

What is to be done?

Militancy

By Dr Tariq Rahman

SO what is to be done about the continuing bombings, kidnappings, beheadings and floggings which have us horrified and caused us to be glued to our TV screens day in and day out?

What, if anything, can be done to reverse the Talibanisation of Pakistan? The number of demonstrations held in Pakistani cities in the wake of the sickening spectacle of a teenage girl being whipped in Swat gives me hope. The sight was revolting and nauseating, but it showed the way. The steps which can be suggested are as follows.

First, such films should be shown to ordinary viewers as well as to anchorpersons, party spokespersons, talk-show guests, academics, bureaucrats and military personnel who do not understand — or pretend they don't — what life will be like under the Taliban. This is not the only video or report about the atrocities perpetrated by the militants. All such evidence, unless it is so revolting that it will cause deep anxiety and depression among the viewers, should be brought to light. But even without showing graphic details gruesome occurrences can be made known to society.

Second, the voices of the internally displaced people should be made public. They generally blame both the Taliban and the army. They are worth listening to because they confirm that life under the militants is not worth living. Moreover, their stories confirm and add to the available information.

Third, information regarding all the schools destroyed and pupils and teachers who have suffered must be made known to the public. Just a fact mentioned somewhere in print does not entrench itself in the mind. But if someone actually makes the effort to present the sorry tale of girls' education in militancy-infested areas in images, words and people's life stories it will make a difference — just as the flogging of the girl did.

Fourth, the gravity of every suicide attack and bombing

These six steps should make Pakistanis understand the choice that is being made for them when they do not oppose the Taliban. They should also know that all scientific growth and technological and industrial development will come to a full stop if we strangulate the freedom of thought. Pakistan is still a talkative society. People discuss everything under the sun without fear. After years of military rule this is remarkable and very promising. But if we allow the militants to take over we will create a silent, frightened, cowardly society which will be impossible to live in.

Opinion-makers in Pakistan must wake up to these dangers. They must not cry hoarse about our sovereignty when drones use our air space to bomb us more than they should. The fact is that the drones fly because our government allows them to do so. It is not, therefore, a matter of sovereignty. It is, however, a policy which does not seem to be working. All aerial bombardment and heavy artillery kill innocent civilians and this increases hatred against America and our own government. That may be a reason for opposing drones or other aerial attacks but not nationalistic protests.

While it is true that foreign countries do create instability, the problems we face are more of our own making than of either India's or America's. India might be giving money, even weapons, to dissident Baloch nationalists but would not be able to do so if we could reach out to the Baloch and give them their rightful share in power and wealth. As for the Taliban it is very doubtful that they depend on India. Some groups might have Indian backing but most are backed by local warlords. The Taliban are financed by drug money, money from crime and income from areas they control. They do not seem to be controlled by anybody and they obviously have their own agenda.

In fact, any sensible intelligence agency in any foreign country would know that it would not be able to deal with militant Islamists while it could

suicide attack and bombing needs to be driven home. Facts about these are in the archives of the police, army and the intelligence agencies. Even statements given by suicide bombers who were arrested before they could explode their devices are available. These are not very well-known which makes the public reiterate

the incredibly senseless claim that Muslims cannot do such things!

Fifth, a number of terrorist organisations and leaders have claimed responsibility for the attacks. Such statements are not well-known either. Moreover, they are received in silence or glossed over. Governments do not respond to them nor do they tell the public what they will do to people who have caused such suffering. I believe all such details should be made public knowledge so that people understand who our enemy really is.

Sixth, facts about Taliban rule in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 should be shown to everybody. This will make it impossible to deny that the quality of life, especially where women were concerned, during their rule was very different from what Pakistanis are accustomed to. This is not an abstract idea; this is the harsh reality and our people should understand it.

If we allow the militants to take over, we will be creating a silent, frightened and cowardly society.

do business with the Pakistani state. Therefore, let us stop blaming the 'foreign hand' and let us confess to the public that we created this monster and that it is our moral duty to convert it to ways of peace or destroy it.

The fact is that the militants are jeopardising our Pakistani way of life, causing anarchy, bloodshed and cruelty. They are our enemies. As it happens they are also America's enemies but this does not mean we are fighting them because of America alone. However, if our open alliance with the US is alienating the Pakistani people then it is in our interest not to appear beholden to President Obama's overtures. It is also in America's interest not to send in more drones, but we must look to our survival. And our survival lies in uniting our public in understanding what Taliban rule will be like and resisting it. It also requires fighting them but with our troops instead of American drones. ■