

IN MY VIEWS

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Published/on-aired in 2018



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PREFACE

Pakistan Movement, under the leadership of Quaid-e-Azam, was a purely peaceful struggle which results into achieving Pakistan. To transform the newly-independent state into a model welfare country, he provided a clear roadmap during his address to the Constituent Assembly on August 11, 1947. Appointment of Hindu leader Jogendra Nath Mandal in his cabinet and asking Pakistani Hindu families to make Pakistan their homeland are some examples to highlight the Quaid's vision of peaceful, progressive and prosperous Pakistan.

Alas, the great leader left us alone just after one year of independence. However, I believe that we need to follow the Quaid-e-Azam's vision for the betterment of our beloved country.

Media is very effective platform for awareness among masses. My participation in various TV talk shows is to spread the message of peace and prosperity. In my regular articles, I tried to cover almost all important topics including Non-Muslim heroes of Pakistan Movement, PIA crisis, Syria, Abraham Lincoln, Qasur Tragedy, Chanakya, Korea peace initiative, and Chernobyl tragedy, etc. I also emphasized the real objectives of marking national, religious and world days.

I understand that difficulties could be faced in the way to truth but courage to express our views accurately is in the best interest of our beloved country and humanity as well. My last year's compilation of articles has received very positive response on massive level. I am grateful to all of you who appreciated my sincere efforts.

Therefore, I am once again presenting compilation of my articles published in 2018 in the form of book. I also would like to have feedback on the book to know how much I am successful to revive the Quaid-e-Azam's vision through my writings.

Warm regards,

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THE NEWS

Friday, December 28, 2018

Tread with caution

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



When the year 2018 began, I wrote an article in these pages on US President Donald Trump's controversial tweet about Pakistan.

It is a mere coincidence that my last column of the year is also about Trump.

Recently, the Foreign Office disclosed that Trump, in a letter addressed to Prime Minister Imran Khan, has sought Pakistan's support in the Afghan peace process. He emphasised that the US is willing to explore opportunities to renew partnership with Pakistan.

There are also reports in the US media that Trump is planning to withdraw American troops that are based in Afghanistan. The possibility of the US pulling out of the 18-year-long Afghan war has created panic among the international community. However, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani is of the view that the US withdrawal will have no major impact on Afghanistan's ability to defend itself.

These news reports are also being discussed in the local media. According to some analysts, the US is exhausted by the long war and has accepted defeat at the hands of the Taliban. Some critics have claimed that the crumbling US economy is the actual reason for Trump's decision. Drawing attention to the history of Afghanistan, some journalists have argued that it is quite difficult for foreign occupying forces to remain in Afghanistan due to its unique geographical location.

This uncertain situation reminds me of *Rambo III*, which was released in 1988. In the climax scene of the film, Rambo and

the US commander were about to be defeated by the might of the Soviet Army. But the Mujahideen warriors attacked the battlefield to save them. Later, an Afghan child asks them to stay in Afghanistan. However, the Americans cross the Afghan border to enter Pakistan.

The movie was originally dedicated to the brave Mujahideen fighters of Afghanistan. However, after 9/11, the ending credits were replaced with: "This film is dedicated to the gallant people of Afghanistan".

Pakistan has always tried to maintain brotherly relations with Afghanistan. The country opened its doors for the Afghan people on humanitarian grounds. Unfortunately, the Afghan leadership has always remained hostile towards Pakistan.

The shortest period of cordial relations between both countries was the Taliban era. After 9/11, Pakistan had tried its best to convince the then Afghan leadership to show flexibility in the interest of achieving regional peace. If the situation had been settled amicably, thousands of innocent lives could have been saved on both sides.

The successful ceasefire on the occasion of Eidul Fitr this year showed the commitment of the current Afghan government, under the leadership of Ashraf Ghani, to ensure peace and prosperity. This was also the first time that the Taliban accepted a ceasefire offer since their government was toppled in 2001. This reflects that the attitude of the Afghan Taliban has changed over time. Similarly, the success of the Bajwa Doctrine demonstrates that Pakistan has never fought for money but to ensure peace.

If we analyse Trump's tweet on New

Year's Eve in 2017 and his recent letter to PM Imran Khan, the narrative is the same: do more. However, the positive change in US foreign policy could be an outcome of the fact that the PTI government, unlike previous regimes, is committed towards strengthening national institutions and adopting a win-win foreign policy. There is no doubt that Afghanistan remains important in our foreign policy. That's why Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi visited Afghanistan on his first foreign official tour to engage in dialogue with his counterpart Salahuddin Rabbani.

However, the sudden withdrawal of the US troops will have a negative impact on the region. The presence of Daesh in Afghanistan is alarming for regional countries and the Taliban. The Afghan situation is so complex that it cannot be solved with the help of a letter. The US must also take all other stakeholders, including the Central Asian States, China, Iran, India and Russia on board to move Afghanistan towards peace and prosperity.

In the past, Pakistan was hastily pushed into the Afghan war. But this time, we must first create a national consensus before officially responding to Trump's letter. PM Imran Khan ought to have an exclusive meeting with analysts and experts on Afghan affairs to devise a concrete policy. According to some analysts, a peace treaty with the Afghan Taliban is expected before April, prior to the presidential elections in Afghanistan. In light of these factors, Pakistan must be careful and act wisely.

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THE NEWS

Monday, December 24, 2018

Merry Christmas!

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Like other parts of world, preparations to celebrate Christmas started in Pakistan with traditional zeal and enthusiasm. Members of the Christian community are attending special services at beautifully-decorated churches where prayers are also being offered for the progress and prosperity of Pakistan.

Christmas is held to mark the birthday of Jesus Christ on December 25 every year. It is one of those important festivals that is celebrated with cheer and happiness. Christmas Day is a public holiday in many countries. However, many Sunday schools, churches and communities organise special events to mark the Christmas. Similarly, homes, churches and shopping mall are decorated with Christmas trees. Like other festivals, Christmas is also about gathering with friends and family to celebrate the holiday.

Literally, Christmas means 'Christ-mass', and the day is being celebrated throughout the world since hundreds of years. It is an universal fact that every religion asks its followers to ensure peace, humanity and harmony in society. The purpose to celebrate any religious festival is to spread the positive message of God. As far as Christmas is concerned, I believe it also reflects spiritual message.

On the occasion of Christmas, people decorate their homes and churches with evergreen trees, which are the symbol of eternal life. The presence of candles reminds that Christ is the light of the world. Red reflects the sacrifice of Christ. Bells are linked with ringing out news. This is what I learn about Christmas while interacting with my Christian friends.

Santa Claus, also known as Father Christmas, or simply Santa, is a legendary figure, who is generally represented as a white-bearded man wearing a red dress and carries a bag full of gifts for children. Before Christmas, children write letters to Santa Claus, asking for toys for their good behaviour. However, Santa Claus is known as 'Christmas Baba' in our country.

Pakistan has a significant population of Christians who are contributing to society. Historically, the first Anglican Bishop of Lahore was appointed in 1877 under the British colonial rule. There are also many beautiful churches that were also built during British rule. Saint Patrick's Cathedral was founded in Karachi around 12 years before the War of Independence 1857. Other prominent historical churches included St Joseph's Church Lahore, St Andrew's Church Lahore, Saint Mary's Cathedral Church Multan, the Holy Trinity Church Sialkot, and St John's Cathedral in Peshawar. I believe that these historical churches have the potential for faith tourism, attracting Christians from the Europe and Christian world to Pakistan.

Christians also played a pivotal role for the success of the Pakistan Movement. Pothan Joseph was also one of those educated Christians who spread the message of Quaid-e-Azam in his community. The decisive vote of SP Singha, the Christian speaker of the then-Punjab Assembly, resulted to inclusion of current Punjab into Pakistan. Quaid-e-Azam, on various occasions, also promised that all citizens of Pakistan would enjoy complete equality of citizenship.

On the occasion of Christmas, we must also acknowledge the remarkable contributions of Pakistani Christians in every field of life. Many of them are serving in national institutions and other organisations. Some have received the highest civilian and military awards. Honourable

Justice A R Cornelius was Pakistan's first non-Muslim chief justice of the Supreme Court. On the defence front, the Pakistan Air Force is honoured to have some great pilots on board, including Cecil Chaudhry, Peter O'Reilly and Mervyn L. Middlecoat. Similarly, Sara Alfred, Sunita Marshal, Nirmal Roy, Ashir Azeem, and Benita David are some prominent names belonging to mainstream media.

Every year, I try my best to become part of Christmas celebrations. The purpose is to share happiness, promote interfaith harmony and express solidarity with Christian friends. However, I always emphasise that on the happy occasions of religious festivals - whether Christmas, Eid or Diwali - we must not neglect those who are unable to celebrate happy moments. In every religion, the greatest act of kindness is giving charity to the poor. Supporting others is such a good deed that is encouraged by God.

In my view, religious festivals also provide an excellent opportunity to strengthen our bond with humanity and promote interfaith harmony. Therefore, there is a dire need to declare non-Muslim festivals like Christmas, Holi, Diwali and Easter as public holidays for every citizen. In this regard, I also moved a resolution in National Assembly.

Similarly, it is the responsibility of our national leadership that, besides issuing facilitation messages in the media, they must practically demonstrate interfaith harmony according to Quaid-e-Azam's vision. The government must consider for offering special bonuses and relief packages on the eve of Christmas and other religious festivals. Merry Christmas!

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THE NEWS

Friday, December 14, 2018

A visit to Thar

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



It was an honour for me to be part of the group that accompanied Chief Justice Saqib Nisar to Tharparkar on Wednesday.

Tharparkar is one of the most disadvantaged regions of Pakistan, where poverty, hunger and fatal diseases are prevalent even over 70 years after Independence. Some of the highest mortality rates among mothers and newborns are reported in Tharparkar due to malnutrition and the unavailability of proper health facilities.

Even in our modern times, Tharparkar remains a backward region, where people's greatest goal is to obtain access to clean water. Tharparkar's rich cultural heritage is at stake due to the ignorance shown by the provincial government.

According to a recent report, around 77 Tharis committed suicide this year. Poverty is adding to people's frustration. Animal carcasses are a familiar sight on the roads of Tharparkar. It is highly regrettable that even though the same political party has been at the helm in Sindh for a long time, Thar was never part of its priorities.

Hailing from Tharparkar, I have observed that whenever attempts are made to bring the plight of Thar's residents to the attention of the higher authorities, false claims are presented. Thar's people

can now see a ray of hope after the chief justice took notice of the crisis in the desert region.

I appeared before the chief justice during every hearing of the case for the sake of Thar's people, and made it a point to present the ground realities to the Supreme Court.

However, representatives of the provincial government tried their best to mislead the court by presenting unrealistic claims. According to the Sindh chief secretary, the Sindh government, in collaboration with civil society organisations, also arranged medical camps for Tharis, which were attended by around 81,000 people. Interestingly, the purpose of this initiative was not to provide healthcare, but to understand the nature of the crisis and the health conditions of women.

That is why the chief justice had to visit Thar and witness the situation on the ground. Much has been reported in the media on how beds were arranged on an urgent basis at hospitals.

The presence of plants with fresh flowers in a water-scarce area raised some questions. During our visit to Mithi Civil Hospital, I brought the dire needs of the emergency ward to the chief justice's attention. He also asked how the hospital will cater to the needs of patients in the event of an emergency as there were no medicines were available at the facility.

The chief justice also agreed to visit Diplo tehsil. The delegation was shocked

to observe the poor conditions at Koreo Thakur. There was not a single student present at the local school. During our visit to a hospital, we were informed that the X-ray machine had been out of order for the last 10 years and no medical laboratory at the facility was functional.

The situation of Tharparkar is beyond the control of Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, and he has been unable to do much. The performance of the Sindh government is also called into question when we consider that Rajasthan, a major portion of the Thar Desert, contributes a great deal towards India's economy. If the region bears so much potential, then why are the people of Thar forced to live under miserable conditions?

The CJ's visit will endorse the view that the solution to Thar's crisis is to prepare long-term policies. The implementation of these concrete policies will enable Tharparkar to emerge as the capital of religious harmony, faith tourism and cultural activities. In this way, Tharis will also play an active role in national development.

The chief justice should ask the federal and provincial governments to formulate an action plan for Thar prior to his retirement. The people of Thar will always be grateful for that.

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THE NEWS

Friday, December 7, 2018

Days of promise

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



In order to mark its first 100 days, the PTI government issued a review report. The purpose was to highlight the targets achieved within this time period.

The ambitious 100-days agenda faced criticism when it was unveiled three months ago. This was even acknowledged by the government during the ceremony held on the occasion of its 100th day. "When we presented the 100-day agenda, our friends warned that we are creating trouble for ourselves. I admit that they were right but we wanted this," Adviser to the Prime Minister on Establishment Shahzad Arbab said.

The government was fully aware of the consequences. But difficult decisions are essential for the betterment of our country. I was also part of this ceremony where Prime Minister Imran Khan maintained that Pakistan is moving in the right direction and the government will definitely fulfil its promises. Every country sets its national goals to ensure growth and prosperity. In our national history, past governments made many tall claims but were unable to set clear targets. The PTI not only presented its agenda for the initial 100 day, but also shared a performance report with the public.

Every one of us needs to adopt a realistic approach in the larger interest of Pakistan. The opposition must appreciate the PTI government's sincere intentions. As the head of government, Prime Minister Imran Khan must identify what hurdles were faced in implementing the 100-day plan.

The most important priorities set by the PTI government include ensuring the stability of the economy, safeguarding rule of law, and creating a corruption-free Pakistan. It would have been easy for the present government to turn towards the IMF for temporary relief. However, Imran Khan sought the support of our all-weather friends, such as China, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and the UAE, to pull Pakistan out of its financial crisis.

On the international front, the prime minister responded boldly to the baseless allegations levelled by Donald Trump. The laudable decision by the present government to establish the Kartarpur Corridor is a major achievement that projects a positive global image of Pakistan as a peace-loving country. The foreign media has also praised the country's political and military leadership for this achievement. However, the historic event could have been made even more effective if we had gained active coordination from the Indian leadership and invited foreign envoys to the groundbreaking ceremony.

I was pleased that the PM asked the Indian delegation to not cling to history and instead learn lessons from the past. This is the right time to say goodbye to hostile policies and welcome a new era of win-win cooperation.

To strengthen the national economy, the devaluation of the rupee needs immediate attention. During the first 100 days, the Pakistani currency has weakened considerably against the US dollar. Regrettably, we are also unable to boost our exports. The increase in dollar prices could be beneficial in this regard. We should study the economic policies of some of the world's emerging economies

like China, Malaysia and the UAE. In the context of CPEC, we should try to maximise bilateral trade in the local currency. The government's austerity measures have also resulted in millions of rupees being saved.

To curb corruption, properties worth Rs11 billion were also detected abroad and agreements were signed with Switzerland, the US and the UK to gather information on money laundering. The independent operation of NAB has successfully empowered the accountability process. The government vowed to set up a Madina-like welfare state. But it has so far been unable to implement this model.

It is indeed an achievement of the PTI government that the opposition hasn't been able to create any hurdles. However, the unwanted behaviour of the opposition over appointing the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and standing committees halted the parliamentary process. Those elements that were involved in blockades on roads and highways have been brought to justice during the government's first 100 days. This will lead our society towards peace.

Self-assessment is necessary to overcome all obstacles and improve the government's performance over the next 100 days. We must not forget that time is passing quickly. By the time the next elections draw closer, we will once again have to appear before the public. When that time comes, only our performance will decide our political fate.

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THE NEWS

Friday, November 30, 2018

A step towards peace

Dr Rameesh Kumar Vankwani



Wednesday was most important day of my life as I witnessed the historic groundbreaking ceremony of the Kartarpur Corridor. I am indeed honoured to be part of Prime Minister Imran Khan's team that performed the groundbreaking of the visa-free corridor connecting Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib with Dera Baba Nanak in India. It is believed that Kartarpur is established by Baba Guru Nanak 500 years ago.

On the occasion, Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa, Minister for Foreign Affairs Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar were the most prominent participants. From the Indian side, Minister for Food Processing Harsimrat Kaur Badal, Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs Hardeep S Puri, and Indian Punjab Minister for Tourism and Cultural Affairs Navjot Singh Sidhu attended the ceremony. A large number of Guru Nanak's followers from both sides of the border, journalists and foreign diplomats were also present.

In his welcome address, PM Imran Khan said that: "The happiness I see in you today, if I were to explain to my Muslim brother and sisters, is that imagine that you are standing [four kilometres] outside Madina and cannot go in, and you are then given the chance to go. That is the happiness I see here". Kartarpur is one of the most sacred site for the followers of Baba Guru Nanak as he played a crucial role in establishing this town and spent the last 18 years of life there. Owing to his teachings

on humanity, harmony and brotherhood, Guru Nanak was equally respected by people from all religious communities. During my visit to Kartarpur, I observed that his Muslim followers were offering Fateha at his grave while his non-Muslim followers were praying at his *samadhi*.

I also exchanged views with visiting Indian media representatives, including Suhasini Haidar, Kadambini Sharma, Ajay Kumar (, Devirupa Mitra and Mandira Nayer. During these discussions, I maintained that the opening of the Kartarpur border ought to encourage us to open many more such corridors. I suggested that the corridor must officially be named the 'Kartar Corridor of Peace'.

At the dinner hosted by the Foreign Office in honour of the Indian delegates, I once again urged our guests to understand the importance of peace and prosperity. Citing the examples of relations between Germany and France, North Korea and South Korea, and India and China, I emphasised that Pakistan and India need to learn from history. "We must join hands to enhance bilateral trade and cultural cooperation for the sake of the people in both countries," I said during my address. I also mentioned that our national poet Allama Iqbal also paid rich tribute to Baba Nanak in his book '*Bang-e-Dara*'.

It is painful that Partition in 1947 also left two of the most sacred sites that are attributed to Baba Guru Nanak divided between two newly-independent sovereign countries. Gurdaspur, along with Dera Baba Nanak, was allocated to India while Kartarpur became part of Pakistan.

Following the migration of a large number of non-Muslims, Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib reportedly remained non-functional

for more than 50 years after Independence. Occasionally, Muslim followers used to visit the site to offer Fateha. It is also widely believed that Baba Nanak was a sufi saint who taught people to live in harmony with other communities. During the groundbreaking ceremony of the Kartarpur Corridor, the presence of Pakistan's top civilian and military leadership reflected our firm commitment to give peace a chance. The event offered a golden opportunity for the Indian government to open-heartedly welcome this proposition.

In fact, the Kartarpur Corridor was first proposed during former Indian PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to Lahore. Today, the BJP - his party - is in the central government and Indian PM Narendra Modi has to play a proactive role to fulfil Vajpayee's incomplete agenda. Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj must heed Sidhu's wise advice. In his letter to Swaraj, he wrote: "when opportunity knocks, kindly step up and open the door". Unfortunately, she preferred to participate in the election campaign for the 2019 polls in India.

The international community has now realised that Pakistan has proved positive intentions towards the demands for the Kartarpur Corridor. The ball is now in India's court. In response to Pakistan's initiative, the Indian government of India must also ensure visa-free access to religious sites for Pakistani citizens. The Kartarpur Corridor will be more effective if it facilitates two-way traffic to sacred sites located in both countries.

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THE NEWS

Wednesday, November 28, 2018

Kartarpur: Corridor of peace

By Dr Ramesh Kumar
Yankwani

Finally, the governments of India and Pakistan decided to celebrate the 550th birth anniversary of Baba Guru Nanak jointly in a very unique and his-

toric manner. This is really very pleasant surprise that both hostile sides agreed to establish Kartarpur Corridor allowing Indian devotees for visa-free entry to Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib.

The founder of the Sikhism, Guru Nanak, born in 1469 at

present-day Pakistan, is one of the greatest religious leader of all time. There is a famous incident attributed to his childhood. At the age of eleven years, boys of his caste were asked to wear the sacred thread to distinguish themselves from others. Guru Nanak refused, urging that a person should be distinguished by his values, and his good deeds could be more important, rather than just wearing by a thread.

This is a fact that all religions and philosophers asked to spread the message of mankind, eliminate hate and combat social evils. Being a spiritual thinker, Baba Guru Nanak also expressed his thoughts in the form of extraordinary poetry in Gurumukhi language. He believed that there is only one God who listens to everyone, and all human beings must have direct access to God. He taught that every person is equal and respectable, regardless of caste or gender. He also started a diverse community kitchen, known as Langar, inviting all people to dine together.

His teachings of peace, love, harmony and humanity, made him equally respectable in the eyes of all religious communities. To promote interfaith harmony and message of love, he used to travel frequently. He also visited holy sites of Mecca to show solidarity with Muslims.

It is believed that Guru Nanak spent his last 18 years in Kartarpur, present-day Pakistan. This is the place where he himself practiced his religious philosophy and also breathed his last. He was so near and dear to hearts of everyone that all religious communities wanted to perform his last rites according to their faiths. Even today, his Muslim followers used to offer Fateha to his grave while Non-Muslim followers pay tribute at his Samadhi. Interestingly, both are located at Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib.

Tragically, the partition in 1947 not only divided the land and families in a very brutal manner but also the most sacred places attributed to great Baba Guru Nanak. The entire Gurdaspur district became part

of India, along with Dera Baba Nanak city, situated on the banks of river Ravi. However, historic Kartarpur town, across the other side of river, was merged in to Pakistan.

Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib is just few kilometer away from Indian side, but the bitter bilateral relation between both hostile countries made impossible for Indian devotees to visit the holy place for many decades. Even today, they have to come Lahore via Wagah Border after fulfilling all visa complexities. Then, they have to travel towards Narowal which is almost 130KM away.

After the partition, Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib also remained completely abandoned for more than 50 years. However, Muslim devotees of Guru Nanak continued to visit the shrine for offering Fateha. The historical site is visible from other side of the border, where Indians gather in large numbers to perform Darshan, sacred viewing of the site through microscopes.

The Kartarpur corridor was first proposed in the 1990s. After 19 years, the Kartarpur border issue emerged in news headlines when minister from Indian Punjab Navjot Singh Sidhu joined the oath taking ceremony of his friend and newly elected Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan this year in August. Both are former legendary cricket players. He was highly criticized by Indian media for hugging the Pakistani Army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa during the ceremony. Sidhu, on his return, informed that Pakistan Army Chief had conveyed message to him that Pakistan is going to open the visa-free Kartarpur border for the occasion of the 550th birth anniversary of Baba Guru Nanak.

"It was a dream come true," Sidhu expressed his feelings. He also cited the holy Vedas to emphasize the importance of keeping communication channels open. According to the Vedas, when there is no communication, there is suspicion and then lack of trust happens.

This was indeed most important news of the day and unbelievable for many as well.

The famous saying "when there is will, there is a way" once again proves itself true when Pakistan formally offered to open the Kartarpur border. Within next few days, a resolution was unanimously adopted in the Indian Punjab Assembly, asking the Central government to pursue with Pakistan on the issue of Kartarpur border opening and seeking an uninterrupted corridor from Dera Baba Nanak to Kartarpur. The approval of the Indian Cabinet made the process more smoothly for finalizing the Kartarpur Corridor Project. Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan also decided to hold groundbreaking ceremony on November 28.

In my views, journey of regional peace and stability must not be limited to only one corridor. In fact, we must consider this first step towards right direction for opening hundreds of more peace corridors. Today's superpower the United States was once very much hostile against black people and there was clear societal discrimination among two segments. The US President Abraham Lincoln played pivotal role to end slavery and to move the country towards peace and prosperity. He advised that instead of involving ourselves in to unnecessary tussle, one must put efforts to resolve conflicts in peaceful and amicable ways. Similarly, European countries, who were once enemies to each other, are now united under the umbrella of European Union. Most recently, both Koreas, have offered hand of friendship for the best interest of region.

Today, I believe that preacher of peace and humanity Guru Nanak would be very happy, if alive, to find that after a long period of 70 years, finally people of Pakistan and India also understand the importance of connecting people and serving humanity. The credit equally goes to civil and military leadership of both countries. This peace corridor is also ray of hope for the divided families of Kashmir living both sides.

On the historic occasion of groundbreaking of Kartarpur Corridor, let's pray jointly that

Kartarpur will emerge as an international symbol of interfaith harmony where most prominent religions of the world converge. EcoSikh, a US-based NGO, has already proposed to develop 100 acres of land across Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib as a sacred forest in order to promote eco-friendly faith tourism. Timely formation of the Guru Nanak International Interfaith Harmony Centre at Kartarpur must also be in our priority list. I believed that many other prominent organizations will also come forward for the sake of this noble cause.

We must not neglect the fact that there are also many religious Muslim sites in India, such as Ajmer Sharif. There is also a historic Dargah, located at Raja Tal, adjacent to Wagah Border, inside Indian territory. The Dargah is attributed to holy Muslim Sufi saints, named Hazrat Khidmat Ali Shah and Hazrat Azmat Ali Shah. Currently, there is no local Muslim population there and it is impossible for Pakistani villagers across the border to visit in the presence of border fence, but local Non-Muslim community is keeping the Muslim Sufi traditions alive.

I hope that Indian government will show same positive gesture allowing Pakistani devotees who want to visit such historical religious Dargahs, Masjid, and Mazars. Similarly, Pakistan, in order to promote faith tourism, must also consider opening of Hingraji Temple in Balochistan, Shri Anandpur Temple Terri, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and other religious sites across the country for facilitating Hindu devotees in a similar way. In our 70 years history, leadership of India and Pakistan have shown enmity in almost every field of life, even this mentality leads towards fighting wars and weapons race. Today, while inaugurating the Kartarpur Corridor, both countries must sit together to understand what great legendary Abraham Lincoln actually meant by saying "Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?"

THE NEWS

Friday, November 23, 2018

Dignity in work

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Today, the people of Japan are celebrating Labour Thanksgiving Day. The annual national holiday is dedicated to the positive contributions of workers and production staff for Japan's betterment.

Historically, the day was originally known as Niiname-sai, linked to a Japanese ancient harvest festival. It is believed that the celebrations were initiated by the emperor of Japan thousands of years ago, with prayers for a prosperous new year. The celebrations were usually held in the imperial palace and various shrines. During the traditional ceremony, the emperor used to be the first one to taste rice from that year's harvest to appreciate the hard work done by farmers.

In modern history, Labour Thanksgiving Day was observed in Japan after World War II. It is a bitter truth that the Japanese were treated brutally by the Allies during World War II. Japan faced the most horrific nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. The nuclear bombings resulted in the killing of around 200,000 civilians. The exact details of tragedies are still unknown.

The Japanese armed forces were quite active against the enemy. Even the Japanese Navy Air Service conducted a successful surprise strike against the US naval base at Pearl Harbor. Japan was capable enough to respond to nuclear attacks on its cities. However, the Japanese decided to give up, just after six days of nuclear bombing, to save more lives on both sides. The country's leadership signed the Japanese Instrument of Surrender, which resulted in the end of World War II and the occupation of Japan by the Allied Powers, led by the US.

The new constitution, also known as the 'Peace Constitution', was implemented in Japan. The preamble states that: "We, the Japanese people, desire peace for all time... We desire to occupy an honoured place in an international society striving for the preservation of peace, and the banishment of tyranny and slavery, oppression and intolerance for all time".

History reveals that Japan once again emerged as an independent and sovereign country on the world map after a few years. Interestingly, the US, which had once bombed Japanese cities, became its ally. The Japanese leadership decided to keep its focus on the rehabilitation and reconstruction of war-torn Japan through the active support of the Allies.

Various political, military, economic, and social reforms were introduced. On the international front, Japan struggled to establish cordial diplomatic relations with other countries. The brave Japanese people accepted the challenge to transform their beloved country into a strong democracy and the world's leading industrial power. Most Japanese people were now industrial workers instead of farmers.

Niiname-sai was re-established as Labour Thanksgiving Day. It was first celebrated in 1948 to encourage workers to play a productive role in creating a new Japan. On this day, different events are organised across the country. One of the largest events is the Nagano Labour Festival, supported by labour organisations, to raise awareness about issues affecting the environment, peace, and human rights.

All government offices and schools remain closed to honour the hard work performed by labourers. Schoolchildren are encouraged to make drawings and present them to workers in their community. On this national holiday, a large number of Japanese people spend qual-

ity time with their family and friends.

Today, Japan is one of the world's largest economies. There is a long list of globally-recognised Japanese companies and brands in the automobile, electronics, video games and high-tech industries. These companies include Toyota, Suzuki, Honda, Yamaha, Sony, Panasonic, Fujifilm, Casio, Kenwood, and Sega.

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), a government agency, is also playing a pivotal role to ensure economic and social growth in developing countries. The agency is also cooperating with Pakistan to eradicate polio, develop infrastructure, build power transmissions and, strengthen domestic industries.

On the occasion of Labour Thanksgiving Day, we can learn many lessons from Japan. First, culturally-rich nations never neglect their traditions. Second, there is no permanent enemy in international diplomacy. Third, a true leadership always gives priority to national interests. To safeguard peace, there is absolutely no harm in reviewing policies in the best interest of the country and its people.

We need to work tirelessly – just like the Japanese did. We have to define our foreign policy to present our viewpoint in a better and effective manner. This can only happen if Pakistan manages to emerge as a strong economy. For this purpose, we have to focus on bilateral trade and joint ventures with the international community. We must understand that working people are the engine of the national economy. Therefore, solid steps to ensure their respect and dignity must be taken on the individual and government levels.

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THE NEWS

Saturday, November 17, 2018

Tools for tolerance

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



The International Day for Tolerance was observed on November 16 to raise awareness about the importance of tolerance for a peaceful society. In today's globalised and interdependent world, all of us are aware that human societies are diverse. There are countless differences between people. However, the quality that allows us to accept that other people have the right to say and do as they please is known as tolerance. In simple words, tolerance doesn't mean agreeing with other people. Instead, it involves with disagreeing with others in a respectful manner.

We must understand that when people are naturally diverse, differences of opinion are bound to exist. We have to respect their viewpoint because only tolerance can ensure the survival of humankind. Whenever we don't tolerate others, a hostile situation is created.

History bears witness to the fact that such hostilities will always have a negative impact on everyone. The attack on Iraq by the US and the crisis in Syria are some examples of intolerance. It is believed that the main motive behind the world wars was an intolerant attitude towards opponents. It is historical fact that all those societies where the level of tolerance remained low have failed to survive. People

in these societies could never enjoy peace.

In our society, Mashal Khan's murder, attacks on minorities, and other horrific social crimes also reflect the rising degree of intolerance. However, transforming our beloved country into a tolerant one is my ultimate objective. On various platforms, I have stated that if we want to move Pakistan towards peace, we need to follow Quaid-e-Azam's vision by adopting tolerance in every sphere of life. Various ancient philosophers, including Aristotle, Socrates, Chanakya, Confucius and Plato, have also advocated tolerance.

Every religion urges its followers to adopt a tolerant lifestyle. In Hinduism, tolerance is believed to be the most powerful weapon to combat challenges. In Islam, exercising patience is accorded importance. Similarly, the teachings of Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism focus on promoting tolerance.

Meanwhile, the followers of intolerance gradually lose the ability to differentiate between good and evil. Such people only value those elements that support their viewpoints. A recent example can be seen in the reaction to the Supreme Court's verdict in Aasia Bibi's case. The chaos that ensued sent a negative message to the international community that Pakistan doesn't respect rule of law.

During such tragic events, the Pakistani media should responsibly report incidents while giving top priority to the national interest. I am also leading a social campaign to promote tolerance and reli-

gious harmony in Pakistani society under the platform of the Tolerant Pakistan Media Network. The motive behind this initiative is to encourage journalists to promote mutual respect within Pakistani society and the rest of the world. I invite media organisations and educational institutes to join hands with us and deliver special lectures on tolerance.

The common characteristic of all successful people is that they have implemented tolerance in their lives. I have to face my political opponents on a daily basis on different talk shows and during my 16 years of parliamentary struggles, I was criticised on various occasions. But I have always treated my opponents with respect and accepted their criticism with a smile. A difference of opinion with others is natural. But it should be exercised within moral and cultural limits. My endurance has helped me maintain good relations with all stakeholders in society, even though I belong to a non-Muslim community.

We should also consider making lessons related to patience and endurance part of the school curriculum so that children are taught about the importance of tolerance, forgiveness, patience and endurance to lead a balanced life. To ensure a peaceful society, all of us must implement tolerance in our lives.

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INTERNATIONAL THE NEWS

Festival of lights

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Diwali, the festival of lights, was celebrated across the country on November 7 with traditional enthusiasm. It is one of the most important religious festivals for Pakistan's Hindu community.

To commemorate the occasion, I organised an event at my residence on the night of Diwali. I am grateful to Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjra and National Assembly Speaker Asad Qaiser for attending the Diwali celebrations at my residence. The presence of parliamentary leaders from both houses sent a positive message of peace and prosperity. A majority of Pakistanis believe in tolerance and religious harmony.

The patriotic Hindu community considers Pakistan to be the beloved motherland (*dharti mata*). On this occasion, the community offered special prayers for peace and prosperity in Pakistan. This is the spirit that the international community must get to see on this Diwali. The media's outstanding Diwali coverage also needs to be lauded. In Pakistan, the largest Hindu community resides in Tharparkar, Sindh. As a result, the Pakistan Hindu Council decided to start the Diwali celebrations from Tharparkar by providing food and ration bags and distributing Rs25 lakh among the needy.

An event was held last night in Islamabad to celebrate Diwali and another one will be held on November 10 in Karachi. Similar events will be observed in different parts of the country to commemorate the

occasion. Traditionally, Diwali is an ancient Hindu festival that has been celebrated for thousands of years. It usually falls between mid-October and mid-November. Diwali is also pronounced as 'Dipawali' - a Sanskrit word that means 'rows of lights'. On Diwali, the Hindu community adorns their homes, temples and streets with festive lights. This is why the event is also referred to as the festival of lights.

On the night before Diwali, people make special arrangements to ensure that their houses are clean and any renovations and repairs are duly carried out. Gifts are exchanged among friends and relatives and various kinds of sweets are distributed among family and friends.

Every religious event highlights a positive message. Diwali reflects the victory of light over darkness, good over evil, and optimism over pessimism.

According to the Ramayana, when Ram, his wife Sita and brother Lakshman returned to Ayodhya after spending 14 years in exile in a forest, locals decorated their homes with lights and distributed sweets to celebrate their return.

The festival reminds us that a good person may have to face countless hurdles, but no matter how strong his opponents are, he will triumph over them. This is also a lesson for everyone to not lose hope in the face of life's struggles.

Many countries - including India, Fiji, Guyana, Malaysia, Mauritius, Myanmar, Nepal, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago - announce an official holiday on Diwali.

As a parliamentarian, I tried to push for a legislation to declare an official holiday on Diwali in Pakistan. Now, government de-

partments in Sindh and Punjab have started announcing a holiday for Hindu employees on Diwali. However, there should be a national holiday for such religious festivals. This gesture will promote interfaith harmony, build a stronger understanding about other faiths, and encourage people celebrating together.

The purpose of Eid, Diwali or Christmas celebrations is to bring smiles on people's faces. On Diwali, we must provide financial assistance to the poor so that they can also celebrate these festivals. It is a tradition that rich Hindu businessmen offer an extra one month's salary to their employees as a Diwali bonus. Similarly, a number of discounts are being offered on various products.

The Pakistan Hindu Council is taking solid steps to ensure the participation of neglected segments of society in sacred events. Such gestures of kindness will have a positive impact on society as a whole. That's why Pakistan's Hindu community also arranges mass weddings every year for hundreds of poor couples. The registration process starts every year on Diwali. The next annual mass wedding ceremony, the 11th one so far, will be held on January 6, 2019 in Karachi.

There is a pressing need to help the new generation realise that the Pakistan was created to ensure a peaceful society where every citizen, regardless of whether they belong to a minority or majority group, will have the freedom to contribute towards the country's betterment. Happy Diwali!

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THE NEWS

Friday, November 2, 2018

Faith and tourism

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



First of all, I would like to thank my readers for their positive feedback on my last two articles. One reader has asked about the guidelines that ancient philosopher Chanakya has provided for employees. I believe that Chanakya, in his books 'Arthashastra' and 'Chanakya Neeti', had described the principles that everyone should follow to achieve success.

According to Chanakya, like a businessman whose strength is in his money or a country whose strength is associated with its armed forces, the strength of a professional lies in his/her qualifications, efficiency and loyalty. If an employee sets his/her professional life on these principles, he/she will surely become successful.

I believe that the government of Pakistan must establish a university named after Chanakya. A memorial monument must be built on the site in Taxila where he once used to teach his students thousands of years ago.

This goodwill gesture will not only project a positive, education-friendly image of Pakistan, but will also become a source of attraction for all of Chanakya's fans throughout the world who want to visit his birthplace to pay tribute to him and conduct research or make a documentary on the ancient philosopher.

This step will further promote faith tourism – the topic of one of my articles that received an overwhelming response. In this article, I had highlighted that Pakistan holds significant importance for the followers of four major world religions: Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism and Buddhism.

In this regard, one of my readers commented that many historical churches were also built during British rule in India. Saint Patrick's Cathedral was founded in Karachi around 12 years before the War of Independence in 1857. Other prominent historical churches included St Joseph's Church Lahore, St Andrew's Church Lahore, Saint Mary's Cathedral Church Multan, the Holy Trinity Church Sialkot, and St John's Cathedral in Peshawar. These historical churches have the potential to attract Christians belonging to the UK and other parts of Europe.

During the recent visit of a delegation of the European Parliament to Islamabad, someone told me about the European Network for Religious Places of Worship. The EU-funded organisation aims to connect various likeminded institutions, government departments, NGOs, charities, and religious and university departments to protect religious heritage across Europe. Furthermore, it is determined to convince policymakers about the socio-economic importance of sacred sites.

Despite having so many historic religious sites, Pakistan lags behind in terms of faith tourism. The Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB), which was established to look after sacred sites and property belonging to non-Muslims, urgently needs to be restructured to play an effective and efficient role. The Supreme Court has already ordered that the chief of the ETPB should be appointed from a minority community.

The future ETPB chief must be given the task to take solid steps to promote religious tourism. His first step should be to identify all places of worship for minorities across the country and prepare a comprehensive official list. The most sacred places of Hinduism, including the Hanglaj Temple, the Katas Raj Temple,

and the Anandpur Temple Teri, are located in Pakistan. Similarly, holy sites associated with Buddha can attract faith tourists from Japan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia, and other countries.

The ETPB has to realise that looking after religious site is its primary responsibility. However, the ETPB must also have a concrete faith tourism action plan, with a focus on attracting a maximum number of foreign faith tourists, promoting religious heritage, providing the best facilities to the tourists, and generating revenue.

The ETPB must be authorised to issue visa invitation letters, with the close coordination of the Foreign Office, overseas Pakistani embassies and security institutions, for all those foreign tourists who are interested in visiting religious historic sites in the country.

Our armed forces are playing a pivotal role to ensure peace and combat terrorism. Similarly, the role being played by the Supreme Court has promoted the image of Pakistan as a democratic country where rule of law is given due importance. Now, it is responsibility of the elected government to take the right decisions at right time and appoint the right people in the right places. Such difficult decisions are necessary to move our beloved motherland towards peace and prosperity.

If the ETPB succeeds in defining a comprehensive action plan to promote faith tourism, the day isn't far when foreign tourists will enjoy the traditional and sincere hospitality of Pakistanis. In this way, the closed doors for Pakistanis to go abroad will once again be opened.

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THE NEWS

Friday, October 26, 2018

On business ethics

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Business matters are so complicated and tough that mostly ventures fail to survive. I believe that if someone wants to make money and name through his own business, s/he must have sound understanding and right direction.

Being Pakistani, we must be proud that the great ancient philosopher who provided basic guidelines on this complex subject was none but Chanakya, also known as Kautilya or Vishnugupta. Born in the ancient city Taxila of present-day Pakistan, he was a teacher and also prime minister of the great Indian emperor, Chandragupta Maurya.

Despite the lapse of thousands of years, Chanakya is still a respectable name due to the fact that he not only proved his philosophical knowledge in practical life but also wrote books, such as Arthashastra and Chanakya Neeti, full of wisdom and spiritual knowledge.

Chanakya, being a teacher, royal adviser and economist, was a strong advocate of a society based on firm ethical values and principles. He advised his followers to not only focus on the materialistic approach to life but also understand the equal importance of spirituality.

"Philosophy is ever thought of as the lamp of all sciences, as the means of all actions (and) as the support of all laws (and duties)." This is what Chanakya wrote in the first chapter of Arthashastra to emphasise the importance of spiritual foundations.

Chanakya advised that ethics and moral values must be top priorities for any businessman. He was of the view that "Profits are by-products of business,

not its very goal". According to Chanakya, a business must have an overall positive impact on society. He also believed in the protection of women and prescribed a balance between the organisation and the workers.

In order to achieve success, Chanakya explained that a stable business must be established on seven pillars, termed as the 'Saptangas'. First was 'swami', the leader who is the visionary brain that actually guides the organization. In today's business world, he is also known as the CEO or the MD etc.

The second was the 'amatya', the manager. He is the one who utilises his professional skills and capabilities to achieve the desired goals. The third was the 'janapada', which relates to the market. A strong business always tries its best to capture the market through its marketing and branding strategies.

The fourth, 'durg', means infrastructure. To run a business successfully, a head office is needed, from where administrative work is performed. It also provides support for various policies and their implementation.

The fifth is the 'kosha', which reflects finance, the most important resource for any business. Chanakya believed that a stable and well-managed treasury is the heart of any organisation. Without sufficient financial capital, all kinds of businesses fail to grow. Sixth, the 'danda' which means team. In an organisation, every team member must have a defined role to play and they all must be treated with respect and dignity.

Chanakya defined the seventh pillar as the 'mitra' to highlight the importance of business advisers, mentors and consultants. According to him, a good business must seek support of such friends to expand its operations and market area.

Chanakya believed that a corrupt and

dishonest person has no guts to face life's challenges. He associated the success of a business with honesty, ethical values and principles. He emphasised that a good businessman is a law-abiding citizen. Chanakya termed such characters as 'rajarishi', the belief in contributing something good to society as a whole and bringing positive economic prosperity to all stakeholders.

In his writings, Chanakya also called corruption a social evil. According to him, too many personal interactions in one's professional life lead towards corruption and nepotism. "It is possible to know even the path of birds flying in the sky, but not the ways of officers moving with their intentions concealed," he wrote.

To curb corruption, Chanakya suggested an invisible mechanism of strict vigilance and monitoring. He believed that whistleblowers must be given due awards and incentives to expose wrongdoings. However, someone who passes false information must be punished strictly. Chanakya emphasised that official posts must be made temporary and officials should be frequently transferred from one department to another. Most importantly, there should be a transparent process of accountability for everyone.

Regrettably, such a wise renowned philosopher and teacher is not respected in his own birthplace. To do justice with history, we must give due respect to Chanakya. For all of those who want to achieve success in their businesses, I would recommend them to go through the teachings of Chanakya on business ethics.

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THE NEWS

Friday, October 19, 2018

Thar's dilemma

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Last week, Chief Justice Saqib Nisar asked me to brief the Supreme Court about the real situation in Tharparkar, the country's most backward and underdeveloped district. Since I belong to the region, the honourable court was quite interested to hear what I had to say.

I told the apex court it is quite unfortunate that no one has bothered to design a long-term policy for residents of Tharparkar for the last 70 years. Whatever short-term measures were taken, almost half of them had fallen prey to corruption and mismanagement. Poverty and the economic recession have led to a series of continuous suicides, food shortage and loss of innocent lives of children. The number of child casualties has increase to 500, as per an estimate.

Similarly, there are certain media reports that suggest around 50 people have committed suicide over the last two months and the same number of children have lost their lives. Every religion requires its followers to take special care of innocent animals. But we often see the skeletons of animals on the roads of Tharparkar who have lost their lives due to hunger and thirst.

During my briefing, I requested the chief justice to take notice of the situation in the Thar Desert. A small portion of the Thar Desert is in Pakistan while the remaining part of the desert is in Rajasthan, an Indian state. While Rajasthan is known as a prosperous state of India, we have made the Thar Desert in Pak-

istan a backward area that is the source of only negative news.

Geographically, Thar is among the largest deserts of the world. Hindus and Muslims are living happily in both sides of the Thar Desert for centuries. At the time of Partition, when there were horrific riots everywhere, Thar had the privilege of witnessing peace and stability.

Historically, Thar's name has been derived from 'Thal', which means salt in the local language. The Thar Desert also has a great historical and cultural importance in Hinduism. In the Ramayan, it is called 'Lavan Sagar' (Salt Sea). There are many Hindu temples and *samadhis* throughout the Thar Desert.

Earlier, Rajasthan was known as *Rajputana* (the land of kings). Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan, is an attractive location for historical and cultural tourism. According to an international survey report, Jaipur is among 10 famous tourism spots of Asia. Jaipur not only has an international airport, but it is also connected with Delhi and other cities through road and railway routes.

Similarly, the second largest city Jodhpur also has numerous historical and cultural sites. Its delicious dishes, especially sweets, are famous worldwide. The local economy has been stabilised through the sale of handicrafts, textile, bicycles, ink, sports products, carpet, and marble products. Gypsum and salt are considered to be the country's two major exports. Similarly, there is a large market for wool and agricultural products. In simple terms, the main industries of Rajasthan are mineral-based, agriculture-based, and textile-based. Rajasthan is also the second largest manufacturer of polyester fibre on the national level.

The literacy rate of Rajasthan is also

admirable and the people of Rajasthan actively take part in different sports. During IPL, the Rajasthan team plays under the title of Rajasthan Royals. Similarly, Nagpur – another city of Rajasthan – is famous for its marble, which has been used in the Taj Mahal. Rajasthan is also considered an appropriate place for gas, coal mining and hydropower development projects.

A network of rivers and lakes has been designed to irrigate the dry land of Rajasthan. Anand Sagar Lake, Ana Sagar Lake, Doodh Talai Lake, Fateh Sagar Lake, Gadisar Lake, Pushkar Lake, and Talab-e-Shahi are some famous tourist spots. A number of Bollywood and Hollywood blockbuster movies have been filmed in Rajasthan to present the Indian culture and heritage.

Meanwhile in Pakistan, the Thar Desert is the most unfortunate region where innocent lives are being lost every day. I have requested the honourable chief justice to constitute a committee under an honest officer like Naheed Durani. The committee must comprises the secretaries of health, education, livestock, revenue, food, agriculture, tourism, and mines and minerals who must jointly devise methods to tackle Thar's crisis.

In order to enable Tharparkar to play an active role in national development, we must also ensure the provision of clean water, promote education, and improve healthcare. Strengthening the agricultural sector and the mines and minerals sector must also be our top priorities. I am sure that we will arrive at a meaningful solution to Thar's dilemmas this time.

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THE NEWS

Friday, October 12, 2018

Faith tourism

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



There is no doubt that the economies of peace-loving countries in the modern era are heavily dependent on tourism. To attract international tourists, such countries tend to brand themselves as a tourism-friendly societies. It is, therefore, a good sign that Prime Minister Imran Khan mentioned the importance of promoting tourism in the country in his first speech to the nation.

In the top trends of international tourism, religious tourism holds a prominent place. According to a report, every year more than 300 million people visits different places all over the globe for religious purposes. This generates collective revenues of more than \$18 billion annually.

Visionary leaderships engage universities to conduct research that can help formulate positive policies. Faith tourism also helps promote our local industries, people-to-people contact and cordial diplomatic relations.

Every year, many tourists reportedly visit the Philippines, which is a Catholic-majority Asian country. In order to increase the number of international tourists in subsequent years, the government of the Philippines is also focusing on religious tourism. The government is keen to seek the attention of international tourists through the popular religious festival of Simlog.

One of the largest religious festivals of the world is India's Kumbh Mela, which is attended by 10 million devotees. However, the most well-managed sacred festival is Haj.

A popular spot for religious tourism among people in America and other Western countries tourists is the historical city of Jerusalem. The followers of Islam, Christianity and Judaism frequently visit the city. A large number of Hindu pilgrims also visit River Ganga in India. Similarly, the shrine of Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti at Ajmer Sharif also attracts followers of various religions. Every day, almost 100,000 people visit the Golden Temple in Amritsar.

Muslims pilgrims also travel to Iran, Iraq and Syria to visit their sacred places. Turkey also welcomes around 32 million international tourists every year. There are many places of religious importance in Turkey, which include mosques, monasteries and buildings constructed during the Ottoman Empire.

Pakistan also holds considerable importance for the followers of four major world religions: Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism. The presence of Sufi shrines in Sindh reflects that those who speak the language of love never die. In fact, they live in people's hearts forever.

The Hanglaj Temple, Katas Raj Temple, and Anandpur Temple are sacred places. Hindu pilgrims from India, America, and Canada used to visit them in Pakistan. The traces of the ancient Mohenjodaro and Gandhara civilisations also reflect the impact of Hinduism and Buddhism on the region.

Taxila also had historical importance during the era of Hindu emperor Chandragupta Maurya and also holds significance as a major site for learning in Buddhism. The great philosopher Chanakya was also a teacher at an ancient university in Taxila. Takht Bhair, another historical Buddhist site, is another attractive spot for tourists.

Similarly, Pakistan also hosts many sacred sites for the Sikh community, including Nankana Sahib, Gurdwara Panja Sahib in Hasan Abdal, and the Samadhi of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh.

The Bari Imam Shrine and Golra Sharif Shrine in the federal capital are teeming with visitors every day. An impressive religious gathering can be witnessed at the Raiwind Tableeghi Ijtemah. Without visiting Badshahi Masjid in Lahore and Faisal Masjid in Islamabad, an international tourist's visit is considered incomplete.

We must think about why our country lags behind in terms of religious tourism even though it has so many important religious sites. Political appointments in key posts and the performance of the Evacuee Trust Property Board have made it difficult for the state to protect sacred places of religious minorities. The law and order situation in the country is satisfactory due to the sacrifices of our armed forces. It is now the responsibility of the present government to promote a positive image of Pakistan at the international level and devise strong policies to promote religious tourism.

Our foreign policy must ensure a soft visa regime for international religious tourists. Faith tourism is so important that we should establish a separate department. In this way, we can secure millions of dollars every year by allowing religious tourists from South Korea, Japan, Malaysia and other countries to visit Pakistan. The revenue generated from religious tourists can help us get rid of foreign debts and ensure a bright future for our coming generations.

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THE NEWS

Friday, October 5, 2018

They deserve better

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



World Teachers' Day is being celebrated across the globe today with a noble cause to acknowledge the positive role of educators for the betterment of society. The global day, which commemorates the anniversary of the adoption of the 1966 ILO/Unesco Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers, also aims to provide an opportunity to highlight issues related to the teaching profession.

Every year, Unesco, in collaboration with the Education International (EI), announces a campaign with a different theme. The Education International is a global union federation that represents different teacher organisations. This year, Unesco, in the context of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Sustainable Development Goal 4, urged the international community to mark the day under the theme "the right to education means the right to a qualified teacher". According to the declaration, the fundamental right to education cannot be ensured without qualified teachers.

Unesco has rightly chosen the theme to celebrate World Teachers' Day. I still remember how my father who used to tell me that it is necessary to respect our teachers, even more than our parents, to achieve success. It has also been witnessed that there is always a wise teacher behind the victory of every successful person.

Alexander the Great was a warrior king from Ancient Greece created one of the largest empires in the ancient world. How-

ever, he attributed all of his successes to Aristotle, his teacher. Alexander paid the following tribute in his honour: "I am indebted to my father for living, but to my teacher for living well". According to Alexander: "Without knowledge, skill cannot be focused. Without skill, strength cannot be brought to bear and without strength, knowledge may not be applied".

Historical texts indicate that the man who defeated Alexander the Great is known as Chandragupta Maurya, who was founder of the largest dynasty of Ancient India. Chandragupta was guided by his adviser Chanakya, who was also a teacher, based in an ancient university in Taxila.

It was the wise counsel that both Alexander and Chandragupta received from Aristotle and Chanakya respectively that helped them make a mark in history. This is the reason why every sensible person always tries to find the most qualified teacher for his children. There is a famous saying that: "teachers are not kings but they know how to make kings". It is true that a qualified teacher is capable enough to transform a simple person into a legendary figure.

Similarly, every religion declares that teaching is the most respected and dignified profession, and acknowledges the positive role of teachers for societal development. Every religion asks its followers to respect their teachers at any cost. In addition, there are also many qualified mentors in other professions and vocations who ought to be respected.

The historical letter, written by the 16th US president Abraham Lincoln to his son's teacher, is still considered a masterpiece that highlights the importance of teachers in transforming a student into a good citizen.

Today, China is performing remarkably

in every field of life and competing with other countries. According to a report, teachers in China enjoy the highest levels of public respect. A large number of Chinese people are taught to respect their teachers. But I have observed that respect for teachers in Pakistan is fading.

A recent report issued by the UNDP also disclosed that Pakistan is placed at the 150th position among the 189 countries in the UN's 2018 Human Development Index's annual rankings. It seems that previous regimes, in order to establish infrastructural development, completely neglected human resource development. Owing to this, various scandals emerged that were related to educational institutions and the Higher Education Commission. It is an alarming situation that there is not even a single university in Pakistan that can have been listed in the world rankings. There has been a sharp decline in our achievements in this regard because of the growing popularity of a materialistic approach in all matters.

On the occasion of World Teachers Day, I believe that the current government - led by Imran Khan, the former chancellor of the renowned University of Bradford - will focus on solving the issues of teachers on an emergency basis and include professional training for teachers among its top priorities. Similarly, as Pakistani citizens, we must respect our teachers. If we succeed in doing so, the day is not far when our beloved country will also achieve peace, progress and prosperity in the same way that China did.

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THE NEWS

Friday, September 28, 2018

Citizenship for refugees

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



During his recent visit to Karachi, Prime Minister Imran Khan was informed about street crimes in the city and the involvement of illegal immigrants in these offences.

The prime minister was of the view that Pakistan must either grant citizenship to children born in Pakistan or explore alternative solutions on humanitarian grounds.

Our Citizenship Act 1951 is quite clear in this regard. It states that "anyone born in Pakistan after this act is a Pakistani citizen". However, children of foreign diplomats and "enemy aliens" born in Pakistan are not considered citizens of Pakistan.

As far as the current refugee issue is concerned, we must find a long-lasting permanent solution. I am also aware of the reservations being shown by various Indian, Balochi and Pakistani nationalist leaders. A few days ago, I had an opportunity to exchange views with Sardar Aldizar Mengal on the issue of immigrants. Balochistan's leadership is committed to solve the issue of refugees and, therefore, included the matter in the agreement they signed with the PTI government. During a press conference, Asfandiyar Wali also vowed to support the government in finding a solution to the refugee crisis.

The 'immigrant issue' in Pakistan is quite complicated because the refugees present in our country aren't limited to one single country but belong to different regions. Before analysing the status of refugees, it is necessary to review the citizenship laws implemented in various prominent countries.

There are generally two types of citizenship laws. The Latin word, 'Jus soli' -

which means 'right of the soil' - is used for the first set of citizenship laws. The US is the most prominent example of a country with such laws. Citizenship is, therefore, the right of anyone born in the US territory, as per the 14th Amendment adopted on July 1868. Owing to this, the US became a haven for illegal immigrants arriving from all over the world. Although most refugees who stayed in the country remained aliens, their children succeeded in becoming American citizens.

According to the current Canadian Citizenship law, every child born in the territory of Canada, including its skies and seas, are Canadian by birth. Even if a child is born in an airplane or maritime ship registered in Canada, he/she is eligible to apply for Canadian citizenship. However, Canadian citizenship by birth is not granted to a child if neither parent is a Canadian citizen or permanent resident.

There is another type of citizenship laws that is known as 'Jus sanguinis' (right of blood) in Latin. As per these laws, children must be given citizenship in accordance with the nationality of their parents. This law is applicable in various countries across the globe, including Austria, Germany, Norway, Japan, Mexico, Thailand, South Korea, and Poland. Afghanistan, Armenia, Greece, Finland, Spain, and Turkey also used to issue citizenship on an ethnic basis to people residing in different countries.

In the past, India also granted citizenship to every child born on Indian soil. However, after a constitutional amendment in 2004, it is now mandatory for one of the parents to be an Indian national. In addition, India also offered overseas citizenship to permit foreigners of Indian origin to live and work freely in the country. Though they enjoy all civic facilities, the holders of overseas citizenship have no

right to vote and hold public office.

Any child, irrespective of whether he/she born in Iran or abroad, is Iranian by birth if his/her father holds an Iranian nationality. Like Pakistan, Israel is also considered an ideological state, which was founded in the name of religion. Once a Jewish person, regardless of which part of world he/she belongs to, enters Israel, he/she is eligible to apply for Israeli citizenship. However, there is another permanent residency status for non-Jewish residents of Israel, mostly for citizens of East Jerusalem and Golan Heights.

When it comes to refugees residing in Pakistan, we have to endorse Imran Khan's stance that Pakistan must follow international laws that prohibit attempts to forcibly send immigrants back. There is a need to convene an all-parties conference to tackle the refugee issue in a responsible manner so that the viewpoints and reservations of all parties in this regard can be heard.

Instead of levelling criticism, we should discuss this matter in parliament and devise suitable constitutional amendments, if required. This will help us reach a logical conclusion and consensus on the debate.

In the initial stages, the government must consider issuing *iqamas* (residency permits) to refugees after accurate data is compiled. In this way, they will be allowed to play a positive role for the betterment of Pakistan. Once their *iqama* expires, refugees may return to their homelands through the active cooperation of the UN. However, there should be zero-tolerance for all those elements involved in crime and terrorism.

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INTERNATIONAL

THE NEWS

Friday, September 21, 2018

Journey to peace

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Every year, International Peace Day is celebrated on September 21 to raise awareness about the importance of peace and the negative impacts of war. The day, which was first celebrated in 1982, is dedicated to world peace, and encourages temporary ceasefires in combat zones to ensure access to humanitarian aid.

According to Sustainable Development Goal 16 – peace, justice and strong institutions – adopted by all UN member states, it is necessary to take solid steps to build a peaceful and inclusive society. On various occasions, I have said that there is a direct link between peace and prosperity. I believe that a peaceful society is one that is based on humanity, justice and equality for all. Peace ensures a sustainable environment for every citizen to take active part in order to achieve national development.

Independent analysts believe that Pakistan's armed forces have offered huge sacrifices to ensure peace. Recently, I came across a report by a renowned British security think tank, the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). According to the report, Pakistan Army is working well under the Bajwa Doctrine to defend our national interest. It added that: "The message from the military is quite clear – US equipment is no longer the only option for Pakistan. In fact, Pakistan is actively buying hardware and producing more with China. As far as US military aid goes, the words of the Pakistani Army's spokesperson Major-General Asif Ghafoor sums up Pakistan's perspective, 'Pakistan never fought for money but for peace'."

The RUSI report also quoted leading American generals and officers who admitted Pakistan's role in the war on terror. "It was Pakistan that helped militarily more than any other Nato country. The future, as far as the Pakistan Army is concerned, belongs to them," the report concluded.

For regional peace and stability, Pakistan must have cordial diplomatic relations with the international community, especially with neighbouring countries like Afghanistan. I believe that a peaceful Afghanistan is in our best interest. Unlike our past regimes, Naya Pakistan – led by Imran Khan – has a vision to defend the case of our beloved country on the international front. That's why Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi was sent to Afghanistan to conduct his first foreign tour. Fortunately, he was warmly welcomed by his Afghan counterpart Salahuddin Rabbani, who is the son of the late Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, an Afghan leader.

It is a coincidence that the birthday and martyrdom day of Professor Rabbani was also observed yesterday. He was truly a freedom fighter who played a critical role in defending his motherland. After the withdrawal of the Soviet forces, he also served as president of Afghanistan till the Taliban occupied Kabul in 1996. However, the Rabbani government was widely recognised by the international community, including the UN.

After the Taliban government was toppled in response to the 9/11 tragedy, Rabbani once again returned to Kabul and served as president for a short period of time. During the tenure of Hamid Karzai, he also led the Afghanistan National Front, the largest political opposition party.

Professor Rabbani was a strong advocate of peace and unity in Afghanistan.

For this purpose, he initiated many steps for reconciliation with various Afghan groups. On the occasion of his 71st birthday on September 20, 2011, he was assassinated by a suicide bomber while presiding a meeting with a Taliban delegate at his house for peace talks. Hamid Karzai, on the Afghan parliament's suggestion, honoured him with the title of 'Martyr of Peace'.

Salahuddin Rabbani, his son, is an active part of Ashraf Ghani's government in Afghanistan. Like his great father, he is also determined to lead peace efforts with the Taliban in Afghanistan. On the occasion of Eidul Fitr, Afghan forces, Taliban fighters and citizens celebrated the historic festival together, which reflects Rabbani's vision for peace.

Today, on the occasion of International Peace Day, the leadership of both countries must commemorate the vision of Professor Rabbani, who led a successful freedom movement against foreign aggression, served as a political head of state and opposition, and sacrificed his life for the purpose of achieving peace. There are some non-state actors, supported by global players, who are creating hurdles in the journey towards peace. But we need to collectively defeat them. For this purpose, the Afghan leadership has to join hands with Pakistan to define an effective and efficient border management system.

I am quite confident that our most experienced foreign minister, through the active support of his Afghan counterpart, will play a crucial role in ensuring peace and prosperity for the best interest of both neighbouring countries.

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THE NEWS

Friday, September 14, 2018

Keeping discrimination at bay

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Soon after Prime Minister Imran Khan constituted the Economic Advisory Council, a huge wave of criticism emerged on social media. As a result of this campaign, EAC member Atif Mian, belonging to a religious minority group, had to resign.

Being a patriotic non-Muslim parliamentarian, I decided to express my views on this sensitive issue for the betterment of my country and society. As compared to what great religious scholars have to say about this issue, my knowledge of these matters is limited. However, I believe that we should promote a culture of dialogue, mutual respect and tolerance in our society. Above all, keeping religious discrimination aside, every Pakistani should be given the right to serve the country – just as it was given to Muslims and non-Muslims in Medina.

I believe that as the country's prime minister, Imran Khan has right to choose his team and Atif Mian's appointment was purely based on his outstanding expertise in economic and financial affairs.

Pakistani-American Atif Mian is ranked among the best economists of the world. According to the IMF, he is among those 25 young economists who are able to shape the world's perception about the global economy in the near future.

In the context of the recession, which resulted in the loss of around eight million jobs in the US during 2007 and 2009, Atif Mian, in his globally-recognised book titled 'House of Debt', explained various

important issues pertaining to the modern economy. He also has extensive experience of teaching at renowned American universities, including the University of Chicago and Princeton University.

The main objection over Atif Mian's appointment was that he was Ahmadi. However, our constitution is very clear regarding the status of Ahmadis. As citizens of Pakistan, they are registered as Ahmadis in the government database.

The greatest example of endurance and tolerance was set by the founder of Pakistan, who clearly stated in his August 11 speech that the state has nothing to do with the religion of any citizen and all people must be treated equally. Quaid-e-Azam put his words into practice by nominating Sir Zafarullah Khan, who was an Ahmadi, as the country's first foreign minister in recognition of his capabilities.

Even today, our constitution allows minorities to work on higher posts, even though they are not allowed to hold the offices of the president and the prime minister. Every Pakistani is allowed to avail equal opportunities of growth and progress while following his/her religious beliefs. Meanwhile, all those who create hurdles in the progress of eligible non-Muslims are, in fact, violating the constitution.

Similarly, we must understand that the Holy Prophet (pbuh) showed mercy for all mankind. That is why he always prayed for everyone, even those who opposed him. The non-Muslim prisoners of war, who were captured after the Battle of Badr, were asked to educate people in Medina in return for freedom. Do we bother to realise what kind of education was provided by those enemy fighters?

Seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim – and that too without any religious discrimination. Muslims have been urged to "seek knowledge even if they have to go as far as China".

In the current situation, the most reasonable response on the government's behalf came from Minister for Information Fawad Chaudhry. He categorically acknowledged the role of Pakistani minorities. "How can you justify the persecution of religious minorities and their rights in Pakistan?" he asked. Fawad Chaudhry added that Atif Mian is a respected across the world and is slated to win the Nobel Peace Prize within the next five years.

However, Atif Mian's resignation reflects that the voices of logic, wisdom and dignity are losing day by day in our society. Although Atif Mian's opponents have prevented him from serving Pakistan, they have failed to propose a suitable alternative. The unfortunate situation also damaged Pakistan's image on the international level. It wasn't a wise decision to appoint him if we weren't going to be able to defend him.

In order to transform Pakistan into a progressive and prosperous country, we have to ensure the implementation of the Madina model and Quaid-e-Azam's vision. As a first step in the right direction, we must discourage the culture of intolerance, integrate vulnerable minorities into the mainstream, and allow all Pakistani citizens to serve the beloved country without any discrimination.

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THE NEWS

Friday, September 7, 2018

United we stand

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



September 6 is no doubt an unforgettable day in our national history. To show solidarity with our brave soldiers, I also attended the ceremony held at the GHQ Rawalpindi to pay tribute to our martyrs.

ISPR DG Major General Asif Ghafoor had already announced the decision to celebrate Defence and Martyrs Day in a unique manner through a campaign titled '*Humain Pyar Hai Pakistan Say*'. During the ceremony at GHQ Rawalpindi, the participants recalled the courage and the passion with which our armed forces sacrificed their lives for Pakistan. Organising such events promote national unity, harmony, patriotism and brotherhood.

Similarly, Pakistan Air Force Day will be celebrated today in memory of our beloved country's successful air defence in the 1965 war. On the night of September 5, 1965, India crossed the border and carried out attacks without a formal declaration of war.

On the very next day, our brave soldiers accepted the challenge and set a shining example of bravery by sacrificing their lives to defend Pakistan.

The most remarkable event in the history of the 1965 war happened on September 7, when M M Alam, a flying ace of the Pakistan Air Force, set a world record by shooting down five aircrafts in less than a minute.

Pakistan is among those countries that survived after facing tough challenges and aggression in September 1965. Even today we have some elders among us who have recollections of the war. They remember how Pakistan's sovereignty was attacked

by a hostile enemy only 18 years after Independence. During the war, all Pakistanis were determined to defend their motherland. In such a critical situation, no one was afraid of the numerical superiority and military prowess of the enemy.

Pakistanis stood firmly with the armed forces to ensure that the enemy's aggression towards our territories could be stopped. The Battle of Chawinda is considered to be one of the most significant conflicts witnessed during the war. It is also termed as one of the largest tank battles since World War II.

However, Pakistani soldiers managed to repel the massive assault in the tank battle. The well-known myth that our soldiers destroyed enemy tanks with bombs tied to their chests reflects how bravely they faced their opponents.

When the India Army tried to capture Lahore, it had to face Major Aziz Bhatti who proved with his martyrdom that Pakistani soldiers know how to defend their country by sacrificing their lives. When the enemy was busy in carrying out propaganda on a massive level, the independent foreign media admitted Pakistan's military successes in September war.

Rai Milan, an American Radio Service Journalist, wrote in his war diary that during his two-decade-long journalistic career, he had never witnessed such victorious soldiers like those who belonged to the Pakistan Army.

Our navy and air force also fought alongside the Pakistan Army to defend their homeland. When the war was announced, the Pakistan Navy successfully took control of maritime routes. On one end, the movement of enemy ships was restricted and, on the other, a safe trading passage to reach Pakistan was ensured.

Legendary figures like Air Marshal Asghar Khan, Air Marshal Noor Khan and M

M Alam played a pivotal role in safeguarding the national skies. Squadron leader Sarfraz Rafique, Muniruddin Ahmed, Alauddin Ahmed and many other martyrs sacrificed their lives, but didn't let the enemy harm Pakistan.

The 1965 war highlights the historical and successful resistance against a large enemy. But the main factor for our success was the unity among Pakistanis who bravely faced the enemy as a single team regardless of their differences. During this war, the civil society and the entertainment community also showed solidarity with brave soldiers.

Another significant aspect of the 1965 war was the contribution of patriotic non-Muslim Pakistani war heroes. A number of Christian and Hindu Pakistani soldiers also fought to defend their motherland. Some Hindu officers even sacrificed their lives to prove that safeguarding Pakistan, our *dharti mata*, is part of their religion. Air Commodore Balwant Kumar was the one of the senior Pakistani Hindu officers who fought to defend Pakistan. There were many such brave heroes, including Group Captain Cecil Chaudhry, Wing Commander Mervyn Leslie Middlecoat, Squadron Leader Peter Christy, Air Vice Marshal Eric Gordan Hall, and Major General Julian Peter.

The ISPR's initiative will have a long-lasting impact in raising awareness about the sacrifices of our all martyrs. It is time to stand together with national spirit and harmony to deliver the strong message that all of us stand united to love Pakistan, regardless of whether we belong to a majority or minority group.

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THE NEWS

Friday, August 31, 2018

Our turn now

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Our brotherly country Turkey is currently facing the worst economic crisis, mostly fuelled by international politics of revenge. According to media reports, the Turkish currency (lira) has lost almost half of its value in the last year, and around 30 percent in just the last one month.

The country's dependence on foreign debt has worsened the situation even more. Denouncing the pressure to adjust the interest rate, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan equated increasing the interest rate to committing treason. The currency crisis intensified when US President Donald Trump in his recent tweet announced doubling the steel and aluminium tariffs on Turkey. On the other side, the Turkish president declared the crisis a 'national battle' against economic enemies, and motivated the nation in the following words: 'If they have their dollar, we have the people we have Allah'.

Turkey has enjoyed great respect in the eyes of millions of people around the world since the last many centuries. The Ottoman Empire was once a prominent global power. Although the Subcontinent was never under the direct control of the Ottoman dynasty, local people had strong affiliations with it. Around a hundred years ago when the Ottoman Empire was facing similar threats in the form of foreign aggressions, the people of the Subcontinent used their best to safeguard Turkey. The Khilafat Movement, jointly run by Hindu and Muslim leaders, is one significant chapter in the history of our struggle for freedom. Thousands of Indian women had donated their gold jewellery to support the Turkish people. It is believed

that the financial contributions generated during the Khilafat Movement helped Turkey establish its largest bank, the *Türkiye İs Bankası*, and the Grand National Assembly, located in Ankara.

After Independence, Pakistan and Turkey developed cordial relations in every field. Neither are Pakistanis people of Turkish origin nor do the two countries share geographical borders, yet the people of Pakistan have always been referred to as 'brothers' in Turkey. Pakistanis have also had similar feelings for their Turkish friends.

During the tragic earthquake of 2005, Erdogan was the first world leader who urged his nation to help Pakistan on a priority basis. He himself visited the disaster areas to witness the rehabilitation activities. The Turkish Red Crescent Association also arrived in Pakistan with the slogan 'Simdi Sira Bizde', meaning 'Now, it's our turn'.

Although the current Turkish government believes in building diplomatic relations of equal status with the international community, its opponents describe its foreign policy as Neo-Ottomanism. They are afraid that Turkey's engagement in the formerly Ottoman-controlled regions is drifting away its focus from the West and moving it towards Asia. However, the country's positive role in supporting the Palestinian cause and the issue of Rohingya Muslims reflects that the Turkish people have, in fact, throughout history, supported oppressed nations on the basis of principles.

It seems that such a laudable humanitarian contribution has not been acceptable to some global powers, and that is why conspiracies have been fuelled against the Turkish regime in the form of currency war. Luckily, the government has timely taken significant measures to tackle the challenges of psychological warfare. First, Pres-

ident Erdogan asked the people to have confidence in their national currency, and urged them to exchange dollars and gold for Turkish liras. Second, in a serious attempt to combat the ongoing crisis, the Turkish government has reportedly launched a massive crackdown against all those social media accounts and news portals which were posting fake news related to the lira. Most importantly, the regime is seeking a win-win cooperation from its neighbouring countries and friendly states. In this regard, the decision by Qatar to invest \$15 billion in Turkey's financial markets and banks is remarkable.

Turkey is a role model for many countries including Pakistan, and other countries must also come forward to support Turkey in this critical time. In response to Erdogan's appeal, a large number of Pakistani citizens have also launched a 'Buy Lira' campaign to show solidarity with Turkey.

The ongoing crisis has, in fact, brought numerous opportunities for the brave nation of Turkey. According to Turkey's Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the number of tourists who arrived in the first seven months of the current year has increased by nearly 25 percent as compared to last year. Russians were the highest in number, followed by Germans and Iranians. Being Pakistani citizens, we must also extend bilateral cooperation with our brotherly country in the field of tourism. Finally, I would like to assure our Turkish friends that they must not consider themselves alone in their struggle. The people of Pakistan will always stand by their Turkish brothers.

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Saturday

August 25, 2018

THE NEWS

Zilhqaj 13, 1439 A.H.

The Madina model

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Muslims across the globe celebrated Eidul Azha with religious zeal and enthusiasm. Like every year, thousands of Pakistani citizens performed Hajj.

Every religious festival delivers a positive message for mankind. Although the Hajj sermon was addressed to millions of Muslim pilgrims, the golden principles for spending a purposeful life are, in fact, applicable to everyone, regardless of their religious affiliations.

This year, Eid comes at a time when Pakistan has started a new era. For the first time in our national history, people have elected a government which has a track record of a 22-year-long struggle to ensure social justice and curb corruption.

Pakistan is a Muslim-majority country that came into existence in the name of Islam. But Jogendra Nath Mandal's involvement in the Pakistan Movement reflects the positive contribution of non-Muslims in this struggle. Quaid-e-Azam, in his famous speech on August 11, 1947, also declared that every citizen in Pakistan will be allowed to live according to his/her own faith.

Today, the non-Muslim vote bank consists of around 3,600,000 people who have played a significant role in the PTI's victory in Election 2018. The slogan of Naya Pakistan has effectively won the trust of the people. But it is time to move one step for-

ward to transform Pakistan into a welfare state. For this purpose, it is necessary to analyse the salient features of Madina.

The state of Madina, which was founded by Holy Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) fourteen centuries ago, is considered to be the world's first welfare state where protecting the rights of vulnerable communities was the government's primary responsibility. To ensure internal integrity and safeguard Madina's people from external factors, a peace agreement known as the Charter of Madina was signed between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens.

According to the charter, all citizens were granted civic rights on an equal basis. The territory of Madina was declared as a unit and it was every citizen's responsibility to protect it. It was mutually agreed that the Muslims and non-Muslims of Madina will be allies. In case of any external aggression, they will jointly defend the homeland.

The key priority of the state was to raise the living standard of citizens by ending all forms of exploitation. Rule of law and equal treatment of all citizens were enforced in such a way that when a woman belonging to an influential elite family committed a crime, the Holy Prophet (pbuh) declared that if his own daughter was proven guilty, she would face punishment. This is the real spirit that maintains law and public order within a state.

The non-Muslim prisoners of war, who were captured after the Battle of Badr, were offered freedom in exchange for teaching people in Madina. Similarly, Madina's foreign policy revolved around estab-

lishing peaceful relations with other tribes and nations. If a tribe decided to remain neutral, its decision was respected.

Today, when non-Muslims in Pakistan are told that the ruling party is interested in implementing the Madina model in our beloved country, many of them are in favour of the idea as they know that they will finally be treated equally. It is quite unfortunate that patriotic non-Muslims who declared Pakistan as their homeland have been kept away from the mainstream. For example, the Evacuee Trust Property Board was established to look after properties left behind by Hindus after Partition. But the board has been criticised for its incompetent leadership and the absence of non-Muslim representation.

It is important to appoint those belonging to smaller provinces at top positions to reduce the sense of deprivation among the underprivileged. But we must also account for non-Muslim representation and ensure that it isn't neglected. The appointment of qualified non-Muslims can deliver positive results to achieving the goal of Naya Pakistan. Similarly, their presence can also be beneficial to portray a positive image of the country among the international community.

All Pakistanis are urged to understand the Hajj sermon and implement it in letter and spirit. There is also a dire need for suitable legislation to implement the Madina model.

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THE NEWS

Friday, August 17, 2018

The first 100 days

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



All eyes are on Pakistan as PTI Chairman Imran Khan will be elected as the prime minister of Pakistan in today's National Assembly session. There is no doubt that Imran is determined to reform Pakistan along the lines of Quaid-e-Azam's vision, which is based on rule of law, accountability, a stable economy, welfare, and curbing corruption. On countless occasions, I have mentioned that the first hundred days of the PTI government are quite critical to set targets and win public trust.

It is interesting to note that Imran Khan was only able to secure only one seat in the National Assembly almost 16 years ago. But today, his party has successfully emerged as a major national political party by winning a large number of seats from Karachi to Khyber. The political landscape of various democracies such as India, the US and the UK is based on a two-party system. Even before Independence, British India also had two prominent political parties: the All India Muslim League and the Indian National Congress.

Pakistani politics was also based on a similar system. In such circumstances, the emergence of the PTI as a third national political power due to Imran Khan's 22-year-long democratic struggle is a remarkable achievement. It is a coincidence that Independence Day celebrations and the formation of the newly elected government happened side by side.

People had shown full confidence in

Quaid-e-Azam's dynamic leadership. Whenever he addressed public gatherings, people listened attentively to what he had to say. Although a majority of people in the audience didn't understand English, they blindly trusted their beloved leader and sincerely believed that whatever he said and did was in their best interest.

In the 2018 elections, we witnessed a similar situation to some extent when many people voted in favour of Naya Pakistan. The people of Karachi have particularly reposed their confidence in PTI candidates. The PTI has also formed the government for the second time in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. During my various interactions with Imran Khan, I have found that he is committed to selflessly serving our beloved country. I have also assured him of my cooperation to devise a workable strategic plan to achieve national targets during the PTI's first 100 days in power.

The selection criteria for cabinet members must be driven by merit and key performance indicators must be clearly defined. We must refrain from solely relying on sincerity and political loyalty. In this regard, Quaid-e-Azam set a good example by selecting his cabinet members on the basis of their qualifications and experience in their respective fields. It is unfortunate that due to his tragic demise a year after the creation of Pakistan, some of his sincerest cabinet members – like Jogendra Nath Mandal who was appointed as law minister – were forced to leave Pakistan.

Today, the PTI must follow in the footsteps of strong economies like China. Although China gained independence after Pakistan and faced numerous challenges on national and international fronts, it is

now an emerging superpower. This has encouraged the international community to do business in China's currency. In the context of CPEC, the PTI government has to maximise bilateral trade. Another serious challenge is to restore the value of the Pakistani rupee and do away with IMF loans. Similarly, our national institutions, such as PIA, need urgent attention to rid themselves of incompetent political appointees.

We should also design our foreign policy by prioritising our national interests. We have to understand that there is no permanent friend or foe in international diplomacy and every country has the right to give preference to its national interests. South Korea's transformation into a strong economy through an economic plan put forward by Pakistani economist Dr Mahbubul Haq proves that Pakistan is quite capable to deliver progress. However, public confidence has been shaken by the flawed policies of previous governments.

We mustn't forget that the joint opposition, which comprises renowned political parties with a track record of pursuing politics of protest, poses a real threat. While Imran Khan has wisely offered to cooperate with them to defuse political pressure, the PTI needs to win the people's trust during its first 100 days in power to overcome the challenge of a strong opposition. This is the only way the party will be able to complete its tenure in a smooth manner. For this purpose, Imran Khan must follow in the footsteps of Quaid-e-Azam and ensure equality among everyone.

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INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS

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Vol. 28 No. 147

Zilqa'ad 27, 1439 A.H

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PO Box 52, Karachi

Friday, August 10, 2018

The power of the pen

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Ancient Greek philosopher Socrates, who belonged to the city of Athens, is credited as the founder of philosophy. It is quite unfortunate that a great philosopher such as him was sentenced to death, almost over two centuries ago.

Isn't it surprising that while Socrates' name remains alive even after thousands of years, the names of those who sentenced him to death are lost somewhere in history? Socrates' student Plato played a pivotal role in this regard by documenting the former's philosophy through his pen.

Similarly, the names of Plato, Aristotle, Confucius, Chanakya and many other philosophers are still alive because of their teachings that were preserved in the written form. Shakespeare enjoyed the status of a great dramatist and author because of his pen. If people honour great scientists like Newton and Einstein it is because of the power of their pen.

God's command has also been made available as a guideline for human beings in the form of sacred religious books. The historical agreement of peace, the Charter of Medina, was also drawn up in the written form. The purpose of mentioning these examples is to emphasise how powerful the pen is. It has been successfully used to preserve the world's history to inform us about the events that had taken place hundreds of years ago, even before the existence of human civilisation. We cannot transfer our cultural traditions, religious teachings, moral values and services of our

national heroes to the next generation without using the pen.

In ancient times, the sword was used to impose authority on people. Today, the same mindset is reflected in the race to acquire deadly weapons to undermine opponents. Such elements forget that abuse of power can only pressurise the poor for the time being, but in the absence of moral support, such repression has to end.

We have examples of various cruel and powerful dynasties of the past, but today, their descendants are reluctant to relate themselves to their forefathers because of their negative achievements. Human nature gets more influenced by soft and humble ways. Irrespective of geographical locations, all renowned reformers adopted softness, tolerance and consistency to spread their message of love throughout the world. They proved that with the proper use of the pen, positive change can be brought in society. However, this change is conditional to expressing the truth and reality.

Extensive use of the pen could also be observed during freedom movements of all times against imperialism. Peace-loving poets, writers and scholars motivated people through their writings and became a ray of hope for oppressed nations.

To end the British rule, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah also believed in the usage that the pen is much mightier than the sword. Allama Iqbal's remarkable poetry also played a key role in motivating people and reinforcing the Independence Movement. Similarly, many legendary freedom fighters like Mahatma Jyoti Bapu, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bhagat Singh kept the fire of the freedom struggle burning through their writings.

Before the recently concluded elec-

tions, all political parties presented their manifestos in the written form. As a senior parliamentarian, I also observed that various issues are discussed on the floor of parliament, but issues that are reported on by our journalist friends sitting in the press gallery receive wider attention. Any news published in a newspaper proves to be more effective in solving public issues; a simple application written on a white paper ensures justice in a better way.

The use of the pen in exposing the corruption of the world's elite through the Panama Papers was eye-opening. Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, who had won with a two-third majority, was also disqualified through the court's written orders.

Now, when the PTI, led by Imran Khan, is in a position to form the government, we must understand the importance of using the pen positively to promote education, health and foreign policy on a priority basis. People have shown historical confidence in the PTI candidates on the basis of the party's 'Naya Pakistan' slogan. A positive change must be seen in every field of life to ensure the placement of the right person in the right place. All those appointed must be aware of how to use their pen efficiently and effectively.

We need to convince all democratic powers that politics of contention will bring nothing, and that only through the use of the pen will we be able to achieve peace, prosperity and progress. This is also the only way to discourage dynastic politics and curb corruption, which is, in fact, a curse on the entire democratic set-up.

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THE NEWS

Friday, August 3, 2018

A remarkable victory

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



While other political parties have been limited to regional areas, the PTI has emerged as the only political party to have achieved remarkable success throughout the country – from Karachi to Peshawar.

The post-election situation has made it clear that after having won a majority in the centre and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province, the PTI is also in a strong position to form governments in the provinces of Punjab and Balochistan.

Since childhood, we have been taught that brave people are not afraid of tough situations and that it is quite natural for one to face difficulties in the struggle for a noble cause. But truth ultimately wins. The best example of this is Imran Khan. When he took up cricket as his profession, he touched the skies by winning the World Cup for Pakistan. Furthermore, the Shaikat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital reflects his determination and commitment to curb cancer.

Imran Khan decided to join politics almost 22 years ago to ensure justice in society. Today, not only has he proved himself as an unconquerable politician, after winning all five seats he contested on, but is also all set to lead the country as its prime minister. Interestingly, in the 2002 elections, Imran Khan was only able to secure his seat. However, his recent victory has proved that politics must be based on the noble cause of serving peo-

ple with honesty and dedication.

No doubt, Imran Khan's recent success is the result of his selfless struggle, firm faith in God, public support and, most importantly, his leadership qualities to lead a multi-disciplinary team under the umbrella of the PTI. On a daily basis, activists from different political parties and prominent personalities belonging to various walks of life are joining the PTI to support Imran Khan's cause of ensuring social justice and a corruption-free Pakistan.

It is a common belief that the pen is mightier than the sword. Imran Khan has also authored various books to express his views and share his experience. His book titled 'Pakistan: A Personal History' is worth reading. In the book, he has mentioned various incidents that happened during his journey from cricketer to party chief. The book also provides foreign policy guidelines that are in the best interests of Pakistan and its people.

"Today when Pakistani youth are [sic] living in a society in which there is [a] gaping ethical vacuum, they are in critical need of a deep and comprehensive education based upon [Allama] Iqbal's multifaceted philosophy," Imran Khan writes in his book while paying tribute to our national poet. Considering Allama Iqbal his role model, Imran Khan laid the foundation of his political party on the basis of justice, humanity and self-esteem. On various occasions, he vowed to transform our beloved country into a welfare state that follows the model of Medina and the vision of Quaid-e-Azam.

I personally believe that the unfortunate demise of Quaid-e-Azam after Pak-

istan's first anniversary resulted in the exploitation of the political turmoil the country found itself in at that time. Today, Imran Khan has raised the slogan of 'Naya Pakistan' – this slogan is actually to ensure the implementation of the ideology of Pakistan, where all citizens will be equal in the eyes of the state. The recent election results are undeniable proof that the people have trusted in Imran Khan's leadership wholeheartedly.

These election results reflect the direct relationship between better performance and political stability. Those who were taunting Imran Khan for taking U-turns are today regretting not having shown flexibility to the public's demands.

Imran Khan's post-election address to the nation is being lauded on both national and international levels. This reflects the acknowledgment that the Imran Khan-led Naya Pakistan has received. In response to his commitment of establishing cordial relations with the international community, world leaders, including of China, Saudi Arabia, India and Turkey have felicitated him.

This massive victory has enabled the PTI's leadership to focus on fulfilling the promises of ensuring social justice, curbing corruption, turning Pakistan into a welfare state and ending the country's dependency on foreign debts. These goals can only be achieved if a team solely and wholly based on merit is selected for the federal and provincial cabinets.

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INTERNATIONAL THE NEWS

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Vol 25 No 133

Zigzag 12, 1439 A.E

Phones: 32630611-15, Fax: 32271314-15

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Friday, July 27, 2018

Our tumbling rupee

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Our business community is currently facing considerable pressure as the US dollar has climbed to Rs131 in the open market. This horrific devaluation of the rupee is producing a negative impact on our national economy and foreign debt.

According to currency dealers, the sudden rise in the dollar price has also directly increased its demand. A large number of people are now purchasing dollars on a massive scale. There are also reports of a dollar shortage in the open market. However, economic experts have expressed concern over the new wave of inflation that could result in more economic difficulties for Pakistan.

The country is heavily dependent on various imports, such as food products, oil and petroleum, machinery and electronic items. Ironically, the export ratio is comparatively low. The sudden decrease in the value of the rupee has not only increased the prices of imported products, but it has also multiplied our debts.

To understand the current crisis, there is a pressing need to analyse historical facts. In the past, we were exploited when British introduced paper currency. For nearly 1,800 years, India was among the most prosperous country. The rupee has been the currency used in the Subcontinent since time immemorial. The word 'rupee' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'rupa', which means silver coin. The ancient philosopher Chanakya also referred to silver coins as 'rupya rupa' in his book 'Arthashastra'.

The US dollar was once a silver coin that was designed along the lines of the Spanish dollar. Today, the dollar is used as a currency by more than 20 currencies across the world. The US dollar is also the official currency of East Timor, Ecuador, Micronesia, El Salvador, the Marshall Islands, Panama, Palau, and the Caribbean Netherlands.

By the end of the 19th century, gold was just 15 times more expensive than silver. However, the discovery of numerous silver mines throughout the US resulted in the devaluation of silver. Today, gold is as much as 70 times more expensive than silver. This situation enabled the US government to enforce the gold standard in 1900. This is a monetary system in which the standard economic unit is based on a fixed amount of gold. Moreover, the gold standard guarantees that a currency is a government substitute for money.

During this period, the Subcontinent was under the tight control of the British. In order to transfer gold to England, the silver standard was introduced in British India. Paper currency was initiated by imperialists so as to enable them to not pay back in solid form. After the War of Independence in 1857, the British declared the rupee as the official currency of colonial India. The former royal coins were gradually disowned and paper notes that were issued by the British were circulated across the country. In order to capture a maximum amount of gold, the British government also established postal saving banks at post offices, which offered attractive interest rates. The government accepted gold from the people but wasn't bound to provide any in return.

To further manipulate trade with India, the British government also launched council bills that were, in fact,

a form of bank draft with variable values. Henry Dunning Macleod, a renowned economist, explained the council bills in the following words: "The more India council bills are sold, the more the diminution in the value of silver is increased... and as the council must sell a sufficient quantity to produce the required amount in gold... a still larger amount must be sold to make up for their diminished value... and consequently the heavier is the taxation on the people of India to meet the deficiency."

After Independence, Pakistan had no choice but to utilise paper currency notes issued by the Reserve Bank of India. The bank was established in April 1936 to control the monetary policy of the rupee. At the time of Independence, \$1 was equivalent to around Rs3. It is, therefore, quite alarming that the US dollar is expected to cross Rs131. Meanwhile, the Indian rupee is in a comparatively better position - \$1 is currently equivalent to around INR 67. While there is a race on the global level to increase gold reserves, Pakistan is facing international pressure to devalue the national currency to increase foreign reserves.

China is also aggressively increasing gold reserves to reduce our dependence on the dollar. Similarly, the popularity of cryptocurrencies like bitcoin indicates that the Internet community wants to get rid of dollars.

It will be a serious challenge for our new government to explore suitable alternatives on a priority basis to overcome the rupee crisis in the best interest of our country.

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INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS

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Vol. 28 No. 126

Zlqa'ad 6, 1439 A.H

Phones: 32630611-15, Fax: 32271314-15

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Friday, July 20, 2018

A series of follies

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



What happened with former prime minister Mian Nawaz Sharif is quite unfortunate for the entire political arena. On

various occasions, I tried to discuss with my former party leader the possible consequences of his actions. However, Mian Sahib was more influenced by his so-called advisers

Being his well-wisher, I am dedicating today's column to Mian Sahib with the hope that during his stay at Adiala Jail, he will have sufficient time to read and analyse all those factors that resulted in his political downfall.

Mian Sahib, the Adiala jail cell where you are currently imprisoned was actually constructed by none but your own self during your previous tenure. Mian Sahib, it seems that you were unable to distinguish between your friends and foes due to presence of sycophants around you. Do you remember when you were elected to lead the Pakistan Muslim League? Have you ever wondered why those who once expressed confidence in your leadership are no more with you?

While you want to see the PML-N propagating your narrative throughout the country in the name of sanctity of vote, the

bitter truth is that your own brother and close aides are reluctant to own this narrative. You forget that you came to power three times on the basis of the vote – and nobody created hurdles in your way. Similarly, if you really want to honour the vote then why not just accept the results of the recently-held Senate elections and change in the Balochistan Assembly?

I had suggested several times the appointment of a Hindu chairperson for the Evacuee Trust Property Board, and even suggested the name of Honourable Rana Bhagwandas (late), the former chief Justice of Pakistan – but you had just turned a deaf ear. The incompetent chairperson appointed by you was later on dismissed by the Supreme Court on different complaints. And the PML-N also lost respect in the eyes of 35 lakh non-Muslim voters.

You must recall the time when you approached same Supreme Court against an elected prime minister. Rather than giving advice to others to resign and go home, you could also have resigned or dissolved the assemblies after the Panama scandal emerged. You had a golden opportunity to set a most laudable trend. But unfortunately your advisers suggested otherwise.

Mian Sahib, you enjoyed full authority during your tenure and never faced any undemocratic conspiracy. Sometimes a visionary political leader has to take some unwanted decisions for the best interest of the country but you failed to open four

constituencies for the sake of democracy. When the sit-in outside parliament became longer than expected, again you were in no mood to initiate dialogue.

Because of the wrong policies of Ishaq Dar, the US dollar is climbing to the highest price of Rs130 day by day. Despite your claims of zero-loadshedding, the country is still facing electricity shortages. Further, the mishandling of the Faizabad protest also damaged the overall reputation of the PML-N. Why did you insist on keeping the ministries of foreign affairs and defence without ministers? You appointed the foreign affairs minister right at the end – when the matter was questioned by the honourable courts.

The PML-N's social media cell has been saying that PML-N workers are forced to change their loyalties. I am of the view, though, that it is actually wrong policies and the blame-game with national institutions that have forced people to part ways. My observation is that a large number of people still love you but that they don't support your narrative. Mian Sahib, I believe that an open apology would win you the trust of the public again. To ensure the sanctity of the vote in true letter and spirit, it is very necessary for everyone to accept the upcoming election results.

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INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS

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Vol. 28 No. 119

Shawwal 28, 1439 A.H

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Friday, July 13, 2018

Social media and elections

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



For a stable democratic society, the importance of a free and fair election cannot be denied. The credit for raising political awareness among people after a long struggle goes to the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf.

Political analysts are of the view that young activists of the PTI are utilising social media in a very efficient manner to convey the party's message throughout the country. No doubt, the PTI's narrative is playing a pivotal role in developing public opinion on a larger scale.

To counter the PTI in the digital world, other political parties have also tried to ensure their presence on social media. However, they are ignorant about the fact that social media, if not managed wisely, is capable of harming one's own interests. The most prominent example in this regard is of the PML-N's social media strategy. Its controversial and irresponsible tweets not only resulted in unending troubles for the PML-N's top leadership but also led the country towards uncertainty, misunderstanding and political instability.

In today's digital age, almost every political leader including Imran Khan, Shahbaz Sharif, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Maryam Nawaz, Shehbaz Rasheed and Farooq Sattar are using Twitter to comment on various national and international issues. Their tweets not only become viral within seconds but are also shown on television as breaking news. There are no two opinions that nowadays e-papers, blogs and news portals are more popular than the traditional media. It has happened many a times

that the source of various breaking news was actually a post that went viral on social media, or a message shared on WhatsApp groups.

Social media is also globally used for effective and rapid communication among states, envoys and political leadership. All the world's leaders have official social media accounts, especially on Twitter, where they openly express their views, national stance and support or warning for other countries. The importance of social media in politics can be gauged from the fact that both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton spent mil-

Running social media campaigns has become as essential as carrying out door-to-door drives

lions of dollars on their social media campaigns during the US presidential elections.

Even almost two years after the US presidential elections, reports of Russia's alleged intervention through social media are still echoing in the media. In a meeting with the US Senators, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg also reportedly admitted to such involvement in the presidential elections. The social media networking website's administration is also facing criticism due to reports of data leakage of users and breach of privacy policies. So far Facebook has had to bear a huge loss of \$60 billion in value.

Similarly, another political consultancy firm has been accused of manipulating the US political system. The agency influenced voters through social media by generating propaganda

against opponents, by publicising their scandals and projecting images of favourite candidates. According to foreign media, thousands of voters belonging to various states of the US were targeted to manipulate the election results. The company has also been accused of influencing the UK's Brexit campaign, as well as playing a suspicious role in the elections of Kenya, Nigeria, Brazil, Mexico and Malaysia.

In Pakistan, social media has proved its significance and thus, all political parties are using the platform to convey their political manifestos to the public. Candidates who have a presence on Facebook, Whatsapp and Twitter are likely to have a higher success rate. Similarly, campaigning on social media has become as essential as door-to-door campaigning. Today, almost all political candidates understand the importance of latest technologies very well. Many politicians are hiring social media experts to manage their official Facebook and Twitter accounts to ensure maximum number of votes. Due to social media's active role, voters have become empowered to interact with political candidates and seek answers regarding many issues.

In the current political scenario, many examples can be quoted of how social media influenced decisions of top party leaders. However, we must not believe each and every post. Many a times, fake news, morphed photographs and fabricated videos have also attracted the attention of traditional media. We must use the platform wisely and for good reasons. The active role of social media will help ensure free and fair elections.

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Saturday

July 7, 2018

Shawal 22, 1439 A.H.

INTERNATIONAL

THE NEWS

Leadership matters

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Reccep Tayyip Erdogan of the Justice and Development Party has once again won a new five-year term after securing absolute victory in the Turkish presidential elections.

Initially due on November 3, 2019, President Erdogan announced to hold the election earlier three months ago. The Turkish media reported that Erdogan succeeded by securing nearly 53 percent of popular votes. For the first time, the presidential and parliamentary elections were held together. The voter turnout was reportedly around 67 percent. On behalf of Pakistanis, I would like to congratulate the Turkish people for the victory.

According to recent electoral reforms, the post of prime minister has been abolished. The office of the president will serve as both the country's head of state and government. Similarly, a vice presidency is being introduced, whereas the president has been empowered to take decisions about selecting and removing vice presidents, ministers and other high-level state officials.

Erdogan started his political career by contesting local body elections held in March 1994. He was elected as the mayor of Istanbul. At that time, the city faced a plethora of serious problems such as water shortage, traffic jams, air pollution and heaps of garbage strewn across the city. Erdogan took various initiatives to tackle all kinds of challenges. Due to his tireless efforts, Istanbul was transformed into one of the most beautiful cities of the world. He also initiated the first roundtable conference of mayors wherein mayors from various global cities shared their valuable experiences. Ironically, he was imprisoned and suspended from the mayor's office owing to a speech

latter, Erdogan emerged as an influential national leader of the Turkish political arena. Elected as prime minister in 2003 and ruling for almost 15 years before being elected as the president in 2014, Erdogan succeeded in strengthening Turkey's economy. The Turkish government made investing in education, healthcare and infrastructure their top priorities. Erdogan also managed to successfully free Turkey from the IMF.

Whether it is the Palestinian issue or the Rohingya crisis, Erdogan's foreign policy revolves around supporting the oppressed. The Turkish president believes that: "If we, as a nation and country, want to achieve our goals, we first need a powerful and efficient system of government, in which who has the power and the responsibility is well-defined." He is of the view that political instability results in socio-economic problems.

The recent Turkish elections have brought Turkey in the same limelight that it was in exactly a hundred years ago. At that time, the Ottoman Empire was facing a tough time by nationalist, secular and foreign elements. Interestingly, the Khilafat Movement was started in British India in support of Turkey. The movement brought prominent Hindu and Muslim leaders closer to enhance cooperation for the freedom struggle. Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar, Maulana Shaukat Ali, Allama Iqbal, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Mahatma Gandhi were some political leaders who mobilised masses in support of the Ottoman caliphate - which ruled over much of Southeast Europe, Western Asia and North Africa between the 14th and early 20th centuries. The Khilafat Movement later inspired people across the Subcontinent to achieve freedom from the British.

Pakistan established diplomatic relations with Turkey soon after its independence and their bilateral relations became increasingly strong. The Turkish govern-

ment strongly supports the Pakistani stance on Kashmir. The name of our national language 'Urdu' is itself a Turkish word, a reflection of the two region's historical cultural ties. Both the countries have many roads, parks and public places named after each other's national leaders. The Attaturk Avenue in Islamabad and Jinnah Road in Ankara, are both a reminder of how close the two countries are. The Turkish people love treating all Pakistanis as brothers.

Both the countries used to face similar challenges. However, Turkey was lucky enough to have a sincere, honest and bold leadership in the form of Tayyip Erdogan. His recent victory determines his firm commitment and passion to serve Turkey. A few years ago, when some anti-democracy elements tried to topple his government, the Turkish people came out on the streets in support of their beloved charismatic leader.

As politicians, we need to learn many lessons from the Turkish leader. First, our political struggle must have some noble purpose of serving mankind. There may be a number of challenges, but a real politician overcomes all crises with the support of the people. To achieve our targets, we may review our strategy but there should be no compromise on principles and ideologies.

This month, we are also holding national elections in Pakistan. I believe that the political developments in Turkey will serve as an eye-opener for all of us. We have to understand the importance of vote for selecting the right leadership. If our brotherly country Turkey can get rid of IMF loans, then why can't Pakistan? The transformation of Pakistan into a truly sovereign country depends on how wisely we choose our leadership through the ballot.

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THE NEWS

Friday, June 29, 2018

A water emergency

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



The Rawal Dam is considered to be one of the major sources of drinking water for people residing in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. But from its latest pictures, it is heart-wrenching to see that extremely hot weather and low rainfall has left the dam barren and dry.

According to media reports, the water level has gone below the dead level. Once a popular picnic spot for families, the boats that once took tourists on tours of the scenic Rawal Lake are now parked on dry land.

Similarly, the most important source of water supply to Karachi, the Hub Dam, is also drying up rapidly. According to the water board's officials, the water level in the Hub Dam has dropped to nine inches, and because of reaching the dead level, only 10 days' stock of water is left for the east and west districts of Karachi. Experts are concerned that if there are no rains in the coming days the water supply to the residents could be completely halted by the end of July. The Hub Dam also supplies water to Balochistan.

Water is among the basic necessities of life. From ancient times to the modern era, water availability is ensured before establishing any new town or city. We also have examples of international countries such as Somalia and Ethiopia where water shortage had created the worst kind of humanitarian crisis.

The UN has ranked Pakistan among the five most unfortunate countries that

are presently facing a water crisis. According to the UN report, per capita water availability in Pakistan has declined from 5,260 cubic metres in 1951 to below 900 cubic metres in recent years. According to international standards, a country must have at least 120 days of water stocked. But, regrettably, Pakistan has only 30 days of water storage capacity to meet its average needs, whereas our neighbour, India, has 220 days of water storage capacity.

It is a bitter reality that Pakistan had to face many problems as a result of the unfair distribution of water at the time of Independence. Accepting the intermediary role of the World Bank, India and Pakistan signed the Indus Waters Treaty Agreement in 1960. According to the agreement, control over the water flowing in the three eastern rivers – the Beas, Ravi and Sutlej – was provided to India, while the control over the water flowing in the three western rivers – the Indus, Chenab and Jhelum – was given to Pakistan.

However, India has reportedly built around 3,200 dams whereas the count of total dams and reservoirs in Pakistan over the height of 15 metres is not more than 150. Ironically, Pakistan has always had to face severe criticism of political parties over the construction of new dams. The credit for laying the foundation of the first dam in Pakistan goes to Gen Ayub – the Mangla Dam. In a short period of six years, the dam's construction was completed. Later, work on other small dams, including Tarbela and Chashma, was also started. The Tarbela Dam has the distinction of being the biggest earth-filled dam in the world.

The issue of the Kalabagh Dam has emerged during the tenure of almost every

government. It is said that the paper work of this project was completed during Gen Ayub's era, while the construction began during Zia's era. While some segments of our society are in favour of the Kalabagh Dam, there are also its opponents. Although the largest province supports the Kalabagh Dam, the other three smaller provinces oppose its construction. The water issue is not limited to one area and in the future the entire nation will have to face a severe water crisis.

According to a media report, our other neighbour, China, has constructed more than 87,000 small and big dams to combat the water crisis. China has also proposed to Pakistan that rather than wasting time on a disputed dam, we should construct 40 eco-friendly gravity dams that can generate electricity 14 times more than the Kalabagh Dam. There is also national consensus over the Dasu, Diamer-Bhasha and Munda dams.

The negligence, non-seriousness and the zero interest of all the past governments in the construction of new dams or water reservoirs is the key factor for the crisis that we are facing today. If Pakistan continues to not pay attention to its water reservoirs, we may have to face more serious consequences in the near future. The Pakistani nation, civil society and media all must demand the next elected government to address the issue of water crisis on an emergency basis. We must not forget that our laziness can permanently make Pakistan a water-stressed country.

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THE NEWS

Friday, June 22, 2018

A temporary ceasefire

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Eid is a festival of peace, love, brotherhood and equality. This year, we practically witnessed the positive impact of Eid in Afghanistan. On June 7, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani announced a temporary ceasefire with Taliban fighters so as to ensure a violence-free Eidul Fitr. As a goodwill gesture, the Afghan government also decided to release many Taliban prisoners.

In response, the Afghan Taliban vowed to halt attacks on government forces. This is the first time that the Taliban accepted the ceasefire offer since their government was toppled in 2001. On Eidul Fitr, dozens of unarmed Taliban fighters reportedly emerged from their hideouts and visited different Afghan towns and cities, including Kabul, where they were greeted by locals, government officials and the security forces.

A number of photographs and video clips have gone viral on social media in which Taliban fighters, the people and the security forces are seen celebrating Eid festival in a cheerful manner. Many Taliban fighters were seen taking selfies with people. In a video footage that was aired on an Afghan TV channel, a Taliban warrior is seen arriving in a town on a motorcycle and subsequently taking selfies with an Afghan soldier. Photographs of Afghanistan's interior minister meeting a Taliban delegation also emerged on the second day of Eid.

The Eid celebration also portrayed a soft image of Afghanistan as a whole.

It is a universal truth that violence can never help win the hearts and minds of people. At the end of the day, peace has to prevail. World history serves as a testament to the belief that all violent conflicts ultimately have to shift towards dialogue and mutual understanding. Now, it is in best interest of the Taliban to adopt a political and democratic means to achieve their goals.

The successful ceasefire also came as a pleasant surprise for the international community. A tweet by German Ambassador to Pakistan Martin Koble, stated that: "Impressive pictures from the first-ever truce in #Afghanistan showing the thirst for peace. Some scenes remind me of the joy after [the] fall of [the] Berlin Wall. Hope both sides will continue [the] truce, enter in[to] immediate negotiations". The German envoy, who is popular among Pakistanis due to his various public diplomacy initiatives and tweets in Urdu, also shared a photograph of a Taliban fighter accompanied by Afghan soldiers holding rose flowers in their hands.

Even the US – a key player in the war on terror – has welcomed the temporary ceasefire. A statement issued by the US State Department said that the Afghan government's offer of a temporary ceasefire underscores its commitment to peace as both a national and religious responsibility. Endorsing the US narrative, various world leaders hoped that the ceasefire will allow the people of Afghanistan to move their country towards peace and prosperity. In contrast to the despair spread by many so-called analysts and think tanks, the Eid celebrations in the

country successfully opened new avenues for more hope and expectation.

However, the attacks carried out in Nangarhar on June 17 were quite unfortunate and resulted in the loss of many people – including civilians, government forces and Taliban fighters who were celebrating Eid. The horrific blast reportedly happened outside the regional governor's office in Jalalabad city when the governor was meeting a Taliban delegate. This tragic incident proves that it is not wise to blame the Taliban for all acts of militancy. The Western media believe that Isis was involved in the attack. But it is too early to reach a conclusion.

The Afghan government and the Taliban must jointly investigate the matter and find the culprits. Various global players or non-state actors are presumably not in favour of peace in Afghanistan as it does not serve their vested interests. They must not forget that ensuring a peaceful society is dream of Afghans – whether they are in the government or in the Taliban ranks.

Despite all the troubles created by the Afghan government since the outset, Pakistan always stands with the people of Afghanistan. The Afghan leadership must understand that an effective and joint border management system will ensure peace and prosperity for both countries. The positive role of the Pakistan Army in curbing terrorism must also be acknowledged. Let's hope that we get to see the day when Afghanistan will announce a ceasefire with Pakistan on all fronts.

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THE NEWS

Friday June 15, 2018

Donating blood

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



World Blood Donor Day is celebrated across the globe on June 14 annually. The purpose behind marking the day is to encourage voluntary blood donors and raise awareness about the need for regular blood donations for patients in need.

Historically, our planet has witnessed a number of tragic incidents including natural disasters, terrorism and traffic accidents, which have resulted in the loss of numerous precious lives. In the past, European countries used to wage horrific wars and invasions against each other, resulting in a lot of bloodshed. However, at the same time, many humanity-loving European scientists tried to save lives through blood transfusions.

The first successful blood transfusion involving a human being was performed by French physician Jean-Baptiste Denys in 1667. Later, Dr James Blundell, a British scientist, invented an instrument during the 19th century for directly transfusing blood from a healthy person to a patient.

However, a major breakthrough occurred when an Austrian pathologist, Dr Karl Landsteiner, discovered blood groups in 1900. He succeeded in identifying the three blood groups A, B and O with their respective characteristics. Dr Karl Landsteiner also received many notable awards, including the Nobel Prize in Physiology, for having discovered the blood group system. Born on June 14, the day was declared World Blood Donor Day to pay tribute to his contributions.

During the First World War, there arose

an urgent need for blood donations on a large scale. Thus, blood banks were established to store the donated blood and preserve for later transfusions. Oswald Hope Robertson, a medical researcher and US Army officer, is known for establishing the initial blood banks to serve the wounded soldiers of the British and American armies. Later, a British surgeon named Geoffrey Keynes designed a portable machine that could store blood to ensure that transfusions were carried out more easily. However, the world's first organised blood bank was established in the Soviet Union.

In Pakistan, blood transfusion services are being provided by many public, private and NGO-run blood banks. A majority of blood banks are also established at hospitals. The Pakistan Hindu Council is one such social charity organisation that carries out blood donation activities regularly. According to media reports, it is estimated that at least 3.2 million bottles of blood are required for Pakistani patients on an annual basis. Unfortunately, just 1.8 million bottles are arranged, which ultimately results in the loss of many lives.

There are many myths and misunderstandings found among our people, which is why they are reluctant in donating blood. Being an MBBS doctor, I would like to categorically denounce the baseless claim that only people who are overweight are eligible to donate blood. In fact, there are three extra bottles of blood stored in a medically-fit human body. That is why every healthy adult person of 16 to 60 years of age can easily donate a bottle of blood every three months. It is highly recommended to have blood-screening tests done before donating.

The process of new blood cells forming in our body, as a result of transfusions,

strengthens the body's immunity against diseases. Donating blood improves our overall health. Similarly, increased level of iron in the blood raises the risk of many serious diseases. Regular donation of blood also reduces the chances of a heart attack by 88 percent. Additionally, a research study disclosed that regular donation of blood increases the life of a person by at least four more years. The process of blood donations also helps decrease the cholesterol level.

Blood donation can be a humble gesture to serve humanity. We must not forget that every religion asks its followers to save human life. Therefore, we must consider donating blood as a religious and social duty. According to medical science, the new blood cells formed due to blood donation freshen up the skin on the face by reducing the effects of old-age. However, in my view, it is actually the blessing of God that is reflected on the faces of those who selflessly serve mankind without expecting any personal advantage in return.

In today's digital age, it is easier to connect blood donors with patients. In this regard, a number of websites and WhatsApp groups have been set up and are performing very well. Even renowned social media networking site, Facebook, has introduced a feature for Pakistani users to manage blood donation activities more efficiently.

On World Blood Donor Day, various awareness activities such as seminars, conferences and walks were held in every country. The day demands us to play our due role for serving humanity, even if it is donating just one bottle of blood.

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THE NEWS

Saturday, June 9, 2018

Societal harmony

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



June 8 is of much significance in the history of the US. Today, active participation of white and black Americans can be witnessed in every field of life. The people of the US even elected a black president.

However, there was a time when societal tussle between the two races was at its peak. The Supreme Court of the US in its historical decision of June 8, 1953, ruled that restaurants located in Washington DC can no more refuse to serve black diners. Prior to this, black Americans were banned from even entering restaurants owned by white people.

The US has a diverse population consisting of white Americans as the racial majority. On the other hand, the black American community is one of the largest racial minority groups, amounting to an estimated 12.7 percent of the total population.

The history of black Americans starts in the 16th century, when people from Africa were forcibly brought to the US as slaves. According to research reports, during the American War of Independence, there were about 9,000 black soldiers associated with militias. They also served as privateers and wagoners in the forces, and as servants to officers. Moreover, it is estimated that as many as 5,000 African-Americans were in combat troops at that time.

Crispus Attucks, a stevedore of African descent, is considered to be the first Amer-

ican martyr who sacrificed his life in 1770 during the war against the British. His heroic role is widely acknowledged in the freedom literature of the US. Later, Attucks also became a legendary figure of the anti-slavery movements which rose in the US.

Ironically, after the US was founded, African-Americans continued to be enslaved. It was not until Abraham Lincoln convinced all states to prohibit slavery that the practice was abolished. It was he who had the 13th constitution amendment passed to the US' constitution. The amendment declared that, "neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the US, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." It was passed by the Senate on April 1864. Later, the 14th Amendment, adopted in July 1868, granted equal citizenship to black Americans, including those formerly brought as slaves and liberated after the Civil War.

Even after such remarkable constitutional steps, the black people were reportedly treated as second-class citizens who had no civic rights. The widespread hatred and discrimination against black-Americans in society can be understood from the fact that the doors of the restaurants owned by white people were closed for black diners, just 65 years ago. However, to ensure that black people integrated in the American society the US' Supreme Court took a historic decision.

In Pakistan, when we look at non-Muslim citizens we see that they also made huge contributions to make the Pakistan Movement successful. Jogendra Nath Mandal, a Hindu politician and close com-

panion of Quaid-e-Azam, is among the founding fathers of Pakistan. Quaid-e-Azam, on many occasions, announced that Pakistan would be made a model country where every citizen regardless of his racial, ethnic or religious differences will be provided with equal opportunities, and it will be ensured that they spend their life according to his beliefs.

A recent report by the Election Commission of Pakistan disclosed that the number of voters belonging to religious minorities in Pakistan has reached 3.63 million, where Hindu voters continue to maintain their majority among all minorities. The number of Hindu voters now stands at 1.77 million. It seems as if the Pakistani society is still divided into a majority and minority on the basis of religious affiliations. Despite all the sacrifices for Pakistan, the patriotic minorities are not allowed to send their genuine representatives to parliament through direct and dual vote.

There are restrictions on non-Muslims to hold specific offices. Similarly, doors of many state institutions are closed to the highly-educated, most qualified and talented Pakistani citizens just because they belong to minority communities.

Today, if we want to see Pakistan become a 'Asian Tiger', we need to follow the Quaid-e-Azam's vision in letter and spirit by allowing every citizen to serve our beloved country on the basis of merit. Religious harmony must also be an integral part of every political party's election manifesto.

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THE NEWS

Friday, June 1, 2018

Congratulations Fata

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Finally, all the constitutional requirements to merge the (now formerly) Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) with the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) have been fulfilled successfully. Geographically, Fata is a semi-autonomous tribal region adjacent to the Afghan border, consisting of seven tribal agencies and six frontier regions.

Fata has a rich heritage of waging freedom struggles against foreign invaders. Even at the peak of their power, the British faced tough resistance in controlling the tribal areas. Haji Mirzali Khan alias Faqeer of Ipi was one legendary freedom fighter who belonged to this region. Today, a road located in Islamabad also reminds us of his freedom struggle. To suppress insurgencies, the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) was introduced during the British Raj in 1901. Under the FCR, citizens were deprived of the right to appeal, to have a lawyer as well as present evidence. The law was labelled as a 'black law' that violates human rights, is 'draconian', 'barbaric' and even 'un-Islamic'.

The tribal people also supported the Pakistan Movement to end the British rule. It is reported that a leader of freedom fighters, Maulana Fazal Elahi Wazirabadi, attended the historic March 23, 1940, jalsa in Lahore to represent the tribal population and endorse the Pakistan Resolution.

The unconditional love the tribal people had for Quaid-e-Azam was witnessed during his historic visits to the tribal areas. In 1945, a large number of people came out on the streets of Landi Kotal to welcome their beloved leader and the tribal people chose to associate their future with an independent and sovereign Pakistan. Similarly, Quaid-e-Azam also highly respected the people of Fata for their loyalty, sacrifices and commitment for

achieving freedom. Being the first governor general, Quaid-e-Azam addressed a grand tribal jirga in April 1948 at the Governor House in Peshawar to acknowledge the contributions of the people of this region. He also announced to withdraw armed forces from the area, calling the patriotic tribal people a frontline force in protecting the western borders.

Regrettably, the demise of the founding father after only a year of Independence resulted in the agenda of integrating the tribal areas into the national mainstream being ignored. It is quite hurtful that Pakistan decided to continue governing the area through the FCR law, inherited from the British. The neighbouring government of Afghanistan's continuous attempts to interfere in internal matters by raising the baseless issue of 'Pukhtunistan' was also condemnable.

Although Fata was declared a part of Pakistan in the 1973 constitution, articles 247 and 248 restricted the jurisdiction of parliament, the Supreme Court and high court to the neglected tribal areas. The then prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, formed a committee under General (r) Naseerullah Babar, which included Hafeez Pirzada, Rafi Raza and Dr Mubashar Hassan. The aim of the committee was to create a framework for merging Fata with KP (then the North-West Frontier Province) for the then upcoming general elections.

Contrary to this, Gen Zia transformed Fata into a base for foreign fighters participating in the Afghan jihad. Twenty years later, in 1996, the government tried to introduce the adult franchise system in the tribal areas for facilitating a direct election of parliamentary representatives. The initiative failed to deliver due to the fact that constitutionally Fata was not a part of any province.

In 2002, the government tried to extend the Local Government Regulation to Fata. However, people showed no interest mainly due to the US' attack on neighbouring Afghanistan. During Musharraf's

tenure in 2006, a Fata Reforms Committee was formed. But the law and order situation in the region again proved a hurdle.

Then again in 2014, the Political Parties Joint Committee on Fata Reforms, in its 11-point agenda demanded that the tribal people of Fata must also be given legal, political, democratic and constitutional rights. The successful operations, Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasad, also played a pivotal role in securing peace and stability in the tribal areas. The demand – raised by some people of the region – of declaring Fata a separate province named 'Qabailistan' would not have worked due to the geographic and economic situation of the tribal areas. These areas need KP's support for rehabilitation and reconstruction of infrastructure including roads, communication networks and education and healthcare facilities.

Although Fata had a representation in the National Assembly and the Senate, in the presence of the FCR the parliamentarians were unable to play their due role in carrying out legislation in the interest of the people of Fata. But the Fata-KP merger has abolished the FCR as well as the separate status accorded to the tribal areas. Encouragingly, despite all differences, political parties showed unity. The commitment of Army Chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa, the people of Fata, KP government and all parliamentary representatives who participated in the voting is highly remarkable.

On this historic moment, Maulana Fazlur Rehman and Mehmood Khan Achakzai must also support the decision for the sake of Pakistan. Afghanistan must also understand that a peaceful Fata is in the best interest of the entire region. All Pakistanis warmly welcome the integration of Fata into the mainstream.

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INTERNATIONAL

THE NEWS

Friday

May 25, 2018

Ramazan 9, 1439 A.H.

Tackling heatwaves

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



For the past many days, Karachi has once again been facing the worst kind of heatwave, and reportedly dozens of precious human lives have been lost so far. Most of those who died were fasting due to the holy month of Ramazan. The situation has become increasingly critical due to electricity shortage.

The city was once known for its moderate weather. Geographically, Karachi is located along the coast and is supposed to have a relatively pleasant climate. However, it is indeed very tragic that over 60 people have reportedly died during the ongoing heatwave as temperature exceeded 40 degrees Celsius. Ironically, government officials have denied any knowledge of the casualties. According to the director health Karachi, no heatstroke deaths have been reported at any hospital. Similarly, the spokesman of the Sindh Health Department claimed that all the medicines and necessary arrangements have been ensured at all hospitals. However, he admitted that local hospitals reported having received over 20 heatstroke patients, but all were released after medical treatment.

Such statements remind me of the deadliest heatwave the city faced in 2015 which resulted in the deaths of at least 1,200 people. It was mainly the elderly, sick and the homeless who died. Instead of taking the issue seriously, government officials kept shifting the responsibility from one department to the other. Three years have passed, but it seems that the government has still not learnt anything from past mistakes. Instead of taking concrete steps

to tackle the crisis, our institutions are again busy in denying facts.

Heatwaves are a global phenomenon related to climate change. Internationally, the US and UK, Europe, Australia, India and many other countries also face this challenge. It is further expected that extreme heatwaves will become increasingly common across the globe in the near future. We need to make use of the international community's experience of tackling this crisis.

The government must focus on preparing a proper action plan to prevent and handle a heatwave with the coordination of various departments, individuals, the media and the civil society. There is a dire need to run public awareness campaigns and issue heatwave alerts. We must recognise this phenomenon as a major health risk, and identify vulnerable communities. We must devise a strategy to protect shopkeepers, auto mechanics, taxi and rickshaw drivers, labourers, police officials and security guards, who are extremely vulnerable to heatwaves and its adverse impacts, such as dehydration and sun strokes.

Nobody can deny that forestation acts as a coolant. Trees which can serve as shades for buildings are helpful in decreasing the need to turn air conditioners on. Similarly, trees also decrease all kinds of air pollution and gas emissions. Unfortunately, Pakistan has the highest annual deforestation rate in the region, and according to media reports, the country's forest cover is less than 2.5 percent of the total land.

International experts have time and again emphasised that at least 25 percent of Karachi's area should be reserved for trees and plantation. But sadly, a large number of trees have been cut down in the metropolis to either make space for residential colonies or for security reasons.

The government must initiate massive plantation drives in the city on a priority basis, whereas citizens must also plant trees in their homes and gardens for the sake of protecting the environment. 'One tree for one building' must be made a compulsory rule. Those who live in apartments should consider the environmental benefits of having green roofs. According to my knowledge, a green roof can help keep the temperature down in a home by as much as six to eight degree Celsius. Trees and vegetation play a crucial role in lowering surface and air temperatures, only if they are planted in strategic locations around buildings and public places. The city government must consult international environmental experts to have surveys conducted in this regard. Being the largest city and the commercial hub of the country, Karachi needs more trees to balance its ecosystem.

Recently, a popular trend of planting date palms was witnessed in the city. But the most favourable trees to be planted in the city are those that consume less water and provide more shade. For this reason, and because of numerous other benefits, Neem trees should be planted. According to experts, temperature under the Neem's shadow is around 10 degrees lower than the actual temperature, whereas it is only three to four degrees lower under shades of other trees. I believe that planting trees is the only workable solution that can save innocent lives. Gardening courses must also be included in the school curriculum so that our youth learns about the importance of plantation from an early age.

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INTERNATIONAL

THE NEWS

Friday

May 18, 2018

Ramazan 2, 1439 A.H.

Korean peace

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



since 1953

It was undoubtedly a historic moment when last month a North Korean ruler entered South Korea for the first time - the two had been at war with each other since 1953.

Last year I had the opportunity to represent Pakistan at an international peace summit in Seoul, the capital of South Korea. In an article at the time, I had explained in detail that even after 70 years of separation, South Koreans still strongly hope for a peaceful reunification with their northern brethren. My words have proven true after the recent visit of the North Korean ruler.

The Korean Peninsula was once a unified country but the power politics of the imperialists resulted in its division. Interestingly, both the sovereign states celebrate independence on the same day, August 15.

The national flag of South Korea reflects peace and purity, balance in the universe and movement and harmony in society. On the other hand, the North Korean flag, with a red star stands typically for a communist and socialist regime. The display of the North Korean flag is prohibited in South Korea. A uniform flag is used to represent both the Korean states when they perform as a single team in sporting events.

North Korea has since day one been ruled by the Kim dynasty, with the state's control being passed from the father to the son. Contrary to this, South Korea is a modern democratic country which has had 11 rulers changed so far and has emerged as a country that protects human rights and democratic values. South Korea also has the honour of electing the first female president Park Geun-hye, who is also the first female

president popularly elected in the whole of East Asia.

The North Korean military is considered to be the world's fourth largest military. Every citizen is required to undergo some sort of military training. According to media reports, North Korea has at least 10 nuclear warheads, whereas South Korea has kept away from participating in the race. While North Korea tries to secure its future through achieving nuclear weapons and missiles, South Korea, supported by the US and other Western countries, tries to develop itself as a modern country which is also the world's biggest investor in research, smartphone and other digital technology. Its leading mobile manufacturing company, Samsung, is popular across the globe. In North Korea, only one out of every 10 person has a mobile phone.

While North Korea has restricted its citizens from accessing internet, people in South Korea enjoy the world's fastest average internet speed, 28.6 Mbps. The government is rapidly rolling out 1 GB per second connections, which is 142 times faster than the average speed offered globally and 79 times faster than the average speed available in the US. About 45 million people or 92.4 percent of the South Korean population are internet users. Ironically, there are reportedly only 28 websites available for North Koreans to visit, most of which contain state propaganda.

North Korea also lags far behind in infrastructure development. Reportedly, only three percent of the roads in North are actually paved, and only 11 out of every 1,000 citizens are able to own a car. Long queues can be observed at bus stops throughout the country. On the other hand, South Korea has extensive networks of railways, motorways, highways, bus routes, ferry services and air routes, and almost 92 percent of the roads are paved. South Korea is also the third

country in the world where maglev trains are being operated on a commercial basis. Approximately 15 million tourists visit South Korea every year.

The North Korean economy is highly dependent on coal exports to neighbouring China, and is considered one of the world's poorest countries. However, the South Korean economy is the fourth largest in Asia and the 11th largest in the world. South Korean universities are ranked among the world's top universities. The country's youth is highly educated and is said to perform well in every field. Various high-tech giants are located in South Korea, whereas the local film industry is also labelled as the Hollywood of the East.

Interestingly, the progress in South Korea is based on a five-year long term development plan that was borrowed from the government of Pakistan during president Ayub Khan's era. Photos of then finance minister and economist Dr Mahbub ul Haq are still present in South Korean offices as a tribute to him. However, we failed to transform Pakistan as an Asian Tiger due to our internal and regional issues.

I believe that the North Korean ruler's visit to South Korea will have positive impacts on regional peace and world harmony. Most importantly, a strong message has been delivered to the international community that both the Koreas are committed to ensuring peace and stability and that North Korea must not be considered a threat to the region any more. The peace-loving international community is very hopeful that people of both the states will join hands to take the Korean Peninsula towards progress and prosperity collectively.

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THE NEWS

Friday, May 11, 2018

One Pakistan

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



The new slogan '*Do Nahi Aik Pakistan, Hum Sab ka Naya Pakistan*', which has been introduced by the PTI, has become the talk of the town after an impressive display of political power at the party's rally at Minar-e-Pakistan, Lahore.

People from all segments of life participated in the rally with enthusiasm. They wanted to ensure the revival of a Pakistan that was envisioned by Allama Iqbal, Quaid-e-Azam and our elders. This is a Pakistan where there is no discrimination between rich and poor; male and female; and majority and minority. In fact, it is a country where equal opportunities of progress are available to all on the basis of merit.

History serves as a testament to the fact that the progress of any nation lies in a peaceful society for which rule of law and social justice are prerequisites. Nations that pursued discriminatory policies ultimately lost their identity. The phrase 'united we stand, divided we fall' emphasises the importance of collective efforts for a common cause.

In this regard, we have a successful example of the Pakistan Movement led by Quaid-e-Azam. He was of the view that a peaceful society can only be created when the provision of equal rights is ensured to all citizens. These democratic views brought him closer to the All India Muslim League. Through his tireless struggle, Pakistan was carved out on the map of the world. During his political journey, Quaid-e-Azam was also accompanied by non-Muslim leaders like Jogendra Nath Mandal.

Quaid-e-Azam made it quite clear dur-

ing his August 11, 1947 speech that all Pakistani citizens will be equal citizens of Pakistan and there will be no majority or minority in the newly-established country. Pakistan undoubtedly came into existence in the name of Islam. Overall, the teachings of Islam advocate a strong judicial system and rule of law.

Unfortunately, Quaid-e-Azam's demise within a year after Independence was a major factor in the failure to establish this ideal state. In an article that I wrote last year, I highlighted all those aspects that created ideological rifts within the Pakistani society. Pakistan's Constituent Assembly passed the Objectives Resolution in 1949 under the influence of extremist elements that were once against the creation of Pakistan. At the time, Hindu politicians in Pakistan warned that the resolution will result in unending religious and sectarian conflicts in Pakistani society. But no one heeded their concerns.

It is regrettable that we have even divided our flag on the basis of colours. The concerns soon proved to be correct when people started using religion to achieve their political and personal goals.

Sixty-nine years after the Objectives Resolution was passed, the situation has worsened so much so that the serving federal interior minister recently came under attack due to a religious issue. Prior to this, a governor and ministers also lost their lives due to religious intolerance.

In such a critical time, the slogan of '*Do Nahi Aik Pakistan*' is the voice of all those Pakistanis who want to transform our beloved country into a progressive, peaceful and tolerant country. It was also a moment of satisfaction when PTI Chairperson Imran Khan, before presenting his 11-point election manifesto, mentioned the Charter of Madina and reaffirmed his commitment

to adhere to Quaid-e-Azam's vision.

Today, there are around 35 lakh non-Muslim voters. According to the Election Commission, the Hindu community holds the largest non-Muslim vote bank in the country. I am sure that the non-Muslim vote bank can pave the way for the PTI's victory in the next elections.

It is also unfair that the winning party leaders tend to nominate non-Muslims representatives in parliament on the basis of choice. It is necessary to elect non-Muslim representatives through direct and dual votes. Similarly, we have to discourage the trends of bribery and other unfair means to win elections. Today, the major causes of the destruction of our national institutions are nepotism and political appointments. To end all forms of discrimination, every Pakistani citizen should be treated with equality. If someone is found guilty, he should be treated as a culprit without his religious affiliations being criticised. Similarly, no obstacles should be created for a citizen on the basis of his/her faith.

We have to realise that creating 'One Pakistan' is not an easy milestone to achieve. For this, we need to demonstrate the same passion, faith and courage that was shown by our elders during the Pakistan Movement. If our elders left no stone unturned for the creation of Pakistan, then why can't we take Pakistan towards peace and prosperity through our own endeavours? I believe that change always comes when Karachi wakes up to the possibility of change. I am quite hopeful that a large number of patriotic members of the non-Muslim community will warmly participate in our upcoming rallies.

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THE NEWS

Friday, May 4, 2018

No honour in killing

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



The mysterious death of Pakistani-born Italian girl Sana Cheema has once again turned the world's attention towards Pakistan. A series of negative reporting has emerged in the international media in which Pakistan has been portrayed as a country where blood relatives kill female family members in the name of honour.

Unfortunately, this is not a first-of-its-kind incident. Many women, like social media celebrity Qandeel Baloch, have in the past lost their precious lives to such horrific, insane crimes. What is more disgusting is when some people try to justify such social evils under the guise of religion. On the other hand, those who blame religion for encouraging honour killings are also on the wrong side.

All religions ask their followers to respect the sanctity of human life. This is why I believe that the motives behind these 'honour' killings are probably refusals against arranged marriages and insistence on love marriages, rape, divorce, illicit relations, dowry - anything else, but not religion.

Further, honour killings cannot be attributed to any specific religion, country or society. Actually, honour killings emerged as a means to control women, and its origins can be traced back to thousands of years in various cultures and traditions. Today, the international community, while linking honour killings to Muslim dominated societies, forgets the bitter truth that this trend was actually introduced and promoted by the West.

According to historians, ancient Rome was the first ever human society where adultery was punishable by death. In this regard, the Roman law 'Lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis' implemented by Augustus Caesar can be studied thoroughly which permitted the murder of daughters and their lovers at the hands of their fathers. The law also permitted the murder of an adulterous wife's lover at the hands of her husband.

Honour killing also has a long history in Europe. Prior to 1981, Italian laws carried a three to seven-year imprisonment as punishment for someone who committed the murder of a female relative to safeguard his honour. European reformer John Calvin, during his rule of Geneva, had ordered to punish adulterous women by drowning them in the Rhone River.

Similarly, Napoleon Bonaparte was also a strong advocate of honour killings. Article 324 of the Napoleonic Code, passed in 1810, allowed the murder of unfaithful women and their lovers by their husbands. Although France abolished the article in 1975, it was copied by majority of former French colonies, most particularly by Middle-Eastern Arab countries including Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman and Tunisia. The Napoleonic Code proved very influential, and continues to inspire many countries to date.

Unfortunately, just after the death of Quaid-e-Azam, Pakistan was forced to abandon his vision. Pakistan passed the Objectives Resolution and looked towards the Arab countries which were themselves under the influence of foreign powers.

During Zia's era, Pakistan opened its doors to the Afghan jihad. It is highly regrettable that this also brought Napoleon-inspired ideologies into the country. Zia's attempt to promote extremism in the country

resulted in an increase in honour killings. Prior to Zia, I can't find any high-profile incident of honour killing. The introduction of the Hudood Ordinance further made Pakistani women very insecure and helpless.

It is another tragedy that sometimes the last rites of these innocent women are not performed, while, on the other hand, barbaric murderers are honoured by society as heroes. Our law is helpless against such culprits due to the fact that the murdered and the murderer are both close relatives. It is quite legal for the heir of the murdered to forgive the murderer.

This insane practice of honour killing must be stopped at any cost. First of all, we need to change our mindset towards women as there is no 'honour' in killing. All God-fearing citizens must come together to denounce this insane crime. Religious scholars, intellectuals and the civil society must come forward to initiate a collective struggle for the implementation of the Women's Protection Bill to curb honour killings. It is also our media's responsibility to increase public awareness for protection of women's rights and project a positive image of Pakistan. I also appeal to the West to share their experiences with us about how to get rid of such a barbaric crime.

Parents must understand that in today's digital age, cross-cultural, interfaith and mixed marriages are considered normal throughout the globe. Killing a girl in the name honour because she wanted to marry someone outside of her family and according to her choice must not be the prime reason for taking her life.

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THE NEWS

Friday, April 27, 2018

Crisis of humanity

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Syría is considered one of the oldest civilisations of the world. Historians also connect ancient Syria with Hinduism. Syria was the first place to record inscriptions of Rigveda in Sanskrit, which is said to have been first spoken in Syria. There are also many similarities between the Hindus and Yazidis, the most vulnerable minority group.

Although the teachings of every religion have highlighted the land of Syria in very positive ways, the country is currently facing the worst kind of civil war. As many as 500,000 innocent people have lost their lives while around 1000,000 casualties are reported as a result of the ongoing seven-year civil war. Thousands of Syrian families are trying to take refuge either in neighbouring countries or in Europe.

Historically, Syria was occupied by France after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in last century. World War II resulted in the independence of Syria. Hafez al-Assad took command of Syria in 1970s. Being a dictator, he adopted the Soviet model of one-party rule to strengthen his Ba'ath Party.

After the demise of Hafez al-Assad in 2000, his son Bashar al-Assad took over the mighty office of president of Syria. This was the era when the Soviet Union had collapsed and newly-liberated for-

mer Soviet states were adopting democracy. The US attack on neighbouring Iraq further destabilised the Middle East region. Initially, the Syrian people and the international community were very optimistic about Assad and democratic reforms. Unfortunately, Assad proved himself to be yet another dictator.

The Arab Spring toppled various regimes in the Middle East and adjoining areas. Similarly, large number of Syrian people also came out on the streets to demand political reforms and civil rights. Instead of listening to his people, Assad decided to seek military support from foreign players.

On his invitation, the Russian air force is carrying out brutal strikes against rebels. Russian military advisors and special operations forces are also stationed in Syria, and Russia is repeatedly using its veto power in the UN Security Council in support of the Assad regime.

Iran, another most important ally of Assad, is empowering him to suppress the resistance. The involvement of Iran has ignited other regional countries to interfere in the Syrian civil war. Saudi Arabia is of the view that the solution of the Syrian crisis is not possible with Assad in power. According to media reports, Saudi Arabia is providing military and financial assistance to various rebel groups.

Turkey is also a key supporter of the Syrian opposition. The Turkish government is accused of allowing foreign fighters, arms shipments and refugees to pass through its territory. Moreover, Turkey also agreed to let the US-led coalition use

its air bases for strikes on Syria.

Another neighbour, Israel, is afraid of the Syrian role in support of the Palestinian freedom struggle. It seems that Israel sees unrest in Syria in its best interest. Reportedly, the Israeli air force is also involved in the bombing on Syria. On the other hand, the UN, European Union and international community are in favour of a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis. Similarly, Pakistan also seeks a diplomatic solution, and stresses the need to respect the sovereignty of Syria.

The presence of various foreign countries has made the Syrian crisis very complicated. Involved in their proxy wars, nobody is thinking about the miseries of the innocent Syrian people. Another factor behind the unrest is the arms industry. For the sake of money, Syria has regrettably turned into the world's biggest market of weapons.

I think it was a grave mistake of Assad to invite foreign powers to save his government. He must understand that a ruler has no right to rule if he fails to provide a peaceful society. Taking back control of territories at the cost of people's lives can't be called victory. Assad must step down voluntarily for the sake of innocent citizens. There is also a dire need for a no-fly zone and for deploying UN peace missions in Syria to prevent further war crimes.

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THE NEWS

Wednesday, April 18, 2018

A political shift

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



I was elected as a member of the National Assembly from the PML-N's platform in 2013 under the leadership of Nawaz Sharif. I had laid the foundation for the Pakistan Hindu Council in 2005 - to work for social welfare regardless of any political affiliations.

In 2014, I approached the Supreme Court for the rights of non-Muslims communities. But I felt that the PML-N had failed to fulfil the promises made before the general election of 2013. After a series of hearings regarding minority rights, the Supreme Court announced its historic decision on June 19, 2014 to constitute a national council for minority rights. Unfortunately, the court's directives could not be implemented practically. Despite clear court

orders, no taskforce was assigned to protect religious sites and little was done to exclude hate material regarding non-Muslims from the curriculum.

I demanded that the chairman of Evacuee Trust Property Board should, as a matter of principle, be a Hindu. According to the Liaquat-Nehru Pact, India always appoints an Indian Muslim minister. Similarly, there is a Muslim in Israel to look after evacuee property. I proposed the name of former chief justice Rana Bhagwan Das as the chairman of the board. However, Sidiqul Farooq was appointed due to his political affiliations. I appealed to the Supreme Court and the chairman was terminated. The apex court ordered that a non-Muslim should be appointed for the post.

I believed that the Panama case was an international matter, and former PM Nawaz Sharif and his family must deal with it in court. I was in favour of accepting what the courts decided, regardless of the outcome of the case. I

raised concerns when Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb issued unwarranted remarks about the Hindus.

In fact, the Supreme Court is a ray of hope for Pakistanis, especially the vulnerable non-Muslims. As time went by, it was becoming difficult to support the PML-N's narrative of confrontation. On the one hand, the PML-N raised slogans about the sanctity of votes and, on the other, refused to accept the power of the vote when it came to appointing a new Senate chairman and the in-house changes that took place in Balochistan. Why didn't it adopt a realistic approach? Amid these circumstances, when PTI leadership approached me to join the PTI, I decided to do so against corruption, for my respect to the judiciary and for rule of law.

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A leader forever

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Zulfikar Ali Bhutto has the distinction of being the first elected prime minister of Pakistan. Regardless of the PPP's present policies, Bhutto's charismatic personality fascinates even after 39 years of his death.

After Quaid-e-Azam, Bhutto emerged as a strong political personality in Pakistan. Bhutto's name can be counter among those few distinguished personalities of history who are remembered with devotion even after they have died. He will live in people's hearts forever.

In General Ayub Khan's cabinet, Bhutto was assigned important ministries such as commerce, mines and foreign affairs. However, the most amount of respect he earned was as the foreign minister. He initiated a foreign policy of independence for Pakistan, and during the Pakistan-India War of 1965, he convinced China, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, Kuwait, Syria and many other countries to support Pakistan financially, diplomatically and morally.

Bhutto boldly presented Pakistan's stance on the Kashmir issue before the UNSC and made a historic speech on the occasion, announcing to fight for Kashmir even if it took thousands of years. It was these moments that Bhutto's political struggle gained huge popularity. Having developed differences over the Tashkent Agreement, he left Gen Ayub's government and decided to become a public leader. As he travelled from Rawalpindi to Lahore on train, he so perfectly used the art of rhetoric in his public addresses that a large number of people would come out of their homes just to catch a glimpse of Bhutto. By the time he arrived in Lahore, thousands had

gathered to accord him a warm welcome.

After having gained much public support, Bhutto held lengthy discussions with a few close associates and later laid the foundation of the PPP, at the residence of Dr Mubashir Hassan. The pioneers of the party were progressives and socialists – they included J A Rahim, Dr Mubashir Hasan, Ghulam Mustafa Khar, Basit Jhangir, Kamal Azfar, Rafi Raza, Abdul Hafeez Pirzada, Hayat Sherpao and Meraj Muhammad Khan.

Bhutto had himself designed the three-coloured party flag so as to reflect a plural and socially and religiously diverse Pakistani society. Under Bhutto's leadership, the PPP vowed to struggle for moderation, democracy and basic necessities for the poor. In this regard, the party prepared a revolutionary manifesto that called for Pakistan to be declared a welfare state – a state where everyone has equal opportunities to progress and prosper.

As a result of Bhutto's successful political movement that led to Ayub Khan's ouster, elections were announced by General Yahya Khan in 1970. It was on this occasion that Bhutto raised the most popular slogan of 'Roti, Kapra aur Makan' (food, clothing and shelter). The demand continues to remain the PPP's most popular slogan till today. However, in the elections, Bhutto and Sheikh Mujeeb-ur-Rehman of the Awami League succeeded in attaining heavy mandates in the western and eastern parts of Pakistan respectively. For a long time now, a huge debate has surrounded the division of Quaid-e-Azam's Pakistan, but holding only Bhutto responsible for this tragic incident would be an injustice to history. Due to various social and cultural differences, East Pakistan, located thousands of miles away from West Pakistan, would have separated one day or the other.

Pakistan was passing through a critical juncture when Bhutto came into power.

But he successfully overcame all challenges, on both internal and foreign fronts. During his tenure, not only did 90,000 prisoners of war return home but 5,139 square miles of occupied territory was also recovered under the Simla Accord. He founded the nuclear programme with the determination to face all kinds of bitter circumstances that would come in the way of Pakistan becoming a nuclear power. Time has proved that our national defence is unconquerable today because of Bhutto's political vision that enabled him to take the right decisions at the right time.

Drafting Pakistan's first ever consensus constitution in 1973 was Bhutto's major achievement. The constitution is parliamentary in nature and ensures a free and independent judiciary. For equal representation of all units, the Senate was introduced as the Upper House of parliament. He gave every Pakistani citizen the right to hold a passport, and millions of Pakistanis were sent abroad to seek job opportunities.

Bhutto's contributions for the people of all sections of society are endless, especially provision of employment opportunities to non-Muslim minorities in national institutions. Today, he may not be physically among us, but his ideology continues to remain popular among the public. Following his ouster, he wrote his final testament in the form of a book titled 'If I Am Assassinated'.

Despite being accused of corruption and wrong practices, PPP's politics revolves around Bhutto only to seek votes in his name. Bhutto's teachings, on the other hand, demand every politician to serve people tirelessly to be forever remembered.

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Honesty in history

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



The decision to announce a new medal – Tamgha-e-Azm – at the Pakistan Day parade on March 23 is no doubt a remarkable step to acknowledge the contributions of the security forces.

However, we should not forget the sacrifices rendered by revolutionary hero Bhagat Singh and his comrades who were hanged in Lahore Central Jail by British imperialists on March 23, 1931 – nine years before the Pakistan Resolution was passed. Twenty-three-year-old Bhagat Singh sacrificed his life in the Indian freedom struggle. But it is unfortunate that we are reluctant to acknowledge the role of non-Muslims in securing independence from the British in the Subcontinent.

Born in Lyallpur (present-day Faisalabad) and executed in Lahore, Bhagat Singh and his brave companions raised the slogan of 'long live the revolution' at a time when political parties in the Subcontinent were in favour of a political struggle to achieve freedom from colonial rule. Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah delivered a speech about Bhagat Singh in the Central Assembly. In his speech, Jinnah said that: "the man who goes on hunger strike has a soul".

Bhagat Singh was born to a family who was known for its involvement in the freedom struggle against the British. His father Kishan Singh and uncles Ajit Singh and Soran Singh were diehard opponents of British imperialism. Bhagat Singh's childhood memories included the tragic massacre at Jallianwala Bagh where almost 400 people who were celebrating Vaisakhi were killed on the orders of General Dyer. Bhagat Singh was just 12 years old at the time.

Bhagat Singh opposed the concept of gaining independence by simply replacing brown rulers with white ones as it would not serve the freedom cause. In a letter titled 'To Young Political Workers', he wrote: "You cry 'Long Live Revolution'. Let me assume that you really mean it. According to our definition of the term, as stated in our statement

in the Assembly Bomb Case, revolution means the complete overthrow of the existing social order and its replacement with the socialist order...the state, the government machinery is a weapon in the hands of the ruling class to further and safeguard its interest. We want to snatch it and use it for our ideal, ie, social reconstruction on a new, ie, Marxist basis. All along we have to educate the people to create a favourable atmosphere for our social programme".

He further questioned that: "what difference does it make...whether Lord Reading is the head of the Indian government or Sir Purshottamdas Thakurdas? What difference for a peasant [sic] if Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru replaces Lord Irwin!" He believed that the freedom

In order to transform Pakistan into a peaceful, prosperous and tolerant country, we need to be honest about our history and exclude any biases from it

struggle must be focused against a system that produces an exploitative ruling class.

An important event of Bhagat Singh's life was the arrival of the Simon Commission in Lahore. Hundreds of people were protesting against the commission at Lahore Railway Station when the police started a baton-charge. As a result, Lala Lajpat Rai, a renowned politician and the leader of the protesters, lost his life. Bhagat Singh and his comrades retaliated by killing another police officer instead of the police officer Scot, who had ordered the baton-charge. However, Bhagat Singh managed to escape from Lahore.

In order to crush the Independence Movement, British imperialists presented two controversial bills – the Public Safety Bill and the Trade Safety Act – in the assembly. As a result, Bhagat Singh and his colleagues protested by hurling harmless crackers at the assembly

hall. No casualties were reported as the purpose was to seek attention. Bhagat Singh and his colleagues voluntarily surrendered to the police so they could use the trial court to spread their message. Following the policy of 'divide and rule', British imperialists were not in the mood to tolerate anyone who believed in liberation and social justice. Bhagat Singh and his comrades were hanged on March 23, 1931 for the murder of the police officer.

The historic sacrifice of Bhagat Singh is remembered in various folk tales that have emerged from different cultures. Unfortunately, we are afraid to officially own the son of our soil who was born and martyred in present-day Pakistan.

Similarly, our national literature and curriculum doesn't tell us that the first freedom fighter who initiated the War of Independence in 1857 was a Hindu named Mangal Pandey. He belonged to a Brahmin family and was hired as a sepoy in the East India Company. However, he raised objections against the use of controversial rifles. Mangal Pandey became an icon of freedom and was subsequently denounced as a traitor and mutineer by the British. It is a historical fact that Mangal Pandey's public execution resulted in the outbreak of the war in 1857.

Who were Mangal Pandey, Bhagat Singh and other non-Muslim heroes railing against? Did they not want to end British imperialism? If they did, then why are we reluctant to acknowledge their freedom struggle?

In order to transform Pakistan into a peaceful, prosperous and tolerant country that adheres to Quaid-e-Azam's vision, we need to be honest about our history and exclude any biases from it. The contribution of all those from diverse backgrounds who struggled against British imperialism must be acknowledged. There is also a dire need to initiate national awards in honour of these heroes to recognise their struggle for freedom.

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Friday

March 23, 2018

Our heroes

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Every year, March 23 is celebrated as Pakistan Day. On March 23, 1940, the All India Muslim League, under the leadership of Quaid-e-Azam, passed a resolution through which it demanded a separate Muslim-majority homeland.

Many people believe that the Pakistan Movement was managed by only Muslims of the Subcontinent and that Pakistan was created for the sole purpose of serving Muslims' interests. Interestingly, large numbers of non-Muslims supported the Quaid in the movement. In the historic Muslim League session held on March 23, 1940, non-Muslim politicians, including S P Singha, R A Gome-sand and F I Chaudhry, were all present to support the demand for Pakistan.

These non-Muslim activists, including Diwan Bahadur Sittia Parkash Singha, Rajkumar Amrit, Chandu Lal, CE Gibbon, Alfred Purshad, F.E. Chaudary and SS Albert, were of the view that the formation of Pakistan, on the basis of Two Nation Theory, would ensure regional stability. They believed that non-Muslim citizens would be more secure and prosperous in a Muslim-majority country. In his speech on August 11, 1947, the Quaid made clear that there will no discrimination against citizens that minority communities, and all will be the eyes of the state. Thousands of Hindu zamindars, in response to his appeal, postponed the plans of migration and made Pakistan their beloved homeland.

Among non-Muslims who took active part in the movement, Jogendra Nath Mandal was one of the prominent politicians and founding fathers of Pakistan, who aligned himself with the movement. Being a trustworthy companion of Quaid-e-Azam, he believed that Pakistan would be a role model for peace-loving democratic countries, where equal rights to every citizen would be ensured regardless of their religious affiliation. After Independence, he was given the portfolio of the law ministry. In addition, his presence as a non-Muslim minister on the platform of the Muslim League in British India also played a pivotal role in both strengthening the Pakistan Movement and countering anti-Pakistan propaganda.

The Christian community also supported the idea of a separate Muslim state and took active part in the movement. At the time of the partition, the Christian speaker of the United Punjab Assembly, SP Singha, cast his decisive vote in favour of Pakistan. C E Gibbon and Fazal Elahi along with Singha also mobilised the Christian population to be included in Pakistan. It was quite unfortunate that despite all sacrifices for Pakistan, SP Singha had to step down from the position of Speaker of the Punjab Assembly due to his religious identity.

Sir Victor Turner was one of the central Christian leaders in the Pakistan Movement. He served as the first finance secretary of Pakistan and chairman of the Central Board of Revenue. Being a statistician and economist, he reorganised state departments and financial institutions. Pakistan's first official rupee currency note had also carried his signature, V A C Turner.

Alvin Robert Cornelius was another notable Christian figure in the Pakistan Movement, who dedicated his entire life to the creation of Pakistan. He was a jurist, legal philosopher and judge, and also served as the law secretary for Law Minister Jogendra Nath Mandal. Quaid-e-Azam had elevated him as chief justice of the Lahore High Court bench. He also became the first Christian chief justice of Muslim-majority Pakistan. He is acknowledged as a symbol of how the rights of minority communities should be protected and how the communities should be given religious freedom.

Only a few people know that the Pakistan Resolution was penned by Sir Zafarullah Khan, who belonged to the Ahmadi community. Many may not know that the first national anthem of Pakistan was composed by a Hindu poet, Jagan Nath Azad, on the personal desire of the Quaid. It was broadcast on Radio Pakistan on August 14, 1947 and was officially used during the first one-and-a-half years.

Jamshed Nusserwanjee Mehta, who belonged to the Parsi community, was the first elected mayor of Karachi and known as the 'maker of modern Karachi'. He played a significant role in the rehabilitation of refugees migrating to Karachi. There is no denying that the list of non-Muslims who contributed towards the success of Pakistan is endless. Pakistan Day demands we pay tribute to all heroes – both Muslim and non-Muslim – of the Pakistan Movement.

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THE NEWS

Friday, March 16, 2018

Reviving PIA

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



For decades, PIA successfully competed with world-class airlines. However, the national flag carrier is, regrettably, losing its reputation day by day, both on the national and international levels. Negative reports regarding the airline are being unearthed every day.

Once the only route to the US favoured by regional countries, including China, PIA is currently limiting its flight operations to 29 international and 21 domestic routes.

In a previous column on the PIA crisis, I had emphasised the importance of restructuring the national flag carrier. According to a news report, PIA provides as many as 18,000 direct jobs and 50,000 indirect employment opportunities. Furthermore, livelihood of families of hundreds of PIA workers is associated with its operations.

However, only blaming PIA's employees for its downfall is not right. In fact, anybody hired in accordance with the due HR procedures is innocent. The real culprit is the one who compromised on the recruitment standards to facilitate the entry of incompetent staff. To get rid of such unwanted workforce, PIA has to introduce beneficiary schemes like the 'golden handshake'. The PIA workers' strikes will also need to be addressed.

It is interesting to note that some former employees of PIA have played a remarkable role in making Middle-Eastern airlines a success today. In the past, the airline not only provided professional human resource but also trained employees of other airlines. Ironically, today

these foreign airlines are interested in buying a stake in the troubled PIA. We need to honestly analyse what went wrong from our side, and what kinds of policies are the new airlines adopting to capture the market.

Many suggestions are under discussion for the betterment of PIA. Some elements are of the view that privatisation can save the national carrier from a complete disaster. According to my knowledge, the government holds 94 percent of the airline's shares, while four percent belong to other state institutions and the remaining two percent are owned by private investors. Those who favour privatisation are basically demanding to float further 43 percent shares in the market.

PIA is the identity of our country and must be protected at any cost. Due to the current crisis, the market value of PIA's share cannot be higher than Rs5. Hence, it would not be wise to sell its shares at such a low price. Another question that comes to mind is that if a private businessman is able to elevate PIA's woes, then why has the government not been able to do so with the kinds of resources it has?

If PIA is privatised, there will be many layoffs and the liabilities would continue to stay in place. Moreover, Pakistan will lose direct connectivity without and within the country. In my view, the national airline's suffering will neither end if it continues to operate as a national institute, nor will privatising it do any good in the absence of a dynamic leadership, committed workers and, most importantly, sincere policies.

Today, PIA is incurring huge losses because of a heavy liability worth around Rs218 billion. This debt was granted with the consent of previous regimes. Thus, the government needs to pay off all the liabilities. The operations and the current

management of the airline must not be affected due to this unwanted liability. Similarly, PIA also needs to adopt solid measures to enhance its professional efficiency in accordance with the latest market trends.

Allowing foreign airlines to operate under the 'open skies policy' is what has damaged PIA's business matters. Even in developed countries national airlines are protesting against foreign airlines.

We also need to review our aviation policy on a priority basis. The air fares of foreign airlines must be at least 30 percent more expensive than PIA's. In this way, not only will we be able to increase our tax revenue, but we will also be able to increase the number of passengers. According to an estimate, the ratio of domestic and foreign passengers who fly PIA is 70 and 25 percent. Annually a total of 5.7 million passengers fly through PIA. The airline needs to attract more passengers.

Privatisation is not a sustainable solution for PIA's crisis. The government must announce a clear policy about the restructuring of the national airline. There is also a need for legislation to discourage the practice of inducting political workers in national institutions. We must not forget that PIA is our national asset and it must be saved at any cost. Although difficult, it is not an impossible task.

To make PIA a commercial institute generating a profit of one billion instead of a loss, within one year, we would have to ensure that its higher management and operations remain stable - without any political interference.

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THE NEWS

Friday, March 9, 2018

Press for progress

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



International Women's Day is celebrated across the globe on March 8 annually to recognise the achievements of women. This day also provides an opportunity to salute the outstanding women playing dynamic roles in various fields of life. The annual theme of this year's women's day, 'Press for Progress', emphasises the importance of gender equality.

Although the status of women in various societies is diverse, there are no two opinions about the fact that women are respected in every religion. In Hinduism, prosperity and progress is associated with the happiness of women. One of the central figures in the Hindu epic, Ramayana, is Seeta Mata, highly regarded among all Hindus. According to the holy Vedas, women are a gift of God, and it is the ultimate responsibility of a man to protect women. The Vedas teach that a woman's primary duty is to help her husband perform the obligatory duties of raising a family. However, history revealed that Hindu women, like the Rani of Jhansi and Lakshmi Bai, also held pivotal administrative positions.

The mother of Jesus, Mary, is accorded the holy title of 'the Blessed Virgin' in Christianity. Similarly, Islam also aims to ensure that women are respected. Prophet Mohammad (pbuh), in his last Hajj sermon, emphasised on being polite towards women. Sociologists also agree on the fact that human society is incomplete without women, and to ensure social prosperity, women must be allowed to play an active role. Despite all these positive teachings, it is regrettable that women still face oppression and discrimination even in the 21st century. There is no doubt that today women in the West enjoy much more freedom and liberty as compared to women in other regions, but

they also have a long history of struggle for the protection of their rights.

Historically, the first Women's Day was observed in New York in 1909, to commemorate the strike female workers of a garments factory had organised a year before against poor working conditions. But it was in 1910 that March 8 was declared the International Women's Day at the first International Women's Conference. This women's conference was held in Copenhagen, Denmark, to make the most of the new wave of awareness. It was attended by over a hundred women from 17 countries. Finally, in 1975, the UN decided to observe the International Women's Day on an annual basis.

Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was also a huge advocate of women's rights. In a speech once, he said that, "There are two powers in the world; one is the sword and the other is the pen. There is a great competition and rivalry between the two. There is a third power stronger than both, that of the women". The (mother of the nation) Fatima Jinnah also played a significant role in mobilising women for the Pakistan Movement. Similarly, right after Partition, the first lady of Pakistan, Raana Liaquat Ali, took effective measures to strengthen the nursing sector.

To mark this women's day, different seminars, walks, and conferences were organised by government and semi-government institutes in Pakistan. Since the last many years, Pakistani women have been making significant progress. Their active contribution can be observed in many fields such as health, education, engineering, politics, business, arts, defence and fashion.

Benazir Bhutto, Asma Jahangir, Bilquis Edhi, Arfa Karim, Muniba Mazari, Malala Yousafzai, Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy and Samina Baig are some prominent names that have made Pakistan proud on one international level or the other. The participation of women legislators in the procedures of parliament is remarkable. Dr Fehmida Mirza, appointed the speaker of the National

Assembly in the last PPP government, Rahila Durrani the current speaker of the Balochistan Assembly and Shehla Raza, the incumbent deputy speaker at the Sindh Assembly, have all performed their duties diligently. These examples also reflect the political vision of the women of Pakistan.

On the other hand, it is a matter of shame when women are victimised. There are many heinous crimes that are reported on a daily basis wherein women are mistreated, offended, abused, oppressed and even killed in the name of honour. Forced conversions and marriages and honour killings are bringing a bad name to Pakistan's society. Everyone should collectively raise their voice against these acts of violence against women.

The harassment of women at the workplace also needs to be given serious attention. Although legislation on women protection has been ensured at the federal and provincial levels, but there are still a lot of difficulties and hurdles in implementing it. A bill unanimously passed in the Sindh Assembly against forced conversions, failed to become law. Another bill against honour killings and rape of women presented by former PPP senator, Farhatullah Babar, in the Senate remained pending for three years before it was finally approved.

To ensure women empowerment and gender equality in Pakistan, we need to introduce a democratic way to elect women members of parliament. A female member, coming in parliament through the power of the vote, is in a much better position to defend women's rights as compared to some blue-eyed close relatives of the political leadership. On the occasion of this International Women's Day, we need to ensure that all women are provided equal opportunities without any discrimination.

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THE NEWS

Friday, March 2, 2018

Triumph over evil

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



There are a vast number of religious festivals that are observed according to the Hindu lunar calendar.

Holi is one such sacred event that is widely celebrated across the globe with gusto. Also known as the 'festival of colours', it is celebrated at the arrival of the spring season on a full moon day falling in the month of Phalguna, normally between February and March.

Holi is considered to be one of the oldest festivals of human civilisation. On the occasion, people drench each other in colours as an expression of happiness and joy. Like many other festivals, Holi also serves as a moral lesson about the victory of good over evil. According to the ancient Hindu tradition, Holi is associated with the legend of a king named Hiranyakashipu.

The king was granted special powers. But he expected people to worship him. The cruel king even ordered the killing of his own son Prahalad because he was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu. With the support of his sister Holika, the king plotted to burn Prahalad. The plan failed as the fire engulfed Holika instead of Prahalad. Holika's defeat reflects that evil is always vanquished.

The celebration of Holi emphasises the firm belief that God is great. The power of evil appears to be strong but good people always defeat them. It also teaches that a ruler should use his powers for the betterment of the people rather than to suppress them.

Holi is also attributed to Lord Krishna and Radha. On the occasion, the Hindu

community rejoices over the arrival of spring. Special dishes are prepared in every home and people recite holy verses in honour of Lord Krishna and Radha. Celebrations are organised in Pakistan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, South Africa and in many Western countries, including Britain and the US.

The world has witnessed many conflicts between good and evil, which have existed from the day one. But good always triumphs over evil. Similarly, people with good intentions may have to face immense difficulties and hurdles in life. But if they keep a positive approach they can never be defeated by negativity.

It is a historical fact that the Subcontinent, before the arrival of the British, was the best example of religious harmony. People from diverse backgrounds lived happily and respected each other's religions. Traditionally, the festivals were also celebrated together. In the cultural traditions of Muslims of the Subcontinent, Lucknow holds a special status. Holi has also been celebrated jointly for many centuries. Many prominent Muslim poets like Mir Taqi Mir, Hasrat Mohani, Josh Malihabadi, Khawaja Haider Ali Aatish, Wajid Ali Shah Akhtar, Insha Allah Khan Insha, Sagar Khayami and Nazir Khayami have written favourably about the festival.

Hindus constitute the largest non-Muslim community in Pakistan. A majority of Hindus is settled in Sindh – the land of the sufis, saints and sadhus. In 1947, when there was hate everywhere, it was only in Sindh that peace prevailed. In response to Quaid-e-Azam's August 11 speech, patriotic Hindu citizens declared Pakistan their beloved motherland – '*dharti mata*'. Even today, the community is striving to play its due role in the development and progress

of Pakistan despite all the suffering it has endured.

There is no doubt that a few extremist elements in our society want to disturb the peace of the entire country. But the Hindu community is on their hit-list in particular. Forced conversions of underage Hindu girls; kidnappings; attacks on temples; encroachment of holy places; and the dissemination of hate material through the school curricula are a few examples. After 70 years of independence, evil forces are still active. They either want to create internal anarchy through terrorism or undermine the country's image at the international level by having Pakistan added to Pakistan watch lists.

On the other hand, successful military offensives like Operation Zarb-e-Azb, the Rangers operation in Karachi and Operation Raddul Fasaad have once again proved that good always wins over evil. To counter international conspiracies, we have to ensure unity and harmony within our ranks. For this purpose, Holi celebrations can play a pivotal role. Rather than dividing society, we should spread the message of love, humanity and brotherhood. I have also tried to introduce legislation in parliament to declare Holi a national holiday. We must understand the true spirit of Holi.

To establish a tolerant, positive and pluralist society, I appeal, on behalf of the Pakistan Hindu Council, to all peace-loving citizens to celebrate Holi together. This gesture will help promote positive moral values in our beloved country.

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THE NEWS

Friday, February 23, 2018

Direct voting

Dr. Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Pakistan is one of those democratic countries where a bicameral parliamentary system has been adopted. A bicameral legislature empowers legislators to run the business of parliament in two separate houses.

The Senate is the upper house of parliament. The duration of a senator's term is six years and elections on half of its seats are held after every three years. Unlike the National Assembly, or the lower house, senators are not elected publicly through direct vote. The upper house is supposed to keep an eye on the lower house but picking and choosing non-political candidates for the Senate has brought a bad name to politicians. As has been observed, other than a few sincere senators, most are interested in maintaining personal relationships with the political leadership rather than with the public.

The Senate enjoys many exclusive powers not granted to the National Assembly – such as the power of granting parliamentary bills the status of a law. All legislation that the National Assembly passes has to be approved in the same form by the Senate as well. The chairman of the Senate also has the power to serve as the acting-president of the country.

Ever since the schedule for Senate elections has been announced, various rumour factories have been activated to sabotage the election process. Some such rumours include dissolving provincial assemblies to cause a delay in Senate elections, and a political party's announcement that it would elect senators from a region where it does not have the numerical majority in assembly. Regrettably, differences

over Senate tickets among the leadership of a prominent political party also resulted in the party getting nothing in return. In my view, selling and purchasing of Senate tickets like they are some commodity, and allegations of horse trading, have not only offended people but also made Senate elections the talk of the town.

After thoroughly reviewing the political structure of countries that have bicameral democratic systems, it can be found that the primary reason to form an upper house is to represent all units of the federation. It is a common perception that the root cause of East Pakistan's separation was the unequal representation of provinces in parliament. This was why after the 1971 tragedy, the institution of Senate was established to ensure equal representation of all the federating units.

Britain is considered the mother of democracy and its upper house, also called the House of Lords, is dominated by society's elite. Many a time, cash-for-vote allegations also echoed in the upper house (Rajya Sabha) elections of the world's largest democracy, India. After the establishment of the federal government, the US also realised that its Senate had transformed into a millionaire's club whose primary focus was securing their own economic interests. Thus, the 17th amendment was introduced in the constitution in 1913 so that people could directly elect senators. Today with the power of vote, the Americans send their true representatives to the Senate.

Like our country, there is also a multi-party system in place in Philippines where multiple political parties with diverse backgrounds contest the national elections. Despite this fact, the Senate of Philippines is modelled on the US Senate and people are allowed to elect senators through direct votes. As far as the political situation in Pakistan is concerned, policies based on nepo-

tism, personal liking and disliking and violation of merit have brought negative results in every sphere of our lives. It is quite understandable that a senator who secures a ticket due to his personal contacts with the top political leadership of is not interested in connecting with the public.

We must understand that politics is all about serving the people and humanity. There is a dire need to introduce the direct voting system for Senate elections in Pakistan. In this regard, there should be at least 23 Senate seats from each province for which the people of the respective province can cast votes. Another option could be adopting the popular vote system where senators seek votes from the province they want to represent in the upper house. It is also suggested to make it a prerequisite for Senate candidates to contest at least one general election, either of the national assembly or local bodies, in their political career.

During my discussions with the country's top political leadership, I have always maintained that the presence of non-political elements can never be in the interest of parliament, and only genuine parliamentarians who have roots in their communities can strengthen parliament through their active participation. The reserved seats for women and non-Muslims must also be eliminated.

Anyhow, it is necessary to ensure that only genuine politicians who have fought a genuine political struggle will succeed in the upcoming Senate elections. Members of the National Assembly also need to prove through their actions that they will cast votes on the basis of principles and conscience.

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THE NEWS

Friday, February 16, 2018

History matters

Dr. Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



History helps us understand our past and ultimately enables us to understand where we currently stand. It is true that being stuck in the past can be very painful and can prevent us from moving on in life, but there is too much to learn from the past as well.

I believe that knowledge of history plays a pivotal role in the betterment of individuals, societies and nations. Let's have a look at February 15 that passed yesterday. According to my knowledge, at least three important historical events have taken place on this date. On this day 29 years ago (in 1989), the Soviet forces completed their withdrawal from Afghanistan. The superpower, once considered unconquerable, faced historical defeat in Afghanistan. The collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in the independence of various countries, including the Central Asian states and unification of both parts of Germany. The Geneva Accord, which provided the framework for the Soviet withdrawal, was signed by Afghanistan, Pakistan, Soviet Union and the US.

Historically, the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan share close cultural, religious and social ties. However, Afghanistan's opposition to Pakistan since day one has been quite unfortunate. Afghanistan was the only country that opposed Pakistan's entry to the United Nations. But at a critical time of the Soviet invasion, Pakistan decided to support its neighbouring country on the basis of principles, and opened its borders for Afghan refugees on humanitarian grounds.

Pakistan is also honoured for hosting the world's largest number of refugees.

The Soviet Union learned from its defeat and normalised diplomatic relations with the US and the rest of the West. In the current international scenario, it seems that Russia is once again vying to achieve the status of a superpower. On the other hand, despite 29 years having passed, Pakistan and Afghanistan still don't trust each other. The internationally recognised Durand Line remains largely unrecognised by Afghanistan. Ideally, both the countries should consider celebrating February 15 jointly as the day of departure of the Soviet forces.

On February 15, 2003, the world witnessed the largest protest in human history. Thousands of people from more than 600 cities belonging to 60 countries came onto the streets to oppose the possibility of the Iraq War. The well-coordinated protests had proved that peace-loving people are united to safeguard the world from the miseries of war.

According to media reports, the largest protest series were held in Europe. The number of participants in the protest in Rome was around three million, while in Madrid, 1.5 million people attended the protest rally. Overall, up to 30 million people from across the globe recorded their protest. A renowned American journalist was of the view that February 15 reflected that there were, "Two superpowers on the planet – the United States, and worldwide public opinion." Unfortunately, the US failed to respect the public opinion and invaded Iraq. The war became a turning point in the US downfall. Today, instead of behaving like a responsible superpower that should promote democracy, human rights and freedom, the US has itself become a

symbol of imperialism in the 21st century. The lesson that history teaches us from this is that anyone who does not respect public opinion, eventually heads towards its own destruction and distortion.

On the other hand, Canada celebrates the National Flag Day on February 15 annually, to commemorate the inauguration of the Canadian flag. The national flag was raised for the first time on Parliament Hill on February 15 in 1965. On this historic occasion, Honourable Maurice Bourget, Speaker of the Canadian Senate, had expressed that: "The [Canadian] flag is the symbol of the nation's unity, for it, beyond any doubt, represents all the citizens of Canada without distinction of race, language, belief or opinion." Today, Canada is truly acknowledged as the global human rights champion, promoting freedom, democracy and positive values.

Unfortunately, there is a common misconception that the colour green in the Pakistani flag represents Muslims and the white stands for minorities. In my view, dividing a national flag in such a way is equal to creating divisions among the Pakistani nation. I believe that the green colour is for the entire Pakistani nation regardless of whether they belong to the majority or minority, while the white in the flag reflects peace. We must not forget that studying history gives us insight into our culture of origin and also increases our cross-cultural awareness. Therefore, we must learn from history to maintain unity in our ranks.

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THE NEWS

Friday, February 9, 2018

Positive politics

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Maligning politics and politicians has unfortunately, become a fashion in our country. Every kind of negativity is linked with politicians. The most common perceptions about politics are that it is all about gaining power to fulfil personal gains, that morality has nothing to do with politics and that everything is fair in the dirty power game of politics.

But I have always promoted the positive side of politics. While participating in various television talk shows, I urge politicians to do politics like they are performing a religious duty. Recently, I was invited to the National Press Club to address an event on media ethics. While acknowledging our media's vibrant role in highlighting social and political issues, I urged that to achieve excellence in our lives, we must have strong moral values. We need to promote ethics, honesty and loyalty in every field of life. It has been a personal experience that anyone who possesses these good qualities always achieves their goals. We need to raise awareness that violence leads to more violence. In my view, a politician having positive values can face difficulties but will never fail in his struggle.

I believe that every religion stresses on how ethical politics is pivotal in ensuring peace and prosperity in society. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is known as the most merciful for all creation. The Charter of Medina is truly a remarkable political achievement and is still applicable in defining the state's relations with its minorities. On the other hand, Rama Rajya is a political ideology of ancient Hinduism. Mahatma Gandhi, defined

Rama Rajya as an ideology that transforms society into an ideal society based on pure moral values. In this regard, Gandhi's tireless efforts to ensure equal rights to every person are on record.

The political views of Quaid-e-Azam were also very positive. In his August 11 speech, he categorically announced that every Pakistani citizen, whether from a minority or majority, will be allowed to play an active role in taking the country towards peace and prosperity. There is no doubt that Quaid-e-Azam, throughout his political career, promoted positive politics based on principles. He strongly denounced foul play in every field.

About 150 years ago, the US was divided in slave and free states. Abraham Lincoln sacrificed his life to outlaw slavery in the US. He successfully led the independence war with a commitment that the US must be free for all. His letter to the teacher of his son reflects how much he believed on ethics and positive values. Nelson Mandela is another example of a man of principles and dignity. He dedicated his life to eliminate racial discrimination in his country. Mandela was of the view that, "To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity."

Today, China has the second largest economy in the world, but it also once witnessed exploitation at the hand of several imperialists. Mao Zedong led a long march to establish the People's Republic of China. He believed that politics is war without blood and war, politics with blood. His political theories, strategies, and policies are known as Maoism.

These politicians taught us that to bring about a positive change for the betterment of society, we should struggle to end discrimination and bias. They demonstrated that social justice and solidarity are key political values. They proved that politics

is the best medium for empowering people. Despite all complexities and difficulties, politics is no doubt an essential human activity to build societies based on rules and regulations. Modern history tells us that peaceful solution to every conflict depends on political dialogue carried out by sincere political leaders. In any circumstances, we should never compromise on ethics, honesty and sincerity.

Unfortunately, in our country politics has become a profession. The opposition parties suppose that it is their right to create hurdles in the way of national progress. On the other hand, every government is accused of victimising its political rivals. Regrettably, politicians are also labelled as selfish, greedy and corrupt individuals whose priorities are to pursue personal interests instead of the country's common good and welfare.

This public perception is partially correct owing to the presence of the so-called minority representatives in parliament, selected on the basis of personal liking and disliking of other political party leaders. They cannot be termed politicians unless they prove their worth within the community. I think such issues also need to be addressed so that the public's confidence in genuine politicians is bolstered. Similarly, we should be courageous enough to support positive steps taken by anyone, regardless of our political affiliations.

Parliamentarians and politicians need to promote and engage in positive politics to serve people and solve their issues. This is a tough challenge that needs firm commitment of every politician and endorsement of the public.

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THE NEWS

Friday, February 2, 2018

Freedom for all

Dr. Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



February 1 is celebrated as the National Freedom Day throughout the US to honour the great contribution of President Abraham Lincoln. It was on this day in 1865 that he passed the 13th Constitutional Amendment, outlawing slavery. Abraham Lincoln was no doubt a great visionary and a reformer who served as the 16th president of America until his assassination in April 1865.

Just five centuries ago, America was an unknown land to the world. Renowned European explorer Christopher Columbus is credited with discovering the Americas; the region later saw the worst kind of exploitation at the hands of colonial powers of the time. The US obtained freedom from the imperialist British. But black people continued to be enslaved. It is an historical fact that all societies where division on the basis of ethnicity and race is promoted eventually move towards anarchy and destruction.

The American Civil War, that recorded casualties of more than 600,000 people, was fought from 1861 to 1865. As per the country's history, the root cause of the conflict was slavery. The country was divided into slave states, where slavery was allowed, and free states, where it was illegal. People, mostly abducted from the African continent, were openly sold as slaves in American markets. Legally, they were denied their basic human rights and had to remain duty-bound to their masters for their entire lifetime. Masters treated

their slaves very harshly, so much so that they were even allowed to murder their slaves as punishment.

After the end of the civil war, Abraham Lincoln emerged victorious as a national leader. He played a pivotal role in protecting the slaves and convincing all states to prohibit the practice. The 13th Amendment he had passed through the Congress maintained that, "Neither slavery, nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

Later through the the 14th Amendment equal citizenship was granted to, "all persons born or naturalised in the United States", which included former black slaves who were liberated following the civil war. The National Freedom Day is actually the idea of a former slave named Richard Wright. He founded the National Freedom Day Association to build consensus among all segments of society to observe a national day to celebrate the freedom of all Americans. In this regard, he suggested marking February 1 as the annual day to observe the signing of the 13th Amendment. Just after one year of his demise in 1947, both houses of the US Congress passed a bill to recognise the day as the National Freedom Day. The proclamation was signed into law by US President Harry Truman.

Today, the day is celebrated in the US and foreign missions with a firm commitment that America is the land of the free, and will keep promoting freedom at any cost. Every year, special ceremonies are

held to acknowledge the positive role of Abraham Lincoln. I believe the ideology behind celebrating the freedom day played a pivotal role in transforming the US into a superpower. After the end of the colonial era, the US emerged as a ray of hope for all those who believed in liberty, freedom, democracy and human rights. During my various visits to America, I personally observed that today, Americans belonging to diverse backgrounds are allowed to play an active role in every field of life.

Invention of the internet, computer and other scientific research, space missions, enrolment of foreign students in US universities, granting scholarships and fellowships, development aid, popularity of Hollywood movies and video games and strengthening democracy are some of the things that have won the hearts and minds of the international community. At a time when the Soviet bloc comprised dictator-ruled countries, the US-led Western bloc was promoting positive values. Since its inception, Pakistan has aligned itself with the US on the basis of principles.

There is also a lesson in this for the Pakistani nation: that if it wants to be counted among the Asian Tigers, it will have to root out all kinds of discrimination and biasness in society. On the occasion of this National Freedom Day, I would like to appeal to all peace-loving Americans to join hands with us and promote Abraham Lincoln's vision of freedom for all human beings.

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THE NEWS

Friday, January 26, 2018

Our responsibility

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



The serial killer who raped and murdered seven-year-old Zainab has finally been arrested in Kasur. A person performing such horrific crimes is not even worthy to be called a human.

However, the Kasur tragedy is not the first criminal case; a number of innocent children have been raped and killed in the past. After Zainab's case emerged, similar cases of child abuse were reported from other parts of the country, including from Mardan. It is a matter of shame that internationally our beloved homeland is referred to as a country where society's most vulnerable segment face severe exploitation. In response to innocent Zainab's murder, a series of violent protests erupted across the country. While endorsing the public's demand for strict punishment for the brutal murderer, I would like to define concrete strategies to keep other children safe in future.

Every religion teaches to behave politely with children. Even during wars it is not permitted to harm children. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) always showed special mercy to children. In Hinduism too, children are declared a special gift of God and should be protected at any cost. Termed the future of a country, developed nations have accorded special attention to children's protection and personality development. The United Nations in its Conven-

tion on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) defines a child as any human being under the age of 18. The countries that endorsed this convention are bound to ensure the protection of children in their respective societies.

I have repeatedly upheld the view that providing children a safe environment so as to keep them free from physical abuse is the primary responsibility of a parent. The Kasur incident is an example of our moral degradation. Only blaming the government and the police while ignoring the parents' role and social responsibilities is not an appropriate step.

As far as parental duties are concerned, the UNCRC directs member states to allow parents of children less than 18 years of age to exercise their parental duties to nurture their children. In Western countries parents have to face legal action, even imprisonment, if negligence is proven in a court of law.

Some of us are more concerned about the safety of our wealth. Hiring guards and installing CCTV cameras around our business office premises shows how concerned we are for the safety of our corporations. In our absence, we ensure our partners to take care of all the professional dealings. On the other hand, we are generally careless about our children.

The fact that horrific child abuse cases happen in developed countries too shows that neither the government nor the police are able to keep an eye on every child round the clock. In fact, these serious crimes happen behind the

curtain and only an active role of parents can prove helpful in preventing them.

In today's digital age, it is much easier to ensure child protection with the help of smart phones. Location tracking applications installed in children's cell phones can keep parents informed of their movements. Similarly, children must be made aware to use social media safely. They must be made to understand that sharing personal information on the internet can be dangerous for the entire family.

Children must be advised to keep healthy friendships with fellows of their own age group; unnecessary outdoor visits should be discouraged. Elder people of the neighbourhood should consider all children to be their own. If parents are travelling, they must give their children in the care of trustworthy family elders. In my personal view, grandparents can play a positive role in safeguarding them.

There is also a dire need to introduce legislation about parental responsibilities. At the time of marriage registration, the newly-wed couple must pass a written test about their new duties of raising a family. The government, with the collaboration of civil society organisations, must also introduce guidelines for parents to focus on their duties towards protection of children under the age of 18 years.

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THE NEWS

Friday, January 19, 2018

A matter of respect

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Today every Pakistani political leader actively participates in religious ceremonies of non-Muslims, such as Holi, Diwali and Christmas. Recently, Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi also attended the Hinglaj Prat Asthan ceremony of the Hindu community in Ghotki, Sindh.

However, there is a strong perception in the international community that the non-Muslim population in Pakistan is under threat. Recently, the US enlisted Pakistan in a special watch list for 'severe violations of religious freedom'. This was not the first time that something like this had happened as similar reports have emerged in the past too. But instead of just rejecting these reports, the solution is to find reasons due to which the world points fingers at us. And being the patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council and a non-Muslim parliamentarian, I feel it is my national responsibility to express my views on this sensitive issue.

Pakistan is supposed to be a Muslim majority democratic country. Religious freedom, both in an Islamic and a democratic country, is an essential part of society. On various occasions, I referred to the Charter of Medina which ensures equal civic rights for non-Muslims. There can be no two opinions that non-Muslims had autonomy and religious freedom in Medina – the first Islamic society of the world. Similarly, the Quaid-e-Azam wanted all Pakistani citizens, regardless of whether they belonged to a minority or a majority, to play their due role in transforming the newly-established country into a model for developed, prosperous and peaceful countries.

Hindu politician Jogendra Nath Mandal was one of the most prominent non-Muslim who was a part of the Pakistan Movement. There is also a long list of sacrifices and con-

tributions of non-Muslim Pakistani citizens. The late Justice Rana Bhagwandas is known as a pride of this country's judiciary because of his honesty, commitment and principles.

Although the Quaid-e-Azam always emphasised on a united nation but it is extremely unfortunate that after his sad demise we divided ourselves into majority and minority communities. Today, every political party has a minority wing. Instead of ensuring genuine representation of non-Muslims in parliament, blue-eyed candidates from religious minorities are imposed on the basis of personal likings and disliking. Such so-called non-Muslim representatives neither have their roots in the community nor do they have the courage to represent Pakistan on an international level. In my view, General Musharraf introduced reserved seats in violation of the Quaid-e-Azam's vision, and also created hatred and division among the Pakistani society. The democratic solution, following the example of the Azad Kashmir Assembly, is to have at least 15 constituencies from where non-Muslim candidates can contest elections.

Similarly, the Sindh Assembly unanimously passed a bill to prevent forced conversions and marriages but a few extremist non-democratic elements succeeded in having it withdrawn, and there is no chance for this much-awaited bill to be implemented in the near future. Such incidents send negative messages to the international community. For 70 years, Pakistani Hindu community was living without a Hindu Marriage Act. In case of kidnappings, poor victims' families had no option to seek legal justice. It was after tireless efforts that the Hindu Marriage Act was passed by the parliament, although much was compromised.

Some misleading content in our school curriculum is also a root cause of intolerance; one example can be the way the Somnath Temple incident is depicted. In this regard, I believe that the seriousness of our political parties and implementation of the

Supreme Court's June 19th, 2014 detailed decision can bring about positive results.

It is quite natural that a person who has an emotional affiliation with their property is able to look after it effectively. After the partition, the then leadership of Pakistan and India had a mutual understanding on the issue of evacuee property. Till today, India appoints a Muslim parliamentarian to look after the property that belongs to Muslims. Similarly, Israel appoints an Arab Israeli Muslim citizen to take care of holy places of Muslims. But our SC's recent remarks about the performance of the Evacuee Trust Property Board are eye-opening for all of us. I strongly support the appointment of a Hindu bureaucrat of above grade-20 or a Hindu retired judge for this important post.

The international community also observes that non-Muslims in Pakistan are being ignored in various consultation processes related to national issues. There was no representation of non-Muslims in the All Parties Conference (APC) called for formulating the National Action Plan, whereas other examples include formulation of the 18th amendment and electoral reforms committees. This same situation can be observed in majority of other institutes.

We need to ensure active participation of non-Muslim citizens on the basis of merit. Appointing qualified non-Muslims as heads of national institutes, such as the planning commission, the State Bank, PTA, OGRA and PEMRA, etc, can project a positive image of Pakistan. A non-Muslim Pakistani envoy in the West is in a better position to handle such allegations. To counter international conspiracies, we need to keep unity in our ranks and establish a relation of respect, brotherhood and tolerance with every fellow citizen.

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THE NEWS

Friday, January 5, 2018

Circles of influence

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



US President Donald Trump's New Year tweet has disturbed the entire country due to the fact that he totally ignored Pakistan's sacrifices made during the war against terror. All political leadership and schools of thought are rightly on one page to ask the government to review its US foreign policy.

A state while defining its foreign policy, especially one to deal with a superpower, has to no doubt be very tactful and careful. Being a Pakistani, it must be an honour for us that hundreds of years ago, a wise philosopher born in our territory successfully demonstrated the art of designing an effective foreign policy to deal with state-to-state relations. Belonging from what is today known as Taxila, Kautilya or Chanakya, was a teacher, philosopher, writer and adviser whose wisdom helped an ordinary man like Chandragupta establish the great Maurya Empire. Chanakya was known for possessing all good qualities of the Brahmins defined in the Holy Vedas, such as kindness, capability to forgive, follower of truth, self-control, hatred for sin, knowledge seeker and a promoter of education. Chandragupta, following his valuable advice defeated armies of Alexander The Great, a superpower of that time.

Almost 2,500 years ago, Chanakya authored the ancient Indian political treatise Arthashastra. The book, originally in Sanskrit, is often referred to as 'The science of politics' but I call it 'The book of peace and prosperity' as it also provides guidelines for every ruler to maintain peace and stability on national and regional levels. Traditionally, every ancient

Indian king was required to study this book to learn the art of good governance. The teachings of Arthashastra seem to be applicable even in today's modern world. As a royal adviser to the Maurya Empire, Chanakya presented his theory of international system called the 'Rajamandala', meaning the circle of states. He emphasised on every state forming a circle of neighbouring states wherein the hostile states are required to fulfil interests of the most powerful state.

According to him, it is quite natural for a ruler to increase their circle of influence and territory to the greatest extent possible. Similarly, the rival of the powerful state also forms its respective circle of influence. The hostile state located within the circle of the first state has two options, either to accept the authority of the neighbouring state or join the circle of the second state so as to maintain regional stability. This is the logic Chanakya used to define the universal truth that my enemy's enemy is my friend but due to our lack of knowledge about him, we criticise Chanakya, assuming that he taught us to keep pleasant relations with non-neighbouring countries.

Elaborating on his foreign policy, the philosopher discussed in detail that a state's self-interests and security come above all else, and that it must be any ruler's topmost priority to pursue these national interests. He believed that pushing the state towards peace and progress is a prerequisite to ensuring a peaceful society. Chanakya was completely aware that there generally are foreign elements behind unrest in any state, and in this regard, he advised rulers to follow a responsible foreign policy that takes into consideration the situation and relations with the other state.

Chanakya described six important diplomacy tactics in Arthashastra; 'samdhi' (making peace) which means entering into peace agreements with other states; 'vigraha' (waging war) meaning to crush enemy states through military power; 'asana' (do nothing) when there is nothing to gain from either signing treaties or waging wars; 'yana' (preparation for war) to scare the enemy state; 'samsraya' (seeking protection) to get help from stronger state for the sake of people and 'dvaidhibhava' (dual policy) to deal with multiple enemy states at once by making peace with one rival state for the purpose of weakening the strength of the other enemy state. In his book, he observes that bilateral relations with other states can never be permanent as they depend on varying level of interests. According to him, mutual interests bring two states closer, after a state achieves its interests, it can observe one-sided coldness in bilateral relations.

Today, we cannot afford a confrontation with the US but we can seek guidance from Chanakya's teachings for a better understanding of the Pak-US bilateral relations. Pakistan has no doubt been a part of the US's circle of influence since day one but the recent Jerusalem issue in the UN has proved that other global circles are also emerging. Keeping all sentiments aside, Pakistan must not get involved in irrelevant conflicts of other states instead should react wisely and face the American pressure smartly. We must not forget that the prime objective of an effective foreign policy is to secure peace in the country.

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