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A Lot to Worry About

Pakistan on the Eve of Its First Democratic Transition

The election in Pakistan on 11 May 2013 is just around the corner – but it has not drawn much attention in international media. When it comes to Pakistan, the fact that one acute crisis ties into the next, almost seamlessly, appears to stand in the way of even medium-term analysis. Still, the parliamentary election on 11 May offers a prospect of having game-changing importance, i.e. moving Pakistan from a decades-long game where the democratic process was always interrupted, stalled or manipulated to one where democratically elected governments succeed one another. In this AAN Briefing Paper, the author paints a picture of the environment surrounding the upcoming election. The paper is structured using a series of key questions about radicalisation and sectarianism, domestic armed conflict, the Pakistani military's alleged strategic shift in its approach to Afghanistan, the economic crisis, natural disasters and centrifugal tendencies. The author employs journalistic methods, including interviews conducted in Pakistan during a trip earlier this year as well as extensive reading and research on the ground in previous years. The author does not, however, delve into the details of the election itself or the different agendas of the political parties participating in it.

A successful and credible election in Pakistan on 11 May 2013 will take the country one step further towards establishing a consistent democratic process that will gradually grow stronger and, at best, also one step towards attuning political leaders to the daily lives of their voters – not as their 'vote banks' but as real people with real desires and concerns. Political processes take time, however, and many other, parallel developments are going on, with shorter timelines, that could, again, derail the laborious exercise of building democracy. Let us take a look at some of them.

RADICALISATION AND SECTARIANISM

Religious extremism is nothing new to Pakistan, a country based on one faith, aiming to provide the Muslims of the subcontinent with a national home where they would not be discriminated. That zeal, however, left the new nation without well-conceived and strong protection for minorities. Their vulnerability was subsequently compounded by a series of legal measures. In 1974, Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto¹ played into the hands

¹ Zulfikar Ali Bhutto founded Pakistan's People's Party (PPP) in 1967 and served as Pakistan's president from 1970 to 1973, later as prime minister from 1974 until

of intolerance when the second amendment to the constitution was adopted, declaring the followers of the Ahmadiya variation of Islam to be non-Muslims. In the following decade, military ruler General Zia ul-Haq,² supported by the United States and Saudi-Arabia, sharpened this legal measure, as well as the existing regulations against blasphemy, and generally tightened the grip of conservative religious interpretations over the lives of the country's citizens, not least the women. The last big eruption of the Cold War, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, was dressed up in religious attire. While this followed a pattern seen in previous conflicts in Afghanistan, it was enhanced by the West's use of Pakistan as the channel for its support to the Afghan resistance movement. The Zia ul-Haq regime naturally picked only Islamist groups as beneficiaries, thus choking the secular and ethno-nationalist strands of the anti-Soviet resistance.

Since then, sectarian attacks have been a recurrent theme, varying in intensity over time.³ Now, Pakistan again faces a high point. Religious radicalisation is most easily perceived in the way women dress, the increasing number of *niqabs* and other full-coverage clothing seen in the streets. Another sign is the ease with which branches of banned militant groups are able to act in the public space, putting up offices, recruiting people and even running in the upcoming elections.⁴

1977, when General Zia-ul-Haq declared martial law. He was executed on 4 April 1979.

² After his coup in 1977, General Zia-ul-Haq assumed the Presidency of Pakistan in 1978 and ruled until his death in an unexplained plane crash in August 1988.

³ Just a few examples: during the 1980s and the 1990s, sectarian violence was very strong in Karachi, at times bringing economic activity almost to a standstill. In the summer of 2009, Muslim mobs attacked Christians in the Punjabi village of Gojra, burning victims alive and torching houses. In May 2010, more than 80 persons from the Ahmadiya community were killed when two of their mosques in Lahore were simultaneously attacked (see for instance <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10181380>, retrieved 26 April 2013). Impunity is common in these cases (see for instance Asad Kharal, 'Looking Back: Not a Single Person Convicted for Gojra Riots', *Express Tribune*, 10 March 2013, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/518585/looking-back-not-a-single-person-convicted-for-gojra-riots/>, retrieved 26 April 2013).

⁴ Amir Mir, '55 Charged Terrorists Allowed to Contest Polls', *The News*, 24 April 2013, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-22449-55-charged-terrorists-allowed-to-contest-polls>.

Compared to a decade ago, religion is tangibly present in everyday lives in a more obvious way. It is also prominent in the election process. In nomination forms, individuals registering their candidature have to submit a declaration to the effect that they 'will strive to preserve the Islamic Ideology which is the basis for the creation of Pakistan'.⁵ Lack of Islamic credibility has been used by officials to prevent at least one well-known political figure from registering his candidature.⁶ In the prevailing climate, it is not difficult to see how this provision could also lead to post-election bickering over the interpretation of the requirement, questioning – for all sorts of underlying reasons – the Islamic credentials of one or the other of the elected candidates. At the same time, there are physical threats. Militant Islamic groups regularly attack politicians with a more secular orientation. In all too many cases, the security forces, albeit powerful and well-funded, have not been able to protect targeted politicians.⁷ Nor has the army remained appropriately neutral in this context: In a speech at the Pakistan Military Academy on 20 April 2013, the army chief, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, was quoted as saying, 'Let me remind you that Pakistan was created in the name of Islam and Islam can never be taken out of Pakistan. However, Islam should always remain a unifying force. I assure you that regardless of the odds, the Pakistan Army will keep on doing its best

⁵ 'Christian Candidate for Selection in Election 2013 Will Accept Islam through Nominations', *Pakistan Christian Post*, 30 March 2013, <http://www.pakistanchristianpost.com/viewnews.php?newsid=1896>, retrieved 10 April 2013.

⁶ After complaints from local residents, the nomination papers of Ayaz Amir, a well-known journalist and supporter of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), were rejected by the Election Commission, since he had been 'writing against Islam'. Sajjad Haider, 'ECP Rejects Ayaz Amir's Nomination Papers', *Dawn.com*, 4 April 2013, <http://dawn.com/2013/04/04/ecp-rejects-ayaz-amirs-nomination-papers/>, retrieved 26 April 2013.

⁷ In one of the latest incidents, on 22 December 2012, KP Senior Minister Bashir Ahmad Bilour, a prominent Awami National Party (ANP) politician, was killed in a suicide bombing attack on an ANP meeting in Peshawar. The TTP claimed responsibility for the attack. See for instance, 'Bashir Bilour Killed in Peshawar Suicide Blast', *Express Tribune*, 22 December 2012, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/483051/peshawar-blast-kills-four-live-updates>, retrieved 23 April 2013.

towards our common dream for a truly Islamic Republic of Pakistan.⁸

Thus, from the point of view of secular-oriented political parties, the playing field is far from level. Still, it is unlikely that traditional parties with an explicitly religious agenda will be able to surpass their previous record of 10–12 per cent of the vote – they have never had a broad following in the past and their peak results have been linked to manipulation or tactical arrangements. More interesting, perhaps, will be how new parties with religious leanings will fare in the upcoming election, notably the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) led by former cricket star Imran Khan, nowadays perceived to be close to religious as well as military leaders.

At the extreme end of the religiously charged spectrum, violence flares in different shapes and forms – among them, a wave of attacks against minorities, particularly Shia Muslims who constitute 10–15 per cent of Pakistan's population. In Quetta, the provincial capital of Balochistan, the Hazara community – since the late 1970s greatly enlarged by the influx of refugees from Afghanistan – has been particularly targeted. Nearly 200 people were killed in two separate bomb blasts in January and February – and the carnage has continued, e.g. in Karachi in the beginning of March. Since the murder of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer in 2011,⁹ the blasphemy laws are also very much present, evoked arbitrarily and applied even to a mentally challenged minor.¹⁰

⁸ Asian Human Rights Commission, *Pakistan: Why is General Kiyani Dictating Islamic Ideology as the Basis of the Country?*, AHRC-ART-045-2013, 22 April 2013, <http://www.humanrights.asia/news/ahrc-news/AHRC-ART-045-2013>, retrieved 25 April 2013.

⁹ Salman Taseer was shot to death by one of his bodyguards, Mumtaz Qadri, on 4 January 2011 after defending a Christian woman accused of blasphemy. Qadri was widely celebrated for his deed, and declared a hero of Islam.

¹⁰ In November 2012, a 14-year-old Christian girl, described as being mentally younger than her age, was accused by neighbours of having burnt pages of the Quran and was arrested in Islamabad. She was later acquitted, as the judges found that evidence had been planted, but her family was forced into hiding (see: 'Pakistan Rimsha blasphemy case dropped', *BBC*, 20 November 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-20405290> retrieved 6 April 2013).

DOMESTIC ARMED CONFLICT

At the same time, the *Islamist insurgency*, grouped under the umbrella of the Tehrik-e-Taleban Pakistan (TTP),¹¹ continues to regularly harvest its victims, and to limit the writ of the state, particularly in parts of the FATA, the PATA and the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, KP.¹² But the alliance is reported to be weakened and divided. In the beginning of 2013, possibly inspired by the efforts towards negotiations characterising the transition in Afghanistan, it extended an offer to the government to negotiate a peace deal. Another factor contributing to this shift could be that al-Qaeda, previously believed to work more closely with the Pakistani Taleban than with the Afghan, has increasingly turned its attention to other arenas of conflict, in Africa and the Middle East, while it has also divided and weakened.

At the end of February, an All Parties Conference summoned by the Jamiat-e Ulema-e Islam-Fazl (JUI-F)¹³ endorsed negotiations with the TTP. At first, the TTP welcomed the move: 'The political parties have sent a positive message by excluding the word terrorism from the joint declaration.'¹⁴ The Tehrik-e-Taleban Pakistan (TTP) *shura* (council) gives it high regards,' Ehsanullah Ehsan, spokesman for the banned militant outfit, was

¹¹ Several other groups operate outside the TTP umbrella, several of them based in Southern Punjab. Some of these groups were originally created by the security agencies to be used as instruments in Kashmir; others focus mainly on sectarian issues. However, according to recent reports, cooperation between groups is increasing across the board and the dividing lines between them seem to become gradually blurred.

¹² The FATA are the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, consisting of seven semi-autonomous 'agencies' along the Durand Line separating Pakistan and Afghanistan. The PATA are the adjoining Provincially Administered Tribal Areas, administered from Peshawar, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, but not at par with the rest of the province which was until 2010 named the North-West Frontier Province.

¹³ JUI-F is a Deobandi-inspired religious party led by Maulana Fazl-ur Rehman, sometimes called 'the father of the Taleban'. As part of an electoral alliance of religious parties, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), the JUI-F ruled KP during the years of the regime led by General Pervez Musharraf.

¹⁴ See: 'Declaration', *Dawn*, 1 March 2013, <http://dawn.com/2013/03/01/declaration/> retrieved 2 May 2013.

quoted as commenting.¹⁵ An earlier call for peace talks by the Awami National Party (ANP) ruling in KP met with a more guarded response from the same spokesperson: 'We shall be continuing with more . . . attacks until the peace deal is finalised. Military attacks and peace talks are continuing on both sides, the security forces have also not stopped attacking the Taliban despite offering an olive branch.'¹⁶

The Pakistan army, on the other hand, has not pronounced itself on the issue of negotiations. Criticism against these plans comes mainly from civil society, pointing out, *inter alia*, that the Taleban have routinely broken previous peace deals and have instead used them to advance their positions,¹⁷ and that, while the Taleban may be in disarray, the government would also be negotiating from a point of weakness.

Furthermore, the possible concessions and outcomes of a negotiation remain unclear: Would the Taleban accept the state's monopoly on violence? Would they scrap their plans for an extended Islamic Emirate and give up the semblance of such an emirate that they have already established in North Waziristan? Would they allow girls to go to school and women to work?¹⁸ For the time being, there are no signs that the TTP has undergone any ideological shifts, coming out of genuine rethinking.

¹⁵ Zahir Shah Sherazi, Taliban Welcome JUI-F APC Declaration for Peace Talks, *Dawn.com*, 1 March 2013, <http://dawn.com/2013/03/01/taliban-welcome-jui-f-apc-declaration-for-peace-talks>, retrieved 1 April 2013.

¹⁶ Zahir Shah Sherazi, 'Pakistani Taliban Call Meeting in Response to APC Peace Offer', *Dawn.com*, 14 February 2013, <http://dawn.com/2013/02/14/pakistani-taliban-call-meeting-in-response-to-apc-peace-offer>, retrieved 1 April 2013.

¹⁷ Notably, the Shakai Agreement, signed in South Waziristan on 27 March 2004, the Sararogha Peace Deal in South Waziristan on 22 February 2005, the Miranshah Peace Accord in Northern Waziristan on 5 September 2006, the Khyber Agency Pact on July 2008, and the peace deals on 20 April 2008, and 21 May 2008, with Tehrik-e Nifaz-e Sharia Mohammadi (TNSM), the Taleban movement in Swat. See for instance Sohail Habib Tajiik, 'Analysis of Peace Agreements with Militants and Lessons for the Future', *Pak Institute for Peace Studies*, Jan-Mar 2011, www.san-pips.com/download.php?f=140.pdf, retrieved 6 April 2013.

¹⁸ The attack on Malala Yousafzai, a school-girl campaigner for the right to education who was shot in the head by a Taleban group in Swat on 9 October 2012, does not augur well in this respect.

A STRATEGIC SHIFT?

While the TTP may be shifting (or not), there is also much talk of a *strategic shift* by the Pakistani state. This development has – perhaps with a modicum of wishful thinking – been seen as an important policy change. But it is not a shift proclaimed in Islamabad, rather one perceived in Washington. The enthusiasm could be coloured by the desire for conducive conditions surrounding the retreat of US combat troops from Afghanistan during the coming year. So far, the strategic shift has revolved primarily around conciliatory atmospherics and a change of tone and emphasis in official speech. On Independence Day, 14 August 2012, General Kayani underlined the threat within the state posed by extremism and terrorism, rather than threats coming from a hostile external environment. He also emphasised that the war against this internal enemy is not limited to the army but something which should involve the whole nation. The shift in emphasis was confirmed in the 'Green Book', which was issued by the army on 2 January 2013 and elaborated on military doctrine and operational priorities. In it, the Taleban and 'other terrorists' were again defined as the biggest threat to the country.¹⁹

These moves have widely been interpreted as signs of a re-evaluation of Pakistan's regional priorities, relegating the threat coming from India and the ensuing need for 'strategic depth' in Afghanistan to the back-burner. Civilian government representatives have followed up by breaking some new ground. Notably, in connection with a visit to Kabul on 1 February 2013, Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar had a discussion with representatives of the former Northern Alliance, the first official Pakistani high-level contact with these traditional adversaries. Before that, as proof of Pakistan's good will, a number of Afghan Taleban prisoners had been released in connection with the visit of the Afghan High Peace Council to Islamabad in November 2012. However, contrary to what was first conveyed, a key person like Mulla Abdul Ghani Beradar, one of the founding fathers of the Afghan Taleban who was arrested near Karachi in February 2010, was not included in the

¹⁹ Asian Human Rights Commission, Pakistan: Why is General Kiyani dictating Islamic ideology as the basis of the country? [see FN 8].

group. Significantly, the immediate reason for the arrest of Mulla Beradar in 2010 seems to have been that he was running a freelance dialogue with the Karzai government, beyond Pakistani control, and there are no concrete signs to the effect that the Pakistani establishment would be more willing to let go of this control today. In fact, relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have of late re-descended to one of their lower points. A more militant tune is now also heard from the army chief, echoing military, regional thinking in its more familiar form.²⁰

So what then, is the strategic shift? Positive noises in Islamabad and Rawalpindi and a change of tone between Pakistan and India, which has also gradually become noticeable in spite of remaining ups and downs, can hardly be enough to constitute such a shift. Reality, however, has shifted – on several sides. In Pakistan, the unrelenting tide of terrorist actions has not subsided. With more than 5,000 civilians killed in 235 suicide attacks, 9,257 rocket attacks and 4,256 bomb explosions during the last five years,²¹ not only in distant tribal areas but also in cities like Karachi and Lahore, the problem can no longer be rationalised as solely the work of ‘foreign hands’. It is partly the blow-back from home-grown militants, nurtured as assets in the regional context – notably in Pakistan’s conflict with India over Kashmir. When this truth can no longer be swept under the carpet, some policies will have to be modified; the dividing line between

‘good’ versus ‘bad’ Taleban – the former as useful assets in asymmetrical conflict, the latter as enemies of the Pakistani state – has become increasingly difficult to discern and maintain. The same applies to the dividing lines between nationalist insurgency, extremist militancy, sectarian terrorism, political turf fighting and more purely criminal networks, which have also become increasingly blurred, especially in Balochistan.²² A similar development is noticeable in Karachi, the economic capital of Pakistan, parts of which are now reeling at the brink of total lawlessness.²³ Like in Afghanistan, vested interest in continued conflict and turmoil has emerged, with a capacity to act as spoiler to any peace deals.

Parts of Pakistan have become ‘Afghanised’ and General Kayani’s point in his Independence Day speech – that the Pakistani nation’s primordial task is to close ranks and turn this development around – is hardly revolutionary, but rather a belated recognition of the obvious. At the same time, almost everyone has gradually recognised that a military victory is not achievable in Afghanistan, neither for the ANSF/ISAF coalition, nor for the Taleban. If the Pakistani establishment, or part of it, ever dreamt of seeing the Taleban back as full power-wielders in Kabul, such dreams may now have to be shelved in the interest of realism. And

²⁰ In his speech at the Pakistan Military Academy on 20 April 2013, Kayani was quoted as saying that ‘we have exercised restraint in the face of some very belligerent statements in recent months. . . . Let it suffice to say that Pakistan is fully capable of responding effectively to any threat. Despite our current focus on internal security, we remain fully prepared to defeat an external direct threat.’ See: ‘Pakistan prepared to defeat external threats: Kayani’, *Dawn*, 20 April 2013, <http://dawn.com/2013/04/20/pakistan-prepared-to-defeat-external-threats-kayani>, retrieved 23 April 2013.

²¹ These figures were reported by a representative of the security agencies to the Supreme Court of Pakistan in a hearing on 26 March 2013. The total number of lives lost since 2001, in the ‘war on terror’, was calculated as 49,000 (compared to the previous figure of 40,000). The report also revealed that 1,030 schools and colleges were destroyed by Taleban insurgents in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa from 2009 to 2013. Mudassir Raja, ‘Pakistani Victims: War on Terror Toll Put at 49,000’, *Express Tribune*, 27 March 2013, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/527016/pakistani-victims-war-on-terror-toll-put-at-49000>, retrieved 4 April 2013.

²² Since the creation of Pakistan in 1947, there have been recurrent uprisings against the federal government in Balochistan, which remains the least developed of the provinces. The current confrontation, since 2004, constitutes the fifth major armed conflict. The control over Balochistan’s natural resources, notably gas, is one of the major issues at stake – but a number of other problems exist and, during this persistent turmoil, Baloch nationalists have become increasingly separatist. The situation has regional ramifications, i. a. since Baloch living in Iran have formed a militant group fighting the Iranian government. (The Baloch on both sides of the border are Sunni.)

²³ The murder of Perveen Rehman in Karachi on 13 March 2013 is a case in point. Ms Rehman, an architect turned social worker, had spent the last 25 years of her life assisting slum dwellers in improving their environment. She was gunned down as she arrived to her office by armed men on motorcycles. According to the Asian Human Rights Commission ‘it is believed that she was assassinated by Deobandi militants of Ahle Sunnat wa-I Jamat (ASWJ). These are said to be the same militants responsible for the deaths of the four lady anti-polio workers and the attack on Malala Yousafzai.’ ‘Pakistan: The Country has Gone Mad, No Doubt’, A Statement by the Asian Human Rights Commission, 14 March 2013, AHRC-STM-061.2013.

as the domestic situation also indicates, Pakistan may have to work for a more broad-based solution – but it is likely to be one that retains the possibility to protect what Pakistan sees as its national interests. In a situation where the Durand Line still is not recognised as an official border by the Afghans and Pakistani insurgents fight the Pakistani army from bases on Afghan territory (as well as vice versa – but that is nothing new), Pakistan has no reason to give up its wish to wield what it deems to be a reasonable influence over the Afghan government. Consequently, it wants to have a dispensation in Kabul which includes the Taliban as accepted representatives of the Afghan Pashtun population. Thus, the Pakistani government is unlikely to let negotiations on a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan run their course – it is reserving a central place at the table for itself. What has shifted in this respect, is rather the fact that other players, particularly the United States, are now more prone to accept a crucial role for Pakistan, as well as to include Taliban elements in the future setup in Afghanistan. To some extent – for a time – the Afghan government also made this shift when it offered a key role to Pakistan in the so-called ‘Peace Process Road Map to 2015’ presented by the Afghan High Peace Council earlier this year.²⁴

But Pakistan must also prepare for a situation where Afghanistan, in spite of efforts to reach a negotiated settlement, sinks back into civil war. It would be the first neighbouring country to be affected by such a setback. It is not very far-fetched to assume that a hedging strategy, including some traditional ‘assets’ in the shape of militant groups without official links to the Pakistani state, could still be in place somewhere in the more shadowy part of the security strategy. The problem with hedging strategies, however, is that they are high-risk. If all the regional players keep them as cards up their sleeves, the re-descent into armed conflict may well become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

²⁴ For more details on recent developments in Afghan-Pakistani relations in the context of Taliban talks, see: Thomas Ruttig, ‘The Qatar Office Conundrum: Karzai’s Quest for Control over Taliban Talks’, *Afghanistan Analysts Network blog*, 5 April 2013, <http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=3333>.

In this context, it is interesting to note that a meeting, planned to take place in March between the Ulema of Afghanistan and Pakistan seems to have come up against fundamental differences over the role of the Taliban. ‘We aren’t ready to be Karzai’s puppets,’ Allama Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, the chairman of Pakistan’s Ulema Council, is quoted to have commented. ‘We aren’t ready to call the Taliban’s struggle an insurgency. We recognize jihad in Afghanistan as jihad. We salute the struggle of Mulla Omar.’²⁵ In both Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Ulema Councils, consisting of prominent religious scholars, wield considerable influence over policy-making, reaching beyond strictly religious issues. The plan for a cross-border meeting was prepared by the Afghan High Peace Council during its November visit to Pakistan and announced when Presidents Karzai and Zardari met in London in February as part of the ongoing, regional rapprochement. The plan included the idea of a following wider, international meeting of Muslim clerics aiming at endorsing a negotiated settlement in Afghanistan. All of this has now been put on hold.²⁶

ECONOMIC CRISIS AND POLITICAL FATIGUE

Political discussion on regional and other matters has always been vibrant in Pakistan, but signs of *political fatigue* are now increasing, reflecting a widening gap between the ‘political class’, including not only politicians but also opinion-makers as well as the elite in general, and common people struggling to make ends meet. The mass demonstrations in January against political leadership perceived as corrupt and opaque, called by Mohammad Tahir ul-Qadri, a religiously educated law professor turned preacher/politician, seemed to give voice to a group which is seldom heard in the tumultuous and loud political debate

²⁵ Maria Abi-Habib and Habib Khan Totakhil, ‘Pakistani Council to Skip Kabul Talks’, *Wall Street Journal*, 14 February 2013, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887323478004578304073918201866.html>, retrieved 6 April 2013.

²⁶ For more detail and analysis, see: Borhan Osman, ‘Ulama Conference Aimed at Outlawing Suicide Attacks: Victim of a Blame Game’, *Afghanistan Analysts Network blog*, 4 February 2013, <http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=3333>.

carried on in Pakistani media – an educated middle class not part of the habitual political cadres and their entourage.

Possibly, a disproportionate number of these demonstrators are among the tiny minority of Pakistanis that actually pay taxes and would like to get something in return. Pakistan's tax/GDP ratio of around 9 per cent is among the lowest in the world and, during the last five years, the proportion of Pakistanis who pay income tax has dropped to less than 1 per cent. For the poor majority, this is because their income is below the taxation limit. The problem starts at the top: remarkably, in a country where agriculture accounts for around 20 per cent of the GDP, there is no agricultural income tax and, according to a recent study, 70 per cent of parliamentarians had not filed a tax return for 2011.²⁷ This parliamentary majority can hardly be expected to be in the forefront of radical measures to levy more tax out of the privileged class (which, in Pakistan, is extremely privileged).

Another factor that hampers sound, economic development is the energy crisis.²⁸ It affects industrial capacity and drives potential investors abroad. At the same time, the influx to the job market of young Pakistanis is very high – estimated to require an economic growth rate around twice the current one to provide the next generation with prospects for a decent livelihood. As in other parts of the world, young men with bleak prospects provide a fertile recruiting ground for militant movements – as well as a potential pressure group for modernisation and progress. In any case, the continued traction of the militant groups, in spite of the harsh living conditions that they impose, is compounded by the economic crisis, which, in turn, is tightly linked to lack of governance and political will. While a number of well-intended and welcome laws have been passed during the government led by Pakistan People's

²⁷ See Maleeha Lodhi, 'Pakistan Needs to Broaden Its Tax Base', *The Sunday Guardian*, 6 April 2013, <http://www.sunday-guardian.com/analysis/pakistan-needs-to-broaden-its-tax-base>, retrieved 6 April 2013.

²⁸ According to a report from the Asian Development Bank, quoted in Dawn.com, 'losses arising from power and gas shortages held down GDP growth by 3–4 percentage points in FY2011 and FY2012'. 'Pakistan's Energy Crisis Major Hurdle in Economic Growth: ADB', *Dawn.com*, 11 April 2012, retrieved 26 April 2013.

Party (PPP), implementation of these measures is still patchy.²⁹

'Corruption' is the catch word for a range of political and economic shortcomings, a label applied to all kinds of mismanagement and a tool to get at political adversaries. As such, it is difficult to measure – but clearly the perception is that corruption has continued to increase in Pakistan, adding to the class divide and affecting mainly the poor. However, in terms of natural resources, Pakistan is not a poor country. Wise and committed politicians could do a lot to turn the economic crisis around. One largely untapped potential which could be proactively harnessed is women. A global managing consulting firm, Booz & Company, recently produced a report attempting to quantify the economic potential of the one billion women around the world who could, given the right circumstances, enter the global economy during the coming decade. The report contains a 'Third Billion Index', ranking 128 countries in terms of how effective they are in empowering women as economic agents. Pakistan appears as number 127.³⁰

Another obvious, untapped potential lies in regional cooperation, which has long been held back not only by the conflict in Afghanistan but also by the rivalry between Pakistan and India. While signs of a thaw are appearing in the economic relations between these two countries, notably Pakistan's decision to grant Most Favoured Nation status to India,³¹ progress is still fragile and

²⁹ Apart from the 18th Amendment described in the last section of this paper, the Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act of 2009 and The National Commission for Human Rights Act of 2012 are examples in this context. In 2010, the Government of Pakistan also ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights and the Convention against Torture.

³⁰ DeAnne Aguirre et al., *Empowering the Third Billion: Women and the World of Work*, Booz and Company, http://www.booz.com/media/uploads/BoozCo_Empowering-the-Third-Billion_Full-Report.pdf, retrieved 8 April 2013. (The report does not include Pakistan in its profile countries, where the actual cost of discrimination of women is quantified as percentage of GDP.)

³¹ A cabinet decision to this effect was made on 2 November 2011 but the process of putting it into practice has been stalled, *inter alia*, due to fears in commercial circles that competition from cheap Indian products could have adverse effects on Pakistani enterprises and employment. Like some other difficult

subject to attacks from hardliners on both sides. If the situation in Afghanistan deteriorates, the delicate progress achieved is likely to be one of the first victims. In a renewed round of proxy action on the secondary arena provided by Afghanistan, India would have an edge to the extent that it is today a popular country among Afghans, while Pakistan seems to have taken on the role of the number one scapegoat for almost all of Afghanistan's problems.

DISASTERS AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

In the massive array of political, economic and security challenges surrounding Pakistan's increasingly difficult act of 'muddling through', a tale of human suffering tends to get lost. But Pakistanis are suffering – and not only from the run-of-the-mill gas rationing or power cuts, which make existence for most people either too cold or too hot during most of the year. A low-key *humanitarian crisis* is developing in the country. Much of it is the fallout from instability along the Durand Line: An estimated 750,000 people are internally displaced, mostly from the FATA. Out of these, only around one tenth live in camps while the rest, largely due to traditional preferences, attempt to seek refuge in already vulnerable communities.³² For all of them, humanitarian assistance is in short supply – according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), out of the 366 million US dollars needed for humanitarian assistance in FATA and KP this year, only 64 million is currently available.³³ Due to a shortfall of

decisions, e.g., putting an IMF programme into place, its implementation could now be waiting for the post-election period. India granted this status to Pakistan already in 1996.

³² For school-age girls who end up living in camps, there is at least one advantage: they will have opportunities to attend school, which they would not otherwise have had. Literacy is reported to have gone up to 37 per cent among girls living in camps, as compared to a reported literacy rate of 5.75 per cent for girls in FATA. See: 'Far from Home but Closer to School in Pakistan', *IRIN News*, 17 April 2013, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report/97863/Far-from-home-but-closer-to-school-in-Pakistan>, retrieved 22 April 2013.

³³ The figures from OCHA were quoted in *IRIN News* on 1 March 2013,

funding, the World Food Programme (WFP) has halved the wheat rations given to displaced families, leaving them, for the rest, to their own devices for survival.³⁴

The recurrent natural disasters are another reason for extensive suffering. By virtue of their magnitude, the earthquake in 2005, in which around 75,000 Pakistanis perished,³⁵ and the extensive floods in 2010, which were less deadly but affected 'at least 18 million people',³⁶ attracted a great deal of international attention. The lesser disasters hitting more limited but still large population groups since then have gone largely unnoticed. That applies to, for instance, the 2012 monsoon floods which affected 'over 4.8 million people', leaving 'almost 860,000 people in need of food aid and more than a million requiring farm inputs'. Again, humanitarian assistance is in short supply – according to IRIN News, the humanitarian response for the 2012 floods required 168.5 million US dollars, but just 86 million (51 per cent) had been pledged by the end of the year. Of that, only 49 million, or 29 per cent, had been committed.³⁷

Still, and in spite of all the other problems besetting the nation, Pakistan has been able to, more or less, bounce back from these calamities. The resilience of the Pakistani population is a

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report/97570/How-best-to-serve-Pakistan-s-750-000-IDPs>, retrieved 8 April 2013.

³⁴ Reported in *IRIN News* on 14 February 2014.

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report/97477/WFP-food-ration-cuts-hit-IDPs-in-Pakistan>, retrieved 8 April 2014.

³⁵ According to a report published by the Feinstein International Center of Tufts University, 'the devastating earthquake that struck northern Pakistan and the disputed territory of Kashmir on October 8, 2005, killed approximately 75,000 people, injured 70,000 more, left an estimated 3.5 million people homeless, and devastated the basic infrastructure of a region the size of Belgium.' Andrew Wilder, *Humanitarian Agenda 2015: Perceptions of the Pakistan Earthquake Response*, Feinstein International Center, February 2008, p. 3. <https://sites.tufts.edu/feinstein/2008/humanitarian-agenda-2015-perceptions-of-the-pakistan-earthquake-response>, retrieved 8 April 2012.

³⁶ 'Pakistan Floods Still Claiming Lives, Six Months On', *BBC News South Asia*, 28 January 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12308913>, retrieved 8 April 2013.

³⁷ 'Struggling to Provide for Flood Victims', *IRIN News*, 27 December 2012, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report/97136/PAKISTAN-Struggling-to-provide-for-flood-victims>, retrieved 8 April 2013.

factor commonly cited as one of the country's assets. Together with remittances from a large diaspora³⁸ and an extensive informal economy,³⁹ it has yielded a strong coping capacity. Still, the social fabric has necessarily been stretched and there must be wounds which have not healed. Quite possibly the recurrent environmental disasters have fed into the potentially dangerous brew of political apathy mixed with religious extremism – particularly where the government was conspicuously absent from the scene⁴⁰ while militant groups efficiently organised the first relief efforts. Earthquakes and floods also bring a notion of doomsday and divine wrath that some mullahs and conservative politicians have not hesitated to exploit as proof that people, usually the already underprivileged and overexposed, have failed in their religious duties.⁴¹

In any case, political apathy combined with religious zeal seems to be particularly characteristic of young Pakistanis. Due to the country's demographic youth bulge, this is a huge

³⁸ According to data from the State Bank quoted in *The Express Tribune*, 'Pakistani workers remitted USD 9.235 billion in the first eight months (July 2012 to February 2013) of fiscal year 2012-13, showing a growth of 7.47% or USD 0.642 billion compared with USD 8.593 billion in the corresponding period of preceding year.' 'Remittances Grow 7.5% in First Eight Months of Fiscal 2013', *The Express Tribune*, 12 March 2013, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/519319/remittances-grow-7-5-in-first-eight-months-of-fiscal-2013/>, retrieved 26 April 2013.

³⁹ According to a report recently published by the Jinnah Institute, 'available evidence suggests that Pakistan's informal economy is providing more employment opportunities than the formal sector'. 'Delivering on Promises, Assessing Implementation of Political Party Manifestos', *Jinnah Institute Research Report*, p 9, <http://www.jinnah-institute.org/images/partymanifesto.pdf>, retrieved 23 April 2013.

⁴⁰ In August 2010, when the devastating floods hit large parts of Pakistan, President Asif Ali Zardari chose not to interrupt a European tour, which also included a helicopter trip 'to drop in on the 16th century chateau he owns in Normandy'. Saeed Shah, 'Pakistan Floods: Army Steps into Breach as Anger Grows at Zardari', *The Guardian*, 8 August 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/aug/08/pakistan-floods-army-popular-zardari-anger>, retrieved 8 April 2013.

⁴¹ See for instance Peter Foster, 'Quake is "Punishment from Allah"', *The Telegraph*, 15 October 2005. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/pakistan/1500690/Quake-is-punishment-from-Allah.html>, retrieved 8 April 2013.

group – well over half the population is aged between 18 and 29. Of the registered 85 million voters, 25 million fall into the 'youth' category and 13 million of these will be first-time voters. But according to a survey of 4,450 young people, carried out by the Islamabad-based Free and Fair Election Network (Fafen) in January, only 48 per cent of voters aged 18 to 25 intend to vote, as compared to much higher proportions among older age groups, culminating in 84 per cent of those above 55. At the same time, a recent poll conducted by the British Council found that more than half of 5,000 respondents between 18 and 29 years believed that 'democracy' was not a good form of governance in Pakistan. In this poll, 64 per cent of male responders and 75 per cent of female responders described themselves as 'conservative' or religious.⁴²

CENTRIFUGAL TENDENCIES

Hitting mostly the already poor, the disasters may also have contributed to further *divisiveness* within Pakistan. The urban elites have hardly been struck. At the same time, the spill-over from the conflict in Afghanistan has compounded the differences between the West and the East of present-day Pakistan, with the provinces of KP and Balochistan bearing the brunt of the burden in terms of refugee flows, 'Kalashnikov culture' and terrorist attacks. In its Pakistan Security Report 2012, the Pak Institute of Peace Studies (PIPS) records the number of terrorist attacks during the year as 474 in Balochistan (631 dead, 1,032 injured), 456 in KP (401 dead and 1,081 injured) and 388 in FATA (631 dead and 1,095 injured). The number is also high in Karachi, 187 attacks resulting in 272 killed and 352 injured, while it is much lower in the rest of the country. Notably, there are no terrorist attacks recorded in Azad Kashmir, either in 2012, or in 2011. Thus, in a way, insecurity splits the country down the middle.⁴³

⁴² Zofeen Ebrahim, Religious Youth Could Swing Pakistani Poll, *Inter-Press Service*, 19 April 2013, <http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/04/religious-youth-could-swing-pakistani-poll/> (retrieved 23 April 2013).

⁴³ Pak Institute for Peace Studies, *Pakistan Security Report 2012*, p 7. <http://san-pips.com/download.php?f=190.pdf>, retrieved 8 April 2013.

The 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan, enacted on 19 April 2010, contained a range of provisions restoring parliamentary democracy and was remarkable in the sense that, for the first time, Pakistan's president signed a bill significantly reducing his power. The move to devolve power as well as accountability to the provinces was indeed welcome but, as it turns out, has contributed to the growing lack of cohesiveness in the country as a whole. The capacity to handle the devolved funds varies between the four provinces and, again, those with the worst life conditions, notably in Balochistan, gain less, while Punjab is at the forefront of those moving forward. For real, grass-roots democracy to happen, further devolution to the district level will be needed in combination with effective measures to ensure better governance, transparency and local buy-in.

As the main political parties of Pakistan have their power bases in different provinces, there is a risk that the upcoming election – the first to take place since the 18th Amendment was adopted – will also enhance divisiveness. It could result in a situation where the dominant political forces are perceived to slice the country up between themselves, withdrawing into their respective strongholds and becoming more closely linked to different ethnic groups. Such a development could easily add to existing rivalries. Baloch nationalists already look upon Punjabis as colonisers exploiting their natural resources. Current discussion aiming at creating a new, Seraiki-speaking province in Southern Punjab, as well as dividing Sindh into two different entities along urban and rural lines, has given rise to demands from other ethnic groups, such as the Hazaras, for a province of their own. But minority groups exist in all provinces, including those that may be in the making, and, as we have seen, protection for minorities is inherently weak in Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

Trying to predict Pakistan's development is to aim at a constantly moving target, under the sway of several contradictory trends, internal as well as external. The only thing that can be said with certainty is that the incoming government following the election on 11 May 2013 will not have an easy job. The balance between destructive and constructive forces is at a delicate point and the risk is tangible that even if energetic and committed advocates of reform come out as winners, they will not have time on their side.

This risk is particularly relevant in the context of the regional situation, with neighbouring countries trying to square multi-layered agendas and possibly sacrificing regional stability in that process. Specifically, how the future unfolds for Afghanistan, as international troops continue their exit, is crucial for Pakistan as well. The democratic transition now in the making could become a landmark in the history of Pakistan but it is not, in itself, enough to ensure an irreversible process. Religious radicalisation and extremist militancy combined with continued bad governance and an ongoing economic crisis could well push the country in quite another direction, particularly if the situation in Afghanistan deteriorates in the coming years.

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