

The Business

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Tax collection

Total provisional tax collections July-March 2022 have been estimated at Rs 4,858 billion against Rs 3,778 billion collected in the comparable period last year. The previous govt would naturally focus on this increase while the present government is likely to focus on Rs 5 billion shortfall in April 2022 provisional collection against the targeted collection. Two observations are relevant. Firstly, with respect to the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) claim of raising the collections by 28.6 percent, it is pertinent to recall that the budgeted 6.1 trillion rupee tax collection required 28 percent growth in collections from the year before and hence the growth of 28.6 percent achieved during the first nine months indicates that Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) is well on course to achieve the budgeted target of Rs 6.1 trillion. However, the budgeted target, agreed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), was revised downward by FBR to what it considered was the more realistic Rs 5,829 billion. The collections for the first nine months are therefore at par to achieve the budgeted as opposed to the FBR tax collections for the year.

To meet the budgeted tax target by the end of the fiscal year on June 30 would require Rs 621 billion collections in May and the same amount in June to reach the budgeted target while FBR would require Rs 484.5 billion in May and in June to achieve its downgraded target of Rs 5,829 billion. Secondly, this renders the shortfall in April of Rs 5 billion against the targeted collection of serious concern as it may herald a trend for the remaining two months of the fiscal year based on two factors: (i) the bulk of the tax collections (July-February), to the tune of 52.2 percent, were sourced to imports, and hence the recent highly contractionary monetary policy decisions, in an attempt to curtail the rising current account deficit, is projected to reduce collections.

The rupee is continuously losing value, another monetary policy tool to contain the current account deficit, with obvious negative implications on imports and therefore import revenue collections; and (ii) 883 billion rupees out of the total budgeted collection was to be generated as per FBR from enhanced growth in the economy which, in turn, was budgeted at five percent. Today, at best, the estimates have been downgraded to four percent by multilaterals though independent economists estimate a figure between three and 3.5 percent at best for the year premised on the prevailing political uncertainty

TAIMUR K BANDEY

Nationalistic jingoism, emotional meltdowns, loud chest-thumping and rhetorical comments will surely attract attention, win applause and echo in chambers far and beyond. However, logical arguments, rationality, facts and reason can never be replaced as the best possible way to engage, deliberate and even dissent.

Unfortunately, the present times exhibit much more of the former than the latter even in the best of educated, exposed and well-travelled women and men. We are dealing with a herd mentality where a large part of the population, especially the youth, is swayed by a pied piper into believing almost anything and everything. A close study of our private education system will reveal the circumstances that have led us to the current situation. People have often criticized Pakistan's public sector and the madrassah system for poor content, low quality teaching and missing resources and facilities for their students to compete with the rest of the world. The English-medium private sector has often been glorified as a spectacular example of quality education. While this may be true to a large extent, there lie a host of other benchmarks to see whether this is truly the case or not.

Private school systems have filled in a huge vacuum left by the government of Pakistan. The private sector has delivered

NAURAH KHURSHID

The recent act of verbal abuse directed by Pakistanis at Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb, while she was in one of Islam's holiest sites, is yet another reminder of the rampant misogyny that plagues Pakistani politics. As if that was not horrific enough, some ex-ministers belonging to the PTI posted the video of the incident from their Twitter accounts, endorsing these actions. This is not the first time, nor will it be the last, that misogyny against Pakistan's women politicians is tolerated and endorsed. Pakistan's political history is rife with women political leaders' character assassination at the hands of their male colleagues.

My first experience witnessing such blatant misogyny was as a child growing up in Lahore in the 1900s, when Benazir Bhutto's political opponents would repeatedly attack her character, her choice of clothes from before she entered politics, and her personal life. The words used for her by large sections of the population are categorized as the worst form of verbal abuse di-

China and OIC: Aiming at new horizons-I

SHAKEEL AHMAD RAMAY

China cherishes a long history of cordial relationship with the Muslim world. Silk Route through China was the preferred route for Muslims traders. They were travelling to and from China to explore the markets of East and West for trade and economic linkages. Modern China capitalized on history and the relations kept on growing; presently, many Muslim countries enjoy a stable and respectful relationship with China. The top leadership of modern China has always emphasized on the need of friendly and brotherly association between China and the Muslim world. In the pursuance of this objective, China diligently developed its policy and is executing it since 1949.

Wang Yi, State Councilor and Foreign Minister of China, reiterated the same policy in his remarks, while he was attending 48th meeting of Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), in Pakistan. He explicitly mentioned that China is eager to build on the past success for a sustainable partnership with the Muslim world. He further said that China is looking for mutually beneficial and respectable bond. This is not rhetoric; China has proved its sincerity by engaging with the Muslim countries. Over the course of time, China has launched a good number of initiatives to engage the Muslim countries at bilateral and multilateral levels.

On the multilateral level, the most prominent example is China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASC). It was established in collaboration with Arab League in 2004 during the visit of President Hu Jintao to Egypt. Since

then, China has taken numerous practical steps to show its commitment to the forum. In 2016, a special loan of USD 15 billion was announced for the infrastructure and manufacturing sectors to assist the partner countries of CASC. President Xi, in 2018, further enhanced the level of engagement by announcing \$20 billion special loan for economic reconstruction of the region. In 2021, during the fifth China-Arab States Expo, 277 projects were signed worth \$24 billion to boost the digital economy and green development. Experts believe that it is the beginning of a new era and it will assist CASC countries to enter the fourth industrial revolution.

China is also working with other Muslim countries in different blocs or groups like the Muslim countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), South Asia and Central Asia. ASEAN countries have been engaged through initiatives such as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and China-ASEAN partnership. Partnership with South Asian and Central Asian countries has been built through BRI and bilateral relationships.

On the bilateral level, China is emerging as the major trading partner of Muslim world and CASC. CASC observed a sharp increase in trade and it reached \$240 billion in 2020 from \$36.4 billion in 2004. Saudi Arabia, from CASC, is one of the biggest trade partners with \$67 billion in 2020. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is the key hub for the re-export of Chinese products to Africa and the regional countries. Saudi Arabia is also the top oil exporter to China, closely followed by Kuwait, UAE, Sudan and Oman. China has also invested heavily in many Arab countries

including \$43.47 billion in Saudi Arabia, \$36.16 billion in the UAE, \$30.05 billion in Iraq, \$11.75 billion in Kuwait, \$7.8 billion in Qatar, \$6.62 billion in Oman, and \$1.42 billion in Bahrain (2005-2021, cumulative investment). China-UAE investment fund of \$10 billion is another example. China is also collaborating with Oman for a special investment fund of \$10 billion in the Special Economic Zone of Duqm.

China has deep linkages with Indonesia and the relationship has expanded over time. China is the major trading partner of Indonesia with \$71 billion in 2020 (export \$31.7 billion and import \$39.6). Malaysia also enjoys cordial relations with China. China is also the biggest trade partner of Malaysia with \$77.8 billion in 2020 (export \$37.7 billion, import \$40.1 billion). In the recent years, Iran has emerged as an important trade and investment partner. In 2019, the total trade between Iran-China was \$23 billion. China has expanded its relationship with Iran in multiple fields and has announced huge investment plans in the fields of economy, trade, infrastructure and technology, etc. China is also looking to increase its oil imports from Iran. China and Iran have signed a 25 years' strategic agreement as well.

However, China-Pakistan relation stands out amongst all. China and Pakistan have a history of brotherhood which has no parallel in history. Both countries stood by each other in every circumstance at any cost. While addressing the 48th OIC CFM meeting in Islamabad, the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi remarked on Kashmir that "China shares the same hope." The whole OIC body has taken the stance and advocated for the "inalienable right to self-determination." However, the

extremist right-wing government in India was quick to rebuke the Chinese Foreign Minister's statement. A statement issued by the Indian Ministry for External Affairs stated, "We reject the uncalled reference to India by the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi." India has long claimed Kashmir Issue as an internal affair. This ire of Indian Ministry of External Affairs highlights India's irresponsible behaviour to solve international matters and being a country that considers hegemonic designs suitable for its global power ambitions.

The relationship between Pakistan and China is multidimensional and encompasses all areas including economic, social, military, and security, etc. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the ultimate example of brotherhood. It is assisting Pakistan to transform the economy with the investment of around \$62 billion, which can increase in the coming years. Both countries are working together to further strengthen the relationship and explore new areas of cooperation.

The above discussion established that China has developed a trusted relationship with the Muslim world. The relationship is mutually beneficial and focused on people's development. Thus, the desire to further strengthen the relationship has merit and shows sincere intentions of China to work with the Muslim world. China is offering the Muslim countries to join the BRI, which is a landmark economic initiative by China.

(To be continued)

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(Courtesy Monthly Hilal)

The pied piper syndrome

where the state has failed us. One wonders what the state of education would have been had the private sector not jumped in to provide the missing education. But, while we are all indebted to their nation-building contribution, it is important to now question some of the established practices in many of our private schools that have now curtailed any form of critical thinking, analytical mind and logical thinking. We live in a society where there is grade fixation amongst parents, schools and even the students. The final grade is seen as the ultimate form of success or even failure. But, while grades are important as they become the basis of admissions in good universities within and outside Pakistan, they are not the end or the final word at all.

We are sitting in 2022 now and the world around us has not only evolved, but it has also broadened in terms of access to knowledge, and evolution and progress of knowledge – and that too at a very fast pace. This digital age has completely transformed the markets and has also revolutionized market demands. In fact, Google has even gone on to say that perhaps they don't need these fancy undergraduate degrees anymore and

they will now take students and customize them according to their requirements.

This is food for thought for how far the world has moved on from traditional learning and teaching ideas. We need to see this as a necessity if we are to compete globally as global citizens. Hence the need to think out of the box in Pakistan as well and introspect on some of the nagging and decadent methods of educating our youth. Also important are the ramifications of not evolving with time in the shape of the current intolerant, myopic and less read student of the day.

Our grade and content fixated parents, schools and students rely more on teachers' notes to rote learn than books or research. They are dependent more on tuition/ after-school help than in-class teaching. They are expected to reproduce, not analyze, create or think out of the box in classrooms. Students in general are discouraged to ask questions or disagree in class as well as at homes as questioning or engaging in argument is seen as disrespect instead of a probing mind.

In light of such outdated classroom and home practices, we will surely produce a generation that will rely on and believe

whatever comes their way without an iota of doubt or dissection. They will skim read or just echo what they have heard, seen or have been told by others without trying to go beyond the obvious or questioning them. They will retweet/ post, believe and even argue based on WhatsApp forwards, drawing room chats, TV show content and their favorite politicians' words with zero scrutiny or thinking. All this creates a generation of blocked minds who are walking and talking robots with no research, study of facts/data or any sort of in-depth reading. We thus have all the right ingredients for a massive cult following of populist and fascist demagogues. In short, any pied piper will stand up and walk out and will be followed blindly by many who will buy that narrative easily and quickly due to their own ignorance and gullible minds devoid of knowledge, logic and rationality.

There is therefore an urgent need to move away from the traditional mode of education, learning and assessment that encourages and perhaps institutionalizes surface level understanding, zero critical thinking and any form of research/ in-depth study. We need to make our students agents of

change and allow them the space to explore, create and question. Research, presentations, thinking skills and open-ended questions should be compulsory components of the school curriculum. Sadly, today only the International Baccalaureate (IB) system is doing this as part of the academic framework from preschool till higher levels. Others seem too occupied and happy with the regular rote learning mechanism that we mocked the local public school system for.

Many in the Cambridge system have cracked the code and now know how to attain grades through tuitions, last minute past paper sessions and teacher's notes only. That is why when graduates coming out of such systems reach good universities based on grades only, they struggle to cope with the demands of modern education.

They say that fascist Modi's rise has just exposed the undercurrent of anti-Muslim sentiments that existed across India for decades. They say even Trump rose on a hate campaign that was already there, but hidden, in the US. Many now draw analogies and state that Imran Khan's popularity graph, especially amongst the youth, is a reflection of the inherent intolerance, hate and bigotry that has always been there. While I agree with that assertion, I think what it also exhibits is our decaying and outdated education sector that breeds such a herd mentality that is more glorified today because of

Misogyny in politics

rected at a politician only because of her gender. Even though I could understand very little of what passed as political discussion at the time, I knew that her personal life was open to disgusting attacks by the PML political leadership and their followers only because she was a woman who had stepped into an overwhelmingly patriarchal political world. While the 90s may be one of the vilest political periods, current events indicate that nothing has changed. Clearly, political parties that enjoy massive support from the Pakistani public do not own any responsibility of bettering political discourse and condemning misogynistic and sexist comments directed at women politicians. Most of this abuse is considered funny rather than something that needs to be apologised for. This is truly reflective of Pakistani society where casual homophobia and misogyny is not called out. We have ingrained these attitudes in ourselves so deeply that most people do not

even recognise why it is offensive to call women names on the floor of the National Assembly or refer to a male politician as a woman in a public political rally. Much like the streets and parks of Pakistan, public institutions are also no place for a woman. Entering politics as a woman in Pakistan means that her physical appearance will be discussed and mocked by her male colleagues. Her personal life and character will be freely tarnished for the entertainment of the people.

One cannot have much hope from the majority of male politicians but at least women politicians should present a united front and condemn misogyny and sexism across the board. This is something that no woman, regardless of her political affiliation, is safe from. Today it is Marriyum Aurangzeb, but it has been Shireen Mazari, Firdous Ashiq Awan, Maryam Nawaz, and countless others in the past – and there will be others in future.

When one woman faces abuse by political leaders or

members of the public, others should come to her defence regardless of the political party they belong to. After all, these are the experiences that all of us Pakistani women share. We all know what it is like to be targeted because of our appearance, and to be dehumanized purely based on our gender. Be it women in journalism, who have been at the receiving end of abuse, harassment and threats, women in public offices, doctors, nurses, or women belonging to any other occupation, we all have stories that have sexism and misogyny at their centre. When it comes to abusing women, nothing is taken into account – not the sanctity of the place, nor a woman's position. It is time that people are held accountable online and otherwise for how they treat women and what they choose to say about them.

Men who are responsible for saying and endorsing the most disgusting things to women political workers and leaders must be held accountable publicly; on TV shows that they are invited to, at press conferences, and on social media. The impunity with which they display their misogyny must come to an end if Pakistani politics is to mature beyond petty personal attacks.