

A liberal Muslim goes to America

BY ANATUL ISLAM

MUQTEDAR Khan is one of the rising stars among Muslim intellectuals in the West. A US-based academic of Indian origin, he is a fellow of the prestigious Brookings Institution...

of the Muslim heartland. As he puts it: 'Secular westernized Muslims have little influence in the Muslim World. Islam has become the dominant idiom of the Muslim World and the West must find a way to cooperate and co-exist with... liberal Islamists who believe in democracy, tolerance and pluralism, but within the Islamic rubric.'

He is a 'very vocal critic of George Bush's foreign policy' without subscribing to the thesis of American imperialism. This is evident in his reaction to the 'civilizational dialogue' hosted by France in Paris.

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the French were using the Paris forum to depict 'the US as a neo-colonial power seeking to dominate the oil resources of the [Middle East] by force.'

He reminded Europe of its double standards. As he puts it: 'Compared to Europe's history American colonial ambitions are insignificant and as far as democracy and freedom of religion is concerned...'

gion was concerned the US was streets ahead of the French... I reminded them that the US was, as former Secretary of State Albright pointed out, the "indispensable nation".

His allegiance to America leads Khan to delineate the kind of role that American Muslims ought to play as citizens of that country.

this traumatic experience also provides a window of opportunity to reconstruct the identity of American Muslims. Some positive changes are underway, such as endowments to fund Islamic Studies in American Universities...

Khan emphasises that liberal Muslims are critical of American foreign policy, concerned about Islamophobia in the West and the way in which it is fuelled by ignorance about Islam and the Muslims.

He reminds fellow Americans that there are mutual obligations. 'They cannot allow events overseas to foster anti-Muslim sentiments and Islamophobia at home.'

Khan interprets anti-Americanism in the Muslim world as the product of dual forces. Thus: '...they are the manifestly unjust consequences of current and past American foreign policies towards the Muslim World and the use of America as the "designated other"'

in Islamist discourses seeking to reconstruct an Islamic identity and create a global Islamic political power.'

In his view, Islamic fundamentalists are 'rogue Islamists', a variation, it seems, of the idea of the 'rogue state' favoured by American policy makers. Rogue Islamists have managed to use foster implacable hostility towards the US on a global scale.

Many liberal concerns have been protected in the heydays of liberal Islam in Islamic Spain, under Emperor Akber in Mughal India and under the Abbasid caliphate in the heartlands of Islam.'

Similarly, the UPA hasn't yet implemented the Common Minimum Programme's promises to the toiling poor, like an Employment Guarantee Scheme, food security, and a doubled health budget.

Its economic agenda is preoccupied with issues outside the NCMP, like raising foreign-investment ceilings in telecom and insurance. It has been soft on the NDA's malfeasance in the Centaur Hotel sell-off and the AK-47 deal -- despite damage and opinion in newspapers.

Whose fundamentalism?

The Congress, the Right and the Left



PROF. PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

AT his first press conference as Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh said he's opposed to "fundamentalism" of both the Right and the Left.

That context was set by journalists' questions about the government's attempt to reverse the "safronisation" of education, and the Savarkar controversy triggered by Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar.

It wasn't the Right, but the Left, that the questioners put in the dock -- as if the Left were somehow guilty of distorting history and corrupting education.

Yet, the UPA has given the impression that it wants to please the Right, not the Left. Thus, Dr Singh gave his first exclusive interview to RSS organ Panchajanya, in which he didn't criticise the Sangh.

The UPA has done little to bring justice to the Gujarat victims, barring the Railways' inquiry into Godhra. Gujarat failed to find a mention in Dr Singh's first address to the nation.

What's "fundamentalism"? It connotes fanatical, dogmatic belief in the infallibility of the scriptures. Right-wing fundamentalism has many variants.

There are social ultra-conservatives who make a cult of inclusion and democracy. In today's India, the two main avatars of Right-wing fundamentalism are Hindutva and neoliberal market-fundamentalism.

Creating an environment for development

MD. ABDUL KADER AND AYUB HOSSAIN

UNITED Nations has presented us a new dream namely, "Millennium Development Goal (MDG)". It is expected that, if this dream can be realised, it will contribute significantly in poverty reduction.

This year Bangladesh experienced not only over-flooding but also over-raining. More than 40 districts were affected by flood. Crops washed away including seed and seedbed of next year.

million houses and other structures were damaged. Five million farmers have been directly affected. So far loss in agriculture sector alone stands as 2291.16 crore taka.

If we watch the post-flood situation carefully, two important pictures emerge. First of all, the most affected people are none other than the poorest of the poor. They don't have plough and cows as they are landless.

most often fail and are often even misguided when some of them involve in different anti-social activities. Space of terrorists and terrorism expands and law and order situation deteriorates.

These floating people have become a burden for the city. This current of rural-urban migration of poor and disaster-stricken village people has turned into one of the reasons for disorder and instability in urban society.

To overcome the situation many experts have expressed their concern and opinion in newspapers.

ing evidence. The relationship between the UPA and the Left, its crucial supporter, has become uneasy.

Although Dr Singh says he has "great faith" in the Left's "inherent patriotism", he wrongly tried to settle the "foreign experts" controversy over the Plan review by dissolving the consultative committees altogether!

The Left feels the UPA takes it for granted. The Left's support to the

authority and believe in the "one leader, one people, one nation". Fascists, ultra-nationalists, and Right-wing moral police fall in this group.

Then, there are "market fundamentalists" who have limitless faith in the virtues of greed: the state -- indeed all human agency -- must be kept out of social and economic life; the market will take care of itself.

In today's India, Left-wing fundamentalism doesn't exist as significant force. Of course, there are some fringe groups like remnants of former Naxalites. But they are marginal. They command no influence or power -- unlike the sangh parivar.

UPA isn't based on cynicism. It genuinely wants the UPA to flourish because that will weaken the Hindutva forces.

The Left's attempt to give a pro-poor thrust to the UPA's agenda is perfectly legitimate. The Left's 60-odd Lok Sabha MPs are crucial to the UPA's survival.

Dr Singh has a historic chance to forge an alliance between the Left's radicalism and the Congress' inclusive centrist orientation. This will give the Congress a healthy populist direction.

Under neoliberalism, global inequalities have reached unprecedented proportions. Of the world's 100 largest economies, only 49 are nations; 51 are corporations.

The Top-200's sales are 18 times the combined income of the 1.2 billion people (24 percent of the world) living in "severe" poverty. The

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Hindutva rejects India's religious-cultural pluralism. It has visited untold havoc upon us through hate-acts and by ideologically poisoning minds.

Market fundamentalism is equally harmful. It takes a Social-Darwinist view of the world, in which only the fittest may survive; others deserve to die.

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Top-200 account for 27.5 percent of world economic activity.

In India too, neoliberal policies have had disastrous effects on employment, regional balances and incomes, and caused agrarian distress.

Now consider Left fundamentalism. The term at worst applies to Stalinism, which forcibly collectivised agriculture, super-exploited workers, destroyed the Soviets (or councils) of workers, solders and peasants -- and hence, killed the seeds of a new kind of democracy sown in 1917.

All this was justified by quasi-religious dogma that gave socialism a bad name. Integral to it was the "one-party state" and "dictatorship of the proletariat".

"Fundamentalism" also describes, somewhat less appropriately, Charu Mazumdar-type cults of violence, with Annihilation of the Class Enemy as the sole method of "revolution", and countless groups for whom Marx, Lenin, Stalin or Trotsky are the Gospel.

India's organised Left parties have repudiated or freed themselves of the Stalinist legacy. None even remotely believes in the "one-party state" or centralised planning.

The Left, with all its inadequacies, represents responsible, solidly democratic politics, committed to justice and equality. One might disagree with tactics, but not with its moral clarity, openness and commitment to popular emancipation.

It's the Hindutva Right and the "free-market" dogma-peddlers that constitute the real threat to Indian democracy. Dr Singh should systematically combat the threat -- with his Left-wing allies.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

'Agattya', mosquitoes and more

SYED BADRUL HAQUE

IN our health culture, mosquitoes have since been in the centre-stage, albeit with a negative stance. I am nevertheless tempted to recall the anecdotes of the early fifties about mosquitoes that invaded the Dhakaites bitterly and made their life miserable.

Driven to desperation, a reader of "Agattya", a popular Bengali periodical of the day, wrote a letter to its editor asking what was the way out of this veritable nuisance. The editor replied quoting a line from a hit song of a Bollywood movie, Barsat, "Hamse na puchho, puchho Baharse" which obviously directed the letter-writer to refer his question to Mr. Habibuallah Bahar who was then the provincial health minister under Pakistani regime.

To note, over time, health minister Mr. Bahar accomplished an excellent job in ridding the Dhaka city of mosquitoes. Coming back to "Agattya", may I request our noted academic and cultural personality, Mostafa Nurul Islam (as one personally involved with the "Agattya") to do a piece recapitulating its role in promoting the cause of the Bengali people along with the contribution of a band of those pioneering journalist-writers who ventured to bring out "Agattya" confronting great odds of the day.

Lastly, a word on Mr. Mahub Jamal Zahedi. A founder-editor of the "Agattya", Mr. Zahedi is now a paralytic patient. We wish him early recovery.

Syed Badrul Haque is a former Public Relations Officer to the President.

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