

Pakistan: Super Power versus Super Poor

-ALISHA HASHMI-

Nestled in Southern Asia, Pakistan has the sixth largest population in the world, with about one-third of this population living under the absolute poverty line. Slow growth, high levels of inflation and unemployment, deteriorating social services and colossal amounts of debt are characteristic of third world nations, but Pakistan's plight has always been rooted in politics.

A succession of dictators and corrupt civilian leaders have given only fleeting hope to the Pakistani people, a majority of whom continue to live in either urban slums or rural areas, lacking the basic necessities of life. Despite the 50% literacy rate (which is as low as 35% for women), less than 2% of the country's GDP is devoted to education. The bigger chunk of national income is spent on National Security, as suited to the military-dictated government.

In the global world of the 21st century, there is little room for an illiterate nation. With no funds or opportunities for education, average families are forced to send their children to *madrasahs*, (Islamist schools led by religious heads) which are gradually becoming associated with extremism and terrorism. Pakistan has come to be identified with Islamic fundamentalism and, increasingly, as a gateway for American aggression in the Middle East.

As someone born and raised in such a country, I have grown a thick skin towards riots, strikes, and coups of all sorts. Dinner-table discussions about the complexity of our nations' problems are a staple in any middle/upper-middle class home. Living in the posh, residential area of the cosmopolitan city of Karachi, and going to a renowned private school ensured relative safety and comfort but still does not protect against the harshness of the country's situation. Even the 10-minute drive from home to school is interspersed with periodic knocks on the window by disabled and homeless people, transvestites, children, and women asking for just a few rupees in the name of God.

On the 3rd of November 2007, General Pervez Musharraf, the President and Army Chief of Pakistan, called a State of Emergency in the country. This suspension of the Constitution is essentially a stripping of human rights. In another sense, however, the people of Pakistan have been stripped of human rights since time immemorial; with no democracy, no freedom of speech, no functional judiciary, and no meritocracy. Instead, there is corruption, hierarchy, and lies. A handful of fortunate people who have the means to acquire a foreign education return to work for multinationals and other giant corporations, but the mass of the population is in a cycle of poverty which has only led to frustration and unrest.

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President and former military general of Pakistan, Pervez Musharraf. (Source: BBC News)

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General Musharraf took over the civilian Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, through a military coup in 1999. He has given people hope for democracy, but has supplemented it with dummy elections-- a way to keep its allies happy and camouflage his dictatorship. Year after year there are announcements about the outstanding figures of high GDP and investments, but somehow it is accounted for by a growing income disparity; the rich are just getting richer and poor are mercilessly becoming poorer.

Since 2001, Pakistan has gotten more than \$10 billion in aid from the United States. Besides being pocketed by the higher officials of the government and the army Generals, this money has among other things funded the war against Afghanistan and created weaponry of all levels of sophistication. What it has not done, however, is help the masses of the nation, raise levels of education, improve the infrastructure and nor ameliorate the standard of living.

The late seventies marked the last time the US supported a military dictator in Pakistan. Billions of dollars in American aid poured in to support the government of General Zia-ul-Haq to fight the former Soviet Union in Afghanistan (which seems to parallel to what is happening today). However, once the USSR was disintegrated, Pakistan was abandoned by the USA and was left with a long legacy of fundamentalism, drugs, poverty and 'talibanisation' (creation of an anti-American Islamic militia, formerly known as *mujahideen*).

Although the US promised not to repeat the same mistake again, today's Pakistan seems to perfectly mirror Zia's Pakistan. Suicide bombings, insecurity and a fear of disintegration face the country once again. With no education and high unemployment and frustration, there are millions of frustrated people individuals vulnerable to becoming terrorists.

If the US is an advocate of democracy, then why let Musharraf proceed this way? Though he recently resigned from the post of military commander, it is uncertain how this will impact the dangerous possibility of totalitarianism. In this web of complications, Pakistan has become an object of exploitation when needed, and has been largely ignored otherwise. It is viewed as a lost cause by the world, in which it is perceived that any aid will just lead to more corruption.

In 1947, the British left the subcontinent divided between India and Pakistan. Since then, the people of Pakistan have been left feeling cheated and embittered by the political system. They have been in a constant battle for their rights, which to date have not been granted. It is time that the world recognizes the deplorable situation of the people of Pakistan, leaving aside the distortion of the world of politics.

Sources:

CIA world report on Pakistan
<http://www.voanews.com>

Child Poverty in Canada: The Silent Emergency

-SARAH GRYS-

Upon review of Canada's housing and homelessness record in May 2006, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights declared a "national emergency." This warrants further evaluation of not only the housing situation across Canada but that of low income or impoverished Canadian families in general. According to the '2006 National Report Card on Child and Family Poverty,' approximately 788, 000 of the 3.4 million Canadians living below the poverty line are children. Of those, 788,000, around 402,000 have been added to the total since 1989. [Editor's Note: *The Campaign 2000 report employs the term "poverty line repeatedly without defining how this line is measured. Statistics Canada has repeatedly asserted that they make no efforts to define an official poverty line for Canada. What Campaign 2000 is likely referring to is the StatCan Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) measure, which is used by many advocacy groups as the de facto Canadian poverty line.*] The Campaign 2000 report also claims that, in spite of a strong Canadian economy, the average low-income family continues to live as far below the poverty line as they did a decade ago. This 'Report Card' observes a twenty percent rise in average shelter costs between 1993 and 2006, coupled with an insufficient increase in federal spending from \$1.98 billion to \$2.03 billion. In those same years, average incomes for the poorest ten percent of Canadian families saw only an eighteen percent increase, whereas those in the richest ten percent enjoyed an increase of forty-six percent. For every dollar earned by those families included in the poorest ten percent, families in the richest ten percent earned fourteen dollars. Jacquie Maund, coordinator of the 'Ontario Campaign 2000,' insists that "the benefits of a strong Ontario economy are not trickling down to lift Ontario's most vulnerable families and children out of poverty." UNICEF has labeled the 0.4 percent decline in child poverty since the 1990s "marginal" and current child poverty rates stand at 17.4 percent. In 2003, two thirds of all low-income Canadian families with children lived in what is considered 'unaffordable housing,' allotting over thirty percent of their income to shelter. Further, the seventy percent increase in Aboriginal child welfare cases between 1995 and 2003 cannot be ignored. 'Campaign 2000' places one in four First Nations children below the 'poverty line' and forty-six percent in single-parent homes. A blunt indication of the Canadian predicament is Canada's nineteenth place standing in a UN study of twenty-six industrialized countries and their reduction of child poverty.

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A Problem With no Easy Solution

Such statistics beg the question of how Canada's "national emergency" is being addressed. It was the unanimous resolve of the House of Commons in 1989 to "achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000." As 2008 rapidly approaches, critics of the current Conservative approach and Stéphane Dion's proposed Liberal approach demand more substantial progress and a better-defined budget, respectively. In a recently delivered speech in Toronto, Stephen Harper continued to champion his government's tax cut agenda, which aims to reduce the GST to five percent. Drummond, chief economist for the TD Bank, argues that a GST cut provides "no incentive to work, save or invest." Discussing the Conservative mini-budget, Finance Minister Jim Flaherty assured Canadians that "these tax cuts will move some 385,000 people off the income tax rolls altogether" by raising the taxable income level from \$671 to \$9,600. Economists question what is presented as goodwill towards those in the lowest income tax bracket, insisting that the savings for these Canadians would be at the most thirty-nine cents daily. The Canadian Centre for Policy ALternatives (CCPA) estimates that this 1.5 billion dollar venture would offer low-income individuals maximum reductions of \$242 in 2007, \$187 in 2008 and \$144 in 2009. These amounts offer no significant dent in the \$10,400 increase of annual income necessary to push the average low-income family above the 'poverty line.'

Harper's Conservative view also faces criticism from the well-known non-governmental organization 'Make Poverty History.' Its coordinator, Dennis Howlett, argues that the Conservative Child Tax Credit will do little to serve the children of those families below the lowest taxable income bracket. The 2007 Budget papers acknowledge that, "the measure will provide tax relief of about \$430 on average for those with incomes less than \$37,000 and about \$505 on average for those with incomes between \$37,000 and \$74,000." Make Poverty History also takes issue with the Conservative Working Income Tax Benefit, arguing that \$1.37 daily will not serve as sufficient replacement for the those benefits lost in moving from social assistance to a low-wage job. Some economists stress the importance of continuing to provide social benefits in conjunction with income tax reductions for the poorest of Canadian families. Moreover, anti-poverty advocates agree that governmental fiscal measures must go beyond tax cuts in order to effectively reduce poverty.

The Tories subscribe to Brian Mulroney's famous adage that job creation is the best social policy. However, approximately thirty-four percent of low-income families are those wherein at least one parent works full-time for the entire year. This percentage has risen from twenty-seven percent in 1993, demonstrating that Canadian economic growth and subsequent job creation is not sufficient to keep families above the 'poverty threshold.'

Harper defends Conservative policies, citing the reduction of the Canadian poverty rate from sixteen to eleven percent since 1996. Dion, while not denying the value of such a decrease, finds the numerical value of 3.4 million impoverished Canadians to be unacceptable. He recently unveiled his ambitious poverty reduction plan, which he is calling his '30/50 Plan', aiming to reduce poverty by thirty percent and child poverty by fifty percent in five years. Dion claims that his proposed enrichment of the Conservative Working Income Tax Benefit will create a "real Making Work Pay Benefit" and act as a more effective tool in scaling the so-called 'welfare wall.' The Liberals also offer to enrich the Child Tax Benefit, honor the pledges made to indigenous peoples in the Kelowna Accord and pursue the national childcare program abandoned by the Conservatives. Monte Solberg, the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, accuses Dion of making promises without having a plan. Harper insists that the Liberals will likely hike taxes or run deficits. NDP MP Peggy Nash sees Dion as suffering from a credibility gap when it come to poverty issues and joked that she "thought 3050 was the target year." Solberg notes that, "Mr. Dion is setting targets for reducing poverty just like he had targets for meeting Kyoto; targets that were never met because all he had was good intentions."

It is easy to be discouraged by statistics or the abundant criticism of Conservative and Liberal approaches to poverty reduction. However, the attention being given to the issue of Canadian poverty may in itself be something to be celebrated. It is widespread knowledge of Canada's "national emergency" that may facilitate its eventual solution.

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STAY UP TO DATE ON ALL THE POVERTY RELATED HEADLINE NEWS WITH EPN!

Want to stay informed on recent happenings in the poverty and development sectors? Finding it tough to sift through all the various media sources to find what you are looking for? Well, EPN's website has the place for you! As part of its mandate to keep you fine folks up to date on the issues surrounding poverty and poverty alleviation, our publications committee has been faithfully updating the "Poverty in the News" section of our website. Check it out under the "resources" tab to the left of the homepage!

This feature will conveniently compile in-depth coverage of the headlines from both Canadian and international online media outlets. We will be posting up-to-the-minute headlines highlighting just some of the many pressing issues that affect each of us as global citizens. Put it on your "favourites" tab and check it often!

Better still, if you come across a story you think we should include, please share it with us! Send the URL to Chris at external@endpovetynow.ca

EPN HOSTS COMEDY NIGHT BENEFIT IN MONTREAL!



In November, The Montreal chapter of EPN held a comedy night to raise funds for their operations. Members and non-members alike showed up to split their sides to some of the best comedic talent our city and country have to offer.

Planet Wide Citizen's Income :

An Exclusive Interview with Professor Myron Frankman

-NADJA POPOVICH-

Myron Frankman is a professor of Economics and International Development Studies at McGill University.

NP: *In regards to world poverty, you have proposed the idea of a 'Planet Wide Citizens Income'. Could you briefly summarize this for those who may not be familiar with the idea?*

MF: The basic idea is that every man, woman, and child on the planet should receive an annual income or an annual grant, some kind of basic income guarantee in any event. The idea really started with the whole question of poverty, foreign aid, and bringing these items together. Income guarantees have been an issue in the advanced countries and many of them have schemes of one sort or another. Some of them don't quite amount to a guaranteed income but they're close to it. If you add up what people get under several different programs it almost amounts to an income guarantee. So basically, the idea is to put money in the hands of people. That would allow them to begin to meet their food needs, some of their health and care needs, and in general give some sort of income stability which many in the world are lacking. I think there's a sort of democratic side to this too because people who can band together may in fact be able to start working on resolving problems at the local level in a way that is not presently resolved with things like foreign aid which often goes to large companies and government agencies.

NP: *In your proposal it also states that there would need to be some sort of international agency that would be in charge of taxation of all of the countries in the world, or the richest people in those countries. How exactly would this work?*

MF: What I envision is that we cannot deal with some of the problems of world poverty or environmental issues unless we build global institutions which are responsive democratically to the people of the world. So I think that right now one of the problems facing even our own country is the threat that companies and wealthy people will pull their investment out of Canada if we raise taxes. This is part of the so called 'race to the bottom' and the only way around that is to close all the loopholes, to create taxes at the global level. There needs to be an authority that adequately monitors this. If such a scheme were ever implemented it could be a way to deal with the very substantial inequality in the world. And increasing poverty is the other side of the coin of increasing riches in the hands of very few. They find all kinds of ways of not having their income taxed, so it would have to be some sort of scheme of global taxation. Various kinds of taxes have been proposed but I think ultimately, tapping the income and wealth of those at the top of the world's income distribution could easily finance a scheme that could at least at the outset provide a thousand dollars to every man woman and child on the planet. This isn't going to make a big difference for those of us in North America. In terms of the annual stipend, it might give a little bit of flexibility, but to the more than 2 or 3 billion people living at the poverty margin, it would make a substantial difference.

NP: *So would this be taxing individual citizens or is this more of a business-tax model?*

MF: It could be either one. Currently at the national level we have taxes on transactions, we have taxes on corporations; it could be levied at any particular one of these sources. But in response to some of the more exotic proposals for taxing oddball things, or low-revenue things, my feeling is that we don't need to lift up stones to look for potential sources, when the sources are there, larger than life, the financial income of those of us at the top of the distribution. There are figures now that the top executives of many corporations in the United States, though I don't have the numbers in my head, used to earn about 50 times as much as the average worker, which is already quite astounding. But

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Frankman: Leveling the Economic Playing Field

now it's a couple hundred times the earnings of the workers. There's so much money out there that maybe people wouldn't even miss it if it was taxed away. Ultimately it wouldn't probably make much of a difference in their lifestyle.

NP: You spoke of the national level, but governments even in the most developed countries have not been able to solve their own problems. The US and Canada for instance do not have mass redistributive programs, so how would an international system be able to handle that?

MF: Once upon a time we had support for extensive welfare programs, and they weren't perfect, as no human institutions are. But unless we reconnect with those in our own nations and communities that are clearly in need, then the hope of doing something internationally is just baseless. I talk about social fractals: a pattern that repeats itself at all levels of magnification. In other words, if we are cutting back on welfare programs at home, we're not going to be generous abroad.

NP: You have talked about how Official Development Assistance (ODA) is not enough, and how volunteerism isn't going to solve anything, considering that we can't even reach the 0.7%GDP assistance goal set in the Millennium Development Goals. Do you believe that there are any programs today that are already instituted that have helped more than others in the alleviation of poverty?

MF: We have to begin looking at our circumstances differently and there has been a certain change in people's outlook, of the people who think about these problems and how to look at them. Unless we have this change in our discourse and the way we see things, it isn't going to happen. Those on the right, the so called neo-liberals, have been working for the last more than half century to get us to think that we all have to get by on our own initiative, and if we don't get by it's our own fault, and that this all works. This is still pretty strong but there is, I think, increased reaction to environmental effects and to the effects on democracy. Real democracy is disappearing; the words are there, but when you have people essentially buying up media outlets, and those same media outlets are very careful about criticizing certain candidates, we've already lost a lot. We have a long distance to go. We have to recognize that the problems of the people of the world are really very similar [to our own] and the solutions are going to have to be similar ones. It's got to be

people reclaiming their government institutions at whatever level and adding institutions that will be responsive at the level that doesn't exist now. This needs to be seen as something that needs to be reproduced at many levels because different problems require different solutions at different levels.

NP: The movement towards the grassroots organizational level and NGOs has gained more power recently, but it seems to me that International organizations, like the UN, are actually weaker than they are in the past. So as you were talking about levels, do you think the strengthening at these base levels will eventually be perpetuated up into higher ones, up through the government?

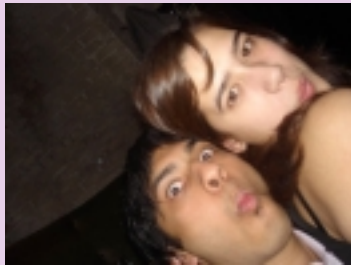
MF: There is a movement now for a Parliamentary Assembly, complementary to the UN general assembly. If it comes into being it might be unofficial at the outset, but it might grow to have a more significant role. So we shouldn't be afraid to think in a different pattern. A lot of what we read in the press asserts the inevitability of not being able to change. There is a Brazilian author who in the 1st chapters of one of his books talks about the 'dictatorship of no options' but we shouldn't be convinced that there is necessarily a crisis in which our hands are tied. We need to always be looking to new things and responding.



McGill University Professor Myron Frankman.

Meet Our New EPN Officers!

Concert Officers:



Binoy & Renée's smoldering visages

Name: Renée Sawtelle
Nickname(s) (if any/appropriate): None really.
Hometown: Leesburg, Virginia
I am most passionate about: Music (and making fun of Binoy)
What really frustrates me is: When birds poop on me.
Last movie I saw: Can't remember. Last movie I

WISHED I saw, but missed in theatres is "Control"
All-time favourite musician/band: I'm changing the question.
Right now, favorite song is Take Time by The Books
Where I waste my time: Behind a book (literary and facebook).
Favourite travel destination: Anywhere I haven't been before.
In 2008 I hope to: Establish a solid relationship between EPN and a few Montréal bands and spend summer somewhere exciting.
Word association time! Duck: Sauce à la chow mein

Name: Binoy Zuzarte
Nickname(s) (if any/appropriate): Fo' shizzle my Binizzle used to dribble down in VA, Curry in a Hurry, Binoying
Hometown: Pickering, Ontario
I am most passionate about: Music, food, reading, travelling, trivia, sleep. Ending poverty, now.
What really frustrates me is: Renee H. Sawtelle.
Last movie I saw: At home? The Life of David Gale. In a theatre? Fred Claus. I wish I were kidding.
All-time favourite musician/band: Don't make me answer this. My favourite song at the moment, though, is Bjork's "Declare Independence"... craaaazy in concert.
Where I waste my time: Do Facebook and Wikipedia count...?
Favourite travel destination: Montreal, although I haven't travelled nearly as much as I would like...
In 2008 I hope to: Not fail out of school. Not freeze to death in the winter. Get a job. Volunteer abroad in the summer. Discover new music and local talent. Word association time!
Duck: Duck, goose? I bet that's what everyone else first thought of.

Sponsorship Officer:

Name: Elise D'OH!
Nickname(s) (if any/appropriate): Stinks
Hometown: Montreal
I am most passionate about: food!
What really frustrates me is: shopping...I would definitely invest in a personal shopper.
Last movie I saw: can't remember...juvenile Alzheimer's
All-time favourite musician/band: My own humming
Where I waste my time: orange velvet bumper sticker store
Favourite travel destination: Africa
In 2008 I hope to: not have anyone asking me if this is my first winter because I look like an idiot with my infinite number of layers.
Word association time! Duck: Hun?

Media Officer::

Name: Alastair Paul Dorreen
Nickname(s) (if any/appropriate): Altron - Destructor of Galaxies
Hometown: Sheffield, England / Halifax, Nova Scotia

I am most passionate about: Bacon n' Eggs and side rolls
What really frustrates me is: Ruthlessness

Last movie I saw: American Psycho
All-time favourite musician/band: Charles Mingus / The ZIts

Where I waste my time: being my alter ego, Spandor, in online RPGs

Favourite travel destination: Home

In 2008 I hope to: Spread the word 'bout Poverty
Word association time! Duck: rascally rabbit



Al's unabashed self-promotion

Newsletter Officer:

Name: Sarah Flatto

Nickname(s) (if any/appropriate): innaprops

Hometown: NYC born, CT bred
I am most passionate about: Marlon Brando circa "Streetcar Named Desire"

What really frustrates me is: writing exams

Last movie I saw: the Sex and the City trailer?

All-time favourite musician/band: High School Musical, hands down
Where I waste my time: online window shopping

Favourite travel destination: Anywhere and everywhere!

In 2008 I hope to: discover the perfect milk/cream/coffee ratio
Word association time! Duck: rubber ducky, you're the one.



Sarah's chillin' like a villain

THE EPN MONTHLY IS A NEWSLETTER PRODUCED BY THESE CONTRIBUTING MEMBERS OF THE PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE OF END POVERTY NOW:

**ALISHA HASHMI, SARAH GRYS,
NADJA POPOVICH, SARAH FLATTO,
CHRIS CONNOLLY**

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