

Poverty of our affluence

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We talk a lot about poverty, with this regret that it has grown in recent years. Largely, we refer to it in statistical terms. A workshop on poverty assessment in Pakistan was held in Islamabad on Wednesday and reports said that the government and the World Bank differed on poverty's incidence and causes. In a larger context, the focus rests on our social indicators that are the most depressed in South Asia. The World Bank report maintains that Pakistan's fiscal policies do not reflect the imperative of improving these indicators.

At the same time, the official spokesmen would want to cheer us up with an improvement in the 'fundamentals' of our economy, again in statistical terms. Our foreign exchange reserves have soared. The Karachi Stock Exchange is surging ahead. And if appearances have any value, look at the lives that are lived at the high peaks of our society. This is particularly the time to enjoy the glamour and glitter of marriages in well off families.

But it is the poverty of this affluence that we do not seem to recognize or understand. What does it mean when some people live in such fraudulent opulence in an overwhelmingly illiterate and injudicious society? Yes, you may call them pragmatic because they can get away with it the time being. Perhaps one should have no grudge against the rich and powerful because ostensibly they have 'earned' what they have. By the

same logic, the poor have only themselves to blame if they cannot make it in a fundamentally sound economy.

Yet the purpose here is not to resort to any sentimental squabble over social justice or the rights of the deprived masses. The spotlight is on the poverty of the people who are privileged and prosperous. In that sense, we need to look at the non-material poverty of the Pakistani society. To some extent, this poverty should also be reflected in our social indicators — if these indicators were to include, for instance, the per capita consumption of newsprint and the citizens' access to libraries, playing fields, theatres, concert halls and art galleries.

At one level, our intellectual deprivation is astounding and one wonders if the likes of Shaukat Aziz have any awareness of this. This is something not to be stated in strictly quantitative terms, though some statistical measures are still available. I have for long agonized over the poor circulation of our newspapers and the frightening dearth of good bookshops and libraries. A revealing exercise would be to count the number of jewellers in Karachi's main bazaars and figure out the increase in their number over the years. Ah, these shops may also be put along foreign exchange reserves and the stock exchange as an emblem of the success of our bejewelled economic management.

Ideally, the more privileged and educated class in a society like ours would be more conscious of its responsibility to work for social and economic development. They should do so in their own vested interest because

poverty and deprivation can lead to widespread disorder. Already, violent crime is present in measures that are not to be calculated with the FIRs registered. But the rich seem to be learning to live with such irritants. In any case, a substantial part of their lives and interests is located abroad.

One dimension of our intellectual poverty, of course, is politics. Or power. Unfortunately, we have just witnessed an unrepentant display of foul play in this arena. Now, the entire blame for this should not be put on the richly decorated shoulders of President Pervez Musharraf. In fact, we have in this sorry state of affairs a damning indictment of the elite that hangs around the ruling establishment. Why are so many of them willing to be a part of an unholy alliance? Why is it possible to cajole or coerce so many legislators into changing their sides?

Ultimately, it is not the political class only that lacks any moral or intellectual values. More damage is done by a growing number of collaborators from the ranks of the intelligentsia. There are surely a good number of people who refuse to become a part of the corrupt establishment and they ought to be applauded. Still, it is scary to think of the battalions that are forever ready to march in the service of the establishment. What makes it truly pathetic is that they know, and often confess in private, that they have indulged in moral and intellectual corruption.

Take the recent example of the referendum. Its evil was not restricted to the irregularities that were committed

on the day of the polling. The manner in which the campaign was conceived and launched was manifestly crooked. At that time, the Musharraf administration was blessed with a number of professionals from the intellectual elite who had had some credibility and respect. Some of them belonged to the NGO sector. And this involvement was a reflection of the initial hope that Gen Musharraf had inspired. It should be noted that not one of them stood up against the referendum fraud or resigned in protest.

What does poverty do to an individual or a group? If almost 40 per cent of our population lives in abject poverty, below the line that is held at one dollar a day, the consequences are bound to be dreadful. Consider the misery that this would cause in human terms. In the same manner, there should be some consequences of the moral and intellectual deprivations of the upper classes. Just as we look at the causes and debate the remedies of poverty in economic terms, we should also be mindful of the reasons that have effectively de-intellectualised our society.

An encounter with the young people of the privileged class can be very educative. They are, no doubt, very motivated in a worldly sense, as children of an acquisitive society should be. They are smart and intelligent. But they have very little interest in the political and social affairs of the country. An informal survey in some classrooms of high-priced institutions has revealed that a large majority of them does not read newspapers and is not

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The News

12.1.03

aware of what is happening in their communities, their country or the world at large. They are simply not aware of the responsibility of the privileged and the educated in our society to lead the campaign for a meaningful social change.

Thus, the initiative has been passed on to the fanatic brigade. Take the instance of armed men raiding the premises of a cable network in Peshawar and completely destroying equipment worth millions of rupees. This is how the nation is to be protected from obscenity and vulgarity. In fact, they want to protect us from the modern world of new ideas and knowledge and they are succeeding — with the connivance of our privileged classes that are content with indulging in their freedoms within the confines of their private lives.

I had referred, at the outset, to the workshop on poverty assessment. This workshop was naturally held in Islamabad. We also need to make an assessment of our moral and intellectual impoverishment. And Islamabad would serve as an ideal point of reference in any discussion on this subject. Take a good look at Islamabad and at the state of our degradation and deprivation in all sectors. Take a good look at the president's and the prime minister's houses and wonder where the rulers of a poor and socially backward country found the wisdom to build these citadels. And if these thoughts make you miserable, revel in the glory of being a nuclear power.

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Why are we poor?

India plus Pakistan is 20 percent of humanity. India plus Pakistan is a mere 5 percent of world income. India plus Pakistan have 45 percent of world's illiterates. India plus Pakistan have 50 percent of all malnourished children. India just by itself has the world's largest number of poor people in a single country. In absolute terms, at least 50 million Pakistanis and 350 million Indians live in extreme poverty (must earn during the day to eat dinner).

Some 60 years ago, Mahatma Gandhi, the *Bapu* of all Indians, had said, "Poverty is but the worst form of violence." Look at present-day Bombay. The city has ten million people and is the financial capital of India. Four million of the ten million live in rough-and-tumble fabrications of bamboo, plastic, wood and tin. At least a million live and sleep on footpaths. For the rest of India, poverty remains a Himalayan problem. Which one of the 14 prime ministers has done anything to save Indians from the worst form of violence?

On 9 August 1947, Quaid-i-Azam, the father of our country, delivered a speech at the Karachi Club. The Quaid asserted that it is the "scared duty of the Sovereign State of Pakistan to solve the problem of poverty of the people." Which one of our 11 presidents or 19 prime ministers has paid any attention to the Quaid's pledge? Look at present-day Rojhan Jamali, the birthplace of our Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali. Out of all of PM's constituents the lifetime goal

of at least 90% is to own a Rs2,000 goat.

What really is poverty? According to the World Bank, "Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not being able to go to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom." Both India and Pakistan have all these forms of poverty. Why are we so poor?

Over the last 5 years, India has spent \$4.2 billion and Pakistan \$2.6 billion on the importation of major conventional weapons. For India that converts to \$4 on a per capita basis and \$19 for every Pakistani man, woman and child. India and Pakistan remained the poorest of all countries but India is now the 5th largest importer of major conventional weapons while Pakistan is the 12th largest.

Pakistan is poor because we have enriched China Metallurgical Equipment Corporation, Lockheed Martin (a billion dollars for F-16s, P-3 Orion, etc) and Raytheon (Stingers, sidewinders and TOW missiles). Over the past 5 years, we have deposited \$1.024 billion into Chinese coffers, \$650 million has gone to Ukraine, \$400 million to France and \$250 million each to the UK and the US.

India is poor because she has been enriching Rosoboronexport, Russia's



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arms exporting corporation. Most of India's defence kitty has gone to Russia; \$3 billion over the past 5 years alone. The Netherlands took in \$350 million and Germany another \$210 million.

We shall continue to be poor. Under the long-term Indo-Russian mil-

must also buy Scorpene 'killer submarines'. France wins both in India and in Pakistan.

More recently, Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI) signed a two billion dollar weapons contract with Hindustan Aeronautics (HAL). The contract covers \$280 million for surface-to-surface naval Barak missiles, \$300 million for pilot-less planes, \$250 million for Green Pine radar systems, Phalcon early-warning aircraft and towed howitzer for the Indian army.

The US, in the meanwhile, has established a tourist-cum-investor 'no fly

Conflict and poverty are the closest of relatives. Look at Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Somalia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Haiti, Mozambique, Mali, India or Angola. They are all in conflict-either within or with their neighbours-and they are all poor. Peace is an essential prerequisite to prosperity

itary technical cooperation programme there are some 350 new defence deals in the pipeline-including the production of Lada class diesel submarines, Gorshkov aircraft carrier, TU-22M long-range bombers, Akula-II class nuclear submarines and AWACS. Total tab: \$4 billion. Then there is the BAE Systems Hawk jet deal with the UK. These 60 Hawks have a price tag of a billion pound sterling which is the equivalent of nearly ten years of India-UK bilateral trade. India's neighbour has billion dollar Agostas so India

zone' over Pakistan while our armament wish list remains heavier than our GDP. Short range ballistic missiles, intermediate range ballistic missiles, F-16 fighters, surveillance aircraft, Harpoon missiles, long-range weapon-locating radars, rocket fuel, anti-tank missiles and combat helicopters. Additional Main Battle Tanks (MBT) are going to cost \$1.5 billion. The PAF wants a multi-billion dollar package covering Mirage 2000-5s and then there's F7-P4 aircraft from China and gunship helicopters. Spare parts from

