

The Business

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Spirit of sacrifice

While commemorating the supreme sacrifice rendered by Hazrat Ibrahim (AS) we need to ponder upon its inner meaning. What is sacrifice? A mother sacrifices her sleep for her children. A father sacrifices his comfort for his son. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) himself has been the embodiment of sacrifice all his life. The sacrifice of the animals is apparently a ritual but the essence lies far beyond. Ceremonies or festivals bring people together. They are means of social cohesion and solidarity. The real purpose of Eid-ul-Azha is to create a caring and sharing society and deepen community feelings. However, many people miss the real significance of this day because they confuse it with materialistic assumptions. Some people indulge in the worldly pleasure of outdoing each other in the number of animals sacrificed and make a big show of distributing meat and feasting the poor as a status symbol. It must be clearly understood that Eid-ul-Azha is not for ostentation, but for the Muslims to learn the significance of self-denial by making a sacrifice of something precious to themselves, as Hazrat Ibrahim (AS) did. When Allah, saw that the Prophet was ready to sacrifice what he loved most for Him, He ordered the angel Jibrail to substitute a ram for Ismail. Hazrat Ibrahim's (AS) unparalleled act of faith and submission to the will of Allah have left an imperishable symbol which is a source of inspiration for all times to come. People demand that such a holy and at the same time festive occasion as the Eid, must not be allowed to be soiled by people who make a profit out of the losses that buyers have borne because of their religious fervour and who have had to pay high prices for their sacrificial animals. The collection of sacrificial animals' skins is an old custom here. In the past, the jihadi groups used to vie for these hides. Another problem that arises after this Eid is that of cleanliness. Apart from the arrangements that the government has made to remove the waste afterwards, the public should also do their duty by helping to dispose off the waste. After all, 'cleanliness is half of faith'. This time the coronavirus has created another serious situation of cleanliness and social distancing. It must be adhered to in order to avoid its speedy spread.

The occasion of Eid-ul-Azha clearly demands that we renew our faith in the principles of piety, devotion and sacrifice. The true spirit of Eid asks for serving and sharing our good fortune with the less-privileged and the poor. If one realises that right actions come from right thinking and right direction, and controlling one's impulses and emotions, our lives would be completely transformed. Eid-ul-Azha should serve to renew a sense of consecration towards Allah and rejuvenation of the universal fraternity among the Muslims.

One nation, one curriculum, many questions

DR KHURRAM BHATTI

A few days ago, there was an online session with Professor Pervez Hoodbhoy and Dr Mariam Chughtai, member of the National Curriculum Council, on the proposed 'Single National Curriculum' (SNC). While the session was informative, the discussion ended up fixating on the issue of religion, and other critical issues fell by the wayside. So, let us return to the basics.

Since the PTI came to power in 2018, it has identified a 'Single National Curriculum' as its central education agenda. However, to date there has been no clarity as to what it actually meant. Historically, Pakistan has had several 'National Education' policies, with limited degrees of success. The last 'National Policy' was formulated in 2006, and since then there has been no national policy because education is now a provincial subject under the 18th Amendment, and so each province is supposed to have its own policy, as in all federal countries. So, what is the government's plan then?

According to what Dr Chughtai noted in that debate, the 'Single National Curriculum,' is neither 'single,' nor 'national' nor a 'curriculum' — and a mere new name for the 'National Education' Policy. Continuing previous practice, the SNC is a set of curriculum guidelines, which the provinces are free to accept or decline. She clearly noted that the SNC creates a 'floor' not a ceiling, and therefore schools, especially private schools,

are free to adapt it to their needs.

The previous policies also created a 'floor,' and provided guidelines, and so there is nothing new here. In fact, she mentioned that the learning outcomes of the SNC are the 'same' as the 2006 ones, meaning that except for the upgradation for the last decade or so there has been no real change in them. Dr Chughtai also mentioned that there will be no 'single' textbook coming out of this, only a 'model' textbook, which again the provinces, private schools, madrasahs etc are free to use, but it won't be imposed. This also conforms to previous practice. In fact, in Balochistan textbooks made by the Punjab Textbook Board have been long used. Thus, what is being proposed is a set of guidelines, with a model textbook — and provinces can either utilise it completely, or adapt it to their needs. Similarly, madrasahs and private schools can have their own textbooks, provided they meet the minimum standards, as is the case presently.

The cerise sur le gateau was where Dr Chughtai elaborated that the SNC has nothing to do with the prevailing multiple systems of education in this country which will remain as they are. She said, 'we are not making an equal system, we are making equal standards, which will serve as a baseline.' Her remarks only further confused an already not-so-clear agenda of the exercise.

Now to some problems: First, is the manner in which the SNC is being made. Dr Chughtai repeatedly mentioned the participation of 400 people,

but despite several search attempts, there is no publicly available list of those people. Since a gathering of 400 people doesn't legitimise anything by mere numbers or their distribution across provinces, it would be good to know who and with what expertise were people involved. After all, the textbook boards have a large number of 'experts' involved and yet have been very successful in coming up with standard books. So, some transparency would be appreciated.

Second, and most important, problems with previous national policies remain in the current one. Foremost is the issue of the medium of instruction: expecting school children in public schools (where the SNC will be implemented largely), to understand maths and science in English at the primary level is wishful thinking. As Professor Hoodbhoy pointed out, the lack of language skills make pupils rote learn such subjects, to no real use.

Furthermore, Dr Chughtai claimed that the religious context of the curriculum beyond the Islamiyat class has been curtailed. I hope that is the case, but the introduction of a separate Quran class, in addition to Islamiyat, increases the content patently. Religious content in Urdu, Pakistan Studies, and Social Studies textbooks also remains an issue. With the proposed influx of madrasah graduates into public schools teaching Islamiyat, the issue of the madrasahisation of schools also still remains.

Third, Dr Chughtai claimed that 'implementation' was not the domain of

the National Curriculum Council, yet this is one of the most central planks of any policy! Pakistan has suffered not from a lack of good policies, but a lack of proper implementation. No matter how good the curriculum, if the teachers are not trained and prepared, and the schools have no supporting infrastructure, the policy remains pious utterances, with no real effect. Hence, the 'policy' has to walk with the 'reality.'

Our previous policies failed not because they were intrinsically flawed, but because they failed at the implementation level. With only six months before the primary school curriculum has to be rolled out, there is no realistic plan for implementation.

However, there must be a robust and open public debate about its several issues. Should education again be federalised and capacities not developed in the provinces to be self-sufficient in this subject? Should the prime focus be a newer curriculum (or guidelines) and not the immense problems in infrastructure and human capital development through rigorous training, which ultimately fails it? Should there be religious content in non-religion classes? And what approach to language acquisition should be adopted to ensure students learn rather than rote-learn? The main reason private schools do well in Pakistan is because they holistically tackle the subject, and combine a good curriculum with teacher training and student learning. Under the SNC they will continue exactly as before, and yet it will be the madrasah.

Make accountability great (again?)

HAIDER WAHEED

To assess the sheer enormity of the task of reforming the National Accountability Bureau, one must read the Supreme Court's recent landmark judgment in Saad Rafique's civil petition for bail in the Paragon City reference.

To end the blatant miscarriages of justice described by the Supreme Court in the above judgment, (i) a system of external checks and balances must be created whereby the excesses and abuses of the accountability watchdog itself must be controlled; (ii) the NAB law (the National Accountability Ordinance, 1999) needs to be amended by parliament, especially as the original law was never enacted by parliament; and (iii) the institution must undertake the internal restructuring and capacity building it direly needs.

To address the issue of partial accountability, at present the burden to externally check NAB is on the judiciary and on the accountability courts in particular but it is the need of the hour for the courts to share this burden with parliament by having a bipartisan parliamentary committee with half its members from the opposition to supervise the activities of NAB. And just as the chairperson of NAB is appointed by the president in consultation with the leader of the house and the leader of the opposition in the National Assembly, so too should the prosecutor general accountability.

Regarding amendments to the NAB ordinance, at the outset, it should be noted that the NAB Ordinance is retrospectively applicable from January 1, 1985 even though 35-year-old offences cannot realistically be proved beyond reasonable doubt due to lack of reliable evidence — the sheer length of the time period being beyond the record keeping requirements of all laws in Pakistan including corporate and tax laws. One only needs to cursorily glance at the references filed against Mir Shakil-ur-Rahman for example to conclude that a conviction is highly unlikely and in the conspicuous absence of legal merits, the zeal and vigour displayed by NAB manifestly evince an intention to restrict press freedom by ancillary means. To curb this practice, a limitation period should therefore be added to the NAB Ordinance restricting NAB from conducting an inquiry, investigation or reference after the passing of seven years from the date of the transaction or act constituting the offence.

Given the entrenched perception of NAB being utilized for political purposes, all references especially against politicians and public office holders ought to be unanimously approved by all members of the NAB Executive Board including the chairperson of NAB and the prosecutor general accountability.

In order to prevent NAB resources from being squandered in the investigation of private or minor offences which are more suitably handled by other law enforcement and regulatory authorities, the NAB Ordinance should not apply to cases involving less

than one billion rupees; or to subject matter not involving any property or funds of the federal or provincial government; or to private persons (persons not holding public office) unless a private person has given gratification to a public office holder or is a benamidar of a public office holder. Further, applicability of the NAB Ordinance must expressly exclude taxation matters, regulatory matters and decisions of the federal and provincial cabinets or any other policymaking statutory body established under law.

Wilful default, cheating and breach of trust are already offences under other laws and should not also constitute corruption offences under the NAB Ordinance, thereby putting an accused twice in jeopardy. Assets beyond known sources of income is an overly broad offence under the NAB Ordinance that trespasses into the domain of undisclosed assets under income tax law. Only if assets are acquired through corruption or corrupt practices should the same constitute an offence. In the Avenfield reference against Nawaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz, for example, the conviction for possession of assets beyond known sources of income was solely based on assumptions and inferences regarding the two-decade old paper trail of the Avenfield apartments without ascertaining details and sources of his income and as noted in the judgment of the Accountability Court itself, no evidence was ever proffered that the Avenfield apartments were the result of corruption. Unsurprisingly, the sentence in that case was suspended by the Islamabad High Court.

The bar against bail by the Accountability Courts must be removed; if nothing else this will lessen the burden on the superior judiciary which is unnecessarily inundated with routine bail matters. NAB's unilateral power to freeze or attach property must be removed and be vested in the Accountability Court and exercised after affording the accused an opportunity to deposit surety in lieu of the property sought to be attached. Additionally, in case of bank accounts, the court should be empowered to allow withdrawals to meet the necessary expenditures of the accused.

The NAB Ordinance provides that cases shall be heard from day to day and shall be disposed of within thirty days which, as the chairman of NAB recently conceded, is not possible to comply with. If anything, rushed trials merely serve to undermine the right to due process of the accused as guaranteed by Article 10-A of the constitution. A more realistic and balanced time-frame of six months should be considered.

The NAB chairman's arbitrary powers to arrest should be extinguished and a person should only be arrested on orders of the court. To ensure the integrity of the investigation process, the accused should have the right to have legal counsel present during interrogation which should be recorded on video; and NAB officials should be barred by law from making public statements regarding a person until a reference has been filed in court.



Battling the 'hunger virus'

SENATOR DR SHAHZAD WASEEM

The deadly and disruptive Covid-19 pandemic has brought to the fore the fragility of human life as well the fissures and weaknesses in the global economic, trade and healthcare systems, social fabric and disaster response mechanisms.

The pandemic also spawned socio-economic ramifications as the 'hunger virus'. A significant proportion of the world's population living close, on or below the poverty line struggled even to get food, let alone other necessities. This view is also supported by a July 9 Oxfam publication, 'The hunger virus: how Covid-19 is fuelling hunger in a hungry world', which says that Covid-19 is deepening the hunger crisis in the world's hunger hotspots and creating new epicenters of hunger across the globe.

The complete lockdown policy, as we have also seen in India and other parts of the world, did not turn out to be socio-economically viable or sustainable. The New York Times, in an

article, outlined the failure of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. Also Tim Sebastian, in one of his 'Conflict Zone' segments on DW TV, severely berated the Indian government for the hasty and ill-planned March 24 lockdown that left millions of workers in cities stranded without jobs, shelter, food and means of transport.

However, Pakistan, as per Prime Minister Imran Khan's vision, quite early on realized that a complete lockdown was not a sustainable and viable solution. Therefore, the PTI government, keeping in view the economic challenges as well as hardships being faced by the common citizen, prioritised providing relief to the common man, labourers, daily-wage earners, poor people, traders and the business community. In this regard, the policy of 'smart lockdown' was strategically implemented, based on real time data and targeting only those localities where a higher incidence of the disease was observed or reported. A 'testing, tracing and quarantining' (TTQ) strategy

is being employed as part of the containment strategy.

The 'smart lockdown' was not an easy decision, and proved to be a test of strong leadership and nerves amidst scathing criticism from different quarters. However, as the world also acknowledged later on, it proved to be the most effective and pro-people approach to tackle the pandemic. The Bloomberg news agency also termed the smart lockdown approach the only hope of returning to a more normal life as the world awaits a vaccine. Also, Business Standard, a Bangladesh-based news platform, while lauding Prime Minister Imran Khan's policy of smart lockdown, stated that "But now as the results show that the measure works, many developing nations are also promoting the policy".

Pakistan, despite meager resources and economic difficulties, efficiently handled the pandemic situation through visionary leadership, realistic and futuristic policies, self-reliance and effective coordination between federal and provincial health authorities despite 'health' being a devolved subject post the

18th Amendment.

Through tailor-made strategies, the capacities of our healthcare institutions were enhanced along with our testing capabilities and number of laboratories. Indigenous capacities were built, as a result of which Pakistan is now not only manufacturing ventilators and PPE, but also exporting the same. The NCOC proved to be a nerve centre to synergize and articulate unified national efforts against Covid-19. Taking another step in the right direction, Prime Minister Imran Khan launched the Ehsaas Emergency Cash programme in order to provide cash assistance to millions of poor people who lost their jobs due to the outbreak. The driving idea behind the economic stimulus initiative was to support small businesses and protect the livelihoods labourers and other workers. The Covid-19 pandemic also proved to be a test of leadership around the world. In the South Asian context, Prime Minister Modi's weak leadership and mishandling of the situation was severely exposed and widely criticized.

Letters to the Editor

Haj with SOPs

Pilgrimage, a process of being forgotten from sins that have been done from birth. In Saudi Arabia the sacred place of Muslims known as holy house of ALLAH and called as KABBA was closed only because of this corona situation, everyone was frightened that pilgrimage will not be done this year but Saudi government did a great job and bucked up Muslims all over the world. Pilgrimage was performed in Saudi Arabia yesterday, with complete follow up for SOPs and hygiene maintaining social distance and masks. As Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) said to His companion that "Cleanliness is half faith". Islam stresses for physical and spiritual cleanliness and purification. From this Hadith we take a message that the SOPs we follow for corona — must be used in daily life. It is a tough job for a govern-

ment to handle and keep alive SOPs for thousands of Muslims at the same time and same location. But Muslims got a chance to prostrate in Creator's Holy place. Hoping that this action will be continued till the day of judgement.

Suhail Saeed Tunio
KARACHI

Utilitarian approach

Almost a century old philosophical theory still possesses an impact in 21st century. We all have heard about the phrase "For greater Good" this statement shows the utilitarian approach but the question here is why I am bringing this up now?

And the answer is that we all had our pause in the pandemic and as we are recovering back, we might think of fresh start. Almost every country got affected by the corona and they used this

opportunity to detect faults in their system, whether its political, technical, economical or transportation.

They all had it and no matter how hard the decisions were, they took it and outshone like a diamond in the rough. So far the condition, we had here because of corona, was never letting anyone step out and lead but as we are recovering back with only 32000 active cases. The government should look for new strategies to develop the economics and entrepreneurial awareness, at any cost.

That's what utilitarianism is about, getting your hand dirty now for a better future. A leap of faith should be taken for all department which are struggling now and eliminate those factors which possess a negative impact. It may sound fantastic but a hard decisions now, will save us from future regression of it.

Mian Aizaz Ahmed
MIROKHAN