

The Business

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Train accidents

According to Pakistan Railways' drivers association, the condition of the country's main line, from Peshawar to Karachi through Lahore, has become so bad that it is no longer safe for train operations. But authorities, who understand the situation very well and know that the broken down condition of train tracks is responsible for an unprecedented spike in accidents, have done nothing to fix the problem so far. Instead, they have repeatedly brushed aside all the concerns shared by the staff and continue to run even the most dangerous routes despite the potentially fatal risk to passengers, drivers and vehicles. It turns out that the Multan-Sukkur and Sukkur-Karachi sections are "really pathetic", which explains why there were more than 100 accidents on this route last year, all the way from minor to fatal, notable among them the Tezgam fire tragedy that gutted at least 65 innocent people. The only action that authorities are considering is shutting down the Sir Syed Express as well as the once iconic Shalimar Express train, but that decision seems to be driven by financial considerations not any compelling data-backed analysis of the absurdly high number of incidents in just the last two years - since this government took over.

The government is right to the extent that these problems have their roots in times of previous governments, and some of the things some of them did to this department in pursuit of political considerations are simply unforgivable, but that does not even begin to explain the paralysis that has gripped this particular administration. If they got control of the department when it had already been run into the ground, and some of the busiest parts of the main line were simply too dangerous to be used any longer, then why did they choose to go about business as usual even when the number of incidents kept increasing? And what, in the two years that they have been in power, have they done to put things right? It's not as if the present railways minister, close political ally and personal friend of the prime minister, is any stranger to the ministry. It seems the government was just buying time because the Multan-Karachi section was due for an overhaul under China-Pakistan Economic Corridor's (CPEC's) ML-1 project in the near future. But that doesn't nearly justify risking so many lives, on a daily basis, especially since people pay good money to use the railways and have faith that the government would not under any circumstances put their lives at risk just so it can trim its expenses while it waits for the Chinese to upgrade our infrastructure. And it speaks volumes about the government's attitude that drivers are now considering holding protest demonstrations if their masters continue to send them on the death track. There is, therefore, an urgent need to investigate the railways department's most urgent problems.

KHURSHID AHMAD KHAN

I come from a time where a middle-class teenager had only two main career choices - becoming a doctor or an engineer. Even this restricted choice was the prerogative of the family's patriarch.

If by any chance, the head of the family was a democrat at heart then he would at least let the kids choose either of the two. That is why primarily we see a lot of families from that time with a perfect split of doctors and engineers whereas some had either all doctors or engineers.

Back in 1985 I too was thrust into FSc (Pre Medical) to become a doctor, my father not realising that I had zero aspiration to become one. When I take stock of those formative years, I realize that I had a strong penchant for fine arts as I used to doodle everywhere and was quite good at it. However, as a simple teenager from a middle-class suburb of a conservative city I did not think that one could also study art as a subject in institutions like NCA. More so, in our times such vocations were looked down upon. Though I actually avoided wasting a medicine degree, afterwards when it came to selecting a proper career path, I still had no proper guidance. There were countless youngsters

The correct career

like me who ended up with some run of the mill arts degrees which were of no interest to us. And being a scion of a middle-class salaried family with no established business to take over, I eventually ended up like a restless soul in a career that has practically imprisoned my soul.

Therefore, being a parent myself I always thought of saving my children from this lifelong misery and hence gave them full liberty to choose whatever career path they had in mind. Generation Z has its own strange choices. A major predicament of today's parents is that 90 percent of their teenage kids stay awake all night as they are addicted to playing multiplayer online computer games. This has enticed most of them into getting unwanted degrees and education revolving around computers as a subject. And even though people like me have given full liberty to their kids to decide their career paths, we still see confused youngsters who have no idea what to do with their lives. I am sure most of us will also agree that it is extremely unfair to spend millions on becoming a medical doctor or an engineer and then eventually ending up in professions like the police or

income tax through competition examinations. It's a complete waste of a seat in a professional college which could have been otherwise used by some other deserving youngster who may have a genuine long-term interest in becoming a doctor or an engineer. When you see people with a degree in structural engineering from the US ending up as career diplomats then it makes no sense and you wonder whose fault it is that a wrong person ended up in a wrong career.

So how do we tackle this big question of letting the young decide what career path will give them both pleasure as well as a steady income stream? First, they should identify their genuine likes and dislikes; career counselors can help to some extent but in the end it is always the kid who has to cut this Gordian knot. Parents must realize that some children may fancy teaching while some may love to become soldiers and so on. It doesn't actually matter as there are countless options; the point is to find out and establish a perfect triangle between a child, his/her education and his/her future profession.

We as parents have to facilitate our children in finding where they

To speak or not to speak

Should violence be suffered or vocalised? wrote the now deceased Sadaf Zahra in January of this year. This was just one tweet from a long Twitter thread about domestic violence. As Sadaf wrote: "Ever since I gained consciousness and life acted as an eye opener for me, I have been keenly observing that words 'patience', 'tolerance' and 'adjustments', 'compromise' are solely associated with women." Sadaf alluded to the fact that she too was now a victim of such violence; the thread was perhaps a cry for help, an act of desperation of a woman who felt she had absolutely no other options.

Now Sadaf Zahra is dead. On June 29, her body was found hanging from a ceiling fan. According to her sister Mahwish Zahra, the deceased's husband, identified as Ali Salman Alvi, called her and said that Sadaf had "done something to herself". Mahwish Zahra rushed to her sister's house where she found all the doors inside the house closed. When she went into the room where Alvi said Sadaf was, she found her sister's bruised body hanging from the ceiling fan. A ladder was found against the wall of the room. Mahwish Zahra asked Sadaf's husband to bring the body of her sister down from the fan.

In shock, Mahwish then proceeded to file a police report against the suspect. Her brother-in-law, she told the police, was used to torturing her sister for the smallest reason. Her sister lived in a world of terror never knowing what would make him lose his temper and begin beating her. Sadaf Zahra's family repeatedly urged him to stop beating his wife but he allegedly continued to do so. When Sadaf Zahra's body was

finally taken down there were reportedly bruises and possible torture marks on the side of her face. The accused said that he had nothing to do with Sadaf Zahra's death. She had become upset and killed herself. The final forensic results in Sadaf Zahra's case have not yet been released but one is uncertain if she committed suicide. Men who abuse women and commit acts of domestic violence often rely on this ruse to cover up their crimes.



killed her, it is unclear whether they will be able to gather enough evidence to show that it was indeed a planned and orchestrated murder, which is a crime that is difficult to prove anyway - more so when the killer may be the person who is closest to the victim.

Sadaf Zahra's case is different because unlike so many women who are killed by their spouses owing to domestic abuse, she actually chose to

Sadaf Zahra's death came to light, Shirazi put out a statement on Twitter: "I was shocked & numbed the moment I got to know abt incident & FIR, not just myself but media group I'm working with strictly condemned & terminated accused. Read Sadaf's thread in morning whom I never met but am heartbroken. #RIPSadaf Justice must prevail #JusticeForZahra [sic]"

Abusers are notoriously adept at covering their tracks and ensuring their victims are isolated, undermined and unable to leave or seek help. But there are always signs. The question is, had no one noticed her Twitter thread before her death - no family member, colleague or friend? Had no one seen any warning signs and sought to help? Her safety should have been the primary concern of anyone who was aware of or suspected her to be a victim of domestic violence.

Pakistan had plenty of laws against domestic violence, the act is routinely condemned all the time and every day. Yet neither the government nor private citizens are interested in delivering the sort of help that abused women need. No one is willing to open up their homes, no one is willing to mediate, no one is willing to watch out and report that there are continuing signs of abuse.

Without a social and cultural transformation, a liberation of Pakistani women from the curse of judging other women and the censure of Pakistani men for refusing to condemn such acts, nothing will change. Sadaf Zahra died a cruel and painful death, but is its cruelty enough to soften the hard hearts that look away from the abused woman begging for help? If past cases are any evidence, the answer tragically is absolutely not.

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After torturing and murdering their victims, it is easy for them to allege that the women were unhappy and chose to end their life. If the first tragedy is the death of the woman, the second one is that the police and courts often believe this lie and file the case away.

This has not happened yet in the present case. The victim's husband was arrested on the spot based on police suspicions that he may have murdered his wife. He has since been held in Adiala Jail, but it is unclear whether he will still be kept in prison following the end of the remand period. Even if the police have good reason to believe that he

speak out about what she suffered. Her Twitter thread is an indictment of a society that diligently pushes issues involving domestic violence under the rug. Even when people know what is occurring, they choose to keep quiet under the pretext of non-interference in other matters. It is a joke as Pakistanis are experts in interfering in other people's lives all the time. They just choose not to do it when it's a matter of men beating up women.

In this case, the suspect worked as a producer on well-known news anchor Asma Shirazi's current affairs programme. On July 8, the day the news of

US after a rude awakening

MUHAMMAD USMAN



IT was an inauspicious moment for a military, United States is banking on to help keep an expanding China in check. The aerial clash, of a bomb that exploded the first by the South Asian rivals in nearly five decades was a rare test for Indian military and it left observers a bit dumbfounded. Its loss of plane last week to a country whose military is about half the size and receives a quarter of the funding, was still telling". This was an unusual outburst by New York Times in aftermath of Indian false flag operation over Balakot but by no means an overstatement. It was an explicit reality check for US policy makers and an implicit resounding tribute to Pakistan defence forces which exposed real Indian worth to all and sundry, in broad day light on 27 Feb 2019 with marksmanship and clockwork precision.

For reasons best known to themselves, US policy makers continued to sleepwalk. They kept relying on pretending India in pursuit of their vital objective to contain China despite its inglorious past and shoddy present to discharge an oversized role. Indian history is of servile submission, acquiescence and subservience, not of mastery and preeminence. It could never hold itself against the superior or even the equal. Its track record is of only bullying the weak. It is mind boggling that how US continued to place reliance upon a country like India to challenge a rising giant, China. However, US is lucky to witness very early ugly end of its strategic misconception at Ladakh with Indian humiliation by Chinese forces with sticks and fists only, never seen before in contemporary times. This has surely upset its apple cart to thwart China's outward advance to the world economically. Notably, US strategic partnership with India was 3D. One, Indian strategic bidding in Afghanistan to help pressurize Pakistan to achieve its ulterior motives in the region. Two, to spur India to threaten CPEC passing through Gilgit-Baltistan in guise of its alleged claim over the territory. Three, Quad; a grouping of US, Japan, India and Australia to contain growing Chinese influence in Indian and Pacific Oceans. This was also stated by US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo during a policy address at Washington "the Quad will prove very important in the efforts ahead, ensuring that China retains only its proper place in the world". Over last two years, military engagements among its member states have broken new grounds.

Due to resolute Pakistan's aversion to Indian strategic bidding, fear of retribution from Afghan Taliban and importance of Pakistan for peace Afghan talks, inevitably, US has to cut back Indian role in Afghanistan. Now it is of tactical level only. Without fear of any doubt/contradiction, on CPEC, Indian role is far from

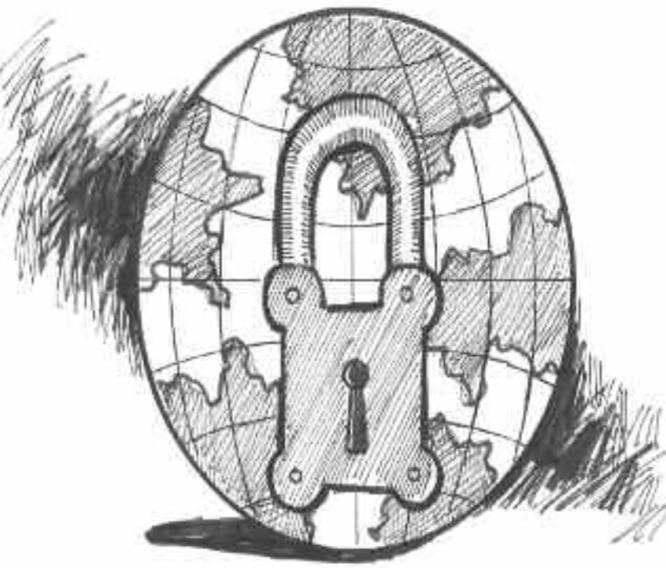
its potential nevertheless, probably in order to bridge some credibility gap between its claim and capability, India made some tactical moves in Ladakh area. To its chagrin, these boomeranged as

of a bomb that exploded on its face. The Chinese response was unambiguous and awesome. Indian response was inverse of it. Total lack of will was conspicuously obvious from Indian civil leadership to military leadership. As expected widely, India collapsed there like a house of cards and meekly sought disengagement at Chinese terms. This is not its first display of cowardice. This is second time. This is confirmation of what India endured ignominiously at the hands of China in 1962. Both times, an outright humiliation was reserved for India. In 1962, being first time, India did not only escape the ramifications but also pocketed massive military aid, rushed in by the West to buttress its military capability against China which was then an international pariah. Now its fall-outs are inescapable for India. Similarly it is a rude awakening to its patrons/supporters worldwide. For their own sake, they need to carry out reappraisal about India, incapable of undertaking a role in a great game. After South Asia, Indian role in Quad is also now suspect.

With Pakistan's befitting response to Indian adventurism in February 2019 and recent Indian capitulation at Ladakh, Indian threat in region is greatly minimized. On one side, China has demonstrated its acknowledged supremacy over India. On the other side, Pakistan has also shown full resolve not to misjudge its apt and robust retaliation. Precisely, this was the reason that this time, India did not dare to indulge in extravagant venture which has been its enduring habit to divert attention of its domestic audiences from its failure elsewhere. Reportedly, China and Iran are set to sign \$400 billion investment pact for 25 years. This is also a bad news for US which has signalled a cold war with China in context of BRI. The South Asia is its mainland, being an area in which its flagship project, CPEC passes through. All these developments portend well for Pakistan but could impel US as an alternative, to crank up pressure on Pakistan to drag its feet on CPEC. The feeble economy is its soft underbelly particularly, the international debts. US still commands predominant influence over international lenders. On its behest, they could twist arms of Pakistan majorly to cave in. Here, China ought to come in a big way financially and over a long haul to rid Pakistan of such pressure. This would not only bail out Pakistan but would also enhance its credentials for a future superpower. So far this is an area where China is lacking considerably.

— The writer, a retired Lt Col, is freelance columnist based in Islamabad.

NO RETURN TO NORMAL LIFE SOON, SAYS WHO



Letters to the Editor

Crime and politics

India's Uzair Baloch, Don Vikas Dubey, the notorious gangster, was killed by the police a few days back apparently in a staged encounter much to the relief of the public and giving solace to the victims' families. There was one thing in common between Uzair Baloch and Vikas Dubey. Both had political protection. They were pawns in the hands of certain political leaders and were used by them for nefarious purposes. However, Uzair Baloch's exploits are many and varied. Apart from killing around 200 persons, he was involved in extortion, forcible occupation of houses and land, money laundering etc. He was arrested by the military forces a couple of years ago and

was in their custody for several years. In a surprise move, he was handed over to the police about a year ago. Criminals in this country are raised and nurtured to assist in politicking and amass ill-gotten wealth. The moot point is that the criminal justice system has collapsed in Pakistan and the word 'justice' has been obliterated from the dictionary. The constitution has become a worthless document while courts seemed helpless in providing protection of lives and property of its citizens. It is a collective failure of all the institutions and organs of the state. The governing law now is 'might is right'. All these are powerful pointers of a nation descending into a failed state.

Arif Majeed

KARACHI

Power crisis

The shortage of electricity has been an annoyance for the people of Karachi for several decades. Now it is creating even more issues, including for students who are worried about attending online classes owing to the loadshedding. On Thursday, Prime Minister Imran Khan took notice of the Karachi power crisis. Most importantly, he asked Asad Umar to meet Sindh Governor Imran Ismail and the K-Elect administration to resolve the power supply issue as soon as possible. Hope this matter is resolved soon.