

## Dynamics of Fata reforms

By Khalid Aziz | From the Dawn Newspaper 19th Aug 201

THE government of Prime Minister Gilani is inconsistent, yet sometimes it surprises everyone with a landmark moment.

Though it is marked by questionable decisions and bad governance most of the time, periodically it pulls out political rabbits out of its hat.

It defies the Supreme Court for months and remains at the tip of disintegration, yet frequently finds the energy to emerge with accolades in another area. For example, it nearly succeeded in making headway in Karachi, yet sold itself short at the altar of political expediency. The welfare of citizens is small change for such a government. Only time will tell whether we elected a government or an enigma in the 2008 elections.

Reforms today are the result of the convergence of opportunity with an intrinsic need. Thus reforms in this context will take place when the narrow ends of the political class merge with the belief of the technocrats that reforms are seriously required. How else would one explain the following remarkable achievements in this self-serving era?

— Obtaining the media's consensus and gaining the upper hand against extremists in most of Fata and Swat;

— Achieving a successful seventh National Finance Commission award;

— overseeing the passage of the 18th Amendment;

— And now the Fata reforms that have achieved two glowing successes, the introduction of the Political Parties Act that will permit the mainstream national parties to mobilize the people of Fata and thus weaken the base of militancy, and humanizing the draconian tribal regulatory law by reforming the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR).

Having remained associated with Fata and contributing to its progress as in the introduction of adult franchise in 1996 and assisting in the reform of the FCR as a member of the reform committee in 2004, one is pleased that these remarkable changes have come to fruition.

I believe that without adult franchise the subsequent reforms could not have transpired. One only wished that these reforms had begun in 1947, rather than now. Had that happened, we

may have prevented the growth of extremism in Fata. But as they say, it is better late than never.

Another mystery that needs to be solved is how successful initiatives take place in the presence of poor governance and a highly fragmented polity like the one today. In my judgment, these successes occur mainly due to convergence of the need for reform with personal interests.

However, another necessary condition for the success of reforms is the support of the opinion of civil servants, technocrats and civil society working to achieve good outcomes. Pakistan was also assisted by other nations; it is remarkable that even now we have countries that show us their goodwill.

Having been privy to the bigger international picture of Fata reforms, one can say Pakistanis are beholden to the international community for assisting in them.

In this matter, although we are not very positive about the US these days, that nation played a pivotal role in urging the reforms. I know about the efforts made by legions of congressional delegations, at least two US national security advisers, the lobbying by eminent US political personalities and the effort put in by the large US think tank community for reforms. The number of scholarly reports that they issued urging reforms is formidable indeed.

The other country that assisted prominently in achieving Fata reforms was Britain. The British worked in their own discreet manner urging change. On innumerable occasions, officers from the high commission urged decision-makers to undertake Fata reforms. They spent an enormous amount of time and money in creating the intellectual framework of debate at conferences in Wilton Park, Sussex, to act as a catalyst for Fata reforms. The Germans, Norwegians and the Dutch also helped in this matter.

However, policy reforms cannot take place unless the government and the people at the helm of affairs in politics, the bureaucracy and the assemblies want them. That the current difficult reforms have taken place at all is thus a tribute to them.

Past opportunities for Fata reforms, like their inclusion in the agenda for the 18th Amendment, were dropped because the government said that the military didn't want them while the operations in Fata were going on. The operations still continue, yet reforms have been ushered in.

Although I have discussed the upside of the reforms there is also a hidden narrow selfish angle to them. They were hastened by the momentum of the ongoing national discourse aimed at creating new provinces. Fata's elite legislators don't want to miss the bus. If the price of Fata reforms is a new province, then let us buy reforms.

These reforms are very likely to be a precursor to the demand of a new province composed of the seven Fata agencies and perhaps the Frontier Regions too. That is the main reason that reforms took place at all.

Will these reforms bring change? The passage of laws ushering in reform is one thing, ensuring their implementation quite another. The framework for success requires close monitoring, advocacy and constant oversight. In my discussions with senior officials, it appears that such a plan exists in its infancy — perhaps a national implementation strategy to ensure these changes is required.

However, the formation of new provinces will not solve the problems besetting the citizens of Fata; their difficulties are related to the demands for adequate employment, food, security, shelter, skill development, education, health and electricity.

To achieve these goals, higher economic growth and sectoral reforms are mandatory.