

Fearless feminists

DR NAAZIR MAHMOOD

They did not have any soft spot for dictatorial attitudes; neither did they brook any incorrectness of behaviour or language that turbocharged masculinity. They offered solutions rather than peddle conservatism and nostalgia. Their feminist ideological positions were strong, but without any virulence. They were Rubina Saigol and Kamla Bhasin.

We lost them within the span of a month; Rubina succumbed to the coronavirus in Lahore on Aug 27, 2021, and Kamla lost her battle against cancer in Delhi on Sept 25. Their departures have left South Asian activism intellectually poorer. I have fond memories of them and feel a personal loss at their passing. One could not find any fragility in their arguments and reasoning. Both abhorred lousy versions of gender-based submission, and their advice to women was to be able to pack a punch to patriarchy. Kamla and Rubina could outsmart their male counterparts, and they suggested that all women attempt to do that.

Both were convinced that women were better positioned for future success if they understood feminism correctly and practised it in their lives. Kamla Bhasin and Rubina Saigol were leading feminists of this region and shared many common traits. Kamla launched the South Asian edition of One Billion Rising (OBR) in 2017 in Nepal, when she was already over 70 years of age. It is a global campaign against violence against women. She was born in 1946 near Mandi Bahaudin in undivided Punjab and migrated with her parents to India after Partition.

Kamla and Rubina were not the ones to sit quietly when at least one billion women around the world suffer violence every year, hence the campaign One Billion Rising. They wanted our women to say 'enough is enough' and rise with one voice against gender-based crimes, rather than suffer in silence.

For both, feminism was not simply an ideology; it was a war against oppression and to counter all sorts of sexism in all societies. Essentially, their feminism was a call for equality and justice for women across the globe. Both urged women to take up creative actions and forge solidarity.

They were part of many civil society organisations as their motto was not to fight alone but in groups and associations. Another common trait between them was that they did not confine their struggles to women's issues alone. Protecting minority rights was also their agenda that they followed in their actions and writings till their last days. While Rubina was a Pakistani feminist scholar and educationist, she shared her activism for women's rights with Kamla. Both authored and edited several books and papers in at least two languages and both were proficient in English, Hindi/Urdu, and Punjabi.

Their scholarly works explore the themes of education, gender, and nationalism as they played out in post-partition years in the Subcontinent. Ethnicity and its relationship to feminism and human rights emerge prominently in their writings. Religious radicalisation was an anathema to both, and that was one reason they tried to expose the role of states in fanning terrorism while pretending to counter it. Just as Rubina was one of the pioneers of Ajoka Theatre, an active member of Simorgh and the Women's Action Forum (WAF), Kamla also used various forums and platforms such as Sangat to voice her concerns and protests.

Rubina Saigol completed her PhD in education at the University of Rochester and MA in psychology at Columbia University, and went on to author dozens of books and hundreds of articles on subjects close to her heart. One of her best books is 'Pakistan Project: A Feminist Perspective on Nation and Identity'. It explores the idea of Pakistan from Sir Syed Ahmed Khan to M A Jinnah from a gender perspective. She was brave enough to expose the as-

sumptions and contradictions inherent in the idea of Pakistan. Similarly, Kamla's scholarly works also appeared in several international research journals on diverse themes, most of them dealing with gender and feminism.

Kamla and Rubina attempted to document the direction and history of women's rights movements in South Asia. Their absence will be felt most by those who considered them as their mentors. They served as guides and teachers to their colleagues, wherever they worked. We drew inspiration from them to carry on their struggles in whatever way we could. Curriculum and gender in education were their specific areas of interest, and they discussed and debated them in both spoken and written forms. Both were great team players and ever ready to learn from others, and even keener to teach.

Interestingly, Kamla and Rubina — despite their diverse personal experiences — lived fully, and on their own terms. They were known for their fun-loving natures, and their generosity knew no bounds. Their creative talent was unique as they both partook of all sorts of expressions from poetry and prose to satire. When you read their writings, you feel that their clarity of thought reflects in their diction. There are many other writers on similar issues, but Kamla and Rubina believed in an accessible writing style, with critical thinking embedded in it. They were free spirits and cherished fluidity in life.

Perhaps their biggest achievement was their ability to bring smiles to their audience and readers, as both were keen to contribute to other people's lives. During their nearly half a century of active life, they graced many gatherings and occasions, and participated in parties across the globe; these were events that were full of magnanimity and high spiritedness. They imparted bravery and courage through their discourses which were compassionate and powerful. They preferred — and encouraged other women to do — things that many in their societies considered unbecom-

ing to a woman. For example, Kamla loved to do symbolic acts of defiance and empowerment. When she conducted Sangat workshops on feminist capacity building, those who attended were ready to break gender barriers and take on the world. Rubina was also a social scientist as well a gender activist who nurtured young feminists. Both spent their entire lives in enabling others to understand feminism and gender, so that they could monitor misogyny and patriarchy in communities and societies. One message that I received whenever I met them was that unless women are free, men cannot be free.

As Kamla used to say time and again, "the struggle for gender equality is not between men and women, it is among two ideologies: one that says patriarchy is better, and the other that says equality is better." Kamla explained patriarchy as the exploitation of women whereby men control women's mobility, physical and reproductive powers, and even sexuality; it is based on violence or the threat of violence. If you apply that to countries such as Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, how true it appears. Rubina too believed the same and promoted diversity, not gender differences.

We learnt from them that the stress on gender differences created control, discrimination, and exploitation. Kamla and Rubina did not want to dehumanise men by boxing them into expectations of protecting women, as it is like ingraining the use of violence as normal. For nearly half a century, both worked for a gender-just society, and they saw the women's movement change in their lifetime. In addition to education and other rights for women, Kamla and Rubina were particularly concerned about the cultural discrimination that persists in societies, especially in South Asian countries.

If we need to carry their struggle forward, we must be anti-misogynistic. We must demand more representation of women in legislative bodies. We must demand that marital rape be

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

1270-B, Peoples Colony No I, Off: Chenone
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

Pandora's Box

The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) has unveiled its Pandora Papers naming Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin, Senator Faisal Vawda, PML-Q leader Chaudhry Moonis Elahi, Ishaq Dar's son, PPP's Sharjeel Memon, the family of Minister for Industries and Production Khusrubakhtiar, PTI leader Abdul Aleem Khan, Axaact CEO Shoaib Sheikh among those with alleged links to offshore companies. Immediately after the announcement, Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin said that he "has done nothing wrong and is ready for any kind of investigation". According to him, a developer, namely Tariq bin Laden, had shown interest in making investment in Silk Bank through fundraising from Europe when the bank was facing the issue of capital. Subsequently, he said that Tariq bin Laden decided not to invest in Silk Bank and the companies - opened with the approval of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) - were shut down in 2014-15. "Neither any account of the companies was opened nor was any transaction made," he said, adding that he had the documentary proof of everything. The files "show" how Chaudhry Moonis Elahi, a key political ally of Imran Khan, purportedly planned to put the proceeds from an allegedly corrupt business deal into a secret trust, concealing them from Pakistan's tax authorities. Elahi did not respond to ICIJ's repeated requests for comment. Yesterday, however, a family spokesman told ICIJ's media partners that, "due to political victimisation misleading interpretations and data have been circulated in files for nefarious reasons."

According to Papers, Tarin and members of his family own four offshore companies. According to Tariq Fawad Malik, a financial consultant who handled the paperwork on the companies, they were set up as part of the Tarin family's intended investment in a bank with a Saudi business. He said that "as a mandatory prerequisite by [the] regulator, we engaged with the central bank of Pakistan to obtain their 'in-principle' approval for the said strategic investment." The deal didn't proceed. Omer Bakhtyar, the brother of Khan's minister for industries, Makhdum Khusrubakhtyar, transferred a \$1 million apartment in the Chelsea area of London to his elderly mother through an offshore company in 2018. Makhdum Bakhtyar said that the anti-corruption agency's investigation was founded on baseless allegations which had underestimated his family's past wealth. In fact, one hopes that Pandora Papers would further strengthen Prime Minister Imran Khan's stance against corruption and ICIJ investigation would open new avenues of transparency and corruption. We hope that this investigation, like the Panama investigation, will open new avenues of transparency and discourage corruption. The overseas assets of some of the world's most corrupt people were uncovered in Panama Papers, now another ICIJ investigation is being released. The Prime Minister has rightly asked the rich countries to discourage hiding of money stolen of the poor in the rich countries. The poor masses of this country are victim of those who are born with a silver spoon in their

SYED AKHTAR ALI

Beyond Thar coal

China has announced, at international forums, that it won't finance any new coal-fired power plant project outside its country anymore. This has sent shock waves among stakeholders in Pakistan who were counting on technology and finance from China to utilise the huge Thar coal deposits of 185 billion tonnes in the country.

China has already built a 660 MW power plant in Thar and is in the process of building another plant along with a coal mine with a capacity of 1320 MW. There are several other Thar-based coal projects in the pipeline, all reliant on technology and finance from China. It has also built three power plants in Pakistan based on imported coal. There were other project ideas and proposals regarding coal gasification to produce diesel, gas, fertilisers and chemicals on which considerations were at various stages.

Also, there were project proposals to transport Thar Lignite coal to outside of Thar and use it in place of imported coal — creating a 20-80 percent mix of Thar Lignite and imported coal. A railway extension project has been developed for the same. Hopefully, China will honour its existing commitments regarding Thar coal, which are not beyond the current two projects: one has already been constructed (SECMC 660 MW) and the other is under construction (SSRL 1320 MW).

In Pakistan, coal is not used in the power sector alone. The cement sector, too, uses imported coal along with some sub-bituminous coal produced in underground coal mines in Balochistan. Before the advent of coal-based power plants, Pakistan imported 10.7 million tonnes of coal, in 2017 — almost all of it went to the cement sector. Its installed capacity is projected to grow to 100 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) from the existing 55mtpa. Thus, the cement sector's coal demand is going to be 20mtpa in the near to mid-term future. The sector is vital for both the domestic construction industry and exports. The total imported coal demand for both the power and cement sectors appears to be touching 25mtpa, which will go up to 35mtpa. Based on an average price of \$100 per tonne, the total annual import bill for 25mtpa is \$2.5 billion.

There is no economic fuel for producing cement other than coal. Previously, cheap local gas was used for producing cement. Rising gas prices and depleting local gas resources have forced cement producers to shift to coal. Unfortunately, now both gas (LNG) and coal are expensive. Coal prices have gone as high as \$146 per tonne from the previous \$70 per tonne. LNG prices are exceeding \$36 per mmbtu, which is absolutely uneconomic and unaffordable. In this context, local coal production appears to be cheaper and viable. Although there has been controversy over Thar coal production costs, recent estimates suggest that the production capacity of \$30 per tonne of Thar coal is equivalent to that of \$60 per tonne of imported coal. Thar Lignite coal is one-half in calorific value than imported coal. Lignite may not be an ideal fuel for cement production as it contains 40-50 percent moisture. However, it can be pre-processed to fire in cement kilns. The cement industry is quite progressive in Pakistan. It has been trying to use municipal solid waste in an attempt to reduce production costs and solve the community's waste problem.

A 20mtpa demand of imported coal from cement factories will be tantamount to 40mtpa of Thar Lignite. Add another 10 mtpa for other sectors and it will add up to 50mtpa of Thar coal demand for sectors other than the power sector. If this import is replaced, the country

could save \$2 billion of foreign exchange. It is, therefore, vital for Pakistan to establish Thar Lignite mines with a capacity of 50mtpa in the next five years, even if we forget about the use of Thar coal in the power sector. It may be plausible that the present undertaking or announcement of China is restricted to only coal-based power plants and that there is no bar on the use of coal in other sectors such as cement. Pakistan should also start developing indigenous mine development and operating capacity. It now has some experience in this respect. The Chinese government may also be more than willing to transfer technology in this sector (by reducing its direct exposure in terms of operations and finance) now that it wants to improve its international image among the world's climate lobbies.

Pakistan started its Thar coal venture quite late, while in India, across the border in the same Thar desert, its utilisation started in the 1970s. Except China, no other country was ready to extend cooperation in this field, and it did. It appears that it cannot do any more than the existing commitments. The need of the hour is to start developing and absorbing local coal mining capabilities projects and develop independence. It should be noted that coal-based power, whether local or based on imported coal, is expensive at 8.5 USc per kWh while renewable energy like solar is available at less than 4 USc. International prices have gone down to even 2 USc and less. There are predictions that solar power might go as low as one USc, although storage cost would double it. The issue is how to manage the transition and avoid stranded investments. China's decision may ultimately prove to be a blessing in disguise. Thar, which is an area of 10,000 sq kms, can generate 400 GW solar electricity based on 25 sq kms per GW. By comparison, the Indicative Generation Capacity Expansion Plan (IGCEP) predicts 55-75 GW of generating capacity by 2030. Although all electricity cannot be produced in one location, it may be reasonable to plan up to 10,000 MW of solar power in Thar. It is quite possible that some large capital-intensive projects may be dropped for a variety of reasons. The IGCEP is indicative. We should not repeat the same mistake of high foreign reliance. A local solar equipment production industry development plan should be developed, not only for producing solar PV panels but also for other items such as inverters. An incentive programme should be prepared to encourage the local manufacturing industry. After all, huge incentives in the form of custom tariffs have been given to the automotive industry. And now, there are proposals for the 10 percent price protection for the refinery sector.

There is ample scope for incentives when we compare coal-based electricity tariff of 8.5 USc vs under 4 USc for solar power. India, Turkey and other countries have similar incentive system, and they have developed their solar industries along with the installation of substantial solar power capacity. Thus, local manufacturing and installation of solar power capacity are not incompatible. As of today, no energy source is a panacea. Solar is available only during the day while hydro and wind energies are available in summer. Fossil fuels such as oil and gas are exhaustible and subject to price variations, while coal is bad for the environment and climate. The days of energy utopia are not far — the targets can be achieved by between 2040 and 2050. The world is moving towards the solar-wind-hydrogen chain. Hydrogen will make energy transportable and tradable across national boundaries. We have to start moving in that direction too.



Biden's contain-China strategy

MALEEHA LODHI

Addressing the UN General Assembly last month, President Joe Biden promised a new era of "relentless diplomacy" and renewed US commitment to multilateralism that his predecessor so disdainfully rejected. In his first foreign policy speech since the American withdrawal from Afghanistan, Biden declared that US military power would now be an option of last and not first resort. He called for international cooperation to meet common challenges and pledged to work with allies. He also said the US was "not seeking a new Cold War or a world divided into rigid blocs."

Welcome assertions that contrasted sharply with the blustering rhetoric of President Donald Trump. But the Biden administration's actions have been at odds with many of these words. Both policy towards China and Washington's treatment of allies have not been consistent with these pronouncements. Consider what happened on the heels of the US departure from Afghanistan. As if to swiftly make good on the promise to pivot to bigger challenges — ie China — Washington forged a new trilateral security pact with the UK and Australia named AUKUS. The coalition's aim is to counter Chinese power in the Asia Pacific region by assisting Australia to build eight nuclear-powered submarines equipped with Tomahawk missiles.

This effort at enhancing Australia's naval power to challenge China's military ascendancy in the western Pacific met a sharp response from Beijing. Accusing AUKUS nations of an "outdated zero-sum Cold War mentality", Beijing denounced the move as "irresponsible" and said it would "undermine regional peace and security and intensify the arms race". To be sure this deal is consequential for the international non-proliferation regime. As former IAEA official Tariq Rauf recently wrote, "it could well open up a Pandora's box of proliferation with non-nuclear-weapon states also going in for nuclear-powered submarines and keeping nuclear fuel outside the scope of IAEA safeguards".

The immediate diplomatic fallout from the deal was a rift among America's allies. Paris, which was not kept in the loop and saw Australia abandon its plan to acquire diesel-electric French submarines, reacted furiously. France's foreign minister described it as a "stab in the back". While Washington sought to calm French anger in a phone call from Biden to President Emmanuel Macron, the damage to relations was already done. The signal sent to Europe was that the US could act as it wished without taking allies on board. It laid bare the gap between Biden's pledge to consult partners and his policy steps. Building a coalition against China by AUKUS opened up cracks in the transatlantic alliance which Biden had earlier sought to shore up for his anti-Beijing diplomatic strategy. The security pact also made many Asean countries nervous — their economies being closely integrated with China's global supply chain.

In the week following the AUKUS announcement Biden hosted a summit of Quad leaders — US, Australia, Japan

and India — in another effort to fortify an anti-China front among regional states. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue was resuscitated by the Trump administration in 2017 with the aim of countering China. But, as many Western analysts pointed out, Quad has now been undercut by AUKUS. US officials described it as non-military and "informal". The haste with which Washington acted after its Afghan withdrawal — perhaps to shift attention away from that debacle — involved moves that appeared so haphazard as to leave many allies disconcerted. For example, a former Indian foreign secretary Nirupama Rao said there was "a strategic ambush of Quad by AUKUS" and questioned its rationale when Quad already existed.

The statement issued after the Quad summit committed member countries to a "free and open Indo-Pacific". While it never mentioned China, the meeting — and indeed Quad itself — is focused principally on offsetting China's rising power. The Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman responded to the Quad summit by cautioning the US not to engage in "closed and exclusive small circles" while Global Times — which reflects Beijing's views — depicted it as an attempt to "incite disputes and confrontation in the western Pacific". What both the AUKUS and Quad moves have done is to intensify US-China tensions and confirmed to Beijing that a US-led contain-China strategy continues to unfold. But while the Biden administration is stepping up anti-China efforts on the global front, at home its domestic agenda has been mired in the country's intensely polarised environment. The irony is that while much energy is being expended abroad Biden's grip on his own party is being tested by two key pieces of domestic legislation, an infrastructure bill and the social safety spending package, on which Democratic party liberals have strong reservations. Meanwhile, Senate Republicans who had blocked a debt limit bill came around to support stopgap legislation offered as a last-minute compromise by the ruling party. This averted a government shutdown and debt default but will keep government funding going only till December. It therefore kicks the can down the road with more bruising Congressional battles ahead.

Perhaps because of these domestic troubles Biden is adopting a more aggressive stance towards Beijing than expected as it is on the international front that he has greater room to manoeuvre. But he is also reflecting political consensus in the US for a tougher posture towards Beijing. For their part, Chinese officials see little to distinguish between Trump and Biden's policies on China. On trade their approach is identical as Trump-era tariffs remain intact. Chinese leaders have repeatedly warned the US against engaging in a Cold War and see the Biden administration pursuing a strategy of "confrontational competition". In September when President Biden had his first phone conversation with President Xi Jinping in seven months the Chinese leader is reported to have declined Biden's suggestion for a summit meeting, insisting that the US first dial down its belligerent rhetoric and improve the atmosphere for such engagement.