

The Business

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TRADE DEFICIT GOES UP BY MASSIVE 55.29 pc



Another Covid-19 wave

The National Institute of Health (NIH) data shows that the positivity ratio was 3.88 percent, down from 4.47 percent a day earlier, which is based on 16,755 tests conducted during this time. Nearly a one percent decrease overnight in positivity rate does not reflect real incidence of infections. In fact, according to a source in the Ministry of National Health Services, the number of Covid cases is doubling every five days. This is backed by daily news reports of increasing number of hospitalisations and deaths. There is a discrepancy between official and unofficial figure because, as explained by a member of the Task Force on Covid-19, Dr Javed Akram, the size of the sample matters rather than the positivity rate, since 30 percent of the infected people are asymptomatic but continue to spread the virus. He also pointed out that the volume of tests had reduced almost to a third from 50,000 in February to 17,000 at present which, he noted, is indicative of fatigue on part of both the citizens and health authorities. The National Command and Control Centre (NCOCC) established by the former government under the then federal minister Asad Umar and assisted by the Army had set up vaccination centres all over the country, also using mobile units for a mass vaccination campaign.

It was closed after large-scale vaccination led to a significant reduction in Covid cases. Many people flocked to vaccination centres as well private laboratories; at present, seeking vaccination jabs are mostly those who need to travel abroad. Little surprise then that the actual infection rate is much higher than the official data suggests. The NCOCC has recently been revived under the Federal Health Minister, but it lacks the support structure previously provided by the Army. Awareness campaign through the media has also fizzled out. A new Omicron variant of the coronavirus has surfaced, infecting more and more people. Although it is not as virulent as the previous strain, its transmissibility is very high. Experts warn that the virus will be around for a long time, and people need to learn to live with it. It is imperative, therefore, to control it with mass testing and vaccination.

Also, public awareness campaigns should be restarted, emphasising the need for strictly observing SOPs. Wearing face-mask in shopping centres and other public gatherings, once again, ought to be made mandatory. With the Eid festival round the corner, religious leaders should be asked to advise people not to hug each other — customary on the occasion — or shake hands. On its part, the government must carefully monitor infections before the virus gets out of control.

Is Modi using Israel's tricks?

MANSOOR JAFAR

The policies and strategies employed by the Indian government and the ruling BJP in the recent past to suppress minorities, especially the Muslim community, have a remarkable similarity to what Israel has been doing with the Palestinians. It seems Delhi is following in the footsteps of Tel Aviv, or perhaps the powers behind Israel have begun patronizing India.

India's tactics to overpower and make Muslims a minority in the occupied state of Jammu and Kashmir are the same that Israel has been using to dislodge Palestinian people from their ancestral lands.

The latest of these in India is the recent policy of demolishing the houses of Muslims protesting the blasphemous remarks of ruling party leaders against the Prophet of Islam (pbuh). Among the dozens of such Muslim houses razed in Delhi was that of Aafreen Fatima, a student leader at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, known for opposing the new anti-Muslim citizenship law and addressing various sit-ins.

Israel has been demolishing the houses of Arab residents for decades, driving them out to occupy their lands for building Jewish settlements. The village of Al-Araqib in Occupied Palestine, which saw 203 demolitions, is an example. From the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, Israel has been evicting original inhabitants via countless such demolitions to change the area's demography.

Hindu extremists have shown a welcome response to the Indian state's demolition policy of Muslims' homes. Hindutva activists have begun considering the bulldozer an important weapon against religious minorities to

realize the dream of making India a Hindutva-inspired Hindu rashtra. Per a headline, a young Hindu groom, Ankush Jaiswal, chose to ride a bulldozer to his bride's place on his wedding day. Looks like India's Hindu youth now want to learn how to operate bulldozers to participate in future demolition campaigns. This amateur move of a bridegroom can go beyond mere antics and lead to serious tragedy for the minorities in India in the future.

The latest US report sheds light on India's oppressive treatment of its minorities. But completely ignoring the report, Delhi is planning to convene the G-20 annual summit 2023 in the occupied state of Jammu and Kashmir in violation of international laws which bar hosting any world meeting in a territory declared disputed by the United Nations. If it went ahead, such a move would be tantamount to a blatant violation of international laws by India and making a mockery of the UN.

Since Modi came to power, he and his Hindu extremist cohorts have been trying to change the country's identity, in utter disregard of world opinion, and by influencing the Western countries using every political tactic. By holding the G-20 meeting in Kashmir, Modi now wants to rope in the West in his sinister plans of annexing Occupied Kashmir for good. This way, he hopes, the world's conscience should be forced to ignore India's worst record of human rights violations and acknowledge Kashmir as part of India and ratify Modi government's move to end the special status of the State of Jammu and Kashmir by amending Article 370 of the Indian constitution on August 5, 2019. Interestingly, all of Modi's attempts have failed so far to get Occupied Kashmir's new status acknowledged by the world community,

and even by those political parties and leaders in Kashmir who have always been considered pro-India. The families of former pro-India chief ministers Farooq Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti have also vehemently rejected the constitutional amendments to annex Kashmir, even after they were imprisoned. To prevent a severe backlash from the Kashmiris, Modi clamped harsh and repressive security crackdown, relentless curfew for nearly two years, the worst communication lockdown in world history cutting all phone, internet, social media, and postage links and blacked-out media. Scores of people were killed, wounded, and disappeared for protesting the move.

India completely ignored the condemnations by the world community, human rights organizations, media, and even the UN General Assembly. Interestingly, Delhi has always got away with its crimes against minorities, especially against Muslims, courtesy the leniency displayed by international bodies and human rights groups. Delhi considers the (previous) Trump administration's shifting of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to occupied Jerusalem in 2018, in defiance of international norms, laws and UN resolutions, as a boon for carrying out its own plan to capture Kashmir. Modi plans to use it as a bargaining chip to push the US look away from his government's violations of international laws and human rights in lieu of supporting Washington policies elsewhere. Modi's plans to seize Kashmir by copying Israel's tactic of pulling world powers' nod through diplomatic channels could be upset by other key global players — other than the US — especially the European Union, which show a firm commitment to human rights. The EU rejected the relocation

of the US embassy to occupied Jerusalem, as did the rest of the world except for less than half a dozen countries prompted by coercion and greed. Norway, an EU ally, just a few days ago refused to accept Israel's name on products from the Occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, in line with a ruling by the European Union Court of Justice. Israel displayed visible unease over Norway's decision to reject the Israeli stance on the issue. The G-20 also includes major world players like China and Russia, and three Muslim countries — Indonesia, Turkey and Saudi Arabia — besides the Western countries.

Pakistan has also frustrated Indian efforts by complying with all the FATF conditions needed to get off the grey list and raised its world acceptance. Islamabad is hopeful of mobilizing the conscience of the enlightened world to refuse to back the illegal, cruel, and repressive actions of the Modi government against Kashmiris.

Though India possesses a global importance of being a big market, no world power can ignore the geopolitical importance of Pakistan and afford to disregard all the violations of human rights, international law, and the ground realities of the region to help India copy Israel in its attempts to seize Kashmir. For India, holding the G-20 meeting in Occupied Kashmir will be a hard nut to crack. Doing it by hook or by crook will have the risk of facing the repercussions of becoming a US policeman in the region.

The countries supporting Indian oppressive designs will face the risk of being held responsible for assisting Delhi in its Hindutva ideology and all the violence and bloodletting that has and will entail. Such an eventuality will also doom the Indian dream of a big world market.

A society under stress

KAMILA HYAT

While we know about the level of political dichotomy in the country and the hatred that has crept up between political parties and their supporters with the use of the most abusive language at times on social media and even on television, we need to think about the other strains which are tearing our society apart.



Pakistan was once a society which was strongly united — during the 40s and 50s — and for the longest time, Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and other groups celebrated events together and maintained good relations. This somewhat ended under the General Ziaul Haq era when hatred seeped into schools, offices and other places, with discriminatory laws coming in against specific minority groups, and a general feeling of difference was created.

We see the impact of this hatred today. Children from minority groups attending missionary schools say that they do not have Muslim friends. This is a loss to them and the Muslim children who see less diversity in their society and little understanding of the groups they live with. At one charitable school run for children from all communities, we have parents complaining that Muslim children should not be exposed to the slightly different Christian culture which they believe will have a negative effect on their children's morality. Again, in the 1980s, such feelings were non-existent. All school-going children, regardless of their religion, would play together, and there was little sense of difference with birthday parties attended by both groups — Christians and Muslims — and there was no consciousness of cultural differences which did exist but were widely accepted. Today this has changed.

Even adult Christians say that they have few Muslim friends and generally socialize only within their community. Even

though Pakistan's minority groups make up over two per cent of the population, such differences are even more unfortunate especially when we consider the fact that Christians and Muslims in Punjab live in close proximity to each other. In Sindh, Hindus and Muslims have enjoyed excellent relations in Tharparkar and other places where they lived together for the longest time. However, this has started to change as many Hindu families are trying to flee the country which, in the words of its founder, was created for all religious groups and intended as a place where all of them were free to follow their religions and live in harmony. While we criticize India frequently for the terrible events that are taking place there and the genocide against Indian Muslims, we should also look within although we are fortunate that we have not yet reached the same hatred levels as are seen in India, with the government promoting anti-Muslim sentiments under the BJP.

But we still witness murder and lynching cases of various kinds, with Christians burnt to death on allegations of blasphemy without any trial, young Hindu girls forcibly converted and married off to far older Muslim men, and Sikhs made to feel uncomfortable and during Ramadan and Muharam asked not to lay out the feasts they traditionally offered to their Muslim brethren, and in case of violence in some areas, they are forced to pay 'jazia' and impelled to move out of the area or even leave the country. This of course is Pakistan's loss and the loss of future generations. The more diversity we have the richer our country will be.

We must also recognize that the same kind of division exists on the basis of ethnicity with divisions between the Baloch and Punjabi communities and other groups. A ban placed on Balochi and Sindhi nationalist websites during the

Musharraf era, which has continued into the present age, does not help matters. Even if we do not agree with their views, we should allow these people to express what they feel and how they think. If this is not allowed, the differences will keep growing as will hatred and the feeling of divide and difference.

India is a glaring example of what hatred can do. We have also seen the horrors of a hate-filled society in our country. We must act against the growing division and build a more united society. A few children attending some Christian schools where Muslims are also admitted say that they are encouraged to be friends with everyone, and anyone pointing out any kind of differences with another group is called up for disciplinary action. This is commendable. These students say that they are generally able to make friends with Muslims as well as Christians, regardless of their religion. This is also true of other schools, but divisions and differences do exist. In some colleges, Hindu girls are isolated completely because of their religion with only a few conscious teachers and students attempting to help them out of their isolation.

These barriers need to be brought down. This includes the barriers based on ethnicity and those based on religion. Both are dangerous and can have an extremely adverse impact on the country. We are already seeing this impact as groups such as the TLP spread more hatred.

We welcome the efforts made to do so at some schools, including missionary schools set up in Youhanabad and other areas. But more effort and action is required. No act of violence against any person on the basis of his or her religion or ethnicity should be tolerated. Yet we hear of such actions even at elite education institutions of higher learning both in Punjab and other places. It is time to think about our country, to bring it together and to fight against the political hatred which has swept over us and the hatred which divides other groups and keeps them apart

Why language matters

CELINE-MARIE PASCALE

In the US, discourses of inequality seldom are rooted to the nation's long history of violent class conflict. Two examples of that history which come quickly to mind are the 1892 Homestead steel strike in Pittsburgh, which earned a place in labor history as the Homestead Massacre and the 1921 coal strike known as the Battle of Blair Mountain in which workers saw their homes bombed as they faced army troops. These were extreme but not unique moments in the history of labor. Oppressive working conditions and inadequate pay have never been an accident or the result of an oversight — they have been for profit.

Efforts to gain basic workplace protections, such as child labor laws and an eight-hour workday, were consistently met with violent repression from businesses and government. Despite these efforts, workers have yet to gain a right to a living wage. Today, class-based power struggles and the language that defined them too often are eclipsed in conversations about inequality. While labor has won important concessions, it is no exaggeration to say they lost the class struggle and with it the language of class. The limited success of labor organizers among farm workers and more recently among Amazon workers seem only to illustrate the loss.

A century after violent efforts to suppress resistance to class exploitation, the nation has learned to think about people and the economy with a language that favors the wealthy and elides issues of power. If workers lack class-based identities, the same cannot be said of the economic elite who consistently advance their own interests — as a class. The interests of the economic elite are apparent in the nation's tax policies that protect wealth. They are also apparent in the government's unrealistic definition of poverty (\$27,750 for a family of four in 2022) which both undercounts the numbers of people who are struggling and limits eligibility for public support. The interests of the economic elite are also apparent in a wholly inadequate federal minimum wage, frozen at \$7.25

since 2009, and in glowing reports of increased jobs that fail to mention that these are largely service sector jobs that do not pay a living wage or basic benefits such as sick leave or health care. And, they are apparent in measures of national economic success rooted to GDP and corporate profit rather than to the economic self-sufficiency and overall health of the nation's workers. At a time when much of the country identifies as being middle class regardless of income, the term "working class" is used as a euphemism for poor people, many of whom work in service sector jobs characterized by low pay, part-time hours, no benefits, and general instability. Just 50 years ago, "working class jobs" referred to skilled and physically demanding work. The blue-collar workers who held those jobs earned a middle-income wage that paid for a mortgage, a family car, often a boat or recreational vehicle, and sometimes a vacation home. Those jobs have largely been replaced by low-wage service sector employment. During the pandemic, another euphemism emerged as business and media characterized some forms of work as "essential" to justify demands that people to continue to work in conditions that placed them at risk of Covid-19. If medical professionals could be called essential workers in a pandemic, the same cannot be said of millions of service workers who were required to work with inadequate protections, sick leave, or health care. The nation called low-wage workers essential yet treated them as disposable.

In the 21st century, our use of language has effectively scrambled class-based identities among workers even as 35 per cent of households have so little economic security, they are unable to pay for an unexpected expense of \$400. The erasure of workers' interests is normalized in large and small ways. Consider that every major metropolitan newspaper in the country has a business section, yet none has a workers' section. For decades the needs, interests, and perspectives of workers have been treated by newspapers either as irrelevant or as commensurate with those of business. It is both a mundane and a striking