

# The Business

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## Decline in CPI

Prime Minister Imran Khan has disclosed that the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose by 5.7 percent in January 2021 against eight percent in December 2020 – a truly remarkable achievement, while core inflation – non-food, and non-energy – remained at 5.4 percent. Two elements of the calculation require clarification. First, all component items in the CPI registered a decline in their indices in January 2021 compared to December 2020 other than food and non-alcoholic beverages with a significant weightage of 30.42 urban and 40.87 rural. However, within this group, the indices of non-perishable items, with a weightage of 25.97 in urban and 35.08 in rural, registered a raise in both rural and urban centres. And it was a massive decline in the prices of perishables with only 4.46 weightage in urban – from 158.5 December 2020 to 128.98 in January 2021 – and weightage of 5.79 in rural declining from 164.99 in December 2020 to 129.31 in January 2021 – that inexplicably accounted for CPI plummeting by a whopping 2.3 percentage points in January 2021 compared to December 2020. The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) data reveals that there was a cumulative decrease in the CPI monthly food and non-alcoholic calculation with rural index declining from 142.65 in December 2020 to 142.23 in January 2021 and urban from 145.86 to 141.87. Unless the government can prove that the registered decline in food prices was largely during the last three days of January 2021 this decline does not match the SPI.

In the case of petroleum levy alone the government generated Rs 260 billion last year against the budgeted Rs 216 billion to a whopping Rs 450 billion budgeted this year comprising about eight percent of total revenue collection target in 2020-21. The impact on inflation of this reliance is however subdued as the combined weightage of petroleum and electricity is less than six percent. The dramatic decline in the CPI must be a source of satisfaction for the Prime Minister; however, he needs to sell the narrative of a decline to the general public and reports indicate that he has not been successful in doing so. Those members of the public who are more aware of data manipulation of those indicators with a direct bearing on the popularity of the government, particularly inflation and unemployment, are likely to challenge data integrity. The general public in contrast relies almost exclusively on what it can purchase each week with a given income and if the basket of goods is less than the week before a reduction in CPI is unlikely to convince anyone that things are improving. Inflation is not an indicator of acceptance of the government's narrative or optics but that of reality as evident from how much each rupee can buy.

## Why is Delhi afraid of CPEC?

ASGHAR ALI SHAD

It is clear that the C-Pack project is so important that it is rightly called a "game-changer." It may be recalled that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a collection of various infrastructure projects that have been under construction across Pakistan since 2013.

The project aims to rapidly improve Pakistan's economic and industrial infrastructure and stabilize the country's economy through the construction of modern transport networks, various energy projects and special economic zones.

The main objective of CPEC is to build a vast network of highways and railways that will expand the length and breadth of Pakistan. The government estimates that the loss of incompetence caused by most of Pakistan's dilapidated transport network is 3.55% of the country's annual GDP. The modern transport network built under CPEC will connect the seaports of Gwadar and Karachi with North Pakistan. At the same time, it will expand northward in western China and Central Asia. Under this project, it was decided to build a 1,000 km long motorway between Karachi and Lahore, while the Karakoram Highway from Hassan Abdal to the Chinese border is being completely rebuilt and repaired.

Karachi-Peshawar main railway line is also planned to be upgraded. In addition, Pak-

istan's railway network was expanded in Kashgar to connect with China's Southern Xinjiang Railway. It should also be noted that after the completion of CPEC's grand project, it is likely that the concessional loans will provide the 11 billion needed to modernize the transport network. It may be recalled that the potential impact of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor on Pakistan is being compared with the post-World War II reconstruction "Martial Plan" launched by Japan and Germany. Pak officials expect China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to create more than 2.3 million jobs between 2015 and 2030 and increase the country's annual economic growth by 2.5 percentage points. The importance and usefulness of this great project need no further introduction.

Everyone is also aware of the fact that the Delhi government is putting up all sorts of obstacles in the way of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and it would not be out of place to say that they are afraid of CPEC. According to impartial observers, it is no secret that India is trying its best to sabotage the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in every possible way. And in this regard, on the one hand, the NDS in Afghanistan is being used for this purpose, and on the other hand, some elements in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan are continuing an endless series of baseless propaganda against Pakistan at every level. According to ex-

perts, every effort was made to give a certain colour to the death of a woman named Karima Baloch last month. It is a different matter that when the Canadian government made it clear that Karima Baloch's death was completely natural and no other evidence came to light in this regard after that, the hopes of the anti-Pakistan elements were dashed.

Despite this, this vested interest group has not given up its abominable attitude and still, all its energies are being spent against Pakistan and its security agencies and some new characters have joined this Indian conspiracy in recent days.

Aqil Shah, Tariq Fateh and many other similar groups and names are playing a significant role in this abominable practice. Last month, on the occasion of Right to Self-Determination Day, several rallies and protests were held across India-occupied Kashmir despite the Indian military siege.

Besides, the Modi government's talks with the Sikhs staging a sit-in in Delhi have once again ended inconclusively. Informed circles have told that the RAW is working on a new strategy to divert the world's attention from all this. In this regard, the Kashmiri freedom fighters will be accused that the situation in India-occupied Jammu and Kashmir is not due to such struggle for independence but due to organizations like Al Qaeda and ISIS.

Indian intelligence agencies have asked all Indian media

houses to try to link Kashmir's Hurriyat struggle with ISIS. Possibly in the coming days, there will be massive propaganda in India against the Kashmir freedom fighters in this regard.

India will try to divert the world's attention from ISIS's training camps in different parts of India, along with Kashmir's struggle for independence, Delhi's Farmer's sit-in, Love Jihad and actions against the Gu-Raksha Act.

It may be recalled that even a few days ago, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) of India registered 21 cases related to ISIS and arrested 143 accused from five states of India. Apart from Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, the organization has now set up its network in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, etc. According to the Indian Home Ministry, ISIS is active in many parts of India under different names.

On the other hand, a spate of sexual assaults in India has exacerbated the sense of insecurity among women and the so-called "legislation" of the Indian government has failed to stop the perpetrators. And now the crime of rape by Indian citizens in other countries is also increasing alarmingly.

It may be recalled that a few years ago in Kabul, an Indian Army Brigadier was deported from Afghanistan on the charges of raping an Afghan girl. But the Indian Army and Indian courts have taken virtually no action against the accused who com-

# Mental illness and possession



RAFIA ZAKARIA

I first learned about jinns in school. One afternoon, our Islamiat teacher, a dour woman with a tendency to scare us, began to talk about jinns. Like the rest of the class, I listened with rapt attention. Jinns were invisible, she told us, and were often around in desolate and un-frequented places. Unlike humans who are made of earth, the jinns were made of smokeless fire we were told.

All of this was new information for me. Terrified, I convinced myself that the stories were meant only to scare us girls. Later that day, after getting home, I brought up the topic with my mother, hoping to be reassured that this wasn't true. No such reassurance came my way. Instead, my mother told me that the teacher was right, that jinns do exist and like humans they can be good or bad. I was 10 or 11 years old at the time and I was terrified in the way only children can be. From then on, I began to recite the quls every time I was alone. It's a habit that has served me well.

As an adult, I began to hear jinns spoken of in conjunction with stories of being possessed. One distant family acquaintance, a woman with children, was rumored to be possessed

by a jinn. The proof of this lay in the fact that the woman in question would speak in a deep voice and foreign language every time she fell into a trance-like, possessed state. Like most other such cases, this woman was being treated by a faith healer. This, of course, is what takes place most of the time such cases surface in Pakistan, in fact, much of the Muslim world.

This is markedly different from the rest of the world where symptoms such as those exhibited by this woman, speaking in different voices, reporting hallucinations, doing things that are socially inappropriate, loss of inhibition, etc are considered symptoms of mental illness. Psychiatric care for those with these symptoms

time, there is no mention of jinn possession in religious texts as relating to mental illness. In this sense, no connection is drawn between jinn, mental illness and possession at all. Many Islamic scholars hold that magic and possession are pre-Islamic beliefs that became a part of folklore.

Most Muslims continue to believe in possession and black magic today. Studies from around the Islamic world have revealed that a very large number of Muslims studying medicine believe in this supernatural phenomenon. This is in stark contrast to Western medicine, which is purely empirical, based on science alone and reliant on pharmaceutical and other biomedical approaches to treat a patient who exhibits symptoms of 'pos-

sion'. This is a deep and consequential conundrum. One wonders how many people with mental illness in Pakistan have been viewed as being possessed by a jinn when their anxiety, withdrawn and inappropriate behaviour and psychotic episodes are in reality mental illness. The predilection to allot a supernatural cause, imagine the person possessed, sequestering and socially excluding them as examples of evil, can severely impede their ability to get the right kind of help. And yet, this is just what happens. Reiterating the earlier observation, recent surveys of Muslim nursing students showed that they believe in possession, black magic and the evil eye, though study-

ing medicine. It is an open question as to which of the two sets of beliefs would dominate patient care if they had to treat a patient with symptoms that cannot easily be discerned as psychiatric or somehow supernatural. One way to proceed in Muslim societies, where the belief in prayer is strongly rooted, is to avail the services of both those who are seen as spiritual healers and medical personnel in the treatment of patients who exhibit symptoms of psychosis. Intelligently done, and with checks, the integration of the two methods of treatment means that those perceived as having the ability to soothe and comfort with prayer and spiritual advice could provide emotional support in keeping with the religious convictions of a patient, while medical teams could ensure that all the appropriate therapies and medicines alleviate a sick person's anguish. The combination of the two therapies, ideally with care providers working in tandem, are likely to have the best outcome for the patient.

This is not currently happening. In most of Pakistan, there is little awareness about the scientific and medical nature of symptoms like anxiety, psychosis (which can manifest themselves in various ways such as speaking in different voices, thinking you're someone else etc) and inappropriate behaviour and the only treatment that is provided is that by faith healers, who often abuse the trust reposed in their perceived abilities. This lack of awareness means that individuals who would otherwise be able to have a complete recovery with medical intervention do not avail this option. This is a tragedy, because the evil associated with some of these phenomena are attached to these individuals and they and their families live with that stigma for the rest of their lives. The very empathy that religion prescribes is required to change this status quo and the task of doing so must begin now.

*One wonders how many people with mental illness in Pakistan have been viewed as being possessed by a jinn.*



## Broadsheet scandal, an unlikely hit show

MUHAMMAD USMAN

Panama Leaks were a bolt from blue for Sharif family. Its thunder rattled them completely and eventually sent them packing when Nawaz Sharif as PM was adjudged by the Supreme Court, disqualified from holding a public office for life, being dishonest. Undoubtedly, Imran Khan was the moving force to bring it thus far. It was a hit show and its dividend was most delectable and rewarding for him. He gained ascendancy morally and politically quite handsomely which helped him to win general election 2018 and form governments at the Centre and two provinces including most populous province 'Punjab'. With Broadsheet disclosures, probably he has seen another God sent opportunity to reap windfalls as of Panama Leaks. His close associates/spokespersons are calling it a 'Panama Leaks Two'. In exuberance, his Interior Minister, Sheikh Rashid has gone even one step ahead by describing it a 'Panama leaks plus'.

A single-member Commission, headed by Justice Azmat Saeed Sheikh (retired) has been constituted by the government to inquire into the saga of Broadsheet with more powers and enhanced purview. According to its TORs, in addition to powers conferred upon the Commission, it shall also be empowered to constitute a special team of officials and experts in any particular field for the purpose of assisting the Commission in conducting the probe.

Everyone is entitled to his opinion/interpretation but given conditions, such a thought is quite far off the mark and is unlikely to yield for him politically as Panama Leaks did. The environment in the country has undergone a qualitative change. Major change is that now Imran Khan is not on people's rostrum at D-Chowk but in the chair of the PM nearby. Instead of rhetorically making heady promises, now he has to deliver and his copybook as PM is not fascinating rather disappointing to his even ardent fans, admirers, sympathizers and supporters. Now he cannot only blame the bulls. Instead, he has to act as a matador against bulls of all kind including of own making.

As already highlighted above, corruption followed by the conviction was a bombshell for Nawaz Sharif and his family politically yet, his media crooks managed to generate a myth about him "agar khatha hay, tu laghatha bhi hay" effectively particularly, in his support base. Now it is fast becoming a blocking position to prevent its further erosion regardless of his loot and plunder rather, amazingly, it is re-energizing its popularity to noticeable extent. This myth had holes and could have easily been debunked if countered thoughtfully however, Imran Khan and his party rely upon stereotype mantra of corruption and corruption only inadvertently or otherwise as a panacea to guard against own inadequacies and purge all ills, prevalent in society. Apart from this, people are increasingly growing weary of such a mantra especially when they see no substantive action against guilty of rampant corruption. They want them to disgorge ill-gotten money and be behind the bars. The score of the government is almost a naught on this account. Ongoing ac-



countability drive is losing relevance for common people. This sounds to them business as usual or propaganda gimmicks with no tangible benefit for their moral and material benefit. This is the replay of what has always been on the round before.

Another critical aspect is dismal performance of government in nearly all spheres related to their everyday lives. Notable areas are livelihood, price control, corruption, civil administration and maintenance of road network/localities. The government brags around injecting new vitality in the dwindling economy but there is no sign of trickledown effect which matters the most to impoverished people as well as to average households. They have waited for two and half years but now seem to lose patience. Improvement in mega economy does not humour them because it has a history of bagging all economic benefits alone rather than sharing them with common flock. Owing to the accumulative effect of all these, a sense of seething discontentment has started creeping in about the change, promised by Imran Khan. It may be a just matter of time when hope may turn into despondency and despair. This could inflict a mortal blow to the change.

Amid such an environment, inquiry about Broadsheet may not be able to fetch anything meaningful rater, manifests the potential to prove counterproductive. Unfortunately, this may nourish incubating negative sentiments in minds of people about ongoing accountability drive thus, strengthening the cause of guilty indirectly. This is inverse of what Imran Khan gained out of Panama Leaks. Most importantly, this may null government into complacency not to take reappraisal of its poor performance so far. To live up to expectations of people as a leader of change, Imran Khan needs to take urgent stock of the situation for its remedy. He is not a PM of ordinary times. He has come in the most difficult time. Whatever, he talks, it has conceptual merit because he has no crisis of intent but his work is of pretty routine nature. It does not exude high acumen, required from the PM of a difficult country like Pakistan. This is the shortfall which he could only compensate with a good team and he has failed to gather good hands until now. Its absence could lead him astray. Accountability is his vision to pull the country out of the deep sinkhole of all types but its accomplishment needs a competent and efficient accountability apparatus which is not there. Fresh initiatives of accountability may pause before ongoing accountability cases arrive at a satisfying end to ward off the possibility of negativity about it. Besides, he needs to hurry up all round because time is slipping dangerously.

— The writer, a retired Lt Col, is a