

# The Business

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## Still a far cry

With the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF's) decision to remove Pakistan from the grey list in October after onsite checks, the anticipated outcome has created a rush of different parties and persons claiming credit for this outcome. Even if, for legal reasons, the good news will still take a few months to come, financial markets are already pricing it in and preparing to welcome foreign direct as well as portfolio investment. That's because once FATF gives the green light, you can count on its contribution to a ratings upgrade, more and better debt support, and more foreign investment. The previous government deserves the credit for the progress, of course, since it did most of the work in partnership with the military. But due marks must still be given to the present coalition government, because without the thaw that it was able to engineer with the US government in a very short time, this could, and most likely would, have still dragged on endlessly. There were also reports that the Chinese, along with a few other friends, were lobbying behind the scenes to get us off the grey list.

Such things can be crucial because we can always count on our eastern neighbour to go well out of its way to poison the proceedings for Pakistan; which it has been doing since well before 2018 when Pakistan was placed on the increased monitoring list. There's a big lesson in this for Pakistan. As Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar said very rightly, this country will never repeat the mistakes that got it into this mess in the first place. No doubt Pakistan was right at the top of the list of countries that lost most from the so-called war on terrorism; even though it was not even directly involved in it in any way.

Even now, it is haunted by the ghosts of the war that took more than 80,000 innocent lives; and nobody can ever forget the darkest day in this country's history when terrorists sneaked into the Peshawar Army Public School and butchered well over a hundred little children in 2014. It's a good thing, then, that we have finally cut off all financial lifelines for these enemies of the state; and the whole world has now acknowledged our efforts. The biggest disservice the state can now do to its people is letting this appreciation of its efforts make it complacent. We deal with an enemy that adjusts to all twists and turns, and will fight right to the very end. We must not be deceived by our advances any more than we should believe the enemy's offers of negotiations and conditions for ceasefire.

## League of her own



SARIA BENAZIR JADOON

June 21 is the longest day of the year. It is also the birthday of Pakistan's slain former prime minister Benazir Bhutto – the first woman to head the government of a Muslim majority country after a long and arduous struggle against a brutal military dictatorship.

A fierce and fearless champion of democracy, human rights, international peace and progressive values, Benazir was truly ahead of her times. Her courage was as extraordinary as her accomplishments and while she may have been physically eliminated by terrorists fifteen years ago, she remains a beacon of light on the horizon of global politics. A world in the throes of war, authoritarianism and inter-civilizational strife can draw important lessons from the life and legacy of Benazir Bhutto.

Her unwavering commitment to the ideals we cherish is the first. Indeed, there will always be obstacles to surmount and quite often, it entails personal sacrifices that one must be prepared to make. Fate took a cruel course when Benazir returned home after graduating from Oxford. Her fa-

ther Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Pakistan's first democratically elected prime minister, was deposed and sent to the gallows for a murder he did not commit. For years, her life alternated between house arrest and solitary confinement in sordid conditions but nothing dampened her resolve to restore civilian rule in her country. However, both of her governments were dismissed before time at the behest of obscurantist forces that could not see Pakistan forge ahead under the dynamic leadership of a modern young woman. Benazir Bhutto's detractors leveled all sorts of baseless allegations to undermine her popularity, attack her family and banish her from the political scene but she was not deterred. Despite threats of death, she returned to her homeland after eight years of exile to save it from falling into the hands of militants who had captured major city centers in the country's north-west. In the process, she lost the battle for her life but the ensuing government of her party won the war against terrorism, preventing Pakistan from becoming the epicenter of global jihad. Her son, Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari – only nineteen when his mother was assassinated – continues this fight.

Freedom is fragile and needs friends. For the same reason, Benazir Bhutto proposed an association of democratic states that would back one another and promote this universal good. Democracy leads to economic prosperity and helps create and conserve constituencies of peace. Like any other form of government, it has its flaws that must be identified and fixed from within for it to persevere and build more equitable societies. With liberal values in retreat everywhere, the exigency of such a union cannot be overstated. Furthermore, advocacy of human rights must be a matter of prin-

ple, not convenience. Democratic nations that are also great powers must censure violation of these rights without any distinction and lend practical support for their protection. Double standards not only erode their own credibility but also the sanctity of those values. In a similar vein, women must stand up for other women. Benazir Bhutto did not repair the iron ceiling after breaking it. Instead, she made way for other women to rise to important positions by setting an example and providing them opportunities. The governments she led took important initiatives to increase their access to education, healthcare, justice, employment and legislation. Economic emancipation was integral to her agenda; therefore, the First Women's Bank was established to provide loans to thousands of women to start their own business. Similarly, Pakistan's largest social safety net envisioned by her and instituted by her successors – the Benazir Income Support Program – seeks to assist and empower poor women by making direct cash transfers to them. The situation just next door where the Taliban have placed restrictions on girls' education, work and movement is starkly different.

Following the withdrawal of the USSR from Afghanistan, Benazir Bhutto warned against the US's abandonment of the region. Thirty-four years later, the humanitarian crisis in the country has worsened in the wake of Washington's hasty exit. With Rs9 billion in assets frozen overseas, tens of millions of Afghans are facing acute hunger, poverty and deprivation of essential public services. Impoverishment enables oppression and creates breeding ground for violent extremism. If the Afghan state collapses, the consequences for international peace and security will be very dire. The

world must therefore do whatever it can to alleviate the plight of its citizens and end the recurring cycle of conflict and war that has plagued Afghanistan for far too long. This goes for other flashpoints too, especially in the Middle East and in South Asia where a protracted rivalry between two nuclear powers imperils the future of almost one quarter of the world's population.

Benazir Bhutto believed that a European Union sort of mechanism to foster trade, cooperation and people to people relations would help put a stop to hostility between India and Pakistan. In her book published posthumously, 'Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy and the West', she stressed the need for a constructive dialogue within and among disparate societies, faiths and civilizations to introspect, find common ground and generate goodwill. The tumultuous times we are passing through have made such an exchange indispensable. Speaking at Harvard on May 26, New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern reminded the audience that the path Benazir carved as a woman decades ago is as relevant today as it was then; so too is her message. By giving birth while she was the prime minister of Pakistan in 1990, Bhutto demonstrated that women could 'have it all'. The Daughter of the East undoubtedly occupies an unparalleled place in the pantheon of world's great leaders.

The woman who inspired Malala Yousafzai and enthralled Hillary Clinton could be no ordinary extraordinary woman. She was in a league of her own but may her league multiply in size and strength. The global community must recognize her in a manner that befits her glorious achievements and supreme sacrifice. Observance of an international day in her remembrance by the United Nations would be the right thing to do.

## Tale of the missing PM



ARIFA NOOR

“There is a tide in the affairs of men, Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune” — Shakespeare

FRANKLIN Roosevelt won four terms as president of the United States before the two-term bar was put in place. He was the only American president to have done so. But along with his unprecedented four terms, Roosevelt is also known for having led the country during some of the most difficult times in the country's history — the Great Depression, Pearl Harbour and a world war. And he did all this as a man stricken with polio and confined to a wheelchair. But what may be less known about Roosevelt is that he was the first president to understand and use modern technology for communicating directly with the people. By the time he came into power, nearly every American household had a radio, and Roosevelt realised he could use it to talk to the people directly without a messenger. Called the 'Fireside Chats', his speech would be broadcast directly into people's homes; about the difficult times, the New Deal, and the war in Europe. Compared to his predecessors, Roosevelt used casual language, referring to himself as 'I' and those he was addressing as 'you', unlike the more formal style used in the speeches given by presidents.

His speeches from those times are still quoted as examples of good communication strategy — the language was clear and simple; he began by saying "my friends" and walked those listening through the many crises facing

America. One of his most famous phrases — "You have nothing to fear but fear itself" — is still widely quoted to this day. Not only did his message get across, the new deal he set in place reset the relationship between the government and the people, and eventually Roosevelt ended up winning four terms.

Communications matter, especially in difficult times. And crises have and can turn men and women into leaders. Hence, it is quite difficult to understand the absence of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif at a time when the country is perhaps going through an unprecedented economic crisis. The government has had to make the tough choice of raising petrol prices by over Rs80 in 20 days; diesel even more. The inflation spiral this will lead to is still to kick off. The attacks by the PTI are relentless, and the government is under pressure.

But pleading the government's case and explaining the crisis is apparently the headache of the second-tier leadership; hence, we see the finance minister, the energy minister and the information minister holding a press conference. This is then followed by a second round where the allies make an appearance; one day, this included Qamar Zaman Kaira and Maulana Sahib's son flanking PML-N's Khawaja Asif. A third round usually includes a talk by a figure from the Sindh government and another by someone linked to Hamza's now-you-see-it-now-you-don't cabinet in Lahore. But where is the real deal? The man at the top — in fact, all the men at the top, who couldn't stay away from the cameras when announcing and then seeing the vote of no-confidence through?

And now, when difficult decisions are being made, a 'bayan' to be run on television or a tweet is about the most we have seen — be it Shehbaz Sharif, Asif Ali Zardari or Maulana Fazlur Rehman. There are vague messages and hints about the prime minister's address to the nation but nothing concrete.

And in the absence of this, there is little chance of the people understanding the urgency of the situation. Who is going to convince them that this is an unprecedented time for us, a war-like situation? The finance minister? Or the petroleum one? No wonder then that Imran Khan's interviews and speeches

about how the vote of no-confidence has tanked the economy and how he had warned of this sounds more plausible. He is winning the war of narratives because he has a more palatable story to tell, and he is the only storyteller in town.

If nothing else, the government should glance back to the beginning of Covid. Once the PTI government of the time realised what it was facing, it put its most important man on the job of communication. Then prime minister Imran Khan gave televised speeches aplenty; he spoke to journalists again and again, and he had his key people with him when he interacted with the press. Undoubtedly, he wasn't as precise as he needed to be, and his messaging wasn't accurate at times, and he got the flak for it too. But the government was not deterred. The seriousness of the situation got communicated.

And along the way, the PTI also managed to make clear what its policies and priorities were, despite the criticism. From the aversion to the lockdown to social protection, to work being done at the NCOC; the information was there, and it could be debated, praised and criticised. And this is why, today, the PTI claims credit for avoiding strict lockdowns as well as for its social protection programmes. In contrast, at present, the absence of the prime minister and the other parties' top leadership means nothing is being discussed except the price hike in the most general manner or the usual bak bak on politics, neutrals and elections. There is little to no debate on even the targeted subsidy of Rs2,000 the government has announced. Perhaps this is not because the amount is small but because the messenger has not been the man in charge.

And if the government is not interested in the optics, perhaps someone in government should think of what this difficult time can do for a first-time prime minister. Crises are not easy for politicians or for societies, but they can also turn politicians into leaders. If the Covid example doesn't interest the prime minister, he could look further afield — Volodymyr Zelensky is now a leader and a statesman at home and for the world. And this happened during a crisis, not because of economic prosperity.

## Safety for all

DIANE BAHATI

Most refugees do not want to leave their homes. In my family's case, a volcano erupted just 8km (5 miles) away from the only house they ever knew. Black smoke rolled above Lake Kivu, filling our streets, choking us. Conflict from the civil war forced my family to flee again. We then sought safety in Uganda.

My father described the Ugandan refugee camp as a boundless desert, with scant supplies and little water. Our family remained there for two and a half years on the brink of starvation. Yet, we persisted. We survived and by some miracle, were granted asylum in the United States. To this day, the smell of rotisserie chicken draws me back to my first meal in the United States. I remember the plastic container, the warmth of the chicken creating condensation on the lid, juices seeping out of the moist meat, and the pattern of the hotel bedspread upon which my family of 10 sat in Salt Lake City, Utah — a world away from our beloved home in Africa. This modest meal exemplified joy and possibility after such strife. Sitting together, enjoying this bounty, we did not have much other than the clothes on our backs, but we felt like the richest people in the world. Our wealth was not measured in monetary value. We were rich within our hearts because we were no longer afraid. We were no longer hungry. We were safe.

My family and I are the lucky ones. According to a recent United Nations report, the number of people forced to flee conflict, violence and persecution has now crossed a staggering milestone — more than 100 million. Of these refugees, nearly half are children. Millions are exploited. Their journeys are often deadly and when they do arrive at a place of safety, they are denied access to basic rights such as

education and healthcare. The conflict in Ukraine has brought unfathomable heartbreak. But I would argue that it has also shown humanity at its best. More than 7.6 million people have fled Ukraine. People opened their homes and offered warm meals. Neighbouring countries have opened schools for Ukrainian children and are providing healthcare to families fleeing violence. The European Union offered temporary protection to migrants. Organisations like the Red Cross and Red Crescent have offered mental health support to help heal the invisible wounds of war. The response has been nothing short of incredible.

While Ukraine has dominated the headlines, I implore you to make this the moment where you open your hearts to the plight of refugees from around the world. My message to people, governments and world leaders is simple: please keep this spirit of generosity alive. Violence and conflict continue around the globe. Migrants from all over the world need your compassion. Today, I am a sophomore at the University of Utah. I plan to go to law school and am committed to helping others. Migrant voices like mine need to be at the heart of the policy process in this country and on the global stage.

Last month, I visited the UN, where global leaders gathered to propose solutions to the complex problems of migration. While there, I had the opportunity to meet with Francesco Rocca, president of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). He said, "Ethnicity and nationality should not become deciding factors in saving lives." I agree. Protecting people forced to flee their homes, no matter where they are from, is our shared responsibility.

Excerpted: 'World Refugee Day: As a former refugee, I want safety