

The Business

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Tourists return

British High Commissioner to Pakistan Dr Christian Turner read out a statement about relaxed travel advisory of UK nationals to Pakistan due to improved security situation in Pakistan, an outcome of "a comprehensive review of UK travel advisory for Pakistan, based on a wide ranging assessment of the country's security situation." Dr Turner stated that he personally made the review a priority after his arrival in December last year, adding that "it is great credit to the hard work of the government in delivering improved security over the past five years." The revised travel advisory allows for travel by road to northern areas, including the breathtakingly beautiful Kalash and Bamborel valleys. After this Foreign Minister Shah Mehmud Qureshi tweeted that this step "is the first major update to the travel advisory to Pakistan since 2015. This will further strengthen Pak-UK relations. Welcome to Pakistan." Prime Minister frequently stated that one of his objectives is to explore the tremendous tourism potential which, if realized, would not only generate foreign exchange but also assist in spreading a soft image of Pakistan in foreign capitals. This prompted the administration to take a number of decisions that would facilitate tourism including setting up a tourist visa application portal and no longer requiring a no-objection certificate for tourists seeking to visit some parts of the country.

There is ample evidence that the security situation in the country has improved dramatically due to the sustained and successful efforts by the country's security forces; however one cannot underestimate Imran Khan's role in the UK government's decision to soften the travel advisory as his ties to the UK, during his cricket days as well as through family ties by his first marriage, are well known. Additionally, Imran Khan has effectively displayed panache in forging relations with world leaders. In 2018, the British Backpackers Society ranked Pakistan as the world's top adventure travel destination describing it as one of the friendliest countries on earth with mountain scenery that is beyond anyone's wildest imagination. Forbes in 2019 ranked Pakistan as the coolest places to visit and the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report placed Pakistan in the top 25 countries of the world for World Heritage Sites ranging from mangroves to the Indus Valley civilisation including Harappa and Moenjodaro.

Travel and tourism contributed \$328 million in 2015 to Pakistan's economy and by 2025 the projection is \$7 billion which would go a long way towards attracting one of the most-desired sources of foreign exchange earnings, even more than exports especially if the country's exporters continue to require subsidies to be able to compete internationally. One would request the Prime Minister to sell the idea of 'Visit Pakistan' through a well-developed strategy that must have a component

Implementing SDGs

FURQAN HYDER SHAIKH

The 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), announced at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in 2012 are also supposed to be proposed public policy guidelines – at least for the member states of the UN that adopted the SDGs in 2015 to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The SDGs are also called 'Global Goals'.

The SDGs' aim has been to meet the global environmental, political and economic challenges the world is facing. The UNDP is said to be helping countries accelerate progress through its SDG integration function.

Pakistan is also trying to achieve these global goals. On February 16, 2016, parliament unanimously approved the SDGs as the National Development Agenda. A Parliamentary SDGs Secretariat was also formed at the National Assembly – one of the few countries to do so this at the government level. However, 'this process of the legislation was the first and crucial step in mainstreaming and localizing the SDGs'.

The federal and provincial governments are to implement SDGs in the country. One often thinks of whether any concrete results have yet been achieved on the SDGs. Who are the stakeholders coming into the implementation of the SDGs? Is Pakistan accelerating progress or going in the reverse direction? Such questions have come up during SDG discussions or dialogues in the country.

It is believed that the SDGs are very crucial for Pakistan's overall prosperity. Besides the development projects and programmes under the SDGs, the government must include SDGs at the local and tertiary level education system, because unless SDGs are made part of the syllabus in schools, colleges, and universities, graduating students will not know their importance in our daily life. It is a big task to include SDGs in the curriculum but once it is done the result will be good for Pakistan's youth empowerment, entrepreneurs, and bottom-up development.

Pakistan has prioritized SDGs 1 (no poverty), 3 (good health and well-being), 4 (quality education), 6 (clean water and sanitation), 8 (decent work and economic growth) and 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions). As of June 2016, 39 percent of Pakistanis lived in the tight grip of multidimensional poverty and more than 70 million of the population dwelled below the poverty line. The health sector too has never been a priority in the country.

Universities appear to be more visionary and objective-bound in attaining social development. Amid all

Sindh's universities, the Mehran University of Engineering & Technology (MUET), Jamshoro has established an Innovation and Entrepreneurship Centre (IEC) at its main campus. The IEC has implemented different projects and willingly applies the 17 SDGs in the criteria for successful applicants to get funding from the centre. Over 22 startup companies have graduated and are providing innovative solutions aligned with prioritized SDGs including Education (SDG 4), Energy (SDG 7), Food (SDG 2), Health (SDG 3), and Water (SDG 6).

The government needs to give the required attention



to the SDGs. First, it can take innovators and social entrepreneurs on board, because they are more determined to solve the oldest issues and problems of society with new approaches and processes. Second, the government should look into the SDG implementation mechanism with new approaches.

Third, the UNDP, as an SDG implementing partner, must bring sustainable solutions for the proper functioning and outcomes of SDGs in the country. It may invest in the capacity building of SDG-related government officials in the federal and provincial setups and implementation stakeholders.

Fourth, for a layered outcome-based SDG implementation, the government should create room for universities where empirical research on SDGs could be

conducted and their findings used to bring about innovative solutions. Immediately, for people's prosperity and the planet's safety, the government should rethink before it tries to utilize resources on the SDGs and their implementation through the current mechanism; rather, it should invest in finding innovative ways of implementing the SDGs.

It is to some extent good that we have good resources, planning and the will to implement but if we are weak at monitoring and evaluating the SDGs' implementation then it would be hard to have our development expectations fulfilled and achieved. Monitoring the SDGs is another necessary component. In fact, it stands on the top before, during, and after SDG implementation. After all, only the prioritized and innovatively implemented SDGs would be able to bring sustainable development for all.

Technological progress is said to be very crucial for the country's overall development and sustainability. And without technology and innovation, industrialization will not happen, and without industrialization, development will not take place.

The 22nd prime minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan has the mandate of the people of the country. He promised (during his pre-election campaigns) to bring Pakistan on the track of sustainability, prosperity and make the country an example of good governance. He has different windows of the opportunities including Pakistan Vision 2025 and the UN 17 SDGs.

Pakistan Vision 2025 talks about developments in education, health, and environment, etc, whereas SDGs are well-established guidelines for the countries of the world to bring sustainable development in many walks of life.

The nest eggs for infrastructure development (transport, irrigation, energy and, information and communication technology) are vital to attaining sustainable development. It has long been recognized that growth in productivity and incomes, and improvements in health and education outcomes require investment in infrastructure. According to the UN data, "470 million jobs are needed globally for new entrants to the labor market between 2016 and 2030."

The prime minister must strive to alleviate poverty, which is the root cause of all problems, including suicide attempts by poverty-stricken women, domestic quarrels, social issues etc.

The government needs to analyze its actions and divert policy direction to development achievement. It should initiate and implement development programmes with the help of universities, business communities, research centres, media and industry, so the country can achieve prosperity and sustainability.



State of the economy

FARRUKH SALEEM

The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) released its Monthly Review on Price Indices for January 2020. The National Consumer Price Index, which shot up by 14.56 percent, actually broke a 12-year record. The most alarming jump took place in 'perishable food items' where the index shot up by a hefty 78 percent. Imagine, perishable food items were 78 percent cheaper just a year ago. Another disturbing trend that I noticed is that prices are going up faster in rural areas than in urban areas. We always used to say that Pakistanis living



took over, our total debt and liabilities stood at Rs29,879 billion. Alarming, the same figure for September 2019 is Rs41,489 billion. So, it took us 71 years to accumulate a debt of Rs29,879 billion and a mere 15 months to add an additional debt of Rs11,610 billion. Imagine; 71 years to accumulate 72 percent

We must remember three things. One, incomes over the past 12 months have been flat. Two, around a million Pakistanis have lost their jobs. Three, around eight million Pakistanis have dived below the poverty

line in rural areas are better off as they have ready access to food items. Not true. Imagine: the prices of 'perishable food items' in rural areas actually shot up by 90 percent (as opposed to 78 percent in urban areas).

We must remember three things. One, incomes over the past 12 months have been flat. Two, around a million Pakistanis have lost their jobs. Three, around eight million Pakistanis have dived below the poverty line. And while all this is happening, the price of tomatoes went up by 211 percent, onions 136 percent, potatoes 111 percent, pulse moong 83 percent and wheat 32 percent.

The other surprise in the monthly review is that overall food inflation which stood at a meagre 1.6 percent at the beginning of 2019 had shot up to 25 percent in just one year. Remember, a good 60 percent of Pakistanis end up spending a good 60 percent of their incomes on food. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) released its summary of 'Pakistan's Debt and Liabilities'. In June 2018, a couple of months before the PTI

of the debt and a mere 15 months to accumulated 27 percent. The fact is that we are taking on debt faster than at any time in our 72-year history. The question is: where is all this debt going? Between 2008 and 2013, the PPP took on an average of Rs5 billion a day every day for five years. Between 2013 and 2018, the PML-N took on an average of Rs7.7 billion a day every day for five years. Over the past 15 months, the PTI has been adding Rs25 billion a day every day.

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has informed the IMF that it has collected Rs2.4 trillion over the past seven months. The target was Rs2.8 trillion. This could potentially lead to a shortfall of Rs700 billion. Yes, the shortfall would be a 72-year record. The IMF now wants the FBR to collect Rs3.5 trillion by end-March or a colossal Rs550 billion every month for the following two months. Welcome hundreds of billions worth of new indirect taxes (since the FBR has no capacity to collect direct taxes). Welcome back the reverse Robin Hood.

A warning for Modi

MALIK MUHAMMAD ASHRAF

Prime Minister Imran Khan while addressing the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) legislative assembly on Kashmir Solidarity Day, and a public rally in Mirpur, expressed Pakistan's unwavering resolve to stand with the people of Kashmir in their freedom struggle.

The PM said that the decision by Modi government to revoke the special status of Occupied Kashmir was a big mistake for India which would lead to the independence of IOK. Referring to the threat by Modi to conquer Pakistan within 10 days, he rightly cautioned the Indian PM that it would be his last mistake. It was a rare show of solidarity with the people of IOK as well as an unmistakable assertion about Pakistan's capability to deal with any aggression motivated by the hate philosophy of 'Hindutva'.

Modi by scrapping Article 370 has not only violated the Indian constitution but also repudiated the UN resolutions on the issue. By doing so he actually has internationalized the issue and though the West was still not showing real interest in the resolution of the Kashmir issue, it has expressed concern over the humanitarian situation in IOK and is urging India to end the lockdown. The UNSC has twice discussed the issue since August 5 last year, and reiterated that the solution of the Kashmir dispute could be found through the relevant UN resolutions on the issue. Thanks to the diplomatic offensive launched by Pakistan, particularly by Prime Minister Imran Khan, India has failed to sell its contention that Kashmir is its internal matter.

There are three parties to the Kashmir dispute, the people of Kashmir, Pakistan and India. Since India has done the ultimate wrong, its rectification will come by the other two parties in case the international community and the UN do not heed the warning.

The Kashmiri leadership has already vowed to continue their struggle for freedom and the people of IOK are defying the curfews imposed by the Indian security forces to protest against the Indian action – undeterred by the pellet guns, tear gas and complete lockdown in the valley. They seem more determined than ever to take their struggle to its logical end. The move by Modi has spurred the movement and the resolve of the people of IOK to win their freedom

at any cost. Freedom movements have their own momentum and cannot be subdued through the use of ruthless military muscle. The scenario building up in IOK in the backdrop of the revocation of Article 370 and the plans of violence in the valley as also pointed out by some international organizations, has raised the prospects of armed confrontation. Pakistan has shown remarkable restraint against India's belligerent posture and continued provocations as it wants the issue to be resolved through peaceful means with the help of the international community and the UN. Never-



theless it also stands fully prepared to give a befitting reply to India in case it commits any indiscretion like the one it unfurled in the backdrop of the Pulwama incident or foists a full-fledged war on Pakistan.

Pakistan is a nuclear power and will not be a walk-over for India. Attacking Pakistan would prove to be a fatal mistake for India besides leading to disastrous consequences for the entire region and the world at large. Only a mad man would go such an option.

The Modi government is under tremendous pressure due to the fierce opposition to the Citizenship Amendment Act within India and the continued resistance by the people of IOK. As feared by Prime Minister Imran Khan, India could

have the temptation to launch a false-flag operation like the one it did after the Pulwama incident to divert the attention of the world community.

But the danger is that even such an eventuality could lead to unpredictable consequences for the entire region and the world at large. The warning repeatedly sounded to the international community by Prime Minister Imran Khan has considerable merit. It is obligatory on the international community and the UN as a peace-making body to take notice of the situation and create conditions for the implementation of the UN resolutions.

It is regrettable to note that the countries around the world tend to support or oppose global issues based on their commercial and strategic interests rather than adherence to the lofty humane considerations, international laws, conventions and the principles of peaceful co-existence enshrined in the UN charter. Had it been otherwise the world would have been free of conflicts like Palestine and Kashmir.

The people of Kashmir have been waiting for the last 72 years to be given their right of self-determination but the international community and the UN have shown criminal apathy to their sufferings. The countries which claim to be world leaders and upholders of principles of liberty and self-determination are actually the worst offenders. It is because of their hypocrisy that the Palestine and Kashmir issues remain unresolved and human blood is being spilled with impunity. President Trump who sounded so enthusiastic about playing a mediatory role in resolving the Kashmir issue has taken a complete somersault after meeting the Indian prime minister. Even some Muslim countries have failed to show solidarity with the Muslim brethren of Kashmir because of their commercial and business interests connected to India. Somebody has rightly said that it is not principles and lofty ideals but the commonality of interests that is the basis of strong links. However, the ultimate reality is that legitimate causes have the last laugh. Prime Minister Imran Khan is right in saying that those who are not supporting Pakistan due to their commercial considerations will ultimately be with us. The people of Kashmir are bound to win their freedom as they are not afraid of rendering sacrifices for their freedom.