

The Business

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Change of approach

Kashmiris all over the world observe 'Black Day' on October 27, marking 75 years since Indian troops invaded their territory and triggered the longest lingering dispute in the subcontinent in 1947. The Pakistani state was also at the top of its game in criticism of the illegal Indian occupation, as usual, with diplomatic missions mobilising prominent Kashmiris by arranging seminars and photo exhibitions. And the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) also reiterated its "full solidarity" with the people of Jammu and Kashmir in their long fight for the right to self-determination. Yet all this has now been going on for so long that it is more like going through the motions than anything really meant to deliver serious, tangible results. Till not too long ago, it seemed as if another generation of Kashmiris would come and go without anything happening to the status quo. But the Modi administration went a step further in 2019, immediately after its re-election, and revoked Kashmir's special status whose sanctity New Delhi had promised – under Jawaharlal Nehru, no less – to protect. Now the Indian establishment is going about a demographic re-engineering of the occupied valley in front of the whole world.

Much has changed since this conflict started a quarter of a century ago. Social media has changed everything; and the way it can bring out truth from conflict-hit areas is also impacting how international diplomacy is carried out. It's fast becoming impossible for governments to take politically correct lines that are divorced from on-ground reality. This is perhaps one area where the people of Kashmir and government of Pakistan can do a better job. All they need to do is feed facts to the international conscience to the point that voters in powerful countries start questioning their elected representatives about their silence on such things. It is one thing for Kashmiri representatives, and even Islamabad and OIC to tell the world about what is happening in the Occupied Valley; but it's another to make them see first-hand the trials and tribulations of the people there; only because India wants its troops and tanks in Kashmir to flex its muscles.

There's no point in waiting for talks that are not going to happen, at least not while RSS-BJP combine is in power, and not going to deliver any results even if the occasional exchange does take place. Otherwise repeated offers by Pakistan to sit down and resolve all outstanding issues would not have gone unheeded. First India rejects any outside mediation and then rules out bilateral talks as well; which is proof enough that it, not Islamabad, wants to preserve and perpetuate this conflict. It's also no good to just issue statements on important days. We will also have to change our approach and take all the facts directly to the people of the world and urge them to become agents of political change in some of the world's most powerful and influential countries.

Here comes November

MOSHARRAF ZAIDI

A lot is supposed to happen in November. A most anticipated change of guard in Rawalpindi, and an even more anticipated FIFA World Cup in Qatar.

I checked to see how Pakistan was doing the last time there were changes of this magnitude in the army leadership. In the November 2016 FIFA rankings, Pakistan was at 197th position out of 204 countries. In the most recent FIFA rankings, released in October 2022, Pakistan stands 194th out of 211 countries. Only the very clever among us will be able to reframe this as a win. But it would also be unfair and disingenuous to link the military to sports. Just ask poor General Arif Hassan, who has been forced to remain in charge of Pakistan's pathetic Olympics showings now for 18 long years. Sports are an important marker of how a country is doing, but they are far from the most important ways to measure how a country is doing.

PwC, the firm that used to be known as Price Waterhouse Coopers, has offices in 152 countries and employs over 300,000 people. Its gross revenues in the year ending June 2022 were over \$50 billion. One of PwC's most interesting publicly available knowledge products is a 2017 report it published titled 'The Long View: How will the global economic order change by 2050?'

The PwC report is exactly the kind of uplifting reading that many Pakistani elites love to cite because it generates a positive narrative about the future of the country. In the 2016 rankings, Pakistan was 24th in the world in GDP by purchasing power parity (PPP). In 2030, PwC expects Pakistan to rise to nearly double its GDP PPP, and climb to 20th position in the world. By 2050, PwC estimates that Pakistan will double its GDP PPP once again, and rise to 16th overall. I know I am especially susceptible to citing and celebrating such estimates – we need to be able to North Star a positive direction for ourselves and our fellow countrywomen and countrymen. The problem is that such optimism should not come through the erasure of other, materially relevant, less uplifting data points.

GDP PPP is a good metric for an economy writ large, but a much better measure of how the people in a country are doing is per capita GDP PPP. How does Pakistan fare on that front? For this, we have to turn to the IMF. The IMF data on per capita GDP by PPP ranks Pakistan at 134th out of 192 economies. This massive fall off, of roughly 110 places, from the overall GDP by PPP versus per capita GDP by PPP is owed to the country's large population. Note: expect every elite and elite-adjacent to perk up at this and make an important point about the perils of a high population. It is like clockwork.

How about other ways to compare the economy? In 2008, when the 18th Amendment was being prepared, the country had a GDP of \$170 billion. In 2021, this had more than doubled to \$346 billion. Good enough? Let's see. In 2008, India's GDP was \$1.2 trillion. It has nearly tripled today to over \$3.17 trillion. India wasn't alone in tripling up since 2008. Vietnam started at \$99 billion and has grown today to over \$362 billion. Bangladesh in 2008 was at \$91 billion. It has quadrupled now to over \$416 billion. Pakistan has done okay, countries with similar problems and opportunities have done dramatically better. There are other ways to measure how well or poorly a country is doing. In the World Economic Forum's 2016 Global Gender Gap Report, Pakistan was ranked 143rd, second from the bottom, above Yemen and below war-torn Syria. In the WEF's 2022 Global Gender Gap Report, Pakistan is now ranked 145th, again, second from the bottom, above only Afghanistan – Yemen and Syria have

dropped out of the ranking altogether owing to a lack of data.

Is it possible for countries to make rapid progress in closing such gaps? If Bangladesh's GDP and the unceasing Beltway romance for India aren't enough, the Global Gender Gap report offers material evidence that it is. In the Global Gender Gap Report, Rwanda is ranked number five in the world – a country where a mass genocide took place less than three decades ago. The Philippines ranks seventh. Namibia too, clocks into the top twenty. And over in Riyadh, where Prime Minister Prince Mohammad Bin Salman has fast-tracked transformational change over the last few years, Saudi Arabia has moved up fourteen places from 141st in 2016, to 127th in 2022. Bangladesh, India, Vietnam, Rwanda and Saudi Arabia are evidence that countries are not destined to be stuck in the same place. What is so unique about Pakistan that it keeps getting overtaken by every peer it has ever had?

There are no simple explanations. Some of us like to explain Pakistan through deficits – current, fiscal, or trade – but too much of one and not enough of the other is good math to help explain why Pakistan is so far behind where it should be. Others among us love 'Islam' – the Zia era did Pakistan in, and the country has never recovered. Conflict with India and the resultantly dominant military is another fan favourite. Of course, allegedly the most widely adhered to explanation today is 'corruption' – it is rent seeking politicians that have destroyed Pakistan's ability to do well.

All of these are compelling explanations – but none really suffice. Plenty of countries run deficits, especially fiscal deficits. They don't all find themselves getting turned into pretzels by mid-level IMF staffers. Lots of countries have extremism challenges, including at the top of the highest offices in those countries. None seem to be

spinning their wheels on basic reforms to make businesses profitable and to draw talent in. Many countries are defined to a much greater degree by conflict with a neighbour than Pakistan – Israel, Singapore, Japan and Bangladesh all qualify. None have struggled as brutally to advance as Pakistan. And corrupt politicians, bureaucrats, judges and generals are baked into economies in Indonesia, Turkey, India, Malaysia, Turkey, China – not to mention the vast rent seeking infrastructure of Western financial institutions. Why then is it only Pakistan that seems to be completely paralysed by corruption?

Nothing is as overwhelming as the insistence of the Pakistani elite about Pakistani exceptionalism. But there is nothing exceptional about the problems that we so often attribute to Pakistan's dysfunction. In all this however, there is one truly unique feature of the Pakistani system that is truly exceptional. Almost nothing about Pakistan's big questions can be taken for granted. When will the next elections be held? Don't know!

Till the government survive the next three months? Not according to this birdie I have!

Is there freedom of the press? There is. But there isn't.

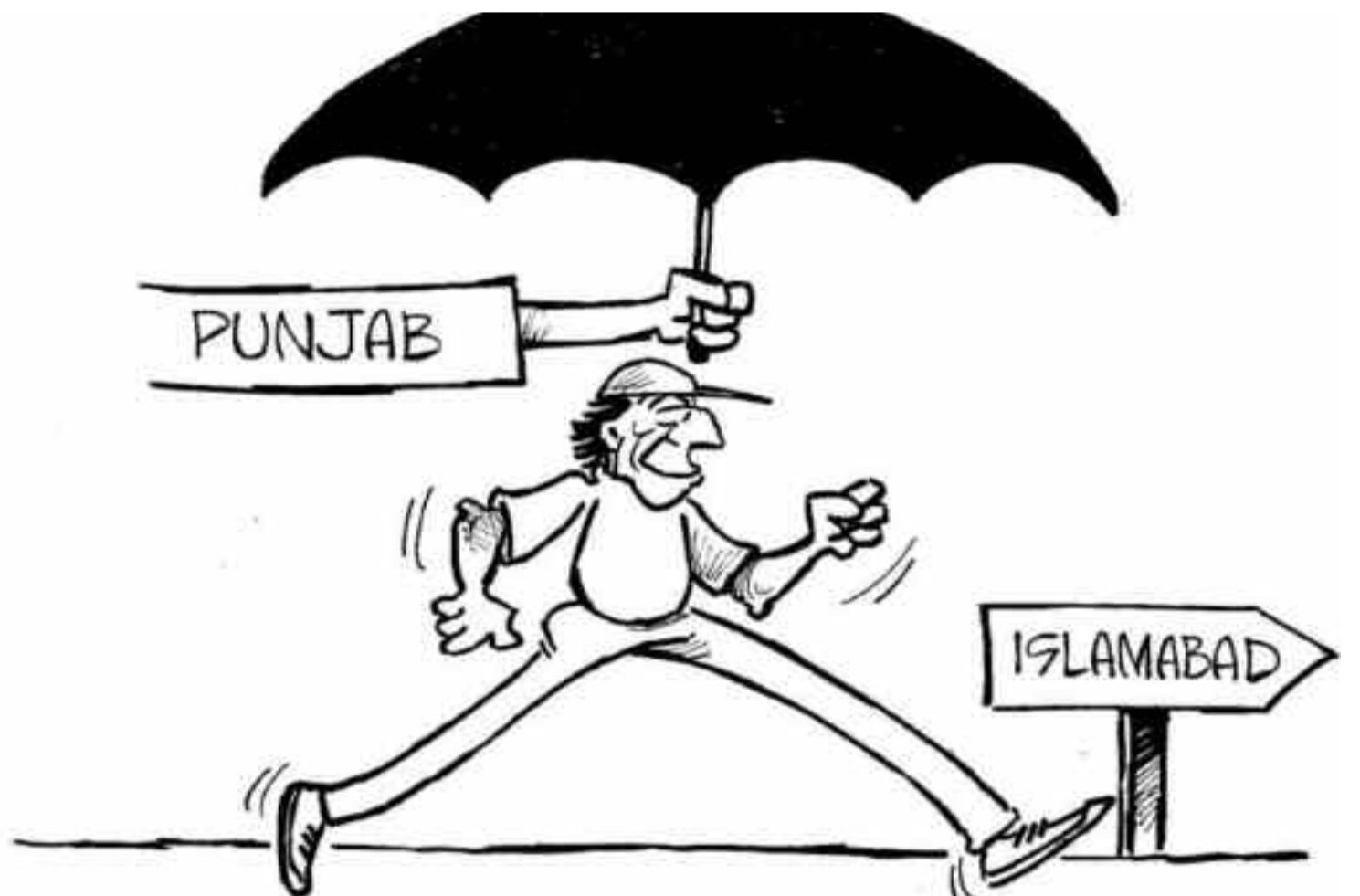
Are there dollars available in the open market? Maybe. But maybe not. But I know a guy. But he isn't picking up.

Will polio be eradicated? Yes. Maybe. Not sure. Probably.

Can you buy Panadol at the pharmacy? No. Well, yes. Maybe.

How long is a prime minister's term? Five years. Unless the PM is assassinated, or de-seated by the Supreme Court, or disqualified, or dismissed in a coup, or voted out through a vote of no-confidence.

Do officials retire when their tenure ends? Not the first time. Maybe the second time. Who knows? We'll find out



Dangerous nationalism

RAASHID WALI JANJUA

The Tipu Sultan Express named after the famed freedom icon who resisted British colonialism in South India in the late 18th Century is being renamed Wadiyar Express after the Hindu ruling dynasty that ruled over Mysore before and after Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan's reign. This puerile act is in line with the Hindutva ideology of the BJP and its ideologues in the Sangh Parivar who wish to rewrite India's history by erasing all vestiges of India's syncretic and pluralistic past. The present revisionist madness in India is in line with David Zions' theoretical model wherein a state invents fictitious past to strengthen a false ideological narrative which is not amenable to any reason or rationality. India being a classical revisionist state is in a vice-like grip of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) cultural apartheid campaign. The ruling BJP party and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi are the political front of the vile Hindutva creed that through a Nazi-like militant cadre known as the RSS is muzzling dissent and muscling out the cultural heterogeneity of India, a land once known for its diversity and Nehruvian secularism.

It is said that the BJP's electoral successes and the stridency of the Hindutva narrative are moving hand in glove with people buying into the xenophobic narrative. Hindutva is different from Hinduism which is a belief system just like other faiths and other ancient tribal denominations. What fear could the Hindu faith, professed by 79.8 per cent of the Indian population, have from 14.2 per cent Muslims, 2.3 per cent Christians, 1.6 per cent Sikhs, 0.7 per cent Buddhists, 0.4 per cent Jains and 0.7 per cent animists/tribal denominations? The answer might lie in Hindutva ideologues' misanthropy vis a vis other faiths as enshrined in the teachings of their ideologues like Savarkar, Hedgewar, and Golwalkar. According to Mohan Guruswamy, the Indian government has an agenda to rewrite Indian history and complete the project begun by a professor from Allahabad University, Dr Murlu Manohar Joshi. Badri Narayan has explained his ideas on cultural homogenization of India through saffronization of lower-caste Hindus. Dalits, the traditional target of Hindu caste misanthropy along with Muslims, are being coerced as well as co-opted through inducements to merge their cultural identity into Hinduism.

The Muslim Rashtriya Manch (MRM) is being propped up as a component of the RSS, using sectarianism as a tool to sow division within the Muslim community. The Dalits, who according to Christophe Jaffrelot are being treated worse than cows, are also being forced to be part of RSS Shakkas (ideological and military training camps) through terror and inducements. RSS leaders like Acharya Giriraj Kishore are on record having said that, "the life of one cow is more valuable than five Dalits", showing how Hindutva looks down upon all other cultures and faiths as sub-human creeds deserving of extermination. The extermination strategy of Hindutva votaries manifests itself in the shape of the Ghar Wapsi campaign wherein people professing other religions are urged to adopt Hindu names and cultural practices. The discriminatory Citizen Amendment Act

is a concrete manifestation of Hindutva exclusivism as it brazenly excludes Muslims from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan from the Indian citizenship scheme.

Why this implacable wave of irrational historical revisionism and illogical religiosity has not been resisted by the mainstream Indian population that was once weaned on the ideals of Gandhi and Nehru is a question worth pondering by sociologists and behavioural psychologists. Why are Rama and Krishna being touted as indigenous heroes while the descendants of Babar are being reviled as foreigners? According to Sumanta Banerjee, the above irrationality is rooted in the fear and hatred among the Indian middle class that views Muslims as invaders who had persecuted Hindus in the past. This subterranean hate psychosis is aggravated by the historical revisionism of Hindutva stalwarts like Golwalkar who had defined the Indian nation as "Hindu race united together by common traditions, Hindu culture and Hindu language-based on Sanskrit". Leaders like Modi have cashed in on that hate by selling Hindu nationalism to paranoid Hindu middle classes that even condone the 2000 Muslim deaths in the Gujarat riots in 2002 under the watch of then CM Narendra Modi. Now the same Modi has ratcheted up the Hindutva madness several notches up. A social media storm was stirred by the RSS extremists in India based on inflammatory accusations of Hindu-Muslim riots leading to riots in Leicester UK. According to Peter Soulsby, mayor of Leicester, the incendiary tweets on social media had stirred up the tensions between two communities. Eighty per cent of the 200,000 misleading geo-tagged social media tweets were traced to India which claimed that Hindu sites were being attacked by the Muslims. Online users in Leicester had complained in the past of an increasing frequency of fake news and disinformation campaigns from India through social media platforms stoking unrest in an otherwise peaceful city. The beans were spilled by a Dalit rights based group 'Equality Lab' that revealed that the "nationalistic, Islamophobic, and casteist disinformation" was being spread from India through Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram under the direct patronage of the BJP government's propaganda machinery.

Social media was used to weaponize Hindutva against minorities even as far away as the UK. The local UK chapter of the RSS began in 1966 under the name 'Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh' (HSS); it has now expanded to 60 branches which are peddling hate narratives with slogans like, "We are Indians not South Asians". In the US too the LA Times has reported that Hindutva organizations are ratcheting up communal tensions. According to a TRT World report, the reach and influence of Hindutva groups is being facilitated in the garb of charity groups in the US. This poisonous religion-based extremism is being spread in the US, UK, Africa, and Australia by RSS affiliates as the world benignly looks away. The million dollar question that begs an answer is whether such crass misanthropy is permitted just because India is a big country offering commercial advantages and strategic leverage to the world powers. The world must wake up to the threats that this religious nationalism – riding on the

Elections in Israel

MARWAN BISHARA

Cruelty has become Israel's national sport. Indeed, "Israel's politics is crueler than most", according to Benjamin Netanyahu. He should know; he's the champ. Cruelty comes in two strands: political vitriol and racist violence. Both flare up like fireworks with each election season, which comes as often as spring or summer these days.

It is no surprise then, that as the November 1 election approached, the fifth in four years, the country's political discourse turned poisonous. Where Israel's racist leaders fall short on political disagreement, they make up for it in personal insults and character assassination. "Scum of the human race", "pathological liar", "assassin", and "fascist" are some of the milder language animating Israel's electoral spectacle. Even accusations of Nazism and anti-Semitism have been hurled again and again by fanatics from the religious and secular camps. It is these types of accusations the Netanyahu camp whipped up in the mid-1990s that led to the assassination of then Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin for daring to advance the peace process without a clear Jewish majority in the Knesset. Crude racism against the Palestinians is as certain to accompany the election season as winter cold and summer heat.

But there is an exception to the rule – if or when Palestinians betray their conscience in return for table crumbs; these "good Arabs" are appreciated like the house slave, Stephen Warren, in Quentin Taran-

tino's film Django Unchained. Cruel violence is likewise predictable during election season as we have witnessed in the past. In a ritualistic projection of machoism and bravado, Israel has bombarded the besieged Gaza, invaded and re-invaded Palestinian towns and refugee camps in the occupied West Bank, killed and imprisoned thousands of Palestinian civilians, destroyed countless homes, and terrorised an entire people under the pretext of combatting terrorism. And so, a year after Netanyahu's minions took over from him, their coalition government has proved just as bad, if not worse. Naftali Bennett and Avigdor Lieberman, who in the past served as Netanyahu's chiefs of staff, Gideon Sa'ar, who was his cabinet secretary, and Yair Lapid and Benny Gantz, who were ministers in his cabinet, have repeated Netanyahu's crimes and follies in the occupied Palestinian territories.

The apples do not fall far from the tree. Their government bombarded Gaza, reinvaded West Bank cities, expanded illegal settlements and blocked all paths to a negotiated settlement. The 'moderate' Gantz, who bragged about flattening whole residential neighbourhoods in Gaza when he was the military chief of staff, was at it again in 2021, overseeing more devastation, this time as Israeli minister of defence. Most recently, he nominated an illegal settler as the new military chief of staff. If this is moderation, why not vote straight for extremism; it is at least authentic!

Excerpted: 'Israel's farcical elections and fictional democracy'.