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# I wanna be in Wana

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I don't buy all this stuff about tribal hospitality that is totally regardless of possible consequences. Hospitality is good, especially for the guests. However, do look at the foolish Taliban who went out on a limb and carried the fine art of hospitality to the highest plane when they protected and humoured their gun-slitting, grenade-bearing, mortar-firing terrorist guests from the Middle East. When the rest of the world beseeched Mullah Omar to turn in Osama that curt refusal to was typical tribal hospitality and the Taliban got rightfully whacked for it. Perhaps it would have been better if Mullah Omar had been man enough and lived up to his vow of dying to the last mercenary, rather than running like a rat and hiding like a rat when push came to shove.

I don't understand what our chivalrous tribesmen upcountry have in common with foreigners that everyone else is hunting down. Hospitality aside, is there really so much at stake that the tribes should mount a mutiny against their own country? The answer is very simple. True to the time-worn tribal traditions, a lot of money has been spread around by the remnants of Osama's terrorist network. Thus it is not completely tribal hospitality that keeps the Al-Qaeda operatives under tribal protection but promises of oodles of greenbacks. Naik Mohammad, the precocious tribal warlord bearing a name he did not deserve, is dead and gone. He too was essentially a mercenary and never a martyr by any stretch of imagination, and has been suitably despatched for rising against his own people. But is that punishment enough to set the house in order in the agencies?

I am, therefore, all for this concerted army action against foreigners holed out in Wana and its environs and the crack-down on outlaws providing shelter and sustenance to terrorists who are no friends of Pakistan. For good measure, it is high time that the good people of this country should do something about the tribal menace also. However, it amazes me that despite vast resources of state and all forms of technological and logistical support from the most advanced war machinery in the world, this eradication programme is taking far too long. More needs to be done.

With the American elections only a few months away and the incumbent idiot savant trailing the front-runner, there is wide speculation that the Osama factor can play a decisive role in the outcome of the presidential race. The privileged amongst us have suspected for months that Osama is already in custody and will be "sprung" and arraigned before the international community just in time to make appropriate headlines and win over the voters sitting on the fence. If that is not the case and if Osama is indeed one of the hundreds of Arab warriors hiding out along the Afghan border, the tribes are not doing anyone a

favour by incurring the wrath of the rest of the world and bringing a bad name to my country.

My rambling today is about the tribal areas and why I am simply ecstatic that the tribal rascals are being dealt a royal hiding. The tribes have been living on us for quite some time now and rather than being grateful they have the temerity to challenge the writ of the state and attempt to turn my country into a pariah in the eyes of the comity of nations. There are more than a hundred good reasons to commend the continuing armed action up north. The tribesmen are a curious lot. They are in the habit of taking, and never giving. They enjoy all privileges in the tribal areas, with access to roads, electricity and such other amenities that the tribes have over the years permitted the Government of Pak-

ally in return for monetary consideration. All types of criminals and people on the run are known to have fled to the tribal areas to escape the rather short arm of the law. Having said that let me also point out that protection often ends when the people chasing the fugitives raise the ante.

The most popular crimes are car lifting, abduction and smuggling. If stolen vehicles are not broken down for spare parts in Peshawar, these are invariably driven into the agencies and put on display for eventual sale back to rightful owners. I am reminded here of a provincial minister from the Punjab who ventured into the tribal belt recently to buy a smuggled vehicle and was instead detained for ransom. Those abducted are released on payment of ransom. Although there have been instances when the mili-

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istan to extend. Civic facilities are not really something to write home about and yet there are no user charges. There are no taxes, no rents or fees and the electricity is free. A bulk of Wapda's line losses of twenty-one percent or so are on account of non-payment of electricity dues by consumers in the tribal belt. The tribes enjoy unrestricted freedom within the agencies and also have the bonus of unrestricted ingress to settled areas and all other benefits that can be enjoyed by any Pakistan national, such as national identity cards, passports and representation in the National Assembly.

There is no question of industrialisation the agencies for the simple reason that the tribes treasure their freedom and would not permit investors to put up factories or businesses. The forests were denuded decades ago and thus there are precious little natural resources left to create economic activity. In the complete absence of employment opportunities locally, crime is the predominant vocation, never mind that the religion of Islam that the devout Muslims of the Tribal Areas follow so rigidly expressly forbids it.

Since there is a mind-boggling inter- and intra-tribal honour, crime is perpetrated mainly in settled areas. Therefore, the tribes steal from the rest of the country over and over again. The agencies are also a safe haven and yet the tribes are not known for extending unrestricted hospitality. Fugitives from settled areas are provided protection, usu-

ally moved in to recover kidnap victims, the success ratio is somewhat on the low side, often resulting in tribal unrest that forces the government to promise additional largesse and concessions.

Smuggling is mainly the forte of the Afghans and the agencies provide a convenient route for goods imported as transit trade to be funnelled straight back into markets throughout the country. The increase in demand for drugs in the west accompanied by the incredible rise in prices in the seventies saw the tribal agencies become fertile ground not only for poppy cultivation but also for drug trade from Afghanistan. It was not long before state-of-the-art heroin processing factories sprouted under complete protection of tribal chieftains and patronage of the militia.

These are thus the people that are currently defying state machinery merely for unlimited amount of money from known terrorists. These terrorists come from countries where Pakistanis are treated like dirt and deported home on the flimsiest of grounds. These terrorists, most of them misguided and brainwashed zealots who think they are on a mission for God and shall be redeemed for killing other human beings come judgement day, deserve to die. The tribes and their supporters in the settled areas, most particularly the bigoted mullahs, don't deserve to be a part of this country. Therefore, I wanna be in Wana to lend a hand and help bring this nonsense to an end.

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