

## The Presidential Address

ASAD ZAMAN

Asalam-o-Alikum! I would like to extend a warm welcome to all our guests. In particular, I would like to welcome and thank our honourable guest Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz, Chief Economist, Dr Nadeem Javaid, and Dr Safdar Sohail, Head of our Centre of Excellence for research on CEPEC, and Dr Ejaz Ghani, the secretary PSDE for organising this event and all the invitees and respected and honourable scholars for coming to grace the occasion.

Supposedly, there is an ancient Chinese curse that

*“May you live in interesting times,”!*

Actually archival research shows that there is no such Chinese proverb but it is nonetheless widespread and famous. There is certainly a lot of truth to the idea that we are living in interesting times. Allah Subhana-wa-talah says in Holy Quran

*Quran 3:140* for it is by turns that We apportion unto men such days [of fortune and misfortune].

That is, victory and defeat are allocated to different nations by turns, in God's scheme of things. This rise and fall of nations has been studied since Ibn-e-khaldoon laid the foundation for the field. Also the causes which lead nations to rise and the causes which lead them to fail and eventually decline/disappear have also been studied extensively by historians. We are all familiar with the proud proverb that “the sun never sets on the glory of the British Empire” and how the sun has set permanently on that empire. At the same time, the sun rose on the American empire since WWI. But, if you look at the symptoms of decay in civilisations, that you can find nearly all of them in the American Empire. So it seems that likely we are living in a transitional period. The regime of global domination is going to be change and Giovanni Arrighi a famous sociologist has predicted that next emerging hegemony will be Asian led by China and there are many historical trends to support his analysis. However, a deeper truth is that in transitional times leadership of the world is up for grabs. In chaotic times,

*jo baDh kar khud uThā le haath meñ miinā usī kā hai*  
(Victory belongs to whoever extends his hands to grasp it)

An essential pre-requisite for grasping leadership is the requisite knowledge. As Iqbal has said:

Asad Zaman <vc@pide.org.pk> is President of the Pakistan Society of Development Economists, and Vice-Chancellor of the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Islamabad.

*Hukumat Ka To Kya Rona Ke Who Ek Aarzi Shay Thi  
Nahin Dunya Ke Aaeen-e-Musallam Se Koi Chara*

*I do not weep for the loss of leadership, for that is destined to circulate between nations*

*Magar Who Ilm Ke Moti, Kitabain Apne Aaba Ki  
Jo Dekhain In Ko Yourap Mein Tou Dil Hota Hai Seepara*

*What makes me cry is to see ourselves bereft, while European libraries benefit from the pearls of wisdom contained in the books of our ancestors*

Similar sentiments are expressed in:

*Ganwa Di Hum Ne Jo Aslaf Se Meeras Payi Thi  
Surreya Se Zameen Par Asman Ne Hum Ko De Mara*

When we lost/wasted the inheritance (knowledge) of our ancestors,  
The Fates tossed us out of the heavens into the earth.

As Iqbal writes in these verses, there is a very strong connection between Knowledge and Leadership of the world. To analyse this further, I would like to go back to Thomas S. Kuhn's analysis of scientific revolutions. Kuhn talks about the facts that there is a period of normal science in which the accepted conventions are shared by all and progress is made on common grounds. However, from time to time, there are revolutions, and when a revolution occurs then even fundamental concepts of previous paradigms are discarded. So in fact he talks about the fact that you cannot even communicate across paradigms because the fundamental concepts basing your talk are changed. One such revolution took place between Newton who had an idea of a fixed world with a common time-space structure, a part of objective reality shared by all. In simper terms, we all live in a common world physically. And the paradigm shift to Einstein is amazing; it's the one that has really not been absorbed in the mindset of the people. We are still living in a Newtonian World but actually Einstein says is that every particle has its own universe. In the Einsteinian world, two different particles have their own different time frame and the communication may not be possible between two of them if the distance is large. The Newtonian idea that there is an objective, physical and concrete universe out there which we all participate in, is actually rejected by modern physics in which the act of observation changes the observed so that the objective/subjective distinction cannot be maintained. The worldview of the hegemon is impressed on the rest, and change of hegemony leads to a change in the way we view the world. Leadership of the world creates the ability to defines the terms upon which the world is to be looked at. Living under American hegemony, we see the world according to the categories and the labels that have been created by hegemon. Thus concepts like democracy, GNP per capita, freedom, and others dominate discourse, whereas these concepts were absent, or of minor importance during the Pax Britannica, which emphasised other things. But when the times change, as is happening today, then language we use also changes, and this changes the way in which we look at the world. The transition period creates an opportunity to redefine the world. In fact the words that we use are very powerful in allowing us to create such change. So for example in the

British rule, it was very much an aristocratic place and wealth was a crass thing. The standards of power as defined, as my father told me at the time of British India, they studied the elements of power, and the talk was about ‘cold climate’, about having natural harbors, having coal mine. These were the element of national power because the British defined it. If you look at the British encyclopaedia, Britannica in 1930’s, I did actually, there is no entry for democracy.

When the USA came to power then the World’s GNP per capita came into use because that was the criteria on which the USA was ahead of the rest of the World. So those became the criteria. One more important thing that we must understand about the current hegemon is that they are a very war-like nation. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, out of 100 years, 89 years the USA has been at war. So this warlike mind set, where the law of the jungle obtains, and the power to conquer and destroy nations confers the right to do so, is part of our accepted mental framework. All of this so called “Islamic terrorism,” and other words that we have learnt to use are part of the vocabulary of hegemon but if the hegemonic transition takes place then we’ll learn to talk in a different language. In the warlike mindset, when you have different civilisations, the assumption is that there will be war; that is, “clash of civilisations”. The idea that two civilisations can live at peace with each other, trade and have friendly relationship doesn’t even occur to the current world leaders.

To illustrate this mindset further, recall H. G. Wells who wrote “the war of the worlds.” The novel described how the Martians came to the Earth. And what do they want to do? They want to conquer it. It’s a mindset. As opposed to it, the Chinese have maxims which promote peace and peaceful co-existence. In fact the famous misquoted curse that “may you live in interesting times of change,” actually originates from an authentic Chinese proverb that “it is better to be a dog in the times of peace rather than being a human being in the time of war.” The original Chinese proverb shows the peace-loving nature of the emerging hegemon. If you look at the sayings of Confucius and Lao Tzu, these are currently not familiar with because the Chinese are not the current hegemons. Among these sayings, you will find that there is much more appreciation of the natural beauty and the wonders of peace. In fact the one of the Jesuit priests who travelled to China wrote that the China’s Empire is very powerful and there are many neighbouring kingdoms Vietnam, Laos, etc. which if they wanted to, they could swallow up at a minutes notice. They have no difficulty to do so but it has never occurred to them to do so. Europeans find this very strange: if you can conquer somebody, why not? This illustrates the contrast between peaceful and warlike mindsets. As further illustrations, Confucius said that everything has beauty but not everyone sees it and Lao Tzu said being loves gives you strength and loving gives you courage. In contrast to war as the test of strength, Lao-Tzu attributes strength and courage to loving others and being loved. This sentiment is very much aligned with Hadith in which our Prophet Mohammad SAW said that “*a momin, a believer is one who loves and who is loved*”.

As philosopher Michel Foucault has clarified, there is a strong and intimate relationship between power and knowledge. Just like power creates knowledge, so knowledge creates power, If we re-learn the categories in which we see the world, we can change the nexus of power. This is something we need to do urgently. We need to shift the orientation from the warlike views that we have been accustomed to thinking about

the world in. It is only by changing these categories of thought that we have hope of bringing peace to the planet. In fact I would like to propose that we should rename this society (Pakistan Society of Development Economists). As Edward Said has documented in his monumentally influential work “Orientalism”, European categories of thought are strongly influenced by the global conquest, colonisation, and imperialism that they undertook in the prior centuries. This idea of development and underdevelopment is a product of the need to justify conquest and imperialism. These concepts imply that one group of people is less or inferior and thereby allow the conquest, invasion and morally justification, especially in context of the social Darwinist philosophy which was popular at the time.

Instead of unquestioning acceptance of terminology and framing ideas of the hegemon, we need to ask critical questions. For instance, regarding “terrorism,” we need to ask ‘who is manufacturing the weapons,’ ‘who profits from sales of weapons and wars?’ These are the things that we need to shift the dialogue that is currently going on. So it’s actually the scholar who carry the day in the end by redefining the world. As Keynes remarked, practical men are, without their knowledge, slaves of defunct philosophers. It is in this spirit that we hold these annual conference, as the creation of knowledge is what shapes the world we live in.

There is an ancient silk road that was actually at the centre of civilisation long time ago and we are reviving that Silk Road and we hope that it would also become a centre of civilisation. By civilisation, I mean the opposite of barbarism which is currently inflicted upon humanity by continuous wars. Civilisation means peace and harmony and living in friendship with neighbours and no clash of civilisations. Let me end on this note of hope.

*Thank you.*