

The Business

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Revival of economy

Five times more rains have drowned thousands of villages in Sindh and Balochistan, rendered millions homeless and their farmlands inhospitable for Rabi crops, particularly wheat. For cultivation of wheat, barley, oat, gram, mustard and linseed the land got to be dry on face but moist a little down below. But the floodwater is feared to stay put on the wet farmlands from three to six months. And in some areas where land dries up the water required for post-seeding wheat crop will not be available, given the collapse of irrigation system. Will the Sindh cabinet's decision to fix support price of wheat at Rs 4,000 per 40 kg is going to be a good enough incentive to grow more wheat? Unfortunately, we are not very hopeful. Any package to revive agriculture in the flood-hit areas is required to include many other incentives like assistance to help the farmer rebuild his house and be assured there is medical care to secure his children against waterborne diseases. All of it is a long haul challenge for the government. Even when the agriculture contributes only about 20 percent to GDP it gives employment to more than 45 percent of country's population. In fact, the entire saga of devastated villages means displacement of 33 million people.

The havoc caused by catastrophic flooding in nearly one-third of the country is under discussion on electronic media and the newspapers. But that is not going to happen with the devastating epic flooding of rural Pakistan where life returning to normality will take months and years. A large number of other leaders and governments have generously helped. While that is very kind of them that they share the pain of Pakistanis, but in totality and in the long run it is our problem and it is our government and people have to come forward and rebuild life in rural Pakistan.

No doubt the armed forces, concerned civilian setups and kind-hearted Pakistanis at home and abroad have come up in a big way to share the pain and grief of affected people. But that said one can't resist saying that the challenge of climate change has to be encountered on our own. Whatever be our efforts to intercept unstoppable rapid speed of global warming and the increasing carbonization these are of no real consequence. And howsoever generous be the world governments and people to share our pain in the final analysis we have to fight this demon on our own. Of course the efforts being made to alleviate the sufferings of affected people were essential and that has been done.

Analysing the practice of democratic rights in India

TASNEEM SHAFIQ

Every democratic state protects its citizens' right to take part in the government of their country, directly or through freely chosen representatives, the right to equal access to public service and other basic human rights.

The International Day of Democracy is celebrated all around the globe on 15th September every year. It was established through a resolution passed by the UN General Assembly in 2007, encouraging governments to strengthen and consolidate democracy. As we celebrate this day, it is pertinent to look into the gap between theory and practice of democratic laws in the world's largest democracy, India.

The Constitution of India guarantees six fundamental rights to the citizens: right to equality, right to freedom of expression, right against exploitation, right to freedom of religion, cultural and educational rights and right to constitutional remedies. Surprisingly, most of these democratic rights have been practiced only by the majority (Hindu) population.

Narendra Modi government has promoted their definition of Hindu culture by enhancing the legal protections of cows, by opening up the state to the RSS, rewriting the history of the country, harassing secularists, reducing the number of NGOs operating in the country and their ability to function. Minorities are stigmatized and targets of repeated campaigns led by the Sangh Parivar (RSS) in its fight against conversions, love jihad, and land jihad and cow protection operations. These campaigns translated into intimidation as well as violence, and even the lynchings of religious minorities.

Hindu vigilantism has become more systematic by expanding into new areas of moral policing, such as the disruption of Muslim prayers in public places and left minorities no respite under the Hindu right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Regime. Before the BJP came to power, Hindu vigilantes used to fear police reprisals for their actions. Since 2014, these groups have been protected (even sponsored and guided) by Sangh Parivar leaders elected to office on the BJP

ticket. The RSS's main task is different in nature.

Their goal is to conquer not state power but minds and to impose cultural and social practices rather than laws to maintain Hindu supremacy. The Sangh Parivar tries to propagate and impose its views through persuasion and coercion. RSS prioritizes reforming society and the collective psyche, the Savarkarites believe in direct political action, including violent means.

Online vigilantes have now transitioned into politics. It is evident from the way a famous Hindu nationalist troll, Tajinder Pal Singh Bagga, was elevated to the post of BJP's spokesperson. Hijab ban in India violates the constitutional right of freedom of religion which is conferred upon people, including Muslims, under article 25(1) of the Indian Constitution. It states, "All are equally entitled to the freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice and propagate religion." They call themselves a secular democracy but the citizens' rights are only limited to theory.

The world's largest democracy has failed to provide security to its citizens. In 2020, BJP government introduced a stringent media policy with new guidelines on media accreditation. It empowered them to determine what constitutes "fake news". Self-censorship also prevails among journalists in India, with local newspapers refraining from reporting on unjustified arrests due to fear of reprisal and cuts to government-funded advertisements.

Reporting in Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir has become so difficult that dozens of Kashmiri journalists have fled the valley, fearing they will be the government's next targets. The Indian government has arrested many journalists and shut down the Kashmir Press Club in January 2022. The arrests and harassment of Kashmiri journalists follow the resurgence of BJP in 2014, following the election of Narendra Modi.

Intent on converting India from a secular democracy to a Hindu rashtra, the BJP-led government has worked to extend its dominance over Muslim-majority Kashmir through heavy militarization and arbitrary detentions and crackdowns on freedom of

expression. By targeting the local press, the government seeks to tighten its control over the narrative surrounding its human rights abuses. In 2017, the government began targeting journalists under the anti-terror Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), which carries harsh bail provisions. Legal harassment, threats, home raids, physical attacks, on the journalists and their family members have become the new norm in India-occupied Kashmir.

About 22 Kashmiri journalists appeared on the no-fly list in September 2021, according to The Wire. Indian reporters are often harassed by police and paramilitaries, with some being subjected to so-called "provisional" detention for several years. Kamran Yousuf was the first Kashmiri journalist detained under UAPA, in September 2017. Sultan was arrested in August 2018, after he published an article in the Kashmir Narrator on Burhan Wani.

He was granted bail but was illegally held by police for 5 days before being re-arrested under the Public Safety Act. Sajad Gul, a trainee reporter at online news portal "The Kashmir Walla" was arrested for only tweeting a video of a protest. After the unilateral revocation of Kashmir's special autonomy status in August 2019, Kashmiri journalists faced significant obstacles when authorities imposed an internet shutdown and communications blackout. 4G access was not officially restored until February 2021. According to the digital blackout monitoring website Internet Shutdown in authorities have shut down the internet in various areas of Kashmir at least 25 times in 2022.

Freedom of expression and right to practice religion is given to the Hindus in India while minorities go through torture which is against democratic and secular values. India has become one of the world's most dangerous countries for the media with an average of 3-4 journalists killed each year in connection with their work. Dozens of activists and journalists are arrested and tortured for reporting against the government. Journalists in India are exposed to all kinds of physical violence including police violence, ambushes by political activists and deadly reprisals by criminal groups or corrupt local officials.



Lessons in school reforms

KAMILA HYAT

Pakistan has struggled to maintain any kind of standard at both government and private schools across the country. While private schools often claim to offer the best education and learning in English to their students, they are not always successful.

The kind of education that many children receive is based on rote learning and cramming – similar to how they would learn at most government schools. The only difference is that parents pay exorbitant fees for their children's education at private schools. Only high-tier elite schools – which charge high fees and are accessible to only a tiny minority – can claim to offer education which matches international standards. According to the available surveys, a majority of Grade-5 children at both government and private schools are unable to write a complete sentence in either English or Urdu. The conflict of the languages adds to the problem. At English-medium schools, children are taught in English and barely understand the content they have been taught. When the same content is provided to them in Urdu, their eyes light up. Children who have never been exposed to English at their homes and have received no specialized English tuitions at their schools begin to understand the concepts.

It is unclear why the country has not chosen to follow models from other countries where children are first taught in their mother tongue so they can understand the content, and then in later grades, they are taught English as a skill they will need for employment opportunities. In our country, the situation is dismal. In Punjab, the education authorities have neglected Punjabi; this has added to the problem. Punjab is the only province which does not offer primary-level education in the native tongue of most children, often leaving them blank in the class, unable to comprehend what they are learning. The only option for them is to cram what is put before them to pass the exam.

Pakistan does not need just major education reforms. The Single National Curriculum (SNC) offered by the PTI government solved no problems and, in some way, added more to them, further emphasizing cramming and taking away from a child's intellectual ability to develop skills. This is a deeply rooted problem and should be solved if the country is to progress and grow in any direction. So, how do we go about it? One method would be to study the example of Vietnam, a desperately poor country in the 1990s, whose per capita income has now grown massively; the Vietnamese government thinks it can grow further if education is massively reformed through the retraining of teachers and other methods. Such strategies help education become child-centred, based on the capacity of children to learn and

then acquire places in universities and gain jobs. In Vietnam, the emphasis is not only on STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) subjects but also on development of other skills. These reforms have been massive, and in some schools, classes were shut down for some days to allow teachers to be trained in the new method required for teaching. The same happened in Japan, and since the 1990s, the Japanese committee responsible for education has recognized that cram learning is not helpful. Japan adopted and introduced an approach centred on child-based learning and the individual ability of children at schools one by one.

This initially resulted in a steep fall in education standards as measured through global academic benchmarks. But Japan has since then caught up and retained its policy of training children not to cram, not to depend entirely on teachers, and to further their skills through their own initiatives and learn through these rules. The results have been dramatic, and today, Japan has once again reached the top of the world in terms of educational attainment as it continues to improve its standards. Pakistan needs to do something similar. Given the situation we face, there may be no harm in closing down all government and private schools for some months so that teachers can be retrained and re-educated to teach in a more modern way and with a better approach, which is in place everywhere in the world. This would be a huge service to our children. We must remember that at one point the standard of Pakistan's government schools was far higher than what it is now, and these schools produced scholars such as Nobel laureate Dr Abdul Salam and other great personalities like IA Rahman. Those days have long gone, and most government schools have fallen into a state of disarray. There is a complete lack of motivation among poorly paid teachers.

It is true we cannot immediately reach the standards of countries like Denmark, where teachers are paid higher than lawyers and doctors. Denmark is said to have the highest education achievements in the world, and children over there receive free education and are encouraged to pursue their interests. Pakistan can at least take some steps towards improving education and making children understand what they are learning, instead of depending entirely on rote learning. This is nothing short of a disaster. We have children who simply do not understand the basics of what they are taught in subjects such as science, mathematics and literature. This is because they are taught in a language they do not understand. We need to change this, and we need to study the Vietnamese and Japanese models as the first step along the road to near-complete change and introduce education reforms so that our children can use their skills and learn at schools, instead of being treated as robots.

King in waiting

F.S. AIJAZUDDIN

IT has taken 64 years and 44 days for him to become King Charles III. No heir apparent in history has had a longer period of training nor ascended a throne better equipped. If he lives as long as his mother did, he has another 22 years to accomplish everything he has sought to achieve during that lengthy apprenticeship.

Charles, then Prince of Wales, made his only visit to Pakistan in November 2006. I, as the honorary British consul, Lahore, had the privilege of attending on him and his wife Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall. It was my second lengthy encounter with royalty. I had performed a similar function for the late Queen Elizabeth II in October 1997.

Such proximity gave me a deep respect for the professionalism of the royal family. Their visits were planned well in advance. The reconnaissance team from Clarence House, for example, arrived in Lahore on Sept 25, 2006 to plan the programme.

The focus of the prince's visit was interfaith dialogue. Just as his father Prince Philip had found his vocation in conserving wild life, Prince Charles found intellectual escape in promoting interfaith communication. He knew that one day he would be both head of the Church of England and also monarch of a multiracial, multi-religious kingdom. He declared his intention of amplifying the scope of his title as 'defender of the faith' to 'defender of faiths'. Clarence House asked me to be moderator of the interfaith dialogue the prince would chair. The governor Punjab, a retired military officer, thought otherwise. First, he denied entry to the advance party to enter Governor House. ("Would they allow me into Buckingham Palace without notice?") He then replaced me with an inarticulate secretary Auqaf.

High Commissioner Mark Lyall Grant invited my wife and I to meet the royal couple in Islamabad at a reception on Nov 2. We watched as Charles and Camilla moved seamlessly through the crowd, exchanging places so that the 200 guests on the upper and lower terraces had a chance of seeing, if not speaking to them.

I had left two of my books on Lahore and Pakistan for them. They contained illustrations done by 19th-century visitors. The next morning, when I received the couple at Lahore airport, I had barely introduced myself when the prince thanked me for

the books, adding: "I greatly enjoyed reading them. I particularly liked Prince Waldemar's sketches."

It was during their tour of the Badshahi Mosque that I received an insight into his well-honed professionalism. A phalanx of photographers had taken pictures of the couple against the backdrop of the mosque's grand façade. When they had appeared to have finished, he beckoned that I should join him. I did. Suddenly, the cameras came into action again. There was a succession of blinding flashes which unnerved me. "How do you cope with this, sir?" I asked him. He replied: "I've had to endure it since birth. One gets used to it."

After a quick visit to the Samadhi of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (which my ancestor Fakir Nuruddin had built between 1839-49), we met again in Governor House for the interfaith dialogue. The instructions from Clarence House could not have been more precise. They specified that 'The Governor will invite the Prince of Wales to enter the dining room from the side door of the Ivory Room. Taking the entry point at 6 o'clock, the PoW will be at 9 o'clock of the round table. He will meet the participants, starting with the person at 8 o'clock and continuing anti-clockwise to his own seat.'

Each of the round table dialogue participants was given three to four minutes to speak. They found it difficult to control their volubility. The Prince spoke without notes. He began by saying that different faiths had more difficulty with the press than with each other. He spoke of the Islamic Advisory Group he had set up. Dialogue was easy at a table; the challenge lay in implementation. While all great religions shared a vision of the same Ultimate Truth, he felt ill-informed leadership was the cause of strife between communities. He described his continuous interaction with the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, which had awarded him an honorary doctorate. He spoke in this philosophical vein for about 10 minutes. He concluded by remarking that what he had said came not from any profound scholarship, but from the heart. At the conclusion of the dialogue, Prince Charles passed me. He shook my hand and whispered: "I was told about the change. But I wish it had been you." Everything that royalty says is remembered by everyone they meet. King Charles will be, as he has been, circumspect in speech, regal in mien, and more than charged to propel the British monarchy into the 21st century.