

NOTE

Of Terrorism and Development

Bharat Dogra writes :

It is well known that levels of malnutrition, child mortality and maternal mortality are among the world's worst in most of South Asia and now the horrific impact of terrorist violence threatens to worsen the situation. The escalating terrorist violence and even the more pervasive threat and fear of violence will lead to a much higher increase in government spending on security and armaments, and this is likely to cut into development budgets. In the midst of increasing insecurity and feeling of insecurity, private expenditure on arms will also increase, even if this is at the expense of other pressing needs.

When this writer was travelling in terrorism affected villages in Punjab at the peak of the Khalistani movement, in villages near the Pakistan border in Amritsar district it was noticed how difficult it had become for many families to perform even the most routine tasks. In such conditions it was of course extremely difficult for farmers to carry out their farming operations carefully. In the villages of Chambal and Bundel-khand, a different kind of terrorism exists one related to ruthless dacoit gangs. In hamlet after hamlet inhabited by poor people it was clear that development goals had been all but abandoned as people struggled for sheer survival in the midst of the terror of dacoit gangs.

A weaver in Varanasi said after bomb blasts there, "When there is a high feeling of insecurity, the number of traders who come for purchase here is bound to be adversely affected."

Although the development impact of terrorism can be very disruptive, it is nevertheless careful to remember that the development costs of a full-blown war will be much, much higher particularly if it involves two such heavily armed nations like India and Pakistan. In fact when two countries with nuclear weapons clash in a full-blown war, what is threatened is not development of people but the very people themselves!

While terrorism definitely harms development, it may be useful to ask a reverse question—are distorted development strategies also responsible for creating conducive condition for pushing youths towards terrorism? Why is it that the most developed province of Pakistan (Punjab) is generating so many terrorists. Earlier perhaps the most 'developed' state of India (Punjab) had also produced a significant number of Khalistani terrorists. It needs to be seriously analysed why in the so-called more intensively developed parts of these two countries, so many rootless youths emerged who were most vulnerable to the simplistic but extremely violent messages of religious fundamentalists. When narrow, top-down models based mainly on expensive technological change are pushed in rural areas with least concern for equality and social harmony, it is likely that this will create frustrated, rootless youths easily pushed towards violence by oversimplified, extremist messages particularly of religious fanatic variety. □□□