

The Business

Chief Editor

Irfan Athar Qazi

E-mail: editorthebusiness@yahoo.com
thebusinesslhr@gmail.com

Tijarat House, 14-Davis Road, Lahore
0423-6312280, 6312480, 6312429, 6312462
Cell # 0321-4598258

1st Floor Ahmed Plaza near Zong Office
Susan Road, Faisalabad, Ph: 041-8555582

ISLAMABAD / RAWALPINDI
N-125 Circular Road, Ph: 051-5551654,
5532761, Cell # 0300-8567331

KARACHI
3rd Floor Kehkashan Mall 172-I Block II PECHS
Opp Rehmania Masjid Main Tariq Road
Ph: 021-34524550, Cell # 0300-8251534

A possible development

According to a report, for the first time the voter data shows narrowing down of the gender gap by a significant 12.41 million. In July this year the total number of voters was 112.39 million of which 62.55 (55.66 percent) were male and 51.66 (44.34 percent) were females, indicating a 12.72 million gap. Since then another 3.28 million people have been added to the voters' lists, more of them women than men. As per the latest data, a total of 115.57 voters comprise 64.07 million (55 percent) males and 51.66 million females, further narrowing down the gender disparity from 12.72 percent to 12.41 percent. While the increase in the number of women voters is a hopeful sign, it does not necessarily guarantee greater participation in the electoral process. There have been several instances in the past when registered women voters were prevented from exercising their constitutional right in the name of tradition. In Dir district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, for instance, even the mainstream parties like the PPP and PML-N cut deals with the local influential to keep women from casting their votes. The same patriarchal attitudes have been on display in certain areas of Punjab as well, such as Dhumal village located not very far from Rawalpindi and Islamabad. It's been a while since a clause was incorporated in the Election Law stipulating that if the turnout of women voters is less than ten percent of the total votes polled in a constituency the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) may presume that the women were restrained though an agreement from casing their votes, and may declare polling at one or more polling stations or election in the whole constituency as void, ordering fresh polls. Unfortunately, the law remains largely unimplemented, though following the last elections the ECP did declare invalid the result in one KP constituency on grounds of low female voters turnout. Things have improved somewhat, but a lot more needs to be done. Be that as it may, the ECP's gender affairs wing deserves praise for taking some concrete steps with a view to increasing the participation of women in electoral roll process. It has, for example, introduced a column in Form-XIV (Statement of the Count) requiring information on the number of women voters who cast their votes at each polling station. But ECP needs to ensure that more and more women get enfranchised. The political parties have a responsibility to help create an environment conducive for women not only to vote but also stand as candidates. Creditably for it, for the 2018 elections the PTI gave its ticket to a woman, Hameeda Shahid, to contest a KP Assembly seat from the traditionalist-conservative bastion of Upper Dir. For now, the new voter data is an important development in that direction.

Peace and prosperity - Two nations, shared destiny

MAREEA KHALID

Withstanding the test of time and the changing regional and global scenario, the Pak-China relations have strengthened overtime. China's will to start a new chapter in the age of globalization and its Belt and Road Initiative, the guiding tool towards the goal of a shared future, will play a key role in promoting peace and stability in the region and beyond while improving connectivity. Besides strong political, military and strategic ties, the two countries also have strong economic links. The global and regional realities affect the efforts of mutual cooperation, however, the Pakistan-China all-weather strategic partnership remained unaffected by the vicissitudes of regional and international developments. The COVID-19 pandemic is a recent example of mutually beneficial cooperation where the two countries derived strength from each other. The hallmark of our continued deepening

cooperation i.e., China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has entered a new phase which will help Pakistan to achieve greater development. Pakistan and China both support multilateralism and the profusion of projects under the CPEC would help the two countries to achieve these shared values and goals. CPEC is but one facet in the net effect of the Pak-China cooperation.

However, to enjoy the fruits of prosperity from this economic cooperation it is imperative that regional peace is not jeopardized.

That is one of the reasons why both Pakistan and China stand by the collective vision of security. Talking about the defence collaboration, China has provided Pakistan essential assistance to upgrade its conventional and strategic defence options. Pakistan is set to acquire Chinese origin third generation Main Battle Tank VT-4 — after the induction of indigenously built Al-Khalid-I Tank, a joint venture between Pakistan, China and Ukraine — which will be employed in of-

fensive role by strike formations after induction. VT-4 is compatible with any modern tank in the world, integrating advanced armour protection, maneuverability, firepower capabilities and state-of-the-art technology. This has further strengthened Pakistan's overall defence capability to thwart enemy designs. It is a reaffirmation of Pakistan's position that Pakistan Army is fully prepared and capable to give a matching response to all types of threats to its sovereignty, security and territorial integrity for the defence of the country shall the need arise.

With such common interests and greater long-term significance in mind, Pakistan essentially views the deepening relationship with China as a constructive development and cooperative engagement, with an eye towards the long-term trends and strategic convergence. It strives for boosting economic growth that is pivotal for the country's financial stability and creating much needed jobs in a country of approximately 215 million people.

Looking at these landmark developments that are for the regional prosperity versus weighing the geopolitical implications of India's behavior that inhibit cooperation such as its recent actions including military, not to mention the ignoble meddling and railing against CPEC, India's role is against the shared goal of regional peace and prosperity.

Pakistan-China relations are an example of friendly co-existence that promotes a peaceful and stable regional order. The countries envision a future of shared prosperity where regional cooperation and not competition is the way forward, a vision that is now more significant than ever before in these times, requiring ever greater commitment, when we are seeing attempts to malign and reverse these gains. The developments in the Pak-China relations from security to strategic economic cooperative partnership can be seen as a straw in the wind as to what is to come in terms of peace and prosperity. Long live Pakistan-China friendship!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Early marriages

The issue of early marriages need to be talked about as much as possible. This tradition of forcing children into marriage is creating a lot of problems, especially in rural areas. Girls often die during childbirth because they get pregnant at a young age. Even though the country has introduced several laws to put an end to this menace, the practice of early marriages is still rampant across the country. The government should start awareness campaigns to educate the people regarding the harmful effects of early marriages and why they should be condemned.

Shana M Ameen
TURBAT

Cramped classes

In Pakistan, private schools have become a money-making business for a majority of people. Many schools didn't pay monthly salaries to their teachers and blamed the lockdown on a lack of funds. However, the same schools collected monthly fees from students. Beside teachers, students also face a lot of problems at these schools, which often go unnoticed. Since private schools are all about making profits, school owners don't pay attention to the problem of cramped classrooms. In some schools, a single class has more than 40 students. How will these schools follow physical distancing measures? Even though private schools are independent institutions, the

government should have a look at the problems being faced by a majority of students.

Mehruallah Mehr
AWARAN

Education for all

The education sector in Balochistan needs the immediate attention of the relevant authorities. A few number of schools that operate in the province lack basic facilities. Education is extremely important for a country's growth. Balochistan needs the best education institutions with top-notch facilities.

Zakria Lal
TURBAT

Sectarianism & civil society



MUHAMMAD AMIR RANA

Nothing is more challenging for a state than maintaining social harmony during times of religious discord and hatred. The challenge becomes more uncertain when civil society and other stakeholders become indifferent or are left out, and the matter is left to state institutions alone. This is exactly what is happening in Pakistan.

During the recent upsurge in sectarian protests and hatred in the country, civil society largely failed to respond proactively; it could not go beyond issuing mere condemnations. While state authorities have taken a few initiatives, these also did not get the attention of opinion-makers in the media.

The Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) recently developed a Code of Conduct (CoC) for ending sectarian violence and communal hatred in the country. Endorsed by religious scholars of all schools of thought, the 20-point CoC is being termed as a major development in addressing sectarianism. It is also one of the major achievements of

the CII under the chairmanship of Dr Qibla Ayaz, who will soon complete his first tenure without having created any controversy.

The CoC is not the first initiative taken by the state or religious scholars to reduce sectarian tensions. Apart from several other state-sponsored religious decrees and declarations, a somewhat similar document was also developed by the Milli Yakjehti Council, an alliance of religious parties formed to address sectarianism in the mid-1990s. The CII's CoC echoes similar clauses espoused in the MYC draft, but can be termed different in terms of authority and source. This is based on the Paigham-i-Pakistan, a comprehensive state-sponsored declaration against extremism endorsed by hundreds of religious scholars of all schools of thought.

The CoC can be divided into three parts. The first in particular refers to protecting the rights of women and non-Muslim citizens. The second discusses legal issues, including related to blasphemy, and declares that only courts of law are authorised to decide on such cases. The third and integral part of the CoC concerns sectarian harmony. It declares all kinds of violence in the name of religion as revolt against the state and denounces the deliverance of hate speech and excommunication of other sects, including at mosques, imambargahs and mass gatherings.

One must appreciate the CII's CoC. But will it be enough to address the violent manifestation of the existing sectarian divide? What miracle can this CoC achieve that previous similar declarations failed to?

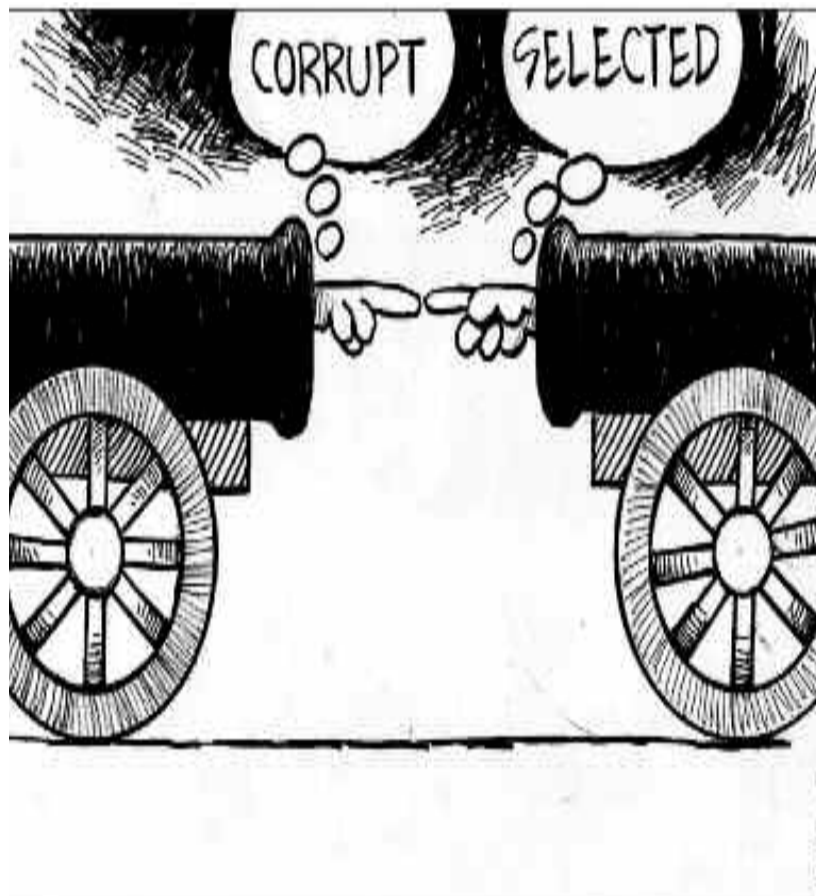
Traditionally, such fatwas and declarations have wielded little to no influence on most radical elements and extremist groups in Pakistan. Even in

the presence of such drafts and decrees, extremist elements and groups would continue to spread hatred as per their convictions or other internal and external compulsions. For state institutions, however, creating and adopting such resolutions is an official obligation and means that the 'job is done'. But the issue is deep-rooted and linked to our society's religious, identity-related and sociopolitical ethos. Civil society — especially segments that operate on a non-religious basis, ie media, professional bodies, and even political parties — does not intervene in such issues proactively due to a few obvious reasons. For one, a sense of religious sensitivity and sanctity, in which the clergy does not allow anyone else the authority to take up religious matters, keeps diverse societal segments out and renders the entire discourse their exclusive domain. Second, state institutions also discourage the involvement of civil society. They have made it an exclusive turf for themselves (in which they engage with the clergy alone) and try to conceal prevalent sectarian fault lines from popping up and tarnishing the country's image abroad. The media blackout of recent incidents related to sectarian hatred is an example of that attitude. Perhaps they believe that such blackouts can prevent the fire from spreading. But the overall environment that it creates discourages not only civil society but also media and even parliamentarians from speaking on the issue.

National cohesion cannot be created without developing sectarian harmony, and both require managing and celebrating diversity. Fear of diversity is rooted in mistrust of the social contract, in which coercive uniformity is seen as the only option. But uniformity cannot be an alternative to diversity. Usually,

state and societies have multiple social contracts to conduct day-to-day business with each other, but two are considered especially important. One between the state and society, ie the Constitution, and the second among diverse segments of society to manage their religious, racial, ethnic and cultural differences, which is part of our collective memories. In Pakistan, the constitutional crisis has deep roots and reflects state institutions' weaknesses in honouring and abiding by constitutional principles, whereas the sectarian divide has badly affected the social contract within society. On one side, state institutions are not providing the way for civil society to participate in restructuring the social contract. On the other, the clergy has developed a stake in the economy that thrives on hate and conflict. The institution of the madressah has further deepened the intellectual and social stakes in sectarianism on which radical groups thrive. Civil society has itself failed to build pressure on the state and clergy to course correct. For civil society, rights issues are more important than a cohesive and inclusive social contract that accommodates all religious, sectarian, ethnic, racial and cultural differences and provides better mutual understanding. A functional social contract can help to develop a better citizenry and ensure social cohesion.

It is also important that all state institutions and pillars act within the constitutional framework and contribute to strengthening constitutional values. Both the state and civil society have to collaborate to break the intellectual and economic stakes linked with sectarian hatred. It would be a great service to the nation if the CII took up the task and provided some useful recommendations in this regard.



After Gujranwala

NASIM ZEHR

The expected did happen on Friday, October 16. People from the Pakistan Mslim league Nawaz's (PML-N's) stronghold of Gujranwala and other areas along the GT Road belt responded to their party leadership's call. On the day of the jalsa, the PML-N's flag-waving supporters, energized after a two-year dry-run and a rough one too, were out on the roads atop buses, Suzuki vans, buses, motorbikes — chanting 'Jaag Punjabi Jaag' and 'Sher Aaya Geedar Bhaga'.

Judging from the Pakistan Mslim league Nawaz banners, Mariam Nawaz is seen as the Pakistan Mslim league Nawaz leader and Nawaz Sharif's successor. The unstoppable crowd moved in groups towards Gujranwala — despite the interior minister's announcement regarding containers being placed to stop cars (he did hint people could walk and so they did).

The combined opposition of 11 parties is now in an eye-ball to eye-ball confrontation with the PTI government.

The confident and unflappable prime minister doesn't seem to take this threat seriously. His army of spokespersons often use memes, invectives and insults to roll back the mostly clearly established facts that the media, including social media, is reporting about the PDM rallies. So, while it seems after speaking to some on background that there appear to be some signs of worry in the government's camp about the PDM's planned activities, bravado is the order of the day for now.

Clearly, the PDM has only just begun its four-month plan. The signs after October 16 may be hopeful for the PDM yet much is still unknown: public responses in different cities; the ability to sustain street support over the next few months; the government's response; whether inflation, which certainly helped swell street support for the Gujranwala rally, be somehow removed?

Hence much remains in the unknown. The PDM's demand that Prime Minister Imran Khan's resignation must be followed by fresh elections may appear to remain only a demand.

What the PDM will be able to achieve in so far as its objectives are concerned is yet to be seen. Nevertheless, given Mariam Nawaz Sharif and Bilawal Bhutto's personal political conviction and commitment that the 'selected government' must go home and fresh elections must follow, the two will keep the PDM united. And that can be said equally for Maulana Fazlur Rehman, who as the leader of the PDM is committed to the movement remaining united.

As a political entity, potentially wielding some political power, the PDM is already there. Past the question of survivability, the question is of the impact it may or may not have. A sustained movement would potentially be impactful.

The next question then is: impact for what? For the government to be sent packing off? For the pulling back of institutional support? For the government-establishment equation falling apart? For fresh and free elections?

Whichever of the foregoing devel-



opments takes place — even if none of them does — we must remain mindful that there are some facts that have kept the last two years of Pakistan's political life on a potholed path. Pakistan's contradictions are now all out in the open — contradictions of our past, of our present, contradictions that we ignored or had let them be discussed on the margins of debate, contradictions that got gutted under new engineered structures with no staying power; contradictions that for the sake of propriety were left unspoken, contradictions that remained on the back-burner and hence never acquired the combustible property as they now do.

Some facts worth recalling: To the opposition, and more, Election 2018 was manipulated; of late, we have seen the Supreme Court and high courts declare that NAB is being used for a political agenda. Fact: Prime Minister Imran Khan is genuinely keen to fix the mess in Pakistan. Fact: Important steps taken to facilitate regional trade and commerce have been overshadowed by the wheat/sugar export blunders, the killer price hike, unemployment etc.

Fact: Prime Minister Imran Khan concluded that to end corruption he must not engage with the opposition and hence totally refused to engage them. Instead, we have seen other institutional heads having to do that. The PM, meanwhile, has continued to wage political war on the opposition.

Fact: Nawaz Sharif's criticism today contrasts with the fact that his party voted for the extension.

Fact: Kashmiris are in the process of losing Indian Occupied Kashmir as India gallops ahead with a systematically planned massive demographic manipulation of the region.

These contradictions are blowing in the wind, louder and louder by the day. So many truths. As partisans we take our pick, but out there in the open, they circulate in our common space — potentially as a combustible entity. Let's not overplay the force of power and underplay the force of human mind and heart. The question is: do we have a genuine interlocutor to steer us towards some calmer, credible and saner path away from the currently mindless combative and self-destructive one?

Imran Khan means well. Yet life is about the greys, about processes, about taking everyone along, about healing not hating — and yes, about accountability absolutely but not about hounding.

The writer is a senior journalist.