**Not Sectarianism but Politics**

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No one can deny the importance of Gilgit-Baltistan regarding its strategic location and resources that have direct and indirect political, economic, and social impacts on Pakistan and its regional apparatus. A prosperous and peaceful Gilgit-Baltistan will lead to a really prosperous region while a violent or unstable Gilgit-Baltistan will result in the downfall of the region. This can be understood clearly if one keeps in mind the interest of China, India, and Pakistan in this region. Now, what to say about the sectarianism inside Gilgit-Baltistan where major powers like the US, China, and other regional and global powers have been looking for their politics, investments, and tourism.

The ongoing conflict between the Shia and extremist Sunni seems a sectarian issue but if someone pays keen attention and tries to analyze the whole situation in the context of the state and its regional apparatus it can easily be understood and judged what the masters of power politics are hatching below these conflicts. One should keep in mind that a stable and peaceful Pakistan would never be in the interest and priority of its historical rival India. It is because China is going to be connected

with the world by establishing and using the shortest route through this land that stings like a thorn in the eyes of the US and India. The cold war in terms of a trade war between the US and China cannot be ignored.

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China has always shown reservations regarding violence in the countries where it has huge investments. It has tried to convince different countries to resolve their conflicts for a peaceful economic rise. A great example of China’s peaceful rise policy is its mediation role between Iran and KSA. The KSA which was once critical of shrines/tombs has now allowed the Shias to build the Shrine of their beloved and sacred personalities inside the KSA. It shows that the leading model of Shias and Sunnis i.e. Iran and KSA respectively are coming closer and relations are getting better. So, the followers of these leading models whether they are in KPK or Gilgit-Baltistan must also come closer and should understand what is going on in the international political arena.

Negative developments always lead to negative consequences. The root cause of the ongoing conflict is the one-sided bill which was passed by the interim government. Now here arises the question that who was behind the bill: the extremist pressure group, the equivocal establishment, the interim government officials, or someone else. To understand these questions one must have to see who is taking benefit from such a worse situation. Let’s flashback to some historical facts. From the inception of Pakistan until General Zia, there was neither sectarian violence in Pakistan nor Gilgit-Baltistan. Zia has no doubt sown the seeds of religious fanaticism in this country. The 1988 tension was its consequences when the trained extremists having guns in their hands brutally killed the local people of Gilgit-Baltistan and also shot down the animals and ignited the crops just because they were nourished by the inhabited Shia population.

Several renowned religious scholars like Arif Al Husseini were assassinated on both sides of the two sects. A big question arises in our mind Why has Zia stirred up extremist mindsets in the name of Islamization?

The simple and vivid answer is that he and his establishment were feeling a great threat from the revolution of Iran as it was perceived that the 1979 revolution could most probably be transported to the

neighbouring countries. The same threat was perceived by Saddam of Iraq and as a result, an elongating war happened between Iran and Iraq. While in our country the Shia-Sunni sectarian tensions happened as a result of the perception of Zia. Zia himself was burst in the air but what he had set the negative precedent of extremism prevailed further and further. The fundamental reason for such conflict was based on Zia’s politics who used sectarianism as a political tool to serve his band’s interest.

Now keeping in view the regional developments and geostrategic location of Gilgit-Baltistan it seems that sectarianism is being used once again as a political tool by some invisible hands of power politics. To identify such invisible hands, one must try to understand who the real beneficiaries of such worse situations are. Besides the dollar hike and high inflation in the country, the cross-fighting at the border of KPK, the PTM’s head Manzoor Pashteen’s protest, the controversial bill, the Jaranwala incident, FIR on Mufti Haneef and Syed Baqir by the extremists, and the exchanging harsh statements between the

religious scholars of both sects in Gilgit-Baltistan are benefitting which faction of the country or world. No doubt, these incidents have diverted the attention of common citizens from the decisions taken regarding the economy, elections, political leaders/parties, and other related affairs. If we try to see these incidents in a broader spectrum, the West particularly the US is one of the beneficiaries. India is also a beneficiary who is no doubt supporting the US stance over China’s economic rise. This is because such an intense situation can hinder China from making good investments, and launching worthwhile projects in the region.

Since the nomination of Donald Blome -an American top diplomat and ambassador to Pakistan -the political and economic directions of Pakistan drastically changed. All such incidents serve the interests of the US, India, and the Mafia in the institutions of Pakistan struggling for their politics and power.

Anyhow, Pakistan is more dependent on the US than vice versa. So, it seems that Pakistan’s democratic and political leadership are under the pressure and compulsion of the institutional Mafia and the US. Let’s see where these dark power politics carry the country and its helpless citizens.

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