

Expression of freedom

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In a lustrous testimonial for the Musharraf government Ms Condoleezza Rice stated in an interview the other day that it was "a tremendous set of achievements" that Pakistan had accomplished. "Well, when I look at where Pakistan was three and a half years ago and I look at where Pakistan is now, it's really night and day" is what she is quoted as saying. There is no denying that from a position of isolation and being on the verge of bankruptcy today Pakistan is a different story indeed not just for the United States but for Pakistan itself. Musharraf's prompt and historic response to the American query in the aftermath of 9/11 has moved Pakistan away from being one of three countries that recognized the Taliban and from the dilemma of becoming an extremist dominated country.

Looked at from any perspective it was not just that Pakistan had no options but that it was a very wise and astute decision to fill the slot of "partner" that the United States was desperately seeking at a time when its self-esteem was badly damaged. That emphatic decision not only assisted us in our overseas diplomacy but it brought to light the underlying fear that the majority of Pakistanis felt at the increasing influence of a rabid and illiterate extremism that was on the verge of destroying the country and would have eventually led us to a ravaged situation like Afghanistan itself or even Lebanon after the onslaught.

The real agony is felt when one reflects on this, at the risk of being overtly repetitive, amazingly bold decision and then as a result focuses on the tepid follow up in dealing with extremism on the domestic scene. Granted that the government is doing more than its share on the borders in controlling the spread of the termites broadcasting this epidemic, but internally there is neither a cohesive response nor any real enforcement. The result is mixed signals, voiced cautiously by the United States not willing to betray its "partner" certainly at this stage, and perhaps a little more vocally by other Western states and some important ones in the east. The international media, encouraged by an increasing viewer-ship which wishes to see savage looking, bearded men frothing at the mouth like wild beasts, is highly motivated to find this variety of caveman and very easily able to do so. It is definitely cheaper and more comfortable than a visit to the local zoo.

Most important of these basic rights is the expression of freedom. Don't get me wrong I am not saying freedom of expression, that is a given, I am saying the expression of freedom. As a human you are free, as a Muslim you are even more free and the right to express yourself in that manner is God given.

cles were attacked and torched. The cost to the citizens and the exchequer was huge. The damage to Pakistan's soft image immense. There was utter disruption and fear spread like wildfire prompting other districts to actively consider postponing the marathons scheduled in their districts in the coming days. The political party concerned said that it had warned the organizers not to hold the girls' marathon. How dare they and what rights are they exercising? If allowed to get away with it even one time they will walk all over us.

Full marks to Pervaiz Elahi for the robust criticism, in a public speech, of those involved in these acts and endorsing the fact that Islam ensured the safety and security of all sections of society. Now he has to enforce this fact. It has been said that government, instead of making a big song and dance about this incident, should move towards the bigger matter of actual women empowerment and install the SOPs that will inculcate this in Pakistan's body politic. While agreeing with the principle, one must look

alone. And it is the duty of those selected to protect us to do exactly that, protect us.

To the extent that this incident must prompt the government to take the steps necessary to permit women to express their freedom one can agree with the thoughts that the final stages of empowerment are the most important. The active participation of more than 50 percent of Pakistan's population in every sphere of life is not a luxury it is an absolute necessity. There is nothing that today's woman cannot do that an average man can. Forget the analogies drawn by puny minds, even you and I cannot unload sugarcane off a truck. Focus around yourself and look at the high quality minds and inputs that you see in the form of women in today's highly competitive world. They excel now as they did in class 45 years ago. Ask any male who was privileged enough to attend a co-ed school and he will tell you.

Succumbing to petty jealousies and the fear of irate spouses has always prompted men in power to distance themselves overtly from women of caliber. This must now be relegated to the past. After all one hopes the spouses have migrated to the 21st century along with the rest of the world. And also, if they are smart, they will be aware that it is not the women of caliber who hold their spouses interest, these women are too committed to excellence to waste time with such degenerate trivia. Why the Musharraf government has ignored some women of outstanding merit is something I have not been able to comprehend. Of course, one is aware of the fact that there is a strong element of "pulling the rug" within the team but why fear a woman or two at the very highest level, especially if you have them with you. Leaving them to do mundane, obscure assignments or none at all is certainly not serving the nation's cause. Do we talk of Pakistan's soft image sometimes? Ok. Now do you now see the answer?

The opportunity to act against extremist elements is continuously presenting itself and being ignored. The role of the clergy is on the pulpit to serve the worshippers and act as men of God. Religion cannot be a part of politics and no political leader should take refuge behind it. Political parties are to do politics and religion and politics must be separated. Let the clergy serve humanity in spreading the word

a visit to the local zoo.

And while this projection goes on, the ranks and file of these elements is in no way being diminished. The nursery of this trend, the madrassah, still continues to turn out "believers" who are committed to driving out the infidel and wage jihad in perpetuity. Their ability to think is totally impaired, almost as if they had a lobotomy performed. Do not for a moment make the mistake of thinking that they can ever be integrated into the mainstream population. All attempts to do so will fail but in the process of collapsing the entire populace will be endangered.

The appalling incident in Gujranwalla the other day of young girls being attacked by a mob of hostiles led by a member of the federal parliament while participating in a marathon is ample proof of what these people are capable of. Women were attacked by a gang of 800 lunatics. Government and public vehi-

light the fact that empowerment of the human being, which includes both genders, is by the Almighty, Himself. By giving one life, he provides one with the opportunity to make an impact on life itself and bestows upon one the basic rights enabling one to do that and live life to the full.

Most important of these basic rights is the expression of freedom. Don't get me wrong I am not saying freedom of expression, that is a given, I am saying the expression of freedom. As a human you are free, as a Muslim you are even more free and the right to express yourself in that manner is God given. Islam advocates the fact that it is between you and God and only He will judge you. It is governments and mobs that make lunging attempts to curb this because they wish to impose upon you their will while it is demanded of you to subjugate yourself to the Will

government must take a firm stance and not change like night and day which it is so prone to. Perhaps banning religious parties from participating in politics will complete the trajectory, from 150 to a full 180 degrees, which Ms Rice spoke of.

Either we Pakistani men act quickly to promote the right of freedom to be a full partner in the life of Pakistan to our women else before we know they will have achieved it on their own the way things are going. Then we shall certainly be subject to a future fraught with danger for the men folk. I have a friend whose wife is ferociously jealous. His greatest fear on going to bed each night is what will happen if she has a bad dream one night! Think about. The faster we give them their due the better off we will be and Pakistan the greatest beneficiary.

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