opposition in the National Assembly and thus enjoyed the position of being in power as well as in the opposition! Why the PPP liked this arrangement is hard to understand. Why did the PPP not take an opposition role in Punjab from the beginning? Also, why did Prime Minister Gilani keep showing up at Raiwind every week dutifully and almost as a subordinate of the Mian brothers? It must have further demoralised the PPP workers. If one goes back in the chain of events it is evident that most of the decisions made by the PPP were endorsed by the PML-N. Then the PML-N shared the deliberations in the Constitution Committee and got everything that was in its favour. So the PML-N marked time, kept its chief minister on the basis of a stay order of the courts, played with the simple PPP prime minister and prolonged its life. On the other hand, the PPP's Mr Gilani thought he was playing safe and ensuring the PML-N support in case the divide in his own party and the coalition partners became worrisome. As these manoeuvrings were going on to make sure that the political situation maintains the status quo, actual governance was non-existent. The PPP obviously wants to stay in power for five years and reap a rich harvest, the PML-N wants to dig deeper and consolidate with rightists, extremists, and General Zia sympathisers and their mysterious financiers. 'Financiers' may not be much of a mystery for those who claim with confidence that substantial funding from al Qaeda was made available to Mian Nawaz Sharif. Also something to think about is that the murdered, Benazir, Taseer, Bhatti, all were enlightened leaders from the PPP. The next target is to involve Musharraf by hook or crook.

The support to the PML-N is strongly committed from the violent minority. Funds, muscle and street power are all made available by exploiting the fair name of 'Islam'. The recent launching of the total control of Punjab by the PML-N appears to have been 'celebrated' through the murder of Shahbaz Bhatti by the Punjabi Taliban.

The future is incredibly depressing for those who believe in the vision of Allama Iqbal and the statesmanship of Quaid-e-Azam.

The important question here to consider is what role the PPP is going to play now. Is the leader of the opposition in Punjab happy with the perks and will stay quiet and let the PML-N continue and expedite the process of radicalisation in Punjab? Would the PPP really stand up and expose and struggle for a Punjab free from fear? Is the federal government of the PPP going to continue to live with the murder of its leaders in Islamabad or is it going to do something about it? Is the PPP left with any commitment, energy or will to stem the tide of radicalisation? At the present time not much can be expected from this party. It seems to be content with the status quo at the cost of the blood of its leaders and maybe does not plan to be an effective political force in future. Its inner conflicts and the disappointed coalition partners are ready to write the postscript to the PPP story. The Bhuttos have been used long enough, so now what?

The PML-N strategy would be to extract every ounce of advantage and seek fresh elections. Sounds simple but politics is not always so. The masses have seen the performance of these parties; they have also seen prices sky-rocketing, law and order shattered, supply shortages, and in-fights within the parties. Would the masses still vote for these feudal and power brokers? They may, under fear.

The writer is a culture and media management specialist, a researcher, author, director and actor

Saturday, April 16, 2011

The Pakistan Arts Council that was — I

It is said that immediately after independence in 1947, the two 'giants' of arts and culture, Mr Chughtai and Mr Taj, also old friends, got together and decided to form an arts body for the promotion of the arts and culture of a new nation

I am sure there are some people still alive who remember the early days of the Pakistan Arts Council — Alhamra — Lahore. Even now the area is the same, located on the Mall Road. However, the building has been replaced and the glorious chinar trees are gone, and with those trees have also gone some traditions and memories.

For a large number of people interested in the arts today, the history of this institution is likely to be unknown. A lot of things have changed in Lahore, and so has the Arts Council. But changes form history and, if recorded in time, these are extremely useful archival documents. I recount some of my memories, which may shed light on the history, trials and tribulations in building this institution. It is part of our national heritage and cultural history. But how did I get connected?

It was in the 1953-55 session, while I was studying for a BSc in Government College Lahore (now GC University), that an interest in the arts started to get the better of me. I was involved in writing, translations of plays, singing, acting, photography, etc., as an amateur. My earlier interests, hiking, swimming, boating and rifle shooting, were fading away. So it was during this period that my interaction with creative individuals increased. While my fellow students would go home after their laboratory work, I would meet my friends, Zafar Samdani, Fazal Kamal and others, and would head towards the famous Pak Tea House or Coffee House or towards Radio Pakistan at Simla Hill.

An interaction with the Arts Council was naturally destined but the Alhamra was not yet a very active body. It was going through the same settlement and 'unsettlement' that followed the post-1947 era.

It was early 1957, when I was a student of Masthead GC and when I had earned a bit of a name in drama, that I was the principal to meet Syed Imtiaz Ali Taj. Taj sahib wanted to induct fresh blood into Alhamra. It was from this point on that I got associated, first as an actor in a play and then as the in-charge of the drama section in the reorganisation of Alhamra. The reorganisation by Syed Imtiaz Ali Taj took place to revitalise the Council. Mr Taj was the general secretary and Justice S A Rahman was the president of the organisation. The section in-charges were Mr Hayat Ahmad Khan (music), Mrs Anna Molka Ahmed (arts), Mr Feroze Nizami (music classes), Mr Theo Phailbus (photography and films) and Naeem Tahir (drama). Only Mr Nizami and Mrs Ahmed were given some allowances. Later on, Syed Imtiaz Ali Taj became the director of Majlis-e-Taraqqi-e-Adab and Mr Faiz Ahmed Faiz was appointed secretary of the Arts Council. The section in-charges continued to work as before. In 1962, I left for the University of California to pursue my passion — a degree in Theatre Arts.

Mr Faiz Ahmed Faiz suffered a heart attack and left for treatment, and the Arts Council looked for a replacement. Since the position had earlier been occupied by luminaries like Syed Imtiaz Ali Taj and Mr Faiz Ahmed Faiz, it carried with it prestige. Several people applied, including me. To the disappointment of some, I was chosen, perhaps because of my foreign training and youthful energy. I stayed there for a decade and learnt about the Pakistan Arts Council and its history that I share now with the readers.

It is said that immediately after independence in 1947, the two 'giants' of arts and culture, Mr Chughtai and Mr Taj, also old friends, got together and decided to form an arts body for the promotion of the arts and culture of a new nation. They discussed the idea with Justice S A Rahman and the three went through the necessary steps to muster support and to register the organisation under the Societies Registration Act.

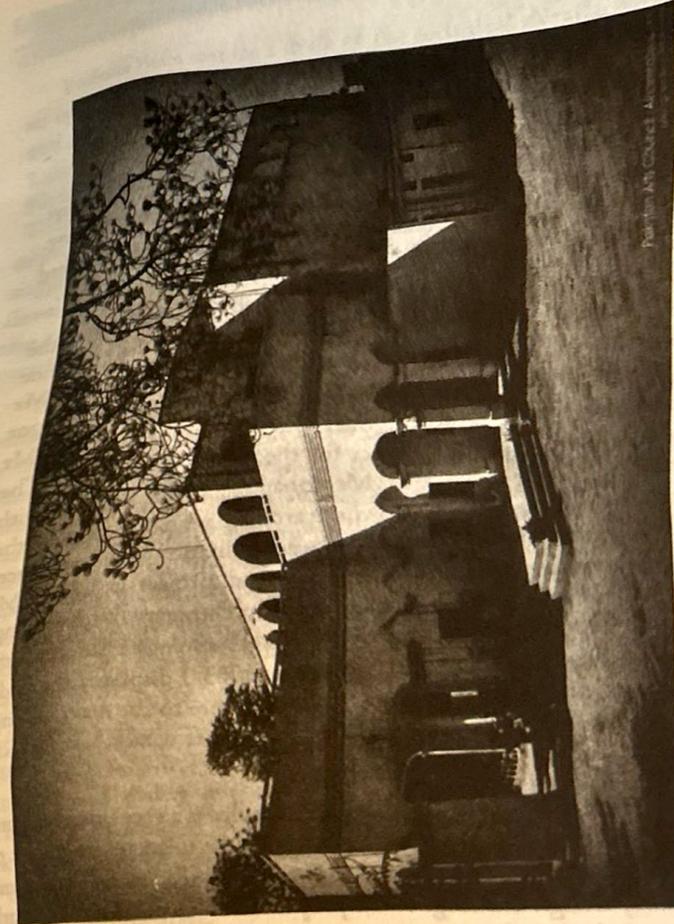
During my tenure, I found a most valuable document. It was the 'minutes register' in which the minutes of all the meetings of the board of governors of the Pakistan Arts Council, Alhamra, were recorded since its inception. It was an ordinary register containing the handwriting and comments of extraordinary men! Unfortunately, it has been untraceable since 1980.

The board of governors was more or less permanent among the founder members and it included: Justice S A Rahman (chairman), Mian Mumtaz Daultana, Tassaduq Hussain Khalid, Professor B A Hashmi, Abdur Rahman Chughtai, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Syed Imtiaz Ali Taj and Zafarul Ahsan. The board also included ex-officio director of Radio Pakistan Lahore, the Punjab finance secretary and education secretary. I found out that Alhamra had been inaugurated by the then Governor General, Khawaja Nazimuddin, on December 10, 1949. A sipasnama (inaugural address) calligraphed in Urdu was last seen by me lying in the carpenter's workshop in its original frame about three years ago.

The inaugural occasion was the first exhibition of paintings by A R Chughtai. Alhamra's rooms had been decorated by curtains and furniture borrowed from the houses of the elite in Lahore and the paintings were displayed. The building was a large graceful bungalow at the same plot as now but located somewhat set back from the front, about where the music section is located now. Originally, the building was owned by a Hindu philanthropist who had set up a school of dance and music in the pre-independence period. After independence, the then Deputy Commissioner and custodian of evacuee property, Mr Zafarul Ahsan, allotted it to Alhamra. In 1963, when I took over, I found out from the PTO that the land with the building was mentioned as being on seven acres. The building was dilapidated and thoughts of renovation were circulating. Mr Faiz had asked an Italian architect, Mr Mario Massina, to prepare a sketch for a new building. That sketch adorned the walls of the secretary's room. But at that time it was only a dream, hard to fulfil!

(To be continued)

The writer is a culture and media management specialist, a researcher, author, director and actor



Black Al Hamra original condition

Saturday, April 23, 2011

The Pakistan Arts Council that was — II

At about midnight, a huge storm hit Lahore. Rain and winds blew the stage arrangements away and the ground was filled with water by the morning. Obviously, one would panic because all our preparations had been washed away

In the interim period, i.e. late 1962 and part 1963, between the departure of Mr Faiz Ahmed Faiz and my joining as secretary, the office was held for short periods of time by Mr Mohsin Shirazi and by Mr Hamid Jalal, Director Public Relations WAPDA. Mr Hamid Jalal got the approval of the board of governors of Alhamra to appoint Mr Tajuddin Bhamani as the architect for the new proposed building. The perceived advantage was that Mr Bhamani, being associated with Edward Stone (the world-renowned architect who was designing the WAPDA house), would be able to benefit Alhamra by his experience. Also, he would charge less for his second project in Lahore. Mr Tajuddin Bhamani went as far as doing the preliminary sketch drawings and preparation of a model of the complex of buildings. I had joined the Arts Council as its secretary in September 1963. I displayed the model of the future building in the porch at the entrance to the main building. But, unfortunately, Mr Bhamani died of a heart attack. The council, once again, looked for an architect.

The story of the present Alhamra Complex is a very interesting one and is hardly known to many people. After the unfortunate demise of Tajuddin Bhamani, what I was left with was a 'model' and some preliminary design drawings of the proposed building. I decided to work on a detailed plan for the requirements of a cultural complex of the highest international standards. I sought the help of Professor Edward Hearn of the University of California. I had worked with Professor Hearn during the construction and planning of the huge cultural complex of the Theatre Arts at the University of California in Los Angeles. I also contacted architect Douglas Honnold who was the chairman of the World Architects Association — I had the good

fortune of having known him and his family. I also contacted Theatre Architects Association.

Professor Hearn sent me a draft of the technical details, according to our requirements. He specified suggested areas, gradients and light and sound standards. Douglas Honnold and his wife Lydia flew to Lahore at their own expense and stayed at their own expense at the then Nedous Hotel (now Avari) to get the feel of the area and the ambience. They quietly walked around, saw the gatherings and workings of the artists and sent an architectural concept. I also incorporated the suggestions of the British Theatre Architects Association and finally developed a detailed document of requirements and standards to assist the new architect. While we were doing this 'homework', something very interesting happened.

A very high level cultural troupe arrived from the USSR. It was comparable to the level of the Bolshevik Ballet. I was asked to prepare for their performance, which was to be inaugurated by President Ayub Khan. It was an impossible task to match the facilities available in Russia. I could only provide a simple platform of the international measurements for performance, and simple wing space in the lawns of Alhamra. Within 48 hours, and working round the clock, we prepared a temporary open-air theatre with 3,000 chairs. President Ayub arrived one day before to inaugurate the show the next evening and camped at the Government House. We completed everything and went home late in the evening.

At about midnight, a huge storm hit Lahore. Rain and winds blew the stage arrangements away and the ground was filled with water by the morning. Obviously, one would panic because all our preparations had been washed away. The civil administration helped and we got to work — hundreds of blankets were purchased from Landa Bazaar to dry the ground and railway workers and WAPDA engineers were engaged to repair the stage.

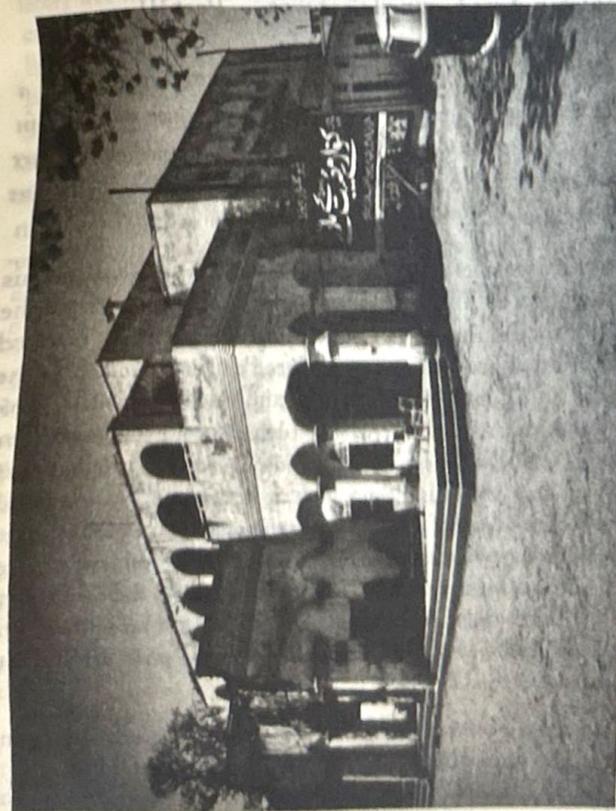
While all this damage control was going on I was struck by an idea. I suggested to the Chairman Pakistan Arts Council, Mr Justice S A Rahman that he should take the president aside for a few minutes on his arrival at Alhamra and request him for funds for an appropriate hall at Alhamra in order to avoid such situations in the future. The facts had proved that Pakistan was ill equipped to fulfil cultural pacts with

friendly countries. I thought that the *President of Pakistan, Mr Ayub Khan* might just agree and our project for a new hall might be funded. Justice Rahman was reluctant to make a departure from the pre-arranged programme. It was difficult for a judge of the Supreme Court to violate the pre-arranged programme and the protocol, but he thought it was okay if a 'young' secretary of the council broke the protocol! I understood. I called Raja Tajammal Hussain, the then secretary finance to the Punjab government, and told him that I was going to attempt a breach of protocol to show the president of Pakistan the model of the new building and request him for funding. Raja Tajammal, a great supporter of the arts, said that the provincial budget was already in the press for printing and was to be presented in the provincial assembly in the next few days, but if he personally heard the president's commitment for funding, he would be able to manage something. So it was agreed between him and I that he would be within hearing distance when I made the 'breach' of protocol! If I recall correctly, the ADC to the Governor, West Pakistan, General Musa Khan, was Captain Zareef and while determining the route and point of reception for the president's entourage, we decided that the president would be received in the porch of the building, about 20 yards before the entrance to the performance arena but about three yards from where the model of the proposed building was displayed. The reception committee would be constituted of the board of governors of the council and Raja Tajammal, as an ex-officio member, would be included.

In the evening, as the president of Pakistan arrived at Alhamra, followed by his entourage, his car was stopped at the porch. A dramatic moment was to follow.

(To be continued)

The writer is a culture and media management specialist, a researcher, author, director and actor



Color Al Hamra original condition

Saturday, April 30, 2011

The Pakistan Arts Council that was — Part III

Who would be the architect? A detailed discussion took place in a meeting of the board of governors and finally the decision was made in favour of the architect from Lahore who was young and would put his heart and soul into the project: Nayyar Ali Dada. The board had, once again, put its faith in the youth

As the President of Pakistan, Field Marshal Ayub Khan and his entourage arrived at Alhamra, his car stopped at the porch and the Chairman of the Pakistan Arts Council, Justice S A Rahman, received him. The board of governors was introduced and, in the end, I, as the Secretary of the Council, shook his hand and held it! He smiled, a bit surprised, and I quickly asked, "Sir may I have a couple of minutes and show you the model of our new building displayed for you right here?" He replied: "Yes, yes, Musa let us look at it." General Musa replied: "Sir!" We took a couple of steps towards the model and I blasted out a quick brief ending with a request for funds! The president smiled, looked at General Musa and said, "Musa, we must help them." General Musa said, "Yes sir, we will." I looked at Tajammal and he winked. The deed was done and we escorted the president to the main arena where the ambassador of the USSR was waiting.

Overnight, a provision of the first installment of funds amounting to one million was added to the provincial budget! There is a memorable photographic record of this moment captured by the internationally known photographer Zaffar Ahmed. It was a happy moment, but there were many ups and downs waiting ahead.

The hope of finding funds and actually realising the dream were heightened. For proper planning, the actual land available to the Council had to be clearly defined. The gutter running through Alhamra's land had to be stopped. I closed it and forced the local administration to provide a decent alternative to the hutments at the back. I requested the neighbours, which was a carpet factory, to stop draining their acid based waste water (from carpet washing) on Alhamra's premises. They were then convinced by Mr Faiz Ahmed Faiz.

Mr Faiz had a large heart. The next thing was to own the land legally and to have perpetual rights on it for the Council. During that period of time, Sheikh Manzoor Ellahi (who became the Punjab CM some years later) was the Chief Settlement Commissioner. Syed Imtiaz Ali Taj called him up and set up an appointment for me. Sheikh sahib was very helpful and agreed to give Alhamra permanent ownership of the land on payment of the reserve price. If I remember correctly, it was about Rs 325,000. This was a lot of money at that time. Presently, it may be equal to billions! The Council did not have enough money so the shortage was made up by other members and through donations. The money was paid to the government via a permanent transfer deed and we had to wait for due process to be completed. However, it was signed and my signatures were recorded on appropriate documents on behalf of the Council.

Now the key question had to be solved. Who would be the architect? Options were considered and Murat Khan, the Turkish architect who designed the Minar-e-Pakistan was made a potential possibility. I talked to Mr Shakir Ali who was the principal of the National College of Arts (NCA) because NCA had a department of architecture. He recommended Nayyar Ali Dada who had just graduated. A detailed discussion took place in a meeting of the board of governors and finally the decision was made in favour of the architect from Lahore who was young and would put his heart and soul into the project: Nayyar Ali Dada. The board had, once again, put its faith in the youth.

By this time, the constitution of the Council was modified and three board members were elected from the general membership. If I recall correctly, Syed Babar Ali and also Mr Ashfaq Ahmed were members of the board and, possibly, Yasmin Tahir was also elected.

I handed over the technical *brief* and requirements in the form of a booklet to Nayyar and he got to work. Since the designing of the complete project was to be time consuming and the actual start of construction would have procedural steps, it was decided to prepare a celebrative small memorial with a 'foundation stone'. It was designed to be placed in a small wall with a small stage around it in the *central lawn*. This stage was to be used for inaugural ceremonies and talks. Nayyar designed it in consultation with Syed Babar Ali and myself. The actual foundation stone and the writing on it was to be done by Saeed Akhter.

a young artist at that time and an icon now. He decided to make an unusual 'stone'. He wanted the black, hard stone 'Sang-e-Moosa', then cut a smaller space into it, to be fitted with a less than one foot rectangle of marble with a calligraphic inlay of 'Sang-e-Bunyad' (foundation stone). Artistic, but hard to make. The consideration behind this design was that it was to be laid by General Musa — therefore the use of Sang-e-Moosa — and since a large stone is hard to handle, a small piece of white marble was to be fitted into it for convenience and aesthetic attraction. The date of this foundation stone laying ceremony was fixed for February 26, 1969. All preparations were complete. The platform and walls were ready and the stone was to be placed by the governor in two days time, so we needed to set up the Sang-e-Moosa wall immediately. Saeed Akhter and I went to collect the finished stone from the shop near Shah Alami Gate and discovered to our honor that a speeding truck had rammed into the shop the night before and the foundation stone was lying in pieces! How we got it prepared and laid the foundation stone is another story but it was finally laid.

What happened afterwards? Why were the funds promised by the president and governor not released? Who made the foundation stone disappear? This story still needs to be told.

(To be continued)

The writer is a culture and media management specialist, a researcher, author, director and actor

Saturday, May 07, 2011

The Pakistan Arts Council that was — IV

The Pakistan Arts Council ceased to be a private body and stayed 'taken over' and designated by the government as 'Lahore Arts Council'. This status was a climb down for an organisation which had pioneered the awareness of the importance of culture for a new nation

The laying of the foundation stone for the new Alhamra Art Centre on February 26, 1969, brought the multitude of artists in the country, particularly in Lahore, a step closer to their dream since independence. Following in the footsteps of Alhamra, a Pakistan Arts Council Dacca had been established just one year later. Karachi followed suit. The organisation in Lahore was providing the lead in building a complete arts centre and we were all very proud. It was a dream about to be fulfilled.

Earlier, in 1964, Nippon Electric Company, NEC, established a small TV station in Lahore. All the preparations were done at the Pakistan Arts Council Lahore. I had an active personal association in these initial stages. Later, it moved to its mini studio in the premises of Radio Pakistan and was humorously called TV khokha or kiosk. A few years later, television was taken over by the government of Pakistan and I was called to Rawalpindi PTV Headquarters in 1969 and posted as principal, Central Television Institute, against a joint secretary post in the ministry of information which was, I suppose, transferred to PTV. My task was to train all TV incumbents, producers, technicians, etc, all over Pakistan, including East Pakistan at that time. I had a group of German experts who helped in curriculum development. The assignment was challenging. Technically, the TV station at Chakdala was the training centre of the Institute, but telecasts were also taking place.

In order to cover the whole of Pakistan, I conducted courses in Dacca and Karachi as well. My contact with Alhamra was minimal during this period, although I maintained a lien but the secretary's position was held by Dr Tassaduq Hussain Khalid.

In 1970, early morning on April 19, tragedy befell our family. Syed Imtiaz Ali Taj sahib and Hijab Imtiaz Ali were attacked with daggers while asleep in their home at Lahore by unknown assailants. It was about 3:00 am that Hijab (my mother-in-law) telephoned me in Rawalpindi while she and Taj sahib were bleeding. I rushed to Lahore with Yasmin and children. Taj sahib was in Mayo Hospital, was operated on by Dr Masud, but could not survive. It was a huge loss to literature, arts, culture, film, and indeed to our family. The whole scenario of our personal lives, mine and Yasmin's, changed forever. I continued to work with TV but it was getting increasingly difficult to ignore the family in Lahore. The president of Pakistan, Mr Yahya Khan, had constituted a special investigation team headed by DSP Ghani Khan. Mr Manzoor Qadir, the legendary lawmaker, was voluntarily advising on the investigations to reach the murderers, but my presence in Lahore was necessary to give him support. In the meantime, the famous national elections of 1970 got scheduled and I was asked to compile data for the round-the-clock telecast. I researched and put together, in three volumes, the socio-political and demographic analysis of each constituency of East and West Pakistan. After elections, I requested the managing director PTV to allow me to conduct some courses in Lahore, as I did in Dacca and Karachi, to enable me assist the family and the investigations. Surprisingly, the request was not acceded to. I was shocked at the lack of consideration. I chose to resign and avail my lien with the Alhamra in 1971.

During the ensuing period, from 1970 onwards, the national scenario went through turmoil. Major political changes were in the offing. When I returned, a lot of things had changed. Discipline was a casualty. It was typical of the PPP style, particularly after the fall of Dacca.

A campaign against Alhamra started in 1972. It was promoted by Dr Enver Sajjad and a bunch of his companions with little experience of 'arts management'. He used to deliver fierce speeches in a thatched tea joint near Shimla hill in Lahore. The joint was known as Café de Ghaas Phoos! Enver Sajjad almost seemed to believe that he was the real Mao Tze Tung. He occasionally incited people to gherao and jalao (siege and arson) of the Alhamra (in Bhashani lingo). He succeeded in getting a new board of governors appointed by the Punjab government and dismissal of Justice S A Rahman and all other founder members. I was

again notified as secretary. But it was hard to work in the work supported by the new 'chairman'.

On top of this situation, my mother, under treatment in England, was found to be in a critical stage. I needed leave, which was denied by Enver Sajjad. My mother died without our seeing each other one last time before her death. It was a grief I have failed to rationalise till date. I felt badly let down and I decided to quit the field of arts.

For me hard times were to follow, including persistent harassment by the new administration of Alhamra. Some elected members of the board, including Mr Masud Akhter, challenged the takeover in the courts. In any case, Dr Enver Sajjad board was removed before the completion of its term and replaced by a board headed by Soofi Ghulam Mustafa Tabassum, and it included Shoaib Hashmi. I made myself unavailable.

The good thing that happened later was that the government started releasing the promised funds. Mr Hanif Ramay as the chief minister took personal interest. However, the Pakistan Arts Council ceased to be a private body and stayed 'taken over' and designated by the government as 'Lahore Arts Council'. This status was a climb down for an organisation which had pioneered the awareness of the importance of culture for a new nation. The 'membership' also ceased to exist and the hundreds of big and small artists, and their supporters, who had spent their lifetime in the Alhamra and its canteen, felt left out. Neither the government, nor the governing council showed sensitivity in this matter. They seemed content to be part of the government and its bureaucracy.

(To be continued)

The writer is a culture and media management specialist, a researcher, author, director and actor

Saturday, May 14, 2011

The Pakistan Arts Council that was — V

In the inaugural plaque, I had the names of all artists engraved who had ever been associated with the Council, including the founder members and board of governors at completion. This was a memorabilia and a tribute to all those artists, big or small, who had seen a dream and worked for it

After my appointment in 1963 as secretary of the Pakistan Arts Council, I started to issue an 'annual report' for members and interested individuals every year. These reports kept the members aware and also created a realistic record. These reports continued up to 1973-4, and were discontinued after my departure.

Later, in 1974, Enver Sajjad's board was removed. After this removal, the chief minister of Punjab, Mr Hanif Ramay, provided sufficient financial support and, once again, laid the 'foundation stone' for Hall No 1.

Funnily, although all agree that a stone was laid, the stone is not traceable now, nor does anyone remember the date. This includes senior functionaries of the present Alhamra, the architect, and even the builders. Another archive gone. One also wonders what happened to the stone laid earlier, on February 26, 1969? It has not been seen since 1974.

As the construction was to proceed, the famous chinar trees were cut down and the historical first abode of the Arts Council, i.e. the majestic evacuee building with pillars and verandas, was razed to the ground. All elements of sentimental attachment, which were the symbols of the life of the arts community of early days, were removed. It hurt many like me. With some sensitivity and resolve, both could have been saved. Most nations in the world show concern and take pride in their history and archives. Why did the Lahorites turn their face the other way?

From 1974 onwards I had learnt to survive without a 'secure' job and earned my living through trade. The Zia regime and its oppression was a national tragedy causing havoc to the fibre of the culturally rich

and progressive Pakistani nation. To please their bosses, some overzealous officers in the government started a clandestine move to dissolve the 'original' Arts Council and transfer the property to Auqaf. The logic given was that the Alhamra activity was not appropriate in the proximity of the Governor's House and Auqaf may set up something better. The real issue was that the new hall was only half built and the Public Works Department wanted to get rid of it by declaring it a faulty design and cover up their misdeeds. Luckily, I came to know of it, filed a case in the court and obtained a 'stay' order. I earned the wrath of the then Governor Sawar Khan and his government. One of the senior retired generals wished he would never see my face out of jail. Life was made difficult for me.

But change has to occur; bad times do not stay forever. The governor Punjab, Sawar Khan, was changed, General Jilani took over; the secretary information changed, and Mr Javed Qureshi took over. Javed Qureshi probably sought direction in my court case. Javed knew me from school, General Jilani knew me since the 1965 War. The government declared that the Arts Council would stay as it is. The decision of the government was praiseworthy. Javed and myself, two friends, were saved the embarrassment of facing each other in court. Much more important was the fact that an institution was saved. The new set-up in the government desired that I supervise the completion of the hall. General Jilani was sincerely interested in the improvement of the quality of life in Lahore. Quickly I was appointed on the board of governors and given the charge to oversee the completion of the hall. Three persons, Javed Qureshi, Naeem Tahir and Rashid Umar Thanvi, got to working 24 hours a day. Intizar Hussain commented in his column that it seems some jinns have got into the Council!

The hall was inaugurated in less than six months of our association. Malika-e-Tarranum Noor Jehan sang the opening song in the presence of General Jilani, and Javed and I pinched each other to make sure we were not dreaming.

In the inaugural plaque, I had the names of all artists engraved who had ever been associated with the Council, including the founder members and board of governors at completion. This was a memorabilia and a tribute to all those artists, big or small, who had seen a dream and worked for it. A few months afterwards when I visited the hall, the inauguration plaque had disappeared and nobody knew

anything about it. The buildings are there, but the archival records have disappeared. The minutes register, the foundation stones, the plaque and the 'welcome address' at inaugural, etc. Would any conscientious officer recover and preserve these as invaluable sources of history? Yes the buildings are there, where is the history? Where is the spirit?

In 1979, I noticed a marvellous sculpture of Navera Ahmed, 'Mother and Child', kept at the entrance of the makeshift open-air theatre, was conveniently used for torn halves of tickets and some visitors' paan peek (a stream of spittle thrown out while chewing paan)! Also, I found in 1981 that the record of drama scripts was piled up and on top of it a water dispenser was placed. The water dripped and the scripts got damaged. This was the most valuable record of the drama written after independence.

All that I have mentioned is a reflection of the insensitivity and incompetence of the management. For most civil servants, it is not a job they can take pride in. A civil servant wants to be a commissioner or something like that. Arts management and development is a very specialised subject and it is the core activity for building a nation and its image. In the present context, the Alhamra managers could at least set up an archival record of their own organisation. The book, *50 Years of Lahore Arts Council*, is a slightly better version than the distorted publication earlier by a self-serving officer. Still, no write-up from the founder members or early associates is included. Why erode the contribution of pioneers?

Monuments are manifestations of the dreams, resolve, dedication, sacrifices and the spirit of many. The present generation would appear graceful if they acknowledge what good has been done in the past and preserve it.

Saturday, May 28, 2011

Is Imran supporting the Taliban?

Just being against the US and the war on terror is again an indirect help to the Taliban. Most significantly, Imran calling the war on terror as an American war is the standard Taliban slogan. Over 30,000 Pakistanis have been killed due to the Taliban's terror attacks. Is it still not our war?

Imran Khan has been in politics for a while now, probably for over a decade and a half. His Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is primarily constructed around his person and is backed up by the reputation of his being the captain of Pakistan's cricket team winning the World Cup. Several cricket supporters were surprised at his acceptance speech when he said, "I have won the World Cup..." without acknowledging that it was a team effort. He was the captain, and captain contributes a lot no doubt. It would have been in good grace if he had acknowledged the efforts of the team that he was the captain of. In no case the credit of his contribution could be taken away from him. His second achievement is the establishment of a cancer hospital in the name of his late mother. It is a personal achievement through fundraising after the World Cup success. The hospital enjoys a good reputation and it is professionally managed.

When Imran entered politics, his image was high. He thought he will conquer all, but politics is different from cricket, or even from a hospital. His hospital runs on the contribution of philanthropists and service charges, and cricket needs individual skills. He was offered a share in governance by Musharraf, but negotiations failed due to Imran's overestimation of his strength. He lost valuable opportunity of sharing power and gaining experience. Imran soon appeared lost in politics; people equated him with the style of Asghar Khan and late Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan. Both of these leaders never obtained 'power', the known pursuit of politics.

Imran Khan appeared to be going through introspection. He was trying to fight against his reputation of being a playboy and his involvement in overseas scandals. Even his marriage with a British heiress was seen with suspicion. He needed to neutralise the critics of

the extreme Right. He met the leaders of the Jamaat-e-Islami and many other groups of the Right and even extreme Right. He started to wear shalwar kameez on a regular basis. His marriage finally ended. All this convinced the Right and so-called religious groups. Since then he has had increased support from the 'right' political groups and seems determined to hold on to it.

Imran has also worked hard on the non-conventional politicians and the youth. Both of these segments are attracted by his debonair look and fresh approach. He is indeed more educated than most of our politicians. He stands out as an upright person among the of 'jaali (fake degree' type parliamentarians. His personality is an asset for him.

His political stance needs a careful and serious analysis. The main point of concern is that he has never taken a clear stand against the activities of the Taliban. Instead, he has been pleading for a 'negotiated' settlement, knowing full well that all negotiations and 'peace' agreements have been used by the Taliban for the purpose of consolidating and then continuing terror activity. He should have offered to negotiate himself if he was confident of this course of action. The failure of the infamous Swat agreements must still be fresh in the public memory. Imran has never supported the army action. This includes army action in Swat and in South Waziristan. He has not even condemned the attacks on army General Headquarters (GHQ) and, more recently, the attack on the Pakistan Navy Station (PNS) Mehran base.

On the other hand, he is prominent in demanding the blocking of supplies to NATO forces through Pakistan — a step which would help the Taliban. He is against drone attacks. It is true that the drones cause regrettable collateral damage but they also target the al Qaeda and its supporters. The Taliban also demand an end to drones. Imran is prominently part of anti-US campaigns. True that many American policies have been self-serving, but then it is our responsibility to protect Pakistan's interests against any foreign country, not just the US. Just being against the US and the war on terror is again an indirect help to the Taliban. Most significantly, his calling the war on terror as an American war is the standard Taliban slogan. Over 30,000 Pakistanis have been killed due to the Taliban's terror attacks. Is it still not our war?

Looking at these factors, one is forced to question: what side is Imran on?

He is agitating in Karachi against the supplies to NATO forces, and the drone attacks. He was active with the extreme Right in protesting against Raymond Davis' release. He has been doing sit-in protests in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In fact, the PTI has been doing so many protests that it may be aptly called Tehreek-e-Ehtijaj. Imran's group seems to be joining every protest and playing to the gallery.

This strategy has also given certain advantages to Imran Khan. Consistent 'exposure' is one of these. Perhaps more significant is the fact that he has won over a sizeable portion of the supporters of Nawaz Sharif. This support primarily comes from the Taliban or their sympathisers. So Imran Khan is obliged to toe their line. As a politician he realised that the white collar will not win him an election but the rightists may. They get together, provide street power as well as loud noises, and this works to collect crowds. Imran is the preferred choice of extreme Right also because of his energetic style, which is more convincing than that of Nawaz Sharif; his eloquence is impressive against Nawaz Sharif's limited capability, and indeed Imran is a 'fresh' image as compared to the repeatedly tried image of Nawaz Sharif. He may find it very hard to risk alienating himself from this segment. He also likes to have them because it is quietening down the critics of his flamboyance and flirtations of youth.

Soon there will be the final stage when Imran may need to do some soul searching once again, and decide if he is going to flow with the tide of extremist groups or stand on his own and refuse to be their cover politician.

The writer is a culture and media management specialist, a researcher, author, director and actor

List of other works:

- Melluhas, The People of the Indus valley from 8000 B.C. to 500 B.C.
- Views and Comments Vol. 1
- Bombay by Boat (Film script) English
- Earlier articles on Theater and other arts. English
- Scripts of stage show.(Various) English
- 'Aap Ki Tarif' Urdu stage play. Naeem Tahir and Yasmin Tahir
- 'Soey Kahan'
- 'Sail Rawan' and 'Jalsa Urdu Dramey Ka' Epic Plays
- Plays for Radio and Television Urdu
- Samjhota Express (Television Serial)Urdu
- Dagh e Dill (Film Story)Urdu
- 'Order Order' (Television Serial) Urdu
- God is mine (TV Serial) Urdu
- Mulla Nasir ul Din (60 Episodes of TV Serial) for children. Urdu
- A bio- graphical interview of Naeem Tahir. Urdu
- Terwan Darwaza auto biography under compilation. Urdu

Recordings:

- 'Molvi Jee' a play, By Naeem Tahir. Recorded during 1965 war
- Kalam-e-Iqbal in the voice of Naeem Tahir

Excerpts:

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The developing scenario presents a very sombre picture. It is a combination of rightist political parties, aggressive Taliban, pro-Taliban factions and a mainstream political force of the PML-N. January 14, 2012

Many of the religious-minded civil and military bureaucrats based in Islamabad and Rawalpindi used to send their daughters to the women's Islamic seminary run by Aziz. Aziz had become a vital asset of the establishment, sitting right in the heart of Islamabad. January 21, 2012

As the west was urging Pakistan for a coordinated strategy and an action against the militants, the game plan was somehow known to the al Qaeda operatives. So al Qaeda decided to take the initiative and strike before the Pakistani plan could be enforced. January 28, 2012

It is my guess that Allama Qadri may seek an electoral reform favouring 'Proportional Representation' as against the winner take all approach. January 12, 2013

The challenge to the present generation of Pakistanis is to face the internal threats, sectarian threats, economy's manipulation, water wars and the war to break the confidence in the country and its nationhood. September 07, 2013

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