POINT ** COUNTERPOINT

Israel, US and the New Orientalism

The challenge of scholarship is to define, locate, contextualize and debunk the New Orientalism. We constantly need to remind the world, especially the Western world, so mesmerized by the images flashing on the TV screens, that there is a long history of Western depredations -- wars, colonization, slavery, exterminations, expropriations, treachery and hypocrisy -- behind the images that disturb their hopes of peace founded on grave injustices.

M SHAHID ALAM

HE West has never had an easy time coming to terms with Islam or Islamicate societies. There was a long period, lasting more than a millennium, when the two were seen as existential threats. In order to mobilize the energy to contain and then roll back these threats -- first from the "Holy Lands" and Southwestern Europe and later from Southeastern Europe -- European writers presented Islam as a Christian heresy, a devil-worshipping religion Mahomet's trickery, a militant and militarist cult crafted for Bedouin

To this list of dark qualities the thinkers of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment added a few more. Now Islamicate societies were also seen as despotic, fatalistic, fanatical, irrational, uncurious, opposed to science, and inimical to progress. When Europe gained the upper hand militarily in the nineteenth century, this complex of Orientalist ideas would be used to iustify the conquest and colonization of Islamic lands

Starting in the nineteenth century, a small minority of European

thinkers began to reject the standard Orientalist constructs of Islam and Islamicate societies. They began to look at Islam and Islamicate societies as they were described in Muslim sources; they wrote of Islamic achievements in philosophy, the sciences, arts and architecture; they emphasized Islam's egalitarian spirit, the absence of racial prejudice, and their greater tolerance of other religious communities.

Many of these Europeans who

had chosen to give Islam its due were Jews who had only recently escaped from the ghettoes to enter into Europe's academies. In part, these Jews were appropriating for themselves the achievements of another Semitic people. In calling attention to the tolerance of Islamic societies, they were also gently reminding the Europeans that they had far to go towards creating a bourgeois civilization based on humane values. Less charitably, one might say that the Jewish dissenters were undermining the Christian West by elevating its opposite, the Islamic East.

A second shift in the temper of Orientalism that began in the 1950s would become more pervasive. From

now on, a growing number of mainstream scholars of Islam and Islamic societies would try to escape the essentializing mental habits of earlier Orientalists. This shift was the work of at least three forces. The most powerful of these forces was the struggle of the colonized peoples in the post-War period to free themselves from the yoke of colonialism. In the context of the Cold War, the political and economic interests of Western powers now demanded greater sensitivity to the culture, religion and history of the peoples they had denigrated over the previous four centuries. A show of respect for their subjects had now

The Orientalists were also being put on notice by the entry into Western academia of scholars of Middle Eastern and South Asian origins -- including Phillip K. Hitti, Albert Hourani, George Makdisi, Muhsin Mahdi, Syed Hussein Nasr and Fazlur Rahman -- who brought greater empathy and understanding to their studies on Islamicate societies. Edward Said too was a member of this group; his distinctive contribution consisted of his erudite and sustained critique of the methods of Orientalism, Said's

become a virtue in the writings of

critique belongs also to a broader part by scholars from the non-Western world -- that not only debunked the distortions of Orientalists but also sought to remedy their errors by writing a more sympathetic history of Asian and African societies. In other words, during this period some sections of the West began to acknowledge with some consternation the racism and bigotry that permeated much of the social sciences and humanities.

Starting in the 1950s, Islam also

attracted the attention of several spiritual explorers from the West who were led hither by their disappointment with the poverty of living spiritual traditions in their own societies. The deep understanding of Islam they acquired through association with authentic Sufis --Muslims who cultivated, in addition to their meticulous observance of the Shariah, the inner dimensions of Islam -- allowed them to write several outstanding books on the metaphysical and spiritual perspectives of Islam, both as they are practiced by its living exponents and as they are reflected in the calligraphy, architecture and the still surviving traditional crafts of the Islamic world. The writings of Rene Guenon, Titus Burckhardt, Frithiof Schuon, Martin Lings, Charles Le Gai Eaton, among others, demonstrate conclusively that Islam offers an original spiritual perspective that is fully capable of supporting a

Yet, running counter to these

developments, a new Orientalism was also taking shape in the post-War era. It was not based on any strikingly new thesis about Islam. Instead, it was mostly a repackaging of the old Orientalism designed to renew a more intrusive dual US-Israeli control over the Middle East. Led by Bernard Lewis, the new Orientalists claim that the Islamicate world is a failed civilization. Among other things, they argue that Islamicate societies have failed to modernize because Islam's mixing of religion and politics makes it incompatible with democracy; Islam does not support equal rights for women and minorities; and Islam commands Muslims to wage war until the whole world is brought under the sway of Islamic law. In short, because of its intransigence and failure to adapt to the challenges of modernity, Islam has become the greatest present threat to civilization, that is, to Western

What makes this repackaged Orientalism new are its intentions. its proponents, and the enemy it has targeted for destruction. Its intention is to mobilize the United States behind a scheme to balkanize the Middle East into ethnic, sectarian and religious micro-states, a new system of client states that would facilitate Israel's long-term hegemony over the region. Ironically, the scholars who have dominated this repackaging of the old Orientalism are mostly Jewish, a reversal of roles that flows directly from the creation of a Jewish colonial-settler state in the heart of the Middle East. Once they had succeeded in creating Israel, the Zionists knew that its long-term survival depended on fomenting wars between the West and Islam. Zionism has pursued this goal by its own wars against Arabs and, since 1967, a brutal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza; but equally, it has pulled out all the stops to convince the United States to support unconditionally Israel's depredations against

The target of the war that the

new Orientalists want to wage are what they variously call Islamists, Islamic fundamentalists, Islamic militants, Islamo-fascists, or Islamic terrorists. Whatever the term, it embraces all Islamicate movements -- no matter what their positions on the political uses of violence -- that appeal to Islamic symbols to mobilize local, national, and pan-Islamic resistance against the wars that the United States and Israel have jointly waged against the Middle East since 1945. These Islamicate resistance movements, which are both national and transcend national boundaries, have replaced the secular nationalists who, after failing to achieve their objectives, were co-opted by the United States and Israel to destroy

The events that have unfolded over the past few decades -- the rise of the Islamicate resistance, the strategic cooperation between the United States and Israel, the new Orientalism, and the war that is now being waged against the Islamicate

the Islamicate resistance.

world -- could have been foreseen. and indeed were foreseen, when the British first made a commitment to create a Jewish state in Palestine. An American writer on international affairs. Herbert Adams Gibbons. showed more acuity on the longterm fallout of Britain's Zionist plans than the leading Western statesmen

In January 1919, he wrote: "If the peace conference decides to restore the Jews to Palestine, immigration into and development of the country can be assured only by the presence of a considerable army for an indefinite period. Not only the half million Moslems living in Palestine, but the millions in surrounding countries, will have to be cowed into submission by the constant show and occasional use of force (italics added)."

Even more prophetically, Anstruther MacKay, military governor of part of Palestine during World War I, wrote that the Zionist project would "arouse fierce Moslem hostility and fanaticism against the Western powers that permitted it. The effect of this hostility would be felt through the Middle East, and would cause trouble in Syria, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and India. To this might be ascribed by future historians the outbreak of a great war between the white and the brown races, a war into which America would without doubt be drawn (italics added)."

We are now living in the future predicted by Gibbons and MacKay. The Islamicate resistance has been slow in developing but now its

has spread in one form or another beyond Syria, Mesopotamia, Egypt and India to the farthest corners of the Islamic world -- and even into the Islamic diaspora in the West.

The challenge of scholarship is to define, locate, contextualize and debunk the New Orientalism. We constantly need to remind the world, especially the Western world, so mesmerized by the images flashing on the TV screens that there is a long history of Western depredations -- wars, colonization, slavery, exterminations, expropriations, treachery and hypocrisy -- behind the images that disturb their hopes of peace founded on grave injustices.

History is the ally of tormented peoples; they can tell it as it was. It is the tormentors who deny their history; they have to make it up to deny the torments they have inflicted. They must speak constantly, unremittingly of the need to put down insurgencies, terrorist attacks, threats to world peace, and violence against the civilized order. We too must constantly revisit the history of Western depredations over the past four centuries to connect the world's present miseries to this infamous history. Only a deepening consciousness of this history. constantly renewed, carries hope that the powers that use stealth to manufacture terror can be stopped.

M Shahid Alam is Professor of Economics Northeastern University, Boston.

Engineering corruption

GHULAM RAHMAN

NCE 2001 Transparency International (TI) has ranked Bangladesh as the most corrupt country for the past five years. Corruption is not a recent phenomenon, and what worries us is its gradual deepening into Bangladesh. However, while most try to be vocal against corruption, many among us seize the opportunity to indulge in it with impunity. Some see it as a part of their entitlement and use their power to make it a part of their

In his 2006-2007 budget speech in the parliament, former speaker and deputy leader of the opposition. Abdul Hamid, suggested that the details of the assets of the prime minister, the opposition leader, ministers and the lawmakers, should be kept track of for the sake of checking graft. He made the assertion that: "If the lawmakers submit their accounts of assets, the government employees will be alert and corruption will gradually recede." He opined that an examination of assets the MPs had before liberation of the country in 1971 with their present possessions would reveal the extent of corruption Further, he offered that the examination should start with him.

BNP secretary general, LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, in response, expressed concern over the spread of corruption, but sidetracked the issue by saying: "The practice of bribing is going on from top to bottom. We have to build social resistance against corruption.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, in her 75-minute long budget speech, spent most of the time detailing her government's various successes but did not respond to the opposition's allegations of corruption. She did not even mention the "Anti-Corruption Commission," an agency created at the insistence of the donors to combat corruption. However, the prime minister and her son Tarique Rahman, who is also the senior joint secretary general of BNP, once again loudly pledged in public meetings across the country that if voted to power again in the upcoming elections they would eliminate graft and corruption.

In the 2001 parliamentary election campaign, the BNP also promised to eradicate corruption. To give credence to their promise they pledged to disclose the accounts of assets of MPs, including the PM and ministers. While corruption has further bloomed since then, no moves have been taken to disclose these specific accounts during the last four and half years of BNP's 5-year term. Time and time again, the AL President and Opposition Leader Sheikh Hasina launched blistering attacks on the government, mainly pointed at the prime minister and her family members, accusing them of corruption

"Corruption" is a national a problem -- a malaise for which an antidote is not easy to find. It is often the country's socio-political environment and practices that encourage its growth. "Corruption" is not poverty driven, but is closely linked with greed and temptation. Occasionally, the inability to meet ones needs induces corruption, but inadequate income is not the root cause of the issue. "Corruption" arises from the misuse of ones power. position, privileges and authority as "absolute power corrupts abso-

A minister whose popularity in his constituency was beyond any question once told me that in order to become a member of parliament he had to spend almost Tk 7.5 million and that at the next election the expenditure could possibly be several times more. He wondered what choices were there for the poorer politicians except for using their power and position to amass wealth in order to win elections? MPs, as well as aspirants, when visiting their constituencies, are expected to make donations to mosques, clubs, or libraries, and give at least small amounts to the poor as well pay local elites and prominent goons. Organising processions and printing publicity materials cost a lot of money. They are also expected to, at least, meet the expenses of setting-up of offices through out the constituency, bear entertainment expenses, and provide workers with pocket money and transportation costs

World Bank Country Director Christine Wallich observed that election financing is a major source of corruption in Bangladesh and that an estimated Tk. 2,000 crores, equivalent to 5 percent of GDP, was spent on electioneering in the last general election. Allowable limit of expenses set by the Election Commission per candidate is Tk. 500,000. However, the actual expenses are many times more and depend on the location and who one's rivals are. Perhaps taking into account the flurry of activities in the forthcoming general election the finance minister has projected a higher GDP growth rate next year.

Most honest and dedicated political leaders and workers do not have the means to bear the huge election expenditure and win the elections. Only rich businessmen and industrialists are in a position to bear the campaign costs and take the risks associated with its uncertain outcome. Therefore, politicians devoted to public welfare are gradually marginalised in their own domain.

Presently, over 80 per cent of members of parliament are businessmen: most of them are from BNP or its partners in the fourparty alliance. The alliance won more than two-thirds of the seats in the 2001 election. The alliance's election strategy was chalked out

and executed by the young leaders of Hawa Bhaban. They are allegedly running "Bangladesh Incorporated" through the PM's "kitchen cabinet" and are apparently managing its affairs in the manner and style of a holding company.

The nexus between politics and

business promotes corruption. Cronvism is detrimental to national interests -- it leads to concentration of wealth and widens income inequality, creates social tension and unrest, fuel price spiral and in the long run slows down the nation's progress. It is widely alleged that the Hawa Bhaban-based young leaders are using their power, influence and connections to enrich themselves and their associates. The opposition, in this scenario, is left with no choice but to nominate more rich business tycoons and goons as their candidates to counter the influence of big money and concomitant muscle power that the BNP candidates assert.

The parliament is the source of all power and authority. The MPs, particularly those belonging to the ruling party, have the choice to either use their position for the people's welfare or for personal aggrandisement through corruption. It is likely that business tycoons, who get elected by investing huge sums of money, would recover their investments with dividends. Instead of upholding the law, they would indulge in corruption. Allowing others to import expensive cars and jeeps, duty free in their names, is just an

Prima facie, the system of "electioneering" we practice is the mother of all sources of corruption. Therefore, without freeing politics from the clutches of people seeking to make profit, any attempt to curb corruption would be futile.

An effort can be made to ensure that the political parties nominate leaders and workers who are dedicated to people's welfare instead of business tycoons and wealthy ex-bureaucrats. Of course, businessmen with long political association should continue to have their rightful place in the political arena.

It is perfectly legitimate for political leaders and workers, when not holding official positions, to remain engaged in some gainful activities, rather than influence peddling, tender snatching and toll extortion, to earn an honest living. However, without reforming the electoral system to free it from the influence of money and concomitant muscle power, no political party can take the risk of losing. Thus, with the current electoral scenario in place as the election expenditures rise, the country will sink deeper and deeper into the quagmire of corruption.

The author is a former Secretary to the

Keeping the G8's promises to the poor

KEMAL DERVIS

HEN the Group of Eight convenes in St. Petersburg Saturday for the annual summit of the leading industrialized nations. the world's developing countries will be watching with keen interest and raised expectations.

To their credit, at their last gathering in Scotland, the G8 leaders took on the challenge of extreme poverty in Africa, Asia and elsewhere in the developing world. They agreed to write off un-payable loans owed by highly indebted but low-income nations and promised an additional \$50 billion in annual development aid by 2010, including a doubling of assistance to Africa. Perhaps most importantly, they pledged support for a pro-poor conclusion of global trade talks, with commitments to cut their own tradedistorting farm subsidies and to lift barriers to imports from the least developed countries.

Yet, one year later, few poor nations have experienced much

tangible impact from these prom-

The welcome debt-relief initiative erased tens of billions of dollars' worth of claims against the economies of struggling developing nations. But most of this went to relatively few countries, with Iraq alone accounting for \$14 billion of the total \$23 billion in loan forgiveness by creditor countries in 2005.

Debt cancellation is counted by most creditors as a form of development aid, which is fair enough. Nonetheless, a loan that was not being serviced, once forgiven, does not have the impact of new resources for

Aid increases can also take a long time to materialize, as legislative appropriations cycles often lag a year or more behind pledges. Soaring energy prices, poor oil-importing countries far more than they are receiving in additional economic assistance. As tracked by the OECD

official development assistance

to \$106 billion in 2005 -- at face value, a seemingly extraordinary doubling of aid in just four years. But when adjusted for inflation and the declining value of the dollar -- the currency in which aid flows are officially calculated -the real increase in economic assistance turns out to be closer to one-third over those four years. And a large part of the

2005 gain comes from a one-time

surge in debt relief that is unlikely

to be repeated.

The biggest disappointment of the past year has been the failure to reach accord in the stalled Doha round of trade negotiations. Too many developing nations are still on the outside looking in, watching mature economies thrive off a "globalization" that is not yet truly global. For this, we need G8 leadership, now, would be much more productive if deployed in a trading environment more favorable to low income countries.

Money is not everything -- or

increased from \$52 billion in 2001 even the main thing: It is vitally important to focus on the end results of aid efforts. The countries most likely to turn aid money into real gains for

their citizens' lives are those with legitimate and capable civil and social institutions. Only with good governance and economic policies that support equitable growth can outside assistance lead to lasting change. Handled right, aid fosters

economic development. But we need to be careful when measuring progress. Income growth, measured in terms of aggregate GDP alone, does not necessarily reduce poverty. Nor does it automatically nurture human development, which entails freedom from oppression, freedom from ignorance, and freedom from violence.

Geopolitical and military priorities throughout the Cold War, and linger still in some donor-recipient relationships. Aid works best when developing nations are allowed to shape

their own course, with wellconsidered advice from a range of partners, including not just the industrialized heavyweights of the G8 but also their neighbors and peers in other developing

On Monday, the G8 leaders will meet their counterparts from China, Brazil, India, Mexico and South Africa. This welcome G8 engagement with the emerging powers of the developing world should be broadened and institutionalized to give these meetings greater global legitimacy.

Gleneagles concluded with ambitious promises -- promises which must be kept in St. Petersburg. If these summits are to have meaning, each one must lead to concrete steps towards lasting improvement in the daily lives of the world's poor -- and bring us closer to effective

Kemal Dervis is the Administrator of the United

ply these good examples. This

cannot happen by government

edicts. The key characteristics

and circumstances of these

models need to be understood

and promoted on a wider scale

through trial and experimenta-

tion. Community organizations,

parents, NGOs and academics

should be involved in this effort.

Resources must be set aside for

this purpose, which can be

drawn from major development

programs in primary and sec-

ondary education -- the Second

Primary Education Development

Program (PEDP II), Secondary

Education Sector Improvement

Project(SESIP) and Teacher

Quality Improvement (TQI)

Project. Efficacy and better use

of other substantial resources

such as those for stipends in

But what about the students?

MANZOOR AHMED

N this election season the government will probably yield to the teachers' demand for salary increase. The total bill will be more than Tk. 400 crore for a year. Better remuneration for teachers is essential to improve student learning. But this connection cannot be taken for granted. What will be the benefits for learners from the substantial extra cost to the national exchequer?

A rough tally of the extra costs: a) Bringing government primary school salary scale in line with other government salaries with similar required educational qualifications for 155,000 teachers -- Tk. 75 crore; b) Raising salary subvention to 95-100 percent of basic salary and increasing other allowances for 80,000 registered nongovernment primary school teachers -- Tk 45 crore: and c) Raising subvention for salaries of some 300,000 teachers of non-government secondary schools, madrasas and colleges to 100 percent of their basic

salary -- Tk. 300 crore. Not included above is the demand by over 10,000 teachers in some 4,000 community schools, who receive an "allowance" of Tk 750 from the government. The logic for government allowance, rather than a salary, was that the teachers were community appointed for community-established schools and were expected to be supported by the community. These teachers have joined the other teachers demanding to be treated

and paid by the government as regular teachers. Also not included are demands by teachers of vocational and technical

Better remuneration for teachers is not a matter of great debate. There is no rhyme or reason for paying government primary school teachers less than other government servants for whom similar education and skills are required, except that the government has gotten away so far with this palpable unfairness. There is no plausible defence for the lead partner of the ruling coalition to make specific promises regarding increasing the remuneration of teachers and then not to do anything about it for four years until teachers lock the classrooms, march on the streets and even resort to mass hunger

Teachers deserve better status and rewards. Students also have the right to better service than what they are getting now. At least 48 eight percent of the students enrolled in class one dropped out by the time they reached class five. according to management information system data for 2004 of the Directorate of Primary Education. It is this writer's experience, which is corroborated by other concerned observers, that most students in class three or four in government primary schools cannot read and comprehend a simple text, such as a newspaper story, in Bangla. The statistical confirmation of this situation is found

in the Education Watch 2002

report which revealed that one-

third of all primary school students, after five years of schooling, remained functionally illiter-

Education Watch studies show that in secondary education, of 100 students enrolled in class six, on average, 40 reach class ten and only 20 pass Secondary School certificate (SSC) examination. Fifty-seven percent of the graduate teachers in secondary school have been recipients of third division degrees. Half of the secondary teachers have no pedagogic training. Parents spend on average Tk 4,000 per year per secondary school child in private tutors' fees in addition to other educational costs. At the primary level, the average spending per child on private tutors is Tk

Neither the government nor the protesting teachers have made a mention of the poor deal the children in school are getting and how the increased spending on teachers may benefit the

students. The government will no doubt do its best to defuse the explosive situation and teachers will have some of their demands met. Whatever gains the teachers make this time, they will not be satisfied and will raise their demands for higher remuneration and better recognition and status again. The next round of demands by teachers will be to "nationalize" all teachers and make them government servants. How will this improve teacher performance, raise accountability of teachers and schools and raise the level of

student learning?

Teachers should get their salary raise. They deserve more than what may be granted by the government. Once the deck is cleared by removing some of the anomalies in teachers' salaries, serious strategizing should begin to link teachers' remuneration with student learning. For one thing, the acute shortage of teachers of English, science and mathematics can be solved only by offering special incentives and offering special contracts at a premium to qualified people, some of whom may not be "cardcarrying" teachers.

Public spending on education including teachers' salary should increase both as a proportion of the government budget and of GNP. At the same time, systems of accountability of schools and teachers to parents and the local community must be developed and enforced at the school level. Performance standards and criteria for teachers and schools as well as student learning must be developed and tied to rewards for teachers and schools. A serious dialogue and exploration of possibilities must begin now to avert the cycle of unfulfilled political promises, teacher protests, grudging acceptance of some demands which satisfies no one, and a repeat of the vicious cycle after a short inter-

There are examples scattered around the country of outstanding institutions in the mainstream system -- other than cadet colleges and private schools -- with excellent student

Ways must be found to multi-

primary and secondary schools must be re-examined. Creative approaches are needed which will inevitably require deviation form the straitjacket of government Project Proforma (PP) -- a bureaucratic device to keep activities and budgets confined to a blueprint prepared at the beginning of a multi-vear project, which in course of implementation turns out inadequate or even inappropriate, but cannot be changed. The ultimate objective of the projects mentioned are better performance by students, which must be the touchstone for all

University Institute of Educational

decisions in the education sec-

Manzoor Ahmed is Director of BRAC