

# Fasting in Islam

SYED ASHRAF ALI

FASTING during the sacred month of Ramadan is obligatory for every Muslim provided that he or she is adult and in full possession of his or her faculties. It is considered to be one of the five pillars of Islam. The holy Prophet (pbuh) said, "Islam is built on five pillars: the *shahada* (profession of faith) that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, *salat* (prayers), *zakat* (alms-tax), the *saum* (fast) of Ramadan and *hajj* (pilgrimage).

The Fast of Ramadan commences with the sighting of the new moon and ends when the new moon of the next month of Shawal is seen. The Ramadan Fast was first prescribed on the second Monday of the month of Shaban in the second year of the Hegira. According to Ibn Kathir, the Muslim Fast went through three stages of development until it reached its present state.

1) When the holy Prophet (pbuh) came to Madinah, he used to fast three days every month in addition to the Day of Ashoura. As things were, Muslims were not required, when they first arrived in Madinah, to fast more than three days every month. Ibn Abbas reported that the holy Prophet (pbuh) had noticed that the Jews in Madinah observed the fast on the Day of Ashoura (the tenth of Muharram). The holy Prophet (pbuh) asked the reason for it and was told that God delivered Moses and his people on this memorable day from their enemy. Moses (pbuh) therefore observed it as a day of fasting, whereupon the holy Prophet (pbuh) told the Jews: "Moses is closer to me than he is to you." He then observed the day as a fast and instructed the Muslims to fast upon it. He sent out a man to tour Madinah on that day and announce to the Muslims that: "He who had already eaten shall abstain the rest of the day and he who had not, shall fast the day. Today is the Day of Ashoura."

2) The second stage begins when Allah, in His infinite Mercy, prescribed the Fast of Ramadan in the second year of the Hegira. When the Ramadan Fast was prescribed through the revelation of verses 183 to 187 of Sura al-Baqara (Chapter II), the fast on other days was abolished. The holy Prophet (pbuh) said: "The Fast of Ramadan has abolished every other fast." But Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah (RA) reported that the holy Prophet (pbuh) also said, "Whoever

wishes may fast upon it (the Day of Ashoura), and whoever wishes may drop it."

3) The third stage deals with the period of abstinence and indulgence there were times of abstinence during the night as well as during the day. When a man had said his *Isha* prayers, he was supposed to abstain from *Mustirat* (i.e. food, drink and sex) after prayers. If a man slept (even before saying the *Isha* prayers) he had to abstain when he awoke. The mere saying of *Isha salatarand* sleep forced a man into a state of abstinence for the rest of the night and the following day until sunset. To provide mankind with the much-needed relaxation from the rigidity and

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hardship, *Rahmanur Rahim* revealed the verse: "It is lawful for you on the night of the fast to go unto your wives; they are your garments and you are their garments. Allah knows that you defraud yourselves therein, so He turns towards you and forgives you. So go unto them and seek what Allah has ordained for you, and eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct from the black thread, then observe the Fast till night-fall." (2:187)

Fasting is an ancient form of worship recognised by all previous religions, even the heathen ones. But Islam introduced a new vision, a new idea, a new spirit into the institution of fasting. For the first time in history, fasting was blessed with a systematic regulation, a scientific method, a noble justification. In the days before the Holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh) Fasting meant the suffering of some privation in the hours of mourning and sorrow.

Islam introduced a revolutionary innovation and *al-Siyam* stood not for mere suffering or abstinence but for an institution for the moral uplift and spiritual elevation of the human soul. A

Muslim fast never indicates mere abstaining from food and drinks and sex, and fasting in Islam is never meant for self-torture.

The restraint from the animal instincts for food, drink and sex enables the attention of a man or a woman to be directed to higher and nobler aspects. Fasting in the light of Islam helps us to overcome lusts and thereby sets us at the mouth of the road leading to perfection - perfection to be achieved through prayers and penance, *Taqwa* and *Tarawwih*, contemplation and acts of charity, total restraint and abstinence from all evil acts and thoughts. The self-restraint or *Taqwa*, indeed, has to be a voluntary effort comprising the

sins forgiven, he who prays during the night in Ramadan with faith and seeking his reward will have his past sins forgiven; and he who passes Lailat al-Qadr in prayer with faith and seeking his reward from Allah will have his past sins forgiven." (Bukhari and Muslim).

Anas b. Malik (RA) told of God's Messenger (pbuh) saying when Ramadan began, "The month has come to you, and it contains a night which is better than a thousand month. He who is deprived of it is deprived of all good, but only those who are denied prosperity are deprived of it." (Ibn Maja transmitted it).

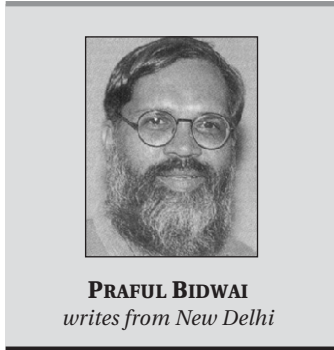
The Holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh) also said, "The one who fasts has two occasions of joy, one when he breaks his fast and one when he meets his Lord". (Bukhari and Muslim).

Salman al-Farsi (RA) told of Allah's Messenger (pbuh), "If some one draws near to God during it with some good act he will be like one who fulfils an obligatory duty in another month, and he who fulfils an obligatory duty in it will be like one who fulfils seventy obligatory duties in another month. It is the month of endurance, and the reward of endurance is paradise." (Baihaqi transmitted it).

The holy month of Ramadan has come once again to teach us that the temporary renunciation of food and drinks, sex and greed makes the fulfilment of the basic desires even more pleasant. Let us celebrate it in a befitting way, not through lavish *Iftar* parties and expensive dresses (for the ensuing Eid), not through extravagance and prodigality, but through *Taqwa* and *Tarawwih*, *Zakat* and *Fitra*, self-restraint and benevolence, prayers and penance. No sensible Muslim can afford to miss this blissful opportunity to learn self-restraint, to temper himself in the kiln of *Taqwa*, and receive thereby divine Mercy from the Creator. Must not anyone forget even for a moment the *Hadith Quds*i (utterances attributed to Allah outside the Holy Quran) communicated to us by the holy Prophet (pbuh) when he says, "Every man's work belongs to him. Every (good) deed of a son of Adam does will be multiplied, a good deed receiving a tenfold to seven hundred fold reward. Allah has said, "Fasting belongs to Me and I repay".

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# India as US camp-follower? A shameful vote against Iran



PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

THERE could have been no surer or stupider way of turning India's long-standing friends into enemies, jeopardising her interests, splitting the Non-Aligned Movement, and being branded a United States "stooge".

New Delhi has accomplished just that by supporting an anti-Iran resolution sponsored by the European Union-3 (Germany, France and Britain) at the International Atomic Energy Agency. India has let down Iran; worse, it has shot itself in the foot.

India's vote is the *greatest*-ever blow to its foreign policy independence. It betrays the United Progressive Alliance's promise to correct the pro-US policy tilt under the National Democratic Alliance.

India's vote was driven by an obsession with joining the Nuclear Club on American terms under the July 18 nuclear deal. Sounds too harsh? Consider this.

Washington pressured India against Iran. It regards Iran as an "exporter of terrorism" and a "rogue state" determined to acquire nuclear weapons. India promised to *oppose* the IAEA's referral of Iran to the Security Council for sanctions, but *facilitated* the referral.

However, the Foreign Ministry's website says "finding Iran non-compliant is *not justified*"; the resolution itself "recognises that 'good progress has been made in Iran's correction of [alleged] breaches'" of Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty safeguards. Yet, India voted for the motion!

In Vienna, the EU-3 acted as a US surrogate. India played surrogate to this surrogate, further demeaning itself.

India colluded with the US-EU-3 in

gratuitously altering IAEA decision-making procedures. Its board of governors conventionally takes decisions by consensus. When the US realised there would be no consensus on Iran, it demanded a vote. India backed it, splitting the hitherto-united NAM group.

The US sent a lobbying delegation to New Delhi, led by under-secretary for disarmament Robert Joseph, just before Dr Manmohan Singh's visit to the US. Following this, but *before* the PM's visit, India decided to vote with the US "in a crunch situation" (*The*

Whatever Iran's intentions behind enrichment, it adopted a highly cooperative attitude towards IAEA inspections. These haven't revealed evidence of a military programme. Traces of enriched uranium were detected on some equipment. But these were sourced to imports from A.Q. Khan's network.

IAEA reports, including the latest (September 2), don't conclude that Iran has violated NPT-IAEA obligations. According to the International Institute of Strategic Studies, London, Iran is *five to 10 years away* from a weapons

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*Hindu*, Sept 17). India then acted out a mere charade.

India's *post-facto* rationalisation was that the resolution would facilitate diplomacy to *resolve* the Iran crisis. In fact, the crisis got *aggravated*: Iran feels offended and terms the resolution "illegal". And the US is triumphalist.

India now stands with Singapore, Peru, Ecuador and Ghana -- not with NAM's weightier players like Brazil, South Africa, and Malaysia. Even Pakistan and Sri Lanka abstained from voting. India couldn't muster that courage. So much for this Emerging Giant!

The Iran crisis exploded in 2002 with disclosures of a nuclear programme concealed from public gaze for 18 years. Iran acquired a small number of uranium centrifuges. Other countries, including Israel, Pakistan, Taiwan, the two Koreas, and India too, have indulged in clandestine nuclear acquisitions. Most go away.

"Axis-of-Evil" state Iran was targeted because of deep-rooted US prejudices and an eye on Persian Gulf oil.

capability.

Some information gaps remain regarding Iran's past activities. These can be filled with further investigations. But the US wants to drag Iran before the Security Council *al lahra*.

The EU-3's mediatory effort wasn't honest. They were meant to offer financial and political incentives, and Iran to forswear nuclear weapons. Following an agreement, Iran *voluntarily* suspended enrichment activities.

Meanwhile, Iran's presidential elections happened. When the "radical" Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won against the "moderate" Rafsanjani, the EU *reneged* on the original incentives package and demanded Iran *surrender* enrichment forever.

Iran refused to renounce its "sovereign right" and started converting uranium oxide to hexafluoride gas at Isfahan, a facility far removed from centrifuge enrichment at Natanz.

The US-EU-3 decided to confront Iran at the IAEA. For credibility, they needed a Third World *heavyweight*-collaborator. India played their game.

# What is the mystery of the letter to Dr. Rice?

MOZAMMEL H. KHAN writes from Toronto

THE alliance government of Bangladesh and Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed who writes from the town of Princeton seem to have a number of things in common: both are in a state of denial, both are in ostrich-like attitude, both are in constant pursuit to invent conspiracy whenever something is published outside our borders depicting the reprehensible state of affairs of Bangladesh and both are in complete tune in accusing our citizens of conducting smear campaign if one raises the despicable human rights situation in the country in any international forum. In an earlier write-up in the Daily Star (DS), he dismissed the NY Times story of Eliza Griswold entitled, 'Bangladesh: The next Islamic revolution?' and inferred the whole story as conspiracy against Bangladesh. After what happened on August 17, and the subsequent and ongoing startling revelations in the news media including the DS, I was expecting that Dr. Fakhruddin would make an apology to his readers for his incomplete perceptions about the existence of the extremist elements and their evil designs. Quite to the contrary, he has even gone one-step ahead of the government of Bangladesh in cutting aspersions on the authenticity of the letter written to Dr. Condoleezza Rice by sixteen distinguished lawmakers of the US congress. A government spokesperson of Bangladesh has responded to the letter that affirmed that the government did not have any doubt about its authenticity. Even the PM in her recent speech, in commensurate with her usual incrimination, in Bangladesh Embassy in NY made an oblique reference through her accusations that "the ill-campaigners are organising seminars and meetings abroad to establish the one-sided and false allegations with the help of politicians of foreign countries who are sympathetic to them".

The letter visibly outraged Dr. Fakhruddin, which was obvious through his rather incoherent reactions. On the one hand, he blamed the Bangladeshi who, in his view, orchestrated this anti-Bangladesh campaign, and took an extremely critical view of the observations made in the letter, while, on the other, raising the apprehension if the legislators 'did actually sign the letter', an incredulity that overtly undermines the integrity and accountability of some of the US politicians from both sides of the political divides, any of whom has the potential and prospect of becoming the next President of the United States.

In his research to find the geographical identity of lawmakers, his conclusion was 'bizarre': 'most of the lawmakers come from the New England area and some one or some groups are orchestrating anti-Bangladeshi smear campaign'. Dr. Fakhruddin miserably failed to distinguish between the State and the government. If the criticisms

against the policies and the wrong doings of the Bush Administration are considered smear campaign against America, then Dr. Fakhruddin's name should feature in the forefront of that list of the 'anti-Americans' and Fahrenheit 911 famed Michael Moore, who portrayed the ugly face of the US government to the billions of audience around the globe should be tried for treason.

Because of the Bush administration's ill-intended policies and attitude towards the rest of the world, albeit George Bush is the elected President of the United States, respect for Jefferson's America is never been at such low ebb in the international arena. Being disenchanted by the faltering image of their beloved country and failing to avail any other internal avenues to redress the situations, if a group of Americans urge the UN to censure Bush Administra-

**What is wrong with the US lawmakers' comments that 'the lower courts are under the authority of the executive and they lack independence'? In fact, the US lawmakers did not touch on the Bangladesh's higher judiciary, which has been allegedly politicised by the current administration. It was ridiculous that Dr. Fakhruddin drew a parallel between the appointments of judges in US Supreme Court with those under the current administration in Bangladesh.**

tion's policy, will Dr. Fakhruddin, presumably an American citizen, add his chorale to those voices or term their effort as an act of 'smear campaign' against US? The maverick independent MP of the British House of Commons George Galloway in his crusade against the labour party government brought his case to the western side of the Atlantic. Only the other day, he was cheered by thousand of students of Canada's biggest university when he delivered a fiery speech castigating the catastrophic policy of the Bush-Blair administrations. Neither the British government nor any of its citizens ever criminated Mr. Galloway of mounting smear campaign against his motherland.

In his own admission it is clear to Dr. Fakhruddin that 'those who stand to gain by Bangladesh becoming a failed state promote and perpetuate the myth that Bangladesh is well on its way towards national suicide'. It would be natural to enquire the identity of the elements who stand to gain from Bangladesh becoming a failed state. Is he pointing his finger to Senator Kennedy, who travelled all the way to our devastated land in 1971

to express his support and solidarity with our life and death struggle for freedom, or to the freedom fighter who moved from village to village in the occupied land with curbides on his shoulder to free his motherland from the foreign occupation or to the school girl, who happens to teach in Boston University now, donated his tiffin allowance to the

cause of Bangladesh's creation? In fact, one does not have to be a scholar to conceive the hypothesis that those who opposed the creation of Bangladesh stand to gain from its failure of becoming a viable state in order to prove that they did nothing wrong by opposing its creation in the first place. It is worth noting that the debate of 'failed state' started during the tenure of the current alliance government; it was never featured even during the regime of martial or quasi-martial law, which the people of Bangladesh, unfortunately, had to endure during half of its life since its inception. Moreover, Dr. Fakhruddin should not be on the receiving end of the lecture in identifying the perpetrators when a State is considered failed. Are these the people who are in the helm of the State or those who are out of it?

Dr. Fakhruddin commented that as in neighbouring countries, political and

the judges in the US Supreme Court possess illustrious legal career with their formal education received in Harvard, Yale or similar reputed education institutions. Their differences come not from their affiliation to the Republican or the Democratic parties; they differ on social and constitutional issues. In addition, they are so much grilled during the Senate confirmation hearing that the whole nation comes to know about their past records and their standing on unsettled social and constitutional issues. They never felt embarrassed to hear the appeal of the self-confessed killers of a victim as because the victim incidentally believed in a political faith different from their own.

In conclusion Dr. Fakhruddin asked the Bangladesh government to verify the authenticity of the letter, which I believe, the government with its multiple mission offices in US soil has done so. The Daily Star possesses an extended periphery of readership that extends beyond the national boundary of Bangladesh. Only on the other day, David Boster Jr., a US citizen, issued a rejoinder in response to a story by Lawrence Lifschultz. On a similar token, my article questioning the statistical validity of CPI data to declare Bangladesh as the most corrupt country of the world in 2001 prompted a response from the Transparency International headquarters in Berlin. We even did not have the perception that fraudulency can occur in the communi-qué that is customarily being issued about the outcomes of a talk between two foreign leaders until we read a protest statement issued by Senator Kennedy regarding his talk with Bangladesh government's minister of Home Affairs. Being a US citizen and residing at a vantage point in New Jersey, transparency of American democracy should give him little trouble to verify the authenticity of the letter. If his apprehension is not true, and if the statement was made 'to oblige the constituent', Dr Fakhruddin who seemingly possesses an unflinching trust on the Bangladesh government's records on Human Rights, Liberal Democracy, Rule of Law, the RAB Actions of extra-judicial denial of right to life, dysfunctional parliament, politicisation of every organ of the state, including the election commission and the judiciary, surely could obtain a few testimonials, 'a routine service to their constituents', from his Senators such as Frank Lautenberg and Robert Torricelli of New Jersey endorsing his own views on those burning issues. It would be, indeed, a befitting reciprocation to counter the 'anti-Bangladeshi campaign' allegedly waged by his compatriots residing in US soil!

religious violence are facts of life in Bangladesh. In which other democracy in our neighbourhood grenades after grenades are thrown in the public rally, in broad daylight, pointing to the leader MP of the opposition and former PM, killing and wounding hundreds and the law enforcing agencies, instead of rescuing the victims, would fire tear gas? Whose interest was served by this nefarious acts of the police force? How one could dismiss the natural inference about the collusion of the authority with the perpetrators? Dr. Fakhruddin is irked by the prominence that slain Mr. Kibria received in the letter, overlooking the full contents that Sheikh Hasina and British HC received due importance as well. He also found fault with the lawmakers' inaction as regard to the case of Narinder Modi of Gujrat. In fact, Narinder Modi is already in the criminal list of the State Department who has been denied US visa.

What is wrong with the US lawmakers' comments that 'the lower courts are under the authority of the executive and they lack independence'? Does Dr. Fakhruddin want to deny this well-known fact? In fact, the US lawmakers did not touch on the Bangladesh's higher judiciary, which has been allegedly politicised by the current administration. It was ridiculous that Dr. Fakhruddin drew a parallel between the appointments of judges in US Supreme Court with those under the current administration in Bangladesh. Most of

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# Musharraf's dilemma

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

IN spite of severe criticism at home by religious groups, including Jamaat-e-Islami on his initiative to have dialogue with Israel President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan has made historic decision in addressing American Jewish Congress, powerful Jewish community, on September 18 in New York. Having no diplomatic relations with Jewish state of Israel President Musharraf announced that Pakistan would take steps to build ties with Israel as the Middle East peace process progresses. He was given a standing ovation as soon as he entered the meeting hall. He availed of the opportunity of the meeting to call for "the establishment of a Palestinian State to end the violence in the Middle East and bring security to Israel."

President Musharraf said that peace in Palestine that does justice to both the Palestinians and Israelis would bring to a close the sad chapter in the history of the Middle East and would revive the historical ties between Islam and Judaism. The President inaugurated the function by breaking the bread, Jewish tradition of honouring a guest, followed by recitation from Torah and Quran. The President was presented by US congressional citation by Congressman Tom Lantos.

This is for the first time that a President from a Muslim dominated country, second largest Muslim country and nuclear power as well, has spoken directly to a group of Jews which took place following hand shake with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in the UN in New York three days before.

Pakistan is reportedly initiated secret meetings with the leaders of Israel two years back, which culminated in a meeting of the foreign ministers of Israel and Pakistan in Istanbul, Turkey with whom Israel has diplomatic relations. Turkey and Israel have been maintaining military and economic relations as well. This meeting has been described by many Middle East crisis observers as a historic event.

As of now Pakistan did not extend recognition to Israel, which declared independence unilaterally on May 14 in 1948 one day before the expiry of the British mandate of Palestine.

There has been series of protests in Pakistan following the disclosure of meeting between Pakistan Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri and Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom. Leader of Al-Jamia-Islamiya said that it was a black day for the Pakistani people and they would not support recognition of Israel while Qazi Hussein Ahmad, Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami that leads opposition Muttahidha Majlis-e-Amal, powerful six Islamic parties alliance, said that this was a move which is against the interest of Islamic ummah and reflects the pro-US policies of the present government. Although previous Pakistan govern-

**India has been maintaining strategic alliance with Israel. That may have caused anxiety in Pakistan. President Musharraf, who initiated measures for improvement of bilateral relations with arch rival India may have decided to develop relations with Israel to thwart US-India-Israel axis. Another scenario could be that of President Bush's foreign policy of marketing democracy as a global phenomenon, particularly in undemocratic Muslim countries. Viewed in this context, President Musharraf has no other options but to succumb to the pressure of the United States to recognise Israel with or without Palestinians having their homeland.**



ments had initiated dialogue at a lower level between the two countries, it was somewhat intriguing why President Musharraf chose to negotiate with hard-line Likud leader: Ariel Sharon.

Against the backdrop of protests in Pakistan President Musharraf temporarily backed out of according recognition to Israel unless Palestinian State is formed. In an effort to cool down the sentiment of the people in Pakistan President now declared that the administration has the blessing of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and the President Musharraf of the Palestinian authority Mahmud Abbas to engage in dialogue with Israel. To make the drama worse Foreign Minister Kasuri said that his country had decided to engage with Israel after Israel's withdrawal from Gaza. This appears to be the travesty of truth as can be seen from the total withdrawal date from Gaza strip was September 12, but both Foreign Ministers of Israel and Pakistan held talks on September 01 as a consequence of secret talks for a period of two years. Similarly, Pakistan's claim of blessing from the President Abbas of Palestinian authority has no basis as a spokesman of the PLA said the authority was "worried about Pakistan's making high level diplomatic contact with Israel. It is not good to give Israel gifts before it really implements the peace process, not only in Gaza, but in Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem". Hamas also



denounced the move. However, there is no word from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as to their concurring with Pakistan's initiative to establish dialogue with Israel.

The meeting between two Foreign Ministers of Israel and Pakistan can be attributed to a successful diplomacy of Israel which may have caused a setback to the Islamic Republic of Iran, a neighbour of Pakistan. Iran maintains very hostile relations with Israel since the Islamic revolution took place in Iran that ousted pro-US Shah of Iran. The secret meeting between Israeli and Pakistani Foreign Ministers held at the initiative of Turkish Prime Minister was Recep Tayyip Erdogan who intends to diffuse tension in the Middle East. The three countries involved in secret negotiations are the close allies of the United States.

With the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq by the United States the prospects of establishing diplomatic relations by Israel with these countries were opened up. Israel established diplomatic relations with these Muslim countries without any hullabaloo. In Central Asia, Israel becomes the important player in establishing quick relations with the countries following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Israel recognised all five Muslim countries immediately. Apart from these, Israel was recognised by four other Muslim countries, including Jordan, Egypt and Mauritania

The resolution imposes harsh demands upon Iran -- even tougher than the IAEA's intrusive Additional Protocol. It demands greater powers to inspect, including "access to individuals, documentation... and R&D locations". Iran must suspend "all enrichment-related activity".

Iran's now being pressed to convert its 2004 *legally non-binding* offer into an *obligation*. Uranium enrichment is permissible under the NPT -- with safeguards.

Iran is being given third-degree treatment, like Iraq in the 1990s. Such abuse of power through the IAEA sets a terrible precedent which could be invoked against yet another country the US doesn't like.

India's hypocrisy is stark. It now preaches non-proliferation. But India has been a *primary proliferator* since 1974. Since Pokharan-II, India has refused to sign any nuclear restraint agreement. India also condoned Pakistan's nuclearisation while rejecting all proposals for restraint.

Equally shocking is India's subordination of its interests to "strategic partnership" with the US. Under the July nuclear deal, India hopes to get American nuclear reactors/materials. But nuclear power stands frozen in America, with no new reactor ordered since 1973!

Nuclear power is fraught with environmental, occupational and health problems. Its contribution is at best marginal in relation to oil/gas.

In contrast stands the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, now under negotiation. This holds the key to peace and prosperity in the entire South Asia-West-Central Asia region and opens new vistas. The Vienna resolution may kill it.

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Here's the critical question: Does India's future lie in South Asia, linked to West and Central Asia, and Southeast-East Asia? Or does it lie with Washington? The second choice will be a grave blunder.

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while Morocco and Qatar have limited trade ties.

Relations with Israel opened up Pakistan's trade ties. According to the announcement of Israel's trade and Industry Ministry there would be no restriction for unlimited imports from Pakistan. Israeli importers are no longer required to hold valid license to bring goods from Pakistan. This decision was taken with a view to encouraging economic and commercial relations between the two countries. This will facilitate Pakistan to increase volume of trade with Israel. It may be mentioned that Israel has been enjoying free trade relations with the United States, European Union, Jordan, Canada, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Turkey.

India being another neighbor of Pakistan has been developing excellent relationship with Israel since it recognised in January, 1992. Israel and India signed enhanced defense cooperation agreement. Under this agreement India has been maintaining strategic alliance with Israel. That may have caused anxiety in Pakistan. President Musharraf, who initiated measures for improvement of bilateral relations with arch rival India may have decided to develop relations with Israel to thwart US-India-Israel axis. Another scenario could be that of President Bush's foreign policy of marketing democracy as a global phenomenon, particularly in undemocratic Muslim countries. Viewed in this context, President Musharraf has no other options but to succumb to the pressure of the United States to recognise Israel with or without Palestinians having their homeland.

Possibility for Palestinians to have homeland is bleak in view of Ariel Sharon's stated goals to expand Israel's largest settlements in the northern section of the West Bank, Maale Adumin. Meanwhile, Israeli government has ordered the seizing of West Bank land with a view to expanding the separation barrier around Maale Adumin in violation of international law (article 49 of the fourth Geneva Convention) and UN charter and link it to Jerusalem. Perhaps Musharraf was given to understand that positive gesture could extend his hold on to power without going through democratic process. If President Musharraf decides to go ahead with recognition process as did P.V. Narasimha Rao, then Prime Minister of India in spite of strong protests within his government and the ruling Congress, Musharraf will go down in history as a peacemaker in the region being a military dictator.

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