

Kabul continues to bleed

Prospect of peace still remote!

WE condemn Saturday's bomb attack in Kabul on a peaceful demonstration of Hazaras that killed eighty and wounded hundreds. The demonstrators were demanding that the original route of the power lines of a proposed power project be adhered to and not bypass the province of Bamyan, a Hazara dominated province. Obviously the attack has an ethnic undertone, the Hazaras being Shias, which demonstrates the continuing widening of the faultiness in Afghan society.

It is a pity that the longest war in recent times sees no prospect of ending. On the contrary the extremist groups take every opportunity to exploit division in the Afghan society as we saw being done on July 23 through the Kabul bombings.

Unfortunately, there is divided opinion on the process of ending the war, particularly in view of the spike in the US led operation against the Taliban and the increase in the number of attacks by the Taliban, particularly after the death of their leader Akhtar Mansour. No wonder that the fifth meeting of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group consisting of Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States and China on the Afghan peace and reconciliation process held in Islamabad on May 18 2016, ended with nothing more than an expression of their continued determination to advance the goal of an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process.

With two differing views on the best strategy for peace, the Afghan administration of Ashraf Ghani rooting for a military solution against the Taliban, and Pakistan, as well as the former Afghan President Karzai, opting for giving more time for reconciliation, and the Taliban unwilling to sit for direct talks with the Afghan administration, the prospect of peace, unfortunately, recedes farther.

Declaring part of Madhupur as reserve forest

Allay the fear it has created

THE recent declaration of 9,145 acres of land in Madhupur of Tangail by the government as a reserve forest has left about 6,000 people living in the area, among them Garo, Koch, Bormon, and Bangalee, in a state of anxiety and fear. Some members of the ethnic communities are looking at the move as a conspiracy to oust them from what they claim is their 'ancestral land.'

The Department of Forest argues that it has followed every rule under Section 20 of the Forest Act of 1927 such as issuance of a notice by the forest settlement officer, taking into consideration the concerns of the local population and making them aware of the government's decision. The initial gazette was published in 1984 but no one came forward to complain or oppose the pronouncement. Also, forest officials have assured the ethnic groups that the authorities have no plans to evict them, the department claims.

The narrative, on the other side, is different. Locals say they were not invited at the official hearing held by the deputy commissioner in 1984, according to sources. According to a study, the denial of land rights to the ethnic groups, and the attitude of the forest department towards them have fostered a deep distrust of the administration among them. In 2003, a member of the Garo community was shot dead by the forest guards while protesting the move to construct an Eco park in the forest.

We emphasise on the need to preserve both our forests and the communities living therein.

M. ADIL KHAN

THE 'coup' of July 15 in Turkey failed within hours of its start, and given that it enlisted very limited support within the army itself, some called it not a coup but a 'mutiny'.

In recent times, there have been many reports, mainly in the West, of unhappiness with Erdogan's Islamism and authoritarian style of governing, but no one thought that this would translate into a coup. After all, it was not that long ago when the world cheered "The Rise of Turkey". Under Erdogan's leadership and with a mix of liberal democracy and neoliberal economic policy, Turkey marched ahead economically. Turkey looked like the poster boy of the Muslim world - modern, progressing and yet Muslim.

However, while the economy was growing, Islamist nationalism also surged unnoticed in the beginning. Islamist nationalism was hailed as Islam's democratic answer to 'terrorism' that in recent times has become the scourge of most Muslim majority nations.

But all of a sudden, the scene changed and the tone became very different - to some, Turkey is now a "failed model" and this is because Erdogan "changed the Constitution for his own benefit and restarted his wicked conflict with the Kurds" (Independent, July 16, 2016), and yet others argue that "the successful liberalisation in Turkey during the last three decades itself paved the way for Islam's later authoritarian and conservative incarnations" (The Fall of the Turkish Model: How the Arab Uprisings Brought Down Islamic Liberalism, Cihan Tugal).

So which one of these views is correct? It is not easy to answer that, but one thing is clear: the way millions poured into the streets at the call of Erdogan to repel the 'mutiny', the answer is not the

disapproval of Erdogan by his people as their leader nor does it seem to be his governance style, not at this stage at least. Notwithstanding, the fact that there has been a 'mutiny' (not coup) indicates that not everything is hunky dory in Turkey these days.

Since its inception as a 'modern' state in 1923 under Kemal Ataturk, a post-colonial invention of the West which was built on the ashes of the defeated, humiliated and dismantled Ottoman

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monarchy, Turkey has rotated between booms and busts, democracy and coups, secularism and Islamism, and this largely depended on the not-so-apparent changing mood of its benefactors. It is no surprise that any effort by Turkey - regardless of whether this is done through a democratic or an authoritarian polity - that pursues nationalistic aspirations at the cost of the hegemon's agenda in the

region is to invite trouble. Like many previous coups, the July 15, 2016 'mutiny' is no exception and thus, needed to be seen in this context.

Indeed, this 'mutiny' is nothing but a culmination of several policy clashes that manifested themselves through Turkey's resurgent sovereign Islamist nationalist identity that challenged the dictates of geopolitics at different levels, and on many occasions has put Erdogan at odds with the West's idea of 'modern' Turkey - a secularised, de-cultured, de-Islamised 'lackey'.

In the context of these complex and conflated dynamics, it is difficult to say which of the factors, Erdogan's authoritarianism or the West's diminishing control over Turkey, has prompted the mutiny but the picture that emerges - and given that millions poured on the street at the call of Erdogan to foil the mutiny - is that the West's script that the mutiny has been caused by deficits of democracy is anything but true. The answer lies somewhere else.

Erdogan blames his nemesis, the US based self-exiled cleric Gulen for the mutiny and accordingly, asked the US government to extradite him to face trial in Turkey. In response, the Obama administration asked for evidence of Gulen's involvement in the mutiny.

Erdogan's woes started with a number of policy shifts, some good and some terrible, that he initiated lately. Firstly, his move to sever diplomatic ties with Israel in 2013, in the aftermath of the latter's attack on a Turkish Gaza peace ship, a principled decision, earned him the wrath of a powerful and dangerous foe that many believe to be behind the numerous political and economic unrests that have been plaguing Turkey lately. Secondly, his clash with Russia was unnecessary and

proved costly. Most importantly, his government's alleged patronisation of ISIS has proved to be a grave mistake, and Erdogan has been paying for it since. Thirdly, encouraged by NATO and inspired by his reported personal hatred, Erdogan's dogged determination to evict Assad in Syria cost Turkey dearly.

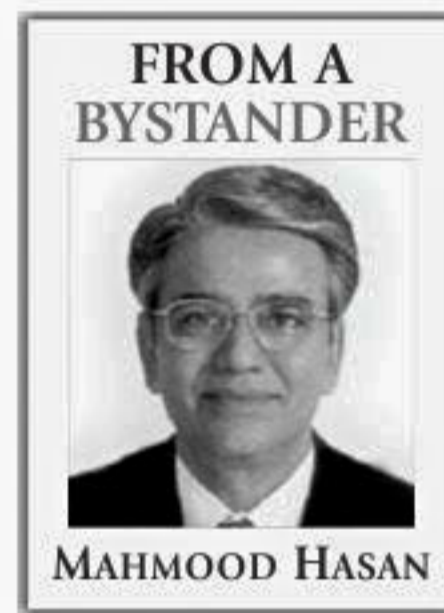
However, it is his recent reversals of some of these policies, especially cementing of relationships with Russia and peace overtures to Syria, that have put him at extreme odds with the Zionist/NATO conglomerate, Turkey's post-colonial 'nurturer'. Indeed, a delayed and somewhat less-than-strong disapproval of the coup by the NATO is instructive and has prompted speculations that they might have expected a different outcome.

Nevertheless, Erdogan be warned, his adversaries have noted one thing quite clearly that more than the support or non-participation of the loyal faction of his army, it is the people who have foiled the mutiny. They are his main strength and therefore, to ensure that the next coup or 'revolution' does not fail, many believe that is quite possible that the hegemon's nexus will make sure to weaken Erdogan's support base, the people, by alienating them through the engineering of a false economic crisis (remember Iran's Mosaddek, Chilli's Allende!).

Therefore, for Erdogan, the journey ahead is fraught and as he has found out already, a stricter form of authoritarianism and purging of critics is not the solution. The people are his answer and thus the way forward is not to shrink that base but expand it by engaging people to build a Turkey that is economically progressive, politically inclusive and spiritually nourishing.

The writer is a former senior policy manager of the United Nations.

Donald Trump to "Make America Great Again"



FROM A BYSTANDER
 MAHMOOD HASAN

AS expected, billionaire Donald Trump was formally nominated as the Republican Party presidential candidate at the Republican Party Convention held from July 18-21, 2016 at Cleveland, Ohio. This finally brings the nasty and vicious campaigning among the 17 Republican Party candidates, which began way back in

2015, to an end. A total of 2,472 party delegates gathered at the convention and 1,725 (69.78 percent) delegates voted for Trump, far more than the majority required. Paul Ryan, Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives of US Congress, who earlier refused to endorse Trump, actually chaired the convention. Attempts by a section of the GOP to stop Trump were unsuccessful as it failed to gather steam.

When the election campaign took off in early 2015, many believed that an outsider like Donald Trump, who had no experience in politics, was just fooling around and would soon quit the race. To the surprise of many, Trump not only stuck around but also secured the nomination. He dominated each of his closest challengers, who one by one quit the race, leaving him the only candidate for the Party Convention.

Donald Trump rode to popularity on the negatives that beset the US. He has repeatedly painted a grim picture of the US. He pandered to the prejudices of angry white men and women. These people, who feel left out, have been blindly supporting Trump. He has, however, alienated Hispanics, Blacks, Muslims, and other minority communities during his campaign.

As is evident, the US of 2016 is not like the US of 1968. The economy is growing at a steady rate, unemployment is currently less than 5 percent, illegal border crossings are at a low level, there are signs of racial progress, and violent crimes have fallen by almost half since 1990.

Yet, in his 75-minute acceptance speech Trump painted himself as the saviour of the republic from decadence. The speech highlighted illegal immigration, crime, trade, etc. Referring to corruption in high places he said, "Nobody knows the system better than me, which is why I alone can fix it". He claimed to have insider knowledge and the required toughness to cleanse the system. He has vowed to "stop the mighty from oppressing those who cannot defend themselves".

White Americans in general believe that immigrants are responsible for their woes and the crime scene is getting worse in the country. Citing the rise in murder rates in Washington and Chicago, Trump promised to restore law and order once he took charge as president. He has outrageously commented that most of the 'criminal activities' are committed by illegal immigrants, while asserting that illegal immigrants are being "released by the tens of thousands into our communities". He further declared to build "a great wall to stop illegal immigration, to stop gangs and the violence..." Referring to the ban on Muslims entering



Protesters hold up signs during a rally against Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump in Burlingame on April 29, 2016. PHOTO: JOSH EDELSONAFF/GETTY IMAGES

US, Trump said he would "immediately suspend immigration from any nation that has been compromised by terrorism..."

Castigating "globalism" as a rotten policy, he declared, "Americanism, not globalism, will be our credo". As a businessman who made billions, he vowed to make America "rich" again. He argued that he would "punish" China for unfair competition and renegotiate NAFTA, which, according to him was one of the "worst economic deals ever made by US".

"I have a different vision for our workers. It begins with a new, fair trade policy that protects our jobs and stands up to countries that cheat", announced Trump.

Taking a dig at his Democrat rival Hillary Clinton, Trump called her corrupt and blamed her for the rise of ISIS, Iran's nuclear ambition, the civil war in Syria and the instability in Libya. "This is the legacy of Hillary Clinton: death, destruction, terrorism and weakness", declared Trump. Trump, however, did not specify how he would conduct foreign policy once in power.

Trump promised to "repeal and replace the disastrous Obamacare". He will also reduce taxes that will help set up "new companies and new jobs to come roaring back into our country". With his new economic policies, "trillions of dollars will start flowing into our country", declared Trump.

Donald Trump has picked up Indiana Governor Mike Pence as his running mate. Calling him, "a great guy", he said, "He is the right man for the job". Towards the end of the speech, Trump cleverly said, "My pledge reads - I'm with you the American people". "I am your voice", he intoned. He concluded the speech with the

slogan: "We will make America great again".

Earlier Trump's wife Melania also spoke to introduce her husband. Interestingly, parts of her speech were plagiarised from a speech which President Obama's wife Michelle delivered in 2008. Ted Cruz, who dropped out last from the race, was also invited to speak at the convention but strangely did not endorse Trump for the presidency, while many GOP veterans stayed away from the convention altogether.

Trump's cleverly drafted speech was repeatedly applauded by the convention crowd. Simple people love to hear promises that would quickly solve the problems that bother them. Trump has bluntly and openly given avenue to the thoughts of many US citizens. He is a master speaker who can convince disgruntled people with chicanery and bluffs.

Trump has seized the Republican Party and divided the American public. He has come with a new political discourse with which the Grand Old Party (GOP) veterans are unfamiliar. His ultra right ideas, though un-implementable, resonate with the voters. He has not only transformed the GOP but also threatens to change the US.

There is no doubt that Trump will be a formidable challenger to Hillary Clinton. But can he win the White House on November 8, 2016?

If people were not shocked when the mendacious George W. Bush won two terms as president, or by the duplicity of Tony Blair and the lies of Boris Johnson duping Britons, why can't the chest-puffing Donald Trump win the White House?

The writer is a former Ambassador and Secretary.

COMMENTS

"Decision beats the wits"
 (July 21, 2016)

Syed Ahmed
 The family was well established in Bangladesh. Unbelievable!

"Drawn into militancy by Mufti Jashim" (July 21, 2016)

Fairgo Smith
 How come his parents were not aware of his activities?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Publish the viva voce results

The inefficiency of the Bangladesh Public Service Commission has reached a new level. The viva voce of the 35th BCS took place more than one hundred days ago, but the result is yet to be published. The participants of the viva voce are really frustrated by this. The result is supposed to be published within 90 days. But till now there is no sign of publishing the result.

We request the authority concerned to take immediate steps to publish the result.
 Sifat Mohammed Istiak Bhuiyan Shovon
 Officer, FBCCI

Why is the airport exit closed?

Recently, Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport exit has been closed and traffic is being diverted to Uttara, where Dhaka-bound vehicles have to take a u-turn at the Jashimuddin roundabout. This diversion is creating huge tailbacks on the Uttara highway and many vehicles are getting stuck in long traffic jams. I hope the authorities will look into the matter seriously.

Aminur Rahim
 New DOHS, Mohakhali
 Dhaka

A peace-loving superpower!

You can't call the US the world's leading champion of peace, considering how many wars and conflicts it's been involved in and considering how eager it is to sell arms to those who would start new ones or keep old ones going!

Ask the Palestinians, who are being gassed by American-made chemicals, shot by American

weapons and bombed by American missiles, how peaceful the US is! Ask the Latin Americans who died at the hands either of governments or guerrillas wielding American arms how peaceful the US is. Or ask the millions of others who are involved in conflicts in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe, fueled and kept going by low-cost

American arms, how peaceful the US is.

If the US would export half as much peace as it does weapons--working on feeding the poor, clothing the needy and providing jobs to the destitute--then it would make the world a far better place!
 Ted Rudow III, MA
 Encina Ave, Palo Alto, CA