

The Business

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Ehsas cash programme

The government must be credited for the success of the Ehsaas Cash Emergency Programme, which puts cash in the hands of the needy segments of society as they struggle with all the limitations brought about by the pandemic. Now the prime minister has given approval for the second phase of this programme. Pakistan must count among a handful of countries with very limited fiscal space and a huge debt burden to roll out such an extensive programme for the poor. Governments all across the world have come up with ingenious relief packages for business to support employment figures, but there's been very little direct attention paid to the bottom of the food chain, therefore it is not surprising at all that the Ehsaas Programme is already winning international recognition. It was no mean achievement, really, that the government was not only able to give the economy a good \$8 billion stimulus package just as it was shutting down, but also spared a good deal of money for income groups that were more likely to die of hunger than Covid-19 without any assistance.

No doubt, the prime minister has been looking out for the poorest among us since the first debates about the official response to the coronavirus took place. As everybody knows too well, that concern diluted the lockdown somewhat and invited a lot of criticism, it was only by keeping the economy partly open and putting money in the pockets of the most vulnerable people that the government was able to rule out the prospect of widespread social unrest and food riots. The PM must also be appreciated for raising this issue at the online International Labour Organisation (ILO) Global Summit on Covid-19, where he urged the international community to formulate a combined strategy to protect the most helpless people across the world, especially labourers, from the worst impact of the pandemic. And surely a lot of them can learn from Pakistan's Ehsaas Programme, which has successfully kept the bottom from falling off so far. It is also very important to note that no matter how successful any country has been so far in the battle against the coronavirus, a much harder battle might well lie just ahead as signs of a second wave are increasing all the time. In such circumstances, the Ehsaas Programme is a godsend for the most marginalised. It has been built on the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) but it has also been expanded many times over. And it is not just the amount of money but also the swiftness with which it has been arranged and disbursed that is particularly impressive. That is why it serves the need of the hour rather nicely. The government must now make sure that it remains on track and reaches out as many poor families as possible till the economy turns around.

Letters to the Editor

Yemen talks

Yemen is one of the poorest Muslim countries. It's unfortunate people are starved of even the basic necessities of life. Economic development has not yet hit Yemen in any meaningful way. On top of it all, it has been for many years in the throes of a bitter civil war between Houthis, a Shia militia allegedly supported by Iran, and the government of Yemen, supported by Saudi Arabia. This fruitless war has wreaked havoc on innocent people. In this utterly brutal scenario, a ray of hope seems to have emerged. Mr Ahmedinejad, former president of Iran, is said to have written letters to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman and Houthi chief Abdul Malik Badreddin Al-Houthi and copied to the UN secretary-general. He has invited Prince Salman for talks to end the devastating civil war. Ahmedinejad may well be advised to take the government of Iran, particularly the supreme leader, on board to give his move a chance of success. On our part, our amiable Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi may also please take the appropriate steps to promote the talks proposed by Ahmedinejad to push this noble cause.

Hameed Akhtar Niazi
ISLAMABAD

Start at the top

The federal government has constituted two separate directorate retirement committees (DRCs) to assess the performance of employees, with the mandate to propose retirement of under-performers even before their age of superannuation. This is a very good step, which I am sure wouldn't have happened without the approval of Prime Minister Imran Khan. But my simple question to the prime minister is: who shall assess the performance of his ministers, advisers and special assistants — especially those who have continuously been under-performing for the last two years? I am sure our prime minister must have read the maxim 'Charity begins at home'.

Abdul Samad Samo
KARACHI

Rafale jets

With the delivery of the first batch of Rafale jets by France to India's IAF under a \$7.9 billion deal alleged to be a tainted one by its main opposition, it is to be seen whether India will deploy these aircraft in Ladakh to oust the Chinese from the territory occupied during the recent standoff and risk a wider war. Or else, it will simply be used to showcase its prowess to its domestic audience and assuage concern in view of the raging debate of the debacle along the LAC.

Kulsoom Arif
KARACHI

Pakistan's economic policies

SHAHID MEHMOOD

The economic might of a nation is dependent upon the success or failure of economic management, ultimately determining where it stands in the global community. What determines this success or failure? There is no straightforward answer, but one can begin to unravel this Gordian knot by analysing economic management in our own country.

Let's take economic management (so far) under the PTI. Even before the pandemic, its performance was nothing to talk about. Two policies, the chicken breeding programme and Sarmaya-i-Pakistan, give us ample insight into why we are such a basket case when it comes to the economy. The former, launched with much fanfare, envisions poverty reduction through breeding and rearing desi chickens at home, while the latter was Asad Umar's brainchild for turning around loss-making public entities.

The main issue with these initiatives was (and still is) that they were never rooted in Pakistan's ground realities. The chicken programme was inspired by Bill Gates — who has been on a crusade to further this initiative — but it won't work, at least not in Pakistan. One does not need to be an Einstein to figure this out. In Pakistan, rural poverty has consistently been higher than urban poverty. Yet, even in rural areas, it's hard to find homes where desi chickens are reared and bred. If chicken breeding were such a potent anti-poverty tool, nobody in the rural areas would have given it up.

The practice has almost vanished because the opportunity cost of rearing chickens at home is higher than having cash at hand through some other en-



deavour that can buy a broiler chicken from the market. Yet, undeterred by this common observation, the government went ahead with the scheme. At present, it's rare to hear anything about it, which in all probability will cause the taxpayers a few billion rupees before it's finally wrapped up.

A similar fate befell the 'Sarmaya' concept, initiated with much fervour. The issue, again, was that it was a 'bought' concept, without any consideration of ground realities. Unlike Malaysia, lobbies and interests in Pakistan's public sector are just too powerful to allow for any reforms. By now, as the initiative fizzles out, this much must have been realised after wasting time (time is globally recognised as a resource, except by our policymakers, who view it as leisure). Trying to run the country on borrowed or externally foisted ideas (the perennial 'white man's burden') is one reason why economic policies in Pakistan remain unproductive and ineffective. Let's now turn to yet another, simpler way of gauging why most economic policies in Pakistan remain fruitless.

The most well-known diagram in economics is the Marshallian cross,

which shows an upward sloping supply and downward sloping demand curve intersecting at a certain point (equilibrium). Put simply, it conveys the message that both demand and supply are equally important considerations. For this discussion, it suffices to point out that our economic managers have been entirely fixated upon the supply side. What better way to illustrate this point than the power sector, and especially in the context of the Indicative Generation Capacity Expansion Plan (IGCEP) 2047, which envisages increasing electricity production manifold. At present, our electricity production capacity is significantly higher than what the demand is.

The end result is billions of rupees in 'capacity charges' that are extracted out of consumers. Notice that this is besides the circular debt (basically a shortage of cash due to inefficiencies), now around Rs1.8 trillion (also to be paid by consumers).

A lot of this has to do with policymakers' exclusive emphasis upon supply-side policies, a theme that continues with IGCEP 2047. It's all about big-ticket items like dams and production plants, but completely missing from this picture is the demand side. To understand its importance, one may turn to what's dubbed as the 'California energy miracle'. In short, since at least the 1970s, California managed to cater to power consumption demand without taking recourse to mega dams or highly expensive IPPs. They are not paying any capacity charges, and there isn't any circular debt. This success, in substantial part, is explained by their emphasis on electricity efficiency standards (part of demand side management). Strict enforcement of these standards meant that, over time, the

same power infrastructure is enough to cater to the demands of residents. Moreover, it has been designed in a manner that the state can piggyback on it for any new initiatives (like electric vehicles) without adding substantial power-producing infrastructure. In stark contrast, efficiency standards have been noticeably omitted in Pakistan's power management, and electricity appliances are some of the most inefficient in the world. Put another way, if we had been serious about the demand side, we probably would not have needed expensive IPPs and mega dams.

This infatuation with the supply side explains why we have so many white elephants in the public sector like motorways, metros, BRTs and railways. It also explains the poor state of critical aspects, like Pakistan's human capital, since government policies are entirely focused on supply side (more schools, colleges and universities) without any consideration of quality. Consider that we have around 200 universities, but none of them produces human capital that can compete at the global level.

In conclusion, Pakistan's economic policies tend to be ineffective because they are divorced from ground realities and considered exclusively in terms of supply. Additionally, policymakers are always on the lookout for imported ideas — which is not bad per se, but becomes problematic when domestic fundamentals are ignored. Being all ears to major donors and ignoring domestic research does not help either.

Good, effective policies will come by when both demand and supply fundamentals are thoroughly considered, and the supporting material (good human capital, effective coordination, etc) are present. In this context, Pakistan has a long way to go.



Securing Pakistan?

FARHAN BOKHARI

The coming US retreat from Afghanistan after almost two decades has narrowed the strategic window of opportunity for India to expand Delhi's footprint on Pakistan's western border.

Consequently, India stepping back from Afghanistan must only drive down its objective of further pressing Pakistan through a two-border challenge — east and west.

This coincides with recent setbacks for Delhi elsewhere in the region, notably India's apparent inability to expand its footprint across Iranian soil. As China's economic ties deepen with Iran, India's ability to follow up its investment in Iran's 'Chahbahar' port with exposure elsewhere has practically been halted. While Delhi's once obvious goal of encircling Pakistan appears to have taken a hit, its targeting of Pakistan is far from over. A spate of terrorist attacks across Pakistan in recent months have been linked by Pakistan's security investigators to Indian attempts at destabilizing Delhi's western neighbor.

Though Pakistan can draw some comfort from the setbacks to India in Afghanistan and Iran, there is virtually no room for complacency. For decades, India has exploited opportunities across Balochistan and the Sindh to keep Pakistan on its toes. While Pakistan's security services have plugged many of the holes across some of the country's most vulnerable areas at the cost of sacrificing precious human lives, India continues to look for breaches elsewhere. Over the years, India has established ties with separatist individuals and groups in Pakistan to promote Delhi's objective of destabilizing the country.

In the past year, India's search for proxies to destabilize Pakistan has intensified as Indian prime minister Narendra Modi's government has further tightened its stranglehold over the part of Kashmir under Delhi's control. The separatist movement in Kashmir — now over three decades old — remains visibly out of control, adding to Delhi's confusion and frustration.

Indian-administered Kashmir remains one of the most militarized regions of the world, given the verifiable ratio of army and paramilitary soldiers along side police deployed, versus the population of the mountainous territory.

Meanwhile, the risk to global security emanating from Kashmir remains powerfully visible. Beyond the

standoff between India and Pakistan — the world's only two nuclear armed foes located geographically side by side — the recent clashes between India and China have exposed another dangerous element to nuclear insecurity emanating from the region. For Pakistan however beyond conditions on its borders, the challenge of internal insecurity provoked by India remains a continuing threat. In the months and years to come, such challenges will likely grow as Pakistan works with China on completion of the CPEC initiative. First begun under the tenure of former president General Pervez Musharraf who oversaw launching of the Gwadar deep sea port, CPEC has become the essential pivot for Pakistan's future prosperity. As the global economy remains in disarray from the twin challenges of the fallout from Covid-19 and lingering uncertainty surrounding factors such as global oil prices, China remains the sole likely foreign investor in Pakistan. It is a reality that Pakistan's planners must tightly embrace and work with for the foreseeable future.

At the same time, Pakistan's security embrace of China is set to deepen over the coming decade as Islamabad expands its naval platforms with the induction of eight new Chinese submarines alongside other maritime platforms, and works to further modernize its air defence and offence capabilities. This will be in addition to the expansion of capabilities for land warfare, necessitated by the dangerous Indo-Pakistan standoff and internal security challenges. Internally within Pakistan, the country will need to further expand its security grip over regions targeted by India, notably Balochistan and Sindh. This will require a combination of economic policies geared towards strategic gains along with a national political consensus on Pakistan's security framework.

While Pakistan's foreign policy will drive part of the way forward, the eventual guarantee of national stability will be driven by Islamabad's ability to take charge of its domestic environment. Given the opportunities and challenges ahead, its vital for key stakeholders including mainstream political parties to build a consensus on tackling internal security challenges. Squabbling among rivals aspiring for political power on other fronts can well continue. But Pakistan's internal security is much too vital to be subjected to divisive debate, let alone divisive policies.

What's in a name?

SYED ALI ZAFAR

Why this furious debate on change of name of Lahore's Nicholson Road to Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan Road? As Shakespeare says "what's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

People ask, "is all this name changing and statue destroying much to do about nothing. Does it fix past injustice or get over our colonial past?"

But the fact is that street names do matter and their power on peoples' psyche cannot be underestimated. Names of places become part not only of the language, culture and ethos of a city but also the nation's soul. Darran Anderson, author of 'Imaginary Cities', says that "Once you decide to name a street after a person or an event, you've started something intrinsically political and subjective." In history, street names have been used to reinforce colonist narratives or to erase local history by dictators and elected persons alike. The Spanish dictator, Franco, named Madrid's streets not only after himself but even his slogans (Plaza de Arriba Espana was named after Franco's salute which meant 'Onwards Spain'). Till today, the Spanish government is "cleaning up" this legacy. During Communist times, the streets in European countries were renamed after their heroes. Poland has had to deal with revising the names of more than 1500 streets and squares.

One of the most effective ways to indicate to present and future generations that the person is an honourable man and deserving respect is to have a road in his name. One proponent of this was Kitchener, a despicable man, who ensured that many streets in London were named after him and even designed the roads of Khartoum, Sudan's Capital, in a way that it represented the British flag, with its central road called the Victoria Avenue.

Serbia is a classic example. Originally, streets were in the names of Ottoman Sultans or the Habsburg Monarchy, then as the influence of the two waned, then after its Royal family and again, when Lenin decided to rewrite history, all these roads were renamed after Communist revolutionaries. The US and countries in Africa and Asia have also time and again changed street names to suit their aims.

Interestingly, sometimes changing street names is done for political reasons and to make a point or send a message to enemies. Saudi Arabia executed Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a Shia cleric, which caused great outcry amongst the Iranian population. Iran in retaliation decided to change the name of the road on which the Saudi Embassy was located to Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr Street.

Iran had made a similar point when it renamed Churchill Street in Tehran, where the British embassy was housed, as 'Bobby Saint Street'; Bobby Saint was the hero of the IRA but seen as a criminal by the English. The idea was to embarrass as any correspondence with the embassy would carry the name of Bobby Saint. (The UK Embassy got over this by opening a new entrance in the back street named after Persian poet Ferdousi!)

Iran of course is not alone in such politically motivated change of place names. In the US, a street where the Soviet embassy was located was renamed after Andrei Sakharov, a jailed Soviet dissident, while the road housing the



Chinese embassy was named the 'Liu Xiaobo Plaza' after the Nobel Prize winner who was imprisoned in China.

Streets are named and monuments put up to commemorate the achievements of famous heroes; the purpose is to keep them alive in memory. However, if the person after whom the street is named is responsible for killing or dehumanizing others, this defeats the very purpose and I therefore believe that it is perfectly acceptable to remove such a person's name or statue. Since Nicholson Street was recognized in history as a bully and racist, unforgiving of local people, the change of the name of Nicholson Street is necessary. However, the criticism that by renaming places one is erasing history is a powerful one.

Darran Anderson while talking about change of street names says that "When we fail to look at what existed previously and why, we rob ourselves of context and roots." Stressing the importance of not burying or denying the past, he says that "Any psychologist will tell you this is a very unwise proposition, and that works for nations as well as individuals. Change is welcome by all means but an understanding of why it is necessary and what came before is also essential. Our lives and lives of our cities operate in time and space and it is important to acknowledge that. We are who we are because, and in spite, of where we've come from."

Is there a balance in which we do not commemorate criminals but yet preserve history?

I think the best compromise in such cases is to rename the street, but also give details of what the street was formerly called. For example in Amsterdam one can find, beneath a new street name, a sign giving the street's former name as well. This ensures that while the historical fact remains intact, it is indicated to the future generations that the person after whom the street was originally named, was an offender, and that his name was therefore removed to commemorate a great man instead.

But it seems that one does not always have to change colonial street names. I read somewhere that there was a proposal to change the name of Napier Road in Karachi because it was named after another racist colonist Charles Napier, the first British governor of Sindh, but this was rejected because, as the story goes, it was felt that the name of Napier Road should stay as it is — owing to its affinity with the Karachi's red-light area, which should not be associated with great Pakistanis. In the end may I say that Pakistan is full of cities, towns and even villages named after people, famous and infamous, heroes, lovers and concubines.

Lahore and other cultural cities are not ordered from above and cannot be purely 'Pakistani' because there is no original point as such in the life of a nation. When we go about deleting places' names, we should always keep the balance between history and change.