

The Business

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Fiscal deficit challenge

Advisor to the Prime Minister on Finance, DrHafeezShaikh has stated that the fiscal deficit prevented the government from releasing funds for the development sector. There are two major issues with his contention. First and foremost, the budget for 2019-20 that Shaikh prepared and which was approved by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a prior loan condition, envisaged outlays in the first quarter (July-September) that he has not disbursed.

Thus, instead of the 20 percent release for Public Sector Development Programme envisaged during the first quarter, Sheikh released only 8.8 percent while grants received 11 percent of the total amount budgeted for the purpose and there were no releases under subsidies.

And what must be a source of serious concern for Prime Minister Imran Khan is that only Rs547 million out of the Rs200 billion budgeted were disbursed under his signature social protection programme in the first quarter which is less than one percent of what was actually budgeted.

Former finance minister Dr Hafiz A. Pasha, while speaking at a seminar lamented the 'intensity' of adjustments in the ongoing IMF programme while citing the economic team leaders' agreement with the IMF to slash current account deficit by 74 percent and deficit by 55 percent in the first year of the 39-month IMF programme period.

Today, inflation is at 12 percent, food inflation is closer to 20 percent as per the Sensitive Price Index; and the number of those who have joined the ranks of the unemployed as a consequence of the contractionary policies of the government agreed with the IMF is humungous with a consequent impact on the quality of life of their entire households.

Pasha recommended that the government must improve performance, reduce electricity losses instead of borrowing heavily and passing on the interest costs to consumers through ever-rising tariffs, increase reliance on direct tax collections instead of continuing to rely on indirect taxes whose incidence on the poor is greater than the rich and focus on reducing poverty levels which have risen from 36 percent last year to 40 percent this year. Sadly, Pakistan's economic team leaders are not focused on alleviating these serious issues facing the general public and whose negative impact is rising with each passing day and are instead engaged in patting each others' backs on achieving milestones set in the IMF programme that does not address ever-growing 'inequalities'.

The economic team cites indicators as positive signals, particularly the reduction in current account deficit but is silent on its cost notably negative growth in large-scale manufacturing sector with reduced employment levels, a stable rupee while ignoring that it remains undervalued fuelling domestic prices, and a reduced fiscal deficit which is at the cost of further shrinking of the economy impacting on productivity and employment.

Education and development



AAMIR HUSSAIN

"When I was ambivalent about choosing a career path on my very first day as a new entrant to high school, I remember one of my teachers saying that one ought to choose a career which is not strictly driven by economic factors.

"The teacher himself being new, had his days numbered at the school as if he had committed an unforgivable offence by challenging the commercial ethos of this expensive private school. With this moral statement of the teacher my ambivalence became even more entrenched and I wanted to explore the meaning of having career choices beyond the economic factor.

"But I could not find time and motivation to explore this question in my school days and I continued to be an obedient and practical student to focus on what was taught. In an environment of competition for excellence represented through higher grades, I chose the easier way to obtain maximum marks rather than being mired in a complex world of imagination and thinking.

"Wouldn't it be prudent to think that choosing a profession is also a social obligation to live up to the expectations of parents? Part of it is certainly about fulfilling the dreams of parents and relatives who sacrificed their money and time to see me a successful person to support them when they need it the most. I distinctly remember that this was the first lesson I was taught on the day of orientation at the school and this

was also communicated to my parents in their first sitting with school management.

"This lesson reveals that choosing a profession is not an independent matter but is linked with the larger familial and social life. Education for parents is both sentimental and material investment and they would like to see me as a successful person in all material senses. Being the eldest son, my parents expected me to help my younger siblings so as to relieve them from the burden. Hence, I must see a deep economics in this. The advice of one of my teachers – to think beyond the economic factor in making career choices – was noble one but I had this inherent fear of losing in the race for survival.

"The real world we live in today is shaped by the weight of your pocket more than sublime feelings, passion and some metaphysical sense of serving humanity. At school we were told that success lies in being practical, but strangely enough we were not discouraged to discuss brands, products and capricious commercial aids. This implied that we were all predestined to do things which make commercial sense rather than being trapped in subjective thinking that does not pay off much for those who have pinned hope on us."

Amidst applause from other young professionals of the development sector, these words were uttered by a young bright professional who attended a workshop on the subject of "The role of civil society in social transformation" this week. As facilitator of the workshop, I found his words rather convincing – reflecting the predicament of our pedagogical practices and education system at large. The ethical dimension of education has gone long and those who sell the dreams of prosperity have crippled inquisition and intellect.

Our expensive private education providers promote commercial greed and fragmented individualism as the primary goal of education. One young professional said that he was constantly reminded of a spectacular future full of material fantasies as the outcome of his expensive education. "My parents were made to believe that their

son was going to be a rich man and the money they invested in educating him was going to bring fame and fortune and happiness."

The mechanical private education does not have much space for critical reflection, artistic expression and self-actualization; it is rather framed in a fanciful world of prosperity to tame the human appetite to question. Albert Einstein was perhaps right when he asserted that education imparted through our schools corrupts young minds.

Our education system promotes imitation more than innovation and creativity. Interestingly, though, most great minds and successful people had not been good students and most of them became ardent critics of our modern commercialized education system later. For varying accomplishments in life, big minds like Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein and successful entrepreneurs like Bill Gates and Steve Jobs – just to mention a few examples – were not the products of commercial education but some were dropouts rather.

Driven by market need, our private educational institutions can only produce good skilled workforce but not transformative leaders. The skilled workforce is trained in mechanical thinking to serve the interests of the system and to be rewarded for the inputs and obedience accordingly. Those who can think critically or have the capacity to innovate or transform are left out as the undesirable lot. Most of the world's undesirable lot has produced the best knowledge and has pushed the frontiers of innovation and change beyond the market fundamentalism.

What is happening in the development sector is not an exception as the sector is swarmed by technical workforce trained by expensive private educational institutions. From this skilled workforce we will never be able to produce change leaders like Paulo Freire, Akhtar Hameed Khan and Fazle Hasan Abed. Our contemporary market-led and corporate type social development framework provides output-based solutions to the long-term socioeconomic and political challenges of social change.

For the most part, the change indicators

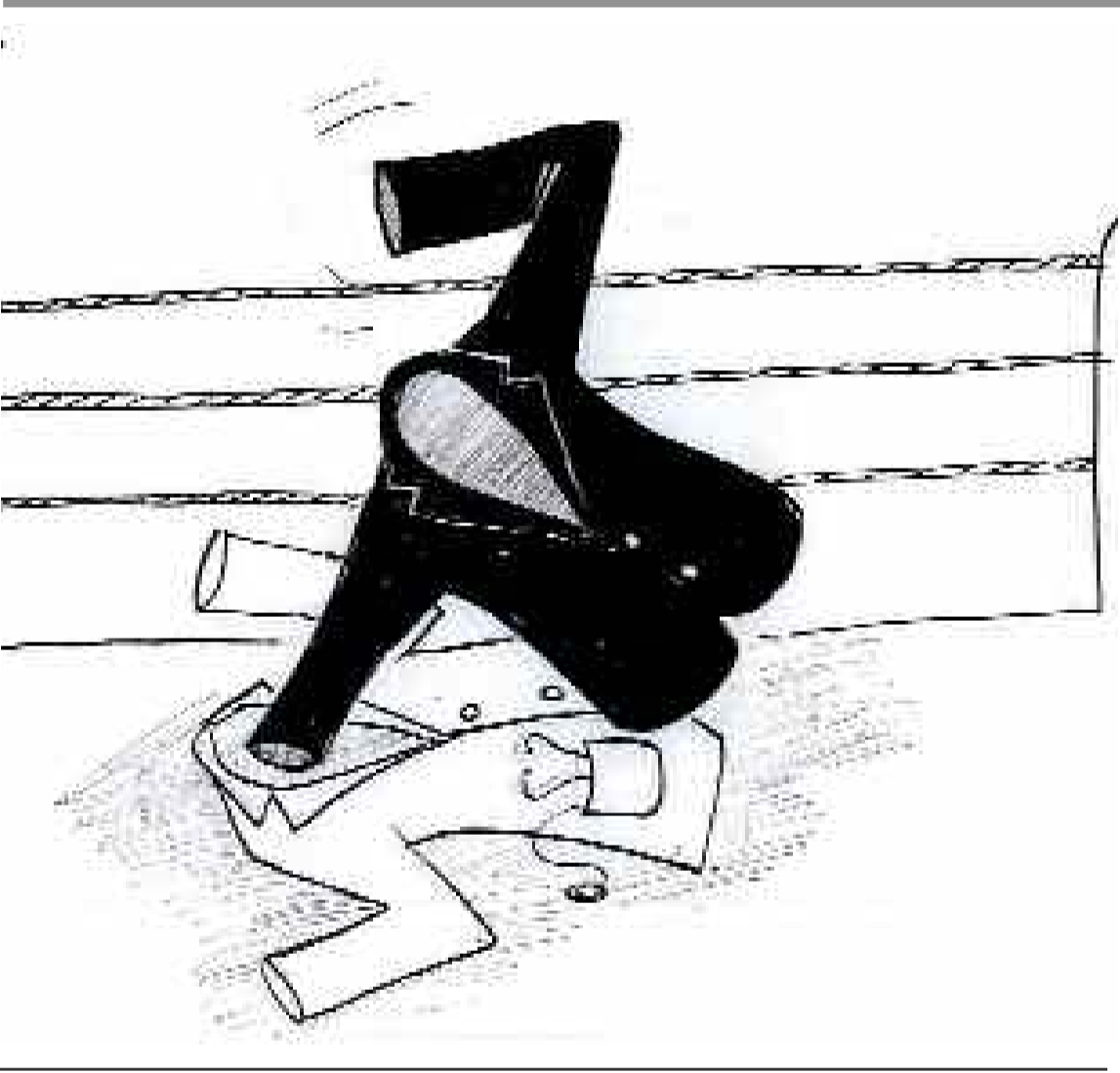
of poverty alleviation programmes are designed on a set of assumptions rather than a roadmap for an incremental and transformative change. The so-called Logical Framework Analysis (LFA) and its variant approaches are frequently being used these days in designing poverty alleviation programmes and gauging the outcomes and impact of such programmes. This oversimplification of the theory of change has reduced the transformative processes to a numbers game which is established through a set of quasi-experimental methods.

Quasi-experimental methods are the most effective tools to correlate real-time changes with institutional attribution. They tend to reduce the larger phenomenon of social change ensued by socioeconomic and political factors to the attribution of a development programme. And development professionals produced by our private educational institutions are good at turning a development goal into a technical output, barring those few who have retained creative thinking despite getting all the wrong kind of education.

There are really few critics who believe that in our increasingly volatile world, the development discourse of poverty alleviation has become a numbers game which is non-assertive and transformation-neutral. Contractors and their clients have a business relationship to maximize their returns and those for whom development projects are designed become mere objects.

The poor and those in need of development support become one of the variables in determining the feasibility of a development project.

Success and efficacy of a development project becomes contingent upon a number of assumptions rather than defining the pathways of transformation. Assertive and transformative development workers are frowned upon as 'miscreants and political' and hence they remain under-utilized, isolated and alienated within the organization. This is how the corporate world has shaped our development thinking today.



Above the law

KHALID BHATTI

Millions of Pakistanis were shocked to see – live on TV – lawyers vandalising a public hospital and assaulting patients, paramedics and doctors.

The enraged lawyers broke windows, doors and equipment at Punjab's largest cardiac facility and also set fire to several vehicles, including a police van. They created chaos in the emergency and ICU of the PIC where doctors were busy providing medical treatment to patients in critical condition.

The horrifying scenes of lawyers attacking the Punjab Institute of Cardiology (PIC) in Lahore, to take revenge from doctors, once again showed how inhuman, cruel and intolerant as a society we have become over the years. This shows how hate, anger and disrespect have replaced the care and respect for each other. We have become a bitterly divided society. It is a shameful act and must be condemned at every level.

Several cardiac patients died because they did not get the medical treatment as doctors fled the emergency for their own safety. What the lawyers did was not only illegal, unethical and immoral but also inhuman and cruel. They put the lives of many patients in danger just to display their muscle power and satisfy their big egos. The lawyers showed the worst kind of mob mentality and violence. No civilised society accepts and tolerates such violent behaviour. But our state and society has so far showed tolerance towards such kind of mob violence.

How angry were the lawyers? They had been insulted and beaten up in a scuffle earlier but there is no justification to attack a hospital where everyday nearly 200 cardiac patients in emergency conditions are brought for treatment. How can they justify the ransacking of a busy hospital and jeopardizing the lives of many critical patients?

Attacking a hospital even during war is considered barbaric and a crime against humanity. The lawyers have done something that will continue to haunt them for a long time. After the shocking attack on the hospital, instead of apologising for their violence and hooliganism, they have announced a strike for the release of the arrested lawyers. They are

bringing a bad name to the lawyers' community.

This horrifying attack was the result of a month long stand-off between doctors and lawyers. The lawyers were enraged over what they say was an assault by doctors against a lawyer at the hospital over his refusal to get in a queue of patients.

If the most educated sections of society – doctors and lawyers – cannot resolve their disputes in a civilised way what can one expect from others? The dispute had been settled earlier after young doctors publicly apologised but a viral video flared tempers again.

The lawyers were angry about the video in which a young doctor is seen ridiculing them for being unable to do anything over their colleague being beaten up. So they decided to restore their honour through hooliganism and violence inside a busy hospital. But the beating up of a lawyer or an insult towards lawyers cannot be used an excuse for such a horrible act.

Most of powerful and influential individuals, groups, organisations and institutions consider themselves above the law in Pakistan. They can go to any extent to satisfy their egos. That is what the hundreds of lawyers did in Lahore on Wednesday.

The elite and ruling classes continuously flout laws and violate the constitution (sometimes even abrogate it) to protect and further their class, political and economic interests. Repeated military interventions have further eroded the concept of supremacy of constitution and rule of law. Selective implementation of the law creates and spread a culture of impunity. The most powerful in our country have lost fear of law and accountability. And the ruling elite have never seriously tried to establish rule of law.

There is always a possibility of manoeuvring around or manipulating the criminal justice system on account of the material status of the victim or the perpetrator. We have seen cases such as these become old news in a matter of time and attention being diverted to other incidents.

Taking the law into one's hands has become a common phenomenon in our society. This must be discouraged at every level. No one should be allowed to become judge, jury and executioner to punish others. The state must end impunity

Intersectional solidarity

CATHERINE ROTTENBERG AND NEVE GORDON

On Friday, December 1, two protest marches met in central London in what felt like a magical moment. A few thousand striking university lecturers had just reached the British Parliament at Westminster after marching from the Bloomsbury neighbourhood, when close to a thousand Extinction Rebellion teenagers came pouring down a parallel street and the two protests united.

The university strikers came to a halt and, as a sign of solidarity, they stood and clapped as the two protests merged. University professors alongside teenagers then began walking together for the last 100 yards to Parliament Square.

To those in attendance, the merger of the two protests made perfect sense. After all, the forces that undermine higher education in the United Kingdom by pushing through the marketisation of British universities are the same ones driving the ongoing climate crisis.

They are also responsible for the socio-economic and political upheaval that over the past few months has pushed people across the globe to the streets: from France and the UK to Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran, through India and Hong Kong to Colombia and Chile.

Clearly, each protest is unique and carries its own set of demands. Grievances may diverge, but there are also some very powerful forces that link many of these demonstrations together. And it is vital that we begin to see these common patterns.

As protesters in Europe, the Middle East, South America and Southeast Asia

are pushing back against austerity, the abuse of power by corrupt regimes, and rising authoritarianism, it is important to remember that these forces are very often connected to the brutal imposition of neoliberal principles of privatisation and deregulation.

In the UK, 40,000 staff members in 60 universities were on strike from November 25 to December 4 to protest against detrimental pension reforms and persistent gender and race pay gaps, whereby white male colleagues are, on average, getting paid 15 percent more than their female counterparts and 9 percent more than colleagues of colour. More than 50 percent of the workforce does not have permanent contracts, while salaries across the sector have decreased by a staggering 17 percent in real terms since 2009.

While inequality and casualisation among university staff are part of much wider trends in the workforce that ultimately aim to increase profits for the few at the expense of undermining job security and reducing pay to many, the marketisation of the universities in the UK began in earnest with the introduction of tuition fees in 2009, followed by the adoption of "managerial models of private and especially public sector corporations".

Institutions that are supposed to cultivate thinking and encourage the search for truth (veritas), now treat students as consumers, professors as service providers, while the university managerial class pockets hefty salaries, at times reaching half a million pounds.

Such changes are part of global processes. Today, the six richest people in the UK control as much wealth as the poor-

est 13 million. Over the past 10 years, billionaire profits have skyrocketed everywhere as whole populations are rendered disposable and as the earth heats up.

And the situation is similar in countries across the world.

In Chile, for example, the demonstrators are protesting against deteriorating socio-economic conditions, which can be linked directly to the legacies of the privatisation policies of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorial regime and programmes introduced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

This is also the case in Lebanon, where corrupt politicians have pocketed millions while ravaging the country. Here, too, the IMF has been involved, demanding structural adjustments.

Indeed, in many countries, people are filling the streets due to increasing fury at the effects of neoliberal economic and political policies – even if these effects manifest themselves differently and unevenly across the globe. Neoliberal policies are predatory and extractive, enabling a small minority to thrive while the rest of the population suffers.

Neoliberalism has also facilitated the rise of reactionary, ultranationalist and ethnocentric governments that just happen to be climate change deniers as well. From Brazil to India and back to the United States, governments are deregulating environmental protections at the very moment when the United Nations is issuing dire warnings about the looming climate catastrophe and calling on nations to urgently transform their economies to cut greenhouse gases and switch to sustainable energy.

Neoliberalism thus operates as a kind of nihilistic colonising force, where profit

trumps people, undermining civil society and weakening democratic processes and institutions while propelling the introduction of policies that will engender a climate holocaust.

It is also what links many of the strikes and protests around the world – from extinction rebellion and the South Western Rail strike in the UK and the massive strike against pension reforms in France to the student strikes at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, India and Punjab University in Lahore, Pakistan and the union strike in Bogota, Colombia.

The congregation of university strikers alongside extinction rebellion militants at Parliament Square should thus be seen as part of a new surge in massive civil protests which have spanned the globe, and it is precisely the prospect of drawing connections between different struggles and activists that provides us with glimmers of hope.

Given the incredibly powerful forces that we are currently up against, it is perhaps more vital than ever that we recognise how the hundreds of daily protests taking place across the globe constitute part of a growing transnational movement that is struggling, each in their separate countries, against imminent devastation that will ultimately be planetary in scale.

The next step, however, is to find new ways of creating intersectional ties and demonstrating solidarity across national borders. We have witnessed how social media can facilitate this, as when Miriam Barghouti, a Palestinian-American writer and student at Birzeit University in the West Bank, sent off a supportive tweet to the African American protesters in Ferguson, Missouri.