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Most of the past week, I spent in Quetta and at Karachi. The Pakistan Organization of Collaborative Research (POCR) had invited me at the inaugural session of their 7th International Symposium to be addressed by Federal Minister and Chairman of the Higher Education Commission Prof Dr Atta ur Rehman. Before leaving for Karachi via Quetta, where Balochistan was becoming centre of Media attention for many reasons, I spent two busy days at Lahore with the Minister for State and Chairman National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) Dr Naseem

Education
26.1.05
Dr Naseem

Education under stress

Ashraf. Whereas, Dr Atta ur Rehman concentrates on the promotion of Higher Education and is devoted to taking various steps for the development of IT and other facilities as well as fostering the PhD programme, for which large amount of funds have been placed at his disposal.

The NCHD was formed under the directive of President General Pervez Musharraf in 2002 with the mission of promoting human development. It would support government departments, non-governmental organizations at the district level, primary education, literacy, income generating activities and provision of basic health facilities. It would coordinate human development efforts, both public and private, with a presence in each district. This is an initiative of a new kind in Pakistan.

At such a moment, when the much neglected education sector, both at the grassroot level as well as in university echelons was upper most in my mind, President Musharraf arrived in Lahore and addressed a representative gathering of the citizens on Saturday last regarding the major issues facing the nation. He took pride in successfully handling four major

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challenges that faced Pakistan during the past three years. These have been widely covered and commented upon in the press. Briefly these can be listed: (1) the economic challenge (2) drought (3) the aftermath of 9/11 (4) long and unusual standoff with India.

The President naturally did not talk about the social sector in particular with reference to education and health challenges but he did dilate upon the macro-indicators proving that the economy was moving in a healthy direction and was getting out of woods, the growing poverty and unemployment notwithstanding. I was surprised that in the distin-

cient financial support to the key sectors was brought to the notice of the President. I have some idea of the plight of the education sector during the past many decades in Punjab. During the past three years, Governor Khalid Maqbool has worked hard to give a new direction to the Education sector both at the primary and secondary school level as well as the domain of Higher Education.

The ghost school are now behind us. However, during my brief stay at Quetta, I found that Balochistan was still not out of the woods. Maybe this province, long neglected politically, economically as well as in the sectors of Education and Health, may now witness a new dawn in view of a Balochi Prime Minister as well as the federal education Minister also hailing from Balochistan. However, much depends upon the political stability and a satisfactory law and order situation, which have unfortunately been missing due to the tribal nature and other factors, which continue to hinder the progress and development in Balochistan.

The present alarming environment of mutual tribal feuds and other acts of sabotage causing damage to the major pipelines of Sui Gas are pointers to the dangers that lie ahead. E-mail queries and comments to: ikramullah@nation.com.pk

guished representatives' gathering at the Governor's House, the fourth Estate namely the press was not represented except two Urdu editors. The decision about such exclusion of the media from such an important occasion could not be made without the knowledge of the President or certainly without the approval of the Press Secretary of the President Major General Rashid Qureshi.

The President in his opening remarks described the province of Punjab as the heart of Pakistan and called Lahore as the heart of Punjab. How could he ignore the fact that press of Lahore was the hearthrob of the nation? Anyway my greater surprise was that at the end of the address, whereas many amongst the audience asked a number of questions from the President, the two editors present, who are normally very vocal did not ask a single question nor offer any comment/observation.

Questions on health and education were raised, deploring the inadequate allocation to these sectors upon which the President asked the Chief Minister Punjab for necessary reply. I was glad that the inadequacy of necessary attention and insuffi-