

The Business

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Monsoon rains warning

The National and provincial disaster authorities (NDMA and PMDAs) have been given the usual directives to stay alert, vigilant and prepared in light of the Pakistan Meteorological Department's (PMDs) warning of heavier and earlier monsoon rains this year. The problem is that once the rains stop and water recedes, everybody goes right back to violating all the protocols, especially in urban areas, and most crucial tributaries and drains are choked all over again. There's also the fact that DMAs are not really active much of the rest of the year. And even when the rains come and cause urban flooding in some parts of the country, these authorities are paralysed just like the people they are supposed to help, despite adequate budgets, training and the sure knowledge of similar problems around the same time every year. And then when the military has to be called in to do the work that civilian agencies exist for, as usual, they are able to unblock drains, clear roads and restore some semblance of normal life within a day or two; which goes to show that it is possible if done the right way. The most important thing to do right now, though, is to soften the impact of the blow that is just round the corner.

There have already been unfortunate incidents of deaths in Sindh and KP, and landslides in parts of Gilgit-Baltistan that have left a number of roads blocked and travellers stuck and vulnerable to more rains. The task is particularly hard this year because, despite the unusually hot and dry spell that preceded the rains, the downpour is expected to be stronger and also last much longer. Therefore, it would be a good idea not just for the government but also the people to ration food and fuel supplies ahead of time, especially in the periphery that will not be easily reachable in case of flooding, which would be a very real possibility.

One can only hope that the paralysis that has gripped the country's politics over the last year or so did not impact the bureaucracy and its ability to deal with emergency situations; not that it was up to scratch even in the best of times. Let's not forget that DMAs exist for one express purpose, and that is to deal with emergencies. And while a lot of them cannot always be foreseen or predicted, the monsoon season is on the calendar every year. Yet so far there hasn't been one instant where these authorities did not disappoint with their preparedness or response. Will this year be different just because the Met office added to their own knowledge that hard rains, and possi-

The missing parts of Pakistani success: — II

FAWAD RANA



Barely six months after my marriage, economic needs forced me to seek greener pastures and I moved to Saudi Arabia. My eldest son, Hassan, travelled regularly to Pakistan till age 14, following which we decided it was time to put him through the paces of the best we could afford in terms of education now that I was doing well. As a result, he studied in the best possible school followed by a top-ranking university from where went on to become an industrial engineer and now works for a major league multinational as a consultant in Canada — a dream come true for him and us!

In the intervening years, from 2008 to 2014, Pakistan went through trying times, with terrorism taking hold. So going back home was no longer a priority. But in my mind and heart, I could not keep a distance. Which is why, in 2015, I decided to invest in Pakistan and acquired Lahore Qalandars, a cricket franchise, with the aim to contribute to a game our people love and cherish. To my surprise, Hassan showed no interest and did not even join us to cheer our team for the first three years (it didn't help that we hit rock bottom every single time!). By now, I sensed he had an unflattering image of the country with an identity crisis — even though he backed Pakistan when we played

India, with the crescent-and-star flag hanging out of his downtown Toronto apartment.

As his doubts brimmed, I decided to take him to a place in Lahore to show him a side of Pakistan I thought would make him rethink beyond the holiday jaunt. We went to see Arshad Mughal at his abode. Hassan was floored immediately and wondered where "this Pakistan" was on the world stage! By any stretch of imagination, Mughal is an astonishing micro artist. If the Guinness Book wanted a walking advertisement, he could very well fit the bill. But ironically, Guinness — or people who could make a case for his superhuman feats — have stayed away from his door. Why that is so, is what makes this such a compelling case study.

Mughal, who mastered the art of creating barely noticeable work — because it's so tiny and delicate that you need to calibrate your movements in a virtually airtight atmosphere to make it and a microscope to view it — is a man of many minuscule parts. Even after creating thousands of these pieces — some of which, he says, can be "hidden behind a strand of hair" — he found few takers to financially support him or even provide a platform from where he could have contributed to advancing the art. He once worked with the only gram of gold he had for over 20 years.

But at 75, with more than a half century of work behind him, all he

has for his legacy are a collection at home besides appreciation letters and sundry newspaper clippings.

Contrast this with say, British sculptor Willard Wigan, MBE, whose microscopic art has taken him places — and that's saying it lightly. Even though he may have outdone Mughal in tipping the scales of the possible, he certainly benefited from honing the trade, finding the most striking platforms before being hailed on the world stage, whether it was courtesy of the BBC, TED Conference, The Tonight Show with Conan O'Brien in the US celebrating his art or putting out his wares to mark the Diamond Jubilee of Elizabeth II. In 2021, his net worth was estimated to be up to five million euros.

The story of music composer Master Ashiq Hussain of the Dama Dam Mast Qalandar and Dhamaal: Lal Meri Pat Rakhio Bhala Jhooley Laalen fame is heartrending. The dhamaal which is the most famous rendered in history was composed by Hussain in minutes at the bidding of eminent poet Saghar Siddiqui. Hussain's feats — Dama Dam Mast Qalandar was rendered by such towering figures as Noor Jehan, Nusrat Fateh Ali, Abida Parveen and Jagjit Singh, to name a few — have outlived him but the nonagenarian died a pauper near Lahore's Bhatti Gate. During this time, his son who, too, was a talented keyboard player, had to sell pakoras at a roadside stall to make both ends meet. Later, his son died of heart failure, but a heartbroken Hussain refused to seek help from those "who do not care about artists". Ironically,

many singers created versions of his signature tune, earning fame and fortune whilst Hussain lived in a slum without electricity and where food was scarce. I would give Hassan and millions of youth like him a noteworthy recent example of Arooj Aftab, Pakistan's first female Grammy winner, who made the cut in April this year. She landed the coveted trophy for a neo-Sufi version of Punjab-based poet Hafeez Hoshiarpuri's iconic ghazal Mohabbat karne wale kam na hon ge/ Teri mehfil mein lekin hum na hon ge. Former US president Barack Obama, no less, picked Mohabbat — declared by Time and The New York Times as one of the best songs of 2021 — amongst his summer playlist favourites for 2021. This space is too scant to encapsulate the inspiring musical journey of the 37-year-old current New York resident born to Pakistani parents in Saudi Arabia, but moving to the US at 19 set her up for a rewarding career.

Arshad Mughal and Ashiq Hussain remain maestros of their art but if they were not constrained by bread-and-butter issues in the dark corners of their hearths, they could have had the world at their feet. On the other hand, a fully equipped Arooj and talented youth like her carve out their own paths to success.

Ultimately, what these stories tell us is that in the absence of a breeding ground that germinates the seed and nourishes its growth, we will only have individual successes occasionally. What Pakistan needs today is an organized and sustained system that

Electorate's youth bulge

MALEEHA LODHI

Pakistan's electorate of over 124 million voters reflects the youthful demographic profile of the country, among the youngest in the world. Sixty-four per cent of the population is under 30 years. Around 47pc of the electorate is between the ages of 18 and 35. A third of total registered voters is under 30. This pronounced youth bulge among voters has transformed the electoral landscape with important implications for politics, political parties and elections.

But this has mostly been an understudied factor in recent years, save for Pildat's ongoing work on youth and Gallup Pakistan's 2021 report, which assesses exit polls over the years. UNDP's Pakistan National Human Development Report of 2017 was the most comprehensive examination of the role of youth in human development, that captured the aspirations and expectations of young people. For Adil Najam, co-author of the report, its main political conclusion was that Pakistan's political culture will be defined in future by the young, and not its elites.

Young voters are a potential game changer who can transform the country's traditional voting patterns. Elections in coming years can be decided by young voters, who are a sizeable constituency — almost 58m in the 18-35 age group. This benefits parties that appeal to the young. PTI is ahead in this game. PML-N and PPP lag behind, even though the latter, in its earlier decades, enjoyed strong support among students. Both parties seem complacent about their 'stable' vote banks, which may explain their lack of outreach to the young. They need to rise above the weight of traditional politics and dial their clocks to 2022 to attract young voters.

A big unknown is whether the young would vote differently than older voters, which is presumed to be largely on the basis of traditional loyalties, personalities, dynastic politics, patronage considerations, ethnicity, biradari alignments or religious reasons. Evidence from other countries shows that voting patterns of youth are dif-

ferent. If they vote differently here, that could be a real game changer. Successive opinion surveys show inflation and unemployment to be young people's top concerns. So is the quality of education, honest and responsive government and religious extremism. In a recent survey, Voice of Youth, Pildat asked members of a nationally representative 'youth parliament' it regularly convenes what inspired them to support a political party. Thirty-eight per cent cited a party's past performance, 36pc party platform and 17pc charismatic party leadership.

This suggests that issues are more important for them than personalities. The most encouraging finding was faith in democracy of the overwhelming majority — 85pc of respondents. This, despite their mistrust and low confidence in the country's institutions. According to the NHD report, "never has there been a generation of young people in Pakistan so invested in the future of their country, so aware that solutions to their problems will not come from above or abroad, who know that it is they who can and must be the change that must start from within".

But here lies the paradox. For young voters to play a key if not decisive political role, their participation in elections should be significantly high. So far, turnout among younger voters has been exceedingly low. Official statistics are lacking on this. But the Gallup report, relying on exit polls conducted since 1988, finds youth turnout to be much lower than overall voter participation. It shows that usually only a quarter of young voters turned out to vote. In the past two elections, their participation was only a third compared to the average overall turnout of 52pc. This compares poorly with the turnout of female voters, which averaged 40pc in these polls, although this also affects the youth turnout number. According to Gallup, the highest turnout was among 30- to 49-year-old voters. The head of Pildat, Ahmed Bilal Mehboob, has also examined this phenomenon and refers to the low turnout of youth as 'absentee voters', urging changes to promote greater participation. Among reasons deemed to contribute to the low turnout is lack of voter

registration and non-possession of CNICs, cynicism that elections won't change anything, disillusionment with political leaders, and little interest in the political process. Many young voters also doubt the fairness of elections. This is another reason that swells the ranks of the large non-voting electorate. Although youth voter turnout is low, even a modest rise can be consequential to electoral outcomes. This is due to several factors. The first is the sizeable number of marginal and tightly fought seats in general elections in a first-past-the-post system. Well over a hundred National Assembly seats were won by a plurality, not a majority of votes in the 2018 election. Eighty-seven National Assembly seats were won by a margin of less than 1,000 votes, and 26 seats by a margin of under 2,000 votes. In 51 constituencies, the winning candidate's margin of victory was under 6,000 votes. Most of these were in Punjab — where general elections are won or lost. With the average size of Punjab's national constituencies around 780,000, these are fragile margins of victory. Given these margins, young voters can shape outcomes if they participate in elections in greater numbers.

A related point is the three-way nature of electoral contests now — between PML-N, PTI and PPP in most national constituencies. In 2018, vote splitting between the two traditional parties enabled PTI candidates to win several marginal seats on narrow pluralities. With the vote dividing between three parties in many constituencies and among others elsewhere, this opens up possibilities for young voters to tip the balance.

New voters are continuously added to the electoral rolls — 18.7m voters were registered in the four years since the 2018 elections. Most, though not all, are young voters. Many may not have any prior party preference. This offers opportunities to parties to reach out and win their allegiance. But the youth vote can only be consequential if more young citizens register and turn up to cast the ballot. Some surveys do indicate their eagerness to vote. Political parties should translate this eagerness into mobilising them to vote, while the ECP should fa-

Palestine's victories



RAMZY BAROUD

In November 2006, the Israeli military prevented all Palestine-based footballers from participating in the final match of the Asian Football Confederation qualification group stage. The news had a major demoralizing effect on all Palestinians. Even rare moments of hope and happiness are often crushed by Israel.

As disappointing as the Israeli decision was, it was hardly compared to the collective shock felt by Palestinians everywhere when, in 2007, Palestinian players were not allowed to participate in a decisive World Cup qualifying game against Singapore. Instead of showing solidarity with Palestinians and condemning Israel, the International Football Association (FIFA) decided to award an automatic victory to Singapore of 3-0. This is why Palestine's latest qualification is historic, as it is more proof that Palestinian resilience has no bounds. It sends a message to Israel as well, that its unjust draconian measures will never break the spirit of the Palestinian people.

The latest achievement should also be placed within another context. It is the third time in a row that the Palestine national team qualifies for the Asian cup finals, thanks to an impressive squad that represents all Palestinian communities, at home and in the Diaspora. This

moment, however, is bittersweet. Many Palestinian footballers, who should have been present in the Sports Center Stadium in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia — where the qualification rounds were held — were missing. Some are in Israeli prisons, others are maimed or killed. Much of the killings happened in 2009.

Indeed, 2009 was a terrible year for Palestinian football. In January 2009, three Palestinian footballers, Ayman Alkurd, Shadi Sbakhe and Wajeh Mosh-taha, were killed during the Israeli war on the besieged Gaza Strip. All three were seen as promising athletes with bright futures. Two months later, Saji Ardash was killed by an Israeli sniper near Ramallah. The 18-year-old was slated to become a big name in Palestinian football, too.

In July of that same year, the tragedy of Mahmoud Sarsak began. Sarsak had only been a member of the Palestine National Football Team for six months when he was arrested and tortured by Israel in a painful saga that lasted for three years. He won his freedom after undergoing a hunger strike that lasted for over 90 days. The permanent health issues Sarsak was left with, however, meant that his once-promising sports career was over. Arrests, torture and killings of Palestinian footballers became a regular headline in Palestine. This includes the killing of former Palestinian football star, Ahd Zaqut, in 2014, and the deliberate shooting of the feet of Jawhar Nasser Jawhar, 19, and Adam Abd Al Raouf Halabiya, 17. The two players were attempting to cross an Israeli military checkpoint in the occupied West Bank to return home after a long training session. These are but mere examples. The targeting of Palestinian sports is a constant item on the Israeli military agenda. Palestinian stadiums are often bombed during Israel's brutal wars on Gaza.

Excerpted: 'Why Palestine's Sports Victories Should Inspire Us'. Courtesy: Counterpunch.org