

Speech, security and society

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Society

If we are secure at the borders, then what stops us from channeling our funds from security to society, from cantonments to cities?

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Without detailing who created religious extremism and its carriers, the President spoke to eradicate the disease and also spelled out his strategy. That it was done after September 11th, and December 13th does not diminish its significance. However, had the President treaded this course soon after he had taken over the reins of power, history today would have been different.

Musharraf's speech of October 17, 1999 carried equally good material for thought, but failed on actions. Who has been stopping the President from implementing his resolute will up till now, is a question that would determine the fate of his speech. The truth is that in spite of wealth, weaponry and will (all inducted), religious extremists are a

minority in Pakistan. They were never as influential as portrayed. They were entities because of the support they received from CIA and ISI and the rich of the world and particularly of the Gulf countries, during and after the so-called Afghan resistance against the Soviets. Now when their supporters have not only severed their support, but also are acting against them, they should cease to function. This is a straight conclusion that Americans are drawing, forcefully as well as diplomatically. For that, however, they had to condemn their old policies.

When President Bush while praising the pre-Taliban era in Afghanistan said that eighty per cent teachers and forty per cent doctors were women in Kabul, he was actually making a confession. Present Musharraf

too confessed. Just recall his policy statements after September 11th wherein he invariably said that our Afghan policy was correct before September 11th. Remember also his severe criticism of the Northern Alliance. His speech has equated the two warring factions of Afghan society. He said that war between them was no *jihad* as Muslims were fighting against Muslims. It is the first confession made during fifty-five years from our rulers though; given their blunders they have to confess more. Yet, the example quoted and reference of *jihad* was irrelevant and undesired.

We were wrong on many fronts, and absolutely wrong on two. Socially we adopted duplicity; and on security we exaggerated our vulnerability at borders. That led to a

destruction of the intellectual fabric of society, and reduction of borders. There were no religious extremists in 1947. They were not there even in 1971. Yet, we were moving backwards with the speed of light. The reverse journey has so far not stopped. Religious extremism is a burden that we carried only after 1979. So, it is an auxiliary problem; the real problem lies somewhere else. Until that is addressed, our address to the Americans or Indians may reduce tension at the borders, it will not help us to improve internally. The President's speech in this regard would not bring the desired results.

A progressive society that President intends to build cannot be unless we wash our minds. We are possessed by such notions and versions of our past that are simply misleading. When the President refers to Taliban and Northern Alliance fighting, and says that it was not *jihad*, he may only be making a confession; but the example subconsciously approves the *jihad* between Muslims and the others. It does not carry the kind of sincerity that relationship between various nations demand.

In the same speech, he has talked about yet another notion that is propagated by Muslim intellectuals, almost all of whom belong to Egypt, India and Pakistan. It is about the period from seventh century to fifteenth century. The President

said that during this period Muslims transferred knowledge and technology to the rest of the people of the world. During this period Muslims also ruled India. What knowledge or technology they transferred here is yet to be discovered. The same happened elsewhere. People—whether they were Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Arabs, Mughals, Europeans or Indians—knew nothing beyond simple mathematics and laws of divinity. Human society underwent a mutation, a revolution, in the West when the knowledge based on logic started gaining first acceptance and then respect. Application of it is what technology and West's power means.

Unless we are enlightened to the fact that almost all knowledge before the seventh century served no meaningful purpose, we would remain prisoners of our past and that would never allow us to acquire logical knowledge honestly. This is the dilemma of our social growth. It is saddening that one-way or the other our rulers are strengthening this dilemma. In any case, does past matter?

Our rulers are practicing duplicity. All of them, their children and their kin are thoroughly Westernised, but they want others to look at the past, and also study in *madressahs*. President's praise for the seminaries saying that they are the largest network of useful NGOs better than anywhere in the world is either

an innocent statement or willfully made. First of all, the West was not made by NGOs. It was the state that brought the change. Second, in how many *madressahs* do the children of Generals, bureaucrats, and the rich study? Unless we come to equality of rights of citizens, we would keep on directing most of our population to such places where we would not like to go ourselves or send our children. This indifference to the majority has affected the collective psyche of our nation. No one is interested in honest work.

Unless education is made a choice, and unless all children have access to modern schooling, we would remain where we are. The state and not NGOs or *madressahs* would do it. Here the question of funds or poverty of state arises. The answer to that has repeatedly been given by the President himself. He often stresses on the fact that we are safe externally, but we are weak internally. He has said it again. So the funds, though they are not enough, are there. If we are secure at the borders, then what stops us from channeling these funds from security to society, or from cantonments to cities? If we know the real disease, then why are we only attacking minor infections? Unless the rulers of Pakistan rise above self and institutional interests, and perform a balancing act within the society, nothing would change—no matter what we say.