

NIS and our expectations

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NATIONAL Integrity Strategy (NIS) is a brand new venture to eradicate corruption from our country. We welcome them the way we did the present Anti Corruption Commission (ACC) and the way we did President Ershad when he called for Jihad against corruption. And also the way we did to all political parties' promises before elections. The consequence of all those optimistic welcome is today's pathetic reality. Instead of going by the history of all those promises/expectations, let us analyze the ongoing initiatives. Look at the mission and vision of ACC with objectivity: all the bigwigs are inside the jail, and in twenty months time corruption increased by 2%. Can any institution assemble more power and energy than the present ACC to eradicate corruption from this country? However, Bangladeshis being optimistic by nature, we don't give up the hope that one day honesty will be reinstated.

Honesty and development are directly proportional; they are like two parallel lines of a railway. And an honest person is a patriot and a dishonest one is a traitor. A state always expects its citizens to be honest and patriots, not dishonest or traitors. If a dishonest person, before going to power, makes promises to the people and does the reverse after winning an election that is hard luck. But, if a soldier is given a mission to destroy a target and a weapon capable of doing so, he cannot rationalize his failure saying that the target is indestructible. Failing to destroy a target is one thing and allowing the target to gain more strength is another. When the bigwigs are quarantined and have no role in maintaining corruption in the society then how could there be increase in corruption?

Have we selected a wrong mission? Or do we have problem in execution? If we fail to unearth these basics, NIS will only add another failure to all our anti-corruption initiatives taken so far in the last 37 years. Fundamentally we have lost our invaluable asset that is our national character. We need either an honest leader or a professional institution to get back our lost national honesty. Unfortunately though, instead of honest leaders we have mostly looters and no institution for the job. Can NIS fill the gap? Can it really come up as the savior to create the environment that people

of developed countries enjoy? We don't want to see failure as a pillar of success anymore. We have piled up unaccountable pillars, now we need only success. When Europe is testing "Big Bang", spending 7 billion dollars to find how the universe came into being, we as a nation cannot bridle corruption, which is at the point of threatening our sovereignty. What a splendid but pathetic display of qualitative difference between the two!

Increase of corruption in absence of the power brokers implies that the environment has something to do with this. And we have not given enough significance to this sector (environmental change). To get the

responsible for creating an honest environment? It is this environment that continuously produces corrupt people in the society. Increase of corruption by 2% is the testimony that we have not taken care of the environment. Under the present scenario office bearers are often getting involved in corruption and losing their hard earned jobs; should we only blame those individuals? What have we done to provide the right kind of environment where in they can remain comfortably honest? Strict accountability can keep a dishonest man away from corruption but cannot turn him morally honest.

Can NIS take this responsibility?

Changing human behavior through tampering human perception is purely technical; it is the job of professionals provided by different planned action, reaction or inaction using different instruments, arrangement and management technologies. West has institutionalized this skill; we are yet to know its appearance. To conduct a physical heart surgery of an individual we need so much of expertise, how can we plan an operation, which deals with an intangible surgery of corrupt heart and mind of the mass? We do not want anymore high profile institutions that fail in their mission. We want a functionally capable institution that can identify its mission in



The ACC - Will NIS's fate follow suit?

country on an honest footing we either need honest leaders who love the people and the nation but not the power and the money, or an institution professionally capable in psychological warfare.

Getting hold of corrupt people is a task easier than turning someone honest or creating an honest environment. If NIS can take this challenge only then can we hope for some changes. Task of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) is only appraisal, task of ACC apparently is only to catch the corrupt persons, Truth and Accountability Commission (TAC) is only to show mercy upon confessions; then who is

Do they have enough human and technological skill to turn dishonest human beings to honest ones? Have they developed any methodology or time frame to execute their planned actions in fulfilling their vision and mission? If the organization is media fringed and does not have a crystalized mission, it will surely drift away from the very objective. They need to conduct professional psycho-cleansing operations to instill perceptions that will change the behavior of our people. This is not an easy task; if they can take this responsibly and ACC is only to catch culprits then only we may see our long cherished desire getting fulfilled.

clear terms and can act professionally and accomplish their mission in given time. We need to amass all the physical and mental strength to withstand the challenge, to face the initial hardship of honesty. Even if we have to sacrifice the collective comfort of a generation, still it is a small price to pay to create a revolution, to come out of the darkness of corruption. May the creator provide NIS enough foresight, insight and wisdom to rid the country of corruption through changing the mindset of our leaders and citizens!

The author is a freelancer.

US economic crisis is good luck for Obama

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THE US economy is in its worst crisis after many decades, sending shock waves round the world while turning the country itself upside down. Even the US\$700 billion bailout package signed into law recently by the US President is being considered not enough to bring the US economy back on rails as people are losing houses, businesses and jobs. So far this year, 750,000 people in USA have lost their jobs. Europe too is in turmoil, and in UK the government has followed the US example and announced an 80 billion pounds bailout package. The IMF boss Strauss Kahn has said: "Intensifying solvency concerns about a number of the largest US-based and European financial institutions have pushed the global financial system to the brink of systemic meltdown."

At the centre of it all should have been George Bush who has supervised this economic downturn but whose good fortune is that he is now a lame duck President and it would serve no useful purpose to unleash any wrath upon him. But history will not spare him as he will be leaving office as the most unpopular President in US history. At the time of writing this, President Bush's approval rating is an abysmal 24%.

Analysts are giving many reasons to explain this worst economic crisis in US history. The Republicans' faith in de-regulation that has allowed the big financial institutions and businesses to fulfill their greed is one major reason being put forward to explain this calamity. Another reason also coming into the equation is the connection between this economic downturn and the ill-conceived decision to go to Iraq in pursuance of President Bush's war on terror. This is a dangerous mix for McCain as it brings to question the legitimacy of the Iraq war to explain the economic miseries and uncertainty affecting US citizens in the mainstream.

It is also bringing back to their memories the infamous claim of President Bush in May of 2003 that

the war in Iraq was over aboard one of US's aircraft carriers. It was far from that for, by then, the US Government had just started to bleed both in terms of the billions of dollars that would go to Iraq as well as lives that would be lost. In a report in August 2008, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) revealed that the real similarity between Iraq and Vietnam has been in the price of staying. In constant FY2008 dollars, the Vietnam War cost the US \$686 billion in 10 years (The actual cost of staying there was US \$111 billion). The Iraq war, at just over five years old, had cost US \$648 billion. The amount is close to the bailout package that the US Government has just announced for its economic recovery. The CRS assessment does not give the full picture though. Noble Prize winning economist Joseph Stiglitz of Columbia University in his book "Three Trillion Dollar War" has said that the Iraq war would ultimately cost USA US\$3 trillion when such costs as lifetime disability and healthcare for troops injured in the conflict as well as the impact on the US economy was considered. In terms of human lives, the US has so far lost over 4000 of its men and women in Iraq while many more times that number of innocent Iraqis have lost their lives as a consequence of the US decision to invade Iraq.

The US went to Iraq to destroy Saddam's WMD program that, according to US intelligence posed a threat to US security in the context of President Bush's war on terror. Subsequently, it has been proven that Iraq's WMD program had ceased long before the Iraq war. Another reason for the Iraq war was to take control over Iraq's huge oil reserve to assure US's energy needs. Instead, the Iraq war pushed oil prices from around US\$30 a barrel to nearly US\$150 in July this year (before falling to about US\$80 a barrel after the 700 billion dollars bailout package by the USA caused worldwide panic). The benefit of it all went to oil rich

Middle Eastern countries with strong links to the elder President Bush and oil merchants in the USA, many of whom have close links to President Bush. While these countries - oil merchants and oil lobbyists - became richer by windfall gains, the rising price of oil adversely affected all sectors of the US economy that the US administration, driven by the greed of their supporters in the Wall Street and a pliant and Republican-dominated Congress (the equation changed only after the 2006 elections), overlooked. In fact, in July after the failure of Indymac Bank, Treasury Secretary Paulsen reassured the US public by saying: "It's a safe banking system, a sound banking system. Our regulators are on top of it. This is a very manageable situation." In August, he said the government had no plans to inject capital into the Federal National Mortgage Association, nicknamed Fannie Mae and the Federal Home Mortgage Corporation, nicknamed Freddie Mac. In September, both were nationalized, a most unusual step that underscores the depths to which the US economy has fallen. The US Congress woke up late to what the US Administration had done to the economy and voted down the first bailout package that favoured those in the Wall Street till the interests of average Americans in the main street were guaranteed in the second US\$700 billion bailout package, whose fate and impact on reviving the economy is still in doubt.

All of this has come to the assistance of the Democrat candidate Barack Obama. Even around the first Presidential debate, Obama and McCain were going neck to neck. At that time, the elections seemed to be a referendum on whether US is ready enough to elect its first black President. Now the election has become a referendum on whether the people of the United States can again hand their country to the Republicans and their faith in deregulation, together with their strong ties to those in the

Wall Street who have brought the US economy to its knees by their greed. A Newsweek Poll this week showed Obama leading 52% to 41%. A similar poll a month ago tied the two candidates at 46%.

At the beginning of the year, the legitimacy of the Iraq war was a major issue in the US presidential election together with the economy. The improvement of ground conditions in Iraq under General Petraeus, the head of Multinational Forces in Iraq, looked like taking away a big vote winner for the Democrats as the Iraq war began to fade out as an asset against the Republicans. Now the economic quagmire into which the US has fallen has made the Iraq war return back to the political centre stage to haunt the Republican Party and the fortunes of McCain in a different but dangerous way. The Newsweek poll referred to earlier in this piece has shown 86% of the voters are dissatisfied with the way things are going in the US, based on the faltering economy that has come close to stealing the great American dream of a house and a steady job away from the average American. It is now up to Obama and his spin doctors to link the Iraq war to the faltering economy and extend that to the faith of the Republican Party in de-regulation and its links to big business and financial institutions and their greed as nails in the coffin to explain the reasons for US' current precarious economic plight. The Presidential debates and Palin's current plight over the report that she abused power while being Governor of Alaska, the so-called "Troopergate" scandal, are also helping Obama's candidature. As these developments articulate themselves the way they seem to be doing, the US may after all get over the colour of Obama that has been hanging like a dark cloud over his candidature and send him to the White House.

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China and India's naval confidence-building measures

India and China plan to conduct joint naval exercises soon as part of bilateral confidence-building measures (CBMs) aimed at ensuring that competition between the two nuclear neighbours and economic rivals does not develop into conflict.

Military officials in New Delhi said People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) chief Admiral Wu Shengli would be making a maiden visit to India later in 2008 to discuss the exercise schedule.

The proposed exercises would follow two earlier rounds of daylong naval manoeuvres held in 2003 and April 2007. "The Indian Navy [IN], like the PLAN, is following a policy of keeping its friends close but its enemies closer," a three star naval officer said. He said the IN was keen to gauge the PLAN's operational efficiency.

The IN is deeply concerned over China's 'string of pearls' strategy of clinching regional defense and security agreements to secure its mounting fuel requirements, enhance its military profile from the Persian Gulf to the South China Sea and significantly expand its presence in the Indian Ocean region.

China's newly revealed strategic submarine base near Sanya on Hainan Island which houses Shang-class (Type 093) and Jin class (Type 094) nuclear-powered submarines (SSNs) is also a source of tension.

The IN believes the SSN base was 'ideally located' to allow PLAN easy access in interdicting vital sea lanes of communication in India's maritime territory in the Andaman Sea adjoining the Chinese-controlled Strait of Malacca.

India also remains wary of the rapid modernisation of the PLA and its expanding infrastructure building up along the disputed Line of Actual Control (LoAC) between the two sides and also of the military and strategic ties between the Chinese and Pakistani armed forces.

Relations between Delhi and Beijing had deteriorated after China raised objections at the recent meeting of the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) in Vienna regarding the US backed proposal to allow India to conduct global civilian nuclear commerce whilst retaining its strategic weapon programme. The NSG waiver was eventually granted, although China abstained.

On 8 September India's Foreign Minister, Pranab Mukherjee, conveyed his "unhappiness" over Beijing's move to block the NSG waiver in talks with his Chinese counterpart, Yang Jiechi, in Delhi. Yang insisted his country had played a "constructive" role at the NSG.

Meanwhile, the 12th round of talks to resolve the Sino-Indian border dispute opened in Beijing on 18 September. Officials in Delhi were downbeat on the chances of achieving a settlement, despite diplomatic, political and economic ties between the neighbours having improved considerably over the past decade.

Sri Lanka applies pressure on LTTE

Sri Lankan government forces had reached the outskirts of Kilinochchi, the stronghold of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), on 19 September, as part of a major offensive aimed at destroying the rebels as an effective fighting force before the end of 2008.

On 18 September the Sri Lankan Navy also destroyed three large Sea Tiger craft, as well as seven smaller vessels, in a naval battle off Nachchikudra, the government claimed.

A naval engagement in September 2007 during which the Sea Tigers lost most of their known fleet was previously believed to have crippled the LTTE's naval capability. However, the engagement showed that the LTTE retained the ability to procure new equipment.

The apparent success of the government offensive which is impossible to verify as no independent observers remain in the north of the country suggests that President Mahinda Rajapaksa is making headway with his campaign to eliminate LTTE.

However, the onset of monsoon rains in October, could give the LTTE the breathing space it needs to regroup.

Courtesy: James Defence Weekly

Pakistan: From religious politics to religious extremism -PART I

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FOR years, internal situation in Pakistan has been getting from bad to worse. With the bombing of Marriott Hotel in Islamabad on 13 Sept 2008, there is now serious concern about the long-term viability of the state of Pakistan itself. Is it going to be another Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan or Somalia is the question. The worry is many times more because Pakistan happens to be a nuclear-armed state. Any nuclear weapon or fissile material falling in the hands of the terrorists will have disastrous consequence. The North-Western part of the country bordering Afghanistan, known as Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), has been virtually under the control of Islamic Militants, known as Pakistani Taliban. The Taliban are fighting a two-pronged war - in Afghanistan against the Afghan-NATO forces and in Pakistan against the Pakistani military, yet most of the victims of their random attacks are innocent civilians. They have imposed harsh and arbitrary 'Sharia' law on the populace that include random killing and brutal torture. The bombings and assassinations in both the capitals of Afghanistan and Pakistan by the Taliban mean that they have now extended their areas of operations right up to the capitals. The situation is further complicated by the cross-border operations performed by the Afghan-NATO forces into Pakistan, chasing and attacking the Taliban. Although this had been going on for quite sometime, probably with a nod of approval from the Pakistan government, but with the new elected government in place in Islamabad such news are putting them under increasing pressure. Although commentators are quick to blame President Musharraf for the mess, I would argue that Musharraf continued with a legacy that started with the birth of Pakistan as a nation-state.

Pakistan was the first country in the world created on the basis of religion. It was the second and only other one. Its founder Mr. M.A. Jinnah argued that Muslims of India constitute a separate nation based on 'distinctive culture and civilization, language and literature, art and architecture, names and nomenclature, sense of values and proportion, legal laws and moral code, customs and calendar, history and traditions, ----' (1944). Jinnah's

vision of Pakistan, however, was a Muslim majority democratic state and not a theocratic one. On the future constitution of Pakistan, he said on 11 August 1947, "You will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State." Again in February 1948, he reiterated, "In any case Pakistan is not going to be a theocratic State -- to be ruled by priests with a divine mission. We have many non-Muslims - Hindus, Christians, and Parsis - but they are all Pakistanis. They will enjoy the same rights and privileges as any other citizens and will play their rightful part in the affairs of Pakistan." Things changed with Jinnah's death a few months later. The Basic Principle of the Constitution (Objective Resolution 1949) adopted in 1952 stated that the Quran and Sunnah were to be the sources of all laws in Pakistan, that it would be an Islamic Republic and only a Muslim could be the Head of state. Gradual inroad of religion into Pakistani politics had begun. The politicians in Pakistan increasingly used Islam for achieving their political ends. All the three constitutions of Pakistan (1956, 1962, and 1973) promised to create an Islamic Republic, although the political players had no consensus as to what such a republic would be.

It is interesting to note that the Pakistani politicians, while not known for religiosity, were keen to use Islamic cards to political ends and as such always courted the Mullahs. One figure who stood out against the Mullahs was President Ayub Khan (1958-1969). Ayub Khan, despite violent opposition by the Ulemas promulgated the Muslim Family Law in 1961, which, still today, is the only marriage safety mechanism for Muslim women in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Yet Ayub and his handpicked Muslim League opposed secular democratic movements by raising the bogey of "Islam in Danger." Ayub's successor, Gen. Yahya used the Muslim League and Jamaat-e-Islami to carry out large-scale atrocities on the Bengalis during the Liberation War in 1971. In 1974, Mr. Z. A. Bhutto (1972-1976), again not a particularly observant Muslim, declared the Ahmadiya community as non-Muslims, threw them out of public life and created restrictions on their religious practices, only to placate the Mullahs.

Islamic parties in British India had little contribution towards the

creation of Pakistan. Leaders of the Pakistan Muslim League that led the Pakistan movement were urban elites nurtured in English traditions. The foremost Islamic religious party then was Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind that supported Indian National Congress and opposed the partition. Maulana Maududi, who founded Jamaat-e-Islami, had opposed partition, but upon his migration to Pakistan started campaigning for a state based on Islamic Sharia. He was sentenced to death in 1953 (commuted later under Saudi pressure) for his alleged involvement in anti-Ahmadiya riots in Punjab. Religious parties with extreme views such as Jamaat-e-Islami could never win the hearts and minds of the larger populace because traditionally the Muslims of Pakistan, like the rest of Muslims in South Asia, had been followers of Sufi tradition of Islam. Veneration of saints and sufis formed a core belief across Pakistan. This was an anathema to the Jamaat ideology that was based more on the Deobandi tradition. Thus, despite over 95% Muslim population, the religious parties that preached exclusive and often violent brand of Islam did not have a large support base nor had an overt say in power. However, it all changed, when Gen. Zia-ul-Haq (1976-1988) seized power.

Like most of the rulers of Pakistan since 1947, Gen Zia was a migrant, a refugee from India and as such had no political base. He picked up the Mullahs as his power base creating a Mullah-Military nexus in Pakistan since then. Two years into the power, Zia introduced Sharia Courts to oversee Civil Courts that functioned on Anglo-Saxon Laws. These courts sanctioned brutal punishments such as stoning, amputation of limbs and lashing. Although many of these sentences were turned down by Higher Courts or suspended due to outcry from the Human Rights activists, whenever those were carried out the victims were almost always the poor and downtrodden. In 1977, Zia-ul-Haq made consumption of alcohol by Muslims a punishable offence. Ironically, the consumption of alcohol and addictive drugs in Pakistan has gone up many times since then. Zia's Islamic law against blasphemy and adultery made a mockery of justice when those were directed against poor minorities or tortured and tormented women. He made a wholesale revision of school textbooks to make those more Islamic. Thus, children were taught that the Hindus, Sikhs, Jews and Christians are the mortal enemies



and there can be no friendship with the infidels. The Hindus and Sikhs were portrayed as conspiratorial and blood thirsty, while Muslim invaders, such as Sultan Mahmud Ghazni, were heroes, even when they came only to loot and plunder. The children were encouraged to go for holy Jihad in order to defend Islam and Pakistan. These textbooks were not meant for the madrassas, but for the government sponsored mainstream schools. Thus, a whole generation of youth grew up in an atmosphere of hate and prejudice. All these were being done at a time when there were serious issues of social injustices and inequalities to be addressed at home. Zia's use of Islam was aimed at perpetuating his dictatorship over a populace covered down by divine justice. His edicts on zakat and ushr alienated the Shia's and sown the seeds of sectarianism in Pakistan. It can be said in retrospect that Zia contributed much to the rise of fundamentalism, obscurantism and retrogression that is threatening Pakistan today. No wonder, Zia-ul-Haq is a despised figure in today's Pakistan.

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 came as a blessing for President Zia and the power elites of Pakistan. As the Afghan

resistance against the Soviet occupation forces grew, the US found it an opportunity to draw the Soviets into a quagmire. Soviet Union Vietnam. It fell on the CIA to fund, arm and train the Afghan dissidents, then known as Mujahideen. The CIA's partner in Pakistan was the Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI). The CIA passed billions of dollars of cash, weapons and explosives through the ISI. Much of these arms and cash were siphoned off by various religious extremists in Pakistan and had been a source of violence and instability since then. Pakistan has since been awash with arms and drugs known as "Kalashnikov culture". Research estimates that in a population of 160 million there are 40 million firearms and 4 million drug users. For any nation, this could be a prescription for death.

Call for Jihad against the communist infidels in Afghanistan attracted Muslim youths from all over the world to the training camps set up in Pakistan's north-west. Thousands of CIA-funded Madrassas or religious schools provided fresh recruits for the Jihad in Afghanistan. These Madrassas graduated young men steeped in the doctrine of armed Jihad against the enemies of Islam. Interestingly, prior to the 1970s, Pakistan had only

few Madrassas, attached to the mosques or shrines for producing Imams and Muezzins. Pakistan did not have Aliya or Quomi Madrassa system as we have in Bangladesh and in parts of India. By 1980s, however, Madrassas proliferated in Pakistan thanks to the flow of funds from the ME countries, particularly Saudi Arabia. Increasingly, the madrassas went under the control of Jamaat-e-Islami or Jamiat-ul-Ulama-e-Islam (JUI), the two leading religious parties of Pakistan. The madrassas were used as a springboard for Wahabi/Salafi school of Islam as practiced in Saudi Arabia. The Sufi and Barelvi schools, two main Sunni traditions in Pakistan, were on retreat. Meanwhile, the minority Shias of Pakistan were alarmed by the growth of Sunni madrassas and the rise of various Sunni/Jihadi organizations, such as Lashkar-e-Janghvi, Lashkar-e-toiba, Sipah-e-Sahaba, which went on a killing spree of the Shias. Soon the Shias started opening their Madrassas and had their militant outfits such as Tehrik-e-Jafri, Sipah-e-Muhammad etc. Since mid-80s, violent Shia-Sunni clashes had been on the rise. By one account, more than 400 people died of sectarian violence in 2007 alone. This year's toll would be even higher.

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