



An elderly displaced woman waits to see a doctor at the Chota Lahore camp on June 8 in Swabi, Pakistan. Paula Bronstein / Getty Images

State of decay

Manan Ahmed on the real threat facing Pakistan today

Pakistan ka matlab kiya? La illaha illallah. What does Pakistan mean? There is no God but Allah. This rallying cry boomed across India in 1945 as the struggle for independence from British rule reached its apex. Even then, that basic tenet of Muslim faith seemed an odd answer to the question posed: a declaration where one expects an explanation. This slogan has persisted through the subsequent 62 years as a readily available yell at any given gathering – from a cricket match to an anti-drone rally. Throughout these many years it has been the answer of choice – the non-answer, really – to the most fundamental question for Pakistanis: What is Pakistan? What kind of state, and for whom?

The supposedly impending “Talibanisation” of Pakistan remains a central concern for foreign observers, despite its plain improbability. While the irrational fear that the Taliban can precipitate a political or military collapse of the state has abated somewhat following the Pakistan Army’s aggressive campaign in the northwest territories, the fighting has produced its own set of new problems. As a direct result of the military operation in Swat, more than a million displaced citizens are now facing a lack of food and shelter as well as a growing realisation that the state has little or no plans for their rehabilitation. Adding insult to injury are political parties in Sindh and Punjab who are arguing that the Swatis cannot seek shelter in their cities – denying them the legal right of citizens to reside anywhere within Pakistan. At the same time, separatist sentiment persists among Baluchis, fired by decades of neglect, and more recently, violent repression by the state, with the army likely to make Baluchistan its next central front.

The fear of a “Talibanised Pakistan” does not reconcile with the facts of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. But we are still left grappling with the question: What manner of state is Pakistan? What kind of an Islamic Republic? On a continuum of Muslim-majority nations, from Saudi Arabia to Turkey, how does Pakistan define itself? Can religion, in fact, force disparate populations into political cohesion? Or is the state – as is popularly mooted – destined to disintegrate?

The early decades of the 20th century saw a number of attempts by Muslim intellectuals in India to articulate what was then termed “Islamic Nationalism”. Muhammad Iqbal, a leading Muslim poet and philosopher, first posited that a federation of Muslim majority areas of India (Bengal, Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province, Sindh and Baluchistan) could form a political unit built on the principle of Muslims as contractual citizens of God’s one nation. In his articulation, Iqbal was drawing on a long history – since the failed Uprising of 1857 – of anti-colonial Muslim nationalist thought

which presupposed a political unity to the adherents of Islam from Cairo to Karachi. What remained unclear, however, was how Iqbal’s nation would function as a state.

In 1940, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the leading political voice of the Muslim community in India, provided the platform for the basis of the independent state of Pakistan. He argued that Muslims in India had a civilisational cohesion that remained distinct even though they had shared a thousand-year history with the Hindus. Jinnah didn’t simply advance communal politics, though – he articulated a path for moving Indian Muslims from a politics of “minority rights” to one with “global citizenry”. His usage of Islam as a unifying force was, then, an effort to highlight cultural affinity at the expense of political expedience. Just as he asserted the uniformity of Muslims to transcend their ethnic and linguistic diversity in India, he maintained the ability of this new state to transcend religion. In his first address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan in August 1947, he stressed this democratic nature of Pakistan: “Now I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal and you will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State.”

Pakistan, as constituted by the re-creating British, was hardly a cohesive state. The two biggest provinces were themselves partitioned (Punjab and Bengal) and the fate of three princely states was undetermined – Swat, Baluchistan and Kashmir. The country itself was divided into two unequal halves separated by India. The communal horror of Partition, which saw the displacement and killing of millions, soon gave way to the mobilisation of the Army of this nascent state to redraw its borders. In fact, the actions taken then in Baluchistan and Kashmir quickly shifted the balance of power in Pakistan from the civil and the political to the military.

Still, Jinnah’s hopes for a democratic state were briefly glimpsed in the first constitution, which was

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signed in 1956. The constitution declared Pakistan an Islamic republic but reserved minority rights and enshrined laws in the hands of a secular judiciary. But this was a short-lived achievement, and in the next several decades, dictatorial leaders would steadily erode the unity of the state through their often brutal attempts to consolidate power in Islamabad – first under the guise of modernisation, and then Islamicisation and, more recently, anti-terrorism.

The first of these, Field Marshal Ayub Khan, with the Cold War support of the United States, suspended the constitution and embarked on a decade-long military dictatorship during which he systematically broke down all progressive and democratic voices in the nation. In order to cement his military rule, Ayub Khan preyed on exactly those ethnic divisions which Jinnah had hoped to eliminate. His West Pakistani military regime deliberately marginalised the East Pakistani Bangla population. Though there were populist resisters to Ayub – most notably the political campaign of Fatima Ali Jinnah in 1965 – the military dictators brokered no relief. The creation of Bangladesh in 1971 – after the Pakistani military failed to recognise a legitimate national election and embarked on a systematic killing of Bengalis – spelt the end of Iqbal and Jinnah’s notion that Muslims in India could form a cohesive political union. The fate of Pakistan, the state, in turn, hung in the balance.

In the aftermath of 1971, ethnic tensions flared up across Pakistan. Sub-nationalist movements (based sometimes on linguistic grounds, and sometimes on pre-Partition claims) emerged in Sindh, Baluchistan, Swat, and southern Punjab. The populist prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who had campaigned on a socialist platform, responded by reasserting the Islamic nature of the state, but in a manner very different from that envisioned by Jinnah. Where Jinnah conceived of a state as a democracy where the majority of citizens were Muslim, Bhutto re-defined the state itself as an Islamic state, opening the way for legal implementation of religious law. He oversaw the 1973 constitution, which declared Islam to be the official religion and curtailed the many liberties enshrined in the 1956 constitution. He also refocused Pakistan towards West Asia to forged closer ties with the global Islamic community. He held an Islamic Conference in Lahore in 1974 and worked hard to court substantial support from Saudi Arabia. Internally, he continued to escalate ethnic politics in an effort to strengthen federal powers – using the military to brutally crush Baluchi calls for justice and self-rule.

This process of Islamicisation intensified during the dictatorship of Zia ul Haq and became specifically

a Sunnification policy. General Zia explicitly framed Pakistan’s identity along two lines: one anti-Shia and Salafist, the other a national “jihad” focused on Kashmir and Afghanistan. In this he enjoyed the specific support of the United States as it fought its proxy war against the Soviets in Afghanistan.

Twenty years of military dictatorships, under Ayub Khan and Zia ul Haq, cemented the rule of the few over the many. Their policies led to the emergence of specific grievances by sub-nationalist groups in Baluchistan and Sindh. In the decade of Pervez Musharraf’s rule, these tensions grew dramatically, and pushed the state into a greater alienation from its own citizens.

Musharraf’s dictatorial regime sought to polish over any internal incoherence with a unified foreign front aimed primarily at operating militarily in Afghanistan, NWFP and Baluchistan. The influx of cash, some \$6 billion, into the coffers of the military propelled the army to new-found heights as the country’s largest landlord, largest employer and largest business. But maintaining this new oligarchy came at a steep price for Pakistan.

The two main post-2001 theatres, the states of NWFP and Baluchistan, have born the brunt of military overreach and dwindling civic engagement. It is these sub-nationalist discontents – and not the phantom “Taliban” threat – that pose serious problems for the unity of the state, and they cannot be answered by military escalation. In Baluchistan, since 2004, a low-grade civil war emerged after brutalities committed by Musharraf’s regime, hearkening back to the Baluchi nationalist struggles of the early 1970s. NWFP remained the “frontier” both ideologically and developmentally. Besides being a military staging-ground, its people were denied even rudimentary access to health care, education or a functioning judicial system. The call for Islamic law in 2008, which elicited such alarm around the world, should be seen against the backdrop of such neglect – an attempt to reassert local control and not merely an example of rampant radicalisation in Pakistani society.

Rather than addressing the legitimate needs of Pakistan’s various regions and groups, one government after another has, for half a century, taken power from citizens and provinces alike. If the state is indeed incoherent today, it is the consequence of decades of military rule. The greatest threat facing Pakistan today is not a ragged band of armed Pashtuns. It is what follows the deployment of indiscriminate firepower to defeat them – mass displacement and a rising toll of civilian deaths.

Manan Ahmed, a historian of Islam in South Asia at the University of Chicago, blogs at *ChapatiMystery*.

the tangled web

Love connection: Hamas gets into matchmaking biz

At 29, Tahani is considered a spinster by the standards of deeply conservative Gaza. So in her search for a husband, she turned for help to the best in the marriage business: the Islamic militant group Hamas.

“I gaze at all the men on the street and think” “Oh God, isn’t there just one for me?” said the young woman with dark skin and honey-coloured eyes, set off by a maroon headscarf.

Her application is among 287 from single women in the files of the Tayseer Association for Marriage and Development in Gaza. Photographs stapled to the files show Muslim women in headscarves, some wearing make-up, some smiling, others looking startled. They all want a husband, and the Hamas loyalists running the association are intent on finding a man for each.

About 40 marriages have been arranged since Tayseer opened its matchmaking department in 2007. Most women apply in secret because it’s taboo for women in Gaza to seek husbands outside the traditional route. Most girls are married in matches set up by their mothers. Dating is nearly nonexistent and love marriages are a novelty.

Tahani, who spoke on condition that only her first name be used because she is using the service without her family knowing, said she turned to Tayseer a year ago. Her mother died when Tahani was young, and none of her relatives were helping her find a groom.

The young woman said she became more determined to find a husband after Israel’s three-week war on Hamas, which ended in January.

“My brothers held their wives when they were scared. I felt lonely,” said Tahani, a university graduate in social work.

Most women are shy when they first come in the door, said the Tayseer matchmaker Nisrin Khalil, 21.

“I tell the girls, be like Khadija!” said Khalil, referring to the Prophet Muhammad’s first wife.

Muslim tradition says Khadija proposed to Muhammad – and was years his senior. It’s a powerful message to women: Islam’s first lady bucked conservative Arab tradition more than 1,400 years ago and they can defy Gaza tradition now.

Didaa Hadid
Associated Press
ap.com



Millionaire seeks husband through matchmaker

A female millionaire’s public announcement to seek a life partner is becoming the talk of the town. It is rare in Korea for rich female singles to publicly seek a future husband through a matchmaking agency.

The businesswoman has asked matchmaking company Sunwoo to find her future husband. The agency posted an open proposal on its website on May 21.

According to the agency, the businesswoman is 49 years old and is worth 20 billion won (about \$16 billion).

The proposal starts with the headline “success in business, now looking to succeed in love! We are looking for a special man who is going to be her lover”.

“The client operates a business in Gyeonggi Province. Through her 20-year business, she made about 20 billion won in real-estate, but missed the right time for marriage,” Sunwoo CEO Lee Woong-jin was quoted as saying.

The ad describes the client as “an elegant, slim, feminine and active woman who enjoys sport and travelling”.

However, there are conditions for husband candidates: “Single man of the same age to 10 years below.”

The “gold miss”, defined in Korea as a single woman aged 30 to 49 with a college degree and annual income of at least \$40,000, introduced herself through a handwritten note. “I am a genuine, considerate and open-minded person who has a heart of gold.”

Hwang Aesol
The Korea Herald
koreaherald.co.kr



Air New Zealand continues edgy marketing with singles’ matchmaking flight

Air New Zealand recently announced it is holding a “matchmaking flight” in October 2009 as a way to draw an alternative demographic of travellers to the airline and New Zealand. The flight, departing Los Angeles and arriving in Auckland, New Zealand, is designed to inspire American singles to visit New Zealand, but is open to travellers from anywhere.

“New Zealand is often positioned as a thrill seeker, adventure destination, but it’s also very romantic too,” said Sarah Miller-Reeves, PR and sponsorship executive for the Americas at Air New Zealand. “This allows us to present the romantic nature of New Zealand... really engaging a wider cross section of American consumers.”

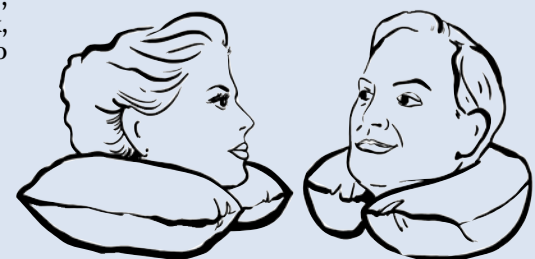
To engage potential “matchmaking flight” travellers with the brand, the airline created an online community using Ning, www.thematchmakingflight.com. Members can create profiles, interact with one another, and pose flight-related questions to a moderator.

Additional features on the network are unlocked after consumers book the flight, such as the ability to become acquainted with the flight crew and send Facebook gifts to fellow passengers, said Larry Lentz, online marketing executive at Air New Zealand.

The flight will feature romantic movies, speed dating, and other matchmaking games to encourage interaction between those on-board. There will also be pre- and post-flight parties in Los Angeles and Auckland.

Playing on the fact that Auckland and Los Angeles are located on opposite sides of the world and have opposite climates, the airline is incorporating the idea of “opposites attract” into its messaging. In addition to traditional media relations, the PR team is placing a strong focus on its social media presence by utilising Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Flickr and the video site 12seconds.

Beth Krietsch
PRWeek
prweekus.com



Illustrations by Sarah Lazarovic for The National