**Chomsky masterclass**

BY ASH RAF JEH ANGIR QAZI 2020-12-10

ADDRESSING the sixth Yohsin Lecture at Habib University, Karachi, on Dec 7, the renowned linguist, political commentator and human rights activist, Noam Chomsky, who will this month observe his 92nd birthday, gave yet another fascinating masterclass on the state of the world. More than an icon, Chomsky has been an intellectual, political and moral treasure for the world.

He has never sought to make grand philosophical or ideological statements that would encompass and explain the realities and meaning of our existence. Instead, he has always addressed himself to specific issues and challenges as a way to advance the welfare, happiness and security of humanity and similarly to avert and minimise injustice, violence and calamity.

Even more importantly, he has never sought to impose his views other than to explain why he sees specific issues and developments the way he does. No wonder, global powers and elites or as Chomsky calls them, the `masters of the universe`, see him as a menace to the world their world, actually.

Chomsky spoke of the three existential and imminent threats to human civilisation as we know it: the threat of nuclear conflict which is growing; the threat of environmental catastrophe which is also increasing and will soon become irreversible if not urgently addressed; and the `deterioration of democracy` which prevents `an informed public engagement` withgovernance thatis essential to avert the threats of nuclear conflict and environmental catastrophe.

Chomsky adds that the current Covid-19 pandemic and likely future pandemics are a fourth existendalthreatthatis being exacerbated by the fossil fuel industry which contributes to increased respiratory diseases and vulnerability. Although the least of the four threats, the world will emerge from Covid-19 at `terrible and needless cost`. He notes how the US and Western media completely ignore China`s contribution to Covid-19 vaccine development and falsely accuse China for the spread of the virus. The US simply cannot bear the fact that China has controlled the spread of the virus and is almost back to normal while in the US the Trump administration `just gave up` and `people are dying of the virus while denying its existence`. There are, of course, several equally lethal derivatives from the four main threats to human civilisation.

The recent presidential elections in the US, Chomsky says, were `a total disaster`.

The Republicans won everything `from the state level to Congress` except the presidency which Biden won because of popular `hatred of Trump`. Chomsky believes Trump will leave the White House withoutconceding the elections. His endless litigation against the results are aimed at raising money, energising his base with the slogan that the elections were stolen, `our hero was cheated by the deep state`, etc. Moreover, three-quarters of Republicans actually think so. Trump could even try to set up an alternate `valid and true` government supporting him. The Senate, says Chomsky, is `finished as a deliberative body`. Its job now is to make the country ungovernable under the Democrats, and to serve the corporate super-rich, stack the judiciary with `ultra-right` lawyers and, thereby, block any way back to the Obama reforms under the Republicans.

Chomsky spoke about a Reactionary International in the making led by the US, and including the likes of Brazil, the Gulf Emirates including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel and India, where amazingly `the younger generation is more reactionary than the elder generation`. Modi was destroying the remnants of Indian secular-ism, crushing its Muslims, and the Kashmiris were suffering under his very brutal regime. It was here that Chomsky added, almost sotto voce, that `Pakistan was not too far behind` in becoming part of the Reactionary International.

Chomsky`s audience was made aware thathe panders to no one and speaks the truth as he sees it without hesitation or qualification.

At the very end of question time Chomsky`s host asked him whether he had a message for the university. Chomsky by way of reply observed that there was a time when Pakistan had a very advanced scientific establishment which included a Nobel Prize winner. Unfortunately, that kind of scientific establishment had now virtually disappeared from Pakistan`s educational system, although there were a few serious scientists who were trying to preserve a rational educational system. He concluded by warning that Pakistan would have `no future if it was going to live in a world of religious superstition`. This was not a statement against religion itself. It was a statement against religion being allowed to crowd out the scientific temper.  The writer is a former ambassador to the US, India and China and head of UN missions in Iraq and Sudan.

ashrafjgazi@gmail.com www.ashrafjgazi.com