

## **Why are we poor?**

Dr Farrukh Saleem\*

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 "sacred 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, side-winders 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 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 military 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 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 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 the US are also high on our wish list.

Just who is profiting from the sale of all these machines of death and destruction? The top ten exporters of conventional weapons are USA, Russia, France, UK, Germany, Netherlands, Ukraine, Italy, China and Belarus. The top corporate merchants of death are Lockheed Martin (USA), Boeing (USA), BAE Systems (UK), Raytheon (USA), Northrop Grumman (USA), General Dynamics (USA) and Thomson-CSF (France).

When the poverty-ridden East fills West's craving for drugs there is talk of 'supply control'. The West remains the chief pretender of virtue but is the largest seller of arms to the East. The US, for instance, accounts for a full 50% of the world trade in arms.

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. Without peace there can't be any poverty alleviation.

India's economy is 800% the size of ours. On a per capita basis, we have a record of spending 500% more on arms imports than does India. Which country is likely to run out of resources first? Just who is most likely to win without firing a shot? There certainly are no prizes for getting these riddles right.

*\* originally posted at Jang Group Online Editions*