

IN MY VIEWS

BY

Dr. Ramesh Kumar Vankwani

Member, National Assembly

Patron-in-Chief,

Pakistan Hindu Council

Founder,

Tolerant Pakistan Media Network

Published/on-aired in 2019



PHC House, Flat #HP-2, Ground Floor, Block-B, Mehmoodabad House,
Plot # 12, Frere Town, Opp. Century Apartment, Bath Island, Clifton, Karachi.
Phone: +92-21-99332532 Cell: +92-333-5544347 Fax: +92-21-99332533

Email: pakistanhinducouncil2017@gmail.com

Facebook: Pakistan HINDU Council

Twitter: @RVankwani

Website: www.pakistanhinducouncil.org.pk

PREFACE

It is a universal fact that people, who follow the path of truth, have to face a number of difficulties and hurdles in their struggle. However, there should be no compromise on principles.

Pakistan Movement, under the dynamic leadership of Quaid-e-Azam, was a purely peaceful struggle which results into achieving a separate country. To transform the newly-independent state into a model welfare country for protection of minorities' rights, 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, there are numerous patriotic Pakistani citizens, including myself, who want to promote the Quaid-e-Azam's vision for the betterment of our beloved country. In the today's digital era, media is most effective platform for raising awareness among masses. That's why, my active participation in various TV talk shows is to spread the message of peace and prosperity.

My first column in 2019 was dedicated to Khawaja Ghareeb Nawaz (the benefactor of the poor), who is also known as the king of kings. I wrote the article while on pilgrimage to his shrine, Dargah Ajmer Sharif. In my other regular articles, I also used to express my views on all such important events that are linked with my beloved country. It is also a matter of satisfaction that the Kartarpur Corridor, which I call as Kartarpur Corridor of peace, is now functional. It proves that when there is a will, there is a way. Let's hope that it will lead opening of hundreds of more corridors in order to promote religious tourism throughout the country. The promotion of faith tourism could play pivotal role for strengthening our national economy.

I am grateful to all of you who always appreciate my sincere efforts for the noble cause. Therefore, I am once again presenting compilation of my articles published in 2019 in the form of book. I also would like to have feedback to know how much I am successful to revive the Quaid-e-Azam's vision through my writings.

Warm regards,

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani

NEWS COLUMNS ENGLISH 2019

INDEX

No.	News Paper Report	Page No.
1.	King of King	01
2.	Mass wedding	02
3.	Qatar's challenges	03
4.	Tragedy in Sahiwal	04
5.	Parliamentary friendship	05
6.	Beyond subsidies	06
7.	A network of peace-builders	07
8.	Online hate	08
9.	Say no to war	09
10.	On the diplomatic front	10
11.	World citizenship	11
12.	A message of harmony	12
13.	A week of lessons	13
14.	Tackling forced conversions	14
15.	Attack on humanity	15
16.	One year with the PTI	16
17.	securing our countries	17
18.	Belt and road	18
19.	When will we learn?	19
20.	Ending forced conversions	20
21.	US-Iran tensions	21
22.	After the election	22
23.	Responsible reporting	23
24.	European values	24
25.	Reviving Sharada Peeth	25
26.	On Canada	26
27.	Chanakya's taxation	27
28.	Mandela's vision	28
29.	The PM'S visit	29
30.	Natural allies	30
31.	Long live Pakistan	31
32.	Tourism infrastructure	32
33.	A wise decision	33
34.	Call for humanity	34
35.	The Hinduvta myth	35

NEWS COLUMNS ENGLISH 2019

INDEX

No.	News Paper Report	Page No.
36.	The road ahead	36
37.	Yet another challenge	37
38.	Good neighbourhood	38
39.	Preacher of peace	39
40.	Economy and security	40
41.	A memorable dialogue	41
42.	Importance of reconciliation	42
43.	A free media	43
44.	Month of blessings	44
45.	Model of tolerance	45
46.	Meatless days	46
47.	The Madina model	47
48.	The legend of Disney	48
49.	Save the country	49
50.	Secularism at risk	50
51.	Fall of a superpower	51
52.	The Times of India (Column)	52
53.	Talk Shows (January-March)	53
54.	Talk Shows (April-June)	68
55.	Talk Shows (July-September)	72
56.	Talk Shows (October-December)	84

THE NEWS

Friday, January 4, 2019

King of kings

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



My first column in 2019 is dedicated to Khwaja Syed M o h a m m a d Moinuddin Chishti, a sufi mystic who is also known as Khawaja Ghareeb Nawaz (the benefactor of the poor). I am writing this article while on pilgrimage to his shrine, Dargah Ajmer Sharif.

The shrine, located at Rajasthan, is considered to be one of the most sacred Muslim shrines in the Subcontinent and its doors are open to everyone. Like other devotees, I also believe that anyone who prays with a clean heart at the shrine gets all his/her wishes fulfilled. That's why I offered special prayers for Pakistan's prosperity and regional stability, and improvements in bilateral ties between India and Pakistan.

Around 150,000 devotees visit Ajmer Sharif on a daily basis. Bollywood celebrities also frequently visit Dargah Ajmer Sharif to seek blessings for their careers.

During my stay, I observed that people from diverse backgrounds visited Ajmer Sharif and sought blessings at the shrine. I also got an opportunity to speak with many of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti's devotees, including Muslims, Hindus, Christians and Sikhs. Many Pakistani devotees complained about the hurdles involved in obtaining an Indian visa.

Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti was born in a rich family in Sistan in present-day Iran. After the demise of his parents, he went to Samarqand and Bukhara to gain religious teachings. In search of knowledge and spiritual peace, he trav-

elled to many regions, such as Iraq, Khorasan, and other Central Asian territories.

During his travel, he emerged as a mystic saint and provided guidance to thousands of followers. He also offered Haj and Umrah, and finally travelled towards India. After spending some time in Lahore and Multan, he made Ajmer his home until his death. He dedicated his entire life towards the noble cause of serving poor and vulnerable communities, irrespective of their race and religion.

Khwaja Moinuddin is also known as the 'king of kings' because he managed to spiritually rule over the hearts and minds of thousands of people.

Almost every ruler of India has visited to the shrine. Shamsuddin Iltutmish was the first one who offered a *chadar* (shawl) at the dargah. Mughal emperor Akbar walked bare-foot from Agra to the shrine in Ajmer to pray for a son. His successors, including Jahangir and Aurangzeb, were also devotees of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti.

Almost all maharajas, rajas and nawabs of the princely states of India used to visit the dargah on a regular basis. When British imperialists ruled over India, Queen Mary had offered a *chadar* at the shrines.

According to historians, Queen Victoria visited the shrine to pay homage to Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti. Lord Curzon, a viceroy of British India, also visited Ajmer Sharif paid tribute to the sufi mystic.

After Independence, the government of India began managing the shrine under the Dargah Khwaja Saheb Act, 1955. No matter which political party rules India, it is mandatory for every head of state to visit the shrine.

Rulers from South Asian countries

like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka also visit the shrine. Ziaul Haq and Pervez Musharraf were among the prominent Pakistani rulers who visited Ajmer Sharif. It was also once reported that when Asif Zardari was in jail, Benazir Bhutto prayed here for his release. When he was released, both of them visited the dargah together.

Former US president Barack Obama had also offered a *chadar* at the shrine. This was for the first time that the head of any non-South Asian country and superpower extended spiritual greetings of peace to the king of kings.

It is indeed the dream of every Pakistani citizen, regardless of whether he/she is Hindu or Muslim, to visit Ajmer Sharif. In our 71-year history, India and Pakistan have fought horrific wars and are still confronting each other on every front. It is time to understand the message of spiritual leaders who struggled for a peaceful society based on kindness, forgiveness and tolerance.

Following the groundbreaking ceremony of the Kartarpur corridor in November 2018, I urged both governments to focus on establishing the Ajmer Sharif Corridor to ensure visa-free entry to Pakistani nationals who want to visit the shrine. Improved bilateral relations are in the best interest of both countries. In the next step, visa-free entry should be granted to facilitate pilgrimages to other sacred sites like Dargah Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi, Hanglaj Mata Temple in Balochistan, and Shri Anandpur Temple in Teri, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.

Twitter: @RVankwani

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS

Editor-in-Chief **Mir Shakil-ur-Rahman**

Senior Editor **Talat Aslam**

Vol. 28 No. 297

Jamadi-ul-Awwal 4, 1440 A.H

Phones: 32630611-15, Fax: 32271314-15

PO Box 52, Karachi

Friday, January 11, 2019

Mass wedding

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



The Pakistan Hindu Council organised its annual mass wedding ceremony in Karachi on January 6. This year, 79 Hindu couples tied the knot during the ceremony.

Around 1,100 couples from 2,200 families have tied the knot through these ceremonies over the last eleven years. A decent dowry, which included crockery, electronic items, bedroom accessories, cash and other items for daily use, was also provided to help the couple start their married life.

This remarkable achievement is a source of happiness, peace of mind and spiritual satisfaction for me. I am grateful to my entire community for always showing firm confidence in me. Members of the managing committee, advisers, observers, youth teams and the secretariat staff of the Pakistan Hindu Council deserve appreciation for making this event successful.

The support provided by different organisations and individuals for this noble cause is truly laudable. Our electronic and print media also played a pivotal role and helped us promote a positive image of our beloved country through this initiative.

The mass wedding ceremony has delivered a clear message to the international community that Pakistan's Hindu community remains united in serving the motherland. Regardless of the circumstances, the country's patriotic Hindu community is always committed towards progress. The active participation in this

event also demonstrated that a majority of Pakistanis, excluding a few extremist elements, believe in transforming Pakistani society based on the golden principles of tolerance, diversity and interfaith harmony, according to Quaid-e-Azam's vision. That's why special prayers for the peace and prosperity of Pakistan were also offered on the occasion.

A new year must always be welcomed with acts of kindness to please God. The most righteous act is to help couples who cannot afford extravagant wedding ceremonies tie the knot. The teachings of all religions emphasise on the importance of marriage and the family system. Marriage is a social and religious duty. According to Hinduism, a couple ties the knot for their entire lives and there is no concept of a separation or divorce.

The three primary goals that underpin a Hindu marriage are *dharam* (religious duty), *parja* (descendants) and *rati* (enjoyment). Religious duties must be given priority. Similarly, there is a consensus in all religions that a strong family system is the foundation of a happy eternal life. It is also believed to be the root of human civilisation.

Pakistan's Hindu community has faced countless problems since Independence. The registration of marriages was the most critical problem, especially in the absence of a legislation that regulates Hindu marriages. To tackle this serious issue, the Pakistan Hindu Council decided to issue marriage certificates to Hindu couples and arrange annual mass marriage ceremonies.

Social and financial factors were the driving forces for this initiative. A major-

ity of Hindus live in remote areas of the country and struggle to organise weddings ceremonies due to their limited financial resources. According to some estimates, at least Rs5 lakh are required from both the bride and the groom's side to organise a wedding ceremony in Pakistan. Not being able to get married on time is also a major reason of ongoing frustration in our society.

Today, the Pakistan Hindu Council takes pride in successfully facilitating countless underprivileged families through these initiatives. The annual Hindu mass marriage programme is now the country's most prominent socio-cultural event. On the occasion, strong social bonds are also developed among participants as they celebrate their big day at a joint gathering.

Each year's ceremony proves to be far better than the one held in the previous year. I personally ensure that all the necessary arrangements are made for the couples. In return, I enjoy the spiritual contentment of being a father-figure to a hundred brides and grooms at the same time. I am thankful to parents for reposing their trust in me. Without their active support, this wouldn't have been an easy task.

In fact, these good gestures are essential in directing any country towards peace and prosperity. Therefore, I urge all citizens of Pakistan to join hands and expand the reach of such welfare initiatives across the country.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

THE NEWS

Friday, January 18, 2019

Qatar's challenges

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



The Middle East faced a diplomatic crisis in June 2017 when the Gulf state of Qatar was accused by some of its powerful Arab neighbours of allegedly promoting terrorism and extremism. However, just after a year and a half, Qatar has managed to overcome the crisis successfully.

The Saudi-led coalition, as part of cutting off all kinds of diplomatic, trade and economic ties with Doha, had also started deporting Qatari nationals and imposed a land, maritime, and air blockade on Qatar. The transmission of Qatar-based Al-Jazeera Television was also banned by these countries.

This situation created a lot of panic among the people of Qatar. Regional trade organisations had to face severe challenges, due to which the international community too became uncertain about the future of the Gulf state.

Interestingly, it is believed that the main reason behind the diplomatic crisis was a controversial news report, posted on the official website and social media accounts of Qatar News Agency (QNA). Later, the news agency deleted the post and accused hackers for it.

The Qatar diplomatic crisis also echoed on various international forums, including the UN, which urged to settle the situation through dialogue. However, for the sake of normalisation of ties, the neighbouring Arab states presented a list of 13 demands to the gov-

ernment of Qatar. The demands included shutting down Al-Jazeera TV and its affiliate stations, closure of under-constructed Turkish military base and scaling down of bilateral relations with Iran.

The Qatari leadership refused to comply with these demands, and preferred to face the challenges. Today, when Saudi Arabia is considered a main ally of the United States in the Middle East, the largest regional air base of the US is still located in Qatar. To understand the Qatar crisis, we must not neglect regional history, which consists of various tussles and violent conflicts. In 1867, Bahrain and Qatar fought a horrific war which caused huge destruction on both sides. After its independence in 1971, Qatar's leadership refused to become part of the UAE and decided to emerge as a sovereign independent country. We also need to remember that the current leadership of Egypt is mistrustful of Qatar because of the latter's active support to the Muslim Brotherhood in the past.

The Qatari leadership tackled the situation on both the internal and external fronts sensibly. First, they assured the people of Qatar to have confidence in the government. On the diplomatic front, Qatar succeeded to show firm commitment to curbing global terrorism as well as proving allegations against the country baseless. The timely support provided by its international allies, such as Iran and Turkey, also played a crucial role in this regard.

To attain self-sufficiency and reduce dependency on foreign imports, Qatar initiated a number of projects related to dairy production, poultry products, and

raising different types of cattle. Many farm houses were established throughout the country. The local leadership also ensured the best utilisation of natural gas reserves, which cover a major portion of the world supply. The recent report by S&P Global has also rated Qatar stable, because of "effective management of the fallout from the ongoing boycott related to trade and financial flows".

Qatar with its very small population of around 2.5 million – most of whom are foreigners – has emerged as a real winner in this crisis. Its success proves that when there is a will there is always a way.

Pakistan is facing multiple crises – terrorism, power and energy issues, water shortage, political issues, economic vulnerability etc. We must learn lessons from Qatar's experiences and achievements. Nature has also provided many precious gifts to Pakistan in the shape of goldmines, coal mines and most importantly, a patriotic population.

Unfortunately, we have built it into our national narrative to blame foreign players for all our failures. Following the success story of Qatar, we need to adopt a realistic approach. It is the last chance for us to struggle in the right direction with the right policies by appointing the right person at the right place so we can move our beloved country towards stability and prosperity.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.

Twitter: @RVankwani

THE NEWS

Thursday, January 24, 2019

Tragedy in Sahiwal

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Last weekend, I was visiting my hometown in Tharparkar to attend the Dharmik Quiz Contest. At the event, I urged all Hindu children who participated in the contest from across the country to follow religious and moral teachings, and serve humanity at all costs.

It is unfortunate that innocent members of a family travelling in a car were shot dead in Sahiwal on the same day. Ironically, this crime against humanity was committed by none than the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD). I was initially unaware about this incident as I had limited access to the internet. While returning to Karachi, I saw a tweet by PM Imran Khan, saying that he was "still shocked at seeing the traumatised children who [had seen] their parents [being] shot".

Later, I watched footage of the barbaric incident on social media. The Sahiwal tragedy raised questions in my mind. How can such acts of barbarism take place in Pakistan, a state that was founded in the name of Islam? The most disturbing fact is that this incident occurred during the tenure of a government that claims to follow the model of a Madina-like welfare state.

Islam urges us to take care of travellers. What's more, the conquest of Makkah was carried out peacefully and everyone, including the Holy Prophet (pbuh)'s worst enemies, was forgiven. Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA), the second caliph of the state of Madina, instructed the Mus-

lim army to refrain from killing even a single child, woman or elderly person.

Other religions also emphasise the need to follow moral values, even during warfare. "Nobody should attack chariots with cavalry... One should not assault someone in distress, neither to harass nor defeat him... One should not be enraged toward an enemy who is not trying to kill him." These are some of the teachings found in the Mahabharata. Throughout world history, the law of war focuses on three factors: wars should be limited to achieving goals; wars should be brought to an end as soon as possible; and there should be no unnecessary destruction.

The UK has adopted 10 principles of war that are taught to all officers of the British Army, the Royal Navy, and the Royal Air Force, and are also used by the armed forces of Commonwealth countries. These war principles include maintaining morale, teamwork and flexibility. Cooperation is essential to ensure joint operations, and share risks and opportunities in every aspect of warfare.

The US introduced three new principles of joint operations in 2011 that focus on limiting collateral damage and preventing the unnecessary use of force; introducing a careful and disciplined mechanism to conduct military operations; and ensuring the legality, morality, and rightness of actions. The Geneva Conventions aim to provide special protection for women, children, and civilians. International humanitarian law also highlights the need to distinguish between 'combatants' and 'non-combatants' during conflicts. It also requires an assessment of the anticipated civilian damage or injury.

The purpose of highlighting the above-mentioned laws and principles of warfare is to understand that Pakistan hastily decided to become a frontline state in the war on terror. Although our armed forces have played a pivotal role in curbing terrorism, the entire nation has also paid a heavy price in terms of civilian casualties. Most recently, the Sahiwal incident indicates how brutally the CTD tried to handle the situation. The unnecessary action and conflicting statements have brought a bad name to the country as a whole.

It is universal practice to make efforts to break down the network of terrorists. Any information that is shared by sources is always cross-checked. After it has been confirmed, a decision is taken on whether to arrest the suspects or not. Unfortunately, the Sahiwal incident was carried out without any proper homework and violated all professional practices. Even if the driver was a terrorist, he ought to have been captured alive. At this stage, many political parties are trying to politicise the incident. As a parliamentarian, I believe that instead of simply condemning the incident and engaging in political point-scoring, we must join hands to prepare a national warfare policy.

All state institutions must also follow the principles of warfare. At a time when the US is planning to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan and engage in dialogue with the Taliban, we must end the war on terror and create a peaceful environment in our beloved country.

**The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani**

THE NEWS

Friday, February 1, 2019

Parliamentary friendship

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



It is a matter of great privilege that National Assembly Speaker Asad Qaiser has acknowledged my selfless struggle to promote regional peace and

interfaith harmony by appointing me as the convener of the recently-established Pakistan-India Parliamentary Friendship Group.

The purpose of such informal groups is to strengthen the bonds of friendship, expand the scope of cooperation and foster closer relations with parliamentarians from countries that are diplomatically recognised by Pakistan. I have been given the noble task to establish cordial relations with Indian parliamentarians.

Despite the undeniable fact that the people of Pakistan and India share many socio-cultural values, both countries are considered to be rivals in the eyes of the international community. Pakistan and India also have a rich common history of successful freedom struggles against British imperialism.

However, after the demise of Quaid-e-Azam and Mahatma Gandhi soon after Independence, both countries have deviated from their real vision and engaged in blame games and the politics of confrontation. It is quite unfortunate that even after seven decades both countries are still struggling to achieve peace and prosperity. Even wars and the weapons race have brought no hope to solve bilateral conflicts. If the leadership of both countries analyse the reasons for this, they will obviously find that their hostile attitude is an actual hurdle in this regard.

There are no permanent enemies or friends in international politics. Mutual interests bring both countries closer. We must not forget that European countries, which now stand united within the EU,

once fought horrific wars with each other. Similarly, both Koreas were also worst enemies. Although China considers Taiwan a rebel province, it still maintains trade relations with the state. The wise leadership understands that any victory obtained through the use of force is temporary and dialogue is the only sustainable solution to address all forms of conflicts.

According to the official website of the Indian High Commission in Islamabad, India's policy towards Pakistan focuses on three areas: (i) all issues can be resolved through dialogue; (ii) there are only two parties to this dialogue: India and Pakistan; and (iii) terror and talks cannot go together. If India truly considers terrorism a major issue, then it must be acknowledged that Pakistan is the only regional country that faced huge losses in terms of curbing terrorism. Even today, the brave armed forces are offering sacrifices to maintain peace.

Instead of closing the doors to dialogue, we must cooperate with each other in the common struggle against terrorism. Unwanted elements and non-state actors, which are present on both sides in a rather limited number, must not be empowered to sabotage the entire peace process.

Our incumbent government is in favour of establishing cordial relations with neighbouring countries. Prime Minister Imran Khan mentioned the need for peaceful relations with India in his first address to the nation. The opening of the Kartarpur Corridor by Army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa showed the commitment to bring people of both countries closer. Similarly, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi emphasised the importance of dialogue to resolve disputed issues in his first press conference as foreign minister.

As the convener of the Pakistan-India Parliamentary Friendship Group, I believe that the active support of the Indian high commissioner can play a pivotal role in connecting Pakistani parliamentarians with

their counterparts on the other side of the border. Therefore, I requested the Foreign Office to arrange the high commissioner's visit to Parliament House. If the Indian high commissioner interacts with Pakistani parliamentarians, it will definitely break the ice and offer new opportunities to build trust between both countries.

India is considered to be the world's largest democracy and the next general elections in the country are scheduled for May. Unfortunately, an anti-Pakistan narrative for political campaigns is on the rise. Therefore, I would also like to take a delegation comprising parliamentarians, members of the business community, the civil society and the media to India before the election. The delegation will visit the Indian parliament, the Indian Supreme Court, the Taj Mahal and the Ajmer Sharif Dargah, and hold meetings with the Indian prime minister, the foreign minister, the opposition leader, the speaker of the Rajya Sabha, and other prominent personalities.

If the Pakistan-India Parliamentary Friendship Group becomes part of the next Indian elections as election observers, it will help to closely monitor the entire process to constitute the 17th Lok Sabha and convey a goodwill message from the people of Pakistan. In this way, the anti-Pakistan propaganda can also be replaced with the message of peace during the election campaigns.

Through the platform of the Pakistan-India Parliamentary Friendship Group, I sincerely hope to explore opportunities to organise seminars, exchange programmes and other activities, with the active cooperation of other like-minded organisations and individuals to promote people-to-people contact. Let peace prevails in both countries.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

THE NEWS

Friday, February 8, 2019

Beyond subsidies

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



The government's decision to abolish the Haj subsidy has resulted in an interesting debate in the media. The opposition has criticised the PTI government for this move, saying that the Haj subsidy should not be withdrawn. But the government is of the view that the current economic situation of the country doesn't permit offering the subsidy.

Such conflicting narratives are confusing people who used to utilise their savings to perform Haj with enthusiasm. A few suggestions should be taken into account to improve Haj operations.

The concept of a 'pilgrim' exists in every religion. For hundreds of years, Haj, the Kumbh Mela and Jerusalem have attracted many pilgrims who visit such sacred sites to seek spiritual satisfaction and eternal peace.

Historically, the Haj subsidy traces its roots to the British colonial era. Prior to this, Muslims in the Subcontinent travelled to the kingdom of Hejaz in caravans. In 1932, the Port Haj Committees Act was passed, which empowered government-funded Hajj committees, operating from Karachi, Bombay and Calcutta, to offer subsidised Haj packages through sea routes. This initiative actually ensured a monopoly for the Mogul Line, a shipping company owned by the British company, Turner Morrison.

After Partition, the Indian government introduced the Haj Committee Act to manage Hajj affairs. Like the 1932 act, a Haj subsidy was offered to cover overhead expenses. Today, Haj operations in India are the responsibility of the Central Haj Committee, which falls

under the Indian foreign ministry. However, we have a full-fledged Ministry for Religious Affairs in our country.

During her tenure, Indira Gandhi changed the mode of travel for Haj from ships to aircrafts. The Indian government offered a new subsidy to allow pilgrims to travel in airplanes even if they purchase tickets equivalent to sea fares. However, Indian Muslims demanded an end to the Haj subsidy, saying that the subsidy is actually in favour of the state-owned Air India.

Many Muslim parliamentarians, including Asaduiddin Owaisi, raised voice in the Indian parliament to put an end to government-financed Haj. This was also long-standing demand of Syed Ahmed Bukhari, the Shahi Imam of Delhi's Jama Masjid. In order to ensure high-quality services at the cheapest prices, the Shahi Imam proposed that an independent organisation should be set up to hold fair biddings and allot tenders of tickets along the lines of what happens in Malaysia.

The matter of the Haj subsidy also echoed in the Indian Supreme Court. In 2012, a two-judge bench of the country's highest court asked the government to end the subsidy within the next 10 years. In his written note, he cited passages from the Holy Quran, which mention that Haj is only compulsory for those Muslims who can afford it. According to media reports, the judgment was based on two important factors: that the Haj subsidy is against Islamic principles and that Muslim pilgrims are unable to benefit from the subsidy. Following the court's orders, the Haj subsidy was completely abolished in India last year.

Ironically, a similar situation can also be observed in our country where a large share of the Haj subsidy actually goes to PIA. Despite paying a huge

amount of money, Haj pilgrims from Pakistan have complained about countless difficulties. The federal cabinet has recently decided to withdraw the Haj subsidy. However, this subsidy should not be discontinued so suddenly. Instead, it should be withdrawn in a step-by-step manner.

A majority of Pakistanis are worried about covering extra expenses beyond their budget. Following the Indonesian model, a special Haj fund must be established by the government. Pakistani nationals and overseas Pakistanis, who consider serving Haj pilgrims their religious duty, will be more comfortable about contributing towards the fund. If such a fund is established, I will not only be the first person to contribute towards this fund, but will also ask other people to support this noble cause.

Air fares will be reduced once the national carrier's monopoly is broken in this regard. Other private and international airlines must be allowed to offer Haj packages through open tenders and biddings. Similarly, the practice of encouraging pilgrims to travel by sea must also be restored as the costs won't amount to more than Rs30,000. During the weeklong journey, necessary religious teachings could also be provided.

Haj is, in fact, a holy worship to please God and there must be no political point-scoring. I would like to urge the opposition to understand the real spirit of the Haj philosophy and the government's intention for ending the subsidy. Instead of demanding subsidies, we must ask the government to ensure high-quality Haj facilities at relatively cheap prices.

**The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani**

THE NEWS

Friday, February 15, 2019

A network of peace-builders

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Once again, I am visiting Seoul, the capital city of South Korea, to attend the World Peace Summit, organised by the Universal Peace Federation. The UN-affiliated international and interreligious organisation aims to connect peace-loving individuals and organisations, including representatives from various religions, governments, the civil society and the private sector.

High-level distinguished delegates, belonging to 112 countries across the globe, are currently under one roof to discuss ways to achieve world peace and global harmony. I have the privilege to attend the World Peace Summit as a member of parliament, the patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council and the convener of the Pakistan-India Parliamentary Friendship Group.

While exchanging views with Indian delegates, including Vijay Joli, Dr Anupam Hazra, Vijay Kumar and Ajay Dutt, I stressed the importance of forming a Pakistan-India Parliamentary Friendship Group in the Indian Lok Sabha.

Akinwumi A Adesina, the president of the African Development Bank, emphasised the need to tackle challenges of poverty by taking solid steps. He was of the view that there cannot be peace in a world that is hungry. "Hunger persists in regions and places going through conflicts, wars and fragility. Those who suffer the most are women and children," he said in his address, adding that the most vulnerable communities are women and children.

One must agree with the viewpoint that the human race is one family, regardless of nationality, religion, race or colour. My current visit to Korea reminds me of the last time that I visited the country two years ago in 2017. I was invited for the Heavenly Culture, World Peace, Restoration of Light (HWPL). The current summit once again highlighted that a forced invasion and war will not exist if the international community cooperates to achieve peace.

Back then, the international community was in panic mode due to North Korea's missile tests. However, South Korea's laudable progress in research, smartphones and digital technology proves that the key to success is, in fact, education rather than the weapons race. North Korean ruler Kim Jong-un's historic visit to South Korea played a pivotal role in bringing both countries closer. That's why regional peace seems to have rapidly prevailed in the Korean Peninsula over a short period of time.

During my stay in Seoul, a tweet by US President Donald Trump also became the talk of the town. Announcing the successful dialogue with North Korea, he disclosed that the next summit dialogue with the North Korean ruler will be held on February 27 and February 28 in Hanoi, Vietnam.

I told the summit participants that Trump is prioritising the interest of the American people. His policies are in favour of the US to ensure better relations with the international community, even with enemy states such as North Korea. As a result, the US under Trump is also seeking peace talks with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

We must understand that history is not about sticking to the past but learning les-

sons to ensure a brighter future. In the today's digital era, successful and wise nations don't engage themselves in conflicts, but cooperate for peace and prosperity in the people's interest. It is time for every country to get rid of a stereotypical mindset regarding foreign policy.

Today, we need a bold and visionary leadership at the international level that must be capable enough to resolve long-awaited conflicts in a peaceful manner. For this, organisations, like the Universal Peace Federation, are providing a wonderful opportunity to build a global network of peace-builders. It is good to know that the UPF also shares the vision of the Pakistan Hindu Council to focus on interfaith peace; education and the youth; marriage and family to transform a peaceful society.

I would also like to recognise the outstanding contribution of Pakistan's ambassador to South Korea Rahim Hayat Qureshi to strengthen bilateral ties, in the fields of economic, cultural and trade co-operation. During my meeting with the representatives of overseas Pakistanis, I also found them to be committed about serving peace.

On the same pattern as the World Peace Summit in Korea, there is also a need to organise the Pakistan-India Peace Summit where the people of both countries can seek regional peace and stability through dialogue. For this purpose, I am willing to play my due role in seeking co-operation between like-minded individuals and organisations.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

THE NEWS

Friday, February 22, 2019

Online hate

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman has successfully concluded his visit to Pakistan. Pakistan has always enjoyed cordial relations with Saudi Arabia. The first foreign visit of Imran Khan after taking oath as prime minister of Pakistan was Saudi Arabia. Similarly, the Saudi crown prince also selected Pakistan for his first formal foreign tour.

Recently, a federal minister announced a massive crackdown against the misuse of social media. A journalist has also recently been booked in connection with his controversial tweets. Many critics are seeing such developments as an attack on the freedom of expression. In my view, freedom of expression and disseminating hate material on the internet must be distinguished as two separate entities.

In a column published last year in these pages, I had described how beneficial social media could be, if used positively in a constructive manner. The huge popularity of the internet is, no doubt, the most defining moment in human history. In today's digital era, various social media tools, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and WhatsApp, are proving themselves to be most powerful tools to play a prominent role in resulting social change.

Unfortunately, social media is also acting like a dangerous weapon for some criminal-minded people to spew hate speech and extremist ideologies. That's

why many analysts are suggesting that there is a direct link between social media and hate crimes. According to a research report, social media has all the potential to act as a propagation tool between online hate speech and real-life violent crime.

Various governments are adopting different strategies in order to regulate social media in their respected countries. In this regard, public pressure on social media giants like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube is also intensifying day by day. Some are of the view that there must be non-commercial ownership model of social media, either on a non-profit basis or some form of public ownership.

The situation in our country is also very disturbing, where the misuse of social media is on rise. The presence of hate material and baseless propaganda against vulnerable communities is particularly alarming for all who want to positively utilise social media.

A few years ago, during my hearings in the Supreme Court for the protection of minorities' rights in Pakistan, I had informed the then CJ, Justice Tassaduq Hussain Jilani, that there was an immediate need to delete all hate material in the country. To formalise the National Action Plan to curb terrorism, the previous government had also announced to establish a working group, led by the then interior minister Chaudhry Nisar, for taking measures against abuse of the internet and social media promoting hatred, extremism, sectarianism and intolerance.

At that time, I had suggested in a column that a nationwide awareness campaign is required to highlight the importance of using social media for the

betterment of society. I believe that instead of restricting social media by force, we must focus on ensuring positive use of the internet. The internet regulation strategies of different countries, such as Turkey, China and Iran, could also be analysed.

Today, when Prime Minister Imran Khan is retaining the interior ministry portfolio for himself, I, once again, would like to emphasise that the government must convince social media companies to establish local branch offices in Pakistan. Currently, these companies are based outside Pakistan and our local rules and regulations are not applicable to them.

Following the biometric verification of all SIMs, we must devise a mechanism whereby internet users will only be able to use social media after registering their mobile numbers. A biometric-verified mobile number will not only ensure the constructive role of social media but the internet user too will have a fear of being caught for abusing regulations. Moreover, this will also prevent various social evils related to online harassment and hate crimes.

It is quite unfortunate that we have limited the subject of Ethics to Non-Muslim students. In my views, the federal and all provincial governments must declare this subject compulsory for all students in all educational institutions throughout the country. We must play our due role to protect innocent people against the harms of online hate campaigns.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

THE NEWS

Friday, March 1, 2019

Say no to war

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



When Nimrod tried to burn Hazrat Ibrahim (AS) in a horrific fire, a little sparrow was carrying water in its beak with a purpose to quench the great fire. A crow asked the poor bird why it was doing something so useless, since the fire was so huge and its beak was so small.

The sparrow said: "I know, I am not so strong to fight the fire, but I am playing my due role to extinguish the fire."

This ancient story echoed in my mind due to my recent visit to India. At the time of my appointment as convener of the recently-formed Pakistan-India Parliamentary Friendship Group in the National Assembly, I vowed to bring the people of both countries closer. That is why, when I was invited by the Indian government to attend the holy Kumbh festival, I decided to avail the opportunity to spread the message of peace.

It is an ugly tradition in the neighbouring country to promote Pakistan bashing, especially during election campaigns. Unfortunately, this year the Pulwama attack also occurred just a few months before the general elections. As a result, the Indian media started non-stop coverage to blame Pakistan for the unfortunate incident.

Due to the ongoing tough situation, I was advised by my many well-wishers to postpone the India tour. However, after consultation, I decided to participate in the Kumbh Mela, held at Alla-

habad. The festival is the world's largest religious. It is a peaceful event, which also has deep philosophical and spiritual significance for the Hindu community across the globe.

It is believed that anyone who takes a holy dip in the sacred water of rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati gets rid of all sins and attains eternal peace. This year, 182 participants, belonging to 181 countries, were invited to attend with the purpose of promoting inter-faith harmony.

I told the Indian media that Pakistan is a peace-loving country, and being the frontline state against war on terror, it has offered huge sacrifices in order to achieve peace and prosperity. We must strengthen people-to-people contacts, and resolve long-standing conflicts in a peaceful manner. My presence also resulted in empowering the local peace communities in India. Similarly, I warned the international community that possible war between two nuclear powers can destroy ninety percent of the world population. I succeeded in convincing many that the solution to each and every conflict is dialogue, not war.

I also reminded my Indian guests about the poetry of their own poet, Sahir Ludhianvi. After the Indo-Pak war 1965, the renowned poet highlighted the miseries of war in his poems. I am glad that my message of peace had secured due coverage by Indian, Pakistani and foreign media. On behalf of the Pakistani nation, I condemned the Pulwama attack, and also offered condolences with the families of the deceased.

Later, I was accompanied by former Indian army chief V K Singh and other

international delegates of the Kumbh Mela to New Delhi in a special plane. On the second day, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi called on to greet us warmly. On the occasion, I once again urged the importance of maintaining regional peace and harmony. I also had an exclusive one-on-one meeting with Indian Minister for External Affairs Sushma Swaraj and other high-level officials.

I made it clear to the Indian leadership that no Pakistani institution was behind the Pulwama attack and that restoration of peace is in the best interest of the people of Pakistan and India. No doubt, there are on both sides those that are trying to sabotage the peace process but the door of dialogue must never be closed. It is a clear message from Pakistan to India that if war is imposed then the entire Pakistani nation will safeguard its national dignity and honour.

However, just after three days, India invaded Pakistani territory. We must salute our brave armed forces that are quite capable to defend our motherland Pakistan. India must understand that now the entire Pakistani nation is united against Indian aggression. Still I am hopeful that peace-loving segments across the borders will join hands to restore regional peace. It is a good sign that internet users from both countries are running a campaign using the hashtag #SayNoToWar on social media.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.

Twitter: @RVankwani

THE NEWS

Friday, March 8, 2019

On the diplomatic front

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



An important meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, representing 57 Muslim countries, was held at a time when two nuclear powers, Pakistan and India, were confronting with each other.

Inviting Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj to address the inaugural session as guest of honour and, in response, the boycott by the Pakistani foreign minister were considered extraordinary moves on the diplomatic front.

Due to Pakistan's pivotal role to strengthen the OIC since day one, there were two opinions regarding this year's participation in the presence of India. Some were of the view that Pakistan is the founding member of OIC and so the Pakistani government must record a protest for inviting the Indian delegate without taking Pakistan in confidence.

However, there were also a good number of intellectuals and parliamentarians, including myself, who believed that Pakistan must attend the OIC meeting at any cost to present its point of view more effectively in the presence of the Indian delegate, and seek peaceful solutions to long-standing disputes with India.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi announced during the joint session of parliament that Pakistan would not attend the 46th session of the OIC's Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM), hosted by the UAE. Earlier, there were media reports that Pakistan had also written a letter to the host country that the invitation to India "was extended without consultation with member states

and contrary to the rules of the OIC".

India's attempt to join the OIC is as old as the OIC itself. In August 1969, two dozen Muslim countries gathered in Rabat, Morocco to discuss the unfortunate attack attempt on the holy Masjid Aqsa in the occupied Palestinian territory. Keeping its large Muslim population and rich Islamic heritage in view, India was also invited that time to attend the first meeting. A high-level Indian delegation even reached the Conference Hall but due to strong protest by the then Pakistani president Yahya Khan, the delegation was sent back.

The second meeting of the OIC was hosted by Pakistan in 1974. Also known as the Second Islamic Summit Conference or the Lahore Summit, it was attended by many Muslim countries. The sincere contributions of the then Pakistani prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to make the historic meeting successful was appreciated by all participating Muslim countries. The OIC had made clear to India that even after the separation of its eastern part, Pakistan still had the strong support of a large number of friends, including some of the world's wealthiest countries.

The OIC is always supportive of Pakistan, and has passed a number of resolutions to condemn the violation of human rights in Indian-occupied Kashmir. Even this time, the OIC reportedly concluded with a statement to endorse Pakistan's stance. According to media reports, the statement also reminds the international community of its obligation to ensure the implementation of the UN Security Council's resolutions. The OIC, while urging the need to resolve outstanding issues through peaceful means, also appreciated the goodwill gesture of peace shown

by Prime Minister Imran Khan by freeing Indian fighter pilot.

One must agree that presenting a country's stance to the international community through diplomatic ways is a very complex procedure and needs sensible decisions. When I was listening to the speech of Sushma Swaraj, it was very strange for me that nobody from Pakistan was present to counter her claims. During my meeting with her in New Delhi, I categorically said that Pakistan was not involved in the Pulwama attack. In fact, Pakistan is a victim of global terrorism, and a frontline state in the war on terror.

Pakistan enjoys cordial relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In the context of the recent visits of Saudi and UAE leaderships to Pakistan, both countries were in a good position to arrange a meeting of the Pakistani foreign minister with his Indian counterpart. If that happened, it would have a long-lasting impact on regional peace and bilateral relations between Pakistan and India.

Therefore, I personally believe that leaving the diplomatic front open for India is not a wise decision. In the past, Pakistan has suffered a lot due to such an attitude. It is time to review our foreign policy in the best interests of our people. For this purpose, we must keep emotions aside and define a concrete policy to join each and every diplomatic forum available for defending our beloved motherland. There is also a need to take bold and blunt decisions to resolve regional disputes in a peaceful manner.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS

Editor-in-Chief **Mir Shakil-ur-Rahman**

Senior Editor **Talat Aslam**

Vol. 28 No. 360

Rajab 7, 1440 A.H

Phones: 32630611-15

PO Box 52, Karachi

Friday, March 15, 2019

World citizenship

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Today, on March 15, the international community is celebrating World Speech Day. The day was initially launched three years ago by a professional speech writer Simon Gibson at the Athens Democracy Forum. The emphasis of the first event was on "unexpected voices", including ordinary people, especially youth, from all over the world. This year's theme for speeches is World Citizenship.

According to the official website of World Speech Day, this brilliant idea came from Simon's work in establishing a free archive for contemporary and historic speeches. He truly believes that speeches can change the world in all aspects such as: socially, politically, in the arts, business and religion. Therefore, it was decided to mark an international day to acknowledge speeches and speech-making around the world and reach out to the people everywhere.

It is really a remarkable achievement that just within a short period of three years, the day is getting huge popularity among more than 100 countries. Today, hundreds of 'live' speaking events are taking place simultaneously around the globe. The purpose is to celebrate the power of speeches, bring communities together, share ideas and change our lives.

All religions too focus on good speech and good language to win the hearts and

minds of people forever. According to the Holy Rig Veda of the Hindu religion, "One should be cautious not to speak anything that hurts others. Such talk never helps, but brings destruction." This is why it is believed that if speaking well is a skill then speaking kindly is a life skill. Every prophet, saint and preacher used soft speech to get people's attention.

Quaid-e-Azam was known for his excellent speeches. He was a strong advocate of democracy and free speech. The speech he delivered on August 11, 1947 was so outstanding that it must be included in the curriculum of Pakistani schools. In this speech, he provided a comprehensive roadmap of the newly established state of Pakistan.

John F Kennedy also used to emphasise the power of words. After being elected as the US president, the inauguration address by Kennedy is still considered one of the best speeches of the ages. According to him, "the only reason to make a speech is to change the world."

We, the parliamentarians, are the voices of our people. They trust us and elect us to play our positive role in parliament. Therefore, it is our moral obligation to raise public issues in our parliamentary speeches. Due to our choice of words and way of speech, we have the ability to truly touch people.

In a democratic setup, we cannot deny the role of free speech. However, I always urge that a parliamentary leader is a role model for entire community, and his speeches have a long-lasting impact on people's minds. Therefore, hate speech and usage of cheap language

must be discouraged at any cost. We must not forget that excess and unnecessary talk may also cause misunderstandings and anger.

In today's modern digital era, World Speech Day can act as a source for new thinking, sharing views, and most importantly, gathering ideas from the usually unheard voices of youth. Keeping the theme 'World Citizenship' in view, all of us must avail the opportunity to express views to promote societal tolerance, interfaith harmony and world peace.

We are living in a globalised world, where societies are diverse: religiously, linguistically, culturally and ethnically different from each other. Today, the focus of our speeches must be on intercultural dialogue; promote education for tolerance, peace and human rights, and support of peace-building initiatives. We must also reach out to people of other nations and faiths to demonstrate that the majority of Pakistani people is peace-loving, open-minded and tolerant.

I would like to make an appeal to all Pakistani institutions, schools, colleges, universities, media, think tanks and NGOs, to celebrate World Speech Day with full zeal and dedication. Even if you are not joining in any public event, at least spare some time from your busy schedule to enjoy reading the speeches of legendary personalities.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.

Twitter: @RVankwani

THE NEWS

Friday, March 22, 2019

A message of harmony

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Like other parts of world, the festival of Holi was celebrated in Pakistan with the spirit of love, humanity, respect and happiness. Also known as the festival of colours, it is associated with the celebrations of the arrival of the spring.

Holi is considered one of the most important events in the Hindu religion, followed by Diwali. The event reminds of the victory of light over darkness and good over evil. The legend of Prahlad emphasises trust in God.

The Pakistan Hindu Council this year decided to celebrate Holi in a unique way, dedicating Holi to Pakistan Day in memory of the historical Lahore Jalsa, held on March 23, 1940. In the context of recent Pakistan-India tensions, the managing committee also passed unanimous resolution to condemn Indian aggression and to show solidarity with the brave armed forces.

Responding to the call by the Pakistan Hindu Council, the patriotic Hindu community actively participated in the mega colourful event of Holi at Hanuman Temple, Karachi, which was decorated with Pakistani flags and Hindu religious flags side by side.

Traditionally, the most senior person of the family used to throw colour to inaugurate the festival. Being patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council, I was obliged to perform the inauguration. A one-minute silence and prayers for departed souls of the New Zealand terror victims were also ensured.

At Hanuman Temple, the Pakistani flag was raised with due honour and dignity. After the national anthem,

Hindu children presented patriotic songs. A video documentary was also shown to recall the outstanding speech of Quaid-e-Azam on August 11, 1947. The founder of Pakistan had assured religious freedom to every Pakistani national, regardless of his/her religious affiliation. Special prayers for peace and prosperity of our beloved Pakistan were also held.

During my speech, I emphasised that Quaid-e-Azam wanted to transform Pakistan into a role model Muslim majority country, where non-Muslims would enjoy equal civic rights. That is why our elders, like Jogendra Nath Mandal, wholeheartedly supported the Pakistan Movement. A large number of non-Muslim politicians were all present in the March 23 Jalsa to support the demand for Pakistan.

Such non-Muslim activists, including Diwan Bahadur Sittia Parkash Singha, Rajkumari Amrit, Chandu Lal, CE Gibbon, Alfried Purshad, E Chaudary and SS Albert, were of the view that the independent state of Pakistan would be in a better position to protect the rights of minorities on the basis of the Charter of Madina. Therefore, on the occasion of Holi, we lauded the tireless positive contributions of all legends of Pakistan Movement.

I feel honour that our elders, in response of Quaid-e-Azam's appeal, decided to declare Pakistan their beloved motherland (dharti mata), instead of migrating from here. Even today, the patriotic and peace-loving Hindu community is playing a pivotal role for the betterment of the entire Pakistani society.

This year, we celebrated the Holi festival with the ideology that a person having strong faith in God must not give up against powerful powers. My visit to neighbouring country India, even at the

peak time of the Indo-Pak tussle, also reflected that we must keep struggling to achieve regional peace in the best interest of people of both sides. The good gesture, in response to Indian aggression, shows that the political and military leaderships of Pakistan are on one page to ensure regional peace and stability.

Evil powers, in the shape of non-state actors in both countries, must not be allowed to sabotage the entire peace process. The peace-loving Pakistani Hindu community, while celebrating Holi, also urged Indian prime minister Narendra Modi to get rid of negativity and follow the Mahatma Gandhi's principle of Ahimsa. According to Hinduism, a true ruler must safeguard the lives of the public, instead of leading towards destruction and anarchy.

Historically, the Indian subcontinent, before the arrival of British imperialism, was a role model for interfaith harmony. Regardless of faith, people used to celebrate each other's festivals. Respect to all religions is also common teaching of every religion. Therefore, I believe that celebrating Holi together can bring people of different faiths closer. I am grateful to all participants and media representatives who presented the soft face of our beloved country.

We must understand that the actual concept behind celebrating Holi is not just throwing colours but breaking the ice to bring people of diverse backgrounds closer. Holi festivities must be utilised to convey a message of universal brotherhood and interfaith harmony.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

THE NEWS

Friday, March 29, 2019

A week of lessons

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Here are my views on three important events that took place last week. First, Prime Minister of New Zealand Jacinda Ardern, in response to the horrific terror attacks in Christchurch, succeeded to emerge as an ideal ruler for the protection of the rights of minority communities. Her positive attitude is indeed helping win the hearts of peace-loving people across the globe.

Second, the visionary speech of Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad which he delivered on the occasion of Pakistan Day. He emphasised on the importance of peaceful relations with other countries. According to him, following Japan and South Korea, his focus is on strengthening bilateral trade relations. He believes in avoiding interference in the internal matters of other countries (there is no official enemy state declared by Malaysia). The way all ethnic and religious communities are allowed to play a pivotal role in the progress of Malaysia is really remarkable.

Third, the Pakistani-Hindu community, to demonstrate their eternal love to Pakistan, also set an excellent example of promoting interfaith harmony and national unity by associating the Holi festival with Pakistan Day. However, it is quite unfortunate that on Holi, two innocent Hindu sisters were abducted for the purpose of forced con-

versions and forced marriages. According to the Pakistan Hindu Council, another Hindu girl has also been kidnapped from Tando Yousaf. All three girls are teenagers.

New Zealand is regarded among the top most peaceful and prosperous nations in the world. The tragic terror attack had shaken the world and also proved that terrorism has no religion. Leaders like Jacinda Ardern are truly a blessing for humanity; they have the courage to stand with the victims and their families, while keeping aside all prejudices and differences.

During the ceremony of Holi, I also emphasised that festivals like Holi teach us that ultimate victory is always of the truth. Now, every sensible person can testify that the terrorist's evil plan has failed and all the citizens of New Zealand are united to curb hate crimes.

The minorities of Pakistan are still are under threat by some extremist elements. The grave issues of abductions, forced conversions and forced marriages of vulnerable minor Hindu girls are most alarming. Such painful incidents are not only increasing the insecurities of our patriotic minority community but also bringing a bad name to the entire country.

In this regard, some controversial religious figures like the pir of Bharchunoodi, Mian Mithu (formerly from the PPP) and Pir Ayub Jan Sirhindi are behind such social evils. That is why I have tabled a resolution in the National Assembly to deal with all such elements who are preaching hatred under the cover of religion. We must ask these

so-called preachers that why are no adult men or mature women getting inspired by their preaching?

The abduction of minor girls and their forced conversions are very painful. Being patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council, I stand with the poor victims. As a result, a petition was filed in the Islamabad High Court against me and the poor father of the girls under pressure of the alleged kidnappers. I have already issued a video message in this regard that I will fight on legal front for the sake of justice and truth.

Today, we all need to feel the pain of these oppressed Hindu parents. It is time to learn lessons from the past week. If the prime minister of a secular country like New Zealand can visit a mosque to condole with minorities and ask her country's media to live broadcast the Azaan, then why are citizens of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan hesitant to show sympathy with non-Muslim minorities of their own country?

Now enough is enough. All parliamentarians are requested to pass my bills unanimously, so we can end forced conversions and child marriages. The entire world is now looking towards the parliament of Pakistan to see who is sincere in fulfilling the vision of Quaid-e-Azam. Opposing my bills will also expose all of those who are exploiting the religious sentiments of innocent people.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS

Editor-in-Chief **Mir Shakil-ur-Rahman**

Senior Editor **Talat Aslam**

Vol. 29 No. 14

Rajab 28, 1440 A.H

Phones: 32630611-15

PO Box 52, Karachi

Friday, April 5, 2019

Tackling forced conversions

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



How painful that Pakistan, founded by the great law-abiding Quaid-e-Azam, is now known as a country where abductions, child marriages and forced conversions are becoming a norm. Most alarming is that nobody dares to raise voice against this barbaric social evil, and stand with the poor victims.

The recent incident of two Hindu sisters, Reena and Raveena, has raised the sense of insecurity among our peace-loving non-Muslim community. The pain of the victimized family can only be felt by those who believe in humanity regardless of race, colour and religion.

First, the Pakistan Hindu Council tried to tackle the issue on its own for three days. But it failed. The council then proposed a five-point resolution and asked me to raise this issue at every possible and available forum like parliament, media and civil society etc.

I decided to table a resolution and two separate bills in the National Assembly for a permanent fix to this sensitive matter. I am grateful to minority parliamentarians from various political parties, including Lal Malhi (PTI), Dr Darshan (PML-N), Ms Shunila Ruth (PTI), and Ramesh Lal (PPPP), who – irrespective of their political affiliation – supported my resolution.

However, unfortunately rather than appreciating my sincere efforts towards

a noble cause, some extremist elements are bust doing propaganda against me. A video clip is currently viral on social media in which some demonstrators, under the cover of religion, are publicly maligning me and my struggle.

In my view, all religions of the world are equally respectable. I highly respect the Prophet (pbuh) who laid the foundation of Madina, the first welfare state of the world. The Charter of Medina emphasized the rights of all citizens.

Whenever I visit Ajmer Sharif, I get the privilege to clean the floor of the shrine with my own hands. I regularly visits the shrines of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar and Shah Abdul Lateef Bhittai.

It is a universal fact that association to any religion is connected with the heart – and the human heart cannot be forced. History tells that if on the basis of power, we tried to impose something forcefully then at any time they can get back to their original place.

Regretfully, some misguided elements in our society are targeting minor Hindu girls, who even do not have a national identity card. When we do allow an under 18-years child to drive a car or even smoke then how come we allow minor immature girls take such important life decisions such as change of religion or marriage?

According to psychologists, the social status of women is severely affected after abduction. In most cases, they have no choice but to spend the rest of their lives with their kidnappers. Because they know the bitter fact that if they return

then society will be reluctant to accept them. Such unfortunate women are spending a miserable life away from their blood relations.

This is the right time for serious legislation against forced conversion in Pakistan. For this purpose, it is also necessary to study the laws for religion conversion in different countries. In some countries, if someone wants to change religion then he/she has to file an application to the government for a notice of three months and then they also have to appear before a district magistrate about their conversion. In other countries, nobody is allowed to convert their religion before 18 years of age.

From the core of my heart, it is my sincere wish that all political parties must be on one page in enacting legislation to give a permanent end to all such shameful incidents. For the sake of humanity, all parliamentarians are requested to pass my tabled resolution unanimously. A parliamentary committee must also be formed to build a consensus on my bills. Two members from each political party, one Muslim and the other non-Muslim, must be members to give recommendations.

I am quite confident that if we opt for the right direction with good intention then the solution to every problem can be achieved.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

THE NEWS

Friday, April 12, 2019

Attack on humanity

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



The horrific tragedy of the Samjhota Express attack is a painful chapter in the bilateral ties of Pakistan and India. Twelve years ago, on February 2007, the Samjhota Express was set on fire by some extremist elements. The unfortunate train was on way to Lahore from New Delhi. As many as 68 passengers, majority of them Pakistani nationals, were burnt alive.

Although the tragic incident occurred inside Indian territory, India started to blame Pakistani militants. An aggressive propaganda was launched by the Indian media. A wave of violent demonstrations was observed throughout India, against Pakistan.

This is well-said that the truth can never remain hidden. During the investigation of the Samjhota Express attack, a number of facts were disclosed, such as: the attackers were not Pakistani nationals but Indian citizens, the explosive devices were provided by an Indian army officer. India's National Investigation Agency, on the basis of the evidence, claimed that a local extremist named Swami Aseemanand was the actual mastermind behind the attack.

However, on March 20, 2019, a special court in India concluded that the evidence against Aseemanand and other fellows was not sufficient and, thus, the accused deserved to be free. This decision shocked all peace-loving citizens on both sides. Pakistan's Foreign Office has also termed the court ruling a historic injustice.

It seems that the Indian leadership wanted to malign Pakistan in the eyes of the international community through the Samjhota Express attack, and therefore, important evidence was discarded to misguide the court.

The release of the murderers of innocent people is condemnable. My stance in this regard is very clear: terrorism has no religion and such brutal culprits should be punished at any cost irrespective of their religion, race, cast or region.

I believe that the international community, including Pakistan and India, should be on one page to defeat terrorism. During my visit to India, I urged the Indian leadership to ensure peace across the border. I emphasized that both countries should move on from hostile mentality and learn from past. Since Independence, both countries encountered horrific wars and also competed in the arms race but could not succeed in eliminating poverty of their people. In such circumstances, the presence of extremist elements is a major threat to the improvement of bilateral relations.

Both countries should understand that without getting rid of extremism no one can become an Asian Tiger. Pakistan is determined to end terrorism, and also wants to improve bilateral ties with India. But it is unfortunate that the Indian leadership is still promoting its Pakistan-bashing narrative.

On one side, India justifies the release of extremist militants behind the attacks on the Samjhota Express due to insufficient proof, and on the other hand, a blame game on Pakistan's involvement in terrorism without solid ev-

idence is going on. How this can be justified? This is indeed a big question mark on India's commitment to fight against terror.

It is also alarming that whenever both countries start to proceed on some kind of peace talk, some unfortunate incident happens and the journey once again gets halted. Today, every peace-loving person, either s/he lives in Pakistan or India or any other part of the world, must support my point of view that the Samjhota Express bombing was an attack on humanity in which the blood of innocent passengers was shed. The culprits behind such horrific incidents should be given strict punishment to prevent similar kind of terrorism in the future.

I want to give a message to all those who are doing hate politics in the name of religion that God loves those who help and serve His creation, and every religion of the world teaches humanity. So, stop shedding the blood of innocent people, especially travellers whose protection is taught by every religion.

I want to assure the victim families of the Samjhota Express attack that if today the culprits succeed in getting temporary release then tomorrow they will have to face God and then justice will prevail. India must follow the example of New Zealand. This is also a test case for India to prove its commitment to curbing terrorism, normalizing bilateral ties with Pakistan and protecting the rights of minorities.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS

Editor-in-Chief **Mir Shakil-ur-Rahman**

Senior Editor **Talat Aslam**

Vol. 29 No. 28

Shabaan 13, 1440 A.H

Phones: 32630611-15

PO Box 52, Karachi

Friday, April 19, 2019

One year with the PTI

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Last year in the same month, I joined the PTI. My joint press conference with Imran Khan was live broadcasted by almost all news channels. A large number of leading Hindu business personalities including former presidents of the Pakistan Hindu Council were also present on the occasion.

It was indeed a good day for my political career. However, at the same time, it was a very painful decision to leave the PML-N. During my time with them, I gave sincere suggestions repeatedly to avoid the politics of confrontation and personal interests. Alas, there was no change in the attitude of their top leadership. That made me switch the party for achieving my goals to serve the community in larger public interest.

I whole-heartedly welcomed the arrival of the PTI chief at my residence and announced to carry on my struggle under the umbrella of the PTI. I believe that the purpose of politics must be to serve people. In this regard, my role model is Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah who switched from the Indian National Congress to the Muslim League to achieve his noble aims. Even today, I have the same logical demand that the ETPB, one of the most important national institutions, must be headed by some well-qualified and talented Pakistani Hindu citizen.

Representing the non-Muslim Pakistani community, I had assured Imran Khan of the best cooperation to fulfil his dream of transforming Naya Pakistan. We both agreed that there must be stable economy, rule of law and end of corruption in the country. I focused on establishing a welfare state on the basis of the Madina Model where every Pakistani citizen will be allowed to play their due role for the peace and prosperity of our beloved country.

During my many interactions with Imran Khan, I strongly believe that he is committed to making Pakistan free from all social evils such as: corruption, money-laundering, fraud, and injustice. To set an example of good governance, he agreed to probe the allegation of rigging and offered himself for an unconditional accountability.

Bringing back looted money is one of the key priorities of the current government to stabilize national economy. For this purpose, institutions are ensured to be free of all kinds of influence to implement rule of law. This is the prime reason that today we can witness accountability for all.

The way Pakistani government responded to Indian aggression has successfully projected the soft, positive and peace-loving image of Pakistan on the international level. Similarly, the sacking of a provincial information minister over hate speech also demonstrated responsible governance and respect for the sentiments of Hindu minorities.

In my view, the biggest challenge the PTI government is facing is from status quo forces. Due to their huge influence,

a layperson believes that whichever party comes into power, the public will remain exploited. To win the people's trust and confidence, the government needs to control inflation, corruption and the devaluation of the rupee on immediate basis.

Today, every Pakistani citizen is looking towards Imran Khan for the solution of the problems they are facing. Particularly, non-Muslim patriotic nationals are in dire need of the PTI's support for their survival. In this regard, my personal suggestion is that Imran Khan should avoid the policies of picking and choosing, and must focus on merit for the implementation of his agenda. We should not forget that all the leaders of the Pakistan movement were true examples of loyalty and honesty. However, Quaid-e-Azam had preferred merit only at the time of forming his cabinet after independence. Therefore, only those were selected who were able to deliver good performance.

On the completion of my one year with the PTI, I am quite confident that the Imran Khan-led PTI government will succeed to overcome all crises and move Pakistan towards peace, progress and prosperity.

I also want to assure Pakistani citizens that for the betterment of my beloved country, I will continue to promote Quaid-e-Azam vision at every available platform including parliament and the media.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

THE NEWS

Friday, April 26, 2019

Securing our countries

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



It was indeed very pleasant to interact with Iranian Ambassador H E Mehdi Honardoost in Islamabad. The people of Pakistan and Iran are connected by inseparable bonds of cultural, historical and geographical affinities.

After our independence, Iran was the first country to recognize Pakistan as an independent and sovereign state. Our national anthem is also a masterpiece written in the Persian language.

Before expressing my views on the ups and downs in the diplomatic ties of neighbouring countries, I would like to strongly condemn the recent terror attack on a passenger bus at the Makran Coastal Highway. The martyred also included personnel from the Pakistan Navy. The unfortunate incident seems to be a part of an organized series of conspiracies against our beloved country.

The Foreign Office claimed that the attack had been carried out by an alliance of terrorist organizations based in Iran. In the past, Iran has also blamed Pakistan-based elements of terror attacks there. However, it is on record that the Pakistani government always condemns such terror attacks.

In such circumstances, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's decision to visit Iran on the invitation of the Iranian president is a major breakthrough to strengthen bilateral relations. The enthusiastic welcome received by our prime minister in Tehran also proved that, despite misunderstandings, the leadership of both countries is willing to cooperate with each other. According to Iranian media, Prime Minister Imran Khan also

discussed various topics of mutual interest in his meetings with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and Supreme Leader Ali Hosseini Khamenei.

Both countries must demonstrate serious commitment to curb terrorism at any cost. Prime Minister Imran Khan's statement is also of huge importance; he said that both Pakistan and Iran are victims of terrorism, and spoke of the use of Pakistani soil by foreign elements to carry out activities in Iran. Similar attacks are also carried out in Pakistan using Iran and Afghanistan territories in the same manner. Both sides also announced to establish a joint rapid reaction force in this regard.

The leadership of both countries, during the joint press conference, also conveyed a common message to the international community that justice should be ensured to oppressed nations for achieving global peace and harmony. Conflicts including Kashmir and Palestine can only be resolved through dialogue rather than force. The two sides also desired to enhance economic relations on a long-term basis.

In my view, Prime Minister Imran Khan's recent visit to Iran has recalled the glorious past of bilateral relations when Iran and Pakistan were close allies on the global front. After Partition, Iran supported Pakistan from day one. It is believed that Quaid-e-Azam himself laid the foundation of cordial relations with Iran, and Ghazanfar Ali Khan was appointed as the first ambassador of Pakistan to Iran. In 1948, the first independence anniversary of Pakistan was officially celebrated in Tehran with full enthusiasm. On this occasion, Iranian newspapers published special editions with photos of Quaid-e-Azam. Iran also supported Pakistan during the Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971.

Iran did not recognize Bangladesh as a country until Pakistan recognized it.

Unfortunately, the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and General Ziaul Haq's regime increased the distances between the two countries and even today some unwanted elements are playing with the lives of innocent people to fulfil their vested interests.

The top leadership of both countries should realize that the current century is the era of joint ventures and bilateral co-operation. Once-rival countries are now joining hands for the sake of peace and prosperity. European countries, under the banner of the EU, are forgetting their bitter past and moving forward together. Similarly, both Korean countries are now coming closer. After decades of war, the Taliban are being invited for dialogue in Afghanistan.

I am sure that Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Iran can positively impact the region only if both countries decide to get rid of past misunderstandings and hostility. To promote bilateral relations, Pakistan and Iran should not feel threatened by the Gwadar Port or Chahbahar or any other development project. In fact, they should take initiatives to get benefits in the interest of the entire region.

I believe that non-state actors are the real threat for all countries of the region. But it is not wise to blame each other because of such unwanted elements. To curb terrorism, Pakistan and Iran must cooperate with each other for establishing an efficient and effective border management system. This is the only way to secure our countries from all kinds of terrorism.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwanf

INTERNATIONAL THE NEWS

Editor-in-Chief **Mir Shakil-ur-Rahman**

Senior Editor **Talat Aslam**

Vol. 29 No. 42

Shabaan 27, 1440 A.H

Phones: 32630611-15

PO Box 52, Karachi

Friday, May 3, 2019

Belt and road

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



I was in Beijing recently, where the Chinese government had organized the second session of the Belt and Road Forum. It was attended by prominent leaders from around the world, think-tank representatives etc. Prime Minister Imran Khan was honoured to lead the high-level Pakistani delegation.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), formerly known as 'One Belt One Road', is China's biggest development project, linking more than 66 countries to ensure economic cooperation. According to the World Bank, this project can be very beneficial to connect two-thirds population of the world.

The mega project, announced by the Chinese president six years ago in 2013, is now becoming a reality very rapidly. The initiative is actually a strategic attempt to enhance regional connectivity and embrace a brighter future. Following the ancient Silk Road, the BRI project aims to connect China with other regional countries through a network of roads and rail tracks. Similarly, the Maritime Silk Road focuses on sea routes in order to foster collaboration in Southeast Asia, Oceania, and Africa.

The most important part of the Belt & Road project is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This development project, worth \$62 billion, is expanded from the Chinese borderline area of Khunjerab to the Gwadar Port. The project is supposed to guarantee the socio-economic development of

millions of people living in this region.

According to a report published in Jang, Pakistan is the only country to get maximum benefits from this One Belt, One Road project. CPEC had kept the momentum of rapid growth from last five years and helped to improve the micro economic situation of the country. China has supported Pakistan to tackle the economic challenges and energy crisis. Even, this fact has been acknowledged by Prime Minister Imran Khan in his recent speech in Beijing.

In the international scenario, Pakistan is considered a close ally of China. The CPEC project is transforming Gwadar into the world's most important economic hub. Special Economic Zones are also scheduled to be established in the next phase of the CPEC project. However, I feel that Pakistan did not receive due importance during the Belt & Road Forum. India is a strong opponent of the One Belt, One Road project since day one and one of the reasons behind Indian resistance to this great mega project is the passage of the CPEC route through the Gilgit-Baltistan region. This year again, India boycotted the One Belt, One Road forum. Ironically, during the session of BRI forum, a project map, attributed to a Chinese ministry, went viral on social media where Pakistan's name was not mentioned but India's name was highlighted in a prominent way.

It is a matter of serious concern for every patriotic Pakistani citizen to see Jammu & Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan as part of Indian territory on the map. Understanding the sensitivity of the issue, I immediately identified this to my

top leadership and suggested that we needed to record an official protest at the highest level.

The Chinese president, during the media briefing after the concluding session, informed that cooperation agreements worth more than \$64 billion were signed during this BRI forum, but according to a report published in Jang, there is not a single project directly with or for Pakistan. According to the newspaper, analysts are of the view that Pakistan was deliberately ignored during the recently-held Belt & Forum because China is more interested to develop close relationship with India in the perspective of its economic interests.

China is achieving the status of a global superpower due to its successful economic policies and hard work, but there was a time when world access to Beijing was not possible without the Pakistani national flag-carrier, PIA. In the past, we also cooperated with China to connect with the US and the West. Today, CPEC is the most important project under the Belt and Road Initiative.

We want to enhance bilateral cooperation with China in the fields of infrastructure, railway and IT sector; and agriculture, education and health are also included in the priorities of present government. However, to achieve respect and dignity in the eyes of the international community, it is also very necessary to play a very proactive role at the diplomatic front.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

THE NEWS

Friday, May 10, 2019

When will we learn?

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Right now I am waiting at the passenger lounge of Istanbul Airport for my flight to come back to Pakistan. This newly-constructed airport is no doubt an amazing masterpiece. The state-of-the-art hotel rooms are also competing all other world class hotels even of New York and Heathrow airports.

Turkey is our brotherly country which was once a superpower just one century ago. However, today's Turkey prefers to ensure the prosperity and betterment of its people which is even reflected through the new airport present in front of me.

The purpose of my visit to Turkey was to catch a flight to Baku, Azerbaijan, to attend the 5th World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue. The government of Azerbaijan, in partnership with UNAOC, Unesco, UNWTO, the Council of Europe and IS-ESCO has hosted the international conference under the motto of 'Building dialogue into action against discrimination, inequality and violent conflict'.

On the occasion, various international delegates were invited to express their views for promoting cultural dialogue and to shun the practices of extremism. Deputy Speaker of National Assembly Qasim Khan Suri led the Pakistani delegation. Besides myself, it included Member National Assembly Malik Amir Dogar, Special Assistant to Deputy Speaker Bayazid Kansil, and Assistant Director PR Tanveer Hussain Malik.

The government of Azerbaijan, especially President Ilham Aliyev, deserves congratulations for successfully organizing the international conference. The Azerbaijani president in his welcome

speech emphasized to determine an effective strategy to ensure the establishment of a peaceful human society.

Nada Al-Nashif, the Unesco envoy, stressed the importance of fostering youth participation in decision-making and in processes for ensuring peace and security. Sevil Alirzayeva, chief of staff at the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), highlighted the alarming rise in hate speech, xenophobia and other forms of bigotry across the globe. Manuel Butler Halter, executive director of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), was of the view that tourism is in fact an important driving force for intercultural dialogue.

After the international conference, we also availed the opportunity to visit public and historical places. I was highly impressed by the simple nature and high morals of people of Azerbaijan. Being Pakistani citizens, we were greeted with special love and respect on most of occasions.

Muslim-majority Azerbaijan is located in the South Caucasus region of Eurasia at the crossroads of Eastern Europe and Western Asia. It is also the largest and most populous country of South Caucasus. The mountain range of Caucasus (Koh-e-Qaaf), which is also known as the hometown of fairies in our Urdu folk stories, acts as natural boundary between Asia and Europe.

However, this beautiful country also faced many regional conflicts throughout its rich history. The region came under the influence of Greeks, Sasanis, Arabs, Mongols, Persians, Turkish and Russians in the past. After World War I, Azerbaijan also received the honour to establish the first Muslim parliamentary democratic state. Unfortunately, as a result of the Soviet invasion, Azerbaijan became part of the Soviet Union.

Like other former Soviet occupied states, the defeat of the Soviet Union in

Afghanistan also enabled Azerbaijan to achieve independence in the 1990s. However, a war with neighbouring Armenia broke out. Even today, despite resolutions passed by the UN, the Nagorno-Karabakh region in the southwest of Azerbaijan is still occupied by Armenia.

Since 28 years of independence, Azerbaijan has learnt a lot from its past and developed itself as a secular peace-loving republic state. During my visit, I observed that mosques as well as churches and other religious places were equally attended by people. Azerbaijan is also an active member of various international prominent organizations, such as the UN, the Council of Europe, the Turkic Council, the Non-Aligned Movement and Nato.

During our visit to the Pakistan embassy, we acknowledged that Pakistani Ambassador in Baku Dr Saeed Khan Mohmand is playing an active role to develop cordial relations between Azerbaijan and Pakistan. On the occasion, we also reviewed various measures taken by Pakistani envoy to strengthen cultural, trade and economic ties with Azerbaijan.

It was very interesting for me to observe how Azerbaijan and Turkey, both Muslim majority countries, succeeded in developing themselves in a very short time. Both countries are also promoting interfaith harmony and projecting a positive image through such conferences at the international level.

When will we learn to end violence, discrimination, hate speech and extremism from our society? We need to ensure the right person at the right place. We must consider promoting faith tourism on a priority basis.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

THE NEWS

Friday, May 17, 2019

Ending forced conversions

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Finally, my point of view regarding forced conversions is getting endorsed by every corner of the country. Being patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council and a follower of Quaid-e-Azam as a role model, the focus of my peaceful struggle is always to ensure the protection of the rights of patriotic non-Muslim minorities. However, abductions, child marriages and forced conversions of patriotic minorities are becoming a norm.

Recently, in a highlighted case of two teenager sisters Reena and Ravina who converted from Hinduism, the Islamabad High Court constituted a commission comprising Dr Shireen Mazari, Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani, Ms Khawar Mumtaz, Dr Mehdi Hassan and I A Rehman, and Maj (r) Azam Suleman Khan.

On the directions of the honourable chief justice of the IHC, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and I submitted our reports separately on May 14, seeking solutions to end forced conversions and child marriages. It is a good sign that all sensible parliamentarians, regardless of their political affiliations, the civil society, media, and the public are currently on one page to curb this social crime which is not only increasing a sense of insecurity among patriotic vulnerable minorities but also giving a bad name to our beloved country.

The well-researched and detailed report on behalf of the commission con-

stituted by Islamabad High Court disclosed that at least 300 such cases are being reported every year. The report also contained a list of forced conversions cases, highlighting that the vast majority of persons affected are girls aged 12-16 years of age.

I believe that this is the right time for serious legislation against forced conversions and child marriages. The report submitted by the HRCP also endorsed my point of view that dual vote right should be given to non-Muslim minorities to elect genuine representatives in parliament through election, not selection.

In Sindh, the number of cases has been so high that a bill on forced conversions was passed by the Sindh Assembly in 2015. However, it was later withdrawn by the Sindh government.

Unlike controversial Bharchundi, all other widely-respected spiritual shrines, including Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, Sachal Sarmast, Qalandar Lal Shahbaz are not involved in patronizing forced conversions. The HRCP report stated that, while suggesting an independent commission of minorities to deal specifically with such issues.

The HRCP report also noted that the provincial government had not done much to address the issue. Therefore, the chief minister of Sindh must grant an interview appointment to the Hindu community in order to be acquainted with the grievances and plight of religious minorities.

Informing the honourable high court about my recently-tabled bills in the National Assembly, I recommended that specific courts must be notified to hear cases of forced conversion and that, until such notifications are issued,

courts of competent jurisdiction shall hear all such cases.

Moreover, the government must form a particular commission, committee or institution to oversee the effort to end this social crime. No person shall be deemed to have changed their religion until they attain the age of majority (18 years) is something I had emphasized in my 20-point recommendation report.

In case of alleged forced coercion of an adult, the court shall allow the alleged victim 21 days for an independent decision regarding conversion to a new religion before initiating a case of forced conversion. During this time period, he or she may be provided the opportunity to study comparative religions of he or she desires.

Upon completion of the time period, the victim shall record a statement before the court stating whether he or she has converted his or her religion with their own consent and will. "No report in any newspaper, magazine, news sheet or any mode of social media of any case or proceeding in any court in which a child or a person of unsound mind is involved, shall disclose the name, address or school or include any particulars calculated to lead directly or indirectly to the identification of any such child or person of unsound mind."

It is good that the issue of forced conversions and child marriages is now being taken serious. I am quite hopeful that very soon we will succeed in ending this injustice forever.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS

Editor-in-Chief **Mir Shakil-ur-Rahman**

Senior Editor **Talat Aslam**

Vol. 29 No. 62

Ramazan 18, 1440 A.H

Phones: 32630611-15

PO Box 52, Karachi

Friday, May 24, 2019

US-Iran tensions

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



At the moment, when Pakistan is facing severe economic crisis due to the hike in dollar rates, another horrific war is likely to break out between Iran and the US.

The recent threatening tweet by US President Donald Trump against Iran is really a matter of serious concern. Trump has already pulled the US out of the Iran nuclear deal, signed by the Obama regime. This has resulted in strict economic sanctions on Iran.

On the other side, the Iranian leadership has vowed to defend the motherland at any cost. Some analysts are of the view that Pakistan must focus on the improvement of its own internal matters, and thus, should stay away from Iran-US tussle. However, I think this is not practical approach and we should prepare ourselves to face this unwanted crisis.

In the context of our unique geo-strategic position, active role in the Saudi-led joint military alliance, as a frontline ally of the US to curb terrorism, a large Shia population and, above all, historical, cultural and religious ties with Iran, it is not possible for us to be neutral. My stance is also supported by the recent letter by the Pakistan government to Iran regarding the Pak-Iran gas pipeline.

According to the international media, the Middle East region is currently facing the worst kind of instabil-

ity and crises. Iran is being blamed by the US for the recent attacks on vessels off the UAE coast. Similarly, Saudi Arabia is also accusing Iran of supporting Houthi insurgents in Yemen and providing weapons to them.

According to the American media, the US is deploying a Patriot missile-defence system to the Middle East region against Iran. The US is justifying such moves due to possible threat to US forces in the region by Iran. Another regional player, Israel, is also busy in lobbying to ensure an attack on Iran.

There was a time when Iran was a close ally of both the US and Israel but after the 1979 revolution, anti-Americanism gained credence throughout the country, and the US was declared an evil power by the new Iranian leadership. In this situation, the Iran-US nuclear deal by the previous US government was welcomed by the international community as a big achievement for regional peace.

I believe that the Prime Minister Imran Khan led government has to face many new challenges. One of these is the ongoing US-Iran tension. The Middle East situation is very complex for us due to the fact that Pakistan has equal respectable diplomatic relations with the US, Iran and Saudi Arabia from day one.

Iran is the first country that not only recognized Pakistan after Independence but also provided solid support to us during the Indo-Pak wars. On the other hand, Pakistan has the honour to be a close ally of Saudi Arabia. Pakistan also preferred to ally with the US. Even

today, peace in Afghanistan is impossible without the active support of Pakistan.

In my view, our diplomatic relations with any country should not be sabotaged due to any international conflict. Our diplomatic policy is currently based on the point that we will not allow anyone to use our soil against any country. However, before the start of any new military clash in our neighbouring country, we have to use all diplomatic channels to convince the international community about the devastation of war. We should not be reluctant to offer mediation in this regard. I am sure that US-Iran conflict will also be not in the interest of China, Russia, France, the UK and Germany which were also party to the US-Iran nuclear agreement.

We should not forget that the Iran border is adjacent to Balochistan, where the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is being developed rapidly. The flames of a war can engulf the entire region. As a result, once again Pakistan may have to face a large number of refugees. Such a war can push our economy back too.

Therefore, we must keep urging that war is not the solution, but in fact is a problem in itself. All countries must sit together to resolve this issue through dialogue in a peaceful way. There is also a dire need for Pakistani media to build this national narrative on the ongoing Iran-US tensions.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.

Twitter: @RVankwani

THE NEWS

Monday, June 3, 2019

After the election

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



This year after my visit to India, I predicted a win by more than 300 seats by the Narendra Modi led BJP alliance in India's Lok Sabha elections. The historic landslide victory of Modi proved my estimate was realistic on the basis of ground realities and public opinion.

The Congress-led opposition coalition has faced a bad defeat, with even Rahul Gandhi being defeated by former TV actress Smriti Irani. The Indian elections have been declared the world's biggest election because of the 90 crore eligible voters. However, it is very unfortunate that, like previous elections, anti-Pakistan narrative was used by some political elements during their election campaigns.

Modi is supported by not only the majority of the Indian people but the international community too has warmed to him. In this regard, Modi's political advisers and media managers used brilliant tactics to pave the way towards his victory. For example, in previous elections, Modi was introduced as 'chai wala' (tea boy) to win the support of the poor peo-

ple. This time, his political image was projected as a 'chowkidar' (watchman) who is always ready and alert to protect his motherland from "corrupt, criminals and anti-social" elements. Following Narendra Modi, various BJP leaders including Sushman Swaraj also added the word 'chowkidar' to their names on their official Twitter accounts.

One aspect worth mentioning is the acceptance of the polls results by all parties without raising any issue of rigging. Congress Chief Rahul Gandhi, while accepting his defeat, congratulated Modi on his victory. Rahul also congratulated his opponent Smriti Irani on her success.

Although Rahul Gandhi had taunted that the watchman is actually a thief, this couldn't help the Congress to win. Modi's record on minorities is known to the world. Yet, he has now apparently expressed the resolve to win the trust of everyone including minorities. During his victory speech, he announced that the country will now have only two castes – the poor and those who want to alleviate poverty. He dedicated the victory to the people who, according to him, are desperate for honesty in the system.

Despite our differences with some of Modi's policies, we have to agree that as compared to previous elections, the re-

cent polls in India were conducted peacefully. Another noticeable aspect, in my view, is the success of a large number of female politicians in the Lok Sabha elections; Indian Muslims too cast their valuable votes.

Today, when Narendra Modi is talking about transforming his country into a New India, he must know that across the border the PTI is also committed to establish a New Pakistan under the leadership of Prime Minister Imran Khan. I am happy that Modi has also positively responded to the congratulatory message sent to him by Imran Khan. However, Modi's decision for not inviting Pakistani counterpart in his oath-taking ceremony resulted in hurting peace-loving citizens of both sides.

Modi must not hesitate to cooperate with Prime Minister Imran Khan for resolving the long-standing bilateral conflicts in order to achieve regional peace, stability and poverty alleviation. Similarly, Pakistan must also adopt a realistic approach in this regard. Let's hope that peace will prevail in both countries.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.

Twitter: @RVankwani

Responsible reporting

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



During my interactions with the media, I have been told many times about the hurdles that journalists are facing in our country. I believe that the history of journalism is as old as the history of life on this planet.

From day one, humans have wanted to have better communication with each other for better understanding. In ancient times, people used to express their views through symbols, colours and pictures. That can also be called the beginning of journalism. Later on, the invention of different languages, scripts, alphabets, and most importantly, the development of the printing press resulted in the formalization of the media industry.

Newspaper, radio, television and after that the internet, and the smartphone, introduced new horizons in the fields of modern journalism and today, every person not only wants to stay updated with the latest news but also wants to contribute to the dissemination of news through social media.

In the era of digital journalism, any tweet or viral video clip has the potential to become breaking news for traditional media. Due to this, it is becoming very difficult to distinguish between an authentic news report by a professional journalist and a sensational news post by amateurs

for the sake of earning likes and retweets. Therefore, the traditional structure of the news industry is also being forced to substantially modify itself, affecting the core values of the profession and its ethics.

In my view, journalism is a sacred profession, where a journalist, using his/her pen, plays the noble role of spreading truth for the betterment of society.

Obviously, the long journey of the media is still going on with immense difficulties and hurdles. Almost in every part of the world, the journalist community has to pay heavy sacrifices in search of the truth. According to a report, Pakistan is believed to be one of the dangerous countries for journalists where many journalists lost their lives while carrying out their professional duties.

While paying tribute to all those brave and legendary journalists, I would like to say that the final victory is always of the truth. World history has witnessed that in every era, good people used the pen to prove their arguments, and today after hundreds of years, their good work is still acknowledged. Is it not strange that Socrates, who took poison thousands years ago for the sake of the truth, is even alive in the history but those who punished him are lost in the darkness of past?

It is the right of every journalist to have the freedom to practise fact-based reporting without any fear. However, the journalist community must also devise a reliable mechanism to be self-accountable. For the sake of responsible journalism, the media must not reluctant to highlight those who

are a source of bad name to the entire sacred profession of journalism.

We are also religiously bound to not spread rumours, and fake and negative information which may harmful for the society. While using social media, we have to be careful while expressing our views, especially regarding national ideology. Many malicious elements are found spreading negativity and hopelessness among the nation. It is duty of every patriot journalist to defeat the nation by promoting responsible journalism, while keeping patriotism and national interest on top priority.

The government should also not pressurize the media either directly or indirectly. If someone has any problem with any media outlet, he/she must consult proper forums like Pemra for redressal. For this purpose, Pemra should constitute a committee with a good reputation and credibility, both in the eyes of the media and the public, so that the decisions and recommendations are acceptable for everyone.

However, unconstitutional steps such as the closure of television channels or halting government advertisements must be discouraged at any cost. Being strong advocate of responsible media, I believe that there should be no compromise on press freedom in our beloved country.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.

Twitter: @RVankwani

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS

Friday, June 21, 2019

European values

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



French author Gustave Flaubert once said that "Travel makes one modest.

You see what a tiny place you occupy in the world." No doubt, tourism puts great impact on the human personality, bringing positive change in terms of exposure, awareness, learning and interactions.

Keeping this in view, every year I ensure to dedicate at least one month exclusively to tourism for visiting other countries. While writing these lines, I am currently on a European tour to spend quality time with my family. During our stay here, we are visiting a number of places in France, Spain, Italy and Switzerland.

Europe is considered the birthplace of Western civilization. However, the region was once involved in the worst kinds of conflicts. A number of countries also faced oppression by neighbouring countries. Europe was also victim of intolerance due to religious differences. The era of the Soviet Union also resulted in the separation of the eastern and western parts of Europe.

Being a student of history, it is quite interesting for me that European countries, which were the worst of enemies just a few decades ago, are now united under the umbrella of the European Union. It was the legendary leadership of Sir Winston Churchill who presented the idea to

unify Europe to achieve common goals, resulting in the Council of Europe in 1949. The EU which initially originated in Western Europe has witnessed expansion after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Currently, 28 European countries are active members of the union.

According to historians, the Peace of Westphalia laid the landmark foundation of modern international relations, based on co-existence, sovereignty and tolerance. It was actually a series of peace treaties signed between May and October 1648 in the Westphalian cities to seek the end of European wars of religion, most importantly, the Thirty Years' War. During my Euro tour, I am also trying to analyse the long tireless struggle of the European people to attain this achievement.

Although Europe covers not more than two percent of the Earth's surface, the European Union represents a highly populated and culturally diverse alliance of 28 member countries. According to a report of January 2018, the population of the EU has reached 512.6 million people. Having a single currency, the Euro, traveling from one country to another is very easy. However, it is quite alarming that every year the devaluation of the Pakistani rupees increases the rate of currency exchange.

The European Union's fundamental values, as I observe, are respect for human dignity and human rights, faith freedom, democracy, good governance, equality for all and most importantly, the rule of law. These wonderful values create a strong bond among all member

states. It is cleared for every one that no country that does not recognise these values can belong to the Union.

This is the main reason that the EU member states are pluralistic in nature. All government officials are required to ensure respect of others and be tolerant. Gender equality and women's empowerment can be seen in every walk of life. Keeping the main objective of the EU to defend these values in view, the European Parliament also seeks to ensure that these principles must be reflected in the EU legislation.

In my view, since the idea of unifying Europe was floated, the unity of European countries is a success story for the entire world community. Economically, it succeeded to create a much bigger market for economic growth and stability. Strategically, it also helps to contribute more effectively and efficiently, both at regional and international levels. I think the role of Pakistani embassies is quite important to promote cordial relations with the EU.

There are also many lessons that can be learned to move our beloved country towards peace and prosperity. If Europe, having so many differences, can be united to achieve peace and posterity then what are the hurdles for us to not unite? This is the question whose answer I am still trying to find during my Europe tour.

**The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani**

Reviving Sharada Peeth

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



On the special invitation of Prime Minister Azad Jammu Kashmir Raja Farooq Haider Khan, I am currently leading a delegation of the Pakistan Hindu Council to visit the most beautiful valley of the world, Neelum. The purpose of our visit is to extend our cooperation to the AJK government for the revival of the ancient holy temple site of Sharada Peeth.

I am highly obliged to PM Raja Farooq, who along with his cabinet and speaker of the AJK Assembly, welcomed us warmly. The love and respect we received during the dinner held at the PM House in honour of Hindu delegates can never be forgotten. The Pakistan Hindu Council delegation comprises Advisor Raja Asser Mal Manglani, President Gopal Khamuani, Secretary General Parshotam Ramani, and Prem Kumar Talreja.

During our visit to the LoC, we also showed solidarity with brave armed forces who are sacrificing their precious lives to defend our beloved motherland. I am thankful to AJK Secretary Tourism AJK Midhat Shahzad for all the arrangements and hospitality.

It is indeed a great honour for me to visit the Sharada site as the first Hindu follower since the partition in 1947. The current visit not only fulfils my religious sentiments but is also strengthening my commitment to promote interfaith harmony and faith tourism in Pakistan, and project the positive image of our country as well.

In ancient Hindu holy books, the Neelum river is named Kishanganga, Sindhu-Ganga and Maha Ganga. In Hinduisim, Sharada Mata is the goddess of knowledge, wisdom, and learning.

It is commonly believed that Sharada Peeth was built two thousand years ago

during the era of Ashoka the Great. In Hindi language, the word 'Peeth' is used for a centre of learning and teaching. Thousands of students used to stay here for the purpose of learning various skills. Some historians also discuss academic cooperation between the Sharada University and ancient Taxila University, famous for renowned scholar Kautliya Chanakya. Due to this importance, the entire Kashmir valley was called Sharada Desh in ancient civilization.

There was once a pond of holy water at the Sharada temple where devotees had for centuries taken holy baths. It is

There was a time when all Kashmiri people, regardless of religious affiliation, would join hands to celebrate the festivals of Nowruz and Baisakhi

believed that besides numerous lakes in the Kashmir Valley, at least three lakes are directly associated with the Sharada civilization. During our visit, we will also avail the opportunity to take a holy bath in the Madhumati and Tejjan streams.

An elderly local Kashmir man, while recalling his memories, told me that a large number of Hindu devotees used to visit the Sharada Peeth due to its sacred value. However, partition resulted in the migration of the Hindu population from the valley. According to him, the site was equally important for Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists. Sharada Peeth had even attracted devotees from China, Japan, Korea, Thailand and other parts of the world. There was a time when all Kashmiri people, regardless of religious affiliation, would join hands to celebrate the festivals of Nowruz and Baisakhi simul-

taneously to welcome the spring season.

Today is no doubt an historical day for the entire Hindu community which has been demanding that Sharada Peeth be opened up. On behalf of the Pakistan Hindu Council, I assured the AJK government our best cooperation in this regard. I also presented a comprehensive work plan for the revival of the holy site. Initially, Sharada Peeth must be opened for Pakistani nationals as a heritage site, and visitors must come here via the Kohala route. In my views the access for those in Indian-occupied Kashmir may be considered in the next phase, depending upon the trade and travel opening. Similar reciprocal arrangements must also be ensured by India.

After the complete revival and rehabilitation of the Sharada Peeth, I will also request the Indian government that the original statue of Sharada Mata be returned back to us.

There is also a message here for India and the international community – that Pakistan is committed to ensure regional stability, world peace, interfaith harmony and protection of minorities' rights.

With the support of the AJK government, it is my dream to transform Sharada Peeth, a site that belongs to a non-Muslim minority in a Muslim majority country. I am quite confident that the place, known for learning, will once again succeed in showing people how the rights of minorities can be protected in a state.

While paying great respect to Sharada Mata, I am here praying for the peace and prosperity of Pakistan, the Kashmiri people and the entire region. Let's hope that the Hindu community and local Kashmiri people will jointly welcome the next spring season in the Sharada Peeth.

**The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani**

On Canada

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



This week, July 1, the people of Canada celebrated the 152th birthday of their country. In this connection, various events were held throughout Canada, with people expressing their patriotism and respect for their country and fellow citizens.

Canada was also once ruled by the British. On July 1, 1867, the British parliament passed the British North America Act to form the Dominion of Canada. The act, now known as Constitution Act 1867, resulted in merging the separate colonies of Canada, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick into a united country. One year later, there were demands for a national day to mark its formation. However, the federal government first recognized Dominion Day in 1879.

The national day was officially named Canada Day in 1982. Over the years, Canadians have embraced the national holiday, with a purpose to celebrate the country's rich history and noble achievements.

The history of the Canadian flag is also quite interesting. It is a result of the years-long struggle of the Canadian people to distinguish Canada as a sovereign independent country and reflect its self-governance. Historically, it was proposed in 1895 that Canada must have its own national flag. At that time, despite independence from the British, the Union Jack was used in Canada.

After 30 years, a committee of the Privy Council started researching possi-

ble designs but was unable to deliver the required results. In 1946, once again a similar task was given to a parliamentary committee which received more than 2,600 designs. Due to the volume, it was quite difficult to call upon parliament to formally vote.

In 1964, then prime minister of Canada Lester B Pearson announced in the House of Commons that the government was interested in adopting a distinctive national flag. As a result, submissions for flag designs were called once again. Finally, the House of Commons, in a resolution on December 15, 1964, approved the current design of national flag; this was followed by the Senate on December 17, 1964.

Finally, on February 15, 1965 Queen Elizabeth II participated in an official ceremony, held at Parliament Hill, to raise the new maple leaf flag. The enthusiastic crowd was singing the national anthem, "O Canada", followed by the royal anthem, "God Save the Queen."

On the occasion, the then speaker of the Senate Maurice Bourget also elaborated the symbolic meaning of the flag, saying that: "The 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 one of the most developed countries in the world, and has opened its doors for all those who are talented. According to media reports, the expected number of new permanent residents this year is 330,800 and is expected to rise to 341,000 in 2020 and 350,000 for 2021. Canada is also one of the most educated countries. Every year, Canadian universities succeed to

attract a large number of foreign students.

Its advanced economy is considered among the top ten largest economies in the world. Canada is an active member of several prominent international forums, such as: the UN, Nato, the G7, the Group of Ten, the G20, the North American Free Trade Agreement and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. Being a founding member of the UN, Canada's foreign policy is based on world peace and international harmony. Its peacekeeping efforts are widely recognized in every part of the world.

Canada is religiously a diverse country; the 'Fundamental Freedoms' section of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms ensures liberty for every citizen to practise his/her faith. There is strict prohibition on promoting hatred on the basis of colour, race, gender, religion, ethnic origin, etc. The Canadian government is also committed to support other countries to ensure religious freedom there.

I have visited Canada many times and what I observe is that today, Canada is a sovereign independent country which is playing a pivotal role for the promotion of world peace, cultural and religious harmony, and strengthening democracy at all levels. The tireless struggle of the Canadian people for adopting their national flag demonstrates that genuine nations never ever give up on their national agendas.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

Chanakya's taxation

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



No doubt, the government is struggling hard to promote a tax culture among Pakistani citizens and businesses in order to raise revenue and achieve budgetary demands.

It is matter of honour that there was a great ancient philosopher, belonging to the regions of present-day Pakistan, who developed a most comprehensive and successful taxation system almost two thousand years ago.

Kautilya Chanakya was the actual king maker and man behind the successes of the great Hindu ruler, Chandragupta Maurya. The regime is still acknowledged due to the good governance during its time. Chanakya believed that the state must promote the economic welfare and fully regulate economic activities. In this regard, he advised that the king must start his day by getting reports on three most important issues – defence, revenue and expenditures.

"Kosha Moolo Danda", Chanakya wrote in first chapter of Arthashastra; this means 'revenue is the backbone of administration'. This verse in the Devanagari script is also part of the official logo of the income tax department of India. Arthashastra, written in the ancient holy language of Sanskrit, is considered the first ever book on public finance, public administration and fiscal laws in human history. The book widely covers many types of taxes in detail, including general sales tax, defence tax, import and export duties, toll tax, transaction tax, and royalty, etc.

"Just as one plucks fruits from a garden as they ripen, so shall a king have

the revenue collected as it becomes due. Just as one does not collect unripe fruits, he shall avoid taking tax that is not due because that will make the people angry and spoil the very sources of revenue," Chanakya writes in Arthashastra. According to him, tax should be levied once a year, and should not prove burdensome for the public. He insists that taxes should be levied according to the ability to pay.

He further emphasized that taxation should not be a painful process for the people and it is very necessary to ensure leniency and caution while deciding the tax structure. He recommended tax exemptions for the poor, the elderly and the needy. Chanakya was of the view that all achievements are highly dependent on finance. Therefore, serious attention must be paid to increasing the treasury on a priority basis. He believed that a large number of people paying tax on less rate are much better than a few people paying tax on heavy rates. Therefore, he emphasized on a wider range of the tax net.

Chanakya understood that taxation is most important source of income for the state, which is why revenue collection officials must be honest, dedicated and professional. According to him, negligence of duty, ignorance, corruption, arrogance, greed and non-professional attitude are the main reasons behind loss of revenue.

Interestingly, Chanakya defined the rules for foreign trade two thousand years ago. He proposed that import and export duties must be ranged between 4 percent and 20 percent. He also emphasized that international trade should not be like one-way traffic where one country imports so many goods from other countries and results in damaging the local industry. He warned that the national economy

would ultimately collapse if the state fails to maintain a balance of imports and exports. He also asked for special facilities for foreigner experts and businesspersons for knowledge sharing and technology transfer.

The basic principle of Chanakya's taxation doctrine was that the purpose of taxation must be to strengthen government to ensure public welfare and national development. According to him, the public must not be exploited by imposing heavy taxes more than one's ability to pay. In this regard, Chanakya, in a very smart way, quoted the example of the honey bee, saying that: "Governments should collect taxes like a honey-bee, which sucks just the right amount of honey from the flower without causing any harm."

Chanakya's teachings are still applicable. Anyone who follows such useful instructions can achieve success. Such great personalities must not be victimised on the basis of religious discrimination and biases.

Today, the current government is struggling tirelessly to enhance the tax net. In this regard, my advice is to follow Chanakya's tax doctrine. People must consider paying tax as though it were a religious obligation. There is also a dire need to convince people that, unlike past regimes, the money collected will not be used for the luxuries of the ruling elite. The government must also listen to the reservations of the public and the business community. Otherwise, the opposition may succeed in giving the government a tough time on the streets.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

THE NEWS

Friday, July 19, 2019

Mandela's vision

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Nelson Mandela International Day is observed every year on July 18 across the globe. The purpose is to acknowledge the tireless efforts of the great leader for ensuring equal civic rights for everyone in South Africa.

Being the first democratically elected black president of South Africa, Mandela is one of those great human beings in history who are still alive in the hearts of the people despite their physical departure from this mortal world. The UN General Assembly passed an unanimous resolution in November 2009 to celebrate his birthday on July 18 as Nelson Mandela International Day.

Today, South Africa is ranked among one of the developed countries of the world but just three decades ago, people there were suffering with racism and hatred. Although the era of British imperialism was over, white people were still in government. Deprived of fundamental rights, the black people were required to serve the white elite class.

All exploitative policies against the black population also had constitutional protection. Raising one's voice against injustice was considered an anti-state act. In such critical circumstances, Nelson Mandela publicly denounced the abuse of power by the government, which was pushing South Africa away from the path of development.

According to him, people living in such conditions are unable to positively contribute to the welfare of society. Thus, Mandela initiated the freedom struggle to

break the chains of slavery. In the charter of freedom, he wrote that "...South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people."

Due to such ideologies, the white government booked Mandela on treason charges and he was sentenced to life imprisonment. Defending himself in court, Mandela once again emphasized the importance of democracy, human rights, societal harmony and justice for all. He was of the view that education was the most powerful tool for socio-economic development. He was also an advocate of women's empowerment and gender equality.

Nelson Mandela spent 27 precious years of his life in jail but did not bend before the prejudiced government. On the other side, his closest companion Oliver Tambo carried on an organized campaign in favour of Nelson Mandela. Finally, the government had to listen to the public and free Mandela. People were given the chance to cast their vote independently without any discrimination in the country's first ever national elections. As a result, Nelson Mandela was elected as the first democratic black president in the entire history of South Africa.

Mandela was aware of the fact that he was in position to temporarily win the heart of black people by taking revenge from the white people. However, he adopted a policy of tolerance and forgiveness in the best interest of South Africa. Right after coming into power, Mandela took various concrete measures to maintain trust among both the black and the white population, to eradicate poverty, and to promote education. Merit was ensured throughout the country, and gov-

ernment officials from the white community were asked to keep serving people.

For the promotion of social harmony, eleven languages were recognized as national languages and cordial relations with the international community were developed on the basis of equality. After completing his tenure as president, Mandela kept himself engaged in welfare activities under the platform of the Mandela Foundation.

Mandela was a great visionary leader who demonstrated throughout his entire struggle that never ever falling in life is not success but rising after falling is a real achievement. Mandela believed that wise people, in order to achieve their noble cause, never hesitate to forgive their opponents. "If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner," Mandela had once stated.

Nelson Mandela was also privileged with many international awards, including the Noble Peace Prize, and Nishan-e-Pakistan. Several international personalities attended the funeral of the father of new South Africa and people from different faiths organized special prayers for his soul.

Today, Nelson Mandela is no more present among us, but the world still celebrates his birthday with the message that all conflicts can be solved with dialogue, and that to make this planet a beautiful place for everyone, we need to say goodbye to all kinds of biases and prejudices.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

The PM's visit

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



The recent visit to the US by Prime Minister Imran Khan along with the top military leadership was a most successful one. One of the most prominent aspects was to convey the message, in a very effective way, that all Pakistanis are on one page for moving our beloved country towards peace and prosperity.

The strategy to address a large number of overseas Pakistanis was really amazing and remarkable. The event not only motivated Pakistani-origin US citizens to contribute something positive for their motherland but also helped the US administration realize the huge popularity of PM Imran Khan. In the past, no Pakistani leader has had the courage to take such initiatives.

It is an undeniable fact that the US tends to develop bilateral ties on the basis of ground realities. Many rulers, mostly from third world countries, mistakenly believe that personal relations with the US leadership can be a guarantee to their rule. However, as soon as such rulers lose public support in their respective countries, the US changes its priorities.

Donald Trump is considered an unconventional politician who is used to expressing his views openly without much diplomacy. During his meeting with PM Imran Khan, he appreciated that Pakistan is a great country of great people. He positively acknowledged that Pakistan is helping the US a lot to solve the Afghanistan crisis.

The revolutionary change in Trump's attitude towards Pakistan is all due to the popularity of the Imran Khan led PTI government. PM Imran Khan un-

derstands that cordial relations with the US and the international community are very essential in order to tackle economic challenges. That's why he made clear during his recent visit that Pakistan is in need of trade not aid.

Historically, Pakistan has always considered itself a natural ally of the US. Our founding father Quaid-e-Azam, in a reply to the letter by then-president of the United States Harry Truman, vowed to establish friendly ties with the US and the international community. The US warmly welcomed the inde-

It is a good sign that the Trump administration is acknowledging the leading role played by Pakistan in the Afghan peace process

pendence of Pakistan, and established formal diplomatic relations on August 15, 1947.

The first official visit to the US by the first Pakistani prime minister Liaquat Ali Khan laid the foundation of bilateral relations on principles and our commitment to join the Western bloc, led by the US. Since then, every Pakistani government, either democratic or otherwise, has attempted to get closer to America.

During the cold-war era, Pakistan actively allied itself with the US. In response to the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan, Pakistan decided to become a front-line state. Pakistan played a crucial role on every front for helping the US become the only superpower in today's unipolar world.

It is indeed a good sign that the Trump administration is now acknowledging the leading role played by Pakistan in the Afghan peace process. In the past, Pakistan was blamed for being in contact with the Taliban but now PM Imran Khan is openly announcing this.

I believe that the history of the 1990s must not be repeated this time. Rather than only focusing on the withdrawal of US troops, it is also the responsibility of the US to ensure formation of a broad-based government in Afghanistan, which has representation from all Afghan segments. There is no harm in accepting the demand by the Taliban for a new national constitution.

Usually, American rulers avoid discussing the Kashmir issue, considering it a bilateral conflict between India and Pakistan. However, the way Trump showed his willingness to play the role of mediator to solve this long-awaited conflict is a ray of hope for all peace-loving people. This is not only a major breakthrough but also a diplomatic victory for Pakistan. It is worth mentioning that Trump has also succeeded in bringing both Korean countries closer. Therefore, he is also in a better position to use his influence in the best interests of Pakistan, India and the people of Kashmir.

This is a golden opportunity for the leaderships of Pakistan and the US to join hands for ensuring world peace, regional stability and security. The people of Pakistan are also excited to eagerly welcome Trump on a possible visit to Pakistan in near future. This is the right time to strengthen historical ties between both natural allies.

**The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani**

Natural allies

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



US President Donald Trump is an influential world leader who recently succeeded to bring South Korea and North Korea closer.

On many occasions, I have called Pakistan and the US natural allies due to the fact that both countries have deep roots in democratic struggle. If the Americans are proud of Abraham Lincoln then we honour Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Al Jinnah who is famous for his principles, dignity, character and democracy.

The US is among those first countries that established diplomatic relations with Pakistan. Bilateral relations were also promoted through public diplomacy. Many elderly Pakistani citizens still remember the historical visit of US Vice President Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s. A large number of people of Karachi stood by the roadside to welcome the honourable guest.

There was a man standing with his camel, waving at the US convoy. Lyndon Johnson was so impressed that he shook hands with him and invited 'Camel guy' to visit the US. And after a few months, Bashir Sarban reached there as the official guest of the US government. On the occasion, Johnson himself was present at the airport to receive him. The hospitality of the Americans showed their respect for friends. The media of both countries projected him as a symbol of Pak-US people friendship.

This was the golden era when Pak-US people-to-people contacts were on

the rise. Schoolchildren were provided milk packets, books, and stickers, etc as gift from the US. American libraries were established in major cities. Even if a child wrote a letter to the US for any support, s/he was facilitated positively. The father of a five-year-old Pakistani heart patient named 'Afshan' had asked the US for the medical treatment of his daughter. The US government not only invited them for a successful operation in a US hospital but also sent a team of American doctors to start heart surgery operations in Pakistan.

When Pakistan faced a crisis of food shortage, the US came forward to provide a huge quantity of wheat. USAID also initiated many development cooperation programmes. Pakistani students were provided scholarships in American universities. Exchange programmes were started.

It was very unfortunate that some common enemies succeeded in creating misunderstandings and mistrust among both countries. The situation became so tense that the US visa became almost impossible to attain for the Pakistani people. The movement of US nationals was restricted in Pakistan. Although, no Pakistani citizen was involved in the 9/11 tragedy, still Pakistan was linked with terrorism. Pakistan is still playing a leading role as a front-line state in the 'war against terror'. In fact, the innocent people of Pakistan have been victims of terrorism, violence and extremism. The unfortunate situation favoured some elements to exploit the sentiments of people for their vested interests.

Why are once-close-friends now blaming each other? The answer to this

question must be found by both governments jointly. In my view, diplomatic relations between both countries were cordial until the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Hollywood blockbuster movie 'Rambo III' can be watched in support of my stance. If the situation of Afghanistan after the exit of the Soviet Union is the main reason for all tensions, then the history of the 1990s must not be repeated by the US to once again leave the region alone at the mercy of extremists and war lords.

No doubt, Trump has pleased Pakistani people due to his stance on Kashmir. Pakistan is now eagerly looking forward to welcome him to Pakistan. Non-Muslim minority Pakistani citizens are also interested to present the real situation of religious freedom in the country. However, the new wave of terrorism, just after the return of PM Imran Khan from the US, must be considered part of the ongoing conspiracies to engage our brave armed forces of Pakistan on the border, and keep the US away from Pakistan.

The US must also use its influence on India for recognizing the crucial role of Pakistan in the Afghan peace process and to extend cooperation to curb terrorism in the best interests of world peace and regional stability.

Let's hope that PM Imran Khan and President Donald Trump will succeed in reviving people-to-people contacts between the two countries.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

THE NEWS

Friday, August 9, 2019

Long live Pakistan

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



During the recent joint session of parliament, all parliamentarians and media friends experienced a pleasant surprise to see the world's largest ever national flag, prepared by 60,000 green and white balloons, at the National Assembly Hall.

The huge flag, an initiative of the Pakistan Hindu Council, was the result of five days of hard work. The unique plan also succeeded to attract the attention of the Guinness Book of Records and the certificate will be issued before Independence Day on August 14.

The patriotic Hindu community has once again demonstrated its love for Pakistan at a critical time when India has revoked Articles 35-A and 370 of its constitution to suppress the people of Occupied Kashmir. This unfortunate situation is not only raising a sense of insecurity among the Kashmiri people but is also a violation of the Indian constitution.

This year, during my visit to India, I emphasized to the top leadership of India to understand the importance of cordial relations between both countries. When both Korean countries can join hands in the best interest of the Korean people, then why are we reluctant to initiate peace process? Even the countries that achieved independence after us are now among the world's developed ones countries. How long will we blame each other for all wrongdoings?

The motive behind the partition of the Subcontinent was to ensure regional stability and co-existence. Quaid-e-Azam was known as the ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity. Therefore, the leading role of non-Muslims such as Jogendranath Mandal and S P Sinha must not be ignored. We must not forget that Quaid-e-Azam had given Mandal a most important responsibility in his cabinet. He made clear on various occasions that Pakistan would emerge as a role model country where all citizens have to enjoy equal civic rights.

However, the sad demise of Quaid-e-Azam resulted in the empowerment of a few extremist elements on both sides. The Evacuee Trust Property Board is still non-functional without any capable Hindu chief. The national institution is supposed to look after as many as 1130 Hindu temples and 517 Gurdwaras across the country. The exclusion of non-Muslims in the federal cabinet and ministries without any just reason is another separate debate.

In my views, the upcoming US presidential elections can be a turning point for Pakistan in the sense that Trump is expected to adopt every strategy to win. He is well-aware that peace in Afghanistan is not possible without Pakistani support. However, he is least bothered to convince India for cooperating with Pakistan. The current situation of Kashmir is in fact conspiracy to engage the armed forces of Pakistan to the borders. Therefore, the US election can have long-term impacts on Pakistan and region, both positively and negatively.

During my speech at the joint session of parliament, I emphasized that

we must strengthen our economy and overcome internal differences in order to promote the Kashmir cause in an efficient and effective manner. Moreover, we must avoid using foul language and blame-game. Our focus of struggle must be to serve the national interests.

It is very unfortunate that we are not utilizing our geo-strategic position and leading role at the international level. History is witness that every great leader used to adopt realistic approach to solve conflicts. In this regard, I also quoted the Last Prophet (pbuh), Madina Model, and Nelson Mandela's vision to forgive opponents for the sake of societal harmony.

Therefore, a committee with representation of all parliamentary political parties must be formed on a priority basis. The representation of non-Muslims must be ensured in this regard. The committee must be given the task to mobilize the international community on the Kashmir issue. Today, 22 crore Pakistani people are standing with the innocent people of Kashmir, saying "Enough is enough".

We need to convey this solid message to the world including the UN and OIC that the entire Pakistani nation, regardless of political or religious affiliations, is on one page to support the Kashmir cause. We must keep highlighting our stance that the Kashmiri people must be given their just right to self-determination. Otherwise, typical speeches and condemnation statements are of no use for Kashmiris.

**The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani**

THE NEWS

Friday, August 16, 2019

Tourism infrastructure

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



After the hectic parliamentary schedule and other activities, I am currently visiting the northern areas to celebrate Independence Day. I have visited various parts of the world but there is no doubt that we have been blessed with all kinds of gifts of nature – geographically, historically, socially, culturally and in other aspects.

Three of the world's major mountain ranges – the Himalayas, Karakoram and Hindu Kush – are connected to each other here in the Naran valley. The second highest peak K2 is also located here. The queen of mountains, Malika Parbat, is about a few kilometres south of Lake Saiful Muluk and near Ansoo Lake. The Kunhar River, famous for its crystal clear water and delicious trout fish, originates from Lulusar Lake from the Naran valley and flows throughout the entire Kaghan and Balakot.

Like other ancient places, there are also many folk tales associated with the Kaghan valley. Saiful Muluk, a mountainous lake located near the town of Naran, is named after a legendary prince who fell in love with a beautiful fairy. The folk tale, written by renowned Sufi poet Mian Muhammad Bakhsh, gave the lake worldwide fame. Even today, it is believed that fairies used to dance here each full moon night. Similarly, Aansu Lake is linked with the tears of the prince, who once wept here in pain of separation from the fairy.

During my tour, I also visited the most beautiful valley of Hunza situated in

Gilgit-Baltistan. The Attabad Lake, created nine years ago as a result of landslides, is one of the popular tourist attractions offering many recreational activities such as: boating, jet skiing, swimming, and fishing.

Promoting tourism is part of the current government's priorities and PM Imran Khan has also expressed his commitment on various occasions. But during my recent tour what I observed is that we need to take concrete steps for improving the basic infrastructure of tourist destinations on a priority basis. The key to the success of any international tourist attraction is easy access. Unfortunately, the condition of various roads is miserable here. Finding public washrooms is not less than a nightmare for tourists. In today's digital era, unavailability of internet and wi-fi facilities is another disappointment.

During my three-day tour, I stayed at the PTDC motels which were located at very beautiful places. The motels, managed by the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation, are playing a pivotal role for attracting tourists. However, reports about a possible handover of control to provinces in the near future is not only creating panic among PTDC employees but also affecting performance. There is a dire need to define a solid strategy for its effective and efficient operation. In addition, there are dozens of other privately-owned hotels and restaurants throughout the area but due to lack of proper check and balance, many tourists face genuine issues.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is one of the biggest mega projects of this century and has the potential to up-

lift us socio-economically. In my view, this mega project can also have a positive impact on tourism. Various development projects under CPEC are directly or indirectly linked with the tourism industry. Therefore, we must also consider establishing a National Tourism Development Authority at the federal level.

The proposed tourism authority must be given the task to define the national vision for tourism and must be responsible for keeping a check and balance and handle all kinds of tourism affairs across the country. The authority, having representation from each province, must allocate tourism funds to elected representatives of the respective destination. The authority must open membership for domestic and international tourists who are interested in visiting Pakistan. The authority may also provide facilities such as ensuring quality standards, tourism directory, registration of hotels and tour guides, ranking of tourist destinations, and emergency rescue support, etc.

I believe that this will also be beneficial to tackle the economic crisis in terms of securing foreign exchange reserves. Instead of going abroad, many tourists, like myself, would prefer to spend quality time in our own beloved country. Similarly, foreign tourists would also visit Pakistan and return with good memories. This will boost our soft image in the eyes of the international community.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

THE NEWS

Friday, August 23, 2019

A wise decision

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Prim Minister Imran Khan has approved an extension in the tenure of present Army Chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa for a period of three more years. The wise decision has been taken in the context of ongoing regional security situation.

Last year, on the occasion of World Peace Day, my column (September 21, 2018) elaborated on the effectiveness of the Bajwa Doctrine for our national security and regional stability. In my column, I also highlighted a report by a renowned British security think tank, the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). The report quoted leading American generals and officers acknowledging positive role of our brave armed forces under the supreme command of Gen Bajwa.

The Bajwa Doctrine emerged at that critical time when bilateral relations between Pakistan and the US were very tense. Moreover, at least three international doctrines were actively targeting Pakistan. First, there was the Cold Start Doctrine by India which aimed to keep Pakistan's armed forces engaged at the eastern border. That's why, more than 80 percent of Indian armed forces were deployed at Pakistani border. The recent tension in Occupied Kashmir and aggressive behaviour by the Indian leadership could also be considered part of this military doctrine.

The second most important doctrine was the Af-Pak doctrine introduced by the Obama administration. According to this, a joint policy is required for handling the entire region of Afghanistan and Pakistan as a single unit in the 'war on terror'. However, critics alleged that it actually aimed to move the war ground from Afghanistan to Pakistan gradually. Sectarian violence, extremism, suicide bombings and guerrilla attacks at that time were directly linked with Afghan elements. Some tweets by US President Trump, during his initial tenure, also showed his commitment to keep following this Af-Pak Doctrine.

Another most dangerous doctrine, known as the Fifth Generation Warfare is allegedly adopted by many enemies of Pakistan. The purpose of this harmful doctrine was to destabilize Pakistan by targeting its ideology. However, DG ISPR Asif Ghafoor has warned the Pakistani nation about its hazards and potential risks. No doubt, some anti-state elements want to create misunderstandings among different segments of society, to confuse people with propaganda in the shape of fake news, and to promote sectarianism and separatism. The maligning of national institutions obviously leads towards anarchy, unrest, violence, and bad governance.

In such critical circumstances, the Bajwa Doctrine successfully confronted all conspiracies. Operation Raddul Fasaad has played a key role to curb the remnants of terrorism across the country.

In order to raise the morale of Pakistani soldiers, the army chief offered Eid prayers with them at the LOC. Keeping the economic crisis of the country in view, the COAS refused the annual increment in the defence budget. The COAS and his core team also accompanied Prime Minister Imran Khan during his recent historical visit to the US and presented Pakistan's stance in a brilliant way. He demonstrated that our political and military leaderships are on one page for the sake of national security and prosperity.

It is in fact a landmark achievement of the Bajwa Doctrine that the US, once known for demanding "Do More" is now seeking Pakistan's cooperation regarding Afghanistan. Despite all the smart Indian moves, the Kashmir issue has come under discussion in United Nations Security Council. Today, our patriotic Pakistani youth is successfully confronting fifth generation warfare propaganda on social media. Similarly, the US government is no more using 'Af-Pak' as a term. China has also welcomed Gen Bajwa's extension, acknowledging his positive role in strengthening bilateral ties and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project.

At the moment, the entire nation is appreciating the wise decision by the prime minister.

**The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani**

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS

Editor-in-Chief **Mir Shakil-ur-Rahman**

Senior Editor **Talat Aslam**

Vol. 29 No. 157

Zilhaj 28, 1440 A.H

Phones: 32630611-15

PO Box 52, Karachi

Friday, August 30, 2019

Call for humanity

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Every sensible peace-loving human is worried about the tense situation in Occupied Kashmir. It is human nature to cry in response to pain. In my view, it is the worst kind of cruelty and barbarism to silence the voices of the oppressed Kashmiris. There is complete ban on the internet, media and any other form of communication in IoK. The people of Kashmir are not allowed to even communicate with other human beings. Due to the prevailing curfew, Kashmiris are unaware what exactly is going on with their loved ones.

After such brutality in Kashmir, I do not think that India has any right to claim itself a secular democracy. After the violation of the so-called agreement between Maharaja Hari Singh and first Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, India is now labelled as an occupying power.

India is trying its best to validate its controversial moves through a parliamentary process. It is good to see that some peace-loving Indian citizens have successfully moved the Supreme Court of India on this sensitive issue. The Indian leadership must not forget that the French parliament, during the colonial era, had also passed similar legislation to declare Algeria its integral part. However, such moves didn't help France curb the Algerian independence movement.

Such tactics are proving that the Modi government is following the footsteps of Hitler-led Nazi Germany. The truth, though, is that the Nazis are now history and today nobody likes to associate with them.

Ironically, while making Kashmir bleed, the Indian government did not consider that the religious festivals of Muslims (Eid) and Hindus (Krishna Janmashtami) were also looming. In such critical circumstances, a news report attributed to the US President Trump also emerged, stating that: "Kashmir is a very complicated place. You have Hindus and you have the Muslims and I wouldn't say they get along so great. I will do the best I can to mediate." Here, I would like to comment that the diverse society of the Indian subcontinent is traditionally based on tolerance, interfaith harmony and pluralism. For hundreds of years, Hindus and Muslims have lived together peacefully. It was actually British imperialism which promoted unwanted policies of 'divide and rule' in order to occupy the region.

In Sadiqabad, thousands of patriotic Hindu nationals, while showing solidarity with Kashmir, demonstrated that a true follower of Krishna never ever engages in hatred and anarchy. Our holy book Bhagavat Gita is entirely based on Krishna's teaching of love, peace and humanity. On the occasion, a large number of Pakistani Hindu citizens were also holding flags of Pakistan and Azad Kashmir.

My message to the US president is that the Kashmir issue is not compli-

cated; its rather simple. According to the Indian Independence Act 1947 passed by the UK parliament, every princely state was allowed to either join India / Pakistan or stay independent. If the people of East Timor and South Sudan can get independence through referendum then depriving Kashmiris of their right to self-determination must also be considered a grave violation of UN resolutions.

In the past, I tried many times to convince the Indian leadership to solve our bilateral conflicts. I once again urge Indian PM Modi to apologize to the innocent people of Kashmir and adopt a realistic approach. In the 21st century, it is not possible to control any region through military power.

I believe that the civil society, media and every peace-loving citizen, regardless of national and religious affiliation, will keep pushing India to solve the Kashmir issue for the sake of humanity. On August 31, PM Imran Khan, on the invitation of the Hindu community, will also address a Kashmir solidarity Jalsa at Umarkot, Tharparkar.

In the next stage, the Pakistani Hindu community will also organize solidarity events at in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and even at the LoC, Azad Kashmir. I would also like to lead a fact-finding delegation to Occupied Kashmir in the near future.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

The Hinduvta myth

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



I was recently invited by a TV channel to express my views on the rise of Hinduvta in India, especially in the context of the Kashmir crisis. I categorically denounced Hinduvta, and explained that no such thing is found in Hinduism.

Like all other religions, Hinduism also teaches us to serve humanity, help mankind, and support the vulnerable. It also urges to stand against brutality, cruelty and evil.

The Kashmir issue, despite the immense sacrifices of the Kashmiri people over 72 years, is still not resolved. The main reason, in my opinion, is the way it has been complicated on the basis of religious biases, ego and arrogance.

The entire history of the Subcontinent shows us that our society is traditionally based on interfaith harmony, tolerance, pluralism and diversity. However, the slogan of Hinduvta was first raised in British India after World War I. This was the era when the Ottomans were defeated and British imperialism was promoting nationalism everywhere in order to design a new world order. The term 'Hindutva' is used to show the promotion of religious extremism and nationalism following in the footsteps of Hitler-led Nazi Germany.

After Independence, the first victim of this extremist ideology was none but Mahatma Gandhi. He was a true follower of Ahimsa, one of most important values of

Hinduism. Ahimsa is a word from the holy Sanskrit language, which means 'to not kill and to not injure'. That's why it is strongly recommended to be vegetarian rather than eating any animal or bird. According to Hindusim, violence and bloodshed must be avoided at any cost for the sake of mankind, and doors for dialogue must not be closed. Keeping this in view, I visited India for a meeting with their top leadership so as to impress upon them to refrain from war.

The basic teachings of our holy books, the Bhagavad Gita and Ramayan, focus on becoming good human beings to serve mankind. All the Hindu rulers had ensured religious harmony, societal tolerance and pluralism under their rule.

Helping the oppressed is another key virtue of Hindusim. It is said that during the Karbala tragedy, a Hindu named Rahib Dutt and his twelve sons also sacrificed their precious lives in support of Hazrat Imam Hussain. Even today there is a Hindu community called Hussaini Brahmin who mourn every year in the month of Muharram.

The current Indian government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is known to follow the so-called Hinduvta agenda. The insane policies being adopted in Indian-held Kashmir show that the Modi government is violating the peaceful teachings of Hindusim. Kashmiri people were not allowed to offer Eid prayers. For the last one month, strict curfew has been implemented in the occupied valley. Such miserable conditions are alarming for every peace loving good

human being; no true Hindu can justify Modi's oppression of innocent Kashmiris. Today, a large number of peace-loving Indians are also raising a voice in favour of the Kashmiri people.

The Hindu community residing in Pakistan, firm believes in following the true teaching of Hindusim and rejecting all kinds of extremist ideologies. Therefore, the Pakistani Hindu community organized successful events in Sadiqabad, Punjab and Umerkot, Sindh to show solidarity with Kashmir. Preparations for another historic event at Sharda Peeth Temple, LoC are currently going on.

In the next stage, similar events will be organized in other provinces to show the true peace-loving face of Hinduism. I would like to invite every Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian and follower of other faiths to join hands to support the oppressed without discrimination of religion and nationality.

The occupation of Kashmir and Palestine, the aggression against Bosnia, the barbarism against the Yazidi community by the Daesh, the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya and the attacks against patriotic minorities even in Pakistan prove that such extremist ideologies are present in every society.

I would also like to ask the Pakistani government to abstain from defaming any religion while discussing the Kashmir conflict.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.

Twitter: @RVankwani

THE NEWS

Friday, September 13, 2019

The road ahead

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Although the public still loves the charismatic personality of PM Imran Khan, it is also very important to determine to what extent the PTI succeeded in fulfilling the hopes of people after coming into power. There is no doubt on the commitment of the prime minister for overcoming the economic crisis and transforming Pakistan into a corruption-free land. At the same time, the one year performance of the government is raising many questions.

In my view, people voted for change and it is their right to see positive change in society. For a common Pakistani citizen, life is becoming more difficult day by day due to heavy taxes and inflation. Similarly, continuous reports regarding the Punjab Police are giving a bad name to the PTI government. After the Sahiwal tragedy, the prime minister himself had promised that he would take action against the culprits, but nothing happened.

The failure in changing the police torture culture further reflects the helplessness of the present government in the eyes of the general public. People are interested to know that if the provincial government of the PTI

in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa can engage IG Nasir Durrani for police reforms so brilliantly then what are the hurdles to bringing police reforms in Punjab and at the federal level?

I had shared my concerns with Prime Minister Imran Khan after his US visit, and said that we should adopt a careful approach. After a few days, the Indian aggression in Kashmir, more than one month of curfew in occupied valley, and silence from international community on Kashmir issue proved my stance. Despite standing half an hour in solidarity with Kashmir, what else we have done practically to reduce the sufferings of the Kashmiri people?

The great ancient philosopher Chanakya had advised thousands of years ago that before taking a decision think a hundred times but once decided then struggle for its implementation. The presidential ordinance to waive a hefty sum in loans, and then its withdrawal due to media pressure also left many PTI sympathizers wondering. No doubt, all such unwanted incidents are linked with past governments' policies. We must admit that Imran Khan's government can't correct everything just in one year but why has it not determined the right direction to achieve desired goals?

Prime Minister Imran Khan is still honoured on a national and interna-

tional level. Specially, the overseas Pakistani community is committed to supporting the PTI. However, it seems the prime minister is surrounded by some elements who are interested in their own interests.

Today, people still supporting the Imran Khan led PTI despite all the difficulties, but – being a well wisher of PM Imran Khan and a sincere PTI worker – I would like to state that people are about to lose patience because of inflation, price hikes and police brutalities. Similarly, patriotic non-Muslim communities in spite of their huge sacrifices are continuously ignored.

Prime Minister Imran Khan should ensure that the right person is appointed at the right place. Rather than favouring a few personal friends, the focus should be on devising wise policies and right decisions. Internal differences in the PTI's federal cabinet must be tackled. Positive criticism from sincere party members should be taken seriously.

People still feel proud of the charismatic personality of Prime Minister Imran Khan but now it is his turn to meet the expectations of the people without wasting further time.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.

Twitter: @RVankwani

THE NEWS

Friday, September 20, 2019

Yet another challenge

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



The mysterious drone attacks on strategic oil installations in Saudi Arabia have made the already vulnerable Middle East tense. This situation has not only affected the oil supply to the world but price hikes are also being observed in the international market.

According to media reports, the Yemen-based Houthi rebels have claimed responsibility for the attacks. However, the US accused Iran immediately after the incident. A few months ago, oil tankers of the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Norway were also targeted at the UAE port.

In this regional scenario, various global powers are also playing a critical role. If, at one end, the United States continues to threaten Iran then on the other end, Russia is firmly with Iran. However, China, Germany, the United Kingdom and other countries are in favour of peaceful solution. The silence of Muslim countries over various issues has proved that the so-called representative OIC has lost its effectiveness.

Iran has categorically denied being involved in the Saudi Arabia oil installations attacks. Following latest Indian aggression in Occupied Kashmir, this recent tense situation in the Middle East is leading Pakistan towards yet another critical and sensitive challenge on the diplomatic front.

Due to our unique geo-strategic position, both Saudi Arabia and Iran may seek Pakistan's help to support their stance. However, the current regional situation requires us to take a wise diplomatic step.

Historical facts disclose that superpowers, in order to fulfill their own vested interests, used to ignite fire during regional conflicts, which resulted not only in a flourishing weapons industry but later also led to these superpowers portraying themselves as saviours.

The Middle East has always faced war over the occupation of oil reservoirs. During the era of the Shah, Iran was considered America's policeman in the region, but after the Iranian revolution, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein emerged as America's favourite ruler. Iran and Iraq also encountered a purposeless war resulting in the loss of thousands of innocent lives. Ironically, the Kuwait invasion transformed Saddam Hussein as the worst enemy of America.

On the basis of such bitter historical facts, I believe that the Middle East is currently on the edge of a proper world war. Without Pakistani cooperation, it is very tough, if not impossible, for Saudi Arabia and the United States to take any extreme action against Iran. On the diplomatic front, the Iranian parliament has taken a laudable step by passing a resolution in favour of the oppressed people of Kashmir.

However, we also need to adopt a careful approach towards the US offer

of being a mediator in the Kashmir issue. In my view, America always makes deals on the basis of a give and take policy, while giving priority to its own interests. There are chances that America may demand something particular from Pakistan before playing the role of mediator for Kashmir, enforcing Musharaf's formula of accepting the LoC as a permanent border without giving Kashmiri people the right of self-determination.

Every issue of the world can be resolved through dialogue. Aggression only increases hatred, extremism and violence. Keeping this in view, it is my sincere advice to the world leadership to resolve their conflicts through bilateral dialogue without involving any third party.

The United Nation General Assembly session is scheduled to be held next week. I believe that on this important occasion all country heads should engage one-on-one meetings to ensure world peace. We must not forget that if third world war would start then it can engulf the entire planet.

Being Pakistani, our immediate focus should be on Occupied Kashmir and elimination of terrorism from the Pak-Afghan border. Pakistan should play a neutral and positive role towards the Middle East conflict and we should avoid becoming part of any new war.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.

Twitter: @RVankwani

Good neighbourhood

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



At the moment, when world leaders are attending the UN Session, American people are busy in preparations to celebrate

National Good Neighbour Day.

In the 1970s, the concept of celebrating a national day, in order to recognize the importance of good neighbours, was introduced in the US. It was proclaimed by then US President Jimmy Carter in 1978 with a purpose to raise awareness and build strong communities. National Good Neighbour Day is now celebrated every year on September 28 as a national holiday so that Americans can spend quality time with their neighbours.

On the diplomatic front, the focus of the US government is also to establish cordial relations with both its neighbouring countries, Canada and Mexico. Today, America is in laudable relationship with Canada. Along with sharing the world's longest border, both countries are not only strategic allies but also enjoying strong economic, cultural and defence partnerships. The signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (Nafta) by three countries had resulted in to boosting regional trade and investment.

During the 19th century, Mexico and America fought horrific wars over territorial disputes. However, later on both countries recognized the importance of resolving their bilateral conflicts through dialogue. The US-Mexico Boundary Treaty, signed in 1970, resulted in ending almost all disputes. Today, the US is largest trading partner of Mexico and the US's third largest trade partner is considered Mexico.

Every religion of the world emphasises to keep good relations with neighbours. The last Prophet (pbuh) offered

freedom to enemy prisoners in exchange for teaching Muslim children. Amnesty for everyone was announced after Mecca was conquered.

Geographically, our neighbouring countries are China, Afghanistan, Iran and India. In the past, Pakistan played a key role in connecting China with the modern world. China is also a firm supporter of Pakistan's stance on different international forums. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the largest development project of the century, is also an attempt to further strengthen friendship bonds.

Our other neighbour Iran was the first country to recognize and accept

Rather than involving any third party for mediation, we should resolve our conflicts with neighbouring countries through bilateral dialogue

Pakistan as a sovereign and independent state. In the past, some non-state actors caused bilateral relations to face ups and downs. Today, on the Kashmir issue, Iran is not only standing with us but the Iranian parliament also passed a resolution in solidarity with the Kashmiri people. We must also play a significant role to resolve the Iran-US tensions for the sake of regional stability. Pakistan should be well-aware about international conspiracies about both friendly countries, China and Iran, and we must not accept foreign pressure in this regard.

Unfortunately, our relations with Afghanistan have not been good since day one. We should analyse why there is such a lack of trust between us. Why

does Afghanistan always prefer India over Pakistan? The answer to such questions must be found for promoting a good neighbourhood.

Although Pakistan and India share a common history and culture, the countries have fought wars over Kashmir, and armed themselves with the latest technological weapons. Examples around the world show us that major disputes among countries are mostly over border conflicts but sensible and mature countries resolve their disputes through dialogue. To ensure the prosperity and betterment of their people, their leadership focuses on trading partnerships. Our neighbouring country China's example is before us.

In today's era, no country can progress in a state of isolation; establishing cordial relations with neighbours is essential for peace and prosperity. While adopting a realistic approach, we need to consider all those points because of which we are unable to resolve the long-standing issue of Kashmir and involving our country in new global conflicts. Ironically, our so called friendly countries for which we designed state policies are standing with Indian PM Modi.

The current situation is eye-opening for us that in this critical time China and Iran came forward to support us. On this occasion, I want to convey that we should learn from history and rather than involving any third party for mediation, we should resolve our conflicts with neighbouring countries through bilateral dialogue. In my view, free trade and people-to-people contacts between Pakistan and neighbouring countries could play a pivotal role in promoting good neighbourly relations.

**The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani**

Preacher of peace

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



On October 2, the world community observed the International Day for Non-Violence. According to a resolution passed by the UN General Assembly, the day is celebrated every year on the occasion of the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, one of the leaders of the Indian independence movement against British imperialism.

Gandhi is also known as a pioneer of the philosophy and strategy of non-violence in the modern era. The purpose of marking the day is to create awareness about non-violence, and to promote peace, tolerance, pluralism, harmony and diversity.

Gandhi was born 150 years ago in British India. While keeping a simple lifestyle, he spent his entire life preaching peace over violence and urging to stand against injustice. He proved that victory through force is temporary whereas real success always comes through truth and strong character. Due to his remarkable contributions to the non-violence movement, various international personalities including Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Dalai Lama and Barack Obama were inspired by him.

It is quite regrettable that the present leadership of his own country, India, has neglected the peace-loving ideology of Mahatma Gandhi. Similarly in Pakistan, we do not have much knowledge about history and there is much ignorance in this regard. People are unaware of some historical facts about Mahatma Gandhi.

After Partition, Gandhi went on a hunger strike with a demand to ensure provision of due rights to Pakistan and protection to Muslims. Gandhi also led a peace campaign in favour of Muslims. The peace pledge was signed by around 200,000 people, including Hindu, Sikh, Christian and other citizens, to show solidarity with the Indian Muslim minority.

Unfortunately, his support for Pakistan and Muslims became the reason of his assassination by an extremist. Now, Birla House in New Delhi, where Gandhi was killed, holds all-religion prayers on a daily basis. When the Subcontinent is burning in the fire of hatred and violence on the basis of religious discrimination, Gandhi's positive role and sacrifice will be remembered as a sincere effort to rebuild interfaith harmony and peace among communities.

Mahatma Gandhi's peace teachings are based on three core values – non-violence (Ahimsa), adherence to truth (Satyagraha) and self-rule and self-government (Swaraj). He believed that firm faith in God is the foundation of all moral values.

Gandhi studied different religions thoroughly for the welfare of humanity and interfaith harmony. While terming Islam as a religion of peace, Gandhi had a special devotion to Hazrat Imam Hussain.

The oppressed people of Indian-held Kashmir would never have to face such cruel atrocities if the present Indian government followed Gandhi's teachings. In fact, I believe that Gandhi would have definitely played a role in ending the Kashmir conflict. According to both Quaid-e-Azam and Gandhi, the purpose of Partition was to ensure re-

gional stability rather than creating two rival countries.

My message on the international day of non-violence is that Pakistan and India should resolve all their disputes including the Kashmir issue through bilateral dialogue. Both countries should focus on mutual cooperation. As Pakistanis, we should also practically adopt measures to protect Jinnah's Pakistan from violence. We should also ensure that the history of attacks on Hindu temples, most recently in Ghotki, must not be repeated. Similarly, we should make serious efforts to end our disputes with neighbouring countries through non-violent means.

Quaid-e-Azam, following his speech of August 11, took Jogendar Nath Mandel on board as a part of the cabinet. We should also practically involve the non-Muslim community in state decision-making processes. For the protection and proper care of 1130 Hindu temples, 517 Gurdwaras, agriculture properties and other religious places, we should appoint a competent Hindu notable as chairperson of the Evacuee Trust Property Board.

All Hindu citizens, following Gandhi's ideology of non-violence, must come forward to counter Modi's violent policies. I have also made a promise to myself that if in the future I am given any government position I will definitely play my role to make Pakistan violence free and devise policies to end the acrimony between Pakistan and neighbouring countries, including India.

**The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani**

THE NEWS

Friday, October 11, 2019

Economy and security

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Recently, a statement attributed to Army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa emerged. During a meeting with business tycoons in the presence of the government finance team, he is said to have stated that: "National security is intimately linked to [the] economy while prosperity is [a] function of balance in security needs and economic growth."

The statement resulted in attracting the attention of the national media. Various journalists started analyzing the statement according to their own understanding. Is the meeting of the army chief with the business community a really unusual activity? I was also invited by various TV channels to comment on it.

Exchanging views in TV talk shows, I seconded the statement of the army chief that it is an undeniable fact that national security is entirely based on a strong economy. Political stability, strong defence and peaceful environment are key factors for moving any country towards progress and prosperity. I also mentioned international history and politics in support of my stance.

According to the Hindu ancient philosopher, Kautilya Chanakya, a strong army played a pivotal role for any country's national security. In the first chapter of his book 'Arthshastra', Chanakya emphasized that revenue is the backbone of administration. He further wrote that the presence of treasure is very important for the success of any mission, and that a strong economy guarantees protection from all kinds of threats.

In ancient times, economically stable states dominated over neighbouring countries and in today's era, such states are using economic power to influence the international community on various issues. In the modern age, the US designs national policies with a focus on economy and national security. Understanding the close association of both factors, frequent coordination between the political leadership and the Pentagon is normal activity there.

After the end of the cold war, the United States focused more on those factors that affect people directly as compared to military concerns. However, the 9/11 tragedy was also a turning point for the economy and homeland security of the US. Being a global superpower, the US is achieving economic and military targets by providing a business friendly environment.

To ensure close coordination between political, commercial and military institutes, an informal alliance – the Military-Industrial-Congressional Complex – was also formed. According to a report, the US States spends nearly \$650 billion on its national security which is more than the combined defence budget of China, Saudi Arabia, India, France, Russia, United Kingdom and Germany. Many countries like China, Israel, Iran, and India are also following in the footsteps of the US in order to focus on national defence.

Being a patriotic Pakistani citizen, it is part of my belief that love for our beloved motherland must be an important aspect for us and there should be no compromise on national security. We must not forget that the business community used to have interactions with army chiefs in the past too.

In my view, the recently-held meeting is an attempt for the success of the Bajwa Doctrine, aiming to keep Pakistan on the path of success and prosperity. I would like to remind that around two years ago, the present army chief had also clearly said in a ceremony, held at Karachi, that the economy has an impact on all walks of life; strong economies have to face aggression and tackle challenges to national security. It is the best time to keep economic growth and stability as a top priority and for a bright future, there should be consistent economic policies.

Therefore, we should appreciate the army chief for taking the business community and the government finance team into confidence regarding the emerging challenges for national security. Various proposals were obviously discussed on the occasion. I believe that this meeting will have positive impact on our economy in near future and uncertainty for business investment will be ended. The practice must also be continued in future.

The government should also accelerate the process of consultation with all stakeholders. To establish a suitable environment for investment, the government must consider valuable suggestions by the business community during the policymaking process.

For the first time, the political and military leadership are on one page. If the present government also succeeds in winning the confidence of the business community, then no worldly power can stop Pakistan from emerging as an Asian Tiger.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

THE NEWS

A memorable dialogue

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



It was really a matter of pleasure and privilege for me to meet with the honorable royal highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge at Badshahi Masjid, Lahore. The inter-faith dialogue organized by the British High Commission was a good step regarding coexistence of religions and interfaith harmony in the context of Pakistani society

During our interaction, I expressed that all religions ask their followers to ensure respect for all other faiths. The majority of Pakistani people believe in tolerance, peace and humanity. However, there are some few elements that are creating problems for the local non-Muslim minority community. Similarly, I also highlighted the role of parliament in safeguarding the rights of minorities.

During our meeting, the empowerment of the youth was also discussed, so they can understand the importance of co-existence and establish cordial relations with other faiths.

The passionate way in which the royal couple is being welcomed in Pakistan truly reflects the cordial bilateral ties between Pakistan and the UK. For the last many days they are trending on Twitter. Similarly, the royal visit is making prominent news headlines in both electronic and print media.

The ongoing visit also resulted in many Pakistanis revisiting memories of

Prince William's mother, the late Princess Diana, who had visited Pakistan three times. During her first trip in 1991, she succeeded in winning the hearts of the Pakistani nation due to her unique style and kind nature. With a passion to serve humanity, Lady Diana again visited Pakistan after five years in 1996 and participated in a fund-raising event of Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital. Her last visit to Pakistan happened in the very next year in 1997, where she attended the inauguration ceremony of Shaukat Khanum Cancer Hospital. The sudden death of Lady Diana in a car accident also shocked the Pakistani nation.

Many elderly Pakistani citizens still remember the historical royal visit of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip in 1961 during President Ayub's era. It was the first visit of the royal family after the independence. On the occasion, President Ayub Khan was personally present at the Karachi Airport to welcome the royal couple. A large number of people were on the roads to greet the royal couple. The queen had also visited the mausoleum of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

Queen Elizabeth scheduled her second visit to Pakistan in 1997, when the entire Pakistani nation was celebrating fifty years of independence. British Queen's second visit to Pakistan delivered a strong message on the diplomatic front that the United Kingdom, while respecting the independence and sovereignty of Pakistan, loves to share the happiness of the people of Pakistan

on the occasion of the country's golden jubilee celebrations. The queen had also addressed a joint session of parliament.

Prince William's father Prince Charles also visited Pakistan with his wife Camilla Parker in 2006. Now, after a gap of thirteen years the British royal's family current visit to Pakistan is happening at such a critical time when Pakistan is facing different challenges on both internal and external fronts. At the one end, Pakistan is trying hard to meet the expectations of the FATF to avoid being blacklisted and on the other end, India's aggression in Occupied Kashmir is becoming a big threat to regional stability and peace. In my view, the long-awaiting unresolved dispute of Kashmir is the incomplete agenda of the British government at the time of Partition that has now transformed into a human tragedy.

In such circumstances, the royal couple's visit to Pakistan will obviously help highlight the positive image of Pakistan internationally. Pakistan is among those few countries that are blessed with natural beauty and kind-natured people. The photographs and visit details of royal couple in Islamabad, Chitral and the northern areas will result in attracting the attention of tourists and investors from all over the world.

**The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani**

THE NEWS

Friday, October 25, 2019

Importance of reconciliation

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Prim Minister Imran Khan has returned to Islamabad after completing his visit to Iran and Saudi Arabia. On many occasions, the prime minister vowed to play a role to lessen the ongoing tensions between the two.

However, this is such a critical time for us, with the federal capital facing yet another challenge in the form of an upcoming long march.

When there is a problematic situation at a larger level, sensible people prefer protecting their home first. There has been unrest and instability in the Middle East region for a very long time. Bringing peace to the Middle East is not an easy task.

Earlier, when the Saudi oil installations were attacked and in response, Iran was accused I had expressed that the mysterious attacks had made the already vulnerable Middle East even more tense. In case of any possible aggression against it Iran will not stay calm and will promptly respond with military action.

As a patriotic Pakistani, I am very concerned on how to keep Pakistan safe in this kind of regional situation. It is very worrisome that India had already deployed its armed forces at our border, and our other border with Afghanistan has been problematic since day one; our third border is with Iran. How will we keep Pakistan safe from the flames of war?

Iran was the first country to recognize us after Independence and always stood by our side in every difficult time. We are thankful to Iran for passing a resolution in solidarity with Kashmir and condemning Indian aggression. We would probably not let Iran tackle any critical challenge alone.

Before offering any kind of mediation and facilitation, it is very essential to learn from the experiences and understandings of our friendly countries on the international level. In the global scenario, Pakistan has three important friendly countries – China, Iran and Turkey.

China has always supported Pakistan's stance on all forums of the world. Whether the Kashmir issue or the economic crisis, China has always kept its doors open for Pakistan. The way China has patiently waited for the peaceful return of the occupied region of Hong Kong and Macao from international imperialism is highly laudable. However, these days China is busy keeping a rather intense focus on the Hong Kong situation.

Turkey is also engaged in counter-ing Kurdish militants. The issue of the Kurds of Northern Syria is a very complicated matter. Just a few days ago, both Turkey and the Kurds were American allies against Isis. The way the US left Kurds alone reminds one of the time when the Soviet Union left Afghanistan in the 1990s. It also reflects that the US changes its priorities after fulfillment of its strategic interests. Therefore, in such circumstances, when our friendly countries are being dragged in regional and internal issues

then Pakistan should also keep its people's interests as the top priority.

The expected long march towards Islamabad has become the talk of town and is resulting in increasing uncertainty and insecurity among citizens. Even the government seems to be in a state of confusion to handle it. In my view, Pakistan is not in a position to afford any kind of confrontation and tussle. If we can make efforts to ease the tension between Saudi Arabia and Iran then we should also not feel any hesitation to negotiate with our own countrymen.

Maulana Fazlur Rehman and his brother Maulana Ata ul Rehman are very well aware of the importance of reconciliation in politics. Every issue of the world can be resolved through dialogue and talk. On the other hand, egoism and non-cooperation increase hatred, unrest and violence. Use of power and offensive language against political opponents can only add fuel to fire.

For Pakistan's sake, I would like to request the government and opposition both to develop a collaborative approach through dialogue that could result in the betterment of our country, improvement of the national economy and the realisation of a sustainable solution to the Kashmir issue.

Keeping our internal circumstances and regional situation in view, all political parties should avoid the politics of tussle and confrontation.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

Friday, November 1, 2019

A free media

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Exactly eight years ago, a huge number of PTI workers were gathered at Minar-e-Pakistan Lahore on October 30, 2011 to participate in the historical jalsa. Besides this, people were also sitting in front of their television sets to eagerly listen to their beloved leader Imran Khan.

The impressive coverage by Pakistani media helped PTI transform itself into a prominent political party. Every TV channel was broadcasting live transmission and various TV anchors and analysts were enjoying full freedom to debate on the PTI achievement.

The historical jalsa is also known for changing the dynamics of politics in Pakistan, and as a result, electables from other political parties started joining the PTI movement. It was obviously the power of the media that made Imran Khan's 22 years tireless struggle fruitful. Slogans related to 'Naya Pakistan' and 'Madina Ki Riyasat' gained public popularity.

Now eight years after that historical jalsa, it is very unfortunate that media representatives are facing uncertainty under the current government. Most recently, a notification issued by Pemra barred television anchors from expressing their opinions during talk shows in their own or other channels. The regulatory body further asked to

ensure that: "Participants/invitees should be selected with due care having credibility as fair and unbiased analysts with requisite knowledge/expertise on the subject matter."

In reaction, the journalist community termed this as yet another move to curb press freedom. Top anchors, in a joint statement, also recorded their protest. Similarly, intellectuals and opinion leaders belonging to various segments of life including some federal ministers also showed displeasure over this directives.

Freedom of expression is the fundamental right of every person living in a democratic society. Today in the digital era of 21st century, imposing bans on electronic media in such a way is not a laudable step. In a democratic society, nobody should be given the right to decide about the selections of guests in television talk shows.

Around the world, all independent, democratic, and supporters of human rights have one thing common: their independent and vibrant media. Similarly all those countries that are facing poverty, anarchy, exploitation, and violation of human rights have restricted freedom of expression.

Pakistan came into existence as a result of a democratic struggle. Quaid-e-Azam had categorically assured that there would be freedom of expression in Pakistan. He was a strong advocate of using the power of the pen to bring a positive change in society and to make the future bright. Article 19 of our constitution also ensures that every cit-

izen shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression, and there shall be freedom of the press.

PM Imran Khan, on various occasions, has showed his commitment to build the country on the pattern of the State of Madina. Here Today, we may have political differences with Maulana Fazlur Rehman. We may disagree with his manifesto, but we must not forget that he holds a prominent position in our national politics. Now, If he is using his democratic right of protest, then stopping media for not providing him due coverage is sheer violation of democratic process.

Although Pemra has now issued a new statement to explain its position on the controversial notification, it seems that the present government is continuously making such mistakes. As a sincere PTI worker and well-wisher, it is my opinion that we should avoid all such factors, including usage of offensive language and unnecessary policies that brought all political parties against us and now media is also feeling threatened by us.

Rather than becoming a hurdle for the media, we should strengthen independent, free and vibrant media. We should also identify all those advisers who are bringing a bad name to the present government.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

Month of blessings

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Recently, I was invited as a guest speaker to deliver a lecture in a top class educational institute of Lahore. On my way, I witnessed many Sikh pilgrims who were enthusiastically praising Pakistan regarding opening of the Kartarpur Corridor on the occasion of Baba Guru Nanak's anniversary. I always feel proud while hearing good words about my country from others.

The teachings of every religion urge a peaceful society. Baba Guru Nanak, throughout his life, spread the message of peace, serving humanity, eliminating hate and bringing people closer. Baba Guru Nanak spent the last days of his life in Kartarpur and his last rites were also performed there.

It is a matter of pride that the government of Pakistan has fulfilled its commitment to open the historical Kartarpur Gurdwarah and in a short period of one year, Kartarpur is ready to welcome Sikh pilgrims on Baba Guru Nanak's 550th birthday. Prime Minister Imran Khan himself in his tweet message announced that: "For Sikhs coming for pilgrimage to Kartarpur from India, I have waived off two requirements: i) they won't need a passport – just a valid ID; ii) they no longer have to register 10 days in advance. Also, no fee will be charged on

day of inauguration and on Guruji's 550th birthday".

Apart from that, the government of Pakistan also issued a Rs50 commemorative coin and a postal stamp to mark the grand celebrations. Different organizations are announcing different services for Sikh pilgrims. I believe that all such positive measures taken by the government are not only promoting the positive image of Pakistan internationally but also helping dispel the propaganda regarding rights of non-Muslim communities.

In fact, it shows our firm commitment to transform Pakistan into a state with interfaith harmony, tolerance, faith freedom and equal civic rights for everyone. Similarly, it further delivers a message that every place of worship is sacred and respectable in our eyes. The opening of the Kartarpur Corridor, after a gap of 72 years, is no doubt a precious gift by the Pakistan government to the devotees of Baba Guru Nanak throughout the world, including India and Pakistan.

The people of Sindh also have special affiliation with Baba Guru Nanak due to his sincere efforts to promote interfaith harmony and serve mankind. Even, today many Nanakpanthi shrines can be found in every part of Sindh province. A large number of Sindhi Hindus associate themselves as Nanakpanthis, followers of Guru Nanak. Their respect for Guru Nanak Sahib and Guru Granth Sahib is the unique aspect of the Sindhi Hindu community.

To mark Baba Guru Nanak's 550th birthday, the inauguration of the Kartarpur Corridor is officially to be on November 9, which is also the birthday of our national poet Allama Iqbal. Iqbal in 'Bang-e-Dara' dedicated an entire poem as tribute to Baba Guru Nanak, saying that "A perfect man wakes up India from the dreams of ignorance."

In my view, the life purpose of all such great personalities was to serve humanity while keeping aside all discrimination. That is why they asked their followers to carry their message of peace, love and humanity from one generation to the next. I believe that in every society of the world, there are a few extremist elements but the peaceful majority of their citizens should come forward to promote peace and prosperity.

Today, in Rabiul Awal, the month of blessings, we must understand that the greatest achievement is to serve humanity. Let's hope that inauguration of this Kartarpur Corridor will lead towards the opening of many other peace corridors in future. It is my humble request to Prime Minister Imran Khan that we should also start focusing on the Charter of Medina and the last sermon of the Hajj for policymaking processes at the state level.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

THE NEWS

Friday, November 15, 2019

Model of tolerance

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



It is a matter of great honour and privilege to have been exclusively invited from Pakistan to attend the World Tolerance Summit under the patronage of Prime Minister of UAE Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. Unesco observes November 16 every year as World Tolerance Day throughout the globe. However, last year, the UAE had announced to mark entire year of 2019 as the Year of Tolerance, as a way to pay tribute to the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, founding father of the UAE and first president of the country. The great Sheikh Zayed believed in the importance of tolerance and co-existence.

The World Tolerance Summit, held at Dubai, is part of the different initiatives being taken by the UAE government in order to promote tolerance in the country. I was invited as the only speaker from Pakistan to express my views on the role of the media.

On the occasion, we exchanged our views on various methodologies to promote the noble cause of tolerance, peace and harmony in society. I emphasized that every religion of the world asks its followers to ensure respect for other religions. In today's digital era, the media can play a positive role to bring people closer and also to expose the few ex-

tremist elements present in every society. I had proposed to establish a worldwide media forum with a one-point agenda to ensure a tolerant society in this digital era. I also shared my experience of launching the Tolerant Pakistan Media Network.

Today, the UAE can be declared a land of tolerance due to its unique model of promoting peace and co-existence for every citizen. Although the life of the UAE's founding father and first president Sheikh Sultan Zayed was full of struggle, his greatest achievement was the formation of United Arab Emirates consisting of seven emirates. Under his visionary leadership, the UAE obtained a special prominence in the global scenario when the great Shiekh decided to ensure his homeland with modern facilities. For this purpose, he opened the doors to foreign citizens without any bias.

Sheikh Zayed was ranked among the world's wealthiest person but he loved to establish a network of schools, hospitals and social charity initiatives all around the country. He also provided financial support in many welfare projects of neighbouring countries. He was also a strong advocate of women empowerment and protection of rights of Non-Muslim community.

The pivotal role of the Hindu community for moving the UAE towards development and prosperity is indeed remarkable. Unfortunately, there was no temple for the community to perform religious duties. In 1997, the socio-spiritual

Hindu leader Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited the UAE and prayed in a desert located in Sharjah. Besides prayers for peace, he had prayed for a Hindu temple to be built in the UAE.

The crown prince of Abu Dhabi donated 13.5 acres of land for the purpose of building a Hindu temple in 2015. The said temple with seven spires that represent the UAE's seven emirates is a true symbol of interfaith harmony and shows the firm commitment of the UAE rulers to promote tolerance and co-existence.

As part of the year of tolerance, Pope Francis, during his historic visit to the UAE, also paid rich tribute as "a land that is trying to be a model of coexistence, of human brotherhood, and a meeting place among diverse civilizations and cultures". The UAE government will also be launching an interfaith complex that will unite a church, a synagogue and a masjid.

The UAE is also first-ever country in the world with a minister for tolerance. The UAE government, while organizing the World Tolerance Summit successfully, delivered a positive message that all human beings are equal in the eyes of God. The world community, including Pakistan, must also learn from this model of tolerance in order to ensure peace, prosperity and harmony.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.

Twitter: @RVankwani

Meatless days

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



In response to my recently-issued video message in support of marking an international meatless day (animal rights day) on November 25, many internet users asked so many questions. Due to this, I decided to elaborate its significance in detail.

All religions urge treating defenceless animals with kindness and mercy. Various medical research reports also highlight the importance of abstaining from meat to overcome different diseases.

Every year, World Meatless Day is observed across the globe on November 25. Also known as the International Animal Rights Day and Vegetarian Day, it actually marks the birth of socio-religious leader Sadhu T L Vaswani, born in Hyderabad, Sindh. He was also a renowned educationist and led the Mira Movement in Sindh to promote education among the people. Sadhu Vaswani also served as a professor of history and philosophy at Metropolitan College, Calcutta and later, moved to Karachi's D J Science College as professor of english and philosophy. After Partition, he preferred to stay in Pakistan but had to migrate to Pune, India after the death of Quaid-e-Azam.

Vaswani was a strong supporter of interfaith harmony and well-aware about the teachings of different religions. He was of the view that only education can

bring people closer by ending all kinds of misunderstandings and biases. Sadhu Vaswani was also the author of hundreds of books, mostly in English and Sindhi.

He was supporter of Mahatma Gandhi's ideology of Ahimsa, which urges that that all living beings have a basic right to live freely in this world and nobody should be allowed to hurt other living being, whatever the reason. Sadhu Vaswani dedicated his entire life to ensure that all living beings, including birds and animals, must be allowed to live on this beautiful planet in the same way as human beings.

Vaswani considered that meat eating and world peace both are interlinked. He emphasized that the root cause of all world conflicts is actually irreverence towards life, and thus, we must try our best to save a life at any cost.

Sadhu Vaswani not only followed such golden principles throughout his life but also asked his followers to carry them forward. Although he is no more in this mortal world, his ideology to preserve life is still alive in the shape of the Sadhu Vaswani Mission. The organization, led by spiritual mentor Rev Dada J P Vaswani, had taken many initiatives to spread the message of peace and love. In order to promote compassion, nonviolence, tolerance and respect for all life, the Sadhu Vaswani Mission had launched a massive campaign named Stop Animal Killing (SAK), and thus, successfully introduced World Meatless Day.

The international day is now being celebrated all over the world. Every

year, millions of individuals used to extend support to the Sadhu Vaswani Mission. Many slaughter houses voluntarily closed operations for the day to show solidarity. On this day, different awareness events are held in various countries. A number of students and youth participate in walks and marches to raise awareness about the importance of being vegetarian. People are asked to refrain from all sorts of food consisting of meat, at least for that one particular day. Educational institutions are approached with a request to educate students about the need for developing kindness towards animals.

The Pakistan Hindu Council, keeping the above in view, has also decided to spread the message of Sadhu Vaswani, born in present-day Pakistan. On the occasion, the focus of my all socio-political activities will also be on protecting the right to live and shelter animals and birds. And most importantly, the right of coexistence must be given priority in every life matter. Being a good human being, it is our prime duty and responsibility to show kindness and compassion to everyone.

I also would like to request every peace loving citizen to abstain from eating meat for at least one day on the occasion of World Meatless Day.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

The Madina model

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Recently, a video clip regarding my remarks on the issue of the Madina state went viral on social media, on which I am still receiving massive feedback, positive and negative both.

While a number of people appreciated my bold and realistic stance, some elements from the government circle also showed displeasure. An honourable minister even raised a question about my knowledge on the Madina state.

It is regrettable that my statement about the Madina state was taken out of context and widely used on social media for propaganda purpose.

Being a student of history, I firmly believe that world's first role model welfare state was established 1400 years ago in Madina and it is still applicable in the modern era, subject to our commitment and dedication. Last year, in my article published on August 25, 2018 in *The News International*, I mentioned that: "The slogan of Naya Pakistan has effectively won the trust of the people. But it is time to move one step forward to transform Pakistan into a welfare state. For this purpose, it is necessary to analyse the salient features of Madina."

The state of Madina is known for protecting the rights of vulnerable communities, and it is the state's primary responsibility to provide civic rights on an equal basis. To ensure internal integrity

and safeguard Madina from external threats, the Charter of Madina was signed between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens. According to this peace agreement, the territory of Madina was declared as a unit and it was every citizen's responsibility to safeguard. It was mutually agreed that in case of any external aggression, all citizens, regardless of religious affiliations, would jointly defend the homeland.

The state of Madina also focused on character building of its citizens on strong moral grounds. Everyone was required to show tolerance and respect to others, and no foul language was allowed. Similarly, high qualities related to good citizenship, rule of law, justice, responsibility, fairness and trustworthiness were also promoted. 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.

The importance of education in the Madina state can be understood through the incident of the Battle of Badr. The non-Muslim prisoners of war, who were captured after the battle, were offered freedom in exchange for teaching people in Madina. Similarly, foreign policy revolved around establishing peaceful relations with other tribes and nations. On the occasion of the conquest of Mecca, amnesty was announced for everyone.

When a delegation of Christians from Yeman came to Madina to discuss bilateral issues, the doors of Masjid-e-Nabvi

were opened for the delegate members to pray according to their own religious beliefs. This is a wonderful example of promoting interfaith harmony and ensuring respect to all religions.

As far as Pakistan is concerned, we must understand that the formation of a welfare state is not an easy task. The Imran Khan led PTI government has been facing a number of hurdles since day one. In order to tackle these challenges, we must transform our society on the Madina model.

We must ensure a business-friendly environment in our country to make every citizen an earning hand. In the state of Madina, every citizen was so prosperous that nobody was interested in charity money.

Thus, we must ensure we appoint the right person at the right place. Like in past, the Evacuee Trust Property Board is still in dire need of a well-qualified non-Muslim Pakistani chairman. Similarly, there must be some capable non-Muslim politician to represent the interfaith ministry; s/he not only must be well aware about the teachings of all religions but also be able to present the stance of Pakistan at the international level.

The entire non-Muslim community is committed to support the government for implementing the Madina model in Pakistan.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.

Twitter: @RVankwani

The legend of Disney

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



December 5 is marked as the 118th birthday of the renowned American producer, Walt Disney. Whenever we hear his name, so many cartoons characters like Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Goofy and Cinderella come to mind. Every person, regardless of his/her geographical location, is familiar with such immortal cartoon characters.

Walt Disney is known as a successful film producer, cartoonist, animation expert and business man but the journey of his life from failures to success is hidden from many of us.

Walt Disney was one of the most powerful and influential media personalities of the previous century. However, he had worked hard day and night tirelessly to fulfill his dreams. After a long struggle, he attained an honourable role in his professional life. Born in a poor family of Chicago, Walt Disney was fond of drawing and painting since childhood. However, extreme poverty and limited resources forced him to sell newspapers at the railway station. He managed to get employed with a local newspaper but was fired after being told he was not creative.

Walt Disney strongly believed that "All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them." Once, he said that: "I always like to look on the optimistic side of life, but I am realistic enough to know that life is a complex matter." Walt Disney was

of the view that: "Times and conditions change so rapidly that we must keep our aim constantly focused on the future."

Disney, in order to implement his vision in practical life, established a film studio with the support of his brother and close friend. Unfortunately, the business venture went bankrupt. Brave Walt Disney did not lose heart and once again tried to establish another studio in New York. Again he had to face loss in business. The creation of the famous cartoon character, Mickey Mouse, proved to be a turning point in his career. Disney himself provided a voice to Mickey Mouse. Soon, his first animated film Snow White and Seven Dwarf was released. The film was nominated for Best Musical Score at the Academy Awards. He was also awarded an honorary Oscar for the film.

The entire world was now witnessing that the man who once faced rejections and many setbacks in life had succeeded in transforming himself into one of the most successful personalities of the century. His productions were securing million of dollars worth of business. Walt Disney achieved many awards and his remarkable success started impacting each corner of the world. Every child was now a fan of Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and other cartoon characters, and wished to meet them. To fulfil this innocent wish of children, Walt Disney established the Disney Land amusement park, the home of Disney's cartoon characters. To keep alive his past memories of railway

stations, Walt Disney gave special attention to the rail track in Disney Land.

Walt Disney died at the age of 65 just after ten days of his birthday. It is an undeniable fact that the Walt Disney Company still holds a prominent position in the international media market. Disney Theme parks, being developed in different parts of the world, are attracting a large number of children and families on daily basis.

Although such legendary personalities like Walt Disney have to depart from this mortal world, their vision stays still alive. Whoever serves the people, he/she succeeds in engraving his/her name in history forever. We must understand that children are a precious gift from God. Today, we can see the happy faces of our children watching Walt Disney's cartoons on TV screens. It also reminds us of our own childhood days when we also used to enjoy these cartoons.

In my view, Walt Disney's birthday delivers the message that we must not give up in our struggle, and must carry on consistently. The right direction plays a pivotal role for success. We should behave politely with everyone; especially children should be treated with great care, kindness and love. Today, I also express my firm commitment that I will keep struggling for the welfare of my community and will never ever give up. A Belated Happy Birthday to Walt Disney!

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

Save the country

Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



The recent incident in Lahore is yet another black day in our national history. Many innocent lives were lost during the tussle between two honourable professions.

Even during war between two countries, hospitals are considered sacred places that must not be targeted. Many sensible people, including myself, are still in shock to see such a horrible attack on a hospital.

Every religion of the world emphasizes saving one's homeland. Quaid e Azam had given us the gift of Pakistan but we are still unable to help it prosper. Most of the time, I love to express my views on ethics, moral values and patriotism. However, the most frequently question asked to me is about the need to deliver lectures on ethics to parliamentarians.

In my view, parliament is a very respectable, honourable and supreme institution. I never ever miss any single opportunity to share my same views with fellow parliamentarians on the need of ethics and promoting moral values in our society.

A number of Hindu citizens also supported the Pakistan Movement, under the dynamic leadership of Quaid-e-Azam, in order to achieve a separate Muslim-majority country. The contributions of the Pakistani Hindu community for national development are remarkable. Even, today many Hindu soldiers in the Pakistan Army are sacrificing their lives to strengthen the country's defence.

Being a patriotic Pakistani national, I strongly believe that we should not give importance to sectari-

anism, provincialism and religious bias. We must identify ourselves as Pakistanis at every forum. However, it is very unfortunate to witness some parliamentarians using foul language and indulging in a blame game.

Such an attitude also reflects in our society when we see doctors are on strike, and lawyers are attacking hospitals and public property. This condemnable behaviour, no doubt, leads towards a situation of anarchy, which is not at all in the interest of our country.

When I was in college, student groups were involved in violence in the name of student politics. Unfortu-

All sensible citizens, doctors, lawyers, engineers, civil society, and the media, should come forward to bring Pakistan out of crisis

nately, there was less education and more bullying in educational institutes. No doubt, students played a key role in the Pakistan Movement but after freedom, Quaid-e-Azam himself advised students to make education their top priority and understand the importance of utilizing their precious time in positive activities to make Pakistan a prosperous and developed country.

Civilized societies are recognized by their high moral values where people debate with logical arguments in a decent and positive way. Today, the focus of every wise country is to pay special attention towards nation-building. Today we need to adopt a 'one nation for all' theory to move

Pakistan in the right direction. According to this, there is only one nation resides in Pakistan and that nation is called Pakistani.

Every person, living in any part across the country, belonging to any cast, whatever his/her any religious affiliations is, must have a single recognition and that is Pakistani. Quaid-e-Azam said the same thing during his 11th August speech – that every citizen of Pakistan must play their due role for national development and progress. "You may belong to any religion or caste or creed – that has nothing to do with the business of the state," the great Quaid had ensured.

Today, Pakistan's regional situation stressed the need to focus on Kashmir and Afghanistan. Our borders with another neighbour Iran are also tense. Our economy is considered the weakest economy of the region. In such a critical time, all sensible citizens, doctors, lawyers, engineers, civil society, and the media, should come forward to bring Pakistan out of crisis.

Students should focus on their education as per Quaid-e-Azam's advice. All political parties belonging to government and opposition should sit together to devise solid policies to tackle the challenges faced by Pakistan.

It is also our duty to respect each other and behave politely. If we are not bothered to follow such instructions and if we keep on along the path of arrogance then this attitude will lead nowhere but anarchy in society as a whole. I hope that my message of unity will be understood positively by all segments of the society. Save the country.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.

Twitter: @RVankwani

THE NEWS

Friday, December 20, 2019

Secularism at risk

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



During my visits to India for religious rituals, what I have observed is that Indian Muslims are as patriotic to their country as their Hindu or Christian community is. Regardless of their religious affiliations, local Muslims are playing a pivotal role in national development in India.

However, the recently-passed controversial citizens bill has resulted in creating an atmosphere of fear and anxiety throughout the country. According to the bill, non-Muslims refugees from nearby Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan can apply for Indian citizenship. However, Muslims are not included.

The entire Muslim community is in shock; violent riots have erupted in different areas; human rights activists are on the roads to record their protest; many educational institutes are closed; and at least five Indian states have refused to implement the recently-passed controversial bill. There are also reports about resignations by many Muslim government officers as protest against the citizenship bill. The international community, including the US, is also showing serious reservations regarding this act. Keeping the current situation in view, many heads of states are considering to postpone their visit to India.

I believe that the issue related to Muslims and Kashmir has now spread across India. Since Independence, India has portray itself as a secular state and the world's largest democracy before the international community where every citizen, regardless of his/her religious affili-

ation, has the freedom to spend their life. However, this recent Indian citizenship law has not only made Indian Muslims insecure but also put a question mark on the big claims of India. I mentioned in my last column that Pakistan came into existence on the basis of the Two-Nation Theory, but at the time of Independence, our founding father Quaid-e-Azam had emphasized that all residents of Pakistan are now one nation and will be called Pakistani regardless of their religious affiliation and geographical location.

As far as India is concerned, the Indian leadership has never accepted the Two-Nation Theory, and opposed the formation of Pakistan. The recent turmoil has proved that the demand of a Muslim-majority separate country was a wise decision by our elders under the leadership of Quaid-e-Azam. The Pakistani Hindu community committed to declare Pakistan as its dharti mata (motherland) after the August 11 speech of Quaid-e-Azam.

On the issue of the current bill, I also exchanged views with some intellectuals across the border. I was informed that unlike the Hindu population, the Indian Muslim community is growing so rapidly that Hindu nationalists have concerns that India may transform into yet another Muslim majority country in the near future. Due to a democratic setup to elect the government, local Muslims may be in a better position to influence the policymaking processes. In order to increase the Hindu vote bank, the current Indian leadership is interested in offering citizenship to non-Muslim migrants of neighbouring countries.

In my view, all such assumptions regarding the future are ridiculous and sensible nations never sabotage their ideo-

logical foundation on the basis of fabricated facts. The wrong decision of the citizenship bill by the Indian government is not only against its own constitution but it has also affected India's claims of democracy. On the other hand, the region is also facing another challenge in the form of religious immigrants.

If we talk about Islam or Hinduism, every religion has taught its people about serving humanity irrespective of religious bonds. We must understand that God's blessings are for everyone; and that's why we should behave politely and kindly with our fellow human beings.

This kind of religious citizenship offer will not benefit India because no Muslim from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan would think about migrating to India. However, India will definitely face the consequences of this controversial bill because it has made the patriotic local Muslim community insecure. This unnecessary act will also affect the image of India at the international level. Similarly, the border situation with Pakistan and Bangladesh may also become tense. The Indian citizenship bill has also promoted the Two-Nation Theory of Quaid-e-Azam.

To rectify this severe mistake, the Indian government should review its policies and bring back its constitution to its original form. Every patriotic and wise Pakistani Hindu citizen is well aware of the real motives behind the Indian citizenship bill and would never think of migrating from their beloved motherland Pakistan.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.
Twitter: @RVankwani

Fall of a superpower

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani



Exactly 28 years ago, it was a Christmas night when the unbelievable news about the dissolution of the USSR emerged on media. Nobody was willing to believe that the Soviet Union, which was a superpower, was going to collapse in such a way.

The USSR was a prominent global player of the last century. It was the second largest economy of the world. People belonging to more than 100 ethnicities were living there. The Soviet border was the longest border of any country. It played pivotal role against the defeat of Nazi Germany during World War II. The USSR was also a nuclear power, and invented many weapons, including the Kalashnikov.

The education system of the Soviet states was considered one of the best. Soviet scientists, researchers and innovators were very prominent at the international level. It was the Soviet Union which sent the first satellite and astronaut to space. The USSR was giving a tough time to its rival superpower, the US, at every level.

During the cold war era, the world community was literally divided into two blocs. The USSR's role was very crucial in the success of various revolutions, including Cuba, Vietnam, and the Middle East. Even, today many revolutionaries are inspired from Soviet ideologies. Rather than only economic and military power, the USSR was also leading the world in the fields of arts, science and culture.

Keeping the above in view, the

downfall of the USSR is a very interesting incident of modern history. In my view, the most important factor behind this was the leadership of the last Soviet president, Gorbachev, who failed to keep the country united. Due to an economic crisis, people were in trouble. Ukraine was the first one to break ties with the union. As many as 10 republics had announced sovereignty. Various republics, including Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were interested to become independent members of the UN. Internal turmoil was forcing Gorbachev to step down.

Reportedly, the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus held a meeting for agreement on the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Authoritarian rule and press censorship were the main hurdles in the way of such developments making it to the international world. However, analysts keeping a close eye on the situation were hinting that the USSR would collapse in the near future.

On December 25, 1991 Gorbachev announced his resignation as president of the USSR. "I hereby discontinue my activities at the post of president of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics." On the same day, Russia's official name was changed from 'Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic' to the 'Russian Federation'.

Just after the departure of Gorbachev from the Kremlin, the Soviet flag was lowered and replaced by the Russian flag. Similarly, the national anthem of the Soviet Union was played for the last time, and the Moscow-based state television channel also broadcast the Russian flag. These were symbolic indications for marking the end of the superpower once known as the USSR.

India was one of the closest allies of the USSR. In my view, there are also many similarities between them. Both countries consist of a large area, and interested in becoming global players. Like the USSR of yore, there are also a number of ethnicities living in India, and a number of languages being spoken.

Indian nationals are also playing a pivotal role in every field of life. IT experts from India are considered one of the best throughout the world. Since Independence, India has been quoted as a bright example of diplomacy and democracy. The Indian model of secularism is also acknowledged across the world.

However, the current Indian leadership seems to be sabotaging the original image of India. The controversial citizenship act has resulted in creating anarchy at a large scale. People are on the roads to record their protest. Many Indian states are reluctant to implement the newly-passed bill.

There is another interesting fact: the USSR was finally collapsed after 74 years of its formation. Indian PM Narendra Modi's extremist policies are becoming a threat to internal integrity and regional security. The major reason for the USSR's collapse was Afghanistan. The longstanding dispute of Kashmir is also a source of tension between India and Pakistan. The Indian leadership must learn lessons from the collapse of the Soviet Union. India should understand that making people suffer and violating citizen rights always results in anarchy and chaos.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.

Twitter: @RVankwani



THE TIMES OF INDIA

November 10, 2019

Sindhi Nanakpanthis believe serving humanity is prime purpose of life

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani

This is an undeniable fact that teachings of every religion urge to ensure transforming a peaceful society. On various occasions, I have expressed that the decision to celebrate the 550th birth anniversary of Baba Guru Nanak in a very unique and historic manner is a remarkable initiative by both hostile sides. Baba Guru Nanak, throughout his entire life, used to spread message of peace, serve humanity, eliminate hate and bring people closer.



Sindh is considered a very important Pakistani province, where a large number of Hindu population resides. It is also known as land of love, tolerance and diversity. People of Sindh have special affiliation to Baba Guru Nanak due to his sincere efforts to promote interfaith harmony and serve mankind. Even today, many Nanakpanthi shrines can be found in every part of the province. A large number of Sindhi Hindus associate themselves as Nanakpanthis - followers of Guru Nanak. Their respect to Guru Nanak Sahib and Guru Granth Sahib is the unique aspect of Sindhi Hindu community.



Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur Sahib in Pakistan

According to some reports, the first Gurdwara Sahib in Sindh was constructed when Maharaja Ranjit Singh sent Guru Granth Sahib Ji to the capital city, Hyderabad. Recently, a large Gurdwara Sahib opened at Bhit Shah under the supervision of Pakistan Hindu Council office-bearers. Another biggest ever Gurdwara Sahib is also under construction at Hyderabad. Among Sindhi Hindus, a three-day Guru Granth Sahib Path has become a norm before starting any ceremony, be it a birthday, a wedding or launching a business venture.

However, today, numerous Udasi darbars can be found across the province. It is commonly believed that Udasi Panth was founded by Baba Sri Chand, son of Guru Nanak. Thatta Darbar was built to honour his visit to Sindh.

Historical evidences suggest that Udasi darbars played a pivotal role in introducing Gurbani and Guru Granth Sahib to the region. In simple words, there may be less number of Gurdwara Sahibs in Sindh but presence of Udasi darbars keeps the teachings of Baba Guru Nanak alive in the hearts of Sindhi people.

In every darbar, Guru Granth Sahib Ji is placed with due respect and in accordance with *maryada* (Sikh code of conduct). Every year, 'Akhand Path', nonstop recitation of all verses in the Guru Granth Sahib from beginning to end, is also performed at various Guru Nanak darbars. Mostly, holy shrines used to display photographs of Baba Guru Nanak, Durga Mata and Sain Baba, with Sindhi language trans-

cripts in honour of "Wahe Guru".

Sain Vali Vilayat Darbar, located at Kambar town in Kambar-Shahdadkot district, is one of the largest Nanakpanthi shrines in the province. It was founded by Sain Vali Vilayat Rai, who was born in a rich Hindu family but earned fame as a renowned Sant of 19th century. In order to promote interfaith harmony, Sain Vali Vilayat Rai used to frequently interact with Muslim sufis, Sikh saints and Hindu sadhus of his era. Interestingly, a branch of Vali Vilayat Rai Kambar Darbar was also established at Kandivali, Bombay (now Mumbai) in 1960s. The foundation stone of Kambar Darbar at Kandivali was reportedly laid by Mata Chaini Bai, who migrated from Larkana after the Partition.

She also became the first female spiritual head of Kambar Darbar at Kandivali.

Swami Dharamdas, disciple of Sant Bhai Wasan Shah, is another prominent Sindhi Nanakpanthi who founded darbars at Mena village and Larkana. Such Nanakpanthi saints, following the footsteps of Baba Guru Nanak, dedicated their entire life to spread the message of love, peace, harmony and tolerance among the local Hindu, Muslim and Sikh

communities. Another most important aspect of Nanakpanthi darbars is langar, a special charity food service for everyone. During langar, all people, regardless of their religious affiliations, used to sit together to eat and drink free of cost. This is the best reflection of practicing humanitarian teachings of Baba Guru Nanak across the Sindh province.

The opening of Kartarpur corridor is very exciting news for every peace-loving Pakistani citizen, including Sindhi Hindu community. In fact, people of Sindh are excited about visiting Kartarpur Sahib, where Baba Guru Nanak spent his last years. Sindhi Nanakpanthis are now looking forward to hosting Indian Nanakpanthi pilgrims on the occasion of 550th birth anniversary of Baba Guru Nanak, with a belief that prime purpose of their life must be to serve humanity and connect people.

The Kartarpur peace corridor is, in fact, a ray of hope for the divided families of Sindhi origin who migrated after the Partition. There is also dire need to connect people of Sindh in Pakistan with Indian state of Rajasthan for the sake of humanity.

(Member, Parliament of Pakistan; Patron-in-chief, Pakistan Hindu Council)

Guest column