

# The Business

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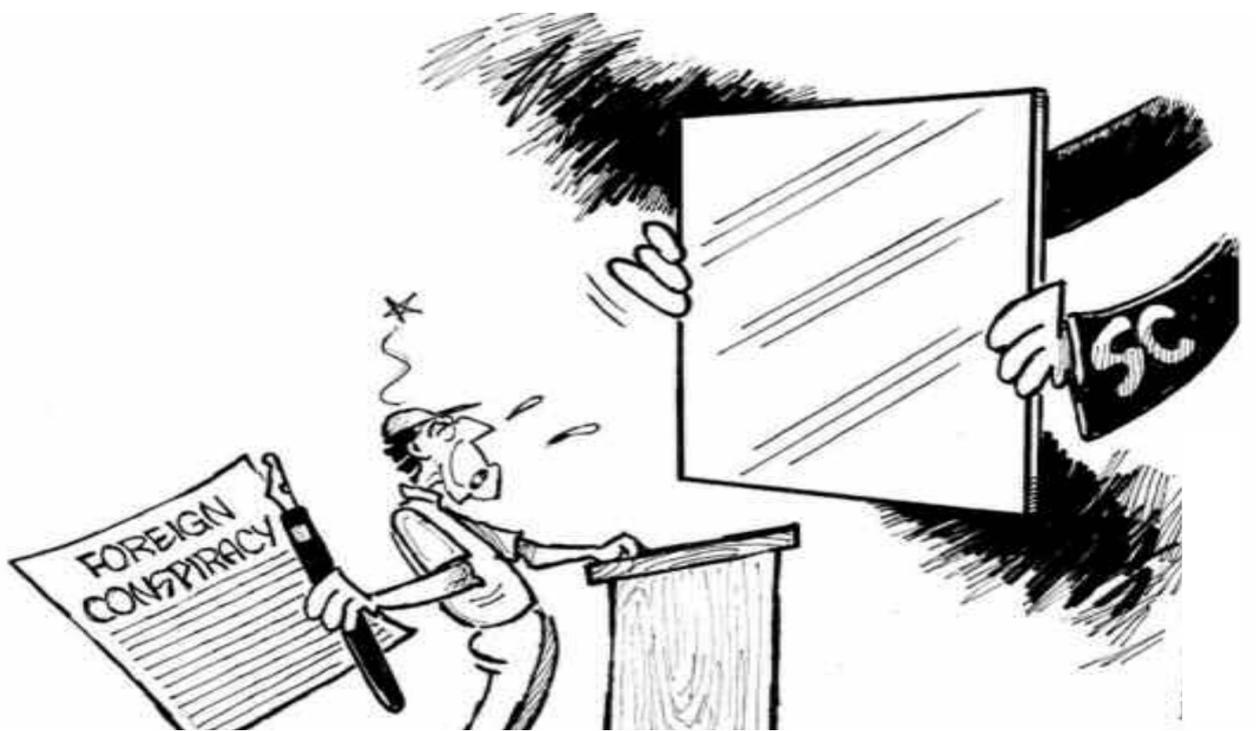
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## Heavy rain

Minister for Climate Change Sherry Rehman has warned that this is only the beginning of above-normal monsoon season triggered by global warming, and emphasised the need for making policies and taking action to deal with climate change. As part of the national narrative, raising awareness, as her ministry "was already doing", to educate the public about the environment. She also urged the people to pay heed to weather advisories so as to prevent loss of lives and damage to properties. True, extreme weather events produced by global warming are causing calamitous rains, floods and other catastrophes, but it is unfair to attribute all the death and destruction that has occurred in the last few weeks only to that phenomenon. Part of the problem is also bad governance. Like at present, the authorities concerned get active only after disasters strike, directing rescue efforts and offering sympathies to those at the receiving end of their neglectful policies. It is not accidental that the heaviest losses of life occurred around rivers or nullahs.

Since June 14 heavy rains have been playing havoc with lives and property, claiming at least 77 lives in rain-related disasters. In Balochistan where 39 people died and 35 others were injured, those familiar with the lay of the land point out that most of these people lived in houses near poorly built river dams, which gave way to surging rain waters. And in Punjab's Rawalpindi city, the Lai Nullah, once a freshwater stream rising in Islamabad, which carries down below the capital city's rainwater as well some of its junk, also claimed several lives because its banks have been encroached upon by all sorts of people. In a tragic incident last Wednesday, a man drowned in it while trying to save three children. In a similar incident before that, another man drowned in Islamabad's Korang Nullah in an attempt to rescue four children, fortunately, though they were rescued by Navy divers.

So far, it is not known if the people living on river banks in Sindh suffered any losses. But, as usual, storm drains in Karachi remained clogged with garbage, with the result that rainwater inundated roads and residential areas all over the city, while at least one person died from electrocution. Clearly, it is a combination of climate change and weak governance that is causing so much death and devastation. The federal and provincial governments should not blame everything on global warming. That, of course, calls for urgent mitigation and adaptation measures. But it is not enough to educate the masses about impending disasters; equally important is the need for action to offset their effects as far as possible.

## By-elections and beyond

RAOOF HASAN

The by-elections scheduled to be held in 20 constituencies throughout Punjab are likely to have a monumental effect on both the current political situation in the country and what may follow it.

For the incumbent illegal and unconstitutional government in Punjab, a victory is essential to stay in power and, for the PTI, it is a chance to topple not just the provincial edifice, but also make inroads into getting the better of the government in Islamabad. Even more daunting in the shape things would take in case the process of elections is tampered with as is being widely speculated.

The one common factor in the method pursued for inducting the governments at the centre and in Punjab was the trading of human conscience. Twenty votes by the PTI turncoats were polled to facilitate the making of an illegal and unconstitutional government in the province.

When the Supreme Court judged that such votes, if and when cast, should be disregarded and perpetrators unseated from the assembly, the government lost its artificial majority which, constitutionally, should have led to its ouster.

But, because of the LHC intervention and other supportive factors, it was provided a lease of life leading to the holding of by-elections.

It is obvious that not only does the future of the provincial government in Punjab depend on ensuring a victory, but the entire unconstitutional edifice imposed on the country led by a bunch of established crooks, convicts, criminals and absconders will come crumbling down if the same is not secured. The importance of these elections can, therefore, be clearly gauged as the future of the entire foreign-inspired concoction rests on ensuring victory in the by-polls.

An operation to capture the elections is already underway in the province which encompasses the use of all available instruments of state machinery to pressurise PTI voters, to have cases registered against them and even arrest them. It also includes incentivizing voters with lucrative offers to dissuade them from supporting the party.

The voters' lists of PTI members and supporters have been grossly tampered with and their votes

have been shifted to places which are far removed from the addresses provided in their CNICs by a brazenly partisan ECP. This is tantamount to gross manipulation of the administrative machinery which is under the command of the federal and provincial governments.

Going by the surging crowds which have converged to all rallies addressed by PTI Chairman Imran Khan wherever he has gone in the province, and seeing the lurking danger of a potential loss, some federal and provincial ministers of PML-N have resigned their positions in an attempt to boost the election campaign. This speaks of the jitters that the incumbent provincial government is suffering from in its bid to hold on to a wobbly power base using illegal and unconstitutional means at its disposal. This accentuates the fear regarding the post-election eventualities if a victory is carved out by manipulating the state machinery which the administration appears geared to doing.

While a landslide victory for the PTI is being forecast by all independent observers, an extremely grim picture is being painted if the same is stolen from the party through use of unfair means and methods. What are the potential options if such a situation were to occur and how can anger be contained which would naturally emerge given not only the huge number of people, but the indomitable passion witnessed at all PTI rallies held in connection with the election campaign? Will this be stopped from overflowing into violence? Once it surges forth, will even the party leadership be able to hold the charge back? Therein resides a real danger of Pakistan plunging into a spate of irretrievable violence which may spread across the entire country.

So the government (illegally) in charge in the province and its promoters elsewhere must heed the situation with utmost care before they give in to their desperation to win the by-elections no matter what may be its cost and consequences. A hollow victory in these elections won through the use of illegal, unfair and unconstitutional means could spell chaos in the country. But is the desperation so intense that the prospect of such an eventuality be either not evaluated at all, or it be rubbished?

Nothing is beyond reckoning at this stage. This is primarily because of the dire need to stay in

power by the existing concoction till the primary objectives of their incumbency have been met: that of having themselves exonerated from cases they have either been convicted in, or they can potentially be indicted for.

While the process to free themselves from these cases has already been initiated by the cabal of convicts, criminals and absconders who have been fraudulently placed in seats of power, it may still require some time to finish the job.

That is why it is vital for them to stay on in there — which is exactly why using unconstitutional methods and even running the risk of plunging the country into violence may be overlooked to meet their sinister and self-serving agenda.

But these perpetrators have to be stopped not by unleashing violence, but by the power of the vote and the passion of the voter. These ingredients are witnessed aplenty wherever Khan has gone on this most recent whirlwind tour regarding the by-elections. The venues have been rendered small for the numbers pouring in to listen to the voice of conviction which has not only freed them from the demons of fear, but it has also broken their silence.

This voice is now resonating across divisions and divides uniting people in the common cause of winning back freedom for their country and restoring their self-esteem. The power of this voice is rising to a crescendo with each day leading up to the elections. It is earnestly hoped that the illegal and unconstitutional incumbents and their facilitators are abreast of the charged environment that prevails throughout the country. Even the slightest spark can ignite this into an inferno.

This can be avoided only if this voice of reason and conviction is not ignored, and the due process of elections is not tampered with. A real-time danger for the onset of chaos and violence looms in the event of a stolen ballot. Khan has turned out to be an incredibly more formidable challenge than the schemers would have imagined in their evaluation. The only way to move into a peaceful future is to ensure an election process which is free from intervention.

If, however, an attempt is made to impose an artificial writ through a stolen ballot, it would inevitably lead to the spark turning into an inferno with a potentially catastrophic outcome.

## Something for the kids

KAMILA HYAT

Many years ago, when most of us were children or teenagers, PTV, the only official channel on air, used to host a series of television programmes for children, in its evening transmission. These programmes included education material, some dubbed shows from channels such as National Geographic, high-quality local programmes including quiz shows and dramas, etc.

There were programmes which people of that generation still remember such as the unforgettable Uncle Sargam who offered life lessons and entertainment, and other shows which encouraged literacy and skills.

Today we have over 100 channels on air. But not a single channel seems interested in producing content for children or young people. There is so much that could be achieved through the media in a country where the bulk of the 220 million people is under 30 years. Children and young people are the future of this country; they need to socialize and be educated and trained in a completely different fashion from what is happening today. Parents, regardless of their social and financial standing, hand over smartphones and tablets to their children as young as four or five years, setting up a different manner of thinking for the brain — one which encourages less focus and therefore less interest in reading, a skill which requires concentration to complete a chapter and absorb the words that run through it. This is a handicap for life and not just for studies.

They are challenged in terms of awareness of the world and for work purposes. Good reading encourages good writing. And this is a skill that is still required in today's digital age since Google spellchecks and grammar checkers cannot correct or improve the basic quality of a piece of writing.

But television programmes are not intended just to promote focus and ability to pay attention to a single event for a prolonged period of time, depending on a

child's age. This can vary from five minutes for toddlers to over an hour for teenagers. Instead, teenagers and younger children are obsessed with astonishingly violent video games. It is surprising that parents give the gaming console to children without any scrutiny or vetting of these games. The messages given out in such games are frightening. They promote the idea of killing as a fun activity, where more deaths lead towards victory.

In the US alone, starting from the terrible Columbine school shootings to the other shootings that have followed since then, children, all of them boys, are thought to have been brought into the dark world through the video games that have absorbed their attention and time and within which they have built their lives. We do not want this age of darkness in our country, with video games taking over the life of children and teens.

Childhood is also the time when a great amount of learning takes place. This is not only limited to the learning imparted — often quite poorly — at our schools and colleges, but also learning which involves respect for others, tolerance, community life, civic behaviour, and other factors which are inherent to a group of people living together for prolonged periods. Television shows targeting the age group between 6-7 years and 17-20 years could help impart all of these important ideas in the minds of young people — the seeds of an education we have lost.

It is quite obvious that textbooks, including those that were compiled under the PTI-led Single National Curriculum, have no intention of doing so. Nothing in these books was directed towards low-income groups or those who live in rural areas. Have we forgotten about these people? Have we forgotten that a massive one-third of our population lives in poverty? This is something to think about.

Where books fail, television can help fill the gap even today where it is often watched on personalized screens, such as laptops and tablets, by putting forward programmes which can hold the attention of young people, and offer them not only

knowledge in the conventional sense, but also learning in a far wider understanding of the world.

This can happen by developing a team at one or more channels, which produces quality programmes for children, as is the case in some other countries, providing both entertainment and lessons on how to conduct oneself in a diverse society. The idea of ending divisions which have been created and taken up by young children and their elders today is frightening. We see children in school battle it out in fields over the question of which party they support because of the dichotomy which now exists and the manner in which these parties have conducted themselves and the language they use.

The use of such language in the media has led to children taking up similar vocabulary when addressing rivals whether at school, or in terms of politics and sports. This is harmful. We need to return to the age of greater innocence and understanding. Well-meaning and well-directed programmes can enhance learning and knowledge of children to a tremendous degree.

Right now, most children at government schools and at low-tier private schools do not know about towns in Balochistan, continents in the world, the manner in which the solar system works. The same is true in other fields such as maths, with no effort made to clear concepts, and this critical subject is taught only through formulae and rote-learning, as is the case with other subjects.

Again, television can be used to help expand knowledge as has happened in other countries, including some in South-east Asia and Latin America. We must remember that children and teens are the future of this country. We quite clearly need a different kind of person, people with compassion and understanding, even if many live in the country today, if we are to turn into a country which is respected in the world and respected by its own people no matter where they live and what they do. This should be the aim of TV producers for the future.

## Ehsaas Rahan Riayat

DR SANIA NISHTAR

Each year, Pakistan spends billions of rupees in untargeted federal and provincial subsidies across sectors. Much of these government transfers are subject to elite capture, subsidizing producers, corporations, and middlemen instead of reaching the poorest households.

Earlier this year, Ehsaas sought to address this issue by launching the first-of-its-kind, end-to-end-digitized targeted commodity subsidy programme, called Ehsaas Rahan Riayat. The programme established infrastructure to deliver government subsidies directly to millions of deserving households. Within the first five months, the programme saw an overwhelming response and received more than 40 million registrations from beneficiaries. To process these, we set up a robust beneficiary verification pipeline through which more than four million families have already been declared eligible.

Unfortunately, the current government has decided to end the programme as of July 1, 2022, and instead committed Rs16 billion in untargeted subsidy to be disbursed through Utility Stores. Utility Stores are meant to provide subsidized 'rashaan' without any digital targeting or verification. This will open avenues for collusion and elite capture. Given fiscal constraints and double-digit inflation, which is placing a disproportionate burden on the poor, I would urge the federal government to reconsider its decision and use the Ehsaas Rahan Riayat mechanism, instead.

Ehsaas Rahan Riayat was launched after extensive stakeholder consultations and has several features, which can be a gamechanger to target support to poor households while minimizing likelihood of corruption or elite capture. To make sure that public money is targeted, the programme created objective criteria for beneficiary eligibility, based on socioeconomic conditions drawing on data infrastructure of the 2021 National Socioeconomic Registry.

The backbone of the programme is the nationwide network of kiriyana, Utility, and CSD stores, which were leveraged for disbursing the subsidy, instead of creating new

distribution channels. Through an extensive process of engagement with merchant unions, visits to multiple cities, social mobilization, and grassroots awareness campaigns, the programme achieved a retail outlet footprint in 84 per cent of districts across Pakistan, to develop a network of 15,000+ merchants. This helped us reach the poorest families by mobilizing distribution channels wherever they lived. The plan was to reach more than 50,000 merchants by the end of the 2022 calendar year.

A key feature of the programme was to digitize the entire network of participating stores. These stores were linked in real-time through a mobile app of the National Bank of Pakistan, which was used to conduct subsidy transactions, with the subsidy given as a digital voucher. This programme enabled small, often informal kiriyana stores to become more technologically savvy. Additionally, by connecting these merchants in an online database and geotagging them, the programme started digitally documenting a previously undocumented part of the economy.

The programme improved financial inclusion for thousands of unbanked small merchants by facilitating the opening of bank accounts. These merchants were reimbursed for the subsidy disbursed, in near real-time, through an entirely digital payment mechanism. These small merchants were to get access to banking services, including saving, transacting, and using other financial instruments, which could help further scale their businesses.

To conduct transactions, an eligible beneficiary had to visit an Ehsaas Rahan Riayat listed merchant or Utility Store. Upon keying in CNIC and commodity purchase details, the mPOS, which was linked to several databases, checked beneficiary eligibility, duplication within family and subsidy availability in real time. An SMS-based OTP prompt, which was used to prevent fraud, was needed to complete the transaction. The merchant disbursed the subsidy, and the subsidy amount was credited into the account of the merchant in 24 hours along with an eight per cent commission. The merchant had visibility of all transactions on the mPOS itself.