

## Opinions

# The end of ignorance

## Honesty, but no action in Pakistan



Neel Arora  
Columnist

In one of the most surprising turnarounds in Islamabad's enduring policy of denial, President Asif Ali Zardari admitted to the collusion between his state and militant Islam, a first by any head of state in Pakistan, on July 8.

"Militants and extremists emerged on the national scene and challenged the state because they were deliberately created and nurtured as a policy to achieve short-term tactical objectives," Zardari

confessed to a group of civil servants, in what seemed to be a rather innocuous gathering in Islamabad.

Despite numerous accusations and continued international pressure to dismantle the terror networks existing within its territories, the Pakistani establishment has never come out with an official statement recognizing its support for the Islamists.

Until now, Pakistan's alliance with the militants has been assumed, and at times even taken for granted by the international community. Zardari's "candid admission of the reality," carries a legacy since the inception of Pakistan as a nation.

For far too long, Pakistan has been suspected of using militancy to fight its proxy war against Indian forces in the disputed territory of Kashmir. Over the past two decades, the jihad seems to have extended well into Indian territory.

The horrific attacks in Mumbai last November come to light. The evidence suggesting that the repeated terrorist efforts have originated from Pakistan is overwhelming. Whether they were a part of Pakistan's "short-term tactical objectives" is well within reckoning.

The fall of the Soviet Union can be linked to Pakistan, where the Mujahidin was, in part, created with the blessings of Washington and Langley.

In the aftermath of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, it was Islamabad that backed the treacherous Taliban regime, thinking Pakistan would gain some amount of control over the region and create a strategic advantage over India. The fire they fueled seems to have left behind several burns, and continues unchecked.

Pakistani jihadists have been captured not only in Afghanistan, but also in Iraq, Chechnya and even parts of Africa. Since the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, their leaders have used Pakistan as a safe haven to regroup and continue waging their jihad against coalition forces and innocents the world over.

Zardari's unveiling of one of the world's worst-kept secrets may be an attempt to diffuse international pressure, with a civil war ensuing in the country, ironically pitting him against the Taliban.

But there is no point in him stating the obvious if Islamabad is going to continue with its old policy line and do little about their extensive network of jihadists.

Islamabad has been full of promises in the past, but sustainable action beneath the peripheral has rarely ever followed suit when dealing with extremism. Now is the time for action.

Zardari can complain all he likes about America using Pakistan "as a blunt instrument of the Cold War," and for supporting corrupt totalitarian military regimes to achieve its own objectives, leaving Pakistan in the dust. But he cannot deny that his country has reaped the benefits of militancy and it is only now, with the jihadist insurrection completely out of hand that Zardari speaks out.

His revelation should not be viewed as an act of repentance, rather, it should be observed with caution. These are just words attempting to prevent or delay action, and maybe even shield Pakistan's instability and inability to control what was once their brainchild.

But, as far as the Islamist connection goes, Pakistan's days of denial are no more.

# Disasters in-waiting



Derek Kiszely  
Columnist

Last year, just three days before Christmas, an environmental disaster of epic proportions woke the residents of Kingston, Tennessee in the middle of the night.

Today, to the few people who are even aware the event occurred, it is known as the "TVA Kingston Fossil Plant coal-fly ash slurry spill." But on that fateful night, Kingston residents only knew chaos after an earthen dike ruptured at the nearby power plant.

Within seconds more than a billion gallons of coal combustion waste poured out of the storage pond and rushed down the valley. The ashen-gray, toxic muck covered the surrounding land with up to six feet of sludge, spanning more than 300 acres, or the equivalent of 1,660 Olympic-size swimming pools. The volume of ash and water was 100 times greater than the amount of oil spilled in the 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster.

The first tests conducted by the Tennessee Valley Authority showed "no threat" to the area's drinking water. But on New Years Day, the first independent tests, conducted by the Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry laboratories at Appalachian State University, showed "significantly elevated levels of toxic metals" in nearby streams, threatening the ecosystem and raising serious concerns about the safety of drinking water. To this day, cattle can't graze on affected pastures.

Unfortunately, not enough has been done to prevent another spill, and the reality is that something similar could very likely happen here, in North Carolina.

The Environmental Protection Agency recently revealed North Carolina is home to 12 "potentially high-hazard ponds," more than any other state. These sites, like the one in Tennessee, have existed for years with little -to-no federal regulation.

The EPA's high-hazard rating means that people would most likely die if a dam failed, and if a storm or structural failure did cause them to leak into the surrounding communities, there would be "significant property damage" and immeasurable damage to the environment.

The EPA initially refused to disclose the locations of 44 "high-hazard potential" sites to the public but eventually relented and released the list that the Obama administration had previously insisted be kept secret.

Given the EPA's purpose, it comes as a surprise to find out that they were stonewalling the public on this issue. But this is the same agency that lied to New Yorkers about the quality of air after the Sept. 11 attacks left high levels of asbestos in the dust that covered lower Manhattan.

Coal combustion waste, a byproduct of burning coal, is full of highly toxic chemicals that can cause birth defects, cancer and other ailments. Coal ash dumps also contain millions of pounds of toxic metals such as arsenic, lead, cadmium, mercury, chromium and selenium, which can cause cancer or damage to the nervous system and other organs if ingested. A study from the Oak Ridge National Laboratory found coal ash to be several times more radioactive than shielded nuclear waste, yet coal ash is subject to little regulation.

Yet there are stronger protections for household garbage than for coal ash across the country.

This means that North Carolinians will be forced to wait months until the EPA finally takes action, even though they've had three decades to do so. In the meantime, an enormous amount of toxic material has gone largely unregulated. Because there are no federal regulations regarding the disposal of coal ash, the task is handled by each state.

North Carolina's power companies say their disposal methods are safe and economical. Sure, they're "safe and economical," until there's an unexpected ash pond catastrophe, like the one in Tennessee. Thankfully there hasn't been a catastrophe in North Carolina. But just because it hasn't happened doesn't mean it can't.

## Print is just the appetizer

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# A holiday without meaning



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July always arouses a resurgence in superficial patriotism among Americans who otherwise do not exhibit such emotions.

American flags are more prominent on porch rails and mailboxes, Wal-Mart has a Fourth of July area set aside for decorations and red, white and blue potato chips, and many flock to see the climatic fireworks shows on the special holiday most celebrate in some form or another, but few understand.

Like Christmas,

Independence Day has become too commercial. It's a shallow holiday whose meaning is long forgotten and often overlooked.

The love of this country does not run deep, and true patriotism in America is a misunderstood concept. While many think the definition of a patriot is voting during elections, abiding by the law and possessing a basic understanding of the judicial system, true patriotism runs much deeper.

"Patriotism is supporting your country all the time, and your government when it deserves it," Mark Twain said.

Many mistake devotion to a country as love for a government, which is a flawed and dangerous misconception.

Patriots love their country, it's foundation, set standards of living and will do everything in their power to ensure that absolutely nothing compromises the values and morals said country stands for.

"Every good citizen makes his country's honor his own, and cherishes it not only as precious but as sacred," President Andrew Jackson said. "He is willing

to risk his life in its defense and is conscious that he gains protection while he gives it."

It is ironic the citizens of the greatest nation in the world lack loyalty to the only country that offers absolute freedom. Americans are quick to complain and slow to act.

Rather than using their constitutionally-guaranteed rights to make a difference, they are content to remain complacent, allowing their nation to radically change for the worse.

One of the many problems plaguing Americans in this epoch of post-modernism and hedonism is a "going-with-the-flow" mentality. When asked, many cannot even explain what they believe.

The Declaration of Independence is not an ancient historical document. It is as relevant today as it was in 1776 and should be honored as such - not rewritten to abide by the dictates of new leadership. We are guaranteed only three inalienable rights, which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness - pursuit being the key word.

Health care is not a right. Equal opportunity is not a right. Government intervention is not a right. The redistribution of wealth is not a right.

Instead, we are guaranteed an equal playing field where everyone has the ability, whether rich or poor, healthy or sick, black or white, male or female, to pursue our desires.

Life is not fair and there are clear distinctions in America between the millionaires and those living beneath the poverty line. But one's status in life should not dictate loyalty to their country. It is our duty to uphold the Constitution and to act as our forefathers did when their liberty was in jeopardy.

Cowards and slackers may ignore the signs of quickly changing tides, but we need to step up to ensure our current leaders do not succeed in making changes that should not be made. It's time to take a patriotic stand.

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