

Is anyone listening?

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Dissenting Note

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Two weeks ago, US bombs killed five people on Pakistani side of the border in North Waziristan. Five more Afghans were killed in the same bombing across the border. The Pakistan government hardly issued a

protest on the incident. But, that is no longer news as Pakistani officials have long given up the right to speak in return for petty favours from US. What is still problematic, however, is the silence on the part of the international community. The fact that US can continue to bomb whichever area it wants and take innocent lives and yet no government or leader at international level is protesting this, is very disturbing, to say the least.

The continued use of force against Iraqis in the name of "liberation", torture tactics adopted at Guantanamo Bay and other US prisons dealing with foreign prisoners, and continued military operations along the Pak-Afghan border that kill innocent people represent gross violations of basic human rights. These are facts that anyone can see. But, for those who are unwilling to see for themselves, the Amnesty International Report 2005 presents a scary picture of the extent of US barbarism. An Amnesty International official, in a recent interview, said that apart from all the known practices, US is operating many prisons around the world as secret camps in which people are "literally disappearing".

The Report documents many concerns regarding US methods that have been developed as part of efforts to curb terrorism in the world. The unacceptable behaviour of the US prison officials in Abu Ghraib prison, which became an international scandal, did not lead to any proper investigation. It was bad enough that US prison officials were engaging in such psychotic torture tactics, but as the Amnesty International's report observes, more damaging is the fact that the US Administration as well as the Congress have refused to conduct a full and independent investigation.

This is especially worrying given that there is enough evidence to show that the same torture tactics are being used in Bagram, Guantanamo and other detention centres. Similarly, it has almost been four years since September 11, but the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay are still denied right to normal judicial process. As the report argues, it is high time that these prisoners are released or charged and prosecuted with due process.

Not much of this is completely new or unbelievable. But, that does not make such practices justifiable. It is clear that in claiming to rid this world of terror, US itself has become the biggest terrorist in the world. It has stooped to practices one can associate with the age of barbarism and

not with the most advanced nation of the world. The real fear is that even after four years of these policies, there is no widespread realisation within US that these practices are wrong or should be brought to an end. The US public elected Bush back with an even bigger majority than before. At the same time, there are hardly any public protests in US against these practices. All of this leaves very little hope that there will be any change in US practices and policies in the near future.

The pressure now is really on the other developed nations to resist US. The fact that in the recent British elections, the UK public has castigated Tony Blair for taking the country to war in Iraq,

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might make the UK government less keen on supporting US policies in the coming years. The French and Germans have been resisting US policies in Iraq even before the country was attacked. But there is need for the world community to listen to its conscience and actively exert pressure on US government to stop violations of international human rights.

Also, there is need for more international human rights groups to speak out as bluntly as Amnesty International has spoken. Such reports might not make much difference in the Muslim world where people are already convinced of the atrocities of US policies. But they are very important in influencing the western public. One can only hope that more US nationals will actually read such reports and realise that what their government is doing is neither making America nor the world any safer place to live in.

Pressure from liberal groups within US, and active resistance from other developed countries is critical if the world is to see any change in the practices of the current US government. Else, the world is going to plunge in an even more severe crisis. Is anyone (especially in the UN) listening?

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They trade in children and women, don't they?

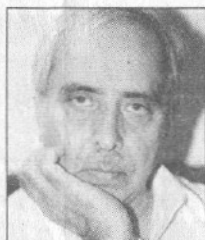
THE 2005 *TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS* report issued by the State Department last week should have made every one of our leaders, turbaned divines, retired crusading generals like Hamid Gul "Ribbentrop" and some of the more preachy Urdu newspaper columnists to sit up. It failed to do any such thing. Since most of these gentlemen rarely read anything except what they have themselves written, chances are they did not read what brief reports of its contents appeared here and there.

The MMA bearded brigade, whose great nemesis Ahmed Bashir is sadly no longer alive to give them the tongue lashing they deserve, one does not expect to do anything about the report's findings either. In the MMA's book, anything that comes from the House of the Great Satan is to be dismissed as yet another attack on Islam. Be that as it may, here is a bit of what is really going on in the land of Enlightened Moderation-to-be, the Islamic Republic, little of which is either Islamic or Republican.

The entry on Pakistan begins thus, "Pakistan is a source, transit, and destination country for victims of severe forms of trafficking in persons. Women and girls from Bangladesh, India, Burma, Afghanistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are trafficked to Pakistan for commercial sexual exploitation and bonded labour. Girls and women from rural areas are trafficked within the country to urban centres for commercial and sexual exploitation and involuntary domestic servitude. Women trafficked from East Asian countries and Bangladesh to the Middle East often transit through Pakistan for bonded labour and domestic servitude. Boys are trafficked to Persian Gulf states for use as camel jockeys. Children are trafficked internally for forced begging and bonded labour."

The review says the Government of Pakistan does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, but is making "significant efforts" to do so. Certain steps have been taken and an anti-trafficking unit has been formed as part of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). For those who have forgotten, it was Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who set it up. Several

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Government of Pakistan has not signed the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons. It has signed but not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. Again, it has signed but not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Armed Conflict

public awareness campaigns have also been run.

Religious parties which keep screaming about *uryani* and *fahashi* and disfiguring billboards that show women, have done nothing about this scandalous and shameful situation. Their ire is directed at Indian TV channels and movie houses running those so-called blue movies, one of which, some years ago, was called *The Nurses of Faisalabad*. It was reassuring to know that Faisalabad not only had nurses, but nurses whose talents went beyond

administering to the medical needs of patients.

Some steps have been taken by the government, such as the establishment of 267 detention centres but much, much more needs to be done. What the effort needs is an Edhi but in the person of Ansar Burney, chairman of the Ansar Burney Welfare Trust, there is a worthy second. The State Department review lists him among 11 of the world's "Heroes acting to end modern-day slavery". I think we should all be proud of this man.

This is how the report takes note of him: "A noted Pakistani human rights activist, Ansar Burney has worked relentlessly to bring to light the plight of thousands of South Asian and African children trafficked to Arabian Gulf countries for exploitation as camel jockeys. These abused children, some as young as two years of age, are purposely malnourished to keep them lightweight and denied education. As a result of Mr Burney's efforts, the Government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) established its first-ever shelter for rescued children and repatriated 43 through the shelter. He is quick to point out, however, that much more needs to be done to rescue, rehabilitate and repatriate thousands of trafficked children throughout the Gulf region."

While what efforts the Government of Pakistan has made have been given credit by the annual review, it also needs to be stressed what the Government of Pakistan has *not* done. It has not signed the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons. It has signed but *not* ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. Again, it has signed but *not* ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Armed Conflict, *neither* has it signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Isn't it time for our elected representatives to stop thumping desks and staging walkouts to do the right thing, even if such not be their habit or inclination!

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