

The Business

Chief Editor

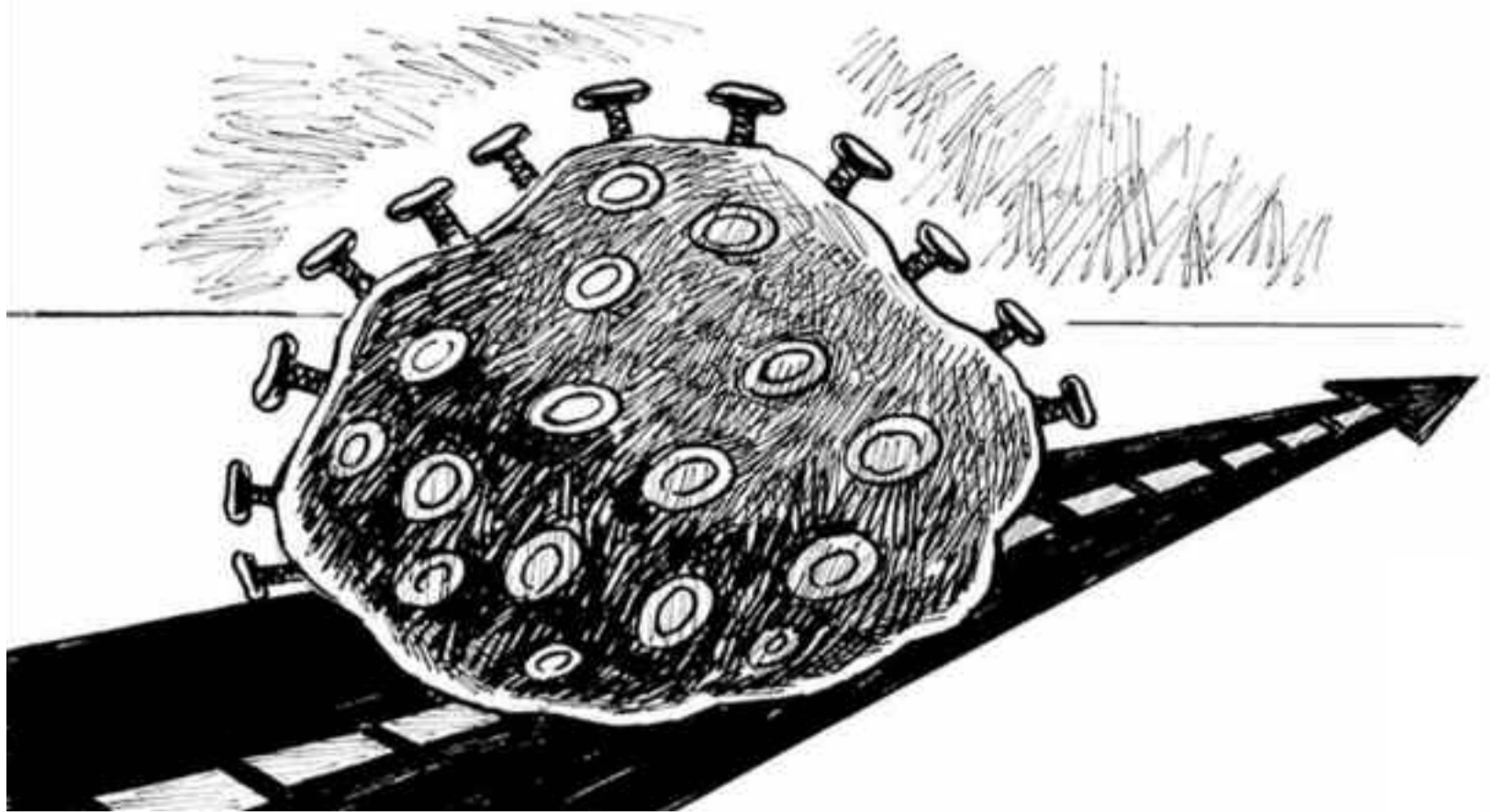
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Saving Yemen

The time has come to save Yemen from a war which since 2014 has already killed 233,000 people and left more than 85,000 children in a state of virtual starvation, according to the UN. Unfortunately, this has become more difficult after the escalation in fighting when Houthi rebels in Yemen, who had overturned the Saudi-backed government in Sana'a in 2014, struck three oil tankers and the Abu Dhabi International Airport in the UAE on Monday. The strike killed three people, including a Pakistani national. It is quite obvious to most observers that the strike could not have taken place without support from Iran. The Houthi attack was followed by an assault on Saana by the Saudi-led forces and then between Thursday and Friday a more serious assault on a prison in Sada which left 70 prisoners dead and over 135 injured according to MSF and local reporters. Internet and other communications were also disrupted. The UN has sought an emergency meeting of the UNSC. The war in Yemen is essentially a proxy battle between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The Saudis had in 2015 set up a coalition, which included the UAE and other countries to combat the Houthi rebels, who have so far been able to retain their hold over Sana'a. The time has come to end a conflict which has claimed far too many lives and left too many people close to starvation and further misery – now moving even away from Yemen and into other countries in the region – as shown by the alarming attack recently. This is dangerous. And the arrival of the Covid-19 virus has only added to the difficulties. It is obvious the war cannot be stopped without intervention by all stakeholders involved, and particularly Saudi Arabia and Iran. The two countries, which have recently shown some signs of an improvement in ties, must sit together and determine how best to bring the fighting to an end. The concerns of all persons must be addressed and the complaints of the mainly Shia Houthi rebels of Saudi intervention in Yemen dealt with. The UN has already called repeatedly for peace in the region, which has suffered now for too many years. As is the case in all wars, ordinary people are of course the chief victims of the fighting. Reports from the region are somewhat limited, but it is obvious that the latest fighting will lead to an escalation in tensions, and the possibility of further attacks. This must not happen. The war is a futile one, serves no real purpose and has behind it only power agendas. It helps no one. It solves no problems, and indeed only adds to them in so many ways, creating vast unrest and instability in the region. The countries in the region and the rest of the world, including the West, must unite to put an end to this war, set up a stable government in San'a and ensure there is no further fighting so that some normalcy can be restored to Yemen, and the misery of people reduced as quickly as

Growing terrorism threat



MUHAMMAD AMIR RANA

The terrorist attack on a police check post in the heart of the federal capital earlier this week was a dangerous happening. It is good that the security agencies have taken the incident very seriously (they should be equally concerned about the security of other cities such as Lahore that witnessed a blast on Thursday). But what is questionable is the state's penchant for talking to the notorious banned group that claimed the attack. The Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has escalated terrorist attacks in Pakistan since the Afghan Taliban took power in Afghanistan, and the interior minister has indicated that the trend may continue in the coming weeks.

Last year too, two terrorist attacks were recorded in Islamabad in which the banned TTP killed three policemen and injured a couple of others. Indeed, the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi have witnessed sporadic terrorist violence in recent years despite perceptible security. During the last two years, the TTP and its factions have carried out 11 terrorist attacks in Rawalpindi and Islamabad, resulting in the deaths of 13 security, mainly police, officials. This week's attack in Islamabad also targeted policemen. The second worrying aspect is that in

the past the TTP remained active mainly in the outskirts of the federal capital, but the latest attack was reported from a busy sector in the heart of Islamabad.

The attack reveals the intention of the terrorist group to create fear. If more such attacks happen, barricades and check posts on the roads of Islamabad will be brought back. Only recently, a sense of security had returned when the number of security check posts was reduced to a minimum. Though Islamabad has a functional safe city mechanism, the security of the federal capital remains critical and security departments can take any measures to counter threats.

It will not be surprising if Islamabad comes under increased security surveillance when a so-called pro-Pakistan regime in Kabul is reluctant to hand over or act against terrorists causing insecurity in this country.

Some media reports indicate that certain Afghan Taliban leaders are

The killing of Mufti Khalid Balti, a former spokesperson of the TTP, has further increased the trust deficit between negotiators from both sides and their guarantors. In that context, if the mantra of talks is merely a tactic to create rifts in the TTP leadership then the cost is very high and still may not be enough to eliminate the threat. The TTP will continue to cause damage to Pakistan, and over time, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan will learn the tactics to avert pressure from Pakistan. After all, the TTP is their ideological brigade and shares the same view of establishing an Islamic order of governance.

Security institutions have to carefully craft the approaches to deal with groups like the TTP and Al Qaeda which are under the protection of the Taliban regime. The TTP is not only a major actor of violence in Pakistan, it is also a facilitator of the regional operations of Al Qaeda and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM).

against Chinese interests in Pakistan can prove lethal and cause a diplomatic crisis. The TTP can overcome its internal differences and restructure its networks. The group has seen many crises but has not lost its sting. It was involved in 87 terrorist attacks in 2021 (12 out of 14) were also perpetrated by the TTP. The geographical spread and number of TTP attacks in 2021 indicate that while the group carried out most of the assaults in former Fata, it also showed it had a presence in northern Balochistan and the Rawalpindi-Islamabad area.

One can imagine the potential lethality of the group which it has already displayed. Its core strengths include its close association with the Taliban and Al Qaeda, and a narrative that still attracts youth from the peripheries and religious institutions. The Afghan Taliban have proved themselves a liability for Pakistan and have been negatively affecting the country's counterterrorism policies. They are not fully cooperating with Pakistan in dealing with the TTP, nor are they collaborating with it to secure Pakistan's western border.

The TTP itself and Pakistan's tendency to negotiate with it are encouraging other terrorist groups. The militant Islamic State group's so-called Khorasan chapter has also become active in Pakistan, where it carried out multiple attacks in 2021 on Hazara Shias, alleged Afghan Taliban members and associated religious scholars, as well as political leaders/workers in Balochistan and KP. Several of its associates were arrested from parts of Sindh and Punjab in multiple search operations conducted by law enforcement during the year. Pakistan has to devise a different approach to deal with the TTP threat. A timely change of course can save many precious lives and damage to the country.

The Afghan Taliban are not fully cooperating with Pakistan in dealing with the TTP.

trying to restrict the movement of the TTP leaders and impose an arms embargo on the group. But the situation on the ground is different and the TTP's confidence is gradually improving. Meanwhile, Pakistan has reportedly initiated another round of peace talks with the TTP through a tribal jirga, which can only be interpreted as extending one more olive branch to the terrorists. One wonders why security institutions are obsessed with talking to the TTP, especially when the latter has taken a hard stance on talks and continues its attacks against Pakistan.

Al Qaeda has maintained its ties with the Afghan Taliban and has reportedly also helped the TTP recover and regroup in recent years; some Al Qaeda-aligned Pakistani groups even joined the TTP. In April 2021, CNN claimed, based on its interviews with two Al Qaeda operatives, that the group would step up its operations in the region after the US exit from Afghanistan. The report claimed that the group was planning a comeback by relying on its partnership with the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban. Any probable operational alliance between the TTP and Al Qaeda or with ETIM

Forty-one months

BY DR FARRUKH SALEEM

On August 18 in 2018, Imran Khan took oath as the 22nd prime minister of Pakistan. On August 20, 2018, then president Mamnoon Hussain administered the oath to the new federal cabinet; 16 plus five advisers. The cabinet has since exploded to 28 federal ministers, four ministers of state, four advisers and 16 special assistants. History, I am told, "teaches us that men and nations behave wisely once they have exhausted all other alternatives." Apparently, we are yet to reach that point.

Shooting-in-the-dark: A shot-in-the-dark is "an attempt to guess something when you have no information or knowledge about the subject and therefore cannot possibly know what the answer is." A total of four finance ministers over the past 41 months with an average tenure of 10 months. Hammad Azhar lasted for a mere 17 days. A total of eight FBR chairmen with an average tenure of around six months. We have had 44 FBR chairpersons over the past 74 years and eight over the past 41 months. A total of six finance secretaries with an average tenure of seven months. A total of seven inspectors-general of police in Punjab with an average tenure of six months. How long will we continue shooting in the dark? We have had 51 inspectors-general of police in Punjab over the past 74 years and seven over the past 41 months. How long can we afford to continue shooting in the dark?

Blaming the predecessors: Public debt and liabilities go up from Rs30 trillion in 2018 to Rs50 trillion – blame the predecessors. The price of wheat flour goes up from Rs35 a kilogram in 2018 to Rs75 a kilogram – blame the predecessors. The price of sugar goes up from

Rs55 a kilogram in 2018 to Rs120 a kilogram – blame the predecessors. The price of electricity goes up from Rs11 a unit in 2018 to Rs23 a unit – blame the predecessors. And, "the search for someone to blame is always successful." Yes, pointing fingers at the PML-N and the PPP can buy the PTI some time but neither the PML-N nor the PPP is in a position to solve peoples' problems. Yes, blaming provided an early and artificial solution for the PTI but that time is long gone. Blaming the PML-N and the PPP means two things: a quick escape from guilt and denial of responsibility. But this denial of responsibility has denied the PTI control of the situation.

Distracting: The price of petrol has hit a 74-year high in Pakistan. But, petrol in California is still more expensive, says the government. For the record, the per capita income in California is \$70,192 as opposed to \$1,190 in Pakistan. Two dozen people, including 10 children, froze to death in Murree. But the suicide rate in Japan is much higher, claims the government.

Denialism: On January 3, PM Imran Khan asked PTI spokespersons to "inform the masses that there is no inflation in the country....." Denialism is the "practice of denying the existence, truth, or validity of something despite proof or strong evidence that it is real, true and valid." In the "psychology of human behaviour, denialism is a person's choice to deny reality as a way to avoid a psychologically uncomfortable truth." For the past 41 months, the PTI has been shooting in the dark, blaming their predecessors, distracting and denying the truth – doing everything other than solving voters' problems. Voters elected the PTI to solve their problems. Will the PTI get its act together?



Wasted on the young

HASSAN KAMAL WATTOO

Hello there, it's me again. We know each other, though it tends to slip out of your memory from time to time. That's alright though, because it never slipped out of mine. You know me by many names, some of them quite flattering. But to put it nicely, I've been seeing a disconnect between words and action. To put it bluntly, we need to talk.

Let me first get introductions out of the way. I'm the silent majority of one of the youngest nations on the planet – 63 per cent of its population and barely a sliver of its political representation. Occasionally declared a tiger, regularly employed to fuel popular movements, consistently forgotten once those movements bear fruit. I am the naujawaan, the gen-Z, the vehemently neglected yet persistently hopeful future of this country – its youth.

And then, there is you – the reader of this paper. An unthinkable diverse consortium of anomalies, with notable inclusions. This country is run by men in high offices. In every office is a desk. And on every desk, every morning, is Dawn. You are the federal minister sipping his morning tea, the bureaucrat on her chauffeur-driven commute, the justice in between his judgements. But crucially, what you are not – is me. You are not the section of society devoting exponentially greater time to TikTok than op-eds. For whatever reason, my generation seems to have better things to do than read the paper.

Considering this, I'm cognisant of how unlikely it is that my words are reaching you here. Indeed, many who write for

publications of this stature have been doing so for longer than I have been alive. And while that's nothing unnatural, it opens the question: where exactly do such disconnects stem from?

Earlier pieces have laid out how an exaggerated emphasis on seniority above merit holds Pakistan back. With every seat at the table refused to the new and reserved for the old, just how much of it is the former's inexperience? How much of it is the latter's unease?

Decisions made by senior leaders in realpolitik often had lasting effects on my generation's childhood. Consider Pakistan's role in the war on terror: in third grade, a suicide bombing next door shattered my classroom windows and sent us all scrambling out into the courtyard. I wish I could say the experience solidified my faith in good old Pakistani bravery, but the truth is my Urdu teacher had made a run for it before any of us had a clue what was going on. Bless her heart, I don't blame her, and the rest of us made similar manoeuvres for self-preservation. I retreated to the safety of my home with surety that the worst had passed. Then a month later an explosion shattered the windows there too. I'll admit it feels strange, melodramatic even, to bring these instances up. After all, that was the world we all lived in. Life moved on. What worries me is what happens when the next generations open their eyes to a newer normal. When a world of filthy air, forever wars, and crumbling economies are all they have ever known, will they speak out, or will life move on for them too?

But of course, none of this is your fault. It is everyone's, and therefore, no one's.

Mohsin Hamid wrote in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* of inequality and ambition; there are some people born outside of the candy store, and others born on its threshold, watching as the door closes shut. The volatility of this country makes it feel like a revolving door, offering glimmers of hope and rude awakenings to reality. The youth of Pakistan might be on the threshold of take-off, or the edge of a cliff. As to who led us to those cliffs, I couldn't disparage those who came before me even if I tried. Because of course, that's how my elders raised me. What I can do, however, is solidify a pledge on these pages. In the decades to come, if I fail to contribute to the fight against climate change, if I succumb to the seductions of self-interest, if I find myself sacrificing merit at the altar of seniority, may those who succeed me exercise their right to demand answers. Where I still fail, may they step in to make the decisions for themselves.

There is currently a youth election quota bill pending before parliament. Spearheaded by researcher and youth activist Shaheera Jalil Albasit, it proposes fair representation of youth not just in election tickets, but party leadership as well. Much like those it aims to uplift, this bill could do wonders if taken seriously. But its fate comes down to you, dear reader. The opportunity is there to back up words of appreciation with meaningful representation. Are you going to capture it, or just let it slip?

It's said that youth is wasted on the young. If it were up to me, I'd give some of mine to you. But until I can, I look towards those who will succeed me. If we can't give them a liveable planet, a stable economy, and freedom from perpetual conflict, the least we can give them is a chance.

