Pakistan might have become one of the Asian success stories. It is potentially a prosperous country, with the resources to save all its current population from poverty. But this potential has not been realised, and according to the UN’s 1992 Human Development Report, 36 million people subsist below the poverty line.

Considering that Pakistan had no industrial base to speak of when it came into existence, nor a highly developed infrastructure, its economic progress has been remarkable. Relatively liberal economic policies, together with the industry and thrift of its people, and a helping hand from foreign aid, have led to steady economic growth. GNP growth rate has increased to about 6-7 per cent per annum during the 1980s, doubling since 1972. The annual per capita income of US$400 is the second highest in South Asia after Sri Lanka. Pakistan has managed to keep its economic growth rate ahead of its bounding population growth rate of 3.1 per cent. Pakistan is not over-dependent on primary commodity exports, and has succeeded in diversifying its exports, with textiles forming the largest element. Over the past two decades, Pakistan has benefited from a valuable form of export: its manpower. Remittances from migrant workers, particularly from the Gulf, played a major role in keeping the economy booming during the 1970s and 1980s.
Primarily, Pakistan’s is a rural economy. The agricultural sector accounts for about 26 per cent of GDP and for 47 per cent of total employment. It contributes the most to the country’s earnings (rice and cotton exports) – about 60 per cent between 1984 and 1990. The industrial sector, on the other hand, accounts for about 25 per cent of GDP, employing 22 per cent of the labour force; and the service sector 49 per cent, providing employment to 33 per cent. The industrial and service sectors are a mix of public and private enterprises.

A major source of foreign exchange earnings has been the high level of remittances from Pakistan’s workers abroad. Although on the decline these are still about US$1.75 billion, which is equal to about a quarter of total export earnings or 3.7 per cent of GNP. Total export earnings amount to 16 per cent of GDP (all figures from Human Development Report, 1994).

Debt

Although not classed as a severely indebted country, Pakistan is dependent on external borrowing. In 1991-92 the interest on both economic and foreign debt went up by 31 per cent; the total external debt then amounting to US$23bn. This works out at about £125 owed per Pakistani, and some 21 per cent of Pakistan’s export revenues go towards servicing this debt. Payment of interest works out at £4.50 for each Pakistani. Over the years, debt servicing and high military expenditure has made the economy more and more dependent on foreign resources. For this reason, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) asked Pakistan to implement a programme of structural reforms in its economy. The government has had to commit itself to increased taxes, reduced public spending and reduced price subsidies, so that the government deficit falls substantially. This, as in other developing countries, has led to inflation, spiralling prices, and harsh living conditions for low-income groups.

Military expenditure

Pakistan’s military expenditures are high (6.5 per cent of its GDP), the equivalent of Rs.556 per person. Pakistan justifies high spending by the perceived security threat from India and the latter’s spending on defence. (India’s military expenditure is substantial, with 12 per cent of all its imports comprising non-nuclear arms.) Pakistan received a spurt of US-sponsored military aid following the 1979 USSR intervention in Afghanistan.

Underdevelopment in Pakistan

The dominant forces in the political economy since Partition have been the feudal elites of Punjab and Sindh, the army, the bureaucracy, and the bourgeoisie. These dominant political elites have been able to divert the bulk of public spending away from poverty alleviation and social services. This process is most visible in the way that the armed forces have appropriated the lion’s share of state resources. Interest payments on government debt have also...
been high. The result is that little revenue is left for improving water supply, health care, or educational facilities, or for other social priorities. Each year the Pakistan government (federal and provincial combined) spends Rs 164 on Education and a paltry Rs 78 on health per capita.

Pakistan has failed to provide many of its people with the basic necessities of life, despite the availability of resources. The roots of this failure lie in the political structures and the development model that has been adopted. Pakistan's bureaucratically-regulated, free-market strategy has allowed incomes to grow but there has been little investment in basic services, and social inequalities have increased. In comparison with its south Asian neighbours, Pakistan's average income is only rivalled by Sri Lanka, but its achievements in education, health care, and provision of water are way behind Sri Lanka and India and are barely on a par with poorer countries like Bangladesh and Nepal.

**Profile of poverty in Pakistan**

Poverty in Pakistan involves more than lack of food or basic necessities. Among the 36 million poor people are groups who are economically, socially, and politically marginalised; they lack productive assets with which to earn a living, they are despised or neglected by their community, and they lack political or legal protection. People such as landless labourers, tenant farmers, and marginal farmers are among the poorest in Pakistan; in urban areas, the poorest are those who do not own any property, renting even the shack they live in. Religious minorities, such as the Punjabi Christians and the Sindhi Hindus, are among the poorest people in Pakistan. The most vulnerable of all are the 'untouchable' castes, looked down on by fellow Hindus and Muslims.

Many women in Pakistan are restricted in their mobility, education, and services, and economic participation, and many experience domestic violence. They are often discriminated against in the distribution of household resources, and by the legal system. Women-headed households are a small but particularly vulnerable group. However, not all women are equally disadvantaged: women from the middle classes, who are generally educated, are in a better position to defend themselves.

Bonded workers are often exploited by their employers in what amounts to a latter-day form of slavery. The bondage arises from a loan taken by the worker from the money lender, who may be a rich trader in his village, or the owner of a factory. Bonded labour, in its classic form, is most common at the brick kilns, but is also found in other rural and urban occupations. The indebted workers are unable to leave their employer, unless they find another employer willing to pay off their loan (in effect, to buy them). They are forced to accept very low wages, from which there are systematic deductions for debts, and to work in poor conditions. Often the whole family provides the labour, normally at piecework rates.

Rural workers, agricultural or artisan, are also very often effectively bonded. To buy household necessities, they get into debt with the village shop-keeper. They are then bound to sell all their produce to him at a rate that is well below the market price, at the same time as paying prohibitive rates of interest on the loan. Floods, illnesses, and the like can put a family in bondage for life.

**Child labour**

Children in the families of bonded labourers suffer particularly, as they help to pay off a loan taken by their parents. They are deprived of education, and poor working conditions and sexual harassment may scar them for life. Child labour can be found in almost every sector, but is most common in carpet weaving, the brick kilns, and small-scale manufacturing, such as shoe-making. In one of the Bengali Burmese immigrant settlements on the outskirts of Karachi.
Razia's story

Razia's family lives and works at a bhatta (brick kiln) outside Lahore. In 1994 her father died, leaving nine-year-old Raiza, her younger brothers and sisters, her mother and grandparents. To survive, they must make at least 1,000 bricks a day. They are paid per brick, and lose money for every one that is damaged. Razia's grandmother is too old to work making bricks, so she stays at home and looks after the small children. Razia's grandfather still helps to make bricks, but he has asthma, so he can only make about 50 bricks a day. That means that Razia and her mother have to make the rest, and do all the housework. There's more to it than just making the bricks, they must mix the clay and dry the bricks as well - the bricks must be turned so that they dry evenly before they are fired, each side must face the sun for half a day. For their 1,000 bricks, the family is paid Rs110 (about £2.28). The family took out a loan of Rs6,000 (£124) when Razia's father first fell ill in late 1993. Today, half their pay goes in peshgi, that is, towards paying off the loan. That's £1.14 every day for more than two years – and no sign of the payments ever coming to an end. Says Razia: 'All we get is weeping and wailing about money.'

(left) Bricks drying in the sun.
(below) Razia making bricks.
small carpet workshops are the mainstay of impoverished families, who pledge their children’s labour for loans to build houses or meet other pressing expenses. One such workshop has 500 children working, some just five years old (Newsline, October 1993). The work environment is oppressive – low ceilings, and no ventilation. Their earnings usually go to parents who may have to use the money for daily expenses and not always for repaying the initial loan.

Child labour of this sort is a complex issue to tackle. Banning it without clear alternatives may even be counter-productive, pushing children, sometimes sole earners for their families, into even worse situations of exploitation, such as prostitution. Multi-pronged action at different levels is what is required – a combination of literacy and alternative skills for the children and employment opportunities for parents. Some NGOs offer education and literacy to children outside working hours. But these are few and far between, and there are many thousands of child workers in Pakistan.

The Carpet Weavers

‘Why don’t you send your sons to school?’ I asked the mother of six boys in one of Lahore’s slums. Abandoned by her husband, she lives in an illegal one-room lean-to not far from the main railway station. Her eldest son is in his twenties, the youngest 8 or 9 years old. Two of her sons, 12 and 15 years of age, are working in a home-based carpet weaving workshop. Her answer was simple. She had put the boys in a government school where after the first two or three grades the treatment by teachers became so harsh that they began to run away from school. Instead they would sneak off to the canal, swim and have a good time.

So she placed them in the workshop. ‘At least I know where they are, and they are learning a skill and getting free food. Above all, I do not have to kill myself with anxiety over their getting into bad company, taking drugs or drowning in the canal!’ Once they are proficient at weaving they will bring in much needed income. As many hands as possible have to earn.

The informal sector

The informal sector includes everything from small-scale manufacturing to roadside tea stalls. Statistics are not reliable, but huge numbers of men, women and children are involved. Workers in this sector are often extremely poor. One of the side-effects of Pakistan’s relatively stringent labour laws has been for large-scale manufacturers to ‘put out’ work to women working at home, and to small workshops employing fewer than ten
workers, because these workers are not covered by the laws. Even multinational companies, such as shoe manufacturers, are now getting products made in these tiny workshops. In the garment industry, many larger units will employ people for just less than the statutory 90 days, lay them off for a week, and re-employ them again, to keep them perpetually short-term workers, who are legally unable to unionise. Food, sports goods, medical instruments, 70 per cent of textiles, and all carpets, are produced in small-scale workshops. The level of technology used and the wages paid are low; costs in the informal sector are only one-tenth of those of large-scale enterprises.

A great many women work in the informal economy. Because women whose mobility is restricted can only work at home, they are unable to organise, and not in a position to bargain, and so are liable to be exploited. The sheer pressure to survive is pushing more and more women into the labour force.
The swelling middle class

Pakistan’s industrial take-off in the 1960s triggered the formation of a middle class. By the 1990s this has emerged as a vibrant section of society. A combination of state patronage and their business acumen has propelled this new rich class to the centre stage where it is now aspiring for political power. The class is most visible in urban centres, expressing its new found affluence through ostentatious consumerism. It also seeks to lead the way in redefining existing cultural, political, social and economic identities and relationships.

The obvious prosperity of the middle class has led to the oft repeated comment that ‘the people of Pakistan are prosperous but the government bankrupt’. State institutions and bureaucracy are becoming moribund: security is inadequate, electricity and water supply mismanaged, the telephone service non-functional. This is being compensated for by private security firms, private electricity generators, tube-wells in people’s gardens, and payment for water brought by tankers.

Mobile phones, fashion shows, private English schools, burger joints with American-style menus, jeans, MTV music, permed hair, ‘White House’ architecture, huge weddings and parties, are some of the more ostentatious manifestations of the wealth of this new generation of Pakistan’s upper-crust yuppies. The status of women within this social class is variable; some study abroad in the West, others are in purdah. Many middle-class women are highly visible, taking an active part in social activities; others are ‘queens of their home’.

The emergence of the middle class has sharpened the differences between rural and urban areas, propelling rural-urban migration, as well as creating disparities between different regions and provinces. Clashes may occur in future in Pakistan between the old and the new elites. Benazir Bhutto’s government and that of Nawaz Sharif, have sometimes been seen to epitomise this cultural divide, Bhutto representing the old feudals and Sharif the newly-emerging capitalists. Other commentators believe that the old feudals are turning into the new capitalists, with the sons of tenant farmers being recruited as labourers in the factory of the feudal lord.
Women in Pakistan play a major economic role that often goes unrecognised. In rural areas, in addition to their household tasks, poor women are active in agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, water carrying, and firewood gathering. At harvest time, thousands of women work on the land, many as cotton pickers. The construction sector traditionally employs the greatest number of woman labourers. Women are also fairly well represented in the service sectors of education, health, and administration.

The life of a Pakistani woman – like that of a Pakistani man – is determined by the social system, region, or class that she belongs to. She may be a peasant woman working from dawn to dusk in the fields alongside the men in her family, or providing unpaid family labour in a brick kiln. She may be leading a cloistered existence in a lower-middle-class urban neighbourhood, or be a highly-trained professional government or business executive.

Women are least visible in Baluchistan and NWFP, where social codes are very rigid. Some women in these two provinces are closely guarded and can even lose their life if suspected of contact with a male outside the immediate family. However, in parts of the Frontier-Kohistan region where tribal feuds are prevalent, women cultivate the land, while men remain indoors. In Punjab and Sindh, seclusion is relatively less stringent, and women work outdoors. They retain stronger links with their parental homes and families after marriage.

In the cities the pace of change is more rapid. Schools (both private and public), professional training, and higher education institutions, offer numerous opportunities to women. Women work in banks and administrative offices; as doctors, architects, and accountants; as industrial workers; and as entrepreneurs running businesses. There is a growing demand for women as secretaries, administrators, and computer operators. Large numbers of women work in small workshops, or in home-based production.

Two extremes of women's life-styles in Pakistan: (above) spreading a fresh layer of mud on the floor of a courtyard in preparation for a wedding; (below) the first two women pilots to be trained by the Pakistan International Airline.
Despite their different life-situations, Pakistani women share a common disadvantage. There is a negative attitude to women within society: they have no identity of their own; they have limited access to economic or social power; they are seen as a burden, and also a symbol of the honour of the household, or a threat to it. Women are viewed as subordinate, as incapable of taking decisions, as dependants. The great majority are illiterate, weak in health, burdened by frequent childbirth. It is the patriarchal system of society in Pakistan which determines attitudes towards women. The system predates Islam and is embedded in the feudal and the pre-feudal tribal systems prevailing in different parts of the country. Patriarchal values pervade all strata of society, though there may be variations by class and region. However, the system is beginning to be challenged.

Women's resistance
The 1980s witnessed an intense mobilising of women to challenge discriminatory laws. Within months of each other, two new groups were set up: the Women's Action Forum, and Sindhiani Tehrik (Sindhi Women's Movement). The former represented continuity with earlier women's struggles, and was composed mainly of middle- and upper-middle-class women, whereas the Sindhiani Tehrik was the first rural women's organisation in the country. The platform of Women's Action Forum was rejection of the Hudood Ordinances, the Law of Evidence, and other religiously-motivated legislation, and of attempts to segregate universities. Negative images of women on the official media, their stereotyping according to prescribed roles (wife and mother) were vehemently opposed as distortions of reality. Street agitations, pickets, press campaigns, lobbying, research and writing forced politicians and government to recognise women as a political reality. Political parties and trade unions alike put women's issues on their agendas, and the government claimed that it was seriously concerned about women's welfare.

The paradoxes in Pakistani society will remain for a long time to come. What better example of this paradox than the fact that a woman could be elected as head of government – in a society which devalues its women by declaring that a woman's evidence is worth half that of a man's?

Women's militancy
In 1983, in Lahore, women organised a protest against the proposed Law of Evidence, in response to a call from a group of women lawyers. The plan was to march to the Punjab High Court and present a memorandum against the proposed law to the Chief Justice on behalf of women's organisations.

About 300 women from different walks of life – teachers, students and factory workers – gathered in a side street ... They were quite
surprised to see a large number of male and female police in the area (at least 500 of them)... The women were told that they could not go to the High Court as that would be a violation of the law ... The women's assurances that they would walk in pairs with enough distance between them so as not to violate the law ... was not accepted by the duty magistrate... When force was used to remove from the scene Habib Jalib, an anti-government poet [who] recited poems specially written in support of women... enraged women broke through the police cordon and started running in the direction of the High Court.

A free-for-all followed. Groups of women zigzagged down the 40-ft wide Mall Road with police brandishing batons... some women were trapped by the police, beaten up, dragged along the road and rounded up into police vans. In the middle of it all tear gas was used... and the Mall Road presented a bizarre sight of a group of all-female demonstrators involved in a street fight with the police. Fifty women were arrested, but many managed to get to the High Court where male lawyers were waiting with garlands to receive them.

(Extracts from K. Mumtaz and F. Shaheed, Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward One Step Back?)

Female literacy

Poor people in Pakistan view education as an investment they make in their child’s future. Education is regarded as a ‘qualification’ for a better job. One of the effects has been that people saw little reason to educate their daughters, since ‘we are not sending our girls out to feed us, are we?’ Education was seen as irrelevant for women, who were only going to work in the fields as unpaid family labourers, or as housewives.

This view is gradually changing. Nowhere in Pakistan is there a girls’ school which is not packed with students. But there are many villages without a school for girls, and many girls’ schools are understaffed and poorly equipped. What has not changed, or only for the worse, is the political will of the government to provide primary education for all children, boys and girls; nor has the quality of the education provided improved.

In Pakistan there are hundreds of one-room private schools all over the country catering for the millions of children whose parents pay fees to get them an education. But there are also many drop-outs, children who run away from ill-treatment at the hands of teachers, or out of boredom with the education on offer. Among the poor, where a mother goes out to work, often the eldest daughter has to take her place in the home, and this may mean taking her away from school.
Nai Raushni (New Light) Centre, Quetta

There are little girls, not so little girls, and young and older women milling all over this building in the evenings. Over 200 students, from 12-year-olds to women in their forties, attend the Nai Raushni Centre in Quetta, making it the largest literacy and education centre for young girls and women in the country.

Fatima is a student here. A shy, quiet girl of 13, Fatima is the daughter of a day labourer, one of eight children. None of her brothers and sisters go to school. Two brothers are apprenticed to motorcycle mechanics, another works in a cobbler’s shop, while the eldest works in a carpet factory. Fatima used to work in the carpet factory too, but earned so little that her mother went to work there instead, while Fatima stayed at home to cook and clean and look after her baby sisters. Fatima doesn’t enjoy housework, but she was grateful to be spared the back-breaking carpet work.

In the evening Fatima’s brothers go to the Nasl-e-nau Talimi Markaz, a literacy centre for working boys and men. One evening, they discovered that there was a similar centre for women, which did not run quite so late. Fatima was really excited and asked her mother if she could attend. Her mother made enquiries and came to see the teachers. Now Fatima goes there every evening, after her mother has returned home from work.

Fatima has an ambition: ‘I would like to do my school-leaving exam and then become a teacher, so that I can teach other children who could not go to school,’ she says. And with the help of Nai Raushni, she may well do so.
Pakistan’s population growth rate at 3.1 per cent per annum is one of the highest in the world, making it the ninth most populous country. The population in the area which is now Pakistan was 16.5 million in 1901; it is currently about 120 million (with 45 per cent of the population below the age of 15 years) and is projected to double by the year 2017 if growth continues at the present rate.

The rapid increase in population has stretched the country’s limited resources. There are not enough schools, health facilities or houses. The average number of people living in a house is seven; and half the population live in one-room housing units. Other basic utilities are also lacking: electricity is available to only 31 per cent of households; water and sanitation to very few people; and according to UNICEF estimates, only 55 per cent of the total population and 35 per cent of the rural population lives within 5km from a fixed health facility. There is a clear correlation between poverty and population. A study of a district in Punjab found that the landless had more children than those with large landholdings; that households where children contributed to labour had more children; and that, whereas the total fertility rate of the village was 6.1, the average number of living children was three. It appears that general poverty and economic insecurity create the need for more children in order to increase the earning capacity of the family.

The desire for large families is partly due to high levels of infant and child mortality. Few women dare to use irreversible methods of contraception after two or three children, given the high rates of mortality, a rate highest for the poorest parents.

Women’s status in society is yet another factor in population growth. The preference for male children means that a woman’s status increases with the number of male progeny she produces. One of the most profound forms of oppression endured by Pakistani women is excessive childbearing, due to lack of control over their fertility. Even women who do not want more children are unable to use contraceptives because of family pressure.

There is a widespread misapprehension that the use of contraceptives is in conflict with religion. While conservative social values and a particular interpretation of Islam lead many men to deny their wives the right to use birth control, there has been little serious government commitment to overcoming the problem.
There is a huge unmet need for birth control in Pakistan. According to the latest survey, only 18 per cent of married couples use contraception. The corresponding figures for Bangladesh and India are two and three times that figure. A good quality, readily available family-planning service could make a progressive and liberating contribution to development in Pakistan. It should be stressed that female circumcision is unknown in Pakistan. There is a widespread misunderstanding about this among foreigners.

Many women in Pakistan are in very poor health; as many as 90 per cent of pregnant and lactating women are anaemic. Restrictions on their mobility makes it difficult for them to get to a health facility or family planning service, and the burden of daily chores leaves them little time to seek such services.

In addition, services are of poor quality, and there is often a failure to provide women with proper counselling. Accounts of the unpleasant side-effects of a particular method can deter other potential users of contraceptives. Not only are health and family planning services inadequate in terms of coverage, but they lack facilities for follow-up, and there is an acute shortage of trained staff.

**Family-planning policy**

Pakistan’s is one of the oldest family planning programme in South Asia and it is also probably the least successful. Government policy on population planning has varied. For example, during General Zia-al-Haq's years of Martial Law, the number of field staff in the Population Department was drastically reduced. Family planning policy was officially ‘reborn’ in 1980, and for the first time a multisectoral approach emphasising the incorporation of Mother and Child Health Care, and the enhancement of education and employment opportunities, for women, was adopted. These inter-linkages have remained only a paper commitment as far as the government is concerned.

It is clear that the problem of rapid population growth will not be solved simply by providing services. Complex factors are involved: social norms placing a high value on sons, religious beliefs, unemployment, quality of health facilities, medical technologies, economic security, women's lack of education and status in society, their autonomy, and reproductive health rights. By and large, official policy has failed to recognise these factors. Because of the implicit assumptions that the biological function of reproduction can be divorced from the social context, and that women have the sole responsibility for bearing and rearing children, the focus of all family-planning programmes is on women, despite the fact that they are not in a position to make decisions or enforce their choices.

In recent years, however, a change in social mores is becoming apparent. More girls are attending school, particularly in rural areas, and the average age of marriage for girls has gone up from 17 years in 1981 to 20.2 years in 1993-1994. The correlation between improved female education and fertility rate is being recognised by policy makers (women with secondary education have on average 3.6 births per woman as opposed to an average of 5.7 births for women with no education).
Health services in Pakistan

In Pakistan, only 56 per cent of people have safe drinking water, and just 24 per cent have good sanitation. Out of every 1000 babies born, 91 die before their first birthday. In Pakistan there are health services – doctors and health centres – for only 55 per cent of the population.

Non-government organisations have long been active in the health sector, ranging from flourishing national organisations, such as the Family Planning Association, to local charities running free dispensaries for poor people. At partition, Pakistan inherited a number of Mission Hospitals, which have been maintained, and several of them run community health projects. The Rosary Hospital, Gujrat, runs one such programme, the Community Health and Development Programme (CHDP).

Every day, hundreds of patients from the surrounding villages make the journey to the Rosary Hospital. Often, they come only at a very late stage of an illness, or when a woman is experiencing complications in labour. Staff at the hospital realised that some problems would be easier to tackle at an earlier stage, and that simple preventive measures could reduce the incidence of illness.

About ten years ago, the hospital started an outreach programme (CHDP) of health education, to give people information about immunisation, simple treatments for diarrhoea, the dangers of unregulated use of drugs, and other basic information. In the villages, they came face to face with the many other, inter-related problems with which poor people have to struggle. They realised that health education alone was inadequate, as there were so many other factors affecting women’s lives and health.

‘We would be lecturing them about the use of oral rehydration solution for infant diarrhoea, when they were worried to death about a husband who was becoming addicted to drugs, or how to raise a dowry for their daughter,’ said Shakila, the leader of the CHDP team. So they have adapted traditional folk theatre techniques to talk about health education messages and about social problems such as dowry, and arranged marriages. The use of drama, song, music, and dance has proved a highly effective part of CHDP’s work. They have also helped to run a small credit and savings scheme, encouraged children to clean up the environment and plant trees, helped villages to build latrines, and trained teachers for adult literacy classes.

**Rational drugs policy**

Of equal importance as the availability of health services is the treatment and the cost. As in many countries, a profusion of medicines are available over the counter. Not all are safe; many are of no benefit at all. The Network, an information and campaigning organisation, based in Islamabad, is tackling the problem.

‘In Pakistan, what is not widely known is that we have an official essential drugs list,’ says Dr Zafar, Director of The Network. ‘We have published it in our newsletter, so that people are getting to know about it. We hold seminars for young doctors, giving them presentations on various aspects of rational drugs; in the next two years we will be covering all the medical colleges in Pakistan. We are also running
workshops for journalists and NGO health workers, giving them information about all these issues. Having good will is one thing, but people also need the basic knowledge. We tell them that you have to concentrate on essential drugs, and not waste your money on buying useless drugs. The rational prescribing of essential drugs is the next step.

'We thought we should work in a phased manner, starting at the policy level and the medical community. Going directly to the consumers needs a lot of resources, and a different kind of approach, which we are preparing ourselves for. In a country like Pakistan, if you can get a problem drug deregistered, that means you have saved millions of potential users of that drug.

'There is a study which shows that of the average household budget, 90 per cent of spending on health is spent on drugs; so there is a need to educate people. People think there is a pill for every illness. Instant cure! People spend very little on preventive care, hygiene, cleanliness, and check-ups.'
Pakistan’s environmental problems

Pakistan, like a number of other developing countries, is faced by two mutually reinforcing crises: the seemingly persistent problem of poverty, and environmental destruction. Pakistan is not a major producer of CFC-gases or emitter of greenhouse gases, does not contribute to the global environmental crisis, but remains vulnerable to both the threat of climate change and depletion of the ozone layer. Like other developing countries, it is suffering a loss of biodiversity: animal and plant species known to have existed in the past have vanished, and many more are under threat of extinction. The expansion of human settlements and unlawful hunting practices have reduced the numbers of animals such as the ibex, snow leopard, wildass, and houbara bustard to danger level, and a number of plant species are disappearing fast. The imbalance in the ecological order has long-term effects: for example, the number of snakes has decreased, and as a result rat numbers have in increased greatly, causing heavy grain losses.

Natural resources are being misused; only half of the urban excreta is disposed in sewers; hazardous chemicals are disposed of in water-ways and other convenient places like empty lots; motor vehicles emit deadly fumes; land is being lost to desertification, waterlogging and soil erosion; there is destruction and degradation of forests; wetlands are being drained; the food-chain is being poisoned.

The roots of these problems are economic and demographic pressures on a limited resource base, and the failure to manage natural resources sustainably. Regulatory measures are inadequate, or, more often, not strictly applied.

Headwater control point on the Rahuki Minor canal, which is part of the Sukkur Barrage.
Water collecting on low-lying land. In the past, this was productive agricultural land, but water-logging has meant that crops can no longer be grown.

A vast aquifer exists under the Indus Plain, recharged by rain and river flows. Almost all of the Indus basin's run off has been captured through the development of large-scale irrigation schemes over the last 50 years, and the scope for further increase in water resources is limited. Unlined canals have proved to be extremely inefficient, losing large quantities of water in transmission.

A further problem is the increasing contamination of groundwater and surface-water from agricultural chemicals, and industrial and municipal wastes.

Agricultural production is threatened by land degradation. Only about 20 percent (20 million ha) of the land area of Pakistan is classified as cultivable — equal to the area already under cultivation. Much of the land is of medium to poor quality, ravaged by water and wind erosion, salinity, waterlogging, flooding and loss of organic matter. More than 96 per cent of cropland contains less than adequate organic matter. Due to the pressure on land, unsuitable areas are being used for agricultural production. Crops are not selected to match soil quality, and crop rotation is not practised properly.

Widespread and unregulated use of pesticides and fertilisers, promoted by multinationals and permitted by the government, is leading to untold long-term damage to the land and those who work on it. Women who pick cotton, for example, develop severe skin complaints from the pesticides used on the crop.

The livelihoods of pastoralists are seriously threatened, because rangelands are being over-grazed without any rehabilitation measures. Land distribution in most of Pakistan remains lopsided, with a small percentage of landlords owning a large proportion of cultivable land.
Salinity and waterlogging

The Indus basin area of Sindh has been used for rain-fed and irrigated agriculture for thousands of years. But earlier this century, under British rule, a huge modern irrigation scheme was constructed, involving 19 barrages, 43 main canals covering more than 37,000 square miles, and more than 89,000 small water courses, to irrigate over 40 million acres of land. It is one of the largest irrigated areas in the world, and has more irrigated land than there is in the whole of Africa. Now cotton, sugar, mangoes, and guavas are grown as cash crops, both for sale within the country and for export. The scheme has alleviated poverty, but has also widened the gap between rich and poor, and the environmental cost has been enormous. The impressive growth rate in agriculture that followed large-scale irrigation is faltering.

Over the years, the water-table has risen. This was a welcome result to begin with, but has led to waterlogging and salinity, because more and more water is collecting in the Indus basin area, and less and less flowing into the Arabian sea. The impact of waterlogging is determined by its combination with other factors like water quality, soil type, and precipitation/evaporation ratios. Sindh is the province worst affected by waterlogging. Within the affected area, the water table is now within 5 feet of the surface.

A major internationally-funded project – the Left Bank Outfall Drain – is now under way to try and solve the problem. Due for completion in 1992, best estimates are that it will not be fully operational until after the year 2000. A network of drainage canals is to run along the left bank of the Indus in Sindh, and a system of tube wells is to be built which will pump excess water into these canals.

Local people have little faith in mega-projects, of which there have been many, with no significant results, because they have no way of influencing the design or outcome. Fields are still waterlogged and land is still degrading.

In addition to widespread waterlogging, 1,961,000 hectares of land in the irrigated areas is now covered by white salty crust and is uncultivable. Every year between 10 and 15 million tons of salt are added to the Indus basin. As land has become unproductive, people are being forced to migrate to other areas. The loss of income amounts to around $2.5bn. Salinity occurs when either the water-table rises to a point where evaporation leaves behind salts on the surface; or with application of water that has a high content of dissolved solids which on evaporation brings salts to the surface. The waters of the Indus have very little dissolved solids and therefore do not create salinity. But ground water, even when fresh and sweet, does have greater solid content and can in some instances be hazardous. The greatest incidence of salinity and sodicity, is in Sindh and Punjab. Sindh has about 23 per cent of its surveyed land area affected by salinity and Punjab 13 per cent.

Collecting water from a shallow well. The water-table is very close to the surface in this part of Sindh.
Rehabilitation and
regeneration

The mango trees had been slowly
drowning over the years. The
waterlogged soil was rotting their
roots. When, in 1992, the monsoon
rains came, it seemed they would
never cease. The Mangla Dam
reservoirs were dangerously over-full,
so the sluice gates had to be opened
and protective embankments along
the rivers and canals breached. The
waters overflowed and inundated
hundreds of villages on the banks of
the River Jhelum and the Indus.
Pabban was one of the villages.
Pabban is a village of smallholders
(1 to 10 acres) and landless
peasants. Although they could see
the flood coming, and could take
themselves and their belongings to
safety, they could not carry their
mango trees with them. The
floodwater stood for four weeks. 'It
took us years to grow these mango
trees', said an old farmer in Pabban.
'Our land is so fertile, and our
mangos are some of the best in the
world. But the rising water table was
already starting to kill our trees. The
flood has simply killed them quickly.'

The land was now so waterlogged
that even the regular wheat crop
could not be sown. Rose farms in the
area were wiped out, houses
destroyed, and belongings damaged.
The villagers were in despair. And
then a group of activists swung into
action. In the past they had been
involved in welfare work, but they now
decided to focus on protecting
people's livelihoods. Pabban Fruit
Farmers, as they called themselves,
decided to rehabilitate the orchards,
to generate assets for the landless,
and to gain long-term control over
waterlogging and salinity.

They have replanted mango
saplings as well as the more water
resistant cheekoo and guava trees on
65 acres belonging to the 23 poorest
families. Eleven landless peasants
have together leased a block of 11
acres, which is being planted with
eucalyptus supplied from the
organisation's plant nursery. The
eucalyptus will help to lower the
water-table in the immediate area
where they are planted. They have
installed piezometers on the land,
and even non-literate people can use
this simple technology to measure
the water-table level.

The saplings have been carefully
tended, and are flourishing. The
piezometers show the difference in
the land planted with eucalyptus. A
women's block forestry scheme has
been set up, and the organisation is
planning another land reclamation
project. Rekindled hope and self-
confidence is visible on the faces of
the people of Pabban.
Vanishing forests

Pakistan’s estimated forest cover of 5.2 per cent is one of the lowest in the world. Of the total area under forests 43 per cent is coniferous forests, 38 per cent scrub forests, 12 per cent is made up of mangrove forests, and the rest is irrigated plantations and riverine forests. Hill forests are the main source of timber for construction and provide large quantities of fuelwood and resin, and fodder for millions of cattle, goats, sheep and camels. Growing in the country’s major watersheds, these forests contribute significantly to mitigation of floods and droughts in the plains.

The foothill forests, consisting mostly of bushes and stunted trees, provide important grazing areas and protection of watersheds and wildlife. Riverine forests along the southern part of the Indus produce high-value timber for the coal-mining and furniture industries, as well as fuelwood and charcoal. Wood provides 60 per cent of household energy and the demand for fuelwood in the country is likely to increase if the current population growth rate persists and cheap alternative fuels are not developed.

The mangroves along the coast of Sindh and Balochistan are integral to the life-cycles of many marine animals, providing important breeding sites. They also act as coastal protection barriers. The mangroves are under grave threat due to the increasing levels of sewage and industrial pollution, increased salinity in the Indus delta, and through cutting for fodder and fuel.

Forests have been used unsustainably in Pakistan and significant reduction in forest cover has occurred over the last 30 to 40 years. Much of this decrease is attributed to illegal lopping and felling, both by poor people (including Afghan refugees in NWFP and Baluchistan in the last few years, for cooking and warmth in the winter), and also by the ‘timber mafia’ as it is now known.
Sungi takes on the timber mafia

After raging floods washed down villages and tore away crops in 1992, the inhabitants of Hazara district became even more aware of how deforestation had become a crucial issue for them. Sungi, a development organisation, organised public meetings in a number of villages in the area to thrash out an action plan to save their forests from ruthless cutting, and develop a strategy for community-based forest management. These meetings were attended by ordinary village people, local government officials, and representatives from the forest department.

Forests are depleted by livestock grazing, and cutting by the local people for fuel, but the major factor in the dramatic forest depletion in this area is what has been described as the 'timber mafia'. Rich and powerful, these loggers have lucrative contracts, political connections, and friends among government officials and law enforcement officers.

In one village, when Sungi tried to organise a pubic meeting on forests and people, they could not find anywhere to hold it. Although most meetings were held in the local school, threats against the school forced it to withdraw permission for the meeting to be held on its premises. Local members of Sungi were interrogated by the police and told to cancel the meeting. But they went ahead and held an open-air meeting. Some 300 people attended, including a good number of plainclothes and uniformed police.

Despite serious intimidation Sungi activists are still working in the area, continuing to organise public meetings, and helping the community to protect their forests. The meetings are always attended by a large contingent of police, busy taking notes.

The National Conservation Strategy

The government has made a serious attempt to respond to the environmental crisis and to address future needs by commissioning and publishing the National Conservation Strategy. This provides a candid review of the state of Pakistan’s environment, its past and present policies and institutional mechanisms. Developed through a consultative process involving policy makers, sectoral experts and non-government organisations, the NCS has identified priority actions for immediate attention: maintaining soils in croplands; protecting watersheds; supporting forestry and plantations; restoring rangelands and improving livestock; conserving biodiversity; increasing energy efficiency; and controlling pollution.

Recommending sustainable development as the philosophy for policy-making the NCS envisages implementation through ‘greater public partnership in development and management; combining environment and economics in the decision making process; and focusing on durable improvements in the quality of life.’ The overriding objective of the NCS is to reverse the trend of environmental degradation and to involve local people in the effort.
NGOs in Pakistan

In both rural and urban areas in Pakistan, there is a tradition of local organisation, led either by philanthropists or community activists. These organisations have predominantly concentrated on social welfare activities, and seldom challenged social inequalities. (The organisations which address social questions would tend to act under a party political banner, or be attached to the trade union movement.) Some local ‘social’ organisations are taking the first steps towards an involvement in development activities, but in general, the NGO sector in Pakistan is weaker than in other countries in South Asia.

Some NGOs concentrate on advocacy and lobbying. Many direct their activities at the government and policy-making bodies, with little involvement at the grassroots. An NGO called The Network is one example, which lobbies the government on the rational use of drugs along WHO guidelines (see page 51). A more widely-based organisation is the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, which works at many levels, from the grassroots and the streets, to parliament and the courts of justice.

In recent years, the voluntary education movement has grown dramatically. In both urban and rural areas, groups of educated, unemployed young people have got together to organise street schools. Although genuinely based in the communities they serve, most of these groups lack an analysis of poverty and poverty-focused development, and have little administrative capacity.

Two important NGOs have had a major impact on development thinking in Pakistan in both the public and NGO sectors, and provide innovative models for others to follow. The Aga Khan Rural Support Programme has pioneered an approach of building up village organisations, with separate groups for men and for women, and then launching development activities through the strengthened groups. In Karachi, the Orangi Pilot Project has been equally influential in urban development, working for the upgrading of one of Karachi’s worst slum areas firstly through a sanitation scheme and following up by a range of community development activities.

In complete contrast to these large-scale NGOs are the grassroots village organisations. Run by village activists, these organisations are sometimes backed by the village elder, but may also be in opposition to the village hierarchy. Originally involved in welfare activities, such as providing school books for the poorest children, they may also be active in lobbying local authorities for electricity or water supplies, or a teacher for the village school. Now some of these groups are wanting to move towards a more developmental approach, and many have started working with their communities on environmental projects, income-generation schemes, and awareness raising.

Recently, a new kind of NGO has grown up in Pakistan, based on experience of voluntary work in disasters. Many young people have become involved in emergency work during floods or other environmental disasters, only to realise that even more needs to be done after the disaster is over, in terms of community-level rehabilitation and disaster-preparedness.
Up-date: events in Pakistan since 1996

Since this book was first published in 1996, Pakistan has experienced almost continuous turbulence, under pressure from internal tensions and external shocks. This supplement (written in March 2003) offers a brief survey of the intervening years and a description of the current political and economic situation in Pakistan.

Civilian rule, 1988–1999
In November 1996, the then President of Pakistan, Farooq Ahmed Leghari, dismissed the government of Benazir Bhutto, charging it with corruption, mismanagement of the economy, and implication in extra-judicial killings in Karachi, the provincial capital of Sindh province. An interim government took over, pending elections, which were held in February 1997 and won by the Pakistan Muslim League Party (Nawaz Group). In March 1997, with the unanimous support of the National Assembly, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif amended the Constitution, stripping the President of the power to dismiss the government, and making his power to appoint military-service chiefs and provincial governors contingent on the ‘advice’ of the Prime Minister. Another amendment prohibited elected members from voting against party lines.

The Sharif government tried to control all major components of governance, by appointing its own supporters to the judiciary, the bureaucracy, and the ranks of political functionaries. The Prime Minister allegedly prevented the appointment of three judges approved by the then Chief Justice, Sajjad Ali Shah. With the President backing the Chief Justice, Pakistan was brought to a virtual standstill by the conflict between the executive and the judiciary. Cordial relations between the key institutions of the State were not restored until the President resigned in December 1997, and the Chief Justice was ousted by his own judges in the same month, following the storming of the Supreme Court by ruling-party loyalists. Parliament elected a new President, Rafiq Tarar, who was a close associate of the Prime Minister. The government moved to restrict press criticism and ordered the arrest and beating of prominent journalists.

The eleven-year period of civilian rule (1988–99) was a great disappointment for the people of Pakistan. The Pakistan People’s Party and Muslim League (Nawaz) repeatedly accused each other of rigging elections; activists in the civil movements (for women’s rights, labour rights, and human rights) were largely dissatisfied with the policies and programmes of both parties. Four general elections were held during this period; however, the infamous discriminatory laws against women were not repealed. People’s confidence in democracy was undermined during this time. The government of Nawaz Sharif
initiated a widespread campaign of harassment against non-government organisations: more than one thousand were closed down in Punjab alone. The Social Action Programme (1992/3-2002), costing approximately US$ 500 million, and focusing on elementary/primary education, basic health care, and the provision of rural water supplies and sanitation, proved to be a failure, owing not only to operational mismanagement by the government of Pakistan but also to foreign donors’ limited understanding of the Pakistani context, as well as weak systems of collaboration and co-ordination.

The military coup – and after
On 12 October 1999, General Pervez Musharraf overthrew the civilian regime in a bloodless coup. A Proclamation of Emergency and a Provisional Constitutional Order were issued, according to which the 1973 Constitution was put in abeyance; the National Assembly, the Provincial Assemblies, and the Senate were suspended; all the State office holders, save the President of the Republic, also stood suspended, while the whole country came under the indirect rule of the Armed Forces of Pakistan. General Musharraf assumed the position of Chief Executive, ruling the country through Chief Executive’s Orders. Nawaz Sharif, now the ex-Prime Minister, was exiled to Saudi Arabia. The military regime was at first welcomed by many people in Pakistan, harassed by heavy taxes and rising inflation, and hoping for economic reforms.

Musharraf appointed a National Security Council, with a mix of military/civilian appointees, a civilian Cabinet, and a National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) to formulate structural reforms. The NRB devised a plan for the devolution of power, under which district governments have been established through elections, and political power has been devolved to the districts and sub-district levels. The system is still evolving, and financial transfer formulas are being worked out gradually. Programmes to develop the capacity of district administrations are also under way.

A National Accountability Bureau (NAB), headed by a military officer, is prosecuting those accused of wilful default on bank loans and corrupt practices; conviction may result in disqualification from political office for 21 years. The NAB Ordinance has attracted criticism for being selective in its choice of targets, and for holding the accused without charge and, in some instances, without access to legal counsel.

Military trial courts were not established, but in January 2000 the government stipulated that justices in the Supreme, High, and Shari’a Courts should swear allegiance to the Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO) and the Chief Executive. Under the PCO and its amendments, all power flows from and to the Chief Executive, and the judiciary is proscribed from issuing any order contrary to his decisions. The President, Cabinet, National Security Council, and Governors serve at his discretion. Most of the justices acquiesced, but a small minority were not invited to take the oath and were forcibly retired. In practice, Musharraf consults extensively with his civilian appointees and Corps Commanders, and in certain policy areas (such as economic reform) civilian appointees have been able to exercise considerable latitude.

In an effort to legitimise the military government, on 12 May 2000 the Supreme Court issued a judgement declaring that the army’s seizure of power had become inevitable – thus validating the coup by a ‘doctrine of necessity’. The judgement set a deadline for the restoration of the constitutional order through general elections to be held by 12 October 2002, three years after the military take-over.
The Khoj Network on Communication and Development works in poor communities in Lahore, organising literacy classes for women and helping them to obtain identity cards, which entitle them to vote in local and national elections.

The task of devolving power was assigned to the National Reconstruction Bureau, which developed a system of local government through research and nation-wide consultations. In 2001, local elections were held for the third time in Pakistan's history. For the first time ever, legal provisions were made for a proportion (33 per cent) of the seats in local elections to be reserved for women.

On 20 June 2001, General Musharraf became President of Pakistan and took oath. In April 2002, a controversial referendum extended the duration of his presidential term for another five years. Elections were held on 10 October 2002, but no political party won a majority of the votes cast. However, the Pakistan Muslim League has formed a government, in coalition with Muttahida Mahaz-e-Amal – United Action Front (MMA), a coalition of religious parties, with Mr Jamali as Prime Minister.

For the past two decades, religious organisations have become more and more organised and have been actively taking part in the political arena, with limited success so far. Now MMA has won a clear majority in North West Frontier Province, and a majority sufficient to form the government in Baluchistan Province. At the national level, MMA has won nearly 50 seats.

This situation places responsibility for law and order on the shoulders of the religious parties and challenges them to fulfil their promises to create a just and fair Pakistan. Although there are fears that laws discriminating against women may be promoted by MMA, there has so far been no such indication. Ironically, during the first session of the national assembly in October 2002, neither the representative from the People’s Party nor the representative of Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-e-Azam Group) mentioned women in his introductory speech; the first speaker who mentioned women’s rights was Qazi Hussain Ahmed, representing the right-wing coalition of religious parties.

In the National Assembly, there are 72 women out of a total of 332 members; 60 of them occupy reserved seats, while 12 were selected in open contests. Cynics have observed that most of them are from the long-established so-called ‘political’ families and may not all be sensitive to matters of gender-fair governance.

President Musharraf’s decision to side with the USA and support its ‘war on terrorism’ has been met in Pakistan with mixed feelings. Although people understand that Pakistan was given no choice in the matter, the general feeling
is that the government should have imposed some conditions before agreeing to becoming the frontline State in the service of US political interests in the region.

**External relations**

**Pakistan and India**

Relations between Pakistan and India have always been strained, for many reasons, dating back to the violence that attended the partition of India in 1947. Pakistan owes its existence to the ‘two-nation theory’, which held that Hindus and Muslims had distinct identities and could not co-exist within one State. Behind this argument was a real fear that, once the British had left, the Hindus would take revenge on Muslims for their thousand-year rule, not all of it benevolent. But the process of partition was too hasty, and systems of governance and infrastructure collapsed as hundreds of thousands of people began migrating from both India and Pakistan, and communal clashes occurred all over the country. Thousands of people, members of every ethnic and religious group, lost their lives and their livelihoods in the aftermath.

Pakistan and India have been at war four times since the partition in 1947, and their dispute over the status of Kashmir remains unresolved. As both States possess nuclear weapons, there is a grave danger that any conflict between them might escalate into a war of mass destruction, with widespread and unforeseen consequences. At the time of partition, the princely state of Kashmir, although ruled by a Hindu Maharajah, had an overwhelmingly Muslim population. When the Maharajah hesitated in acceding either to Pakistan or to India in 1947, some of his Muslim subjects, aided by tribesmen from Pakistan, revolted in favour of joining Pakistan. In exchange for military assistance in containing the revolt, the Kashmiri ruler offered his allegiance to India. Indian troops occupied the eastern portion of Kashmir, including its capital, Srinagar, while the western part came under Pakistani control.

In 1949, the United Nations arranged a ceasefire along a line dividing Kashmir, but leaving the northern end of the line undemarcated and the Vale of Kashmir (home to the majority of the population) under Indian control. Pakistan agreed to India’s call for a UN-supervised plebiscite to determine the future of the State, but the plebiscite never took place because India repeatedly postponed it.

In September 1965 a full-scale war broke out, ending three weeks later in response to mediation by the UN and interested countries. Indian and Pakistani representatives met in Tashkent, in the former USSR, and agreed to attempt a peaceful settlement of the conflict over Kashmir and their other differences. But in 1971 another conflict began, this time lasting almost a year, with four weeks of full-blown war, fought mainly in East Pakistan and resulting in the fall of Dhaka on 16 December 1971. President Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi agreed to the establishment of a line of control in Kashmir, and endorsed the principle of settling bilateral disputes through peaceful means. In 1974, Pakistan and India agreed to resume postal and telecommunications links, and to enact measures to facilitate travel. Trade and diplomatic relations were restored in 1976 after a break of five years.

India’s nuclear test in 1974 generated great uncertainty in Pakistan and is generally acknowledged to have been the impetus for Pakistan’s nuclear weapons development programme. In recent years, the Indo-Pakistani relationship has fluctuated between rapprochement and conflict. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif moved to resume official dialogue with India in 1997. A number of meetings took place, with little progress towards peace in the region, although generally the atmosphere improved.
Under a pro-Hindu fundamentalist government, India exploded a nuclear device in 1998. The government of Nawaz Sharif promptly responded by exploding its own device in Chaghi district, Baluchistan, in defiance of pacifists in Pakistan and pressure from international community, but to the jubilation of common people in Pakistan.

Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee travelled to Lahore for a summit meeting with Sharif in February 1999, but hopes of a positive breakthrough were dashed a few weeks later, when infiltrators from Pakistan occupied positions on the Indian side of the Line of Control in the remote, mountainous area of Kashmir near Kargil. They cut Indian supply lines to forces stationed on Siachen Glacier. By early summer, serious fighting had flared in the Kargil sector. The conflict ended after a meeting between Prime Minister Sharif and US President Clinton in July 1999. Relations between India and Pakistan have thereafter been particularly strained, especially since the military coup in Islamabad in October 1999.

After the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington in September 2001, India quickly offered to co-operate with the US government in fighting terrorism and routing Osama bin Laden. India saw it as an opportunity to strengthen relations with the USA and hoped that the US ‘war on terrorism’ would be extended to target the Kashmiri militants. However, the US government chose to make Pakistan its frontline State. Pakistan now feels that it has an opportunity to pursue a proactive policy on Kashmir, one that combines deft and imaginative diplomacy with overt efforts to alter the status quo. Certainly, the United States is now more receptive to Pakistan’s argument that an inextricable link exists between a settlement of the problem of Kashmir and the quest for a durable peace between South Asia’s two nuclear-armed adversarial neighbours. But with India and Pakistan each aspiring to gain total control over Kashmir, and the people living in the Pakistan-controlled area (known as ‘Azad Jammu and Kashmir’) aspiring...
to establish an independent state of their own, a peaceful solution seems as far off as ever.

In global terms, Kashmir, like Palestine, is a major flashpoint, but there is a significant difference between the two cases: in South Asia, a million men under arms are facing each other in an eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation which could spin out of control and lead to the deployment of nuclear weapons.

**Pakistan and Afghanistan**

According to the website of the Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Pakistan supports a united, stable and prosperous Afghanistan. Pakistan's primary objective in Afghanistan is the restoration of durable peace and it supports any formula that is acceptable to Afghan parties. Pakistan has always condemned external interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan.'

After the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979, the Pakistani government played a vital role in supporting the Afghan resistance movement and in hosting and assisting Afghan refugees. In February 1989, the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, but Pakistan continued to provide support for displaced Afghans, with co-operation from the world community, multilateral organisations, and NGOs. By 1999, more than 1.2 million registered Afghan refugees remained in Pakistan, as fighting between rival factions in their home country continued. Pakistan formally recognised the Taliban as the government in Afghanistan and gave them assistance. The government of Pakistan has periodically offered to try to bring Afghanistan’s warring factions to the negotiating table.

Pakistan claims that it has suffered more than any other country from the continuation of the conflict in Afghanistan. The government website states: 'For us, vital security interests are linked to stability on our western and northern borders. We therefore seek peace, stability and national reconciliation in Afghanistan. This will open new opportunities in our economic and commercial relations with the Central Asian States.' General Musharraf was one of the first visitors to Afghanistan after the Taliban government fell. His purpose was to establish good relations with the new regime, and reconfirm Pakistan’s solidarity with Afghan people. He handed a cheque for US$10 million to Chairman Karzai of Afghanistan, as part of a $100 million package of aid, offered without conditions for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Pakistan also provided airplanes for Afghan pilgrims travelling to Saudi Arabia. These measures have helped to create a conducive environment for Pakistani businesses to invest in
the reconstruction of Afghanistan, which should eventually pay financial dividends to Pakistani traders.

In the field of economic co-operation, Karzai and Musharraf took a major decision: to form a Joint Ministerial Commission (JMC) to promote bilateral economic and trade links. The JMC would also help to co-ordinate reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. The two governments have discussed the recommencement of air flights between the two countries, and the use of Pakistan’s seaport for the transportation of the equipment and material to be used in the reconstruction of landlocked Afghanistan.

Drought in Afghanistan has increased the volume of food imports from Pakistan, but re-exports of consumer goods to Pakistan are much lower, because of tight border controls and reduced consumer demand in Pakistan. Overall, the trade from Pakistan has helped Afghanistan to generate incomes, provide employment, and increase supplies of basic goods, including food in the current drought.

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, approximately 1.5 million Afghan refugees had returned home by August 2002, and an estimated 2 million still remained in Pakistan, given the continuing instability of political, economic, and security conditions in Afghanistan.

Pakistan and the USA
The United States and Pakistan established diplomatic relations in 1947. The USA agreed to provide economic and military assistance to Pakistan, but military aid was suspended during the 1965 Pakistan–India war. This gave rise to a widespread feeling of betrayal in Pakistan. Financial support from the USA has been proffered, withdrawn, and resumed several times, often without notice, and always in response to the strategic concerns of the superpower. Although the people of Pakistan respect US knowledge and technical expertise, there is a growing suspicion that the US government will only exploit Pakistan, use it for its own ends, and abandon it eventually.

Since 11 September 2001, anti-American feelings have run high in Pakistan. The US bombing of Afghanistan did not have grassroots support, and civilian deaths in Afghanistan have not made the USA any more popular in Pakistan. More recently, the US attack on Iraq brought hundreds of thousands of Pakistani people out in peaceful protests on the streets, demanding an immediate end to the war and a strong government stance on the issue. The Pakistan government condemned the conflict, but refrained from overt criticism of the USA. However, a prolonged war would almost certainly increase anti-American sentiments at the popular level.

The economy
Pakistan has a great potential for economic growth, possessing as it does significant natural resources and entrepreneurial skills. However, that potential has not been realised for the benefit of the mass of the population, for many reasons: the inequitable distribution of income, a less than effective tax-collection system, an unmet need for land reforms, and fiscal mismanagement which has resulted in a large foreign debt. Debt servicing and the defence budget impose a heavy burden on the economy. Although Pakistan averaged an impressive growth rate of 6 per cent per year during the 1980s and early 1990s, the economy is vulnerable to internal tensions and external shocks. For instance, in 1992–93, floods and political instability reduced economic growth, and the financial crisis in Asia hit major markets for Pakistani textile exports. Average real GDP growth from 1992 to 1998 dipped to 4.1 per cent.

Pakistan has been pursuing market-based economic reforms since the 1980s. In 1988 the government launched a structural adjustment programme with
the assistance of the International Monetary Fund. A number of initiatives were undertaken: barriers to foreign trade and investment were removed; there were attempts to reform the financial system; foreign-exchange controls were eased; several State-owned enterprises were privatised. Even today, Pakistan continues to struggle with these reforms, but with mixed success. The rupee was continually devalued until very recently, when US involvement in Afghanistan strengthened the value of Pakistan’s currency.

**Agriculture**

Arable land and water are Pakistan’s principal natural resources, although water shortages have begun to occur in the past decade. Approximately 25 per cent of Pakistan’s total land area is under cultivation and is watered by one of the largest artificial irrigation systems in the world. Agriculture accounts for about 24 per cent of GDP and employs about 50 per cent of the labour force. The most important crops are wheat, sugar-cane, cotton, and rice, which together account for more than 75 per cent of the value of total crop output. The government assists farmers by supporting prices and providing easy credit. Agricultural initiatives, including increased production of wheat and oilseed, play a central role in the new government’s economic reform package.

**Energy**

Pakistan has considerable reserves of natural gas, oil, and coal, and large hydro-electric potential. However, the exploitation of energy resources has been frustrated by a shortage of capital and by political constraints. Domestic petroleum production meets only about half the country’s needs for oil; the rest has to be imported. The current government has announced that privatisation of these resources is a priority, and attempts are being made to use indigenous gas instead of imported oil, thus saving precious reserves of foreign currency.

**Industry**

Pakistan’s manufacturing sector accounts for about 26 per cent of GDP. Cotton textile production and clothing manufacture are Pakistan’s largest industries, accounting for about 64 per cent of total exports. Other major industries include the production of cement, fertiliser, edible oil, sugar, steel, tobacco, chemicals, and machinery, and also food processing. The government has been trying to privatisate many State-controlled industrial units. Pakistan provides adequate formal legal protections for foreign investment, but, due to sectarian and ethnic violence and a poorly educated workforce, foreign investment is limited.
Poverty
Almost one third of the people of Pakistan, mainly in rural areas, live below the official poverty line, in the sense that they regularly go hungry. Per capita government expenditure on health care is currently only US$ 2 a year – well below regional and international comparators. Access to education and other services is limited, especially in the countryside, and women and girls are at a particular disadvantage.

With a per capita GDP of about US$ 1928, the World Bank considers Pakistan a low-income country. No more than 45 per cent of adults are literate, and life expectancy is about 61 years. The population, currently about 148 million, is growing at the rate of 2.1 per cent per annum, very close to the GDP growth rate. Inadequate social services and the high rate of population growth help to perpetuate poverty and the unequal distribution of wealth.

In the last three years, the government of Pakistan has implemented wide-ranging structural reforms to stimulate economic growth. An interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper has been developed; it highlights the needs of the poor in many sectors, including education, health care, and water supply. The devolution of political power, if successful, has the potential to improve the coverage and quality of social-service delivery for the poor, as well as encouraging their involvement in monitoring and managing the facilities. The government has also undertaken two major initiatives – Khushal Pakistan (a comprehensive poverty intervention) and Khushali Bank (a micro-credit bank) – as nationwide efforts to address poverty and vulnerability.

Supplementary text written by Bilquis Tahira, March 2003.