

The Business

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## ML-1 project approval

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council's (Ecnec's) approval of the Mainline-1 (ML-1) railway project will benefit the economy as a whole. The railway department is broken down enough to be the text book example of the typical State-Owned Enterprise (SOE) brought to its knees by decades of corruption and political opportunism. It needs all the help it can get whether it is in terms of fresh tracks or new trains to help with transportation of people as well as goods. For the longest time successive governments focused on land transport, which is among the most expensive forms of conveyance, instead of upgrading the railways network through the years. In doing that we ignored the unwritten principle of the business, that for every one passenger train you need at least five to six cargo trains to remain profitable. Yet for all sorts of reasons like gaining political mileage authorities have been constantly adding to the fleet of passenger trains, much to the neglect of cargo trains. The result has been increased transport of goods through highways, which involves wear and tear of the roads and is thus a further drag on the budget.

The railways department has been suffering huge losses for years, and projects like ML-1 should go a long way in relieving it of some of the stress that it currently faces. Even within the CPEC framework the ML-1 is the only strategic project being finalised as part of the initial deal worth \$46 billion. It includes dualisation and upgradation of the 1,872 km railway track from Peshawar to Karachi and counts as a major milestone for the second phase of CPEC. Apparently, the government has been very careful in fine-tuning the financing of the project, lest it upsets the debt ceiling calculus arranged with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). It turns out that Ecnec's approval opens the door to loan negotiations with Beijing, which according to news reports will finance 90 percent of the total cost.

Now, with more and more of the infrastructure needed for CPEC taking shape all the time, the feeling that things are moving in the right direction is constantly reinforced. Let's not forget that the whole process of erecting the entire infrastructure is capital- as well as labour-intensive and creates lots of jobs for the economy, so there are lasting benefits for the government as well as the people. Just as things have improved on the Covid-19 front there are clear signs that the government has made all the right moves at the right time to give the economy as much of a push as possible. It will not be too long before some of the steps taken now begin to bear fruit.

## Letters to the Editor Laudable efforts

It has been nearly six months since the first case of the coronavirus was detected in Pakistan. All indicators suggest that the number of cases have started to decline in the country. With the number of cases continuously declining, Covid-19 patients recovering at a fast rate and the closure of critical units made especially for Covid-19 patients, it seems that the measures taken by the government have been successful so far. At present, there are more than 20,000 active cases in the country. The National Command and Operation Centre played a major role to curb the spread of the deadly virus. Healthcare professionals also played a key role to deal with the situation and that too in the absence of protective gears. Now, we must have a look at what other countries are doing to contain the spread of the virus. The authorities should make it compulsory for people to wear a mask when they go out and practice social distancing. We have to follow all SOPs to avoid the second wave. It is the duty of every Pakistani to follow the instructions of the government.

Abid Hussain Samejo  
UMERKOT

## Suffering in silence

One of the most sensitive social issues in Pakistan is discrimination and violence against the transgender community. The plight of the transgender community in Pakistan remains invisible. Members of the community are still neglected by the government that does nothing to ensure that they have basic rights. From jobs to education to proper healthcare, trans people don't have access to basic facilities. It is the duty of every Pakistani to support all marginalised communities as they fight for respect and equality. And as feminists, we believe that we need to keep fighting for gender-based services and resources together.

Irma Yousuf  
KARACHI

## Road accidents

The number of road accidents in Loralai, Balochistan has increased rapidly. Overspeeding has been a major cause of fatal road accidents that end up claiming the lives of people. Every other day, we listen to the news of a collision between a car and a truck driver. The traffic authorities have to introduce more strict rules to ensure the smooth flow of traffic and to reduce the number of road accidents. The traffic police must make sure that everyone is following traffic rules and forbid them strictly for overspeeding. Also, anyone who is not 18 or older should not be allowed to drive.

Farahnaz Farooq Ahmed  
TURBAT

# Changing dynamics of Iran-Israel conflict

GEN MIRZA ASLAM BEG

General Qasim Solemani of Iran was assassinated, blaming him and Iran for the death of many American soldiers. Soon after, American and Israeli forces deployed to punish Iran. Instead of direct confrontation, Iran preferred a 'strategy of deterrence': "If Iran was attacked, the response would begin with massive use of free flight rockets, missiles and drones from several directions to degrade the iron-dome air defence system of Israel as well as the public morale, followed by explosive loaded vehicles to breach the barrier at multiple places and the suicide bombers rushing forward through the breaches, to cause fear, panic and rout to the enemy."

The deterrence forecast existential threat to Israel, forcing retreat, including the fleet blocking the Persian Gulf. A 'Stealth Strategy' was therefore developed to harm Iran through punishing strikes at several targets. Reportedly the 5th generation F-35 air superiority stealth fighter aircraft was used against which Iran has no defence: "Israel has apparently been conducting what amounts to a slow motion, semi-covert military campaign against Iran's nuclear and missile programmes, and perhaps other industrial and infrastructure targets as well. Mysterious explosions and fires have struck a key centrifuge production facility; a military base where missiles are produced, as well as power plants, aluminum and chemical factories. A fire

erupted at the port of Bushehr on the Persian Gulf, destroying seven ships." Similarly, Hizbollah was targeted with a huge blast in Lebanon, as punishment for causing defeat to Israel in 2006 war. The tri-lateral US-Israel-Arab Strategic Alliance, called Abraham Accord, is exploiting the Shia-Sunni divide, to isolate Iran. Ever since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, USA has demonized Iran as a threat to the Sunni Arab countries, who have been buying weapons and military hardware from USA, worth billions of dollars. Now as, the threat becomes focused, there would be a spree of defence purchases from Israel, in particular.

The diplomatic offensive of Israel-UAE Agreement - Abraham Accord has ruptured decades of Arab unity. The deal also reverses the order of diplomatic offensive by the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002." Under this treaty Egypt and Jordan recognized Israel but they stand cheated, now. As a matter of fact a creeping annexation is already underway, that would dash all hopes for the two nations' strategy. Oman, Bahrain and Sudan appear more interested in establishing diplomatic ties with Israel. As a matter of fact "a tri-lateral US-Israel-Arab strategic alliance is shaping up against Iran, seeking a cynical alliance and not benevolent peace."

**Iranian response:** In response, Iran lost no time forging the Strategic Defence Partnership with China.

This Partnership has kicked-up a geopolitical storm, defining the contours of the New World Order. China has suc-

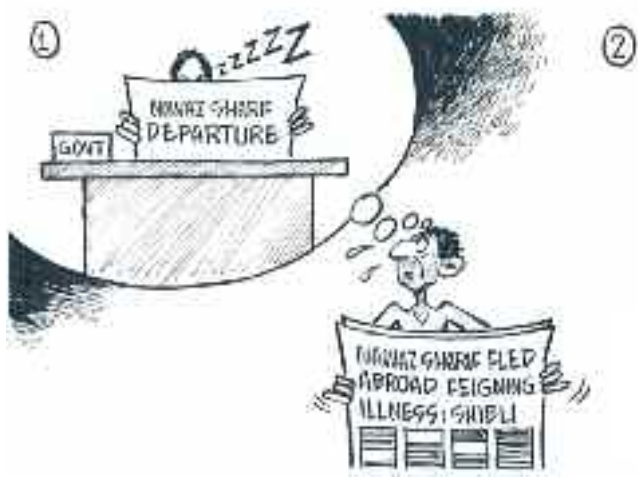
ceeded building a financial system that bypasses the US and its "maximum pressure" policy. It is for the first time that the Chinese "Economic Order" has created the Economic Deterrence which provides security to Iran, and to all those who come under the security umbrella of this order. The Chinese "economic order", has created a meaningful "Economic Deterrence" against the forces of aggression. It provides security to Iran, against the US-Israeli stealth strategy. The United States displayed the strategy of "Shock and Awe" and "Extreme Pressure" over the last four decades, decimating several Muslim countries, killing over eight million Muslims, now is engaged with Israel, against Iran, putting the entire Middle East in a state of turmoil. Indeed a dangerous juxtaposition of events has emerged, creating a complex situation. Thus "the political and strategic blue-print which is being drawn in the Middle East, is pushing Arabs into an undiminished mutual enmity and an internecine war that would benefit Israel." At present Iran is vulnerable to Israeli attacks by its air superiority aircrafts F-35 fighters and accurate intelligence. It is a matter of time that China develops the capability to counter this threat, which is so critical for Iran. The Chinese J-20 also is a 5th generation stealth jet fighter. It may or may not be able to challenge the American F-35, but knowing that the China can shoot-down a satellite in the outer-space, it should not be difficult for them to develop the capability to shoot-down the F-35. When that hap-

pens, Israeli "Stealth Strategy" will fade away, which rests at the cutting edge of technology, as of now.

Options for Pakistan: The American and Saudi factor would be compelling for Pakistan to take a neutral stance, notwithstanding Chinese open-hearted support both to Pakistan and Iran. However, now we must start thinking about our "deterrent capability" other than the nuclear. The cost of a conventional deterrence is the actual difference between the cost of a free-flight rocket and a patriot missile. Our best wishes are for the Arabs, seeking peace with Israel but not at the cost of Palestinians blood. The moment of truth will soon arrive, when the Israeli Prime Minister visits UAE, and their national anthem is played, relaying the message from Tel Aviv:

"Let those who are our enemy shudder. Let all the inhabitants of Egypt and Canaan tremble. Let the inhabitants of Babylon shudder. To loom over their skies, panic and terror from us, When we plant our spears in their chests, And we see their blood being shed, And their heads cut off." (Jo chup rahy gi zuban-e-khanjar, Lahoo pukarey ga aasteen ka). The stains of blood on the mortal hands, convey "the divine verdict" (Quran, Surah Al-Hajj (22) verse 40), that the Nazi's could not liquidate the Jews, the Jews cannot curb Palestinians resolve for freedom and the Indians cannot crush the Kashmiri struggle for right of self-determination.

— The writer, a retired 4-star Gen, is former COAS, Pakistan Army.



## All about good governance

DR A Q KHAN

The last two days have been full of self-praise by the ruling party. The public has yet again been taken for a ride and we are all now ma'moon. Our ears are tired of hearing about turning this "rotten-to-the-core" country into a Madina-like state. Read the books on Hazrat Umar bin Al-Khattab, the Second Caliph, and then the history of the administration of Hazrat Umar bin Abdul Aziz.

Here are a few examples of good administration, justice and counsel, as explained by the great, famous, wise man, Shaikh Saadi of Shiraz in his famous book 'Bostan' (a free rendering of the translation by Richard Francis Burton) "The goodness of God is beyond imagination; what service then can the tongue of praise perform? Keep, O God, this king, Abu Bakr, beneath whose shadow is the protection of the people, long established upon his throne and make his heart live in obedience to you. Render fruitful his tree of hope, prolong his youth and adorn his face with mercy.

"O King! Deck not yourself in royal garments when you come to worship; make your supplications like a dervish saying: 'O God! Powerful and strong you are. I am no monarch but a beggar in your court. Unless you help sustain me, what can I do? Help me and give me the means of virtue, or else how can I benefit my people?' If you rule by day, pray fervently by night. The great among your servants wait upon you at your door; you should serve in the same way with your head in worship upon God's threshold."

"Noushiravan, when at the point of death, counselled his son, Hormuz: 'Cherish the poor and seek not your own comfort. The shepherd should not sleep while the wolf is among the sheep. Protect the needy, for a king wears his crown for the sake of his subjects. The people are as the root and the king is as the tree; and the tree, O son, gains strength from the roots. He should not oppress the people. Do not look for plenteousness in that land where the people are afflicted by a misguided king. Fear those who are proud and those who do not fear God."

"There once landed at a seaport in Arabia a man who had widely travelled and was versed in many sciences. He presented himself to the king who was so captivated by his wisdom and knowledge that he appointed the traveller as vizier. With such skill did he perform his duties that he offended no one and brought

the kingdom completely beneath his sway. He closed the mouths of slanderers because nothing evil issued from his hand and the envious, who could detect no fault in him, bemoaned their lack of opportunity to harm him. "At the court there were two beautiful young slaves towards whom he displayed affection. The former vizier, who had been dismissed to make room for the newcomer, maliciously said to the king. 'This new minister does not live chastely' he said. 'I have heard that he intrigues lustfully with two of your slaves. I am not so unmindful of the favours that I have received at your hands that I should see this and remain silent.' Angered by what he heard, the king stealthily watched the new vizier and when he observed him and one of the slaves exchange glances, his suspicion at once became confirmed. Summoning the minister, he said: 'I did not think you would be shameless and unworthy. This lofty position is not your proper place, but I am to blame.

If I retain one who is evil by nature, assuredly I would be sanctioning disloyalty in my house.' "Since I am free of guilt" the vizier replied, 'I fear not my accuser.' "When told that the accuser was the former vizier, he said: 'I am not surprised. What else would any envious man say when he has been replaced? If you are willing to listen, I will tell you a story. In a dream, someone saw the Prince of Evil - erect as a fir tree with a face as fair as the sun.

The sleeper said: 'O splendid being! Mankind knows not how beautiful you are. Fearful of countenance they imagine you and hideously have you been depicted on the walls of public baths.' The Prince of Evil replied: 'the pencil was in the hand of the enemy! I threw them out of Paradise, now they malign me.' In the same way, the vizier said, they do the same to me.

"But the king was angry. 'Have I not seen with my own eyes the way you look at those two slaves?' 'That is true' said the vizier, 'but like a beggar eyes the rich with envy. Once I too possessed grace and beauty but now look at me - old and toothless! Why may I not glance with envy and recall my past?'

The king was convinced by this pearl of truth. 'To carry the hand to the sword quickly leads to regret,' he said. Admonishing the slanderer for his evil words, the king further increased the dignity of the vizier, who directed the affairs of the state for many years with justice and benevolence and was long remem-

## Israel-UAE Abraham Accord-2020

IMTIAZ RAFI BUTT

When a Palestinian man was asked about the normalization of diplomatic relations and peace agreement between UAE and Israel, with anger in his eyes he said, "We have been stabbed in the back".

After Egypt and Jordan, UAE is now the third country to have recognized, legitimized and initiated diplomatic ties with the state of Israel. Palestinians had no part in the negotiations. Benjamin Netanyahu and Donald Trump have hailed the Abraham Accord as a diplomatic breakthrough after decades. The Western countries have rallied behind the United States for brokering the agreement and moving a step further in giving legitimacy to Israel's occupation. The pretext given by UAE is that as a result of the Abraham Accord, Israel will suspend annexation of the West Bank, temporarily, to say the least.

This peace agreement and normalization of relations by a rich Muslim/Arab country is a massive diplomatic blow to the cause of Gaza and Palestine. Once again, it seems that significance of strategic alliance, benefits of commerce and power have taken over ideals of justice, human rights, brotherhood and freedom. Today, the world is a little more insecure and unjust than before.

The most critical factor to be considered when analyzing the Abraham Accord is its timing. Covid-19 pandemic has done unprecedented damage to the economies of both the United States and Israel and leaders of both nations have failed to mount an appropriate response to the outbreaks. Millions of jobs have been lost. The health infrastructure has failed to produce the required results. Trump is even in more hot waters than Netanyahu who barely made it out of corruption charges. In America, the Black Lives Matter movement has polarized the electorate in favor of the Democrats unless a miracle campaign turns it around. Both leaders needed a diplomatic victory and UAE was pushed with the right incentives to come forward. Without a doubt, the UAE-Israel agreement will be used in the United States and Israel to score points and win voters. The ties between UAE and Israel were already established through the back-door channels. 2020 was the right time to bring out the relationship as a spectacular breakthrough, obviously for motives that have nothing to do with peace in the Middle East.

The second important feature to consider is what the peace agreement means for UAE. In 1971, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan referred to Israel as the enemy. As they say, "the apple has fallen far away from the tree", Prince Muhammad bin Zayed has now opened the country to diplomatic, trade, defense and commercial ties. It should not come as a surprise that shortly after the announcement of the Peace Agreement; the United States unveiled the sale of advanced F-35 jets to UAE. That is a short term benefit. UAE is a rich country with oil and massive trade opportunities. The trade between UAE and Israel is only 3 Million Dollars which will now be boosted to around 350 Million Dollars. Israel has been provided by the US with state-of-the-art technology in defense and Warfare which will now be shared with UAE. Further, Israel is the hub of Jewish business bloc which will create new opportunities for the UAE. With deep pockets, UAE can pay for a new range of weaponry and technology and Israel would be more than ready to provide the equipment needed. This is apart from the geo-strategic implications of the peace agreement. Saudi Arabia and UAE have held close relations with the United States and now with Israel in countering the influence of Iran and Turkey in the region. Iran, despite sanctions and economic deprivation has man-

aged to exercise a forceful presence in the Middle East. In Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, the Iranian influence continues to grow. Also, Iran remains the most dominant threat to Israel occupation in support of Hezbollah and Hamas. UAE has dived into diplomatic ties with Israel in hopes to create a defense line against Iran. Although, Iran has never posed any threat to the UAE, still, an alliance with the likes of United States and Israel would prove to be a significant step in becoming a major power in the region. The cause of Palestine has been put on the back burner to ensure regional prowess. The diplomatic cover being used by UAE is that as a result of the peace agreement, Israel will temporarily suspend the annexation of Palestinian lands into Israel. The emphasis is on the word "temporarily". Donald Trump in his Oval Office Press Conference termed the annexation of West Bank into Israel as suspended, for the time being. Erdogan of Turkey had only one word to comment on the UAE pretext for the Peace Accord; "disgraceful". Ironically, on the other hand, UAE continues to support military campaigns in Yemen and Libya to kill fellow Muslims.

The Abraham Accord has come as a shock to the people of Palestine. This is a black day for people suffering at the hands of the Israeli army. This diplomatic victory for Israel will reverberate in the United Nations. It creates the narrative for more countries to recognize Israel and legitimize its occupation. Egypt fought four wars with Israel for Palestine and Jordan has fought three wars with Israel. With the support of the United States, they could not succeed and with pressure tactics, Egypt resumed diplomatic ties with Israel in 1979 and Jordan in 1994. But UAE has no border with Israel. It has never gone to war for Palestine. It is a far off nation that is rich and prosperous. The Abraham Accord will force the Palestinian argument of independence and liberation of their occupied lands into further submission. Following the announcement, Palestinians took to the streets in protest and heavy fire resumed from the Israeli side. The next day, Israeli jets bombed the Gaza strip injuring scores of civilians. The World is closer to diffraction with the Abraham Accord. The plight of Palestinians forgotten and voices of justice, morality and freedom simply ignored. The Arab-US-Israel Tri-lateral alliance against Iran and Turkey is soon to be a reality.

This alliance is heavily up against a formidable alliance between China, Iran and Russia. China is set to unveil its own defense and trade coalition to counter United States satellite countries, although, China for now has accepted and welcomed the Abraham Accord. Many smaller countries will be forced to choose sides. Following the announcement, Imran Khan came out as a leader of ideals. In his message, he clearly created the same argument for Palestine which he expounds for Kashmir. Self-determination for Palestinians is the voice of Pakistanis. Protests have broken out in condemnation of UAE-Israel agreement in many cities across the country. Pakistan as a country has gone through its own crisis of diplomatic corners dealing with the Western bloc, especially the United States.

The autocrats of the Arab World are making deals that are against the wishes of their people. Pakistan as a truly democratic country is committed to the idea of Muslim unity and freedom for Palestine. After the response message from the Government of Pakistan, the embassy of Palestine in Islamabad formally gave a vote of thanks to the people of Pakistan. In pursuit of progress, power and influence, sacrificing the voice and freedom of Muslim brethren is not the forte of the people of Pakistan. Freedom for Palestine!

The Writer is Chairman