

Headlines:

- **Switzerland Shocked by Muslim Teens who Refused to Shake Hands with Female Teachers**
- **Panama Papers: Treasure Trove of Rich and Powerful Concealing Wealth**
- **Pakistan Again Suspends Pointless Talks with India, says No to NIA**

Details:

Switzerland Shocked by Muslim Teens who Refused to Shake Hands with Female Teachers

It is widespread practice for schoolchildren in Switzerland to shake the hands of their teacher at the beginning and end of each day. Now, one school's decision to exempt two children from this tradition -- because the children are Muslim and their teacher is a woman -- has caused a storm of controversy across the European state. The two pupils at the school in the town of Therwil, near Basel, had requested an exemption from shaking a female teacher's hand, citing their belief that it would go against Islamic teachings. The local school district later came up with what they felt was an acceptable compromise that could avoid discrimination: The pupils, who are aged 14 and 15, would not be required to shake any teacher's hands, whether they were male or female. However, the plan hit a hitch when the Schweiz am Sonntag reported on it, sparking a public debate about the compromise. "We cannot accept this in the name of religious freedom," Swiss Justice Minister Simonetta Sommaruga said in an interview with Swiss-German broadcaster SRF. "The handshake is part of our culture." Others agreed. "Today's it's the handshake and what will it be tomorrow?" Felix Mueri, a member of the anti-immigration Swiss People's Party and head of the Swiss parliament's Education Commission, said in an interview with the 20 Minuten news site. Both the Swiss Teacher's Union and the local Therwil council have also come out against the plan. However, the school itself has defended the decision, despite the controversy. "They are no longer allowed to shake the hand of any teacher, male or female," headmaster Jurg Lauener told SRF, "For us, that addresses the question of discrimination." Authorities in the local Basel-Country canton could overturn the decision, but have not done so, with canton education chief Monica Gschwind suggesting to reporters that it was a temporary and "pragmatic" measure. The situation is the latest controversy over the integration of Islam into Swiss society, where Muslims are thought to make up around 5 percent of the population. In 2009, Swiss voters banned the construction of minarets and last year the canton of Ticino passed a law that made the wearing of a burqa in public punishable by a \$10,000 fine. [Source: The Independent]

Why are the Swiss shocked? According to freedom of religion, or pluralism people should be allowed to practice their faith, without intervention from the authorities. What is more shocking is that the Swiss authorities did not use their ideology to judge on the matter, but their prejudice towards Islam.

Panama Papers: Treasure Trove of Rich and Powerful Concealing Wealth

The Panama Papers are an unprecedented leak of 11.5m files from the database of the world's fourth biggest offshore law firm, Mossack Fonseca. The records were obtained from an anonymous source by the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung, which shared them with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). The ICIJ then shared them with a large network of international partners, including the Guardian and the BBC. The documents show the myriad ways in which the rich can exploit secretive offshore tax regimes. Twelve national leaders are among 143 politicians, their families and close associates from around the

world known to have been using offshore tax havens. For example, a \$2bn trail leads all the way to Vladimir Putin. The Russian president's best friend – a cellist called Sergei Roldugin – is at the centre of a scheme in which money from Russian state banks is hidden offshore. Some of it ends up in a ski resort where in 2013 Putin's daughter Katerina got married. Among national leaders with offshore wealth are Nawaz Sharif, Pakistan's prime minister; Ayad Allawi, ex-interim prime minister and former vice-president of Iraq; Petro Poroshenko, president of Ukraine; Alaa Mubarak, son of Egypt's former president; and the prime minister of Iceland, Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson. An offshore investment fund run by the father of British Prime Minister David Cameron avoided ever having to pay tax in Britain by hiring a small army of Bahamas residents to sign its paperwork. The fund has been registered with HM Revenue and Customs since its inception and has filed detailed tax returns every year. The firm is Panamanian but runs a worldwide operation. Its website boasts of a global network with 600 people working in 42 countries. It has franchises around the world, where separately owned affiliates sign up new customers and have exclusive rights to use its brand. Mossack Fonseca operates in tax havens including Switzerland, Cyprus and the British Virgin Islands, and in the British crown dependencies Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man. [Source: The Guardian]

Leaking of information that hurts the super-rich or Western interests is a routine occurrence. Panama Papers leaks follow Snowden files, and wiki leaks. What the leaks show in general is how a small cabal of people decide the fate of billions of people through secret channels and corruption. The leaks are a protest against the injustices of Western liberal democracy and capitalism, and an eye opener for those contemplating rebellion against the existing political order.

Pakistan Again Suspends Pointless Talks with India, says No to NIA

Pakistan on Thursday said the dialogue process with India had been suspended and there was no question of allowing an NIA team to visit Islamabad to probe the Pathankot terror attack. Pakistan High Commissioner Abdul Basit also said that the arrest of an alleged Indian spy, Kulbushan Jadhav, proved Islamabad's allegations that New Delhi was causing unrest in Balochistan. Asked at the Foreign Correspondents Club about a meeting between the foreign secretaries of the two countries, Basit said: "There is no meeting scheduled for now. I think at present the peace process is suspended. "India is not ready as yet," Basit said, but quickly added that "we can only resolve issues through dialogue". This is the first official word from Pakistan about the latest breakdown in the now-on-now-off peace process with India. After a team of Pakistani officials visited Pathankot to probe Indian charges that Pakistani terrorists were to blame for the January 2 attack, New Delhi had expected Islamabad to allow a National Investigation Agency (NIA) team to visit that country to take the investigation forward. Basit ruled out the possibility. "The investigation (into the Pathankot attack) is not about reciprocity," he said. Earlier, reading out a prepared statement, Basit referred to the arrest of alleged Indian spy Jadhav in Balochistan last month and said that it "irrefutably corroborates what Pakistan has been saying all along". We are aware of all those who seek to create unrest in Pakistan and destabilise the country. They are bound to fail." He said Pakistan had arrested scores of terror operatives with "foreign linkages" over the past month. "The presence of such elements is quite disturbing, to say the least." He also spoke on Jammu and Kashmir, saying it was "the root cause of mutual distrust and other bilateral issues". "And attempts to put it on backburner will be counter-productive," he added. "The resolution of (the) Jammu and Kashmir (dispute) should be fair and just." [Source: Khaleej Times]

Despite India's support for the insurgency in Baluchistan and its close cooperation with the Afghan intelligence, Islamabad insists on convening a pointless dialogue process that has been going for decades. The Kashmir dialogue process is neither a Pakistani nor an Indian initiative. America is the chief orchestrator of the dialogue process, which aims to de-hyphenate Kashmir and resume normal ties between the two countries, so that the sub-continent can act as a counterweight to China.