

President Musharraf's woes go far beyond the Red Mosque siege

BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

THE days are difficult for President Musharraf. Since 1999 he has ruled Pakistan with an iron hand, brought economic stability and aligned with the US President Bush in the war on terror in 2001. Confidently he pays official visits across the world.

President Bush now knows the name of President Musharraf very well and during his election campaign in 2000, Bush failed to recall the Pakistan President's name when asked by a journalist. What difference a few years make in politics?

Pakistan's military Presidents have been lucky in a way. External factors helped them to rule the country. When General Zia-ul Haq captured power in 1977 deposing Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the invasion of Soviet Union in 1979 in Afghanistan afforded him a long life-line to continue till 1988 because he fully used America to his advantage against the invasion of Afghanistan. Pakistan became a closely ally of the US.

War continued in Afghanistan between the Soviet Union and Islamic militants aided, abetted by the CIA and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) until the Soviet Union withdrew its forces by February 1989.

Strategically, Pakistan always wanted Afghanistan within its influence and not under India. It is noted that during the time of Pakistan's admission to the UN in 1947, Afghanistan was the only country that opposed Pakistan's membership because of disputed land boundary drawn by Durrand Line under the British period.

It is reported that ISI created Taliban from madrassah students, mostly Afghanis, to occupy Afghanistan and Taleban swiftly brought the country to its rule in 1996. Taleban, orthodox Islamic government was recognized by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan (a neighbour of Afghanistan), and UAE. Pakistan seemed to be happy with Talebanised Afghanistan that was under the influence of Pakistan. Neither Iran nor India had any influence on the Taleban Mullahs.

Similar external situation occurred with President General Musharraf. In 1999 he captured power deposing the elected Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and in 2001, Afghanistan became the "hot-bed" of war on terror after 9/11.

President Musharraf changed Pakistan's policy of supporting Taleban and switched to US policy to defeat Taleban government. By the end of 2001, Taleban leaders had to flee Kandahar and Kabul.

The result is that, since then General Musharraf received reportedly more than US\$2 billion aid annually from the US and the General was given a "free hand" to rule Pakistan by the Bush administration. He ruled under the veneer of elected Parliament. The General manipulated the country's Constitution in a way so that he retained the constitutional power to dismiss the Prime Minister and dissolve the Parliament in the name of "national security."

Furthermore, President Musharraf had also been wearing the "hat" of the Chief of Army Staff. Many think it is unconstitutional that a public servant of the Republic holds the political position of the

President. The two do not mix.

Although at one stage he wanted to relinquish the top army post, under pressure of the Commonwealth, he changed his mind again in the name of "national security". The Bush administration kept silent at political developments in Pakistan, while ardently promoting democracy in the Middle East.

Why does President Musharraf put himself in hot water? There are many reasons and some of them deserve mentioning below:

First, it is widely believed that late President General Zia ul Haq, during his 11 year rule, had turned Pakistan into an orthodox Islamic country with Shariah courts, inconsistent with its founder M.A. Jinnah who proclaimed in 1947 that religion would cease the political identity of Pakistanis.

Second, President General Pervez Musharraf became too sure of himself in his position because of country's economic stability. He brought an international Banker as the Prime Minister. Both of them ran the country well within their limits.

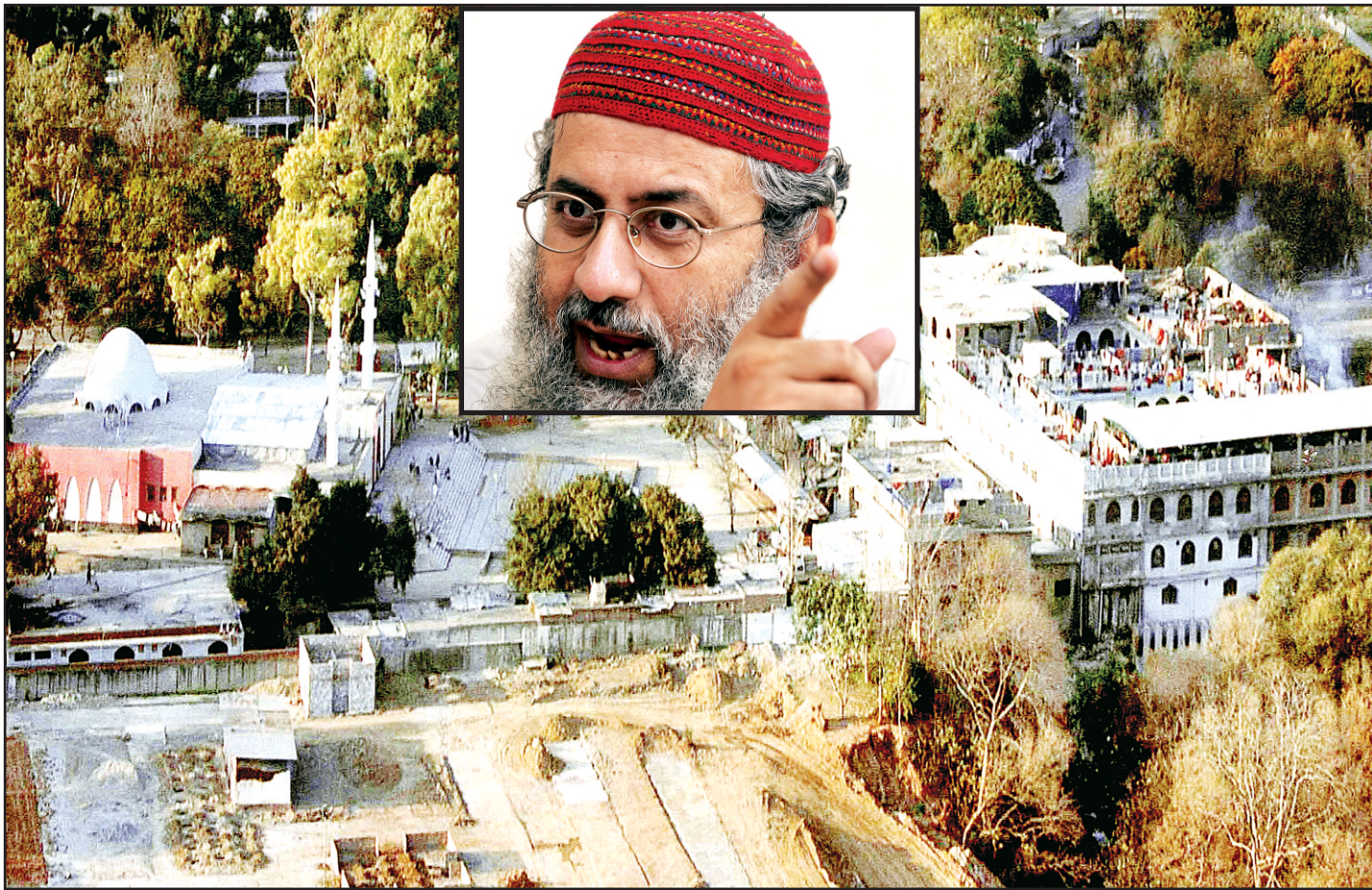
Often the President does not understand that economic stability does not equate with freedom and liberty. There is a saying that fish cannot survive in very clean water and they need algae. Economic stability is not an end itself for an individual who after a certain time craves for freedom and liberty that may not create a situation that the President likes. Economic stability leads to greater desire of political freedom and some say there is a symbiotic relationship between the two.

Third, although the President is secular in his attitude, for political power, he is known to have com-

promised with some Islamic parties and allowed the province, North West Frontier Province, next to Afghanistan to be ruled by Islamic clerics. Groups friendly to Taleban in the province are fighting with government forces for some time. The agreement with militants in Tribal area, South Waziristan, reportedly demonstrated that the government had some limits how far they could go in Tribal areas.

Fourth, the suspension of the Chief Justice of Pakistan by President Musharraf has been unwise and a great political blunder. It has manifested the President of being too sure of himself in the exercise of his power. It is reported that the wily lawyer Sharifuddin Pirzada (a former Attorney General and former foreign Minister during President Ayub's rule) advised both the President and the Prime Minister to take action against the independent-minded Chief Justice. Both the President and the Prime Minister appeared to have failed to gauge the current simmering dissatisfaction among the civil society including human rights activists of President Musharraf's ironhanded rule.

Fifth, if the military administration is too tight for a long time, it bursts just like a dam that bursts if water flow is held for a long time. People forget the good things and remember negative things. Eight-year rule is a long time for General Musharraf in Pakistan which is a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic state. As a federal state Pakistan has yet to take firm roots with greater autonomy for its prov-



inces. For example, Balochistan has become a political problem for the President as the province has yet to reconcile with Islamabad rule.

Sixth, the Red Mosque siege demonstrates how far the extremist Islamic armed militants have spread in Pakistan. Serious questions are already raised as to why the government has tolerated the extremist Islamic clerics so long right under the eye of the President in the capital. The two

clerics Moulana Abdul Aziz of Red mosque, now arrested and another radical cleric Fazlullah of the Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Law have been allowed to run madrassas where young extremists are breeding to support Talebans. The Red Mosque drama is a symptom of a deeper malaise.

Finally, President Musharraf's authority seems to be dwindling because of the rising popularity of the two former Prime

Ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif-- who live abroad in exile. The Bush administration reportedly supports their return and participation in the next election. The support of the US seems to be a political setback for the President. There is a report that Benazir Bhutto and the President are expected to conclude a political deal.

President Musharraf should have seen, especially since the uproar over the suspension of the

Chief Justice, the cracks in his popularity among people. A great leader is one who retires voluntarily when he/she feels that time has come to hand over to the next generation. Luckily the armed forces support the President and once their loyalty is gone, he will be gone from the political scene.

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It's time for reforms

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THE Chief Conservator of Forests has lowered the status of money, for, of all the places, he had stashed this power manipulator in rice drums and other wacky places. Osman Gani stands guilty of, among other crimes, lowering the prestige of money in prestige conscious Bangladesh. What was all that money for? His ailing mother's dilapidated state in a remote village shamed everybody less the forest boss of course. Shame is a thing condemned to banishment among the likes of Osman Gani. He has proved once more that academic degrees or accomplishment in life is not enough to make a respectable human being. It is now revealed that the forest department has a large pool of men infused with Gani culture, but it was never branded one of the most corrupt departments. There are only two things this government needs to do, bring the prices of food and essentials within purchasing power of the poor, and then put right all the irregularities. When Barrister Mainul and Maj Gen Matin say there is no excuse for corruption, they are echoing the voice of the people.

When political parties became personal or hereditary estate, wishes of the leaders were the order of the day, sending aspirations of the people down the drain. That's what happened in all departments and corridors of power. With infinite tenacity for hogwash during the last six months, the agenda of political reforms is finally taking off, not to challenge anybody, but to dislodge personal or hereditary claim on national leadership and

A revolution - silent or deafening - is never authorized. Civilization has developed and is still formulating laws for collective welfare. If the pledge of welfare is turned into abuse and repression, the government elected or unelected becomes illegitimate.

dump unbridled corruption in the dustbin. Connection with an illustrious family is an asset if one can live up to the expectations. The nation trusted them with power and position; it is their turn to prove their honesty and sincerity. More needs to be done against the corrupt; the predators and their mountain of ill-gotten wealth are lurking about to exploit any opportunity that may arrive due to legal and procedural loopholes or bottlenecks. Hiding behind the glowing memory of the great national events and leaders, the offenders have not given up hope to arouse sympathy and support of the people. They will resort to the turns and twists of law to buy time or resort to lengthy review of the cases in the superior courts while trying to arouse the fifth columnists who are lying in wait to slow poison the administration. They abused everything - the great names, people and democracy. Constitution, administration, parties, laws, courts, institutions, education; just about everything that could provide nation building resources have been rundown by the greed of money and arrogance of power. No controversial person can be friendly to this administra-

tion. Corruption is an infectious social vice that needs to be weeded out from every department of the government.

What does the nation have to offer the professionals in military and civil bureaucracy who have given their lives working honestly and efficiently? I know an Income Tax cadre officer who retired as Member, Board of Revenue serving 35 years with honesty and dedication. The only plot of land that he ever acquired was through the officers' cooperative in Chittagong. Hardship and misfortune combine against honest and dedicated people in this land. His wife is due for rheumatic related knee surgery but financial problems are holding them back. On retirement, he discovered that a politically connected cadre illegally occupied his plot. Many clerks of the income tax department are ten times richer than him. The broken man lives with his sick wife in a rundown apartment on rent. Will he ever get back his only piece of land that he came to own legally?

With so many things in the hands of the few in the interim

establishment, the reform agenda has its limitation due to both time and legal constraints. We are in a quiet revolution. Revolutions or reforms, if slow and shy, may get stifled along the way. Expansion of the honest effort needs both speed and tenacity to reach the light across the obstacle-filled tunnel. One also needs to wear horse-blinds for focusing on the mission for acceleration and accomplishment. There is no two way of achieving a goal; either it is accomplished or it fails. Vengeance will be the character trait of the exposed if honest intentions fall short of the desired goal. The French Revolution was eventually frustrated by the weight of the old order. Corruption is not in a few families or politicians, its contamination is everywhere. The mean money culture is showing its tenacity despite the much higher degree of danger involved, the way joint forces are catching people red-handed with bribe money.

Nobody scores hundred percent in an exam, yet a line is drawn below that. If one is caught cheating, he or she is simply disqualified. The nation has no stake in 'minus

two' formula. This simple notion can be interpreted as personal vendetta against individuals or families. There is no quarrel with individuals but against sordid details that betrayed the pledge to the people. The endemic corruption worked as a force multiplier to intensify the quarrel into a national crusade. The future outcome will be of historical importance; if the people win Bangladesh will belong to them, they win and the land goes to the devoursers. Compromise will roll back everything that 9/11 gained and bring public wrath.

Time has become a critical factor for the interim establishment. A whispering campaign is already on by vagabond rank and files of political parties all over the country in collusion with corrupt officials to malign this government. Already increasing price of essentials is hurting the government; the next few months will be crucial for them.

A revolution - silent or deafening - is never authorized. Civilization has developed and is still formulating laws for collective welfare. If the pledge of welfare is turned into abuse and repression, the government elected or unelected becomes illegitimate; SOS salvage mission is humanitarian and a duty of the soul. Neither independence nor democracy is a guarantee of freedom unless institutions are built to safeguard the interest of the people. Bangladesh is not just a national anthem or a flag; it is delivery of the needs and opportunities to 140 million people. It is never free; people pay taxes to the government for time-bound delivery of the pledge-bound benefits.

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MUZAMMEL HUQ

TO believe that the military profession in developing countries cannot anticipate any future alternative but an inevitable major economic and political crisis, is to commit a crude error. To believe that the military have become integrated with other leading groups into a monolithic national political establishment is to commit a sophisticated error. But to believe that the military are not an effective pressure group on the organs of governments is to commit a political error.

When the military in a developing country is faced with a crisis, politico-military responsibility will require new theoretical conceptions to meet its enlarged multiple functions, both inside and outside the country, and is likely to produce transformative roles for the military. Education, career path and the realities of military authority all influence the logic and decision-making process of military leaders.

Above all, the military often operates and intervenes political control in response to national crisis. Despite its past direct and indirect involvement in management issues of the state, which did not always go well in many countries, the military has been able to maintain varying degrees of heroic posture, pro-people stance and a long public service tradition.

The military is not a monolithic body. Multiple cleavages exist in its ranks, in respect to viewpoints on domestic and foreign affairs, cleavages which somewhat mirror civilian disagreements. The military profession and establishment conform to the pattern of an administrative pressure group, but one with a strong internal conflict of interest. It is a very special pressure group because of the vast resources it controls, its perceived stature in national affairs,

and the grave problems of national and international security in all its dimensions and manifestations.

The military have accumulated considerable power, and that power protrudes into the political fabric of contemporary societies. In fact it could not be otherwise. However, while the military naturally presses for higher budgets and resource allocation, they exercise their influence on political matters with some unease and considerable restraint.

Civilian control of military affairs remains fundamentally acceptable to the military and therefore structurally intact. Therefore, imbalances in military contribution to politico-military affairs are often the result of default and failures by civilian political leadership. When political service mutates from public service to private investment for profits, when elected office becomes a path to unearned wealth through government patronage (with knowledge and support of all major institutions), this can be considered a crucial failure.

The phenomenal development of military technology in the recent past overshadows the important growth of a new intellectualism among military professionals. The military profession has become more and more dedicated to the development of a critical capability, which includes a critical outlook towards its own professional tasks.

The officer corps is taught from the beginning of their career that they must be realistic, that they must review the shortcomings of the past and the contemporary record of military affairs. Will this emphasis on critical capacities produce negativism, or will it lead to a focus on new solutions? The military profession, like any profession, runs the risks of confusing its technical and professional training with political expertise and necessity. One response already

discernible is the search for a comprehensive ideology, at the expense of creative problem-solving mechanism. Another outcome could be an increased sense of frustration which could become harmful to the military profession and the nation.

Very few nations have succeeded in both adequately solving the political problems of civil-military relations and maintaining a healthy, constructive political freedom. In this new era and globalising world, old-fashioned military dictatorships are not feasible in most societies.

But it is equally outmoded to think in terms of maintaining traditional forms of political structure and control. The modernisation of the agencies of the civilian government is a continuous process. But the focus also needs to be on the military profession and enabling it to develop into a fully professional force. This is most likely to happen if there is no undue interference by partisan political agendas. This would enable the military to perform its national security duties and provide its rationale for civilian political control.

In this context, the primary task of civilian political leadership is honesty, transparency and accountability in the running of affairs of state. But civilian leadership also has to help create a national environment for the military profession -- one that eliminates partisan interference and injustice, prevents the growth of frustration in the profession, and aids the military to carry out its professional duties. Political leadership should understand that a professional military is one of the best safeguards of democracy.

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Terrorism plank and Indian Muslims

DR ABDUL RUFF COLACHAL

THE era of US-led terror wars has helped anti-Muslim India to treat the Muslims as terrorists, the suspected and the potential ones.

Indians living abroad and leading a comfortable life often enjoy "patriotic" rhymes and rejoice at praising India saying that India is the best country in the world where the Muslims are "better" placed than Hindus and that the Muslims are bad guys and live quite comfortably in India. They are in no way different from those in India who enjoy the fruits of development all by themselves leaving almost nothing to Muslims, but relish by insulting them. Hypocrisy and shame know no limits, of course.

A few lines would help these "self proclaimed patriots" to understand the factual position.

Muslims lead a pathetic and strained life as offered to them by the governments of India and states. The role of the Muslims in India's independence, wherein many of their lost lives for the country's sake as well as their positive contributions to country's development, are totally ignored by the State as well as media. Instead, issues like Pakistan and terrorism are cleverly brought in

to play a destructive role in the lives of Muslims. While focusing on Muslims in India, the media and politicians encouraged by the bureaucrats make it appear that Muslims are a burden and a lot of resources are spent on them unnecessarily. Wonderfully, even by keeping a Muslim as President, India keeps doing what the USA does to Muslims all over the world. Insulting and bashing the Muslims is routine event in the country, including New Delhi.

Babri Mosque, pulled down during the Congress rule at the centre, and with its support, by the anti-Islamic terrorists and other state-sponsored forces led by the BJP and the UP state then ruled by the BJP, is a glaring example of how the Muslims and Islamic institutions are treated in India. With advent of US sponsored war on the so-called terrorism, India has been ably using the terrorism plank to deny what is legitimately due to Muslims. Like the USA and the West, India too describes and views the Muslims as suspected terrorists. All Muslims thus, are potential terrorists, if not real or suspected ones.

All these years since Independence, the print media, English as well as vernaculars, have faithfully portrayed Muslims as evil

and unwanted elements that need to be eliminated at all costs, secretly or, if that is not possible, openly. The majorities Hindus are projected as the "tolerant ones" and "sufferers" and badly hit people by the "on-slaughter" of the Muslims, whereas the truth suggests to the contrary. Of late, however, Indian media, under the prevailing circumstances, seem to have been caught between its "duty" to go all out for shielding the majority and advancing the so-called national interest and the need to project India as the largest democracy at the same time.

Media successfully fueled the anti-Muslim tragedy and promoted the anti-Islamic propaganda. The ugly depictions of Muslims, where the Muslims are shown as villains and ugly guys, have caused tensions in the society that led to the slow annihilation of the Muslims. The media that are so used to paint the Muslims in India in dirty colors of their choice, now finds it extremely difficult to change their anti-Muslim format for fear of angry reaction from the special sections that fomented friction in the society, apart from the worry about a possible slash in daily circulation affecting the profits of the media magnets controlling politics in the country.

More Indian Muslims are

employed outside India than in the country as India refuses to ensure their involvement in jobs and education. Neither the media nor the government, both the central and the state, seems to be ashamed of the fact that Muslims have to look outside India for a lively-hood. Muslims are deprived of any dependable leadership and resources to face the challenge from the media. While criticizing the Muslims for what they may or may not be responsible, the media refuse to give due credit to the hard work of the Indian Muslims do, not only at home but in the Middle East and to their immense contribution to the upsurge of Indian economy during the past 20 years with their regular bank remittances.

But for the Gulf countries the plight of Muslims in "democratic" India would have been indescribable in normal language. It is too difficult now, or at a later stage, to remold the minds of the people by giving real facts, even if the media wants to set the record straight; more so of those Hindus who enjoy a fine life abroad.

The crux of the issue is how to reset the mind-set of the readers who were made to believe as facts the fiction presented to them, even if the media wants to undertake the

task. Indian newspaper readers and media viewers were told earlier that Muslims are bad lots, terrorists and suspected fellows and that they shouldn't be entertained in societies at all. Muslims, deprived of any dependable leadership and resources to face the challenge from the media, are used as a mere vote bank. The majority might question the veracity and reliability of the "new" material if supplied to them as new facts about Muslims. To accept the Muslims as fellow travelers, after targeting them thus far for no fault of theirs, is difficult and the readers would be required to treat the Muslims as humans, which would indeed be a difficult proposition. That would mean that democracy is a farce.

Of course it is not to deny the fact that Indian Muslims are not too great and that they also cheat, insult and would not even hesitate to kill each other, if the network asks them to do so. Mischief and distrust characterize the intra-relationship among the Muslims not only in Muslim dominated areas, but even in localities where there are hardly much Muslims living. Torture, physical as well as mental, inflicted by the state agencies upon the Muslims has driven them away from seeking any justice from the government agen-

cies and seeking any share in the national development or resources. One does not know if that is a victory for the State and the loyal media.

A faulty and corrupt leadership has harmed the cause of Muslims in a great way. Also, the Muslim leadership is controlled by the ruling parties both at the center and the states and the Congress and other major parties oblige the Muslim leaders by meeting their personal demands. As a result the Muslims are betrayed by the very leaders who claim to be protecting their interests. No less corrupt and tricky than other political parties in India, Muslim League and Hyderabad based Muslim Majlis Party (MIM) having the pretensions of defenders of Indian Muslims, quietly take dictates from the Congress party. This explains why the Muslims in Kashmir are subjected to insults and harassment by those very personnel who are duty bound to protect them, apart from regular genocide and loss of properties. Gulam Nabi Azad, the chief-minister of JK and the only Muslim chief-minister in "secular" India, like all other chief-ministers in the country, pretends to ignore the situation. New Delhi still perceives and views Kashmiris as troublesome bad guys.

The main worry of the media magnets and their political bosses

seems to be economic advancement of Muslims that they don't wish the Muslims to have. By re-projecting Muslims as humans now, the media is indirectly trying to make room for advancement of Muslims in the society. The governments, by taking cue from the media, would be compelled to pass necessary laws to uplift the Muslims as well. But the readers are well equipped to receive the supposedly change in mind of the journalistic justice. This is the real dilemma that media, like the bureaucracy and politicians, face today. Hence the reluctance on the part of the media to present facts as facts and turn away from fictional portrayal of Muslims as unwanted ones coming in the way of the majority sharing all resources by themselves, just as the war booty is being shared by the US-led forces in the Middle East.

It has been enough of the so-called terrorism as this plan has harmed the Muslims more than any other section in the society in terms of livelihood and advancement. A better future for the Muslims would be possible only if the media changes their mind-set in favor of uplifting the Muslims. It is time, therefore, after six decades of Indian independence, for the governments, both the central and the regional, to

formulate afresh the media rules of portrayal of Indian reality in the context of the growing "popularity" of anti-Muslim journalistic format in the country and in keeping with the growing urgency for a new face of journalism which should be against anti-Muslim but reflect an all-people theme.

The Indian majority population does have a right to appreciate reality correctly, view their Muslim brethren correctly and not insult them unreasonably. Will the Indian State and media magnets cooperate at least now to create a genuinely conducive media atmosphere promoting mutual respect across all sections of the people in India and thereby serve the national interest better? Or, is nurturing that kind of an idea of real secularism still a utopia? A particular section of population cannot be considered as anti-national, ill-treated badly and denied, on some pretexts, their due share in national development of the so-called largest democracy. It would be nothing but a national shame!

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