

The Business

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Lopsided subsidies?

While briefing the media on Cabinet decisions, Firdous Ashiq Awan, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Information and Broadcasting revealed that Rs 100 billion subsidy would be extended to the agriculture sector though she did not provide any details as to how this sizeable amount would be disbursed. In the first week of July 2019, Jehangir Tareen, acknowledged as the architect of the five-year 309 billion rupee agriculture emergency programme, together with the Minister for National Food Security and Research stated at a press briefing on July 2 2019 that the amount would become available from next fiscal year with the federal government contributing 85 billion rupees, provinces contributing 175 billion rupees (with Sindh still foot dragging on its participation in the programme) while the farmers would contribute 50 billion rupees. The target areas for spending would be as follows: increasing yields of wheat and sugarcane, though surprisingly and much to the chagrin of the textile sector, the programme did not include cotton as well as greater water availability for crops. The budget for the current fiscal year presented three weeks before the announcement of the Agriculture Emergency Programme earmarked a total subsidy of Rs 15.5 billion for PASSCO inclusive of Rs 8 billion for wheat supply to Gilgit-Baltistan, Rs 5 billion for wheat reserve stock, Rs 2 billion under wheat operation and half a billion rupees as reimbursement on account of donation of wheat by the government.

With respect to power sector subsidy, Awan claimed that 242 billion rupees had been released as subsidy to protect those consumers using up to 300 units of electricity in any month. It is unclear whether the figure cited by Awan, around Rs 12 billion higher than in the budget documents, was a revised estimate or whether it includes the entire period that the Imran administration has been in power. And what impact would this have on the projected budget deficit that would have inflationary implications?

No one is opposed to subsidy to the farm sector given that the sector contributes 21.4 percent to the GDP. This may still be higher if we consider the contribution of agriculture to our agri-based industrial sector that is heavily reliant on farm output as an input (textiles) and employs 45 percent of the country's labour force. Another reason is the disturbing fact that food inflation in Pakistan today is prohibitively high that accounts for a rise in poverty levels and a rise in unemployment due to the tight monetary and fiscal policies of the government. However, we fear that a direct injection into the farm sector is unlikely to pay dividends unless the monetary and fiscal policies are also appropriately adjusted to inject productivity into the

For India: Enough is enough



AIJAZ ZAKA SYED

I have never felt so proud of my country in a long, long time. Led mostly by students and the youth, Indians are marching in their millions across the length and breadth of the country to assert that India belongs to Muslims as much as it does to anyone else.

Millions and millions of students from schools, colleges and university campuses — as well as ordinary people across India — have come out on the streets in solidarity with the students of Jamia Millia Islamia and Aligarh Muslim University. They are not just protesting against the brutal, unprecedented crackdown unleashed on the students of the two central universities earlier this week, they are also demonstrating against Narendra Modi's new brazenly fascist and Islamophobic citizenship law as well as the relentless targeting of Muslims under this order. The nationwide protests and demonstrations that rocked the country on Thursday, December 19 — Martyrs Day, by the way — bringing out people on to the streets in every village and city of the country have not been seen in India in a long, long time — perhaps not since the 1974 Emergency. The protests saw every section of society united in their opposition to the high-

handed actions of the BJP government. As Yogendra Yadav put it, these protests are no longer about one religion or region.

It goes without saying that the majority of these students and protesters happens to be Hindu, naturally reflecting the demographic profile of the country. And they have firmly and resolutely rejected this government's attempts to do to India's 200 million Muslims what Hitler's Nazis did in Germany to the Jewish minority. That is: politically isolate, disenfranchise and disempower the already marginalised Muslims, turning them into non-citizens, like Myanmar's Rohingya, or worse, like the persecuted Jews in Nazi Germany. After the stifling darkness and oppression of the past six years, Indians appear to be finally waking up to say enough is enough. They have been resisting and defying the tyranny of the BJP and its deadly duo. In its hubris and sheer arrogance of power, the BJP has ended up uniting this nation, reminding it of the ideals and values that inspired the founding fathers of the nation and their hard-won freedom.

Modi and Shah have managed to awaken a sleeping giant of a nation, not to mention the long docile and voiceless Indian Muslims who have silently suffered over the past few years, taking every injustice and atrocity in their stride. The BJP managed to ram through the Citizenship Amendment Bill — just as it had rammed through the Triple Talaq Bill, the dismemberment of Jammu and Kashmir — notwithstanding the fact that it does not have enough numbers in the upper house of parliament. This was chiefly because of the coercive tactics of Modi and Shah and shameful disunity in the opposition ranks.

President Kovind dutifully signed on the dotted line, approving the legislation that openly discriminates against Muslims and strikes at the very heart of India's secular and liberal constitution. It appeared as if nothing stood in the way of the BJP's agenda to turn the Gandhian democracy into a Hindu Rashtra. Even though people in the northeast began taking to streets in their thousands against the proposed law, viewing it as an existential threat, even as the bill was being debated in parliament,

for the rest of the country it had been business as usual. Until our youthful heroes from Jamia Millia and Aligarh decided to rise up in defiance of this black law, provoking the now infamous and unimaginably cruel response from the thugs in uniform who report to Amit Shah. From raining lathis and firing bullets on peacefully protesting students to molesting girls and destroying Jamia's historical library, the Delhi Police did everything possible to terrorise and intimidate students. Many of them sustained serious injuries and broken limbs. Across the world, students are viewed as a nation's future. Their voices are heard by powers that be with the seriousness that they deserve.

Under this order, though, everything is viewed through the twisted prism of fallacies that it has invented for itself. Dear Leader chooses to see those protesting against the divisive policies and agenda of his government not as Indians but by the clothes they wear. In doing so, he is once again doing what the BJP does best — trying to divide this country by pitting Hindus and Muslims against each other. The home minister is hardly joking when he says that by bringing in the citizenship law and, its next logical stage, the NRC, which would cleanse India of "termites" (read Muslims) in his own words, the BJP is "correcting the historic wrongs of Partition."

This is the real agenda of the BJP and its Parivar: divide Hindus and Muslims in the name of religion. The CAA-NRC is nothing but yet another shameless attempt to fracture this country along religious lines, portraying the BJP as the sole guardian of the Hindus. Many of us, including this writer, had been under the impression that the Parivar has nearly succeeded in this mission. But, no, we couldn't have been more wrong. The spontaneous protests in the length and breadth of this country against the Jamia and AMU crackdown and the whole injustice of the CAA and NRC prove that all is not lost. There is still hope for India.

The majority of this nation remains steadfast in its belief in the secular and plural ethos that we all inherited. It is be-

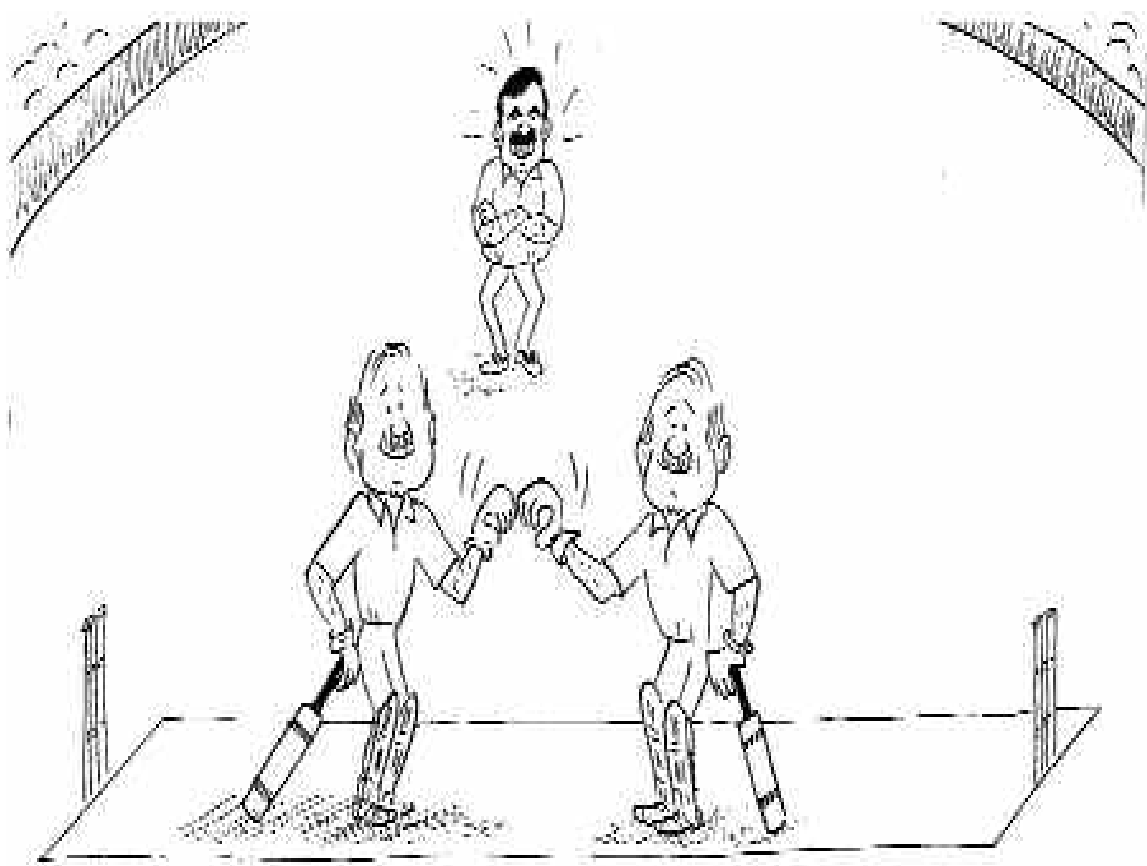
ginning to see through the dangerous game that the BJP has been playing to perpetuate itself in power at the cost of the nation and its future and stability. As Pavan Verma, who has revolted against his party and its president Nitish Kumar's stand on the CAA, put it, ordinary Hindus in whose name the Parivar has been waging this relentless war on the Idea of India want no part of this perpetual strife created by the BJP. They want peace and stability and simply want to get on with their lives. This is what all Indians — except the Parivar, of course — want. And they have clearly concluded that it is time to speak up. Enough of this regime's perpetual fighting of phantoms at the cost of real challenges like a floundering economy and deepening unemployment crisis.

Enough of peddling hate and bigotry against minorities, Dalits and women. Enough of lynchings and rapes. Enough of the reign of terror that has brought so much shame and infamy to India. Newspapers around the world have been reporting on their front pages how the BJP is destroying the world's largest democracy by ramming through its sectarian agenda. The salutary act of defiance by the students of Jamia Millia, a university that was born out of India's freedom struggle and founded by Maulana Mohammed Ali Johar, and AMU, has clearly set off a revolution, sparking a million mutinies throughout the land. Young girls like Ayesha Renna and Ladeeda Farzana, the Jamia students who valiantly took on the might of the Orwellian state, have overnight become heroes or 'sheroes' — as they are being called by the media — of a nation that desperately wants to return to its original noble self and its all-embracing spirit.

By rising in revolt in solidarity with JNU and AMU students, Indians have demonstrated that they remain a united nation and are not prepared to be divided as Hindus and Muslims.

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Shahbaz Sharif playing on both sides of the wicket - Shaikh Rasheed

India and the outsiders

MAHEEN AHMAD

History has been a persistent and sorry tale of "the outsiders". Those who do not seemingly look, think or speak like "us" are treated differently for they are not "us" and we are not "them". The harrowing stories of the Holocaust, apartheid and Rwandan genocide are some examples of systemic discrimination that snowballed into colossal tragedies. With the passage of the Citizens Amendment Bill (CAB), it is feared that India too may be stumbling down this perilous path.

Passed by India's Parliament on December 11, the CAB grants Indian citizenship to religious minorities that migrated to India from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. On the surface, it's an initiative of the Modi government to offer sanctuary to persons fleeing religious persecution. However, the bill only grants non-Muslims accelerated citizenship, denying the same to Muslims. With such a bill, PM Modi is attempting to reshape India into a Hindu rashtra. This clearly contradicts the pluralism and secularism espoused in the Indian Constitution.

Such overt discrimination against Muslims seems to be a continuation of a process unleashed by the BJP in its first term, including mass conversions to Hinduism (ghar wapsi), changing Muslim street names, and allowing cow vigilantes to lynch Muslims. But CAB is particularly worrying because xenophobia has now begun to take a legal shape. The Modi government secured 311 votes in support of the bill against 80 in Lok Sabha (lower house), and 125 votes against 105 in the Rajya Sabha (upper house), setting a worrying precedent. The question is: will BJP legislators continue to enact laws that contradict the historical ethos of the Indian polity?

The Modi regime is following the vision of MS Golwalkar, the ideological guru of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Essentially, the bill fits neatly with Modi's RSS-driven Hindutva ideology. In some of his most cited works, Golwalkar wrote of how he saw outsiders (Muslims) threaten-

ing his motherland, a nation he felt was built for Hindus. The Muslims, he wrote, would never serve the motherland earnestly. The CAB is not just anti-Muslim. The people in Assam are resentful of granting citizenship to migrants from neighbouring countries on grounds that their political, linguistic, cultural and land rights are threatened. In Assam, two million residents were declared illegal and excluded from the National Register of Citizens (NRC) because they could not prove they had settled there before the creation of Bangladesh. Interestingly, the bill is being viewed to accommodate non-Muslims who would otherwise be excluded from the NRC, like the Bengali Hindus — a strong BJP voter base. This means that the Modi regime is taking steps that would polarise its population along ethnic and religious lines, making some feel like outsiders. Naturally, this is troubling to those who had always taken pride in being part of a pluralistic and tolerant society. Some however feel India was never truly secular. The RSS ideology pre-dates the Partition and has become main stream in the last few decades. The BJP first used the 1992 demolition of the Babri Mosque to shore up its Hindu vote bank. In Gujarat, Modi and Amit Shah supervised the mass killings of Muslims, the gory details of which were uncovered by an investigative Muslim journalist, Rana Ayyub. One cannot help but recall a short story, by Nadine Gordimer, of a family that lived in perpetual fear and suspicion of the people outside their neighbourhood. They were different from them — outsiders. To protect themselves, the parents built large fences with barbed wires and installed alarm-protected gates. One day, as their son went out to play, he trapped himself in the barbed wire and bled to death. He died, ironically, of the barriers that were built to protect him.

Today, much like installing barbed wires, India has set in motion discriminatory laws. For such a diverse country, this is worrying. When discriminating against the "outsiders", India is only hurting itself.

One man's hero is another's villain

MUHAMMAD ALI EHSAN

No society can progress if it cannot have order. Many things contribute towards the sustenance of an order in a society but the three that eat it up the most are — unequal distribution of power, weak institutions, and the failure and helplessness of the order itself to adjust when the circumstances change. Obviously order never adjusts itself and the "lack of adjustment" remains most essentially a human (leadership) failure. In the post-Musharraf era there has been a phenomenal change in the identity of both politics and the military in this country. A gradual balance of power between the politics and military returned and despite some "political tremors", politics on the whole moved forward and the assemblies for the first time in the history of Pakistani politics completed their tenures. Politics also engaged in executing some constitutional amendments and the distribution of power concentrated in one person (the president) was handed over to the Parliament.

After 2008, there were political, economic as well as security issues but the pillars of the state were working within the boundaries defined by the Constitution and there was this fair and admirable return of balance of power between the institutions in this country. With a few minor exceptions here and there all institutions worked within the boundaries established by the Constitution. Underpinning this balance of power was the media which now defined "the changed circumstances" in which the order had to operate. Unlike the past nothing could be shelved or brushed under the carpet and nothing that politics or the mil-

itary did could be hidden from the watchful eyes of the media. The forced circumstances had brought in a change of order — forced because of the War on Terror which highlighted our huge internal and external vulnerabilities and if it was not for resilience and sacrifices of our law enforcement agencies and our entire society which gave rise to our newborn nationalism, we couldn't have won this war.

If the order in the society could have changed for good and it had adjusted favourably to the changing circumstances, we would have benefited a lot as a nation. The victory in the War on Terror was giving us an opportunity — it was becoming the seam that was stitching the nation together with the state. But those driving the order made the mistake of not adjusting to it; instead of cashing on the opportunity and promoting good civic nationalism we continued on our path of sustaining our politics through bad ethnic nationalism. The order that could have evolved was allowed to decay.

When democracy decays it goes backwards and when it does that it takes the country with it. The problem of this country was not what General Musharraf did or did not. The problem of this country was when the opportunity had come knocking on the door of politics it didn't extract the benefit of the "changed circumstances". It is said that when the rulers uphold their bargain (the bargain of ruling in the public interest) in the social contract that binds them with the ruled, then national identity supersedes all other identities (religious, ethnic, sectarian, and tribal). The drivers of the order (democracy) in the changed circumstances had their political cart driving the military horse. All they needed to do

was drive it well, even this they couldn't do and motivated by greed, religion and power, the drivers failed to adjust and made mistakes. The result of those mistakes is pretty much evident in the social, political, economic and security conditions of this country. Had the mistakes not been committed, would the two major political parties that showcase "dynastic rule" have many members of their families facing corruption charges, with few in jail, others on bail and many having reached the safe shores of Britain?

Today when you mention the word Britain in Pakistan it does not bring to mind Brexit but Oliver Cromwell. This is because of paragraph 66 of the famous ruling by the special court on General Musharraf's treason case. Before the Honourable Judge of the special court in his judgment quoted from British history in his famous paragraph, our now retired chief justice of the Supreme Court had done the same in the detailed judgment of General Bajwa's extension case by writing, "I understand that democratic maturity of our nation has reached a stage where this court can proclaim that as declared by Chief Justice Sir Edward Coke of England in Command case in the year 1616 regarding powers of King James I, 'However high you may be, the law is above you'."

One person's hero is another person's villain — a reality that all of us are well aware of but when the judgments of the judges, including some of the superfluous remarks that don't respect this reality, then create more confusions and divisions instead of harmony and unity in the country. General Musharraf had his flaws and his inconsistencies and as much as many hate him for his "anti-democracy" there are

many that still love him for his brand of patriotism, his unwavering loyalty and his selfless and restless energy all utilised for the creation of a better democracy and a better country. Not tried for his original sin of abrogating the Constitution in 1999 for reasons best known to our judiciary, General Musharraf was tried for a lesser crime of holding the Constitution in abeyance in 2007. Eventually, the special court didn't touch the subject of "aiders and abettors" and in a charged up judicial environment of "justice hurried is justice buried" gave a judicial verdict that many senior lawyers like Aitzaz Ahsan are looking at as "judicial nonsense".

Our Islamic history is filled with the examples of generosity and sympathetic treatment and none is more evident than the one conducted by a Muslim general of the 12th century, Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi, who after 88 years of Christian control on the city of Jerusalem, retook it from them. He relived the moments of the Conquest of Jerusalem by Caliph Umar in 638AD and pardoned the entire presence of 60,000 men, women and children in the city. The judges would do well to give the examples of what our religion teaches us — examples of generosity and sympathetic treatment instead of examples that speak of inhumanity and cruelty.

Lastly, Oliver Cromwell "whose body was dug out, beheaded and hanged for three days" was selected as one of the 10 greatest Britons of all time in a 2002 BBC poll. Surely, history has a funny way of coming back and biting those who try to manipulate it. Maybe tomorrow history judges General Musharraf as a great hero and his "facilitators" as the actual villains — who knows?