

RAJLAKSHMI SAIKIA BHIMWAL GETS AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH **PIOTR BALCEROWICZ**, THE LAST MAN TO INTERVIEW THE FAMED LION OF PANJSHIR



A MATTER OF 'HAVES' AND 'HAVE-NOTS'

The affinity to India happened to Prof. Piotr Balcerowicz as a teenager when he started enjoying Indian classical music and later, Indian philosophy and vegetarianism. The last man to interview Ahmad Shah Massoud, the famed 'Lion of Panjshir' before he was assassinated on September 2, 2001, Prof. Balcerowicz shares with us the math behind insurgency and mayhem. His interest in 'unrest' arose when, as a student at Banaras Hindu University (1987-1988), he met many Afghan refugees who had fled from the Soviet invasion. This led him to meet Ahmad Shah Massoud on two occasions, including a personal

invitation with hospitality by the man himself. He recalls the long and complicated trip through land and air which took him to Massoud's abode. Prof. Balcerowicz reasons that the simple answer to what makes the third world so explosive is "poverty", while the more complex answer is of "several elements triggered by poverty". It is the existence of cognitive dissonance, that is, dissonance between one's expectations vis-à-vis wealth, that causes explosions within humanity. He adds, "As people have learnt that it is possible to have higher standards of living, their expectations have changed. Also, the rich and the influential suddenly feel

threatened as the poor realise that they deserve a better life. This situation can trigger conflict, which is what the world is witnessing today." In his view, poverty, accompanied by cognitive dissonance (which, in turn, is fuelled by religion or political ideologies) creates 'conflict'. Religion has been the politicians' tool for mobilising groups of people for their own goals. Even the more peace-loving philosophies like Buddhism and Jainism have historical occurrences of conflict in the name of religion and faith, he points out. Be it monasteries fighting over different schools of thoughts in Tibet or Jain kings waging war in the name of religion; they

are not very different from the Islamic fundamentalists who are using the same weapon to create destruction. Prof. Balcerowicz's logic says that Kashmir is a problem of conflict in modern India, adding, "It is wrong to blame just Pakistan and ISI for all the problems. They are not the causes, but the additional factors. Indian politicians have committed too many mistakes that have led to the aggravation of the Kashmir problem; and military solutions are never solutions." So do we see India and Pakistan becoming friendly neighbours in the future? Perhaps in theory alone! Such a friendship might take away the political leverage that politicians on both sides enjoy. Prof. Balcerowicz recalls the Partition which was no more than Jinnah's plan of ensuring his command. The split of Pakistan in 1971, which led to the emergence of Bangladesh, was a clear sign that there never was a Pakistani identity. Rather, the identity was constructed on Muslim heritage. The excuses

of conflict and external threats continue to be used by Pakistani politicians, for the fact that they need to have an enemy just to keep the so-called nation consolidated. The India-Pakistan friendship is not in the interest of most Pakistani and Indian politicians, reveals Prof. Balcerowicz. While the root of conflict lies in poverty, religion and ethnicity are the tools being used by politicians to create continuous destruction and unrest even in this case. Unlike Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Prof. Balcerowicz does not believe unrest as an indication of a real clash of civilisation. He finds the book rather destructive and lacking adequate evidence or understanding of cultures. He observes, "Huntington stated that conservatives like George W. Bush will clash with equally conservative groups in the Islamic world, and both sides will compete for power. But that does not mean that an average Westerner will clash with an average Muslim."

