

# The Business

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## Level-playing field

Federal Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin, together with members of the federal economic team as well as Governor State Bank of Pakistan Dr Reza Baqir, held a virtual meeting with the Managing Director (operations) of the World Bank Axel van Trotsenburg for reforms in the power sector. Two reservations were, including Pakistan must provide a level-playing field to all investment followed by noting that the Chinese power projects installed in Pakistan under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor did not conform to this criteria. It is relevant to note that the IMF's second to fifth review documents uploaded on the website this month stated that "the authorities and more than 45 private IPPs signed formal agreements on renegotiated PPA terms that will result in savings of about 1.8 percent of GDP over the next two decades of remaining life of these IPPs (inclusive of IPPs under the pre-1994/1994/2002 and renewable energy 2006 policies)." Irrespective of the fact that the first payment agreed by the authorities to the IPPs due end March 2021 remains stalled as a consequence of the ongoing investigation by National Accountability Bureau (NAB) the Fund has set a new structural benchmark of payment of 180 billion rupees by end May to IPPs.

The response of the Pakistani team was to state that negotiations with China are ongoing. In Pakistan's defence it is relevant to note that China entered the Pakistani market under the CPEC umbrella when no other country at a government or private level was willing to engage with us. A related solution proposed by the Pakistani team was early termination/buyout of oil-based IPPs at a discounted value of one billion dollar or else it would cost the exchequer 450 billion rupees in aggregate capacity charges over the average seven remaining years of their contracts. Disposal of 11 plants, the team pointed out, would benefit Pakistani consumers to the tune of 60 paisa per unit.

Given the constraints under which the power sector operates today there can be no immediate solutions other than those highlighted by the Pakistani team. However, for the medium to the long term the government must translate the recommendations made by (i) the Dr Waqar Masood-led subsidy cell which concluded that at present the government provides a total of 4 trillion rupees subsidy every year (4.5 pc of the GDP) which needs to be targeted to the poor and vulnerable; (ii) pension reforms proposed by the task force must be implemented to ensure that the government's rising burden is shared with the pensioners as in other countries; and (iii) institutional reforms begin to be implemented as per the outcome of a task force report submitted late 2018 early 2019 though inexplicably the reforms remain stalled.

## Development for Balochistan

AMIR HUSSAIN

Balochistan is 44 percent of Pakistan in terms of its geography and is also the most resource rich province of the country. However, it seems as if its vast geography and natural endowments have become a political nemesis for the people of Balochistan.

If you are bold enough to traverse the bumpy tracks of an impoverished country to reach its 'interior' spaces in any other part of the world, you have to be even bolder than that to muddle through the odds to venture into the heart of Balochistan. The poverty, deprivation, privation – and as many adjectives of adversity as a lexicon can hold – seen there would not be able to accurately capture the plight of the people of Balochistan.

This becomes by no means an exaggeration when you bump into a barefooted child in Pishin just 57 kilometers away from Quetta or within Quetta district pleading for a loaf of bread. If you move further from Pishin to Qilla Saifullah, you will be lost in a medieval world very much like a beleaguered kingdom of a vanquished prince. By the time you reach even deeper into Balochistan like Dera Bugti, Jhal Magsi and Awaran you will feel frozen in a bygone era.

It will take hardly 14 hours of drive even from the modern and scenic federal capital of Islamabad to reach the environs of the heart of Balochistan. For a tourist, this journey of the evolution of human society just in 14 hours may look like an incredible voyage of adventurism into the past but it is not so fascinating for the local people of Balochistan. The people and geography of Balochistan cannot be re-

duced to mere artifacts of a writer's imagination or a dreamland of some simulated altruism of a far-removed reformer.

The first thing to do is to recognize that the people of Balochistan are not the objects of the policy perceptions of a distant well-wisher. Their human agency matters, and they are the best judge of what works for the development of their land. A sensitive mind may react to all this by bashing our lack of empathy, lack of compassion and our condescending attitude towards the peripheral parts of our hypocritical society. This reaction makes sense but that is not all we must be content with if we are committed to working with people and helping our peripheries transform into livable places.

A lot has been written on the plight in Balochistan. Unfortunately, policymakers in the federal capital, and far removed well-wishers of Balochistan suffer from the colonizing white man burden syndrome. All they can do at their best is to dictate the terms of development which at times end up feeding the bulging bellies of the rich at the cost of the common people. Balochistan needs a local development paradigm in which people feel included in the process of development.

Balochistan with its rich natural endowments and vast geographical location can help long-term development in Pakistan. Its vast swathe of rangeland provides a sustainable means of livelihood in that Pakistan can overcome the looming national food insecurity by extending business development services of food supply chains. This can entail supporting the local rural population in raising goats, sheep, buffaloes, cattle, camels and other livestock, and

building basic infrastructure to link them to dairy production centers and food markets. Balochistan's southern part occupies about two thirds of the national coastline and can help build reliable supply chains to national and international food franchises right from the large pool of fishery resources. The province can become the hub of national economic growth through trade with Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf countries.

For the last many decades, Balochistan has remained the source of an uninterrupted supply of cheap natural gas to Pakistan's economic centers. The province has many untapped natural resources which cannot be utilized for inclusive economic growth without ensuring the peace and political stability. This requires a larger framework of development, ranging from district development strategies to provincial development plans for expediting the pace of prosperity across Balochistan with huge dividends for the political and economic stability of Pakistan. This calls for a paradigm shift from geostrategic thinking to geo-economic thinking for which it is essential to strengthen democratic institutions and improve governance.

There is also a growing realization in the power corridors to redefine the national development trajectory with a geo-economic lens to overcome the political vulnerabilities of Pakistan. The geo-economic strategy works well when governments make conscious efforts to bring political stability to create an enabling environment for economic growth. Political stability can be attained through locally informed strategies of development

which are inclusive and intrinsically linked to the aspirations of the people. No matter how effective the provincial development strategies might look in theory, it is local planning which works well in the final analysis. It is, therefore, important to devise locally grounded, context specific and integrated district development plans for Balochistan.

With this context in mind, the government of Balochistan should embark upon developing district development strategies through consistent engagement with local stakeholders, in particular with the local communities. The provincial ministry of planning and development can engage poverty alleviation agencies to support the government in broad-based, integrated and sustainable development. District development strategies will pave the way for an overdue process of engagement of all stakeholders to crowd in their resources and strategic investments to help build a better Balochistan.

There needs to be a comprehensive provincial development strategy for Balochistan which outlines the key areas of investment for inclusive growth and provides the roadmap for integrated development in the province. The provincial development strategy should highlight the fundamentals of impact-oriented community driven development and local action for poverty alleviation. District Development Plans, therefore, will be the key instruments to translate provincial strategy into local action. Nonetheless, local action needs to be buttressed through a process of continued engagement in which federal and provincial governments work closely and extend support in local action for social change.

# Rejected curricula advice



MUHAMMAD AMIR RANA

The reaction to the one-member Shoaib Suddle Commission report, which recommended that content on Islamic teachings and history be only carried in Islamic Studies textbooks was not unexpected. The report came at a time when the protests of the now banned Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan was underway and the state could not afford an upsurge in emotions.

The Council of Islamic Ideology and the National Commission on Minorities both denounced the report. However, it was on the directives of the governor of Punjab that the Department of Human Rights and Minorities Affairs withdrew the notification to implement the recommendations of the Supreme Court-appointed commission.

The Supreme Court of Pakistan had formed the one-member commission in 2014 to implement the judgement of the justice Tassaduq Jilani-led bench for the protection of minorities' rights. According to the judgement, the federal government was required to set up a task force for developing a strategy on religious toler-

ance, revisiting the curriculum for the promotion of a culture of tolerance, establishing a special quota for minorities in the federal and provincial services, acting against hate speech, and establishing a special force for the protection of places of worship of minorities. Since then, Dr Suddle has been handling this multidimensional task. In the process of developing the recommendations on curriculum reforms, he consulted all relevant stakeholders from the power corridors, law enforcement, civil society and religious minority groups. Nor are the recommendations new, as one can find in them a reflection of the recommendations of multiple human rights bodies in the country.

The government and state institutions may not pay attention to the recommendations for reasons of a possible backlash from religious groups and their allies in the media. Even previous federal and provincial governments had withdrawn curriculum changes whenever the clergy objected. The curriculum has become an area of influence for the clergy in Pakistan, and governments are often seen to accede to their demands in this.

Unfortunately, because of the state's negligence, religious extremism has become a regular feature of Pakistan's educational curricula for the past 40 years. For the state, the core purpose of education is to disseminate vague state ideologies as part of its nation-building project. The intellectual development of the citizens has never been the goal.

The textbooks promote narrow worldviews often at the cost of other faiths. The teaching of religion is not a problem in itself, but the way the majority faith is projected and imposed as the sole religious identity in Pakistan is highly challenging and one of the causes of radicalism that we see in a country that is home to di-

verse peoples, cultures, languages and belief systems.

The government is chiefly concerning itself with the curriculum of public-sector education; both the madrasahs and the private education sector resist if the government tries to touch their curricula. Overall, public-sector education in Pakistan is facing a number of challenges and it has reached a level where diagnosis has become difficult. At one end, the madrasah sector is encroaching on public-education spaces and at the other, the private-education sector is eyeing the public sector's educational infrastructure. Apart from employment concerns for its graduates, the madrasahs have ideological motives. Islamic Studies and many other faculties of humanities in the public sector are dominated by madrasah graduates. Largely, the private sector is the ultimate beneficiary of the poor quality found in public-education institutions. Now the private sector wants to capture the physical infrastructure of public institutions.

The same motives have been identified as being behind the removal of the chairman of the Higher Education Commission, who was resisting an ill-conceived programme of public-private partnerships, which was a means of facilitating the grabbing of university lands. A powerful education mafia wants the leftovers of public education in the country while proposing lucrative but non-transparent actions to the government.

The madrasahs and the private-education sector have a common aim to destroy public education in the country; the former has ideological and economic motives, and the latter eyes profits. This is interesting because the government is supporting both the madrasah and private sector in the name of reform. Some scholars lament that the state has privatised education. They assert that education

is a fundamental right of the citizens, and the state has privatised the people's fundamental rights. On the other hand, madrasahs have also mushroomed, adding to the perception that the state has abandoned its responsibility of providing education to the country's children. While overall public education remains in tatters, the madrasah sector, in contrast, has seen constant expansion over the last two decades. Government estimates put the number of madrasahs at 35,000 with only 9,500 (about 27 per cent) of them registered with the madrasah educational boards. Exam attendance figures show that some 275,000 students studied in madrasahs registered with Tanzeemul Madaaris, and over 175,000 were enrolled in madrasahs registered with different Wafaqul Madaaris.

The private sector has eroded and discredited public schools and is now eyeing higher education institutes. The government too is experimenting with public education and has come up with a plan to enforce a unified educational curriculum across the country. Called the Single National Curriculum, the new educational plan is premised on the idea that teaching more religion will produce better citizens, though Pakistan's experience shows that such a practice has only produced extremism in society. Nevertheless, the plan seeks to inject more religious content into the curricula. Though the SNC is currently being rolled out in phases, there is still no transparency. Based on the details available, some leading academicians believe that under the SNC, the government is planning to impose madrasah education on non-madrasah students. If this is the case then who will pay attention to Dr Suddle's recommendations? This will only serve as another reminder about the sorry state of the education system in the country.

## Hazrat Ali's martyrdom

FARHAN BOKHARI

As Muslims bowed down during the early morning 'fajr' congregational prayers in the historic mosque in Kufa, southern Iraq, an assassin armed with a poison-dipped sword rose and struck Hazrat Ali (A.S.), the son-in-law and cousin of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the fourth caliph of Islam.

"Fuztu bey Rab' il Kaaba" [By the Lord of 'Kaaba', I have succeeded] proclaimed Hazrat Ali (A.S.) as blood oozed from his fatal wound. Members of the prayer congregation that he was leading gathered around him while Abdul Rehman ibn e Muljim, the assassin, was arrested.

So profound was the impact of this monumental tragedy in 661 AD or 40 years after the 'hijrah' Islamic calendar began that the martyrdom of Hazrat Ali (A.S.) is commemorated to this day from the 19th day of Ramazan till the 21st of Ramazan – the day when Hazrat Ali (A.S.) passed away. The remembrance bears testimony to a life lived to the full in the service of Allah and his followers.

In keeping with past tradition, scores of Muslims will visit the 'Kufa' mosque and Hazrat Ali's final resting place in Najaf, southern Iraq on Sunday, to begin three days of mourning as they pay respect to the legacy of the fourth caliph of Islam.

Hazrat Ali (A.S.) is still remembered as the wisest of the wise and the bravest of the brave among a long line up of rulers in the history of Islam. As the first among men to convert to Islam, Hazrat Ali (a.s.) was closely influenced since childhood by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

His birth on the 13th day of the Islamic month of Rajab ul Murajab still takes Muslims to the Holy Kaaba, Mecca, where Hazrat Ali (A.S.) was born. This gave him the unique distinction of being born inside the house of Allah and martyred too inside a historic place dedicated to Allah, the mosque at Kufa.

In a clear testimony of his profound influence in history, some of the world's leading scholars have written extensively about Hazrat Ali (A.S.) as a leader, a guide and a teacher, an able administrator, a skillful general and last but not the least, an exemplary individual among pious figures. The multi-faceted personality of Hazrat Ali (A.S.) comes across prominently in 'Nahj al-Balagha', a compilation of his sermons, letters and commandments.

Within this record, an oft-repeated document remains a letter that Hazrat Ali (A.S.) wrote to Malik Ashtar, one of his most loyal followers, upon the latter's appointment as the governor of Egypt – then a province of the Islamic empire. The letter has been repeatedly cited as a model for the successful administration of a state based on justice.

Among prominent international citizens who spoke out publicly to acknowledge this document, the



words of the late Kofi Annan, the former secretary general of the United Nations remain memorable. "The Caliph Ali (A.S.) is considered the fairest leader (after Prophet Muhammad [may peace be upon him]) who appeared in human history, so we advise Arab countries to take Imam Ali (A.S.) as an example in establishing a regime based on justice and democracy. In the times of radical and extremist interpretations of Islam, it is essential to put forward Hazrat Ali's understanding of Islam to establish a just system" said Mr Annan.

These views followed the original text of the letter where Hazrat Ali (A.S.) advised his followers to embrace humility in ruling over their subjects. "(Do not say) I am your overlord and dictator, and that you should therefore bow to my commands as this will corrupt your heart, weaken your faith in religion and create disorder in the state. Should you be elated by power, ever feel in your mind the slightest symptoms of pride and arrogance, then look at the power and majesty of the divine governance of the universe over which you have absolutely no control".

Beyond his unparalleled knowledge and wisdom, the example of the bravery of Hazrat Ali (A.S.) is often cited in relation to his success on the battlefield. The success of Muslims during the battle of Khaybar is often remembered as an example of Hazrat Ali's bravery. The event involved a 17-day siege of a well-protected fort held by a Jewish tribe outside Medina.

In the face of what may have looked like a long-drawn standoff, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) proclaimed that he would give the flag of his army the next day to an able individual who would bring victory. The flag was handed over by the Prophet (pbuh) to Hazrat Ali (A.S.) who single-handedly breached the front entrance of the fort and led Muslims to victory.

Perhaps the most enduring legacy of Hazrat Ali (A.S.) remains his unparalleled grip on knowledge, laying the foundation for a continued search for knowledge by muslims for times to come.

From his pulpit at the 'Kufa' mosque during his five years as caliph, Hazrat Ali repeatedly claimed; "Salooni, Salooni, Qabla Ant'afkadooni" (Ask me, Ask me before I am not amongst you). Since his martyrdom, that claim by Hazrat Ali (a.s.) has never been successfully made by any one in the history