

Note for Record
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Subject: The Resurrection of Swat

I started my working life from Swat 57 years ago from the Jahanzeb College. Four years ago, Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) took me to Kalam in Swat for their annual retreat. The road was awful, it took me 8 hours to Mingoara from Islamabad and another four to Kalam. Last week it took me just three and a half hours from Islamabad to Mingoara. But the scene had changed. There were visible signs of plunder and destruction and most of the small shops in all the villages and towns, we drove through, were closed. The traffic on the road was unbelievable, as if life was back to normal. Some of the roadside restaurants were also open. The orchards were untouched and as soon as one came out of inhabited areas along the roadside, the old beautiful heavenly Swat was visible. In 1953 I had driven in a tonga from Thana to Saidu Sharif, changing horses at Barikot. The old name of Swat was Uddayyana – the Garden, It indeed is a garden.

The population explosion has made small villages into towns and Mingoara into a city. There were houses built everywhere even in the river bed called Khurs.

Despite international and national outrage against cruelty perpetrated on Swatis and loud promises of help nothing much seems visible. The Girls and Boys Schools are awaiting reconstruction. The Education Department has big plans to make 6-room primary schools and so on; debates and discussions are going on the modalities of costing, tendering and contracting while the boys and girls who have already lost two years wait in vain for opening of their schools. Nine schools were built by Sarhad Rural Support Programme (SRSP) in less than three months including repairs of a complex of government primary, middle and high schools. It was all done with funds donated by people of Pakistan to SRSP for Swat IDPs. DFID offer to SRSP to build more such schools, was torpedoed by authorities who are awaiting large grants from USAID for the purpose. It seems there is more interest in commissions and contractors profiteering than seeing children in school as soon as possible.

Sultanwas was in the news when the militants turned towards Buner after capturing Swat. The army authorities told me that after the peace deal, they could not move anywhere without the permission of the new rulers. Sometimes when permission was granted and if they had even one

more vehicle, they were turned back from the checkpoint. They were helpless. At Sultanwas people decided to resist the militant incursion but without civil or military support, they were outnumbered and after suffering casualties, decided to evacuate from Sultanwas.

The owner of the ten million rupee house Abdur Rashid Khan who asked the army to bomb his house to drive away the militants, showed us his house in ruins. Down below his house was the bombed out Madrassah. In a village of 650 households ruination was brought about by two persons and one of them was running the Madrassah. When I asked Abdur Rashid Khan how come it was all happening under his nose and he didn't notice. He said the man used to go abroad every year and bring millions of rupees, we didn't suspect in the least what he was upto. The army had forbidden removal of the debris of the Madrassah to serve as a reminder to the village for all times to come.

Masoodul Mulk, CEO SRSP managed to get a grant from UNDP to mobilize 22 community organizations (COs), repair and rehabilitate 17 link roads, 10 drinking water schemes comprising 29 hand pumps, 8 streets pavement, 2 causeways/culverts, 2 village sewer lines, trained 200 villagers in different skills, distributed 143 animals, vaccinated 26,291 animals in two phases and distributed agri inputs and fertilizer.

In the COs meetings, Kaimaya Zar, Secretary of Village Organization (VO) stated that on March 6, 2009, the Militants attacked and by 10th March the whole village was empty and on 11th the village was occupied and destroyed by the militants. After military action, on return we found militants had destroyed everything. With SRSP assistance we got mobilized even sinking our past differences especially the two Khans, who are now one in this effort to rebuild Sultanwas. Of 200 persons trained, 90 are women. Projects worth Rs. 33 millions were implemented by COs/VOs with UNDP assistance through SRSP in a short span of time.

In the women organization (WO), one of the women complained about her house was not included in the list of damaged and destroyed houses. The other members informed that the CO decided not to include her house as her son was one of the two persons in the village who invited the militants and cooperated with them. This decision would never have been taken if a CO would not have been formed.

The CO/VO Sultanwas made an emotional plea for continuation of the work initiated by UNDP through SRSP. In Peshawar, I met the Chief Secretary Mr. Javed Iqbal to convey the appeal of the people of Sultanwas. UNDP has already approved funds to undertake rehabilitation

and livelihood interventions for 18 Union Councils of Buner and Swat, which is awaiting approval of the authorities. While people suffer authorities take their own time.

On way back from Sultanwas we noticed why the militants had chosen the village. It provided the camouflage they needed. Fully forested with Abdur Rashid Khan's house on the highest elevation giving a commanding view of the surroundings below. When army came, the militants were holed up in the basement of the house. Only F-16 bombing brought an end to their occupation of Sultanwas.

From Buner to Saidu we stopped at village Ghalegai adjoining the ancient village Oodigram and Bilougram with Buddhist ruins and Stupas. Ghalegai is no more a village. It has a population of 20,000. In 1986 Community Welfare Association was formed which has now over 1,000 members representing 3,000 households who elect their office bearers every three years and have undertaken umpteen projects from the World Bank, ARP, MRDP, MDP, ACTED, ARC and now from SRSP. They run a vocational training centre and have established a library. Fortunately, despite the mass evacuation of the population, the militants did not do much damage to the village. They were keen in forging linkages with SRSP.

Our visit to a valley in Matta Tehsil in upper Swat Union Council |Al-Marroof Bamikhel took us to one of the remotest part of Swat. The jeep track was unbelievably rocky and the jeep could only crawl on it. The valley was lush green and full of fruit trees. At one point we saw a board commissioning construction of 1-km of the road at Rs. 7.8 million. I wondered where the money was spent and how. Finally we reached our destination high up at the end of the valley and were welcomed by over 300 persons, who had crossed over from the adjoining Union Council Gatbela which comprises 900 households with a population of 6,300. The population had no link with the rest of Swat except the jeep track by which we came which used to stop 2 km short from the UC and also had no bridge on the nullah which divided the two Union Councils.

The army found out that this valley was the escape route of the militants and for two months, they had to camp on the mountain ridges to plug the escape route. One day they came across in an abandoned house an old woman with another woman and child. They were well dressed and had imported blankets and other things. On enquiry, the child declared that Fazlullah was her uncle. They had been abandoned. The old woman frail and sick was Fazlullah's mother.

The army through Ehsanullah Khan, Adviser SRSP, approached SRSP to help the unfortunate people of UC Gatbela and Masoodul Mulk made Rs. 1.6 million available to SRSP District Manager Swat Zahid who following SRSP's approach, four community organizations (COs) and village organization (VO) were formed to undertake the project. The work on the project had been started just 15 days before we visited. Under technical and engineering advice of SRSP, the VO Gatbela had already completed the 2-km road linking with UC Al-Marroof with the quality of their side of the jeep road far superior to the old track and also taken in hand the construction of the RCC bridge which was nearing completion. We could not but be awed by the potential and determination of the people. Ehsanullah made an emotional speech which brought tears to many eyes. Masood explained SRSP's strategy of fostering institutions of the people to facilitate harnessing the potential of people. Chairperson SRSP Mrs. Munawar Humayun appealed for giving equal share to women in the development process. Much against Rural Support Programmes principle of never accepting hospitality from villagers, I could not refuse a bowl of curd offered to me by VO Chairman Sahibzada and General Secretary Yousuf Khan. It was done with such feeling of hospitality.

Coming down to UC Baidara where SRSP had repaired, reconstructed and refurnished a government complex of schools comprising a primary, a secondary and a high school at a cost of Rs. 2.4 million in Durushkhela, my heart sank to see the neglect with which the government school administration had maintained the complex completed only three months ago and opened by the General with a lot of fun fare. The new beautiful furniture was dirty and each classroom looked like a godown. The school has eight support staff to keep the premises neat and clean. The Chairman of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), a venerable retired Principal expressed his dismay at the lack of response of the school administration and the Education Department to the advice or instruction of the PTA. The contrast between what community was doing at Gatbela and what was the sense of responsibility of the administration at Durushkhela school complex was apparent.

While we were visiting a few shelters built by people with SRSP assistance from UNHCR, nearly 300 persons met us belonging to the Union Council. I was touched by their request only to share with them SRSP's method of work. On explaining the terms of development partnership of SRSP, I expressed my regrets at the way School Complex was being maintained. Later on I was informed that 15-20 persons from the meeting went to the School Complex to take care of the cleanliness and maintenance immediately. Unless people take these things on their own hands, the government departments can never be made accountable.

At the invitation of Col. Tarique, we visited the newly laid park of Khwazakhela which was teeming with the visitors. In the evening Brig. Ajab visited me at Ehsanullah's house where I was staying. Earlier I had met Col. Aftab and Major Jahangir. In these officers, I saw the best of the Pakistan army. Their compassion and concern for the unfortunate traumatized people of Swat was genuine. They want to do everything to mitigate the sufferings of the people and are prepared to collaborate with all organisations who have similar agenda. I saw its practical display at Gatbela. With all this goodwill and determination at the local level, I fail to understand the slow pace of rehabilitation and reconstruction in Swat. People of Swat and Buner are suffering and waiting for the assistance the whole world had promised them. Nothing much has come so far except whatever the army has been able to do with the meagre development resources at their disposal. I would beseech the civilian agencies to emulate the army in providing much needed succour to the people of Swat. I have seen the best of civil service in Chief Secretary Javed Iqbal. I am sure he will take note and let nothing stand in mitigating the sufferings of the unfortunate Swatis.

Before leaving Swat, we called on Brig. Ajab at his headquarters in Khwazakhela and was shocked to find him in a five star hotel luxury. He assured me that this is how he found the place – a Madrassah.