

The Business

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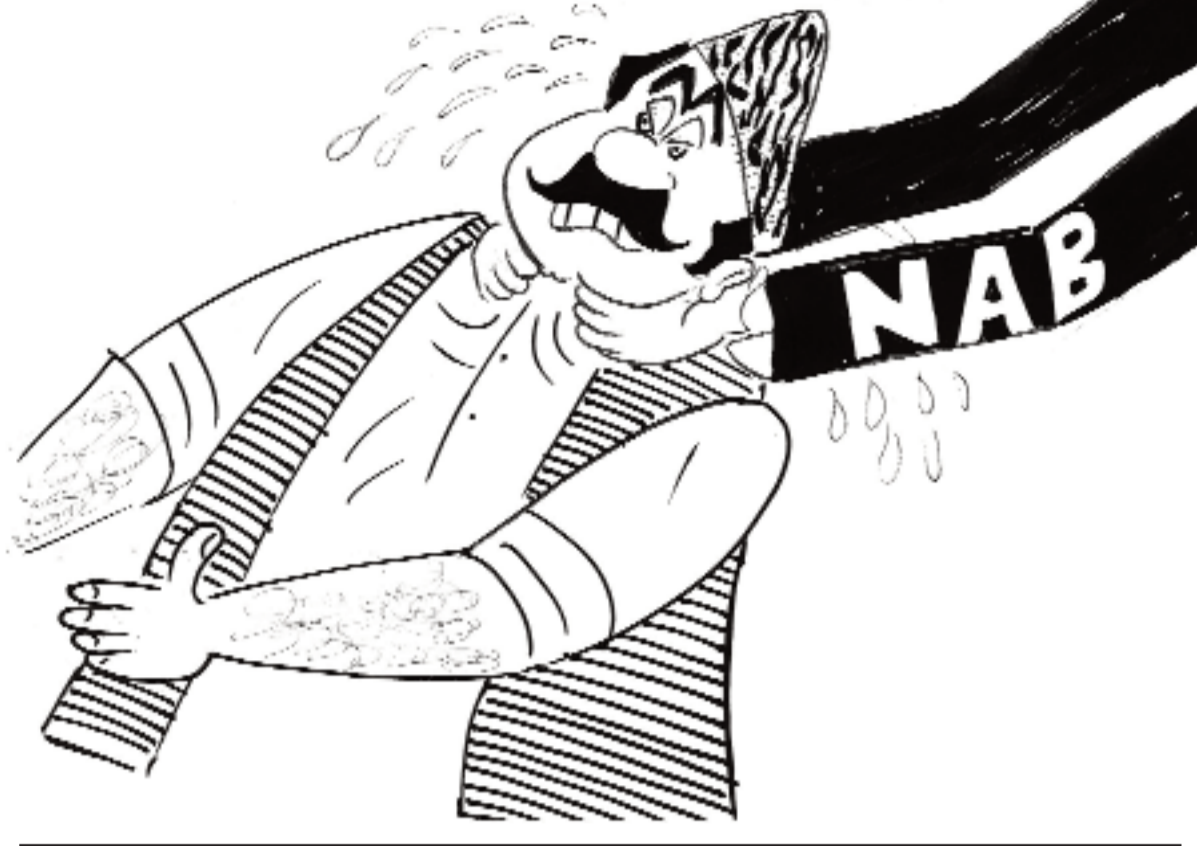
Mohmand Dam contract

According to reports, a joint venture of Descon, a firm owned by the Prime Minister's Adviser, Abdul Razzak Dawood, and a Chinese company by the name of China Gezhouba, is set to secure the contract after the bids had been processed on Monday, December 31. The long-awaited, long-delayed Mohmand Dam project has once again landed in a controversy as questions are being raised regarding transparency in its bidding process. However, besides the issue of 'conflict of interest' due to the stakes of an adviser to Prime Minister Imran Khan in the project, there is also some confusion as to the nature and number of bids. The Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda) chairman has been quoted as saying that a consortium of Descon and China Gezhouba has won the bid for the construction of the dam, adding that other joint venture of the Frontier Works Organisation and the Power China failed to qualify.

The Mohmand Dam project was conceived decades back but the work on it continued to be delayed for one reason or the other. This naturally resulted in the escalation of its cost from one billion dollars in 2003 to what is now estimated at more than three billion dollars. It was after the Supreme Court gave a wake-up call on energy and water crises that the work on the project was expedited. But the project has once again been caught up in a controversy, besides some confusion over the nature and number of bids. The groundbreaking ceremony of the project was scheduled for Wednesday, January 2, but it has been called off due to some unexplained reasons. With water and power crises getting from bad to worse, any further delay in the execution of the project would be catastrophic. The government must, therefore, come out openly to explain its position and put all speculations to rest so that work on the project is initiated without any further delay.

The present government which claims to bring transparency in all its projects has earned a bad name by awarding a contract to the adviser of Prime Minister Imran Khan. It is, therefore, in the fitness of things to clarify the actual position of the awarding the contract and do the needful in adopting the transparency claim and silence the voices which are raised every now and then. In other case there would be no difference between them and the rulers of the past who are blamed and facing the corruption and nepotism charges in the National Accountability Bureau (NAB).

NAB tightens the noose around Punjab bureaucracy: Report



Loadshedding in the winter

MIFTAH ISMAIL

When the PML-N won the 2013 elections, our country had debilitating power and gas shortages. PML-N leaders believed that the party won the elections on the back of Mian Nawaz Sharif's general popularity and the transformative work Shehbaz Sharif had done in Punjab during the previous five years. But also that unless they made good on the central promise of their campaign – to rid the country of loadshedding – they would have no chance in the next elections. Hence from Day One, the PML-N went to work on setting up power plants.

At the start of the PML-N's term in office, there was a shortage of about 7000 MW of generation capacity. A lot of power plants had also outlived their useful economic life and were running very inefficiently on furnace oil and diesel. Oil was still around \$100 per barrel and LNG was about 18 percent of the price of oil price. At that point, then, the only fuel that made economic sense was coal, especially indigenous Thar coal. But since taking Thar coal out of the ground required four years and setting up power plants, even if done simultaneously, perhaps another year, the PML-N government decided on a strategy of first putting up some plants on imported coal and then mostly shifting to local coal once enough coal had been mined.

However, two fortunate things happened as the PML-N started work on the power sector. First, the price of oil went down; and second, and more importantly, the price of LNG went down from 18 percent to about 14 percent of the price of oil. This meant that electric power generated from gas (regasified from imported LNG) became competitive with power derived from coal plants.

This allowed the government to alter its strategy and also induct LNG-based power plants into the system. The government decided to set up three LNG-based power plants of 1200 MW each (with the government's own money; two owned by the federal and one by the Punjab governments) and two imported coal fired plants of 1320 MW each (as part of CPEC). In addition, it decided to complete the Neelum-Jhelum hydro power project and the fourth extension to the Tarbela Dam power plant.

Whereas Shehbaz Sharif and his team were focused on the three LNG-fired plants and one coal

plant being set up in Punjab, Khawaja Asif, the Ministry of Water and Power, Wapda and the NTDC looked after the other thermal, wind and hydel projects, including ensuring that we could transmit power out of the new projects. Shahid Khaqan Abbasi and the Ministry of Petroleum were given the responsibility of setting up LNG import terminals and for setting up a pipeline of more than 1200 kms to convey the regasified LNG up country. Somehow all the pieces of the puzzle fit together and with great relief the government announced in November 2017 that loadshedding had ended in Pakistan. This was Nawaz Sharif's signature achievement during the PML-N's term in office.

When summer came, Pakistan was able to produce about 21000 MW of power and even during the peak Ramazan demand of 22000 MW we avoided any loadshedding. (We did shed load, but only in areas where more than 50 percent of the bills went un-recovered).

And because we were importing LNG we were also able to mostly mitigate the huge shortage of gas in the winters, especially in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Sindh and Balochistan didn't experience much shortage as it is). One trick we used was to sell some LNG as domestic gas during the winters and sell domestic gas as LNG during summers to smooth out supply throughout the year. This allowed both the industry and domestic sectors to have gas supply all year round.

But today, in the middle of January, when the winter is upon us and demand is low there is power shortage. Is this due to a shortage of power plant capacity, or lack of transmission capability or some management issue? After looking at the PTI government's stewardship of our economy for the last five months it wouldn't surprise readers to know that the current shortage of gas and, especially, power is just a management issue.

The government miscalculated demand for LNG and decided to not order enough LNG – even though we have two terminals that are contracted to regasify 1.2 billion cubic feet of gas every day. As a result, the three most efficient power plants in the world (yes the world; they convert 61 percent of energy in gas to electric power and produce power at about seven cents per kwh) are running at half capacity. The next four most efficient power plants (they convert about 45 per-

cent of energy in gas to electricity) that were set up in Punjab during General Musharraf's time are completely shut down.

And since there isn't enough LNG in the system, for the first time we even saw large gas shortages in Karachi, where in previous winter months some LNG was sold as domestic gas and there was hardly any shortage.

But that's not all. Because all these gas fired plants are shut, and we have to have power, the government is running vastly inefficient furnace oil plants (which on average convert less than 35 percent of energy in oil into power and produce power at 13 cents per kwh). But some people make a lot of money when generation plants are using furnace oil, and as the PTI government is now hopefully learning, tackling these vested interests is not always easy. Thus the main reason for the power and gas shortage this winter is the government's failure to import sufficient LNG. There is some bad luck too; many of the furnace oil plants running now are in the middle of the country and during the winter fog some transmission cables get tripped. This is not allowing the system to move all the power it can generate in the middle and south of the country to the more northern regions. As a result, the Lahore and Faisalabad regions are experiencing quite severe loadshedding.

The LNG plants set up by the PML-N were intentionally located near the north-central load regions to ease the transmission burden. So, if they were running at full capacity, even the tripping that limits the ability to move power from the centre to the north wouldn't have affected the power supply. The only way out of this mess of course is for the government to order sufficient quantity of LNG to run the efficient power plants and supply a little excess LNG as domestic gas, and make up the difference during summertime when demand for gas is low. You don't need to be a rocket scientist to figure this out. And now – after five months of Inspector Clouseau-like PTI governance – not even their most ardent supporters will mistake PTI leaders for rocket scientists. But a basic understanding of how to manage supply and demand of the power and gas sectors is something this nation should reasonably expect from those who wish to govern it. This is why I hope the PTI doesn't falter again during the coming summer and winter months.

Angry American woman

RAFIA ZAKARIA

Nearly every newspaper around the world covered the history-making event. On Thursday, Jan 3, 2019, two Muslim-American women were sworn into the United States House of Representatives. Together, Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib became the first Muslim women in the history of the US to become two of over 400 House representatives. Cameras followed the two everywhere, from the moment they arrived in the capital, to the time they along with their families celebrated after the oath of office was administered. One wore a colourful Somali headscarf, in a nod to her Somali-American roots; the other, Rashida Tlaib, wore a maroon Palestinian thobe. Such was the excitement about her thobe that a Twitter hashtag, #showyourthobe, asked other Palestinian-American women to also display their own embroidered traditional garments. Many did.

This, however, was not how the hubbub over Rashida Tlaib's swearing-in would end. The cameras that had been trailing the newly elected representative followed her to a reception held that evening by the progressive organisation MoveOn.org, which has long opposed President Donald Trump and his policies. When asked to take the microphone, Representative Tlaib recounted a conversation she had previously had with her son. "Bullies don't win," her son had told her. Tlaib said she responded with, "Baby, they don't. And we're going in there and we're going to impeach the [repletive]." Applause followed and Tlaib quickly gave up the microphone.

No sooner had the clip featuring Representative Tlaib hit the contentious airwaves of American cable news that it went viral. Millions watched it on the social media and on television. Republicans, eager to find a reason to castigate the now winning and gloating Democrats – particularly a brown, Muslim and very progressive Democrat – were quick to denounce the language used by Tlaib. The House minority leader immediately demanded an apology, using strong language to criticise Tlaib. The House majority leader, Democrat Nancy Pelosi, said she would not have used such words herself but that Tlaib's words were certainly "nothing worse than [what] the president has said". Other Democrats, particularly those belonging to the prim and trite "when they go low, we go high" Obama-Clinton camps, who have long insisted that they must stand for civility and not bow to the depths Trump plunges to, were also critical. For her part, Tlaib refused to apologise. She stood by her words; she had said exactly what she had intended to say, and what she had meant to say. Many agreed with her; a hashtag echoing her call for impeachment trended on Twitter for hours as angry Democratic supporters rallied in favour of Tlaib, noting that she had finally said what so much of the country has been thinking and saying. The Tlaib episode is no-

table for several reasons. For starters, while she may have been criticised by certain news media outlets and Republican politicians, she did not face any actual consequences for her use of indecent language. She was not officially censured; the US government did not begin any proceedings against her. Threatening Republican mobs did not gather outside her house, and while Trump did say that her comments were "highly disrespectful" and that she had "dishonoured herself" when specifically asked, he too was powerless to actually stop her from using similar language in the future.

These facts are notable because they are uncommon ones in other places where Muslim women hold office; in most Muslim-majority countries, not only would a woman be criticised for using what is deemed inappropriate language, the feeble protections that safeguard freedom of expression would readily be moved over. Through one or another rule or agency directive, she would face immediate consequences, likely even losing the power of her elected position. Far less noxious language used by Muslim women in political office in Muslim-majority countries has resulted in far greater consequences. The freedom afforded to Tlaib in America is not a freedom she would enjoy in many parts of the Muslim world. Tlaib's statement also reveals the turn that Muslims in America will have to take in the years to come. Muslim-American organisations, many that balk at giving women, particularly women who do not cover their heads, leadership positions within their own organisations and boards, have been eager to embrace the two new emblems of Muslim-American leadership. Tlaib's use of inappropriate language is far beyond the narrow codes of decency that are viewed as permissible to most. And, yet, it is just such an expression of Muslim rage that is admissible given the bans, surveillance and demonisation that Muslim-Americans routinely face in Trump's country. Given their roles within the Democratic Party's progressive caucus, both Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar are slated to be the most liberal voices in Congress, a fact that is also likely to push once-conservative Muslim-America further to the left. It is not something that Muslim-American organisations (beyond those with a political and civil-rights bent) are inwardly enthusiastic about; it is, however, what they will regularly have to celebrate. Not only will the face of Muslims in America be female, it will be very outspoken and unafraid, and willing to fight a president who has made Islam the most suspiciously viewed religion in America. President Trump has used some of the filthiest and profanity-laced language for women. Many of the more than 100 American women elected to the House last week would have liked to give to the president a dose of what he has been dishing out to everyone else. Few, Muslim or non-Muslim, would have guessed that one of the two new Muslim-American representatives would be the first to do so.

Our hockey debacle

WAQAS YOUNAS

The fate of world cups in 1994, whether field hockey or soccer, was increasingly being decided on the basis of penalty shoot-outs. Our fortune was hanging in the balance in the hockey World Cup final on December 4, 1994 as it had come down to penalty shoot-outs. Late Pakistani goalkeeper Mansoor Ahmad had laser-like focus on the ball.

The umpire was ready, as was the Dutch player. The umpire whistled, heartbeats stopped and the Dutch player pushed the ball towards Mansoor's right. Mansoor threw his body that way, as if to catch the best prize in the world. Best prize it was – he stopped the ball. Players and people back home jumped in ecstasy. Pakistan was the world champion. Sadly,

for the last time. This glory is now lost.

Our exit from the Hockey World Cup 2018, held in India, was shocking. We lost to Belgium, without scoring a goal, to a team that cons ago would have dreamt of scoring a goal against Pakistan. Our team almost pulled out of this world cup owing to a lack of sponsorship, but managed to make it on time.

However, it is disappointing to see our nation, once considered to be a giant in field hockey (its national sport), crashing out of the world cup without winning. This warrants some serious analysis.

So, our sports analysts turned to 'experts' for this purpose. On one TV show, an anchor was trying to determine the reasons for our hockey team's failures. His guests were two former Olympians from our more tri-

umphant days. One of them remarked that we failed because we didn't select players with "fresh legs". He implied that married or older players enfeeble a team since their "tissues weaken" with age.

Is this true? Do tissues only weaken in a player's legs? If all tissues weaken, can we infer that mental tissues are also weakened in the process? And if they do, should married or older people be employed as coaches, trainers, and professionals in senior positions in the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF)? Does marital status or age matter for athletes? Marriage is not an obstacle to greatness.

Tennis requires extreme agility and fitness. Roger Federer has won the most Grand Slams; he won some even after he got married in 2009. Swimming is another intensive sport.

Michael Phelps, a great swimmer, kept on winning Olympic medals even after he was married. Squash is fairly demanding. Last year, a top-ranking husband and wife duo won the men's and women's titles in the US Open.

But these are isolated examples, you may say. Our experts seem to have implied that copulation weakens players. However, many scientific studies have disproved the idea that intimate relations affect athletic performance.

The notion that age hinders athletic abilities is discredited if we examine the profiles of teams that participated in the Hockey World Cup 2018. Australia is ranked in the first position across the world. It has 11 players who are 25 or above (including three players who are over 30). The Netherlands is another top-ranked team that has over six players who are 30 and

above. Argentina is a current Olympic champion. It has nine players above the age of 30, including one who is 39 and another who is 37. Clearly, hockey is not just for "fresh legs".

If our experts were in charge of sports in other countries, they would have deprived the world of the skills that Roger Federer and others bring to their respective sports. They also wouldn't have included many deserving players because of their marital status or age had they been coaching hockey teams in Australia or Argentina.

We need a more prudent dissection of our hockey team's failure. The aforementioned analysis by our 'experts' ignores ground realities. I have no doubt that the failures of our hockey team over the last couple of decades can be attributed to this approach. Since these experts (former

hockey players) have been at the helm of affairs in the PHF for quite some time, their decisions have probably been informed by it.

We need to reconsider how we appoint people to senior positions in the PHF. Is being a former great player sufficient to become a coach, trainer or a decision-maker in the PHF? This criterion alone shouldn't make someone qualify for a particular job that requires specialised skills.

Excellence as a player alone doesn't guarantee that you will be able to analyse team performance, train and produce athletes, and lead an organisation. If it did, appointing former hockey players would have worked to our benefit and Pakistan would have been a world champion in hockey today. We need to change our approach or we won't be able to bring back the glory of field hockey.