

The Business

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Rupee erosion

A factor in checking the continuing erosion of rupee, besides the inordinate delay in a positive conclusion of the sixth review talks with the IMF and the delay in receipt of the promised three billion US dollar from Saudi Arabia, is the mid-August Taliban take-over of Afghanistan. The total trade with Afghanistan is a relatively small percentage of our total trade and that Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves at over 17 billion dollar and the current account deficit that is not under stress as it continues to be bolstered by a steady rise in the flow of remittances, irrespective of the rising trade deficit, are much more critical contributors to the value of the rupee. There is, however, the rather serious matter of the inconclusive sixth review talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in spite of repeated claims by the de facto Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin that their success is imminent. An eroding rupee is in lieu of resisting the IMF pressure to raise the discount rate, currently at 7.5 percent, to bring it to the positive territory as Consumer Price Index (CPI) for October registered 9.2 percent (the indicator that SBP linked the discount rate to from May 2019 till the onslaught of the pandemic end-March 2020) while core inflation (non-food and non-energy - a more appropriate indicator) in October 2021 was 6.7 percent.

It is little wonder that the expectation is that the discount rate will be raised (which in turn will impact on the government borrowing rates) by 100 to 150 basis points in the next scheduled Monetary Policy Committee meeting later this month, which would provide room to intervene in the foreign exchange market. There is a general misperception that the rupee is in a free float due to the staff-level agreement with the IMF in May 2019. However, a free float is defined as a currency that is set by market forces of supply and demand and only strong currencies including the dollar, the pound or the Euro have the strength to adopt a free float system. The IMF and Pakistan agreed to adopt a market determined exchange rate defined as the SBP exercising discretion to identify disorderly market conditions and when they become evident and to make appropriate interventions to ensure that their result is minimised.

While the country requires IMF support today to provide a comfort level to other bilateral/multilaterals to fund its budgeted expenditure, which may compel the government to negotiate a settlement of conditions with minimal impact on the poor and vulnerable, yet the government has ignored the most obvious solution: cut expenses massively instead of almost doubling the total outlay to 8.4 trillion rupees in the current year from 4.75

Scrutinising terrorists' attack on APS



BY MUHAMMAD USMAN

The Maginot Line was the most expensive and elaborate defence line ever prepared by France at the time.

It could be equated with the F 35 of present time. It was considered a mighty and nigh-unassailable however, stood bystander when in a surprise attack, Germans just bypassed it while crossing through Ardennes forest, thought to be impassable for mechanized forces; a prelude to humiliation of France later.

Again, the Bar Lev Line had a chain of formidable fortifications, built by Israel on the Suez Canal. It was considered impregnable and a symbol of Israeli military perfection yet it was overrun by Egyptian military forces in the 1973 War. The catch was again the surprise and it stems from an element of initiative, invariably held by the attacker. In asymmetric warfare, surprise is even easier to achieve because attackers operate in familiar environments and amid identical multitudes of people. The soft targets are in abundance with no high degree of sophistication/coordination required for engagement thus, minimizing the possibility of loss of surprise in the process.

Due to other peculiar dynamics, environments were far more slanted in favour of terrorists to surprise the

security apparatus when they attacked APS. The fight against terrorism ought to be led by government. Here, it was content to sit in apex committees under military high command. District civil administration is the pivot in counterterrorism but found in state of stupor when APC tragedy was perpetrated upon in continuation of what could be called a tidal wave of terrorism, causing huge scores of killing and maiming people by the time. Civil leadership at helm dithered, procrastinated rather, virtually slipped into state of resignation and readily outsourced its onerous responsibilities to Army when it decided to pick up the fallen standard and defang the monster of terrorism.

The PPP government was also guilty of permitting Raymond Davis type intelligence operatives to enter into the country and cobble together terrorist networks which wreaked havoc. The judicial system proved unequal to the task of bringing bands of saboteurs to justice. The Swat and FATA were virtually in hands of terrorists and no street and alley in the country was safe from their explosive reach. Coupled with other af-

out of them. Given conditions, this cannot be rightly categorized as a security lapse when seen in the backdrop of obtaining conditions and established facts of warfare as highlighted above. At the cost of some repatriation, these are enumerated again for benefit of easy recall. Every defence could be breached, even ironclad security arrangements cannot provide guaranteed security. With inept and indifferent governments at helm and nearly all national institutions dysfunctional, the Army had to put on the mantle of a matador to all charging bulls, instigated and supported from outside too. The Army had to establish military courts when the judiciary was seen as reluctant for performing the needful. All this combined, was an enormously added responsibility and bound to over stretch the Army and obviously it had to have some inevitable downsides.

These were known but had to be accepted as necessary evils. Under these formidable and exacting conditions along with its extended role, it is less than fair if the Army is held responsible for the APS tragedy. In

fighting valiantly. By that time, the Army had mopped dens of terrorists in Swat and South Waziristan by its operations; Rah-e-Rast and Rah-e-Nijat. It reacted swiftly to foil instant terrorists' attempt and was ahead of others to provide solace to victims in their hour of grief.

The operation Zarb-e-Azb, was launched after APS attack and it uprooted terrorism from soil of Pakistan and rose in estimation of world with a badge of winning a war which no one in world, could win. Besides counterterrorism, the Army also took other vital tasks beyond its designation.

Notably, these include militancy in Baluchistan, restoration of normalcy in Karachi, gigantic rescue operations, rehabilitation of IDPs, facilitating return of civil government in FATA/Swat, frequent escalations at Line of Control/Working Boundary, handling undiminished mantra of Do More by US and galloping Indian intrigues in collusion with Afghan government/NDS and pressing diplomatic engagements. When going is tough, only tough get going and the Army did all splendidly.

Nation stands in thankfulness. For our nemesis, it was a shattering experience. They learnt that for Pakistan to collapse, it is the Army which has to collapse and there is no possibility of it until they create a wedge between them and the people of Pakistan.

Precisely this the reason that they have now launched hybrid war against us and target is the people and method is subversion. No one is infallible and so our Armed Forces, however, no one in the country can lay claim, even a fraction of it, to what they have done for the cause of the country.

It is a collective assessment of the nation including the majority of victim families of APS's attack. Probably few victim families need a little more shock therapy and psychological rehabilitation. It is hoped that Supreme Court would take holistic view when it hears petition on APS's attack again. This is a sensitive matter, entailing grave implications.

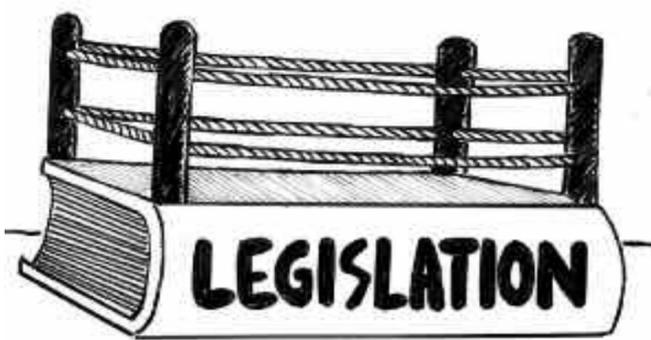
At the cost of some repatriation, these are enumerated again for benefit of easy recall. Every defence could be breached, even ironclad security arrangements cannot provide guaranteed security

flicting threats to national security, it constituted an existential threat and none except Armed Forces of Pakistan were in compatible shape to stand in epoch of challenges to save the country. On 16 December 2014 when terrorists attacked APS, the Army was not sitting in the barracks. It was out on the battlefield across the country with tooth and nail.

It was busy non-stop to secure the country however, understandably could not provide foolproof security to every soft target in the whole country and APS Peshawar was one

cricket analogy, performance of a team playing against a fierce, arch and bigger opponent under overcast conditions at alien ground with turning pitch in front of hostile crowd, cannot be judged with the same metric kept for a team playing against an ordinary opponent on flat pitch at home ground in front of their own crowd. This is the right lens which one has to see through before the Army is judged on APS's tragedy. One may blame the other if he sits idle in face of impending threats.

Army was up against all odds and



Fighting feudalism

BY SAJAD JATOI

Undoubtedly the world has made considerable progress and will continue to do so in the future. Throughout the world, people have rebelled against archaic social norms and have successfully shunned toxic traditions. They have also been successful in bridging class differences to some extent.

However, our part of the world has not witnessed such progress. The entire Subcontinent, especially our country, is no different from what it was centuries ago except for the existence of huge industrial complexes where people still serve as slaves.

In the 21st century where some nations, which are free from toxic customs and social systems, are thinking of the colonisation of the moon and Mars, our country is still plagued by issues of social inequality. Here, as George Orwell remarked in his book 'Animal Farm', some are equal and some 'are more equal than others'. In our country, some people are treated as lesser beings who can be easily duped, exploited, tortured and killed.

Feudalism is a real menace. Although it is prevalent across the country, it has remained firmly entrenched in Sindh throughout history and has taken alarming proportions in recent years. The most recent brutal killings of Nazim Jokhio and a woman in District Shahdakt show that this problem needs to be dealt with in an effective manner.

Nazim Jokhio was allegedly killed by an influential landlord over the video recording of the latter's guest's hunting ventures. To back their allegations, relatives of Jokhio have released those video clips, which are now viral on social media platforms. In these clips, Jokhio revealed that he was receiving threats from the people (feudal lords) he had a squabble with. He also said that if anything happened to him, those people would be responsible. However, no one took notice of his pleas, and eventually Nazim was tortured to death inside a feudal lord's farm house.

Undoubtedly, this brutal act is condemnable and the people's rage over it is also justifiable. At the same time, it highlights the fact that most parts of Sindh are virtually under control of feudal lords who consider themselves powerful enough to decide who has the right to live and who doesn't. They have established their own state within



the state. Feudal lords with such a mindset have done considerable harm to society. Among other things, they have prevented the province from making progress in terms of intellectual and human development. On one hand, they control almost all resources and are involved in corrupt practices, and on the other, they have made the working class their slaves. Also, they influence certain law-making institutions and virtually control executive institutions. This can be seen through the leverage they enjoy from state institutions like police. It is said that some law-enforcement personnel obey the orders of these people.

Such behaviour has challenged the writ of state institutions and exposed their weakness. It is crystal clear that feudal lords commit crimes with impunity. They know that they will be able to get away with almost everything - even murders. The murder of Ume Rabab's relatives is a case in point.

Sindh has had enough of this and wants to get rid of this class. But realistically speaking, this still appears difficult. While it may sound pessimistic, it is an unfortunate fact that the feudal class has strengthened its clutches over society. Hence, it is apt to ask: will the murder of Nazim Jokhio lead to a revolution against the oppressors just like the way the self-immolation of Muhammad Bouazizi of Tunisia sparked the Arab Spring?

Doing away with this toxic system is the need of the hour. The people need to be bold enough to rebel against this system. They have to take on the system that has made their lives miserable; they are powerful enough to shatter the chains of feudalism. Feudal lords also need to understand that their oppression cannot continue endlessly. It has to end some day. They ought to realise that they are not superior to other people just because they have land and money. They should mend their ways and start treating people as humans. They also have the responsibility to work for the better-

S for sustainability



BY MEHR F HUSAIN

As COP26 comes to a close, Lahore is engulfed by a sick monster named Smog. The famous saying 'jinnay Lahore nahin takeya, oh jameya nahin' can officially be put to rest as those who grew up in this historical city cannot fathom a future here due to the alarming pollution. Who would want to visit such a city where its locals are unable to breathe? One wonders then how this government, that was so gung-ho about marketing the country as a hotspot for visitors, can peddle the tourism narrative when our environment is being destroyed.

We all know the rhetoric - Pakistan's diversity lies in its culture and geography. From the Hindukush and the Himalayas down to the beaches of the Makran coast, every 50 to 60 kilometres there is a new region with its own cultural flavour. This is a country which is said to have a history spanning thousands of years and the evidence is there. From Mehrgarh which has been there since 7000 BC, to Mohenjodaro one of the oldest civilisations in the world, to the Gandhara civilisation spanning Buddhist and Hindu sites, to Islamic shrines and

religious structures - we have it all.

As per Aftab ur Rehman Rana, president of the Sustainable Tourism Foundation, there are nine ecological zones across Pakistan. Add to this the varying cultural elements including dress, cuisine, art, craft, music, literature and more plus the geographic diversity - and 'tourism' is too broad a term to use as a marketing tool. It ought to be broken down into categories to reflect the versatility of the country. Terms such as 'adventure', 'eco', 'religious', 'recreation' can give visitors a clearer picture of what is to be expected and what they are going to experience. However, all of this is possible if we address the much-ignored elephant in the room - the environment - that continues to act as an obstacle to the establishment of a much-dreamed about gloriously thriving tourism industry.

In 2017, the World Economic Forum ranked Pakistan 124 out of 136 on the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index as per the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report. On the same index in the same report, Pakistan ranked 133 out of 136 for environmental sustainability. This screams the need for the country to reassess 'tourism'. It is clear as day that without sustainable development tourism cannot take root, no matter what spin in the form of fancy bloggers or otherwise is peddled.

Under the pandemic, national tourism was all the rage due to travel restrictions. This too is hugely problematic as tourist sites are poorly equipped to manage the droves of tourists driving up and down the country. Domestic tourism that is as healthy and economically stronger than interna-

tional tourism is a leading cause of mass environmental damage. With a massive surge for the northern areas in particular, as a means of escaping the rising temperatures during our scathing summer, there has been widespread growth of infrastructure in the form of roads, hotels, guesthouses, hostels and private residences.

The demand from domestic tourism has wreaked havoc as unplanned concrete structures replace forests with trees being razed, hills shaved for mushroom growth of ill-planned development. In turn this sets in motion a devastating cycle where not only is the natural landscape completely destroyed but the local natural resources including water, biodiversity, fauna, wildlife and tree species are completely destroyed as well.

Just one look at Murree, the 'Queen of Hills', is enough to see the impact of this unsustainable tourism. The 'Switzerland of the East' - Swat - suffers the same; its rivers, once crystal clear, are now empty of local fish and are made up of crisp packets and plastic water bottles. The K2 base camp has not even escaped the scourge of human devastation as it is littered with rubbish.

Beyond this, culture suffers another level of destruction. For tangible culture such as heritage sites, their visitors seem to seek the same immortality as ancient structures as they scrawl their names on walls using paint or carve them with knives. Communities such as the Kalash or regions such as the Seraiki Belt which is home to Sufi shrines are all victims of the negative impact of tourism including violation of privacy, intolerance of religious beliefs, hostility towards

women whether they be locals or visitors, and lack of appreciation of local cuisine and art. All of this means that the socio-economic benefit lies in the hands of the developers, and those residing in tourist sites gain nothing but piles of trash from tourism. Exactly what is a tourist to experience in such a situation? Our tourist sites are in a state of decay and no amount of gloss is going to change the ground reality.

So, what can be done? If the government is serious about tourism it needs to set in place a plan, a model of sustainable tourism which ensures local communities are part of the socio-economic benefits. Instead of developing concrete jungles, there needs to be wider accessibility to digital connectivity so local artisans can earn through direct selling and their craft is utilised as a PR mouthpiece instead of using fancy bloggers.

Better regulation of construction and greater investment in HR can ensure that tourists are managed in a more organised manner - and they get their money's worth. By breaking down tourism into categories, ecotourism can be a fantastic way of focusing on maintenance of the natural biodiversity and educating locals of the need to conserve our environment. Better utilisation of resources is desperately needed given how water is fast becoming a precious resource and parts of the country are regularly facing water shortages. Until all of these are addressed, Pakistan will continue to lag behind in tourism. It is clear that without sustainable development, there can be no tourism. How long can our spaces continue to offer what is fast becoming an empty promise? Sustainable tourism holds massive potential for the country