CHAPTER V

The Post-Zia Years

Benazir Bhutto's rise to power in Pakistan owed to her, and her father's bete noire, General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq's permanent political eclipse following his tragic death in an air crash in Bahawalpur (Punjab) on 17 August 1988. Initially, her advent to power in November 1988, as leader of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), created an euphoria among Pakistanis and Pakistan watchers elsewhere. It created an expectation among the latter two that the hitherto-triumphant praetorian dispensation would be a thing of the past and that a civilian, democratic political order would be ushered in in Pakistan. Her ascendance to power was expected to ensure a more positive response to urgent and rising internal and external problems that were confronting the Pakistani state. Benazir herself gave vent to these daunting tasks lying ahead for her government. In a countrywide broadcast on the national television, she said: "You have bestowed a great honour on your sister and placed a heavy responsibility on her shoulders. We are standing on the brink of disaster, but a whole generation is ready to launch on constructive efforts to save the country. We will bring an end to hunger and degradation. We shall provide shelter over the heads of the homeless". ¹ Internally, the state of economy remained much to be desired; a severe resource crunch; a looming scenario of bankruptcy, problems of poverty, unemployment, and mass illiteracy and budgetary deficit, all cumulatively engaged the attention of the Government. The position on the foreign exchange front was not satisfactory either. Her government applied to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a loan which entailed cuts in internal and external deficits. Moreover, the World Bank, deviating from its traditional practice of withholding remarks about sensitive political issues of its constituent members, pointed out that Pakistan was

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spending far more on defence than comparable countries. Moreover, Pakistani Army as an ubiquitous political force could not be neglected in her reckoning towards shaping domestic and external policies of her government. The former Chief of Army, General Mirza Aslam Beg, in December 1988, underlined the need for collaborating different countries in defence production, which could ensure Pakistan's national security and provide for strong security linkages. While stressing the need for strengthening the existing collaboration in defence production with traditional friends like the USA, China and Turkey, the former Army Chief also urged an extension of this relationship to other countries of the region, especially Iran and Afghanistan, with whom Pakistan shared a commonality of interests and religious affinity. Aslam Beg felt that such a grandiose strategy would add to the defence potential of Pakistan. Aslam Beg's wishes found their echo in President Ghulam Ishaq Khan's address to Parliament on 14 December 1988, when he proclaimed on behalf of the Benazir Government, high priority to the needs of national defence. The armed forces were to benefit by the best professional training and the acquisition of modern equipment. Budgetary allocations on defence would not be cut.

Afghanistan: Continuation of Zia's Policy

The Afghan imbroglio was far from settled (remains unsettled even at the time of writing) by the time she assumed the reins of power in Pakistan, just two months before the Soviets started pulling out from Afghanistan. The internal struggle for


3. See Aslam Beg's address to the Eight International Seminar on Defence Technology, The Pakistan Times (Rawalpindi), 7 December 1988 and quoted in ibid., p.151.

power among different factions of mujahideen—popularly called 'Buzkashi' in Afghan political parlance—acquired a salience of its own in the post-Soviet Afghanistan. Besides, she had to cope up with the legacy left behind by her predecessor, General Zia-ul-Haq. The latter favoured Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, the leader of Hizb-i-Islami (Party of Islam) to assume the mantle of power in a post-withdrawal political arrangement in Afghanistan. On the contrary, Benazir sought to explore other options without, however, endeavouring to disturb or reopen the hitherto-followed foreign policy orientation of the late General. The fact that she had scrupulously toed the late Zia line on Afghanistan in its fundamentals was vindicated in her decision to retain Sahabzada Yakub Khan, a Zia protégé, as her foreign minister as she felt that such an action would 'send a signal of continuity in foreign affairs'. His retention was intended to ensure the continuation of the existing policy on Afghanistan and not to change it mid-stream. The Mujahideen were to be supported until fighting stopped, a line pursued by her in conjunction with the one favoured by the United States. Thus, the apprehensions prevalent among some sceptics that the post-Zia political establishment would invoke a retreat of Pakistan from vigorously supporting the Mujahideen and turn its back on the latter had proved bereft of foundation. Instead, as she put it, 'the geopolitical realities remain even if Zia is gone', and 'Pakistan cannot accept a Soviet-dominated Afghanistan on one border and India on the other'. Thus, Pakistan's geostrategic thinking remained unaltered and unaffected, notwithstanding the changed character of political order symbolised by Benazir's democratic political ascendance. She was unable to break free of policy compulsions springing from traditional wisdom regarding Pakistani security thinking on Afghanistan. However, a few shifts in nuance were discernible in her approach

5. The Pakistan Times (Rawalpindi), 15 December 1988.


towards Afghanistan. She was less zealous about the choice of post-Soviet ruling personalities in Afghanistan unlike Zia-ul-Haq who had envisioned an Islamic regime under the direct control of Gulbuddin Hikmatyar. The difference was that her government’s inclinations to support the seven-party alliance’s claims were shorn of emphasis on the aggressive overtones with which the Zia policy was associated. Further, the opposition PPP’s perception of the US role was that the latter had used Pakistan as an instrument to fight its battles against the Soviets allowing the risks to fall to Pakistan while Washington limited its responsibility to merely supplying arms.

Following the Soviet pullout from Afghanistan in February 1989, the Pakistani Army’s adventurous military campaign for Jalalabad ended in a fiasco in the spring of 1989. Taking advantage of the embarrassment suffered by Army, Benazir ousted the then ISI’s Head, General Hamid Gul from his post. This decision, taken in May 1989, was hailed by many as a highly significant move, both in terms of heralding change in Pakistani foreign policy towards Afghanistan and in leading to a reduced Pakistani presence in Afghanistan. Gul’s removal by Benazir was also considered as crucial to her power consolidation efforts at home. However, the forced (and apparent) removal of Hamid Gul from the scene did not lead to anticipated shift in policies. Besides, her selection of General Shamsur Rahman Kallu as the new Chief of the ISI, meant no more (and no less) than a figurehead. In effect, the Army Chief, General Beg seized direct control of the ISI and, concomitantly, its pet Afghan policy. The Peshawar-centered Mujahideen were assured increasing support. Hamid Gul, though deposed and sent to the far-off Multan with an assigned command post, continued to be consulted by the intelligence service on important decisions impinging on Afghanistan.

During her 20-month old first term (having took charge of the Prime Ministerial office on December 2, 1988 till she was dismissed on 6 August 1990), Prime Minister Benazir displayed requisite deference to the military. She allowed the military to assume a near-exclusive responsibility in steering the course of Afghan
policy. Her political weakness stemming from her party's inability to obtain an absolute majority in the parliament helps explain this state of affairs.

Besides, the army was kept consulted on matters of national interest. She did not consider this practice unprecedented or unconstitutional. Moreover, she contended that consultations among various institutions and organs of the state including the armed forces constituted an essential component in the process of policy formulation. She perceived this process as an exercise in the sharing of responsibility and in developing a consensus on security issues rather than the one aimed at power sharing. She, however, did concede to the army that it had possessed a culture of its own which in the Pakistani milieu, encompassed a commitment and readiness to act as the fortress of the 'Ideology of Pakistan'. This was the much-fancied and the assigned role of Pakistani army enthusiastically nurtured by the deceased Zia which Benazir did not, and could not, seek to reverse. Pakistan's military academies look after this doctrinal role of army through their instructions and syllabi. For instance, the syllabus of the prestigious Pakistan Military Academy at Kakul (its Indian counterpart being the Khadakvasla-based National Defence Academy), contains a course on "Islamic Studies and the Ideology of Pakistan". The said course lays "emphasis on the political and military logic of the creation of Pakistan and the requirement of Pakistan to overcome India or keep it on the defensive."  

In regard to Saudi Arabia, the policy pursued by her father, Z.A. Bhutto and later followed by Zia-ul-Haq, was also continued by the Benazir Government. After assuming power, one of her first acts, was to express her desire to visit Saudi

8. The Economic Times (New Delhi), 1 September 1995.
Later, it turned out to be her first visit to any foreign country with a view to performing an umrah - a lesser pilgrimage - to Makkah. Benazir was the Muslim World's first woman Prime Minister, and Saudi Arabia carried great symbolic value as the custodian of Islam's holy places, besides being a traditional ally of Pakistan. Initially, King Fahd declined to receive Benazir, amidst speculation that receiving a Muslim female head of government, might offend the Kingdom's orthodox ulama. Moreover, the Kingdom's Mufti, Sheikh Abd al-Aziz bin Abdullah bin Baz, issued a Fatwa (a religious decree) which declared that a woman could not lead a Muslim nation. However, with the good offices reportedly provided by Yasser Arafat, King Fahd relented and finally decided to receive Benazir. The King was apparently counselled that his refusal to receive Benazir would be an unnecessary snub to the leader of a friendly country.11 King Fahd's initial reluctance to receive Benazir was probably owed to his perception that she would endeavour to undermine the Islamization programme carefully nurtured by Zia-ul-Haq who was extended unambiguous Saudi support for his Islamization programme during his political stewardship of Pakistan.

Even before the outbreak of the Gulf War in 1990, the role of Pakistan in the security affairs of Saudi Arabia was sharply cut back when Pakistan withdrew its combat forces for reasons that are still unclear but involved either a dispute over deployment or a Pakistani refusal to exclude Shias from their ranks, as demanded by the Saudis. Benazir wanted to utilize her Saudi visit to stem the possible deterioration in Pakistan-Saudi relations due to this development. Her entourage to Saudi Arabia included Yakub Khan, her Foreign Minister and Iqbal Akhund, National Security Adviser. The policy of cooperation between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in resolving


11. Kail C. Ellis, 'Pakistan's Foreign Policy : Alternating Approaches' in ibid., p. 146.
problems such as Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iran-Iraq was cherished and upheld. Saudi Arabia's close affinity with the Peshawar-based Mujahideen and Pakistani Jamaat-i-Islami had for many years acted as a constraint on those Pakistani policy-makers willing to press the Mujahideen towards a diplomatic settlement. The Saudis settled for a decisive armed victory to hopefully result in a Wahabi-Sunni political ascendance in Afghanistan. The Saudi financial largesse, direct and indirect, provided to Zia and that was continued to Benazir, enabled them to have a decisive say in matters concerning Afghanistan. During Benazir's tenure in office, there was always the fear that if offended, the Saudi leadership would side with the domestic religious opposition in Pakistan, which was capable of creating internal chaos for the regime.

Benazir was cognizant of the fact that the Islamisation process ushered in in Pakistan had impinged (and still does) on the foreign relations of Pakistan. She regarded her predecessors' Islamisation as controversial and that it had led to brutalization of society. To her, Islam was the religion of the state and the ethos of Islam were discernible in tolerance and brotherhood, and not in fanaticism and rigidity. However, her efforts to distance her government from its predecessor on the subject of Islamisation should not delude one to think that she had fundamentally deviated from the Zia-driven Islamisation programme. Far from it. Benazir's change of policy from the one followed by Zia was insignificant, and only in nuance. As before, her government would enforce the Shariah, which both in its inspiration and enforcement, was decidedly Saudi in flavour like her predecessor, she contended that 'any law contradicting the Holy Quran and the 'Sunnah' will be abolished'. In her approach towards Islamization, Benazir had to reckon with the legacy of her immediate past, her father's imprint, the internal scene radicalized by Islamic political

forces, sensitivity of the Saudi regime, and her own need to obtain political legitimacy from the populace. Her father's legacy is discernible in her belief in, and the pursuit of, 'bilateralism' as a foreign policy strategy.

Even then, during her pre-poll (the poll was held on 16 November, 1988) political campaign in 1988, Benazir debunked Zia's Islamization programme in practically every press interview that she had given. In an interview given to Javed Anand for the *Sunday Observer*, she had a dig at Zia and his scheme of Islamization:

What is Zia's Islamisation all about? It boils down to two issues - the amputation of hands and the stoning of people in certain cases. Yet Zia himself knew that there was no consensus for this...Despite these laws [Hudood Ordinances] having been passed, there have been very few instances either of amputation or stoning. What Zia did was not so much in substance...what he actually did was to create a climate of hysteria within the country which made it very difficult for working women and minorities and even those sects which did not concur with the official interpretation of Islamic laws. Because she would not justify military repression, he tried to cloak it in the name of religion and the consequence was the brute bisecting of our society.\(^{14}\)

However, once her party, the PPP, emerged as the single largest party in the National Assembly, the constraints of office made her to dilute her anti-Zia rhetoric as far as his sphere of Islamisation was concerned.

PAKISTAN AND THE CAIRO INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT: AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

The United Nations-sponsored Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (September 5-13, 1994) created a great deal of controversy over the wording and contents of the draft action plan to be adopted by the International

\(^{14}\) *The Sunday Observer* (Bombay), 26 August to 3 September 1988.
community represented in the United Nations. Much before the Conference was formally been inaugurated, a split of sorts in the International Community between Islamic states (and the Holy See, representing the Roman Catholic Community) and the Western states was already in place. The former felt that the draft was an attempt to thrust Western social/cultural values and its concepts of family planning on the non-Western world and that the draft would allegedly encourage homo-sexuality, promiscuous sexual mores/behaviours, abortion (on demand and as a contraceptive device) and undermine sanctity of life and the institution of family on which the structure of Muslim society is based. An Indian Scholar on Islam, Asghar Ali Engineer, in his essay titled "Islam & Family Planning", recognises the dichotomy between eastern and western societies regarding their respective socio-cultural values including family planning. Some Islamic movements, notably Al-Gamaa al-Islamia of Egypt and the Jamaat-i-Islami of Pakistan did not only criticise the draft on the grounds as cited above but also spearheaded the demand in their respective countries for the boycott of the Conference by their governments. Even a supposedly moderate Al-Azhar (an Egyptian Islamic Seminary which has been coopted by the successive Egyptian governments beginning from Gamal Abdel Nasser) attacked the draft of the Conference describing it as violative of the Islamic principles and has called upon the Islamic countries to seek to get controversial issues divested from the programme of action. The Council of Ulama, the highest and the twenty-one member Islamic religious body of Saudi Arabia, pronounced that "it is not allowed to Muslims, in line with the Sharia to take part in the Conference." The Council considered the Conference's draft action plan as "contrary to Islam, to exalted religions, to common

15. Even some Liberal thinkers, notably Nicholas Eberstadt and Amartya Sen of Harvard University have criticized the draft plan for its wrong prioritization of International problems. For instance, the question of redistribution of wealth from the rich North to the poor South did not receive an adequate attention from the Conference Planners which it deserved.


17. The Asian Age (New Delhi), 2 September 1994.
sense and morality". Further, in a statement unanimously adopted by its members, the Council felt that the document/draft "calls for permissiveness, the sterilization of humanity and does not take into account the moral principles set out by the religion." It condemned the Conference for the later's alleged "ferocious assault on Islamic Society." Pakistan's Jamaat-i-Islami termed the document "a Western Plot to promote obscenity and sexual vulgarity".

The response of the Muslim states to the Conference had been like on other issues, divisive. Some of them, such as Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan, Bangladesh and Indonesia decided to boycott the Conference, broadly on the ground that the Conference document conflicted with their social and religious tenets. Turkey sent a delegation without its Prime Minister, Ms Tansu Ciller, a decision prompted by domestic compulsions. Be that as it may, the organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), a fifty-one member International Organisation - exhorted its member-states to take part in the Conference in order to ensure that the latter's recommendations conformed to Islamic values. In a rather lengthy statement sent to the Reuters, the Organisation said:

18. Ibid.  
19. Ibid.  
22. Initially, Bangladesh, under the present Primiership of Begum Khaleda Zia, decided not to participate in the Conference because of "pressing domestic reasons", alluding to the Taslima Nasreen episode which has rocked the nation snowballing into a major political crisis for her government. Later, the government reconsidered its initial decision and decided to send a ministerial-level delegation, a step necessitated by the OIC's appeal to member-states in favour of participation. See The Asian Age (New Delhi), 5 September 1994.
The OIC considers that...(original) it is necessary for member-countries to press forcefully for the imposing [elucidation] of our Islamic positions and preventing the approval of any documents which goes against the teachings of the Koran....Behind the diplomatic formulas can be seen the arrogant claims of the liberal thinking that wiped out communism and is now preparing to impose itself on the great majority of mankind as the only correct path to achieve progress and happiness ....the draft recommendations, if put into practice, would strip U.N. member-states' political, economic and educational programmes of any religious or moral content. 23

The above quoted OIC statement made within a specific context of the Population and Development Conference, reveals some characteristic features. The Organisation posited the issue in an overall perspective of participatory politics. It's lofty objective of achieving Islamic solidarity required it to lead the way for the crystallization of Islamic viewpoint on this and other issues affecting humanity's future and to counter the hegemony of consumeristic/materialistic/hedonistic weltanschauung masquerading as liberalism. Implicit in this polaristic situation was an yearning of the Third World Muslim states to seek respect and recognition for its social mores governing their peoples. Scholars and media analysts too started viewing the post-Cold War International system from a civilizational divide of the Huntingtonian fame.24

Partly in deference to the OIC's appeal, as referred to above, and partly to establish their Islamic credentials in their domestic societies (not withstanding the internal opposition mounted by Islamic groups against participation), and similar other considerations played their respective parts in motivating some Muslim states in favour of participation. They perceived that such an opportunity would enable them

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24. For details, see Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" Foreign Affairs (Washington D.C.), Vol.72, No.3, Summer 1993, pp.22-49. As each day passes, this school of thought is receiving wider publicity and those who are conforming to his prognostications are increasing. Also see in this connection, Brian Beedham, "Islam and the West", The Economist (London), Vol.332, No.7875, 6 August 1994, pp.3-18.
to guide the draft action plan on the lines prescribed by the Holy Qur’an and the Shariah as seen by them. In the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Saudi boycott of the Conference might have acted as an additional incentive to propel itself for the leadership role of the world Ummah. Besides, Iran’s position was further reinforced by its own constitution which states thus:

The family is the fundamental unit of Society and the main centre for the growth and edification of human being. This view of family delivers women from being regarded as an object or an instrument in the service of promoting consumerism (hedonism) and exploitation.

In Pakistan’s position, while there seemed to be some sort of dithering as regards participation in the initial stages25 (with Jamaat-i-Islami’s demand for boycott, as cited in the aforesaid), the OIC’s appeal against boycott appeared to have facilitated Pakistan’s conclusive decision in favour of participation. Besides Pakistan could not afford to pay a deaf ear to the voice of the OIC, for the latter had been diplomatically useful to Pakistan in the mounting of its tirade against what it calls India’s human rights violations in Kashmir. Further, the boycotting states were few in number, even though Saudi Arabia’s role was very crucial so far as the OIC affairs are concerned. Being the neighbouring state of Iran, Pakistan’s decision to participate in the Conference might have been influenced by that of Iran.26 Among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was the first state to send a delegation to the Conference. Kuwait stressed the need for achieving international cooperation in solving demographic problems provided such endeavours did not violate Shariah.27 India sent a delegation, headed by its Minister of Health and Family Welfare, B. Shankaranand which also included its Minister of State for External Affairs, Salman Khurshid. The delegation utilized this opportunity by

25. Ibid., n. 20, p. 39.
27. The Hindu (New Delhi), 4 September 1994.
appraising the Muslim nations of India's point of view with regard to the Kashmir problem. In this connection, Salman Khurshid did have private parleys with the delegates from Iran, Algeria, Egypt and also with the UN Secretary General. The objectives of these behind-the-scene confabulations was to neutralize Pakistan's diplomatic moves against India with the OIC member-states on the Kashmir imbroglio. On the subject under the conference consideration, India unequivocally made it explicit that it would accept no compromise on the right to abortion as a form of family planning. This uncompromising stand on India's past seemed surprising in the context of even the die-hard pro-choice Western states' proclivity to come to a sort of compromise with the Vatican and Islamic opposition to "serious flaws" in the draft document. It was in this context that Mr. Sarojoque Mohammad Saddik, the head of the Afghan delegation, had clarified the position of Islamic states: "We will never go a step with anything that violates Islamic law. We Islamic countries have definite commandments about abortion and we cannot deviate from them." 28

As a mark of gesture to the sensibilities of these countries, the draft document of the Conference was heavily interspersed with parentheses ("bracket areas" as called by media analysts).

The Vatican-Islamic Collusion?

If Indian and International news media (some sections) were to be believed, then there emerged an alliance between the Holy See (representing the Worldwide Roman Catholic Community) and the Muslim states. The Times of India (New Delhi), in its Editorial of 2 September 1994, poignantly talked of "a strange alliance between the Vatican and the Islamic fundamentalists." Pouring its venom further, the Editorial continued:

In a drastic reversal of the crusades to free the Holy Land from Islamic rule, the Vatican has now found that it has more in common with Islamic

fundamentalists than with enlightened Western values... While the Vatican cloaks its animosity to family planning under the garb of it violating the sanctity of life, the Islamists have predictably detected a Western Plot to curtail their population... In opposing the values of the modern world, the Vatican has shown itself capable of supping with the devil. It will do well to remember that at the time of the Crusades, the West found much to admire in Islamic culture. It is regrettable that the latter-day custodians of Christendom have chosen to encourage the darker aspects of Islam. 29

Other news media also referred to the Vatican as having found "a willing ally in Islamic fundamentalists in countries like Iran and Libya." 30 A Time article talked of the Vatican's predictability of objections to the draft document "but not its alliance with many Muslim Leaders." 31 This article also reported of the Papal envoys' meetings with several Muslim leaders. The proclivity of the Indian news media (some sections) to talk ceaselessly of the sceptre of Islam haunting the world order is not something new as they are merely echoing the "fears" of their counterparts in the rest of the world. It seldom fails to see such a "sceptre" in every conceivable issue being confronted by the international community.

While this being the case, a closer look at the draft document and subsequent deliberations of the Cairo Conference would reveal an underlying philosophical chasm that seemed to have enveloped between the prosperous North, on the one hand (with the rare exception of the Holy See) and the poor South (with the rare unanimity among Muslim states), on the other.

With the virtual disappearance of the Soviet Union as the messiah of communism, the ideology of liberalism seems to have abrogated to itself the cause

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29. The "Editorial" of The Times of India (New Delhi), 2 September 1994.
celebration of the former, whereas the reasons for the latter were basically intrinsic to itself, i.e. internal in character. In the aftermath of communism's exit from the scene of international politics, liberalism seemed to think that it alone has possessed a viable model for the international community to emulate and that it alone seemed to contain solutions to every conceivable entangle being confronted by the world. This hegemony of the Liberal Idea has brought in its wake an unanticipated anti-thesis: the rise of resurgent Islam that has been catching the imagination of the increasing broad masses of the Third World Muslim states. Viewed from this angle, it was not surprising that there developed two apparently different viewpoints at the Cairo International Conference: liberalism with all its conjuncted offshoots, namely unbridled consumerism, materialism, hedonism, etc., on the one hand, and Resurgent Islam with the sprinkling of Catholicism as a supportive element, on the other. (This was by no stretch of imagination, a strategic alliance, as critics (as referred to above), would have us believe). The Vatican Pope John Paul II was not far off the truth when he said that "today it is more urgent than ever to react against models of behaviour that are the fruit of a hedonistic and permissive culture". The lines that follow will seek to clarify the issue further:

As cited in the foregoing, the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) while making an appeal to its member-states for participation in the Conference, viewed the issues involved in the Cairo conclave from the broad perspective of what might be termed as "Liberal Hegemonism". It's exhortation to its member-states ought to be seen in the light of the felt need to counter the perceived "Liberal Hegemonism", lest the latter should ride rough shod over the rest of the international community.

33. Ibid., no. 31, p.37.
34. The Hindu (New Delhi), 5 September 1994.
Reference was made to the alleged Vatican-Islam alliance or collusion. Much should not be read into this beyond a mere fact of convergence which was not unnatural in a given situation. Besides, the fact that both Catholicism and Islam emanated from the same theological base - Abrahamic Monotheism - many occasionally make them converge on issues as they did in Cairo. A mere meeting of minds on an issue or issues need not smell an alliance. It was a mere tactical coincidence or accidence. An alliance requires blueprint, a grandiose design or a strategy whose achievement results in a major fundamental transformation in society. Nothing of the sort was envisaged by either the Vatican or Islamic countries at the Cairo confabulations. The Holy See itself denied that it was forming an alliance with Muslim states to fight the draft action plan.\(^ {35}\) Further, a Vatican Spokesperson Joaquin Navarro-Valls himself said that "it is not surprising that different religions can agree, but to speak of an alliance is non-sense."\(^ {36}\) If this convergence is understood in a wider international context, such a meeting of minds has not been stretched to form an alliance at the global level. This was at best a single-issue homogeneity of viewpoints. On other international issues, they entertain opposing viewpoints. Moreover, in the last stages of the Cairo deliberations, the Vaticans' exclusive commitment to anti-abortionism, at the cost of other pressing issues, incensed the Muslim States, especially the host country (Egypt) and Iran.

Thus the notion that cultural factors could not be neglected in tackling developmental issues was struck very hard at the Cairo meet. A veritable division of sorts between the liberal viewpoint and the Vatican-Islamic viewpoint jostled against each other for a wider acceptance among the participating states. Keeping this background in view, an attempt has been made to analyse the Pakistani role at the

\(^{35}\) The Asian Age (New Delhi), 5 September 1994.

\(^{36}\) Ibid.
Conference, by also taking into cognizance, the part played by other Muslim countries.

Despite strident opposition of Islamic groups against Conference participation by Pakistan, as referred to above, Pakistan's Prime Minister, Ms Benazir Bhutto (reinforced by the OIC's exhortation and other attendant, extraneous factors, as cited in the foregoing), braved herself to attend the same and set the initial tone of what was called the "Islamic Perspective" on "Controversial Issues" identified in the draft action plan. Incidentally, she was the only female Head of Government of an Islamic State to attend and present an address to the Conference gathering. Establishing a raison d'être of sorts for Pakistan's participation, Ms. Benazir felt that "we must go and oppose it [the draft document's "non-conforming" references to Islamic values and beliefs, as she sees them] rather than leaving the arena open for projecting Western thoughts on family planning." She further declared that "we will not accept anything in the document that is against Islam," and hoped for the

37. For instance, opposition for the provision of contraceptives to unmarried persons, and rejection of the word "union" instead of "marriage" in the draft, to name only two. Even after the draft document was approved by consensus on the last day of the Conference, the 13 September, it was done so with the recording of reservations to some Chapters/clauses of Chapters by the Vatican and Islamic countries. For example, Iran, supported by Egypt (host country), Pakistan, Syria, Algeria, Yemen, Malaysia, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Libya, Maldives and Jordan, objected to the clause in Chapter Seven which pointed to the "basic right of all individuals and couples to decide freely and responsibly the number, timing, and spacing of their children" They stressed that "the basic right of all individuals..." would be interpreted in accordance with the Shariah which recognizes "union" only within the context of matrimony and family as the basic nucleus of society. See The Times of India (New Delhi), 14 September 1994.

38. Her Norwegian counterpart, Mrs.Gro Harlem Brundtland, pleaded for the "decriminalisation" of abortion right, thus taking a liberal, pro-choice stance. Both Ms.Benazir and Mrs.Bruntdtland have, as the Conference progressed, taken mutually opposite stances.


40. Ibid.
acceptance of Pakistani viewpoint by the assembled gathering. As she stated: "Regretably, the conference's document contains serious flaws in striking at the heart of a great many cultural values, in the North and in the South, in the mosque and in the church....Islam... except in exceptional circumstances, rejects abortion as a method of population control". 41 Thus, one may see that Pakistan sought to make use of its participation by projecting an alternative "Islamic approach" to problems of family planning and development in an overall and general context of the ensuing shape of international relations as projected by futurologists such as Huntington 42 and Brian Beedham 43

Against this backdrop, Ms. Benazir's American-educated Special Assistant on Social Sector, (covering population, women's affairs, health, education and welfare), Ms. Shahnaz Wazir Ali, outlined Pakistan's Islamic perspective on the issues facing the Conference:

Pakistan does not believe in sex education in schools. We believe that only (the) hetero-sexually (and) legally married couples should have access to (the) population planning (methods) and nobody else. 44

Ms. Shahnaz further elaborated that Pakistan would not accept all those population planning concepts alien to Islamic traditions and beliefs. It would oppose the notion of abortion as a family planning method. It believed that abortion could be resorted to only on medical advice and, that too, by a legally

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married woman with her husband's consent. This subject was further clarified by Ms. Benazir herself, in an interview given to the BBC on 7 September 1994:

Abortion is not an issue in Pakistan. The social ethos is quite different. People marry young, they usually have arranged marriages, so the problem we face is the large amount of children to married families.

Pakistani perspective on the issues raised by the Cairo Conference was basically contained in the Benazir speech delivered on the Inaugural day of the Conference, the 5th September 1994. The speech took an adequate note of the demographic challenges being faced by almost all the developing societies. She underlined the need for combining both the global strategies and national plans in order to achieve population control in the years to come. She considered this as a stupendous task, a "dream", as it were.

I dream of a Pakistan, of an Asia, of a World, where every pregnancy is planned and every child conceived, is nurtured, loved, educated and supported. I dream of a Pakistan, of an Asia, of a world, where we can commit our social resources to the development of human life. That dream is far from reality we endure.

Ms. Benazir, in order to transform the "dream" into a reality, underlined the need for a global partnership to meet the objectives of planned parenthood and population control. However, she tempered this with a note of caution to the International community, by stating thus:

This Conference must not be viewed by the teeming masses of the world as a universal social charter seeking to impose adultery, abortion, sex

45. Ibid.
46. Quoted in The Asian Age (New Delhi), 8 September 1994.
47. An excerpt from her Cairo speech, some important excerpts of her speech are available in The Pioneer (New Delhi), 10 September 1994.
education and other such matters on individuals, societies and religions which have their own social ethos.48

It is significant to note in this context that the above-mentioned paraphrased statement took its cue from the pre-Cairo positional statements made by Ms. Benazir and her Social Sector Special Assistant, Ms. Shahnaz Wazir Ali, on both the occasions, sex education in the school curriculum was abhorred, abortion—save under extraordinary circumstances—was denounced, and adultery was frowned upon. Thus, to Benazir and to her Pakistan, family planning was conceivable only within the confines of this framework evolved historically over a period of time with social and religious sanction. Further, with a dig at the Islamic opposition back home who opposed Pakistan's participation in the Conference, Ms. Benazir endeavoured to present a modernist version of Islam both for domestic consumption and to the international community gathered in Cairo, thus:

Leaders are elected to lead nations. Leaders are not elected to let a vocal narrow-minded minority dictate an agenda of backwardness. We are committed to an agenda for change, to take our mothers and infants into the 21st century with the hope of a better future, free from diseases that rock and ruin.49

She contended that in a democratic country, the presence of an opposition is obvious, but insisted that with regard to family planning, there is a consensus in Pakistan. Other important feature of her speech pertained to sumptuous references to the Holy Quran which contained the general principles of human behaviour. Ms Benazir quoted The Holy Book on sanctity of life on which the former lays a great emphasis:

49. Ibid., n. 47.
Kill not your children
For Fear of want: We shall
provide, sustenance for them
As well as for you;
Verily the killing of them is a
great sin.\textsuperscript{50}

The said verse was interpreted to mean the prohibition of abortion (except
under exceptional situations) for want of means. In another context, as a part of her
speech, Ms. Benazir referred to \textit{The Holy Book} to the extent that

Allah wishes you ease,
and wishes not hardship
for you. He has chosen you,
and has not laid on you any
hardship in religion.\textsuperscript{51}

It was, therefore, evident that Ms. Benazir Bhutto intended to show that Islam was not
incompatible with the policy of family planning as such provided the policy was
infused with the moral and ethical principles as adumerated by the \textit{Holy Qur'an}.
Her viewpoint was further buttressed by her statement to the effect that Islam’s
adherents encounter no conceptual dilemma on addressing themselves to questions of
population regulation in the light of available resources.\textsuperscript{52} There are some excellent
studies undertaken by Arab scholars who say that since the inception of Islam itself,

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{The Holy Qu’ran}, 17:31. During the reign of Anwar Sadat of Egypt, the Rector
of al-Azhar, Shaykh Abdul Halim Mahmoud held that it was un-Islamic to argue
in favour of birth control on grounds of want of resources. See \textit{Al-Dawa},

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{The Holy Qur'an}, 6:152.

\textsuperscript{52} An excerpt of her speech. See \textit{The Pioneer} (New Delhi), 10 September 1994.
Muslims had evolved a tradition of family planning within the framework of abiding moral and ethical principles enunciated by the *Holy Qur'an* and the *Hadith*. A typical representative of such studies is the one undertaken by a Saudi medical practitioner associated with the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA).^53^

Thus one can see a semblance of a modernist interpretation of Islam with regard to family planning by both Ms. Benazir Bhutto and Abdel Rahim Omran on this specific subject. In the present context, it is of interest to note that the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, the late Liaquat Ali Khan had also endeavoured, during his official sojourns to the USA and Canada in the early fifties of the century, to project Islam's compatibility with democracy, in his official statements and press conferences and before the American and Canadian audiences.^54^

Even though the specific issues on both the occasions are different, there is an obvious similarity between the two: Liaquat's understanding of Islam-democracy compatibility and Ms. Benazir's version of conformity between "restrictive" family planning and Islam. Through these strategems, both the leaders sought to achieve their respective purposes: Liaquat desired to obtain material assistance from the USA to sustain Pakistan's newly-acquired statehood and Benazir fancied to be projected as a moderate Islamic leader of Pakistan.

During the course of her speech, Ms. Benazir also referred to Islam's great emphasis on family as a basic unit of society: "There is little compromise on Islam's emphasis on the family unit. The traditional family is the basic unit on which any society rests. It is the anchor on which the individual relies as he embarks upon the

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^53.^ For an excellent portrayal of the family planning practices since the time of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), see Abdel Rahim Omran, *Family Planning in the Legacy of Islam* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. xxi + 284.

journey of life. Islam aims at harmonious lives built upon a bedrock of conjugal fidelity and parental responsibility. Many suspect that the disintegration of the traditional family has contributed to moral decay. Let me state categorically that the traditional family is the union sanctified by marriage. 55

To achieve the objectives of family planning at both the national and global levels, requires free flow of information among the members of international community. With Islam's seminal premium on acquisition of knowledge, "Muslims... would have no difficulty with dissemination of information about reproductive health, so long as its modalities remain compatible with their religious and spiritual heritage. 57

Seen from this perspective, it is the availability of the basic family planning infrastructure, and not ideology which is the crux of the whole problem. Research studies unambiguously established the salience of infrastructural facilities with regard to the family planning programme in the Pakistan milieu. Such studies did prove that the family planning programme in Pakistan did not bring desired results even though the programme had a long history in the country. The following reasons, which were infrastructural in nature, were cited for the poor performance of the programme: poor accessibility of services, poor quality of services, ineffective management and administration, the lack of political and administrative support at all levels, irregular and ineffective supplies of family planning devices, inconsistent programme policies


56. In fact, an authentic Hadith of the Prophet (PBUH) even goes to the extent of saying that it is incumbent on every Muslim, male or female, to acquire ilm (knowledge), even if he or she is required to go to China.

marked by failed experimental efforts and the absence of long-term personnel commitment. Hence, these infrastructural facilities need to be coeval to the core problem of overpopulation. In an interview given to the BBC on 7 September 1994, she stated the subject in clear terms:

Families in Pakistan want to know how they can Plan their families, how they can space their children...  

In this context, it is necessary to delineate some features of the address delivered by the then United Nations Secretary-General, Dr. Boutros-Boutros Ghali which seemed to bear a semblance of similarity to that of Ms. Benazir’s.

Recognising "the fears, hesitations and criticisms" that did grip some Catholic and Muslim states in the preceding environment of the Conference, and calling such feelings as "understandable", the Secretary-General had to temper his speech with what he called "principles of conduct" embodied in his three essential words: "rigour, tolerance and conscience", a triad of sorts. "Rigour" signified the seriousness with which the family planning programmes at the national, regional, and international levels are (or should be) pursued "Tolerance" recognized the salience of social and cultural factors in the pursuit of developmental objectives, and their recognition by the international community, as Dr. Ghali clarifies:


60. An excerpt from the address of the UN Secretary-General at the opening ceremony of the UN International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 4-13 September 1994. Some excerpts of his speech are available in The Pioneer (New Delhi), 10 September 1994.
Tolerance requires us (the members of the international community) to be highly respectful of cultures and beliefs, for...a conference on population and Development raises both social and ethical questions.  

As the third element of the triad "conscience" recognized that "the population" is not an indiscriminate mass. Each member of the population belongs to a culture, a society, a tradition. A population consists of multiple relationships, in which each community deserves our respect, and of which the family is the nucleus...(lt) encompasses diverse and varying loyalties...(lt) is also a set of peoples and a set of individuals.  And, finally concluding his address, Dr.Ghali made an appeal to the international gathering assembled in Cairo: "never fail to make the link between (the) Conference and the basic concept of the right of peoples."  

Thus, in the respective addresses of both the Pakistani Prime Minister and the UN Secretary-General, there were obvious similarities: the former made explicit references to the *Holy Qur'an* in order to evolve an 'Islamic Perspective' on the issues which fell within the domain of the Conference, whereas the latter couched his address in the general sociological lexicon of according respect to the traditions, customs, etc., of the peoples of the developing world while drawing plans for population regulation. The Secretary-General might not have lost sight of the raging controversy about the semantics and contents of the draft action plan among Catholic and Muslim states much before the commencement of the Conference.  

In this way, the Secretary-General tried to mollify the ruffled feathers of these countries. Ms.Benazir's objectives, as the foregoing indicates, were to pacify the domestic oppositional groups by coopting their agenda into her governmental programmes including in the sphere of foreign policy too. In this sense, her Cairo

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address may also be construed as an address to her own countrymen. Pakistan's active projection of an Islamic perspective in the Conference reinforced by that of Iran's did more than compensate the absence of some Muslim states which boycotted the conference. The practical demonstration of unity found among the participating Muslim states in Cairo, will, it is hoped, in future, be replicated in other spheres of international relations in order to find a place for themselves under the sun.

BENAZIR'S TESTING OF POLITICAL WATERS IN SELF-RULED PALESTINE: THE FAILED CASE OF GAZA VISIT

The direct fall out of the post-cold war international politics, caused primarily by the disintegration of the Soviet Union into a number of sovereign states, had enabled the bone superpower to endeavour to ease tensions in the major regions of the world. West Asia is one of such regions where the traditional hostility between the Arabs and Israelis appears (as of now) to be yielding its place to a series of negotiated settlement of disputes among the combatants. Under the sponsorship, particularly of the United States of America, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) under the leadership of Yasser Arafat consented, through a series of agreements with Israel, to an arrangement wherein the Palestinian people will have self-rule-autonomy in the West Bank town of Jericho and the Gaza Strip. Following on the heels of these agreements, between Israel and the PLO, the King of Jordan, Hussein Ibn Talal, concluded a treaty to make peace with Israel. The Syrian Arab Republic, under the Presidency of Hafez al Asad, is being prodded and cajoled by the Americans to conclude a similar peace treaty with the Jewish State.

In the backdrop of this fastly unfolding West Asian scenario, the proposed (which was later aborted) visit of the Pakistani Prime Minister Ms Benazir Bhutto to the Palestinian self-ruled Gaza needs to be posited. Prior to her visit, a Pakistani Ambassador to Egypt was to have made a visit to Gaza to prepare his Prime Minister's visit. However, owing to the "obstructions" created by the Israelis, the
Palestinians could not arrange for his visit.\textsuperscript{64} It was probably intended to acquire a first hand knowledge of the situation obtaining in the region. The planned visit was to take place on 4 September, 1994, preceding the United Nations sponsored International Conference on Population and Development which began in Cairo on 5 September in which the Pakistani Prime Minister participated. Closely following these two, is an extraordinary meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) held in Islamabad during 7-9 September 1994, in order to address themselves to the situations obtaining in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Afghanistan, Jammu & Kashmir, and Palestine. A linkage of sorts between the cancelled Gaza visit and the Conference that followed in Islamabad could not be missed, as it seems to demonstrate the objectives of the Pakistani Foreign office. In earlier times too, such a politics of linkage was sought with mixed results.

Ms Benazir's cancelled Gaza strip succeeded in creating an expected ire from the Israeli quarters, quite notably from its Prime Minister, Yitzak Rabin, himself. Obviously, the Pakistani Foreign office did not prepare the visit in consultation with the Israeli authorities as the Jewish state was not yet accorded diplomatic recognition by Pakistan. The Israelis created hurdles in the way of the Palestinian self-governing authority which in turn advised Pakistan to call off the visit. Profoundly irked by these moves by Pakistan, the Israeli Prime Minister, Rabin, made some intemperate comments on his Pakistani counterpart to the effect that "the lady from Pakistan (referring, in bad taste, obviously to Ms Benazir Bhutto) must be taught some manners. One does not announce in the media, "I will come to Gaza. I am not prepared to see any Israeli",\textsuperscript{65} implying that the Pakistanis should have made the visit's preparations in consultation with the Israeli authorities. As expected, Pakistan reacted very strongly to Rabin's reaction as referred to above. A counter-reaction

\textsuperscript{64.} \textit{The Hindu} (New Delhi), 30 September 1994.

\textsuperscript{65.} \textit{The Times of India} (New Delhi), 30 September, 1994.
from a spokesperson of Pakistan's Foreign Office has the following to say: "Mr Rabin has displayed extremely bad manners and bad judgement in the remarks he has made on our Prime Minister's visit. It does not behove some one who is in illegal occupation of another people's land to display such arrogance". The Palestinian self-governing authority termed the Israeli hurdles in the way of Benazir's visit as a violation of the peace accords. They decided to make a complaint to the UN Security Council.

Echoing the Rabinian "arrogance" in spirit, if not in letter, some sections of the Indian news media have commented upon the episode in an unbalanced fashion, reinforcing, in the process, their trait of Pakistan-bashing if an opportunity was presented. The Times of India (New Delhi) stated editorially that "Ms. Benazir Bhutto packs a mean punch when it comes to diplomatic relations..." Continuing the Editorial further, it strongly commented:

No wonder that the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Yitzak Rabin, has advised her to learn some manners before she decides to visit controversial hot spots. But then, manners were never uppermost in the minds of Pakistani Leaders. Gen. Yahya Khan once called Mrs. Gandhi "that woman", Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was quite open about his dislike for her. Indeed Ms. Bhutto's own fulminations against India at any available public gathering do not really smack of Sindhi sophistication, and shows that as far as politeness is concerned, she is certainly to the manor born.

One, thus, finds here in ample measure a parochial, a narrow nationalistic tirade bordering on hatred against the leaders of a neighbouring state (which is quite understandable given the state of relations between the two countries). It is quite remarkable to note that the said Editorial has totally absolved the leaders of Israel, whose conduct in the diplomatic/political arena has not been above board since it was inducted into the region by the configuration of international forces favourable to it in the late forties of the century.

67. 1 September, 1994.
Another piece of comment smacking of chauvinism is contained in an "Editorial" of the *Asian Age* (New Delhi) 68 captioned as "Bringing up Benazir", which talked of her "immaturity on international display", and that "the world should begin to have a better understanding of the unscrupulous nature of her foreign...policy", referring to her Gaza episode. However the Editorial puts the whole episode (other problems like Kashmir may also be juxtaposed to it) in perspective when it said that

...the problem is that every decision is sieved through a personal-interest prism that is focussed primarily on Pakistani vote banks and is influenced by no other consideration, not even well thought-out understanding of the Pakistani national interest.69

Indeed, domestic compulsions cannot be altogether neglected in the analysis of the foreign policy behaviour of Ms Benazir Bhutto, as it was also no less true in the case of her predecessors, particularly Mian Nawaz Sharif, presently the Leader of Opposition in the Pakistan National Assembly. When their credibility is on the downslide, they have not hesitated to resort to Kashmir diplomacy in order to drum up their popularity and thereby legitimacy. Nawaz Sharif created a political storm of sorts by explicitly stating at a public meeting (Neela Butt) in Azad Kashmir (the portion of Kashmir under the control of Pakistan) that Pakistan possessed a nuclear bomb. One of his motives might be to obviate the possibility of capping and/or rolling back Pakistan's nuclear programme under the increasing pressure of the Clinton administration. By creating such a noise, Nawaz Sharif intended to enhance his political fortunes in the medley of Pakistan's unstable politics. South Asia's political leaderships had quite often dexterously made use of their foreign policy ventures in order to drum up their sagging fortunes at home.

68. 2 September, 1994.
At one time, under Benazir's present political dispensation, Pakistan's Foreign Office appears to have been reduced to address itself to a single point foreign policy agenda: self-determination of the people of Jammu and Kashmir in order to enable them to join the state of Pakistan. Pakistan's diplomatic resources and energies appear to have been totally committed to the Kashmiri cause at the very heavy price of equally important and pressing domestic and international commitments.

In this context, it is very tempting to make an analogy between Benazir's recent Geneva fiasco and the present Gaza episode. In the former case, the Paksitani draft resolution on Kashmir could not be put to voting before the United Nations Human Rights Commission at Geneva as both Islamic Iran and Communist China had successfully persuaded Pakistan not to press for a decision on the subject by means of voting. In the total of fifty plus members of the Commission, Only Saudi Arabia and Bosnia-Herzegovina had consented to sponsor the resolution. Whatever may be the discrepancy in the twin cases, the end product remained the same; failure. However, in the Geneva case, the foreign policy goals of Pakistan are very clear, whereas in the Gaza episode, the immediate objectives are shrouded in mystery. In the latter case, very inadequate bureaucratic preparation seems to have been made unlike in the former. However, in the absence of any incontrovertible information, it is very difficult to make any conclusive pronouncements. There are reports in some sections of the Indian news media, quoting an Israeli daily, the Ha'aretz, that Pakistan and Israel are engaged in "unofficial" contacts. The said "contacts" are reported to have taken place between Pakistan's Karachi-based Chamber of Commerce and an Israel "State authority subordinate to the Prime Minister's office," sometime in the beginning of August. The reports also say that Pakistani Ambassadors stationed in the UN Headquarters, Washington, and some Western capitals are allowed to discreetly meet their Israeli counterparts. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was reported to have

70. The Hindu (New Delhi), 13 August 1994.
met Mr. Ezer Weizman, the Israeli President, on the occasion of the installation of Dr. Nelson Mandela, as President of South Africa in May, 1994. Whatever may be the veracity in these reports, one truth emerges unambiguously: Unless and until Pakistan accords recognition to and establishes diplomatic relations with the Jewish state, some motivated reportage and disinformation campaigns will continue to pour in in the news media. In this context, it is very essential to note that Pakistani regimes cannot ignore public opinion over the issue that has crystallized virtually from the beginning of the century. In the pre-partition years, the All-India Muslim League did not miss any opportunity to clarify its stand on the subject. In the post-partition period which coincided with the Cold War years, Pakistan’s stand on the Arab-Israeli issue got further rigidified which does not seem to have abated even after the demise of the Cold War and the ushering in of the post-Cold war detente following the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Thus, one can observe three different historical stages traversing the Pakistani stand on Palestine: pre-Cold War Cold War and Post-Cold War Detente. In the last case, the configuration of international forces (The conspiracy of circumstances, as it were) has forced the Palestinians to recognise Israel and subsequently accede to self-autonomy in Gaza strip and Jericho, a less than a sovereign state status for the time being. Under the sponsorship of the U.S.A. and the Russian Federation, a peace process was set in the region involving Israel and the states of the region: Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Jordan has, of late, come to an understanding with the Jewish state that it would be willing to contribute its mite to a stable peace in future. On 26 October 1994, both Jordan and Israel signed a treaty to establish and live in peace with each other thus putting an end to a historic antagonism spanning over four decades. With Hafez al Asad’s Syria, Israel with the active encouragement of the U.S.A., is trying to loosen the tight knots, with no tangible results so far. If Syria is persuaded to come to terms with Israel, other states will not be lagging behind. Of late, on 27 October 1994, President Clinton had a summit meeting in Damascus with President Asad in order to persuade the latter to come to an

71. Ibid.
agreement with Israel to buttress the on-going peace diplomacy. In this fast unfolding scenario triggered by the demise of the Cold War, Pakistan needs to re-evaluate its hitherto-held position vis-a-vis Israel. (This is not to suggest for an immediate recognition). Israeli authorities on their part, would be adamant towards any Pakistani leader purporting to visit any self-ruled area in future, unless they come to some sort of understanding with the Israelis who would insist on the Pakistanis to accord recognition to them. Bereft of recognition, the Israelis will continue to create hurdles on the Pakistani endeavours to liaise with the self-governing authorities of once-Israeli occupied twin Palestine lands. This was demonstratively proved by the Gaza episode. Unlike India, which long ago accorded its recognition to the State of Israel immediately after the latter's emergence on the political map of the world and recently (two years ago) established diplomatic relations with the Jewish state, Pakistan did none of the two. The Shakespearean dilemma, "to be or not to be" seems to haunt the architects of Pakistan's foreign policy. Hitherto, in their struggle for a sovereign statehood spearheaded by the PLO under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, the Pakistanis have put their eggs in the basket of the latter. To the peace accords ushered in by the Joint sponsorship of the U.S.A. and Russia, the PLO had no other alternative except to accede to and participate in it. Islamic activists groups, particularly HAMAS (Harakatul Muqawimah al-Islami, Islamic Resistance Movement) in the town of Gaza, and Shiite Islamic groups in Southern Lebanon, notably Hizbollah and AMAL (Al-Afwaj al-Muqawimah Al-Lubnaniyya, the Lebanese Resistance Battalions), and the Islamic Republic of Iran, have opposed the peace process. It is still unclear whether Pakistan is totally committed to the unfolding peace process or to the rejectionist group or simply biding time for the political waters to stabilize in the region to enable it to take an unambiguous stand. Meanwhile, the Pakistani Prime Minister, Ms. Benazir Bhutto made a statement to the effect that the recognition of Israel is not yet ripe and that it would be contingent upon the progress of the on-going peace negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians and on
consultation with the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). 72

Substantiating the current Pakistani position on the subject, the Pakistani Foreign Minister, Sardar Asef Ahmed Ali said:

"Pakistan has not devised any immediate plans for recognition of Israel... We feel it is not in the general interest of the Islamic countries to recognise Israel unless there is substantial progress on the implementation of the PLO-Israel accords and on the issue of Jerusalem... The accords were a first step towards a comprehensive Middle East Peace settlement.73

The Jerusalem issue has been a thorny one. Since its annexation by Israel in June 1967, the restoration of its Arab and Muslim character has been a subject of intense diplomatic activity pursued by Arab and Muslim states both within and outside the United nations. Of late, in July 1994, in Washington, Israel, in accordance with its agreement reached with Jordan, has "vowed" to

Respect the present special role of the Hashemite Kingdom ... in Muslim shrines in Jerusalem.... When negotiations on the permanent status take place, Israel will give priority to the Jordanian historic role in these shrines.74

This agreement between Israel and Jordan or Jerusalem has expectedly raised the ire of the Palestinian National Authority which has rightly termed it as creating an obstacle in the ongoing peace process. This Israeli tactic is nothing new but only an addition to its traditional diplomacy which aims at dividing the Arab ranks and dealing with them individually in order to enable to strengthen itself vis-a-vis those Arab states.

73. The Asian Age (New Delhi), 6 September 1994.
74. Quoted in The Asian Age (New Delhi), 17 September 1994.
Keeping these developments in view, the foreign ministers of the League of Arab states met in Cairo on 15 September, 1994, and made the following statement:

Based on the fact that Holy Jerusalem is a Palestinian Arab city that has a sublime status to the Arab and Islamic worlds, the League Council stresses the extreme importance of Jerusalem and the need to restore its Arab and Palestinian sovereignty as the capital of the Independent Palestinian state... Jerusalem was an integral part of the Arab and Palestinian land occupied (by Israel) in 1961... The League asks the World body [The United Nations] to put pressure on Israel to stop erecting obstacles to the tasks of the national Palestinian Authority and to stop expanding (Jewish) settlements which are a new obstacles to peace.75

The fact that Jerusalem has been an Arab and an Islamic city for most part of its recorded history is incontrovertible. As one Palestinian religious leader, Adnan Husseini, said: "Jerusalem has been an Arab city for 5,000 years, and it has been an Islamic city for 14 centuries".76 In the light of the aforesaid, Pakistan's current thinking on the subject (according recognition to Israel) assumes significance.

If Pakistan sticks to this stand taken by its Prime Minister, Ms Benazir Bhutto, it will indeed be analogous to the one taken by her father in relation to Bangladesh in consultation with some members of the OIC nominated by the latter for the purpose. It is of interest to note that the PLO was one of those members.

Bosnia-Herzegovina77

Bosnia’s declaration of independence following on the footsteps of Slovenia and Croatia (and the latter two states) immediate recognition by Germany and the

75. Ibid.


77. The causes for the disintegration of the Yugoslav federation is not the concern of this section. The break-up of this federation led to a number of independent states-Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia and Montenegro ("rump Yugoslavia"), and Bosnia-Herzegovina-and recognized as such by the international community.
Holy See followed by other states') has led to a series of developments epitomised by the chilling label of "ethnic cleansing": an abhorrent practice perpetrated to perfection by Bosnian Serbs predominantly against the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Serbian "ethnic cleansing" of Bosnia's Muslims was enabled by the military, political, and economic support lent to the former by their ethnic comrades of "rump Yugoslavia. The crystallization of Islamic states' position vis-a-vis the evolving situation in the Balkans has a great deal to do with "ethnic cleansing", whose victims predominantly happen to be Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Pakistan is one of those countries that has sent a military contingent as part of the United National Protection Force (UNPROFOR). As a manifestation of Islamic solidarity, it has given shelter to a few hundred Bosnian nationals on its oil. A Quid pro quo of sorts has, of late, developed between the government of Pakistan and the mainly-Muslim government of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The support of Bosnian government to Pakistan's Kashmir diplomacy in the various international fora is a counterpart to Pakistan's steadfast espousal of the Bosnian case in the UN system, the Non-aligned Movement and, of course, in the organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). The Bosnian support to Pakistan is primarily reflected in the form of tabling/co-sponsoring draft resolutions on Kashmir. In February-March 1994, Pakistan's intention to table a proposed resolution (which was withdrawn later on the advice of China and Iran) on Kashmir in the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva was co-sponsored by Bosnia-Herzegovina (the original sponsor being Saudi Arabia). Bosnia's co-sponsoring of Pakistan's Kashmir draft resolution was described as "virtually parroting" Saudi Arabia by Salman Khurshid, India's former Minister of State for External Affairs. 78

"Rewarding" Serbia and Montenegro

In an approved Security Council resolution that was drafted by the Great Power "contact group" on Yugoslavia, consisting of the USA, Russia, France, Britain and Germany, a decision was taken on 23 September 1994, by a majority of

11 states to 2 with 2 abstentions, to ease sanctions on rump Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), as a reward for its acceptance of the international peace plan (chalked out by the members of the "contact group") and the cutting of military supplies to its ethnic cousins in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Both Pakistan and Djibouti exercised their negative votes by arguing, as did other Islamic states, that the passage of the Security Council measure would send a wrong signal to the Serbs. The abstention vote was exercise by Rwanda and Niger. However, speaking on the subject in the Security Council, the U.S. Ambassador M.S. Madeleine Albright, made a strong plea for lifting the arms embargo against the Bosnian Muslim-led government. She further stated:

We cannot wait indefinitely for the Bosnian Serbs to change their minds. If Pale [Bosnia’s Serb controlled province] does not agree to the peace plan by October 16 [1994] We intend to see a resolution in this Council to lift the arms embargo.... We understand the pain that more fighting might bring. But there is a choice: the peace plan be accepted by the Bosnian Serbs. [The approved resolution] demonstrates this Council's determination to use both cannot and sticks to move the parties towards a negotiated settlement. 79

However, the "cannots" have not been extended to the Muslims of Bosnia who have been at the receiving end of the whole exercise. The subsequent developments have rendered her statement redundant, as the lines that follow would demonstrate.

Meanwhile, an understanding between the US President, Bill Clinton and the Bosnian President, Alija Izetbegovic, seems to have been reached to postpone the lifting of arms embargo in favour of Bosnian Muslims till the ensuing six months. The Pioneer has editorially called this [six month extension decision] "a strange Turn of events," an "U-turn", given Bosnia's hitherto-held clamour for embargo lifting. 80

Besides, the exact course of action during and after this six month extension is left undefined. It is also unclear as to whether the present-lift oppositionists will, after this stipulated period, change their policy in favour of the lifting of embargo. Again, confusion reins in regarding the exact objective to be achieved during this interregnum.

The U.S.-Bosnia understanding seems to have been taken with a view to obviating the likelihood of the withdrawal of the British and French ground forces from the area. Russia's open declaration of opposition to the embargo lifting, to quote Yeltsin's words:

My response would be negative, of course, but we will discuss this issue....

might have dampened the clamour of the U.S. and the Islamic states' for pushing ahead with embargo-lifting proposals. Even the former UN Secretary-General, Dr. Boutros Ghali expressed his opposition to the embargo-lifting proposals emanating from the U.S. and Mulsim states on the ground that the already-stationed contingent of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) might be the victim of ensuing attacks from the Serbian side. The two western states that have stationed their troops in the war-torn Bosnia, namely France and Britain, have expressed their opposition to the lifting on the ground that the conflict would be widened and that their forces would be the target of the Serbian attacks. It is regrettable that these two states are overtly nervous about the likely casualties of their forces in the event of embargo-removal in Bosnia's favour. Being the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council, they are required to shoulder the onerous responsibility with regard to the maintenance of international peace and security for which the Security Council was crated. By adopting a negative posture on the subject, they are, in fact, displaying their lack of political will to see to it that the Serbian brinkmanship against Muslims does not go unpunished. The stance adopted by Russia, France, Britain and the

former UN Secretary-General has been creating disillusionment among Muslim states which in turn paved the way for the increasing calls for an Islamic response to the situation as an antidote to the lack of necessary political will displayed by the "P-5" (the UN Permanent Members, with the possible exception of the USA, in this case).

Be that as it may, it would be pertinent, in this context, to quote what Alija Izetbegovic, President of mainly-Muslim Bosnian government had said while delivering a speech to the UN General Assembly on the occasion of the latter's 49th Annual Session:

We would limit our demand for lifting of the arms embargo only to the adoption of (a) formal decision, while its application, or its consequences, would be deferred to another six months. 82

As the statement made it evident, President Izetbegovic sought to link the subject of six-month postponement of embargo-lifting to the international community's readiness (now) to take a formal, explicit decision (to the effect that the existing regime of arms embargo will be lifted in its favour at a scheduled future date). Further, he was reported to have uttered that "if his proposal were rejected, Bosnia would call on its friends to work for an immediate, an even unilateral, end to the embargo." 83 In this context, it is of interest to recall the joint communique issued by the recently concluded meeting of the Islamic foreign ministers conference held during 7-9 September 1994 in Islamabad. (The meeting deliberated, inter alia, on Bosnia).

If no Security Council confirmation (of the inapplicability of the Resolution 713 relating to the relevant arms embargo) is forthcoming, the OIC membership, along with other UN members, will come to the conclusion that members acting individually or collectively can provide the means of self-defence to the (mainly-Mulsim) Government of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. 84

82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
84. Reproduced in The Hindu (New Delhi), September 18, 1994.
When President Izetbegovic was reported to have expressed his willingness to "... call on [Bosnia's] friends to work for an immediate... end to the embargo," as cited in the aforesaid, he has obviously in mind the OIC joint communique, as referred to in the foregoing, it is to be seen whether Izetbegovic will in fact execute his resolve by seeking the help of the OIC; and in case he does so, will the OIC oblige him. It is a test case for both the parties and the wider international community. Only the future course of events will provide answers to these queries.

As referred to in the foregoing, the Security Council had "rewarded" Serbia and Montenegro with a selective lifting of sanctions imposed on it for its acceptance of international peace plan evolved by the Western "Contact Group" and its blocking of military supplies to Bosnian Serbs.

Bosnia's patience, as evidenced in the heavy loss of its territory, men, and material (to Serbs), has not had the fortune so far to obtain any such "reward". Instead, the constellation of international forces 9as buttressed by the Russian intransigence against embargo lifting and the French and British decision to withdraw their respective contingents in case the existing embargo is removed) might have forced President Izetbegovic to make a proposal for a six month postponement under the given scenario, with the available circumstantial evidence, this seems to be the plausible explanation for Izetbegovic's decision.

Besides, on grounds of pragmatism, the American President declined to support the lifting of embargo as he faced stiff opposition from Russia, France and Britain. The USA did force the Bosnians to ask for a delay though not directly. The Clinton Administration official, made the Bosnians recognize the dangerous

implications of lifting the arms embargo\textsuperscript{86} as outlined above. While this being the case, Yeltsin's stubbornness against embargo lifting seems to have further rigidified in views of his following utterance: Now the Bosnian Muslims think they have to wait\textsuperscript{[for]} six months (for the embargo to be lifted).... Let us wait for six months and then perhaps we can decide once and for all that this [embargo removal] should not be done.\textsuperscript{87}

Of course, the western powers, viz., Britain, France and Russia, which are involved in finding out a way for the impasse, have welcomed Izetbegovic's decision of postponement. However, it is to be seen as to how they will successfully bridge the chasm that presently obtains between them on the one hand and the United States and Islamic states on the other. That the Serbs have so far skillfully made use of the apparent ambivalence discernible in the west's approach towards the crisis is an irrefutable verity. The western states may, during this six month period, iron out their differences about strategy, that these Great Powers will hopefully adopt a Bosnia-friendly posture, appears to be a wishful thinking of the Bosnian President.

Russia, as a successor state to the erstwhile Soviet Union, is not oblivious of its potential to become future. Of late, it has been trying to pursue an independent foreign policy befitting its Great Power status, as symbolised in it's veto-carrying Permanent Membership of the UN Security Council. Further, in its neighbourhood, particularly in the regions of Caucasus and Central Asia (which it describes them as its "Near Abroad", implicitly falling within its sphere of influence), it endeavours to zealously guard its vital national interests and expects the Great Powers, notably the USA, to recognise them as such. In this scenario, Russian considerations of ethnic/civilizational factors cannot altogether be removed from its strategic thinking in

\begin{flushleft}
86. \textit{Ibid.}
\end{flushleft}
the Balkans, Caucasia, and Central Asia as it seeks to guard the interests of its ethnic comrades, i.e., the Slavs. At any rate, in the Balkans, its rationale for opposing the demand for embargo removal needs to be related to what it considers as compelling historical (to be read as "ethnic") and geographical reasons.

The upshot of the foregoing is clearly indicative of the Security Council’s selectiveness in addressing itself comprehensively to issues besetting the international community. With regard to Haiti, it had swiftly authorised/empowered the United States to invade the former in order to restore the democratically elected government in that poverty-stricken country. In the case of Somalia too, it empowered the United States to provide humanitarian relief supplies to the famine—stricken people of that hapless country and to disarm the tribal "warlords" in order to effect a semblance of political order there. In these two cases (and the list is not exhaustive, as many more such cases can be added), it has set a precedent which is at variance to that of Bosnia, thus, enabling the critics to rightly denounce its actions as lacking consistency and uniformity and instead, smacking of double speak or duplicity.

It is, thus, very ironic that the moral human dimension of Bosnia’s tragedy is increasingly getting eroded by the continuing manoeuvres of diplomacy, in a "New World Order" with, inter alia, promotion of democracy and human rights as constituting it’s defining principle or are they merely a smokescreen?

**The Beijing World Conference on Women: Pakistan and Islam**

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto attended the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 4-15 September 1995) as a special invitee on 5 September 1995 and was the first person to get the rare honour of addressing the plenary session of the conference.
Like the Cairo conference, the Beijing conference, attended by 189 states, also witnessed a perceptual chasm between Islamic countries and the West on issues affecting women's status in society. Besides, the variance in the respective agendas of developing and developed countries was also a bone of contention at the conference. For instance, the question of distributive justice engaged a major attention of the developing world to which the developed West paid scant attention. Even the question of human rights of women was reduced to their rights of reproduction which were, in turn, made to imply population control. Women's issues were identified almost entirely with one strand of radical feminism. The media coverage was such that it gave fillip to such an orientation or definition. Sexual orientation and lifestyle of lesbians was sought to be projected as real issue of women at the conference. To this, the developing world, not the least the Islamic countries, responded differently, albeit negatively. The conference, thus, turned out to be an admixture of paradoxes, conflicts and contradictions.

Be that as it may, the ubiquity of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) was a characteristic feature of this conference. The government-sponsored NGOs representing Islamic states attended the conference in large numbers, reportedly 300 in number, according to the media. The Islamic perspective on women maintains that in Islam women are treated with respect and dignity and it recognizes their crucial role in society, whereas in the West, woman's role in family has become redundant in view of the latter's obsolescence; besides, she is increasingly drawn into the vortex of consumerism and hedonism as life-regulating ideas in contemporary times. Historically, until the nineteenth century, Christian women in Europe enjoyed lesser rights and privileges than are accorded to women by the Qur'an.88

The Holy Qur'an contains a good number of verses on women which throw light on their status in their multifaceted capacities: mother, daughter, sister, widow and divorcée. Besides, the Hadith literature exemplifies and provides a feedback to the Qur'anic position on women. Some of the Qur'anic verses deserve to be quoted in this connection in order to obtain a clear Islamic perspective on women:

Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, And that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, Say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them But address them, in terms of honour. 89

And, out of kindness, Lower to them the wing of humility, and say: "My Lord, bestow on them, Thy mercy even as they Cherished me in childhood. 90

Again, And we have enjoined on man (To be good) to his parents: In travail upon travail Did his mother bear him. And in years twain was his weaning: (hear the command), "Show gratitude To me and to thy parents: To me is (thy final) Goal". 91

The Muslim NGOs turned the Beijing debate on women's rights and status in society into one on supremacy of Islamic culture over the "decadent Western culture". They viewed the UN conference as yet another attempt to impose a life style (of "the

89. The Holy Qur'an, 17:23.
Other”) which leaves no room for religious tenets and morality as understood by them in their cultural context. Viewed in perspective, the discourse of Islamic resurgence vividly observable on the international political landscape has also widened its ideological niche to cover Muslim social concerns. The latter with a particular reference to the agenda of the Beijing meeting was portrayed by the Muslim delegates in a voice born of conviction and national vocation as shaped by Islam. As a member of an Iranian NGO, Parveen Dodandish felt: "The West is trying to impose an alien system of beliefs and practices on us and we cannot accept unreasonable demands of women from other societies just because all of us are women".92 She further maintained that some of the most important aspects of a women’s life such as religion, spirituality and family have not been given their due importance in the draft and that the NGOs would lobby for inclusion of these aspects. Implicit in these statements was a determination that the Western social and cultural influences should be kept at bay lest the latter should destabilize the institution of family which occupies a hallowed place in Islamic culture.

The Muslim NGO delegates were emphatic in declaring that their concerns were very different from their Western counterparts. As Fatima Alavi, representing Women’s Solidarity Association of Iran, posited the contradiction between the Islamic and Western perspective on the subject:

All these women keep saying [that] they want equality, but what do they mean by it? Women and men have physical differences and these differences cannot be done away with... Motherhood is an important aspect of women’s life [sic] and this cannot be wished away. Why should we accept the demand of abortion rights by women from Western societies when they contradict our religious beliefs?93

92. The Pioneer (New Delhi), 4 September 1995.
93. Ibid.
Further, these delegates laid emphasis on the strict enforcement of Islamic tenets (injunctions) in their proper spirit with a view to forestalling injustice and oppression against women as they admitted that women were victims of these practices. It is to be noted here that the implementation of Islamic tenets is largely contingent on their interpretation and the nature of political regimes in a given juncture.

Be that as it may, the North-African NGO delegates held a slightly different viewpoint reflective of a liberal hue. Maghreb Egalite, a network of women's associations, intellectuals and researchers representing Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, demanded that "the keenness to preserve the culture and identity specificities should neither be considered as a negation nor an obstacle to prevent women from freely exercising their fundamental rights". The imprint of the French cultural values mediated, of course, by the modernist interpretation of Islam, was discernible in this Maghrebian viewpoint. However, the Iranian delegates did not seem impressed with this argument. Instead, they asserted: "We are not concerned with others' demands. We are here for a purpose and we shall achieve it". It is, thus, obvious that the Islamic perception of gender issues is made up of various hues.

Saudi Arabia persisted with the policy of opposition to the Beijing conference much like what it had done in 1994 in regard to the UN International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo). The grounds advanced for opposing participation in both the cases were similar. The mufti of Saudi Arabia, the highest religious authority in the Kingdom, on 4 September 1995, called for Muslims around the world to boycott the Beijing conference which began the following day, the 5 September. The mufti, Sheikh Abdallah ibn Abdel Aziz ibn Baz, in a message

94. Ibid.
95. Ibid.
broadcast on state radio, appealed to Muslim leaders "to take a united stand against this aggression that targets Muslims". The mufti charged that the conference working document "contains resolutions contrary to Islam that encourage immoral and debased behaviour and seek to transform human societies into packs of animals". Sheikh Abdallah also added that the document expressed "atheistic principles-such as one calling for the abrogation of laws making a distinction between men and women on the ground that religion prevents equality between the sexes". The Council of Grand Ulama also joined the mufti in opposing Muslim participation in the conference on the ground that the working document authorises "immoral acts" and seeks to destroy family life. However, the Saudi plea went unheeded by the rest of the Muslim world. Moreover, the Muslim states could not take a common stand on issues deliberated at the Beijing conclave.

Implicit in these utterances was Saudi Arabia's self-professed role of the custodian of Islam's pristine values; a role which goes beyond the confines of a modern nation-state. In interpretational terms, in the hands of the Saudi Ulama and the al-Saud dynasty, the Quran and the Hadith (including the religious debate on women's issues) remain within the parameters of the established Sunni Shari'a as formulated by conservative juridic authorities of the Hanbali madhab (school of legal thought). Within this framework, the Saudis were zealous of preserving Islamic values as defined by them.

Benazir Bhutto did not bind herself to such a Saudi interpretation, as the pages that follow in this section would testify. Continuing her Cairo tirade against

96. Ibid., p. 6.
97. Ibid.
98. Ibid.
objectionable aspects of the document (a repeat performance), Pakistani Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, on 5 September 1995, made an impassioned plea for the defence of Islam against critics who said that it endowed women with a second class status. Quoting from the Holy Book, she told the opening session of the conference that her religion did not seek to confine women to the household. 99 "As a Muslim woman, I feel a special responsibility to counter the propaganda of a handful that Islam gives women a second class status". 100 She delivered what was hailed a powerful speech which had drawn much applause from the participants. 101 Implicit in her pronouncements was a "liberal-modernist" interpretation of Islam which aimed at strengthening a "moderate" image of Islam and its Pakistani variant, meant to be conveyed to the international community, particularly to the West. Domestically, they were geared towards rebuffing the religious groups' Islamic orthodoxy and their efforts to seek mass acquiescence to their conception of Islam with a particular bearing on the question of women. She was of the view that a distancing needed to be made between the prevalent social role of women and the Islamic teachings on the subject. According to her, the origins of the former were traceable to "social taboos spun by the traditions of a patriarchal society" and not attributable to Islam per se. "This is a distinction that obscurantists would not like to see. For obscurantists believe in discrimination... the first step to dictatorship and the usurpation of power". 102 Discernible in her stand was her favoured nature of national polity (an equitarian political order) in Muslim societies, including Pakistan, in which religious forces operate at the political level on a regular basis. It may be recalled that when she became the Prime Minister of Pakistan in her first phase of reign in the fading

99. Ibid.

100. The Hindu (New Delhi), 5 September 1995.

101. Ibid.

102. Ibid.

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days of 1988, orthodox Islamic groups in Pakistan mounted a campaign that a Muslim female could not lead a Muslim country for Sharia did not permit it. On February 27, 1989, more than 500 ulama from different parts of Pakistan, representing all the schools of Sunni theology (Deobandis, Brelvis, Ahl-e-Hadith, Wahhabis) met in Rawalpindi, under the auspices of the Muttahida (United) ulama convention. They unanimously passed a resolution, calling upon the people to reject her leadership. They vowed that they would not rest content until this "anti-Islamic" (her heading the government of an Islamic state) act was undone. 103 Even the King of Saudi Arabia, Fahd, was initially reluctant to receive her lest it should hurt the orthodox convictions of the Saudi ulama (later acquired in to her arrival). In this backdrop, it makes sense to view her Beijing fulminations against Islamic orthodoxy back home and in the wider context of conservative Arab regimes in the Middle East. She also referred to the fact that the present Islamic world boasted of three women Prime Ministers- Begum Khaleda Zia of Bangladesh, Tansu Ciller of Turkey, besides herself-who got themselves "elected by male and female voters on our abilities as people, as persons, not as women." 104 Further citing these three female Prime Ministers, she stated that "our election" has destroyed the myth built by social taboo that a woman's place is in the house, that it is shameful or dishonourable or socially

103. Shias, however, held an opposite view. Their leader Allama Sajid Ali, Chief of the Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Figh-e-Jaffriya (Movement for the Implementation of the Jaffriya law) categorically stated that the Shias were not opposed to a women's rule and advised the Sunni ulama not to embark on a course of action which might lead to-political chaos in the country. Thus, no consensus among various religious groups obtained regarding the eligibility or otherwise of a Muslim female to head an Islamic government. See Rafiq Zakaria, The Trial of Benazir (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1989), p. 13.

unacceptable for a Muslim woman to work." 105 She asserted that "Islam forbids injustice; injustice against people, against women, rates women as human beings in their own right, not as chattels."106 (The Holy Book, inter alia, gave them the right of inheritance in property). It vividly establishes the spiritual equality of men and women as human beings subject to Allah and encourages kind and just treatment of women. Verses in the Holy Book abound on the subject. the Surah "Al-Nisa" (Woman) bears testimony to this. As one of its verses state:

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O ye who believe:
Ye are forbidden to inherit
Women against their will.
Nor should ye treat them
With harshness, that ye may
Take away part of the dower
Ye have given them, - except
Where they have been guilty
of open lewdness;
On the contrary live with them
On a footing of kindness and equality
If ye take a dislike to them
A thing, and Allah bring about
Throught it a great deal of good. 107
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Besides, scholarly works did unmistakeably establish the fact that "the Prophat, throughout his life, loved and respected women and treated them very well".108 The Quranic enjoining of a just status for women as perceived by Benazir has, of late, received serious academic attention and was treated in a manner which smacked of a

106. Ibid.
liberal, positive hue. Notable among those academic commentators is a female Moroccan Sociologist of repute, Fatima Mernissi. Fatima attacked the age-old conservative focus on women's segregation as mere institutionalization of authoritarianism, achieved by way of manipulation of sacred texts, "a structural characteristic of the practice of power in Muslim societies".109

On the basis of her reading of the Qur'an and the Hadith, she asserted that Prophet Muhammad's wives were dynamic, influential, and even enterprising members of the nascent Islamic community, and fully involved in Muslim public affairs.110 The very proximity of their houses to the mosque in Medina ensured their participation in the political process.111 Again, according to Fatima, the women were Prophet


A rich corpus of academic literature exists which throws analytical light on the issues of women from an Islamic perspective. Notable among them, besides the aforesaid scholars, are Leila Ahmed, Nawal el Saadawi, Farah Azari, Azar Tabari, Nahid Yahganeh, et al. They have been among the forerunners in subjecting the nature of the relationship between gender construction, Islam, and society to a rigorous analytical scrutiny. Some of the sample studies of these scholars are: Leila Ahmed, Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1992).


Fatima Mernissi, Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987).


111. Ibid., p. 133.
Muhammad's intellectual partners. Accompanying him on his raids and military campaigns, they were "not just background figures, but shared with him his strategic concerns. He listened to their advice, which was sometimes the deciding factor in thorny negotiations".\textsuperscript{112} In the city (Medina), they were leaders of women's protest movements, first for equal status as believers and thereafter regarding economic and socio-political rights, mainly in the areas of inheritance, participation in warfare and booty, and personal (marital) relations.\textsuperscript{113} The modernized version of the role of Prophet's household depicts that "Muslim women are not just men's followers and wards but are the very support structure of man, family, and society, they are, themselves, prime guardians of cultural and spiritual values, Islam's most precious heritage".\textsuperscript{114} The later day segregation of women from public life was a function of patriarchal social order. Benazir Bhutto's Beijing utterances on the status of women in Islam, thus, ran parallel to, and seemed to draw their inspiration and sustenance from, their modernized version. The impact of this version on her was discernible.

The tenor of women's movement in Muslim societies is predominantly conducted under Islamic framework. However, in the specific case of Pakistan, the women's movement, as found expression in organisational terms as Women's Action Forum (WAF), could not make an unambiguous choice in favour of an Islamic paradigm. Pleas for adoption of alternative strategies are being made. The theoretical debate does not, however, cease.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., p. 104.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., p. 118 and p. 129.
to exist. Benazir's choice seems to in favour of an Islamic framework, if the aforesaid is kept in view.

Benazir utilized the occasion provided by the Beijing conference to lend her support to the institution of traditional family. Dwelling on this subject, she considered that the draft platform for Action was "disturbingly weak" in this respect in that the draft did not accord priority to the traditional family. "This weakness can lead to misinterpretation and even distortion by opponents of the women's agenda": an assertion pointed towards her critics at home and abroad. She desired that the document jargon should be free from ambiguity lest it should provide a stick for the critics to beat the government with. She also could not accept the wording of the document on single mothers, saying that in Islam only a divorced or widowed woman could be a single mother. However, the final document that was approved at the end of the conference contained a provision which asserted that "various forms of the family exist in different cultural, political and social systems making up the international community."

Having stated, in unambiguous terms, Pakistan's position vis-a-vis the draft platform for action, Benazir also aired her country's position on contentious political

115. For a discussion concerning the triangular interaction of Pakistani state, Islam, and women, see Kamla Bhasin, Ritu Menon and Nighat Said Khan, eds. Against All Odds: Essays on Women, Religion and Development from India and Pakistan (New Delhi: Kali For Women, 1994). In this slim but interesting volume, the female authors from Pakistan made a strong plea for the adoption of a non-religious ("secular") feminist paradigm within whose purview women's movement in Pakistan ought to be organised. For details, see the respective essays of Shahnaz J. Rouse, Fauzia Gardezi, Shahla Zia and Rubina Saigol.


issues plaguing the international community. She spoke about the proliferation of regional tensions and conflicts in the world, pointing her finger clearly towards the Balkan region and the Indian subcontinent, with a further reference to the Bosnian tragedy and the separatist movement in Jammu & Kashmir, respectively. Viewing these twin issues from a feminist perspective (of sorts), Benazir said that "as in the past, women and girls have again been the most direct victims of these conflicts". Referring to the tragedy in Bosnia-Herzegovina, she said that "the use of rape as a weapon of war and instrument of "ethnic cleansing" is as depraved as it is reprehensible. The unfolding of this saga in different parts of the world, including Jammu & Kashmir and Bosnia-Herzegovina, has shaken the conscience of the entire international community". She was critical of the draft for not being strong enough on "protection of women entrapped in armed conflicts and the realization of the right to self-determination of the territories still under foreign occupation and alien domination", a discreet reference to the question of Jammu and Kashmir. She, therefore, urged the conference "to express its complete solidarity with our sisters and daughters who are victims of armed conflict, oppression and brutality". Her pleas, in this connection, bore fruit as the approved final document of the conference forcefully condemned rape as an instrument of war. However, if her Beijing assertions are juxtaposed to the unfolding ethnic situation at home in Sindh involving the security forces and the rank and file of the Muhajir Qaumi Mahaz (Muhajir National Front), then the hollowness of her stand gets exposed. Further, with the passage, in May 1991, of the Shariat Bill during the Prime Ministership of Nawaz Sharif, women's organisations in Pakistan expectedly voiced their resentment against it.

119. Ibid.
120. Ibid.
121. Ibid., n. 117.
by pointing out that its provisions would be used against them. She found herself unable or unwilling to modify existing policies towards women as bequeathed to her by her immediate predecessor, General Zia.

Pakistan's international image is largely contingent on its domestic management of ethnic tensions, inter-sect Muslim relations involving Shias and Sunnis (in particular), and the treatment to be meted out to the non-Muslim minorities of Pakistan. As in relation to other issues, the state's tackling of women's issues within an Islamic framework did not lead to national consensus or cohesiveness. Instead, diverse interpretations of the Quranic text and the Hadith vis-a-vis the gender question led to factionalism among social groups. In the backdrop of her Beijing utterances, it makes sense to portray her government's domestic policy towards women as it would shed further light on the subject. Immediately preceding the November 1988 election, the PPP released its manifesto outlining a number of reforms for the empowerment of the people of Pakistan, including provisions for securing basic human rights, employment, and political participation. In particular, it pledged to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women by promising that the new government would

* sign the [United Nations] Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against women;
* provide women with the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work, to protection against unemployment, to equal pay for work of equal value, and payment of maternity leave; repeal all discriminatory laws against women;
* reform Personal Law and bring it in line with the demands of contemporary socio-economic realities;
* make the law-enforcing machinery effective to protect modesty of women;
* take special measures to promote literacy of women;
* eradicate the "curse of Jahez (dowry), a pernicious evil on our societies", by enlarging social consciousness and enforcing strictly the relevant laws and Dowry Act.\textsuperscript{122}

One of Benazir Bhutto's first acts as Prime Minsiter was to free all female prisoners from Pakistan's Jails. This was followed by the government's request in the late December 1988 to the women's Division, to provide a list of all laws that were discriminatory against women. Trade unions were revived and seemed to be including a sizeable number of women in their ranks. The government lifted press censorship, and there was a marked difference in the media's portrayal of women.\textsuperscript{123}

On 23 March 1989, Pakistan Republic Day, when Benazir expanded the federal cabinet to forty-three members she included five women in it. Only one woman-her mother-was among the twenty-four minister. Of the nineteen ministers of state, four were women: Begum Shahnawaz Wazir Ali (Ministry state for education); Begum Rehana Sarwar (Minister of state for the Women's Division); Mahamooda Shah (Minister of state for special education and social welfare); and Begum Khakwani (Minister of state for Population Welfare). [The symbolism of this gesture could not go unnoticed-women were encouraged to participate actively in public life]

As noted in the preceding, Begum Wazir Ali played an active role in the 1994 Cairo conference on Population and Development.

In July 1989, the government took an important step by elevating the Women's Division to the level of a ministry, the Ministry for Women's Development. The new


\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
ministry, however, faced a number of formidable tasks: The government had requested that by the beginning of 1989 the Women's Division provide it with a list of laws discriminatory against women, which it did. Most of the laws that the Women's Division listed had been promulgated under Zia's Islamisation programme and were recommended for either amendment or repeal. The government had also requested that the Women's Division explore expanding employment opportunities for women by providing it with the following:

* A list of training programmes that provide skills for women (there were almost none).
* Information on how the Women's Division has assisted women in seeking employment.
* A completed affirmative action proposal that would enable women to be placed into decision-making positions within each ministry. From 5 to 10 percent of all posts would be reserved for women.\textsuperscript{124}

The Women's Division's first publication under the PPP government was released in late December 1988 for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Summit held in Islamabad. Entitled \textit{Solidarity: SAARC Women's Journal}, it included chapters on rural development programmes for women, contributed by each of the member nations. Pakistan's chapter was commendable, honest portrayal of life in rural areas: "The villages themselves present an unedifying picture of poverty, ill-health, alarmingly low rate of literacy, malnutrition, increasing population, poor communications, lack of institutions, low production and productivity, unemployment, migration trend to cities, low holding capacity and exploitation of the poor by landlords and petty government officials".\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., p. 440.

\textsuperscript{125} Women's Division, Government of Pakistan, \textit{Solidarity: SAARC Women's Journal} (Islamabad), December 1988, p. 44.
The status of women in Pakistan and state policy oriented towards changing it cannot be separated from other events that are happening in the country. Political and inter ethnic tensions are exacerbating the strains within civil society at virtually every level, and the ensuing social confusion has spread over into gender relations. Writing about the world in general, "African social historian Ali Mazrui made an argument particularly pertinent to Pakistan: "A greater role for women is needed in the struggle to tame the sovereign state, civilize capitalism, and humanize communication".

State policy under Zia-ul-Haq was pursued within a rather complicated ideological framework. From one side, Zia was praised by some orthodox religious forces, although others felt that his Islamic reforms did not go far enough. The religious forces, however, are a small minority with a limited following and therefore win a few seats in fair elections. But their support was in the state's ideological interests because it would use an Islamic interpretation as a basis for cohesiveness.\textsuperscript{126}

An untoward outcome was that by relying on an Islamically based policy, the state created factionalism between groups. By legislating what is Islamic and what is not, Islam itself could no longer provide unity, because it was now being defined to exclude previously included groups. Shiite-Sunni disputes, ethnic disturbances in Karachi, increased animosity toward Ahmediyyas, and the revival of Punjab-Sind tensions can be traced to Pakistan's having lost the ability to use Islam as a common moral vocabulary.\textsuperscript{127}

In Pakistan, state policy toward women indifferent periods is derived from the symbolic representation of women in (1) redefining traditional culture; (ii) affirming

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., n. 122, p. 438.

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
social identity or juxtaposing to another group (e.g.) Hindus, Indians); or (iii)
maintaining social cohesion in the face of rapid—and potentially
destabilising-change.\textsuperscript{128}

In a major decision symbolising a \textit{volte face} as compared to the 1994 Cairo
International Conference on Population and Development, the Vatican (Holy See) and
Catholic countries decided at the Beijing conference not to have any truck with the
Muslim countries. This was stated categorically by the head of the Vatican delegation to
the Fourth World Conference on Women, Prof. Mary Ann Glendon of Harvard
University. The reason stated for such a policy decision was that there existed
"substantial and profound differences between Islam and Christianity on Women".\textsuperscript{129}
Even at the 1994 Cairo conclave, there existed nothing like an alliance between the
Vatican and the Islamic states. As stated elsewhere in this chapter, the Vatican-Islamic
states' relation this at Cairo amounted, at best, to a like-mindedness of ideas and
interest; a mere coincidence; and a tactical move, devoid of any grandiose, strategic or
alliance-like designs. From Cairo to Beijing, the Vatican moved away from the Islamic
countries even on this limited, tactical meeting-point. The Vatican's stated reason(s) at
the Beijing conference did exist even at the Cairo gathering. What accounted for the
change in decision? The policy shift might have aimed at ensuring the isolation of Iran,
Sudan, Libya and other radical Islamic states, from the international community which
is already in place through the imposition of sanctions.

Viewed in perspective, much of the turmoil over the draft platform reflected a
competition of ideas observable in any broad political movement. Besides, the
deliberations of the conference reflected, and gave vent to, multiculturalism which
informs the variegated ethos of the members of the international community. In a

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., p. 412.
\textsuperscript{129} The Hindu (New Delhi), 7 September 1995.
veritable sense, multiculturalism is a defining principle of the contemporary nation-state system reinforced, *inter alia*, by the present-day phenomenon popularly known as "Islamic Resurgence". Multilateral covenants such as the Charter of the United Nations and other statutes of its associated bodies do, in fact, give recognition to such a cultural diversity. Multi-culturalism, being an intrinsic component of democracy, needs to be strengthened in order that hegemonisation of international politics by a few states becomes difficult to attain. Benazir's views on issues germane to the conference could be visualized in the broad framework provided by multiculturalism of which the culture of Islam forms an important part. Besides, it could also be viewed from a constitutional perspective which enjoins upon the state to endeavour to evolve an Islamic viewpoint on international issues in the overall context of promoting Islamic unity among the countries of the Muslim world.