Thursday OCT 22, 2009

Sir, to be noble and magnanimous is not to be realistic and right

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I have received a letter from Air Marshal (Retd) M. Asghar Khan which I am reproducing hereunder, and which is self-explanatory.

My association with Air Marshal Sabih is not a distant one. I have known him for more than half of that period of time and have been associated with him and his causes as a faithful companion. That period ended with the defeat of the PDA in the general elections of 1990-91. A White Paper on those elections was prepared and published under the title of 'How An Election Was Stolen'. The committee that finalised that project was headed by Air Marshal Sabih. The other prominent members were the late Omar Asghar Khan, Mr. Iqbal Haider (PPM) Mr. Khurshid Muhammad Qasim (then TDP) and the writer of this column. The White Paper was launched by Shabed Mobin, President of BWA late in 1991.

I am mentioning all this to emphasise the level of my association with this remarkable man who even at the age of well over 80, and after having gone through the soul-numbing agony of his elder son's untimely death, remains actively involved in the affairs of this great country which he loves (deeply and passionately) and about which he harbours very noble longings (of becoming a genuine modern welfare state).

I am aware that since 1992 my association with Air Marshal Sabih has largely been spiritual. We have not met frequently, though it was 'now and then' whom I invited to lunch this newspaper in 2007. I continue to hold him in the highest esteem for his honesty integrity, his commitment to a better and brighter Pakistan, and his enormous personal goodness.

But men, even when they respect such others as deeply as we do (Me & Air Marshal Sabih) are unlikely not to differ on some key issues. Before I go on to explain this statement, let me readers hear his letter.

With kindest regards,
(M. Asghar Khan)

As one who very kindly asked to the launching of the 'Herald Tribune', I was distressed to read your column in your daily of 21 October, 2009 about Dr. Pervez Hoodbhoy. Not only I did not know how good a Pakistani he is, but also because I held similar views on the acquisition of Nuclear Weapons by Pakistan. However, I now understand what Air Marshal Sabih means when he says that he holds similar views on the acquisition of Nuclear Weapons by Pakistan. Of course there is a strong case in favour of the view that a state in order to be strong need not be nuclear. But this is only a theoretical case. The case against this view being pragmatic is much stronger. This is a subject that requires a detailed debate. In this space there is no room for details. However, I am raising two fundamental questions here. These questions may please be answered with 'realistic' honesty by the objects to Pakistan's acquisition of nuclear weapons.

(a) Had Iraq been a nuclear power with a 'capacity' to hit Israel or American Navy, would Washington have dared to attack and occupy the heart of the Middle East?

(b) Why didn't India have backed down (and off) from its threat of attacking Pakistan, first in 2002-3 and then in 2008 if Islamabad hadn't reminded New Delhi that our Nuclear Weapons were not far show rooms?

History's greatest irony is that it has been the fate of 'civilized' and 'peace-loving' nations to be overrun by the likes of Chengu Khan, Halaku Khan, Temoor Lang and George W. Bush. As for the matter of 'hounding out and silencing' the holders of the views not in agreement with a state's philosophy and not in consonance with the general public's beliefs, let us look at China, Singapore, Malaysia and other Asian luminaries rather than the imperial West where there is so much talk of freedom of thought and views, yet Muslims are hounded for being vocal and vehement about their Islam.

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