

Landlessness is a serious issue

Wake-up call for a management policy

It is extremely worrying to note that the number of landless people in the country has increased three times in the last 50 years. It is a major problem since the bulk of the population still depends on agriculture for their livelihood.

The phenomenon has exacerbated more or less at the same rate that the population has grown. It has a lot to do with fragmentation of holdings. River erosion and land grabbing by the influential people have greatly aggravated the situation. We believe that governments could have kept things under control through recovery and distribution of khas land, the total area of which is estimated at 50 lakh acres. But mismanagement in this important area, which could otherwise have considerably broadened the base of agriculture, has left a staggering 58 percent of the total population being landless.

Distribution of khas land has not taken place in the last 10 years -- a phase in our farming sector over which the peasants achieved a breakthrough in productivity. If khas land were distributed and uncultivable parcels made fit for production, the output would have been so much more. Basically, the government failed to recover the khas land grabbed by powerful people. This also resulted in the land ownership ratio between the rich and poor being very lopsided.

The political leadership has failed to tackle the problem of land grabbing, rather the grabbers are exerting political influence to throw their weight around and bend government policies. It is an example of the government failing to protect the interests of the poor and check the process of pauperisation. The people at the grassroots level have achieved great success through small agricultural projects. But the sharp increase in the number of landless leaves a big chunk of the rural population out of the purview of such projects.

Some of the major factors contributing to the rise in the number of landless will have to be addressed. Obviously, river training and dredging will help solve the problem of large scale erosion and, needless to say, we have to cut back on our population growth rate that still continues to put pressure on the economy and threatens to lead to further shrinkage of the land-man ratio. However, the need of the hour is to reclaim fallow land, recover khas land in wrongful hands, redistribute them and, above all, have a comprehensive land utilisation policy.

Historic moment for Nepal

Political leadership shows exemplary maturity

THE recent agreement between the government of Nepal and the Maoists is a very welcome development. It will, we are sure, help allay the concern of those that were looking at the political developments in Nepal unsure of how the Maoists would be accommodated in the future political arrangement in the country. The agreement is not only historic, it will we hope, given the positive mind frame displayed by all the parties concerned so far, also launch Nepal onto a path of lasting democracy.

The Maoists were the uncertain quantity, and given its sway over the countryside, of which between 70 and 80 percent were under its control, there was a lingering anxiety that they might exploit their political hold to demand more concessions as a condition for abjuring violence, which was their tactical expedient for the overall strategic aim of seeing the end of monarchy in Nepal.

What is an object lesson for all of us here is that, if the interest of the country is kept at the forefront, and if issues are addressed with maturity and prudence, no problem, however much intractable it might appear at first, will defy resolution. It is a credit to the wisdom and sagacity of the political parties in Nepal that national, and not parochial, interest determined their political position. This will surely augur well for peace and stability in the kingdom that had not seen much stability even when democratic government was at the helm. The plans to form an interim government that the rebels will also participate in, is as clear an indication as any of the Maoists' intention of shunning the path of violence and to be a part of the political system as is the acknowledgement by the seven party alliance that without the Maoists no political solution to Nepal's problem is achievable.

Insofar as matters like the modalities of holding the election to the constituent assembly, sharing of power in the interim government and the disarming of the Maoists are concerned, these will, we are confident, fall in place with the help of the international community, particularly of the UN. We wish the people of Nepal the best in their road to democracy.

Mr. Wind & grabbing fiesta



SHAHNOOR WAHID

SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

There is this special breed of "bank loan grabbers." Some of them are known as first generation loan grabbers who started their grabbing business soon after the liberation of the country. They have their names etched in golden letters in the history books. As pioneers, they made good use of the 'uncles' and 'brothers' in extracting loans against sick or even ghost projects.

There is a fiesta of grabbing going on in the Land of Hope. In fact, a favourable wind of grabbing is blowing across the land, and one can make windfall profits from this if one has connection with the legendary "Windy Castle" there. Whatever you may grab hold of at these last hours it's yours. No kidding. And there is nothing to worry about because two distinctly different systems work there in absolute harmony. To be more precise, law(s), law enforcers, lawyers, law minister and the law ministry work differently for different people there, depending on who is who in the country.

For opposition leaders and workers they have one set of guidelines and for the sons of men and women in power, a totally separate one to follow. As a result, overweight sons of powerful men and women can go about doing all sorts of things in broad daylight and yet can manage to remain outside the purview of law. You see, in that country law does not chase them. They chase the law. Rather, they chase out the law. That is the beauty of being in power. "Might is right" is the mantra, and "grab it all" is the name of the game. Since these youngsters have nothing else to do, they do what others dare not do. In fact they are there to "undo" everything good that has been done previously by noble men and women.

These cute little "Baby Docs" of the popular leaders (!) have dozens of cases lodged against them in various police stations but no charge sheet has been prepared ever by the police to take them to the court and try them. So, in a recent case of carjacking our reporters in that country got hold of strong evidence of involvement of Mr. Wind, a son of a mighty scary man belonging to the party in power. One of the accomplices of this "boy wonder" even spelled out his name to the police and

yet the latter did not prepare a case against him. You see, the police will have to follow the "other" guidelines for the sons of the powerful or else they might get transferred to Andaman or Timbuktu.

On many earlier occasions, this Mr. Wind has been accused of ransacking shops in some shopping malls in the city and extracting toll from businessmen. Since his doting father remains busy politicking elsewhere and since the father does not read newspapers or watch TV news, he remains totally in the dark about his son's activities. He is proud of his son and does want to hear any rubbish about him.

This latest incident of carjacking by his friends is classic. This Mr. Wind simply fell in love with the car as soon as he laid his eyes on it. He wants it. So it is his. No questions asked. Now, the happy baby hops into the car and drives around the city. He even got fake papers with the help of some corrupt ele-

ments in the relevant department. So, one evening the illustrious son of the mighty man finds himself in a jolly good mood. He drives downtown and goes to a fast-food shop and begins crushing chicken legs, dozens of them. You see, he loves to eat too. But, by a quirk turn of fate, the original owner of the car happened to be passing by at that moment. This spoilsport immediately recognised his car. He called up the police. The police took the car, the real owner and the fake owner et al to the police station. The papers of the fake owner turned out to be fake too. The legal owner produced valid papers. In the meantime, the ever-nosy media got the wind of the sordid drama. They flashed the news of the latest "karma" of Mr. Wind along with his photo. And now, according to latest news reports from that country, powerful people are working from behind to get Mr. Wind's name out of the police case. Let's wait and see what transpires eventually.

But the police action against the friends of Mr. Wind did not scare off the grabbers. They are still out there laying their paws on people's land, family graveyards, houses, balconies, kitchens, boundary walls even toilets. They grab private cars, buses, trucks, taxi-cabs, autorickshaws and cycle-rickshaws. Then there are shops, ponds, agricultural farms, poultry farms and fish farms to be taken. Wait, there is one thing missing from the list. Believe it or not, dead bodies are not safe either in that country! Specially, bodies of people who have been struck down by lightning get stolen from their graves! Good Lord!

Speaking of dead bodies reminds us of another precious commodity in hot demand at the moment in the grabbing business. And that is a human, very much alive and kicking. Yes, kidnapping for ransom is getting popular over there. It is one form of grabbing too since one has to grab the victim strongly before taking him or her away.

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loans against sick or even ghost projects. Since they have siphoned off most of the loan money available at various commercial banks, small-time and genuine loan seekers had to fight for the crumbs to do business. It is amazing fact that about 20 top class defaulters hold nearly 50 per cent of the bad loan in that country? And what is the total amount of that bad loan? It is Tk. 6, 445 crore!! One should actually give these brilliant people the idea of writing a book. This could be a befitting title, "How to Grab Bank Loans and Get Away".

The grabbers of land are doing better business at the moment. These people always lurk in the bushes sniffing for government land and buildings, property of widows or minorities or even helpless elderly people. They start to drool profusely as soon as they smell something that is vulnerable to grabbing. These grabbers work in close cooperation with the powerful people in every government. They befriend close relations of the ministers and MPs and scout the country for such property. The trick of the game is to build a club or a mosque on the land intended for grabbing. One may even use the name of some powerful people living in the "Windy Castle".

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Democratisation of Pakistan

The US and the West would do well to help Pakistan build the political institutions, insist that the military stop marginalisation of established political parties viz Bhutto's PPP and Nawaz Sharif's PML, encourage Bhutto-Sharif pledge to establish "real democracy" and Charter of Democracy agreed by the two last May in London, take measures to stop "Talibanisation" of Pathan politics and Islamisation of Pathan nationalism in Pakistan, and encourage President Musharraf to give up the post of the army Chief of Staff

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

FRENCH political analyst Frederic Grare has debunked the fear of the West, particularly of the US, that an overthrow of Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, his replacement by an Islamist regime and consequent control of nuclear weapons as "myth of an Islamic threat" deliberately propagated by the Pakistan army to continue its stranglehold on Pakistani state power. He argues that an Islamist threat is neither great nor autonomous as it is thought to be and the Islamists have no possibility of capturing power through free and fair elections. Historically the Islamic political parties got between 5-8 per cent of popular votes except in 2002 elections when they garnered about twelve percent votes by forming an alliance with other Islamic parties called Muttahida Majlis Amal (MMA) and formed government in NWFP and Baluchistan. This has been possible mainly because of the support of the army that has remained the most dominant and coherent force in Pakistan since the inception of the country.

Ironically the founder of

Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, was a "Westernised Muslim with Victorian manners and a secular outlook" whose promise for a liberal and secular polity, albeit in total contradiction of his two-nation theory claiming that the Hindus and the Muslims could never live together, was rejected by the Pakistan army almost immediately after independence of the country from British rule. The Generals' conviction that army rule was necessary to thwart Indian domination led to successive military coups subordinating all state institutions including the judiciary which had to sanctify abrogation of successive Constitutions by enunciating the "Doctrine of Necessity".

During the Cold War when India opted for non-alignment the Cold War warriors in Washington put India in the Soviet camp the Pakistani Generals took full advantage of a sort of McCarthyism in the US foreign policy and strengthened Pakistan's security alignment with the US through SEATO, CENTO and other arrangements. In the pursuit of George Kennan's policy of containment of the Soviet expansionism the Ameri-

cans created NATO in Europe, got involved in Vietnam war and promoted military dictatorships in Latin America, Africa and Asia including several military governments in Pakistan. In the process the West while insisting that democracy be practiced in their own countries willed to accept the developing countries as "Antarctica of democratic values" where liberal values were kept frozen for getting short term security benefits from kleptocratic dictators.

One wonders whether a kind of incipient racism did not run riot in the Western thought process that the subalterns of the newly freed colonies were not fit to be endowed with modernity meaning secularisation and humanisation of the world and freeing the individual from tradition. In the case of Pakistan finding religion as insufficient basis for nationhood the Generals in collusion with the landed aristocracy and economic elite achieved dominance in "a nation without clear definition or cohesion". Stephen Cohen, perhaps the greatest expert the US has on South Asian affairs, calls this compact "moderate oligarchy... an informal system that (tied)

together senior ranks of the military, the civil service, the key members of the judiciary and other elites". Cohen holds various US administrations responsible for the ascendancy of the army in Pakistan and encouraging Pakistan's nuclear ambition. A series of US Presidential waivers relating to economic and military sanctions were allowed despite the facts that Pakistan disclosed in 1984 that it could enrich uranium for nuclear weapons and in 1987 that it could assemble a nuclear device.

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 put a solidarist face on US policy towards Pakistan that the Bush administration considers as a very important partner in its war on terror. It is not known whether unbridled support given to Pakistan including giving it the status of a major non-NATO ally is despite the fact that Pervez Musharraf's decision to join the war on terror did not signify a structural change in Pakistan's policy but was an expedient one resulting from the total decimation of its ally the Taliban and the US threat that Pakistan could either join the war on terror or face the consequences. The US policy makers who insist on the continuation of Pervez Musharraf in power ignore the fact that the Musharraf government recognised the Islamist political parties combine MMA -- as the main opposition party in parliament though Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party has more parliamentarians (MMA-63, PPP-81), perhaps to impress upon the West of the pseudo-civilian

government's indispensability in its "struggle" with the Islamists for power in Pakistan.

This strand of argument is fallacious on the ground that "no Islamic organisation is in a position to politically or militarily challenge the role of one and only centre of power in Pakistan: the army"; and that in the event of exit of Pervez Musharraf the likely successor will be another General and not a populist civilian leader. Such deterministic prediction, albeit comfortable for the moment, ignores the on-going Baluch nationalism, wrongly projected as Islamic terrorism by the intelligence services, which has sprung from deprivation and dissatisfaction of the Baluch already feeling colonised by the Punjabis.

It would be prudent to remember that in unified Yugoslavia the slogan that what is good for Serbia is good for Yugoslavia has ultimately led to the separation of Montenegro which was the last bastion of the old Yugoslav republic. Baluchistan accounts for 43 per cent of Pakistani territory, 36 per cent of Pakistan's total gas production, holds large quantity of other minerals and is a potential transit route for gas pipeline from Iran and Turkmenistan to India. But the province's gas and mineral deposits are being expropriated and the people are feeling marginalised and dispossessed.

While an independent Baluchistan cannot be a desirable outcome of the existing trouble there for Pakistan, South Asia or the international community, "Pakistan today" writes

Ashley Tellis (of the Carnegie Endowment), "is clearly both part of the problem and the solution to the threat of terrorism facing the United States". Indeed the 9/11 Commission had more or less highlighted Pakistan's deep involvement with international terrorism and recommended a long term US commitment to provide comprehensive support to Pakistan. The choice for Pakistan, it has been said, is not between the military and the mullahs but between the military-mullah combine and the civilian and secular political parties.

The US and the West, therefore, would do well to help Pakistan build the political institutions, insist that the military stop marginalisation of established political parties viz Bhutto's PPP and Nawaz Sharif's PML, encourage Bhutto-Sharif pledge to establish "real democracy" and Charter of Democracy agreed by the two last May in London, take measures to stop "Talibanisation" of Pathan politics and Islamisation of Pathan nationalism in Pakistan, and encourage President Musharraf to give up the post of the army Chief of Staff. US may also try to convince the Pakistan army that promotion of across the border terrorism in Kashmir and other parts of India is counter productive. In short, only a truly democratic polity in Pakistan would be beneficial for the country and the international community and reduce tension in South Asia.

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OIC: The reform fad

In the light of the failure of United Nations to bring its member states out of their inertia against change and reform, one can well imagine that even if the OIC panel comes out with brilliant recommendations, the odds against them being carried out are particularly high. Yet, one would still like to consider even the appointment of this new OIC panel as a watershed in the OIC history. It is the first time that the need for reform has come out from rhetoric and speeches to something tangible, i.e. a committee, is in place.

SAAD S KHAN

THE Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) appears to have realised the necessity of reform. Following the lead of the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, who had constituted a 25-member panel last year to come out with plans to reform the United Nations, the OIC Secretary General Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu has constituted a High Level Advisory Panel, the first meeting of which was held in Istanbul, Turkey, last month on May 18 and 19. The readers will recall that the

UN expert panel did come out with very ambitious plans including raising the number of Security Council members to 24, giving all four regions, namely, Americas, Europe, Africa and the Asia-Pacific, an equal of six seats each. It also recommended more permanent seats in the Security Council, albeit without veto powers, and abolition of the Geneva-based Human Rights Commission with leaner and more effective Human Rights Council. None of the ambitious proposals got carried through, except that the UN Human Rights Council has come into being, that too after much dilu-

tion of the original proposal. And on top of it, it is not much leaner having a whopping 47 members (compare that to 53 in the defunct Geneva based Commission).

Save for the fact that the Council has not elected Robert Mugabe and Kim Jong Il as the founding co-Chairmen, it has all the weaknesses that the replaced Commission had. Not the least is the fact that there was no vetting of the candidates by an independent body such as the International Court of Justice and just like in the Commission the major human rights abusers have got elected as members of

this new watchdog now: totalitarian states like China, military dictatorships like Pakistan, fascists like Algeria, theocracies like Saudi Arabia, corrupt like Russia, and tinpot autocracies like Azerbaijan.

In the light of the failure of United Nations to bring its member states out of their inertia against change and reform, one can well imagine that even if the OIC panel comes out with brilliant recommendations, the odds against them being carried out are particularly high. Yet, one would still like to consider even the appointment of this new OIC panel as a watershed in the OIC history. It is the first time that the need for reform has come out from rhetoric and speeches to something tangible, i.e. a committee, is in place.

More importantly, for the first time "democracy" and "human rights" in the Muslim world are on the table. Before that, these two issues were hush-hush affair and even a mention of that in the OIC conferences, which as one

analyst had put it, used to be "assemblies of more butchers than statesmen", was an anathema. The OIC continued to lambaste India, Philippines, Bulgaria, Myanmar and others of their treatment of the Muslims, yet the condition of Muslims citizens, especially sectarian minorities and political opposition, within the (totalitarian) Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan or Indonesia, for instance, was never up for discussion. Times have changed and the new Advisory Panel has been entrusted to make recommendations on redrafting the OIC Charter with emphasis on role for the OIC regarding the issues of good governance, democracy and human rights.

True, the OIC had several committees in the past like the so-called commission of eminent persons, as recently as last year, of which Mushahid Hussain of Pakistan was also a member, but the final reports of such panels found their way into the dustbins of history and

never got implemented. This time, one can hope, it is likely to be different since unlike the Eminent Persons Committee of last year, the present Advisory Panel has the most of the big names in the Islamic World today. Each of the members is a towering personality and it is difficult to presume that the opinion of this new panel could be ignored totally.

The Advisory Panel consists of former Prime Minister of Malaysia Dr. Mahathir Muhammad, former President of Turkey Suleyman Demirel, former Secretary General of the OIC Dr. Hamid Al Ghabid, former Foreign Minister of Indonesia Ali Alatas, former Director General of UNESCO Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, former Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Jameel Al Hujailan, and former Judge of International Court of Justice Nabil El Araby, in addition to the incumbent OIC Secretary General Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu himself. Last month was the first session

as the Panel has to hold two more sessions, the next one in Jeddah in October and the third and last probably in Kuala Lumpur a quarter later. Dr Mahathir Muhammad had been elected to chair all the three sessions.

Inaugurating the meeting, Prof. Ihsanoglu said that while preparing the new Charter due consideration was to be given to major changes that have taken place in the world to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. He said that vision by the Panel would include human rights, good governance, democracy and economic agenda for the progress of the Muslim countries especially to eradicate diseases and poverty.

Speaking on the occasion, Demirel noted that OIC, since its establishment, has been a source to promote solidarity among all the member States and have consolidated cooperation in the field of economic, social, cultural, scientific and other fields. While drawing attention to the rapid changes

being taken place in the world, he called for the OIC member States to seize the moment.

Addressing the meeting, Dr. Mahathir Muhammad observed that the world has changed a lot since the foundation of OIC 36 years ago. "Today, the Muslim world is the target of vilification and we have to respond to it. We have to look at ourselves and to tell the world that we are capable of having good governments, and good governance and that would give us credibility and respect," he said adding that it was essential to review how far the Charter benefited the Muslim world and served the purpose of the OIC, and what are the major factors that affected its effectiveness, especially due to the lack of much support from member States.

Lofty goals, they are, but can the OIC translate these dreams into reality? Time will tell!

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