

Swat—Yesterday & Today

Executive Summary:

On the eve of Kalam festival held from July 11-18 to celebrate restoration of peace in Swat, the CRSS, in collaboration with *Idara Barai Taleem-o Taraqqi* (IBT) [organization for education and progress] conducted a jirga [assembly of local elders] on 17th July in Kalam to discuss problems and progress in Malakand since the end of military operation last year.

The jirga titled “Swat—Yesterday and Today”, attended by over 120 people belonging to different walks of life, was chaired by Syed Jafar Shah, a member of Khyber Pakhoonkhwa Assembly. Other participants included CRSS Chairman Imtiaz Gul and IBT Executive Director Zubair Torwali.

MPA [member of provincial assembly] Jafar Shah was of the view that a strong civil society is the “only panacea” for permanent peace in Swat and that the achievements against militants during the last year or so must be consolidated.

“The military operation in May last year had helped people understand the real reasons behind the militancy,” he told the jirga which was the first such initiative in three years and also the first gathering at this windswept sprawling town.

“Every child in Malakand has become aware of what the game (of the militants led by the Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan) was. This is our gain vis-à-vis forces that want to subject these regions to their skewed view of Islam,” Shah told the audience that comprised tribal elders, writers, academics and educationists from the Malakand Division.

Many jirga members expressed their reservations about the army’s “omnipresence” and its authority over civilian matters in Malakand.

According to the jirga participants, the key issues existing in the area included absence of civil representatives, deficient and stagnating education system, unemployment, crime, absence of a functional and cost-effective speedy justice system, massive corruption, administrative infrastructure disproportionate to the exploding population and neglect of the areas.

Khalid Mian:

Educationist

People generally describe our jirgas as conferences or seminars; however, it is a matter of happiness for all of us that the CRSS has gathered us in a jirga according to our traditions.

Pakistan – particularly Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa and the tribal areas – have been suffering the scourge of militancy for about a decade. However, to me, it is a continuity of the consequences of the cold war, in which Pakistan was given the title of a “front line state”. The Pukhtoons in the form of Afghan Taliban became its victims.

Terrorism itself is no issue; it is, in fact, an ugly face of radicalism. We will have to delink terrorists from fundamentalism, and for this, we will have to give an alternative. Terrorism will have to be uprooted from the society. We will have to bring the existing class system in the society to an end. The peasants who had joined the Taliban are still languishing in jails, while the influential affluent have been bailed out. The entire world is being affected by this menace, and we need to tell it the truth about it.

Muhammad Saleem:

Educationist

The Swat state’s merger into Pakistan in 1969 brought deterioration in every sector instead of any betterment or improvement. Swat could never become part of the mainstream. Unemployment, lawlessness, corruption and population considerably increased. And the educational process continuously remained on the falling graph, as many serious mistakes had been committed in this regard. The standard of schools fell. The educational syllabi could not help create a social harmony in the area. Instead of improving the lot of the people, it fanned hatred in the area. It remains a question as to why was terrorism promoted in presence of 2250 schools in Swat?

As regards informal education – in which people related to media have a major role – the educational standard remained low as no attention was given to this sector as well. If we want to bring a change, we will have to eliminate ignorance.

How can one expect peace in an area which lacks roads, law enforcement and justice, besides lagging behind in education? The things which led us to the current situation include ignorance, oppression, injustice and lack of real representation. There was only one girls middle school and two teachers for 30,000 population in the area. And more so, the terrorists even targeted these few girls schools, blowing them up in blasts. The people of Swat suffered a lot at the hands of terrorists, and the ones sitting in Islamabad could not feel it.

The reconstruction process is highly slow, with a little attention being given to the destroyed girls schools. The army has been keeping everything under its control without involving the community in the rehabilitation process. Peace has no price. The agencies responsible for establishing peace have to be stabilized and strengthened.

Haroon Bacha:

Nazim Union Council Kalam

The problems and agonies we are currently suffering are not creation of one day but they gradually emerged in the form Talibanization, terrorism or extremism. And the responsibility for this obviously lies on our representatives and government officials. It is necessary to analyze whether we have lost our identity and our thinking process has also got paralyzed.

Has any progress been witnessed after 1969? I would rather say that the things have gone so worse that the crime rate of today is much higher than that of pre-1969 era. The situation cannot improve until provision of justice, improvement of educational standard and elimination of ignorance are ensured. All the people should join hands to bring peace back in the area.

Rehmat Din Siddiqi:

General Secretary Kalam Hotel Association

The emergence of militancy in the area brought a lot of miseries for the locals. The Pakistan army has effectively dealt with this wave of militancy by killing or forcing most of the militants flee the area. However, there are still some issues including absence of complete peace, ignorance and poor economic condition, which have kept the area in trouble.

The reconstruction and rehabilitation process cannot be effectively taken ahead until complete peace prevails in the area. Terror incidents are occurring there time to time, and people also have fear of the Taliban re-emergence. The process of imparting education has not yet been fully restored, and as long as youths remain illiterate, they can be easily won by the extremist forces.

As regards economy, 50 percent economy of the area depends on tourism, and the remaining half is based on agriculture. Both the sectors have been badly affected by militancy. As many as 20,000 people were turned unemployed in tourism industry. The area has to suffer a total loss of about Rs 5 billion in the last three years. The imposition of curfew in 2007-2008 for a long time brought a loss worth billions of rupees to the locals.

Syed Aqil Shah:

Local elder

The centre and provincial governments are not taking due interest in restoring civil administration system in the area. The reconstruction process is also moving at a slow pace. Whatever restoration and reconstruction work is being witnessed in the areas has been done by the army. The provincial government totally remains absent in it.

Malik Amirzada:

Ex MPA

Public representatives of Swat are not present in their respective constituencies. They even do not like to visit the area. Perhaps, they have boycotted the area as well as its people. There may be dangers in the area, but public representatives have some responsibilities. In the hour of need, political leaders are supposed to remain preset among people and make efforts to redress their grievances.

The prevailing deteriorated situation can hardly improve as all the government organizations are working as mafias. Instead of bringing any relief to the people, they are rather creating problems for them. Even education sector is not functioning properly. Mere construction of buildings, poles and roads will not bring about any progress, but educational system will have to be promoted. I would implore all the participants to carry on quest for goodness fearlessly.

I have a few questions, which still remain answerable to me. They include; a) Why was extremism promoted in Swat? b) Why was Swat selected for it? c) Was religious education a reaction to Western education? d) Can terrorism not be eliminated through jirga?

Jafar Shah:

Awami National Party MPA

The issues which caused emergence of militancy in Swat include class system, faulty educational system, economic deprivations, geographical situation and extremely positive and unusual thinking of the people of Swat.

In the wake of challenging of the writ of the state by the militants, the army was called in by the government. With people's support, the militant forces have been defeated in the area. As the situation further improves, the authority will be handed over to the civilians. There is no question of the Army's permanent stay in the area.

The ANP government received highly complex problems in legacy. We would receive threats every day. Had there been any other government in the province, it would have given up. Today, every child of Swat knows what was the real game, and the same is our success vis a vis militant forces. Every individual engaged in this mission played his respective role, bringing the bustling of Kalam back.

In order to get rid of this scourge permanently, we will have to strengthen the civil society. I believe that strengthening of civil society is the key to solution of our problems. There should be 'social audit' of public representatives. The anti-state forces will get defeated the moment we as civil society become united. All the stakeholders will have to get integrated for having permanent peace. We will have to act even at the cost of our lives in order to win this war and establish permanent peace in Swat.

The government is making all out efforts to introduce educational reforms in the area. The reconstruction of 28 schools is underway, and the government is also taking measures to encourage and promote female education. Four girls schools are being upgraded to college level and a degree college is also being established in the area.