

This place we call home

KAMILA HYAT

What is this place that we call our home? It is a land where sometime last month, according to the still unconfirmed reports we have, the man wanted for some of the most heinous crimes ever committed on the soil of Pakistan apparently simply walked away from where he was being kept, or else possibly escaped during some mysterious operation. No one has told us the official version. There are those that have appeared on television even bizarrely defending Ehsanullah Ehsan.

We may never know the reality of his cases. Did he fire the shot that made its way through the head of Malala Yousafzai in 2012 himself, or simply give the orders? Does it make a difference? How precisely was he involved in the massacre of 134 children and around nine adults at the Army Public School in Peshawar in December 2014? He has admitted to this crime and to others involving the deaths of scores in Lahore, Gilgit and other places. There were no charges filed against him, though.

But the young students who protested for their rights in Islamabad still remain behind bars. Only a few political parties leaning left of centre have in any way called for their release. Some have been freed, others remain behind bars. Human rights activists, lawyers and others have been 'picked up' or placed on the ECL without their knowledge or information as to the reasons for this.

How many of us think of that grandmother who for years walked to the gates of the APS every day following the murder of her grandson, hoping he might walk out through the gates in his green blazer? How many think of the father who has insisted on dressing only in black since that day? Why has their been no justice despite promises from top officials at the time of the tragedy? What are we waiting for? Have we heard the warnings being issued about a Taliban resurgence in the former FATA areas? Are

we concerned about it? Or are we more interested in locking away those who give out the warnings? This is something to think about.

There is also a great deal else to consider about what has become of the place we call our home. Till the early 1980s, Pakistan kept pace with India in terms of GDP growth balanced against the size of each country's population. It has since fallen far behind and after the late 2000s, the pace of this decline has increased to a faster and faster fall down the ladder, leaving Pakistan as a nation that leaves economists wondering whether it can be saved or not.

Bank staff, who have little decision-making power of their own, struggle against a sea of clients making complaints over repeated biometric data collection and other new rules which simply make life harder for everyone alike. Small bank branches scattered across the country simply do not have the capacity to deal with the demands put on them, ostensibly in an effort to check corruption and meet FATF demands. The high pared persons placed to head the State Bank of Pakistan with their close links to the IMF should be considering solutions to these problems faced by people. But the guidelines they follow are not written for Pakistanis. They are written beyond the boundaries of our homeland to serve the purposes of others. Nations before us have noted precisely the same sequence of events.

What ordinary people deal with is the multitude of fraudulent housing societies which take away from them a lifetime of savings, offering nothing in return. There are others who must live the last years of their lives deprived of the pensions owed to them because the companies, the banks, the mills they have worked for have refused to deliver these in violation of rules. Cases have been continuing before courts often for years. Some of the plaintiffs are already dead. Others pass away even as the usual shenanigans of a court case continues, with lawyers failing to turn up or unable to

provide required documentation.

The ruthlessness of companies, with some of the petitioners having put an entire life into work with them, is soul-destroying. Can somebody intervene? Will someone? It appears that we all basically know the answer, whether or not we choose to dwell on it. In streets across major cities, we have children working, despite the laws which prevent this, there are fourth graders who go to school in the morning and then stand behind vending carts for the rest of the day to support families and bring home their small incomes. They are treated with scorn by city authorities who have again and again torn down small kiosks, pushed back vending carts but allowed plazas occupying acres of illegally obtained land to stand.

The change that was promised in 2018 as we open eyes in our 'new' country does not seem to be visible. There are other quite extraordinary instances of courts ordering that the marriage of a teenage girl — provided she has reached puberty — is valid, even though there are specific laws which bar this. People continue to end up behind bars, often for decades, with little hope of escape. Even if they are freed, as Aasia Bibi was last year, years and years of their lives have been wasted behind jail cells and their children have grown up without them. Good deeds also take place.

These are heartening. There are always people who as individuals or small groups work for the good of others. They include students, alliances of various kinds and simply goodhearted citizens who opt to help others, often at their own cost. There is also the heart-warming story from Zhub on the Pak-Afghan border in Balochistan of an elderly. We can only hope there can be more small miracles of similar nature. But it will take more than miracles to make our home a place where dreams can be turned into reality, where suffering is limited and this can only happen if genuine control over policymaking is given to people who care and truly wish to turn their coun-

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Quagmire

KHURRAM HUSAIN

The initiative has now been lost and they have been pushed almost entirely into reactive mode. Usually, it takes a govt a few years, well past its midway mark, to reach this point but we seem to have arrived at it a little sooner than most. We now have daily news of meetings in the Prime Minister House on price rise and inflation, and much of what they are discussing by way of solutions is little more than band-aid interventions anyway.

Regaining the initiative is a little like putting the genie back in the bottle, to borrow a cliché but, then again, it is the time for clichés because in one of those meetings in PM House they actually discussed bringing back the ration card scheme. I remember that from when I was a kid. Never thought we'd see it again one day. The opposition's strategy is simple. Time is on their side. They say that the government will sink under the weight of its own failures. Nobody need do anything. The only thing left to think about is the mechanics of it. Back in the 1990s, governments were evicted from office through the Eighth Amendment. At the moment there is no such mechanism, so if the speculation engulfing the capital of a coming change in faces at the top is to be played out, one wonders how exactly it will be achieved.

The opposition's strategy is simple. Time is on their side. They say that the government will sink under the weight of its own failures.

But in terms of policy direction, there is no longer any. An IMF programme is being implemented like a textbook, and whatever shortfalls are cropping up in it, such as on the revenue side, they will be made up through stopgap measures, such as rushed privatisations whose only job is to raise money to help meet the fiscal and current account deficits. Large subsidised interventions in the food markets of the country are planned. Incidentally, when the privatisation law was drafted back in 2000, 90 per cent of all proceeds were to be used for retirement of debt and the remaining 10pc only for 'poverty alleviation'.

Also, the law prohibits using privatisation proceeds as 'revenues'. They have to be classified as 'financing', which is not the same thing, and does not count towards meeting the revenue target or augmenting the tax-to-GDP ratio. But a clever way has been found to circumvent this law, and from what we understand, they will be showing privatisation pro-

ceeds as "nontax revenues".

Alongside these measures they have to withdraw the 7.5 cents per unit power tariff offered to exporters last year, a move that has sparked outrage among the exporter community because the power division sought to make it retroactive, meaning they would collect all surcharges and taxes from last year. Weeks after this notification was sent out, representatives of the power and finance divisions were trading blame before a parliamentary panel where they were questioned on it.

A few days later, data on the amount of receivables by government-owned power distribution companies provided some answers. The data showed that the receivables, which is the amount owed to these distribution companies that they are unable to collect, increased by 27pc or Rs220bn between June 2018 and Dec 31, 2019. In December, the IMF had warned that

part of stabilising the fiscal framework. If the losses are not brought down, then the accumulated costs must be passed on to paying consumers. This is what they call 'full cost recovery' and it is what the IMF urged in December.

Something substantially similar is happening in the gas sector. So the government is now sitting on two large hikes it has to make — one in the price of natural gas and the other in the power tariffs. Both decisions have been postponed in the face of rising food inflation, but sooner or later it will have to be made. The month of March could well see food inflation fall sharply, given the level of attention the government is giving to the matter. But no sooner will that happen then they will have to come forward with gas and power tariff hikes, and who knows perhaps even a mini budget. Each of these will be inflationary in its own way.

This is what I mean by 'reactive

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the growing circular debt, of which these receivables make up a significant part, presented a serious risk to the fiscal framework, and must be tackled proactively either through tariff increases or vastly improved governance of the power sector.

The improved governance never came. There was a moment when the energy minister began tweeting out his 'successes', at one point even sharing a picture of himself working in his office on a Sunday. We were all supposed to be impressed that he was working so hard, but sadly, the results are nowhere to be seen. The power distribution companies lose between 20pc and 40pc of the energy supplied to them, the IMF noted in December, and this loss makes them critical contributors to the circular debt. Controlling the continuous growth of this circular debt is a critical

mode. It has been a year and half, and if all we are talking about is how to control prices and meet revenue targets, then you can be sure that there is nothing else coming after the stabilisation ends. For two months now, the prime minister has been repeating his promise that 2020 will be the year of growth. How this will be achieved, other than by blowing the limited reserves and fiscal buffers that have been built with a lot of toil and tears, is not clear at all. It sounded like a vacuous thing to say about the future, that somehow, from somewhere, growth will come.

Now events have superseded even that vacuous promise. Instead of growth, we have firefighting to bring the prices of staple and perishable food down. Politically, this government is unravelling at the seams. Economically, it is bogged down in a quagmire.

The CPEC narrative

YASIR MASOOD

With the advent of fast forward information technology and intelligence, hegemonic states are busy innovating ways to extend their power by increasing their influence over weaker states.

More or less all states seek to win over others in pursuit of their strategic, political and economic objectives.

The exercise of soft power, the imposition of sanctions, control over cyberspace and the development of methods of biological and psychological warfare, some of which are almost invisible, are combined with traditional instruments, altering the dynamics and indicators of international political conflicts and struggles.

Like old wine in new bottles, the terms 'hybrid wars' or 'perception management' or '5th generation warfare' are not entirely novel war stratagems. Strategic war studies suggest that hybrid or furtive wars are engineered through a blend of direct and indirect, offensive and defensive, implicit and explicit means. The purpose is to destabilize and weaken a state from the inside out and to impede its progress through overt and covert tactics. The ultimate aim is to successfully implement a strategy that weakens contenders, causes them to collapse and results in a change in their ruling elites, a change of course and a change in their international relationships and partnerships.

Pakistan as a pivot to Central Asia, Eurasia, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and beyond is a thorn in the flesh of its nemesis which is incapable of envisioning that Pakistan can paddle along a path of success.

The most concentrated element of the current hybrid war against Pakistan is the fate changer concept — the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This project can truly help turn around Pakistan's ailing economy and open a pathway to successful economic development.

The traditional US-Pakistan partnership can be epitomized as part of needs-based ties in which Pakistan remained subject to horrendous US-determined strategic and political compulsions that led to an evident downward spiral. The cost of partnership with the US was too heavy, resulting in a crumbling of trust at every testing time. Even in the case of CPEC, thus far, American diplomats, strate-

gists and political commentators have quite frequently made anti-CPEC comments with or without knowing the real face of CPEC as an economic portfolio.

For instance, Alice Wells, the US Secretary of State on a recent official visit to Pakistan called CPEC a "debt trap" in an uncalled-for talk about this subject. The same anti-CPEC rhetoric in a speech given in Washington in November last year also created a lot of distress in both Pakistan and China. Within no time, both Islamabad and Beijing resoundingly denounced this poor attempt to malign CPEC.

It is important for us Pakistanis to comprehend the underlying horrific objectives which are at play in seeking to corner Pakistan economically through the FATF, and to keep the country locked into its current depressed situation through the schemes of IFI hitmen like the IMF, the World Bank, etc. Interestingly, the US government has never been in the least concerned about the 'real' debt trap economy imposed by their mentored IFIs and the sweet poisonous impacts it has had on Pakistan's development.

At the same time, Pakistan's next-door neighbour has been trying tooth and nail to destabilize Pakistan through multipronged schemes. For example, vicious attempts have been made to isolate Pakistan diplomatically, politically, strategically and, above all, economically. Fortunately, Pakistan has been able to counter the surreal whims of India on all fronts through successful foreign policy practices. The rest of the current disarray in the inner and outer 'Shining India' has been explicitly executed by the terrorist, fascist and jingoistic leadership of so-called secular India.

To sum up, the best countermeasure in the face of the slanderous accusations made against CPEC is to keep on disseminating the true narrative by investing in savvy minds that can strategize, steer, strengthen and construct perceptions in light of the actual facts, especially through the media. If envious states can twist the reality against Pakistan, there is no reason whatsoever why Pakistan cannot deconstruct and thwart such narratives and provide rational accounts of the real situation. An all-inclusive media strategy communicated persistently in multiple languages to inform the national, regional and global populace is one of the most

Letters to the Editor

University of Balochistan

It refers to the recent scandal of black mailing and harassment of UOB students. The scandal was unveiled by court soon after this, the news was on air across the country. Sources revealed that this harassment was continued over a longer period of time. Various means were adapted for harassment, among these, most notable were spy cameras that were installed in Ladies washrooms and other adjacent places also.

Sazian Naguman
KECH.

Kashmir issue

Both India and Pakistan have durable uncertain issues. During many years of political commitment, they have attempted different configurations of dealings organised and non-organised, and individuals to-individuals. In any case, they have neglected to determine even a solitary respective debate. Kashmir has

been a flashpoint among India and Pakistan for over 50 years.

Pakistan has reliably preferred this as the best answer for the contest. In perspective on the state's dominant part Muslim populace, it accepts that it would cast a ballot to turn out to be a piece of Pakistan.

Anyway a solitary plebiscite held in a district which involves people groups that are socially, strictly and ethnically various, it would make estranged minorities.

The Hindus of Jammu, and the Buddhists of Ladakh have never demonstrated any longing to join Pakistan and would dissent at the result. Such an answer would be probably not going to carry dependability to the locale as the Muslim occupants of Pakistani-directed Jammu and Kashmir, including the Northern Areas, have never demonstrated any craving to turn out to be a piece of India.

The trouble of embracing this as a potential arrangement is that it requires India and Pakistan to surrender an area, which they are not ready to do.

Any plebiscite or submission liable to bring about a dominant part vote in favor of freedom would in this manner most likely be restricted by the two India and Pakistan. It would likewise be dismissed by the occupants

of the state who are content with their status as a feature of the nations to which they as of now owe devotion.

Anum Farooq
LAHORE.

'Quaid was right'

Under the frenzy Hindutva agenda of BJP government, first, the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A and then the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act--blatant anti-Muslims moves--India is leading towards chaos and the extremist regime of Modi seems to be hoisted with its own petard.

And, this consequently is giving rebirth to the Quaid Azam's Muhammad Ali Jinnah's two-nation theory in India.

Those Muslims who were against Jinnah's movement for a separate Muslim state are now realising their mistake. Briefly, he united a scattered mass into a cohesive block with one voice and one flag where they could achieve political, religious and economic freedom by ridding themselves of Hindu dominance and repression.

Those who realised this truth include Mehbooba Mufti, a former chief minister of

Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir, who recently tweeted: ' Decision of Jammu and Kashmir leadership to reject two-nation theory in 1947 and align with India has backfired'.

Such faith-related malicious shenanigans to marginalize Muslims is making India an apartheid state like Israel. India's akhand Bharat expansionism move is a vivid replication of Israel's Zionism. In 1971, after fall of Dhaka, Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi had boasted when she said: "Today, we've sunk Jinnah's two-nation theory in the Bay of Bengal". But, contrary to her whim, life has come full circle. Given the nationwide riots and protestations across India post-CAA and evident remorse of Indian Muslims over their opposition to Jinnah's theory vindicate our great Quaid's vision and theory and shrieking that 'Quaid was right'...

Zahid Ali Behram
GILGIT-BALTISTAN.

SSWM Board

Sindh Solid Waste Management Board

(SSWMB) was established in 2014 for the collection and disposal of solid and other waste in the province of Sindh.

Although five years long came and gone but all districts of Sindh including Karachi instead of being clean and green all the cities are becoming mound of garbage.

The board was assigned the responsibility to keep all 29 districts of Sindh clean but unfortunately it kept itself confined to Karachi only yet Karachi has mounted high in ranking as one of the most polluted cities in the world although there are many reasons for pollution however, improper management of solid waste is one of the leading causes of pollution.

The trash cans placed at different locations in Karachi are overflowing with rubbish spreading more pollution. When you happen to cross more backward areas in Karachi you will be surprised to see waste bins knee-deep buried with solid waste. It seems that SSWMB staff has forgotten these cans or the board is bored of collecting waste. The authorities concerned should pay attention to this issue to keep Karachi clean so that the residents of the city can prevent themselves from diseases.