Pakistani Scholar Worries About Country’s Future

Siraj Wahab, Arab News

JEDDAH, 9 September 2006 — Dr. Israr Ahmad is known for his excellent analysis of the Qur’an in Urdu. He appears regularly on PTV, QTV and Peace TV providing critical explanations of the holy verses. He was originally associated with Maulana Abul Ala Maududi, the founding father of the Jamaat-e-Islami. He was even more closer to the legendary Maulana Ameen Ahsan Islahi, the author of the monumental analysis of the Qur’an entitled “Tadabbur Al-Qur’an.” Dr. Israr drew inspiration from his mentor, Maulana Islahi.

Maulana Islahi was also associated with Maulana Maududi. When there were differences between Maulana Maududi and Maulana Islahi and many other leading scholars of the time on the issue of whether the Jamaat should dabble in politics, Maulana Islahi parted ways with Maulana Maududi. Dr. Israr followed his mentor and dissociated himself from the Jamaat and Maulana Maududi in the late 1950s. Maulana Islahi and Dr. Israr were of the opinion that reforming society should take precedence over politics.

Maulana Islahi also edited the respected Islamic journal “Misaq,” which is still published from Lahore. In a special issue of the journal, Dr. Israr’s biography was published.

Dr. Israr completed his graduate degree in medicine (MBBS) from Lahore’s King Edward Medical College in 1954. He gave up his medical practice in 1970 and since then has devoted his life for the study and teaching of the Holy Qur’an.

Dr. Israr was in Jeddah last week and Arab News sat down with him for a discussion on the current state of affairs in Pakistan. Now in his 70s, Dr. Israr seemed very disillusioned and pessimistic. In his younger days he was very active in politics having been the president of the Jamiat-ul-Tulba, but it is politics that now disturbs him.

“I am upset with this vicious cycle, or what I call this three-sided prism of military democracy, civil bureaucracy and feudal lords,” Dr. Israr said. “They take turns at power. Sometimes the military takes charge, and the other two follow it; at other times the bureaucracy takes over, and the remaining two follow suit. Their interests are intertwined.”

Dr. Israr described the situation. “When Ayub Khan took over everybody joined hands against him,” he said. “At that time, it was believed that Ayub was the source of all
evil and that immediately after his removal, things would be hunky-dory. When Ayub left, Yahya Khan took over. When Yahya left Zulfikar Ali Bhutto assumed power. Then all the religious parties came together to oust him. Then Zia-ul Haq took over. So democracy could never take root."

The scholar said Pakistan has been thus plagued since its beginnings. “The party that was responsible for the country’s creation — the Muslim League — was in fact not a party. It was a ‘tehreek’ (movement). And as with all movements when it achieves its goal, it folds up. The Muslim League that created Pakistan died immediately after achieving its sole purpose.”

When asked about military interventions interrupting the flow of the political process, Dr. Israr said they were due in large part to the weakness of Pakistan’s political system. “If the political traditions were strong, the military would never have dared to intervene. Why didn’t the military intervene in India? Is it a small army? Morarji Desai (the former prime minister of India) was once visiting Pakistan. He was traveling by train from Lahore to Karachi. As was mandatory, the DIG in Rahim Yar Khan area was accompanying him in the train’s coupe. So he asked him why the Indian military never intervened in his country’s political affairs. Desai replied that the Indian military knew full well that if martial law were to be imposed, there would be thousands of bodies littering the streets of India, and one of them would be that of Morarji Desai.”

Dr. Israr said the ongoing political upheaval in Pakistan damaged the nation’s respect among its neighbors and the world community. “We became a laughing stock with the frequent changes in governments. So much so that (Jawaharlal) Nehru (India’s first prime minister) once said sarcastically: ‘People keep pestering me to hold dialogue with the Pakistani leadership. My question to them is: Who should I talk to? I don’t change my clothes as frequently as they change governments in Pakistan.’ It is very easy to blame the military establishment, but one should also be asking who gave it the reason to intervene? It was the ineptitude of the political leadership. There were elements in the political class that were ready to welcome the military rulers with garlands. If the military had felt that the people would not like its intervention in the country’s political affairs, then it would have hesitated; it would have thought twice.”

Now Dr. Israr finds a disturbing portent for the future of Pakistan. “I am worried. The reasons why Pakistan was created (‘wajh-e-jawaaz’), its raison d’etre, are being questioned now. This worries me. ‘Why Pakistan?’ the younger generation keeps asking. It is becoming a chorus now. ‘Why did you go for partition?’ they ask. ‘What was the reason?’ Is that not a worrying factor?”

Dr. Israr elaborated. “There were two reasons (for the creation of Pakistan) — one positive and one negative. The negative factor was the fear of the Hindu: the Hindu will finish us off; the Hindu will suppress us (‘Hindu hum ko dabayega,’ ‘Hindu hum ko kha jayega’... etc., etc.) The Hindu will take revenge. It will finish our culture. It will
strangle our language. This was the negative issue that became a rallying cry for the Muslim League. Remember, at this stage the Muslim League was not a party. It was just a club of nawabs and jagirdars. In his address of 1930 in Allahabad (‘Khutba-e-Allahabad’), the legendary poet Iqbal gave an ideological injection to this movement. During the address, Iqbal said: ‘It is my conviction that in the north of India an independent Muslim state will be established.’ It was a prophesy — not a proposal. Iqbal went on to say: ‘If this happens, we will be able to project the true picture of Islam to the world.’ This was the positive reason. One year before 1930 Mr. Muhammad Ali Jinnah … I am not calling him Quaid-e-Azam because he had not yet become the ‘quaid’. He was not among the founders of the Muslim League. And for six years after the founding of the Muslim League he didn’t join it. He was the private secretary of (the Indian independence hero) Dadabhai Nawroji. Even when he eventually became a member of the Muslim League, he retained dual membership — both in the Congress and the Muslim League. He did his best (‘sartod koshish ki’) to find some solution to the Hindu-Muslim problem. That is why Mr. Jinnah was referred to in those days as the ambassador of unity. Then he became disillusioned. So in 1929 one year before Iqbal’s ‘Khutba-e-Allahabad,’ Mr. Jinnah closed his political shop, bought a palace (‘kothi’) in London and started practicing law. S.M. Ikram, who wrote some interesting books in Urdu, was in England in those days studying at Oxford. He went to see Jinnah and asked him why he had left India. ‘The Muslims of India need your leadership,’ he told Jinnah. Jinnah’s reply will give you some idea of his disillusionment. ‘Hindus are incorrigible,’ he told Ikram. ‘And the thing with Muslims is that their biggest and tallest leader who talks with me in the morning goes to the commissioner or deputy commissioner or governor in the evening and spills all the beans. How can I lead such a community?’

The turnaround in Jinnah, according to Dr. Israr, came later. “It happened in 1932 when Iqbal went to London for the Second Roundtable Conference. At that time, he gave the same ideological injection to Mr. Jinnah. ‘This is the cause of the Muslims,’ he told Mr. Jinnah. It was this injection that Mr. Jinnah came back with to India in 1934. He was rejuvenated, and then he became the Quaid-e-Azam.”

When Dr. Israr thinks back to the creation of Pakistan, he marvels over the consensus that formed it. “It was a miracle. Can there be any bigger stupidity from the political standpoint as to why a UP Muslim should support the Muslim League? It was an emotional atmosphere. Bombay Muslim, Madrasi Muslim, CP (Central Provinces) Muslim — what did they have to do with Pakistan? But they were the real creators of Pakistan. In Punjab, there was never a Muslim League ministry even for one day. It was either in East Pakistan or Sindh. Until the end, it was the Congress ministry in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). The real creators of Pakistan then were the Muslims of the minority provinces. They generated a wave in 1946. It was because of this wave that when the elections took place, they established beyond a shadow of doubt that the Muslim League was the sole representative party of the Muslim community.”
Dr. Israr said that what started right, soon went wrong. “The creation of Pakistan was a good thing. It was created with good intentions; there was a long historical background to the movement, but we failed badly. There is one quote from Quaid-e-Azam worth remembering: ‘God has given us a golden opportunity to prove our worth as architects of a new state, and let it not be said that we didn’t prove equal to the task.’ Unfortunately, we proved that we were not equal to the task. Where is Pakistan? We divided it into two countries (in 1971). What do we have now? There is no such thing as ‘qaum’ in Pakistan. ‘Qaumiyaten basti hain. Qaum ho aur Kala Bagh dam na ban sake?’”

The Islamic scholar was asked if his view was similar to the American view which considers Pakistan a failed state. “I don’t know what the Americans are saying. When they say Pakistan is a failed state, maybe they are referring to the country’s failed economic policies. I am talking about the ideological failure. Pakistan was not an ordinary country. It came into existence on the basis of an ideology. If you couldn’t take care of that ideology, then it is a failed state. It is an ideologically failed state.”

When asked if Pakistan’s nuclear leadership of the Muslim world qualified it as having some measure of success, Dr. Israr dismissed the idea out of hand. “What is the use? Just one phone call — ‘with us or against us’ — and you are finished,” he said, noting that it wasn’t just a failure of leadership but rather the failure of personal conviction of the populace. “A country is known by its leader,” he said, “and then what about the people? What did they do? Don’t just blame the leader; the people are equally responsible for the sad state of affairs. ‘Paisa imaan hai, paisa deen hai.’ Except for materialism, people are not interested in anything. This is not the case of one or two people; I am talking about everybody in Pakistan. They have become too materialistic.”

So now the aging scholar holds a dim view of Pakistan’s future — divine intervention notwithstanding. “Only a miracle can save Pakistan,” Dr. Israr said. “To me, the creation of Pakistan was in itself a miracle, and I see optimism only in the form of a miracle. In 1946, Quaid-e-Azam had given up on the demand for Pakistan. When you had accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan, what did it mean? It meant that the country would remain united for 10 years. There were to be three zones. Yes, after 10 years any zone would have had the option of secession. All this meant that for 10 long years, there was no question of an independent country. It was only after Nehru issued a statement saying ‘Who lets anybody separate after 10 years?’ that is when Quaid-e-Azam got adamant. He took a step back. ‘Agar yahi niyat hai to ye Cabinet mission plan hamen manzoor nahi hai’ (If these are what your intentions are, then we don’t accept this Cabinet Mission Plan). It was Nehru who created Pakistan. To be honest, what Nehru said was absolutely true. Would anybody have allowed one zone to separate after 10 years? Nehru was right. ‘Nikal jaati hai jis ke muh se sacchi baat masti me/Faqeeh-e-maslehat been se wo rind-e-baada khaar accha.’ A miracle is possible even now but only if there is a will in the nation and among the people for the cause of Islam. Not for Islamabad but for Islam. The young generation should re-read the chapters of history. ‘Sabaq padh phir shujaa’at ka, adalat ka, sadaqat ka.’”

Story Link: [http://www.arabnews.com/?page=9&section=0&article=79003&d=9&m=9&y=2006](http://www.arabnews.com/?page=9&section=0&article=79003&d=9&m=9&y=2006)