

The Business

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Stunting incidents

Prime Minister Imran Khan has been stressing about the growing incidents of stunting in Pakistan since long before he became prime minister. Noted London-based intellectual of high repute Tariq Ali, among others, has been consistently highlighting this challenge. The prime minister also made a point of talking about it, and the harm it does to our children and the future of the country, in his first official address to the nation after winning the election. So it is great news indeed that his government hasn't gone on to disappoint and recently at the first meeting of the Pakistan National Nutritional Coordination Council (PNCC), he was informed that the Ehsaas Development Dashboard would start working across the country immediately and soon provide detailed data on the issue. Going by official figures at least 45 percent of the country's children suffer from stunting, while for Sindh the figure is somewhere between 50 and 60 percent. Yet the United Nations made some noise about the issue as well in the early 2000s and put the overall number nearer 60 percent. Therefore, the decision to conduct a country-wide data analysis is the right way to proceed. Everybody understands the nature of the problem, but only when its depth is properly analysed will it be possible to allocate necessary resources and build a workable timeline.

When the odds are that 40 to 60 percent of the whole country's children are stunted, most of them born this way, it becomes a national medical as well as an economic emergency. For Pakistan's high population rate is very much a problem but it also provides the country with a potentially large workforce, a very big chunk of which is fortunately quite young, which means that the difficulty can be turned into an advantage with proper planning. However, the so-called demographic dividend suddenly becomes a demographic disaster when the state is unable to equip that workforce with the skills required for a national economic transformation. It's a big enough problem that the country has failed so badly in providing quality education to even a fraction of its population, but things become that much worse when even the few that can be taught at least the basics are incapable of learning because of medical and health issues that should have been addressed decades ago.

Much of Pakistan's population lives just around the poverty line and even many of those that earn slightly better are forced to endure appalling living conditions. The process of identifying all the people in need, many of whom will be expecting mothers and little children, then developing workable interventions, and then monitoring the progress will require patience and dedication. But with the centre more than willing to assist the provinces in any way possible, and the prime minister himself so centrally involved, there is no reason for things not to begin to get better sooner rather than later.

Letters to the Editor

Bright-eyed and bushy-tailed

The longer we delay, the more we will pay. Parents have high expectations for their Graduate children regarding their future. Annually 530,000 students completed their Graduation degree from different universities in Pakistan. Although public service commission exacerbate delaying in their recruitment process. First and foremost, Federal public service commission takes two to three years in final allocation. A cogent example worth mentioning in this regard, Advertisement case No-150/2018 comes in my mind this recruitment is still under process onward from 2018 and the interview list could not be finalized yet. Moreover, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa public service commission is sleeping like a log. A primary example worth mentioning in this regard is Advertisement 4/2018. Recruitment of Assistant sub inspectors in Police department is Still under process and did not conduct the descriptive test yet. Moreover, the KPSC announced Provincial Management Services in 2017 and completed in 2020, took three years to complete the selection process. Whereas, Punjab Public Service Commission and Sindh public service Commission took competitive exams every year.

Zohaib Jamir Kaka Khel
NOWSHERA

Corrupting the system

The Pakistan Meteorological Department warned that the unusual heatwave waves may prevail in different parts of Sindh including Karachi over a week, a smart high alert was imposed at all the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) run hospitals due to the rise of a heatwave after forecast of (PMD). Actually, a high pressure area over central Asia, rised the temperature to 40-42 centigrade which causes a heavy warm and dry weather in the city. According to official sources the all of KMC's medical and health services were asked to pay strict attentions on their duties round the clock. People were warned too to avoid stepping out from 9am to 5pm if no emergency or urgent. An United Nation office on Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRP) warned that high temperature resulted 13pc of all disaster death worldwide and the majority caused heatwave waves with 91pc death between 2000 and 2019. Apart from it, the May and June heatwave waves of 2015 caused 1,229 death in Pakistan. Similarly, over 72,000 European were killed in heatwave in 2003, and Russia was also faced heatwave waves in 2010 which resulted more than 55,000 deaths. Currently, two more heatwave waves caused over 1,400 death in France in 2019. The medical and health services department are requested to alert the people to take precautionary measures to avoid irresponsibility going out.

Shadri Akbar
KECH

UNHCR and the refugee crisis

AMIR HUSSAIN

According to the UNHCR, there are some 70.8 million forcibly displaced people across the world today including 41.3 million internally displaced persons, 25.9 million refugees and some 3.5 million asylum seekers.

Fifty-seven percent of these refugees come from Syria, Afghanistan and South Sudan and 80 percent of refugee influx is hosted by neighbouring countries. The magnitude of international conflicts and civil strife within states has increased over the years as wars and insurgencies continue to shape international politics. Forced displacement and statelessness is a continuing threat to millions of lives around the world and it is not going away anytime soon. International organizations like the UNHCR do their best to address the humanitarian crisis caused by wars and conflicts, but we need to buttress their efforts through collective actions.

In our conventional national debates on forced displacement, we usually end up doing some calculations of net losses in economic and political terms. Forced displacement of people will of course have spillover economic and political consequences for neighbouring countries – with visible implications on livelihoods, peace and social cohesion. That is why it calls for collective planning and concerted action to minimize political and economic cost and also to address the humanitarian crisis with empathy rather than with econometrics.

In the absence of planning, Pakistan has suffered from the political and economic burden of hosting millions of refugees in the last three decades. Hav-

ing said this, it is important to contest the debate regarding the refugee crisis in Pakistani media which tends to blame Afghan refugees for all social, economic and security related ills. It is important to understand that Pakistan opted to go with world powers in re-shaping Afghanistan from the days of the cold war which, inter alia, entailed getting international assistance to host refugees. It was not out of any altruism or a sense of helping the Afghan brethren; it was all about money and politics. Those who wanted to carve out a new Afghanistan in the aftermath of the cold war left this impoverished country to bleed internally once their political objectives were met.

The protracted internal strife in Afghanistan is one of the longest unsettled conflicts in the world without any chances of peace and harmony to prevail in the foreseeable future. Pakistan, being amongst the top refugee hosting countries in the world along with Turkey, Germany, Uganda and Sudan, will need assistance to deal with this humanitarian crisis amicably. That is exactly why the UNHCR needs to expand its operations in Pakistan to build on its ongoing good work. In addition to IDPs, refugees and asylum seekers, there are millions of stateless people with no political entitlement of citizenship and right of representation as well as no access to basic services like education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement.

Some experts suggest that one must classify stateless people into two categories. One is the situation of benign statelessness which involves no right of representation and citizenship. Under this category one can include people of

Gilgit-Baltistan as an example of benign statelessness in the context of Pakistan as they do not have the right of representation in the national politics and hence no citizenship rights.

The other category is the situation of absolute statelessness which includes all those who are not entitled to political, social and economic rights. The UNHCR must come up with two separate strategies to address the plight of the people under these two categories of statelessness. There are many untold stories of agony, violence, harassment and torture faced by forcibly displaced people which must be told to sensitize the world. Forced displacement is not a choice; it is coercion, up-rootedness, horror, death and loss of human dignity.

Long ago in November 1995, I joined a campaign run by some community development institutions to help 30,000 Afghan refugees who were forced out of their country. Taliban rule was not fully established in Afghanistan then but there was internal strife for the control of mainland Afghanistan. As a young volunteer, I had the opportunity to visit refugee camps in the then North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan and to collect some horrible stories of miseries and agonies inflicted upon poor Afghans by the warring factions and proxies of the world powers. The stories I collected were the firsthand account of the refugees who lost everything including the right to live in their own homeland but most of them had not lost the hope for a better future.

A highly educated Afghan man in his early forties narrated some heart-wrenching stories of how his family and others managed to escape exter-

mination at the hands of the Taliban in the southern province of Kandahar in June 1995. His whole family was kept in a dilapidated house filled with stains of blood, the smell of explosives and screams of injured and dying people all around. All women were asked to leave after two days and the men who resisted were killed or taken to custody and most of them were then disappeared. This educated man could escape by acting dead by the dead bodies in the compound of that decrepit house. In the darkness of the night when the Taliban left the compound he managed to escape the death trap.

In the refugee camp this gentleman organized the people into small groups to teach them English language, history and basic numeracy. He was optimistic that 'one day these refugees will enter Afghanistan as educated people to serve their country and to help restore peace rather than killing their compatriots under a tribal instinct of retribution'. Despite living in subhuman conditions in refugee camps, this educated man and many others like him strived to contribute for a better future for their compatriots and were optimistic that peace will return to their country. We must bring forth such emotive stories and we must acknowledge that being a refugee does not undermine human potential to contribute to make the world better.

In the year 2000, as students in our university days we created a platform of migration and refugee studies with the primary objective to organize awareness-raising programs about the refugee crisis and issues of forced displacement among the university students. Under this initiative we organized conferences and invited the



Dangerous divide

MUSHTAQ RAJPUR

The November 3 US presidential election will be the first one whose outcome is already scary and uncertain, not in terms of who will win, but whether the result will be accepted, or a new wave of intensified conflict will begin, ending up in the US Supreme Court.

Elections are meant to give legitimacy to an elected majority to rule and to put an end to electoral rivalry. It is seen as a democratic method to resolve conflict in societies.

This US presidential election does not present the traditional case though. President Trump has repeatedly expressed his unwillingness to concede defeat if he fails to win. He will accept results only if he wins.

During a presidential debate when moderator Chris Wallace asked Trump if he would denounce white supremacists Trump, instead of condemning them, told them to 'step back and stand by'. A week later the FBI announced a case against eight white supremacists of a plot to kidnap Michigan's democrat governor Gretchen Whitman. Michigan is the same state where during the peak of current pandemic Trump called on his supporters to 'liberate Michigan'. The plot to kidnap governor surfaced during that time.

America appears to be at a dangerous crossroads. Trump's hysterical anguish expressed everyday in his tweets and frequent appearances on Fox News are fueling the divide in the country. The economic slowdown continues to badly affect millions of people, with 11 million people still on unemployment allowance. Economically, it will be hard for states to continue to pay so many people unemployment benefits.

Even rich American states like California and Virginia need federal assistance. The Democrat-led House passed a pandemic relief bill of over \$3 trillion, but the Republican-led Senate refused to take it up. Due to economic stress millions are people are on the verge of losing their rented homes due to failure to pay rent.

It is bewildering to see the low level of discourse during this election campaign. It is not policy which is at the center of debate, but the character of the leadership which is under angry attacks. Polls from the battle-ground states give Democrats cautious hope of possible victory on November 3, while the Trump campaign is hoping to gain more ground by creating drama on the debate stage.

The 2016 polls betrayed Hillary Clinton, therefore polls are scary for both sides. Trump does not believe them and the Democrats had a different experience in the past. However, what is different this time is that Trump is now a tested candidate and not a new entry anymore. Above all, if the Congressional mid-term elections, state legislatures and gubernatorial elections are any indication the Republicans have lost, and in a big way. In two key battle-ground states in the mid-west – Wisconsin and Michigan – which Trump won by margin of 73,000 votes, Republicans have lost all elections in both states.

The worst fears of the Republicans were recently expressed by Texas Senator Ted Cruz who saw possibly a 'bloodbath for Republicans' to a scale of post-Watergate back in the 1970s.

Such fears are not farfetched. At stake are not just the battle-ground six states, but the very states which have been considered red-states and safe for the Republicans. For example, Georgia: which Democrats have not won since Jimmy Carter became president back in the late 1970s. Trump carried this state with margin of 230,000 votes; new Hispanic registered voters in the state are over 250,000, and two years ago Democrat nominee for governor's slot Stacy Abrahams lost the election in an extremely close contest – to the extent that results were delayed, but later she conceded. The second key state to watch is Arizona. In 2016, Trump carried this state by 2.5 points.

Three reasons should be seen while considering whether this deep red state could go with the blue wave. First, the Democrats won the Senate seat. Second, this is the first time Spanish-speaking voters make up 25 percent of eligible voters. And third, well-respected Republican Senator late John McCain's wife, family and a former Senator Jeffrey Flake not support Trump, and along with two dozen Republican members of Congress has endorsed Joe Biden.

The third state to keep an eye on is Florida where Mike Bloomberg has invested millions of dollars to help Black voters pay their court fines in order to be eligible to vote. Hundreds of thousands of under privileged voters in the state have faced a systematic voter suppression, in some cases inmates completed their imprisonment but did not have enough money to pay for court fee/fines and thus under a discriminatory law were dis-

Knowledge and power

ANJUM ALTAF

Everyone interested in education knows Macaulay and his 'Minute on Education', the basis of the English Education Act of 1835, that determined to give the native population of India "a knowledge of English literature and science through the medium of the English language" because no one "could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia."

Virtually no one knows the views of the philosopher and political economist John Stuart Mill who, for almost half his life, was associated with the East India Company. In 1836, he submitted a report titled 'Recent Changes in Native Education', which was approved by the Company's Court of Directors but dismissed by the president of the Board of Control. His comments, locked away for more than 100 years, expressed his belief that it was impossible "to expect that the main portion of the mental cultivation of a people can ever take place through the medium of a foreign language"

All the issues that engage us at this moment are there in this debate from almost 200 years ago – the desideratum of scientific knowledge, the non-availability of content in local languages, the best medium of instruction, and the process of mental cultivation. Reading history is so humbling. Everything being said today can be found in the columns of the newspapers of those days, 'The Tribune' and 'The Civil and Military Gazette' from Lahore among them, debating heatedly the pros and cons of the Anglicist and Orientalist positions.

Reading history is also so very sobering. Then, as now, when all is said and done, when all the words and wisdom have been exhausted, it is power that carries the day. What is decided on high is impervious to reason, argument, or the well-being of the recipients – and driven solely by the needs of the ruling class.

There are many fascinating dimensions to this bit of history. Compare Macaulay and Mill to begin with. Were it not for the 'Minute', Macaulay would be a footnote to history. Mill, on the other hand, was the most influential English philosopher of the nineteenth century whose 'On Liberty' is still considered a seminal text. But the ridiculous pronouncements of the former trumped the commonsense observation of the latter just as the footnotes of today override experts of the stature of Dr Tariq Rehman. Why commonsense? Because it takes half a minute of honest reflection to recognize its truth. Imagine a five-year-old child from a village trying to understand addition in her own language or in English. Which alternative would she find easier? Imagine her narrating the day's events in either language. In which would she be able to express herself with greater ease, fluency, and creativity?

The answers are obvious. Why then would we want the child to learn in English rather than in her own language? Is it because content is not available in her language? But what content does a five-year-old child need to learn to add? Give her a pile of stones, a bunch of marbles, a few apples and she would do a lot better than reading out of a book. What content does she need to tell a story or talk about a butterfly or a frog or about the weather and when it is time to milk the cow? And why

one milks the cow in the first place and what happens to the milk after it is collected? Making five-year olds learn out of books is a poor and unimaginative choice.

What is given up when a child is taught in a language not her own? "Mental cultivation", as Mill had mentioned nearly 200 years ago. Instead of learning about things and ideas, the child is left struggling with an alien language, fearful of making mistakes, preferring silence to being laughed at, apprehensive of being tested on things that are not fully understood. This is the beginning of the road to memorization, to reproduction without understanding, to acquiescence instead of enquiry.

If all of the above is so obvious, why is it that parents want their children educated in English, the argument always cited, then and now, in support of English as the language of instruction? In preparing the 'Minute', Macaulay had said that "English is better worth knowing than Sanscrit (sic) or Arabic," and that "the natives are desirous to be taught English."

The simple answer is easily deduced by a student of the history of education in colonial India: "By making English a necessary skill to gain access to employment in the higher levels of the Indian administration, an English education became something to which all Indians strove." The answer to the puzzle is obvious and lies buried in the distinction between the two functions of education – that of mental cultivation or learning and that of a passport to employment. Parents, especially those who are poor and without old-age security, invest in their children in the hope that the latter find good jobs in the market. To that end, they are willing to sacrifice mental cultivation especially when no educationist has made them aware of how high the cost is of the sacrifice.

The English had an obvious vested interest in creating a class of people who, English in all but name, would prove to be "loyal servants of the colonial regime." But no such interest is at play in a sovereign nation where power is supposed to reside in the people. Why then do we retain English as the passport to good employment requiring such a huge sacrifice in mental cultivation of which all serious educationists have long been aware since the time of Mill?

This is the real puzzle that requires an answer. Why don't we just do away with the requirement of such a colonial legacy? China does not require it; Turkey does not require it; and they are considered successful countries doing far better than us. For all our English-speaking geniuses we can't even collect our own garbage, for which we need assistance from the non-English speaking Chinese and Turks. So why do we continue to require English as the passport for decent jobs? Is it because colonialism has never really left our land? Is it because our neo-colonial masters wish to cripple the mental abilities of the people to keep them loyal, docile, and uncompetitive? Is it because power is afraid of knowledge? Meanwhile, just as in colonial times, there are Chief's Colleges, quite distinct from the intellectually impoverished institutions for the natives, to reproduce and perpetuate the status quo.

Surely, it should not be so in an Islamic country aspiring to the Riasat of Medina.

Quotes are from 'Patriots and Practical Men: British Educational Policy and the Responses of Colonial Subjects in India,