

The Business

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Gas supply

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif held a meeting in which a consensus was reached that tough economic decisions will be implemented to steer the country out of the prevailing economic woes and ensure long-term sustainability. However, it was further argued that the tough decisions would begin to pay dividends by the middle of next year when elections could be scheduled. The question is whether this narrative has been abandoned since given the recent decision to prioritise the domestic sector in the provision of gas which is clearly at odds with this claim as economic considerations would have dictated prioritising the productive sectors. The government has decided to give top priority to gas supply to domestic sector this winter. The government's gas management plan includes shutting down supply to the non-export industry, with an impact on their domestic supply and their price, though the export sectors will continue to be supplied gas. Granted that the decision to prioritise domestic sector over all others, including productive sectors that have a direct link to the Gross Domestic Product growth as well as available employment opportunities, was taken by previous administrations as well; however, none of the previous administrations claimed that it was taking politically unpopular decisions to stave off the prospect of imminent default and for long-term economic stability.

The plan includes a decision to reduce RLNG gas supply to the Power Division by 250mmcf from November onwards till the end of winter and increase the electricity output through coal by up to 4000MW. Reports indicate that the power sector is now concerned about purchase of the Afghan coal with rupees with the objective of saving scarce foreign exchange as the Taliban, strapped for cash, and fully aware of Pakistan's energy sector problems, upped the price which in turn has put off importers while competing claims over coal mines have emerged triggering Taliban infighting. To those who argue that the government would be better advised to purchase RLNG the response is fairly disturbing. Pakistan simply does not have the foreign exchange reserves to buy RLNG in the quantity required to stave off a severe gas shortage this winter that would necessitate the implementation of a gas load management plan.

Problems associated with the power sector are not only varied but also deep rooted that require sustained reforms for a decade or so to deal with; and with the steady erosion of the gas reserves leading to a contraction of available domestic supply the problem is becoming acute. What is extremely disturbing is that there appears to be little effort in undertaking these politically challenging reforms and administration after administration appears to take decisions based on political considerations as opposed to economic considerations, which constitute the main reason behind the appalling state of the economy today.

DR IMRAN KHALID

Being a high priest of realpolitik, Henry Kissinger, the 99-year-old former US secretary of state, is undoubtedly among the most pragmatic statesmen in recent times who have the grits to accept their miscalculations without any whimper and also adopt their stances as per the changing ground realities.

The recent alteration in his chronic stance on important global topics — the Ukraine war, Russia, Putin and China — is a lucid example of this realpolitik, a sophisticated amalgam of pragmatism and ideology in the domain of international affairs. In June, when Putin was going full throttle to consolidate the Russian positions in the southern and eastern parts of Ukraine, Kissinger propagated a three-pronged narrative.

One: the war will sooner or later be stopped but that if the negotiations were not resumed immediately — he meant Jun-July — then it would become extremely intricate for all the stakeholders to manage and contain its side-effects later on. Two: Russia had been an integral part of European politics for the last 400 years and

HUMA YUSUF

We need more art. Whatever inquiries into Arshad Sharif's killing determine, his death will be a reminder of the limits of free speech in Pakistan — not least because he was forced to flee the country to escape threats. And where speech is curtailed, images must prevail.

This may seem like an anachronistic argument in this newly dawned era of neutrality, in which it is seemingly possible to say what has always been concealed between the lines, when metaphors of boots and boys, thieves and traitors, are being discarded in favour of plainspeak. But those who know Pakistan know that times of instability are the most dangerous — it is easier to trip over red lines when they are shifting. The coming months will show what levels of censorship and control persist once the political dust settles. For now, it is sufficient to remember that while press conferences hog headlines, disappearances and detentions continue, and an MNA languishes in jail for saying far less than those currently marching on the capital.

Rather than clear the air, pressers and political speeches are creating a fog of politicised rhetoric, blame games and counter claims, through which the lines between heroes and villains are blurred. Through all this,

Settlement of Kashmir dispute and peace in S Asia

DR GHULAM NABI FAI

A large number of students gathered at Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF), Barcelona to learn about the latest situation in Indian occupied Kashmir. UPF is one of the top 16th young universities in the world.

Shahal Khoso, doctoral student in Political Science and young energetic scholar, and Emcee of the event, during his opening remarks said, "Prominent Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben, in his works, brought forth to the world the concept of the State of Exception. For Agamben, the biopolitical significance of the state of exception, acts as a law that encompasses living beings to their own suspension.

Even though this state of exception was predetermined through the narrative of emergency in Kashmir for the last 7 decades, on August 5th, 2019, the far-right Indian govt of BJP under PM Narendra Modi, removed the special status of Jammu & Kashmir, abrogating Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian constitution. Thus, starting a new wave of assault, repression, and isolation — under a military curfew that is still in place today, making systematic demographic changes in Jammu & Kashmir during this period, and starting the process of settler colonialism. Around 3 million non-Muslim Indians are now being settled in Kashmir, by the ruling party. Mr. Shahal Khoso added that before we hand over the session to our speakers, it is pertinent to add here, that the root of the conference here at UPF neither stem from the narrative on Kashmir from the Pakistani perspective nor the Indian perspective. Today, let us speak about why the world (at large) should care about Kashmir from those who are the sons of the soil of Kashmir.

Muhammad Shafiq Tabassam, President, Tehreek-i-Kashmir, Spain expressed his appreciation to the students for taking time during their hectic schedule. He expressed the hope for a suc-

cessful and informative Q & A session after the speeches of the guests.

Ghulam Nabi Fai, the key-note speaker and the Chairman, World Forum for Peace & Justice thanked the students for taking time to be part of this academic discourse. Fai explained that the Kashmir dispute has an international dimension because it has the sanctity of the UN Charter and UN Security Council resolutions and has become a big hurdle or obstacle in the growth and stability of both India and Pakistan. The unresolved conflict over Kashmir threatens the international peace and security of the world.

It is far past time for the UN to take forceful action in order to restore peace to the region of South Asia. Responding to a question, Dr. Fai said that it was India which raced to the United Nations Security Council on January 1, 1948, and championed resolutions of the Security Council that prescribed a self-determination vote for Kashmir on the heels of United Nations supervised demilitarization. At that time, the United States championed the stand that the future status of Kashmir must be ascertained in accordance with the wishes and aspirations of the people of the territory. The United States was the principal sponsor of the resolution # 47 which was adopted by the Security Council on April 21, 1948, and which was based on that unchallenged principle.

India, however, was soon undeceived of its delusions over Kashmir's political yearning. Recognizing that its people would never freely vote accession to India, it contrived excuse after excuse to frustrate a plebiscite. When asked whether the conflict could be resolved bilaterally, Dr. Fai said that the people of Kashmir are mindful of the urgings by the United Nations and the world powers that India and Pakistan keep talking to each other. It would be perverse on the part of anyone to oppose that course of action. But to expect a breakthrough in talks is to ask for miracles. It would be

irresponsible on our part to encourage the hope that if the Governments of India and Pakistan are willing to depart from the stand of principle, the compromise will be endorsed by the people of Kashmir. Fai clarified that the people of Kashmir are fully aware that the settlement of the Kashmir dispute cannot be achieved in one move. Like all qualified observers, we visualize successive steps or intermediate solutions in the process.

It is one thing, however, to think of a settlement over a relatively extended period of time. It is atrociously different to postpone the beginning of the process on that account. Answering a question, why resolution of Kashmir was important, Fai stated that peace in the region would benefit not only those who are directly impacted by this conflict — Kashmiris — but India as well. Sounder minds must prevail. More rational methods of dealing with differences must be sought. Repeating the same mistakes while expecting different results has long ago been found to be the path of failure. Seventy-five years should demonstrate a need for a change in policy, a policy that accepts the need for coming together in a process that accepts the right of all people to determine their own destiny.

With regard to the role of the United Nations Dr. Fai said that its role had slowly faded as India became more of an alluring commercial market.

'But, he said, 'that doesn't mean it went away. Very recently, Antonio Guterres, the Secretary General of the UN declared that Kashmir issue has to be resolved under UN Charter and applicable UN Security Council resolutions. Without a shadow of doubt, Fai emphasized, peace is the only option for Kashmir, and Kashmiris are ready to play their part in the process.

Fahim Kayani, one of the dynamic Kashmiri diaspora youth leaders and President, Tehreek-i-Kashmir, UK, who was the guest of honor, declared that it is interesting how problematic it seems for India & Pakistan to agree that

Kashmiris themselves have a stake in any talks about their future. In what kind of democratic process would this not be of prime consideration? The moral, legal and historical foundations for such a principle have been frequently raised not only by Kashmiris but by the world community as well, which are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as in the United Nations Security Council resolutions on Kashmir. Mr. Kayani added that the people of Kashmir, like most people, are by their nature peaceful. History testifies to that fact. They do not seek war, and do not want to see their children die in a bloody conflict.

They seek and would welcome a peaceful and negotiated settlement to the crisis for the sake of peace and stability in the region of South Asia. Kayani explained that perhaps not by coincidence, the danger of nuclear threat will be of paramount interest. Kashmir has been regarded by President Bill Clinton as the most dangerous place on earth. Former Prime Minister of New Zealand, Helen Clark said, "Kashmir is a nuclear flash-point."

"It is clearly the bone of contention of nuclear confrontation between India and Pakistan. During the long years of domestic and international political chess by the United Nations and the world powers it must be stressed, the people of Kashmir themselves have been denied even the role of a pawn.

Their voices have neither been summoned nor heard; yet they have suffered the most in daily and harrowing human rights violations. Therefore, it is in the interest of world peace, Fahim Kayani emphasized that India and Pakistan need to resolve the Kashmir dispute to the satisfaction of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. The final and durable settlement of the Kashmir dispute will undoubtedly guarantee peace and stability in the region of South Asia. It will also have a great impact on the international peace and security.



The art of pragmatism

its role could not be ignored, under-valued and degraded. Per this, subjecting Russia to an embarrassing defeat in the Donbas would push Putin into panic mode and he might retaliate by resorting to even the battlefield-size nuclear weapons to avenge his humiliation — thus having all the potential to metastasize the war to other parts of Europe. And three, he advocated for 'status quo ante', which referred to the restoration of the situation in which Russia could maintain its formal control of Crimea and informal control of Luhansk and Donetsk.

Three months down the road, after witnessing Putin announce partial mobilization of reserves to bolster the weakening Russian posts, Kissinger has made a palpable shift in his stance towards the Ukraine war. Speaking in a Council on Foreign Relations talk on 'Lessons from History Series: Conversation with Henry Kissinger' on September 30, he admitted that Russia has "already lost the war," but stressed that the West

must keep contact with Russia in some way. "Some dialogue, maybe on an unofficial level, maybe in an exploratory way is very important", and that "in the nuclear environment" such an outcome is preferable to a "battlefield decision."

Kissinger is a very pragmatic practitioner of diplomacy, and he understands the sensitivities of the Russians with regard to retreat from Ukraine. But his views again do not go well with the hawkish elements in Washington and Western capitals who are not ready to listen to anything that resembles treating Moscow as 'equal' after the Ukraine debacle. There is another budge in Kissinger's stance and that is related to the definition of status quo. In May and June, he was advocating that Ukraine should initiate negotiations with Russia even at the cost of ceding the territories captured by Russians and that it should be treated as status quo. Now, though, he has revised his definition of status quo as pre-February 24 international borders between Rus-

sia and Ukraine as prerequisite to initiate any direct or indirect dialogue between the two. Similarly, further corroborating his renewed thinking, Henry Kissinger is now advising Chinese President Xi Jinping to "re-calibrate" his support for Russia on Ukraine to prevent a "wall of opposition" from developing in the West as has happened with Russia. Kissinger is of the view that Putin has lost the war in Ukraine, and the outside world should now tackle him quite diligently to muffle the possibility of any desperate step — including the use of nuclear weapons.

The recent spree of missiles on different cities of Ukraine, including Kyiv, as retaliation for the destruction of Kerch Bridge linking Crimea to Russia, has further validated the vindictive nature of Putin. Kissinger truly represents realpolitik, where enemies and friends are never permanent. He is very clear that Russia is gradually losing the war, but he is still preaching for a relatively face-saving formula for Putin when things move to the negotiating table. Kissinger does not want Putin to be subjected to any "humiliating" treatment at the end of this episode. Perhaps this is the point on which hawks are upset with Kissinger's doctrine on the

Art of the matter

politics trumps meaningful priorities, key messages are lost and the voice of the people is erased. And that's why we need more art.

This call may seem counterintuitive at a time when the world's obsession with art is being lambasted by climate activists. Just Stop Oil has caught the world's attention by throwing soup at masterpieces, thereby outing people's perverse prioritisation of paintings over the planet. It is a powerful protest, but it draws its power from the fact that art is considered sacred. Rather than denigrate art, Just Stop Oil highlights its influence, and the effectiveness of activism that engages with art. Indeed, by filming their acts of vandalism, the climate activists were creating new, powerful performance art.

Artists are also at the centre of Iran's ongoing protests. Protests and social media alike are flooded with incredible images of women cutting their hair, a metaphor for rejecting the regime. The water in public fountains has been dyed blood red, and banners bearing Mahsa Amini's image have been unfurled at New York's Guggenheim Museum. Graphic art has spurred

the simplicity of the protests' message, 'zan, zindagi, azadi', and built solidarity. Pakistan has its own history of provocative political art. Ijazul Hassan was imprisoned and tortured at Lahore Fort in 1977 for resistance posters against Zia's dictatorship. Abdul Rahim Nagori's 'anti-militarism' exhibition was banned. Artists such as Salima Hashmi and Lalurkh both painted and founded the Women's Action Forum, seeing both as pathways to fight for women's rights. Akram Dost Baloch was repeatedly jailed for using his art to assert the Baloch voice against Zia's repression and regressive security policies. More recently, Adeela Suleman's artwork on extrajudicial killings in Karachi was attacked by plainclothes men, and resulted in the closure of the 2019 Karachi Biennale. Drones, suicide bombings, political portraits, gun shots and camouflage have become a regular feature of art over the past 15 years. But this is not enough. Pakistan's visual artists widely exercise self-censorship, and our visual culture is still defined by the parameters established in the 1970s and 1980s, when figurative art was banned and per-

formance art stifled. Today's artists continue to fear their work being perceived as anti-state, and more terrifyingly, as blasphemous. When powerful art is produced, it often remains confined to galleries or private homes, accessible only to a lucky elite. And even if dissemination were possible, Pakistani art would confront the reality of a lack of visual culture and literacy — many Pakistanis do not know that artworks are an act of interpretation and meaning-making, a site of discourse or resistance, an invitation to respond through more art. Truck art is a rare example of a mass visual culture. It's time to invest in art. We need it to raise awareness, express viewpoints otherwise marginalised, and to create solidarity (through the consumption and reproduction of that art). We need art to amplify that the lives and perspectives of others have value, and that alternative approaches are possible. Art can challenge power structures, and attempts to silence it only further empowers the art. Art weakens propaganda, and strengthens dissent. And it is not just in the context of anti-authoritarianism that art matters. As Pakistan looks ahead to new and increasingly complex challenges — the ravages of climate change, the increasing disempowerment and exclusion of ethno-linguistic minorities at the country's peripheries, the resurgence of militancy — it must find new ways of speaking about and tackling