



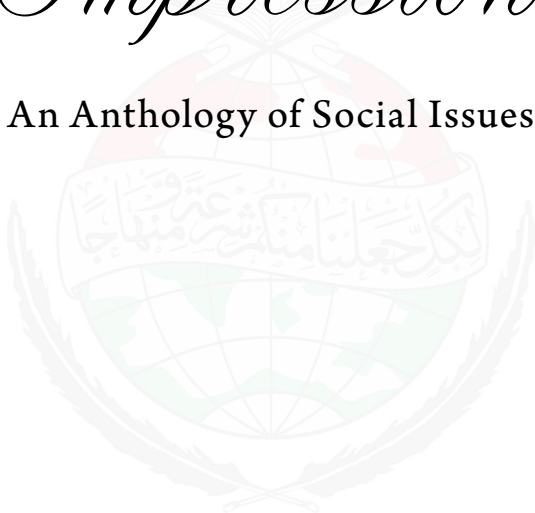
Stray Impressions

An Anthology of Social Issues

DR HUSSAIN MOHI-UD-DIN QADRI

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Dr Hussain Qadri was born in Lahore on 24th of October 1982. He received his early education from the notable institutions of Pakistan like Aitcheson College and Pakistan Air Force College Lahore. After completing his intermediate level studies from Pakistan, he moved to Canada where he accomplished his Under Graduate Degree from York University Toronto with Economics and Political Science as his majors. During these years at University, he was dynamically active in students' politics along with his educational pursuits. In 2005, he moved to France and received his MBA degree from the renowned university, Sciences-Po Paris. Upon his return to Pakistan in 2007, he worked for Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) in the capacity of Research and

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During his time at Victoria University Melbourne, he was again very active with the student's politics and was twice elected as Post-Graduate Students' Representative and Member of the high academic and governing bodies of the University.

In addition to the acquisition of erudition in modern sciences, he has also received learning in Shariah and classical Islamic sciences from renowned and eminent scholars. One of his most effective teachers has been Shaykh-ul-Islam Prof Dr Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, his venerable father, who has also been his spiritual guide and a source of inspiration. His main areas of interest in Islamic sciences are: theology, mysticism, jurisprudence, science of hadith, exegesis, ijtiḥad, Islamic philosophy, Islam and modern science, Islamic thought and Islamic economics, finance and Islamic management.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	I
1. UTILIZATION OF OUTSOURCING	3
2. TACKLING TERRORISM	11
3. WHY DEVELOPING WORLD AFRAID OF WTO?	15
4. DEVELOPING BIO-ENERGY	20
5. EXPLORING AREAS OF COOPERATION FOR SAARC	24
6. ROLE OF ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN NATIONAL SECURITY	28
7. FIXING PRIORITIES	32
8. LIMITED DESIRES, UNLIMITED RESOURCES	35
9. PARLIAMENTARY SOVEREIGNTY VS JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE	39
10. FIXING THE FUNDAMENTALS OF ECONOMY	43
11. BEYOND THE USE OF POWER	47
12. MORE OF THE SAME	51
13. MUSINGS ON THE INDEPENDENCE DAY	55
14. FOR A MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE	59
15. PROSPECTS OF ECONOMIC INTEGRATION IN ECO REGION	62
16. WHAT AILS SAARC?	68
17. ECONOMIC OPTIONS FOR PAKISTAN	72
18. ECO: PAST AND PRESENT	77
19. EU—A CHRISTIAN CLUB?	82

20.	ISLAMIC VIEW ON ECONOMIC INTEGRATION	85
21.	EXPLORING COOPERATION AMONG MUSLIM COUNTRIES	89
22.	EXPLORING ISLAMIC COMMON MARKET	93
23.	SAY NO TO LAND-GRAB	97
24.	WHAT AILS POLITICAL PARTIES	101
25.	TIME TO MAKE A DECISION	106
26.	ANALYSING ROLE OF BUREAUCRACY	109
27.	ROLE OF MEDIA IN POLICY FORMULATION	113
28.	WHITHER KASHMIR POLICY	117
29.	BACK TO SQUARE ONE?	122
30.	IMPERATIVES OF A DIALOGUE	126
31.	BREAKING MYTH ABOUT MUSLIM WOMEN'S EDUCATION	130
32.	FATWA AGAINST TERRORISM	135
33.	LESSONS FROM TURKEY	139
34.	POWER CRISIS AND REGIONAL ANGLE	143
35.	WHAT AILS MUSLIMS IN CHINA?	147
36.	REVISITING MUSLIM HISTORY	151
37.	STOPPING BRAIN DRAIN	156
38.	CORRUPTION IN EDUCATION	159
39.	DRUGS ADDICTION AND THE YOUTH	163
40.	DEALING WITH WATER CHALLENGE	167
41.	REVIEWING AMERICAN SECURITY STRATEGY	171
42.	DEEPENING OF AFGHAN QUAGMIRE	174
43.	UNDERSTANDING ECONOMIC INTEGRATION	178
44.	THEY FAIL US AGAIN!	182
45.	THE DEVASTATING FLOODS THAT CONTINUE TO SWEEP THROUGH ALL	185
46.	A CASE FOR NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT	189
47.	STRAY REFLECTIONS	193

48. CRICKET AS A METAPHOR	197
49. FROM 'TERRORISM' TO FREEDOM STRUGGLE	201
50. WILL ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN DIALOGUE SUCCEED?	205
51. APPROACHING AFGHAN ENDGAME	210
52. MISPLACED PRIORITIES	214
53. OBAMA—ON A SLIPPERY SLOPE?	217
54. MULTI-LAYER REGIONAL TRADE PACTS	220
55. NEED FOR AN INTERFAITH DIALOGUE	224
56. UNDERSTANDING EGYPTIAN MOVEMENT	227
57. ANALYSING MUSLIMS' DOWNFALL (I)	230
58. ANALYSING MUSLIMS' DOWNFALL (II)	234
59. STATE OF EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN	238
60. ANALYZING EDUCATION SYSTEM IN PAKISTAN	243
61. BRIDGING GAPS IN EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURE	248
62. IDENTIFYING THE MALAISE	252
63. BEGINNING OF AN END?	255
64. MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING	259
65. REVIEWING TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT	263
66. THE WAY FORWARD	267
67. TRUE HAPPINESS IS A JOURNEY, NOT DESTINATION	270
68. INTERFAITH DIALOGUE GENERATES GOODWILL	273
69. VIEW: AFTER GAZA CEASEFIRE	276
70. NEED FOR UN'S REFORM	280

INTRODUCTION

The collection of articles “Stray Impressions” was produced over a span of six years from 2007 to 2013. They cover a variety of subjects ranging from the modern economic thought, Islamic view on economic integration, exploring Islamic common market and economic options for Pakistan to parliamentary sovereignty vs judicial independence, role of media in policy formation, analysing role of bureaucracy, stopping brain drain, challenges to leadership and analysing education system in Pakistan. They mostly relate to the fields of educational growth, social justice, economic prosperity, political evolution, security, role of international organizations like ECO and SAARC and burning national issues.

The objectives these dissertations tend to achieve include rousing awakening among the youth and developing a healthy public opinion in regard to squarely facing the national predicaments. For instance: economic self-sufficiency is vital to national security but that urges us to boost agricultural industry; promotion of Islamic business ethics can boost trade; the Islamic business model is based on limited desires and unlimited resources while the Western business model is premised on limited resources and unlimited desires. That is what, today, the world economies have turned to—advocating self-restraint and abstinence instead of amplifying taxes; the welfare of the poor people should be the linchpin of our economic policy-making but that requires paradigm shift in approach and thinking out of the box. As for political upheaval, the political parties in our country have miserably failed to come up to the expectations of the electorate. Unless the rules of the game are set, the narrow approach to politics

would continue to characterize our body politic. Our politics would continue to be in backwater if no real attempt is made to transform the very dynamics of politics in Pakistan. If this country has to adopt democracy as a culture, a self-introspection is direly called for—the only way to save the country from disaster.

After taking a rich account of political affairs, economy and the economic options for Pakistan, the collection of articles surveys ECO, past and present, EU—the areas of cooperation for SAARC, Muslims in China, Afghan quagmire, Israel-Palestine dialogue, Muslims' downfall and interfaith dialogue. Thus it enlightens the readers about developments taking place in the Muslim world. In like manner, the collection proves to be an eye-opener on a number of issues and seeks to create a realistic mindset for a healthy and balanced approach towards solving national problems. We hope the readers will find this book of great benefit in developing a scientific vision on the dilemmas we are faced with as a people. Whetting the zeal in the youth to bind them to the national cause and strive to foster a committed and proactive generation would go a long way towards overpowering the difficulties and earning laurels in making the country prosperous and invincible.

UTILIZATION OF OUTSOURCING

[Dec. 17, 2007; The Nation]

I. INTRODUCTION

The increased competitive aspects and importance of increasing bottom-line performance by the officers and directors of public as well as large corporations has caused management to seek ever increased cost-saving solutions utilizing globalization. The realities of today's highly competitive business environment and the use of outsourcing as a solution to lower costs in specific aspects of the production and delivery of goods and services have evolved to the point where it is an essential component in corporate cost savings. In the early 1800s the fabric covering wagons in America were outsourced to Scotland and the raw materials, fabric, was imported from India (Global Envision, 2005). It took thirty years for England's textile industry to become competitive enough to wrest this business away from Scotland and India, indicating that bottom line costs have always been the rationale for outsourcing (Global Envision, 2005). The progress of outsourcing moved slowly in terms of it being a major business technique till 1970s when major companies started to contract out their payroll services for processing.

Today's outsourcing has transcended the locally based efforts of the 1960s, 70s and early 80s in that it encompasses the utilization of labour and resources in foreign countries half a world away, rather than those within a company's immediate vicinity. The contribution of cost efficiencies resulting from outsourcing has increased as companies specializing in offering

this service have developed in countries where the cost of labour enables them to compete in this manner. Additionally, foreign governmental programs offering tax, tariff, land and building concessions in cooperation with foreign corporations as well as part of their own individual economic initiatives and the advent of technological advances has hastened this process.

On the positive side, outsourcing entails firms taking a specialized aspect of business operations, be it product parts, administrative services, customer service (call centres), and other labour intensive functions. Though economies of operation by specializing on specific areas of expertise, along with economies of scale, lower labour costs as well as reduced operational (land, facilities, taxes, etc.) the preceding translate into savings in end costs making firms more competitive, and improving bottom line results. The negative aspects include the loss of jobs in a originating countries, increased dependency on services by companies located at a considerable distance, potential quality control issues as well as potential political and economic repercussions (Katz, 2004). The following will examine these aspects, taking into account the theoretical as well as practical areas along with supporting and opposing points of view.

2. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL OUTSOURCING ASPECTS

A simplistic definition of outsourcing is “a process in which a company delegates some of its in-house operations/processes to a third party” (Bizbrim, 2005). In today’s business environment this entails two forms, domestic and offshore (White & Case, 2004). Domestic outsourcing refers to those instances when the operations/process are conducted within a country’s borders, while the other form entails the utilization of company(s) located in another country. Offshore outsourcing, in general, consists of transferring non-productive, labour intensive or

specialized work to an outside firm that used to be conducted in-house (Economic Report of the President, 2004). As a business practice, the theoretical rationales for outsourcing are (Taglipietra *et al*, 1999):

3. GAIN OR MAINTAIN A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

In providing any goods, product or service a company must contend with the quality, expectations of end users, pricing and market positioning of competitive firms within its business sector. Theoretically, if a company reduces its operational expenditures it will thus gain a competitive advantage in savings that it can utilize to reduce cost, increase margins, and provide extra services or other benefits that will sway customers to its products, goods or services. The broad practical aspects of the preceding can consist of one or all of the following examples which represent a few of the more important elements of the concept:

3.1 IMPROVED OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCIES

Depending upon the industry sector this can entail the moving of part or all of a segment of operations to achieve this end. A study by Forrester Research (Global Envision, 2004) estimated that 3.3 million jobs in the United States representing \$ 136 billion in payroll will move outside of the country by 2015. In Europe it was reported that during 2003 outsourcing agreements increased from \$ 19 billion to \$ 44 billion over 2002 and that the United Kingdom accounted for 54% of all the contracts signed in that year (Jaques, 2004).

3.2 REDUCTION IN OPERATIONAL COSTS

The costs of labour, union regulations, land, taxes and facility space comprise a few operational expenditure areas that a company can realize savings in as a result of outsourcing. Lower labour costs in China as well as India, Russia and other

countries explain one aspect of why there has been a tremendous growth in the utilization of outsourcing for not only payrolls and call centres, it also accounts for computer parts and or assembly such as sneakers (Nike), clothing, software and medicines. In the last instance this can entail the research and development phase or the insurance claim department handling the forms submitted by insured individuals. In 2003 the United States had a \$ 120 billion trade deficit with China, and the main contributor to this was the outsourcing of manufacturing (Global Envision, 2005).

3.3 JUST IN TIME DELIVERY

One of the other large corporate areas for savings is in inventory. The cost for materials and warehousing finished items is an additive that is reflected in the final price. Just-in-time delivery was developed in the 1970s in Japan to meet consumer demands and to aid the Japanese economy (Mariathasan, 1999).

All of the preceding practical outgrowths of the theoretical advantages derived from outsourcing to “gain or maintain a competitive advantage” are dependent upon an individual company’s ability to implement a successful outsourcing strategy that solves the multitude of logistical problems.

4. ACCESS TO NEW MARKETS

Theoretically, depending upon the product(s), goods or services a company is engaged in, access to new markets as well as the ability to improve the position in those markets is based upon being able to be effective and efficient. The theoretical advantage inherent in outsourcing is that when the proper supplier is selected the necessary expertise to accomplish the preceding can be found within a firm that has vast experience in the laws, culture and policies that accompany entry into new markets and countries. To work, this theory has to be put into practice. Company management must investigate the positive

as well as downside aspects of utilizing a third party source as opposed to internal methods. This entails an understanding of the diverse elements, laws, customs, regulations, currency fluctuations, market conditions, competition and associated areas.

Management's responsibilities entail exposing the company to new markets of opportunity to increase the potential consumer of client base enabling it to sell more cost-effective products, goods and services. When key operational segments and allied operations are spread throughout different countries the company faces massive duplication of processes and employees, thus adding to overhead costs. Application of outsourcing techniques can permit a company to gain access to a new market.

Some of the other practical benefits resulting from the utilization of outsourcing in entering new markets are:

- a. Organizational flexibility
- b. Improved operational efficiencies
- c. Reduction in operational costs
- d. Economies of scale
- e. Increased competitiveness
- f. Reduction in capital investments

The preceding all contribute to the objective of:

- a. Improving a company's profitability
- b. Enhance its competitiveness and
- c. Increase its ability to respond to change.

5. ABILITY TO CONCENTRATE ON CORE COMPETENCIES

The utilization of outsourcing theoretically permits a firm to marshal its internal management and other resources to allow it to concentrate on its core competencies. Hamel *et al* (1990) describe this as "... The collective learning and coordination skills..." of a company's products. They explain

that core competencies represent the source of a company's "... competitive advantage..." Hamel *et al* (1990) and that this is the method by which the company can introduce new services and products. The importance of this corporate theory cannot be over.

In a practical sense this has been the approach of China, India and other outsourcing locations as they understand that their competency lies in lowered labor costs thus providing them with an advantage in luring business operation segments in manufacturing, services, and other areas.

6. OUTSOURCING REALITIES

Regardless of the product, goods or services the element that makes any of these areas work is people. Even industries that are non-labour intensive are in effect labour intensive from the standpoint that it takes people to make it work and run. India reigns as the prime outsourcing locale for software and service exports to the United States as a result of such lower costs. During 2003 through 2004 this total was estimated as 8.5 billion USD in outsourced services (Krishnadas, 2003). As outsourcing represents a cost saving strategy for manufacturing, the development of products, customer service and support, IT, records retention and other areas it is a bottom line additive that contributes to increased profitability, competitiveness, and enables a company to offer goods and or services at lowered prices with more features and benefits. Realistically, those firms which do not maintain pace with the cost cutting measures of their competitors are looking at reduced market share and business decline. But rather than being viewed as a must do alternative firms in all industry sectors, by and large, view outsourcing as practical (Hanel, 2005). He advises that there are four steps in the process of selecting as well as establishing an outsourcing relationship:

1. Development of specifications that define the selection criteria
2. Evaluation of potential partners against these criteria
3. Design of a structure encompassing the relationship which consists of the objectives and an agreement defining the terms and level of performance
4. And lastly, the management of the association through formal and informal means as an ongoing process.

As outsourcing is a viable business strategy that aids in either keeping pace with or maintaining an advantage over competitors, management attitudes are positive. The Garner Group's study on this area indicated that 80% of the boards of American companies have discussed the issue of outsourcing and 40% have actually completed either a pilot study or implemented it for segments of their operations (Ezrati, 2004). He points out that historically those individuals whose jobs were displaced by outsourcing found employment in differing industries and that there are and have been cases of hardship on the part of a percentage of these individuals. Ezrati (2004) indicated that on an historical basis the jobs displaced by outsourcing mirrors developments in the 1950s and 60s when lower cost European labour threatened the American steel industry. These figures reveal that the present heated climate of outsourcing represents another cycle in business than seeks to maximize cost outlay against productivity that benefits all concerned.

7. CONCLUSION

The global context of business in today's technologically based environment creates a climate whereby the utilization of outsourcing is a viable and constructive management technique. The ills attributed to its use are the same arguments utilized in the 1960s and 70s in the exodus of manufacturing in the United States to Mexico and China, yet industry not only survived, it

increased productivity as a result. And that is the core around which outsourcing revolves.

From an historical perspective the theoretical approaches and arguments for outsourcing weigh heavily on the positive side as its purpose increases shareholder value through improved operational costs and thus bottom line performance. In terms of the net effects to individual national economies, outsourcing has put countries such as India, China, Pakistan and others on the economic map in the same manner it did for Japan.

Outsourcing permits companies to focus their attention on their core business as well as obtain skilled labour at cost savings to improve returns. It also aids in improved technology at lowered costs fostering their competitiveness. Outsourcing is a technique that weeds out the unproductive elements in a business operation, replacing it with a more cost effective means to accomplish the end objective.

While equating the global effects of outsourcing one must take into account that it has served to bring technology and innovation to developing economies. The transfer of technology, plant, software and other skills that form the foundation of the outsourced functions serves to upgrade the standard of living for workers in those sectors. The question of job loss in the countries of origin represents segments of corporate operations that needed cost containment in order for the company to remain competitive, grow and thus eventually add additional jobs. As an important segment of business operations and cost control, outsourcing historically has permitted companies a means to contain costs as well as remain in business, and this continues to be the case.

TACKLING TERRORISM

[Jan. 17, 2008; The Nation]

Ever since 9/11 struck the world, Pakistan has been the worst affected country of the phenomenon of terrorism. Other than Iraq and Afghanistan, where naked civil wars are being fought as a result of foreign interventions, Pakistan is the only country, which has paid so immensely for its contribution to the so-called war on terror. The assassination of national leader Benazir Bhutto in cold blood in Rawalpindi on December 27, 2007 is a cruel reminder of the penetration of terrorists in the body politic of the country. Going by the statistical data on terrorist attacks in the recent years, one is left gasped and aghast at its fast-speeding occurrence. The incorporation of suicide bombing into the terrorist strategy aimed at bleeding Pakistan has posed a major challenge to the national security planners.

What is even more horrifying is the fact that the state and its symbols are also the target of attack by the terrorists. The perpetrators of gloom and doom have declared a war on the state of Pakistan. The state needs to bounce back with full might at its disposal to take on terrorism in a befitting manner and arrest its onward march. It would be in the fitness of things on the part of policy makers to make an assessment of Pakistan's anti-terrorism strategy, identify its flaws and suggest proposals for mid-course correction. Some of the points given here below are instructive in this regard:

Right from the word go when the Pakistani establishment turned its back on the terrorist organizations and declared its

support for the US-led war on terror, certain flaws bordering on strategic errors were too discernible to be neglected. No formal channels were utilized for arriving at consensus on the issue. From the hindsight, it appears that our ruling class chose to move ahead, single-handedly, on the question of cooperation with the US. The terms of engagement negotiated for participation in war on terror left much to be desired. Our policy makers should have calculated the nature and enormity of backlash in case of such a policy turnaround. The guardians of our national security have long been in touch with such shadowy characters due to their mutual involvement in Afghan Jihad in the 1980s. We should have told the US about our domestic compulsions while jumping on the American bandwagon, at the same time, extending our cooperation to the US.

Secondly, our anti-terrorism strategy has been based on the use of force to the exclusion of other available means. Such an exclusivist approach has been counter-productive for our national unity and internal law and order. It should have been known that this war is not a traditional war with a foreign enemy for which our armed forces have been trained. Here the enemy is nameless, faceless and region-less closely intermixed in populations of our tribal areas and parts of NWFP. Although some sporadic attempts were made for solution of the issue through political engagement but the approach was soon to be jettisoned under foreign pressure much to our own detriment. Therefore, we need to revisit our policy of use of force in the light of our experience of fighting militancy and in the larger national interest.

Thirdly, our government has been under fire from the US and other allied quarters to 'do more' in spite of delivering so much in war on terror. We have always been on the defensive vis-a-vis the US demands. Dictation seems to have been the order of the day. Coupled with sporadic acknowledgement of cooperation and praise on the leadership, the US has used

the policy of stick effectively. Our internal disturbances and law and order situation, a natural corollary of our role in war on terror, is being invoked as a sufficient reason for lack of security of nuclear assets. These clearly are the pressure tactics being employed to force the Pakistani government to do more. Unfortunately, our government has been equally ready to accept all sorts of pressures owing to its own legitimacy problems.

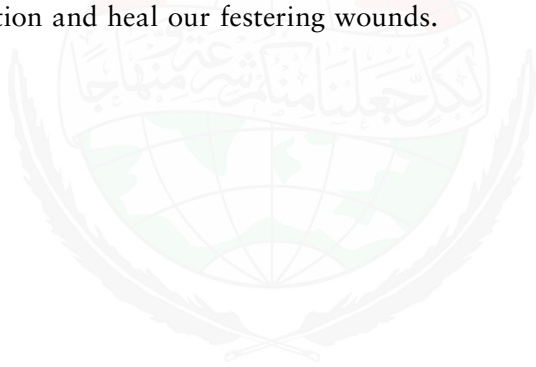
Our internal situation is touching the boiling point by any standard. This is high time we thought of making mid-course correction to arrest our downward march into abyss and anarchy. There is no time for further procrastination. It is high time for action. Our reformulated anti-terrorism strategy should be aimed at following two planks for the achievement of both short-term and long-term interests.

The first and foremost is the tactical plank in order to salvage the fast-deteriorating situation. We need to rethink our engagement with the US on the present terms and conditions. Our further staying the course can be disastrous. We need to disengage ourselves from the American baggage to ensure our tribal brothers and sisters that we are not fighting someone else's war. In the light of peculiar conditions and tribal traditions of the area we should enlist the support of local elders for alienating and defeating the terrorists. This calls for a shift onto political approach. Military approach subordinated to the political strategy can have the potential of healing the wounds and restore some semblance of normalcy in the country.

At the strategic level, there is a need to think of long-terms steps for calming the situation. The top most at the agenda is the conduct of fair and free electoral exercise resulting into the formation of democratically elected government. Democracy provides the best shield against terrorism and militancy in that people have the feeling of participation in the national decision-making, which is not the case in authoritarian regimes. Thus in this way they come to own governance and its institutions. The

biggest challenge at this point in time is to enlist the support of common man against terrorists and terrorism. This can only be done if they are made stakeholders in policy-making. In the long run, it is the institutions, which can eliminate the feelings of deprivation and dispense justice. Therefore when national institutions are credible and above-board, it is easier to fight such scourges as terrorism.

The government needs to take an initiative to reach out to all religio-political parties to form unity among all strands of opinions and develop consensus on all the thorny issues facing the country. Our foreign policy decisions should be informed by such consensus. Political parties also need to realize that rising above party divide for national interest is the need of the hour. Only such a holistic and repackaged strategy may reverse the situation and heal our festering wounds.



WHY DEVELOPING WORLD AFRAID OF WTO?

[Feb. 01, 2008]

The World Trade Organization was the culmination of Uruguay round aimed at regulating international trade. The edifice of WTO is erected on multilateral trading system evolved in the form of GATT since 1947. In 1947 the members of the system were 23 which increased to 150 in 2007. In terms of membership, it is remarkable increase and points to the fact that multilateral trading system is the best possible arrangement for regulation of international trade evolved by the world community so far. WTO is a reality now.

The proponents of multilateral trading system argue that not only has the membership of multilateral trading system increased; its scope has also enlarged with the passage of time. Initially multilateral trading system was restricted to regulation of trade in goods only but with the formation of WTO in 1995, its scope increased to services and intellectual property rights also. The issues like antidumping duties, Customs valuation, Rules of origin, subsidies and safeguard measures etc. have also come under its ambit. There is an elaborate legislation on these issues under the WTO and different cases decided by its appellate body have further improved and clarified the WTO legislation.

It is argued that WTO dispute settlement mechanism is very remarkable. The law provides for timelines to be observed for different stages of the case. It further provides for equality before the law where a least developed country can file a complaint

against the giant like USA. Two fundamental principles of non-discrimination i.e. Most Favored Nation (MFN) and National Treatment (NT) underpin the equal rights of WTO members. It treats all its members alike irrespective of the fact whether they are rich or poor, big or small, strong or weak.

The decision making in WTO is based on the principle of consensus. All member countries have full participation and this distinguishes WTO from other international organizations where authority is normally delegated to take decisions on behalf of members of the organization. WTO secretariat has limited executive powers and does not have power to influence the countries' policies. It merely provides technical and analytical comments on issues like regular trade policy reviews. The proponents of WTO also say that development issues concerning the developing countries have also been taken up by the WTO as these issues are at the core of Doha development round launched in November 2001.

Despite all above 'good' points, the popular perception among the developing countries is that WTO is not adequately addressing their concerns. It has failed to take concrete steps on issues having much relevance with the developing countries. The mushroom growth of regional trading agreements is manifestation of their dissatisfaction with the multilateral trading system. The concerns of the developing countries came to the fore at Cancun when they raised their voice on market access issue both for agriculture and non-agriculture products. The Cancun Ministerial Meeting in September 2003 ended in fiasco and without an agreement on how to proceed.

The developed countries are the major providers of domestic support to their farmers. This agricultural domestic support is of great concern for developing countries. The farmers of the developing countries are unable to compete in the international market with the farmers of the developed countries who receive large amount of domestic support from their governments.

The bulk of domestic support is provided by the EU, USA and Japan. According to World Trade Report (2006), the EU spent on average US\$96.1 billion on domestic support, followed by the USA with US\$66.2 billion and then Japan with US\$48.1 billion, during the period 1995 – 2001.

Export subsidies for non-farm goods are prohibited under the WTO law. Elimination of farm export subsidies means bringing agriculture at par with other goods. It was agreed at the Hong Kong Ministerial Meeting that such subsidies will be phased out by 2013. The World Trade Report says that 21 developed countries spent nearly US\$250 billion in 2003 on subsidies. The total subsidies given by whole of the world were about US\$300 billion in that year. In terms of subsidies to GDP ratio, the developing countries spent 0.6% compared with developed countries whose ratio was 1.4%. It is imperative that elimination of these subsidies should be an essential component of a comprehensive Doha agreement.

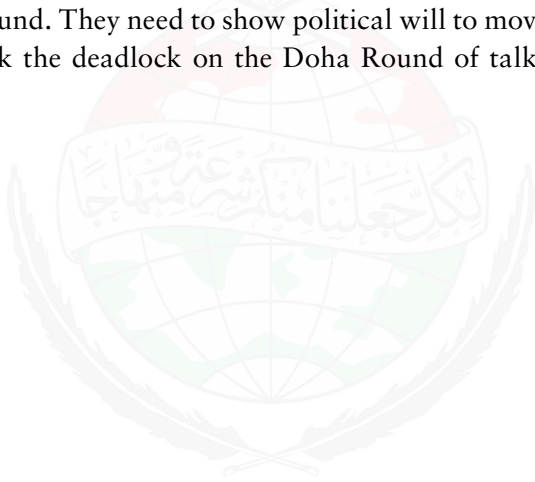
The results of negotiations on non-agricultural tariffs are also not forthcoming. The effective rates of tariff on goods of particular interest for developing countries are still high. Even the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) has not yielded any tangible results for the least developing countries. The traders of the developing countries requesting preferences have to comply with some administrative and technical requirements. The most important requirement is related to compliance with Rules of Origin intended to prevent trade deflection. Different empirical studies have estimated the cost of compliance in the range of 3 – 5% of the value of goods. For developing countries this compliance cost may be higher due to institutional weaknesses and information disadvantages. Paul Brenton & Miriam Manchin (2002) have found that only one third of EU imports from developing countries eligible for preferences under GSP entered the EU market with reduced duties.

The developing and least developed countries constitute an insignificant share in world trade. In 2004, Least-Developed Countries (LDCs) accounted for only 0.6% of world exports and 0.8% of world imports. Their export profile is characterized with a narrow range of products, a lack of diversification of export markets and low technology content. Besides market access issue, these countries face acute supply-side constraints and do not have much “exportable surplus” to supply in the world market. Even if trade is fully liberalized and market access issue is appropriately tackled, the developing world will not be in a position to take full advantage of trade liberalization due to their low capacity to supply. The emphasis of WTO is on trade liberalization and no tangible mechanism is in place to increase their potential for generating more exportable surplus, which reduces the degree of relevance of WTO for them. This strengthens their perception that WTO is a club of developed countries only.

The development issues came to the forefront when provisions under the head “Trade and Development” were added to GATT. Special and differential (S&D) provisions were also a part of this move but fact remains that WTO has not been able to evolve an effective mechanism to render help to the least developed countries for overcoming their supply-side constraints. There is a growing demand from the developing world that they should be given aid for increasing their trade. “Aid for trade” is highly needed to address the concerns of the developing world and change the popular perception that WTO is not capable of solving their trade problems.

Time factor is highly important in this regard. The negotiations under the WTO are conducted in rounds spanning over years, meaning thereby that reforms in the system are not frequent. About seven years elapsed between the end of the Tokyo Round and the beginning of the Uruguay Round and it took eight years for the completion of Uruguay Round and the

launch of the Doha Development Agenda in November 2001. The Doha Development Round is still going on and chances of its early completion are not visible due to deep differences between the developing and the developed world over the issues of agricultural subsidy and market access. The glacial pace of negotiations in WTO Rounds has further disillusioned the developing world. Despite several ministerial meetings, the WTO has failed to break the impasse regarding cuts in barriers to trade in agriculture, industrial goods and services amid cross-cutting disagreements. It is imperative that all WTO members make their contribution for successful completion of Doha Round. They need to show political will to move forward and break the deadlock on the Doha Round of talks.



DEVELOPING BIO-ENERGY

[Feb. 04, 2008; The Nation]

Bio-energy is emerging as a top priority on the international agenda. There are a host of factors, which have focused the attention of the world on exploring alternative sources of energy to meet its ever-increasing demand. Biofuels, which are the sources of bio-energy, are heating fuels derived from biological sources such as grains, sugar crops, oil crops, starch, cellulosic materials and organic waste. Bioethanol and biodiesel are two major types of biofuels. Bioethanol is produced from sugarcane, corn, beets, wheat and sorghum. In 2006 production of bioethanol was estimated at 32 billion litres. Brazil (using sugarcane) and USA (mostly using corn and some soya) are the main producers of bioethanol and account for about 70% of the global supply. Biodiesel production, derived from oil or tree seeds such as rapeseeds, sunflower, soya, palm and coconut was estimated at 2 billion liters in 2005. Germany, France and Italy collectively produce nearly 90% of the global supply primarily using rapeseed. Bioethanol and biodiesel however collectively account for around 2% of the global annual consumption of gasoline in terms of energy equivalents.

Biofuels as a source of energy have been a subject of global focus since decades. An abnormal increase in the prices of crude oil has, however, propelled the world community to accord much greater attention to the development of bio-energy sources and resultantly interest in biofuels has further enhanced in the recent past. There are a number of cogent factors for this enhanced interest in biofuels. They include energy security,

increasing trade deficit, desire to decrease greenhouse emissions and potential benefits to the rural livelihoods.

The oil prices are volatile and its global distribution is highly uneven. Historically, oil-importing countries have been heavily dependent on imported fuels and this dependence makes these countries vulnerable to energy crisis caused by the increase in prices and supply disruptions. There have been apprehensions that heavy dependence on imported oil is also not desirable due to strategic considerations. This has enhanced the interest of the countries in biofuels as a part of their strategy to reduce dependence on crude oil. Moreover, oil starved countries spend major portion of their foreign currency reserves to buy oil and oil bill forms a major part of their composition of imports. Pakistan is a pertinent example in this regard. There are instances that countries have decreased their dependence on oil as a source of energy by resorting to biofuels. Brazil is one such country. It has been estimated that between 1976 and 2000, she saved US \$ 1.8 billion per year due to its ethanol program.

The use of biofuels as an alternative source of energy is also advocated from the environmental perspective. It is said that the use of biofuels reduces green house gas emissions as compared to fossil fuels. This aspect is, however, still controversial and results of different studies conducted in this regard are inconclusive. Some studies even indicate that biofuel production generates more greenhouse gas emissions. It is also argued that biofuels help in creating jobs in rural areas and supplement incomes of the farmers. According to an estimate, sugarcane in Brazil employs one million workers.

Besides above mentioned 'good' points for developing bioenergy sources, the use of biofuels have got its cost also. Biofuels require additional land and water resources, which, economically speaking, are highly scarce resources. It is apprehended that with growing population and increased use of biofuels, pressures on natural habitat will mount. Biofuel crops

especially sugarcane are water-intensive in nature and may lead to increased water scarcity and water pollution. According to an estimate, about 1.2 billion people of the global population live in water-scarce regions and the widespread use of biofuels will further add pressure to fast depleting water resources.

There are some other valid concerns regarding the use of biofuels. It is argued that the increased demand for biofuels will cause price hike in agricultural commodities. The higher food prices will though benefit the landed farmers but will adversely affect the urban and landless poor. Thus the use of food crops for energy in a world where hunger still persists is also questionable on ethical grounds.

Due to environmental challenges like climate change, increasing mono-cropping and deterioration of water and soil conditions due to greater fertilizer and pesticide use, bio-energy sources should be exploited with great caution. Sustainability is a key issue in this regard. There is a growing recognition in the developed countries that not all bio fuels are harmless so far as their impact on environment is concerned. According to “Bioenergy Development in G8 + 5 countries” Report of Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the European Union and some of its member states are working for setting up sustainability standards in case of biofuel use. Brazil has also created its ‘social seal’ in this regard.

Biofuel energy issue is also closely linked to food security concerns. Food security requires that all the people have physical and economic access to sufficient amount of food to meet their dietary needs in a sustainable manner for a productive and healthy life. Increased use of biofuels may give rise to food security issues and from this angle, it becomes more important to adopt a well thought out policy by striking a trade off between food security and energy security concerns.

As regards Pakistan, we have comparative advantage in respect of certain requisites for bio-energy development. Firstly

a large chunk of land still remains uncultivated in the country. By using modern technology, this land can be made cultivable for producing crops used for generation of biofuels. Secondly Pakistan has a good irrigation system and by improving the existing dams and building new dams where feasible, excellent use can be made of available water in raising crops meant for biofuels. It is thus required that a comprehensive policy after exhaustive deliberations on the issue with all its pros and cons, is adopted for bio-energy development.



EXPLORING AREAS OF COOPERATION FOR SAARC

[Feb. 04, 2008]

The intention of transforming the South Asian region into SAARC Customs Union or better still SAARC Economic Union expressed during the last SAARC summit held in New Delhi is no doubt quite formidable, to say the least. Other issues aside, one thing comes home in very stark terms that the South Asian leadership is seized of the idea of pooling together their respective sources, goods and services in creating collective economic body for the benefit of the member countries on the pattern of European Union. There is no dearth of those who would certainly doubt the practicality of such proposition in view of immense structural and political problems SAARC has historically been faced with. In an atmosphere marked by dominance of religious rabble-rousing, half truths and lack of vision to grasp the emerging realities in the global order, conditions may not be that conducive for the realization of this dream.

However, the difficulties involved in the enterprise should serve to further boost the efforts for gathering political will for starting the movement towards the avowed goal. This is, however, not to suggest that real issues among the South Asian countries should be put at the backburner. What this writer aims to propose is the fact that time for rigid and inflexible positions on matters of foreign policy is long past. Every age has its own preferences and compulsions. Therefore when old methods have failed in resolving the issues due to maximalist

positions, there is a need to employ more creative and innovative approach to deal with them. The world experience amply proves that the economic cooperation plays an important role in creating 'peace' constituencies, which in turn are helpful in bringing the disparate viewpoints on the negotiating table. That is why the economic integration of South Asia may be instrumental in resolving the age-old issues, for economics and politics are inseparable.

South Asia is the poorest, most illiterate and least gender sensitive region of the world. All countries of the region have very low ranking on the Human Development Index, which speaks volumes of appalling state of vital indicators like education, life expectancy and real income. What really makes the situation further deplorable is the short-sighted vision of the ruling elite of South Asia towards resolution of the regional problems and their failure in taking bold initiatives for South Asian regional cooperation. There are a number of areas where the member countries of SAARC should cooperate with one another for collective benefit.

South Asian countries should make investments in the field of education. At a time when knowledge-driven growth is the order of the day around the world, our educational standards are abysmally low, which do not correspond to the demands of the market. Furthermore, the female education is one of the most neglected areas. No country can progress without capitalizing on the capabilities of its women. But unfortunately South Asia continues to lag behind the rest of the world in empowering its woman folk in making them a useful and productive member of the society. Another aspect of education deficit relates to the child education, which does not figure that prominently on the agenda of the countries of the region. Sound education coupled with targeting of nutritional poverty should be an important ingredient for educational uplift of our peoples.

Energy sector is another very important area where joint cooperation of the South Asian countries is required. Almost all countries of the region are hit very hard by the shortage of energy, which is taking heavy toll on the industrial growth of these countries. In future, this crisis is likely to worsen with incalculable consequences. In view of this, the countries should explore various options for the solution of this problem. Gas pipeline project between India, Iran and Pakistan is a bold initiative and needs to be pursued much more vigorously than is the case at the time. Some experts on South Asian affairs have put up the proposal of interactive energy grid throughout South Asia. The policy makers need to look into this proposal seriously.

Intra-regional trade between South Asian countries is very low as compared with other regional blocs like EU, NAFTA and AFTA. Despite several efforts made in the past, intra-regional trade has not registered any noticeable growth. The future of SAFTA is not very bright as the experience of SAPTA suggests. It is now accepted fact that trade is an important stimulator of economic growth and economic growth is a necessary condition for poverty reduction. Concrete measures need to be adopted for enhancing the trade within the region. It is suggested in this regard that trade barriers are removed to facilitate the flow of trade. India should take bold decisions in this respect.

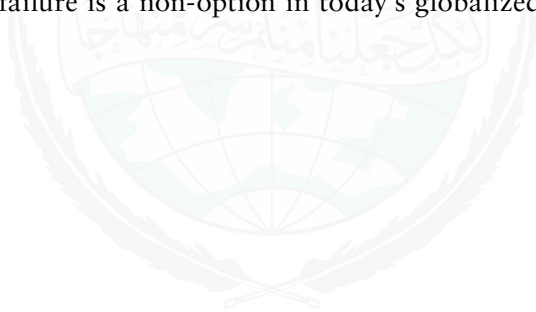
Development of infrastructure is a necessary condition for boosting the intra-regional trade since sustained investment in infrastructure increases the labour productivity, reduces cost of transportation and production, both farm and non-farm, and promotes rural-urban linkages.

Growth of Information technology has come to play meaningful role in achieving development in any country. It has brought countries together in the form of a global village. India has done well in this sector and should be a role model for other countries, for growth without technological basis will be

slow and costly. Water is also very important given its multifold importance and the South Asian countries should also explore possible solutions of this problem for short-term and long-term needs.

It is also required that practical steps are taken for the harmonization of Customs clearance procedures, quality standards and sanitary and phytosanitary standards. The establishment of banks and other financial institutions across the region can also be a target area. Their business processes and standards should be harmonized.

South Asia has a tremendous potential for growth. What it lacks is the political will and determined leadership who has the courage to take bold and practical decisions for the collective good of its people. A lot of time has already been wasted and the circumstances dictate that we should grow wiser by the day. For failure is a non-option in today's globalized world.



ROLE OF ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN NATIONAL SECURITY

[Mar. 10, 2008; The Nation]

One are the days when the national security was considered as a merely military concept. The collapse of USSR showed that the military might was not the only factor in saving the disintegration of the countries. At a time when the denouement of the Communist Bloc became too stark a reality to be ignored, it was co-equal of the US in the terms of military prowess. It collapsed simply because it could not support its federation economically. The point has been brought home more clearly by the conduct of the US as the sole superpower of the world in post-cold war period. The economic interests have shaped the military and foreign policy agenda of the sole super power. Therefore it is safer to conclude that no paradigm of national security is perfect if it is bereft of self-sufficiency in the economic domain. The challenges for countries like Pakistan are many and can only be countered if our national security concept is inclusive with economic prowess being the core. The following is an appraisal of our strengths and weaknesses:

The federal government should establish a good institution to check the standards of the products manufactured domestically having a large network and state-of-the-art laboratories as well as skilled human force to do the undertakings. The products so cleared by this institution should qualify for export to the outside world. The foreign companies are operating in this domain to the detriment of the locals. Let me tell you that Pakistan's position in the surgical industry is quite prominent

whose history is traceable to the pre-Pakistan period. Coming into existence with an amount worth \$20 million, it exported products of \$ 1.6 million last year. Germany and the US are the large importers of surgical instruments from Pakistan. Many other renowned companies of the world wish to seek cooperation with surgical industry in Pakistan.

Therefore we need to promote this sector. The Sports Industry is yet another potential strength of Pakistan's economy. The only problem with it is the lack of domestic distributional channel. Resultantly it has to depend upon the sweet will of the foreign companies. Pakistan should fill in the void by establishing its own distributional channel tasked with locating potential consumers. Our institutions have reactive approach waiting for the consumers to come over to them for the purchase of goods. This attitude should be given up and replaced with proactive approach.

The second issue is that emphasis is being placed on the small and medium-sized industries along with the large industry globally. But in our case, we have not given any concessions to these industries. The interest and benefit of the multinationals is at the heart of our law making and policy formulation. The small and medium sized industries are neglected in this regard. Sri Lanka has legislated upon promoting the small and medium-sized industries, which has opened up many vistas of progress and prosperity. There was a time in not too distant a past when the textile industry of Pakistan was of international standard. But with the passage of time, we have lost our competitiveness in this sector. Therefore it would not be wise on our part to give extra importance to this industry. It does not mean that it should be neglected. The fact of the matter is that the resources should also be spared for more promising industries.

If Pakistan cannot produce finished goods of good quality, it should focus on the production of the raw material, as it has become a big industry. The benefit accruing from it could be

as much as from the sale of finished goods. There are many institutions in our neighbourhood, which hinder the sale of our finished products in the markets. Therefore Pakistan should not produce such goods as are difficult to sell in the markets and which fetch in less amount of profit. Other countries will prefer the purchase of goods from Pakistan and when Pakistan will not produce finished goods for their benefit, they will be forced to pay good price to her.

When countries integrate in the form a bloc, it improves their position economically since the integration is based upon the idea of mutual benefit. So the comparatively less developed countries also stand to gain from such a process. One such example is the reconstruction of Japan undertaken by the US after the World War when it detonated two nuclear bombs on Japan in order to destroy it first and then to demonstrate its capacity to take on other likely threats like Russia in case of their intention to mess up with the US. It also played an important role in formulation of its constitution. Japanese people used this anger against the US as a fillip for their efforts at achieving unprecedented growth and prosperity. Japan is an unrivalled economic power today.

When the US experienced worst economic crisis in the 70s with the result that the people lost their purchasing power, it was Japan that came to its rescue at that critical point in time. The biggest industry of the US was that of automobile and cars, which stood in show rooms in hundreds of thousands of numbers, as there were no buyers. Japan purchased all these cars and supported the sagging American economy.

Now the question arises here as to why they did this after being met with such a great oppression? They would have left the US to fend for himself but great countries do not think on this pattern. Japan is the producer of technology of the highest quality and sells it to the US. No other country can replace US in this regard as the buyer of the Japanese technology.

Japan chose to bury the hatchet in favour of its economic gains that came its way through the rehabilitation of the American economy. They knew if the US went down, so would their burgeoning economy.

The importance of agricultural industry cannot be over-emphasized. Pakistan's last year GDP was worth \$ 4.75 where the contribution of manufacturing sector was 25%, while agricultural sector alone accounted for 23% as its share. Both China and India have performed tremendously by capitalizing on this sector. Pakistan's agricultural sector is very robust and enjoys worldwide fame. Its place in manufacturing and agricultural sectors stands at 51st and 20th positions respectively. The share of services sector in the Indian GDP is 60%, while it is 53% in our case. We could not progress that well in this area. The ratio of agricultural in Chinese GDP is 11%. They have focused on services and industry. We are not competitive in these sectors even if we work too hard. Pakistan has neglected agriculture since 1953 with the result that our sufferings have known no end in this area. In 1998, in spite of sanctions on Pakistan, the US allowed the export of wheat from Pakistan for its own benefit. If the agriculture of a country is in strong position, it can negotiate with the other on better terms and conditions.

Agricultural development is a must for national security and integrity of the country. We have swelled the ranks of the unemployed by ignoring the agriculture. About 1/3rd of our land is not under cultivation. 20.5 million People are associated with agricultural sector in one way or the other. There is a need to establish a think tank for the development of agricultural economy, which is responsible for determining the needs of the agricultural sector and offering policy prescriptions for their solutions.

FIXING PRIORITIES

[Dec. 29, 2008; The Nation]

The economies of both developed and developing countries are in a state of chaos. By virtue of their strong institutional capacity and diversification, the developed world has the wherewithal to stand the challenges produced by the recent surge of recession in the global market. But the developing countries like Pakistan are hard put to offset the negative effects of the global economic crisis. Given the criticality of the issue, it needs to be discussed in some detail to reach at the right kind of conclusion. Common people are shocked at the fact as to how the Pakistani economy, dubbed as emerging economy of the region with foreign reserve crossing the psychological barrier of \$16 billion, plummeted within months.

This downward and steep journey of economy was so acute that Pakistan stood chance of defaulting on meeting its international obligations if it did not get any immediate support from the outside. The newly elected government, upon taking over, drew up Plan A, B, C to shore up sagging economy.

The Plan A involved the multilateral institutions like World Bank, Asian Development Bank and Islamic Bank, which were expected to come to the relief of the economically entrapped government. Failing which the government looked to new multilateral forum called 'Friends of Pakistan' for availability of liquidity to avert the impending prospect of default on balance of payments.

This was plan B. When the friends made their intentions clear with the Pakistani leaders returning empty-handed from

time friends like China and Saudi Arabia and Mr Richard Boucher going to the extent of saying that there would be no cash on the table, the PPP-led government was left with no option but to tread the beaten track—International Monetary Fund.

This was Plan C. The Fund had gone out of business with total loans to various countries worth \$18 with Turkey topping the list of recipient countries. Courtesy the resent global meltdown, the Fund is back to relevance with a bang.

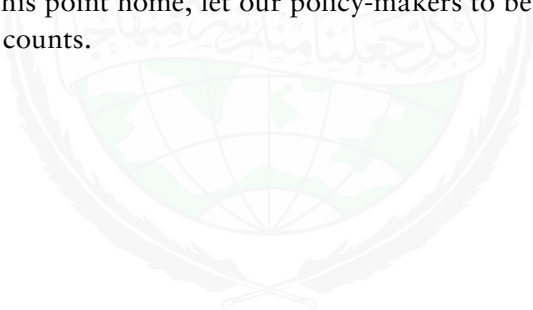
It needs to be understood that the previous government led by Gen Musharraf under the economic wizardry of Shaukat Aziz based its economic philosophy on consumerism. Due to Pakistan's participation in global war on terror, huge foreign direct investment (FDI) and capital flowed into the country. But it was the services sector like banking, telecommunication and stock market, which was the major recipient of these investments. Agriculture, manufacturing and textiles, the mainstay of Pakistan's economy where the country has competitive edge in the international market, were ignored. In the financial year 2007–2008, the share of agriculture in the GDP was 20.9% and that of manufacturing 25.9%. Contrast these figures with the share of service sector, which was 53.3% of GDP.

Pathetic is the word, which comes to mind while analysing this data. There is greater space for generation of employment in agriculture and manufacturing if proper attention is paid to these sectors.

The problem with the services sector is that it has limited capacity for employment creation. Secondly, the foreign investors not only take back their profit from the local market but they take no time in withdrawing their capital and investments once law and order problem is created. No doubt Pakistan's services sector has shown commendable performance but it should never come at the cost of agriculture, as it has been the

case in Pakistan at the policy-making level. In 2004–05, the growth of agriculture registered slowdown from 6.5% to 1.5% and that of manufacturing from 18% to 5.4%. This explains how ‘Bubble Economy’ was created and finally came crumbling down at the first available test.

Pakistan’s economic woes are not because of global meltdown, now sweeping across the world forcing the Bush administration to pump in liquidity of \$700 billion, an amount equalling the one spent at the Iraq war so far. They are more of our own making and have indigenous sources i.e. lop-sided and unimaginative economic policymaking etc. Secondly given structure and orientation of our economy, it is loosely integrated with the global financial system. Unless we fix our priorities and give agriculture the place it right deserves, we cannot get out of economic woods. Instead of allowing crises to bring this point home, let our policy-makers to be proactive on these counts.



LIMITED DESIRES, UNLIMITED RESOURCES

[Jun. 05, 2009; The Nation]

International trade rules and regulations and different business models are under the process of evolution. Societies with different cultural and civilisational backgrounds are out in the run for earning maximum profits by designing new business rules every now and then. This explains the permeation of materialistic forces in societies. Islam is the only religion whose trade laws, which were formulated some 1400 years ago, cannot be altered. These principles would continue to guide man till the Day of Judgement. Any state and society could reach the apex of growth and prosperity by following these principles. Before we dilate on the Islamic business system, it is in fitness of things to look at the prevailing conditions for an objective assessment.

Today western businessman, western corporate world, organisations and policies happen to be our role model. The western world put forward a new system after it managed to achieve unbelievable successes in the economic domain with the result that the rest of the world was left with no option but to follow the Western model as a means for sustainable growth. Even Islamic countries, which are supposed to implement Islamic system, are tied to the apron-strings of western economic model. There is a dominant feeling within the Muslim elites that either Islam is unable to respond to complex contemporary challenges in the fields of economics and trade or its economic concepts are outdated. Both of these perceptions are incorrect.

The fact is that the spirit of the Islamic economic model has not been understood. To cap it all, the Islamic economic system has not been codified in the modern jargon and there is acute dearth of presentable research work on it.

History bears witness to the fact that about 800 years ago when the western world did not know how to live a decent life, the Muslim in Spain prided itself on vast material progress in multiple fields. Their success emanated from practical implementation of economic and business model designed by the Holy Prophet (PBUH). China is moving ahead with this cost efficient model but it has become more of a copy cat thing, which has never been able to become superpower.

Undoubtedly, there is a need of mentioning other models besides the Islamic one, which receded into background with the passage of time. One such model was Relativism. This model did not urge people to follow pre-determined principles. Rather they were required to do whatever they thought was correct. Thus no system could be put in place with the result that society rejected it. Utilitarianism replaced Relativism.

Utilitarianism weighed human actions on the touchstone of pain and pleasure. Whatever constituted pleasure was good and hence acceptable even though it may be morally wrong. Universalism was the third model, which preferred good intentions rather than factoring process and final outcome into account. Islam recommends the totality of intention, action and result or outcome and then passes judgement about its being fair or foul. Thus this model of Universalism does not resemble the Islamic business doctrine.

The fourth model hinges on the idea of Distributive Justice, which is closer to the Islamic system of trade and is in operation in a number of countries including Pakistan. But it has not been implemented with its spirit since it hinders the maximisation of profits. This system talks of the rights of employer and employee both. Capitalist system and socialist economy are both alien to

the Islamic trade system. While the former protects the rights of the employer or those having means of production, the latter fully recommends and guards dictatorship of the proletariat. Both systems are poised on extremes.

Moderation is an important plank of the Islamic system. Distributive Justice ensures apportioning of rewards to both employer and employee without causing loss to one at the cost of the other. Islam protects rights of the individual if these rights do not encroach on the rights of society.

Islam does not favour the quantitative democracy. Rather, it puts emphasis on qualitative democracy.

It is necessary for the promotion of Islamic business ethics at corporate level that a position of moral advocate is created tasked with the responsibility of promoting and projecting excellence of trade morality and good attitude in the entire organisation. The company owner could also be a moral advocate. Difference could only be made and felt if the employer or CEO practised these golden principles of honesty and propriety. The right of the customer is the duty of the employer in the Islamic system of trade. The customer right includes product quality and cost efficiency. Islam talks of cost and time efficiency not for company but for customer. West reached this conclusion after years of experiments but Islam designed these rules 1400 years ago. The Western Business Model is based on limited resources and unlimited desires, whereas the beauty of the Islamic Business Model is that it is based on limited desires and unlimited resources. Who can defeat such a society, which endeavours for acquisition of unlimited resources but makes sure to limit its desire?

If this Islamic model is implemented, the country and industry would grow and the poor would have share in the economic benefits leading them to make their mark in life and live honourably in society. The Islamic economic model discourages concentration of wealth in a few hands. It is in

favour of establishing welfare state where economic rights of all and sundry are protected. If the Muslim business class adopts honesty the concept of limited desires and unlimited resources as a driving force behind their business pursuits, there is no reason why the Muslim community cannot reach the top.



PARLIAMENTARY SOVEREIGNTY

VS

JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE

[Jul. 29, 2009; The Frontier Post]

The events of past week surrounding the issue of petroleum products have ignited debate on the role of the apex court vis-à-vis the institutions of parliament and by extension that of the executive. The government of Pakistan replaced petroleum development levy (PDL) with carbon tax to be charged from the start of this financial year from July 1, 2009 onwards. Carbon tax was a part of the Finance Bill 2009 passed by the National Assembly in its lengthy budget session. Hearing a petition against the imposition of the carbon tax, the Supreme Court suspended its imposition and ordered OGRA to furnish complete data on the oil pricing mechanism. This resulted in the reversal of pre-July prices of petroleum products.

Fearing that the government might lose Rs. 122 billion, which were estimated to be received from imposition of the carbon tax for bridging fiscal deficit in the budget 2009-10, President Zardari, in a late night move, issued an ordinance imposing PDL raising the prices of petroleum products as on July 7 position. Attorney General, Latif Khan Khosa, admitted in the Supreme Court that the imposition of the carbon tax was a ‘mistake’, which was rectified through issuance of an ordinance.

Instead of defending itself in the Court, the government thought it expedient to resort to the issuance of ordinance to

do the needful. Those who held that the Supreme Court had intervened in the domain of legislature as it was latter that passed carbon tax in the Finance Bill 2009, were dealt a severe blow. The government disregarded the ‘mandate and will’ of elected parliament itself by issuing an ordinance—a familiar course of action during the dictatorial regimes--- instead of taking the matter to the logical conclusion.

Those who champion the mantra of sovereignty of parliament are under the erroneous impression that the passage of a bill or any other measure or imposition of tax renders it immune to judicial intervention. There are a number of ‘problems’ with this line of argument. First and foremost, does the measure enjoy support of the electorate? Wide scale protest demonstrations and rallies following the imposition of carbon tax reveal the extent of public resentment and disapproval of the governmental move. When people voted the present political administration into power on February 18, 2008, they hoped that the ushering in of a democratic order would make their life easier, not more difficult. If the government was so much concerned about the ‘sanctity of public mandate’ being ‘violated’, it could well have gone to the people in the form of referendum clarifying its present economic difficulties and asking them to extend it complete support and put up with difficult times.

Pakistan has a written Constitution which prescribes role, function and structure of each organ of the state. All institutions are creation of the Constitution and are independent in their respective domain. This is also the spirit of and a necessary condition for successful functioning of federalism. The job of the judiciary especially that of the higher judiciary is to interpret the Constitution, protect the fundamental rights and make sure that the laws enacted by the legislature are consistent with the Constitution. There is no doubt about the fact that legislation is the sole responsibility of the parliament but the apex court has

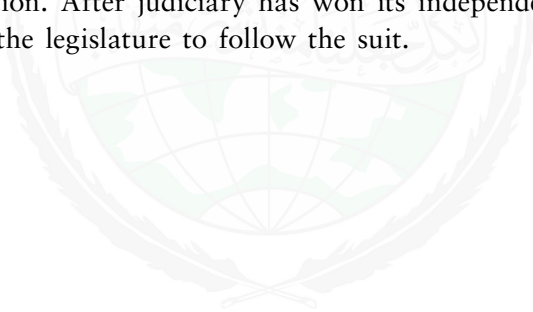
the power under the Constitution to declare any legal measure null and void if it contravenes the Constitution. Judicial intervention on this count does not represent the infringement on the role and functions of parliament.

It is an unfortunate reality that executive organ of the state assumed disproportional powers and role at the cost of legislature and judiciary following the creation of Pakistan in 1947. In the absence of sustainable structures, the palace intrigues hatched by the civil and military establishments gave paramount importance to the executive. Historically, legislatures and judiciary have been playing subservient role to the executive. Parliaments were there to rubber-stamp the actions of both civil and military regimes and give 'legal' cover to otherwise out and out unconstitutional acts of civil and military dictators. The quality of parliamentary debates has been poor to put it mildly. The record of our elected parliaments in doing their basic job i.e. legislation has also not been satisfactory. The parliamentary committees, which are the backbone of any democratic order and symbol of parliamentary sovereignty due to their oversight role, could not register much progress in calling the executive and its institutions to account for their excesses. Parliament's election of former president who was still donning the army uniform is a glaring case in point.

In the similar manner, the verdict of Federal Court (the then apex court) in *Mauliv Tamizuddin Case* under Chief Justice Munir also set the sorry tone. Decades down the line, our superior judiciary has been playing second fiddle to the establishment handing down such decisions which favoured the powerful elite at the cost of principles of justice, fair play and legal propriety. It was as a result of heroic role of lawyers, media, civil society and defiance of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudry that the judiciary was able to redeem itself and find its right place in the national structure of power. The infamous

‘Doctrine of Necessity’, which defined the conduct of our judiciary in the last sixty years has been buried for good.

Through a painful process of evolution, we are coming to a stage where national institutions have begun to assert themselves. Though there is still a lot to be done and all is not well in the state of Pakistan but signs are emerging that domineering role of the executive branch is being questioned thanks to media-fostered public awareness. There is an urgent need to cut its over-sized and disproportionate role in accordance with the demands of Constitution 1973. This warrants the system of checks and balance to be put in place so that no single institution gets to dominate the power structure at the cost of others. Therefore instead of getting bogged down in such meaningless rhetoric as clash amongst institutions, we need to give every state organ what is its due as defined in our Constitution. After judiciary has won its independence, it is now for the legislature to follow the suit.



FIXING THE FUNDAMENTALS OF ECONOMY

[Aug. 1, 2009; The Frontier Post]

Pakistan's recourse to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) for much needed foreign exchange to prevent default on its external obligations shows country's predicament. Despite promises and claims by successive governments, both military and civilian included, about breaking the proverbial begging bowl, Pakistan continues to remain trapped in the vicious cycle of IMF. It is a classic case of "the more things seem to change, the more they remain the same." Given the surge in economic activity caused by growth in the telecom sector, stock exchange, foreign remittances and flow of international aid and investment, an impression of 'economy being on the track' was created, which led the then Prime Minister to claim that Islamabad had said final good bye to IMF and had achieved economic sovereignty.

Upon taking over, the PPP-led government found itself sandwiched between fast deteriorating security situation in the country and rising oil prices, which inflated the import bill and caused the depletion of precious foreign exchange reserves. Pakistan's engagement in internal war on terror had also very huge economic cost. The outbreak of energy crisis further aggravated the economic situation and served to slow down economic development.

While international financial crunch did have its toll on our economy in ways more than one, however, most of our economic woes have owed their origin to the very manner in

which we have been managing our economy. Some analysts are of the view that Pakistan got least hit by the recession in international market because its economy is loosely linked with international financial architecture. This may be true at its face value. However, Pakistan's economy was affected indirectly. Consider:

The destination of most of the country's exports is mainly Europe and the US. The economic crunch did decrease the purchasing power of the people, thereby decreasing the demand for our exports. Secondly, no country can make progress without foreign investment and inflow of foreign capital. Precarious security situation coupled negative portrayal of the country's image in the international media and economic crunch brought investment from the Europeans almost to a zero level with horrendous consequences for the national economy. Thirdly, the foreign remittances by the local expatriate community, which are a major source to strengthen foreign exchange reserves, were also reduced.

The government had little control on these factors nor could it do much to stem the downward slide. The economy could still have borne shock had our successive governments paid attention to fixing the fundamentals of economy. It is unfortunate that our governments have had ad hoc economic strategy. They have been reacting to the economic crises rather than taking on them proactively. The previous government led by General Pervez Musharraf had the golden opportunity to undertake policy reforms and reorient the direction of our economy. However, it used the breathing space in building 'bubble economy', which got busted at the first available test.

No reform effort can succeed without acknowledging the due importance agricultural sector occupies in our economy. But it is equally unfortunate that this important sector has not received the kind of attention which its potential warranted. Pakistan is blessed to have fertile lands, hard-working farming community

and conducive weather. The focus on this sector cannot only be instrumental in achieving economic development and self-sufficiency but can also earn much needed foreign exchange through export of agro-based products. As indicated in the Economic Survey released on June 11 this year, agriculture sector alone showed signs of growth by 4.7% contrary to poor performance of other sectors.

Secondly, we need to work hard to increase our exports and decrease imports to allow economy space to grow. Presently there is a huge gap between our exports and imports much to the detriment of the national economy. Heavy import bill consumes precious foreign exchange. Pakistan is a front-line state against terrorism suffering huge sacrifices both in man and material. The government needs to put forward its case strongly before the international community and ask for giving maximum market access to our products.

Thirdly, the tax regime, currently in vogue in the country, is highly discriminatory. The major share of our tax receipts is through indirect taxes, which puts heavy burden on the poor and downtrodden sections of society. There is a need to shift from indirect taxes to the direct taxes so that the more affluent sections of society are made to contribute to the national kitty in accordance with their levels of income. Equally important is the task to broaden the tax base. Untaxed sectors need to be brought within the tax net.

The government should also cut down its non-development expenditure. This writer is of the considered view that if our political leadership develops consensus on keeping the non-development expenditure to the minimum, it could go a long way in bridging the fiscal deficit. The policy of simplicity and austerity at the top level could bear fruits motivating people to follow suit.

The welfare of the poor people should be the linchpin of our economic policy-making. Instead of passing the burden on to

the poor, the government would do well to ask more affluent sections to bear cost of their material progress. Let them share develop the feeling of ownership of state, a state which cares for them. It requires paradigm shift in approach and out of box thinking.



BEYOND THE USE OF POWER

[Aug. 9, 2009; The Post]

The fourth phase of return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) of Swat and Malakand division is successfully on its way towards completion. It should be a matter of immense satisfaction for both government and people alike that thousands of families, which got displaced from their homes following the initiation of military operation against terrorists, are finally able to travel back. The successful rehabilitation of IDPs and resumption of normal life in the affected areas would be instrumental in restoring the confidence of people in the government and state structures. While the immediate task of securing the areas and purging them of militants has been accomplished, it is time for policy makers to fathom the crux of problem and evolve a dynamic and comprehensive strategy to turn this tactical gain into strategic success. The following points are instructive in this regard:

For any long-term strategic policy to be successful and result-oriented, it is important to understand the ins and outs of the problem and identify the factors which gave birth to the phenomenon of terrorism and extremism in our own midst.

To begin with, the state's sponsorship and patronage of particular religious school of thought during Afghan Jihad sowed the seeds of extremism in the country. The obsession of the Establishment with such notion as 'strategic depth' coupled with its propensity to use these forces for its narrow political agendas further complicated the problem in the decade of 1990s. There was little realization of the deadly damage this

Frankenstein monster would cause in the event of turnaround in national policy following change in regional and international political scene. The lack of 'exit strategy' aimed at diluting the lethal effect of such extremist forces proved detrimental in the end.

The mushroom growth of religious seminaries, which was made possible due to unhindered and undocumented flow of foreign money, added to the severity of the problem. With foreign money came the sectarian influences, ideas and ideology. It caused the mass scale indoctrination of people. Such notions as accommodation, respect for dissent, tolerance and peaceful coexistence, which were the hallmark of the cosmopolitan Pakistani society, were the first casualty. The state chose to be indifferent to the 'slow poisoning' as some analysts have put it for it needed such elements for protection of its interests at home and abroad.

Other factors such as lack of good governance & education, expensive justice system, unemployment, and widening gaps between haves and have-nots provided breeding ground for recruitment of the disgruntled youth.

Thus the problem of homegrown extremism and terrorism turns out to be complex and multi-faceted, not merely an administrative issue involving the challenge to the writ of the state. It requires comprehensive and long-term policy framework worked out in consultation with all the stakeholders for complete elimination. While the military operation was the first and foremost part of the long drawn out battle, turning the military success into elimination of the factors which breed the scourge of terrorism and extremism remains the key challenge requiring dynamism, statesmanship, sustained engagement, emphasis on the use of soft power and to top it all 'out of box' thinking as major policy planks for success.

The government needs to go beyond the policy of three Ds (Dialogue, development and deterrence) to formulation of

comprehensive reform package aimed at winning the battle for ‘hearts & minds’. The policy of three Ds is short-term in nature, which spells out the impression of having been worked out as a reaction. More proactive response that goes beyond the use of hard power is the need of the hour in an attempt to find lasting solution. Consider the following:

To begin with, successful rehabilitation of IDPs and development of infrastructure to their complete satisfaction is the first major and immediate task before the government. Instilling the feeling of security is of equal importance in regaining the confidence of people in the ability and willingness of the government to protect its citizens, which was battered by the emergence of the Taliban when there was virtually no writ of the state in the region. The presidential announcement of building up an army cantonment is a welcome step in this regard.

The state needs to invest in systems and structures aimed at correcting the religious approach of people. Mind you it is battle of ideas and people can only be won over if their mindsets are transformed. It is possible by allowing people access to diverse ideas, opinions and viewpoints and forgoing its previous practice of patronizing a particular school of thought for vested interests. Instead of taking sides, the state should stay neutral in religious affairs.

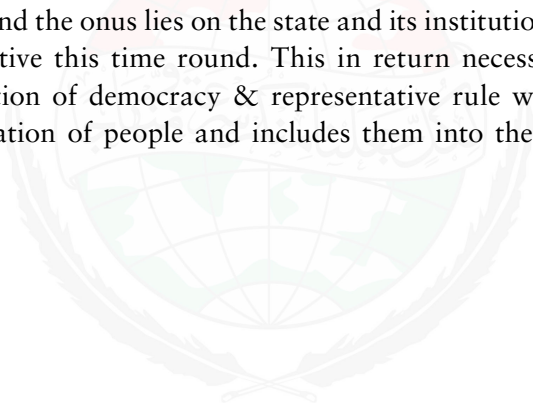
There is a need to register and document the religious seminaries. The reform of their syllabi and structure is very important as this would provide students an opportunity to look at other angles and develop respect for dissent.

The establishment of good governance is a key to achieving stability and securing the region against influences of terrorism and extremism. There is a need to make arrangements for cheap and accessible justice system, quality and job-oriented education, efficient & corruption-free administration,

creation of and access to economic opportunities through job employment etc.

Federally Administered Tribal Areas needs to be integrated with mainstream Pakistan in a phased manner through political reforms because stability in FATA is closely linked with the stability of the settled areas of NWFP, thanks to geography and uniformity of culture, history, traditions, race and language etc.

To top it all, the state needs to regain the space it has gradually lost to non-state forces. It is possible if it is able to assure its citizens that it is there to take their care and mete out even-handed treatment. The state should play a motherly role through implementation of welfare-oriented policies. It calls for renewal of social contract between the state and its citizens and the onus lies on the state and its institutions to take the initiative this time round. This in return necessitates the continuation of democracy & representative rule which ends the alienation of people and includes them into the decision-making.



MORE OF THE SAME

[Aug. 11, 2009; The Frontier Post]

The developments following the issuance of the joint statement after a meeting of the Pakistani and Indian prime Ministers in Sharm el Sheikh point to a familiar patten of ‘on and off’ relations between both countries. The dictum that “the more things seem to change, the more they remain the same” appears to have been coined in view of peculiar nature of relations between Islamabad and New Delhi that have seen few ups but more downs in the troubled history of 62 years since 1947.

The grilling of the Indian Prime Minister by the opposition parties in parliament and media over his ‘concessions’ to Pakistan in the joint statement shows that there is a lot that needs to be done on both sides of the border at multiple levels that may encourage governments to take bold initiatives without fear of reprisal at home. Pakistani governments that dared cross ‘red line’ also faced similar treatment at the hands of the conservative elements and hawkish establishment. The oft-spoken slogan of ‘sell-out on Kashmir and compromise on the national interest’ comes to mind.

What really caused uproar in Indian media and parliament was the agreement of the Indian government to the de-linking of peace talks from terrorism and not so unveiled reference to ‘threats in Balochistan and other areas’. So ferocious was the reaction of the journalists accompanying the Indian PM during the visit that the latter was forced to put a different interpretation on the joint statement which clearly belied

the facts. While the joint statement manifestly signaled the resumption of composite dialogue between Islamabad and New Delhi starting with the meeting at foreign secretaries' level, Dr Manmohan Singh would have the Indians believe that it did not mean anything to that effect and that India was wanted Pakistan to fulfill the conditions for dialogue before it formally entered into structured talks with it.

The opposition political parties in India thought that the government was going too far in accommodating Pakistan without getting anything in return on bringing the alleged perpetrators of the Mumbai attacks to justice. Their contention was that Pakistan was able to achieve major diplomatic success through Indian readiness to resume the composite dialogue, which also meant that her official position on the Mumbai carnage was also correct. It is to be kept in mind that following the events in Mumbai in 2008, India not only suspended the composite dialogue but also put forward two preconditions for initiation of dialogue. One condition related to the complete dismantling of the terror infrastructure in Pakistan and second was about bringing the alleged perpetrators of the Mumbai attacks to justice.

This brings us back to not too distant a past when the Indian establishment used the similar trick to browbeat Pakistan into submission. In December 2001 when the Indian parliament building was attacked, India put all the blame at the doors of Pakistan and mobilized its forces to the borders. Pakistan was left with no option but to follow suit. Thus there developed very explosive situation which could get out of hand anytime due to any mistake or miscalculation by either of the sides. The eye-ball to eye-ball confrontation between both countries that persisted till the end of 2003 coupled with aggressive Indian diplomacy to isolate Pakistan internationally and get her declared as terrorist state was only avoided due to active American engagement. The American backdoor efforts paid

off when the leadership of both countries signed what came to be known as 'Islamabad Declaration' in January 2004 sparing South Asia what could well develop into one of the worst catastrophes of the world.

One can easily discern a pattern to this Indian approach towards Pakistan. Invoking any untoward terrorist incident, the Indian establishment aims all the guns at Pakistan holding it responsible for the perpetuation of the terrorist acts before any proof is found and presented in the court of life. This is followed by aggressive media and diplomatic offensive against Islamabad, which is meant to alienate it and prove it culprit in the eyes of the world community. The coming of the Indian defence forces into war mode is geared to browbeat Pakistan and cripple its fledgling economy. Then after a certain period of protracted confrontation, de-escalation takes place, largely due to involvement of the international players led by the US, and India agrees to resume the stalled dialogue process with Pakistan. This cycle continues until another incident thwarts the pace of the developments brining everything back to square one.

Thus there is something fundamentally wrong with the structure and principles of composite dialogue framework as it exists today. Though the contention of de-linking terrorism from talks is not new as the same was agreed to in talks of both countries in April and September 2005, however, the reiteration of this important point could lay the much-needed foundation to move the dialogue process forward. The disproportionate reaction of the Indian media and conservative political forces appears pregnant with the vested interests.

As Prime Minister Manmohan Singh rightly pointed out in his speech in the Lok Sabha, dialogue with Pakistan is the only option available to India. Both countries do not afford the continuation of adversarial relations anymore. Pakistan, on its part, has been more than welcome to think 'out of

box' solutions to the disputed issues between both countries including the core issue of Jammu and Kashmir. The Indian establishment needs to introspect and review its Pakistan policy with all the seriousness at its disposal. Threats posed to the region could be turned into opportunities if India felt the pulse of time and changed its policies accordingly. This requires vision, statesmanship, dynamism and courage to take difficult decisions.



MUSINGS ON THE INDEPENDENCE DAY

[Aug. 14, 2009]

Pakistan is all set to celebrate the 63rd anniversary of its independence on this 14th of August, 2009. While this is time to celebrate the establishment of a free and independent country with the traditional fervour and extend gratitude to Allah Almighty for His greatest favour in the form of this country, it is also high time we as a nation introspected ourselves with a reformatory mindset. The comparison of our collective national conduct with the ideals, which characterized the freedom struggle, is helpful in identifying the grey areas and resetting our direction.

It is good to see our country back on democratic path after a long period of dictatorship, a fact which was out of sync with what the founding fathers of this country envisaged. The establishment of Pakistan was the direct outcome of a democratic struggle under the dynamic leadership of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. It is unfortunate that Pakistan has been led by the military dictators for larger part of its life. The Quaid-e-Azam, in his numerous statements and speeches, made it clear that Pakistan would be a democratic polity based on Islamic principles of social justice, equality and brotherhood. This was an open rebuke to liberal and religious extremists who wanted to put their respective versions on the new state. While the liberals thought Pakistan to be a democratic country based on the Westminster tradition without having anything to do with religion, the extremists wanted to impose a theocratic

and conservative interpretation of religion where the Mullahs would have divine right to rule.

Both of these extreme positions were in clash with the Quaid's vision of Pakistan. He could not have imagined Pakistan to be a Western-style democracy because doing so could have rendered Islam irrelevant to the demands of the contemporary age. At the same time, the Quaid did not want the newly established country to have a theocratic order because it could have negated Jinnah's ideals with graver implications for multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society that Pakistan was.

While the return of democracy is something to feel good about, this represents the beginning of a long drawn-out journey. Being the citizens of this country, we are duty-bound to protect democracy and work for reform in the system. The long-term solution of all problems, this country is faced with, lies in having democratic structures and processes. It is through empowerment of common man and his inclusion in the decision-making that would strengthen our federation and make democratic institutions stronger and sustainable. As long as masses remain indifferent or do not have any stake in the democracy as agent of change, we would continue to remain condemned to musical chairs between so-called democrats and military dictators.

If we go by the history of this nation, the fact comes home that much of our troubles owe themselves to the lack of state institutions. The political system has been so structured that powers were concentrated in the ruling elite, both military and civilian included, which did not allow devolution of powers and its distribution among the institutions. This also explains the strains our federation is suffering from with full-blown active insurgency raging in the restive province of Balochistan. Had we acted upon the Constitution and allowed provincial autonomy to the provinces with the Centre retaining only a few subjects, we would not have seen this day. Judiciary sold

its independence to the executive in 1954 and has been playing subservient role until 2007 when a lawyers-led movement was able to get the independent judiciary restored.

In the same manner, the role of parliament is not praiseworthy either. Over the decades, it has held itself hostage to the powerful executive ready to do the bidding of the rulers. The passage of the 15th amendment bill also known as Shariat Bill by the National Assembly within minutes without following the set procedure during the tenure of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif says it all. It is a different matter that the bill could not be presented in the Senate for want of required number of votes. Similarly, the last parliament had the gall to elect President Musharraf while he was still donning uniform by contravening all legal, political and moral values. It is pathetic that we have not been to develop a single institution which is credible and enjoys public support. Our long-term survival lies in building up institutions, which cater to the public demands and aspirations in a proactive manner.

Pakistan faces the phenomenon of extremism and terrorism in its worst form. This is not merely a simple law and order problem warranting administrative response as some people would have us believe. Extremists and terrorists are targeting state and its symbols and want to replace them with their version of a state. They seek to replace the inclusive Ideology of Pakistan with exclusivist version of puritanical Islam with no space for any competing ideology and viewpoint. This is a clear case of 'battle for hearts and minds'. We can only win this war if we make conscious efforts to change mindsets of people coupled with establishment of good governance. Pakistan was created as a welfare state in accordance with the golden principles of Islam for giving better life to all and sundry without any discrimination.

I am of the considered view that our resort to the Ideology of Pakistan as enunciated by the Quaid-e-Azam and Allama

Muhammad Iqbal, which can provide sovereign remedy to the scourge of terrorism and extremism. This year's Independence Day should be celebrated with the determination to implement the ideals of the Quaid-e-Azam in letter and spirit.



FOR A MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE

[Aug. 23, 2009; The Frontier Post]

After the initial storm over the Indian PM's alleged 'concession' to Pakistan in the Indian parliament seems to have receded, it is high time both the governments pondered ways and means to not only resume stalled dialogue but also work out modalities to keep it afloat. The very fact that the meeting between top chief executives of both countries took place on the sidelines of the NAM Summit instead of being a regular feature of the composite dialogue process is regrettable. The past 60 plus years of our collective history amply prove that war, being a policy solution to the intractable issues between New Delhi and Islamabad, is not an option anymore owing to the nuclear factor with massive potential destruction. Both countries ill-afford to opt for this course of action.

The establishment on both sides of the border may resort to the talk of nuclear saber-rattling but when it comes to actually 'getting involved', the very thought of it sends shudders through everyone's spine. Both Indian and Pakistani Prime Ministers were bang on target during their speeches in their respective parliaments that dialogue was the only way forward to find solution to the issues and its door should remain open even during the worst of times. Since geography cannot be altered and both countries are destined to live as neighbours, why is there lack of determination to resolve the disputed issues through constructive engagement aimed at removing irritants in the way of improvement of relations? Why are millions of impoverished and poverty-stricken people being held hostage

to mutual acrimony? At a time when the rest of the world is moving forward towards formation of regional groupings through economic and political integration, it is the South Asian region, which continues to remain in the backwaters. So far, the composite dialogue framework that came into existence in 1997 has lacked luster, coherence, energy and determination to make it meaningful. It has been more of a smokescreen which was put in place at the behest of Washington-led international community that has been interested in seeing normalisation of relations between the South Asian rivals. The 'homegrown factor' has been missing in the entire scheme of things. That is why the composite dialogue framework has often come to a grinding halt at the first available test when even a single terrorist incident of small proportions has had the potential to derail it off track. It has been due to active engagement of international community that it is normally started but only to be suspended by another such incident.

In the backdrop of this situation, the consensus of both countries to delink talks from terrorism should be a welcome move in the right direction. There is a need to build structures that should help dialogue process keep moving on despite any terrorist incident. In this way both countries can defeat the nefarious designs of terrorists' whose aim, otherwise, is to bring them into antagonistic mode. Terrorism is a collective enemy of both nations, nay, of entire region. A proper response, which is formed by institutional intelligence sharing and coordinated action, is need of the hour. Until now, there has been disproportionate emphasis on the role of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) as the facilitator for the meaningful dialogue. Despite Pakistan's urging to move beyond CBMs, India has been attaching further strings in the forms of more CBMs from Pakistan. This only resulted in waste of time, dissipation of energy and caused trust deficit. CBMs are no doubt important in improving the atmospherics but things

start going berserk when they become the end in themselves instead of being means towards an end. It allows anti-dialogue elements, who are in plenty on both sides, the opportunity to rear their head and start trumpeting their anti-peace mantras.

Therefore, any future engagement between India and Pakistan should attend to this problem. While the Pakistani establishment seems to have modified its strategic focus and re-evaluated threat index posed to the national security, its Indian counterpart is reluctant and is ill-prepared to follow suit. Internal terrorism and extremism have figured prominently on the security calculus of Pakistan's powerful military. It is less India centric now though New Delhi continues to worry the strategic policy makers in Islamabad. President Zardari echoed similar sentiments during his address to a Hindustan Times Summit 2008. India not only needs to acknowledge this shift in Pakistan's policy but also respond in a proactive manner in the larger interest of peace in the region. The Indian committal of 'water terrorism' against Pakistan only strengthens the hands of extremist forces and dilutes the Pakistani position. Last but not the least, media on both sides of the border should strengthen nor hinder the resumption of peace process. There is a dire need for the media to design a code of conduct for the cause of peace. Its role is very crucial in educating people about the possible dividends issuing from the normalization of relations between both countries. At the same time, it can also serve as a bridge for enhancing people-to-people contact and exchange of views among the intellectual circles in both countries. For too long have the South Asian region been beholden to the forces of anarchy, fear, poverty and war. It is time to think out of box and take courageous decisions. The onus to deliver remains on India. It can start by resolving water-related issues and less contentious issues like Sir Creek etc.

PROSPECTS OF ECONOMIC INTEGRATION IN ECO REGION

[Aug. 27, 2009]

The main thrust of the work in the field of trade liberalization has been towards the reduction of tariffs and removal of non-tariff barriers in the ECO region. While trade does not obviate the need for large scale development investments, an open and equitable trading system can be a powerful driver of economic growth in the ECO region, especially when combined with adequate political support. Therefore, implementation of ECOTA and relevant trade facilitation programs rightly lies at the heart of the trade development in the region. The ECO countries strive to dismantle market access barriers and begin phasing out trade-barriers in the region in order to pave the way for free-trade area.

ECOTA was signed by five Member States during the 2nd Ministerial Meeting on Commerce/Foreign Trade, held in Islamabad, Pakistan on 17 July 2003. Since then, the ECO Secretariat is pursuing for its implementation in the region through urging Contracting Parties to expedite ratification process and approaching to non-signatory Member States to be Party to it as soon as possible. This agreement will enter into force after the date of receipt of the instrument of ratification, acceptance, or approval from five Contracting Parties. Amongst the Contracting Parties, so far, only Pakistan and Tajikistan have ratified the said Agreement. Some member states are negotiating on adopting a fast-track approach which foresees

further reduction to the highest tariff slab from 15% to 10% within five years time instead of eight years.

The 1st High Level Expert Group (HLEG) meeting on Trade and Investment, held in Ankara, Turkey on January 13–15, 2004 recommended adopting a “Fast Track Approach to ECOTA”. Although, signing of the Protocol on fast-track was included in the agenda of the 3rd Ministerial Meeting on Commerce/Foreign Trade (July 7, 2005) held in Istanbul, Turkey, it could not be realized due to some reservations raised. The 4th HLEG meeting to be held on 9–10 November, in Kabul, will resolve controversial issues so that the Member States could sign the Protocol at the earliest.

The 3rd Ministerial Meeting on Commerce/Foreign Trade approved and signed a “Protocol for the annexes of ECOTA on (i) ECO Rules of Origin (ii) Anti-Dumping Measures, (iii) State Aid, and (iv) Intellectual Property Rights”. The said Protocol was signed by four Member States, i.e. Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey. Moreover, Pakistan has already ratified the said Protocol. This achievement will facilitate signature/or ratification process of ECOTA with its annexes by the Member States.

TTA was signed in 1995 (except Afghanistan and Uzbekistan) and ratified by all the signatory member states. It is not fully implemented. Initially, in face of difficulties for new ECO member states to become a party and implement the TIR Convention, TA aimed to facilitate trade between two member states via transit through other member states. It is applicable to road, railway, sea, air or any combination of them. Goods transported under the Agreement are not subject to import/export duties and taxes. Guaranteeing Associations undertake to pay duties/taxes and default interest due under the customs law/regulations of the country in which an irregularity has been committed. Goods shall not be subject to examination through Customs en route. Customs offices will accept the

validity of ECO Passage Document in order to avail facilities under the Agreement. Guaranteeing Associations will act as the guarantor of the transit system. Transit Trade Committee comprising of one representative from each signatory member state will monitor the implementation, make procedures, and resolve any disputes arising out of the operation. Guaranteeing Associations have been nominated (except by Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan). ECO Passage Document has been finalized (except Authorization for Natural and Legal Persons to utilize EPD). Technical standards of vehicles have been approved. ECO Road and Railway Maps have been prepared, to be approved by the member states.

Prospects and challenges for TTA are: (i) minimum conditions and requirements (i.e. authorization) for natural and legal persons to utilize EPD shall be adopted by the member states; (ii) printing, distribution, and monitoring of EPD; (iii) establishment of a Regional Guarantee System which will ensure that all duties and taxes are covered either by the transport operator or by the national guarantee associations of the Member States; (iv) capacity building in Guaranteeing Associations; (v) activation TTC for monitoring the Agreement; (vi) collecting data on transit volume, clearance time and problems; (vii) involving freight forwarders and transporters and ECO Chambers in implementation of the Agreement.

Other physical and regulatory requirements can be summarized as: (i) improvement of facilities and infrastructure in border crossings; (ii) alignment of working hours in border crossings; (iii) simplification of customs transit procedures; (iv) harmonization of technical requirements of vehicles; (v) reducing high and diverse transit charges; (vi) making transit rules and procedures transparent and stable. 8. Implementation of Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) which was signed in 1998 is other important issue. TTFA being in line with current developments that more and

more ECO member states strive is ready to become a party to the TIR convention, in time, has gained an upper hand over TTA and now preference is given for its early implementation.

However, TTA is not shelved until the TTFA enters fully into power. TTFA covers all modes of transportation including insurance and other related issues. The Secretariat has emphasized on the importance of the ratification of this agreement in several meetings as well as in its contacts with the relevant officials of the Member States. So far, five member countries namely Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan have ratified the agreement. Afghanistan unofficially has informed the Secretariat about ratification of TTFA in that country. In addition, the Secretariat has requested the Member States to introduce their nominees for Transit Transport Coordination Council (TTCC), which will monitor and follow implementation of TTFA. Azerbaijan has recently agreed to be the coordinator country for the implementation of TTFA.

Customs and Transit Trade cooperation also plays an important role in the economic cooperation among the ECO Member States. The 4th meeting of the ECO Council of Heads of Customs Administration (CHCA), held in Baku, Republic of Azerbaijan, on May 16-18, 2005 finalized the text of the draft Agreement on establishment and operation of the ECO Smuggling and Customs Offences Data Bank. The said Agreement was approved by the Member States and initially signed by Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkey during the 3rd Ministerial Meeting on Commerce and Foreign Trade. Recently, we have acknowledged the willingness of Kyrgyzstan to sign the said agreement. This Agreement would come into force upon signature/ratification of at least four ECO Member States. To this end, an action plan will be prepared in coordination with Turkey (host of Data Bank) leading to the operationalisation of the Data Bank.

The 4th meeting of ECO-CHCA also reviewed a UNDP Consultant report on simplification and harmonization of customs procedures and agreed to form a working group of experts to further consider actions on the recommendations of the Consultant. Cooperation with WCO within the framework of MOU signed between ECO and WCO, cooperation with ADB and customs cooperation among the ECO Member States were also reviewed during the said meeting. Member States were requested to provide their customs news/material to Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) on regular basis for publication in the ECO Customs Newsletter. The Council elected the Head of Turkish Customs Administration as its next Chairman and the First Deputy Chairman of State Customs Committee of Azerbaijan as its Vice-Chairman.

Exchange of updated data/information relating to trade and investment among the ECO Member States has gained special significance. In this regard, ECO has held several seminars. The 3rd ECO Seminar on Trade and Investment Information Networking held in Karachi, Pakistan on 31st January to 1st February 2005 was the latest. In this Seminar, ECO Member States actively participated and agreed to designate fresh Focal Points on Trade and Investment for prompt exchange and presentation of relevant data/information through the interactive ECO Web portal (www.tradeeco.org), which was developed with financial assistance of UNDP. The said Web portal is being upgraded time-to-time taking into account the recommendations of ITC Expert who participated in the abovementioned Seminar. Moreover, utilization of ECO Feasibility Fund is being proposed to Council of the Permanent Representatives (CPR) for this purpose.

There is an urgent need to follow the effective implementation and further updating/expanding the scope of the agreement on simplification of visa procedures for the businesspersons of the Member States to further facilitate the contact and

communication among the citizens of the Member States. In this regard, the CPR approved that the Islamic Republic of Iran, as a coordinator, to host the 1st Experts Group Meeting (EGM) to revise the Agreement on Simplification of Visa Procedures for the Businessmen of ECO Member States.



WHAT AILS SAARC?

[Aug. 31, 2009]

Since its inception in 1985, the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has been a non-starter. Given the sorry figure cut by the organization in implementing its charter it has rightly been dubbed as a debating club without any ability to address the challenges that the countries of the region face. Even the level of progress in the areas of economics and mutual trade has been less than expected. Keeping this track record in view there is a need of an earnest effort to review the charter of SAARC, identify the hindrances and offer a reform strategy to bring the aims of the organization in line with the demands of the times.

All the South Asian countries should understand the international security climate following 9/11 catastrophe. The American conduct in post-Nine Eleven period has brought about fundamental policy shifts in the security arrangements across the world. The reduction of the position of UN to insignificance by the US during its Iraq campaign illustrated new power dynamics. The old security and economic alliances underwent a process of serious review with growing realization among the countries that they should look for new alignments for greater economic and physical security. This reappraisal process was not confined to the countries at the wrong side of the US; rather the long-standing American allies are also the part of this review process. Now the focus of international community is towards regional alignments with greater stress on economic and security cooperation. Thus the policy of

regionalism and bilateralism finds a newfound space in the foreign policy formulations of the countries; the aim being to reduce dependence on the US. Resultantly the old alliances have been reviewed and weaknesses overcome, while new alignments have taken place. But unfortunately South Asia remains unaware of and unresponsive to these challenges mired in old mindset of archivals.

There should be no doubt about the fact that the establishment of SAARC was a much-needed step in order to enhance the regional cooperation among the member states. The natural conditions, international climate, geography of the region, history and culture also warranted a combined effort to pool together natural and human resources for achieving better living standards for millions of people who otherwise are condemned to perpetual misery and poverty. But in the effort to set up such an organization and demarcate its area of activity, some structural gaps were left, which in spite of the passage of some 18 years, have refused to be bridged thus keeping the organization unresponsive to the growing challenges. At the time of initiation of the SAARC, the thought in the minds of its founding fathers might well have been to bring all countries to negotiating table, hoping that the structural flaws would be overcome once the member states started interacting. However the exclusion of bilateral and contentious issues from charter of the SAARC has been one of the major factors inhibiting the growth of the organization.

This factor alone has given space to India and Pakistan to hold the whole organization hostage to their mutual recriminations with rest of member states constrained to move the organization forward on their own. Given the huge gulf of perceptions characterizing the mutual relationship between Indian and Pakistan, there is a least possibility that SAARC would be able to play an effective role unless the member countries share the realization of modifying its charter in

a way as to use good offices of SAARC for discussions and dialogues on bilateral issues and facilitate their solutions. Some people might argue that the exclusion of contentious issues from the SAARC charter and its unadulterated focus on economic cooperation is justified by the depth of differences existing among certain member states and that enhancement of economic cooperation can still be possible without reference to disputed issues. They may give examples of certain regional groupings, which include politically rival countries. But what is lost sight of in this process of argumentation is the fact that the member countries happen to share some collective values and threat perceptions. Furthermore, the world has undergone gigantic change in last few years. The old period marked by ideological polarization has given way to the policy of realism. From absolute and maximalist positions, the countries are now moving towards more flexible and minimalist stances in their foreign policy objectives. This also applies the countries of the SAARC.

Secondly the SAARC charter denotes that all member countries are represented on the platform on the basis of equality. But in actuality it is not the case. India by virtue of its size, position and economic strength, has been trying to play the role of a big brother whose authority should go unchallenged. It has invariably been trying to browbeat the rest of countries into submission. But it is Pakistan that has refused to be subjugated, while the other South Asian countries rightly nourish grievances against India caused mainly by its hegemonic designs. This Indian attitude violates the principle of equality as enshrined in the SAARC charter thus rendering the organization impotent. If SAARC has to become dynamic organization, it should apply the principle of equality and should not allow any single country to dictate its own terms for engagement.

In the 14th SAARC summit held last year in New Delhi also included the following paragraph in its Declaration: “The Heads of Stat or Government emphasized the need to develop, at an early date, a roadmap for a South Asian Customs Union and a South Asian Economic Union in a planned and phased manner.”

In the next article, I would try to explore the areas which need immediate cooperation of the member countries of the South Asian region for greater good.



ECONOMIC OPTIONS FOR PAKISTAN

[Sep. 01, 2009]

The economic interests of Pakistan dictate that it will either have to join any economic grouping on the pattern of European Union or enhance its trade relations with the countries of the SAARC by transforming the organization into a coherent organization. The inclusion of China and Iran also appears to be a realistic possibility as the politics of bloc is taking root across the globe. Europe had integrated into a Union at the right time and has now reached a position wherefrom it is threatening for the US economy. The Iranian decision to use Euro for its trade with Europe dealt a sever blow to the US dollar. The Bloc Politics has proven to be very beneficial for the member countries. We also need to take up this route and for that, we will have to open up our borders and enter into new trade arrangements with the world. The countries of the European Union put their mutual differences at the backburner and moved ahead. We will also have to do the same. SAARC also reached certain agreements within the member countries but they could not be implemented in true letter and spirit.

We can approach the subject from two angles i.e. integration and inclusion of certain new countries in the reinvigorated SAARC. The economic angle involves the common market, which will be instrumental in cutting down unemployment. Every country has its own national interests and industries, which face the prospect of being threatened and that can be discussed. For example the textile industry of China and India is far ahead of Pakistan's. As a result, Pakistan's textile

industry is on the losing side. So when these countries decide to get associated in the form of a bloc, all these things can be discussed.

There are two countries, India and China, in the neighbourhood of Pakistan, so huge are their economies that they have the potential of devouring the small economies. Germany and France had antagonistic relations and were each other's enemies but when they hit upon the idea of joining their respective forces for their common goal i.e. economic development, they put their differences at the backburner and moved ahead. The result is the formation of the European Union.

People may object here to my inclusion of China in any such economic Union by saying that we have religious and cultural differences with China. Two or three factors are important in this regard. There are no religious barriers in Europe. The differences in cultural matters were also very minimal. The number of countries in European Union was 10 but after the participation of 15 countries of the East Europe, who are relatively poor, it has reached 25. The countries like Germany and France are having to face problems but they have worked out 10-year plan according to which these countries will be spending certain portion of their incomes on the uplift of the poor countries of the Europe. This speaks volumes of the commitment of these countries towards the improvement of socio-economic conditions of their brethren in Europe.

So far as India and Pakistan are concerned, there are, no doubt, cultural and religious differences among them. But the policy of keeping the borders shut is not a solution to protecting your religious values. We are confused over the issue of national identity. The problem is that we have not got any nationalistic leadership. Whoever came to hold the mantle of power turned out to be corrupt and self-serving. Therefore religion is not an issue in that sense. All we need to do is to realize that getting

together on one platform is a compulsion now. The question of reaping the economic gains from the collective efforts should be seen without its reference to religion. The best example is the good economic relationship enjoyed by Iran and India. We are refusing to enter into the era of science and technology in the name of religion. It is a different matter that our religion does not hinder us from doing that.

Iran has never been a part of Arab land nor will it be able to. There is a huge difference of opinions between Arab countries and Iran. China is a giant in economic terms. It has a large population which China has transformed into an asset. India is a developing economy and is in a position to support the countries like Nepal and Bhutan. So when South Asia will be ready to form economic grouping, Iran will not commit a blunder of staying out. The proposed Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project is a case in point.

The question may arise as to the possibility of large economies being a threat to the small economies. Pakistan, Iran and Bangladesh may be fearful of China. When you join each other in the form of a bloc, it becomes clear that whatever progress you could have achieved in your industry, you achieved. If Pakistan has not been able to strengthen its industry in the last 60 years, it cannot do that now. If it thinks that it can do that, then, it is a pipedream. Times are gone now. For example our textile industry is faced with difficulties since 2005 and has been demanding concessions from the government. And we do not have the potential to make it competitive globally.

So in order to succeed, we will have to seek cooperation from other countries. Pakistan should try to explore its avenues in terms of its strong industries like sports industry etc. Our agricultural industry is better but due to short-sightedness of our policy makers, we have not been able to capitalize on this with the result that fruits and agricultural products produced in Pakistan are being sold in the international market with the

Indian stamp. The best course available in this situation is the exploration of those industries where Pakistan has comparative advantage. It should also do an analysis of the industries in which other countries are in a better position. So after being clear on this subject, Pakistan can enter into agreements with other countries to give protection to some industries and demand the same from them for some others.

In my view, Pakistan is not yet in a position of take-off, which may put it on the path of progress and prosperity. It is groping in the dark to find its direction. It has not been able to come out of its fixations. Pakistan has an important role to play in the region and its interests cannot be neglected by anyone. People are in search of practicable economic model for achieving progress but the way our successive governments have been making policies in the economic domain, I am afraid, has eroded the already fragile relationship between government and people. Our leadership needs to assure people that our country can still take off.

Pakistan is an agricultural country and its agricultural products have very good quality. India has a large area but its soil is not that much fertile as ours. So Pakistan is the producer of fruit of some of the best quality but unfortunately, it bears the Indian stamp. The same is the case with our wheat, rice, mango and other fruit. The Pakistani exporters should export these items in fair manner.

It is only by becoming powerful on the economic domain can we secure our country from the internal and external threats. Economic policy making is very closely associated with improving the condition of man in the street. Therefore it is does not achieve this purpose, whatever progress a government may claim will remain merely that: progress on the paper. The recent crises Pakistan has been subjected to are very harmful for our internal unity. We had better take a deep look and

come up with innovative solution rather than following the old jargons, which have failed us many a time in the past.



ECO: PAST AND PRESENT

[Sep. 2, 2009; ECO Times]

The pattern of international relations in the domains of economy, trade and politics is under the process of evolution. The whole world is moving away from the exclusivist post-Cold War period mindset characterised by unipolarity to a new and inclusive multipolar world. The need to integrate into economic and political and economic alliances has been felt due to the consequences of uni-polar world as well as desire to accelerate the process of growth through pooling of resources and sharing of ideas and experiences aimed at mutually benefiting each other. Unfortunately, the Muslim world, though rich in resources, remains far behind the other countries and is unable to effectively respond to economic challenges. While leaving the analysis of other regional alliances for some other time, it is pertinent to critically evaluate the performance of Economic Corporation Organization (ECO).

The countries that form ECO are on the path of trade liberalisation through agreements such as Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) and Economic Cooperation Organization Trade Agreement (ECOTA). At the ECO Summit held in March 2009, member states have vowed to make ECO region a Free Trade Area by 2015.

Regional cooperation among the developing countries has increasingly been advocated as a strategic tool for economic development. Generally, the rationale for regional cooperation is not merely economic; it is also political and socio-cultural. The economic case is based on small size of domestic markets,

economies of scale in production, specialisation and utilisation of the underutilised potential in terms of human, technological and natural resources. Through regional cooperation, developing countries not only enable themselves to expand existing industries but also to establish new ones based on dynamic comparative advantage, which helps them diversify their industrial base. In Asia, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey entered into a grouping called Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) in 1964. For 15 years (1964-79) since its inception, the intra-regional trade never exceeded the pre-RCD level of less than two percent of their aggregate GDPs. The ECO is a successor to the RCD and inherits all its problems.

The ECO is an inter-governmental regional organisation, founded in 1985 to promote economic, technical and cultural cooperation among the member states. Its basic charter is enshrined in the Treaty of Izmir originally signed in 1977. In 1992 it was expanded to include seven new members—Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The people of the region are linked not only by natural geographic proximity but are also woven into centuries old historical, religious and cultural bonds. In pre-colonial times, trade flowed freely within the region. There was also free movement of labour. The onset of colonialism disrupted these links, and the Soviet advance isolated them completely. As these states have achieved their independence and sovereignty, there is no reason why traditional cultural links could not be reasserted and joint efforts made for fostering prosperity and closer understanding among the peoples of the region.

With a total population of about 380 million (6.1 percent of the world population), the combined GDP of the ECO countries amounted to \$ 500 billion in 2003. This constituted only 1.4 percent of the world GDP. The region is spread over an area of about eight million square kilometres, twice the size of EU.

At present the member countries produce about 6.8 percent of world crude oil supply and absorb about 3.7 percent of world crude oil demand.

The region exports more than 45 percent of the oil it produces, up from 40 percent during 1990s. The region is not only rich in natural resources but also in human capital. Despite being better endowed in natural resources, the economies of the region are facing serious problems such as external debt, unemployment and poverty. Countries like Turkey, Iran and Kazakhstan with per capita GNI of \$ 2790, \$2000 and \$ 1780 respectively are the high-income member countries. Others like Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyz Republic with per capita GNI \$ 470, 420, 330 respectively are low income countries.

The bulk of their economy is accounted for by oil and gas. A more relevant indicator for regional cooperation is the share of manufactures in exports. Here only Pakistan, Iran and Turkey figure prominently although they have a high concentration in automobile, agriculture, industrial equipment, textiles and clothing.

During the five-year period (1998-2002), the total merchandise exports of the ECO member states reached the peak of \$ 94.6 billion in 2002. The region contributed 1.54 percent and 1.65 percent of the world merchandise exports and imports respectively in 2003. In 2002, the intra-regional exports of the ECO accounted for 5.4 percent. The rates of change in merchandise exports of ECO countries dropped sharply in 1998 when most of the members experienced negative rates of growth in their merchandise exports reflecting the effect of the Asian crisis. However, the following years (except 2001) witnessed a strong recovery in export performance when member countries registered the highest average rates of change in their merchandise exports in 2002. After 1998, export performance of the region deteriorated again and experienced negative rates of growth (1.1 percent) in 2001, affected by the

slowdown of world economy and the deterioration in world commodity prices.

The ECO member states have made efforts to promote intra-regional trade. They have taken steps for improvement of regulatory frameworks and removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers in the region. The regional intra-trade situation is, however, far from satisfactory.

Total intra-regional trade volume of ECO region (excluding Afghanistan data) in 2002 increased to \$ 10.2 billion from \$ 8.6 billion in 2001. The intra-trade ratio of the ECO region (excluding Afghanistan data) in 2002 like the previous years could not cross the threshold of 6.0 percent. In fact, despite a high average rate of growth in merchandise exports (14.9 percent), the region's share in total merchandise exports of the world increased by 0.2 percent point over the previous year.

Attempts to follow the path in the ECO region have not had much success until now. A Protocol on Preferential Tariffs was signed by the three ECO members (Iran, Pakistan and Turkey) in May 1991. Lists were drawn up and implementation started in May 1993. However, this Protocol could not make any headway as the lists drawn were very limited in nature and the products on which preferential tariff was offered were not traded and a 10 percent margin could not have much impact anyway.

In July 2003, ECO countries also concluded a trade agreement known as ECOTA. The agreement is a major step towards realisation of the objective of removal of trade barriers and establishment of FTA in ECO region by 2015. It is comprehensive in terms of commodity coverage to be realised over a period of eight years by 2015 and will reduce the tariff to a maximum of 15 percent on 80 percent of the goods traded. The three founding member states agreed to adopt a fast track approach for early implementation of ECOTA by reducing

maximum tariff to 10 percent within five years instead of eight years. (ECO 2004, 2005).

The last conference of ECO member states, held in March 2009, has reiterated its commitment to the goal of making ECO region a FTA by 2015. This statement shows the interest of ECO member states in economic integration of the region. However, there is a need to analyse the potential as well as pros and cons of FTA and Customs Union (CU) in the region.



EU A CHRISTIAN CLUB?

[Sep. 29, 2009; The Post]

During discussion with my Professor about the possibility of the major Muslim countries like Pakistan, Turkey and Iran integrating into an Economic Union, I was faced with a veiled rebuke. My Professor, while terming such a possibility as non-starter in the first place, forbade me to mix religion with economy. His contention was that religion was a hindrance rather than an enabling factor in forming any economic union.

In reply to my mention of European Union as being ‘Christian Club’ held together by the factor of religious homogeneity and its persistent refusal to allow Turkey in, he got infuriated and took strong exception to my argument. The Professor could not offer even a single argument to support his viewpoint and negate mine.

My labeling of the European Union being a Christian Union is not driven by any bias or hatred or emotions. Turkey’s unsuccessful bids to find a place in the EU illustrate it too authoritatively. It is ironic that the countries of the Eastern Europe, which were part of the much-demonized Soviet Club, have been accepted as the full members but the entry of Turkey is being delayed on newer counts. A recount of Ankara’s association with EU would be instructive:

Turkey applied for associate membership of European Economic Community (EEC) way back in 1959. The EEC signed Association Agreement with it in 1963. However, Ankara submitted application for full membership in EEC

in 1987. Final agreement on EU-Turkey Customs Union was signed in 1995.

It was in 1999 that Turkey was recognized as EU candidate officially. The formal opening of accession negotiation took place in 2005. EU identified 35 areas or to be more precise chapters for talks with Ankara. In 2007, the talks were suspended on eight areas with Turkey for its failure to open its ports and airports to Cypriot ships and aircraft.

As Turkey made strenuous efforts to meet the criterion laid down by the European Union, more and more strings continued to be attached for its entry into the EU. There has been a clear-cut divide among the EU member states about allowing Turkey admission in the All-Christian Union. Those of the countries which ganged up to stop Ankara's entry put forward the following reasons, which on a microscopic scrutiny appear religiously motivated:

Firstly, the opponents of Turkey's admission into EU state that its culture and values differ from those of the European Union as a whole. They point out that Turkey's 99.08% Muslim population is too different from Christian-based Europe. Former president of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, is on record as having stated that the EU is mainly a "Christian Club".

Secondly, naysayers are of the opinion that Turkey is mostly out of Europe both population-wise and geographically. Therefore it does not deserve to be part of EU.

Thirdly, the case against Turkey's entry into EU rests on non-recognition of Cyprus, which became a bull-fledged member of the European Union. Turkey is required to open its ports and airports for the Cypriot ships and planes, which otherwise borders on withdrawal of Turkish stance on the controversial issue.

Fourthly, Ankara is said to be cutting poor performance on the human rights and democracy. Turkish people especially

Kurds are bereft of civil rights and fundamental freedoms. It is said that Turkey should improve upon its behaviour to be able to qualify for the membership of EU.

Lastly, there are strong fears and apprehensions among the powers that be of the European Union that Turkey's large population would alter the balance of power in the European Union. After all, Germany's population (the largest country in the EU) is the only at 82 million and declining. Turkey would be the second largest country (and perhaps eventually the largest with its much higher growth rate) in the EU and would have considerable influence in the European Union. This influence would be especially profound in the population-based European Parliament.

The above-mentioned facts represent the crux of the problem. It is Turkey's Islamic identity that is at the heart of its non-entry into EU. Negotiating framework clearly states that "these negotiations are an open-ended process, the outcome of which cannot be guaranteed beforehand." The stringent conditions are only meant to serve as a smokescreen for what seems to have been clearly established a "Christian Club".

ISLAMIC VIEW ON ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

[Oct. 2, 2009; Pakistan Observer]

[Oct. 3, 2009; The Post]

[Oct. 4, 2009; The Frontier Post]

The Arabian economy mostly consisted of trading people before the advent of Islam. International trade contributed significantly to that economy. The Arabian peninsula had quite a number of active trade centres. Trade routes to Abyssinia were from Hijaz to Palestine, Egypt and then Abyssinia. The ships used to sail from Jeddah through Bab-ul-Mandab to any of the Abyssinian ports.

Zafar and Suhar were old centres for the sea trade of Indians on the coastal soils of the Persian Gulf. Zafar was situated to the East of Hadrawat and was a known market for perfumes. Suhar and Waba were old markets and traders from Sindh, India, China and other eastern and western countries gathered there to participate in trade fairs held at these places. Before the dawn of Islam, these areas were under the jurisdiction of Jalandhar b. Mustakabar who charged a tax from the traders at the rate of 10 percent. He also hosted trade fairs. Among these fairs were those of Ukaz, an oasis between Taif and Nakhlah. The fair was held on 1-20 Dhul-Qadah, the 11th month of lunar (Islamic) calendar.

The direction of external trade of Arabian economy was mainly focused on China and Abyssinia. The Makkan traders used to take leather, glue and frankincense to Abyssinia.

Woolen cloth and gowns were also exported to Abyssinia and bartered for food grains. In this way, the pre-Islamic Arabian economy had a lot of international trade links. A reference to trade caravans of the Quraish has also been made in the Holy Quran. In one of the chapters (Al-Quraish 106:2) the Quraish are reminded of the protection God provided to their caravans traveling in summer and winter.

The advent of Islam introduced new motivations and dimensions to the international trade of the Arabian economy. Muslims were encouraged, individually and collectively, to seek bounties of God and promote trade.

Islam also provides certain regulations regarding trade and it is compulsory for the traders doing business within the Muslim territory to abide by those regulations. According to the Muslim jurists, the following guidelines should be followed by Muslims traders while conducting their business affairs.

The seller should not praise his goods for the qualities they do not possess.

The seller should disclose the qualities, good or bad of his stock to the prospective buyer.

A trader should not hide the weight and quantity of his goods.

He should not keep the price a secret in a way that if the buyer comes to know of it, he will refuse buying.

All this is binding on all Muslims and business whether they are living in one country or the other. The trade links with the well-known trade centres and trade fairs in the world also continued during the Islamic era. International trade kept playing a very important role in the Arabia after Islam. The Muslims established trade relations with almost all the known countries in the world. They were great navigators and their ships touched the shores of India, China, Europe and Russia. Caravan traffic with the 'Ship of the Desert' was the common

means of traveling and trade between different Muslims countries especially the pilgrimage caravan to Makkah.

In Islam, people are divided into two different classes for the purpose of collecting taxes. There is a world of Muslims called Dar-ul-Islam and the world of foes, Dar-ul-Harb. So the sources of revenue fall into two distinct categories:

The taxes imposed on Muslims are called zakat and ushr.

The taxes imposed on non-Muslims called Jizya, Kharaj and a tax on non-Muslims traders called import duty or tariff called 'ushr'.

As is shown above, in the pre-Islamic days, the Arabs and the neighboring Byzantine and the Sassanian trade caravans were accustomed to sell their commodities in one another's territory. It was customary for the market chiefs to impose duty at the rate of ten percent on the goods brought for trading by foreign traders in their territory. This kind of trade levy looks like the present-day customs duty. There does not appear any sharp distinction between the market toll at octroi posts between the trade levy on goods imported for sale. The term 'ushr' and perhaps 'maks' equally applied to both.

On the system of 'ushr', collection on merchandise goods, we have numerous traditions in which the Holy Prophet (PBUH) condemned it in the severest terms. To quote a few traditions,

The collector of maks will not enter paradise.

The collector of maks will not be questioned for anything. He will be caught as such and thrown in the hell fire.

In his agreement with some Arab tribes, when they embraced Islam en mass after conquest of Makkah, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) decreed that they would no more be subjected to the payment of ushr which was a common practice. Thus the Jurists generally held the system of market levy to be a jahili practice which the Holy Prophet (PBUH) abolished. Thus we can say that Islam rejects any customs duties among Muslims countries and this becomes a plus point in the formation of

customs union among the Muslim counties in which they will be having free trade among themselves. This clearly means that during the early period of Islam there was no trade toll on the international movement of commodities. This position is fully reflected in Mawardi's assertion that nothing lies on the international movement of trade commodities and that in the Dar- ul- Islam this kind of levy is unlawful.

As regards the common external tariff, it is reported that during Caliph Umar's time the traders complained to the Caliph that the Muslim traders had to pay the toll of the tenth of their saleable commodities according to the pre-Islamic customs while selling their merchandise in the non-Muslim territories. In reciprocity Caliph Umar order the cancellation of the same rate from traders from outside the Muslim state coming to trade in the Muslim land. However, he also ordered not to impose any 'ushr' (Customs duty) upon a Muslim or on a dhimmi, if the former had paid zakat and the latter jiziya in accordance with the pact made with them. Ushr was levied on the people of Harb only when they sought permission to trade in Muslims lands. ushr collectors were appointed who collected a levy of 10 percent from the Herbi traders, five percent from the dhimmi traders and two and a half percent from the Muslim traders.

The rationale behind different rates of the above levy as imposed by Caliph Umar on different categories of traders was that the rate of 10 percent on Harbi traders was to reciprocate and to balance the same rate collected from the Muslims traders in the Herb lands.

EXPLORING COOPERATION AMONG MUSLIM COUNTRIES

[Oct. 11, 2009; Business Recorder]

The existing international relations and realities make it desirable to have integration among the Muslim countries. Trade commands a special place in regional cooperation. The OIC member countries face a formidable set of impediments and setbacks in expanding trade amongst themselves, as well as with the outside world. One of the major features of their economy is that the member countries are exporters of primary commodities and importers of manufactured goods.

This common profile of exports and imports of the OIC member countries inevitably narrows the trade potential that these countries can exploit. Such potentials are further undermined by the lack of an appropriate level of basic infrastructure necessary for trade, such as the information infrastructure, communication and transport networks, permanent commercial and marketing ties, financing arrangements, preferential trade arrangements, standardization, packaging, supply availability, competitiveness and so forth.

Lack of complementarity among some of the Muslim countries could be another factor for low trade. Therefore, if the Customs Union is to be established, some degree of complementarities among the members of the Union should exist even before such an arrangement is put in place. One of the problems with the Muslims countries is that they have done nothing to promote the potential trade complementarities among them. Variety in their resource endowments, apparently,

should result in strong intra-trade relations. But in reality this has not happened.

Most members of OIC import food from non-members in spite of the fact that a number of them have exportable food surplus (e.g. rice in Pakistan, edible oils in Malaysia, pulses in Turkey and Syria, etc). Another dilemma is that some of these countries import food and agricultural raw materials from non-OIC member countries despite having large agricultural economies. Once again, the main reason for this is that these countries have not properly exploited the potential trade complementarities at the OIC level. Any regional effort to reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers would allow them to benefit from such complementarities.

There is also a general potential in the Industrial sector. There are countries like Pakistan, Iran, Malaysia and Turkey, which are industrializing at a faster rate. Cooperation among these countries can result in the development of basic industries like iron and steel and other metallurgical products. This provides a natural reason for having close trade relations among these countries.

In an Islamic economy, the competitive spirit will be accompanied by an over-riding sense of cooperation, which is more than just an act. It is at once a mood and a motive, a principle and a psychology. The element of struggle will not be altogether absent from an Islamic society. Only, it will be oriented differently.

A purposive relationship, based on good will and cooperation, is found in the individual-society-state relationship. It is the State, which enforces the Islamic law and makes individuals fulfill their obligations towards society, but it is the individuals who select their rules to enforce the Shariah.

In the moral sphere, Islamic faith is essentially a unity. It is, at once, worship and faith; the secular product of life is not divorced from the religious beliefs of Muslims. In the social

sphere, its distinguishing feature lies in its complete human equality, just and coherent unity of existence and mutual responsibility of individuals and societies in the Islamic scheme of things, nobody would be allowed to exploit the other; everybody should be given an equal opportunity to go up on the social ladder.

The free-market mechanism is based on effective demand, making resources available to those who need them. As such, in an Islamic economy, the price offered by the market cannot be accepted as a matter of rule. Competition, as implicit in the market, needs to be supplemented by conscious control, supervision and cooperation. This is where Islam enters. The key lies in mutual good will and cooperation, while the market price emerges from the wholly unsurpassed interaction of competing buyers and sellers. An Islamic equitable price needs to emerge from supervised competition, conscious control and cooperation between buyers and sellers. Such a system is to be established in all the Muslim countries and a Customs Union will help in this direction.

With a positive attitude to economic enterprise and socially-oriented purposive rights of ownership, individuals and groups in the brotherhood of man are enjoined to cooperate with one another in patterning life on earth in accordance with the will of Allah. Economic relations, especially those in production and exchange of wealth, should be cooperative in nature.

- Rivalry and cut-throat competition makes no sense in this context.
- Cooperation is seen as the basic value in Islam's economic philosophy.

Unlike earning pecuniary profits, which is an individualistic aim, social service calls for mutual consultation, cooperation and joint action. The individual entrepreneur will, therefore, be drawn towards other fellow entrepreneurs in order to devise a

course of action, which ensures simultaneous and harmonious attainment of both the ends, individuals and social.

Cooperation among the producers may take such forms as dissemination of knowledge regarding the needs of the society, in general or specific industries through machinery voluntarily set up for this purpose by the producers themselves, or through the agency of the state. Dissemination of such knowledge may go a long way to assisting the individual producers in taking correct policy decisions, especially in the formative stage of the firm.

Later on, it may take the form of joint research projects, labour welfare schemes and mutual consultations on such policy matters as equality and price of the product and advertisement etc. As this cooperation is motivated by social service and satisfactory profits, it will be different from monopolistic combinations or collusions detrimental to public interest. Such joint ventures are going to occur among the producers of Muslim countries also in the fields of food production, industrial output, skilled manpower, scientific research and modern technology.

EXPLORING ISLAMIC COMMON MARKET

[Oct. 24, 2009; The Post]

[Oct. 25, 2009; Business Recorder]

[Oct. 25, 2009; The Frontier Post]

The economic imperatives have shaped the New World Order, which came into being following the demise of Communism when the uni-polar system of international relations was established under the leadership of United States. The pursuit of political agenda and advancement of foreign policy objectives has become subservient to economic interests of the countries. China appears to be the best example in this regard. In the same way, the phenomena of regional economic groupings and Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) have added a new dimension to the international system. In a world dictated by the forces of globalization marked by new rules of the game, achieving the goal of economic integration acquires all the more urgency so far as the Muslim Ummah is concerned.

The oft-suggested idea of setting up an Islamic Common Market (ICM) was first mooted at the second Islamic Summit Conference in Lahore in 1974. It was agreed that the establishment of such a market could be at best a long-term objective and the proposal needed careful and deep consideration. During this period, some progress has been made towards greater cooperation among the OIC member countries. A number of economic cooperation arrangements

made between member states could be the basis for a future ICM.

By definition a common market is a scheme of economic integration where the members agree to abolish all the tariffs on each other's exports, follow a common tariff policy towards their imports from the rest of the world and allow a free flow of commodities as well as productive factors (capital, labour, entrepreneurs and technology) within the member states. In case the Muslim countries are part of some regional integration schemes, even these have not taken any substantial steps to achieve advanced forms of economic integration. There are three viewpoints so far as the idea of Islamic Common Market is concerned.

Firstly, some states simply oppose such a market and prefer simple bilateral trade between the members. Secondly, another group supports the idea of an ICM but rather passively and unenthusiastically. Thirdly, this group actively promotes the establishment of at least a basic structure which would later be developed into a full fledged common market.

The later group stresses that a vital prerequisite for this is increasing economic, industrial and commercial cooperation and development of all Muslim states. This would largely depend on the exchange of information, development of communications, increase in relations between private sectors, promotions of trade fairs and exhibitions for the products and services of the Muslim states, common educational programmes and scientific exchange and research between member countries.

There are those who emphasize that in view of the prevailing political climate in various Muslim countries, it would be difficult to unify the diverse economic structures. Political and ideological differences between some of the member states will further hinder the process of economic integration among OIC countries. This process, however, could be given a stimulus if member states established economic and industrial cooperation

on a regional basis to start with. Others still say that the greatest barrier to the establishment of greater economic cooperation between Muslim states is the lack of political will.

Despite that, the most significant progress towards both increased intra-trade and as ICM has come within the framework of OIC's "Plan of Action to Strengthen Economic Cooperation among the Member States", which was adopted by the Third Islamic Summit Conference in Taif, Saudi Arabia, and within the extensive follow-up action of the Standing Committee on Economic and Commercial Cooperation (COMECEC), which became operational in 1984 after the fourth Summit in Casablanca and in its meeting in March 1987 in Istanbul, Turkey. The Plan of Action specifies the targets to be achieved in ten major areas of cooperation i.e. food and agriculture, trade, industry, transport, communication and tourism, population and health and technical cooperation.

The COMECEC established "The Longer Term Trade Financing Scheme" which is being run by the 44-member Islamic Development Bank (IDB) as a fund. The \$600 million fund, the first ever of its kind to be launched by IDB, became operational after the Fifth Summit Conference in Kuwait. The objective the Scheme is to increase trade among the OIC member countries in non-traditional items with emphasis on exports. It will provide partial funding for periods ranging from eighteen months to five years. Another scheme launched by the IDB is the Islamic Corporation for the Insurance of Investment and Export Credit (ICIEC). The establishment of a Trade Information Network and a Trade Preferential System are some steps which hopefully would lead to greater cooperation among the OIC countries, which is a pre-requisite for ultimate integration of OIC member states.

The joint declaration adopted at the extraordinary meeting of OIC heads of states held in Makkah in 2005 identified the economic challenge as the cornerstone to be able to address

the political issues facing the Muslim world. It is no doubt a very formidable task capable of testing our collective grit and determination. Any step towards restoring the lost glory of the Muslim Ummah should start with efforts for economic progress and the best course to achieve this is to form common Islamic Market (i.e. economic integration and FTAs). Let the coming generations not say that we did not prove equal to the task.



SAY NO TO LAND-GRAB

[Nov. 06, 2009; The Frontier Post]

At a time when the media attention remains focused on the new developments in the context of Pak-US relations and domestic politics, another issue of serious import pregnant with graver implications has, unfortunately, failed to get the kind of response it deserved from the media, civil society organisations, lawyers and opinion leaders on the whole. The news have been doing the round in a past few months that cash-rich Gulf states have embarked on “agricultural joint venture” by colluding with the high and mighty in Islamabad. “Agricultural joint venture” and corporate agricultural farming are basically euphemism for the local land grabbing on the strength of power of the purse. According to details revealed by the Saudi media, 6 million hectares of land has already been sold out, whereas the promise of sale of one million hectares of more land has been made. The production of these lands would start in 2010.

A newspaper based in Abu Dhabi has revealed that UAE firms have hired about 16,187 hectares of land in Pakistan’s Balochistan province for an estimated \$40 million to produce food for their population back home. A delegation is said to have held meetings with Balochistan and Sindh chief ministers to explore the possible purchase of about 12,140 hectares in Shikarpur, Karkan, Sukkur, Thatta and Badin. Similarly, Market Access Promotion (MAP) Services Group, a Bahrain company, plans to develop 10 model dairy and livestock farms in Pakistan during 2008-10. A Qatari aims to acquire Kollurkar farm in Punjab, a deal, which is likely to dislocate

about 25,000 villagers. The Saudi Fund for Development (SFD) is also creating a \$566 million special investment to purchase foreign land to produce wheat and rice for the country. Likewise, the UAE also held talks with Pakistan last June for purchase of \$400-500m worth of farmland of 100,000-200,000 acres in Punjab and Sindh provinces. Details are under the process of finalisation. To add insult to injury, the land being 'leased' under the pretext of 'agricultural joint venture' happen to be precious fertile farmlands having access to water. The produce grown here would be taken to other countries for making up the food deficiency.

There are also reports suggesting that the investors have also requested for exemption from the export restrictions on the foodgrain produced here. In order to protect the farmlands, a special security force would be set up, which would extend protection and security but the question arising in mind is against whom? The above-mentioned facts present a scary scenario. This policy of land-grab would deal a severe blow to the agriculture sector in Pakistan, which is already in ramshackle state. Agriculture, which is backbone of Pakistan's economy contributing 25% of GDP, employing 47% of workforce, contributing 67% to industrial production and accounting for 67% of export earning, would be destroyed to an irreparable extent. With the best of the lands being sold out and already scarce resource of water being used for them, it would lead to not only reduction in our annual food production but would also create class discrimination with lethal effects for social fabric of our society. The poor farmers and peasants, who solely depend on agriculture for their sustenance, would be the worst-hit stratum of society. The systematic policy of land-grab with the full connivance of the Pakistani rulers heralds the beginning of a new era of Neo-Colonialism. At a time when the entire world is faced with the prospect of severe food shortages, it is high time that the powers that be in Islamabad formulated

consistent policy aimed at ensuring food security. This, in turn, warrants the importance of agriculture as a bastion for ensuring economic development of the country.

Pakistan can not only feed its own people through broad-based reforms in the agricultural sector but can also earn precious foreign exchange through export of the agricultural products. What it requires is the political will and correct prioritization of national agenda, something our successive rulers have failed in managing to the detriment of the nation. The government's act of 'selling' fertile lands to the foreigners is nothing but a crime. This way of 'agricultural corporate farming' spells disaster for the less privileged sections of society whose sole dependence remains on agriculture. There will be massive unemployment and the resultant urbanisation in case such deals mature. Thousands of the poor families would get displaced. Instead of adopting this route, the government is well advised to undertake land reforms based on the premise of giving lands to the landless peasants. According to an assessment, 20 million hectares of land, owned by the government, is without cultivation. If 10 million families are allotted 10 acres of land, the entire land would come under cultivation. It would take care of unemployment problem besides enhancing the agricultural output.

There should be trade deals with other countries and no one can object to them in his right mind provided they are mutually beneficial to the parties concerned. Foreign investment should be welcome as it can be used for development of agricultural infrastructure and expansion of livelihood options for those associated with the profession. Pakistan can ink Free Trade Agreements with the Arab countries. The injection of resources in this key sector of national economy would not only reduce the cost of cultivation but also enhance productivity, which in turn would take care of food needs of the friendly countries. It

should be hoped that the good sense prevails in the end and the government reviews its policy in this regard.



WHAT AILS POLITICAL PARTIES

[Nov. 12, 2009]

Viewed in the context of development of political institutions and civilianization of national decision-making structures, the ship of Pakistani politics has been stuck in uncharted waters for the last six decades since its inception in 1947. The understanding of the key variables is important to grasp the prevalent political realities. These realities include, inter alia, the inability of political parties to learn lessons from the past mistakes and chart out a course of action that is based upon political expediency and a culture of co-existence. Even the capacity of making new mistakes has been lost in the political wilderness.

To start with, politics is often defined as the art of the possible. The idea of politics arose out of people's concern for their welfare and their wish to make their viewpoint known to the powers that be on the issues that can affect their life. With the expansion of human thought, the difference on the handling of issues among the representatives of people (politicians) led to the multiplicity of political forces representing specific viewpoints different from what other party was holding. Thus the presence of more than one political party with divergent views is seen as a plus for the growth of civil society and democratic norms. This is an indication of the fact that the growing needs of people are taken care of in every possible manner. The mutual relationship between the political parties is not characterized by enmity, vendetta and antagonism. Rather respect for each other's views is the hallmark of the politics and harmonious democratic

culture. This tolerance and an atmosphere of reconciliation comes from the well entrenched rules of the game that political parties set as cardinal principles directing their conduct in the domain of public policy and general welfare.

In Pakistan's chequered political history we find that political parties have cut very sorry figure on a number of fronts. Whenever they got a chance to rule the country, they have failed miserably to come up to the expectations of the electorate. Their mutual relationship has degenerated into personal enmity and antagonism. If one party is in power, the other would concentrate all its energies on dethroning it even though it entails the military intervention. Things come back to square one with resultant chaos and political turbulence. Unless the rules of game are set, narrow approach to politics would continue to characterize our body politic.

In the developed societies the political parties are the champions of democracy and rule of law. They have well-established internal mechanisms where members of a party discuss and debate the issues freely before airing them publicly. This is possible because political parties have internal democracy. But here in Pakistan the space for discussion and dialogue within a party is taken to mean the loosening grip of party's leadership and tendency on some members' part to dilute the party. Hence little wonder if central leadership of party provides little space for internal discussion and often takes recourse to unfair means to curb dissent. The result of this practice is that the decision-making remains concentrated in few hands and only the thinking of the party leadership sets the tone and tenor of the party. The introduction of 14th amendment to the constitution by a former PM is case in point. The amendment was proposed with the intention to curb dissent and tighten up his grip on the party. Due to lack of democracy in a party, the top leadership often aided by a kitchen cabinet of 'yes men' takes all key decision without generating broad

consensus. This attitude has stunted the growth of political parties and turned them into a personal possession of a few individuals.

In developed democracies the parties come to power on the basis of their manifesto. A manifesto of a party is the most important document since it contains the broad policy parameters that the party intends to implement if people vote it into power. When a political party ends its tenure, people then judge its performance on the basis of the promises contained in the manifesto. Unfortunately in Pakistan, the manifesto-based politics is unheard of. The political parties prepare their manifestoes just to fulfill the legal requirements and once they are in power, they forget each and every thing about their manifesto.

Our political parties remain alive on newspapers and electronic media all through the year. They get motivated on the ground only when the elections approach. This reflects very badly on their commitment to solve the people's problems. Since the concept of politics has come from the idea of people's welfare, therefore, political parties in the developed democracies serve as a bridge between the state and the people. They implement their manifesto when in power and campaign for the good of people when out of power. Even when out of power, they launch people-friendly schemes to help them out and guide them in a number of ways. But in Pakistan the political parties have not imbibed this idea so far. They are the possession of elite and serve as an instrument for protecting their corporate interests in the power structure. Even the smaller religio-political parties and other NGOs have made a mark for themselves by virtue of their being close to people. These outfits are well organized and embark upon a number of projects that are meant to endear them to the people at the grass roots. They may not perform ideally courtesy the prevalent political system but they certainly

serve as a pressure factor upon the overall policy outlook of the country.

The last but not the least is the deplorable fact that our political parties have not done people-oriented politics. Their efforts have been concentrated on the idea of basking under the sun of the Establishment. Unfortunately our political leaderships without any exception have developed a notion that power in Pakistan lies with the military-led establishment and if they are in the good books of the establishment, this is supposed to be a license to seek power. This attitude on the part of political leadership has not let democracy flourish and take roots among the people. In mature democracies people are the source of power but in this country it is the rating of a political party in the eyes of the unseen forces that counts. This also explains why political parties start campaigning for the ouster of their rivals from the corridors of power and often look toward army to 'save the country from disaster'.

This is because of this factor that political chaos and turbulence have become the defining features of our polity. In Pakistan all parties are Kings Parties. The only difference is that one party that is able to cut a deal with the Establishment is publicly dubbed as a Kings party, while the others take up the mantle of opposition to the government simply because they fail to clinch a deal to get into power.

It is certain that our politics would continue to be in the backwater if no real attempt is made at transforming the very dynamics of politics in Pakistan. The major challenge facing the political parties is to establish the civilian supremacy. Only a party that derives its strength from the people would be able to establish a code of conduct and rules of the game in politics. This can happen if our political leadership ponders over the factors as to why democratic norms have not struck roots in this country. In this view it is instructive to wind up this piece with the contention that instead of indulging in blame-game, a

self-introspection is direly called for if this country has to adopt democracy as a culture.



TIME TO MAKE A DECISION

[Nov. 28, 2009; The Frontier Post]

Lack of democracy, unending spate of dictatorships, rampant corruption, extremism, absence of political institutions, weak judiciary, feudalism and unhindered foreign interference are all a horrible realities that plague today's Pakistan. The people of this nation claim to be patriotic when the opposite is true. Patriotism means to resist oppression, not to embrace it. It is right to question the authority of our leaders. When we are challenged simply because we want to know the truth, it goes without saying, something is not right.

Democracy means government by the people. A form of government in which, the power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them through their elected representatives. At this point in time, I am sure there are many who do not feel we are a democracy. It is my opinion that Pakistan has become a nation of lethargic people.

More interested in cricket, movies, music and gossips, the Pakistani society has no idea what goes on in politics. Our constitutional rights have been (and are being) slowly chiseled away. Yes, there are those who claim they are angry and want to see a difference. Yet, they stay seated in their chairs, watching dramatic news paying no attention to the political prison being built around them.

Dictatorship means absolute, imperious, or overbearing power or control. Do you think it is correct for a nation to be ruled by one person? Do you feel one person should be able to decide whether you live or die simply by a wave of his

hand? Should anyone be allowed to have such power over the sovereignty of any nation? Then why we allow such dictatorial governments again and again, which play havoc with our collective destiny.

We, as a nation, no longer have a backbone, by that I mean our own identity, culture, language, traditions, education and social values. How childish our elders and politicians have become. Our society, on the whole, is behaving like kindergarten children in a sandbox.

Corruption is: moral perversion, depravity, perversion of integrity. Unfortunately, we have corruption in all walks of life. Our political system, executive, education system, police, health system, even the so called religious groups are all plagued by corruption. The menace of corruption is prevalent everywhere.

Money is quite a temptation for most people. Not too many will turn their backs on a few extra (or many extra) rupees or dollars. Money motivates people much more than any thing else.

When a person, or group of people, goes overboard in their socio-religious thoughts and political views, this state can be defined as extremism. With so many people putting on “blinders” thinking they are safer by not seeing, it is important for some to be pushy. But, we do not need to be violent when challenging the views of others. Neither do we need hateful attitudes. The accommodation of one another’s views, exercise of tolerance and acceptance of diversity are characteristic of a civilized society.

Our judicial branch of government is in total chaos. Our court system is overloaded with cases whose number continues to increase by the day. We have crooked police officers, judges, federal, provincial and district governments, lawyers, clerks; the list goes on and on. If this branch of bureaucracy were to be halted, think of all the people without a job. Have you ever

thought just how useless many of these professions are? Does true justice actually exist in our country?

Now, our rupee is quickly slipping into oblivion. Rich spend too much buying items they do not need and complain that they do not have enough to pay their Zakaat. Huge houses are not a necessity. Gold and Diamond watches are not a necessity. The rich believe that these things are status symbols and elevate them to a new breed of privileged people. They oblige by purchasing them by ignoring the fact that extra money spent on the poor and in welfare-oriented projects could deal a severe blow to the scourge of terrorism and extremism.

Foreign interference in our domestic affairs is now a known fact. Unfortunately our so-called political elite has chosen to prostrate itself before the foreign powers for the sake of their vested interests. How can we sit back and allow such situation to go from bad to worse? Pakistan is supposed to be a family. Would you let a stranger enter your home telling you how to eat, drink, sleep and function in your house? Of course not! Then why do we, as Pakistani citizens, support this type of domination?

The Pakistan's citizenry enjoys staying asleep. They feel if they keep their eyes closed, ears shut, and mouths silent, this will grant them safety. We are being invaded by foreign armies willing to take our rights away. The terrorists we should fight are right under your noses. When will we wake up and smell the crap they place in our face? Make a decision.

ANALYSING ROLE OF BUREAUCRACY

[Jan. 25, 2010; The Frontier Post]

[Jan. 26, 2010; The Nation]

Of late, the role of bureaucracy has come in for great discussion and debate across the world. It is good to see this debate as it involves key issues of governance, policy formulation and policy implementation. Whatever system being followed by the countries, the existence of bureaucracy is a necessary condition to run the affairs of the state. Now it depends on the structure of the government as to what type of role it wants to assign to bureaucracy. There is no denying the fact that bureaucracies are doing good work too within their allotted ambit but then you need to see the difference in the role and orientation of bureaucracy among the developed and developing worlds. Let us look at the role of bureaucracy in both developed and especially developing countries vis-à-vis policy formulation in order to identify why our country has performed so poorly in the delivery of services.

The main function of bureaucracy in any part of the world is to implement the policies of the sitting government with full commitment and devotion. The basic idea behind the formation of bureaucratic structures was to provide ‘permanent’ government in the sense that the bureaucrats kept running the system of the government for the larger benefit of people as they were and are civil servants. Political executive in the form of politicians could come and go but the bureaucrats stayed on to look after the working of the governments. So their job has never been formulation of policy. They do help

political leadership in policy making but never make policies themselves. It is the within the sole domain of the politicians to formulate policies as their mandate stems from their being elected representative of people. It is a pity that the political class has abandoned its role of policy formulation and bureaucrats have taken over this role by filling in the vacuum.

Going by the working of the bureaucratic set-ups, it becomes clear to identify the fact that the pattern of their functioning is often rigid and inflexible. Every thing is to be done in an unimaginative and imitative manner. This rigidity cripples initiatives. That is why bureaucracies are a great hurdle in the way of reform and improvement.

Since bureaucrats are not elected representatives, therefore, they can not be expected to know the public aspirations and sentiments. Thus if they happen to perform the policy-making function, they are very likely to fail as they are not programmed and trained for it.

One of many characteristics of bureaucracy as noted by famous German sociologist Max Weber is the spirit de corps even at the cost of public interest. It has often been observed that when the status quo is challenged, all moral and professional principles are set aside aimed at protection of vested interests. Therefore such a group can not be given a role of policy maker as their interests and those of their targeted class may come in to clash with each other.

In third-world developing countries like Pakistan, bureaucracies are often politicized to the detriment of the operationalisation of the institution. So such a biased and prejudiced institution can not be expected to play an impartial role of policy-making.

In our view, the purpose of policy formulation in larger interests of people of Pakistan will be served if we bring about reforms in our civil services to make them compete with the demand of the changing times. The response of the state

structures should be proportional to the enormity of the tasks facing the state systems.

The institutions play the basic role in the policy formulations. They are assigned different tasks. They collect data and information through various sources, analyse it scientifically and professionally and then reach conclusions through this process in a rational manner. After getting feedback, they then revise their results. Thus they come up with the best formulated policy evolved through consensus.

It is a misfortune that our policy making on key issues of state and society has been unstructured, whimsical and highly individualistic. This has cost our country very dearly in almost all walks of national life. Therefore we need to move fast to more organized and institutionalised policy-making.

There are three major pillars of a state mentioned in the constitution namely Parliament, Judiciary and Executive. The function of parliament is law-making. Judiciary is tasked with interpretation of laws and the role of Executive branch of government is to make policies and implement them. Now executive is further divided into two distinct branches with different mandates i.e. political executive and Implementing executive.

The job of political executive is to make policies and the job of government machinery as bureaucracies are also referred to is to implement those policies. In perfect democracies, this is the norm, whereas the case of the third-world countries is different where roles of various branches are overlapping causing confusion and bad governance. Therefore if any effort to reform governance and bring about change in how the country is to be run is to succeed, submission to the constitutional requirements is a must. Our constitution amply provides us the solutions to our national problems, what is required is the willingness and commitment to respect the constitution.

Institutionalisation of policies can only be done if we clearly draw a clear-cut line between arrangements for policy formulation and policy implementation. Failure in this respect is sure to cripple our efforts at reform and improvements. We also need to identify the relevant institutions for that purpose. It is by taking recourse to the ideas of decentralization and delegation that we can succeed against heavy odds.

Here question arises as to why institutions are so important in achieving the above-mentioned aims? The following reasons could be cited in this regard:

The process of institutionalisation is instrumental in achieving efficiency in organizations and processes.

Since institutionalisation emphasizes on separation of powers, therefore every organ or institution is geared to achieve results in time and will observation of transparency.

In institutionalised decision-making, substance not form is important. So people may come and leave but the process continues. Thus continuity of policies is ensured and it is helpful in delivery of services to the society.

The inclusion of diverse viewpoints into the whole of policy formulation in institutionalised mechanisms gives it a bipartisan touch, which is necessary for fair play and meeting the ends of justice.

By virtue of decentralized activity and its responsibility in institutional policy-making, it is easier to fix problems and conduct accountability.

ROLE OF MEDIA IN POLICY FORMULATION

[Jan. 30, 2010; The Frontier Post]

‘Information explosion’ as the transformation on the media landscape has come to be known worldwide has caught the world unawares. It is now globally recognized as a fourth pillar of state along with parliament, judiciary and executive. Historically, the right to freedom of expression is traced back to United Nations Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948. This is not true. The fact of the matter is that Allah Almighty endowed this right on the angels at the time of creation of Adam. He ordained them to express their opinion freely. Likewise, Allah Almighty awarded the right to oppose to Satan for the first time. Thus those who are associated with this profession are in fact acting upon the Sunna of angels, hence a sacred duty. It is for this reason that Islam considers freedom of expression as one of the fundamental rights.

Gone are the days when governments could hide information from its consumers i.e. common people and (mis)lead people up the garden path. Now policy formulation processes are bound to be transparent as media keeps a continuous vigil. The rise of investigative journalism has added to the strength of media as a fourth pillar of state. Following points could be instructive in this regard.

Policies were manipulated in the past to the benefit of the elites because no information reached people because channels of dissemination of information did not exist. Whatever sources of information were there were under the direct or

indirect control of these ruling elites. With mushroom growth of media both print and electronic, information has become easily available for the people. It is not easier any more for the vested interests to hide information. Thus this has resulted in transparency in the policy formulation.

The role of media is not just confined to make information available. It is also to educate people on the key national issues, which are concerned with lives of common people. Media conducts in-depth critiques, analyses and appraisals by discussing pros and cons of a given policy of government or any issue in an impartial and fair manner. In the process, it brings out what is good or harmful for people. Thus it informs people to oppose or support a given policy. That is how media performs the role of an opinion-maker. The aggregate result of such approach is that the governments have to be very meticulous in the formulation of policies.

Since media undertakes critical appraisals of policies in a threadbare manner, therefore, it performs the role of a national watchdog. If a government adopts a policy, which is collectively not beneficial, the media can criticize this policy so severely as to arouse people's opposition towards this policy. So powerful is this role of media as a watchdog that the governments have to sometimes withdraw themselves from their stated positions. Therefore this role of media as a protector of public rights is very important for fair and beneficial policy formulation.

This role of media as a representative of masses emerges from the above-mentioned role as a national watchdog. Through a number of methods and techniques like the columns, interviews, seminars and public forums etc, the media serves to convey the aspirations of people to the top policy makers who may otherwise not know them by other available channels.

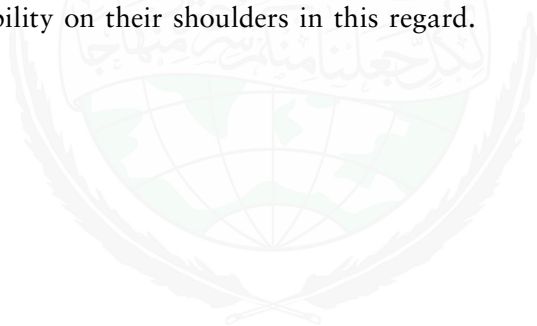
Media is also a unifier of diverse viewpoints. At a time when a national policy may not be in accordance with popular appeal but it is in the larger interest of the country, it does educate the

populace about the benefits accruing from adoption of such and such policy for the country. Such situations often arise on issues of diplomacy and foreign policy where policy has to be worked out keeping in view country's strengths and weaknesses not emotionally.

It is also worth mentioning that at times the media has tended to overstep its limits. The nature and content of political talk shows is a proof that instead of spearheading informed and constructive debate on issues of national importance, the TV anchors and hosts with the full connivance of their employers try to direct the debate in a particular direction. This attitude runs counter to the principles of neutrality, objectivity and fair play. Political talk shows give birth to more confusion instead of resolving them. The unrestrained rush to telecast 'breaking news' coupled with competition factor which is premised on grabbing maximum viewership is also responsible for this careless behaviour on the part of electronic media. There is a need to formulate code of conduct and settle rules of the game, which should characterize the functioning of electronic media in Pakistan. Such an arrangement should serve as watch-dog and oversee the working of media.

Times have changed. We need to change our policies accordingly. Change is always the most difficult to accept. It demands courage, conviction and willingness. We need to get common people—the real stakeholders of any state into mainstream of national decision-making. The focus of governance is to shift from 'a few' onto 'all'. For that, our policy formulation should undergo a paradigm shift. We need to evolve 'all-inclusive' rather than 'exclusive' model of governance. We had better spearhead evolutionary change rather than the one dictated by violence. The challenge is huge, so should be our resolve to overcome it. We should realize that we owe it to future generations. Let it not be said by them that we did not prove equal to the task.

Given the sorry literacy rates and poverty of mind and intellect, it is generally not possible for the people to understand intricate issues of governance. Neither do they have the leisure of apprehending these things as they are already faced with graver concerns of survival. In these circumstances, it is the responsibility of the aware and educated sections of society to form groups and associations to impact upon decision-making and policy formulation at the national level in the interest of the down-trodden sections of society. Such groups so established by the responsible citizens can go a long way in lessening the burdens of common people. At a time when political parties have abandoned their responsibility of looking after interests of poor people, such groups are need of the hour. For that we need to agree on the minimum rules of the game. NGOs, opinion leaders, social and political groups and lawyers have heavy responsibility on their shoulders in this regard.



WHITHER KASHMIR POLICY

[Feb. 07, 2010; The Frontier Post]

In Pakistan, February 5 is observed as a Kashmir Solidarity Day nationally every year. Seminars, workshops and demonstrations are held to highlight the plight of the Kashmiris suffering from the Indian occupation for last 63 years and tribute is paid to their undying courage and determination for standing up to the overwhelming Indian military might. The Day also symbolizes the natural association and expression of support from the people of Pakistan for their Kashmiri brethren. It also reminds the international community of its commitment to enable the Kashmiri people to get their right to self determination as mandated by the resolutions of the United Nations, a commitment that has not yet been fulfilled.

Instead of turning this Day into a mere ritual which it has, we need to focus on its essential message and get our act together. Some questions naturally come to mind. Can an unstable and economically weak Pakistan project the case of Kashmir in a befitting manner? Has Pakistan any coherent Kashmir policy? Does Pakistan have the ability to move beyond its traditional position in tandem with demands of time and ground realities? Has Pakistan's policy to use religious groups as a proxy in Kashmir advanced the Kashmir cause? Why has Pakistan lost broad international support on the Kashmir issue despite its morally, legally and politically justified stance on it? Does Islamabad's apologetic and reactive attitude vis-à-vis New Delhi advance its strategic interest? Answers to these questions represent a crucial test of our collective ability to respond to the

foreign policy challenges on the disputed question of Kashmir. What options does the Pakistani establishment have to change the status quo? While we spend the day eulogizing the sacrifices rendered by the Kashmiris, it is high time we also introspected ourselves with utmost objectivity at our disposal with a view to determining the pros and cons of our policy choices on the Kashmir issues. Following points are instructive in that regard:

The ongoing wave of political instability, economic meltdown, and decay of state institutions is eating into the vitals of our body politic. Islamabad's engagement in eliminating domestic terror, though a step in the right direction, is also producing a deadly backlash, thereby upping the ante for the country. Unfortunately Pakistan happens to be a classic case study in bad management, personalized & unaccountable style of governance with no rules of the game, nepotism & favouritism, corruption and unending power bickering between so-called political parties and military-led establishment. To top it all, Pakistan has a highly centralized political system with little autonomy for the federating units. The clash between federation and provinces over a whole range of subjects is also at the heart of our weakening polity. Despite the political system being parliamentary as declared by the Constitution, it is presidential in essence, for most of the powers are vested in the office of the president.

This sorry state of affairs Pakistan is mired in undermines its negotiating power vis-à-vis India on Kashmir and other disputed questions. It also sends a negative message to the Kashmiris about the kind of political arrangement they would have if they get to accede to Islamabad in case of political settlement of the issue.

Pakistan's Kashmir policy has also been suffering from systematic flaws in that it has been more whimsical and less institutional. Every ruler of the day has had different and incoherent approach to the Kashmir question dictated more

by his political compulsions than regional contexts. There has not been much of civilian input into the policy, which has been considered to be sole preserve of military and intelligence apparatus to the exclusion of parliament. The older generation of the Pakistani political and military leaders has gradually lost space to India to maneuver the international opinion in its favour by diluting Pakistan's stated position. They have been less creative and more status quo-prone wedded to the world of make-believe. The ruling elites have also been found wanting in keeping a pace with changing regional and international demands and coming up with proactive response to cope up with the new realities.

The establishment's policy to use religious groups as a proxy to advance its interests in Kashmir has done more harm than good to the Kashmir cause and Pakistan's position on it. The 1989 Kashmir movement, which was purely indigenous in character, represented the demonstration of people's natural urge to determine their political future and rise against the Indian military domination. This movement won broad international support besides highlighting the centrality of Kashmir as the major factor in achieving stability in a highly volatile region that is South Asia. It also put India on the defensive on international diplomatic plane.

However, the intrusion of religious groups from across the border provided India with a lever to justify its domination and beat the drum about the irrelevance of the UN resolution on Kashmir in the wake of change in "ground realities". These groups ended up hijacking the indigenous movement for freedom and self-determination. Their patrons who collected finances and found new recruits carved out a new role in the political landscape of the country with the full connivance of the establishment, which was ever eager to dilute the hold of mainstream political parties. The newfound empowerment of the religious parties enabled them to develop their own agenda

informed by their sectarian and ideological associations. The “bleed India” policy of the extremist groups was more than manifests in their overseas operations. In hitting the Indian symbols of prestige and power, they have not necessarily worked with the backing of their patrons. In their attempts to expand their ‘sphere of influence’, the militant religious organizations have also tended to suppress and eliminate all symbols of resistance from the Kashmiri nationalist forces who were apprehensive of the intentions of these groups and saw in their working the danger of a superimposed religious order defined by strong sectarian connections.

Following the catastrophic events of 9/11, India was able to invoke the international community’s obsession with terrorism and paint Pakistan as a breeding ground of terror through its robust diplomatic offensive. This led to evaporation of international support for Pakistan’s principled stand on Kashmir.

Now the questions arise: will Pakistan continue to ignore its social and economic development by spending its meager resources on its defence? Will the initiative to pass the gospel word on Kashmir stay in the hands of security establishment without the inclusion of elected representatives? Is the UN still a credible institution capable of delivering solution to the Kashmir issue in the light of its resolutions after its total failure in reining in the US in recent times? Do we have the imagination to think out of box and agree to the resolution of the Kashmir problem along lines different from what has traditionally been put down our throats over the decades? Can Line of Control be declared and accepted as international border? Is settlement of Kashmir possible on the basis of demography and religion? Is an independent acceptable to India and Pakistan?

While we observe February 5 as Kashmir Solidarity Day and rightly pay homage to the sacrifices of our Kashmiri brethren, we should also do some soul-searching on our past conduct.

Only an economically strong, peaceful and politically stable Pakistan can protect the rights of the Kashmiris, force India to the negotiating table and evoke international interest and role.



BACK TO SQUARE ONE?

[Feb. 12, 2010; The Frontier Post]

[Feb. 15, 2010; Business Recorder]

A predictable pattern whose contours can easily be identified characterizes the relationship between Islamabad and New Delhi. Following 14-month long stalemate in its relations with Pakistan caused by the Indian policy of no talk after the Mumbai terror attacks on November 26, 2008, the Indian foreign secretary's invitation to her Pakistani counterpart for resumption of dialogue, though a welcome move, represents the treading of a familiar road. However, unfortunately this is a road which India has most often traveled without making much of a difference. While the Pakistani foreign office prepares the agenda for talks with India to be held anytime this month, it is important to take stock of a number of critical factors which underline the Indian attitude and precede the offer for resumption of dialogue with Pakistan.

First, the last high-level engagement between top leaderships of both countries took place at the Egyptian recreational city, Sharm el Sheikh, in July 2009 which culminated in the issuance of joint communiqué. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh clearly committed to the de-linking of peace process from terrorism, a stance Pakistan has been espousing all along. Secondly he also agreed to address the Pakistani concerns about the Indian intervention in Balochistan and FATA. The communiqué betrayed the Indian readiness to engage in a bilateral dialogue with Islamabad. However, he was quick to take a somersault on the interpretation of the communiqué when confronted with

political storm in the Indian parliament and strong protest from the opposition political parties. The subsequent months saw hardening of the Indian posture and gradual mounting of diplomatic pressure on Pakistan. As in case of political and diplomatic standoff between December 2001 and January 2004, New Delhi tried its level best to portray her as the sponsor and breeding ground of terrorism. The statements of the former Indian National Security Advisor are a case in point.

Only recently in December 2009, outgoing Indian Chief of Army Staff, General Deepak Kapoor, threw light on the broad contours of the Cold Start doctrine, which is now an essential part of the Indian strategic policy. He boasted about the New Delhi's capability to open two fronts simultaneously with Pakistan and China by undertaking target-oriented and highly calculated surgical strikes on the important strategic locations of the adversary without letting the situation escalate into a wide ranging military engagement accompanied by the threat of the nuclear weapons. According to the defence analysts, the Cold Start doctrine was coined in 2004 with minute details after India's failure to browbeat Pakistan into submission despite its mobilization of around half million troops along the Pakistani border in what came to be known as an eyeball to eyeball confrontation between 2001 and 2004. The Cold Start doctrine also explains New Delhi's threat to target 'terrorist training camps' within Pakistan by way of preemption to forestall any possibility of the Mumbai-like attacks from these non-state actors.

As if this was not enough, the Indian government brought its pressure to bear upon the management of Indian Premier League (IPL) not to buy the services of the Pakistani cricketers. Similarly, the Indian government also did not allow its team to visit Pakistan last year to play test series and ODIs against the home side. It also successfully presided over the shifting of matches of the upcoming Cricket World Cup from Pakistan,

which were previously scheduled to be held here by invoking the security concerns. The purpose of this carefully calibrated anti-Pakistan campaign is to isolate her from the rest of the world and to prove to the international community that the country is hub of terrorism.

Recently India also heightened border tension with Pakistan when it resorted to violation of the working boundary in the Lahore and Sialkot sectors besides reported rise in the firing incidents across the Line of Control. There has also been drastic reduction in the visas to the Pakistani visitors with the result that the number of cross-border visitors has fallen by 80%. The Pakistani publishers and booksellers who wanted to participate in the World Book Fair in New Delhi have been denied visas. This Indian attitude runs counter to its proclaimed objective to enhance people-to-people contact as a Confidence Building Measure (CBM) to help create 'peace constituencies' in both countries.

The Indian establishment also made American Defence Secretary, Robert Gates who recently visited both India and Pakistan, echo its favourite mantra that in case of any other Mumbai-like terrorist attacks on its soil, the Indian patience would run out. The implication was that the terrorist strikes from the alleged non-state actors would be considered to have full backing of the Pakistani state and that Pakistan is still using the terrorist organizations as its proxy to 'bleed India'. This evoked firm response from the Pakistani political and military leadership who made it clear to Secretary Gates that Pakistan did not buy the Indian line and that any misadventure under this false assumption would be countered with full force.

The above-mentioned narration of immediate background of the India-Pakistan relations after November 26, 2009 is important to understand the shift in the Indian attitude. This would help in deciphering the Indian intentions behind its policy U-turn on the question of talks with Pakistan. While

the exact nature and content of dialogue is not yet known, it is important for the Pakistani leadership to guard itself against any euphoria. We do not know yet whether the Indian offer of dialogue is tactical or substantive. The major question is: would the composite dialogue process be resumed from where it broke off in 2008?

However, the informed leaks in the Indian media do not suggest that New Delhi is interested in starting a broad-based and wide ranging composite dialogue framework. There is a talk of ‘measured contacts’ within the Indian political leadership. In his article published in the Harvard International Review magazine’s latest issue, Shiv Shankar Menon, the newly appointed Indian National Security Advisor, gave an idea of things to follow when he wrote that “from an Indian perspective, foremost among the issues that divide India and Pakistan is terrorism. For Indians the dialogue with Pakistan, and the entire relationship, is predicated on an absence of violence against India from Pakistan, a sense that has hardened since cross-border terrorism began three decades ago.” He further stated that India has faced a series of attacks from the territory of its neighbour, “with complicity of official organs of that neighbour and that no other state has responded to a sustained terrorist campaign of this nature with the sort of restraint and patience displayed by India namely without recourse to direct military options or retaliation.”

In view of the above, the Pakistani leadership needs to carefully consider its options and calibrate its response by seeking the input from all stakeholders. Pakistan does not afford to be lured into a trap of meaningless dialogue as has been the case in the past. Other than terrorism, there are a number of contentious disputes including the core issue of Jammu and Kashmir that lies at the heart of strained relations between the South Asian neighbours.

IMPERATIVES OF A DIALOGUE

[Feb. 21, 2010; The Frontier Post]

Dialogue between Indian and Pakistan has never assumed a life of its own against heavy odds pitted against it by virtue of geography, regional and international contexts. It has been more of a non-starter to put it mildly thanks to complexity of the relationship and high stakes involved. The kind of seriousness and consistency required to keep the dialogue process sustainable has been missing. This state of affairs owes itself to the varying and at times cross-purpose positions both countries have taken on issues affecting their relationship much to the detriment of durable peace in South Asia. Thus the dialogue process has been more about form than substance.

Despite agreeing to a clear-cut roadmap as was symbolized by the initiation of composite dialogue framework in 1997, New Delhi has allowed its big power ambitions to dictate the terms of engagement with Islamabad. Going by the history of composite dialogue, it may be concluded that India used the dialogue process to serve as smokescreen to hide its 'bleed Pakistan' policy through the employment of robust and coercive diplomacy. The events of 9/11 came in handy for the Indian establishment to paint Pakistan as a sponsor of terrorism. At a time when Pakistan is busy taking care of the indigenous terrorism through very effective military action, India has left no stone unturned to fish in its troubled waters through a highly calibrated interventionist policy.

There has been very little understanding within the Indian strategic and political community that all attempts to weaken Pakistan in ways more than one could be very lethal with long-term implications for the region. A weak and instable Pakistan can be the worst nightmare for New Delhi. While the Congress-led government has realized the importance of opening the stalled diplomatic engagement with Pakistan, there is all the more need to take a fresh look at the peace process with a view to make mid-course corrections. The following is instructive in this regard:

India needs to fathom this reality that there are limits to which coercive diplomacy could be employed. It is a failed strategy which has boomeranged the second time with no positive results for New Delhi. Islamabad is as resistant to the challenge from its eastern border as has been the case in the past. However, it has gradually grown more suspicious of the Indian intentions due to the Indian policy of 'hit and run'. The very notions such as coercive diplomacy and Cold Start doctrine violate the spirit of the peace process. It allows the anti-India and anti-peace elements within Pakistan an opportunity to pressure the government into going slow in its relations with India, thereby spoiling the overall atmospherics within which the dialogue process gets severely undermined.

It is too early to expect any major breakthrough in the talks and one should equally be constrained from prematurely evaluating the chances of 'success or failure' of the dialogue. However, a lot would depend on how both countries reconcile their diverse viewpoints and structure their divergent positions into an acceptable framework. The formation of and agreement over such a framework for resumption of dialogue would have been a redundant exercise had there been unconditional unwillingness from the Indian side to take up the thread from where it broke off in November 2008.

While Pakistan remains committed to resume the composite dialogue from where it got disrupted in 2008 so that a lot of ground covered since July 1997 lays down the foundation upon which edifice of durable peace in South Asia could be erected, India is caught up in policy confusion. The signs coming from the Indian media and official circles suggest that it is hesitant to start dialogue on all areas mentioned in the composite dialogue. Given the change in international geo-strategic situation with terrorism forming the global discourse, it desires to limit the entire gambit of its engagement with Islamabad to the issue of terrorism. Pakistan should not have any problem in discussing this issue as long as India regards it as a common problem facing the world community in general and South Asia in particular.

However, the Indian attempt to highlight terrorism as the most prominent issue between both countries is a smart move to paint Islamabad as promoter and breeding ground of terrorism where terrorists have well entrenched 'training camps and are facilitated logistically from some of the official quarters'. Pakistan, which has already rendered huge sacrifices in successfully fighting off domestic terrorism and militancy, has a reason to resist the Indian attempt to make terrorism the only problem bedeviling the relations of both arch rivals.

For long India has insisted on the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) as facilitator of the peace process, so much so that the CBMs, which were supposed to serve as a means to end, became an end in themselves. There is no gainsaying the fact that initially these CBMs played their positive role in making the atmosphere conducive for peace. However, in the absence of progress on the contentious issues, the exchange of CBMs merely proved cosmetic measures.

As both New Delhi and Islamabad prepare to resume their talks on February 25 at the foreign secretaries' level, the CBMs could be modified with the inclusion of terrorism, IPI and water issue, important and serious issues critical to Pakistan and

India. Meaningful progress on these CBMs can pave the way for the resumption of open-ended engagement. The Pakistani leadership needs to take up these issues if India does not show its readiness to resume the composite dialogue process.

It represents a measure of failure of political leaderships of both countries that in the absence of vision and statesmanship vis-à-vis peace process, non-state actors i.e. extremist parties, media and international power players, have shaped the discourse between both countries. So overbearing has been the role of these players in setting the agenda that the governments in both countries have gradually grown less innovative and more beholden to these voices in settling the rules of the game. This complex web of domestic politics explains why political administrations have been found wanting in exercising imagination and offering bold and courageous political approach on the contentious issues. The success or failure of the sustained engagement rests on the ability of the political leaderships in both countries to regain the ground they have surrendered to the non-representative forces.

The presence of critical challenges facing South Asia is also accompanied by a set of opportunities. It is up to both countries to decide whether they would continue to remain mired in useless cold war syndrome or allow the regional and global imperatives to change its mindsets and political approaches to the benefit of millions of people across the border.

BREAKING MYTH ABOUT MUSLIM WOMEN'S EDUCATION

[Mar. 29, 2010; The Frontier Post]

Islam enjoins upon its followers both men and women to dedicate themselves fully to learning knowledge. There is an ingrained value in every Muslim, man and woman alike to pursue knowledge and to learn about God's Truth. Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H) advised his followers to seek knowledge from every nook and corner of the world. In keeping with this value, Muslim women are continuing to make headway in the field of science and their participation in terms of graduation ratios often surpasses that of western women in pursuing scientific degrees according to UNESCO.

Contrarily, the western media is never tired of churning out stereotypes and outdated clichés about the Muslim women. Their favourite propaganda line is that it is because of discrimination ordered by the Islam that the Muslim women lag behind in the field of education. The western mind gets swayed in favour of this kind of reasoning when it is repeated over and over, while the fact is that truth is other way round. The Islamic message, which stresses gender equity and rights for women, is often polluted by competing cultural values that have no basis in Islam scripture.

The quest for knowledge has always applied to women in Islam. God has made no difference between genders in this area. The Prophet (P.B.U.H) once said: "Seeking knowledge is a mandatory for every Muslim (male and female)." (Sahih Bukhari)

History bears witness to the fact that the Muslim women have achieved numerous excellences in the field of science and technology thereby opening ways for more exploration through their findings and dedication. But the western media does not take these contributions into account nor is it ready to offer any kind of appreciation for these women who have broken male hegemony in the field of science and technology.

The fact is that the United States falls behind six Muslim countries in the percentage of women graduating in science to the total science graduate population. The countries whose ratio of women science graduates exceeds that of the United States are Bahrain, Brunei Darussalam, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Qatar and Turkey. Morocco exceeds the United States in the ratio of women engineering graduates as a percentage of the science graduate population.

Traditionally, Muslim women do not face the kind of discouragement in the sciences to the extent that their Western counterparts do, which explains why statistics show such high ratios of Muslim women graduates in science fields as a percentage to the total science graduate population. However, the fact of the matter is that instead of any religion injunctions, these are the socio-economic hurdles that apply equally to both men and women and hinder their way to advancement. These hurdles reflect themselves in the form of poverty, illiteracy, political instability and the policy of foreign powers.

Data that explains the real problem can be found by comparing the total educated populations of countries and regions of the world. A high degree of illiteracy and low levels of secondary school enrollment account for the less number of graduates in poorer countries than in the wealthier regions. In locales defined by UNESCO in their recent report, gross secondary school enrollment ratios are very low: Africa (below 40%), West Asia (below 60%), and East Asia (below 75%).

Gender inequity is a fact of life and does exist, but Islam cannot be singled out for being responsible for it nor can it be relegated to Muslim countries. Some disparaging gender gaps in higher education exist where the religion of Islam isn't even practiced by a majority of the population. For example, only 44% of people enrolled in higher education in Switzerland are women, Guatemala (43%), Rwanda (37%), Korea (36%), Bhutan (34%), Cambodia (29%) and Liechtenstein (27%).

On the other side of the coin, in Tunisia, a country where 98% of people practice Islam, there were 5% more female students enrolled than males in higher education. Malaysian women made up 55% of the enrolled population in higher education, Lebanon (54%), Jordan and Libya (51%). Bahrain even exceeded the United States in the ratio of women enrolled in higher education by 6%. If education is freedom, then it looks like Muslim women in Bahrain are more liberated than American women.

It is not Islam that threatens a woman's right to education. Rather these are the governments, which are hostile to Islam, which often set up roadblocks to prevent Muslim women from obtaining education. Both France and Turkey are guilty of this type of exclusionary persecution, all under the false guise of secularism. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), a prestigious nongovernmental organization, these bans exclude thousands of women from institutions of higher learning each year. A 2004 HRW report states, "This restriction of women's choice of dress is discriminatory and violates their right to education, their right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and their right to privacy."

Despite the fact that the Muslim woman is constantly being harassed about her choice in religion and face the sustained and clichéd portrayal at the hands of the western media that ridicule her faith and demonize her culture, there exists an Islamic tradition celebrating women in science. The Muslims

need to remind the world of such heroic and ground-breaking women contributions in an attempt to correct their perspectives. Today, the Islamic culture in which women are encouraged to participate, excel and lead in scientific fields continues to express itself, not only through statistical data, but in real, living, breathing and praying people. Although these women are exceptional, they are by no means the exception to the rule.

Here we have few examples from around the world.

Professor Samira Ibrahim Islam, was nominated as a distinguished Scientist of the World For the Year 2000 by UNESCO. She made significant contributions in drug safety by defining the Saudi profile for drug metabolism. Sameena Shah, presented an innovative algorithm in computerized cognitive leaning that she and a team of colleagues developed at IIT Delhi, India. Professor Dr. Bina Shaheen Siddiqui, has made significant contributions to medicine and agriculture through her study and classification of indigenous plant materials. She has been awarded several patents for anticancer constituents and biopesticides and has written more than 250 research articles. She has been honored with several prestigious awards including the Khwarizmi International Award of Iran and Salam Prize in Chemistry.

Historic records show that women participated in science and medicine in Muslim societies. By contrast, in America, during the 1890's women could not be doctors, and yet, Muslim women doctors were seen as equals to their male counterparts hundred's of years earlier, they were even responsible for written contributions in the field. Also, women like Ijliya, an astrolab builder, were employed as skilled scientists in Muslim courts. Others made progress in pharmacology.

The data for years 2002/2003 contained in these tables describes the percentage of women graduates in science and engineering out of the total science and engineering graduate population in each country, and pertains to higher-education in

science: (Statistics from the “Global Education Digest” report released from UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2005)

Woman Graduates in Science

Bahrain 74%

Bangladesh 24%

Brunei Darussalam 49%

Kyrgyzstan 64%

Lebanon 47%

Qatar 71%

Turkey 44%

Compared with...

U.S. 43%

Japan 25%

Women Graduates in Engineering

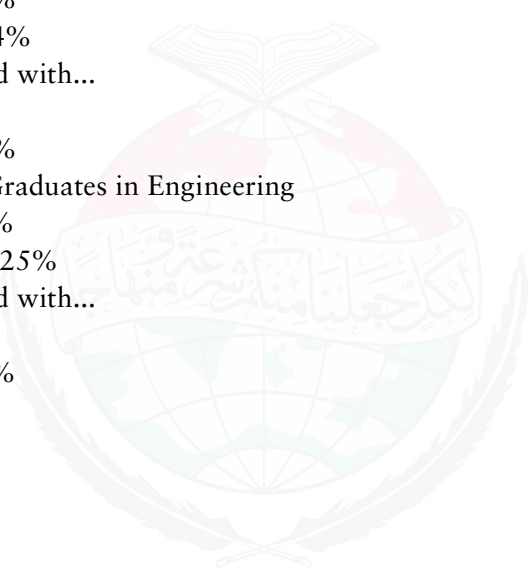
Eritrea 4%

Morocco 25%

Compared with...

U.S. 19%

Japan 13%



FATWA AGAINST TERRORISM

[Apr. 04, 2010; The Frontier Post]

[Apr. 04, 2010; Pakistan Observer]

Pakistan's success against homegrown terrorism has been recognized globally. So compelling has been the impact of the military's engagement with terrorists of different hues and colours but converging on their unanimity to taken on the state of Pakistan that every visiting dignitary has made it a point to visit Swat and get the first hand information about what has come to be known as Swat Success Model. Contrast this with the failures of the US-led war on terror in Afghanistan despite having abundant military and economic resources and interest of Pakistan's so-called allies becomes even keener. Emboldened by the success in the Malakand Division, the Pakistan Army chose to extend the operation to South Waziristan to dismantle the control and command structure and training camps of the terrorists.

Any attempt to simplify the complex problem of terrorism and attribute the recent success against it to merely military means would be tantamount to losing the larger picture. Military action no doubt played the most important role in eliminating the danger to the state and society and re-established the government's writ. However, what enabled the military and government of Pakistan to initiate action was the visible swing in public opinion against terrorism. Media also played critical in changing perceptions and educating people about the dangers associated with onward march of terrorism.

Having said that, it is pertinent to mention that Pakistan has merely achieved tactical success against terrorism and the monster can raise its head again if comprehensive course of action is not chalked out. Resting on past laurels can engender complacency with grave implications for the state and society. It needs to be remembered that terrorism, which represents a climactic point of militancy, is a process that emanates from radicalization and extremism. It is more a matter of mindset than a physical phenomenon.

Therefore in order to comprehensively defeat terrorism and eradicate its roots, the state needs to invest its energies in changing mindsets and perceptions of the people. It is a battle of ideas and an idea can get cancelled at the hands of a superior idea. Terrorists invoke religion and its teachings to justify their actions. Through their bigoted and misplaced interpretation of the Quranic text, they confuse the general people and win over the raw youth into their ranks by exploiting their emotions in the name of religion. It is in this area that the terrorists and their supporters need to be exposed.

This presents the context in which the importance of Fatwa issued by renowned scholar Dr Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri can be understood. The Fatwa, which consists of more than 600 pages, is significant in a number of ways. The following is instructive in that regard:

One, this scholarly contribution in the form of Fatwa (religious decree) is the first of its kind that a man of immense erudition both in classical and contemporary sciences has made. Dr Tahir-ul-Qadri is one of Pakistan's top religious leaders with vast following not only in Pakistan but also in the rest of the world. No other scholar of his stature has come out so openly against terrorists.

Second, the Fatwa draws heavily on the Quranic text, hundreds of Hadith and exegesis of jurists of all schools of thoughts. It is a first scholarly attack on the terrorists' main

contentions and exposes the fallacy of their understating of religion. It discusses all important and relevant issues such as Jihad and revolt in elaborate detail which the terrorists and their sympathizers have been harping upon to justify their otherwise reprehensible actions.

Third, the Fatwa is objective in its nature. It also discusses why the phenomenon of terrorism reached such alarming proportions besides offering ways and means to take care of the problem for good through corrective approach. It does not absolve the international powers and state agencies of their responsibility in promoting this scourge.

Fourth, the biggest service Dr Tahir-ul-Qadri has rendered to Islam is that he has presented true message of Islam in the West and tried to show a mirror to the anti-Islam elements. In the absence of intellectually credible Islamic narrative on terrorism and other affiliated matters, certain vested interests in the Western world have been having free run aimed at demonising Islam and bringing its fair name into disrepute. They have been demonstrating extremism of the other kind. Instead of taking broad-based review of why and how the Frankenstein monster of terrorism became so lethal, they have been prone to lay every blame at the door of Islam thereby implying that its teachings perhaps recommend coercion and use of violence against the non-Muslims. While quoting numerous original references, Dr Qadri has vehemently negated such assertions and stated the position of Islam on these issues in very candid manner. Thus the Fatwa is the first scholarly defence of Islam against charges of extremism, conservatism and terrorism.

Fifth, by virtue of his outreach and highly organized educational networks, Dr Tahir-ul-Qadri has reached out to the Muslim youth living in the western world. These youths are most susceptible to the calls of Jihad by terrorists and their patrons. Given their cultural, religious and identity crises, they are likelier to fall victim to the extremist organizations. This

Fatwa, which is getting printed in a number of languages of the world including English, would help these otherwise intelligent Muslim youth to understand Islam in its entirety and reconsider the follies of their actions.



LESSONS FROM TURKEY

[Apr. 11, 2010; Business Recorder]

The Turkish President's recent visit to Pakistan at the head of a large delegation represents a welcome change in our foreign policy, which continues to remain mired in its sole dependence on the US. During his four-day tour, President Abdullah Gull struck right chord and made vibes, which resonated well with Pakistan's leadership and people.

The dialogue between both leaderships covered wide-ranging areas, including trade, investment, agriculture and infrastructure. President Gull's offer to Islamabad to help it overcome its energy deficit could not have been better timed, given the fact that Pakistan is faced with the worst crisis of energy with lethal implications for its economy and businesses across the country.

The highlight of the visit was the Turkish President's remark that brotherly relations between both countries needed to be concretised and reflected in enhanced economic co-operation. There is no denying of the fact that trade relations between Ankara and Islamabad have not realised their potential so far.

There is an immense opportunity for both sides to take it to five billion US dollars per annum. The extension of Pakistan-Iran cargo train service to Istanbul marks a major step forward, which, besides increasing bilateral trade between Pakistan and Turkey, would also present the latter with an opportunity to access the European markets.

On matters of foreign policy, both Turkey and Pakistan agreed that terrorism was one of the prominent issues facing the

Muslim Ummah and needed to be uprooted comprehensively. They also reiterated their resolve to extend every kind of co-operation in that regard. Ankara also expressed its support to Islamabad on Kashmir issue. Likewise, Pakistan also supported Turkey's stand on the Cyprus dispute.

President Zardari also recognised the services of President Abdullah Gull in enhancing the co-operation between both countries by conferring on him the biggest civil award 'Nishan-e-Pakistan'. All in all, President Gull's visit was an important landmark both in form and substance.

Turkey has come to be acknowledged as a relatively developed country with a functioning democracy within the Muslim world. It has also joined the ranks of G20 countries and stands on the doors of European Union. It offers a number of lessons to Pakistan, which can stand it in good stand if they are imbibed and replicated accordingly. The following is instructive in that regard:

"Secularism has been the state ideology since the establishment of modern Turkey at the hands of Mustafa Kamal Pasha. Because of their spearhead role in the nation-building process, the Turkish armed forces have been invested with the responsibility to protect the Kamalist ideology. Resultantly, the Turkish military has been a principal actor in the political architecture of the country.

Credit goes to Turkish political parties, especially the ruling AKP (Justice & Development Party), founded by Prime Minister Erdgon that it has gradually but wisely regained the lost space, which has traditionally been the preserve of the powerful military.

It has been able to set the rules of the game and managed its relations with other important stakeholders in the Turkish polity. The AKP-led government is also preparing to table a bill of constitutional reforms in the parliament to restore the full-fledged democracy in the country."

The Pakistan military is also deeply entrenched in the political system of the country, a fact which is borne out by its retention of power for more than three decades of our national life. The failure of political parties to agree to minimum rules of the game and establish good governance has resulted in surrendering space to the powerful military.

The lesson for Pakistan's political elite is that it is by setting better governance standards and exercising wisdom and political maturity that they can reinstate true democracy in the country. Turkey has also brought about huge revolution in the educational field.

Its literacy rate is more than 99%. Turkish language is the medium of instruction, while education up to matric level has been declared compulsory. It is totally free for the economically disadvantaged sections of the society. In 2002, when Justice and Development Party came into power, the number of universities stood at 53, which has now risen to 142.

During his visit, the Turkish President has offered to cooperate in establishing a technical university on the pattern of Istanbul Technical University. There is immense potential for Pakistan to learn from the Turkish experience of technical and higher education.

Agriculture is yet another area where Pakistan has a lot of learning to do. Turkey is one of the agriculturally-developed countries of the world. According to an estimate, its agricultural produce has crossed 57 billion US dollars with more than 11 billion dollar of exports.

The signing of memorandum of understanding (MoU) on agriculture between the agriculture ministers of both countries is a good thing. There is a need to expand the co-operation in this field. The strength of the Turkish economy can be gauged from the fact that its exports in 2008 stood at 132 billion dollars.

At a time when the entire world faces the prospect of food shortages, Pakistan's agriculture can not only meet its domestic food needs but also help it earn precious foreign exchange, provided attention is paid to this sector of economy. Pakistan can learn a lot from Turkey in modernising its agro-based industry. Turkey has already shown its seriousness by declaring to invest 60 million dollars in the fields of agriculture and energy in Punjab.

President Gull's offer to help Pakistan in overcoming its fast-expanding energy deficit is also very timely. Turkey has said that its 250 construction companies are interested to invest in Pakistan. Pakistan is already constructing a number of small and medium dams, besides Dia Mir Bhasha Dam. The services of these companies can be hired to accelerate the pace of construction of dams and incomplete sections of motorway.

The regional grouping of Pakistan, Iran and Turkey, which is already there under the name of ECO, can offer every country vast opportunities for progress. While Pakistan should stay engaged with the US, it should not make its foreign policy solely dependent on Washington. The diversification of Pakistan's foreign policy by seeking to expand its strategic partnerships with other countries is what should top the government's agenda.

Both of these notions should not be mutually exclusive. It is high time we took practical steps to translate our brotherly and positive relations with the countries into economic partnerships. Turkey has already shown us the way. It now depends on the Pakistani leadership to seize the initiative and move proactively.

POWER CRISIS AND REGIONAL ANGLE

[Apr. 21, 2010; The Frontier Post]

The unabated spate of load shedding throughout Pakistan has made life difficult to live in this sizzling summer. The unending energy crisis with power outages for more than 15 hours on daily basis has also dealt a severe blow to the national economy. Resultantly, business units and factories are getting shut down and layoffs of the workers are reported to be running in hundreds of thousands with grave implications for already burgeoning unemployment and poverty. According to a careful estimate, the difference between demand and supply is above five thousand megawatts, which is likely to increase as the weather gets even hotter in the months of June and July. The monster of load shedding first raised its head in 2007 and the national power scene has been becoming uglier with every passing year.

There have been minor fluctuations and readjustments between demand and supply due to weather and water factors but the crisis on the whole has remained consistent in its lethality and ugliness. The criticality of situation warranted urgent policy response at the highest level but the same was not forthcoming, thanks to red-tapism and perennial malaise afflicting our decision-making processes. The questions arise in the background of severity of the crisis: has Pakistan in reality been deprived of treasure of energy? Do we have no alternative system to produce electricity in the country? Can we establish energy market, the biggest in the region through collaboration with neighbouring India and other countries? These are the

questions whose answers should be in the affirmative, which should not be less than a glad tiding for the people hit hard by crises of different nature. Resort to empty promises, a favourite pastime of the government, would not help.

It is about time that the government made practical strategies to resolve the energy crisis on the war footing basis without any further delay. Geographically Pakistan is located in a region where neighbouring country, India, is emerging as an economic giant. Despite massive use of energy to meet the growing demands of economic development, there is no load shedding in India. Among other countries of the region, Bangladesh is the only country whose local reservoirs of power are more than that of Pakistan. Economically speaking, India is ahead of Pakistan and Bangladesh but in terms of being self-sufficient in power, even Bangladesh is far ahead of Pakistan. Islamabad stands at number three in the field of power generation. Despite this power generation potential, the country suffers from the worst bouts of power crisis courtesy internal and external factors. If Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and other countries of the region launch power generation initiatives jointly, they cannot only strengthen their diplomatic and economic ties but also earn precious foreign exchange by exporting the surplus electricity.

These countries are home to vast natural sources of energy. All countries of South Asia can launch a joint project of power grid. Nepal and Bhutan are two countries blessed with maximum of natural gas, which is used more than electricity. On the other hand, there are issues in regard to planning of natural resources and installation of power lines to ensure flow of electricity in these countries of the region. Despite this, when we look at the natural resources in these countries, it becomes certain that only these countries forming the energy bloc would stand to benefit in the future energy scenario. However, they would have to take steps to attract the attention of international

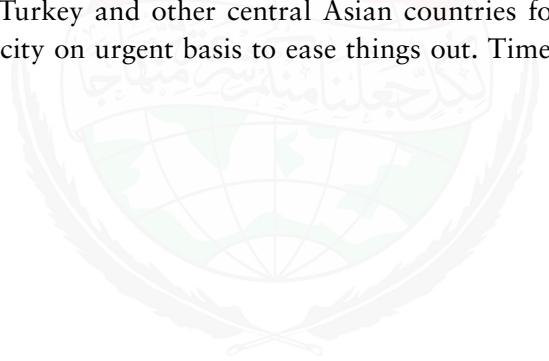
investors. If these countries succeed to formulate a joint strategy, it would not only help them overcome their energy crunch, but also establish a trade bloc in South Asia.

A brief detail of some of the models is given here below to become self-sufficient in the power sector: According to an analysis undertaken in the countries of South Asia, it has become known that if they formulate long-term policy of natural resources, they can save electricity from 6% to 13%. South African countries had undertaken this experiment first of all by which the countries of the region were able to save up to 100 billion dollars. If the South Asian countries take a leaf from the book of their African counterparts, there is no reason why they do not become self-sufficient in energy resources. Implementation of this model would also promote the intra-regional trade besides offering solution to the power crisis. Pakistan should be a strong proponent of this model given its huge energy deficit and demand. A long-term policy will need to be worked out spanning over 10 to 12 years. The broad contours of policy would include power agreements, long-term policy, and cooperation in the field of engineering, etc.

The government of Pakistan has already formulated a ten-year plan but it is not in sync with the ground realities. There is a difference between resources and planning. By acting upon this model named as South Asian Power Pool, Pakistan, India and other regional countries can become success stories in the conservation and self-sufficiency of natural resources. The major benefits accruing from this model are the way out of present power crisis and enhancement of regional trade through striking of preferential trade agreements. Import of hydropower from India, Bhutan and Nepal can provide us with a big push to go ahead with this plan. Last but not the least, the South Asian countries can ink a regional agreement known as South Asian Regional Energy Trade (SARET) based on revolutionary steps to enhance energy trade in the region.

However, in order to ease out the situation, urgent measures need to be taken. This includes the equal distribution of load shedding throughout Pakistan without any exception.

The issues of non-payment to IPPs and circular debt need to be sorted out as a matter of priority to generate electricity according to full installed capacity. The matter of import of electricity from Iran should be dealt with on priority basis besides working out workable strategy to cut down line losses, which are the major source of wastage of electricity in the country. To conclude, it can be said that energy crunch is both regional and global issue and regional efforts need to be made to overcome this deficit. Time is long past when issues of urgent nature were kept pending due to political expediency. Pakistan, a country hit hard by power crisis, needs to reach out to Iran, Turkey and other central Asian countries for import of electricity on urgent basis to ease things out. Time to act is now.



WHAT AILS MUSLIMS IN CHINA?

[Apr. 23, 2010; The Frontier Post]

There are varying figures on the number of total Muslim population currently residing in different parts of China. According to information for the years 1912-49, they were said to be around 50 million but subsequent data in 1990 placed the total number of Muslims at around 17 million due to their migration to neighbouring Central Asian Republics and influx of Han Chinese promoted by the government. Muslim population in China may be divided into two large groups: Hui—who are descendents from Central Asian, Arab, and Persian Muslim immigrants who intermarried with Han Chinese and Turkic Muslims of China's Western province. These include Uighur, Kazak, Tajik, and Kyrgyz groups.

Muslims of Turkic origin primarily live in Xinjiang ("the new frontier," in Chinese). The area is in the middle of Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The landmass of Xinjiang is one-sixth of all of China. The population of Xinjiang includes the non-Muslim Han and various groups of Turkic Muslims (the Uighur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, and Tartars). The Uyghurs are reported to be largest group. Xinjiang has plenty of natural resources, including precious minerals, coal, and petroleum. Confirmed oil reserves are "expected to reach 6.5 billion tons, along with billions of cubic meters of natural gas." The record of the Uighur independence is intermittent. It was marred by conquest by the Mongol and then by the Manchus. After conquering China, the Manchus invaded Eastern Turkistan in 1759 and ruled it until

1862. The Eastern Turkistanis (Uyghurs) with the help of the Ottomans expelled the Manchus in 1863. The Uyghurs briefly established the independent state of Eastern Turkistan. China, with the help of Britain, regained control of Eastern Turkistan in 1877. The area was formally annexed to China in 1884 and given its present name, Xinjiang.

The Uyghurs have not only maintained their religious identity throughout the long occupation by China, but also kept alive their aspiration to become independent once again. Traditionally, Muslim groups in China have maintained their distinction from the mainstream Han population, largely as a result of their affiliation with Islam. Although the Hui became more assimilated into the Han culture than their Turkic counterparts, they still maintained their separate religious identity. The cultural differences between the Han and Chinese Muslims (especially Uyghurs) are acute and may not be reconciled, since the Chinese political regime inhibits cultural and political pluralism. Thus, ethnic and religious minorities who wish to maintain a separate identity undergo repression and hardship to sustain their very existence. The regime strives to assimilate them into the mainstream Han culture. The Han social order gives primacy to a Chinese society “founded on the political, social, and religious premises of filial piety and the Confucian ancestor cult.” Chinese Muslims did “not accept the Confucian formulation of state and society.” Muslims “remained alien to the larger culture while their shared faith led them to identify deeply with the larger world community of Islam, the universal Ummah.” Because of their unique religious perspective, Muslims were “scorned by Confucian society,” and they, in turn, “turned more to their faith as a basis of their identity.” The north-western and south-western parts of China experienced Muslim unrest in the latter half of the 19th century. Until the communist takeover of 1949, the general attitude of the various Chinese governments toward

Muslims of China oscillated “between a policy of assimilation and one of autonomy that resulted in hardship for the Muslims and their continued mistrust of the Han administrations. In the early years after the communist takeover, during the relaxation phase of the Hundred Flowers era in the PRC, a number of secessionist Muslim rebellions erupted. China’s Muslims had to suffer during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s.

As a result, many fled to the Turkic regions in Soviet Central Asia. The Shadian Incident that unfolded in 1967 led to the closing down of several mosques and burning of Muslim religious books. This incident formed part of a larger attempt to wipe out what the government termed the Four Olds—old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits. Muslims in China, like Marrano Jews under the Spanish Inquisition, “prayed in secret at home. Their children pursued their study of the Quran with their imams (Akhonds) in the evenings.” Despite the repression, even the fasting in the Muslim holy month of Ramadan was observed. Conflicts between the Han and Muslims escalated when the latter were compelled to eat pork. According to some reports, “abominable acts of anti-religious coercion were perpetrated when pork bones were thrown into wells in order to pollute irretrievably the drinking water.” Official reports say 1,600 Hui Muslims were massacred and 4,400 Hui homes were destroyed in July 1975. A document entitled “Circular of Rehabilitation to the Shadian Incident” stated that this incident should not have been dealt with as a “counterrevolutionary rebellion.”

The circular admitted that the use of military force was “wrong” and declared that “the many leaders and the people of Hui nationality who were involved in this incident should be rehabilitated.” The Chinese government also provided economic assistance to widows and orphans of this brutal phase. In 1987, the party committee of Yunnan “rectified the previous records” and exonerated the leaders of the rebellion “from being treated

as counterrevolutionaries.” Nonetheless, after the emergence of five independent states in Central Asia in the early 1990s, many Muslims in Xinjiang Province harbour their own aspirations of independence. Moreover, the success of Afghans against the former Soviet Union has palpably encouraged the Islamist groups of Xinjiang.

The increased politicization of Uyghurs in Xinjiang has caused a great deal of concern in China. The PRC has sought reassurances from the Kazak and Kyrgyz governments and signed several agreements ensuring border security. Despite these agreements, the PRC leaders remain wary of the potential escalation of Islamic resurgence in the Muslim regions of their own country due to the continuing war in Afghanistan and the political instability in Tajikistan. There have been frequent reports of clashes between Uighur separatists and Chinese government forces. The most notable clash was the so-called Pinavuanjie Assault in 1992. The Chinese authorities, like their Soviet counterparts in previous decades, described this incident as a battle with gangster groups. However, since the clashing forces were identified as Hui Muslims, one cannot rule out that this event was related to the separatist activities. A year later, skirmishes and turmoil broke out in 12 counties of Xinjiang.

There was also a report of increased clashes between Chinese security forces and Uighur Islamist separatists in Xinjiang in January 2000. How China deals with these developments within the Xinjiang Province will also affect the course of political stability and economic development in that province. If the past behaviour of the Chinese leadership continues toward political dissent then Xinjiang Province would only edge toward increased political turbulence and instability.

REVISITING MUSLIM HISTORY

[Apr. 26, 2010; The Frontier Post]

Seeking knowledge is obligatory in Islam for every Muslim, man and woman. The main sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the Sunnah (Prophet Muhammad's (P.B.U.H) traditions), encourage Muslims to seek knowledge and be scholars, since this is the best way for people to know Allah (God), to appreciate His wondrous creations and be thankful for them. Muslims were, therefore, eager to seek knowledge, both religious and secular, and within a few years the great civilization sprang up and flourished.

The outcome is shown in the spread of Islamic universities. Al-Zaytunah in Tunis and Al-Azhar in Cairo go back more than 1,000 years and are the oldest existing great seats of learning in the world. Indeed, they were the models for the first European universities such as Bologna, Heidelberg, and the Sorbonne. Even the familiar academic cap and gown originated at Al-Azhar University. Muslims made great advances in many different fields, such as geography, physics, chemistry, mathematics, medicine, pharmacology, architecture, linguistics and astronomy. Algebra and the Arabic numerals were introduced to the world by Muslim scholars. The astrolabe, the quadrant, and other navigational devices and maps were developed by Muslim scholars and played an important role in world progress, most notably in Europe's age of exploration.

For centuries following the fall of Rome, medieval Europe was benighted backwater, a world of subsistence farming, minimal literacy, and violent conflicts. Meanwhile, from Persia

to Spain Islamic culture was thriving, dazzling those Europeans fortunate enough to be aware of it. Muslim Philosophers, Mathematicians and Astronomers were steadily advancing the frontiers of Knowledge, as well as exploring ancient Greeks works lost or forgotten in the west.

While Europe was mired in superstition and feudal chaos, Baghdad was the intellectual centre of the world. It was there that an army of scientists, philosophers, translators and scholars took the wisdom from Quran and Sunnah and combined Greek philosophy with their own culture, traditions, creativity and knowledge to create a scientific, mathematical and philosophical golden age. Their accomplishments were staggering that Muslim philosophers invented the scientific method and paved the way from the Enlightenment.

This article is dedicated to those Muslims whose multi-disciplinary contributions sparked the light of learning and productivity and without whom the European Renaissance would have remained a pipedream and would never have come to maturity. Their contributions to our basic understanding of sciences, mathematics, medicine, technology, sociology, and philosophy have been used without giving proper credit to them. The subject has largely been left to few obscure intellectual discourses on world history and human development. It is rarely mentioned in formal education, and if at all mentioned their names are Latinized or changed with the effect of obscuring their identity and origin, and their association with the Islamic Civilization. Here I am partially listing up some of the leading Muslims. Major Muslim contributions continued beyond the fifteenth century.

Jabir Ibn Haiyan (Geber) Chemistry (Father of Chemistry) Died 803 C.E. Al-Asmai Zoology, Botany, and Animal Husbandry 740 – 828. Al-Khwarizmi (Algorizm) Mathematics, Astronomy, Geography: (Algorithm, Algebra and calculus) 770 – 840. Amr ibn Bahr Al-Jahiz Zoology, Arabic Grammar,

Rhetoric, Lexicography 776–868. Ibn Ishaq Al-Kindi (Alkindus) Philosophy, Physics, Optics, Medicine, Mathematics and Metallurgy 800 – 873. Thabit Ibn Qurrah (Thebit) Astronomy, Mechanics, Geometry, Anatomy 836 – 901. Abbas Ibn Firnas Mechanics of Flight, Planetarium, And Artificial Crystals Died 888. Ali Ibn Rabban Al-Tabari Medicine, Mathematics, Caligraphy and Literature 838 – 870. Al-Battani (Albategnius) Astronomy, mathematics and Trigonometry 858 – 929. Al-Farghani (Al-Fraganus) Astronomy, and Civil Engineering C. 860. Al-Razi (Rhazes) Medicine, Ophthalmology, Smallpox, Chemistry and Astronomy 864 – 930. Al-Farabi (Al-Pharabius) Sociology, Logic, Philosophy, Political Science and Music 870 – 950. Abul Hasan Ali Al-Masu'di Geography and History Died 957. Al-Sufi (Azophi) Astronomy 903 – 986. Abu Al-Qasim Al-Zahravi (Albucasis) Surgery and Medicine. (Father of Modern Surgery) 936 – 1013. Muhammad Al-Buzjani Mathematics, Astronomy, Geometry and Trigonometry 940 – 997. Abu al-Qasim Maslimah al-Majriti, Astronomy Died 1007. Ibn Yunus Trigonometry and Astronomy Died 1009. Ibn Al-Haitham (Alhazen) Physics, Optics and Mathematics 965 – 1040. Al-Maward (Alboacen) Political Science, Sociology, Jurisprudence, Ethics 972 – 1058. Abu Raihan Al-Biruni Astronomy, and Mathematics. (Determined Earth's Circumference) 973-1048. Ibn Sina (Avicenna) Medicine, Philosophy, Mathematics and Astronomy 981 – 1037. Al-Zarqali (Arzachel) Astronomy (Invented Astrolabe) 1028 – 1087. Omar Al-Khayyam Mathematics and Poetry 1044 – 1123. Al-Ghazali (Algazel) Sociology, Theology and Philosophy 1058 – 1111.

The Muslims faced the first wave of devastation following Fall of Muslim Toledo (1085), Corsica and Malta (1090), Provence (1050), Sicily (1091) and Jerusalem (1099). With decline of political power came the downfall in the realms of science and technology. So much so that the lives, resources, properties, institutions and infrastructure of the Muslims,

which they had built up after decades of toil were destroyed within a short span of one hundred years.

Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn Yahya (Ibn Bajjah) Philosophy, Medicine, Mathematics, Astronomy, Poetry and Music 1080 – 1138. Ibn Zuhri (Avenzoar) Surgery and Medicine 1091 – 1161. Al-Idrisi (Dreses) Geography (World Map, First Globe) 1099 – 1166. Ibn Tufayl, Abdubacer Philosophy, Medicine and Poetry 1110 – 1185. Ibn Rushd (Averroes) Philosophy, Law, Medicine, Astronomy and Theology 1128 – 1198. Al-Bitruji (Alpetragius) Astronomy Died 1204.

The second wave of devastation swept across the Muslim lands during Crusader invasions (1217-1291) and Mongol invasions (1219-1329). Crusaders remained active throughout the Mediterranean from Jerusalem and west to Muslim Spain. Mongols wreaked havoc from the eastern most Muslim frontier, Central and Western Asia, India, Persia to Arab heartland. Fall of Baghdad (1258) and the subsequent end of Abbasid Caliphate represents the most traumatic period in the Muslim history. The aftereffects of political downfall were so horrific that the Muslims came to be gripped by the feelings of impotence and helplessness. Two million Muslims were massacred in Baghdad. Major scientific institutions, laboratories, and infrastructure were destroyed in leading Muslim centers of civilization besides merciless raping of resources, lives, properties, institutions, and infrastructure over a period of one hundred and twelve years.

Ibn Al-Baitar Pharmacy and Botany Died 1248. Nasir Al-Din Al-Tusi Astronomy, Non-Euclidean and Geometry 1201 – 1274. Ibn Al-Nafis Damishqui Anatomy 1213 – 1288. Qutb al-Din al-Shirazi, Trigonometry, Astronomy and Physics 1236 – 1311. Al-Fida (Abdulfeda) Astronomy, Geography and History 1273 – 1331. Muhammad Ibn Abdullah (Ibn Battuta) World Traveler. 75,000 mile voyage from Morocco to China and back 1304 – 1369. Ibn Khaldun Sociology, Philosophy of History

and Political Science 1332 – 1395. Ulugh Beg Astronomy 1393 – 1449. Baha al-Din al-Amili, 1540 – 1621.

The end of Muslim rule in Spain (1492) marks the closure of a glorious chapter in the history of not only Muslims but also of humanity. More than one million volumes of Muslim works on science, arts, philosophy and culture were burnt in the public square of Vivarrambla in Granada. Colonization began in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. The cycle of downfall of Muslim supremacy in the domains of culture, knowledge and politics was complete. Defeatism became the order of the day. The ship of the Muslims was rendered rudderless with depleting faith to set it back on track. So penetrating has been the impact of Muslim downfall that the despite passage of many centuries, Muslims still remain unsure of themselves.

Two hundred years before a comparable development elsewhere, Turkish scientist Hazarfen Ahmet Celebi took off from Galata tower and flew over the Bosphorus. Fifty years later Logari Hasan Celebi, another member of the Celebi family, sent the first manned rocket into upper atmosphere, using 150 okka (about 300 pounds) of gunpowder as the firing fuel.

Tipu Sultan of Mysore [1783-1799] in the south of India, was the innovator of the world's first war rocket. Two of his rockets, captured by the British at Srirangapatana, are displayed in the Woolwich Museum Artillery in London. The rocket motor casing was made of steel with multiple nozzles. The rocket, 50mm in diameter and 250mm long, had a range performance of 900 meters to 1.5 km.

At the dawn of Renaissance, Christian Europe was wearing Persian Clothes, singing Arab songs, reading Spanish Muslim philosophy and eating off Mamluk Turkish brassware. This is the story of how Muslims taught Europe to live well and think clearly. It is the story of how Islam Created the Modern World.

STOPPING BRAIN DRAIN

[May 25, 2010; The Frontier Post]

Brain drain for developing countries occurs when professionals leave their countries to work in countries where they may have better opportunities. When this happens, we may see an influx in developed countries but that may mean a shortage in under-developed third world countries. While this may include people in any profession, it tends to be more prevalent with the engineering, finance and medical fields. Potential professionals may leave their countries for educational purposes and choose to remain in the country they migrated to for a number of reasons. Some people may migrate to another country seeking a better way of life only to find that country will not honour their degree. When this is the case they may be forced to start over and go back through Universities from the beginning if they choose to stay.

If they choose to do this then they may have to find other means of supporting themselves. This means such countries may have a cab driver, house cleaner or a helping man on gas stations with a degree in medicine, Engineering or even Doctor of Philosophy. They can't acquire professional jobs without a degree the country they reside in will accept, so they are forced to find whatever job they can to lay their hand on. Brain drain for developing countries means that they face a severe shortage of professionals and skilled labour. In countries where crises are rampant and resources and options are scarce, the lack of professionals only heightens the strain of an already over worked system.

The one bright spot in all of this is that it allows for a melding of minds and those that go back to developing countries to help those in need often bring back a new perspective. They have knowledge of modern aspects of profession that may be unheard of in their own countries of origin and this knowledge can be used to help those that are suffering. To begin correcting these problems, the governments of these countries must first take action. There needs to be more funding for scientific research, education, and industry. They also need incentives to keep professionals in their countries such as better pay and secure career paths. While it is very true that no one can force people to remain in these countries to practise, bit of nationalism in hearts, higher standards of living and better wages would surely help.

Other countries can do their part as well by helping with research funds and sharing knowledge they have gained in different fields. This is not a charity but a melding that has the benefit of saving nations and potentially helping the world as a whole. Development in developing countries can help eliminate crises worldwide and prevent the spread of hate mania presently raging among the poor nations against the rich ones. Brain drain for developing countries means that a few selected countries end up having most of the brilliant scientific minds while others have an acute shortage. This uneven distribution may mean that some countries flourish while others seem to be stuck in the dark ages.

This is especially true in Pakistan's case. If this were more even then we might see a big change in some of the developing countries. The simple fact that a person may elect to start over rather than practise in their own country tells us that there must be a big problem that discourages the professional from serving their motherland. Acquiring professional education isn't easy in any country like Pakistan. I simply can't imagine getting a PhD and then moving to another country and staring all over

again just to be able to work there. The numbers of people leaving their countries in the hope of better opportunities are truly staggering to say the least. In one report it is estimated that over 23,000 medical professionals emigrate from Africa alone and the number of nurses is even more extreme.

What's more these numbers are for a single year. With numbers like this, one wonders where they all go and if they continue to practice. If only a small percentage of these trained professionals remain in their countries, then it could have a real impact on the standard of medical care in the developing nations around the world. We can also see similar results in other professions too. The phenomenon of brain drain is very scary for developing countries like Pakistan. It calls for immediate policy attention from the highest level. There is a need to set up a task force of professionals to unearth the reasons of precious brain drain and come up with proposals to stop the phenomenon.

Without affirmative action from the states, brain drain would continue to occur and time would soon come when the developing world would suffer from acute shortage of skilled workforce and professionals. It is unfortunate that this important aspect has failed to elicit the government's attention. It is hoped that immediate attention is paid to this state of affairs and corrective actions taken in the larger interest of the nation. Let us prove through action that future of our nation depends on our youth.

CORRUPTION IN EDUCATION

[May 29, 2010; The Frontier Post]

The United States has had an influx of foreign students since 2008. While the percentage of these students has risen to high levels, the fact that most of these students have passed through without even getting an education is unbelievable. This sort of 'admission practice' is also happening in the United Kingdom and in Australia as well. A lot of students from China, India, Thailand and Pakistan are gaining university admission not because of their educational merit, but because they have a large amount of money to hand over. Some US, UK, Australia, International students from abroad are literally paying their way to good grades instead of studying and learning to get them. The admission of these students like this is an outrage and a manifest violation of merit and civilized norms. This is especially true when this practice has affected the admissions of those local students who want to join universities purely on educational merit.

Due to these schools being full of the moneyed foreigners, there isn't a lot of room left for those students that truly deserve to be there. This leads to questions as to what has happened to morals of education system of these countries. While most of the educationists do not subscribe to this policy of admissions, they have, however, been instructed to turn a blind eye and deaf ear to such instances or get ready to lose their positions altogether. These professionals have most likely been threatened with the fact that this money being obtained from these kinds of students is what forms their salaries. Most of these students

from the foreign countries can't speak English well even after they have graduated from a top-notch university. What does this mean for the officials at these institutions? What does this say about the governments that are supposed to be aiding these universities with funds for scholarships and faculty salaries?

This should serve as a sign for all that there is trouble somewhere in these educational structures. Something that is amiss enough to cause illegitimate practices such as these university admissions to these students is appalling. Most universities have admission requirements for those international students that plan to apply at their institution. These guidelines are certainly being ignored in many cases and compromised greatly for the sake of a dollar. The emphasis that these schools are placing on money when it comes to these kinds of students is extreme. Extreme enough that these students are being passed off as something they are not. They leave that school with a supposed hard earned degree that is truly a falsification, an outright lie and obvious deception. The sad fact is that the students that deserve to be in the seats of those universities don't get to be. They are settling for second rate schools that are going to provide them with a second rate education. These are the students that could make positive contributions to society.

The world's very future depends on these kinds of students that are being pushed to wall for the sake of money and more money. These are some of the students that are likely to succeed in these schools, gaining high marks on their own merit without having to flash a buck or two to the right person to get them. The worst case scenario is when these foreign students are passed on to graduation; they are graduating with a deceptive degree. Some of these students end up in the workforce of these countries they attended school at. This spells disaster for some of those infrastructures hiring them. This is especially true of medical fields of these countries, the one place where every single individual involved needs to have true knowledge about

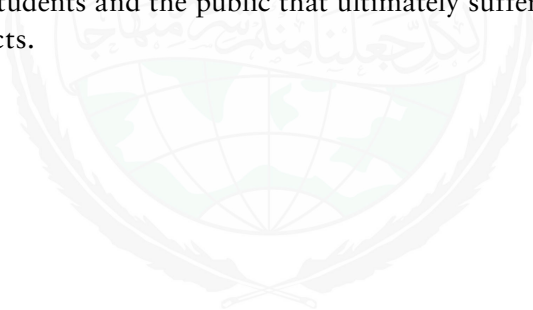
what they are performing as a job in medicine. How can these universities expect the economies to be run efficiently when they are turning out students that are fouling up the workforce with unacceptable performances in the very fields they hold a bachelor's degree in? Consider the number of law suits due to this fact. Another grey area in the admission system of foreign universities is that certain developing countries like Pakistan have forged educational partnerships with the top universities of the world. They send the students having poor educational track records, selected through spurious process, for higher education to these universities whose stupendous cost is paid by the taxpayers.

These students 'outsource' their research work and other assignments and thus are able to get good grades. Upon returning to their countries, they hold important positions. One can well imagine the disaster caused to public interest in the entire process. This writer also has practical experience of coming across a group of Pakistan students who were sent to Australia to get higher education. Majority of them were not able to write even a single correct sentence in English. There is a need to formulate Standard Operating Procedures to ensure that the deserving students get to the top universities through a sound process of selection. There are many of these kinds of lawsuits present in the field of medicine. The rising number of law suits being argued over in the courts due to reckless judgments by those who are supposed to be prolific in their fields is a waste of money and an additional factors in a failing economies.

The average person could visit a hospital in any of these countries and find a doctor from China or India. While some of these professionals may really be proficient in their field and actually know what they are doing, there are a lot at the same time that graduated from schools that didn't care what kind of grades they actually made; they were going to pass anyway.

The problem is being able to choose the professionals that have a real education through earning through studying not by paying the educators off. Concerning the field of medicine, choosing wrong could mean serious consequences for someone innocent. The big question is how to find the ways to stop these illegal and immoral university admissions. Does there have to be a planted spy in every university admissions office or can the officials at these schools face their governments for the monetary support they need to be able to operate efficiently?

If you or someone you know is applying for admission into any university, you should stop and ask someone there on the top of ladder just how many US, UK, Australia, International Students are admitted without having educational merit. Maybe then these officials would realise how unfair the game is that they are playing in the educational system. It is the capable students and the public that ultimately suffer from the aftereffects.



DRUGS ADDICTION AND THE YOUTH

[Jun. 20, 2010; The Frontier Post]

[Jun. 20, 2010; The Post]

Drugs addiction is harmful not only for the addicted but also has negative impact on the fabric of the society. The effects of such an addiction can cause dangerous changes in the mind, body and spirit of the drug addict. The most disturbing aspect of drug addiction is that it is reaching epidemic proportions in the whole world. People in our part of the world are increasingly becoming addicted to all kinds of drugs including street drugs and prescription drugs etc.

Street drugs include cocaine, heroin and crack, marijuana and meth, while prescription drugs include those such as Valium, OxyContin, Percocet and Ritalin etc. The price of drugs can be very heavy. Simple ill-effects of such addiction include physical itchiness, coma and even premature death. On the other hand, the psychological ill effects can make a person completely dependent on taking drugs in order to survive.

Drugs addiction is a very serious problem and even if the addict is using prescribed drugs, the ill effects can be very harmful indeed. It is, therefore, important that the government takes administrative, legal and policy measures that put an end to the menace of drug addiction. The right kind of information can help the addict avoid overdosing and it can also prevent medical-related complications.

The ill effects of addiction to drugs can be very difficult to endure, which is why the addict must be treated for their condition at the earliest. A lot of research is being done on how

addiction to drugs harms people and societies. An individual that takes drugs will expect certain changes to take place in his being.

In the US, addiction to drugs is quite widespread. One study on this problem revealed that one in every five American aged between sixteen and fifty nine had used at least one drug. What's more is that about half (46 percent) of Americans, aged between 16 and 21, admitted having used drugs in different phases of their life. Even more worrying is the fact that approximately twenty million people, aged above twelve years, have used illegal drugs in the US. In fact, about 1.47 percent of Americans are addicted to drugs.

North America, which includes US and Canada and even Mexico, has a major drugs addiction problem. The problem is no less dangerous in Central America where countries such as Belize, Guatemala and Nicaragua are major centres for drug abuse.

Drugs addiction in Pakistan is no less worrisome. Though its neighbours (India, Bangladesh and Maldives as well as Nepal) all have drugs addiction issues, Pakistan is the worst affected throughout South Asia. It is, after all, home to the largest market for heroin consumption. What's more, Pakistan is also a major exporter of heroin and, in fact, approximately fifty tons of opium is illegally brought into Pakistan to produce heroin.

Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and even Sri Lanka all have major issues with use of drugs. Afghanistan, for example, has about 28,513,677 drug addicts, while Bangladesh has 141, 340, 476 addicts. India has a staggering 1,065, 070,607 drug users, while Pakistan has 159, 196, 336 addicts.

The worst thing about being addicted to drugs is that it is affecting the youth in every part of the world in a major way. The trouble starts among the school-going children but the

problem is exacerbated with abetment by those who wish to earn money out of selling drugs.

The problem among children and youth arises because of a perception that they seem to harbour the notion of their inadequacy for failing to measure up to their expectations of their elders. Nowadays it has become fashionable for the actors and singers to include tales of drugs addiction and sexual references in their music. So instead of inculcating good values in the youth, the entertainment industry is responsible for propagating the use of drugs, which is further fuelling the addiction to drugs in both the developed and developing world.

The youth has become the target of major drug peddlers. These peddlers sell drugs and package them as symbols of revolution and freshness but have no regard for the consequences of their actions. The youth that takes to drugs are more likely to commit suicide because of the harmful effects of the drugs they are taking. Misinformation about drugs is another reason for these deaths as the addict or user may take the drugs in wrong doses, which can then lead to a fatality.

Drugs addiction among the youth is killing them morally and socially as well as psychologically and even physically. And, drug barons are becoming increasingly wealthier by supplying these drugs that are causing untold misery.

It is time that societies and governments took a firmer view about preventing and stopping drugs addiction. There should be a community plan that should be implemented to stop addiction to drugs. This plan must identify the specific drugs that youth are using. It should build on existing resources such as existing drug abuse prevention programmes and it should also develop short-term goals relevant to proper implementation of research-based drug abuse prevention programmes.

In addition, the community plan must project its long-term objectives to ensure that resources are made available and in addition, the community plan must also incorporate ongoing

assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of their preventive measures and strategies.

In fact, all preventive measures need to address different forms of drug abuse and addiction and should also target different types of drug abuse and addictions. It should also be tailored to address risks that are specific to certain populations or audience characteristics. It must be aimed at specific populations and at major transition points such as at middle-school level.

Unless serious measures are taken now, the very future of a large chunk of today's youth will be severely compromised. The problem of drug addiction is too real and serious to be ignored. The governments need to involve communities and media in highlighting the perils associated with the drug addiction. Media has a responsibility to highlight such issues with a view to educating people and building a consensus among them to forge a united stand against such scourges.

The perpetrators of doom and gloom are well entrenched in the power structures and have formed transnational partnerships for their nefarious purposes. The response to deal with such an organized menace should also be concerted for effective output. It calls for sustained engagement and coordinated action among countries. Individual efforts cannot produce desired results. For how long shall we turn a blind eye to such critical issues? It is now time to be responsible in our actions.

DEALING WITH WATER CHALLENGE

[Jun. 23, 2010; The Frontier Post]

Wars related to water have been fought from the very earliest times. In fact, the earliest such war was fought way back in the year 3000 BC and from that time to the present these wars have been fought in various parts of the world on account of various water related issues. Wars between India and Pakistan have occurred quite regularly with the first of them being fought during the period 1947-1948. Wars between India and Pakistan have mainly been fought over getting control over Kashmir and have usually begun without the aggressor formally declaring war. The only exception was when India had to go into East Pakistan to support secessionist demands in the then East Pakistan. This war was fought in 1970 and led to the surrender of Pakistani forces and the independence of a new country called Bangladesh. Currently, the two sides are not at war but it is believed that the next India-Pakistan war will be fought over water shortages in Pakistan. If, as estimates suggest, both nations during the period 2018 and 2020 experience monsoon failures, then there could be a war between India and Pakistan, which will have been parched.

The demand for water throughout the world continues to rise and when demand exceeds supply there is a risk that shortage of water will compel nations to go to war with each other. In fact, over fifty countries, spread across five continents, are at a risk of being involved in wars that will arise on account of water disputes. This is why the need of the hour is for these countries to move as quickly as possible to agree to terms on

sharing of reservoirs as well as rivers and even underground water resources. Conflicts and wars related to water disputes may soon emerge on a number of different geographical scales. The international community needs to address certain factors to help lower tensions among countries that may easily go to war on account of water conflicts. Water as we all know is essential to our survival and it is also required for different human activities including for use in agriculture and industry as well as for generating power and even for transportation of goods and people.

About ten percent of water is used for domestic purposes, twenty percent is used in industries and the remaining seventy percent is used for agriculture. Water also holds symbolic and emotional value and is needed to maintain the ecosystem as well. When there is pressure on supply of fresh water because of reasons such as a growing population and economic development, this water becomes scarce and this scarcity can then be the reason for a war or other profound consequence. From the very beginning of history, water has been a major reason why wars among nations have been fought. These wars are fought on various levels including on the local level, national level, international and even global levels. Each level is linked with the other and interventions that affect one level will impact the other levels. In addition, factors such as socio-economic, political and cultural also play a role that can lead to conflicts and increase in tensions. Some of the reasons why wars related to water can be and have been fought also include improper allocation as well as use of water. This precious commodity is also vital to production of food which alone accounts for seventy percent of water withdrawals. Fortunately, at present, the world has sufficient supply of water to take care of its population.

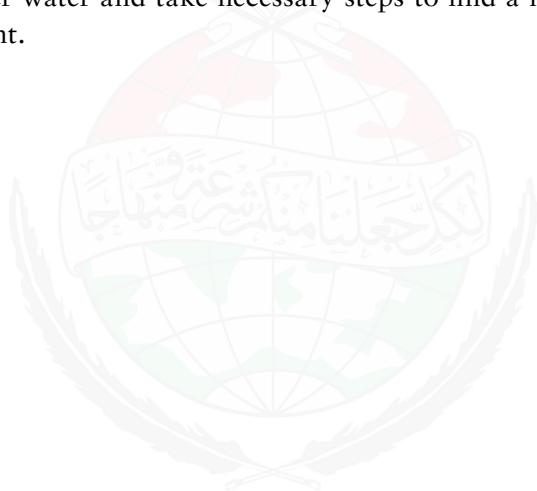
However, water scarcity is a threat to mankind and this scarcity can be physical as is witnessed in regions such as North

Africa and the Middle East. It can also be an economic scarcity as is happening in Sub Saharan Africa. Water can also be used as a military tool in which water resources are used by one country as a weapon during military actions. It can also be used as a political tool to achieve political goals. Water can also be used by terrorists to conduct violent acts and to coerce nations to do what they (the terrorists) want. Even countries such as America and Canada that have abundant water resources often come into conflict because certain regions in the respective countries experience shortage of water. Canadians are known to use up double the amount of water as compared to an average European. Such factors show that water consumption in all of North America tends to be very high. Almost seventy five percent of Canadians depend on surface water supply and the remaining twenty five percent depend on ground water. Since both of these sources are under threat, it has increased the possibility of water conflicts in these regions too.

In 2007, Canada was struck by terrorism related to use of bottled water. In the same year, terrorism was the reason for another conflict related to water. In 2008, China launched its own crackdown of Tibetan dissidents. This is because Tibet holds water resources that are vital for China which wants to control this resource to safeguard its own interests. Given the impending danger of water scarcity in the South Asian region, the observers of regional scene have hinted at the possibility of next clash between Pakistan and India on the water issue. Tensions have already been simmering between both countries over Pakistan's allegation of its water theft by India. The Pakistani authorities are of the view that Indian construction of dams on rivers, whose waters Pakistan is authorized to use, violates the Indus Water Basin Treaty signed by both countries in 1960 brokered by the World Bank.

There have been mutual exchanges of high-powered delegations aimed at sharing information and removing the

‘misunderstandings’ but no solution has emerged so far. The water issue has become so critical that political parties across the border have started using it in order to project their political interests by playing to the gallery. The international community needs to preempt the danger to global peace that may emanate from the water conflicts. It needs to pool its resources and offer solutions to cope up with the challenge. It would be pertinent if the United Nations includes water on its agenda and formulates a comprehensive strategy in that regard. It needs to identify the ‘sore regions’ that are likely to get involved in any sort of clash over water and take necessary steps to find a negotiated settlement.



REVIEWING AMERICAN SECURITY STRATEGY

[Jun. 26, 2010; The Frontier Post]

[Jun. 27, 2010; Pakistan Observer]

The election of Democratic candidate, Barack Obama, to the US presidency in 2008 signaled a change in the American foreign policy. During his election campaign, President Obama made all the right vibes and touched the relevant chords. His election slogan, change, inspired hopes among the Americans at home and the millions of people in the rest of the world who looked in Obama's person a deliverer. The US president's maiden speech after oath-taking and his subsequent address in Cairo promised the beginning of a new chapter with the Muslim world 'based on shared values and common interests'. Obama acknowledged that the relations between US and the Muslims had touched all time low under President Bush and there was a need to reverse the tide in the greater interest of global peace and harmony in the world.

Underscoring the importance of giving State Department a superior role over the hawkish Pentagon, President Obama appointed his two special envoys for Pakistan-Afghanistan and the Middle East. In a marked departure from the Bush era's national security strategy, which was characterized by the policy of preemption, the Obama administration has come up with a new strategy. The 31-page National Security Strategy Paper of the Bush era identified the potential areas of threat to the US. 'The regions where technology and fundamentalism

met' were put on the hot spot of the US security calculus. "We cannot defend America and our friends by hoping for the best...In the new world we have entered, the only path to peace and security is the path of action," said the Bush era's NSS document.

In a manifest contrast to this military-led doctrine of the Bush administration, the new National Security Strategy (NSS) of President Obama is conciliatory in tone and realistic in substance. It reiterates the US' commitment to ideals of free market economy, liberalism and democracy. 'To succeed, we must face the world as it is,' is the opening line of the document. The new NSS recognizes the fact that it is not within the control of a single country to shape the global order and that Washington would pursue rule-based international system in cooperation with the rest of the world. Thus the policy of preemption stands replaced by that of engagement. "While the use of force is sometimes necessary, we will exhaust other options before war whenever we can, and carefully weigh the costs and risks of action against the costs and risks of the inaction," says the report. 'Enlightened self-interest' has been marked as the basis of engagement with the world.

In order to ensure the US supremacy, the new NSS emphasizes the importance of economy. The current fiscal deficit of \$ 1.5 trillion spells a danger to the US economy and there is a strong realization that this burgeoning fiscal deficit needs be narrowed down. In other words, it calls for reversing the policy of 'outreach', that is responsible for ever increasing public spending on wars outside the US. The exact amount that the industrial-military complex under President managed to spend on its Iraq and Afghanistan misadventures is simply staggering. The situation becomes even more hostile in the wake of the global recession that hit the US and entire Europe and from whose aftermath the world including the US has yet to recover fully.

Another area of departure from the rotten policies of the Bush era is the acknowledgement that militant organizations who are engaged in a fight with the world community do not represent political Islam. The fact that no religion including Islam sanctions violence against anyone is welcome. While defeating and dismantling Al-Qaeda and its affiliates remains the major US goal, the report identifies Pakistan and Afghanistan as the core of the terrorist organization. In order to accomplish its declared objective, the incumbent US administration seeks to diversify the ambit of its engagement with Islamabad encompassing several areas.

The Pak-US Strategic Dialogue, whose status has been upgraded to the level of foreign ministers, represents an effort from both sides to concretize the relationship. While the military aspect of the relationship continues to remain important, it is the cooperation in non-military areas that is the chief highlight and matter of immense importance.

All in all, the new National Security Strategy Report seeks to make amends for the policy failures of last eight years of the Bush era. However, the real challenge lies in turning the intent into policy action. Obama's performance during his stint in power falls short of the needful. Other than stabilizing the US economy in the aftermath of the global crunch, the US president does not any feather to his cap in the realm of foreign policy. The Middle East continues to burn with Israel choosing to violate the international law with abandon. Islamabad and New Delhi are still locked in a position of no dialogue. Afghanistan is as volatile as it was on Obama's taking over of the presidency. What options Pakistan has in the fast-changing situation after the launching of new NSS is the subject I plan to write on in my next column.

DEEPENING OF AFGHAN QUAGMIRE

[Jul. 11, 2010; The Frontier Post]

[Jul. 17, 2010; Pakistan Observer]

The unceremonious exit of General Stanley MacChrystal, the commander of the American forces in Afghanistan, shows a deepening mess the US increasingly finds itself in, in what has been termed as ‘graveyard of empires’. While the sacking of the top American commander in Afghanistan testifies to the long-held principle of military’s subservience to the civilian control, it also shows that the Obama’s much trumpeted ‘surge and exit’ strategy declared in December 2009 with a lot of fanfare suffers from serious flaws. The policy, which was meant to reflect President Obama’s vision in the arena of foreign policy aimed at realizing his slogan of ‘change’, appears to have been formulated with a reactive mindset.

As the analysts have pointed out, the policy represents a mix of surge strategy championed by now disgraced General MacChrystal and ‘limited operations’ approach espoused by Vice President Joe Biden. In striking a balance between the civilian and military viewpoints on how to approach the endgame in Afghanistan, President Obama tried to please both camps through selective ‘pick and choose’ approach. He did order a surge of 30, 000 US soldiers in Afghanistan against the demand of 40,000 to strengthen the planned US offensive against the now resurgent Taliban in the Kandahar province. Coupled with the surge was the President’s declaration of timeframe i.e. July 2011 for the withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan. One major flaw that the strategy suffered

and whose consequences have clearly been laid bare much to the detriment of the sole superpower of the world is that the military component still dictated the political approach, while the fact remains that this must have been other way round. The Obama administration hoped that its planned surge would enable the US and NATO forces to launch a decisive military action against the Taliban and consequently break their back in Kandahar province, the Taliban stronghold. Following the military success, the US would then be in a dictating position on the negotiating table vis-à-vis the Taliban. It would then set the terms of engagement and make the Taliban comply with the US' demands. It was taken for granted that the US and NATO would be able to achieve military victory easily. This presumption was against the logic of set norms of warfare and defied the military history. The US authorities should have known better given their experience of fighting a full fledged war against the Taliban since 2001. The dynamics of guerilla war should also have been taken into consideration besides the peculiar characteristics of terrain, weather conditions and strength of the enemy.

The second major flaw of the US exit strategy is that it relied too much on the Karzai administration and the quality of governance that it offered to the people of Afghanistan. It was also assumed that the 1,34,000 strong Afghan forces would be equipped with requisite training and resources by July 2011 enabling them to take over the control of the security in a phased manner. In making such an assessment, the ethnic composition of the Afghan army, which drew majority of its personnel from non-Pakhtun pockets, was ignored. Despite having been in power for good nine years or so, President Karzai has failed to deliver goods. He still carries the stigma of being an American lackey, his contrary utterances notwithstanding. The writ of his government does not extend beyond the Afghan capital and he needs the American security for his own safety. His

government has miserably failed in giving any relief to the poor Afghans who continue to suffer at the hands of the Taliban, the US forces and the Karzai government simultaneously. Corruption is a buzzword everywhere. There is no doubt about the fact that the international aid, which is meant to alleviate sufferings of the Afghan people, has been ending up in the pockets of the warlords whose support is a critical factor for the longevity of the Afghan president. Hamid Karzai's election to the presidency was marred by serious allegations of rigging and malpractices.

Marja was supposed to serve as a model of counterinsurgency before the launch of formal operation against the Taliban in Kandahar. The operation failed to progress the way it was thought to be. The battle for Marja exposed the limitations of the American strategy. The local support, which was to play a leading role in the success of war effort, was nowhere in sight. The outcome of the Marja experience compelled the US authorities to delay the launch of formal offensive against the Taliban.

Michael Hastings, the author of Rolling Stone article, made a very telling remark about the direction of the US strategy: "Whatever the nature of the new plan (for Kandahar), the delay underscores the flaws of counterinsurgency. After nine years of war, the Taliban simply remain too strongly entrenched for the US military to openly attack. The very people that COIN (counterinsurgency) seek to win over—the Afghan people—do not want us there. Our supposed ally, President Karzai, used his influence to delay the offensive and the massive aid championed by McChrystal is likely to make things worse."

The American exit strategy also failed on another count: the Pakistan factor. There is no denying the fact and even the US authorities have admitted it that the road to peace in Afghanistan goes through Islamabad. Seemingly Pakistan's input was said to be part of the US strategy but practically

the Obama administration has not departed any radically from his predecessor's policies vis-à-vis Pakistan. In continuation of President Bush's deep-rooted partnership with India, which reflected itself in the form of Civil Nuclear deal with New Delhi giving it waiver from the stringent conditionalities of Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG), the Obama administration has stayed the course. Despite Pakistan being a frontline ally in war against terrorism, discriminatory treatment is being meted out to it on behalf of the US on the question of civil nuclear deal with Islamabad. The increase of drone strikes within Pakistan has also angered the people of Pakistan who have sacrificed immensely for war on terror. The efforts of the US to ensure a role for India in Afghanistan once it pulls out its forces have not gone well with the Pakistani establishment. Pakistan remains wary of the US' intentions.

The American 'surge and exit' strategy is in deep trouble on the above mentioned counts. The foundation-stone upon which the edifice of the policy was erected is shaky to say the least. It calls for a serious review, which is synchronized with reality. Two wrongs cannot make right.

UNDERSTANDING ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

[Jul. 17, 2010; Business Recorder]

[Jul. 30, 2010; The Frontier Post]

Global economic integration, a generally rising trend, does not constitute a new phenomenon. Even during ancient times, communication and trade occurred between distant civilisations. Since Marco Polo's travels, global economic integration included communication of economically useful knowledge and technology, factor movements and trade.

Even though the globalisation process in the economic domain routinely experienced challenges as well as occasional interruptions, such as the period following the collapse of the Roman Empire or this century's inter-war period, sometimes it did not benefit all of those it affected. Nevertheless, among different societies around the world, the degree of economic integration has regularly risen.

The pace of economic globalisation has reportedly been particularly rapid during the past half century. There are three fundamental factors that currently affect the process of economic globalisation and are predicted to continue driving it in the future. First, improvements in the technology of transportation and communication have reduced the costs of transporting goods, services, and factors of production and of communicating economically useful knowledge and technology. Second, the tastes of individuals and societies have generally, but not universally, favoured taking advantage of the

opportunities provided by declining costs of transportation and communication through increasing economic integration.

Third, public policies have significantly influenced the character and pace of economic integration, although not always in the direction of increasing economic integration. The previous three fundamental factors, which influenced the pattern and pace of economic integration in important dimensions, include the three significant dimensions of economic integration: human migration, trade in goods and services and movements of capital and integration of financial markets.

The term economic integration may be interpreted in two senses. The more usual sense is that economic integration constitutes the process by which member states gradually eliminate economic frontiers between themselves, eg, abolishing national discrimination between integration partners, with the previously disconnected national economic entities progressively merging into a larger whole. “In a static sense, it is the situation, in which national components of a larger economic zone function together as one entity.”

The economic frontiers between independent states result in the economies of these states ultimately functioning as one entity, albeit economic integration does not serve as an objective by itself. Instead, it aims to serve higher objective; both economically and politically.

The Business Dictionary.com (2009) defines economic integration simply as “elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers to the flow of goods, services, and factors of production between a group of nations, or different parts of the same nation”.

Molle asserts that the following potential factors may also relate to economic integration:

1. **Economic Welfare:** The prosperity of all participating countries is enhanced by overcoming the inefficiencies of

nationally segmented economies through specialisation of production and through co-operation in policy making, the two basic elements of economic integration.

2. Peace and Security: When countries become dependent upon each other as a result of economic integration, this reduces the chance of armed conflicts between them.

3. Democracy: If participation in a group that brings benefits through integration is made conditional on the existence of a parliamentary form of democracy, it is less likely that attempts to overthrow this system of government in a member country will stand much chance of a success.

4. Human Rights: In much the same way, the respect for human rights may be safeguarded if this is set as a precondition for participation in a scheme for economic integration.

Economic integration is generally achieved through an evolutionary process of regional co-operation. The most outstanding example is the European Union (EU), which after achieving near-complete economic union, is seriously debating about a political union. In the Americas, the most important regional grouping is the North America Free Trade Area (NAFTA).

The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) is the most successful economic grouping in Asia. These groupings are better positioned than individual countries to exploit opportunities offered by the rapid globalisation of the world economy.

Under the WTO arrangements, these Regional Trading Arrangements (RTAs) are viewed as complements to multilateral free trade. Under the Article XXIV of General Agreement of Tariff and Trade (GATT), regional economic integration agreements are permissible provided that the resulting liberalisation of trade among the countries in the group takes

place without raising the pre-existing tariffs against third countries.

Economic Co-operation Organisation (ECO) aims to promote economic, technical, and cultural co-operation among its member states. Origins of the ECO may be found in its forerunner, the Regional Co-operation for Development (RCD), founded in 1964, with the ECO's identical goals and working procedure. The activities of ECO are organised through the eight working groups or technical committees in the fields of economic and commercial co-operation, transport and communications, agriculture, energy, infrastructure and public works, narcotics, educational, scientific and cultural matters.

At the 1992 ECO summit, a very limited system of tariff preferences among member countries was agreed, establishing a 10% reduction on specific tariff lines. The agreement was initially for four years, but would be automatically extended for further periods of two years each.

The ECO summit of 1993 adopted a decision to establish the ECO Development Bank as well as a joint insurance company for shipping and airlines. These global organisations, representing different regions, aim to integrate their member countries in structured economic frameworks for the attainment of the optimal results. The fast-changing geo-strategic imperatives have also made it incumbent upon the world community to protect and promote their interests through regional partnerships.

THEY FAIL US AGAIN!

[Aug. 23, 2010; Pakistan Observer]

[Aug. 24, 2010; The Frontier Post]

As more than 20 million Pakistanis battle for survival amid the raging floods, the country's politicians across political divide have left no stone unturned to prove that they have not learnt any lesson from their past mistakes and remain adamant on repeating and reinforcing the same mistakes. Since Pakistan lurches from one crisis to the other, the political elite ends up betraying manifest signs of incompetence, intellectual bankruptcy and accumulation of maximum benefits to the total neglect of their electorates. There is an increasing level of public disappointment with the conduct of its elected leaders. The recent floods afforded political brigade an opportunity to make mid-course correction and take charge in the rescue and relief operations by rising above their political differences. As the floods continued to engulf more and more areas, the leadership vacuum developed gradually. Once again our politicians failed to rise to the challenge and allowed the initiative to slip in the hands of other players.

A classic case of political considerations getting the better of effective management of the flood operations pertains to the shelving of otherwise sound proposal of setting up an independent 'Flood Relief Commission' composed of people having above board credibility. The situation becomes more exacerbated after the proposal was agreed to in principle by the country's chief executive. One explanation of why behind the door pressure was brought to bear on the prime minister to do

away with the idea is that perhaps the step might have held the government guilty of incompetence and financial impropriety. Instead of looking into the causes of why the people at home and international community abroad remain skeptical about the credentials of the government, the PPP's top leadership's resort to killing the idea smacks of bad politics and bad judgment.

Yet another example of politicians' kowtowing to the Khakis and demonstration of subservient role in the power calculus relates to the grant of extension to the Army Chief for another three years. After taking initial steps in the right direction, the political leaders allowed the initiative of spearheading the country's fight against terrorism and homegrown extremism to go into the hands of the security establishment, which has been the sole in-charge of anti-terrorism operations. Following the government's taking over in 2008, the military waited for leadership by the political government on how to execute the war on terror. That leadership vacuum was then gradually filled in by the military itself because of the government's and by extension politicians' lack of vision and absence of effective counterterrorism strategy. By and by, the security establishment became the custodian and navigator of Pakistan's policy vis-à-vis India, Afghanistan and the US. This explains why the top American and NATO leaders have made it a point to pay a visit to the General Headquarters for 'serious business', for they know as to who has the final say on the strategic matters. The 3-year extension to the Army Chief by the democratic government reaffirms the military's preeminence in the power equation.

One more example of politicians' stark failure to go by the book and run the business of the state smoothly was their inability to resolve the judicial crisis in accordance with their promises with the nation. The Army Chief's no so covert role in impressing upon the PPP-led government the need of restoring the Chief Justice and other sacked judges of the Supreme Court

thereby stalling the menacing Long March in 2009 speaks volumes about his distinguished position as the adjudicator in the national affairs. In other words this means that politicians are unable to settle rules of the game and need the 'guidance and leadership of others' manage the state affairs.

In the wake of ongoing target killing in Karachi, which has taken a heavy toll on the people, the government is not serious in the stemming the cruel wave of assassinations out of political considerations. The preference of political interests over national ones by the ruling elite is condemnable. Had government not condoned these actions out of political considerations, it could have deployed rangers and army and ordered it to shoot at sight. Such timely act would have saved numerous lives and valuable property from being destroyed. The message sent across is that people's lives do not matter as long as the politicians' interests are not at stake and they better be on their guard.

If democracy is to survive and be a sustainable process, the politicians need to mend their ways. As long as people remain disempowered and out of the power loop, the system would remain fragile. The political class needs to prove through action, not words that democracy is a better system, which is capable of bringing about real change in the lives of the people. Enough of rhetorical allegiance to democracy! It is about time that politicians seized the initiative and set about their task of ensuring good governance so that people at large develop ownership of the system.

THE DEVASTATING FLOODS THAT CONTINUE TO SWEEP THROUGH ALL

[Aug. 24, 2010; The Post]

The devastating floods that continue to sweep through all the four provinces of Pakistan including AJK have left behind stories of miseries, pain and anguish. According to the UN assessment, the total damage done by these floods is more than the combined devastation of the Tsunami in 2004 and earthquake 2005, which rocked KP and AJK. In his urgent dash to Islamabad, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon held meetings with the Pakistan leadership to review the flood situation and visited the flood affected areas. The UN has already appealed for \$460m on emergency basis to cope up with the challenge. It warned that in case of slow response, there would be huge humanitarian crisis as around 20 million people face the prospects of starvation, and outbreak of epidemics. There is no denying the fact that nothing can be done to avert the natural disasters. However, it is the rescue and relief phase by which the damage can be minimised and many precious lives saved. This is the area where the government and its leadership has major role to play. It is an unfortunate commentary on the state of affairs in Pakistan that raging floods exposed the inadequacy, incompetence and lack of vision of the ruling elite with the result that millions of people including women and children were left on their own to fend for themselves. Following points are instructive in this regard:

Firstly, the earthquake 2005 brought this lesson home the hard way that the government needed to put in place a swift

and state of the art damage control mechanism with trained personnel to cope up with any natural disaster in future. As the recent tragedy shows that when the floods started inundating cities and villages, the government sat inactive not knowing what to do. The havoc caused by raging floods and monsoon downpour could have been minimised had the state equipped itself with state of the art rapid response mechanism. But the ruling elite whether in the government or opposition, seemed to have different priorities. In the wake of devastating earthquake 2005, our government should have focused on acquiring modern gadgets and training rescue personnel to help people in case natural tragedies struck in future. People are justified in concluding that our political parties and governments are more interested in finding ways and means to perpetuate themselves in power. They give a damn to what happens to people. A country that prides itself on being the seventh nuclear power of the world does not have the equipment to cut stones and trees as was evident during the search operations following the unfortunate air crash of Air Blue plane in the Margalla Hills.

Secondly, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is the only federal agency responsible for spearheading the relief and rescue efforts and coordinating the same with the provincial governments. Given the magnitude of the flood disaster, NDMA is simply ill equipped to undertake the operations in a befitting manner. There is a dire need of upgrading the status of this Authority to make it more responsive and efficient to meet the future challenges.

Thirdly, there has been a marked lack of coordination and cooperation between the provincial and federal governments during the recent floods. This resulted in dissipation of energy, duplication of functions and wastage of resources with little output and more miseries for the suffering people.

Fourthly, despite the fact that the MET office had predicted unusual monsoon rains this year, the warning was not taken

seriously by the government. Had there been a proper system of information collection, analysis and its dissemination to the relevant quarters, the damage could have been minimised. Perhaps it is not in sync with the mindset of our officialdom which believes in acting once the tragedy strikes.

Fifthly, there is a systematic flaw in the response pattern of the government. It has been well over many months since the local government system was disbanded but no elections have been held so far. The unimaginative and lousy bureaucrats continue to lord over the district governments. In the absence of a sound and efficient local government system duly represented by elected leaders of people from the grassroots, relief and rescue operations became well-nigh difficult. There was little community mobilisation. The problem would become even more critical once the rehabilitation process kicks off. Sixthly, political class once again showed that the welfare and interests of people are none of their priority. The President's ill-timed and ill-advised trip to the UK and France to launch the political career of his son was symbolic of indifference politicians have for their electorate. Both mainstream parties resorted to 'flood politics' and traded blames aimed at deriving political mileage out of the human tragedy of the gigantic proportions. The occasion demanded that political parties of all hues and colours should have forgotten politics and converted their grassroots representation into a huge force of volunteers to help the people stranded in water.

Couple this disdain for the lives of common people with the criminal official inaction in Karachi, Pakistan's financial hub. While the target killing spurred on by the murder of a local MPA was name of the game, the state was totally absent. Both federal and provincial governments chose not to intervene out of political considerations. The message sent to people was loud and clear that they matter little in the calculations of the political elite for whom capturing power at any and every cost

remains the top most priority. Mmedia again played major role in exposing the follies and lack of inaction of the government. Media's outreach to and reporting from the far-flung and unheard-of areas forced the governments to act reactively. Also contrast abysmal performance of political brigade with the rescue and relief operations carried by the Pakistan's army, Navy and Air Force and result would be crystal clear.

Our government needs to work out concrete rehabilitation plans that may be presented to the international community. The foreign missions of Pakistan have a huge role to play in awakening the local and expatriate community to the reality of tragedy in the country, thereby urging them to come forward and contribute their bit. Above all, the government needs to deal with the questions of credibility and trust so that the money and donations could be channelised for the benefit of its end-users. The government's belated decision of establishing a national commission to oversee the spending of aid money is a good step.

At least, it would ensure transparency and proper use of money. Once relief and rescue operations are over, the government needs to be get busy over plugging the visible lacunae in the response system and coming up with a national disaster management policy. The people of Pakistan deserve better.

A CASE FOR NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT

[Aug. 30, 2010; The Frontier Post]

Pakistan's otherwise serene political scene has been ignited by the statement of a leading political party's chief wherein he asked the 'patriotic generals' to step in for the sake of poor people and bring an end to hereditary and feudalistic politics. The fact that MQM he heads from the overseas is an important coalition partner of Pakistan People's Party, both at the federal and provincial levels, has added a serious dimension to the debate. This has led both mainstream political parties i.e. PPP and PML-N to get together in condemnation of the statement and promote a collective cause for the sake of democracy. Whatever be the intentions of the MQM chief behind this statement, he has, however, highlighted the serious deficit so-called democracy suffers from.

The fact that the present version of democracy currently in vogue in the country cannot make a bit of difference to the lives of millions of people even if allowed to function for a hundred years cannot be denied. It is true that it is too early to comment on the efficacy and potential of the system to deliver if seen in the background of the country's political history where powerful military kept on holding the reign of power for more than half of our national life. The argument that democracy should be given time and space to improve itself also holds water in the light of our political experience. But the crisis Pakistan and its governance structures suffer from calls for serious and in-depth introspection on part of all the stakeholders. It needs to be acknowledged that luxury of time

is not available to the political elite as people have continued to be exploited at the hands of vested interests for the last 63 years with the result that they have come to the end of their tether with their frustration and anger ready to burst. As if man-made disasters were not enough, two successive natural calamities i.e. earthquake of 2005 and massive floods struck them unawares in a period of five years.

Couple it with the protracted periods of corruption and bad governance and it becomes a perfect recipe for potential disaster. People have continuously been reminded of the fact every now and then that state is either unwilling or incapable of coming to their rescue. More worrisome than these instances of public outcry at the apathy of the government is the creeping hold of sub-identities over the national identity. The recent incidents show for yet another time that ethnic, linguistic, provincial, racial and sectarian narratives have come to characterize the polity. Individuals and groups are not ready to rise above their parochial interests by conforming to the mainstream narrative of 'Pakistaniyat'.

This lack of national integration and unwillingness to subject the sub-national identities to the mainstream national identity is the mother of all crises facing Pakistan. What is more, the country's intelligentsia, political elite and the so-called establishment who have been running roughshod over the fate of the country do not seem to realise the potential dangers associated with this phenomenon. They are busy in their usual political games of power. The unending spate of target killings in the country's financial hub, Karachi, has been subjected to a clear ethnic tinge. Karachi has traditionally been characterized by the turf war between members of different ethnicities but the way dozens of people were eliminated in a span of a few days speaks volumes of the penetration of violence in the city. The ongoing infighting and accompanying riots have rightly been billed as the survival struggle on part of the warring ethnic

groups to ‘preserve their territory’ and save it from intrusion by others. Couple this with the unfortunate incident of public lynching of two brothers in Sialkot city of Punjab and you would come to know how powerful and deep rooted violence narrative has become. One very cogent explanation of why the phenomenon of terrorism and extremism refuses to go away is the absence of any alternative ideology. It is primarily a battle of ideas. An idea can be killed and replaced by a superior idea.

All other steps to stem the onward march of poisonous ideology are merely superficial in nature and cannot achieve durable results. Those ready to kill and get killed in the process are fired by the missionary zeal. A comprehensive victory against the extremist forces can be won after the idea producing such perverted mindsets is defeated. Unfortunately, the counter-terrorism strategy employed by the government seems to ignore this important area with emphasis placed on the use of physical force and economic development. The only way we can deal with these lethal crises is to revive the ideology of Pakistan as a counterweight to the forces of extremism and terrorism. Jinnah’s and Iqbal’s conception of a moderate, progressive Islamic welfare state was overshadowed by the clamour of the rightwing forces for Pakistan to be a theocratic state.

The official patronage provided to this particular brand of religious zealots by the former military dictator in the 1980s played havoc with our national identity and explains why narrative of extremism characterizes Pakistan. This writer strongly believes that our educational system requires a comprehensive overhauling aimed at reminding our youth of their real roots. This cannot happen unless the entire syllabi is carefully sifted and modifications made thereof. Emergence of national unity and pride on our common heritage can work wonders in the face of heavy odds.

Our political brigade also needs to know that if democracy has to survive as a system, the politicians need to work it to the

benefit of the common man so that he develops its ownership and is ready to defend it in case of any danger posed to it. Mere rhetorical allegiance to democracy fails to serve any purpose. This calls for revision of social contract between the state and its citizens. For long have the people been suffering at the hands of callous elite. It is about time steps were taken to correct the historical wrongs. There is no time to waste.



STRAY REFLECTIONS

[Sep. 5, 2010; The Frontier Post]

Many people agree that there are things missing from today's world. Selfishness appears to be epidemic at levels. A large chunk of populace seems to be so self-enthralled that they no longer respect anyone else. Many of the values taught by religion may be the only possible recourse. Lost human values may be regained.

There is nothing wrong with working hard to earn money. However, this can sometimes override sense and reasoning. When one places materialistic needs over and above the concerns for others, it denotes general loss for the humanity. A sense of community may vanish entirely. People may have no interest in helping their neighbours. Everyone comes home and remains behind closed doors. They might forget that when they help others, they help themselves in the process.

Perhaps much of the population should take the time to explore their motives. Are charitable deeds done solely for tax purposes? If so, they lose much of their ability to help others. In some cases, someone may give a large sum of money away. It may be simply for the recognition. It is a good thing, yet something is lost in the process. It may not be a good deed, if done for self gain. Much of the money may go to a fund raiser for his new car or house.

Parents are the most important teachers in society. They control whether their children have manners and respect for others. By the time they get into school, it may be too late for teachers to train them otherwise. It is very important to spare

time for children. Remember, you may be old and have trouble getting around, some day. You will want the time and attention of your children. Do not expect it, if you do not have time for them now.

Systems of education are adept at turning out graduates. Many students learn how to get good grades. This means performing well on tests. However, tests may not be a true measure of learning. There are many courses that deal with things that may not carry over into real life. For example, treating people well and adapting to changing situations are lost in the shuffle. There are no degrees in being a good person.

Poverty has been around for a very long time. It is nothing new. There are programs for the underprivileged. However, they do not work. If so, there would be very little poverty around. These programs may not work due to selfishness and motivation. For example, many people wish to do something about the homeless problem. The reason is that they do not wish to see them. There is no real interest in saving or helping these people. They want someone else to deal with them. This passes the problem on and it eventually comes full circle. If everyone honestly helps one needy person, there is a chance that the problem may disappear.

Some may argue that these people cannot be helped. Those same people may have no idea what it is like to suffer that way. Until they do, they may be very hard to convince. This may be traced to the problem of lost human values. This includes apathy, selfishness and lack of concern for others. It is almost impossible to make the majority of the population care about others. Unfortunately, it may take a major catastrophe to convince many.

Most world religions have a common cause. Treat others as you want to be treated by others. This is extremely simple and is still overlooked by most people these days. Perhaps selfishness and uncaring attitudes cloud the thinking process.

Why treat others well? The answer is simple. All things eventually come full circle. The reward of every good deed that one does eventually comes back to visit the doer. In the short term, this seems impossible. Yet, it is a universal law. If everyone helps one person for no apparent reason, it will sweep the world. Why does this not occur? Maybe no one wants to take a chance. No one wants to be the first to take the leap. They do not think that anyone will be there to catch them. There are injustices in the world. However, they may only be a symptom of breaking universal law.

Many people do not admit that there is more to life than they will ever know. There are powers that are far beyond human comprehension. If this is not true, there is no mystery of life. Everything would be perfectly clear. This is not now, nor will it ever be the case. Many things must be taken on faith. There is no other course of action. Denying the truth will not falsify it. Hiding one's head in the sand does not make things go away ostrich-like.

This is why religion is important and should be relevant. It is not important to subscribe to a particular sect or belief system. However, it is important to accept the fact that human beings do not have all of the answers. Some things have to be taken on faith. When this happens, people can start to become part of a greater cause. It may help to end much of the selfishness in the world today.

It is humbling experience to look up at the stars and wonder. You have no idea what they are and where they come from. You can have theories, but they cannot be proven. It is the same with life on earth. No one has the answers. They can only guess. One guess is as good as another. Look at a new born child. Did human beings create that wonder? The answer must be no, as there is no current recipe for babies. People assume that is the way things are.

Religious values have other benefits too. They make people realize that there are repercussions of their actions. This may prevent many crimes and dishonest actions. It is not simply a matter of going to jail, when you do wrong. There are many people who do not find this to be a hindrance. If it is a true hindrance, there would be no overcrowded prison systems. Religious values may be a saving grace for lost human values. They may help to restore respect and a caring attitude. If everyone will treat others properly, many problems may disappear. Before you criticize, condemn, and complain, stop for a moment. Do you want someone doing this to you? Treating others as you want to be treated seems simple. Yet, it may hold the key to a better world for everyone concerned.



CRICKET AS A METAPHOR

[Sep. 18, 2010; Business Recorder]

[Sep. 19, 2010; Pakistan Observer]

The recent developments in respect of Pakistan cricket are not bolt from the blue. They are something known to both the people of Pakistan and the cricketing community for quite sometime. Pakistani cricket team has been lurching from one crisis to the other much to the dismay and disappointment of its countrymen who adore both cricket and the cricketers.

Despite the passage of strict laws by the International Cricket Council, the players have not been deterred from crossing the red line and getting involved in the objectionable activities. While the final outcome of the investigations into the alleged instances of ‘spot fixing’ by the top Pakistani players is yet awaited, it does prove the fact in no uncertain terms that something is fundamentally wrong with structure of the sport in the country, which is mainly responsible for the mess Pakistan’s cricket finds itself in.

On the serious side, Pakistan’s present cricketing predicament presents interesting parallels and is a reflection of the larger malaise, which afflicts the country. If one is interested in knowing as to what ails Pakistan, one can form a clear idea of that by surveying the scene of national cricket and the deep abyss to which the sport has fallen. Following points are instructive in this regard:

As is the case with the cricket and those involved in the game from top to bottom, Pakistani politics also lacks rules of the game. The political players are least bothered about

conducting the affairs of the state amicably through consensus and reconciliation. They are closely tied to their petty, parochial interests and are driven more by personal whims and caprices instead of a value system.

The cricketers' indulgence in suspect activities owes itself to lack of any accountability. In the same way, those wielding political power in the country think that they cannot be held accountable for their misuse of power and mega corruption. There is no independent and credible accountability mechanism in the country and whatever accountability arrangements were put in place by successive political administrations, they were meant to victimise the opposition marked by vendetta and political point-scoring instead of bringing the guilty to justice.

The absence of fear of law has emboldened the so-called political elite to indulge in shady undertakings. The system lacks in-built self-reform procedure with the result that we go back to square one after every 10 years with military stepping in the political arena 'to put things back on track'. It is a different matter that the military rulers end up adding to the country's woes by causing damage to the infant national institutions. Laws are twisted to suit the ends of the high and the mighty.

The cricketers' putting of a tag on their souls and national honour is driven by their unbridled urge to amass more and more sums of money. Likewise, politics has also come to be known as a means to get rich overnight. It has taken the shape of a rewarding business where investment fetches good amount of dividend besides ensuring political clout for the concerned parties. Public service, which is otherwise an integral part and outcome of politics, has become a thing of the past. Politicians misuse public offices to derive all kinds of advantages. The 'money factor' is a motivational force behind all the doings and undoings of our political brigade.

Much of our cricketing woes emanate from the mismanagement and incompetence of those tasked to manage

the affairs of the game. Both the PCB's management and the erring cricketers have established a nexus to cause the demise of the game from Pakistan. Hence there is no accountability of those cricketers who have brought a bad name to both their country as well as game through their objectionable on-the-field and off-the-field activities. 'The players' power' has made the Pakistan Cricket Board helpless before the 'super stars'. In the same way, the erring politicians find themselves on the right side of the 'real power wielders'.

There are all kinds of nexus between political elite and those who matter in the state structure. They protect and advance the interests of one another through such collusion and as a result keep on enjoying the uninterrupted fruits of power. Such a nexus amongst the stakeholders has been a defining feature of the Pakistani politics, which has turned the entire system into one based on patronage and extension of 'mutual' favours.

There is also an interesting parallel between cricket and politics. The 'players of both games' have frustrated the wishes of the teeming millions to whom they owe their present status and stardom. The people of Pakistan have periodically been dismayed and disappointed by the 'performance and conduct' of their 'heroes' who have allowed their narrow interests to dictate their agenda. After getting elected to high offices, politicians give a damn to the wishes and desires of their electorate. They know that going back to masses for votes is merely a ritual shorn of its essence and it is the money and right connections, which matter in the end. This is how narrow self interest has overtaken the public interest, thereby causing loss of faith and confidence in the outcome of both 'sports'.

The above mentioned analysis suffices to make one conclude that we as a nation are bereft of the higher ideals. We are a people without any direction. All departments of our national life are on the downward slippery slope. Our collective ship is caught in the uncharted waters due to blunders of those

whose duty it is to navigate us out of these troubled waters. The cycle of our decadence and degeneration is complete. In 1947, there was a nation, which struggled to create a state for itself. Today after passage of 63 years, we have a state which is in search of a nation. This is not the fate we deserve.



FROM 'TERRORISM' TO FREEDOM STRUGGLE

[Sep. 20, 2010]

In his message to the Congress on August 8, 1950, Harry Truman warned that “once a government is committed to silencing the voice of dissent it has only one way to go. To employ increasingly repressive measures, until it becomes a source of terror to all its citizens and creates a country where everyone lives in fear.” Nothing illustrates the Indian policy vis-a-vis occupied Kashmir better than the above quoted remark of the American leader. Since its forcible occupation of valley of Jammu & Kashmir, the successive Indian governments have employed disproportionate state power to suppress the Kashmiris’ demand for right to self-determination, thereby turning their back on the pledges of Prime Minister Nehru about ascertaining the wishes of the Kashmiri people through a ‘plebiscite.’ The first Indian Prime Minister went to the extent of saying (June 26, 1952) that “India would be prepared to change her constitution if Kashmiris do not want to be with India.”

While held Kashmir’s summer of discontent and oppression enters its third season, the figures of those martyred and injured by the Indian security forces call the Indian bluff of portraying the Kashmir issue as a “domestic problem.” As reported by the Kashmir Media Service, the total number of killings of the Kashmiris in the Indian custody are 72 including 37 men, 4 women and 31 children only in the month of August, thereby taking the death toll to well over 100 since the second Intifada

began this June. More than 1505 people got seriously injured and 20 women were raped by the Indian soldiers. Going by the Indian standards, even Prime Minister Manmohan Singh “was shocked and distressed to see young men and women—even children—joining the protest on the streets.” He asked the Indian authorities to employ “non-lethal” methods and deal with the protest demonstrations “humanely”. This underscores the magnitude of brutality demonstrated by the Indian security forces to muzzle the voice of the Kashmiris who are up against state might armed only with pebbles and stones.

Two cabinet meetings and an All Parties Conference on Kashmir organized by the Indian government on September 15, 2010 failed to produce any political roadmap for resolution to the raging problem. The only thing All Parties Conference agreed on was sending the fact-finding delegation composed of members from all political parties to occupied Kashmir with a view to getting first-hand information as to what caused unrest and turmoil at such a massive scale. The subsequent incentive package offered by the Indian authorities as bait to people of Kashmir has also failed to get any favourable response. Kashmiri leader Syed Ali Geelani was bang on target when he said that the Indian leadership failed to touch the core problem of the unrest. The issue is not economic but political i.e., question of right to self-determination, a point the successive Indian administrations are clueless about.

The civilian uprising of the Kashmiris has caused alarm bells in the Indian establishment besides catching the world community and the Pakistani establishment unawares. While the resilience, courage and fortitude of the people of Kashmir would be chronicled in golden letters to the annals of history, the recent protests are accompanied by unmistakable aspects of the age-old Kashmiri struggle for political right to determine their future. Some points are instructive in this regard:

1. One, the most lethal aftermath of 9/11 was that lines differentiating between freedom struggle and terrorism got blurred. Consequently, freedom struggles being fought in Kashmir and Palestine came to be seen as terrorist campaigns in the western world. What these demonstrations have served to remind the world of is the need for finding solutions to the political questions that involve future of those peoples. The Kashmiris have rewritten the history and washed with their blood the allegations of terrorism raised against their freedom struggle. The world cannot shrug its responsibility anymore by simply portraying these endeavours as reflections and manifestations of terrorism. If the cause of global peace is to be promoted, then addressing the root causes that spawn extremist tendencies is a *sine qua non*.

2. Two, the way protesters have carried on their demonstrations and braved the might of the Indian security forces show that Kashmir is not the 'domestic issue' of India. The shifting of global media spotlight back on atrocities and gross violations of human rights by the Indian security forces has internationalised the Kashmir problem, forcing UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon to urge all sides "to show utmost restraint and address problems peacefully." So unnerved has been the Indian establishment over this mild-worded concern of the UN Secretary General that it dubbed his call for calm as "gratuitous". India has been at pains to point to the international community that Kashmir is a bilateral issue between New Delhi and Islamabad and from this point, it has moved on to describe it as 'domestic issue', thereby forestalling any possibility of international intervention of account of Kashmir being a disputed issue. It is a different matter that pending resolutions of UN Security Council on Kashmir are enough to characterise it as a global issue much to chagrin of New Delhi. The Chinese refusal to grant visa to Lt. General BS Jaswal, chief of the Indian army's northern

command, is also pregnant with implications for the Kashmir dispute.

3. Third and most significant aspect of these protests is their indigenous character. For long India has been trying to implicate Pakistan holding it responsible for the militancy in Kashmir. Pakistani Foreign Minister accurately said that “can Pakistan orchestrate thousands of people? Can Pakistan plan, sitting in Islamabad, a shutdown all over Kashmir?” New York Times has described these protests as “an intifada-like popular revolt”, which signalled “the failure of Indian effort to win the assent of Kashmiris, using just about any tool available; money, elections, and overwhelming force.” What is even more remarkable is that these protests were neither planned nor led by established political parties. It is a youth-led indigenous movement born out of decade-old frustration over subjugation of their rights.

So far the response from the international community to the violations of human rights in Kashmir has been lukewarm. But the world can demonstrate this indifference only to its own peril. Sooner or later, it would come to realize the urgency of making a serious effort for resolution of the Kashmir dispute through a tripartite dialogue under the UN auspices. Nations cannot be kept in shackles of slavery for long when the old and the young take to street for getting their rights. This is the lesson history has imparted time and again.

WILL ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN DIALOGUE SUCCEED?

[Sep. 22, 2010; The Frontier Post]

Finally after a 20-month hiatus, both Israeli and Palestinian leaders are back to the US-brokered face-to-face negotiations that started on the 2nd of September in Washington. The subsequent talks in the presence of US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Egyptian Resort of Sharm el Sheik and in Jerusalem proved yet another time that the core issues—which have defied all attempts at resolution in the past—continue to block the outcome of the recent attempt at peace-making. However, Secretary Clinton expressed optimism about the positive outcome of the negotiations. In an interview with the ABC News channel, Clinton gave voice to US hopes that Israel would extend its partial construction moratorium past a Sept. 30 expiration date. She urged both Palestinian and Israeli leaders to ‘seize the moment of opportunity’ besides describing President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as ‘sincere and serious’ leaders. ‘I would say they’re in a constructive channel and that has been very reassuring to us,’ is how she described the ambiance after her meetings with both leaders.

US special envoy for Middle East, George Mitchell who is a former Senate majority leader from Maine, also echoed the same optimism of his boss when he said that “their common goal remains two states for two peoples, and they’re committed to a solution to the conflict that resolves all issues.” He hoped

that peace talks had the potential of brokering a deal between the both parties within a year.

Despite demonstration of this optimism by the top US officials, situation on the ground paints a very grim picture. Israel continues to stay firm on its decision to resume the construction of houses along West Bank. The 10-month construction moratorium is due to expire on September 30 this month and there are clear indications that Tel Aviv would resume the building activity. Israeli Prime Minister said this in no uncertain terms that “The end of settlement freeze must not be allowed to foil the talks.” So far calls for extension of moratorium for another three months have failed to elicit any positive response from the Israeli side. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak told Israel’s Channel 1 TV “he had raised the idea with Netanyahu to keep the moratorium in place for another three months, hoping to buy time for negotiators to agree on the borders of a Palestinian state.” In the same way, George Mitchell also opposed the Israeli decision to resume the construction activity: “We think it makes sense to extend the moratorium, given that the talks are moving in a constructive direction.”

The traditional obduracy of Benjamin Netanyahu owes itself to the political considerations. The right-wing coalition partners of his administration have threatened to leave the government if construction is not restarted in the West Bank. There is a strong opposition to extending the settlement freeze. Likewise, Mahmoud Abbas is also equally constrained to go ahead with the peace process unless Tel Aviv betrays manifest signs of addressing the Palestinian concerns, which includes placement of ban on establishment of new settlements in the West Bank and an end to siege of Gaza strip. “The president (Mahmoud Abbas) reiterated to Secretary Clinton the Palestinian position regarding the requirements for the continuation of the peace process, specifically the issue of freezing settlement construction

and ending the occupation,' said the spokesman of Palestinian Authority Nabil Abu Rdainah.

While the American engagement in the Middle Eastern crisis was long awaited, it is yet to be seen as to how it would be able to ease out escalating tensions in the region. The last eight years of George W. Bush dealt a severe blow to the image of the US as honest broker. Exploiting the 9/11 catastrophe, the neoconservatives who dominated the administration of President Bush launched a so-called project of 'remaking' the Middle East. Israel was given a predominant role of a sheriff and a lackey ready to do Washington's bidding at the throw of a hat.

Any attempt at resolving the decade-old conflict must take care of the factors which created the problem in the first place. It must aim at addressing the root causes of the issue. The problem with various negotiations brokered by the US is that they have tended to deal with the symptoms or outcome of the problem, not its root cause, which is to give back to Palestinians their state to live in as per the resolutions of the United Nations.

The off-and-on nature of talks between Palestinians and Israelis has failed to produce any concrete result so far. The consequent disenchantment of Palestinians with the negotiations as a way out of the costly conflict is justified. It has radicalized a whole generation of people there. It needs to be told at the cost of repetition that Palestinian question is mainly a political question, which has enjoyed mainstream support from across people of different religions including Christians and right-thinking Jews. However, protracted nature of the dispute and the silence of the world community have tended to cast the entire problem into religious colour i.e. terrorism etc., which militates against the moral and political values of the freedom movement of Palestinians.

Israeli-Palestinian dispute presents the formidable challenge for the American foreign policy under President Obama. Presidential candidate Obama blasted the foreign policy of then president Bush in his campaign speeches and debates. He said that the American foreign policy lost moral and strategic principles in the administration of George Bush who, according to Obama, played havoc with the American values and dreams. His slogan of 'change' epitomized of what was wrong with the policies of his predecessor.

Obama's response to the foreign policies challenges has been slow and studied. The observers of the American scene have dubbed it as 'internationalist/neo-realist approach'. His rhetoric and speeches have indicated the fact that he is aware of the need of 'de-neoconizing' the foreign policy. For those of us who wanted to see 'structural changes in the American global strategy', it should be clear by now that he is no revolutionary who is transforming the traditional U.S. policy in the Middle East. Instead, he is trying to turn back the radical foreign policy approach pursued by Bush and his neoconservative advisors (i.e. the policy of preemption, regime change, unilateralism, and so-called democratic agenda). He wants to recapture some of the elements of strategic status-quo that existed in the Middle East before 9/11. This is a call for return to Bill Clinton's era in the domain of foreign policies. This also explains his disengagement from Iraq as well as increasing disenchantment with Afghan mission.

The entire world especially Europe is duty bound to right a historic injustice done to a people with unique civilization, culture and traditions. They are the ones who gave birth to the problem and it is they who should make sure that it is resolved to the satisfaction of the Palestinians. Thus when the US gets involved in the peace process, it is not a favour but constitutes fulfillment of an obligation.

The above-mentioned notwithstanding, Palestinian issue is the acid test for Obama. Reconciling the domestic political imperatives with role of honest broker in the Israel-Palestine conflict is the highest challenge on his foreign policy calculus. There is a trust deficit within the Middle Eastern community in general and Palestinians in particular. He needs to act fast to regain the lost respect and confidence. This also calls for widening the scope of talks through incorporation of global input such as European Union, Arab League, OIC and the UN.



APPROACHING AFGHAN ENDGAME

[Oct. 12, 2010]

Of late, the news of engaging the Taliban leadership in talks with the consent of the United States has surfaced. There are now credible reports that the US is busy talking to the much feared Haqqani network based in North Waziristan. This demonstrates a clear departure from the earlier policy of dictating terms of engagement with the Taliban premised on the assumption that the surge of the US troops would break the back of Taliban thereby forcing them ‘to beg for peace’.

The thrust of ‘surge and exist strategy’ announced by the Obama administration in December 2009 was on using the military muscle to flatten the terrorists before moving ahead with the negotiation process. Obama’s policy on how to approach the endgame in Afghanistan sought to reconcile tangible refits within his administration. The surge option was advocated by the US military commanders, while the anti-surge camp led by Vice President Joe Biden emphasized the need for limited counterinsurgency operations based on the use of CIA-operated drones and Special Operation Forces.

In an attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable and reflect stance of both side in a consensus policy on Afghanistan, President Obama fixed the July 2011 for the withdrawal of the US combat mission adding a caveat that the fighting capacity and number of the Afghan army would be enhanced to enable it to replace the US forces besides urging the Karazi administration to bring about reforms in the governmental structure.

It is often said that plans and strategies worked out in war rooms often do not get implemented on the battlefield. Situation on the ground shapes its own dynamics and sets the agenda for the warring parties to respond to. Since the day one when the US president launched his policy on Afghanistan, it was said to be a failure waiting in the wings to mark the US war effort. The policy only reflected lack of direction characterized by contradictions and intense policy rifts between the military commanders and the civilian leadership. It was said to be a non-starter and has proven to be so in the first place.

A Guardian's editorial of October 7 describes the situation thus, "There is a clear and pressing need to end the monumental folly of prosecuting a war in Afghanistan. It is spreading in intensity into the tribal areas of Pakistan and could yet rattle a weak civilian government in Islamabad to bits." The increase in the number of drone attacks in the North Waziristan and subsequent Pakistani response of halting the NATO supplies through Turkham border has exposed the myth of deepening strategic relationship between Washington and Islamabad. To all intents and purposes, it largely remains a tactical and need-based relationship bereft of any deeper understanding on mutual issues.

Though the Pakistani government has ordered the reopening of the border for transportation of the NATO supplies after both NATO and the US government tendered public apologies over the helicopter incursions into the Pakistan territory, which resulted in the deaths of three Pakistani soldiers, the relationship between the so-called war allies remains fraught with tensions and policy rifts. These apologies might have served to cool down the raging anger for a while; however, there is a clear clash of interests between Pakistan and the US. The short-term tactical objectives of the United States are at odds with the long-term strategic objectives of Pakistan in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's security establishment is rightly worried over the situation in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the US. Given the huge economic constraints further exacerbated by the history's worst floods, Pakistan ill-affords to face two hot fronts, one in the East and other in the West.

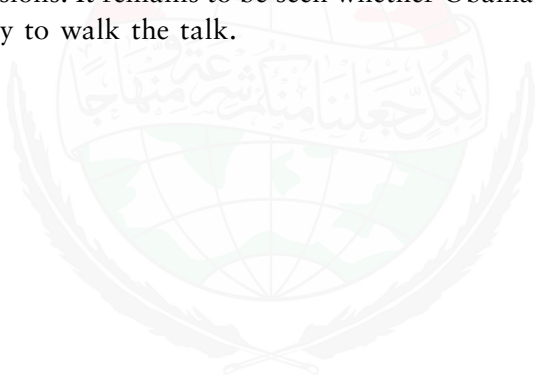
The increase in the number of drone strikes over the border areas of Pakistan and shifting of war theatre from Afghanistan to North Waziristan may be necessitated by the urgent need to show results to the war-weary American public that the surge strategy is bearing fruit. It may also be an effort on the part of US and ISAF commander, General David Patraeus, to thwart Obama's plan to start withdrawing the US forces from July 2011 by constructing a false notion of 'victory'. There have also been contradictory statements on and the differing interpretations of what the US President meant by July 2011. Did he mean to start the actual withdrawal of the US combat mission by this date, come what may, or was he referring to it tentatively by way of spurring efforts to wind up the United States engagement in Afghanistan? The upcoming mid-term elections in November might also have catalysed the recent surge in strikes over Pakistan's borderland in an attempt to deflate the impression built by Obama's Republican political adversaries that he was not a war president.

The Obama administration's Af-Pak strategy is a stark failure and does not stand any chance of success. Instead of containing terrorism, it has further fuelled its intensity. The White House assessment sent to the US Congress coupled with disclosure of WikiLeaks some time ago raises serious doubts about the loyalty and intensions of Pakistan in prosecuting war against the Taliban. Despite tall claims by both sides, there is no institutional arrangement capable of harmonizing their differing viewpoints into an integrated policy.

The US is adamant on continuing with its present Af-Pak policy and shuns any notion of engaging with the Taliban

publicly. This is the impression one gets from the President Obama's statement wherein he said, "We are continuing to implement the policy as described in December and do not believe further adjustments are required at this time."

However, internally there is now a gradual change of heart in Washington with increasing realization of negotiated settlement of what has been termed as the most intractable overseas engagement of the US. The Obama administration can make much needed mid-course correction in the upcoming policy review in December by aligning discordant elements into a cohesive line of action in the light of the lessons learnt over the year. The success or failure of the policy review depends on a large part to addressing the Pakistani concerns and apprehensions. It remains to be seen whether Obama possesses the ability to walk the talk.



MISPLACED PRIORITIES

[Oct. 26, 2010; The Frontier Post]

Rumours about the fall of the government are galore. Not a single day passes when a section of the media does not come up with new deadline about the ouster of the government. These media-led speculations about the government emanate from the ongoing legal battles in the Supreme Court where the government is in the dock for its lack of willingness to implement the verdicts of the Apex court especially the one related to so-called National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO). The Opposition is also hiding behind the smokescreen of judicial battle and waiting for the entire script to play out there. The government on its part is contributing no less to this political melodrama by increasing the chances of confrontation with the Supreme Court over the non-implementation of its NRO verdict. There appears to be a manifest disconnect between what the leaders of the government say with regard to the judicial challenges and what they actually are doing to make sure that the situation reaches a 'boiling point'.

The government does not seem to have a handle on the issues facing Pakistan and is clearly bereft of any vision or long-term strategy to cope with them to steer the country out of its never-ending crises. The opposition political parties are also not playing any constructive role either to help defuse the explosive situation. They are more interested in getting into power than contributing to the maturity and evolution of the nascent democratic order. The entire political class is adrift and unwilling to rise above its petty interests. The extent of

apathy of political class can be measured from the magnitude of national crises. There was and is a clear need of forming national consensus to resolve these crises on a war-footing basis. In the absence of a clear vision, general discontent and disenchantment with the so-called democracy is on the rise forcing people to rethink their preference for the oft-tested political brigade. The following is instructive in this regard:

The devastating floods have left behind agonizing tales of death and destruction. More than 20 million people including a large number of women and children are in acute need of support from the government. It requires undivided policy focus and long-term commitment of the political forces to battle with the challenges in the aftermath of the floods. The rehabilitation and reconstruction phase can be completed to the satisfaction of the flood victims if the government involves all stakeholders in spelling out a national vision through consultation and consensus. The rehabilitation phase is a battle for hearts and minds. If those at the helm of affairs fail to respond to the enormity of the challenge, they would hit hard at the national unity and cohesion, for the consequences of this criminal negligence would be too grave to think. Can the reconstruction and rehabilitation tasks be undertaken while instability holds sway with the government and opposition dissipating its time and energies on non-issues?

The second major challenge before the political class is the revival of national economy. The damage done to infrastructure, livestock, agriculture, energy and communication sectors runs into billions of dollars. The government is having to slash Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) to meet the needs of rehabilitation. Our national economy, which was already hugely impacted by the energy shortages, law and order situation and global recession, has been crippled due to these unprecedented floods in the country's history. Our oversized public sector eats into precious national resources,

while the country's tax to GDP ratio falls below 10% with very inequitable and limited tax structure. Pakistan cannot cope with the economic challenge without bringing about structural reforms. These reforms are not possible without forming a political consensus on the fundamentals of economy, which include widening the tax net, raising tax to GDP ratio, improving agricultural productivity, cutting non-development expenditure, increasing exports and decreasing imports and fetching international investment. A privileged political class divided against itself is a major hindrance in the way of revival of economy.

The third most formidable challenge is that of terrorism and extremism. Despite military action in the Malakand Division and tribal areas of the country, terrorism does not seem to go away anywhere. Every now and then we are reminded of its lethality when a suicide bomber strikes. A sustained anti-terror national effort informed by consensus across the political divide is the key to fighting this evil menace. Militancy and terrorism thrive in conditions of political instability and varying approaches to battle it. As long as the issue of terrorism and extremism is not tackled once and for all, our national economy would not be able to stand on its feet.

The above-mentioned challenges constitute a daunting national agenda. All political forces are expected to form consensus and a clear strategy to cope with them. Nothing should distract their attention at this critical juncture. The signs on the ground seem to suggest that the misplaced priorities are consuming the national will and focus much to our detriment. The danger to democracy does not come outside. Rather it comes from insides, from the actions and attitude of the political elite. People at large would safeguard democracy if they also happen to be the beneficiary from this system. As long as our politicians do not learn this important lesson, democracy would remain vulnerable in the country.

OBAMA ON A SLIPPERY SLOPE?

[Nov. 12, 2010; Pakistan Observer]

The results of the mid-term polls in the US have been unexpectedly surprising for even the observers of the American political scene. A party and its candidate that were voted into power with such a great demonstration of public support amid huge expectations have lost out to the very same party, which had crushing defeat in November 2007. The Republican Party has been able to gain its majority in the House of Representatives besides improving its strength in the US Senate. The Democrats also lost coveted positions of governorship in ten states. The outcome of the polls constitutes the discontentment of the American people with the way President Obama has ruled the US ever since he got into power in 2008 amid much fanfare. The mid-term polls are significant from many angles having bearing on the future of the Obama administration as well as the world. Consider the following:

The first and foremost aspect of the recently concluded polls is the demonstration of maturity of the American people and the American political system. Through their vote, they have expressed their dissatisfaction over the policies of the Obama administration. When the American people voted for Obama in 2008, they, having been disappointed with the disastrous policies of George W. Bush, wanted a change in the US policies both at home as well as abroad so that fast dwindling American image could be saved from further damage. Candidate Obama made all the right vibes and struck relevant chords. His

characteristic speaking style and charisma mesmerized millions promising them a fresh beginning. However, two and half years down the life, the much-trumpeted promise has to yet to be realized with the overall image of the US getting more tarnished with the passage of time.

The major factors that explain Obama's fall from grace are domestic in nature. The global recession, which hit the capitalistic world two years ago, has had huge repercussions whose effects would continue to be felt for many years to come. The US like the rest of the developed world also got badly hit by the world economic crunch. Millions of jobs were washed away in a span of days with the result that the unemployment rate in the US has touched all time high in its history.

President Obama's bailout package of worth around eight hundred billion dollars for the Wall Street was resented by the common man who did not like the idea of taxpayers' money being squandered away on the big fish. More than 300 Nobel Laureates wrote a letter to the President dissuading him from taking any such action. Such drastic have been the changes brought about by the global meltdown that the US has never been the same again. The financial crisis also exposed the weak foundations of the capitalistic order which favoured the rich and moneyed classes with little space for underprivileged sections of society. Coupled with the issue of high unemployment rate has been the failure of the Obama's administration to thoroughly implement Health Reforms Bill.

Yet another major factor that caused decline in Obama's electoral fortunes is the policy muddle that now characterizes his Afghan policy. The failure of the Obama administration to formulate a consensus-based creative policy on Afghanistan has led to more confusion about how the US plans to approach endgame in the war-torn country. The 'surge and exit' strategy unveiled last December in 2009 with much fanfare has failed miserably in producing the desired outcome conducive for

the promised withdrawal of the US forces in July 2011. The presence of clear difference between the military commanders and civilian leadership has served to making things difficult for the US.

In the absence of a clear-cut representative Afghan strategy that takes every stakeholder on board including Pakistan, the American losses both in man and material have been on the rise. There is no denying the fact that the US and ISAF forces have been unable to achieve their objectives of surge so far. With the onset of winter, the situation is likely to worsen making it impossible for the allied forces to undertake any fresh invasion. The cost of Afghan war, which runs into four billions per week, has further crippled the American economy. Nine long years down the line, the US economy has suffered a staggering loss of hundreds of billions of dollars. The cost of Iraq misadventure is in addition to that. The failure of the Obama administration to right the historic wrongs has annoyed the American people further alienating them from the Democrats.

Therefore, in choosing to vote for the Republicans, the electorate has sent a very strong message for the US President who has now come to be known as someone 'high on words and low on action'. The American people voted on the domestic agenda by shedding their so-called idealism. The powers of the Obama administration may now be dented in view of strong presence of the Republicans in the American Congress. Whether Obama would take up the gauntlet and change tack to secure his second term in office remains to be seen. It requires him to do something revolutionary. Will he rise to the occasion or allow himself to be thrown in the dustbin of history as one-time accidental president?

MULTI-LAYER REGIONAL TRADE PACTS

[Nov. 29, 2010; DAWN]

The global economic integration is not a new phenomenon. Even in ancient times, communication and trade occurred between different regions. While the globalisation process in economic domain experienced challenges as well as occasional interruptions, the level of economic integration has generally risen, particularly over the past half a century.

Depending upon their level of integration amongst the participating nation-states, Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) comprise the following categories: First, at the most basic level Preferential Trading Agreements (PTAs), the lower trade barriers among members. Such preferential trade is usually limited to the portion of actual trade flows from the less-developed countries and is often non-reciprocal. An example of such an agreement is the Papua New Guinea – Australia Trade and Commercial Relations Agreement (PATCRA II) that has been in effect since 1977.

Second, a Free Trade Agreement/Area (FTA) is a reciprocal arrangement whereby trade barriers (usually tariffs) between participating nations are abolished. However, each member independently determines its external trade policies against non-FTA members. Most commonly, barriers to trade are reduced over time, but in most cases, not all trade is completely free from national barriers. A prominent example of a FTA is the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

The third level of economic integration is the customs union. In a customs union, trade barriers among members are eliminated. Also, the participating nations adopt a common external trade policy (e.g. common external tariff regime or CET) against non-members. Such a union is equivalent to an FTA plus, a common external trade policy. The customs union of the Southern Cone -Mercosur-represents such an arrangement.

The fourth level of economic integration is the common market. In a common market, countries remove all barriers to movement of both goods and factors, and retain the common external trade policy. It is equivalent to a customs union plus free mobility of factors of production. One example of it is the common market for Eastern and Southern Africa.

The fifth level of economic integration is the Economic Union. In such a union, besides the free goods and factor movements, member countries also adopt common macroeconomic policies. An example of it is the European Union (EU).

The orthodox theory of economic integration determines gains and losses by judging the relative strengths of trade creation and trade diversion effects arising from economic integration. Trade creation refers to a shift from high-cost domestic products to the low-cost products of the member countries in an economic union or a regional bloc. This shift involves a production effect and a consumption effect.

The former saves the real cost of domestic production owing to reduction in the production from an increase in the import of those goods, that a member-country can produce at a lower cost, while the latter enhances consumer satisfaction because of increased consumption of those goods which are imported at a lower price but were produced domestically at higher costs.

Trade diversion entails a shift in the source of imports from lower-cost external sources to higher-cost member-country sources as a result of economic integration. The result is an

increase in the cost of imports due to the shift from foreign to member-country sources and a loss of consumers' surplus resulting from the substitution of higher-cost goods for lower-cost goods.

In general, regional cooperation in developing countries leads to dynamic impacts embodied in technical change and economic restructuring pushed by comparative advantage. They can join hands to see globalisation as an opportunity rather than a threat. In the World Trade Organisation (WTO) era, facing up to new forms of protectionism such as anti-dumping duties, environmental quality and social standards, presents a challenge, which is better managed by a regional bloc rather than by divisive individualism. Essentially, RTAs are violations of WTO's non-discrimination principle. This basic principle is defined in the Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN) rule, which requires a member country to extend to all WTO members the privileges that it grants to one contracting party. However, WTO views RTAs to be good and encourages the formation of free trade areas and customs union.

Article XXIV of GATT and article V of GATS present the legal foundation for RTAs to cover trade in goods and services. The "enabling clause," adopted in 1979, "provides for the mutual reduction of tariffs on trade in goods among developing countries"

RTAs are in fact helpful to world trade liberalisation. Compared with multilateral negotiation systems, smaller numbers of parties are involved in RTAs, and similar political and economical interests can be easily processed. RTA rules can pave the way for WTO multilateral negotiations.

To ensure that RTAs improves regional trade liberalisation without hurting global trade liberalisation, Article 24 of GATT regulates that RTAs should trade more freely among their member countries without raising barriers on trade towards the outside world. In addition, the WTO General Council created a

Committee on Regional Trade Agreements (CRTA). Its purpose is to examine regional groups and to assess whether they are consistent with WTO rules.



NEED FOR AN INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

[Jan. 1, 2011; The Frontier Post]

Owing to information explosion, the world has become a global village where happenings in one part of the world can have a considerable bearing on the rest of the world. The tools used for dissemination of information – such as the web and cell phones lead to a change in attitudes among followers of different religions and cultures, as well as performing educative and informative roles. Therefore, the need for efforts to foster positive understanding and interactions among all religions and civilizations has increased manifold in view of peculiar nature of threats posed to global order and peace.

Different efforts were made in the past to create reconciliation among religions but they could not bear positive outcomes. Mughal emperor Akbar, in 16th century India, tried to bring Muslims and Hindus together by contriving his own ‘Din-e-Elahi’ (Divine Religion), which he thought could be rendered into a state religion to establish a fundamental commonality among diverse peoples and a common identity. This was an unnatural way of integration, and ultimately a failure. Likewise, the philosophy of amalgamating ‘Ram’ (Hindu god) and ‘Raheem’ (Muslim God) espoused by the leaders of the Bakhti Movement could not succeed.

The basic reason behind the failure of these efforts was their unrealistic approach, which served to eliminate faith-based identity by imposing a uniform religion, foreign to all.

Islam offers a realistic philosophy of dialogue among different religions and faiths. It accepts the ideological diversity.

Islamic history is replete with the examples of inter-faith harmony. Islam has been a strong proponent of dialogue and engagement among different religions and civilizations. The first Islamic state established by the founder of Islam, where followers of three religions lived together, was a perfect example of harmony and peaceful coexistence based on mutual respect. The British encyclopedia Britannica writes about this realistic approach of Islam, “Islam achieved stunning successes in the first phase because the followers of other religions lived their life with complete religious independence during the period of Islamic government.” After all, it is important to understand contradictions and lack of uniformity among peoples in order to build a harmonious society for the establishment of a durable peace in the world. The respect for other religions and creed can only be created after one has thoroughly understood the differences and diversity. The acknowledgement of diversity and multiplicity tends to broaden our vision and create space for the establishment of an inclusive society where the citizens enjoy equality before law and have equal access to opportunities irrespective of their religion, colour and race. This forms the basis on which different sects and religions can be brought together for the pursuit of shared goals of human welfare.

The important principle Islam has worked out in this regard suggests the need for creation of harmony among people, not religions because differences between religions are natural and cannot be wished away. All divine religions also have shared values and commonalities, which can lay the foundation of a peaceful world. Peace and welfare of humanity constitute the essential message of every religion. The Madina Pact issued by the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) is the written constitution that acknowledged the non-Muslims such as Jews and Christians living in the state of Madian as equal citizens and conferred all rights on them including the freedom to practice their religion.

The world needs to grasp and implement this principle as a way out of our present-day predicaments. The followers of every religion have their unique set of creed and beliefs and no one has the right to denounce them under any pretext. The commonalities among religions can be emphasized by understanding their differences. There are so many shared areas such as education, social and welfare services, climate change, social security, science and technology, multiculturalism and peace, which call for concerted efforts through global partnerships and alliances.

The followers of different religions and faiths need to join their forces and open the doors of dialogue and interactions to live peacefully and eliminate terrorism and extremism. The UN has a key role to play in instituting a permanent mechanism to make this happen. It can design an institutional response through broad-based participation of the international community. We need to understand that the threat to global peace comes from non-state actors who want to impose their highly bigoted and radicalized version of religions on others. They use the fair name of religions to justify their otherwise unjustifiable actions. We can only defeat these people if we launch interfaith dialogue as a structured movement at the global level with a view to building bridges among different civilizations. This process of interfaith presents us with the only road ahead on the path of abiding peace, harmony and development.

UNDERSTANDING EGYPTIAN MOVEMENT

[Feb. 10, 2011]

The law and order situation in Egypt seems to worsen by the day. The protesters have refused to accept President Mubarak's contention of not standing for elections. President Mubarak in a nationwide address late on Tuesday evening announced to stay in office till September hand over power in a phased manner. Their major demand is that the President leaves office immediately before the opposition leaders come to the negotiating table. Meanwhile, the clashes between the protesters and the supporters of President Mubarak continue at the Tahrir Square in Cairo. The international community has expressed its concern over the rising violence in Egypt and demanded both of the Egyptian authorities and the opposition parties to refrain from violence. The protesters have announced to continue their demonstrations unless the President steps down, which means that more chaos and rioting is likely to happen in days to come.

This wave of public anger originally kick started by the uprising in Tunisia which forced Ben Ali to leave the country, has spread through the streets of Yemen, Jordan, Egypt and other countries. While the ruling elites in the Arab and Muslim world have been shaken out of slumber, the masses in general have welcomed the developments. This speaks volumes about the widening disconnect between the ruling elites and masses who have increasingly become critical of the way their countries are being run like family fiefdoms. The nature of political

system and the domination of the state decision-making and resources by the corrupt elite have sowed the seeds of hatred and anger among the people. Added to this state of affairs is the political disempowerment of masses where they are merely used as tools to say yes to the public policy and the facades of referendums held to give longevity to the dictatorships.

While the emergence of awareness among masses about their rights is a welcome development, however, these uprisings run the risk of further deepening the divides and making situation even worse than before. In our zeal of impending change, we must not lose sight of bigger picture and long-term implications of our actions. There is a dire need to dispassionately review the entire situation as it unfolds and draw right conclusions. The following points are instructive in this regard:

There is difference between violence and revolution. Violence leads to negative change and begets rioting and lawlessness. Furthermore, it is instrumental in changing the set of oppressors. Revolution though accompanied by violence, on the other hand, is constructive force, which changes the overall power paradigm in favour of the disempowered and the dispossessed.

Another major difference between revolution and violence is that revolution is a process which seeks to implement a new philosophy. It is not an end in itself but a means to an end. Revolution has a strong and dynamic leadership to lead it who sees it through various phases. A revolutionary leader or set of leaders plans their movement, exercise influence on their followers and knows their limits. They carefully choreograph their actions to achieve the desired objective. The major weapon in their armoury is a revolutionary program or idea which rallies people from different walks of life. Contrary to this, violence is abrupt, has no philosophy or leadership. The unending spate of violence leads to chaos and instability.

If we go by the history of revolutions in the world, we come to know that popular revolutions in Europe which were indigenous in character were led by ideas. They had clear destinations to reach and objectives to achieve. In case of Egypt, hatred or one man seems to override all other considerations. While this writer holds no brief for dictatorship and monarchy, but the fact of the matter is that the present movement for change in Egypt appears to be influenced by extraneous factors. Those supposedly leading the movement have not offered any program or reform agenda. There is hardly any credible leader to command respect and influence. Reports suggest that the extremist elements, banned by the Egyptian government, have resurfaced and are in the forefront of this movement. They have a vested agenda to veer the movement towards their declared goals.

If change is what is required as it should be, it must come from the internal ethos of people. The people have to build their capacity for change and bring about change in their value system, actions and thoughts so that a representative leadership may emerge to lead the movement in a positive direction. A movement without ideology and true leadership is destined to fail. We must not forget the outcome of fall of the Ottoman Empire whereby a Muslim empire was splintered into various countries which came under influence of colonizing powers and have had little say in their own affairs.

ANALYSING MUSLIMS' DOWNFALL (I)

[Mar. 24, 2011; The Frontier Post]

In our formal and informal debates and discussions on the plight of Muslims, there is always an unmistakable reference to the glorious past. In a way, past characterized by the real and supposed heroics and achievements has become a reference point and identity for the Muslims. Such is the level and depth of despondency currently ruling the roost among different strata of the Muslims that they derive their sense of worth from the past allowing it to define their present.

Today the Muslim world presents a classic picture of a house divided against itself. There are more divisions in their ranks today than was the case in the past. Rather than allowing religion to define their collective identity, Muslims have allowed sectarian, lingual, ethnic, and racial parameters to define them. Little wonder if the binding force amongst them is on the decline. Another reason which explains their present-day predicaments and is responsible for sharp divides in the Muslim world is the de-linking of religious knowledge from the secular sciences. When the Muslims were the masters of the all they surveyed in the good old days, there was no split between religious and secular sciences and both were taught at the seminaries or Madaris. The word 'Madrussa' referred to an educational institution contrary to what it is used to mean today. The reason why the Muslims held the sway over large continents is discernible from just this example.

During the reign of Mamoon-ur-Rashid, the Muslim empire established a grand think tank known as Dar-ul-Hikma for

translation of Greek philosophy into the Arabic language for the consumption of the Arab readers. The ideas used to be modified in the light of the Holy Quran and Hadith. Such a forum presented an opportunity for sharing of ideas and exchange of views. There was no division between the religious and the secular, which defined the Muslim political thought. The experts of the Holy Quran and Hadith were also the experts of modern sciences such as physics, chemistry, biology, and sociology etc. At a time when the European world was mired in darkness, Spain under Muslims was a bright star on the horizon of the world civilization. The Arabian Peninsula was known for fighting and bloodshed amongst antagonist tribes before the advent of Islam. With the arrival of Islam came emancipation of a people previously bound in shackles of exploitation.

Through Islam they entered into an unbreakable relationship of brotherhood and rendered disparate people into an irresistible and unified force. This is because of the deep and penetrating influence of Islam on the Arab psyche, culture, and ethos, that former Bedouins of Arab turned out to be the masters of one-third of the known world in a short span of three decades. Such was the overwhelming power of the Muslims that the contemporary mighty Persian and the great Roman empires chose to submit themselves before the new-found Muslim glory and prowess. In the words of Ibrahim Madkour: "In any society, culture is the offspring of many factors: human potential, creative consciousness, intellectual and spiritual vitality, real achievement and progress and freedom, among others." Early eighth century A.D. showed that the Arab society was set for extraordinary cultural achievements unknown to the civilized world hitherto. Blessed with creative activity generated by the advent of Islam, the Arab consciousness registered phenomenal progress in various fields.

The Muslims laid the foundations of a glorious civilization in Spain which still embellishes the pages of medieval history. In the words of Philip K. Hitti: "Muslim Spain wrote one of the brightest chapters in the history of medieval Europe." The Arabs founded astronomy during the early period of the Abbasid Caliphate. During the middle of the 10th century A.D. the Muslim rulers of Spain patronised astronomical studies in particular. Khwarizmi had written a valuable treatise on astronomy and compiled his tables (Zij) which after two centuries were revised by a Spanish astronomer Al-Majriti which was later on translated into Latin by Adelard of Bath. This remarkable work laid the foundation-stone upon which was raised the edifice of later astronomical pursuits both in the East and the West. Moreover, it replaced all earlier tables of the Greek and Indian astronomers. Al-Zarqali (Azharchel: 1029-1087 A.D.) was a renowned Spanish astronomer. Jabar Ibni Aflah was another illustrious Spanish astronomer of the 12th century, whose famous book "Kitab ul Hayat" (Book of Astronomy) was later on translated into Latin by Gerard of Cremona. In the words of Philip K.Hitti: "Finally it was through Spanish channels that the Latin West found its oriental inspiration in astronomy and astrology. The leading Muslim astronomical works were translated in Spain into Latin, and the Alfonsine tables compiled under the aegis of Alfonso X in the 13th century were but a development of Arab astronomy."

The Arabs in Spain revolutionized the field of agriculture and developed it on an unprecedented scale. According to K. Jamil Ahmed: "Hardly any country of medieval times enjoyed greater agricultural prosperity than Muslim Spain." The Spanish Muslims made great strides in the field of Botany and developed horticulture to a high degree of perfection. According to G. Sarton: "Al Ghafiqi was the greatest expert of his time on samples. His description of the plants was the most precise ever made in Islam; he gave the names of each in Arabic,

Latin and Berber.” Medicine was another area which interested the Spanish Arabs a great deal and they took to its study very assiduously. In the words of Hitti: “Most of the Spanish Arab physicians were physicians by avocation and something else by vocation.” The credit for greatest achievements in medieval surgery goes to Az-Zaharawi of Moorish Spain. This is an area, which was almost a neglected field with the Muslim physicians who did not pay much attention to it. As in the words of K. Jamil Ahmad: “It was translated into several European languages and the famous French surgeon Guy de Chauillac benefited from one of its Latin translations.” (To be concluded)



ANALYSING MUSLIMS' DOWNFALL (II)

[Mar. 25, 2011; The Frontier Post]

The facts presented in the last article show the Muslims at the pinnacle of their civilization glory and height of material progress. However, they have been going down the drain ever since and are now stuck in the worst ever downfall in their history. Three types of models were used in the past as far as religions are concerned, in an effort to create artificial oneness among them. These models are unification, simulation and integration.

The unification approach sought to bring religions together without understanding their inherent distinctions and characteristics. Different efforts premised at unification were made in the past to create reconciliation among religions but they could not bear positive outcomes. Mughal emperor Akbar, in 16th century India, tried to bring Muslims and Hindus together by contriving his own 'Din-e-Elahi' (Divine Religion), which he thought could be rendered into a state religion to establish a fundamental commonality among diverse peoples and a common identity. This was an unnatural way of integration, and ultimately a failure. Likewise, the example of simulation is best reflected in the philosophy of amalgamating 'Ram' (Hindu god) and 'Raheem' (Muslim God) espoused by the leaders of the Bakhti Movement, which could not succeed.

The basic reason behind the failure of these efforts was their unrealistic approach, which served to eliminate faith-based identity by imposing a uniform religion, foreign to all. Contrary to these, Islam has always supported and projected

the idea of integration. Islamic faith acknowledges the distinctions and attributes of all religions. It enjoins upon its followers to accept and respect diversity. Integration approach presents a way out of our present-day challenges and lays the ground for sustained interfaith dialogue and harmony in the world. If these imperatives are fulfilled, peace can be restored to this otherwise blighted world. One dominant reason as to why the Muslim world has gone down so low in every walk of life such as politics, and economics etc. is the absence of unity in their ranks. Sectarianism has played havoc with the idea of unity. Theirs is a house smashed to the ground due to internal divisions and rifts. Sectarianism is also responsible for the status quo and presence of undemocratic orders.

All attempts at revolution and change within the Muslim Umma have failed due to sectarian affiliation and tendencies of those meant to spearhead the movement. Today the Muslim youths are highly disgruntled and disappointed with the way their countries are being run, afflicted with sectarian conflicts and turf-wars. Sectarianism has played a major role in alienating them. When they look for solutions, they are handed down prescriptions with prominent sectarian undertones. They fail to grasp the original Islam in a plethora of narrow-minded and sect-based versions of Islam, which are currently on offer. There is a need to rethink and review this state of affairs. We need to identify those responsible for making things so murky and confused. We must know that we are answerable to Allah Almighty and His Prophet (peace be upon him) for our deeds. We can allow this state of affairs to persist at our own peril. It is unfortunate that no serious efforts have been made to resolve the issue and if they have then they have been more of cosmetic measures, meant to push the entire matter under the carpet.

The models of unification and simulation failed miserably so far as the goal of achieving the sectarian harmony is concerned. I would recommend the integration approach to

resolve this age-old riddle for good. Sects are a reality which cannot be wished away. If the unity within the broad stream of the Muslim Umma is our ultimate objective, then we need to start by acknowledging and accepting the differences that exist amongst various sects instead of making them a matter of life and death. The acceptance of diversity must pave way for emphasis on commonalities and shared values. The mosques and other religious institutions should not be used for fanning the fires of differences among the sects. The intellectual discussions which often become the cause of sectarian fights and havoc in society, must be held behind closed doors.

The tendency to make these differences public must be shunned. In order to comprehensively deal with the sectarian issue, there is a need to bring about fundamental changes in the educational system. It also calls for sweeping reforms in the structure and syllabi of religious seminaries or Madaris. The present syllabi being taught at various seminaries tend to promote sectarian interests. It is highly narrow-minded and produces a generation of conservative Mullahs who have myopic vision and are strongly attached to their sects and regard them as Islam. According to a study undertaken by Pakistan Education Statistics 2005-2006, the total number of seminaries belonging to different sects is 12,153 and the present enrolment of these institutions is 1,512,445. Such overwhelming number of students gets a daily dose of sectarianism and narrow interpretations of the texts of the Quran and has no exposure to the outside world.

Once they pass out of these seminaries, they become a pawn in the hands of their sectarian handlers. I have a firm conviction that our raging problems having religious background cannot be resolved unless we bring about fundamental reforms in the syllabi of our Madaris. They need to be opened up to the outside world and amalgamated into the mainstream. This is possible if a uniform religious education up to a certain level

is prescribed for every category of students. The coupling of religious and secular sciences at our educational institutions and universities of all hues and colour presents the best solution in the given circumstances. Minhaj University is a classic case in this regard where religious subjects are imparted along with the modern education. The scholars of this great seat of learning are playing their due role in propagating the real message of Islam and promoting peace, harmony and love in the world. I also have a request to make to the parents. They must educate and train their children for the sake of Islam instead of making them the prop of their old age.

Our great religion, Islam, is and must be over and above everything else. The mothers have also equally an important role to play in educating their children. We need people who are experts of religion on the one hand and experts of modern sciences on the other. Today we need our educational system to be structured on these lines and geared to achieve this objective. This is no doubt a daunting challenge. We can accomplish this if we make our intentions pious and are determined to achieve our objectives come what may. Let us resolve to work towards this end. (Concluded)

STATE OF EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

[Apr. 24, 2011; The Frontier Post]

Pakistan's education system has failed to equip the youth with the skills necessary for the development of a modern state, society and economy. The government-run schools and colleges educate the vast majority of children. But their performance compared to the private sector educational institutions is rather poor. Since education is a provincial subject after the passage of the 18th Constitutional Amendment, it is yet to be seen whether the provinces have the capacity and necessary resources to manage education in a satisfactory manner. A quick look at the state of education is in order here below:

Pakistan is falling significantly short of its constitutional obligation to provide universal primary education. And while the demand for education remains high, poorer families will only send their children to a school system that is relevant to their everyday lives and economic necessities. The failure of the public school system to deliver such education is contributing to the madaris boom as it is to school dropout rates, child labor, delinquency and crime.

Public school students are restricted to an outdated syllabus and are unable to compete in an increasingly competitive job market against the products of upper class private schools that teach in English, follow a different curriculum and have a fee structure that is unaffordable to most families.

The involvement of politics in the education sector created a lot of problems due to the injection of political appointments. This further damaged public education. Many educators, once

ensconced as full time civil servants, rise through the system despite having little if any interest and experience in teaching. The widespread phenomenon of non-functional, even non-existent “ghost” schools and teachers that exist only on paper but eat into a limited budget is an indication of the level of corruption in this sector. Provincial education departments have insufficient resources and personnel to monitor effectively and clamp down on rampant bribery and manipulation at the local level.

The public school system’s deteriorating infrastructure, falling educational standards and distorted educational system impact mostly, if not entirely, on Pakistan’s poor, thus widening the linguistic, social and economic divisions between the privileged and underprivileged and increasing ethnic and religious alienation that has led to violent protests. Far from curtailing extremism, the public school system risks provoking an upsurge of violence if its problems are not quickly and comprehensively addressed.

Private Education Sector is totally commercial-based and the educationists emphasize on the maximizing of profit instead of educating the nation. That’s why the whole private school system, colleges and universities are far away from the reach of general public. As a result, today nearly 50 million Pakistanis, half the adult population, cannot even read or write. Female literacy rate is approximately 42 percent which is much lower than male literacy; approximately 65 percent. This disparity is more pronounced in rural areas, where only 31 percent of women are claimed to be literate. We may easily find that some of the major factors that keep children uneducated are limited access to education, teacher absenteeism, low quality of education, poverty, corporal punishment and a high student-to-teacher ratio.

Pakistan’s literacy rate is substantially lower than that of many developing nations; only about a fourth of all adults

are literate. A significant percentage of those who are literate, however, have not had any formal education. Educational levels for women are much lower than those for men. The share of females in educational levels progressively diminishes above the primary school level. Presently, access to school education is inadequate and there are also gender and rural-urban imbalances, both in the availability and quality of education.

Education remains inequitably distributed among the various regions and income groups in the country. Literacy and participation rates are lower than those of other countries with similar levels of economic development. The target of minimum essential requirement for quality education has not yet been achieved. There are shortages of trained and qualified teachers, especially females. Educational Institutions also lack proper physical infrastructure, and on the other hand some are sub-optimally utilized. Teachers lack training, dedication, motivation and interest in their profession. Curricula, too, are mostly non-relevant to the present day requirements.

The low base of higher education is reflected in total student enrolment of 100,000 at the graduate and university levels. The funding for higher education in Pakistan is only 0.39 percent which is very low as compared to other countries. This should be raised to at least 5.0 percent of the GNP. Our neighboring country India is spending 6% of the GNP on Education. The national education budget of France amounts to \$65.96 million or 23.31% of the overall national budget and represents 3.91% of the GNP while Malaysia is spending 17.2% of its budget on education.

At present, 2.6 percent of the relevant age group has access to higher education in Pakistan. The total enrollment in public sector universities is around 100,000 students. Given the present rate of population growth, Pakistan would have approximately 25 million population in the age group of 17-23 years. Such a large number of students' population would require a variety

of institutions. In order to develop the country's human resources, what is required is the need to enhance the access to higher education to at least 10 percent of this age group. For this purpose, the nation needs a greater differentiation and proliferation of institutions and a much larger role by the private sector as the state cannot provide sufficient funding. It is, therefore, important that the private sector should be encouraged to set up institutions of higher education.

Rather I would suggest a public-private collaboration to improve the standard of education in the country in addition to making education accessible to people belonging to far flung areas. This collaboration would not only bring in uniformity of structures, curriculum and affordability of fees but also generate enough incomes for both sectors.

At present, the Technical-Vocational Education (TVE) facilities are highly inadequate and there is a dire need to broaden the base of TVE. In order to implement the concept of integration of skill development with the general stream of education, technical stream should be introduced at secondary school level, parallel to science and arts group. To implement this concept, the following steps may be taken:

Introduction of Technical stream in existing high schools.

Establishment of Model Technical High Schools.

Translation of Technical Syllabus in Native (Urdu) Language

In order to improve the education situation in the country a comprehensive educational revolution is required. We have to analyze the current education system in detail and should address the problems in very adequate, progressive and professional manner.

Government education budget may be increased to 3 fold immediately. It should be targeted to be 6% of GNP till 2011.

New educational institutions should be launched at all of the primary, secondary and higher education levels.

Private sector should also be encouraged to Invest in the education field.

Education structure needs to be up-graded and redesigned according to the needs, and requirements of the nation and the country.



ANALYZING EDUCATION SYSTEM IN PAKISTAN

[Apr. 30, 2011; The Frontier Post, Pakistan Observer]

According to an English language daily, Pakistan has been ranked last out of 14 Asian Pacific countries in a “School Report Card” investigating developing countries’ commitment to basic education. Pakistan received F grade, India E, Nepal F, Sri Lanka B, Bangladesh E, whereas the level of adult ILLITERACY in Pakistan, is 58.9 percent.

We spend less per pupil than most of our South Asian neighbors and charges user fees in full. Such low spending can only deliver pitiable results: two out of three Pakistani adults are illiterate, with the same proportion of secondary school age children out of school; four out of 10 children are missing primary school; and girls and women constitute a majority of those who are denied access to and an equal chance for complete basic education. In addition, Pakistan’s primary school teachers are overworked and under trained. In all aspects, there is clearly little quality and state action and commitment in the public education.

The scale of children missing out on access to basic education: 45.3 percent have no access to early childhood care and education: 40.3 percent to primary school, and 76.1 percent to secondary school. The level of adult illiteracy in Pakistan is one of the three highest in this report at 58.9 percent.

Pakistan’s favourable cost per pupil rating is offset by a poorly trained teacher per pupil ration (51 pupils to every trained teacher) – perhaps indicating that investments in education

should be spent more judiciously on quality learning inputs such as teachers training or in mobilizing female teachers. On gender equality, Pakistan ranks 13th, with 20 percent marks. Malaysia and Sri Lanka tie for the first place on this count.

Another problem of our education system is the existence of multiple languages of Instructions in the country. All the nations who developed and progressed taught and educated their people in their native language. Germany, France, Italy, Japan, China and many other nations are relevant examples in this regard. In Pakistan, we are so much inspired/impressed by Britain that we have imposed English as the mode of instruction at most of the educational institutions. Being an international language, English is a necessity today. So we cannot ignore the importance of the English language and should embed it as a foreign language from class one till Masters. But we must focus our attention on increasing the prospects of our children learning fast through the introduction of national language as the main medium of instructions at the initial level. Enough research is available to prove the point that the children are more receptive to new ideas if those are imparted in the local language they are most familiar with.

The educational system in Pakistan is divided into five major levels. The pre-university education consists of four levels: the primary level (grades one to five), the middle level (grades six to eight), the high level (grades nine and ten, culminating in matriculation), and the intermediate level (grades eleven and twelve, leading to a diploma in arts or science). There is also a university level, which leads to undergraduate and graduate degrees.

The Pakistani educational system is highly centralized. The Ministry of Education is in charge of coordinating all institutions involved in academic and technical education, up to the intermediate level. For education programs above that level, there is a government-designated university in each of

four Pakistani provinces of Sind, Punjab, Baluchistan, and the North West Frontier. These universities are responsible for coordinating instructions and examinations of all post-secondary institutions in their respective province. Apart from the Ministry of Education, other ministries may oversee certain degree programs of relevance to their activities.

Private and nonprofit schools and universities have begun to appear in Pakistan. These include the Lahore University of Management Sciences and the Aga Khan Medical University in Karachi. As privately funded universities, they provide an opportunity for higher education for a small percentage of people who do not have a chance to pursue their studies at publicly funded universities, which have limited annual admissions.

Despite the intentions of the Pakistani government, the educational system has failed to eradicate illiteracy in the post-independence era. It has also failed to train an adequate number of professionals to meet the needs of the country in different fields, which has been a major hindrance to the nation's economic development. The government-implemented reforms of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s did not address these deficiencies. By and large, they focused on replacing English, the colonial language of education with Urdu, the language of most Pakistanis. The reforms of the 1970s also led to the nationalization of schools.

Facing the continued shortcomings of the educational system, the Pakistani government implemented new reforms in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These took the form of three major initiatives. The government privatized the schools nationalized in the 1970s. It also reversed the process of promoting Urdu as the language of education and encouraged a return to English language in the elite private schools.

Finally, the government emphasized Pakistani studies and Islamic studies as two major fields in the curriculum. This was

a shift from colonial education's emphasis on British history and English culture and literature.

The reforms of the post-independence era have improved the educational system and increased the number of literate Pakistanis, but there are still basic shortcomings. Educational funding is low, and there is little political will to make improvements. For example, in the 1999–2000 school-year, the government spending on education was about \$1.8 billion, equal to 2.1 percent of Pakistan's gross national product (GNP). This amount represents a decrease from the period 1995–1997, when government expenditure on education equaled 2.7 percent of GNP, which itself was an insignificant figure for a country of approximately 144 million (2001 estimate), whose population is increasing at the annual rate of 2.4 percent.

Pakistan's expenditure on education is even significantly lower than that of India, a nation more or less at the same developmental level, with a much larger population and a heavier financial burden. During the period 1995–1997, India's expenditure on education was 3.2 percent of its GNP. In short, Pakistan's expenditure on education is not enough to meet the growing demand for educational services for the nation's increasing young population.

According to official statistics, the Pakistani literacy rate was 47 percent in 2000. This rate may be exaggerated, as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) statistics for 1998 suggest a literacy rate of 44 percent. According to the UNDP statistics for 1998, India's literacy rate was 55.7 percent, far above that of Pakistan.

The Pakistani educational system has demonstrated a discriminatory trend against women. This bias is evident in the pattern of literacy, which shows a strong correlation between gender and literacy rates. The illiteracy rate is very high among Pakistani women of all age groups. In 1998, the adult illiteracy rates were 42 percent for males and 71.1 percent for

females. In the same year, the illiteracy rate for male youth and female youth was 25 and 53 percent, respectively. This gender-based discriminatory trend in education has contributed to the persistence of illiteracy and to a chronic shortage of educated people and has had a major impact on the continued underdevelopment of Pakistan.



BRIDGING GAPS IN EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURE

[May. 8, 2011]

Traditionally, Pakistan's education sector has been classified broadly into three parallel systems "public or government-run schools, private schools, and madaris—each of which follows its own curriculum, teaching methods and examination processes. The state-run school system's inability to respond to the country's educational needs has benefited the madaris and private schools alike. Madaris offer free education, boarding and lodging, providing incentives to the homeless and less privileged sectors of society, whose demand for education is weighed down by economic restraints.

The private school sector has similarly benefited from the failure of the public school system, with the number of its institutions mushrooming to above 36,000 over the past two decades. Many of these institutions are driven by profit and cater to the more privileged segments of society, with tuition fees that are unaffordable to a majority of Pakistanis. The standards of education in the most privileged of them, including their use of English for instruction, is far superior to those of the public schools, which teach in a vernacular language.

In effect, the private school system has created a system of educational and linguistic division. The products of the public school sector often are uncompetitive in the job market. One study observes: ³The present education scenario is full of contradictions. On the one hand, there are dynamic, fast moving educational institutions charging exorbitant fees, while

on the other there are almost free or very affordable government schools as well as religious institutions (madaris), which are entirely free. The students of these institutions live in different worlds and operate in different languages.

The only way to address this increasing segregation is through a radical reform of the public school system. The majority of Pakistanis do not have the means to access quality private school education, and the private school system has neither the resources nor the incentive to expand to the extent that it could accommodate all Pakistani families. Moreover, it is the state's constitutional obligation to provide education to its citizens.

The failure of public sector to provide the basic services such as education to its citizens has resulted in the phenomenal growth of religious seminaries across the country. What further allowed the madaris to grow at fast pace was the state's involvement in Afghan war in the name of jihad when foreign money and extremist ideology found its easy way into Pakistan. The development was only to leave an indelible effect on the country's structure and polity for the worse.

One key feature of these religious establishments has been their construction along sectarian lines meant to serve the interests of the 'donors'. Hence the kind of curriculum taught in these seminaries was designed in accordance with the peculiar sectarian interests. The absence of oversight by the state and society was instrumental in the production of religious ideologues that ignited the sectarian fires and divided people along these lines.

This also explains why the forces of extremism, terrorism and radicalism have emerged in the country with consequence we are having to put up with. It is unfortunate that instead of nipping the evil of radicalism in the bud through broad-based reforms of the religious seminaries, the successive governments have gone about doing things for short-term, tactical ends.

These measures can only bring in small benefits but cannot eliminate the mind-set from which pervert ideas stem.

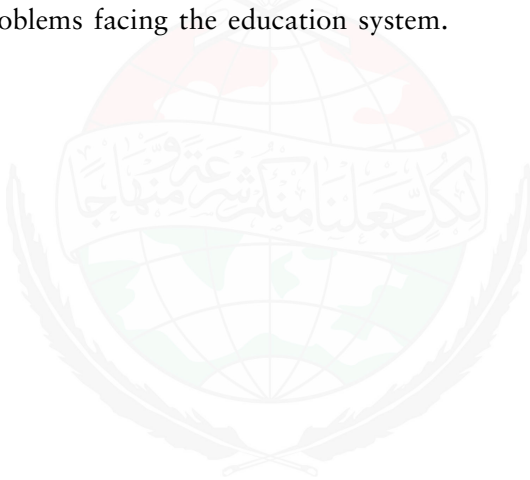
There is a dire need that the government brings these religious seminaries in the mainstream by breaking their age-old isolation through various time-bound reforms. The modification of curriculum and placement of graduates of these institutions in the job market can be helpful. This calls for serious consensus on the issue starting with documentation of religious seminaries. The state cannot and should not jettison the fundamental obligation of educating its citizens to shadowy actors with suspicious interests. This is where the role of provincial governments is of crucial importance after the devolution of education thanks to the 18th Constitutional Amendment.

Effective education reform in Pakistan will, admittedly, be complex, difficult, and unlikely to achieve immediate milestones. It requires a level of political will and commitment that has been lacking. Pakistan's education sector is highly politicized, tailored more to the interests of various state and political actors than to an objective assessment of educational requirements. Far from curtailing an upsurge of intolerance and extremism, it has widened class and ideological divisions.

In the past, the government has initiated programs to upgrade the public education sector and achieve an equitable education delivery system. Many of these initiatives have focused on increasing access to education, especially for female students. Others have focused on the quality of instruction, through teacher training. While such schemes are important, they have failed to redress some of the most significant failures of Pakistan's education system policies at the national level that cater to political rather than development interests; bureaucratic obstacles to policy changes; a carefully controlled, highly centralized syllabus that plays on political, religious and sectarian divisions; and a culture of corruption and

manipulation that has impeded any significant change to public schools.

63 years after independence, Pakistan still lacks an equitable education system, and the literacy rate is 49.5% one of the lowest in the world. Despite an assortment of declared strategies for providing education and removing inequalities, Pakistan's education indicators remain deplorable, including low public spending, literacy and enrolment levels, high dropout levels, acute regional and gender inequalities, and budgetary inequities. Government policies and reform efforts have clearly failed to address the economic, social and political dimensions of the problems facing the education system.



IDENTIFYING THE MALAISE

[May 28, 2011]

Quaid-e-Azam—Pakistan's founding father—wanted to formulate the country's foreign policy on the principle of parity in line with its unique geographical location to safeguard her interests in the region and beyond. He wanted Pakistan not only to become invincible by treading the path of economic and political sovereignty but also become a role model for the rest of the Islamic world. After his death, the policies contrary to his vision continue to be followed. The situation has come to such a point whereby serious dangers have been posed to the country's security, sovereignty and integrity.

Today the ruling elite is intent on neglecting those friends of Pakistan with whom the Quaid-e-Azam wanted to forge ties. Alas! Today's foreign policy represents the continuation of the same. Our body politic is getting wound after wound to the point that the feeling of numbness has marked our conduct. Whenever efforts on improving relations with China get underway, resistance against such efforts emerges. This aspect needs to be probed and looked into. In view of Pakistan's regional and global interests, there is a dire need to reformulate its foreign policy on the guidelines given by the father of the nation. The present policy does not represent the will of people and is premised on trading country's sovereignty for a few dollars.

On the one hand, Pakistan is fighting a war against terrorism. The banned organizations are busy in implementing their nefarious designs and agendas on the other. The terrorists are getting the supply of arms and ammunition to fight against

the security forces. The religious seminaries also continue to impart lessons based on hatred, extremist tendencies and violence to their students. The militants are getting training, while the process of brain-washing the impressionable minds into suicide bombers is also underway unabated. The fact of the matter is that the nurseries of terrorism are those religious seminaries in whose syllabi lie the seeds of hatred, violence, sectarianism and extremism. A tendency of neglecting these glaring and dangerous realities is manifestly present in the officialdom, while the country fights off terrorism and extremism as well. The branches of trees of terrorism are being chopped off, whereas the roots of these trees continue to be watered at the same time.

An organized attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team was interpreted as an isolated incident of terrorism and the entire matter was laid to rest. The result of this ostrich-like approach is that no cricket team of the world is ready to visit Pakistan. The impression of Pakistan being an insecure and unstable state is getting further strengthened in the world today. This explains why the country's economy is not on track in the absence of international investment. It is about time that the military and civilian leaderships put their heads together and identified the malaise, which afflicts our body politic.

Coming on the heels of the Abbottabad incident, the attack on PNS Mehran in Karachi is a watershed deserving of serious reflection and soul-searching at the collective level. These and other incidents have shaken the security establishment. If we shrug off our shoulders and term them as merely acts of terrorism, then this attitude of dilly-dallying can result into serious consequences in future. What we need to understand is that undeclared war has been launched against Pakistan in the garb of terrorism. The earlier we understand it, the better.

The way PNS Mehran Naval base and Sri Lankan team was attacked does not seem to have been undertaken by simple

terrorists. Rather, it is the work of professionally trained anti-Pakistan elements, who through their resistance, put a strong question mark over the security of our military installations. That they were helped from within is only stating the obvious. The question arises as to why P-3 Orion aircrafts were attacked at the Mehran Base? The defence analysts know how crucial those aircrafts are for Pakistan and what is the state of our security without them? P-3 Orion aircrafts were responsible for protecting maritime boundary of Pakistan and they possessed the quality of pre-empting the attack from submarine and retaliate in time. The destruction of these aircraft certainly signals danger.

Any sane person can discern that the attack on PNS Mehran naval base was much more than merely an act of terror. This is an important point that warrants deep consideration. The military needs to discriminate between simple acts of terrorism and direct attacks on the country. Both modes of attacks need to de-hyphenated, for we stand at a critical juncture of history where erring is not an option any more.

The hundreds of covert agents such as Raymond Davis are wandering in the streets of Pakistan. The people are justified to ask whether this is part of Pakistan's foreign policy. Why is superior judiciary, which won its rightful independence after many sacrifices, mum over the matter of direct attacks on the country? Why have those responsible for this state of affairs not brought to face law?

Whether it is about foreign policy, end to terrorism or difference between terrorism and foreign aggression, the powers that be and the military establishment need to face reality instead of following the shadows. The domestic and foreign policies should be formulated in the light of ground realities. Unless we identify the real malaise, we cannot get out of the present crises.

BEGINNING OF AN END?

[Jun. 29, 2011; Business Recorder]

[Jul. 5, 2011; Pakistan Observer]

President Obama's all-important foreign policy speech on June 22 outlining the American drawdown strategy from Afghanistan represents the same policy confusion, which marked the formulation of his surge and exit strategy in December 2009. The President's announcement to pull out a total of 33,000 troops by September 2012 culminating the entire withdrawal by the end of 2014 is informed by differences within the Obama Administration.

While the military commanders favoured a slow drawdown and presence of a sizeable US and ISAF troops to fight off the Taliban for at least another two seasons, the President chose a middle path, reminiscent of what he did in December 2009. In his speech and subsequent interview with the Voice of America, President Obama repeated the usual stuff. He said that the surge he ordered in 2009 was a great success and that the Taliban momentum was broken and the required results achieved.

However, it is not the number or size of pullout, which is important. What would make this pullout a meaningful exercise is whether it is accompanied by a comprehensive strategy aimed at bringing about durable peace in the war-torn country. While the need for political settlement has been acknowledged, no broad contours of the peace process have been spelled out. Three factors have forced the Obama administration to resort to a phase-out from Afghanistan:

One, the US invaded Afghanistan ten years ago on the plea of hunting down al Qaeda and its chief Osama bin Laden. With Osama killed in the Abbottabad raid on May 2, the principal reason of the American presence in Afghanistan has gone. The war remains hugely unpopular among the American people. They are no longer ready to support a war, which has eaten into the vitals of the American economy.

Second, the entire world including the US is reeling under the economic pressure of a global recession whose effects would continue to reverberate for many years to come. The US is incurring an expenditure of over \$100 billion on the Afghan war annually. The administration can ill-afford to bear such a heavy cost for a military enterprise whose outcome seems inconclusive and uncertain despite heavy investment in the war effort during the last 10 years.

Third, by killing Osama bin Laden, President Obama has reached the height of popularity and appeared tough on issues of national security. He now has greater space and maneuverability to spearhead the withdrawal effort contrary to what his military commanders say. Since he faces his second presidential elections in November 2012, the end to the Afghan war would certainly swell his electoral prospects.

The admission by the outgoing Defence Secretary Robert Gates that the US is in talks with the Taliban is an indication of the administration's willingness to seek a negotiated settlement to the Afghan imbroglio. However, in wanting to pull out of the Afghan quagmire, the administration still stays put in the use of hard power to dictate the terms of engagement with the Taliban. This policy, flawed to its core, is instrumental in shrinking the space for a result-oriented dialogue. The success of the outreach policy hinges largely on the cessation of hostilities.

The Obama administration has taken a number of confidence-building steps that tend to engage the Taliban in a

meaningful effort to negotiate an endgame from Afghanistan. There are reports in the international media that the UN has now started de-hyphenating between Taliban and al Qaeda at the behest of the US. Hillary Clinton's statement of renunciation of violence, acceptance of the Afghan Constitution and end of relations with al Qaeda as outcome of the process has created space for a productive engagement with the Taliban.

However, contrary to what the strategists of the Obama administration might plan in the Situation Room of the White House, it is how the script plays itself out on the ground that would determine the outcome of the US drawdown plan by the end of July 2014.

The shifting of focus from Afghanistan to Pakistan signals grave implications for the latter. In his prime-time interview with the Voice of America, the US President made no bones about the determination of his administration to go after what he termed as "safe havens" in Pakistan. His urging of Pakistan to do its part of the job in tough language only betrays the nature of the greatly endangered and strained relations with Islamabad, following the Abbottabad incident on May 2.

Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton's statement before a Senate Committee that Pakistan should not expect the same level of military aid as it was getting unless it delivers on its commitments is part of the administration's efforts to pressurise Pakistan into opening a new theater of war in North Waziristan.

Coupled with this is the claim by Secretary Robert Gates that the war effort in Afghanistan could be successful without Pakistan's help. The increase in the number of drone strikes by the Obama administration shows how 'seriously' Pakistan figures on the American radar screen.

In such grave circumstances, the political leadership divide needs to put its act together and spearhead a national effort aimed at crafting fresh political consensus on the challenges

confronting the country's security and sovereignty. The second option available with the Pakistani government is to reach out to friends such as the China and Muslim states in the Gulf region to seek their support in this regard. Unless we forge unity in our internal ranks, Pakistan is likely to come under increased pressure to do more, leading to more violence and strife in its midst.



MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

[Jul. 4, 2011; Business Recorder]

Indo-Pakistan relations are so deeply mired in history that moving them away from the stated positions and expressing willingness to tread a middle path requires a deep political conviction, which is most often lacking whenever diplomatic parleys have taken place between New Delhi and Islamabad.

Coming on the heels of meetings between both countries' commerce and interior/home ministers and to top it all Mohali encounter between the Prime Ministers of both countries, the recently concluded talks between foreign secretaries, Salman Bashir and Nirupama Rao, in Islamabad on July 23-24 broke no new ground except churning out worn-out diplomatic clichés. While the Joint Communiqué issued at the end of three sessions during two days of interaction did indicate the meetings of working groups on Nuclear and Conventional CBMs and cross LoC CBMs, both countries largely repeated what has already been known to the world.

The agenda of the post-Mumbai included a wide array of points such as Peace and Security including CBMs, Jammu and Kashmir and promotion of friendly exchanges. No concrete movement was discernible on any of the issues except the usual lip service to taking the dialogue process forward in 'a constructive and forward looking manner.'

The interaction between the foreign secretaries again highlighted the vast disconnect that characterises the approaches of both countries. While Pakistan favours conflict-management and conflict-resolution mechanism, India is more in favour of

confidence building measures, which in its view, would lead to building of mutual trust and sufficient space to address the complex issues bedevilling the relations between the nuclear-armed neighbours. While Pakistan believes that the composite dialogue framework is a means to an end ie resolution of all issues, India attaches more importance to normalisation of relations and that too achieved through CBMs incrementally and uses process ie composite dialogue framework as an end in itself.

In a joint press conference with her Pakistani counterpart Salman Bashir, Indian Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao, when asked about progress on the Kashmir issue, made no bones about her country's stated position. She said "we must do away with the shadow of the gun and extremist violence because it is only in an atmosphere free of violence that we can discuss the resolution of such a complex issue (Kashmir)." What she actually meant by this remark was that the Indian establishment looked at protracted Jammu and Kashmir issue as the one marked by terrorism and violence. This remark is consistent with the Indian attempt to portray the indigenous freedom struggle as terrorism in total disregard of the UN resolutions and civilised norms. What the Indian foreign secretary failed to explain is the fact as to why the Kashmiris have been brutally beaten and killed at the hands of the Indian security forces and why the last two summers were characterised by complete shutdown of the valley.

Pakistan's India policy in general and the Kashmir policy in particular suffer from basic drawbacks and may have run out of steam. There is an urgent need to revisit these policies and seek a fresh national consensus on its broad contours in light of the ground realities and the UN resolutions on the issue. India has been quick to exploit the general mood after 9/11, which blurred the lines differentiating between freedom struggles and terrorism. The various U-turns taken by General Musharraf

during his stint in power proved destructive for the Kashmir cause. The various options presented by the military dictator for resolution of the Kashmir issue not only lacked support of Pakistan's mainstream opinion but also flew in the face of the essence of the UN resolutions passed in 1948. They also failed to win any favourable concession from the Indian side as well.

Pakistani foreign secretary also failed to take up matters of serious concern for the country during the three sessions of talks with his Indian counterpart such as water dispute and its subversive activities in Balochistan and Afghanistan aimed at inciting unrest in Pakistan. If one had any doubts about the Indian intentions, her vetoing of the waiver at the World Trade Organisation should be enough to get rid of this doubt. The European Union struck a deal with Pakistan after the devastating floods in 2010 which, under Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) needed a country-specific waiver to come into effect. India that had been raising multiple objections to it finally vetoed it. Likewise, India also conveyed its objections to the Asian Development Bank over Pakistan's efforts to seek international funding to build Diamer-Bhasha dam, which is so crucial for meeting Pakistan's energy needs. The latest reflection of the Indian intentions came from the top when during interaction with a select group of newspaper editors, Dr Manmohan Singh advised Pakistan "to leave Kashmir alone" and "do more to tackle terrorism."

If India is really serious about pursuing peace with Pakistan, relatively less complex issues such as Sir Creek and Siachen have been waiting for resolution for a long time. The previous progress on these issues would definitely have prepared ground for resolution of these disputes thereby injecting fresh energy and meaning into the diplomatic engagement.

In the absence of any concrete achievement, can a process be sustainable? The past experience suggests to the contrary. A time soon comes when a small incident is able to de-track

the entire engagement and dialogue. It is about time that the political leaderships of both countries revisited the composite dialogue framework and invested political capital in taking the process forward.



REVIEWING TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT

[Jul. 30, 2011; Business Recorder]

[Jul. 30, 2011; The Frontier Post]

The train of events set into motion by the Abbottabad incident on May 2 has brought the relations between Pakistan-US to an all-time low. While Pakistan's establishment felt betrayed and humiliated after the American raid, it also came in for strong criticism from all quarters at the domestic front. Instead of opting for covert negotiations with the Pakistani authorities, the Obama administration chose to enhance pressure on Pakistan in a bid to make her comply with ever-increasing US demands.

All elements of the administration's opinion starting from President Obama to Chairman Joint Chief of Staff Mike Mullen to the Congressmen made no bones about their intentions to 'punish' Pakistan with a 'stick and carrot approach.' The Pakistani establishment, which was already finding it increasingly difficult to comply with the American diktat, got cornered as internal voices to detach the country from the America-led war on terror picked up momentum.

The accelerated pace of drone strikes in the tribal areas, bordering Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the increased emphasis on counter-insurgency operations away from the deployment of large armies overseas augur ill for the sustainable future of relations between Washington and Islamabad. Despite fire-fighting efforts by a plethora of US officials to push the reset button in relations, the strains have only become clearer by the day.

Though the two resolutions aimed at cutting down US aid to Pakistan have been defeated in the American Senate, the Obama administration's suspension of \$800 million, a third of the \$2.7 billion in military aid to Pakistan, only reveals the widening chasm between the two countries. The US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, has tried to play down the rhetoric accompanying the suspension of military aid, saying that it should not be construed as 'any change in the US policy' and that the US would continue to give Islamabad civilian aid passed under Kerry-Lugar Act.

The Inter-Services of Public Relations (ISPR), in a reaction to the suspension of military aid, has reiterated the country's commitment to eliminate terrorism from the country with the use of indigenous resources. It said that this suspension would not affect the ongoing military operations. What has further complicated the already fragile relations is an orchestrated media campaign against Pakistan and its institutions.

The bilateral relations of both Islamabad and Washington now seem to follow a usual ebb and flow pattern. While Pakistan should not break with the US as it would be highly inadvisable, it is the right occasion to review the terms of engagement with the US to make it more equitable. An opportunity is always inherent in every risk and we must make the best use of it instead of being cowed down by the incidents. The following points are instructive in this regard:

Firstly, there is a dire need that the civilian and military leaderships undertake a dispassionate and exhaustive analysis of the geo-strategic situation currently obtaining in the domain of Pakistan-US relations. We must not allow the crises to spiral out of control. In accepting every US demand after 9/11, the Musharraf regime turned the country into a subservient state. While fighting terrorism and extremism was in Pakistan's interest, it must not have allowed the US to dictate terms. Pakistan must not plunge headlong into the North Waziristan

operations under pressure from Washington. If at all any such decision is taken, it must purely be taken under our national domestic considerations.

Such an appraisal of our priorities and policies must also spell out 'red lines' for every country to respect and desist from crossing. This must involve the protection of the country's core interests ie sovereignty, nuclear interests, and territorial integrity. In his concluding speech at the National Seminar on De-radicalization in Swat the other day, the Prime Minister talked of the 'red lines' and asked the 'allies' not to advance their narrow interests at the cost of Pakistan.

These high-level statements need to be accompanied by comprehensive and consistent policies and not be a one-time media interaction. Coupled with this is the need of an articulation of consensus-based and uniform policies by all streaks of national opinion. It would send a strong message to the international community and inject substance into Pakistan's position on key policy issues. Any dichotomy of views between the civilian and military leaderships would betray signs of weakness.

The policy of putting all eggs in one basket is flawed to the core. Pakistan has pursued a Washington-centric, uni-focal foreign policy so far. Our relations with the countries of the Gulf region have weakened over a period of time. Islamabad should not only repair its relations with these friendly countries but also find new partners.

However, what Pakistan needs the most is the setting of its own house in order. Foreign policy, by all intents and purposes, is a reflection and sum total of domestic policies. If a country is politically and economically strong, it has a better bargaining position and can sell its viewpoint more effectively. This calls for crafting of national consensus on key issues of national security and foreign policy. These measures would enable the country to renegotiate the terms of engagement with the US. Pakistan's

leadership must articulate the national policy with confidence and optimism. Pakistan has what it takes to be a respectable country in the comity of nations. What it needs the most is leadership and good governance to reflect the dynamism of the nation. History shows that crises bring out the best from states and societies. Let this crisis serve such a purpose in this case.



THE WAY FORWARD

[Jul. 31, 2011; The Frontier Post]

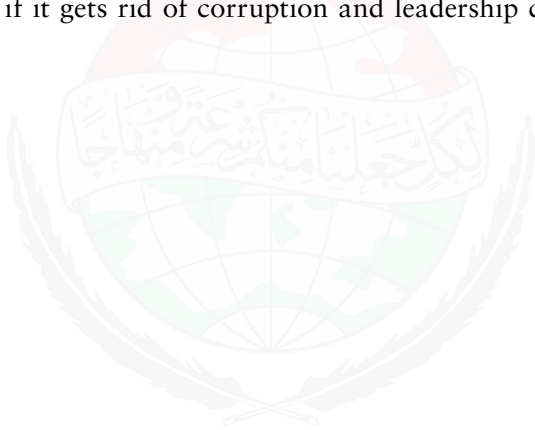
Newly emerging centres of power in this unipolar world are making their presence felt and the war for economic supremacy continues in many forms and manifestations. The European Union has become a major economic power, while China and India are among the emerging economic and political powerhouses. Consequently, the sole world power is busy resetting the rules of the game to offset threats to its supremacy in economic and political domains. It got the then world power, USSR, embroiled in a protracted and nerve-breaking conflict in Afghanistan and got it dismembered, finally. Replicating the same model, it wants to undermine China's political and economic power by dragging it in the matters of Pakistan. But the world has changed and this strategy would not bear any fruit.

The fact that Russia and Spain did not support the resolution against Syria and the Europe left the sole superpower in the lurch, points to impending changes in the global arena. This would, ultimately, result in the establishment of a multi-polar world. In order to attain their stakes and carve out a space in the new world order, the global community has gone into action mode. The EU and China are too focused on becoming economic power hub to play any role in any regional or global conflict. However, this does not mean that they are oblivious to the developments at the global stage. South Asia, which comprises 50% population of the world, occupies strategic position for the future global order. Despite Pakistan having

a weak economy overwhelmed by foreign loans and being sandwiched between powerful economies such as China and India, its geographical location renders it important place. This explains why it has become a hotbed of conspiracies where various regional and global powers are playing out their scripts to mark victory over their adversaries. The potential action against our nuclear programme and keeping a strong eye on China by establishing strong foothold in Pakistan are high on the radar screen of the international powers that be. The orchestrated campaign against Pakistan's nuclear programme dubbing it unsafe is the seminal point of this heinous grand design. What is worrisome is the fact that these plans have been worked out with cooperation from some elements of the ruling elite. This is manifest from the blanket permission to grant visas to 700 foreigners in 2009 by doing away with immigration rules and regulations. These 'covert operatives' are said to be involved in various objectionable activities.

This highly sensitive issue has failed to get sufficient media scrutiny as its criticality warranted. The unending spate of terrorism and incidents of violence in the streets of Pakistan especially Karachi is indicative of the fact that agents of CIA, Blackwater and Mosaad are present in large numbers, whose activities seem geared to keep an eye on nuclear programme besides creating unrest in the country. A clear pattern seems to be discernible. A full-fledged media campaign would be launched at the global level citing some feigned or orchestrated theft of some of our nuclear materials at the hands of these foreign agents. A case would be built up, which would finally end up at the International Court of Justice. The UN has long lost its credibility as a potent and independent organization. Thus the global powers that be would not face much difficulty in getting restriction imposed on Pakistan. This situation must put the patriots and the Pakistani military on the red alert against these heinous conspiracies against the solidarity and

integrity of the country. It is responsibility of every one of us to protect this country. There is no denying the fact that atomic programme is the guarantor of our national security and is key to maintaining its regional prestige. It would serve as deterrent against any form of aggression by the country's adversaries. It is also incumbent upon the people at large to open up their eyes to the grim situation and play their central role in bringing a visionary, honest and capable leadership. It is high time we transformed from crowd into a nation. Every one should be duty bound to send the present exploitative system packing through peaceful and democratic struggle. Pakistan still has the potential to start its journey towards progress and prosperity provided if it gets rid of corruption and leadership crisis.



TRUE HAPPINESS IS A JOURNEY, NOT DESTINATION

[Aug. 13, 2011; Indian Newslink, New Zealand]

Happiness has remained an elusive concept over the centuries. Philosophers, religious scholars, sociologists and academicians have tried to define happiness, with some regarding it as a material thing for which material possessions have been identified as a means to achieve happiness.

Others are of the view that happiness has nothing to do with material pursuits and that it is a moral or a spiritual phenomenon which one can acquire by doing the right things.

Despite these definitions and explorations, the idea is as Greek as it was before.

However, if you want to be happy but are not sure where to start, I suggest you begin by being kinder. Acts of giving will boost your wellbeing as well as offer something good to the recipient and the world at large.

These acts can take many forms and so you can do something that suits you personally. For instance, you can do voluntary work for a philanthropist organisation; you can do good deeds in your neighbourhood, for friends, family, work colleagues and even strangers.

Happiness lies in giving to others. When you stop thinking about yourself, it is then that the journey to happiness starts. Our focal point is always I or me. These two words are the cause of sadness that we suffer. Whenever we run after something to achieve, it runs away faster from us. But when we decide to

turn our back on our sought-after pursuits, those things would come for us.

This is the law of Nature, which is immutable and never changes.

If real happiness could be achieved by having lots of money and concentrating power, then kings would never have left their thrones in search of happiness.

Buddha, Ashoka, Ibrahim bin Adham are a few examples from the history. They abandoned their exalted positions to find solace and happiness. They found happiness once they started serving the poor and the needy of God's creations.

Childhood bliss

The happiest time of our life lies in our childhood. As we grow older, our desires grow as well. Sadness follows unfulfilled desires. In order to acquire eternal happiness, we need to get rid of our desires. That is why it is said that the best state to go back to God is the state in which you were born. That is the state of innocence with one's soul untainted by the worldly desires.

You do not have to volunteer work to be a kinder person but carry out good deeds in your home or at work. You can do something for people you do not know.

Try to give people the benefit of the doubt. Let them make creative mistakes and learn for the sake of personal growth. Offer genuine compliments. Give small gifts. Plan something special for a loved one. Share your possessions without getting uptight about them.

Avoid gossiping in emails and on the telephone. Instead, make a conscious effort to only say good things about others. You always have something to offer.

Positive attitude

Think of ways you can share that information. Think of ways in which you might be a positive influence on someone's life. When you see an opportunity to help, take it.

Not every act of kindness needs to be acknowledged. You are better off assuming the opposite. You are performing good deeds because you want to, not for the thanks but for the sake of happiness that springs from inside.

It's a great way to increase your humility. Recognise that each act, no matter how small, will make a difference. It does not have to be the grand gesture.

The way to transform happiness from individual level to the collective phenomenon is to make efforts aimed at making your country and society welfare-oriented.

One can start this endeavour from the grassroots level by establishing welfare committees and keep on expanding its ambit.

It calls for establishment of systems and arrangements for doing well to people in an institutionalized manner. That is why the People of the Sub-continent rendered numerous sacrifices for their countries inspired by their leaders.

Let us resolve to make our countries modern and welfare-oriented as per the dreams of our founding fathers.

INTERFAITH DIALOGUE GENERATES GOODWILL

[Aug. 15, 2011; Interfaith News – Oceania News]

Today's global crisis is multifaceted in nature. It is fast impacting the world economically, politically, socially and religiously, leading to chaos, hatred and violence. Therefore, the need for dialogue between religions is imperative to ward off the dangers of civil unrest and violence.

Every religion has its own peculiar language and traditions, which give birth to the fundamental values to humanity leading to betterment of the society. These values play the role of a guide and reform the collective ethos of a society.

Owing to the information explosion, the world has become a global village where happenings in one part of the world have their bearing on the rest of the world.

The tools used for dissemination of information cause positive or negative attitudes among the followers of different religions and cultures besides performing their educative and informative roles.

Therefore, the need to foster positive understanding and interaction among all religions has increased manifold, especially in view of the peculiar nature of threats posed to global order and peace.

NONE OF THE PAST EFFORTS HAS HELPED.

Mughal emperor Akbar the Great tried to bring Muslims and Hindus together by contriving his own Din-e-Elahi (Divine

Religion). This was an unnatural way of integration, which met its ultimate failure.

Likewise, the philosophy of amalgamating 'Ram' (Hindu God) and 'Raheem' (Muslim God) could not succeed.

The reason for the failure of these efforts was their unrealistic approach, which was seen as an attempt to eliminate the identities of both religions by superimposing a uniform religious structure.

REALISTIC PHILOSOPHY

Islam offers a realistic philosophy of dialogue among different religions and faiths.

IT ACCEPTS THE IDEOLOGICAL DIVERSITY.

The policy of tolerance, respect and love can be worked out only when one respects and accepts the diversity of opinions, creeds and ideologies held by others.

There is no need to eliminate differences for construction of a good society. It is important to understand contradictions and lack of uniformity in order to build a peaceful and mutually harmonious society.

The respect for other religions and creed can only be created after one has thoroughly understood the differences and diversity. This forms the basis on which different sects and religions can be brought together.

The important principle Islam has worked out in this regard suggests the need for creation of harmony among people and not religions, because differences between religions are natural and cannot be wished away.

The world needs to grasp and implement this principle as a way out of our present-day predicaments. The followers of every religion have their unique set of creed and beliefs and no one has the right to denounce them under any pretext.

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP

The commonalities among religions can be emphasised by understanding their differences. There are so many shared areas such as education, anatomy, social and welfare services, climate change, social security, science and technology, multiculturalism and peace, which call for concerted efforts through global partnerships and alliances.

Islamic history is replete with the examples of inter-faith harmony. Islam has been a strong proponent of dialogue and engagement among different religions and civilisations.

The first Islamic State, established by the founder of Islam, where followers of three religions lived together, was a perfect example of harmony and peaceful coexistence based on mutual respect.

The British encyclopedia Britannica writes about this realistic approach, stating, “Islam achieved stunning successes in the first phase because the followers of other religions lived their life with complete religious independence during the period of Islamic Government.”

The followers of different religions and faiths need to join their forces and open the doors of dialogue and interaction to live peacefully and eliminate terrorism and extremism.

We need to understand that the threat to global peace comes from non-state actors who want to impose their highly bigoted and radicalised version of religions on others. They use the fair name of religions to justify their otherwise unjustifiable actions. We can defeat these people if we launch interfaith dialogue as a structured movement at the global level and build bridges among people.

This process of interfaith presents us with the only road ahead on the path of abiding peace, harmony and development.

VIEW: AFTER GAZA CEASEFIRE

[Dec. 5, 2012; Daily Times]

The studied silence of the Muslim world over the atrocities and gross violation of human rights in Gaza points to a larger malaise afflicting it

Starting a newspaper article with an anecdote is an unconventional way of writing. However, at times one feels persuaded to adopt this approach given the vast similarities existing between anecdotal content and situational realities on the ground. According to a tradition reported by Maulana Rumi in his world renowned Mathnawi, a cub joined a herd of sheep and started living with them. As he grew up, he adopted all the habits of the sheep and behaved like them. He forgot that he belonged to a different breed of animal figuratively referred to as the 'king of the jungle', and was blessed with physical prowess, courage and daring, unlike the sheep in whose company he was growing. Once, a lion attacked the sheep. On spotting that one of his breed was also among them, he talked to him trying to woo him back in his fold by reminding him of his family lineage and proverbial courage in an attempt to alienate him from the herd of sheep. Every argument he employed to achieve his purpose produced little result, as the lion remained adamant on retaining his present identity, secure as he was in the status quo. When every trick failed, the attacking lion hit upon an idea. He took the meek lion to a pond of water and showed him his reflection in it. Upon seeing his image, the lion brought up in the company of the sheep jettisoned his present identity and joined the herd of lions.

This anecdote reflects the present-day reality of Muslims, spread as they are over 57 states and sitting on strategically vital locations as well as vast energy deposits of the world. Despite their strengths, they are unable to face the world the way it is today. They continue to play second fiddle to the world powers and pocket insults and intimidation in the process.

As illustrated by the recent Gaza episode, the Muslims' irrelevance could not have been more clearly and starkly proved. As the Israeli fighter jets continued to rain death and destruction on the innocent and unarmed people of Gaza, the Muslim world looked the other way and remained content by merely issuing condemnatory statements. It did little to move the United Nations, OIC and even Arab League by bringing their collective influence to bear upon Israel and its supporters to stop the massacre of the people of Palestine.

In its editorial, Daily Star wrote on November 26: "The stark numbers confirm that Israel dealt out far more pain than it suffered. More than 160 Palestinians including key Hamas figures were killed and more than 900 were injured, compared to six Israeli dead and 240 injured. The Israeli military rained down 1,000 tonnes of explosives on Gaza, while the Palestinians managed to land one tonne on Israel's built-up areas. Much of Hamas' paramilitary infrastructure and rocket network are a smoking ruin."

The studied silence of the Muslim world over the atrocities and gross violation of human rights in Gaza points to a larger malaise afflicting it, a la the lion who was unable to shed the acquired ways of thinking and exploring his real identity and strength. Like the lion, they need a mirror to look at their reflection with a view to recognising who they are and what strength they possess to fight off contemporary challenges with a win-win mindset. The Muslim world is in acute need of leadership as well as strong institutional capacity building of their representative forums such as the OIC, etc, to leverage

their influence and be counted as a power to reckon with at the global level.

While Egypt did succeed in getting the Israeli government and Hamas leadership to agree to a ceasefire, it achieved this 'success' with full backing from Washington. The rise of the new Egyptian president, Mohamed Morsi as a power broker in the Middle East after the famous Arab Spring marks a departure from the meek and, at times, supine role Egypt under Hosni Mubarak played vis-à-vis the conflict between Israel and Palestine. However, the conduct of the post-revolution Egyptian leadership leaves much to be desired, given the nature of heightened expectations pinned on the post-Mubarak democratic leadership.

The Independent rightfully summed up President Morsi's dilemmas on the Mideast crisis: "For all the human tragedy, the periodic conflicts in Gaza provoke a sense of weary inevitability. What is different this time is that the latest spasm takes place in a region reshaped by the Arab Spring. Under Hosni Mubarak, Egypt was an ally of the US committed to peace with Israel; now its government is led by a member of the same Muslim Brotherhood that counts Hamas among its affiliates. Of the many tests that Egypt's first democratic President has faced since his election in June, the conflict in Gaza is perhaps the most hazardous. Mohamed Morsi is under pressure at home to stand up for beleaguered Palestinians, reversing Mubarak-era policies widely considered unduly supine. But regional instability will hit Egypt hard, and its ailing economy needs western aid. So far, Mr Morsi has played his cards carefully. He has condemned "Israeli aggression", withdrawn Egypt's ambassador to Tel Aviv and sent Prime Minister Hesham Kandil to Gaza. But he has not offered the Hamas military support, or threatened action against Israel."

As for the newly reinstalled US President Obama's decisive role in finding a permanent solution to the Middle East crisis,

the less said the better. As the plot thickens and more lives including those of infants and children are lost with a possibility of violence revisiting Palestine, President Obama seems to have forgotten his famous Cairo speech in which he promised to make a “new beginning” with the Muslim world based on ‘mutual respect’. The slogans of ‘change’ employed in 2007 and ‘Forward’ in 2012 appear to have been masked in the guise of vote fetching platitudes. There could not have been a more skewed world order than this.



NEED FOR UN'S REFORM

[Jan. 31, 2013]

The need for the reform of United Nations cannot be overemphasized, given the complexity of world geopolitical scene and the mess the whole world has got into due to lack of effective oversight of the world body. The Millennium summit of United Nations Organization held in 2000 was a landmark event because it set new goals for the world body to achieve in the realms of world peace and economic uplift. The Millennium Declaration issued at the end of the summit represented the collective will of the member states to work together for achieving peace and ensuring a just economic world order based upon the premise of including poor and third world countries in the economic race.

Unfortunately for the people across continents, the UN underwent one crisis after the other caused mainly by the unipolarity in the global world order. As a result of successive failures of the world body to deal with issues in an even-handed manner, the UN faces the worst crisis of lack of trust and credibility in its ability to rise to the occasions.

There is a widespread feeling among the vast section of humanity that it is in fact a handmaiden of the big powers lacking the capability to enforce its charter and ensure peace in the conflict-ridden world. The disappointed people rightly view its role as that of a helpless institution that has no other option but to fall in line when confronted with the specific agendas of the major countries of the world. Coupled with these issues

is the inability of the world body to solve such disputes as Palestine and Kashmir involving Muslims.

This lack of trust has basically originated from the UN's failure in implementing its resolutions regarding disputes involving Muslims and poor countries of the Third World. In spite of the fact that a score of resolutions lie pending on its agenda, it has been unable to even reiterate its commitment to their justness.

And when it comes to the interest of the powerful countries, it takes no time in doing the needful as is proven by the UN-sanctioned Gulf war against Iraq in 1991-2 and the independence of East Timor.

The big failure of the UN is that it has miserably failed in adjusting itself to the Unipolar World Order. The presence of bipolarity served as a major factor in ensuring the world peace and resultantly the role of UN did not come in for as much questioning as now. The very collapse of USSR should have indicated that the UN would have to be up against grave challenges and huge responsibility awaited it in retaining the trust of all member countries. But it shied away from carving out its role in a new world ruled by new rules of the game.

It is the aftermath of its inactivity that US has been able to coin a new doctrine of unilateralism which constitutes the indictment of the world body. The cherished concept of collective security has been shattered to the core with the penetrating fear.

The mushrooming of the regional blocs for economic and security cooperation should also serve as a curtain-raiser for the UN high-ups. Those integrating themselves in regional groupings have this thought rooted in their mind that the real help would come from the countries of the region because of their mutual stakes and interdependence. This symbolizes the weakening faith of these countries.

In view of the overriding need for the UN to set its house in order, some points are in order which would be helpful in reclaiming the lost ground. Firstly, the UN should review its charter in view of the prevalent world order marked by unipolarity with its attendant problems for the collective security arrangements. The location of its role in the world where different dynamics are at work after the collapse of the communism is of great relevance.

In a bid to restore its lost faith, the UN should decide not to make selective use of force that spells an image of its being a puppet organization. The uniform application of its charter would go a long way in reviving the trust of the member states. It would also restore the UN's independence in its working.

It is not just the area of security and peace that deserves the attention of the UN. The addressing of issues of global poverty, unemployment and hunger is equally important. The ongoing civil wars and internal strife in the blighted countries of the Third World originate from the presence of the above-mentioned problems when gulf between haves and have-nots reach alarming proportions.

In addition to other factors, the unjust economic system in operation in the world characterized by the dominance of rich countries with no space for developing countries is a major reason behind falling standards of life resulting into civil wars and internal conflicts among the competing classes.

The WTO regime is no doubt an attempt at bridging the gap between developed and the developing countries and offers attractive promises for the much-needed change. But there are vast problems in store for the weak economies if they straightaway signup with the regime without first setting rules of the game. The UN should devise a strategy to ensure that WTO regime does not become yet another instrument of exploiting the poor countries of the world.

More importantly the UN should bring about reforms in its internal structure. The decision-making process needs to be made more democratized and broad-based with maximum participation of the member countries so that they could own the decisions and the feelings that the decisions are imposed from the above without their participation in the process should be eliminated.

For this purpose, there is a need to make the role of the general assembly more relevant and decisive one. General Assembly of the UN is the representative institution of all member states. In view of this position it should be invested with more powers. Rather it is suggested that the general assembly should serve as a legislature for the UN where UNSC should be responsible to it for all its actions. The UNSC should be bound by the charter to seek mandate from the General Assembly for its decisions in the realm of security and world peace. The discretionary and superior role of UNSC should be reduced to the minimal levels.

There should be no further extension of the veto power of the UNSC. The possession of this power by permanent five members is already against the principles of justice and fair-play. In addition to the supervisory role of the General Assembly, the extension of its membership to some other non-permanent countries would be very helpful in reducing the dominant role of the permanent five.

Lastly the UN should devise strategy in dealing with the post-conflict policing and reconstruction work and there should not be any space for any external power for exploiting the material resources of the said country. The resources should be used for the welfare of the masses of the same country. These steps hold great relevance for the UN in making itself a credible body of the world.

