



Diplomats without dignity **By** **Nosheen Saeed**

Death is not the greatest loss in life. The greatest loss is what dies inside us while we live. While the people of Pakistan are resilient enough to face natural disasters it seems they are hapless when it comes to man-made fiascos.

One incident that had disaster written all over it took place in New York on August 26, 2010 which not only caused embarrassment for Pakistan, but left Pakistanis absolutely stunned.

The president of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE), to show solidarity with millions of Pakistanis badly affected by the recent floods, graciously offered the NASDAQ screen on Time Square, New York, to Pakistan's consulate with the sole purpose of generating public awareness about the heart-wrenching destruction and devastation caused to life and property in Pakistan. Highlighting the plight and misery of the flood victims meant gathering support and donations for the flood-drowned country.

In a dismal lack of sensitivity, instead of projecting images of the devastation caused in areas ravaged by the flash floods, our pompous, self-serving, incompetent and shameless officials decided to display their own photographs with a slide that read, "Welcome to New York from the Consulate General of Pakistan Mr. R.S.A Babar Hashmi."

One wonders whether these Pakistani diplomats were raising awareness about their country's predicament or promoting tourism in New York? Failing to capitalize on the NYSE's offer, these officials of the Pakistan Mission not only ruined a chance to collect a substantial amount for their flood-hit brethren but infuriated the NYSE members to the extent that one of them remarked, "We were stupid to offer this opportunity to Pakistan."

When merit, competence and professionalism are ignored and appointment letters are reserved for the blue-eyed boys of the high and mighty; when senior positions are given to the utterly incompetent; when cronyism, nepotism, corruption and bribery reign supreme, what else can be expected?

The only thing that bothers one is that while the shameless are walking with their heads high, the deserving, capable, responsible and committed are bearing the brunt of neglect. Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi has ordered an inquiry into the matter, but then inquiries are in reality delaying tactics till memory fades. These officials need to be sacked immediately and replaced by competent and dedicated ones who represent and protect the interests of the sending state.

It's pertinent to recall that Time Square is the same place where a car bomb attempt by Faisal Shahzad on May 1, 2010 was luckily foiled, saving precious lives. New York is the same place where a proposal to build an Islamic centre and mosque - two blocks from the World Trade Centre (WTC) site - has drawn a lot of criticism and the placards of hardliners state, "You can build a mosque at Ground Zero when we can build a Synagogue in Mecca."

In spite of all the commotion, the New Yorkers and the president of the New York Stock Exchange showed a magnanimous gesture of helping out Pakistanis in their hour of dire need. Setting aside the fact that Pakistan's consulate failed miserably to avail the gesture of sympathy it's important to convey that Pakistanis are deeply touched and truly indebted for the support and concern.

The UNO and other aid agencies recently declared that Pakistan is suffering from "image deficit" in the world and the slow flow of aid funds is because the country is linked to corruption and terrorism.

"There are concerns expressed both here and back home (Britain) with the level of corruption in the country. People feel that if they give, it will not go to the people in need," said Neva Khan, Oxfam's director in Pakistan. Such statements should have rung alarm bells in the corridors of power and one would have expected the government to go the extra mile to change the general perception of the country ensuring that mishaps detrimental to its image are abridged. But it seems the government is not willing to correct mistakes and loves to blunder anew. But then what should we expect from those who view the affairs of the state as wheeling and dealing.

While people all over the world have slowly progressed from barbarism to civilization, it seems we, instead of progressing, are retrogressing. And the sad part is that we have no one else to blame but ourselves. If we sit back and let things happen then we are equally responsible for the mess we are in. We need to correct our course. We have been waiting for too long for things to happen in our lifetime. It's time to take chances before it's too late.

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