

The Business

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Imran Khan hand over the economy to IMF- Shahid Khaqan

## Medical Negligence

The Minister for National Health Services (NHS), Abdul Qadir Patel, intervened to suspend the administrative head of the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (Pims) after allegations of medical negligence. Apparently, three pregnant women had been sent to the ICU—out of which one died—after being given either expired anesthesia or treated with infected needles. While an enquiry committee has instructed to determine the truth, the fact that such an allegation was even made is unacceptable.

The complaint was filed to the ministry by the deceased mother's relatives and note was taken of the incident immediately. Minister Patel reiterated the importance of accountability in such cases where a patient may have died due to malpractice and formed an enquiry committee that took six samples of the medicine and surgical items used. Meanwhile, Dr. Khalid Masood who was the administrative head tasked with overlooking patient safety, was suspended.

There are multiple factors worth considering here; there is still the possibility that the claim turns out to be entirely false and only the actions of a distraught family who experienced a sudden and unfortunate loss. Furthermore, the investigation has not been concluded yet so the suspension may have been premature, especially since the ministry did not provide a chance for Dr. Masood to give a statement of clarification.

However, allegations of medical negligence can never be taken leniently and endorsing the importance of accountability is vital. The ministry acted fast, and rightfully so, in response to a complaint by a member of the public who was directly impacted by the alleged negligence and that was its duty. The fact that criminal charges can be levied against the hospital goes to show that it is an urgent situation for which responsibility must be taken. Hospitals are expected to be institutions where taking precaution is the norm because it is usually a matter of life and death. For three women to end up in the ICU in a rather similar fashion does raise some eyebrows and reduce faith in the healthcare system as a whole.



MUHAMMAD AMIR RANA

It would be a serious misstep if parliament were to give safe passage to the banned TTP.

Apparently, the burden and liability of the peace talks with the terrorist group have been passed on to parliament, which is weak and seems willing to lend a shoulder to the security institutions. The talks with the TTP are not merely a security issue entrenched in the region's geopolitical landscape; instead, it is a case for the soul of Pakistan. Both state and society have developed a rare consensus in the protracted war against terrorism: the country needs a review of its ideological paradigm. However, this consensus has not yet yielded some miraculous outcome as the state, by design or inadvertently, continues to exploit religion and empower the radical groups. Some observers also question if the political parties and civil society organisations really believe in resisting radical religious and ideological forces. They also ask if the PPP's bid to bring the issue to parliament is merely a trick to give legiti-

## A collective mistake

macy to an exclusive process led by the security institutions.

Giving legitimacy to the talks with the TTP does not fit in with the PPP's political paradigm of 'democracy is the best revenge'. Mainstreaming a terrorist group will harm and shrink political spaces for the citizens of this country and parties such as the PPP, which have been more vocal and aligned against extremism. The TTP was found guilty of having assassinated former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, but the PPP sees a bigger plot behind the assassination. Though not certain, it appears that the current party leadership may be thinking beyond its own misgivings in the country's larger interest. The party chairperson holds the portfolio of foreign minister in the coalition government and must be inspired by his mother's ideas, including enhancing trade relationships with the Central Asian states. Back in the 1990s, Benazir Bhutto had permitted her interior minister, Gen Naseerullah Babar, to create an Afghan Trade Development Cell in the ministry to promote trade routes to Central Asia and to provide the Afghan Taliban with funds.

For a long time, state institutions have been giving hints of a shift from a geostrategic to a geo-economic plan. The PPP vision may fit well with the new paradigm, but that would require removing the TTP obstacle and providing more confidence to the Taliban regime in Kabul; the institutions are apparently also relying on relations with Kabul for their intended geo-economic shift.

The government is giving the impression that talks with the TTP are still at a stage where a national discourse is not needed. In fact, very recently, the Parliamentary Committee

on National Security (PCNS) received a briefing from the military leadership on the TTP talks. The committee formally gave approval for holding talks with the banned outfit. The government insists that all negotiations would be conditional upon parliament's approval. One can foresee that a few dissenting voices in the parliamentary debate will not be able to prevent the outcome if the deal is a fait accompli.

Many of the arguments in favour of the talks with the terrorists have been analysed on these pages. Still, according to reports, in the last PCNS meeting, the military leadership told lawmakers that the TTP might join the Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K) and that a peace deal with the TTP is a compulsion and not a choice. One may recall that the idea of talks with the TTP was floated back in 2019, even before the Taliban takeover of Kabul. The argument at that time was to identify the missing persons, supposedly hiding under the cover of the TTP fighters. Perhaps, Pakistan's state institutions see the terrorist group in enhanced mirror settings. Regarding the IS-K factor, there are certain probabilities, and a lot depends on possible internal rifts within the ranks of the TTP. The TTP is under allegiance to the Taliban supreme leader, and joining the ranks of the IS-K would mean that they would have to denounce the Taliban before swearing allegiance to Abu Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, the self-proclaimed caliph belonging to the Islamic State group. Can the TTP collectively commit such a big mistake, especially when the Taliban regime has declared war on the IS-K?

The most influential faction within the TTP favours the talks as they see a

victory achieved without violence; a small number of them disagree with the hypothesis. Even the dissenters will think twice before joining the IS-K as the group is very exclusive and the prospects of its long-term sustainability are bleak. There is a high probability that Al Qaeda will support the peace talks, as security experts weigh in with their opinion that any deal between the TTP and the government of Pakistan will also provide Al Qaeda some influence in the tribal districts along the border. Moreover, the deal will give an opportunity to the IS-K to enter Pakistani territory.

More importantly, the TTP has consistently asserted that it would not back down from its core demand of the merger of ex-Fata with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa being reversed. This was said by the TTP chief Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud himself in a YouTube interview which did several rounds on social media and was apparently conducted somewhere in Kabul. There are also rumours that the Pakistani jirga which visited Kabul recently got the impression that the TTP is confident that the government of Pakistan will agree to its demand of reversing the tribal districts' status, and has sought three months to negotiate the demand.

If this is the case, will parliament amend the Constitution to fulfil the demand of a terrorist group? If it happens, one can imagine the legal, political, social and ideological consequences. It would simply mean the state's surrender to terrorists. Can the state institutions not craft another strategy to deal with the TTP threat? And do the political parties have the courage to say that they want the matter deferred until there is an open debate in society and within and among political parties?

## Make-or-break by-elections

ABBAS NASIR

Against the backdrop of rising global energy and food prices which have necessitated widespread power cuts and brutal price hikes at home, triggering staggering inflation currently running at over 20 per cent, all eyes are on the Punjab Assembly by-elections exactly a week from today.



The Pakistani electorate is a very shrewd one, in my humble opinion, and often defies predictions to vote for parties and candidates who will deliver on their expectations and who, it believes, will be good for the country and democracy.

Unless, of course, the voters are cheated out of their verdict in the name of the 'greater good', in the name of clean government or Islamisation or accountability or patriotism or some other red herring to satiate the appetite of extra-parliamentary, anti-democracy forces. These forces have been well-entrenched in the country and its systems. Don't get me wrong but a mention of these forces and people see khaki. But there are many willing collaborators, some with pretensions of being equal partners, among the ranks of the judiciary and political parties too. One can at least see some method to the madness in the non-political forces joining hands for a power grab but it is self-defeatist for political entities, particularly with support among the people too, to coalesce with these forces and barter away their own right to take decisions and govern.

But, like they say, it is what it is. Even knowing the terms of their relationship with an implicit 'junior' partner status and then agreeing to be ushered into the corridors of power, which are no more than a mirage in practical value, they act like a jilted lover when their foolish attempts to assert themselves backfire.

I say foolish because having abandoned popular support as the solitary means of propelling their march to government, and

not meaningful power or authority, after a while they are bedazzled by howling sirens, flashing beacons, secure corridors, helicopters and official jets. If any sanity or reality still remained to remind them of their rather humble junior status, the ability to lock up political opponents, crush dissent and dissidents including riding roughshod over independent media fills them with a false sense of being all-powerful.

And then when they wake up, it's too late, the dream is no more and the nightmare of being out in the cold hits them. Predictably, they cry foul. But by now the shoe is on the other foot. Another willing collaborator has taken their place and their tantrums will deliver very little to them. Their 'historic' defiance will last no longer than it takes someone to reverse their fall from grace.

Some parties will match this description completely, while only sections of others will. Few today will be so sane and principled that they will have none of this. I leave it to your imagination to figure out which of our political parties fits each of these categories. Feel free to adjust the parameters to better reflect your thoughts on the issue. In any case, this was more a general reflection on the sad saga and the reality of the tragedy that is our politics and its players, both political and otherwise. In the 20 by-elections in four urban and 16 rural (with the inevitable spillover of an urban area or two in some) Punjab Assembly constituencies, a week from today voters will have considered some of the factors listed above and made up their minds before casting their ballots.

Walid Iqbal, a PTI senator, and accomplished Harvard and Cambridge-educated lawyer, who is one of the funniest men I have met in my life, appeared quite serious when he told Arifa Noor on her Dawn-News programme that, "we'll win all 20 seats". Such is the surge in support for Imran Khan, he argued. Both Walid Iqbal

and later his leader Imran Khan made their 'landslide' subject to a level playing field. Despite their apprehensions, the PTI leadership also appeared confident that their workers will guard the ballot box and not allow their mandate to be stolen. The central plank of the PTI remains attributing its loss of power to a conspiracy and on exploring the military leadership to shun their self-proclaimed neutrality and pave the party's way back into office in the name of economic stability and national interest. For his part, PML-N Punjab Chief Minister Hamza Shehbaz appeared confident that the coalition he leads will score a major win as, he says, the people of Punjab are well aware of "our record of khidmat [public service]" and also know fully well who is responsible for the current economic crisis.

Despite the PML-N infight over whether Miftah Ismail (backed publicly by Khwaja Asif and Shahid Khaqan Abbasi) or Ishaq Dar (backed publicly by Khwaja Saad Rafique) is best placed to steer the economy, PML backers see the final tally at 15/5 in their favour plus/minus a couple of seats.

Whosoever is making a convincing argument to the voters will win the most seats and the current coalition's fate even in Islamabad will hinge on this result as well. To oust Hamza Shehbaz as chief minister, the calculation suggests the PTI will need to win some 14 seats. Many observers say that seems like a tall order, despite the crowds Imran Khan is pulling in for his jalsas.

By midnight in exactly a week it will be clear who is right. If the incumbent is unable to stay in office after the by-election, the defeat's shockwaves will reach Islamabad too and possibly create grounds for a fresh national election. If not, then possibly the coalition will get a reprieve and about 12 months to address near-impossible challenges in an economically hostile global environment with food prices continuing to rise. The only respite may come in the form of a global economic slowdown or recession that drives down oil prices.

## Civil-military ties and efforts to counter militancy

FAISAL ALI RAJA

The counter-militant actions and their implementation, in physical and nonphysical spaces, are closely related to the nature of civil-military relationship. The interactive mechanism between the civilian government and its military counterpart determines the fate of any counter-militancy measure in a country. The problem crops up when a state starts actions against militants and confronts with the reality that these measures may not be initiated in a uni-dimensional manner.

The multi-faceted response cannot be performed independently either by a civilian government or by a military organisation. Moreover, how these actions are defined capture the essence of their ultimate success or failure. The more narrowly these actions are delineated the more difficult it will be for the state apparatus to eliminate or minimise the militant threat. Hence the decision-making process must deal with militancy in a combined, conjoint and collective manner. The civil-military friction makes counter-militant actions inconsistent, limited and at times incompatible with the changing threat environment. Since these measures include public pacification and service delivery issues, which are beyond the scope and capacity of a military force, the local government must step in to complement the military gains in disturbed regions. There are three main types of civil-military relationship models. In the first, a total military dominated set-up, the military thinking is seeped into the civilian apparatus which follows it without providing its sincere input in the fight against militancy. Such a mechanism results in militarisation of the civilian actions and the focus remains on the kinetic measures. The structural developments in civilian institutions are limited, and initiatives are driven by military demand. Once the civilian institutions stop seeing themselves as bona fide part of the process, they become a mechanical cog of militarised machinery. The counter-actions against militancy may gain short-term successes but miss the long-term strategic objectives. In the second scenario, the military remains a dominant force but the civilian setup manages to gain ground on multiple fronts through strength of constitutional process and robustness of political dispensation in the country. It is a flip-flop model in which the civilian set-up manages to diversify the counter-militant actions especially those that minimise the threat to military organisation. These actions are maintained under the overall military tutelage which pushes the civilian departments at will when a critical incident happens. The civilian government makes headway in certain areas; nonetheless, the disturbed regions remain under the military's close watch. A certain militancy level is acceptable in it which is both sustainable and bearable. However the arrangement can be changed at any time leaving the selective civilian counter-militancy efforts in limbo.

The last model is based on civilian control. Under such a system, institutional stability and sustainability, with special focus on rooting out the causes of militancy, remains on the forefront. All measures are conceived and led by civilian government but its execution is supervised by a hybrid mechanism. Thus, the country tries to find the solution to militancy through engaging regional countries and initiating a broad-based socio-political dialogue with disgruntled elements along with improving public service delivery in disturbed areas and regions. The regional approach against militancy is encouraged and supported in such a set-up which provides an expanded platform in the fight against militancy. The security policies do not bite the dust in the ministries or divisions but are implemented through a proper system of central and provincial governments. The military, as a result, loses its absolute monopoly of control over security. Hence, nature of civil-military relationship translates into a proportionate kind of state equilibrium to formulate, initiate and implement response against militancy. An equivocal relationship reciprocates into an unclear action