

The Business

Chief Editor

Irfan Athar Qazi

E-mail: editorthebusiness@yahoo.com
thebusinesslhr@gmail.com

Tijarat House, 14-Davis Road, Lahore
0423-6312280, 6312480, 6312429, 6312462
Cell # 0321-4598258

1st Floor Ahmed Plaza near Zong Office
Susan Road, Faisalabad, Ph: 041-8555582

ISLAMABAD / RAWALPINDI
N-125 Circular Road, Ph: 051-5551654,
5532761, Cell # 0300-8567331
KARACHI
3rd Floor Kehkashan Mall 172-I Block II PECHS
Opp Rehmania Masjid Main Tariq Road
Ph: 021-34524550, Cell # 0300-8251534

Devolution of powers

There is a cry from the grassroots that it is being starved of funds by the provincial governments. The provincial governments, however, argue that they are helpless and 'orders' have to come from Islamabad, and as these come relief would be provided at the doorstep. This is a loud cry, being raised by quarters right from within the PTI coalition governments at the centre and the Punjab. If the MQM-P wants the centre to give what is due to the urban centres of Sindh and PML-Q is for 'empowering' Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar so that he can help save its reputation among its constituents. The party is not after his job but wish him to be in position to deliver on the promises and commitments the PML-Q made to its supporters. The prime minister's team in patch-up talks has, therefore, offered a share in administrative powers in three districts - Gujrat, Chakwal and Bahawalpur - and some tehsils. But how soon? It's a tough challenge because the PML-Q wants all of it in one week. The question whether PML-Q will ultimately part ways with PTI at the centre and in Punjab has no easy answer. But its demands are genuine; these are said to have received support from a number of the ruling party legislators as well.

Beset with denial of funds for urban areas, the MQM-P has made it clear to PM's team that it would remain PTI's ally in parliament but would not rejoin the federal cabinet. The BNP-Mengal and Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) are also unhappy over denial of development funds for their constituencies, but not yet loud enough to be clearly audible in Islamabad.

Pakistan is constitutionally a federation, a reality all the more since the passage of 18th Constitutional Amendment. But in practice it has functioned as a centrally administered entity for so long that the federal government tends to resist ceding control to the federating units (the provinces). But then the provincial governments too deny space to the local governments, as seems to be the case in Punjab and Sindh. Rightly then there is the second opinion about the ongoing political turmoil: some describe the move as an attempt aimed at bringing about in-house changes in Islamabad and Lahore while others predict mid-term elections. But irrespective of the motivation behind the ongoing turmoil, the need for political stability should override all other considerations or objectives in view of the severity of challenges the country is presently facing. The situation, therefore, underscores the need for all tiers of government to complement each other's efforts strictly in accordance with constitutional stipulations.

Balochistan in a state of despair

SANAULLAH BALOCH

Balochistan's development landscape is worsening day by day, leading to more despair and distress. A province that suffers from multiple crises is no way politically and economically equipped for a positive takeoff. The series of recent bombings, as well as economic stagnation, unemployment, declining education and health indicators are a wakeup call for policymakers that all is not well in Balochistan.

Missing from national policymakers' thoughts as well as media attention, Balochistan is in a state of slow-motion collapse.

Since PM Imran Khan and his cabinet's tenure started, they have not bothered to initiate a multi-stakeholder dialogue to develop a workable strategy and framework to uplift Balochistan from poverty, frightening unemployment, alarming education crisis, vanishing livestock and a deteriorating agriculture sector and vanishing industrialization.

The PTI government has not inquired about the prolonged conflict in Balochistan, and its causes and impact on society including verifiable politico-economic audit of fancy packages and promises announced from 2003 to 2018 by successive governments.

The current federal government has no policy for Pakistan's strategically significant and economically potential province which can address Pakistan's looming energy, revenue, industrialization and internal security challenges. In long run, government policies are more harmful for the economic and physical security of Balochistan.

The development and security challenges are overshadowing the hope and expectations that were rekindled after the 2018 elections. The disappointment began with the lukewarm start of the provincial government in August 2018. Less political and exclusive in nature, the current provincial government stopped all development projects for more than a year.

Since Balochistan's overall economy is reliant on government resources, its poverty-stricken population suffered heavily from the total developmental shutdown. In addition, the government didn't bother to move from the statues quo to experiment a pro-growth developmental model which Balochistan needs desperately to stop the overall decline in social indicators.

The political confusion, inexperience, little knowledge and lack of confidence shattered people's hope. People were expecting a robust leadership to inject a new level of energy in the provincial craft. In addition, the social media savvy generation was expecting to see a technologically compatible governance and development models and programmes.

Development experts were anticipating innovative, self-sustained economic growth policies and strategies to stim-

ulate the stagnant provincial economy and engage the growing youth population in the province. But to no avail.

What is wrong in Balochistan and what can be done to undo the despair? This is not rocket science; the problem lies in flawed political and economic development policies and strategies. Defective and unproductive political engineering of the past many decades has elevated a special class of the 'political elite' in the province. With little vision, they care little about futuristic strategies. They are not bothered about strategies for socio-economic challenges that are exacerbated by an outdated governance, management and development model, functioning in the province.

In addition, there haven't been any efforts by Islamabad's political-security elite to initiate a national debate and sober discussion with the province's political stakeholders to understand and address the looming social and security challenges, that are resurfacing after a brief period of enforced calm.

With such a strategic land and sea mass and economic potential, Balochistan deserves area size attention rather than population-based focus. Unremitting ignorance has the potential to increase insecurity and violence that is fuelled by the growing despair amongst the politically conscious youth.

Undoubtedly, Balochistan's foremost challenges are the result of poor and ineffective governance, including a deteriorated economic structure.

Balochistan's tumble-down socio-political and economic system provides a great opportunity for Islamabad to turn the unruly province into a model region via governance, and economic, cultural, and scientific and technological developments.

In addition, the population deserves various people-oriented welfare schemes and social safety nets to improve public life in many aspects, such as education, healthcare, infant mortality, maternal mortality, potable water, electricity, safe housing conditions, and sanitation facilities.

There are many successful lessons from China and many other developing nations with regard to poverty eradication. China's targeted poverty-alleviation work in the country's less-developed areas has achieved remarkable outcomes through specific measures taken by the government.

Chinese President Xi Jinping concept of "targeted poverty alleviation", which refers to "better education, more stable jobs, higher incomes, more reliable social insurance, better medical services, more comfortable living conditions, a more beautiful environment and a richer cultural life", is a perfect blueprint that needs to be locally tailored and implemented in Pakistan's poverty affected regions.

In 2018, I had initiated a series of debates and discussions in the Balochistan Assembly on the flawed PSDP process and overall institutional issues in Balochistan's outdated

Planning and Development Department (P&D), which is responsible for the designing and implementation of the annual development plan known as Public Sector Development Plan (PSDP). The P&D is incapable and facing a serious issue of professional expertise for designing, drafting, developing and implementing pro-people and economic growth development strategies.

Despite agreement with my suggestions for reforms to restructure the P&D department and result-based long-term PSDP and development budget, the government of Balochistan ignored the recommendations of the Balochistan Assembly and presented a usual annual plan (budget), lacking the very basics of growth and pro-poor development principles.

For instance, in 2019-20, the PSDP's pertinent growth and production related areas and departments received a dreadfully low share, with agriculture getting 3.2 percent, livestock 0.6 percent, fisheries 0.7 percent, industry 0.8 percent, minerals 0.2 percent, and power 2.4 percent, a pattern of resource allocation and planning going on since the inception of the province.

Balochistan's political leadership could learn from the East Asian economies, which provide a useful lesson to strike a better balance between pro-growth and pro poor policies.

While discussing pro-poor growth strategies, John Page, chief economist of the World Bank for the Africa Region, mentioned that the development strategies pursued by all of the first generation high performing Asian economies - Hong Kong, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore Taiwan (China), and Thailand - have been characterized as "shared growth strategies". These strategies consisted of two components. The political elites fostered growth by encouraging high savings, long-term investments, and upgraded organization, technology and management.

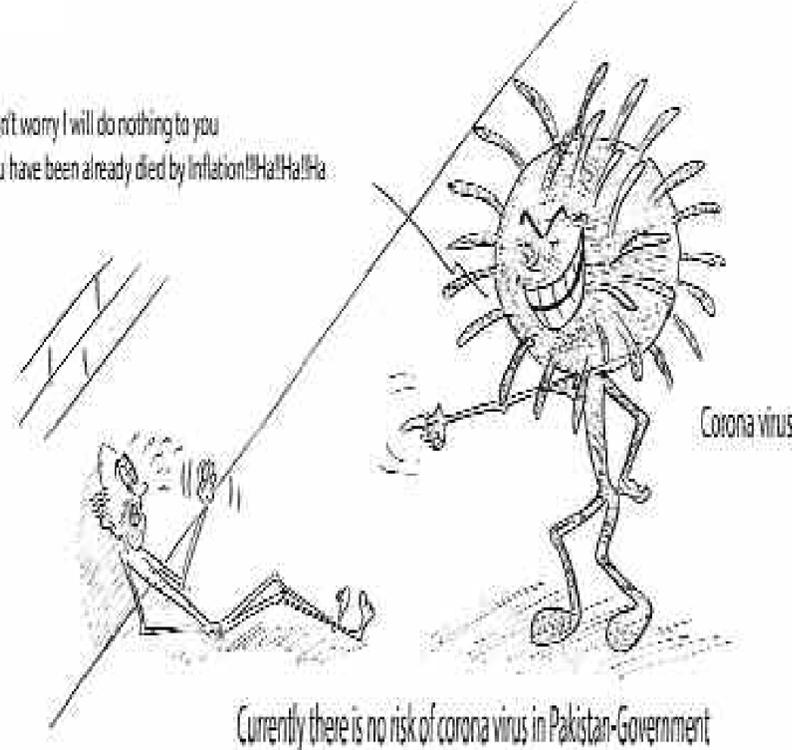
Growth was at the centre of the public policy agenda. But highly visible wealth sharing mechanisms - such as universal primary education, land reform, and free basic healthcare - were put in place to induce non-elites to support the growth process.

Balochistan is suffering from intense multi-dimensional poverty (MPI), near to collapse social structure and standards. This requires a long-term development and investment strategy and a result-oriented implementation plan, upgraded planning, development, management and administrative system coupled with modern technology.

Moreover, a stable political system along with a carefully planned development budget with justified allocation of resources could create miracles in Balochistan by reducing long-term social and security risks.

The writer is a member of the Balochistan Provincial Assembly, and former Senator.

Don't worry I will do nothing to you
You have been already died by inflation! Ha!Ha!Ha!



Thoughts on ThinkFest

YAQOOB KHAN
BANGASH

A few weeks ago, several distinguished academics, thinkers, opinion makers, and others, gathered in Lahore from around the world for the Afkar-e-Taza Think-Fest.

They were joined by thousands of Pakistanis, who despite the freezing weather, came to hear, interact and learn from them. Among the audience were a strong group of university students from across Pakistan - Multan, Bahawalpur, Karachi, Peshawar, Wah and even Lakki Marwat, who especially travelled to Lahore to participate. This one event is therefore bringing disparate parts of the country together, and creating bonds of interaction and dialogue.

ThinkFest has managed to stir a debate which was hitherto not very common in Pakistan. At a time when there is very little interaction between academia and the public, ThinkFest provides a safe and creative space for a cross fertilisation of ideas. Thus, leaving the cursory and the usual cacophony of noise, which is the norm in discussions in Pakistan nowadays, scholars and others at ThinkFest discuss critical issues in a robust yet accessible manner. The fact that over a dozen books were launched at the event exhibits the vibrancy and rigour of public academic debate in Pakistan spearheaded by ThinkFest.

The event has also fostered a culture of inclusivity in Pakistan. There is no separate cordoned-off section for the speakers; everyone sits, eats, and talks at the same public tables. This allows for greater public interaction with the speakers and often leads to discussions more profound and critical than the main talks. An image from last year's ThinkFest where students from Dera Ghazi Khan interacted with a senior professor from Columbia University over a cup of tea in the Alhambra lawns is etched in my memory as the real success of this endeavour.

Now in its fourth year, ThinkFest has also created a momentum of its own and is fast becoming a place for policy and cordial interaction between the treasury and opposition benches. Several of the talks this year were on policy, ranging from education to national security, bureaucratic reform and fiscal devolution. There were also panels where members of both the government and the opposition sat together - and without a shouting match, discussed matters of national importance.

The lack of a ratings game, and the need for a measured, thoughtful and constructive dialogue, led to a discussion seldom present in the mainstream media. ThinkFest has also now expanded to showcase the best in Pakistan. The exhibition on tourism in Punjab by Asma Chishty showcased the amazing countryside, the creative artists and the bountiful natural resources of the region. The three panels which accompanied the exhibition discussed issues relating to heritage and religious tourism, as well as the major issue of smog and the environment.

The event was founded as a purely academic initiative in 2016 with the Information Technology University, where I teach, providing it major support. Over the years it has become larger, more creative, and dynamic - all due to the open nature of its operation - in terms of speakers, who traverse academic, ideological, cultural and other divides. It has also evolved in terms of governance where a diverse and empowered committee runs it; in terms of audience who come from all parts of Lahore - and even cities and provinces beyond, and represent a cross section of society; and, most importantly, in terms of it functioning as an incubator for newer thoughts and action - the 'afkar-e-taza' it strives to promote.

A week ago a person opined that he could not discern who organised the ThinkFest in Lahore which ran from January 11-12, 2020. Even though he knew almost everyone on the organising committee, and had been in conversation with them for years, yet things did not add up in his mind. Apparently it was bizarre, even impossible, for him to accept that there could be a successful non-family run event organised by a diverse committee where everyone had an equal and responsible share. Therefore, his simple mind could only think of 'official patronage' and support by a 'self-effacing body' as the force behind ThinkFest.

The 'deal of the century'

SHIREEN M MAZARI

Despite its often pretentious moralistic language, a careful reading of the Trump Plan for Palestine and Israel is nothing short of creating for the Palestinian people Bantu homelands that had been created for black South Africans to bolster Apartheid. Black 'Homelands' were created and blacks were no longer regarded as South African citizens of one of the 'self-governing' territories.

Now the Netanyahu-Trump Plan for Palestine seeks to create Palestinian homelands under the overall control of a large Israeli state - the Zionist agenda's completion. Some of the main features of this plan include Israel annexing the Jordan Valley, which presently comprises about one third of the Occupied West Bank as well as the Golan Heights. Jerusalem would be solely under Israeli control and would be its 'undivided' capital. All the settlements on Occupied Palestinian territory would also become part of Israel.

The plan states: "the State of Palestine shall be fully demilitarized and remain so" and it would receive territory, mostly desert, near Gaza to compensate for the loss of about 30 percent of the West Bank. Justifying the complete control over the Palestinian State by Israel, including over its territorial waters and airspace, the plan states: "If the State of Israel did not maintain control of the West Bank's airspace, it would not have adequate time to defend against incoming hostile aircraft or missiles. For that reason, in any peace arrangement, the State of Israel must have operational control over the airspace west of the Jordan River."

Nor is that enough for Israel! The plan states "the State of Palestine will not have the right to forge military, intelligence or security agreements with any state or organization that adversely affect the State of Israel's security, as determined by the State of Israel. The State of Palestine will not be able to develop military or paramilitary capabilities inside or outside of the State of Palestine."

In typical Trump 'logic' that defies all rationality, the plan states: "Every country spends a very significant sum of money on its defense from external threats. The State of Palestine will not be burdened with such costs, because it will be shouldered by the State of Israel."

Effectively, the plan offers Palestinians a truncated state with no army, under complete Israeli security control and as

a precondition for this 'largesse', Palestinians would have to fulfil some conditionalities including the "complete dismantling of Hamas". The possibility of stripping Israeli citizenship from tens of thousands of Arab-Israelis who live in 10 border towns, with those towns and their residents being included into any future state of Palestine.

Palestinian refugees would also be denied 'right of return' to their homes that Israel occupied in previous conflicts.



If there was any doubt at all about the Zionist intent of this whole plan, Netanyahu, speaking to reporters after his joint press conference with Trump, stated that he would seek to take steps to annex the Jordan valley as soon as next week. He made clear that Israel only intended to agree to "conditional, limited sovereignty" for the Palestinians.

That this plan is in violation of all UN resolutions on the Palestinian issue and international law is abundantly clear. The plan itself admits that, since 1946, there have been close to 700 United Nations General Assembly resolutions and over 100 United Nations Security Council resolutions in connection with this conflict.

Perhaps amongst these the most critical are: the UN GA Resolution 181 of 1947 that called for the partition of Palestine into Arab and Jewish states, with the city of Jerusalem as a "corpus separatum" ("separate entity") to be governed by a special international regime; the UN SC resolution 242 of 1967 which called for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories, acknowledged the claim of sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the region and called on the UN secretary general to appoint an envoy to facilitate an acceptable solution to the conflict; and, UN SC Resolution 2334 of 2016 which reaffirmed the two-state solution.

The Trump Plan contravenes all these resolutions. It also directly contravenes the Fourth Geneva Convention, which categorically regards any alteration to an Occupied Territory and its demography as a war crime. So effectively this plan, if implemented, would be a war crime, as previously discussed by the International Court of Justice in its Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory case.

The irony is that Trump believes that a money deal will overcome the decades of struggle by the Palestinians for their right to a functional Palestinian state and a recovery of their Occupied Lands by Israel. With this 'money buys all' mindset, the economic portions of the plan would apparently lead to one million new jobs for Palestinians over the next 10 years, an investment of \$50 billion in the new 'state' and tripling of its GDP - if the Palestinians do what Israel wants of them.

For us in Pakistan, such a plan should be an issue of major concern because with Trump wanting to 'resolve' conflicts including in Kashmir, the pattern of conflict resolution that he seeks is contrary to UN resolutions and international law. Trump is to visit India next month - and undoubtedly the fascist Modi regime will be bolstered by the unveiling of the Trump-Netanyahu Plan, especially given the strategic cooperation between India and Israel including on India's Ballistic Missile Defence programme.

Pakistan needs to adopt a clear position rejecting this plan or we may find ourselves at the receiving end of another Trump 'peace plan' - this time on Kashmir - similar to the Plan for Palestine, which really seeks to establish the Zionist dream of Greater Israel.