

Spinning the Conspiracy Wheel (May 29, 2010)

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(In Pakistani Urdu press, Ahmadis are never described as a Muslim sect. If the writer wishes to be polite, he calls them Ahmadis, otherwise they are referred to as Qadianis, intended as a pejorative. Below I have put the latter within quotes to represent the original. Similarly, their mosques must be referred to in Pakistan as *ibadatgah*, "prayer places," and their town, which they named Rabwah, is called Chenabnagar.)

American newspapers have superb "spin masters;" Pakistani Urdu press excels in "conspiracy theorists." Here are the front-page "explanations" in Pakistan's two foremost Urdu newspapers, *Nawa-i-Waqt* and *Jang*, only one day after that carnage at Lahore. Both are published from several cities, and also have web editions. The first sponsors something called "Nazariya-i-Pakistan Trust" (Concept of Pakistan Trust), where on the 26th of May a delegation of Dalits from India was warmly welcomed, and heard earnest expressions of sympathy for their plight in India. The second, *Jang*, is currently the co-sponsor with the *Times of India* of something called "Amn ki Asha" (Hope for Peace). Several exchanges of intellectuals between the countries have recently occurred under their sponsorship. *Jang* also owns some TV channels.

According to one staff writer in *Nawa-i-Waqt*, government agencies are perplexed at the targeting of the "Qadianis." According to them, the war on terror started in 2001, and for nine years the terrorists never attacked the "Qadianis." So why, out of the blue, were there two simultaneous attacks on "Qadiani worship places?" "What could be the purpose behind the attacks," the agencies ask.

"According to responsible sources," the staff writer continues, "the purpose of targeting the Qadianis was to scar Pakistan's dignity abroad, and create instability and confusion within. The terrorists, by targeting the Qadianis, tried to kill two birds with one stone. It was an extremely organized action. They knew what reactions would come from abroad. In particular from Canada, the United States, Germany and other Western countries, where Qadianis live in large numbers and have much influence in official circles.

"On the other hand, investigating groups say that the arrested terrorist was not a Punjabi. As for the matter of the Punjabi Taliban's or Baitullah Mahsud's reported acceptance of responsibility for the attacks, government agencies are nevertheless extending their enquiries to certain neighboring countries. They want to see if Bharat was involved in the two incidents with the purpose of damaging Pakistan's image abroad. Bharat could have used some local group to further its condemnable aim.

"The agencies are also trying to find out if there was any involvement of those foreign agencies that have been putting pressure on Pakistan to take action in Punjab, particularly in south Punjab. Was this an attempt on their part to create an excuse for such action?"

A different staff writer separately contributes an analysis, suggesting that the attacks

could have been a joint action by India, the United States, and Israel, “as a reaction to the recent American failure in its scheme of funding various religious groups in Pakistan under the guise of Culture, Heritage, and Sufism and then pitting them against certain other religious groups.”

The same paper, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, also reports on its front page that “Hizba-al-Tahrir” has concluded it was an act by the Americans and their local agents. “This is how they obtain popular support just before every military operation.” The group also warns the public that soon there will be a deliberate power crisis “so that people could be kept in the dark about the forthcoming massacre in North Waziristan.”

I did not find any editorial comment on the attacks in *Nawa-i-Waqt* on Saturday.

Some of the above explanations are repeated in various reports on the front-page in *Jang*. There is also a special report by a staff writer. It begins by claiming that certain secret agencies of the country had discovered the ugly conspiracy before the attacks, and informed the relevant officials; the latter, however, paid the report no attention. “A senior officer of a secret agency,” the report continues, “told us that the Afghan intelligence, together with India’s RAW, and the intelligence organizations of U.K., America, and Israel, was involved in the incident, and that the senior most officer of the Afghan intelligence had contacted by satellite phone an extremely influential Qadiani in Bharat, to tell him that something against his community was about to happen. According to this senior official of a secret agency, such attacks on the Qadianis bring into question the security Pakistan provides to its minorities. The above-mentioned four countries, enemies of Islamic jihad, have gained strength by getting this operation done. India now gains an excuse for its planned action against madrassas and Muslim scholars in India, in particular against the scholars of the Deobandi school.”

A separate report on the front page carries quotations from the statement issued by the maulanas of “Almi Majlis-i-Tahaffuz-i-Khatm-i-Nabuwat,” including: “[The attacks] are a huge international conspiracy to use the issue of minority rights in Pakistan in order to advance a deliberate scheme seeking to destroy the ‘Anti-Qadianiat’ ordinance and the laws that protect the Prophet’s honor.”

Jang, however, took an editorial stance on Saturday, and condemned the attacks as well as the lapses in security. It, nevertheless, also asked the question, “Why an attack on Ahmadi now,” hinting at what their staff writer had more explicitly expressed, but leaving it to the readers to draw their own conclusions.

Postscript: On Sunday, *Jang* published a second editorial on the carnage, more forceful and unequivocal in condemnation. It also published a thoughtful and revealing column by Nazeer Naji, who as a young man took part in anti-Ahmadi demonstrations in the Fifties. Three other columns dealt with the subject. One by Abbas Mahkari spent one sentence on the attacks, devoting the rest to Gen. Ashfaq Kiyani. The other two, by Irfan Siddiqui and Farah Naz Isfahani, set excellent examples of hypocrisy and double talk, one from the perspective of the religious, the other from the perspective of the Peoples Party. *Nawa-i-*

Waqt remained true to its principles. It wrote a long and passionate editorial that condemned Facebook and Western media and praised all the maulanas and leaders who had organized demonstrations against the infamous cartoons recently. No major columnist in the paper took any notice of the events at Lahore, but two minor columnists opined that the attacks at Lahore showed how “Bharat” was bent upon “avenging Mumbai!” Two of the “most favorite” articles on their website separately accuse “Black Water” and “RAW” for the attacks. Fortunately, they are not also the “most e-mailed.”