

The Business

Chief Editor

Irfan Athar Qazi

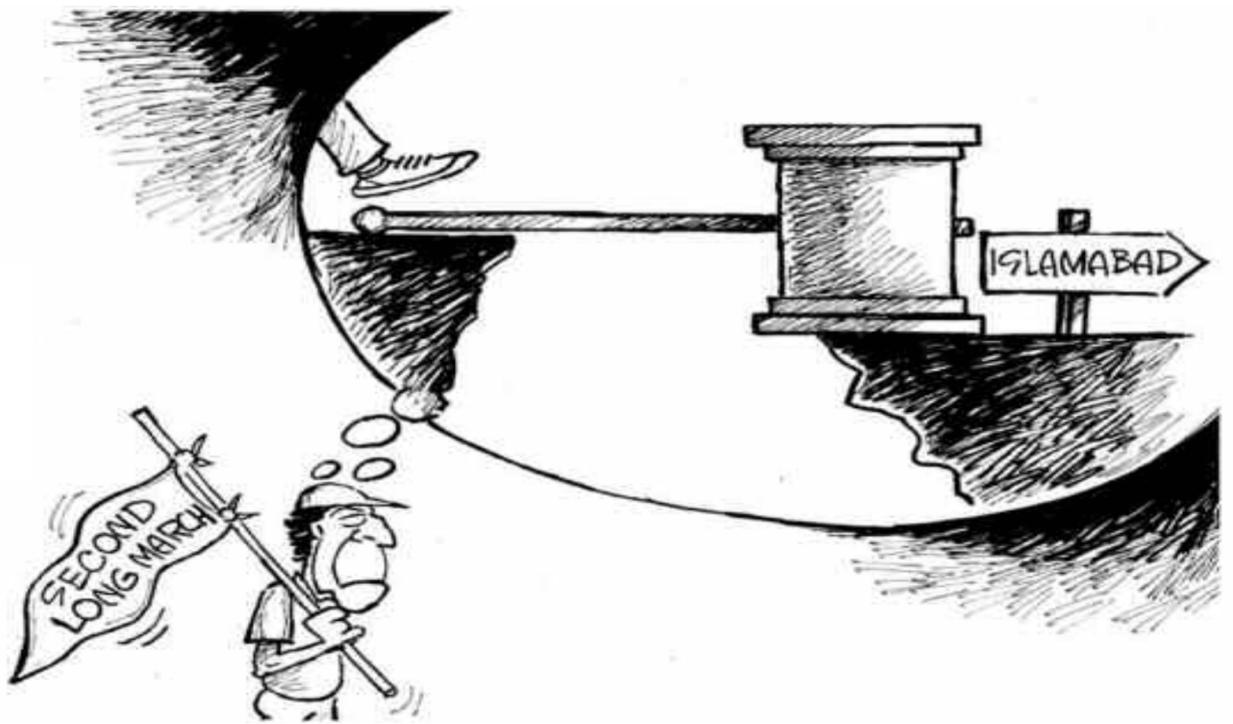
E-mail: editorthebusiness@yahoo.com

thebusinesslhr@gmail.com

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

Hassan Parwana Colony,  
near Water Tanki, Multan

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



## Peace talks again

The peace talks with Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Kabul is not something that is happening for the first time; it has happened in the past as well but never came to fruition because the TTP never surrendered to the sovereignty of Pakistan. This time there is the TTP's promise for an indefinite ceasefire and it seems to be holding. But is it that the TTP commanders want in all or is it something cherished by the Afghan Taliban government? To it there is a wider canvas. Finding itself isolated internationally and with no one reaching Kabul to talk and help it overcome its myriad challenges, the Afghan government is now desperate to break that ice of isolation. It seems to have concluded that its governance invites nothing but renunciation by the world at large. But it had not met this kind of world boycott in 1996. Pakistan was then the first to accord the Taliban government welcome its ambassador. Islamabad also doled out necessary wherewithal to Kabul to kick-start its governance. But that is no more the case now; Pakistan wants the Taliban leadership to win over international legitimacy by changing its mindset on status of women and its patronage and hospitality of the TTP militants.

There is this pressure of Kabul on TTP leadership for an indefinite ceasefire with Pakistan and the ongoing talks under the watch of Islamic Afghan Emirate's (IAE's) acting prime minister, Mullah Muhammad Akhund. The IAE acting interior minister, Sirajuddin Haqqani, is said to be the central mediator who helped put the talks back on track. But will these talks lead to any tangible breakthrough? The answer, however, remains unanswered essentially because Pakistan would not bite the bait of extension of ceasefire in return of meeting a host of TTP demands that are unacceptable to it from the very word go.

Pakistan has only one demand: the Afghan government should refuse hospitality to the TTP militants, ask them to return to Pakistan and pledge to give up terrorism. But for their safe havens in the bordering regions, the TTP militants have no capacity and capability to carry out terrorist forays into tribal region of Pakistan. Should they be on the ground in there the Pakistan forces would wipe them out in a matter of days. And should TTP fighters lay down arms and decide to join the mainstream they would find Pakistan a willing party at the Kabul parleys. As for the TTP demand for enforcement of their version of Shariah in Malakand a similar experiment was tried in 2009 but failed as under that arrangement terrorists returned and had to be snuffed out by a military action. On the face of it, the agenda for rapprochement on the table in Kabul has its inbuilt rejection by Pakistan.



RAOOF HASAN

When I was much younger in life, I had umpteen opportunities to have left this country, but I resisted the temptation with pride. The opportunities kept coming during later years, yet my insistence to stay in my own country never wavered. As a matter of fact, even as things were visibly deteriorating in Pakistan, my passion kept growing stronger that this was the place I belonged to, and this is where I am going to be.

I must concede that, at this late stage in life, this resolve has grown wobbly. I am numbed by the happenings of recent times and feel highly embarrassed to be living in a country which is ruled by a cabal of convicts, alleged criminals and absconders. Almost 70 per cent of the incumbent cabinet is made of such kind of people which is a matter of unmitigated shame for every self-respecting citizen. But this gruesome reality is not likely to have an impact on the orchestrators of this latest tragedy which has befallen the country.

Virtually all institutions of the state are guilty of having contributed to the fulfilment of a sinister plan to dismantle a democratic and constitutional government. They became willing partners in committing this crime in violation of all moral, constitutional, judicial and such other practices on which the edifice of the civilized world proudly rests. In the process, Pakistan has become a rare country where crime is not treated as crime and its perpetration is legitimised by the institutions which are deemed as the custodians of

## A mafia land

law and constitution. This is the new norm which is being instilled into the national ethos.

Indeed, we are such a rare country, and in so many different ways. Find me another country which has been so malevolently handed over to a bunch of certified criminals to restart their spree of loot and plunder. Find me another country where state institutions are lined up to pander to the sinister pleasure of the orchestrators, irrespective of whether doing so would be in conformity with democratic traditions and constitutional provisions. Find me another country where the courts open at midnight to implement a foreign-inspired and funded regime-change conspiracy in collaboration with local thugs and crooks by transgressing into what strictly falls within the domain of parliament. Find me another country where an imported government comprising a myriad variety of criminals moves to make person-specific amendments in laws that would facilitate their exonerated from grievous financial, money-laundering and other crimes. Find me another country where protesters are doused in poisonous tear gas and state terror of draconian measure is unleashed upon peaceful marchers, where women are manhandled and dragged out of their vehicles and cases registered against all with indiscriminate haste.

Find me another country where parliamentarians are hauled as animals because they are purchased commodities for a price for changing political loyalties and where the leader of the opposition establishes his compromised status by stating that he would be fighting the next election on the ticket awarded by the party of the sitting prime minister. Find me another country where human conscience is the cheapest article displayed on the stands. Find me another country where shame is an extinct commodity and crime is celebrated publicly with victory signs.

This humiliation list is endless – the one narrating it would be exhausted in the process. As T S Eliot once wrote, "I am tired with my own life and the lives of those after me/I am dying in my own death and the deaths of those after me". It is such an excruciatingly painful phenomenon that one is at a loss for words to describe it. For most of the years since its creation, the people of this country remained in deep slumber as it was being brutally ravaged. They neither had the awareness of what was happening around them, nor the power to confront the onslaught. They were en-

slaved by the beneficiary elite across the sprawling urban habitations and the backward rural communities. Economic enslavement was the most vicious form of this capture where generations are sold out for pittance as people pass through the rumblings of life with their fates sealed and their destinies stamped. They don't have a clue what lies in store for them except that they are lumbered like animals on the day of elections to vote in favour of the masters they have sold their future to. It is a merciless enactment of how the fate of the country is enslaved in the hands of the privileged elite who use the vilest tactics to keep people in perpetual bondage.

Pakistan owes it to the passionate exhortations of Imran Khan to sensitize people to look after their interests and safeguard the sanctity of the country from those who are out to dishonour it. That is why they have increasingly grown conscious of the tragedy that stalks their lives. They have broken the shackles of fear and servitude and are today more vocal than they have been in the past. The manner in which they have responded to Khan's calls is unprecedented in the political history of the country and the passion they have exhibited at the protest gatherings has been phenomenal. This reflects a paradigm shift: the ones who were clueless about their own bondage and the lack of opportunities they had for improving their lot are today not only vocal about it; they are also raring to act to snatch it from the usurpers. There is this incredible drive which is propelling them forward with boundless passion.

The task of embedding this change is monumental. It is not just a case of struggling to win back your rights. It is not just a moment for demanding what is stipulated in the constitution. It is not just an opportunity for ensuring that state institutions refrain from interfering in the functioning of the government in any manner which is inconsistent with the laws of the land. The challenge is much more formidable than that. The challenge we are faced with is that of shaping a revolution which will alter the way how this country has been reared, how its people think about their rights, and how the siege that the beneficiary elite have laid upon their lives can be lifted. All this has to be secured to free the people from the humiliating bondage they have been caged in. In the meanwhile, the country has been reduced to becoming a harrowing crime circus, a sickly mafia land. I shall resist the temptation of naming the Don.

## Chilling facts

JOSEPH KISHORE

A revealing exchange took place between US President Joe Biden and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a closed-door session of the 'Quad Summit' of the US, Australia, India and Japan held last week. According to a report published by the Press Trust of India (PTI), Biden 'praised' Modi "for handling the Covid pandemic 'successfully' and contrasted India's success with China's 'failure' in dealing with coronavirus, according to a senior Indian official."

The PTI added that "Biden said Modi's success has shown the world that democracies can deliver, and busted the myth that 'autocracies' like China and Russia can handle the rapidly changing world better..."

By what metric he was measuring the 'success' of India or, for that matter, its 'democratic' character, Biden did not say. But let us review the facts.

India officially reports more than 525,000 deaths from Covid-19, out of 43.2 million cases. These figures – a staggering loss of life in and of themselves – are universally acknowledged, except by the Indian government of course, to be a massive undercount. In its report on 'excess deaths' released earlier this month, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that the real figure is between 3.3 million and 6.5 million, with a mean estimate of 4.7 million dead in India in 2020 and 2021. Indeed, of the total estimated global excess deaths from Covid-19 (14.9 million), India accounts for nearly one-third. An earlier report from the British medical journal Lancet estimated India's total excess deaths in 2020 and 2021 at more than 4 million. Thus, according to Biden, the 'success' of the Modi government consists in having overseen the most COVID-19 deaths of any country on the planet.

India's performance in this regard was significantly higher, in absolute terms, than the United States, which 'succeeded' in killing only 1.13 million of its citizens, coming in second place, according to Lancet. As a percentage of the population, however, the death rate is approximately equal.

The real success, for Biden and the finan-

cial oligarchy that he represents, is that India was able to keep production running throughout the pandemic, not least of all at the major production facilities of transnational corporations, including US auto manufacturers. There have been a series of strikes by autoworkers in India, including in June, following Modi's declaration that he would "save the country from lockdown."

As a result of Modi's policy, the virus was allowed to spread without restraint, and funeral pyres were lit throughout the country.

And what of the 'failure' of China? Lancet estimates that total excess deaths in 2020 and 2021 amounted to 17,900, while the WHO concluded that 68,000 fewer people died in the country during the two years of the pandemic than would have been anticipated based on national averages.

As Biden noted in his remarks to Modi, the populations of China (1.4 billion) and India (1.38 billion) are comparable in size. India's death toll, however, is 223 times higher than China, based on the Lancet figures. The United States, with a far lower population (329 million), had a death toll 63 times higher than China. China's ability to contain the pandemic, save lives and ensure a relatively normal life for its population for most of the past two years was due to its implementation of a Zero-Covid policy. The continuation of this policy, in the face of ferocious opposition from finance capital, has succeeded in bringing the most recent outbreak of the Omicron variant in Shanghai under control, with the city due to partially open up on June 1. Let us turn to the 'democracy' of the government of Narendra Modi and his ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It is a fact, now universally ignored in the capitalist media, that Modi cut his teeth politically by overseeing an anti-Muslim massacre in the northeastern state of Gujarat in 2002, when he was chief minister.

Modi ascended to his post as chief minister in 2001 after serving as general secretary of the fascist Rashtriya Swayamesvak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu-nationalist organization founded in 1925 by admirers of Hitler and Mussolini. The BJP, in which Modi was installed in 1985, is effectively the political arm of the RSS. The Gujarat massacre was one of the most horrific incidents of communal vio-

lence in India since the partition of 1947. It began in late February 2002 after a fire in a train coach carrying Hindu pilgrims. Modi, without a shred of evidence, blamed Pakistan and Muslim 'terrorists' in India. He then called for a strike in Gujarat, which was used as the cover for the massacre.

As Modi's police stood by, Hindu extremists, utilizing lists of the names and addresses of Muslims prepared in advance, launched a campaign of rape and murder that resulted in as many as 2,000 deaths, with 100,000 rendered homeless from wholesale arson and destruction.

Testimony before the Concerned Citizens Tribunal noted, "A chilling technique, absent in pogroms unleashed hitherto but very much in evidence this time in a large number of cases, was the deliberate destruction of evidence. Barring a few, in most instances of sexual violence, the women victims were stripped and paraded naked, then gang-raped, and thereafter quartered and burnt beyond recognition."

A report by Human Rights Watch in 2013 concluded that, in the aftermath of the pogrom, the Modi government "created a climate of impunity, where perpetrators of the riots and those who took part in the violence feel they can threaten activists and witnesses to discourage them from pursuing justice, without response from state authorities."

So much for Indian 'democracy' ... Indeed, Modi's direct role in the atrocity was so egregious that the US State Department in 2005, under the administration of George W Bush, denied him a visa to travel to the United States, invoking a 1998 law that bars foreign officials who are responsible for "severe violations of religious freedom."

The US travel ban was only lifted in 2014, when Modi was elected prime minister of India. On the part of the American ruling class, the inconvenience of his role in mass murder was swept aside, and Modi was welcomed with open arms by the Obama administration.

For the last eight years, Modi has enforced the policy of the Indian corporate elite, while serving as a key geostrategic ally of American imperialism, particularly in its conflict with China.

## A humanitarian crisis

DR IMRAN KHALID

When the Americans were leaving Afghanistan in August 2021, two kinds of immediate crises were being predicted by everyone who was even remotely connected to Afghanistan.

One, there was clear indication that the return of the Taliban government would induce an unabating socio-political chaos in the country. And two, the country would be catapulted into an economic crisis because of the apparent possibilities of suspension of developmental funds and aids to Afghanistan. But nobody predicted at that time that Afghanistan would face one of the most horrible food and humanitarian crises within a few months.

The severity of the crisis can be gauged from the fact that analysts are expecting more Afghans to die due to this crisis than all Afghan deaths in the 20-year war. The majority of Afghan households have lost some or all of their livelihoods over the past eight months. Indubitably, the roots of Afghanistan's crisis can be traced to tight external restrictions on the country's banking sector and international humanitarian and development funds. In a direct attempt to bowdlerize the Taliban's access to foreign assets, the US government imposed extremely stringent restrictions on transactions with Afghanistan's Central Bank. Ever since the Taliban takeover last year, the US government has suspended recognition of Afghanistan's Central Bank which has practically truncated the country's economy from the world and severely hampered the payment of essential projects and salaries of millions of government officials, including teachers, health workers and other general workers.

The US has frozen more than \$9.5 billion in assets belonging to Afghanistan's Central Bank. At the same time, apart from impeding international funding, the US has also put the brakes on most of the financial assistance to the development projects there. Even before the departure of the American troops, food insecurity and poverty were already rampant in Afghanistan due to a series of droughts, political instability and the long-drawn-out conflict in the country. But in the months after the Taliban takeover, the crisis has aggravated very swiftly, much to the surprise of all the stakeholders there and outside. The dwindled foreign development aid that runs into billions of dollars has caused havoc in Afghanistan. Extreme levels of hunger are being faced by the majority of Afghans and more than a million children under five are at a high risk of dying from starvation. According to the International Rescue Committee, Afghanistan is on top of the annual emergency watchlist of countries whose humanitarian crises are expected to worsen expeditiously in the coming months. Though the general law and order situation in Afghanistan is much better, the worsening humanitarian crisis is ringing alarm bells for a major human catastrophe in the coming days.

The Taliban regime is not in a position at all to feed the Afghan people. Hunger is quite evident in every town, every village and every street of Afghanistan. Long queues outside the bread shops and riots over food items in different parts of the country are now a daily routine. Unemployment has also reached unprecedented numbers. The media is rife with videos showing people selling their children for as little as \$175. A large number of Afghans are facing this hunger crisis for the first time. Early this year, the US pledged \$308 million in humanitarian assistance for the Afghans.