

# The Business

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## PM Imran's diplomacy

In a very positive and surprising move, Prime Minister Imran Khan contacted his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina Wajed as a policy of the government to mend fences with regional countries. Pakistan, he said, is committed to deepen the "fraternal relations with Bangladesh on the basis of mutual trust, mutual respect, and sovereign equality." He also emphasized the need for regular bilateral contacts and people-to-people exchanges. Relations between the two countries have remained strained since Hasina came to power, hitting a low point during her second term when her government set up the so-called International Crimes Tribunal, and tried several leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami's Bangladesh chapter on charges of war crimes during the 1971 conflict sentencing them to death. Islamabad saw that as a violation of the 1974 agreement under which her father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of Bangladesh, had agreed not to pursue cases against people involved in the unfortunate events of 1971. The National Assembly of Pakistan passed a unanimous resolution condemning the conviction and execution of JI leaders. Although tensions persisted over some issue such as repatriation of Beharis- whom Dhaka had declared as Pakistanis herding them into special camps- and a demand for an apology for '71, the two sides remained engaged.

Notably, for 20 long months the post of Pakistan's high commissioner to Bangladesh remained vacant due to that state's refusal to approve his appointment. It was only last November after Islamabad made a fresh nomination that Dhaka agreed to receive Imran Ahmad Siddiqui as the new emissary of Pakistan. Pursuing quiet diplomacy, he is believed to have brought about a thaw in the two countries relations. What also contributed to his efforts is the discriminatory anti-Muslim Citizenship Amendment Act, passed by the Modi government last year, a major affectee of which have been Bangladeshi immigrants.

No less important has been the role of China asserting its economic heft via the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It has aligned several development projects in Bangladesh with the BRI, also allowing zero tariffs on exports to China. Beijing surely wants Dhaka to improve its ties with Pakistan for the furtherance of its own geo-strategic interests. This development has reshaped the regional diplomatic scenario which is cause of concern for India. In fact New Delhi has been surrounded by China and Pakistan in their powerful diplomacy to foil Indian designs to become regional leader with the backing of the super power the US. Actually Prime Minister Modi is trapped in his own plan of creating instability in its all neighbours, particularly Pakistan and now Bangladesh.

## Letters to the Editor

### Tanker mafia

Tanker mafia is playing with the sentiments of Karachi locals. Everything about this business is illegal: the boreholes dug without permission, the trucks operating without permits, the water sold without testing or treatment. Bosses arrange buyers, labor fills tankers, the police look the other way, and the muscle makes sure that everybody is silent about this. The mafia defends its work as a community service, but there is a much darker picture of Karachi's water industry. The government has made some efforts to stop illegal water pumping and sales, but to no avail. The mafia is not a unified, organized syndicate and thus cannot be eliminated by catching and punishing a few big players. The economics of the illegal water business are straightforward: tanker bosses buy water from the men who steal it and tanker owners then sell the water directly to locals at an elevated price.

Shafi Ahmed Khowaja  
JATI SUJAWAL

### Karachi rain

In today's moonsoon and torrential rain Karachi city is the most affected sector. The seasonal wind and heavy showers have been putting Karachi's residents in hot water. However, at least three people have lost their lives when moderate heavy rain in Karachi made by roads flooded and river like structures and the situation could have been more worse in upcoming time at the season of moonsoon. Do you know the city of lights (Karachi) is blessed with more than dozen natural drain that used to flow during rains. But very luckily there was shortage of actions at the accurate time as many people were in the flooded water and sinking. The condition of Karachi is the most terrifying in these following days. And ignorantly the MNA and MPA are disappeared to solve these issues very soon as the residents can face a plethora of problems.

Barkatullah  
TURBAT

### Indo-China face-off

China is obviously of paramount importance to India's foreign policy. China's every move is scrutinized by Indians, and every issue with China magnified. China is the first benchmark for India's aspiration to be a global power. India and China are engaged in economic and strategic competition in South Asia and beyond. Whenever one attempts to consolidate its position near the border, the other side views it as a security threat. In addition, the involvement of third party, such as the US's efforts to entice India into its new cold war with China, has made the situation more complex and difficult to

# Escalating cold war & Pakistan

MUHAMMAD USMAN

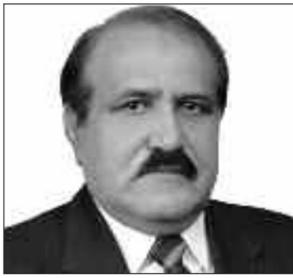
The cold war between US and China has ignited. From incubation to combustion, transition has been dramatic. The gloves are out. Hardly, a day passes when no barb, accusation and action is exchanged in a fit-for-tat manner. Latest incendiary attack was of US when it closed down a Chinese consulate at Houston, citing superficial reasons. China took less than a day to shut down its Consulate at Chengdu as a quid pro quo.

Beside toxic gestures/actions, both countries are also marshalling their energy in every way possible to ditch each other at every step of the way.

The Asia is the heartland where both would slug it out to gain ascendancy. To be precise, South East Asia and South West Asia are main battlefields.

Both have potential to enable China to fan out in world economically and politically. Being a superpower, US seems hell bent upon thwarting its outward move. The respective flash points are South China Sea and road component of CPEC. Arguably, on South China Sea, US may grant China some space. Possibly, this could be inferred from a recent policy address by US Secretary of States, Pompeo "the Quad will prove very important in the efforts ahead, ensuring that China retains only its proper place in the world".

On CPEC, it is unlikely to concede anything until inevitable, being anew and shorter route for China to reach Gulf where US has its two vital interests; Oil and Israel. Without meaning to prejudice



importance of anyone, Israel is unexceptionable for the US. This makes it a prong which would head their strategic calculations. Due to its key importance for Pakistan/space reasons, this discourse would be confined to this dimension only.

Previous cold war ended with triumph of US and disintegration of the Soviet Union in mountains of Afghanistan. Pakistan was the frontline state and played key role to achieve the end. In forthcoming one, again it is at the centre stage. Though in fight of two big elephants, grass suffers however, because of its geography, it is inescapable for Pakistan. A challenge also brings an opportunity. Similarly, emerging scenario albeit loaded with explosive possibilities, could also spring an array of huge opportunities, provided we tread the path astutely with full realization of own importance and a dictum of foreign affairs; only national interests are eternal. We hold the key.

This is the importance, we carry. We need to take cognizance of this and cash

it most appropriately. Probably, it was only General Zia ul Haq who extracted maximum price from US for Afghan Jihad albeit as part of mutually exclusive pursuits. It included closure of its eyes from our nuclear pursuits, provision of state of the art military weapons/equipment, downgrading of its relationship with India and Pakistan would only deal with Afghan Mujaheddin. This was as of taking full pound of flesh. US had to accede because of its high stakes involved in the conflict.

In previous cold war, Pakistan was to deny Soviet Union an access to Arabian Sea. Now it is providing China the same thus, content remains as of same greater importance to now competing powers. Given conditions, provision of an access to China would not be an easy proposition. It is associated with a number of uncertainties and risks.

On good reasons, it could be said that still Pakistan is main plank of US policy in South West Asia. India has no match with Pakistan. Now after its humiliating defeat at Ladakh, it has become even more irrelevant in the context of CPEC. At first, US would try to dissuade Pakistan from operation of CPEC with mix of incentives, waivers, grants and investment. In case, Pakistan does not show amenability, it would apply stick. This may include IMF/other world financial institutions, international watchdogs/media, threats of terrorism and insurgency in Balochistan particularly, against CPEC, domestic polarization and escalation on LoC/working boundary/troops mobilization on border by India.

If all this fails, it may even go for exerting pressure on Pakistan through Arab countries where a large number of Pakistani people work. Some of these countries may do so because of their huge dependence on the US.

Besides, relationship of Pakistan with Arab world is another dimension to be taken into account for formulating our policy. In the Gulf, there is no Chinese military presence.

It is all of US. This leaves shipping a risky undertaking beyond Gwadar. China is likely to conclude a multipurpose deal of worth \$400 Billion with Iran. In Gulf, this would add high octane fuel to fire because of vital interests of US, highlighted earlier. Supposedly, if US is edged out from Gulf and eventually, from world as a big superpower, apart from China, there could be more contestants for greater role including Turkey. It has already started flexing its muscles.

Beyond 2023, it may have a different standing in the region. The world has seldom adhered to ideal of peaceful co-existence/collective wellbeing which constitutes central theme of BRI. In human history, randomly, there were only 268 years when there was no war. Before embarking upon trade through Arabian Sea, China has jobs to do to help Pakistan in insulating itself against implications of above and secure shipping lanes on Sea. For Pakistan, above needs to be considered seriously to ensure interests of the country first and last before opening trade through CPEC.

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

## POST RAIN SITUATION IN KARACHI SHOWS THERE'S NO GOVT IN SINDH



## Reopening schools: it's complicated

I HUSSAIN

Reopening primary and secondary schools will lead to a rise in community spread of Covid-19. This is the sobering conclusion of the most comprehensive research done to date on the spread of Covid-19 recently completed in South Korea. The South Korean researchers followed up on 5706 people who first showed Covid-19 symptoms in their households between January 20 and March 27 when schools were closed. They traced all 59,073 contacts of these "index cases" by age categories to scope out the proportion of infections within all contacts attributable to each age cohort.

Their research indicates that children between 10 and 19 were the largest source of the spread within the household at 18.6 percent of contacts. In contrast, children nine years old or younger had the lowest rate of household spread at 5.3 percent.

The upshot is that, while children may be less likely to contract Covid-19, they are still at risk of getting infected. More importantly, infected children over ten years of age are as likely as adults to spread the virus. Parents should therefore be concerned that in-person school attendance could lead to their children becoming infected and that children in turn transmit the infection to other family members.

Requiring children to attend classes in person would present challenges that most schools would find difficult to comply with. Many schools are operating in structures not built for the purpose. These are buildings with cramped rooms and poor ventilation where the possibility of social distancing can be ruled out, not to mention the high risk posed by droplets carrying the virus circulating in the classroom and inside school premises.

Whether seated in classrooms or out in the open under tents, children can hardly be expected to wear a mask for hours on end in the searing temperatures that prevail for the better part of the year. As for hygiene considerations, schools – even if they do have toilets with running water – will have an impossible task keeping these clean and ensuring that there is adequate soap for hand washing at all times.

Teachers and school staff over 50 years of age would also be at greater risk of contracting the virus and many are understandably nervous about their physical presence in schools as I found in my conversations with several teachers and school heads.

There are moral concerns also as one school principal indicated that he would be mortified at the possibility of facing a parent whose child had contracted the virus traced to his school even though all possible precautions had been taken. Given the protocols required for schools to operate with even a modicum of safety, many schools will close down rather than bear the extra cost of operating in an environment where revenues will be insufficient to cover the extra costs. The implication is that thousands of children may suddenly find that they have no recourse to any type of formal schooling.

Currently private Pakistani schools catering mostly to upper middle and high income households are holding classes through video conferencing soft-

ware (Zoom or Google Classroom), thereby reaching those students whose families can afford to have a personal computer (PC) or laptop/tablet/smartphone in the house, along with an internet connection.

Even though many teachers are unaware of how to optimize the learning experience through online instruction because they have not been trained to develop and deliver courses online, a small minority of students is nonetheless getting a semblance of instruction. Unfortunately, this has created a kind of educational apartheid which will harm the life chances of millions of children now deprived of education especially those in the rural areas of this country whose families cannot afford the cost of internet connectivity and/or for whom the price of a PC or laptop/tablet is prohibitive (smartphones are not an ideal learning platform given their small screen size).

Of course, schools have to reopen eventually as online instruction is not a substitute for in-class attendance in schools where students do more than just learn – they also form social connections, internalise norms for appropriate social behaviour and participate in sports and outdoor activities that are hugely beneficial for a child's physical and mental wellbeing. These benefits cannot be obtained online. (There is also the question of whether children of up to 7 or 8 years of age are even able to learn online.)

The World Health Organization (WHO) has laid down a criterion for reopening of the economy which is that the positivity rate for Covid-19 tests (the percentage of daily tests conducted that indicate the presence of an infection) should be five percent or less for 14 consecutive days – for each of 100 people tested, the number testing positive should be five or less for 14 consecutive days. There has been enormous psychological and economic damage inflicted worldwide due to the disruption of schooling for millions of children, particularly those in developing countries. Girls' education is particularly at risk as they would likely be asked to attend to household chores instead of devoting time to academic pursuits. Since Covid-19 may be with us for a long time and because there is no guarantee that a vaccine will be developed (even though currently there is a kind of gold rush underway with more than 165 vaccines under development of which 27 are in the human trials phase), the government has to take steps to alleviate the situation.

The measures to be adopted should primarily try and fill the gaps hindering the provision of online instruction to those families least able to afford it. Thus one laptop or tablet should be given to each family that qualifies under the Ehsaas program for government assistance – provided they have at least one child in any government registered school with an attendance rate of over 70 percent over the last calendar year. Further, broadband connectivity should be made available gratis at all government schools and in private registered schools whose average monthly fees per pupil are below a certain level (say Rs500). Students should be allowed free access to broadband through their schools' WiFi network or through any nearby private school with the government providing a subsidy to such schools for costs

## The dismissible

SUSAN BABBITT

When an event is unexplained, it can't be repeated. Cuba's astonishing internationalism, the "good news" of the pandemic, is talked about (outside Cuba) as if a miracle, without cause. Support grows for the Nobel Prize nomination but the justification for the Henry Reeve Brigade, established in 2005, is left out. The explanation is ideas.

It is urgent according to Eddie Glaude in a new book on James Baldwin. Well, he doesn't exactly say that. But for Baldwin, "what kind of human beings we aspire to be" is most important and the explanation for Cuba's success is precisely that.

In Zona Roja, Enrique Ubieta Gómez says Cuban medical workers – fighting Ebola in 2014 – know about existence: We exist interdependently. Ubieta describes Cuban internationalism as an "inescapable ethic". Once you've lived it, you cannot not live it. You know human connection – a fact of science – and you learn its energy.

Ubieta's explanation is existential. Baldwin used similar language. In 1963, he wrote, "Perhaps the whole root of our trouble, the human trouble, is that we ... imprison ourselves ... to deny the fact of death, which is the only fact we have." Glaude supports Baldwin's call to "begin again", with the "America idea", shedding its "old ideas". He might look South. Latin American independistas raised precisely Baldwin's question: how to resist the "lie at the heart of the [imperialist] nation" when it is about "love, life and death", that is, everything.

Truth is not enough. If Galileo had just provided truths, he wouldn't have been condemned. Galileo became threatening when he made those truths plausible with a larger picture of "cosmic humility", contradicting the establishment's comforting identity. One thing we might learn from Galileo, according to astrophysicist Mario Livio in a new book, is that he didn't just observe truths and tell stories about them. His "phenomenal capacity for abstraction" let him see where those truths led.

Truths are easy when unexplained. Consider Olga Tokarczuk's 'Flights'. It gives truth about people traveling everywhere "escaping their own lives, and then being safely escorted right back to them". We see people running through airports with "flushed red faces, their straw hats and souvenir drums and masks and shell necklaces". All this "moving around in a chaotic fashion ... [to] increase their likelihood" of

being in the "right place at the right time" even has meaning. A "travel psychologist" explains that such chaos "appears to call into question the existence of a self understood non-rationally".

It is funny to expect deeper meaning regarding people "moving around in a chaotic fashion" to increase their likelihood of being in the right place at the right time from a "travel psychologist" at an airport between flights. We laugh because we do in fact expect that, absurdly.

We get truth from 'Flights' but it's dismissible. Annushka, for instance, escapes her unbearable life: to "go, sway, walk, run, take flight". She finds happiness when "she does not have a single thought in her head, a single care, a single expectation or hope." She's "happy", free of her identity, her life, her responsibilities. But she is also cold, hungry, dirty, alone, tired, and homeless. The image is silly.

In fact, the idea underlying it is silly, namely, that to have no thoughts, you should have no identity, no responsibilities. It's as pervasive as friction, from which Galileo abstracted to get truth about inertia. In fact, to be happy with no expectations or hope, as Annushka is, is not silly. But understanding how that is so requires a "phenomenal capacity for abstraction" from social expectations.

'Flights' doesn't do that. It responds to an expectation identified by Cuban philosopher and diplomat Raul Roa in 1953 as the "world's gravest crisis". It was indeed the "America idea": Human beings imprisoned in discrete selves, defined by action and results. It is not humanist, as claimed, Roa argues, because it omits "the fact of death", as Baldwin recognized. There were "few dissenters" to the "man of action" during the Renaissance, and Roa saw there would now be none because of US power.

Baldwin tried to escape that power by living outside the US. He struggled with what it had "made of him". But "American power follows one everywhere". Emily Dickinson, "the greatest poet in the English language", abstracts from expectations 'Flights' dignifies. According to biographer Martha Ackman, Dickinson lived as if busyness and travel is not progress. She never apologized for, nor defended, the priority she gave to silence and solitude. As result, we get truth from her poetry: about what it means to be human. For, she was in fact not detached from a world she never visited physically or had any desire to. She lived as if isolation and detachment are not synonymous.