

## **The tragedy at Rajanpur**

The unfolding events at Rajanpur once again expose the gloomiest chapter of the tragedy of Pakistan. It is not only tragic because a bunch of ragtag bandits could repulse the police force of the largest province and keep the greatest Muslim army guessing for days on end. It is not repulsive only because it exposed the well-known conduits that connect our 'Sardars', law makers and ministers at one end and the private armies at the other. It is also not disgusting just because it exposed the cosmic contrast between our financial focus on the development of Lahore's Canal Bank Road and the kutcha Jamal area of the Rajanpur riverine.

It is a tragedy because there is no sign that Pakistan has even begun to understand the nature and the causes of its continuing militancy. It is a tragedy because our leaders and political parties have no inclination or capacity to hold a serious debate on what is wrong with our system. It is also a tragedy because our law enforcement agencies consider 'Zarb-e-Aahans' as the only recipe for every 'Chotu' of this land. Finally it is a tragedy beyond words because the state has not grasped a simple fact that it is not wise to first create a monster out of a molehill and then try to seek its one-time demolition.

There are at least four aspects that need to be addressed. There must be equitable development for all parts of the country that provide opportunities for people to engage in professions other than militancy. That the helpless electoral system ought to be re-engineered to ensure that it can prevent warlords and criminals from entering the corridors of power. That the police force needs to be extricated from the clutches of politicians and taught to differentiate between implementing law and the duties of a domestic servant. And finally that reading and understanding Article 256 of the Constitution must be made compulsory for every law-maker and policeman.

Does no one in our parliament know that Article 256 of the constitution categorically states that 'no private organisation capable of functioning as a military organisation shall be formed and any such organisation shall be illegal'. Do the members of our parliament have any idea that there exist many hundred private armies in Pakistan – some directly in their own service and their own constituency. Their organisation, their weapons, their crimes and their patrons are only a photocopy of the nuisance we just witnessed at Rajanpur. Are we so mindless as to first wait for every disaster to surface, take its toll and then reluctantly organise another 'Chotu-specific Zarb e Aahan'.

Are there other rational, proactive and less hazardous ways of combating the monsters who hold the state and the citizens hostage in every urban and rural territory of Pakistan. What stops the government to launch a 'Zarb-e-Aman', with just two main objectives. Any person regardless of his rank or position, if found to have links with any private army, militia or mafia be legally taken to task and stripped of his position. This is a prerequisite if the state is serious about eliminating crime and militancy in Pakistan.

It is not an ideal solution to ask Army to sort out all our self-created 'Chotus'. But if the Army is made to wash the dirty linen every few weeks, it must first begin by a proactive demand for surrender of all weapons and abolition of all private militias. As currently no other state organ has the capacity or the will, the Army must be formally mandated to plan and implement this fundamental task. There is no other solution or short-cut to peace and sanity in Pakistan. Must we remain endlessly engaged in reactionary conflicts and become voluntary hostages to the criminals of our own creation? Will the real victims, the people of Pakistan, demand a permanent end to the hundreds of 'Rajanpur-like' tragedies that await just around the corner?

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