

The Business

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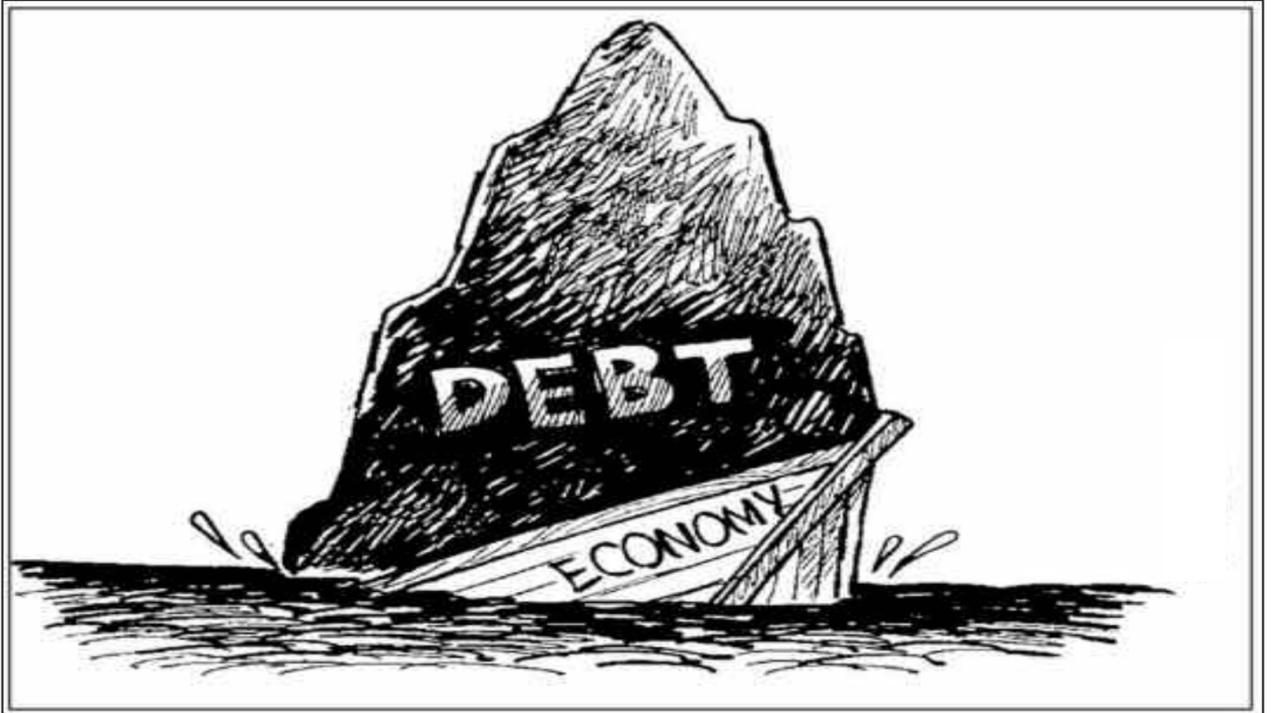
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The madressah riddle

MUHAMMAD AMIR RANA

The state has yet to fully realise the sociocultural and political-economic inferences of religious education institutions or madressahs. Despite having long attempted to pursue the reform of this sector, successive governments have done little to change things on the ground mainly because of fear of a backlash and a reluctance to allocate resources. Those leading the madressahs have taken advantage of the persisting confusion and have continued to strengthen their roots and support among the people.

Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Fawad Chaudhry delivered a bold speech during a consultative conference in Islamabad some days back and rightly identified the root causes of religious extremism in society. While he did not altogether exculpate madressahs, his statement that public schools and colleges were the major source of extremism, and not madressahs, did not tell the whole story. However, his claim that teachers were hired in schools and colleges during the 1980s and 1990s as part of a plot to teach extremism was correct. He appeared to be referring to the Jamaat-i-Islami and its subsidiaries, which were a major partner of military dictator Ziaul Haq in his goal of encroaching on educational campuses, sowing the seeds of religious extremism and recruiting for 'jihad' in Afghanistan and Kashmir.

The minister might have deliberately not mentioned the fact that Zia's jihad project was a multifold initiative and nurturing madressahs was an integral part of it. Without focusing on madressahs, poor Afghan

refugees could not be engaged in 'jihad'. No doubt, the US and Saudi Arabia were major sponsors of this project, but Gen Zia allowed the mushroom growth of madressahs across the country as part of his Islamisation agenda and also in order to create his political constituency. The extremism promoted on educational campuses and in madressahs closed the minds of the youth, and madressahs 'distinguished' themselves through capturing the narrative-formation process.

Keeping the information minister's speech in mind, it is useful to take note of a report by an international media outlet on Afghan madressah students demanding that the Taliban include science subjects in their curriculum; apart from advocating changes to the curriculum for girls' education. Though the report is about a madressah in Paktia province, many experts have depicted it as a positive indication that sane voices such as these will gradually build pressure on the Taliban to accommodate their demands. One wonders if the Afghan Taliban, who were the product of Pakistani madressahs, can become a role model for the latter to bring about changes in their curriculum.

Many madressahs in Pakistan are on the path of transformation and are offering science education to their students, but their numbers are not inspiring, and religious elites are also not ready to holistically revisit their education system. The reason is obvious: the madressah sector is catering to the financial and political needs of the religious elites as well. The institution of the madressah has become the primary political base for religious groups and religious-political parties, and continues to strictly

adhere to its potentially explosive sectarian character. It is expanding and encroaching on the formal education sector and the state has failed to regulate the institution, despite its concerns and (half-hearted) measures. The state has not come out of the Zia era mindset and still believes that the madressah is not the source of the problem, rather it is helping the state cater to the educational needs of the masses. Otherwise, the state would have to cut on other expenses to fulfil its educational obligations. The maximum concern the state could have about the madressahs is their possible links with terrorist groups and for that reason it might not want to antagonise the madressah establishment. In fact, state institutions have adopted the madressah elite's narrative that the source of the problem lies with the public education institutions and not madressahs.

The supporters of the narrative allude to instances of terrorist violence committed by the radicalised youth of colleges and universities. Competition apart, one should not forget that madressah students and graduates have remained far more involved in terrorist activities in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Formal education institutions have not produced a fraction of the number of militants who enter the ranks of various national and international terrorist organisations which the madressahs belonging to different banned militant organisations have produced so far. It is true that until the mid-1990s, the madressahs' human resource contribution to militant organisations was less compared to that of the formal educational institutions. The madressah institution was young at that time but then it took over the militant discourse in the

country. In recent decades, the state has made all-out efforts to make campuses apolitical, while the madressah students remain politically and ideologically charged and vulnerable to be exploited for street protests and recruitment for military purposes.

The state has also failed to understand the equation between madressah, mosque, and school. Almost all mosques get their imams, or prayer leaders, from madressahs, who preach the same version of Islam they learned at their alma mater and influence the public in sectarian terms. An imam is a source of inspiration for the people, especially the lower-income groups that consult him for their spiritual and even physical health needs. A taweez (amulet) matters more to them than medicine as they may not have to pay for it. Secondly, more and more madressah graduates are now joining public education institutions as teachers and are influencing young minds in a variety of ways. The madressah mindset is at its full play in society and is responsible for promoting two major sociopolitical conflicts, which certainly have security implications: first, the sectarian divide, and second, ideological radicalism. The madressah mindset is very conventional and takes any new idea of moderation as a conspiracy against its interests.

So far, it has successfully resisted the state's attempts at reform. However, the madressah leadership is aware of the evolving challenge of extremism. The conference that Mr Chaudhry addressed also had a dedicated session for religious scholars and they agreed that the sectarian divide is increasing in society and that the challenge of extremism will become more complex in the near future.

Incentives to Chinese Cos

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Authority Chairman, Khalid Mansoor, briefed senior representatives of Chinese companies on developments and opportunities available in Pakistan. The criticality of this initiative may be gleaned from the fact that in recent months Chinese companies have increasingly expressed their concerns over their treatment by the Pakistan authorities ranging from failure to release payments to power sector projects as per contractual obligations, a lapse that is compromising these companies' ability to pay dividends which in turn is the major lacuna in approval by the Chinese insurance companies for Phase-II projects, to charges of the cost of these projects being much higher than available internationally to failure of the government to release counterpart funds to provision of the necessary infrastructure at agreed rates. The list is indeed exhaustive especially given the context of two obvious factors with respect to the CPEC: first and foremost, Chinese investment under CPEC's umbrella remains the major source of investment in Pakistan, be it as debt, government guarantee or repatriable profits. And second, the Chinese interest to set up Chinese-owned productive units in Pakistan's special economic zones (SEZs) with the specific objective of exporting to other countries is widely believed to have the capacity to become a major export source for the country. These objectives remain unmet as the PTI administration continues to face difficulties in terms of meeting its contractual obligations to the companies no doubt due to the lack of adequate resources. In this context, one would hope that the government prioritizes due payments to Chinese companies because it would empower the companies to pay dividends which in turn would get them approval from insurance companies for future projects in Pakistan. One way to generate revenue would of course be for the government to impose taxes on items that are a health hazard like in other countries, particularly tobacco and sugary drinks. Of particular concern is the fact that mismanagement by the team at the helm in the Energy Ministry second year running accounts for failure to import adequate RLNG on time, which is expected to lead to a severe gas shortage this winter that, reports indicate, will translate into load (gas) shedding to all consumers, including exporters. There has been many a slip between the cup and the lip and unless a dedicated and concerted effort is not made to prioritize the CPEC and deal with Chinese concerns this major source of economic activity in the country may well peter out with implications on growth, employment and exports — after all, the CPEC, according to Khalid Mansoor, is our last chance for industrialisation.

Voices in the dark

BY GHAZI SALAHUDDIN

We have heard some voices lately that we cannot fully decipher. Some of these voices relate to the past and others express the pain of living in the present. Very much like an individual who is mentally and emotionally disturbed, this country is passing through a very difficult phase in its history. Will it give a fair hearing to the voices I am alluding to in a metaphorical sense?

But there are also voices that demand attention in a literal context. For instance, there is this alleged audio leak of former chief justice Saqib Nisar. Irrespective of its authenticity, the point it makes has resonated with some voices that were raised at the Asma Jahangir Conference held in Lahore last weekend. That audio clip featuring the retired chief justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan has justifiably raised a political storm. Coming in the wake of a number of other revelations, it raises very serious questions about the credibility of the system, with a specific focus on pressures that were allegedly put on the judiciary to restrain the freedom of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and his daughter Maryam and to facilitate Imran Khan's rise to power.

The gist of what Saqib Nisar is said to be saying in the leak is: "Let me be a little blunt about it. Unfortunately, here it is the institutions that dictate judgments". The leak was posted on FactFocus website with the claim that the US-based firm Garret Discovery had conducted a forensic examination to certify its authenticity.

A spokesperson of the firm confirmed this to the London correspondent of The News, Murtaza Ali Shah, saying that the certificate was issued after the professional test requirements were made. This would provide more credence to the demand that a high-level judicial commission should be formed to look into this matter.

In her press conference on Wednesday, PML-N leader Maryam Nawaz asked the former chief justice to not hide behind the

institution. It is about time institutions did some introspection, she added. She invoked previous revelations made by former justice Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui, the late judge of the accountability court Arshad Malik, the former director general of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Bashir Memon and, more recently, the former chief judge of Gilgit-Baltistan Rana Shamim. A measure of the impact that Maryam Nawaz was able to make was available in how the federal ministers were ready to take her on and even Prime Minister Imran Khan referred to her by name when he termed the former chief justice's audio leak a 'drama'. Interestingly, Maryam Nawaz admitted that it was her own voice in an audio clip about refusing ads to certain TV channels.

Among other things, the emergence of this audio clip brings up not so pleasant memories of the time when Saqib Nisar was chief justice. His was certainly a tenure full of drama and thrill. There was his passion for building the dam and he had succeeded in making it a national preoccupation. Donations were collected almost on a war footing. Now you can make your own judgment of how prudent that campaign was and what finally came of it.

Meanwhile, we will have to wait and see what impact the audio leak will have on the evolving political situation. Considering the steady disclosures of sensational audio and video clips, one gets the impression that there is somewhere a hidden treasure of secret recordings of high officials and leading politicians — and they will emerge, like time bombs, at different times.

But we do not need these spectacular revelations to find the truth of what has actually happened, and how things have been managed. It was against the backdrop of this history that some sharp and even shrill voices were raised in the Asma Jahangir Conference, particularly to question the role that the judiciary has played. There was that stirring and provocative speech made by Ali Ahmad Kurd, the firebrand leader of the lawyers' movement. With his

delivery and his tempo, he electrified the large audience of social activists and defenders of human rights. Slogans were raised and a lot of excitement was generated. This show of emotion may not have been appropriate, but the content of Ali Ahmad Kurd's presentation was worthy of serious deliberation. "What judiciary are you talking about?", quizzed Kurd.

On the one hand, Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmad was prompted to defend his institution and dismissed the notion of the judiciary being "under pressure". On the other hand, Chief Justice of Islamabad High Court, Justice Athar Minallah made a thoughtful response to Ali Ahmad Kurd's angry intervention. In fact, he thanked Kurd for opening the dialogue.

Justice Minallah cited the Nusrat Bhutto and Zafar Ali Shah verdicts of the Supreme Court and said they were part of history and could not be erased. "It is very important for us to know what the bar and what the people think about us", he remarked.

There is a lot about what transpired during the Asma Jahangir Conference that demands to be highlighted. It was an inspirational occasion for those who are striving for peace, democracy and human rights and it had the radiance of the memory of Asma Jahangir, who was unrivalled in her struggle for the rights of all citizens of Pakistan. She was one of the very few individuals who became the pride of this country. One tribute that the authorities paid to the conference was that the internet connection was disrupted and wires at the venue were when it was time for former prime minister Nawaz Sharif to address the concluding session from London. There is an indication here that Nawaz Sharif remains the main concern of what is defined as a hybrid regime, and the political confusion that is reflected in the latest audio leak is not about to be resolved. Are there some more leaks, audio or video, in the offing? Be that as it may, the higher judiciary is sure to have an opportunity to show whether it is under pressure or not.

Economic security

BY DR FARRUKH SALEEM

Pakistan's economy is under attack — from all directions. To be certain, Pakistan's 'economic security' continues to be the most neglected element of our 'national security'. For us, 'national security' continues to be all about 'military security'. For us, national security continues to be unidimensional. For us, national security continues to be uni-organisational. There's little doubt that 'economic weapons' are being deployed to 'influence, coerce, intimidate and undermine' Pakistan's interest.

Consider the Gerasimov Doctrine: "War is now conducted by a roughly 4:1 ratio of non-military and military measures (General Valery Gerasimov is the current chief of the general staff of the armed forces of Russia)." Russia's non-linear war is all about the deployment of conventional military forces in conjunction with 'economic weapons'. Then there's Russia's new 'chaos theory of political warfare' that creates "confusion and disorder...exacerbates the perception of insecurity in the populace as political, social and cultural identities are pitted against one another."

Jack Lew, the 76th United States Secretary of the Treasury (2013-2017), pioneered the Department of Treasury's National Security role by opening up of "a new battlefield for the US, one that enables us to go after those who wish us harm without putting our troops in harm's way or using lethal force." According to Jack Lew, the US continues to "employ — and increasingly rely upon — financial measures to help achieve our core foreign policy and national security goals." An internal document (FM 3-05.130) of Army Special Operations Forces Unconventional Warfare, leaked by WikiLeaks, states: "Like all other instruments of US national power, the use and effects of financial weapons are interrelated and they must be coordinated carefully." The document further states: "Financial markets

actually provide a theatre similar to the nuclear environment for the US to play out its pseudo nuclear war." The same document mentions three organisations — the World Bank, the IMF and the World Trade Organisation. Ian Bremmer of Eurasia Group (HQ: New York City), claims: "Instead of fighting countries militarily, the US can now cripple them financially."

We need to adopt 'economic security' as a 'system' — a system whose functions are divided up into at least four groups: protective function, regulatory function, warning function and a social function. Economic security's protective function is about 'protecting critical economic infrastructure, sectors and processes' from internal and external threats. Regulatory function is about government regulation of critical sectors. And the warning function of "state economic security is focused on predicting the emergence of potential crisis situations during economic activity and on preparing the economic system to resist them."

We need to understand that financial warfare is now a preferable alternative to military conflict. We need to understand financial weapons of war. We need to map out our financial vulnerabilities. And, we need to understand the non-military threat spectrum.

Yes, financial warfare is the new war front — and it's a 24/7 war. Pakistan must also move away from the "rigid military taxonomy presently employed to define warfare". The once clear-cut division between war and peace has been erased — completely erased. The new war has no division between military and civilian engagement either. There's little doubt that our national security now "requires a new paradigm that facilitates change from a singular military approach to a multidimensional, multi-organisational" approach. There's little doubt that we need to redesign our national security with the 'economy' as its core. There's little doubt that 'economic security' is the organic dimension of 'na-