

'Amartya Sen, Zakaria among world's top 20 intellectuals'

Two Indians now settled in the US - Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen and acclaimed journalist Fareed Zakaria - are among the top 20 intellectuals in the world today, according to a poll conducted by a US magazine.

Sen and Zakaria, Newsweek International's editor, are at No. 16 and No. 17 respectively in the list published by Foreign Policy magazine in its July/August issue.

The top 20 names were picked by about 500,000 online votes cast by the magazine's readers from among an initial list of the world's top 100 public intellectuals published by the bimonthly in its last issue.

Fethullah Gullen, an Islamic scholar from Turkey with a global network of millions of followers, is at No.1 on the list and Nobel Prize-winning microfinancier Muhammad Yunus from Bangladesh is at No 2.

Aitzaz Ahsan, president of Pakistan's Supreme Court Bar Association and a vocal opponent of President Pervez Musharraf's rule, is at No 5., while Mahmood Mamdani, a cultural anthropologist born in Uganda to South Asian parents and familiar to Indians as filmmaker Mira Nair's husband, is also on the list at No 9.

Other well-known names are former US vice president Al Gore (No 12), Noam Chomsky (11), and chess grandmaster and Russian democracy activist Garry Kasparov (18).

Amartya Sen, the magazine says, witnessed the devastating 1943 Bengal famine as a young boy.

'Decades later, Sen's investigations of the political and economic underpinnings of famines established him as the premier welfare economist of the 20th century. In addition to his famous assertion that famines do not occur in democracies, Sen was one of the first economists to empirically examine gender disparities in Asia,' the citation reads.

The citation for Zakaria on the magazine's website reads: 'Zakaria is one of the most influential and respected commentators on international affairs. His article 'Why Do They Hate Us?' a Newsweek cover story in the weeks after the Sep 11 attacks, upended the conventional explanations of the day for a nuanced discussion of the economic, political, and social forces pulling Islamic societies apart.'

The magazine had selected the initial 100 because of the influence of their ideas.

'But part of being a 'public intellectual' is also having a talent for communicating with a wide and diverse public. This skill is certainly an asset for some who find themselves in the list's top ranks. For example, a number of intellectuals - including Aitzaz Ahsan, Noam Chomsky, Michael Ignatieff, and Amr Khaled - mounted voting drives by promoting the list on their websites,' the magazine said.

(© IANS / India eNews)