

I reached there about 15 minutes late. The receptionist greeted me with a grunt and a stare. Very humbly I submitted that I had an appointment with the doctor. I was asked to sit and wait in the long queue of weirdoes. When my turn came the receptionist, God knows why, was still reluctant to send me in. Perhaps apparently I looked pretty normal. I had to resort to bullying to get in. However what I saw inside really made me forget about the reasons of consulting this psychiatrist, for a while. A very beautiful lady doctor was looking at me with great patience. After a few polite remarks she inquired about the reasons of my visit. My premeditated reply when it came it did so without any hesitation although it had taken me ages to phrase it. "Look doctor, I am not suffering from any usual ailments like backaches, headaches or heartaches. The malady which is really taxing me hard is what I call the soul-ache. But since your medical science does not believe in any soul if you like I can elaborate the symptoms."

"Don't worry, I do believe in souls. And even though I have got the sense of your problem it'll help me in assisting you if you can elaborate it a bit". "Well the other aches that I have just men-



# Capital calling The soul-ache

BY FARRUKH KHAN PITAFI

tioned are limited to a certain part of the body. However this one is evenly divided among all parts, it extends from the bone marrow to the eyeball, from the tongue to the hair and the toenail. And unlike the usual pains it always stays with me. And honestly it has deprived me of my sleep." "And can you identify", asked the doctor "any reasons for this agony?" "Doctor although I am not an expert on this yet my hunch is that it is due to fear". "Fear! What kind of fear?" "Fear of losing something precious that I love madly". "And what is that beloved thing?" "Well I am sure you'll laugh at me Doc. Sounds crazy. But nevertheless let me tell you. I love this country truly madly." "No it's not crazy. Sounds perfectly normal. But tell me why do you fear losing it. You see, thankless as we might be, we are living in this country without any imminent threat."

Having observed that the doctor must be more or less of my age and hence there was no need to hesitate I just told her why I feared so. "You know doctor I am

worried because of the generation that preceded us. Look, it was this generation that fought two and a half wars with India over Kashmir, waged 'Jihad' against the USSR and God knows tried to indoctrinate us with how many narrow minded philosophies. And I did not frame the Kashmir policy. Those who did are criticising Musharraf today for having proposed a Kashmir solution more ambitious than accepting the status quo over LoC. Those uncles who used to tell me the tales of the valor of Mujahideen in Afghan war are now calling them terrorists. Those who used to blame Indian Punjabis including the Sikhs for raping and murdering Muslim women and pillaging the Muslim properties at the time of the Independence are now not only calling them brothers but also taking keen interest in conceptual non starters like the Greater Punjab. It seems that the Indians and their western overlords have figured it out how to end this country. Win Punjabis to your side through your cultural prowess and lure

*Society and Social  
9-12-09  
The New OP*

## Social problems

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the army into a money making spree in the real estate. Then blow by blow demolish the remaining façade of this country." "Go on I am listening to you carefully", she said narrowing her eyes.

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"I often feel I am paranoid. But you know ask those Afghans and Iraqis what really is the true worth of freedom. Do you know doctor I am ethnically a Baloch and someone who can claim not to have gotten the best deal. But I also get angry when some Baloch Sardar talks against Pakistan. Honestly when I decided to settle in Islamabad seven years ago I was only a patriotic Pakistani and a good Muslim. But the capital changed my identity to a Seraiki Baloch and my religion from Islam to Ahl-e-Hadith. I have seldom seen more thankless people living in a single country. Please tell me am I getting mad doctor. If so please advise some antidote." The doctor smiled and said, "Far from it. I think you are perfectly normal. Yes, I'll advise you to go out of this country for a brief change." And she took out a stack of her visiting cards from a drawer. "Take these cards of mine. Next time when you meet someone who makes you feel that you are not normal please give him/her my card for it is that person who deserves my treatment and not you". After that catharsis I must confess I left with at least with some relief from the soul-ache.

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# Curse of child labour

A survey conducted by the Federal Bureau of Statistics, the ILO and the Federal Labour Ministry have revealed some disturbing facts on child labour. Of the 3.3 million working children, 73 percent are boys and 27 percent are girls. It is surprising how the Education Ministry can go about trumpeting their achievements when more than 23 million children are not attending school and are potential child labourers. Eight times more children in the rural areas contribute to the total child labour percentage than in urban areas. Where a major chunk of the allocated budget is going to quality education in cities, children in rural areas are stuck with their doomed fates.

The maximum fine under the Employment of Children Act 1991 is a paltry Rs 20,000 and the fine is routinely reduced, reportedly sometimes to as low as Rs 50, as no minimum has been set. In the 12 years since the enactment of the law, not a single employer has been imprisoned for employing children. This amounts to connivance at gross violation of human rights when these children are abused and exploited. A good proportion of the children work 56 hours or more. The majority of illnesses or injuries suffered by working children are in agriculture, followed by mining, construction, manufacturing and transport.

The government's commitment to eliminating child labour could be best demonstrated by effective enforcement of existing legislation in order to remove children as a priority from bonded labour and the worst forms of other labour, and by making facilities and resources available to provide free quality education to all children. A comprehensive and integrated approach must be adopted which involves the family, community and employers. The government and the private sector have had to respond to tremendous international pressure exerted on Pakistan for its child labour practices by international human rights groups and trade unions. The threat of an export boycott on goods that involve children in their manufacture or production processes has existed for some time. As long as children are put to work, poverty will spread and the living standards will continue to decline. In no country has poverty ever been eradicated by child labour, nor has any family been able to rid itself of destitution through it.

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