

The Business

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CEC RAJA IS AGAINST PTI



Pakistan's economy

Minister for Finance and Revenue, Miftah Ismail said, "We cannot let our fiscal and external financing position deteriorate further and have our development partners walk out. Tough choices need to be made." The dire state of Pakistan's economy today is patently evident and substantiated in the report released by the World Bank, which noted, among other things, that the consolidated fiscal deficit in the first quarter of 2022 showed an increase of 20.6 percent year on year. Higher taxes on imported items and sales tax on goods led to an 18 percent growth in revenues but this was outweighed by higher government spending which grew by 18.7 percent. With most of the increase in spending coming from non-interest expenditures, the primary surplus (minus debt servicing as and when due) shrank to 81 billion rupees. And a sharp increase in federal current expenditure led to a 33 percent increase in federal fiscal deficit — leading to the wider consolidated fiscal deficit. The World Bank report, however, emphasised in consonance with views expressed in International Monetary Fund's (IMF's) ongoing Extended Fund Facility (EFF) programme and in subsequent quarterly review documents, that Pakistan's vulnerability to debt-related shocks will remain elevated as will the country's external financing requirements, and to meet these, Pakistan will need the continued support of bilateral and multilateral partners and access to international capital markets.

One may assume that the present government is actively engaged in talks with Arab development partners, particularly Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates with a focus ideally on grant assistance to shore up the rupee value at terms that are considerably more favourable than the one billion dollar currently parked with the SBP for one calendar year. It is also hoped that the US by dint of being a major shareholder in the IMF, will lend support in convincing the staff to phase out the EFF programme to beyond the scheduled deadline of September 2022 accompanied by a phasing out of the harsh conditions that are even more politically challenging for the incumbent government with intent to hold elections later this year than they were for the previous government. There is, therefore, a need for the Fund to accommodate a strategy for an increase in phases and complete the seventh review promptly. And, as also noted by the World Bank, that with low fiscal and external buffers it is important for Pakistan to successfully complete the ongoing IMF-EFF programme and therefore it is critical for the Fund to take account of the fact that Pakistan is a democracy, currently being administered by a 10 plus parties' coalition government looking towards elections.

PTI and the future

ZIRGHAM NABI AFRIDI

Self-accountability and on-ground mobilisation of volunteers and workers will be key to the PTI's preparations for the next general elections. The two are intrinsically linked. Effective mobilisation will require motivated volunteers dedicating extended periods of personal time for fundraising and door-to-door campaigning. Prior to the PTI forming government in the centre, volunteers were motivated to make personal sacrifices on the promise of a Naya Pakistan alone. This time however, demonstration of genuine introspection and self-accountability by party leadership will be the currency that will motivate. The party's workers are looking for genuine changes before making further personal sacrifices for it. Towards this end, the PTI's leadership needs to begin providing answers to a host of questions. Some of the key questions featuring in PTI circles are provided here. Answers to these will also be crucial in equipping volunteers and election candidates with responses when inevitably met with the same questions on the campaign trail.

Poor selection of candidates: In light of the mass defections of electables from the party dealing a hammer-blow to the PTI's government, what weaknesses have been identified in the ticket-awarding process and what changes will be made to ensure there is no repeat of tickets being awarded to opportunistic electables? Imran's recent statements that he'll personally scrutinize the awarding of all tickets is no comfort given his track record of having previously sidelined old party loyalists in favour of elites and self-serving opportunists.

Imran has also mentioned awarding tickets to 'ideological workers'; what is the definition of ideological workers? Are people like Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Fawad Chaudhry and Parvaiz Khattak who belonged to other parties and parachuted into the PTI when the party's star was rising considered 'ideological workers'? How are they different from the likes of Jahangir Tareen and Aleem Khan?

Selection of ill-suited ministers: what was the selection criteria used to choose the heads of various ministries, especially the highly specialized and nationally crucial ministries? For example, on what basis was Faisal Vawda deemed competent to run the Ministry of Water Resources? Similarly, what was the basis for selecting Zartaj Gul for the Ministry of Climate Change? On what basis were Fawad Chaudhry and later Shibli Faraz — the party's media men — deemed competent to run the Ministry of Science and Technology? What changes will be made to ensure selection of competent

personnel for these and all other ministerial positions moving forward?

Selection of Usman Buzdar: What selection criteria was used to select Buzdar as chief minister of Punjab? What are the weaknesses in those criteria and procedures and what changes will be made to these to ensure competent party personnel are chosen moving forward? Who is the party's preferred candidate to become CM Punjab if re-elected in the province? How is he/she being prepared for the role?

Lack of preparation on the economic front: in the lead up to the 2018 elections, if there was one cabinet position that was always clear, it was that Asad Umar would be the PTI's finance minister whenever the party formed a federal government. Yet, what became clear in the first few weeks of Asad's short lived tenure as finance minister was that he hadn't done any preparation for the role. Why did Asad not adequately prepare for the most vital role in the cabinet? Does the PTI intend on developing an economic plan in preparation for the next elections? Who is the party's next finance minister and is he/she preparing for the role? Does the PTI have nominated personnel who will be cabinet members in a future government — a shadow cabinet — and are they preparing for these positions?

Delaying local bodies elections: why were local bodies elections — a pillar of the PTI's manifesto related to grassroots democratisation — delayed to the point that courts had to intervene to have them conducted? Who was behind delaying these? Does the party commit to holding local bodies elections on time if voted for another term?

CMs' and ministers' performance evaluation: the PTI government introduced Performance Agreements for assessment of ministers' performance. Certificates were awarded to the top ten performing ministers. Will the poorest performing ministers be handed ministries again? Similar to the ministerial performance agreements, was there a system set up to monitor the performance of the different CMs? Can the party leadership commit to ensuring the process of performance assessment will be kept in place and expanded if returned to power? PM's performance evaluation: similar to the above, is there any system in the party that measures the PM's performance? If yes, how did the PM fare over the last 3.5 years? If not, can the party commit that the PM's performance will also similarly be evaluated and provide the criteria he/she will be assessed against and what body in the party will carry out the assessment?

Succession planning: the party needs to think ahead about future leaders who can take on the dynastic off-

spring of the status-quo parties. What is the after-Imran plan for the PTI? When does Imran plan to step down from the position of chairman and give other ideological workers a chance to take the reins of the party? Is there a plan on electing Imran's successor and when will this plan be executed?

Funding and donations: the present foreign-funding case being heard by the ECP against the party was brought about by a founding member of the party. The party has also recently dissociated itself from 11 bank accounts belonging to senior leadership. There have also been reports of funds ostensibly collected for Shaukat Khanum being siphoned into the PTI's purse. When in government, the party dragged the case instead of providing all the information proving its innocence. Surely something's not right and it will come out into the open sooner rather than later. Can the party just come clean for the sake of its own supporters and work on improving its systems? Admitting mistakes and fixing shortcomings will only make the party's fundraising process stronger.

Supporters of the PTI must press the party leadership to provide responses to these questions. Political parties improve with the maturing of their supporters. The sophisticated Insafian must ask critical questions and demand answers, rather than opting for blind allegiance. This will strengthen the party.

In addition, supporters need to think beyond jalsas and begin spending time mobilizing. Even a few hours a week goes a long way. As a first step, begin visiting your nearest PTI office and finding out about campaigning activities. Key ingredients for successful campaigning are setting up social media accounts for your local area; door to door campaigning; organizing local rallies and events; and, signing up to be a polling agent on Election Day.

While there is no knowing if the present lot of party leaders have the desire to hold themselves accountable, improve party systems and bring it back to its original ideological foundations, one thing is certain; they will need to be replaced soon.

By getting involved in campaigning, supporters will experience political mobilisation, teamwork and fundraising at grassroots level. From among this lot of party supporters — from the lower and middle class rungs of society — will one day emerge replacements, of better calibre, to replace the present set of PTI leaders. They will bring the party back to its ideological roots and challenge the feudal and dynastic politics of the status-quo parties. Therefore, PTI supporters need to rally, not for Imran, but for their own political stake in the party and the country.

Theatres of abuse

KAISER BENGALI

Pakistan is not new to contentious politics. However, the last decade has seen the rise of a politics of abuse and violence, with no one and no institution immune from assault.

Three separate theatres of this type of politics can be discerned, each with different degrees of abuse and violence. All of them, however, threaten to unravel the fabric of society and the state and, as such, merit an examination of causative factors. Political opponents have always engaged in partisan battles — in parliament, in courts and on the streets — which reflects the divergent and conflicting interests of their respective constituencies. And that is what politics is all about. Yet, there has prevailed a certain degree of civility in the political discourse; howsoever charged. While mutual denunciations abounded, there were few attacks on the personal integrity of their opponents.

All parties have to date accepted the writ of state institutions: constitution, law, parliament, judiciary, electoral bodies, and the military. All parties, despite remonstrations, have valued and acknowledged the independent role of the media. Essentially, all political actors have recognized the legitimacy of the state and its formal and non-formal institutions. That recognition is now compromised. The star of 'theatre one' is Imran Khan, whose politics has always revolved around the subject of corruption. Come 2014, he upped the ante by introducing vitriol into his attacks, openly displaying a lack of respect for the established political leadership. Post-2018, Imran Khan shed any vestige of decorum in his language — and

body language — resorting to street-level name-calling. His cue was taken up by his lieutenants, who engaged in no-holds-barred volleys of abuse at every forum available; including on televised panel discussions, where physical violence on fellow panelists was also witnessed. April 16 this year saw PTI MPAs in the Punjab Assembly openly resorting to violence on their fellow members.

Imran Khan's lack of respect is not limited to the political class, but extends to all state institutions: His lack of regard for parliament was indicated by his scant attendance; except when it necessitated his purpose. The PTI's disdain for state institutions was reflected during the no-confidence motion proceedings when one PTI MNA expressed his desire to suicide-bomb the National Assembly.

The above is a strong indictment of Imran Khan and his style and substance of politics. There arises, however, a fundamental question: why has the Imran Khanesque politics of abuse found popular support? A possible explanation could be as follows: Imran Khan's lack of respect for the entire spectrum of the country's institutions, including the political class, could be voicing the frustrations, disenchantment and anger of a large section of the population at the long-term failure of the state to perform.

It is pertinent that the PTI support base consists largely of the urban educated youth that came of age during and after the Zia martial law years. The 1980s was a watershed period in Pakistan's history, when the 'development state' that had been built up since independence gave way to the 'security state' and which continues to hold sway.

This post-1980s generation possesses a degree of education and skills, are relatively well off, and are

exposed to the world at large. Many among them have studied or travelled abroad and are aware of the social and economic progress other societies, including in our neighbourhood, have made in education, science and technology and the orderly and modern urban spaces that they have created. They have aspirations, but feel frustrated by the stagnation around them. They feel that the state has failed them; thus, the lack of respect for any of its institutions and established values.

The above is a portrayal of one of the three theatres of the politics of abuse and violence. The second is the one played out by the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), led by the now-deceased Khadim Husain Rizvi. Unlike the PTI's upper middle class support base, the TLP's support base is lower middle class and also draws large crowds, committed to stand their ground militantly in street encounters. Its leadership style is not dissimilar to Imran Khan's, with public language loaded with unprintable abuses aimed directly by name at constitutional office-bearers. And they have not been averse to killing state personnel. The third theatre is most dangerous, being played out in the western provinces in terms of armed insurgency and continuous bloodletting.

The factors underlying the PTI and TLP phenomena and the armed militancy merits serious understanding. As stated at the outset, the pervasiveness of lack of respect for national institutions and established values, bordering on challenging their very legitimacy, and the violent militancy, threatens to unravel the fabric of society and the state. It is imperative that the concerns of the disenfranchised sections of the population across the country are seriously addressed.

Nuclear disarmament

PATRICK GATHARA

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is hardly the first time a nuclear power has attacked a non-nuclear nation. That raises questions about the arguments for non-proliferation.

If nuclear-weapon states can use their weapons to threaten the rest of us, or even hide behind them while launching conventional attacks on non-nuclear states, then a central pillar of nuclear non-proliferation is gone. But there is another crucial element of the non-proliferation regime that the invasion should focus attention on. And that is the requirement under Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty for nuclear-weapon states "to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control". To date, nuclear-weapon states have shown much less eagerness in complying with this requirement to completely disarm compared with the zeal they have exhibited in enforcing the obligations of non-nuclear states. A good example is the sanctions on Iran imposed by nations like the United States, the United Kingdom and France, though they themselves are in violation of the NPT.

The unspoken (and racist) presumption behind the treaty was that existing nuclear powers (and their friends) were the only ones who could be trusted with weapons of such destructive power. Leaving them in the hands of the s*****e nations of the rest of the world, with their tinpot dictators and tribal wars, would eventually end with global radiological disaster. However, the supposedly more rational northern nations would never dream of using them.

Well, Vladimir Putin has put an end to that. Not only has he threatened to attack countries that openly join in the fighting in Ukraine with nuclear weapons, but more and more, we are urged to seriously consider previously unlikely scenarios of tactical nuclear weapons being deployed by the Russians to smash Ukrainian re-

sistance. "For US officials and world leaders, discussions of how to respond to a limited nuclear attack are no longer theoretical." The Associated Press news agency said in a report earlier this month. But this is not the first time the world has been terrorised by the prospect of nuclear weapons in the hands of a deranged ruler of the so-called "developed" world.

Almost since the day Donald Trump took power in the US in January 2017, concerns were being raised about his authority to order a nuclear attack.

By the end of his term, so worried were US generals that, according to the book Peril by The Washington Post reporters Bob Woodward and Robert Costa, the banana-exporting republic's top military official not only secretly called his counterpart in China to promise advance warning if the US was to launch an attack, but also ordered nuclear control officers to check with him regardless of the orders they received from the commander-in-chief. None of this engenders confidence in the ability of declared nuclear powers to exercise responsible stewardship over their weapons. While many may point to the fact that there has been no nuclear war in the last half-century, since the NPT came into force, the fact is it only takes one crackpot with access to, and willingness to use nuclear weapons, to launch a global catastrophe. The very same arguments employed to prevent proliferation apply, with perhaps even more force, to nuclear-armed countries.

Writing in Foreign Affairs, Mariana Budjeryn argues that the current conflict in Ukraine, which gave up the nuclear arsenal it inherited from the USSR, is a turning point.

"If Ukraine beats back the Russian invasion, then countries may come to place less stock in nuclear weapons, potentially paving the way for a world in which no one has the power to unleash nuclear Armageddon." On the contrary, if Ukraine loses, that would be another nail in the coffin for non-proliferation and disarmament.

Excerpted: 'The Russia-Ukraine war: An opportunity for nuclear disarmament?'
Courtesy: Aljazeera.com