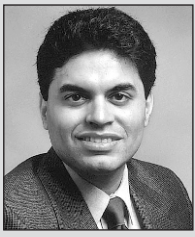


We all have a lot to learn



FAREED ZAKARIA
writes from Washington

A gunman entered the main conference hall of the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore, tossed four grenades into the audience and, when the explosives failed, fired his AK-47 at the crowd. One man, a retired professor of mathematics from one of the Indian Institutes of Technology, was killed. What has worried some about this attack is not its scope or planning or effect -- all unimpressive -- but the target. The terrorists went after what is increasingly seen as India's core strategic asset for the 21st century: its scientific and technological brain trust. If that becomes insecure, what will become of India's future? This small event says a lot about global competition. Traveling around Asia for most of the past month, I have been struck by the relentless focus on education. It makes sense. Many of these countries have no natural resources, other than their people; making them smarter is the only path for development. China, as always, appears to be moving fastest. When officials there talk about their plans for future growth, they point out that they have increased spending on colleges and universities almost tenfold in the past 10

years. Yale's president, Richard Levin, notes that Peking University's two state-of-the-art semiconductor fabrication lines -- each employing a different technology -- outshine anything in the United States. East Asian countries top virtually every global ranking of students in science and mathematics.

But one thing puzzles me about these oft-made comparisons. I talked to Tharman Shanmugaratnam to understand it better. He's

of the intellect that we are not able to test well -- like creativity, curiosity, a sense of adventure, ambition. Most of all, America has a culture of learning that challenges conventional wisdom, even if it means challenging authority. These are the areas where Singapore must learn from America. Shanmugaratnam also pointed out that American universities are unrivaled globally -- and are getting better. "You have created a public-private partnership in

But cultures are hard to change. A Singaporean friend recently brought his children back from America and put them in his country's much-heralded schools. He described the difference. "In the American school, when my son would speak up, he was applauded and encouraged. In Singapore, he's seen as pushy and weird. The culture of making learning something to love and engage in with gusto is totally absent. Here it is a chore. Work hard, memorize and test well." He took his child out of the Singapore state school and put him into a private, Western-style one.

Despite all the praise Shanmugaratnam showered on the States, he said that the US educational system "as a whole has failed." "Unless you are comfortably middle class or richer," he explained, "you get an education that is truly secondary by any standards. Apart from issues of fairness, what this means is that you never really access the talent of poor, bright kids. They don't go to good schools and, because of teaching methods that focus on bringing everyone along, the bright ones are never pushed. In Singapore we get the poor kid who is very bright and very hungry, and that's crucial to our success."

"From where I sit, it's not a flat world," Shanmugaratnam concluded. "It's one of peaks and valleys. The good news for America is that the peaks are getting higher. But the valleys are getting deeper, and many of them are also in the United States."

Fareed Zakaria is Editor of Newsweek International.
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Shanmugaratnam highlighted in particular the role that American foundations play. "Someone in society has to be focused on the long term, on maintaining excellence, on raising quality. You have this array of foundations -- in fact, a whole tradition of civic-minded volunteerism -- that fulfills this role. For example, you could not imagine American advances in biomedical sciences without the Howard Hughes Foundation."

the minister of education of Singapore, the country that is No. 1 in the global science and math rankings for schoolchildren. I asked the minister how to explain the fact that even though Singapore's students do so brilliantly on these tests, when you look at these same students 10 or 20 years later, few of them are world-beaters anymore. Singapore has few truly top-ranked scientists, entrepreneurs, inventors, business executives or academics. American kids, by contrast, test much worse in the fourth and eighth grades but seem to do better later in life and in the real world. Why?

"We both have meritocracies," Shanmugaratnam said. "Yours is a talent meritocracy, ours is an exam meritocracy. There are some parts

tertiary education that is amazingly successful. The government provides massive funding, and private and public colleges compete, raising everyone's standards." Shanmugaratnam highlighted in particular the role that American foundations play. "Someone in society has to be focused on the long term, on maintaining excellence, on raising quality. You have this array of foundations -- in fact, a whole tradition of civic-minded volunteerism -- that fulfills this role. For example, you could not imagine American advances in biomedical sciences without the Howard Hughes Foundation."

Singapore is now emphasizing factors other than raw testing skills when selecting its top students.

Far from integrated?

SAAD S. KHAN

THE past two months saw racial riots in at least three Western countries, Australia, France and the UK. It was soon clear that the riots had religious undertones and they were, or had turned into, in fact, Muslim-Christian disturbances. It was not a premeditated attack by the Christian majorities of these countries to "wipe out the Muslims" rather, if at all, it was the other way round where Muslims/Afro-Asians were deliberately and willfully attacking the Christian/white-owned properties. Defying the conspiracy theorists logic, the governments as well the mass of the general public, both the Muslim and Christian communities, demonstrated exemplary restraint in the wake of the provocations. The rioters from both sides, one must hasten to add, were organized criminal gangs of youngsters, not the least representative of the communities at large.

The riots in UK was a local affair of the city of Birmingham and were initially started between two rival racial groups within the Muslim community. A pirated radio station aired a news that a black Muslim teenager girl had been raped at a beauty parlour owned by an Asian Muslim Ajaib Khan. Angry black Muslim youths started attacking shops and properties owned by Asian Muslims. The next day, hundreds of youngsters of Pakistani and Indian Muslim origin landed in Birmingham by trains from adjacent towns and joined the local Asians in launching revenge attacks on African Muslim neighborhoods. The Police tried to trace the alleged victim only to find that there was none. Most probably no rape had taken place and rumor mongers had had their field day among the poor communities of Asian and African origin who vent their frustrations on each other for want of anything else to do. Ajaib Khan claimed that the news was fed by his rival Asians who wanted to destroy his business as he was doing so well that fellow Asians had boiled with envy.

The riots took a different turn when local white gangsters started attacking Muslims of both Asian and African origin to avenge the Muslim community for, what they believed, destroying the peace of their town. Muslim graveyard was desecrated, graves were vandalized and two mosques were attacked. So it became a street fight between White Christians on one side and African and Asian Muslim together on the other. A timely intervention by the local Member of Parliament Khalid Mehmood, the Police and the leaders of both the communities helped bring the situation under control after three days. One man lost his life, 35 were injured and around 50 arrested.

In the Southern port city of Sydney in Australia, the Western suburbs of the town are densely populated by Muslim immigrants. The violence started when two white life guards on the beach stopped some Arab youth from going afar in the water. Their tone appeared to the youngsters as rude and insulting who then called some other immigrant friends and thrashed the life guards. Some

One thing is clear; the riots in different corners of the world were not spontaneous response to isolated incidents. The causes are deeply rooted in the marginalization of the Muslim communities in the European societies for the last three decades since the major waves of immigration began. The unemployment rate in many of the Muslim neighborhoods of the Western countries is as high as 70% and the average income level as low as 28% of the national average.



Some 15000 cars were torched in French riots.

white youngsters of the town started an SMS text campaign on the mobiles asking the whites to take a revenge. Many gangs coordinated with each other, and by next afternoon 5000 whites arrived at the beach ostensibly to stop another allegedly planned attack by the Muslims on the whites at the beach. As it turned out, it was a hoax there were no Muslim youths ready to attack the whites, so the latter vented their anger on all Asian and Middle Eastern-looking guys and families picnicking at the beach and started thrashing them. So it became a free for all, with Muslims and Christians attacking each other wantonly.

Australian Prime Minister John Howard as well as the State Premier of New South Wales, appealed for calm and took immediate remedial measures to give enhanced powers to the Police. The police behaved effectively and professionally and brought the situation under control very soon.

The most serious riots were in France which were triggered by the death by electrocution of two African youths from an electric pole behind which they were hiding from the Police. The Paris Police, no need to say, is not known to be extremely polite in their encounters with the illegal immigrants.

Here the riots were most serious and soon spread to all major cities of France. The jobless Muslim youths, in their thousands, attacked White-owned property. The riots continued for three weeks and the Police and security forces appeared helpless as they could not be everywhere all the time. The moment the police patrol would be out of sight, small groups of Asians

and Africans would appear from nowhere armed with cans of kerosene oil and a few more cars would be set on fire. Over 15,000 cars were mostly owned by ordinary middle class Frenchmen were set on fire by the arsonists. The Government of France requested and received emergency aid from the European Union to help cope with the emergency and to pay compensation to the local victims.

One thing is clear; the riots in these different corners of the world were not spontaneous response to isolated incidents. The causes are deeply rooted in the marginalization of the Muslim communities in the European societies for the last three decades since the major waves of immigration began. The unemployment rate in many of the Muslim neighborhoods of the Western countries is as high as 70% and the average income level as low as 28% of the national average.

Admittedly, the European nations did not ask these immigrants to come to their countries and have a right to tell them that they are not welcome. But then just one century ago, the forefathers of these Muslims had never begged the European nations to come, occupy and colonize their homelands which made them so impoverished, so as to risk their lives on high seas to land on the shores of developed countries in search of a decent living.

The present poverty in Muslim lands has direct roots in the phenomenon of non-representative authoritarian regimes. The lack of accountability, the arbitrary allocation of resources, grandiose projects with dubious economic utility and all the hall marks of the

'political economies of dictatorship' make the income gap between the rich and the poor, unsustainably great. In a state as rich as Saudi Arabia, the poverty in urban ghettos of the capital Riyadh is appalling; the metropolitan area of Riyadh is comparable to that of Los Angeles, only that in the former one thirds of households have no running water for drinking or sanitation. The poor localities in Riyadh and Dubai seem marginally different from those of the poorest nations, Mali and Niger. The people from this whole gamut of Muslim nations of different political and economic hues pay their way into Europe's ghettos, courtesy the human traffickers, who bribe the Western security and coastal officers for safe passage, and those who fail, find their way into Iraq to blow themselves up near an American or British military convoy.

While one must appreciate the restraint and maturity shown by the Western communities in the face of wild provocations, one must add that for a long term solution of the Muslim minority problem, the European nations would have to put their heads together to draw up a plan of stopping to pat the dictators in the third world, to promote democracy there, and bring the dictators to justice, even if it is by physically arresting them from their home countries, like the US forces did to President Noriega. Unless the developing world is also turned into a world worth living, the riots may recur atavistically.

Saad S Khan is a Cambridge-based scholar and a widely read analyst on politics, governance and human rights in the Muslim world.

Importance and significance of Hajj

KAZI AULAD HOSSAIN

WHEN the sacred lunar month of the Islamic calendar Zil-hajj knocks at the door Muslims all over the world, particularly the eligible adult Muslims think of visiting the Holy Ka'ba, Harem Sharif and other holy places concerned. Since Hajj is one of the five "Rokons" (Pillars of Islam) and as it is obligatory on the part of all eligible Muslims to perform Hajj. They start making brisk preparations for visiting these holy places in Saudi Arabia including the Holy Ka'ba in Mecca and Masjid-e-Nabawi (the Mosque of Muhammad SM) in Medina. As a matter of fact the very term "Hajj" means a journey to a Shrine and in case of Muslims of the world it is the greatest place of worship, the Holy Ka'ba. An able bodied eligible adult Muslim must perform Hajj at least once in his life time.

We are aware of the selection of the site for the Sacred House of Almighty Allah and its construction by Prophet Hazrat Ibrahim "Khalilullah" (Friend of Allah) and his worthy son Prophet Hazrat Ismail (A), and we also know Hazrat Ibrahim's subsequent proclamation of pilgrimage asking people around him to visit the Holy Ka'ba. In Ayats 26 and 27 of Surah (Chapter) Hajj (the Pilgrimage) of Qur-an the Rabul Alameen declares:

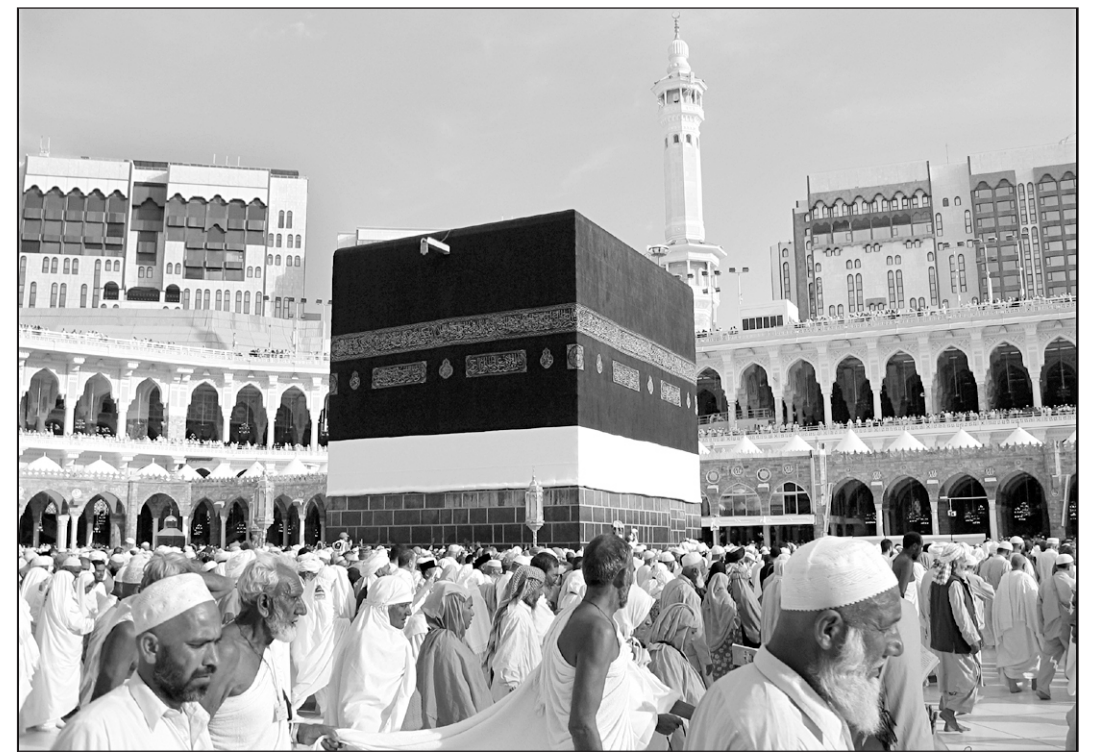
Ayat: 26 "Behold We gave the site, to Ibrahim of the (Sacred House) (saying): Associate not anything (in worship) with Me, and sanctify My House for those who compass it round, or stand up, or bow, or prostrate themselves (there in prayers).

Ayat : 27 "And proclaim the pilgrimage among men: they will come to thee on foot and (mounted) on every kind of camel, lean on account of journeys through deep and distant mountain highways."

When pilgrimage was proclaimed by Prophet Hazrat Ibrahim (A) as clearly indicated in the afore-said Qur-anic Ayat No. 27 "people came to it (Sacred House of Allah) from every quarter near and far on foot and mounted on camel after fatiguing journeys through distant mountain roads." This typifies the difficulties of travel which pilgrims disregard on account of temporal and spiritual benefits.

In this connection it would be worthwhile to quote below what a renowned commentator and translator of the Holy Qur-an Allama. Yusuf Ali has said while commenting on the said Ayat 27. He says: "Purity, prayers, honesty and faith are implied in pilgrimage; in sacrifice we express our gratitude and reverence to God and our desire to share food with our poorer brethren. Striving and

Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam and obligatory for every able bodied capable adult Muslim to perform it at least once in life. The vast concourse of pilgrims also give them the opportunity to enhance brotherly feeling among themselves.



fighting in defence of Truth when attacked are necessary as test of self-sacrifice."

It may be stated here that a pilgrim has to pass through a number of important stages and formalities right from the departure from the country. At the beginning when he leaves for Saudi Arabia, he has to put on a special unsewed loose dress called "Ehram" after shaving his head. And as when he reaches the holy city of Mecca he has to circumambulate seven times the Holy Ka'ba, and to go round the Holy Ka'ba like this is called "Tawaf". Then from the city of Mecca the pilgrims go near two hills known as Safa and Marwa, and they run between these two hills in commemoration of Hazrat Hazra's (consort of Hazrat Ibrahim (A)) search for water to quench the thirst of her beloved infant son Hazrat Ismail (A). Here the pilgrims also collect water gushing out of the world famous Zam Zam well. From this place they go to historical plain of Arafah. They reach here on the 9th day of the month of Zil-hajj and all pilgrims offer their Zohar (mid-day) and Asar (afternoon) prayers together in this large field and while praying they beseech Benign Allah to forgive their sins.

Arafah has a special significance for here in this vast field the holy Prophet (peace be upon him), after realising that he would not live longer, said inter alia, standing on a hill top in his famous and historic farewell pilgrimage address to the vast concourse of people:

"(1) Do not join any partner with Almighty Allah;

(2) From now on father will not be punished for the offence of the son, nor the son will be punished for the offence of his father. In the same way no person will be punished for the offence of another person;

(3) Adultery is a heinous crime;

(4) Remember as you have your full rights over your wives, your wives have also similar rights over you;

(5) I leave behind two very important things for your guidance: one is Al-Qur-an and other is my Sunnah [Sayings of the Holy Prophet (pbuh)] and if you stick to them then you will not be in difficulty."

And while in Mina on the following day, that is, on the 10th day of the month of Zil-hajj the pilgrims sacrifice animals in the name of Almighty Allah, it is in commemoration of the supreme sacrifice made by Prophet Hazrat Ibrahim Khalilullah of his beloved son Hazrat Ismail (A) at the behest of Lord Creator. His son was not

however actually sacrificed and as desired by Merciful Allah a thick-tailed sheep was slaughtered instead of Hazrat Ismail (A). The sacrifice was symbolic.

After sacrificing suitable and unblemished animals on the day the pilgrims, before they return to their respective countries, once again visit the Holy Ka'ba in circumambulation of Ka'ba and also visit the holy city of Medina in order to pay respect to the Holy Prophet's (pbuh) Mosque and his 'Rowza' (the sacred grave).

Another very important aspect of the institution of the holy Hajj is that Muslims from all over the world assemble in the holy city of Mecca and it gives them a unique opportunity every year to exchange views, discuss their problems and find solution to the problems. Hajj also gives them an opportunity for increasing brotherly feelings among themselves. You will not find such a vast concourse of millions of Muslim devotees assembling at a particular place every year anywhere in this wide world. And why they do it? They do it because Almighty Allah desires it.

Kazi Aulad Hossain is a retired govt high official.

Corrupt Indian MPs caught red-handed

Web-site hidden cameras do it

AMM SHAHABUDDIN

WHAT a shocking news! What a great fall on the part of some members of the parliament of the largest democracy of the world, considered as a model for the democracy-loving people around the world. However, it is encouraging to know that at least some 'black sheep' had been caught red-handed, literally by their pants down. Thanks to the web-site sponsors who had been brave enough to launch the 'sting-operation' to expose the 'un-parliamentary' activities of some Indian MPs. It is noteworthy that what the powerful intelligence or security services had failed so far to do (or, they were looking the other way expecting their due share of the 'booty?'). A small group of professional media-men, inspired by dare-devil spirit, through their innovative tactics, had been successful in 'catching them 'naked' through their hidden cameras. They really deserve kudos and official blessings to continue their noble mission.

According to Indian media reports, a web-site, in an ambitious programme named "operation Durjodhana", showed eleven members of Parliament (MPs) receiving cash as bribes to raise questions in the parliament to serve the interests of certain vested quarters. Following this big catch, in another sting-operation, conducted by Star News channel, seven MPs were seen on camera, demanding or accepting bribes for sanctioning projects under the central government for local development, called MPs Local Area Development (MPLAD), launched in 1993 by the then PM Narasimha Rao, under which each MP gets annually Rs 2 crore to finance small development projects in their respective constituencies.

Whatever might have been the objective of Rao's scheme, it had gradually become a big source for corrupt practices, because under the scheme, the funds are channelled by the MPs to the contractors who, on their part, re-channeling a high-rate of 'kick-backs' to the MPs. The scheme seems to have become rotten and smells rat from top to bottom because of the misuse of parliamentary privileges or rights by the MPs. The tragedy is that the 'black sheep' netted by the hidden web-site cameras belong to both the parties who now rule the country by turn. So the shameful exposure

of illegal activities of the MPs had tarred the faces of both the parties before the people.

"Rot" must be "cleansed"

The startling revelation had not only stunned the Indian people but had also created a sensation abroad, particularly, the Asian region, who have a great respect for the Indian democracy as the largest in the world. That is why a Federal government Minister in his reaction, had said that this system of allocation of development funds for local projects was now "rotten

'deal' with a fictitious firm to buy defence materials. That web-site, known as 'Tahelka.com' created a sensation throughout India with bouquets for it.

The adventurous operation against the Defence Ministry high-ups was done by two news reporters belonging to Tahelka, by posing as defence materials contractors, representing a London-based company, named 'West End'. It is really amazing how the Tahelka web-site could lay such a 'mouse-trap' to catch the greedy 'rats.' These 'rats' were so well-seasoned

Now, in the context of signals coming across the border, the question that haunts the people is: What about Bangladesh which has already created world record by capturing the first position in successfully crossing the turbulent sea of corruption, defeating some 145 countries, developed and developing, consecutively for five years?

to the core". He wondered how India was going to survive "as a democracy", unless it had "cleansed" the "rot".

As the first step, the Indian parliament had already expelled eleven MPs for receiving bribes for raising questions to serve certain vested interests. This is for the second time, during the last five decades, that law makers were expelled from parliament for their un-parliamentary activities. Earlier, as far back as 1954, a member of the Indian Lok Sabha (Lower House), was expelled for accepting bribe from a business firm for propagating its cause.

In fact, it is a life and death question for Indian democracy to survive as a spotless parliamentary system. Hence mere expulsion of corrupt MPs won't serve the purpose. They deserve more severe and exemplary punishment for the sake of democracy as a forewarning to those who would like cross the sea of corruption for the sake of money -- they are culprits in true sense of the term.

What Tahelka web-site did?

In this context we may recall what had happened in 2001, when for the first time in India's history high-ups of India's Defence Ministry were caught red-handed a web-site hidden camera, showing them participating in a huge

headed by Manmohan Singh. Now that Congress was in deep water, BJP should have taken the revenge. But they couldn't do so, because this time of the trapped 'rats' almost half belong to BJP. So the black sheep are everywhere. No political party, therefore, can show a clean slate to the people.

What about Bangladesh?

Now, in the context of signals coming across the border, the question that haunts the people is: What about Bangladesh which has already created world record by capturing the first position in successfully crossing the turbulent sea of corruption, defeating some 145 countries, developed and developing, consecutively for five years?

It is a sad story. Perhaps very few heads had rolled down the pathway, no body can claim that all our MPs, bureaucrats and other officials are spotless angels. There perhaps would have been much consolation if some of our 'big fishes' could have been netted by any of our private web-site sponsors. Now that some of the Indian web-sites had done it successfully, our enthusiastic web-site sponsors can venture to try their hands. Perhaps some of them are already waiting in the isle to take their chance. Our media personalities and web-site sponsors should take lessons from their counter-parts in India, who had already set a grand track record in their performance.

It is an open secret that most of the developing countries are in deep water of corruption, more or less -- some upto their knees, some upto waists, and some upto their chests. But Bangladesh is in the worst position, being under neck-deep corruption. According to the corruption index, 2004 released by the Transparency International (TI), among the SAARC countries, Sri Lanka ranks 67th out of the 145 countries surveyed, India and Nepal rank 90th, Pakistan 129th, and Bangladesh reached the peak. It is indeed a difficult job to catch the culprits where almost all are busy in 'golden hand-shake.' At best a beginning should be made by some enterprising web-site sponsors and some dare-devil media men to launch their sting-operation. Let us wait and see when that red day comes.

AMM Shahabuddin is a retired UN official.