

The Business

Chief Editor

Irfan Athar Qazi

E-mail: editorthebusiness@yahoo.com

thebusinesslhr@gmail.com

Tijarat House, 14-Davis Road, Lahore  
0423-6312280, 6312480, 6312429, 6312462  
Cell # 0321-4598258

1270-B, Peoples Colony No I, Off: Chenone  
Road, Faisalabad, Ph: 041-8555582

ISLAMABAD / RAWALPINDI  
N-125 Circular Road, Ph: 051-5551654,  
5532761, Cell # 0300-8567331  
KARACHI  
3rd Floor Kehkashan Mall 172-I Block II PECHS  
Opp Rehmania Masjid Main Tariq Road  
Ph: 021-34524550, Cell # 0300-8251534



## A serious situation

A 14-year old girl Dua Zehra disappeared from outside her family's home in Karachi, creating a general sense of anger and dismay. In an apparent bid to evade public criticism and media spotlight on the incident the police at first tried to portray it as a case of elopement, complete with a purported CCTV footage and nikahnama of her marriage. The girl in the footage turned out to be a different person from Lyari who had left her home of her own free will to wed a boy of her choice. As the footage went viral on social media, the authorities felt constrained to suspend the SHO of the police station concerned. During the last few days the law enforcers in Karachi have shown, once again, that either they are incompetent or are indifferent about resolving such serious cases as abductions, even rape. But for some inexplicable reason the police decided to ignore the complaint of Dua's father, according to which the suspect was a next-door neighbour who 'abducted' the girl and subjected her to 'rape'. He told the media that the police were not cooperating with him since the alleged culprit was an influential individual.

The police were later reported to have sought the help of intelligence agencies to recover the girl, saying they have technical expertise to solve the case. That confirmed the police force lacks the necessary technical wherewithal as well as proper training to perform its duties.

While Dua's distraught parents waited for the safe return of their daughter, another teenage girl, Nargis, went missing from Malir. Her mother believed it was also a case of abduction, and on her urging an FIR was registered against unidentified person(s). The same day, another shocking incident took place near the busy Super Highway.

A woman was returning from a shopping centre when two men forcibly entered the rickshaw she was travelling in and abducted her. She later told the police that she was sexually assaulted by her kidnappers. As if that was not an abominable enough a crime, two lady Medico-Legal Officers (MLOs) at the Abbasi Shaheed Hospital refused to conduct her medical examination. One of them excused herself claiming to be unwell while the other simply left saying her duty hours were over. They must be held to account for their irresponsible behaviour. The law obviously would take its course but what appears as a common factor in both these cases is the contact between the two and their spouses through the internet.

Technology has thrown up another challenge that parents must bear in mind while raising children and must engage more actively in their children's pursuits.

## The power of social media



DR JAVAID LAGHARI

The Russia-Ukraine war has been rightly called the 'World Cyberwar I' as it is taking place in a world where social media is ubiquitous, while videos and images can be quickly uploaded and shared worldwide in real time. Video is the king now across all platforms, whether it be on Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, or Facebook, and shared instantly through popular messaging Apps like WhatsApp, Signal, and Line, etc.

Social media users are exposed to information within minutes of the event. Emotions can stir high after watching such videos, real or fake. A peace activist in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv rolled 109 baby strollers into a square last week to represent the children who had been killed in the war with Russia. Within minutes, the image was available to millions on their phones, leading to an immediate call to cease hostilities. Likewise, a 'deepfake' video showed Ukrainian President Zelenskyy calling on soldiers to lay down their weapons.

The American political war is fought on Twitter space, which has a

subscription of 220 million. In one of the most expensive purchases ever, techpreneur Elon Musk last week purchased Twitter for \$44 billion. Musk, who calls himself a "free speech absolutist," will now gain total control of the company. Some US politicians have called the deal 'dangerous for democracy'.

In the world of politics, former US president Obama has the largest Twitter following with 131 million followers, followed by Donald Trump with 89 million (till he was taken off Twitter), and Joe Biden with 34 million. However, famous actor and wrestler Dwayne (The Rock) Johnson has over 308 million followers on Instagram (more than the combined Biden and Trump Twitter following) and may well announce his candidacy for US president. Outside the US, Indian Prime Minister Modi, for example, has a following of 76 million (an insignificant number considering the population of India is over 1.4 billion), Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan has 18 million and Imran Khan 16 million followers on Twitter.

Social media is not just about politics on Twitter but also – and more so – about entertainment, marketing and learning. Its disruptive power is influencing how the youth make decisions. All businesses, large or small, depend on social media marketing through influencers and SEOs. Facebook has 2.9 billion subscribers, YouTube 2.2 billion, TikTok 1 billion, Instagram 500 million and Twitter 220 million people. Because YouTube videos have no time limits, most entertainment, news channels, travel and food vlogs, skill courses, etc are hosted on YouTube.

Vloggers like PewDiePie with over 100 million subscribers on YouTube, and Kim Kardashian with over 300 million followers on Instagram, are influencing the way Gen-Y and Gen-Z

think and act. When Cristiano Ronaldo, who has the world's largest Instagram following of 422m, removed the coke bottles in front of him during a recent press conference, Coke lost \$4 billion of its share value. Posting of memes and tweets by influencers have been known to increase or decrease stock prices.

Pakistan is catching up fast, with 61 million internet users in January 2021 (increasing by over 11 million just between 2020 and 2021). At this rate, one can easily assume there are currently over 76 million internet users today, which is over 70 percent of the population if one does not include the 0-14-year-olds.

In Pakistan, like in most countries, social media is influencing how the youth make decisions. Forty-three million (20 percent of the population) are Facebook and Twitter users, while 22 million (10 percent) use YouTube. The most popular mobile App to communicate, post and forward videos, images and links is WhatsApp with over 46 million users.

YouTube is popular in Pakistan for news channels, entertainment, travel and food blogs, etc. Among YouTube non-TV news channels, Haqeeqat News leads with 4 million subscribers, while anchor Imran Riaz Khan has 2.8 million. Among food channels, Kitchen with Amna has 4 million subscribers. In the world of business and entertainment, Azad chaiwala who introduces the youth to the world of entrepreneurship, and Irfan Junejo, an influencer, have 1.2 million subscribers each.

Twitter, the popular political platform, is used by 44 million (20 percent of the population), and its following is rapidly increasing among the people. Among the politicians, Imran Khan leads all others with over 16 million followers, Shehbaz Sharif

is next with 5.8 million, and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has 4.5 million followers.

In addition to fake news, trolling (bullying or sending abusive remarks) is one of the main negative aspects of Twitter, as is buying of followers, and setting up of fake and bot accounts. This is a menace that needs to be identified and filtered out.

Instagram on the other hand, with over 10 million followers in Pakistan, is used by both influencers and politicians. Politician Imran Khan leads way with a following of 6.9 million, while Maryam Nawaz (480k), Bilawal Bhutto Zardari (223k) and Shehbaz Sharif (90k) each have a reasonable following. In the world of entertainment, Mahira Khan and Minal Khan lead with 9 million followers.

Last, but not the least, TikTok, also known in China as Douyin, is popular for hosting a variety of short-form user videos, from genres like pranks, stunts, tricks, jokes, dance, and entertainment. It has a large following in Pakistan of over 26 million users. The popular TikTokers, among others, are Jannat Mirza (15.3 million), Chaudhry Zulqarnain (12.7 million), and Al-isha Anjum (12.4 million). TikTok is currently not popularly used for political purposes and was temporarily banned in Pakistan in 2021 to curb immoral content. Social media platforms will continue to rapidly grow, change and morph as newer technology using metaverse, web3, 5G and IOT further unravels. Pakistan needs to keep pace with these developments. The population is rapidly becoming aware of the power of social media, and the influence it has on decision-makers. The future clearly belongs to social media which will determine public opinion and market trends.

The writer is a former senator, and former chairperson of the HEC.

RAOOF HASAN

It seems there is nothing static around us these days. Everything seems to be in a perpetual flux, a kind of movement which is taking us into alleys that had not been accessed before. The realities of the time are dawning in different hues and shapes, and it is difficult to ignore them as they come laden with indomitable passion. At times it appears as if we will be washed away in their intrepid currents.

The movement that commenced with the unconstitutional removal of the Khan government through a foreign-engineered vote of no-confidence has gradually morphed into a revolution for restoration of Pakistan's sovereignty and honour. Such a prospect would have been a million miles away from the minds of those who engineered the plot principally to stop Pakistan from pursuing an independent foreign policy that would safeguard its interests and shape its future. Instead, it wanted to plunge the country back into becoming a vassal state to do the master's bidding. The most credible proof of the veracity of this projection is the government that has been put together for implementing the project. It mostly comprises alleged criminals wanted by the law who are out on temporary relief by the courts. They are accused of having committed huge financial crimes which left behind an indelible trail of

## Pakistan is the destination

tell-tale marks. Instead of responding to the allegations in the courts of law and secure exoneration, the matter has been delayed by resorting to petty technicalities including making themselves unavailable at the hearings. Consequently, the cases have dragged on for months without a decision in sight with the alleged criminals being the principal beneficiaries. One such person sits as the prime minister of the country and the other is purporting to have been elected as the chief minister of Punjab. A fair number of the cabinet members are also out on bail from the courts of law. This makes them excessively vulnerable before the forces which have engineered their induction. The question that is being asked is: do such people have the credibility to defend the interests of the state before the very forces which are the architects of their present sojourn in power?

This, in fact, has added to the intensity of the divide that one is witnessing in the country. With an unprecedented number of people responding to Imran Khan's calls to participate in rallies and protests, there is practically little support forthcoming for the concoction which has taken shape in the wake of the YONC. Its members are actu-

ally being heckled whenever they are spotted in public in an expression of intense displeasure at what people believe has happened in the country through a process of intervention that unfolded involving foreign hands as well as local collaborators and facilitators. This has been perceived as a clear assault on Pakistan's sovereignty and honour which people have set out to restore in earnest.

It is also a reality that it is Khan who has the people on his side. He is calling the shots and has the support that is needed to take the battle forward. This is vociferously demonstrated by the mammoth attendance at his protest rallies in all parts of the country. So far these have been extraordinarily peaceful, but will they remain so when, by the end of the month, these protests take the shape of an Independence March towards Islamabad? The desperadoes sitting within the folds of the government may have different ideas and resorting to violence may be a key instrument that may be used as a means to save their citadel of power. But will that salvage the day for the wobbly fabrication?

One thing is certain: Pakistan is poised for a change. But it is also true that such a

change could have been moulded in a peaceful manner which, unfortunately, has not been the case and we stand on the verge of some turbulent times. We have been pushed this far because of the ill-advised role that some state institutions have played in the matter. The avoidance of violence in the battle that is looming will also depend greatly on the role that institutions end up playing when confronted with the fallout of the events that are likely to follow. The judicial role has, in fact, been a major catalyst in the crisis. There are many stories meandering through the grapevine which one would not like to believe. However, the institution will likely have a decisive role in keeping the situation manageable. For that, it may have to take stock of the ground realities and demonstrate a more just and even-handed dispensation to deal with the potential challenges of the ensuing situation.

A change is inevitable. It is already taking shape. An unjust system cannot prevail, particularly when people have been effectively sensitised to this deep-rooted malady. For long they have suffered the ravages of an inequitable exclusion from

the mainstream of national life. They have survived on the fringes on the throw-away morsels of the privileged and the powerful segments which usurped the riches of the state and held within their control all the avenues to progress honourably.

Coinciding with the advent of Khan in the annals of power, this has all changed irreversibly in the last few months. He brought about a paradigm shift in the way people thought of these things. They have cast off their fears. They are no longer afraid of raising their voice. They are no longer fearful of the consequences of their struggle. They are no longer willing to watch from the sidelines the loot and plunder unleashed by the privileged lot. They no longer lack the confidence in criticising the role of institutions. They are conscious of the grave injustices perpetrated and, more importantly, they are determined to bring about a meaningful change.

This is the crossroads where Pakistan stands today. The process that has been set in motion is irreversible. The only factor that may help matters from slipping out of control is for state institutions to play a judicious role. They must understand that Pakistan is as much the country of the suffering millions as it is theirs. These people have set out to reclaim their inherent right to the ownership of their country. They are leading a colossal movement which is charged

ABDUL SATTAR

Pakistan is going through a serious economic crisis and neoliberals assert that the solution lies in implementing neoliberal policies. They believe that since the market was not allowed to function properly, the country continued facing economic problems. It is their firm belief that had everything been left at the mercy of the market, things would have been much better and the economy would have been functioning in an excellent way.

This is not only the mantra of Pakistani neoliberals; pro-market economists all over the world come up with the same recipe whenever an economic crisis hits any country. The solution first emerged during the decade of the 1970s and was popularized by former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher and American president Ronald Reagan. The two heads of the governments were ardent supporters of this market-oriented cure that turned out to be a recipe for disaster for many countries, especially those in the western hemisphere where ruthless market reforms were carried out, pushing millions

## The neoliberal mantra

of people below the poverty line.

According to Dawisson Belem Lopes, a professor of international and comparative politics, "In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Brazil (under Fernando Collor de Mello), Argentina (under Carlos Menem), Mexico (under Carlos Salinas), Venezuela (under Carlos Perez), and Peru (under Alberto Fujimori) were all being governed by right-wing presidents who adopted the so-called 'Washington Consensus' – a neoliberal formula coined by the World Bank and seen by enthusiasts as a ticket to glory – as if it were the wave of the future. However, the results of Washington Consensus policies in Latin America were tragic: GDP stalled, social policies shrank, income concentration and poverty rose, unemployment and labour precariousness surged, violence skyrocketed. In some of these countries, not even inflation was tamed." Despite following some of the most liberal economic policies in the world, the region still houses more

than 86 million poor people. In 2020, the prevalence of hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) reached 9.1 percent, the highest in the last 15 years. According to Unicef and WHO, "Some 3 in 10 people worldwide, or 2.1 billion, lack access to safe, readily available water at home, and 6 in 10, or 4.5 billion, lack safely managed sanitation." Millions of such people live in the western hemisphere as well, which was a haven for Western companies and multinational corporations during the decades of 1980s and 1990s. So, it is clear that these market-oriented reforms did not benefit people at all; they might have enriched Western capitalists and their local collaborators in the region though.

It was this ruthlessness of market-oriented policies that created unrest in several parts of the Western hemisphere bringing several left-leaning politicians into power. Some of these politicians tried to extend help and succour to their people but unfortunately these left-wing leaders could not

succeed. Crippling Western sanctions are said to be one of the factors leading to their failures. Unfortunately, the leaders of this Spanish and Portuguese speaking belt are once again turning towards a market-oriented solution that is going to be as disastrous as it turned out to be in the past.

Pakistan also witnessed the structural adjustment programme during the decade of the 1980s. It was introduced on the pretext that it would attract foreign investments, industrialize the country, create wealth and eliminate poverty. But despite selling out more than 167 state-run entities, the country still houses millions of jobless youths who have no hope of a better future. More than 60 million people are living below the poverty line while the majority of the people do not have access to clean drinking water. Millions of people are forced to live in semi-human conditions. Literacy instead of rising has declined over the years while economic growth is not as impressive as it was expected at the time of the introduction of these market-oriented reforms. Millions of workers have been rendered jobless in the process of privatization while a number of state concerns that were privatized to boost.