

A people's movement for dewatering.

Weapons, licensed or otherwise, perform exactly the same function. There is rarely a disagreement over what can be accomplished with a firearm. This however has not been sufficient for many to realise the American author Kurt Vonnegut's famous words, "We cannot get rid of mankind's fleetingly wicked wishes. We can get rid of the machines that make them come true".

Gun violence in Pakistan has raged with frightening frequency. A sane and sincere administration ought to have eliminated all fire arms as the first essential task towards peace. Regrettably, despite the government's numerous public declarations and the Prime Minister having eleven times publicly pledged to undertake complete dewatering, there is nothing that has been factually done to curb this menace. On the contrary, the government has been liberally extending the last date for computerisation of weapons. The latest announcement by the Interior Ministry magnanimously stretches the never-ending date from December 2015 to December 2016.

With hundreds of armed individuals and militias, loaded with weapons from 9mm pistols to machine guns, automatic rifles, hand grenades, rocket launchers and anti-aircraft guns, ever ready to kidnap, kill, rape or massacre, the state has begun to appear like a helpless spectator. Ordinary citizens are compelled to seek protection from local mafias or commercially-operated private security agencies. While the militants who threatened the security forces in the mountains of Waziristan may have been neutralised, those who engage in acts of militancy in towns and cities of Pakistan continue to operate unimpeded.

There are an estimated 500 small and big private militias that operate in this country. They are allowed to flourish despite Article 256 of the constitution which categorically forbids their formation. Why does the government not move decisively to eliminate all militants and militias. Is the government scared, under influence, seeking goodwill or simply protecting these gangs for its political exigencies.

The government's apathy and stupor can best be explained by asking a few fundamental questions. Will the rulers and groups whose primary ideology, commerce and power base is dependent on the possession, use, sale and display of weapons be inclined towards a de-weaponisation initiative? Would the politically enslaved and professionally challenged law-enforcers, who find it difficult to capture

even the 'Chotus' of Rajanpur, be remotely enthusiastic to consider such a rigorous new challenge?

There are others who view this issue as not just totally doable but also as the only solution to a lasting peace in Pakistan. They believe that the state must jettison its fossilised views on security and agree on three fundamental principles as a prerequisite to de-weaponisation. a). That providing equal security to all citizens is the business of the state and not that of private gangs, guards or goons. b). That the policy of an endless reactive warfare must be replaced by a scientific and proactive approach of demanding surrender of some 20 million weapons in the hands of civilians in Pakistan and c). That the madness of increasing the height of walls, building more barriers, hiring more guards, adding more weapons and creating more fortifications is a corporate, capitalistic and counterproductive approach. It works well for the rulers and the rich and that is where it ends.

In the path of any weapon reduction and control lies a huge obstacle. While not formally labelled, an equally powerful and devious brand of National Rifles Association (NRA) operates 24/7 to promote and proliferate weapons in Pakistan. The NRA in our case is represented by legislators who hold 69473 prohibited-bore weapon licenses. It is represented by manufacturers, transporters, stockists and sellers of weapons. It is represented by those engaged in smuggling, import and distribution of weapons. It is represented by those who have issued millions of gun licenses without any mandatory checks. It is represented by the cartel of government officials and dealers who exchange both real and fake gun licenses for an under-the-table price. It is represented by the bureaucrats who have perfected the techniques of data disappearance by declaring any record as 'not available', lost or burnt. And finally a large chunk of this disaster capital goes to the powerful private security agencies whose business flourishes with every bullet that diminishes yet another life.

The much needed de-weaponisation in Pakistan is thus in direct conflict with the power and financial interests of the gun lobby. The ruling elite in possession of firearms and the carpetbaggers who profiteer from the unsettled social and political conditions are not likely to voluntarily or easily give up on their primary source of sustenance.

Thus a peoples' mass movement for abolishing all weapons and limiting them to the exclusive domain of the state may be the only way forward in the battle for making Pakistan a peaceful and weapon-free country. It is heartening to note that individuals and organisations such as Citizens Against Weapons (CAW), Citizens-Police Liaison Committee (CPLC), Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), Pakistan Institute of Labour & Education Research (PILER), Shehri CBE, Shirkat Gah,

Tehrik-e-Niswan, Pakistan Medical Association (PMA), Citizens Trust Against Crime (CTAC) , Aurat Foundation and Children's Literature Festival (CLF) have already come together to endorse their support of a nation-wide de-weaponisation program.

A much larger and inclusive mass social movement of students, labour, professionals, lawyers, humanists and pacifists of all shades, environmental activists, doctors, parents, teachers, farmers and workers may be the only solution to dismantle the deeply entrenched and powerful gun cartel. "Slavery wasn't a crisis for British and American elites until abolitionism turned it into one. Apartheid wasn't a crisis until the anti-apartheid movement turned it into one" writes Naomi Klein in her book, 'This changes everything'. What is needed in Pakistan is a similar people's social movement for abolition of weapons. Must we continue to be part of a system that makes access to automatic weapons easier than access to decent schooling for our future generations?