

Pakistan media hawks blame Raw - Indian intelligence agency - for Lahore attacks, cricket shooting

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The online *FrontPage* (www.thefrontpage.in), edited by Seema Mustafa, has devoted its latest issue to the growing threat of Talibanisation in Pakistan. Below is Farooq Sulehria's contribution in the latest issue.

Within moments of the terrorist attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team at Lahore, top television anchors of Pakistan were on air crhying in unison: its the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) [India's most powerful intelligence agency].

Without any proof , they worked on all kinds of conspiracies. Talk show host, Kamran Khan, conducting a late-evening current affairs programme on Geo, did not deem it necessary to even spin a theory. He was direct, frank and determined in declaring: "No need to guess. The identity of the terrorists is evident. Also, it is crystal clear where they have come from. Pakistan now should not sit idle. Instead she should highlight the issue at international forums the way India highlighted Mumbai".

He did not find it necessary to explain that one of the attackers, according to eye witnesses, was speaking Pashto. That there is no precedence for RAW having the ability to infiltrate an important Pakistan city and carrying out such a high-profile terrorist attack, did not matter to the talk show hosts either. Also, the ease with which attackers disappeared did not raise any eyebrows in these talk shows.

Every anchorperson was keen to outdo the other in his bid to establish RAW as the real culprit. They were greatly helped in this attempt by a select group of hawks. This freemasonry of hawks consists of either retired military generals, former ISI boss Hameed Gul being most familiar/notorious. The beards were also in full display with Jamaat Islami chief Qazi Hussain Ahmed leading the attack. Imran Khan was also part of this bandwagon, and as the Punjabi saying goes, he is clean shaven but has a beard in his stomach.

After the Lahore attacks, Hameed Gul added to his television appearances with an article for a right wing rag, Daily Khabrain. He wrote, "India wants to declare Pakistan a terrorist state". The attack on the Sri Lankan team, he declared,"is related to that conspiracy." The real target, according to the former ISI chief is Pakistan's nuclear assets.

His ideological disciple, Imran Khan has become a self-appointed defence counsel for Taliban. Every butchery inflicted upon Pakistan by Taliban is justified by Imran Khan as a just reaction to the 'war on terror'. Imran Khan shortly after the Mumbai attacks had told an Indian newspaper: "There is no problem about the security of cricketers in Pakistan. The terrorists will never target cricketers knowing that they will then lose the battle of hearts and minds of the people (as if they have been

otherwise winning this battle or care about hearts and minds of people)."

When his comments were sought by Hamid Mir, hosting 'Capital Talk' on Geo on March 3, after the Lahore terror attack Imran Khan forgot all that he had said before and went into his usual diatribe blaming the war on terror, the Lal Mosque operation and US occupation of Afghanistan. Mir also sought comments from Lt Gen.(retd) Hamid Nawaz. The general informed the audience that India was dissuading Sri Lankans from touring Pakistan.

Hamid Mir is well known in Pakistan for his conspiracy theories, and while he did not disappoint this time, he did face stiff competition from Talat Hussain of Aaj TV.

In his 'Live with Talat' on March 3, anchorperson Talat Hussain was hosting interior minister Tasneem Qureshi among others. Talat Hussain began by declaring "a plan is being hatched against Pakistan" and announced the handlers of Lahore episode were sitting abroad. But when the interior minister refused to name India "until an evidence emerge", Talat began bullying him. "Why are you taking a soft position", he mocked the minister. "Hindustan se barra dushman koi ho sakta hey" (Can there be an enemy bigger than India), he remarked. Talat also aired the statement by Pranab Mukherjee on Lahore attacks with his own interpretation that went, "India blamed us for Mumbai. Now when we are attacked, again India blames us. India does not want cooperation. She wants coercion."

Ironically, the same anchorpersons---ridiculed as Media Mujahideen for their pro-Taliban rhetoric---had declared a virtual war on Indian media in the wake of Mumbai attacks for its "knee-jerk" finger pointing at Pakistan.

A question these media mujahideen repeatedly posed was: "Do you think the India media should have pointed a finger at Pakistan within such a short time, and without any evidence? Why do we see this knee-jerk response every time some terrorist incident takes place in India?"

On Dawn News - anchors Hamid Mir, Talat Hussain and Nasim Zehra - dissected the coverage in an hour-long programme soon after Mumbai attacks.

"[The] Indian media is overcommitted to projecting India as a success story. They are not used to reporting state failures. They are used to reporting India as a country where nothing bad happens, its Army as the best thing in the world. It projects its heroes as supermen, taller than the Himlayas...So the gap between what the Indian media are committed to reporting, and the crass state failure they had to do report [in Mumbai], they ended up filling it with lies," Talat Hussain told Dawn News.

On the same programme, Hamid Mir asked why the Indian media were not asking hard questions of the Indian government. "When Pakistani forces say they have killed five Al-Qaeda, when they say Rashid Rauf has been killed in a drone attack, Pakistani media are asking them questions — show us the bodies. But Indian media are not asking important questions".

He went on: "There are 500 nautical miles between Karachi and Gujarat, and the Indian media are saying the terrorists came in boats from Karachi. Why are they not questioning the failure of their intelligence agencies?"

The print media is not far behind, giving full space to the pen jihadis. A Hameed Gul of the op-ed world Shirin Mazari wrote, "Like the attacks on the Chinese working here, who has the most to gain by targeting the Sri Lankans? Certainly no Pakistani. But India and our other enemies certainly will make political gains. Interestingly, the incident has come soon after the Naval Chief's statement casting doubts on the Rehman Malik investigation dossier on Mumbai, which upset the Indians. So is

this attack a mere coincidence in terms of timing?"The question that must be examined honestly is whether this is a natural follow-on from the terrorism linked to FATA and Swat, or is it a continuation of Mumbai or is it something new that is conveniently being linked to the former two? It is too early to give a definitive answer but it does not seem to have any linkage or bearing to FATA or Swat – otherwise why was the first match not targeted? In connection with Mumbai, the only connection is the role of RAW given the timing of the attack and the setback to Pakistan's image recovery after Mumbai''.

Liberals, trade unionists, peace-activists, leftists do not get space in talk shows or the op-ed pages of newspapers. This uninformed attack is stifling as it prevents Pakistan from understanding and tackling its problems from within. Fortunately, internet has offered some relief to those who do not share the sentiments of either the hawks or the terrorists. Here, on email lists and blogs, the media mujahideen are grilled. Their lies are exposed, their reasoning challenged, their credibility questioned, their professionalism mocked and their real faces exposed.

P.S.

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