

It's not just arsenic that demands our concern

Harmful metals and chemicals in water challenge safe water policy

IT'S not just arsenic anymore in the groundwater. A recent survey indicates that a variety of metals and chemicals are in the groundwater and in dangerous quantities. They include uranium, cadmium, antimony, boron, chromium and a host of other elements. The safe looking water that gurgles out of the tubewells may have a cross and skull mark on many of the droplets.

British Geological Society and the Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) had carried out a survey in 1998-1999 and the results are now being made public. But what is being told is not good news. This isn't just in terms of what is naturally present in the water but also about our ability to develop a safe water policy.

The study suggests that the presence of the harmful chemicals and metals are quite extensive and it was found in all 31 districts where the survey was carried out. This study took 3534 samples and is considered nationally representative.

The substances found in the tested water can cause almost every ailment in the book and a number of them have carcinogenic elements as well. Others may cause massive multiple organ damage and hypertension too. Impotence and infertility as a result of exposure to such elements are also possible. It's not just a localized health problem but points to a fresh set of environmental health problem with long term implications nationally. International agencies have already declared that they will have to expand their testing parameters from the present seven harmful chemicals to look out for and incorporate some of those found in the latest survey.

One of the issues that emerge out of this survey is the bare fact of person-soil relationship. The idea of endless exploitation of nature without any responsibility is a myth, which we can no longer follow. We have seen how the arsenic crisis hit us and completely disrupted the much-lauded safe water supply programme. While it is true that arsenic and these elements occur naturally, it's all the more reason for us to remember that nature hasn't given a blank cheque on its exploitation. The latest report has added to our concern.

We need to have a policy and actions that are built around the realities of environment, health and the need to have a balanced natural resources utilization policy. The survey in question is a reality check that must lie at the top of our list of concerns.

Infant child slain by father!

Religion-blindness at its outrageous worst

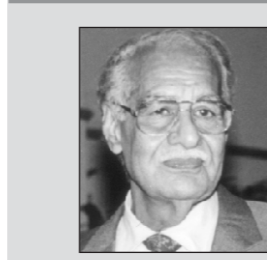
THE Eid mood got suddenly overcast with gloom and horror on February 23rd evening as the television news caster served up a heart beat stopper for millions in the country. And courtesy satellite television millions outside Bangladesh learnt about it, too. What a shame! Golam Mostafa alias Tula Mian put his seven-month old child Solaiman to sword in the delusion of performing a religious duty 'directed' by a voice heard in dream. As his progeny lay slaughtered, a non-chalant Mostafa with his barbaric zealotry muttered the total nonsense about being dream-driven to act. What a single person can do to disrupt or shake social equanimity so violently has been brought to sharp relief by 30-year-old Tula Mian.

There are two ways of looking at this mind-boggling incident. First, he might have been doped by over-religious messages to an extent that he took flight off reality in a fit of hallucination. Although he received his early education in a madrassah, the antecedent by itself cannot explain away his conduct except for the fact that his primitive mindset, fed on the company he kept, might have churned out the barbaric act.

Basically however, he seems to be a psychotic case. He has been showing symptoms of mental illness for quite some time, and yet none in his family or community thought it necessary to take him to a psychiatrist. That's the lesson we re-learn here. According to a survey carried out by WHO, one per cent of our population i.e. 13 lakh persons may be suffering from complicated mental diseases but very few ever get to see a doctor, far less any specialist. Just one of them can wreak havoc on the society.

However, the culpability of Golam Mostafa's brutal act is of such serious nature that it should not escape punishment through any pretense to mental affliction. That members of his family and some neighbours called the police and handed him over to them is a sign of social consciousness that kindles optimism.

Secularism door ast



KULDIP NAYYAR
writes from New Delhi

PAKISTAN is currently in the midst of a healthy and amusing debate on secularism. It is healthy because those who wear Islam on their sleeves are on the defensive. It is amusing because the two-nation theory on which Pakistan is premised does not fit into the accommodation that secularism demands. It all began over the promise President Pervez Musharraf held out to the world in his January 12 speech: to make Pakistan a moderate and progressive Islamic state. In a subsequent interview to the *Newsweek*, he went to the extent of describing Pakistan a "Muslim secular state." The interview was tape-recorded. Still the President's spokesman said three days later that Musharraf never used the word 'secular.' US Secretary of State Powell has only heightened the debate by tagging the term 'secular' onto Pakistan when Musharraf was recently in Washington.

Indeed, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, founder of Pakistan, expounded the two-nation thesis on the ground that Hindus and Muslims living in the subcontinent were two separate nations. But after winning Pakistan, he changed the concept of nationhood from religion to country. His opening address before the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan con-

firmed this: "You are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this state of Pakistan..."

You will find that in the course of time, Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is a faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state."

Even in an interview a few weeks before the partition plan was

The post-Jinnah-Liaquat rulers have tried to go back to the two-nation theory, deliberately creating a gulf between Hindus and Muslims. There are several elements in Pakistan which are hell bent on interpreting Jinnah wrongly. Some quote chapter and verse from the Pakistan constitution to argue that Article 31 makes it mandatory to follow "the Islamic way."

One, the constitution was adopted in 1973 during Zulfikar Ali

secularism, which denotes pluralism. He cannot placate religious groups and secular elements at the same time.

True, Musharraf has restored the joint electorate, which another military dictator, General Zia-ul-Haq, had dropped from the constitution. But secularism does not mean the joint electorate alone. It is a temperament that has to be cultivated. It is a commitment to tolerance and open society and means rising above

was not history but a treatise on Muslim chauvinism. In the name of ideology of Pakistan, the books have buried deep Jinnah's thought of not mixing the state with religion.

In his latest book Pakistan's Political Culture, Prof. KK Aziz, aptly describes its effect on a Muslim: "He found himself hanging from a rope stretched over an abyss whose two cliffs were his yesterdays and his today, and he did not know whether to try to move towards his yester-

a modern state which Musharraf should be following to change Pakistan. But is he prepared to revise the textbooks, change class instructions and repeal the blasphemy law? The government has already refused to drop the blasphemy law. In the same way, it does not want to change the provision that declared the Ahmadiyas non-Muslims.

If Musharraf wants Pakistan to turn over a new leaf, his fight against obscurantism has to be relentless. Does he have the commitment -- and support -- to do so? It is one thing to please the West but another to take steps on the ground to reform a society which has lived and developed with a particular identity in the last 50 years.

And how can Pakistan be a modern, progressive state without democracy? Musharraf says he will continue as President for the next five years. He needs to have the sanction of people through the ballot box. His ratings of popularity, according to the Pakistan press, are above 60 per cent. Fair and transparent elections have to confirm this. The Pakistan Supreme Court's directive to conduct the polls by October this year is there. But so far there has been no movement towards implementing the order. Political parties have not been allowed to function. The return of leaders of the two main parties from abroad is not even on the cards. If Musharraf wants to follow in Jinnah's footsteps, he will have to completely change himself and his military junta.

The next few months will show if he wants to do so. But will the army commanders go with him all the way?

Kuldeep Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.



BETWEEN THE LINES

How can Pakistan be a modern, progressive state without democracy? Musharraf says he will continue as President for the next five years. He needs to have the sanction of people through the ballot box. His ratings of popularity, according to the Pakistan press, are above 60 per cent. Fair and transparent elections have to confirm this. The Pakistan Supreme Court's directive to conduct the polls by October this year is there. But so far there has been no movement towards implementing the order.

announced, Jinnah said, "The members of the new nation would have equal rights of citizenship regardless of their religion, caste or creed." What he was conveying to the people of Pakistan was that they, whichever religion they belonged to, were one nation, like Indians or Americans. The state could not be mixed with religion.

For Jinnah, Pakistan and India were two nations, comprising Muslims and Hindus. He never favoured the transfer of population. And the little time he had before his death, he spent on emphasising that Pakistan was a democratic, secular country. That Jinnah did not want Pakistan to be run "by priests with a divine mission" goes without saying. Nor did he want the country to be theocratic. He had made this known even before Pakistan's formation.

Bhutto's regime. Two, even if the constitution is strictly followed, Article 31 enjoins only on the Muslims "to ordain their lives in accordance with the fundamental principles and basic concepts of Islam..." What kind of secular state would it be, if the 95 per cent people were to live in the "Islamic way?" The founder of Pakistan was opposed to introducing religion to affairs of state. The criterion should be what he said: "You may belong to any religion or caste or creed -- that has nothing to do with the fundamental principle that we are all citizens of one state."

Musharraf has made speeches on building Pakistan into a modern, progressive state. But for such an edifice to be built, secularism is the foundation stone. He does not have to feel embarrassed over the word

one's own religion. Followers of one belief are not superior to people from other faiths.

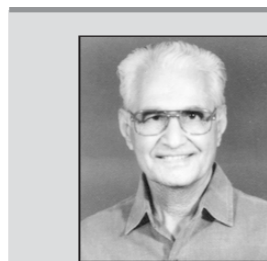
Every religion has noble teachings and lofty moral grounds. There is a tendency in each of us to mock the unfamiliar in others' faith and worship. Such words as 'heathen', 'idolatry' and 'superstition' are often used as insults. But in the moment of prayer, every man is at his best. He should command respect.

But how can the seeds of such thoughts be sown when the books and teachers in Pakistan spew hatred against the heritage of Hindus? General Ayub Khan abolished most of history from the school system and introduced what was called "social sciences." General Zia-ul-Haq demolished whatever was left of history. He created a new subject, "Pakistan Studies," which

years or towards the current times. He could not distinguish between his yesterday and his today. How could he look forward to his tomorrow? His perplexity was complete." What Pakistan did in 50 years to disjuncture history, India, under the BJP-led government, is trying to do in five years, its term till next parliament elections. At the command of Human Resource Minister Muri Manohar Joshi, history is being rewritten to glorify "Hindu culture." Even otherwise, there is an effort to saffronise the country. It is a pity that the BJP-led government should be busy in polarising the society. It will be counter-productive because the majority in the Hindu community believes in pluralism and open society.

In fact, pluralism and open society are the two recognisable traits of

Eclipse of the BJP?



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

THIS month's four state assembly polls and a few by-elections in India have returned an interesting results. The main central ruling party, or rather the leader of the ruling coalition, BJP, has received a definite setback. It has won power in no state and in its UP redoubt, its strength has slumped to just 87 seats of its own and 111 with its allies in a house of 403 seats.

Now the question is: Who has gained and how much? No clear trend seems visible. Relatively speaking, two caste-based parties, Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party have emerged as the largest parties, former leading with 151 (as of this writing) seats and the latter as second largest party with 94 seats. Both these parties have ruled UP, though BSP has always been a secondary party. The Samajwadi Party however has not received as many votes or as many seats as it used to earlier. Congress Party has vastly improved its earlier ridiculous tally to now 23 seats. Which means that the UP has not actually resurrected the Congress. It is obviously a split verdict, with no clear preference for any one party. Samajwadi and BSP parties' strengths reflect their basic support base in the respective castes. This is on the basis of various local caste considerations including the expediencies

of the Muslim voters of UP to choose the more secular candidates.

Elsewhere Congress has shown some resilience by returning to power in Punjab and in the newest province of India, Uttaranchal, as well as it is leading in the Manipur polls. Earlier Congress had shown a certain power to survive after the rise of BJP by holding on to its support bases in southern states. But it has, yet again, failed to regain its earlier supremacy it once enjoyed in

pushing the issue of Babri Masjid which culminated in its destruction in 1992 with ensuing communal riots. This latter catapulted BJP into the corridors of power in late 1990s. It became really respectable only in the 1990s and it became the chief custodian of the new Indian saffronised nationalism. Has this wave of Hindu-Indian Nationalism passed?

It would be foolish to be hasty in such judgements, although it is the

years. Corruption, factionalism and lethargy are sub-continental traits, that rapidly come to characterise most governments in countries like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. To no one's surprise BJP too exhibits corruption, factionalisation and simply bad governance. But its armour remains quite shining for the classes one mentioned that are its true support base. Its drive for power is second to none. There is already talk in UP one gathers that BJP will


may follow one ramshackle coalition after another at the Centre while the provinces go their own way. But even a rickety coalition in New Delhi would be firm and strong on the BJP favored pro-US foreign policy, strengthening the militarism trend and acceptance and promotion of the global economy ideology.

The forces at work in the provinces can easily be enumerated under a few heads: strongest one remains the regional nationalisms

The only areas where some generalisation can be made are about the states south of Vindhyaachals. These are reasonably well integrated. West Bengal, Tripura and Kerala are a special case. Their political base is strong communist parties. These have the ability to lead an integrated province that accommodates and combines regional pulls as well as political centralism of their own. In the rest of the provinces the rise of *Hindutva* has resulted in the release of, to begin with, the caste factor and it radically disfavors religious minorities. In fact these two constitute the other side of the *Hindutva* coin.

If Hindu is the true Indian needs to be empowered, he has to be identified and defined. Can a Hindu be defined without reference to his caste? As Muslims have shown elsewhere, there is no parsectarian or homogenised Muslim. If this be true for Muslims, how can a simple non-caste and non-denominational Hindu be found after so many thousand years of deeply religious but rigidly divided society? Experience has shown that caste is the nemesis of the *Hindutva* idea. Insistence on this definition of Indianism would continue to destabilize India, despite its appeal to those interests that are the true strength of BJP. BJP's *Hindutva* and emotional and ideological integration of India are irreconcilable. Apart from communalism and caste differentiation, other issues of mundane life also divide the people, and perhaps more importantly. These problems have remained unattended in most of the Hindi speaking and the western states of Gujrat and Maharashtra. How long can this haphazard politics continue, with its multiplying contradictions?

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PLAIN WORDS

The Congress is not (yet?) the alternative nor are the two Communist parties. The Third Force idea, supposedly still on the table, does not seem to have much of a vital force behind it. It is true that India is a democracy where naked dictatorship is unlikely to work. Thus, there may follow one ramshackle coalition after another at the Centre while the provinces go their own way.

Bihar and UP. BJP had destroyed Congress power from much of the Hindi belt -- UP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan - before it took over the centre in late 1990s.

The rise of BJP still needs to be understood at a philosophical level that provided a firm political foundation for the Congress eclipse. Its ability to overcome and pierce through the Congress hold over the populous Hindi-Hindu belt was based on two factors: at the ideological or deeper level BJP popularised *Hindutva* way of life being the quintessential Indian Nationalism, while discrediting the secular and composite Indian nationalism that Congress had come to represent and which was primarily the legacy of the small school of thought led by Jawaharlal Nehru. This latter job of undermining Congress had been done by BJP thinkers and writers over a long period, with its culmination being in 1980s. The second level or prong of BJP was fanning communal passions by relentlessly

received wisdom in India that whoever loses moral and political authority to rule UP and Bihar forfeits the right to rule India. But BJP is a party that is loved by Indian middle class, the so-called 250 350 million strong economically better-placed Indians. The big business tycoons revere it. Insofar as can be adjudged, the Indian version of the industrial-military complex is still in tune with BJP's *Hindutva*. On top of it, the bulk of Indian media, owned and controlled by the Big Business and its leading positions being occupied by BJP-favouring professionals is mainly pro-BJP, though there are notable exceptions. Can we write off such a party just because it has lost a few state elections?

What is incontestable is that BJP, both at the Centre and in the States, has obviously failed to show good governance. But which other party could govern India better? The Congress party had grown flabby by being the party in power for forty

like to lead a loose-limbed coalition with BSP and a few other small parties that are to be headed by Ms. Mayawati, the BSP Chief, her only condition for entering alliances. Most politicians love power and will not refuse to join coalition under BJP control. It is true that personal vendetta or the main political plank can create antagonistic alignments. Politically, BJP may still harvest a lot of votes in future after heating up the communal tensions, with communal riots that might result. The BJP chapter might come to a close if another Indian party were to emerge that can undermine BJP in its major support bases, particularly the Big Business, media and the industrial-military complex.

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that are already well established in the peripheral provinces excepting the volatile north-east and Indian controlled Kashmir --- and to a small extent in Punjab. There is some wishful thinking in Pakistan about the sturdiness of Indian unity and integrity. So long as a brutal dictatorship can be eschewed and democratic institutions are retained, there may not be any disintegration of India. For, Indian economy is so integrated that any seceding part will lose more than it can hope to gain. The regional nationalisms south of Vindhyaachals have, via free polls media and federal institutions, learnt to live with the Centre. Regional nationalisms are not a problem in the populous northern or even western provinces. Not even Tamil Nadu can opt for secession. That was established as far back as mid-1960s.

What of the rest of the provinces? Conditions in north-east and north-west of India are too unstable and volatile to permit any generalisation.

OPINION

Translation of Qurán: Some remarks about the Saudi edition

A.B.M. NURUL ISLAM

THE English translation and commentary of the Holy Qurán by Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali is possibly the most popular one among English-speaking and English-educated people. His lucid style, numerous footnotes and comments help the reader to understand and glimpse a little of the beauty of the original inimitable masterpiece. He completed the first manuscript of the work of Interpretation of the Holy Qurán in Lahore in April, 1937 after working on it for three years, at the ripe age of 65 years. He wrote a preface to the Third Edition in 1938. His original work was first published in Lahore in three volumes. Islamic Education Centre, P.O. Box 6720, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia also brought out the same work in one volume in 1946 (Reference 1).

"Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques", the current Saudi King Fahd Ibn Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, when he was the Deputy Prime Minister, ordered the translation of the Holy Qurán into every language spoken by Muslims worldwide (ref. Preface of Reference 2) As part of this

task, the Committee that was entrusted to prepare the English translation decided to adopt the translation and commentary of A. Yusuf Ali instead of writing one themselves as the "second option demanded much time and effort". The Committee then decided, in its collective wisdom, to rid Yusuf Ali's work of "personal bias". This editing was checked by three other committees to ensure correctness and elimination of "thoughts not in conformity with the sound Islamic point of view". One comes to know about these by reading the 5-page Preface to the Saudi King Edition (Reference 2). There is no mention of the persons who made up these committees, however.

What are the "personal biases" of Allama Yusuf Ali that had been changed? No indication is available as a summary or a table. To the extent that I can see from the two versions available to me, the following changes can be noted:

1.The word God has been replaced by Allah in the S.K. edition. This is innocent enough.

2.In place of Mecca and Medina, Makkah and Madinah have been adopted.

3.Seven of the fourteen masterly Appendices that Yusuf Ali wrote on topics like "Allegorical Interpretation of the Story of Joseph", "Who was Zul-qarnain", "Mystic Interpretation of the Verse of Light", "The Muslim Heaven" etc. have been omitted. No explanation is given.

4.The Prefaces to the First and the Third Editions, the L'Envoi (concluding remarks after completion of the first manuscript), notes on "Commentaries on the Qur-an", "Translations of the Qur-an" and "Useful works of reference" written by A. Yusuf Ali are omitted.

5.Some footnotes have been changed to conform to traditional/orthodox interpretation of the Holy Book. The reason I am writing this piece is basically to bring this to the readers' notice.

Original Footnotes (number 324 and 326) prepared by A. Yusuf Ali (commenting on Surá 2, verse 275) read as follows (my comments are within):

324. Usury is condemned and prohibited in the strongest possible terms. There can be no question about this prohibition. When we come to definition of Usury there is

room for difference of opinion. Hadhrat Umar, according to Ibn Kathir, felt some difficulty in the matter, as the Apostle left this world before the details of the question were settled. This was one of the three questions on which he wished he had more light from the Apostle, the other two being Khilafat and Kalalat (see iv.12 n.518). Our Ulama, ancient and modern, have worked out a great body of literature on Usury, based mainly on economic condition as they existed at the rise of Islam. I agree with them on the main principles, but respectfully differ from them on the definition of Usury. As this subject is highly controversial, I shall discuss it, not in this Commentary but on a suitable occasion elsewhere. The definition I would accept would be: undue profit made, not in the way of legitimate trade, out of loans of gold and silver, and necessary articles of food, such as wheat, barley, dates and salt (according to the list mentioned by the Holy Apostle himself). My definition would include profiteering of all kinds, but exclude economic credit, the creature of modern banking and finance. [underline added]

The modified footnotes (bearing the same numbers) in the S.K. Edition read as follows:

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326. The sharp opposition between legitimate trade and usury supports my definition in last note but one [i.e. refers to note 324]. Bai'(literary, Sale or Barter) is also used more generally for trade and commerce, and various kinds of transactions.

Owing to the fact that

interest occupies a central position in modern economic life, and specially since interest is the very life blood of the existing financial institutions, a number of Muslims have been inclined to interpret it in a manner which is radically different from the understanding of Muslim scholars throughout the last fourteen centuries and is also sharply in conflict with categorical statements of the Prophet (peace be on him). According to Islamic teachings any excess on the capital is riba (interest). Islam accepts no distinction, in so far as prohibition is concerned, between reasonable and exorbitant rates of interest; nor between returns on bonus for consumption and those for production purposes and so on. [a totally different note]

There are possibly other footnotes and translations that have been changed, but I have not carried out a line by line search.

Allama Yusuf Ali (1872-1953), a Hafez and an I.C.S., a thoroughly modern man of his time, an educationist (Principal of Islamia College, Lahore) and one who did bridge the knowledge of the East and the West, had the courage of his conviction to state what was/is in effect

against traditional thinking on the question of riba. He translated riba as usury and not as interest. He must have faced much criticism during his life which is evident from the following sentence he wrote at conclusion of his manuscript:

"I had not imagined that so much human jealousy, misunderstanding and painful misinterpretation should pursue one who seeks no worldly gain and pretends to no dogmatic authority."

According to my understanding, nobody has the right to change what an author had written without his or his publisher's consent. I am not an expert on copyright laws or intellectual property issues. Readers may throw more light on this. The Saudis were/are welcome to write an English translation and commentary of the Holy Qurán as they see fit, but they cannot modify someone else's work and flood the market by distributing it at no cost. And people think that they are looking at the original work. I came to realize this when I was scanning a compact disk (CD "Alim") containing the text, translations and commentary of the Holy Qurán plus other Islamic literature like Hadiths,

Islamic history etc. Whether knowingly or not, the compilers of this CD had used the S.K. Version as "Yusuf Ali translation and Commentary" which I believe is a disservice to the illustrious author.

Democracy, dissent and debate are so rare in the current Islamic world. Traditionalists would hammer down any nail that sticks out. Such intolerance breeds a flock of sheep who follow blindly and are of little worth except bloating the numbers of adherents. Holy Qurán and Islam are strong enough to withstand buffeting from its adherents as well as critics. Holy Qurán and Islam do not require any clumsy thought control by self-proclaimed custodians or their cohorts.

Readers, beware!

References:

1. The Holy Qurán, Text, Translation and Commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali. Publication of Islamic Education Centre, P.O. Box 6720, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
2. The Holy Qur-an, English translation of the meanings and Commentary. Revised and Edited by The Presidency of Islamic Researches, IFTA, Call and Guidance. A gift from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Fahd Ibn Abdul Aziz.