

At penpoint

# The ultimate challenge

BY M.A. NIAZI

**A**sif Zardari's return to tomorrow is of a certain level of national significance. So is the first good news from Balochistan for months, in the shape of the opening of the Sui-Dera Bugti road. On a wider scale, the plight of the Muslims around the world gets worse, as all the freedom struggles run in difficulties. Muslims remain labelled as terrorists, nuclear proliferators and worse. Even President Pervez Musharraf's promised restructuring of the OIC seems a rather distant prospect. And that's the good news.



I call it the good news because that is what it seems when we look at the bad news, which is contained in a 2004 Comstech publication, 'Climate Change: Global and OIC Perspective' by Dr Muhammad Jameel. It points out the kind of effects that can result from the current levels of greenhouse gas emissions over the next century or so, and points out that the pattern of global climate change (essentially the warming up of the earth's atmosphere) will have its greatest impact on the countries where Muslims live. It is not an exclusively Muslim problem; there are a large number of non-Muslim states which will suffer adverse effects, but it certainly impacts Muslims enough for it to be possible to think of it as yet another a Muslim problem.

According to a Hadith: "The Muslims are one ummah, their war is one, their land is one." This has normally been interpreted in a purely political sense, that Muslims are politically one entity, and thus they should consider each other's conflicts (with non-Muslims) as common, and there should be only one political entity for all Muslims. The Comstech study leads to a disturbingly different interpretation: that the Muslims are a people who share a single situation, that their struggle is common and that their lands are in the same dire strait. This is a personal interpretation of our particular situation, which does not in any way invalidate the more usual interpretation.

Dr Jameel's study collates a lot of information not usually given much consideration in our policymaking circles. The effect of burning fuel has been that the 1990s were the warmest decade in the world since reliable data has been kept, that is, since 1860, and 1998 the warmest year. Using indirect evidence, it has also been concluded that the 1990s was actually the warmest decade in the last 1000

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will vanish, and Dhaka will become a port. The fate of Karachi and Gwadar is likely to be similar.

To quote Dr Jameel: "Less Developed Countries, on the other hand, could be hit much harder by variations in climate. First, poor countries are forced to live 'closer to the edge,' and have less capacity to adapt to changes. Flooding, for instance, may cause temporary disruption in communications or power supply in North America, while in some OIC countries it usually wipes out entire localities, badly affects food supplies, causes widespread disease and long-term economic dislocation. Secondly, the majority of people in developing countries live in communities which depend much more directly on a specific climate. Their agricultural practices, their housing and many other aspects of there are adapted to local climatic conditions...."

"Climate change is not a fantasy. It is a real and live issue which impinges directly or indirectly on the well-being, even survival, of billions of people, particularly in the OIC and other LDCs which have substantial overlap with the hot, arid and semi-arid regions of the world."

Consider what lies ahead: globally averaged surface temperature will increase from 1990 by 0.4°C-1.1°C by 2025, by 0.8-2.6°C by 2050, and by 1.4-5.8°C by 2100. And the story won't end there; with equilibrium in the future, it will probably get worse after 2100.

Changes in rainfall patterns would mean 10 percent reduction in water supply for billions (including the OIC countries) by 2050.

In tropical and sub-tropical regions, there will be more recurrent extreme events like cyclones, tornadoes, storms, droughts, etc; crops yields will decrease, deserts will spread and water supply fall increasingly short of demand.

Dr Jameel suggests two strategies: adaptation

nate the world's fossil fuel scene, there is a vested interest among some of them to encourage the kind of consumption which has seen world oil prices reach record heights, driven by demand from the developed world, as well as 'emerging economies' most notably China. However, other Muslim countries, which import fuel, have an opposed interest. To expect the OIC to formulate a unified approach on this problem is perhaps overly optimistic.

The political will to solve the problem from the perspective of 1.3 billion citizens of the OIC members cannot come without a single government, because it would involve a number of radical measures. First, it would require the launch of a concerted renewable energy research problem. The goal would be to convert the direct power use to renewable sources (hydel, wind, solar), while developing renewable energy sources which would be able to transform the world's transport economy. Transport of all kinds burns fossil fuels. The 'clean' alternative is an electrolytic conversion of water into hydrogen and oxygen gases, and the use of the hydrogen as fuel, which would give as the end product water. The electrolysis requires vast energy supplies, which can only come from some such renewable source as wind, or from nuclear power, which is not renewable as such, but which can generate power for tens of thousands of years. Interestingly, if the OIC members were taken as a whole, it contains 77 percent of the world's proven oil reserves, about 60 percent of gas reserves, and about 40 percent of economically viable uranium ore.

Political unity has been spoken of by Muslims first as desirable, more recently as a political necessity, but now it seems that it will be a survival necessity. No single Muslim state can take measures on its own which will have an effect on global climate change. But one large state (not much bigger than India, and only slightly bigger than China) would be able to play an important role.

Will the oil be wasted? Certainly not. Oil and gas are finite resources, but instead of centuries, if the world could be weaned off its need for them for energy, they would still be used as stock for plastics, and other synthetic products. However, they would then suffice for thousands of years.

Efforts to explore alternative energy sources have been resisted by large multinational interests. For a start, it would transform the huge petroleum industry as well as the entire automotive sector. Ironically, they are both heavily involved in research in these areas. However, a large enough state with firm enough commitment, plus control over the bulk of the world's fossil fuels, could push successfully in

*Islam  
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What effects have already been observed, as the mean global temperature increased by  $0.6^{\circ}\text{C}$ ? More floods, more droughts, more cyclones, wilder swings in weather, rising sea-levels, all with their attendant costs.

The brunt of the change is going to fall on countries closer to the equator, which is where Muslim countries overwhelmingly lie. Within 50 years, Egypt's Alexandria will be among the many ports to disappear beneath the sea. Within a century, Chittagong

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will vanish, and Dhaka will become a port. The fate of Karachi and Gwadar is likely to be similar.

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Dr Jameel suggests two strategies: adaptation, which would mean paying greater attention to conserving water supplies, and modifying agricultural practices, as well as planning for extreme weather events; and secondly mitigation, which would involve strategies for achieving greater energy efficiency, developing cleaner energy sources and possibly sequestration techniques.

Sequestration techniques, like sending greenhouse gases into old oil wells are theoretically possible, but the technology has not been evolved. Greater energy efficiency still involves burning the fossil fuels which are at the root of the problem. Cleaner energy sources is the most promising direction, especially for the Muslim countries.

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on this problem is perhaps overly optimistic.

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How to go about this task? It is extremely difficult, nay impossible. Muslims are divided by nationality and sect and all sorts of things, after all. OK, let's forget it. Instead, let's be baked and flooded and starved and eke out our miserable lives, happy in our national identities, proudly looking up to our leaders (picked for us by the sole superpower) as they promise us more aid, more subservience.

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