

The Business

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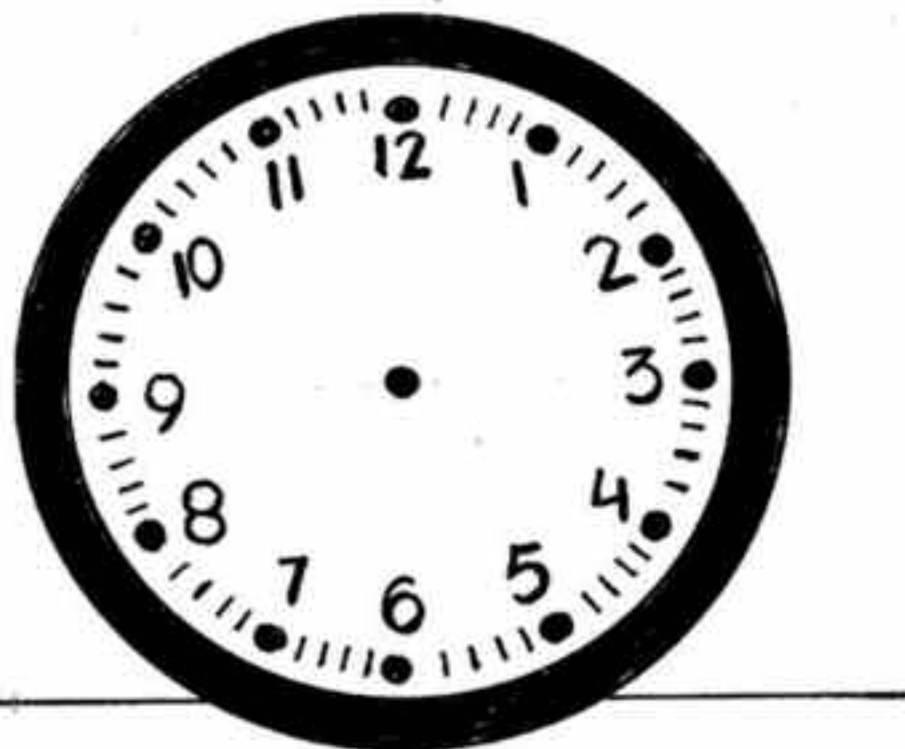
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MENDING CORRUPT
SYSTEM WILL TAKE
TIME!



Afghan crisis

While visiting the newly established Afghanistan Inter-Ministerial Coordination Cell (AICC), Prime Minister Imran Khan instructed all ministries to facilitate Afghans to the maximum. He ordered immediate shipment of in-kind humanitarian assistance worth Rs. 5 billion, which will comprise food commodities including 50,000 MT of wheat, emergency medical supplies, winter shelters and other supplies. He also approved in-principle tariff and sales tax reduction on key Afghan exports to Pakistan. The Prime Minister also ordered that the facility of free COVID vaccination for all Afghans entering Pakistan from land borders be continued. Pakistan is at the forefront of international humanitarian efforts in addressing the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Afghanistan as the war-ravaged country heads into winter. The health sector has been hit hard especially, with many healthcare workers fleeing due to unpaid salaries in the aftermath of Taliban takeover in August. International aid agencies have warned of famine as a drought coincides with a failing economy following the withdrawal of Western financial support. Pakistan under the auspices of the Pak-Afghan Cooperation Forum (PACF) has arranged free medical camps in Khost and Kabul to treat deserving Afghan patients. A free eye camp was organised at the public health office in Khost from November 18 to 20, where 1,820 patients were checked up and another 219 went through eye surgeries. Similarly, another eye camp and medical camp will be organised at Jinnah Hospital Kabul from November 22 to 24, where patients will be treated free of charge. Patients including those visiting the Khost camp from far-flung areas expressed complete satisfaction over the free of charge medical treatment by the Pakistani surgeons. "When I heard out about a free eye camp, I came here. My operation was successful free of charge and I am so grateful to Pakistan," an Afghan patient said.

Pakistan has been urging the international community to come forward to help millions of desperate Afghans after the neighbouring country's assets worth billions of dollars parked abroad were frozen following the Taliban takeover in August. Pakistan has also dispatched tons of food and medical supplies as part of its efforts to rebuild Afghanistan's infrastructure amid looming crises. Earlier this week, Pakistan drew the world community's attention to the dire humanitarian and economic crisis in Afghanistan and fervently called for lifting the "unjustified freeze" on the war-torn country's assets to enable it to deal with the critical situation. "Cash is needed to revive the economy — to pay salaries, restore small businesses, revive the banking system," Ambassador Munir Akram told UN Security Council while highlighting that 28 million Afghans were facing acute food insecurity. Speaking in the 15-member council's meeting on Afghanistan, the Pakistani envoy warned that the consequences of a major humanitarian crisis and economic collapse would be horrendous — massive human suffering, the outflow of millions of more Afghan refugees, the likelihood of chaos and further conflict and reinforcement of Da'ish and other terrorist groups.



BY RAOOF HASAN

The fact that a video or some other controversial material would be released and agitated prior to whenever a hearing is scheduled in cases concerning Nawaz Sharif and Maryam Safdar has assumed comical proportions. This would be inevitably followed by a plea to defer the hearing by citing one brainless reason or the other.

The entire exercise has been repeated ad nauseam to delay the prospect of an adversarial injunction in their cases as also to create an impression that they have been wronged. This is despite the fact that, in almost five years, the entire family including convict-absconder Nawaz Sharif and his convicted daughter, out temporarily on suspended sentence, has failed to answer one simple question: what are the legitimate sources of income for purchasing businesses and properties worth billions in foreign lands? In the meanwhile, Maryam and her cohorts are malevolently busy in cutting and pasting bits to produce and market their fake and fabricated stories. Worse still, our system is absorbing it without even a shade of protest or remedy. All their requests are ceded as if they were still

The mean machine

the potentates dictating both the substance and direction of events.

As part of the larger Machiavellian plan to bring disrepute to the key state institutions and individuals and render them controversial, the two-day Asma Jehangir conference, co-hosted by the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA), was turned into a lowly street agitation. The judges in general, and those present at the function including the CJP and chief justices of the Islamabad and Lahore high courts in particular, were subjected to mocking criticism for being under pressure from extra-judicial forces.

The CJP gave a scathing response and left the function halfway, without completing his speech. Why the honourable judges agreed to participate in a function where the concluding speech was to be made by the convict-absconder Nawaz Sharif will remain a nagging mystery. Seeing the judges of the court which had convicted the former prime minister and the convict-absconder using the same platform to put across their points of view was detrimental to the cause of the judiciary. In doing so, the judges provided an opportunity to the organisers to manipulate their presence to advance their dastardly objectives. Saner counsel would have avoided the embarrassment.

The presence of some senior diplomats, including ambassadors and high commissioners, most notably one from the European Union (EU), who is also reported to have funded the conference, raised eyebrows, even stirring a demand to serve a demarche.

The incidence of internal subversion has been on the rise in the recent past, with an increasing number of people becoming part of the ominous plan to destabilise Pakistan. Unbelievably large sums of money are floating for disbursement among these operators who

have become conduits to carry forth the germs of disunity and casting aspersions on the working of state institutions, most notably the military and the judiciary. The latter mentioned will have to take some blame for helping cultivate this narrative.

When an impression takes root that the rich and powerful are able to buy justice in the country, it only adds substance to the accusations. Even the current outstanding cases against the Sharifs have been marred by prolonged and unjustifiable delays which further strengthen the perception that the influence that is germinated by their bloated billions is the constituent for granting them reprieve. This perception has to be busted and the only way to do so is by expediting adjudication in their cases as also in cases concerning other similar criminals.

Let us not forget that, according to the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index 2021 Report, Pakistan is ranked 130th out of a total of 139 nations. In our part of the world, it finishes barely above Afghanistan which is at the rock bottom. Other countries including India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh have all performed better than Pakistan.

The exorbitant delay in disposing of cases is another grave issue. The number of pending cases in the Supreme Court alone stands at over 53,000 while the total pendency in Pakistani courts is a well over two million including 200,000 cases with LHC, 86,000 with SHC, 44,000 with PHC, 4,500 with BHC and 16,500 with IHC. Delayed justice, according to a popular dictum, is tantamount to denial of justice. Add to that the number of controversial injunctions and decisions aborted, and one gets a fairly embarrassing picture of the state of judiciary in the country. If Pakistan has to move forward, it will have to begin with delivery of speedy and transparent justice to all people ir-

respective of the power of their pockets and positions. The increasing instances of subversion in the country should be a source of extreme concern for the government. The involvement of the media in this nefarious practice adds an alarming twist to the spectacle. Recently, a whistleblower has come forth to speak publicly about complicity between the ECP and Trust for Democratic Education and Accountability (TDEA) which supports the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) in undertaking tasks of election observation, voter mobilisation, governance oversight and advocacy for electoral and democratic reform. The report regarding TDEA bearing the financial expenses of senior ECP officials at a conference creates a serious conflict-of-interest situation which must be probed.

The stated objectives that TDEA supports through FAFEN have to be implemented independent of the ECP. Any connivance among the two institutions would jeopardise the transparency of the activities and authenticity of the outcomes. News of a large amount of money having been delivered to a journalist trade union through the aegis of the same body is also circulating which deserves a thorough investigation.

Ever since the election of Prime Minister Imran Khan, the political mafias, spearheaded by the traditional family oligarchs, have developed a consensus to force him out. With the passage of time, the intensity of their invective has become more poisonous and efforts to challenge the state and its institutions more desperate. In addition to advancing their interests and escaping the prospect of political oblivion for their corrupt clans, hidden hands with an inimical agenda have sprung up.

Pakistan's interests do not figure anywhere in this menacing and consuming drive rooted in foundations of

Pakistani universities and governance



BY DR JAVID LAGHARI

University governance is much more complex than what many believe, including those in government who intervene in university affairs. In reality, unless one has actually worked in a senior administrative position at a university, a person will find it difficult to fully comprehend a university's ecosystem, which is unlike many other government organisations.

A university has many stakeholders, all of whom are educated and include faculty members, scholars, researchers, administrators, syndicate, Senate, academic councils, students, alumni, parents, and the community. Their peers within Pakistan and around the world are also intellectuals, which naturally brings in a sense of collaboration and competition, leading to improved performance. So, what holds universities back in delivering their best?

Universities around the world are autonomous bodies that establish academic and functional policies and procedures on their own. However, in Pakistan, the government is highly involved in universities' governance and, sometimes, even 'rules' public universities. For those who may be surprised at this notion, it is important to count the number of government bodies — and individuals — that are involved in universities' operations since the day they are

established. In Pakistan, universities, whether public or private, are established through an Act, where both the National Assembly and the Senate, including their standing committees, must approve university bills. For provincial government-run universities, it is the provincial assemblies. This process alone involves hundreds of MPAs. Where else in the civilised world, except in colonial countries, does this happen?

The US has the most comprehensive and one of the best higher education (HE) systems in the world. More than 7,000 higher education institutions (HEIs) exist in the US today, with everything from large public and private research institutions to small religious colleges to for-profit institutions located fully on the web.

The US HE sector produces over one million associate's degrees, nearly two million bachelor's degrees, over one million master's degrees, and over 200,000 doctoral degrees every year. Despite these numbers, American universities are not 'regulated' by the governments — federal and state. The universities are fully autonomous and are governed by their Boards and administration, which consist of faculty members.

In the US, the federal and state governments or Congress do not approve university charters, unlike they do in Pakistan. American universities only need to get registered with the appropriate department, which is a trivial step. The Federal Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) does not set standards on how universities should teach, research, or provide service to the community, like the HEC in Pakistan does. The HEA only states that an institution must be "accredited" for its students to be "eligible for federal government grants and student loans."

Accreditation is the key to quality education, cutting-edge research and community service. It is a non-governmental system under which non-profit autonomous private bodies, such as the Middle States Commission on Higher

Education (MSCHE), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET), the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), etc for program accreditation, work with HEIs to review and critique their operations.

The HEI provides a 'self-assessment' tool that an accreditor then uses as a framework for examining an institution's successes and challenges. Accreditation bodies, which are autonomous and highly professional, decide the fate of academic programs and HEIs. In Pakistan, even though HEIs and academic programmes are reviewed by both the HEC and accreditation bodies, the quality becomes highly questionable as accreditation bodies are themselves politicised and established by the government. In the US, all universities, whether public or private, are eligible to receive research funding from both federal and state governments. There is no HEC. While there are federal bodies that fund basic research, like the NSF, the bulk of research funding comes directly from the departments such as the department of defence or energy, from agencies like NASA, NIH, etc, and from the corporate world.

In Pakistan, the president, chief ministers, governors, and ministers (federal and provincial) 'decide' on the appointment of a university's vice chancellor (VC). This process, sometimes, leaves out many qualified candidates. The federal and provincial governments then interfere through ministers, secretaries, and the federal and provincial HECs or HEDs in their governance. The HEC through its control of quality and standards, and being the only source of funding, sometimes acts like a mafia, wanting to impose its agenda on universities, as it happened during the tenures of the last two chairpersons.

In a recent move, two policies, the PhD and undergraduate policies, which were unilaterally imposed by the last HEC chairperson were rejected by 178 out of the 180 VCs attending a three-day meeting held in Bhurban in the first

Garlic and ginger

BY HUMAYUN GAUHAR

In Pakistan, we face situations every day that are both funny and tragic at the same time. Nearly all have pathos in them and large parts of them are rife with ignorance. At such times it is wise to cry and laugh at the same time. When your information minister cannot tell whether 'lehsan' is garlic or not then you laugh. He used the word 'lehsan' and then explained that in English it is called 'ginger'. So, it would not be wrong to conjecture that he has been cooking with garlic when he should have used ginger and with ginger when he should have used garlic. I wonder what word he will find for 'thom,' which means onion in Punjabi and 'pyaaz' in Urdu. But the great man merrily carries on with his ignorance hither and thither and yon.

Reminds me of the time when my little daughter, Saniyya, took her first foray in cooking. She came and asked me how to make chicken korma. She kept walking into the TV lounge to ask me for the recipe and when she finally made it, she proudly presented it to me. Only I discovered it was lamb and not chicken. But I let it pass because it nevertheless tasted very good. The twelve-year-old child would have lost interest in cooking if I had chided her or made fun of her. Instead, my wife and I encouraged her — and today Saniyya is a passable cook. You should ask our information minister to make an omelet but he may end up with a scrambled egg stuffed with garlic and ginger. He should start a restaurant called 'Garlic & Ginger.'

The judiciary is on the run because of a fake audio message in which former CJ Saqib Nisar is allegedly talking about the case against Nawaz and Maryam Nawaz being manipulated. This is complete nonsense. Saqib Nisar has himself said that it is not his voice because the audio tape was created by a cut and paste job from two different speeches and allegedly manufactured because the PML-N tend to do such things to divert attention when the hearing of some case of theirs is coming up. Some of the lawyers are the same faces that one saw during the lawyers' movement. The whole thing is pathetic, and the debate still rages on Pakistani television channels about this tamasha.

Be that as it may, the judiciary has lost a

healthy chunk of the respect and credibility that was remaining. The larger question that arises is: who selects judges and how? Our practice now is to select them in the manner that kills merit — seniority. We have had Supreme Court judges who were 'prevailed' upon to judge against Zulfikar Ali Bhutto which led to his execution. That whole case from high court to the Supreme Court was a classic example of miscarriage of justice and the destruction of due process. But we have lived with it since his execution in 1979.

But the same courts then sat to decide on whether former president Pervez Musharraf had committed treason or not. The case still hangs fire. Our judiciary gives bail to convicted criminals like Nawaz Sharif and lets them leave the country on the excuse of finding a cure in London where Sharif now lives and trashes the judiciary and the army whenever he can. It is food for thought when a corrupt man is given bail and the judiciary looks on, while former president Asif Zardari lords it over without any consequences. It would be a close match between Zardari and Nawaz Sharif.

So much for our exalted judiciary — and let it be said for our lawyers: they succeeded in restoring Iftikhar Chaudhry as chief justice and he proceeded to destroy the judiciary with his misjudgments — doing so much damage and yet not facing any consequences.

We finally have a new programme with the IMF worth not very much. But it will create more problems for Pakistan and Pakistanis. Inflation, already unmanageable, will get another boost and where all this will end, I don't know. Poor Imran Khan is trying to ensure that our next election is free and fair by introducing electronic voting machines. A storm has been kicked up by a jobless opposition and they will put Imran under great pressure to undo this legislative decision. His getting more than thirty bills passed in one day was a big achievement.

And, whilst talking of the IMF, I recall that our finance minister before he became finance minister the first time in the PPP government had grandly declared that he will go to the IMF over his dead body. Well, go he did and begged for another programme. I am still asking all who listen where the body is.

The writer is a veteran journalist, political analyst and author.