

# DAWN



## *Editorials for the Month of July 2016*

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## Afghan refugees

AMIDST rising hostility towards Afghan refugees by elements in the state apparatus and sections of the wider population, the government has once again deferred a final decision on the status of Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

The background to the latest six-month extension in the validity of the 1.5m Proof of Origin cards of Afghan refugees here is dispiriting.

Last year, the federal government assembled a draft Comprehensive Policy on Voluntary Repatriation and Management of Afghan Nationals Beyond 2015, which, according to the UNHCR, recommended extending the validity of PoR cards until December 2017.

But cabinet approval was left pending, so when the PoR cards expired last December, the prime minister used his executive authority in January of this year to grant a six-month extension.

Six months later, with the prime minister convalescing in the UK and cabinet approval still pending, a further extension has been granted to PoR cardholders until the end of the year.

Meanwhile, Pak-Afghan relations have plummeted and the political mood domestically has soured on Afghan refugees, leaving their status more tentative than ever.

To be clear, forced repatriation — sending refugees back to Afghanistan without their consent — is not an option for Pakistan. That would not only violate the moral responsibilities of the state, but also likely fall foul of our international commitments.

With integrating the refugees into Pakistan resisted by too many influential quarters and third-country resettlement not a realistic option either, the focus must turn to what the UNHCR itself states is the preferred option for refugees generally: voluntary repatriation.

But the voluntary repatriation process has effectively stalled, likely because of a combination of security fears inside Afghanistan, lack of job opportunities there and the costs of repatriation.

In the first four months of this year, fewer than 3,500 PoR cardholders opted to return to Afghanistan.

Last year, a little over 58,000 PoR cardholders returned home. Reflecting the need to change incentives, the UNHCR announced earlier this week an increase in the assistance package for refugees voluntarily returning to Afghanistan.

Perhaps the next six months will also provide the time and space for the federal cabinet to approve the government's draft policy — surely, ad hoc arrangements are no longer desirable or feasible when it comes to managing the issue of Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

Immediately, however, the government and the sensible among the political class need to fight against the rising tide of anti-Afghan sentiment inside Pakistan.

To condemn an entire class of people, as some hawkish elements here have wantonly and disgracefully done in recent weeks, as criminals and terrorist sympathisers is to take the country further down the path of isolation.

Moreover, Pakistan and Afghanistan have a great deal of challenges to confront in the year or two ahead — and few of those challenges can be dealt with by either country alone. Humaneness and the national interest must go hand in hand.

## Karachi rain havoc

TWO days of rainfall brought much misery to the hapless residents of Karachi. Though Karachi is often dubbed a metropolis and a megacity, it is shocking to see how a few millimetres of rainfall can paralyse this city of millions.

The scenario witnessed on Tuesday and Wednesday was a familiar one that citizens of the city have experienced innumerable times.

As the rain began to fall, streets and roads started to flood, electricity supply was suspended (in some cases for over 24 hours) while chaos was witnessed on almost all the main arteries as commuters tried to pass through unnavigable roads.

At least six deaths were reported in rain-related incidents. Citizens would be well within their rights to ask why their city must descend into chaos every time a few millimetres of rain falls — especially when other cities across the world that receive more rainfall are able to control urban flooding.

The reasons for Karachi's rain-related woes are numerous, but the main ones are bad planning and administrative neglect.



This week's thunderstorms were not entirely unexpected; in fact, the weatherman had issued warnings in advance.

However, as is the norm in this country, officialdom's performance is usually a reflection of the phrase 'all talk, and very little action'.

For example, the Sindh chief minister said that Rs476m had been released for de-silting the city's 30 drains.

Yet, as residents of Karachi would have witnessed, the 'de-silting' in many parts consists of taking out garbage from the storm drains — and dumping it right beside the nullahs.

It does not take a civil engineer to figure out that if solid waste is dumped next to a drain, instead of being disposed of properly, rainwater will carry it right back, choking the drain and exacerbating urban flooding.

In fact, it seems that all of Karachi is floating on a sea of garbage, with mountains of stinking, putrid solid waste spread across the city.

Sadly, the rain havoc and the lack of proper solid waste disposal are but by-products of administrative neglect — the provincial government, it seems, is not concerned with cleaning up this city and tending to its civic needs.

If the Sindh government were at all sympathetic to Karachi's plight, this city would have a responsive local government in place, one that would be able to deftly handle civic problems.

## CII's existence

IN a welcome development this week, the Senate Functional Committee on Human Rights took strong note of the anti-women stance of the Council of Islamic Ideology.

Holding the body responsible for the rise in violence against women, it called for the CII to be disbanded. It also urged the government to pass the Anti-Honour Killings Bill, 2015, and ensure 'honour' crimes were made un-compoundable offences.

The committee's recommendations come in the aftermath of the CII's proposed 'model' for a women's protection bill according to which errant wives can be 'lightly' beaten by their husbands.

Although it is known to flood the airwaves with distorted interpretations of religious and cultural norms, the CII's recommendations are not constitutionally binding. In a democratic polity, legislators must ensure laws impacting women are passed through parliamentary consensus.

Given the adequate constitutional provisions equipped to enact laws in accordance with religious tenets, the CII's rulings are unnecessary, especially in the context of women.

As the Senate committee observed, the CII is no longer constitutionally bound to send reports to parliament for legislation — its final report was filed in 1997.

It also suggested the CII's Rs100m annual allocation be redirected to the National Commission for the Status of Women. Considering the CII's litany of 'advisories', most of them humiliating to women, this is a useful suggestion.

Just to recap its anti-women rulings: it ruled DNA tests were not acceptable as primary evidence in rape cases; then, it campaigned to lower the marriage age to 12 and nine for boys and girls; and its latest 'bill' prohibits the mixing of genders in schools, hospitals and offices.

Crucially, the upper house's low tolerance for the CII serves as an example for provincial legislatures, especially that of KP.

It should know better than to invite CII recommendations on pending legislation to protect women. That said, it remains to be seen if the Senate committee's bold questioning of the CII's validity will embolden the national parliament to disband this body.

## Denial of PML-N forward bloc

IT may be the oldest rule in politics: a denial is usually a sign that something may be afoot. Interior Minister Nisar Ali Khan's denial that there is a forward bloc in the making in the PML-N parliamentary caucus or that an in-house change is being considered, ie the PML-N may be seeking to replace the prime minister, is an indication at least of how insistent speculation has become in recent days.

The interior minister is no political neophyte — denials or rejection of political rumours by him even during the course of an informal chat with reporters, is likely to draw much attention.

Perhaps Chaudhry Nisar felt emboldened by inside information he may have on the imminent return of the prime minister. Those agitating for change or pushing their

demands within the PML-N are unlikely to create a party crisis when preparations are being made for Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's return from surgery abroad.

What is clear, however, is that the PML-N leadership has badly mismanaged the party's parliamentarians.

The budget session was an indication of a crisis brewing when the PML-N regularly struggled to maintain quorum in the National Assembly.

Rumours were rife that the party's legislators from central and south Punjab were unhappy with the government's agriculture policy and were seeking greater focus — and, inevitably, more resources — from the federal government.

It may have also been the case that with the PML-N leadership, and the Sharif family itself, under siege over the revelations in the Panama Papers, disaffected party MNAs sensed an opportunity to have their concerns addressed. But the immediate issues cannot hide longer-term and wider problems.

The tone set at the very top of the PML-N is one of exclusion and condescension towards party rank and file.

Mr Sharif is famously averse to meeting his party legislators and only seems to grant access at a time of political trouble or danger.

Consider how the prime minister reacted in the days after the Panama Papers became public: he was seen travelling around the country to party events and meeting legislators after a significant while.

That attitude of the prime minister also appears to have affected his inner circle of advisers and family. Be it Finance Minister Ishaq Dar or first daughter Maryam Nawaz, the focus has been more on the political fight over the Panama Papers since Mr Sharif left for London than addressing matters of governance.

Inside parliament, the budget session demonstrated the little interest cabinet members themselves take in the workings of parliament. That attitude must change. Not because it affects the PML-N, but because it affects how the country is being governed and how the institutions of democracy are run.

Perhaps the urgency the PML-N is showing in countering rumours of rifts within the party could be extended to the business of governing.

## Power pricing

THE recent decision by the Economic Coordination Committee to grant unusual advantages to RLNG power plants in their power purchase agreements reflects the costs of poor governance in the power sector.

Because the power sector is riddled with problems, such as the circular debt, poor recoveries (in spite of some improvement in the outgoing year) and frequent policy changes, future investors require high levels of protection before acquiring stakes.

This puts the government in a situation where investment in future capacity has to be mobilised with massive price inducements coupled with guarantees and protections that effectively transfer all risk to the government.

The net result is a rise in the price, nibbling away at whatever gains are made from switching to cheaper fuels.

Examples of this are numerous. The upfront coal tariff was revised upward precisely to accommodate the additional price of the country risk that the Chinese investor wanted. Likewise with the upfront solar tariff, where Pakistan offers one of the highest tariffs in the world.

The upfront LNG tariff also had to be revised shortly after being announced. In the latter case, reading between the lines it seems that it was uncertainty regarding LNG supply and future pricing that drove investor concern.

Now we hear that sweeping guarantees have been assured to RLNG power plants, which ironically are being set up in the public-sector domain with a view to being transferred to private investors eventually, in the matter of fuel supply and pricing.

There is little doubt that the ultimate cost of these assurances will eventually land up in the tariff. The government's power policy in 2013 was to bring down the cost of power generation into single digits by 2017, and some headway has been made towards this goal.

But it has come at a grinding pace, primarily because market forces are playing a very limited role in arranging new capacity.

The state alone cannot carry the burden of reducing this price by its own powers of negotiation, especially when its negotiating position is hampered by a lack of investor interest and enduring weaknesses in the power-sector governance regime.

Rather than continuing to price in the risks and lure investors through guarantees and price inducements, the government ought to have advanced power-sector reforms with more conviction.

That is the surest route to bring down the price of power as well as to improve efficiencies.

## Billboard ban

THE fight against billboards in Karachi is not yet over, despite the welcome absence of visual cacophony on some city streets.

Last month, the Supreme Court had ordered that the law against commercialisation of public amenity spaces — which include roads, footpaths, bridges etc — be upheld and that billboards installed under any licence or lease on public spaces and properties in the city be taken down latest by June 30.

The three-member bench had also ordered that amendments be made to relevant by-laws in order to safeguard citizens' rights.

For the beleaguered residents of Karachi who have helplessly watched the city's parks and thoroughfares fall prey to the naked greed of the civic authorities who make fortunes from outdoor advertising sales, the directive was a much-needed and welcome intervention.

The elite, in their capacity as advertisers, also share responsibility for the destruction of the city's built environment. The unsightly jungle of billboards on the cityscape poses several hazards; one of these was brought home on Wednesday when a huge hoarding collapsed on shanty homes during the rains.

But naked greed does not give up so easily. The court's order has only been implemented partially, that too on some of the arteries of the city, whereas other routes continue to sport multiple hoardings.

Moreover, even in the case of the hoardings that have been removed, their infrastructure is still very much intact.

Clearly, interested parties are biding their time for the 'storm' to pass after which it will be business as usual.

The Supreme Court must not allow these mercenary elements — who can be found in all the district municipal corporations and the cantonment boards, particularly those in the city's more affluent south — to pull wool over its eyes.

It must reiterate that the law be upheld so that hoardings — whether on public or private buildings — do not violate citizens' rights in any way and that every vestige of their display infrastructure is removed so as to comprehensively do away with this menace.

## **‘Good’ and ‘bad’ militants again?**

DECIPHERING the foreign policy and national security statements of the PML-N government is becoming an increasingly odd affair. There is the known, but unacknowledged, gap between the priorities and preferences of the political government and the military leadership.

There is also the pressure that the civilian foreign policy advisers of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif appear to be under from the military to publicly articulate and defend policies that are crafted in GHQ.

But vastly experienced civilians, like foreign affairs adviser Sartaj Aziz, appear to be adding to the confusion rather than trying to find a consistent and defensible line on vital issues.

Consider Mr Aziz's latest pronouncement: citing fears about so-called blowback from militant groups, the foreign affairs adviser appeared to defend the state's lack of action against sanctuaries of the Haqqani network and the Afghan Taliban on Pakistani soil.

While Mr Aziz made familiar reference to the state's decision that action against militant groups should follow some kind of sequence, he appeared to suggest that decisions have yet to be made regarding "how far" and on "what scale" the state will eventually act against some groups.

Has Mr Aziz backtracked on the state's explicit commitment that there will no longer be a policy of differentiating between so-called good and bad Taliban?

That would be an alarming and astonishing reversal made all the worse by the casual — almost careless — manner in which the remarks were given. Perhaps Mr Aziz was hoping to pre-empt pressure from a delegation of US senators visiting Pakistan.

But the foreign adviser's remarks to a wire agency require immediate and emphatic clarification — does the state of Pakistan adhere to a policy of not differentiating between so-called good and bad Taliban?

And, if so, what is the strategy to progressively act against all militant groups that have found sanctuary on or are operating from Pakistani soil?

Surely, the remarks of a senior official such as Mr Aziz cannot simply be dismissed as a misstatement or a bungled attempt at explaining existing policy.

The existing policy — reinforced time and again since the start of Operation Zarb-i-Azb and enshrined in the National Action Plan — is to treat all militant groups as a problem that must be solved by eventual elimination.

That policy clarity matters, even if operational and strategic choices so far do not immediately reflect that.

To reiterate, the security of Pakistan and the region lies in an unambiguous policy against militancy and terrorism in all their manifestations by all countries.

Pakistan's pledge to try and deliver the Afghan Taliban to the negotiating table should not be allowed to become a reason to differentiate between militant groups over the long term.

What threatens the stability of Afghanistan inevitably threatens the stability of Pakistan — the security establishment and political leadership here cannot lapse into old, damaging habits of denial and obfuscation.

## Tragedy in Dhaka

ON Friday night, the mass casualty terror strike that many cities globally have experienced in the recent past came to the Bangladeshi capital, Dhaka. At least 20 people have been confirmed killed in the terrorist attack, claimed by the militant Islamic State group, targeting a restaurant in Gulshan, an upmarket locality of Dhaka popular with foreigners. Though most victims were foreigners, Bangladeshis were also killed in the assault. It has been reported that most victims of the outrage were hacked to death. Observers had long been warning of a growing militancy problem in Bangladesh; the restaurant attack painfully brings home the fact that religiously inspired militants in the country are well organised to stage large-scale atrocities.

Though this particular attack stands out because of the high death toll and the brutality involved, killings believed to have been carried out by such militants have been occurring with some frequency in Bangladesh over the past few years. More than a dozen people have been hacked to death since April, while over the last three years, 50



victims have been murdered. Liberal and secular Bangladeshis have been among the victims, as have Christians, Buddhists, Hindus and Ahmadis. Sufi and Shia Muslims have also not been spared. In fact, earlier on Friday, a Hindu man in the western part of the country was hacked to death. The Awami League-led government's response has been a mix of denial — saying IS has no presence in Bangladesh — and knee-jerk reactions — such as cracking down on the opposition. For example, the ban on the opposition Jamaat-i-Islami, and the hangings of its leaders in connection with the tragic events of 1971, have been said to have pushed some opposition supporters and sympathisers towards extremism. Moreover, a round-up of suspects by police last month was said to have disproportionately focused on opposition activists. To prevent further terrorist atrocities, Bangladesh must clamp down on the infrastructure of militancy; the local supporters of IS, and similar groups, must be investigated and prosecuted if found guilty. However, crushing all dissent — including that of non-violent opposition groups — will be counterproductive and violate democratic norms. Dhaka must be clear in its counterterrorism strategy: those planning and supporting acts of terrorism must be targeted, not any and all opposition groups. A myopic strategy to lump together political opponents with suspected militants will fail to tame the beast of militancy in the country.

## Ramazan in Xinjiang

THERE is some controversy surrounding reports that the Chinese government enforces strictures upon those who observe Islamic rituals, especially during the month of Ramazan, in Xinjiang, a region with a Uighur Muslim majority. Reports of tensions in the sensitive region between Uighurs and Han Chinese are not new. However, with the advent of Ramazan, some news stories had stated that the authorities in Xinjiang had banned government servants and students in the region from fasting and entering mosques. The Chinese government responded by saying that it does not force Muslim citizens not to fast. Interestingly, Pakistan has also become involved in this controversy; media reports state that a team of Pakistani clerics, led by an official of the religious affairs ministry, has just returned from Xinjiang. Invited by Beijing, members of the team claimed that Muslims in Xinjiang faced no restrictions. While the issue is a serious one, we must ask if it is the responsibility of our worthy clerics to ascertain the truth of the matter. The trip seems, as per descriptions, to have been a junket, and the clerics would have only observed what their government handlers wanted them to see.

Religious freedom is a right that should be inviolable, and Muslims in China and elsewhere, as well as members of any other faith, should have complete freedom to live according to their religious beliefs. However, it is definitely not the responsibility of our religious affairs ministry to certify levels of religious freedom in foreign lands. If anything, the state should be working overtime to ensure that all citizens — especially members



of the minority communities — do not face any harassment while practising their respective faiths in Pakistan. Clearly, the high levels of sectarianism, bigotry, and anti-minority attitudes in our society suggest that much work needs to be done to rectify matters. Rather than enjoy foreign junkets and joyrides, our state functionaries should focus their energies on creating an atmosphere of confessional harmony and tolerance in Pakistan.

## US senators' visit

IS it a repair job or recognition that an important relationship needs to be reset somehow amidst continuing and serious differences? Several US senators and the special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan shuttled between Islamabad and Rawalpindi over the weekend, but only the most perfunctory of details have been offered so far by Pakistani officials. Perhaps once the Senate delegation returns to the US, there will be some comment from the American side that may shed more light on what was discussed and what, if anything, was agreed. What can be assumed, from the identities of the visitors, is that Pakistan is trying to reach out to friendly or even businesslike elements in the US Congress, a centre of power that has become progressively more hostile towards Pakistan and its policy concerns. That is a sensible approach, given the hurdles Congress can create when it comes to a stable and relatively normal bilateral relationship between Pakistan and the US.

Yet, is Pakistan prepared to answer the questions that the outside world is asking of it? In terms of policy, the US once again appears to be seeing greater benefit in engaging India and a greater need to keep Afghanistan on side. Of Pakistan, the questions are familiar, though noticeably more insistent. Essentially, is Pakistan willing to take on anti-Afghan and anti-India militant groups that have found sanctuary and operate on Pakistani soil? When it comes to the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network, the space that Pakistan had while dialogue between the Afghan government and the Taliban appeared imminent is gone. While Pakistan can rightly point to the drone strike that killed Taliban leader Akhtar Mansour as the moment talks were undeniably scuttled, nothing has come to light since to suggest that Pakistan was near convincing the Taliban leader of the necessity and inevitability of talks. The US policy in Afghanistan may be muddled, but is the perceived Pakistani policy defensible? Foreign affairs adviser Sartaj Aziz's willingness to differentiate between the so-called good Taliban and bad Taliban will not have gone unnoticed; and it is telling that the Foreign Office has made no effort to clarify the adviser's statement.

Consider also that the backtracking on Pakistan's approach internally towards militancy can have repercussions for what the country's national security architects are trying to achieve vis-à-vis Afghanistan. Border management and ending anti-Pakistan sanctuaries in Afghanistan are essential to regional stability and Pakistan is correct to

highlight those issues in talks with whoever has influence in Kabul with the Afghan government. But how sympathetic and inclined to cooperate will Afghanistan or the outside world really be without clarity of policy and firmness of action by Pakistan?

## Death by drone

FOLLOWING President Obama's pledge in May 2013 to introduce more transparency and oversight in drone strikes, the White House has finally released figures pertaining to casualties caused by such attacks. Between Jan 20, 2009 and Dec 31, 2015, according to the report, there were 473 drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen, Libya and Somalia which killed between 64 to 116 civilians while fatalities of combatants numbered between 2,372 to 2,581. These figures are certain to be vigorously contested by independent organisations tracking data from drone strikes. Reprieve, for one, has scathingly described the report as a "cooked book of numbers". The figures are also at considerable variance from those collated by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, according to which drones have killed between 492 and 1,100 civilians since 2002 in the aforementioned countries. Amnesty International, however, has welcomed the move to release the statistics as a step in the right direction.

While one can agree this is at least a much-needed starting point, in that it is a tacit admission of the number of occasions when 'precision technology' has gone horribly wrong, it falls far short of real transparency even within the constraints of confidentiality warranted by conflict situations. We remain in the dark as to what are the criteria whereby 'civilians' and 'militants' are distinguished from each other. There is clearly no uniform standard — this can be extrapolated from the fact that although the estimate of the minimum total deaths in drone strikes tabulated by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism is very similar to that disclosed by the US, their respective estimates of civilians within that vary greatly. And the lack of detail such as names, circumstances, etc sustains a deeper problem — perhaps the very foundational one — which is the dehumanisation of the 'enemy'. This was starkly illustrated after a drone strike on the Pak-Afghan border in January 2015 inadvertently killed Dr Warren Weinstein, an American citizen held hostage by militants since 2011. Obama's expression of "profound regret" was the first time that a civilian fatality in a drone strike had elicited such a response from the US. The irony was unmistakable. It must also be said that the argument for more transparency — within reason — in times of war, remains valid even where the Pakistan Army is actively party to the conflict such as in Operation Zarb-i-Azb. Information that is unverifiable and tightly controlled by the military is perceived more as propaganda than fact.

## Growing cash economy

OF all the trends that define the fiscal year just ended, the growth of currency in circulation is one of the most important. For years it has been a feature of our economy that somewhere around 20pc of all fresh money creation in any given fiscal year stayed in circulation as cash and the rest went into bank deposits. That proportion has been rising for the last two years, but, in the outgoing fiscal year, it registered a spike unheard of in recent decades. More than 66pc of fresh money creation stayed in circulation as cash, showing a reversal of the ratio. The trend is troubling because it shows a massive defection of economic activity towards informal and 'black' sectors of the economy. In addition, it throws up large challenges for the conduct of policy — both fiscal and monetary — and creates a powerful latent reservoir of undetected funds that can play havoc with the economy if they return as sources of speculative demand, like they did in the latter years of the Musharraf regime.

Along with this, we have seen similar spikes in the property markets as well as stocks, the two traditional destinations for black money. It is not a leap of faith to see a connection. What adds to the sense of foreboding that this trend evokes is that government borrowing from the banking system also increased instead of coming down. So out of the Rs1tr in fresh money creation till mid-June, if only Rs355bn landed up as deposits, how did the banks finance the government's borrowing of Rs1.18tr in the fiscal year just concluded? The answer, according to the recently released third quarterly report of the State Bank, is that the central bank "stepped up its liquidity injections", meaning the funds were provided by the State Bank itself. The trend is a disturbing one and merits far greater attention than it has been getting thus far — especially from the State Bank itself.

## Monsoon mayhem

ALMOST on cue, an unforeseen cloudburst above Chitral has devastated a district, left some 30 people dead at the time of writing, and served up a grim reminder on the eve of Eid that in spite of years of ferocious monsoon weather, Pakistan remains as vulnerable as it ever was to the ravages of climate.

No lessons have been learnt, no preparations have been made, and no capacity to forecast such events has been added.

It has been repeated all through the past few years: the preparation for extreme weather events begins with improving our early warning capability, followed by building a meaningful response plan.

Yet villagers in Ursoon were caught completely unawares when a cloudburst unleashed flash floods, wiping away their hamlet and loved ones, while Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan were hit by ferocious winds and rains that caused widespread damage.

The same episode was witnessed last year, when a cloudburst caused torrential rains which triggered multiple simultaneous glacial lake outburst floods that left the whole of Chitral district devastated. That episode ought to have taught us that Pakistan is susceptible to weather patterns coming from the west as well as the east, and that our weather radars — outdated as they are — that face westward are either not operating or unable to track the development of adverse weather patterns above the mountains.

Currently, the majority of our weather radars are pointed eastward to monitor the arrival of monsoon clouds, which only show up on the radars once they are above Rajasthan. Most floods receive less than 48 hours of warning, woefully inadequate for our times and requirements.

If there is one thing that successive monsoon seasons since 2010 have taught us, it is that each season brings extreme weather events in some shape or form, from the west or the east, and sometimes also from the Arabian sea in the south.

Over these years, it is unfortunate that our weather forecasting system has remained outdated and dilapidated.

The Met office, meanwhile, has been left standing on the door of the government asking for the funds to upgrade the equipment so as to be able to warn the country with more accuracy and better lead times once storm clouds begin to gather. But given the priorities of our government — roads, bridges and highways — the funds have not been released throughout this time period, nor has the government taken any serious note of climate-related vulnerabilities over almost half a decade.

The result is that we find ourselves flying blind into yet another monsoon season, which predictably enough, has opened with ferocious rains causing the loss of life and widespread damage one more time.

What will it take for the government to wake up from its fevered obsession with visible infrastructure projects to realise that strengthening the country's defences against the ravages of weather is also an overriding priority?

## Baghdad massacre

EVEN by Iraq's volatile standards, Sunday's truck bombing targeting a market in Baghdad was massive.

Various news sources are quoting different death tolls, from 165 to over 200. The scale of the atrocity can be judged by the fact that Iraqi officials have said it will take a number of days to recover the bodies.

The militant Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for the slaughter, which occurred in the capital's Karrada area, packed with families busy shopping for Eid.

While violence in Syria, and more recently Turkey, has grabbed the headlines, the fact is that Iraq has been experiencing a wave of mass-casualty militant attacks.

A rough tally of acts of terrorism in various Iraqi cities since January shows that hundreds have been mowed down — in cafes; in markets; during religious events etc.

The Iraqi government may have wrested Fallujah from the clutches of IS, but clearly, the militant outfit remains a lethal threat to the safety of this shattered country's population.

Thirteen years since the American invasion toppled strongman Saddam Hussein, Iraq remains a broken state, torn apart by sectarian and ethnic differences, suffering from inept governance, and preyed upon by militant gangs such as IS.

While the liberation of Fallujah was a breakthrough, significant ground remains to be covered until the country is cleansed of the menace of terrorism. Of course, freeing the city of Mosul — still under the militants' control — remains a major goal.

But in the longer term, the defeat of IS requires coordinated action in Syria and Iraq, the two states that have suffered the most because of the militant group.

For this to happen, the civil war in Syria needs to be wound down, which means the external backers of the government and the rebels, respectively, must make greater efforts to convince their Syrian clients to cease fire and head for the negotiating table.

Treating the IS problem in Syria and Iraq separately will not deliver effective results.

This is effectively one theatre and, unless coordinated action is taken, once driven out of one country, the militants can sneak across the border and easily find refuge and regroup.

A greater effort is required to dismantle IS's infrastructure, including its finances. For the security of the region and beyond, local and foreign actors must work with the governments in Damascus and Baghdad on a joint counterterrorism strategy to uproot IS and rebuild this devastated region.

## Illegal organ transplants

THE spectre of illegal organ transplants is once again rearing its head in the country, threatening to reverse the gains made on this front in the last few years.

The National Assembly Standing Committee on Human Rights in its meeting on Saturday took up the issue based on anecdotal evidence from cases that they had personally encountered.

Hard data is difficult to come by ever since the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act 2010 made the sale of organs illegal. But in the absence of strong implementation of the law — particularly difficult given the nonexistence of a functioning federal oversight body — the activity seems to be making a comeback.

The unethical aspect of this trade is very obvious, for it is leveraged on exploiting the poor who are induced by their circumstances into selling their organs — often finding out later that they have instead paid a high price for ignorance.

Aside from usually not even receiving the amount they are promised, they are saddled with unforeseen expenses and work-related consequences in case of post-surgery complications.

In a business where profit is the bottom line, they are left to fend for themselves because by then they are of little use to those who put them in that predicament. That is not to deny there is a dire need for organ donations: every year, an estimated 50,000 people in Pakistan die of end-stage organ failure, including 15,000 who succumb to kidney failure. That vastly outnumbers those who receive legal transplants.

As per information given to the standing committee by an official from Islamabad's Human Organ Transplant Authority, nearly 5,000 patients have undergone kidney transplants and 300 have received liver transplants since 2010, while bone marrow and cornea transplant recipients number 325 and 80, respectively.

Nevertheless, that cannot negate the argument that organs must be ethically sourced, either from living related donors or deceased donors. In the case of the latter, the state can, and should, do far more to promote the concept.

# Terror in the kingdom

Perhaps there could be no greater sign of the dilemma confronting the Muslim world than the terrorist attack on one of the holiest sanctuaries of Islam.

The militants' message was clear as Saudi Arabia was rocked by three separate, but apparently coordinated, acts of terrorism on Monday, the most shocking being the suicide blast outside the Prophet's (PBUH) mosque in Madina, in which four security personnel were killed as they tried to prevent the bomber from entering the precincts. In other incidents, a Shia mosque in the eastern town of Qatif was targeted; details are sketchy about that incident, just as there was initial confusion about the Madina blast.

Earlier in the day, a suicide bomber had struck outside the US consulate in Jeddah. News reports suggest the suspect was a Pakistani expatriate.

The three bombings — with the Madina attack invoking particular revulsion — show that the militants can strike with relative ease across the kingdom. No claims have been made, but the militant Islamic State group is suspected of involvement.

Of course, there is a precedent for such violence in Saudi Arabia's recent history: in 1979, hundreds of Salafi militants — ideologically on the same wavelength as IS — occupied the Masjid al-Haram in Makkah.

That shocking episode ended in a bloody operation as security forces flushed out the militants from the grand mosque.

Clearly, the spirit of the grand mosque assailants has lived on and been reanimated in the form of the modern storm troopers of Islamist militancy.

Monday's terrorist attacks point to a significant militancy problem in Saudi Arabia. As per official Saudi figures, there have been 26 terrorist attacks over the past two years.

The kingdom had also battled a violent Al Qaeda insurgency over a decade ago. Whether it is IS today or Al Qaeda 12 years ago, or the grand mosque assailants even before that, the fact is that militant movements find willing recruits from within Saudi society.

This is, of course, because for decades, the House of Saud has looked the other way as hard-line clerics have preached a narrow sectarian and confrontational ideology.

For example, clerics in the kingdom have urged young Saudis to go abroad — to Syria, to Iraq — to fight other people's wars, while the state has allegedly backed militant



fighters battling Damascus. Now these radical elements are turning their guns on internal targets.

Pakistan knows the folly of turning a blind eye to radicalism. The Saudis must act now to reverse course, or else considering the deep roots of puritanical elements within the kingdom, more chaos may well be in the pipeline.

## Edhi ‘rediscovered’

Not many Pakistanis inspire the kind of unmitigated respect and affection among their compatriots than does Abdul Sattar Edhi.

The sentiment cuts across divisions of creed, class and ethnicity — because over the course of his charity work, this octogenarian has proved time and again that all that has ever mattered to him is our common humanity, the thread that binds us together as one single race.

See: Edhi, the public's obstinately humble hero

One wishes that this remarkable man's life, his spirit of service to mankind, his selflessness and humility, would also inspire some introspection among Pakistan's ruling elite.

But that is a vain hope in a country where security-centric policies take priority over people's welfare and political point-scoring trumps long-term investment in human capital.

Of late, as rumours about Mr Edhi's failing health started making the rounds, a procession of 'notables', from Pervez Rashid and Rehman Malik to Imran Khan and Aseefa Bhutto Zardari, have been treading the path to Mr Edhi's bedside to wish him a speedy recovery, and score a photo-op.

Even the army chief has sent flowers. The values that Mr Edhi embodies, and the vast gulf that separates them from those of Pakistan's pampered and self-serving elite were never more powerfully highlighted than when former president Asif Zardari offered to have him flown abroad for treatment. The philanthropist declined the offer, indicating that he preferred to receive treatment in his own country, among his own people.

Through several decades of Pakistan's tumultuous history, Abdul Sattar Edhi has been the one constant: providing relief to traumatised survivors of catastrophes both natural



and manmade, picking up the wounded, tenderly bathing bodies too mutilated for even family members to handle.

His charitable work, under the umbrella of the gargantuan Edhi Foundation, has also taken him on disaster relief missions elsewhere in the world.

Finally, it seems 'officialdom' is attempting to own him, but the whiff of self-promotion behind the solicitousness is unmistakable.

For the common man however, Mr Edhi has long been a national treasure, that rarest of individuals who shunned a comfortable existence and instead dedicated himself to creating something akin to a welfare net for the nation's poor.

His philanthropic services, including shelters for the needy, orphaned, mentally disabled etc, and his vast, countrywide ambulance network, cater to those whom the state has historically neglected.

Bringing a measure of comfort to these disenfranchised people has been the purpose of his life.

Whether he is ever awarded the Nobel Peace Prize or not, something that a number of his compatriots have been tirelessly campaigning for, he has already won Pakistan's heart, many times over.

## **Animals in captivity**

IT'S a dog's life for most animals in Pakistan. Recently, a number of particularly distressing reports have emerged about creatures in captivity in this country.

One pertains to Kavaan the elephant, whose pitiable plight has been recounted earlier as well in the press.

The pachyderm has been languishing at Islamabad's Marghazar zoo, alone since its mate died four years ago, and where his enclosure offers scarce relief from the searing heat.

Kavaan has been manifesting classic signs of stress through aggressive behaviour.

Negligence at the zoo was also evident in the recent deaths of an ostrich and a zebra.

Last week, there was a horrific incident at the Karachi zoo where the last surviving puma cub, one of three born two months ago, was found mauled by adult pumas in an adjacent enclosure. These were the first cubs born to big cats at the zoo since 2011.

The concept of keeping animals in captivity is an ancient one; archeological remains in Egypt suggest it dates back to 3500BC. But like many other hoary ideas — such as slavery for instance — this one too may be coming full circle, especially with the concept of animal rights gaining currency.

The 140-year-old Buenos Aires zoo has announced it is closing its doors, and the famous Barnum and Bailey circus recently retired its performing elephants. If the welfare of animals is considered, there is good reason to think along such lines.

Research in the UK has shown that 54pc of elephants manifest behavioural problems, while lions spend 48pc of their time pacing, a repetitive action triggered by the boredom of confinement.

Granted, people in Pakistan have precious few avenues for entertainment. Plus, there is the educational value that zoos are believed to offer.

However, unless we can set aside sufficient funds to maintain captive animals in conditions that do not place them under intolerable strain, drive them insane, or cause their death, there is no benefit to be gleaned from such cruelty.

## Internet governance

THE government has moved one step closer to sealing the deal on legalising the blocking or removal of online content with the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Bill, 2015 — a step that is largely symbolic, as the blocking of the internet by the PTA has been an ongoing process, despite the regulatory body's lack of clear rules to do so. During a recent subcommittee meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on Information Technology, senators and stakeholders discussed Section 34 of the bill, which deals with new powers being granted to the PTA to regulate online content. It is unfortunate that the discussion drifted from this most critical aspect of the PECB, as mass online censorship — from banning Baloch separatist websites to blocking YouTube — has been one of the most misguided contributions of the government to internet governance.

Thousands of experts have written about the distributed nature of the internet that makes censorship a futile, costly effort. Even the PTA, in a response to the Supreme Court last year over petitions seeking a ban on objectionable websites, stated it was helpless in blocking all websites, and that such a process would lead to “deterioration in

internet quality in terms of speed and availability". When even the regulator has submitted reports stating it is playing a game of whack-a-mole when it comes to internet censorship, why is it being further empowered to continue such a pointless job and prevent free speech and access to information, contravening the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights of which Pakistan is a signatory?

Such an approach suggests we are actively moving towards a regressive approach to internet regulation such as that taken by China and Saudi Arabia, where citizens are left coming up with new and inventive means to bypass state censorship. Both China and Saudi Arabia have taken technological and institutional steps to censor the internet that go beyond law and now extend to societal norms, business practices and other areas. Similarly in Pakistan, we may see censorship extend beyond the government's desire to control information to negatively impact society — eg increased instances of online blasphemy accusations used — as seen in the real world — not only to censor information on the internet, but also to target minority groups and ordinary citizens. This is not a hypothetical situation but one grounded in the fact that multiple cases of blasphemy charges based on internet content have already occurred in the last two years. The PECB has no answer to the impact of the internet censorship it will bring into law. It is unfortunate that a lack of internet penetration and thereby an understanding of the internet among the general population and leaders leave the country vulnerable to new policies that once passed will be hard to reverse and damaging to the very people who approved them.

## Moment to contemplate

AS the Muslim world celebrates Eidul Fitr, many in spots around the globe have been deprived of the joys of the festival, due mainly to war and terrorism. In fact, it appears as if most of the Muslim world is in perpetual crisis. Vicious civil wars rage in Syria and Yemen, with significant external involvement, while militants struck the 'usual' targets (Iraq, Afghanistan) as well as newer locations (Madina, Istanbul, Dhaka) in the run-up to Eid. Violent militant gangs acting in the name of Islam — IS, Al Qaeda, TTP etc — have shed much innocent blood, as the silent majority in Muslim lands struggles to formulate a coherent response to this hijacking of their faith. Moreover, militants have struck targets in non-Muslim locales — Paris, Brussels, Orlando — feeding Islamophobia that leads to hate crimes against peaceful Muslims. Indeed, today the social fabric of the Muslim world appears in tatters, with societies fragmented.

There are complex issues that fuel militancy and extremism in Muslim lands. For one, there are genuine grievances regarding the mistreatment of Muslims; the disputes of Palestine and Kashmir have festered for decades without resolution, while Muslims in countries like Myanmar face appalling levels of discrimination. But internally, Muslim

ruling elites have failed their polities. In far too many Muslim states, strongmen lord it over the people; ruling families and cliques live in luxury as the masses toil in an atmosphere of physical and economic insecurity. It is the lack of social, political and economic justice in the Muslim world that pushes some amongst the disenchanting into the arms of extremism, with those questioning democracy and promoting atavistic systems, such as IS's so-called caliphate, appearing to have all the answers. The reality of what the militants peddle is, of course, much darker, but far too many are giving ear to their appeals. Moreover, geopolitical tussles within the Muslim world are major sources of instability. So where does the process of renewal start? Perhaps the key lies with Muslim rulers; instead of preserving the status quo, they must promote participatory governance, and the Muslim state must be one which delivers social, economic and political justice without prejudice to all that live within its borders. Unless Muslim elites come to these realisations, the militant tide, and the chaos it brings, will be impossible to confront. Though it is time for celebration, Muslim states and societies need to consider how best to confront the monster of militancy.

## Ice factory deaths

TO work in a factory in Pakistan, as do millions of its citizens, is to play Russian roulette with your life. Earlier this week, at least six of them lost the gamble, the latest in a long line of victims of industrial accidents in this country. This time the fatalities resulted from a gas explosion at an ice factory in Karachi which was so powerful that it caused the multi-storey structure to collapse. The bodies of the dead were retrieved from the rubble with the help of an excavator, and a police official quoted doctors at the hospital where the deceased were taken as saying that they had died from ammonia inhalation. Residents of the area had to be temporarily relocated because of the gas leak. The predictable tableau that follows such events played out: the chief minister 'took notice', expressed sorrow and sought a report from the relevant departments.

More than likely, that report — if it ever sees the light of day — will gather dust in some government office. Judging by earlier industrial accidents, no changes will be effected in the Dickensian work conditions under which exploited millions eke out a living. One wonders what it will take for the government to address this issue. After all, aside from the Factories Act 1934 as well as other legislation pertaining to worker safety on its statute books, Pakistan has also ratified 36 ILO provisions. Lack of awareness among workers of their rights, as well as the fact that more than 70pc of them are in the informal sector also makes it easier for factory owners to overlook provisions for their safety and violate building codes and equipment standards. The shambolic state of the labour inspection system — shockingly inadequate and riddled with corruption — allows managements to get away with criminal negligence. There have been far too many

deaths on this count, and the state must do its duty by those who produce the goods and services that contribute to the economy.

## Education money

WITH 24 million out-of-school children, the provision of quality education is a Herculean task for provincial governments. That said, last month, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar reiterated the PML-N's pledge of allotting 4pc of GDP to education by 2018. More money will not reform the sector unless there is proper planning. Furthermore, increasing education spending to 4pc is next to impossible to achieve for the PML-N without adding another whopping Rs485bn to up the allocation, according to Alif Ailaan. The current annual allocation of Rs790bn represents 2.83pc of GDP. It would make more sense at this time not to allow development budgets to lapse — most allocations have increased threefold since 2010, such as in KP and Balochistan. In reality, lofty pledges keep the education conversation on the international community's radar, thus appeasing foreign donors. As an education activist observed: "The government must decide whether education is a commitment it really means, or one it puts in its speeches and manifestos to avoid embarrassment when in international capitals. This is as doable as the Orange Metro Line, or the acquisition of F-16s."

Therefore, the solution lies in planned utilisation and oversight within the budgetary time frame. Consider Sindh's dismal indicators despite its high spending on education. For instance, it has the largest overall decrease in learning scores among the provinces — scores attributed to poor quality teaching and low enrolment and retention rates — despite its Rs176bn budget. The province spends at least 12 times as much on teachers' salaries as it did in 2010. With 50pc of girls out of primary school and 61pc of all girls in this province unable to even attend school, the government must act — even if it means removing bribe-seeking officials patronised by politicians. After decades of donor assistance, 40pc of teachers in Sindh remain 'ghost' employees; evident that more money fuels more corruption. Provinces must not overspend on salaries at the expense of needs such as maintaining schools and providing stipends to girls to retain larger numbers. On another note, without an annual national level data collection regime of learning assessments, it is challenging to monitor education outcomes — the last federal assessment was in 2014. This leaves the task to non-governmental advocacy groups, recommending reforms to increase girls' education, enrolment and retention rates. For equitable education, political interest is necessary — more money without evaluating where it is needed to address gaps won't solve the crisis.

## Bahrain unrest

THE small Gulf kingdom of Bahrain is once again simmering due to sectarian polarisation and political deadlock. Though the situation has been far from normal ever since a pro-democracy movement was crushed by the state in 2011 with Saudi help, recent events have put the ruling Al Khalifa on a collision course with the popular opposition. Tensions increased after the state revoked the citizenship of Ayatollah Shaikh Isa Qassim, Bahrain's top Shia cleric, in June. This has led to street protests in the island kingdom, which has a Shia majority. According to the UN, 250 Bahrainis have been stripped of their citizenship for "alleged disloyalty to the kingdom", a euphemism for political opposition. The Al Khalifa have also cracked down on Al Wefaq, the main opposition group, while prominent government critics such as Shaikh Ali Salman and Nabeel Rajab, have faced arrest and imprisonment.

The rulers have accused Iran of stoking tensions in Bahrain. While senior figures within the Iranian establishment have reacted sharply to the revocation of Ayatollah Qassim's nationality, the fact is that Bahrain's opposition movement is indigenous and non-sectarian, demanding civil rights and participatory government. It is also true that after the 2011 protests, the ruling family has shown very little tolerance for dissent, whether it comes from Shia or Sunni citizens. But as the opposition is mostly Shia and the royal family Sunni, the political deadlock is given an ugly sectarian colour. Unfortunately, intolerance of dissent and iron-fisted rule are hallmarks of most Arab regimes, particularly the sheikhdoms of the Gulf. Bahrain seems to be following the Saudi example, as the Al Saud have kept a tight lid on their own Shia opposition in the Eastern Province. Instead of using force and intimidation, moderate elements within the Bahraini royal family, such as the crown prince, should reach out to the opposition and introduce political reforms. Should they fail to do this and intensify their crackdown, the possibility of further instability on the island is very likely.

## Taking forward Edhi's mission

ABDUL Sattar Edhi is no more. There is sorrow at his passing and sadness at the pain his 92-year-old body may have suffered in his final weeks.

Greater, however, is the feeling of pride that he was from among us, if not quite one of us in the way he lived his life.

Edhi: icon, humanitarian, Pakistani – ours. To the end, he put simplicity first and others always before himself.

His organs were to be donated, but age and frailty meant only the cornea could be transplanted.

Perhaps that final act will draw attention to the desperate shortage of healthy organs being donated for transplant in the country – an issue that only comes to the fore tangentially through grim tales about the kidney transplant racket.

If only a few of the many who are mourning Edhi's passing were to emulate his example, many more could live longer lives or have use of faculties they otherwise would not.

It would also be a tremendous boon to the other iconic institution where Edhi was hospitalised: the SIUT, which heroically continues in circumstances of adversity.

The greatest tribute that could be given to one of Pakistan's most famous sons would, of course, be to ensure that Edhi's humanitarian network continues its tremendous work.

Edhi's family and associates have already indicated that they will endeavour to carry on with the man's mission, but the impact his passing could have should not be underestimated.

Charitable donations – likely to spike in the days ahead – may drift downwards eventually.

The Edhi model has been replicated by others and the organisation will surely struggle to emulate the impact he had on donors, large and small.

Perhaps the state, as represented by the highest of officials who attended Edhi's funeral prayers yesterday, could play a role – but with the immediate caveat that it find a way to mobilise funds transparently for the Edhi network without interfering in its management and day-to-day affairs.

The Edhi network, after all, came into being because of acute state failure to look after the dispossessed, the rejected and the scorned.

His mission should not become hostage to the very failures that created the need for it in the first place.

Reflect also on the values that Edhi embodied.

His worldview was ecumenical and increasingly antithetical to the country he grew old in.



Not for Edhi was the religion, caste, ethnicity or citizenship of those he served. All were equal and all equally welcome.

If Edhi's values were superimposed on the Pakistani state, Pakistan would indisputably be closer to the vision of its founding father, Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

A state that discriminates is a country that attacks itself. Edhi was a man who showed a country what is possible when humanity is put first.

Truly, no other has come close since.

## Confronting property rackets

A NEW government initiative to document the fair market value of property transactions may be a move in the right direction, but given the realities of the monster it is trying to grapple with, it is likely to end in grief. The initiative requires some important legislative changes before it can truly become effective under the auspices of the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan. Until then, a temporary mechanism has been created by the State Bank to use the services of a panel of private-sector evaluators to vet the fair market value of all transactions of immoveable property in the country.

In principle, the idea is sound. Considering how widespread the practice of misdeclaration of property transactions is, the sector has become a primary destination for all types of 'black money'. The practice is so prevalent that banks have developed elaborate mechanisms to extend housing loans without revealing the real price at which the transaction has been carried out. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the declared value of property transactions can be as low as 20pc of the fair market price. The practice weakens efforts to document the economy and undermines the state's revenue efforts by shrinking stamp duty collection to less than one-fifth of what it should be, besides providing a safe haven for other tax-evaded wealth, and fuelling a damaging speculative bubble in property markets that cause large tracts of land to be eaten up by housing society developers while starving the poor of adequate land to meet their housing needs. In short, the practice has deep roots in our society, and very large rackets thrive on top of it.

This is the main reason why the effort to get the SECP to determine the fair market price of property transactions is likely to prove insufficient for the task at hand. Efforts to tackle massive rackets usually fail when they are pegged on the powers of a single institution. Last year's tax on the bank transactions of non-filers is a classic example. The SECP has been unable to check the powers of the large brokers in that other racket and destination of choice for black money: the stock market. When it moved aggressively against powerful brokers, it found itself engulfed in legal challenges and



internal feuding that paralysed its own operation. Even today, its chair is struggling against a legal challenge which has murky roots in disgruntled quarters within the business community. Pitting such an entity against the power of the largest racketeers in the country — property developers — is unlikely to yield better results. It would be better to put a little more muscle behind this effort, and work more diligently towards preventing the misuse of government land for the benefit of private property developers, as well as strengthening the rights of the poor to protect them from arbitrary evictions.

## SBP's assessment

YET another quarterly report from the State Bank of Pakistan, released recently, has lauded the government's performance without delving much below the surface. From a bird's eye view, the economy can certainly be said to have grown. The State Bank finds the growth rate "particularly encouraging" in the industrial sector. But read on, and the grounds for encouragement begin to diminish. The growth owed itself largely to "booming construction", "improved gas availability to fertiliser plants" and "strong demand for automobiles". A slightly closer look reveals the patchy nature of this growth. The demand for automobiles was spurred by the Apna Rozgar Scheme of the Punjab government. The boom in construction came from large amounts of public funds being poured into brick-and-mortar development schemes. And fertiliser supply may have improved, but offtakes declined by 13pc from July to March. "The pressure on income may have discouraged growers from using farm inputs to an extent," say the authors of the report.

So how exactly do they find the growth in industry to be "particularly encouraging", if government spending is the major source of demand for two of the drivers, and the third is producing a commodity whose offtake actually declined because its main consumers had "pressure on income"? In the case of fertiliser, one of the biggest contributors to this year's growth in industrial output, the report says "higher production led to all-time high inventories with firms". This is a rather absurd outcome, and far from being a source of encouragement, should have been flagged by the authors as problematic. Even in services, the report tries to smile past the absurdities in the details to the sunshine in the aggregate numbers. Yes, there was an aggregate growth of 5.7pc in the sector, meeting its target. But considering a large share of this is attributed to an increase in government salaries, one can hardly call it grounds for encouragement. In reserves, the report notes an increase of import coverage to four months, but cryptically adds that "[i]mproving the fundamentals, therefore, has become an important element to ensure that the good momentum continues". Where do the authors see the room for "improving the fundamentals"? It seems that falling oil prices have been counter-balanced by an increase in non-oil imports, with China accounting for 33pc of this. One wonders what mixed blessings this implies for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

## Cricket challenge

THE upcoming four-Test series against England poses numerous challenges for Pakistan, both on and off the field. The principal challenge is that it is the first series on English soil since the nasty spot-fixing scam in 2010, and it puts one of the main culprits, Mohammad Amir, under the spotlight as he prepares to return to Test cricket. The game itself may well take a back seat as the media, critics and fans focus their attention on Amir in anticipation of a hostile reception when he takes the field for the first Test at Lord's on July 14. England captain Alastair Cook has not minced his words about the return of the tainted player; his recent targeting of Amir is seen as a ploy to unnerve the young pacer prior to the high-profile contest.

For Pakistan, however, there is much to worry about on other fronts as well. Throughout the past year, the team's pendulum has swung violently from good to dismal, especially in the limited-over games. Surely, the performances in Tests lend some equilibrium. However, a majority of their Test wins have come in the UAE, the adopted 'home' of Pakistan cricket since 2009, and few are convinced about the team's ability in 'away' contests. For Misbah-ul-Haq too, despite his enviable record as skipper, the England series is seen as a litmus test of his leadership and skill. For long, the affable right-hander has been accused of winning only at 'home'. For that reason, a win in England will burnish his credentials. Besides, the series is going to be a watershed for players such as Wahab Riaz, Mohammad Hafeez, Rahat Ali, Sohail Khan and Zulfiqar Babar who have been around for a while without having attained the status of match-winners. On the other hand, England is a formidable side in world cricket today and will be looking to avenge their two series losses in the UAE against Misbah's men. They are hungrier for more wins after defeating Sri Lanka and will surely come out with all guns blazing.

## Kashmir unrest

ONCE again, India-held Kashmir is in the grip of chaos. At least 30 people have died in the violence triggered by the killing last Friday of Burhan Wani, a young separatist militant, by the Indian army.

More bloodshed can be expected unless the security forces refrain from resorting to brute force that has included the use of live ammunition to disperse angry protesters.

It is a familiar scenario, with the usual condemnations emanating from Kashmiri leaders. But the latter can do little unless they come together to try and revive international interest in the Kashmir dispute by persistently pointing to the injustices inflicted on the

ordinary public, and highlighting the Kashmir dilemma as a historical one that needs a political solution.

The key issue is that New Delhi has always looked upon the Kashmir unrest as a law and order problem. Its position that Pakistan fuels dissent within IHK is untenable, for while Islamabad did, in the past, actively encourage Kashmiri separatist groups, today it offers moral and diplomatic support.

Indeed, the current disaffection with New Delhi's rule is very much an indigenous Kashmiri phenomenon, while India's harsh methods are helping create a new generation of militants, such as the late Burhan Wani.

For nearly three decades, India's approach has failed to pacify Kashmir.

Now new ideas are needed that can help bring peace to this troubled region. In Srinagar, the BJP rules in a coalition government with the PDP.

Considering that the BJP is in power both in Srinagar and at the centre, surely the party has a good idea of the Kashmiris' suffering and can advise New Delhi accordingly.

Sadly, the ruling party, instead of working on ways to calm tensions, is focusing on plans such as diluting or removing Article 370 of the Indian constitution, which recognises Kashmir's special status.

Such a move would only fuel further disaffection in the region. A wiser approach is needed — one which would involve discussing Kashmir in the Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue with Islamabad, whenever that resumes — with the Kashmiris themselves taking an active part in the conversation.

A peaceful solution acceptable to Pakistan, India and the people of Kashmir should be the goal arrived at on the negotiating table.

Meanwhile, it is unfortunate that the reaction on this side of the fence to the violence in IHK has been lukewarm.

While there has been condemnation by the Foreign Office, in Azad Kashmir, where leaders never tire of pledging their allegiance to the 'Kashmir cause', parties are too busy electioneering to raise a voice against injustices across the LoC.

Mainstream politicians, too, are barely moved. For example, Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari's comments about the Sharif-Modi friendship harming Kashmir's cause appear to be aimed more at the PPP's rivals than at raising genuine concern about the violence in IHK.

Pakistan's position on Kashmir will only be undermined if leaders here resort to such politicking.

## Nato support for Kabul

THE more significant news from the Nato summit in Warsaw for Afghanistan and Pakistan has been overshadowed by predictably aggressive comments by President Ashraf Ghani and a bristling response by the Foreign Office here.

Mr Ghani's criticism was likely an attempt to keep the pressure on Pakistan and deflect from the hard questions being asked of his own government's performance.

Sensibly, the Foreign Office's response emphasised the need for cooperative solutions, and other institutions have not sparked a new war of words between the two countries.

The more important news from the Warsaw summit, however, was the pledge by Nato countries to continue partially funding the Afghan security forces and maintain foreign troops in Afghanistan to advise and train Afghan security personnel.

The Afghan military and police are now funded through 2020 and the Nato troop commitment is a signal that the world is not looking to cut and run from Afghanistan, but committed to stabilising the country and making it peaceful.

The Nato decision follows President Barack Obama's announcement that he will not be further slashing US troops numbers in Afghanistan — a sensible decision in the circumstances.

For Pakistan, the outside world's fresh commitments to Afghanistan should come as good news.

While the security establishment has always been wary of a long-term, massive, foreign military presence in Afghanistan, there is also recognition that the Afghan state and security forces are not in a position to prevent state collapse, nor can they by themselves ensure that the Afghan Taliban do not emerge as a dominant power inside Afghanistan.

Despite international and Kabul's misgivings about Pakistan's intentions, it is not in our interests for the Afghan state to collapse or the Taliban to take over.

What the Nato and US commitments amount to is a fresh opportunity for Pakistan to facilitate a dialogue between the warring Afghan sides.

A fully funded Afghan security network means the Taliban have to once again adjust their expectations: with foreign troops commitments and money until at least 2020, the Afghan state is unlikely to be defeated by the Taliban on the battlefield.

Mr Ghani and his government ought to recognise the opportunity: there is a new Taliban leadership and Pakistan is still publicly committed to facilitating dialogue and wants the Afghan government to be stable. Now is the time for conversation, not harsh words.

## Edhi's funeral

AT his passing, Abdul Sattar Edhi no doubt deserved the highest honours that a grateful nation could bestow upon him.

However, there was a profound irony in the way the funeral of Pakistan's beloved humanitarian was managed — an irony as lacerating as the barbed wire that separated the haves from the have-nots at the prayer service on the occasion.

Held at Karachi's National Stadium, amidst stringent security by armed forces personnel and the Rangers, the first state funeral since 28 years was a virtually all-military affair.

The casket, draped in the country's flag, was brought to the venue in a military jeep; a 19-gun salute was presented. There were VVIPs aplenty, including the president, all three chiefs of the armed services, the Sindh governor and the chief ministers of Sindh and Punjab, aside from representatives of various political and religious parties, who attended the prayer.

Following the service, Sindh Regiment infantrymen bore the casket aloft before placing it on a gun carriage that carried it to the gravesite in Edhi Village off the Super Highway.

In short, there was much pomp and circumstance. Sadly though, what was conspicuously, spectacularly missing was the awam; the general public, those with no titles or means, who were Edhi's real constituency.

They were held back from the occasion by the demands of security, of privilege, of protocol — all those considerations that meant not a whit to the man who was being honoured.

In fact, through his life's work, Edhi had fought against this very sense of entitlement that has left our society so deeply inequitable, and which made his charitable endeavours all the more invaluable.

Had officialdom understood better the qualities he stood for, it would have ensured that even at a state funeral the 'ordinary' citizens of Pakistan would have been front and centre, and with the Edhi Foundation volunteers rather than the security officials in charge.

A people's funeral would have been a far more fitting tribute to the quintessential man of the people.

## Response to APS planner's killing

THE killing of the alleged mastermind of the APS Peshawar attack is an important marker in the ongoing fight against militancy.

Both for operational and psychological reasons, the elimination of an individual determined to have wreaked the most terrible havoc inside Pakistan is a counterterrorism victory that must be welcomed in the context of this country's security.

Yet, the circumstances of the killing of Umar Mansour, aka Umar Naray, in a US drone strike in Afghanistan, have met with a surprisingly muted response from Islamabad/Rawalpindi — and Kabul.

Pakistani officials, who publicly oppose drone strikes in this country and reacted with displeasure to the May attack that killed Mullah Akhtar Mansour in Balochistan, may be wary of publicly celebrating drone strikes anywhere, no matter the tactical benefit to Pakistan.

Meanwhile, Kabul, which cheers drone strikes in Pakistan that target the Afghan Taliban, is perhaps uncomfortable about publicly acknowledging that anti-Pakistan militants are operating from Afghan soil. The game of shadows helps no one — but secretive states pursuing policies in contradiction to what they tell their own public dictate it.

While this game is an old one and there's no sign of a rethink by any of the three players involved — Pakistan, Afghanistan and the US — its absurdities should be reiterated.

The US decision to eliminate Mullah Mansour, even as its diplomats were trying to resume a stalled dialogue process with him, was a decision that cheered Kabul and irked Islamabad/Rawalpindi. Immediately, a familiar, though officially denied, damage-limitation exercise began.

Umar Mansour was put on a US terrorist watch list and, as Pakistan pressed for Afghan or US action against the banned TTP in eastern Afghanistan, some reassurances were likely extended.

Now, less than two months after Mullah Mansour's death, Umar Mansour has been killed in similar fashion. Would it not be better if the three countries spoke more candidly to one another? All sides know the drone capabilities of the Americans and each side needs something from the other.

Surely, the key must be for Pakistan and Afghanistan to recognise the limitations of their dual policies.

The deaths of Mullah Mansour and Umar Mansour have occurred in circumstances where the two countries find themselves at odds with one another rather than working trilaterally to benefit diplomacy and the policies of all countries.

There is also the danger that an expanding, secretive drone war poses. Already we've seen the extension of that war to Balochistan, while for Kabul the benefits of helping Pakistan's fight against the TTP are accruing to the US.

Drone wars may appear to be the least-worst option to mutually suspicious state powers, but what they represent are a continuing missed opportunity. Pakistan, Afghanistan and the US can't escape the circumstances of their own creation.

## Call for military rule

THE creators of the banner that has appeared almost overnight in several cities across the country, clearly wear their heart on their sleeve. Their message: Gen Raheel Sharif should seize power in Pakistan.

The banners are the latest iteration of increasingly urgent entreaties addressed to the army chief by a little known Punjab-based party called Move On Pakistan — rather ironically named, considering it seeks to take Pakistan back to what, in lucid moments, are considered some of the darkest chapters in its history.

An earlier poster by this group that emerged in February asked him to reconsider his retirement, due in November, and “help in eradicating terrorism and corruption”.

Not surprisingly, the new banner has set off fevered speculation in a country where, for historical reasons, the doffing of the chief's uniform has always provided fertile ground for conjecture.



Those behind the current campaign told this newspaper there is no need for a political government and that their goal is to have Gen Sharif lead a technocrat government after he imposes martial law.

Given that the general has already — emphatically and unequivocally — stated in January that he does not believe in extensions and will retire as scheduled on Nov 30, there should be no speculation on this score.

Granted, if he does hang up his uniform on the due date, he will be the first army chief to have done so in two decades.

However, Gen Sharif — who has rightly earned praise for leading Operation Zarb-i-Azb so ably — has on more than one occasion shown that he is a man of his word.

To suggest any wavering on his part would be to cast aspersions on his character. Indeed, the institution he heads should be incensed at this naked attempt to drag it into politics when it already has its hands full with defending the country from enemies within and without.

For its part, the government must investigate the hidden hand behind these blatant efforts to invite the dismantling of a representative democracy that, however flawed, is the only long-term solution in the oft-mentioned ‘national interest’.

There is also a strong case for Move On Pakistan’s credentials to be reviewed by the ECP.

Surely, there is no rationale for a party calling for an unaccountable system like martial law to be registered with the body overseeing the electoral process. Meanwhile, we hold the general to his word.



## Trigger-happy police

ONCE again, the disproportionate use of force by police officers was in evidence after a young man, Abrar-ul-Hasan, was shot during a car chase in Karachi on Sunday.

Even for a city rife with crime, the events leading up to the tragedy were surreal.

The incident involved an alleged fraudster set to swindle the 21-year old student of his mobile phone advertised online.

Pretending to examine it, the 'buyer' attempted to drive away without paying when the victim tried to get into the speeding car to retrieve his phone.

Witnessing this escapade but unable to ascertain the facts, counterterrorism police in the vicinity gave chase, firing indiscriminately which resulted in Abrar-ul-Hasan being fatally shot.

This is not the only incident where the police have shot at apparently unarmed persons without assessing the situation.

As with other such incidents, this episode, too, underscores the need for institutional police reform, especially where the indiscriminate use of force is concerned. After all, police are responsible for maintaining law and order and protecting citizen's rights — and not turning their weapons on unarmed people.

Was this the only way to stop the car? Instead of pumping 20 bullets into the body of the vehicle, could the policemen not have shot at the tyres instead?

After this incident, four counterterrorism police have been charged with murder. As an elite police force tasked with controlling terrorism, street crime and robberies do not come under their purview.

Regrettably, 'trigger-happy' has become a common prefix in references to well-armed special law-enforcement units — so much so that even regular policing interventions are feared by citizens.

Recall in 2011 when Rangers personnel shot an unarmed man in a Karachi park. Those responsible for resorting to the use of brute force must be penalised because they work against the mandate of policing that is to serve and protect.

Reducing crime with preventive policing (eg targeted patrolling and intelligence-sharing) is more effective than the use of force that only alienates citizens.

## Edhi's successors

ABDUL Sattar Edhi's legacy must be cherished, perpetuated and jealously guarded. Indeed, what he has left behind is one of the world's largest and most well-organised charities run entirely on non-state donations.

He organised it from scratch and expanded it to dimensions that he himself could not have possibly imagined. Because he was true to the mission he had chosen for himself, Edhi was not concerned with what his detractors thought of him or how they tried to belittle him and his selfless service to humanity.

He continued to serve the poor, and that alone should be the sole concern of Edhi's successors. We are constrained to write these lines because his successor and son, Faisal, in a radio interview spoke of the difficulties the Edhi Welfare Foundation was facing and the possible decline in donations.

The Edhi scion especially referred to "extremists" and "capitalists" and to some clerics who often denounced his father in the strongest possible terms and did not hesitate to call him a non-believer. That is typical of those who are envious, but that is also how things are in this imperfect world.

Even the Quaid had his critics, but that did not deter him from pursuing his goal. His weapons were honesty and dedication to his mission. Thus the successors of both Jinnah and Abdul Sattar Edhi have had role models.

Overexposure to the media is a double-edged sword, especially for a charity organisation run on private donations.

In his BBC interview, Faisal Edhi spoke of things that will only be exploited by his critics and could render the foundation controversial. That would be a blow to Edhi's mission and to the poor of Pakistan for whom Edhi centres provide services which the state is unable to deliver.

Those running the Edhi Welfare Foundation should then shun the media, concentrate solely on their job and draw heart from the fact that the ordinary public has reposed trust in their organisation.

# The Chilcot inquiry

TODAY, large swathes of the Middle East are on fire, either torn apart by sectarian or ethnic fissures, or brutalised by militant Islamist groups seeking to remake the region in their own dark image.

While this chaos has partly been fuelled by bad governance and the unrepresentative rule of local strongmen, the role foreign powers have played in destabilising Arab states cannot be overlooked.

That is why the Iraq Inquiry, better known as the Chilcot report, which was released last week, is such a valuable document. Commissioned by the then British prime minister Gordon Brown in 2009, the inquiry has examined the run-up, conduct and aftermath of the 2003 Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in exhaustive detail.

This space is too limited to comment on all of Sir John Chilcot's and his team's findings, but perhaps one sentence best sums up the whole debacle: that the Anglo-American coalition "failed to achieve the goals it had set for a new Iraq". And what a spectacular, tragic failure it has been.

The George W. Bush-Tony Blair combine helped transform Iraq from an autocratic, though stable, state into a miserable, divided wreck of a nation, where thousands have been killed in the violence unleashed since 2003, where sectarian divisions, terrorism and corruption have become entrenched, to the detriment of the Iraqi people.

Many scholars and analysts had long been saying the things the Chilcot inquiry has established. So beyond introspection, what other lessons can we derive from it? Perhaps the most important lesson is that the West's 'civilising mission' — manifested in the form of regime change — is a disastrous geopolitical tool.

Sadly, the lessons of Iraq remain unlearned. We saw this in 2011, when Muammar Qadhafi was eliminated in Libya.

Today, Libya fares only marginally better than Iraq, mired as it is in factionalism, and where extremists have found safe haven.

Yet despite these disasters, many in Western and Arab capitals still have the appetite for encouraging regime change, especially if the regime to be changed is the one in Syria.

In Syria, Western states and their regional allies have not deployed their own troops in significant numbers, but have supported proxies — many of them linked to extremists — to topple Bashar al-Assad's regime.

In defence of their strategic ally, Russia and Iran have supported Damascus through their own proxies, or by giving the Syrian government crucial air cover.

All of these actions have prolonged the civil war, which has provided fertile ground for the rise of monsters such as IS, Al Nusra and others. Mr Assad is indeed a ruthless autocrat, as was Saddam Hussein before him in Iraq.

But should the ruthlessness of authoritarian regimes be a casus belli, paving the way for regime change and the destruction of nations? Perhaps this is what world leaders must ponder as they go through the Chilcot inquiry.

## PML-N vs PTI

FOR 48 days, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was abroad. For 48 days, the PML-N leadership left behind had to try and break the impasse over the Panama Papers. And all the PML-N leadership in Mr Sharif's absence has been able to provide the prime minister on his return is the advice that he turn up the heat on the PTI.

As reported in this newspaper yesterday, in meetings with his political aides on Tuesday, Mr Sharif was urged to take a tough line with the PTI.

Presumably, that would mean the prime minister continuing with his campaign-style rallies after the Panama leaks and before his heart surgery interrupted his plans, while unleashing his party members for aggressive political attacks on the person of Imran Khan and the PTI generally.

Certainly, it would be a terrible idea if Mr Sharif gives in to the advice of the hawks in his coterie. The negotiations over the Panama Papers judicial commission may have stalled, but it was always likely that the final decision would be taken by the party leaders themselves — such being the nature of politics here, especially when it comes to the fate of the prime ministership.

So, if Mr Sharif were to personally intervene and offer a sensible path forward, surely the parliamentary committee tasked with the job of drawing up the terms of reference for a judicial commission would be able to quickly conclude its work. While the PTI's unstated goal may be the ouster of the prime minister come what may, it is also the case that the PTI leadership has wanted a judicial commission to be formed.

The dispute, then, comes down to the opposition demand that the allegations against the prime minister be probed first versus the government's demand for a

comprehensive accountability process for all public figures against whom there are allegations of financial misconduct.

That is not an unbridgeable difference and sophisticated legal minds on both sides can surely work on an acceptable arrangement without compromising on the need for an authentic accountability process.

What would be impossible, however, is for all sides, especially the PML-N as the incumbent government, to ratchet up political tensions and then expect to reach a solution.

Mr Sharif is the single-most experienced political leader in the country today. His party is known for its aggressive politics. Now is the time for him to impose order, discipline and good sense on his party.

## Congressmen's fury

LIKE most legislatures in the democratic world, committee hearings are mostly turgid, wonkish affairs that attract virtually no public interest.

But when known Pakistan-bashers gathered in the US Congress for a joint subcommittee hearing provocatively titled 'Pakistan: Friend or Foe in the Fight against Terrorism?' there was certainly going to be a spectacle.

Yet, what transpired during the hour-long hearing was extraordinary even by the already low standards that could be expected from a cast of characters that usually chides, berates and threatens Pakistan.

Not only were there epithets casually uttered and incendiary allegations tossed around like irrefutable fact, the range of punitive measures discussed bordered on the pathological.

One of the so-called expert witnesses called to testify on Pakistan suggested a travel ban to the US for Pakistani citizens, including students.

Earlier in the session, a congressman made a number of wild accusations about militancy in Sindh. By the time a notorious Pakistan-bashing congressman spewed hate about Balochistan and the Pakistani state, the reasonable observer could have been forgiven for wondering if a collective madness had overcome the room.

To be sure, there are continuing and important questions to be asked of the Pakistani state's anti-militancy policy.

The army leadership has in the last week explicitly indicated that it will act against those using Pakistani soil for attacks inside Afghanistan, but that extraordinary commitment remains to be tested.

Yet, no sober, realistic or honest appraisal of what has transpired in Afghanistan over the past decade and a half can possibly lay the bulk of the blame for that country's continuing instability and insecurity at Pakistan's doorstep.

Indeed, when asked about his and the US government's support for Hamid Karzai as the post-Taliban leader of Afghanistan, former ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad offered a weak defence, citing the need for a Pakhtun leader in Afghanistan.

But few American officials would deny that the Karzai era proved to be hugely damaging for Afghanistan itself — the opportunity to build institutions and a somewhat viable state was lost to the preferences and choices of Mr Karzai who put self-interest first.

Moreover, no rational outside observer would suggest that the US has ever had a viable or realistic strategy in Afghanistan. No one should forget Gen Stanley McChrystal's infamous "We've got a government in a box, ready to roll in" boast.

The arguments over Afghanistan, what went wrong and who is to blame can be endless because they are mostly rooted in political and strategic preferences of those arguing.

What is undeniable, however, is that wild and vicious comments from the US Congress have the potential to stoke anti-Americanism here in Pakistan and make it significantly more difficult for reasonable voices on both sides to engage in healthy debate.

Democratic norms prevent calling for a ban on political speech, but perhaps sensible voices in the US can speak out with clarity on Pakistan right now.

## Fata administration

AS reported in this paper on Thursday, the army will now be monitoring schools and health centres in Fata. This arrangement will be in place as combat operations wind down in many parts of the tribal region.

Earlier, the KP governor had said the military could be brought in to monitor development projects in Fata because of the 'corruption' that had infiltrated these schemes.

Indeed, the military has done a commendable job in clearing most of the tribal areas of militants. But the new arrangement seems to go a step beyond, as the men in uniform have begun to visit schools and colleges; their oversight will reportedly continue for an "indefinite period".

Soldiers will also be collecting data on the attendance of teachers and students. It is evident that the local administration is still trying to find its feet, and is quite content to leave the running of local affairs to the military.

Unfortunately, not only does this fuel the perception of the military overstepping its mandate, it also raises questions of the duplication of duties by officials and soldiers.

Now that the rehabilitation and reconstruction phase is under way in the tribal areas, it is up to the civilian administration to take the lead, with the armed forces providing security back-up in sensitive areas — reprisal attacks by the militants are still likely, and the military will be needed to curtail these.

But civilian lethargy continues. We saw a similar dilemma after the Malakand region was cleared of extremist fighters; the military had done its job of neutralising the militants and wanted the local administration to take over; regrettably, the civilians themselves were too ill-prepared to resume their duties. They must realise that the involvement of the military in all sectors of governance, including health and education will only lead to negative vibes in a democratic set-up.

Those who oversee the affairs of the tribal areas must reconsider this arrangement.

Surely the proper functioning of schools and health facilities in Fata requires the input of area experts.

There are admittedly problems with these sectors, but unless local governance structures are revived and made functional, these can hardly be solved — and retreat from responsibility is certainly not an option.

There is much to do in Fata — families have to return, homes and schools have to be



rebuilt and access to health services restored. The local administration should awaken from its stupor and take charge.

## Protecting the young

THE Punjab Restriction on Employment of Children Ordinance, 2016, provides legal stimulus for ending child labour and puts new limits on the exploitation of adolescents between the ages of 15 and 18 as workers in “hazardous occupations”.

It aims to protect children and adolescents against “slavery ... trafficking, debt bondage and serfdom”.

It guards the young against forced labour, and, significantly in the current circumstances, against “forced or compulsory recruitment ... for use in armed conflicts”.

It bans “the use, procuring or offering of a child or adolescent for prostitution ... production of pornography or for pornographic performances” and “illicit activities, in particular the production and trafficking of drugs”.

Further, it regulates the work of adolescents in “occupations and processes” not considered hazardous. The list of hazardous professions can be added to, just as every law can be improved upon.

Promulgated on Wednesday, the new law is a continuation of some recent steps taken by the Shahbaz Sharif government to curb inhuman practices that the vulnerable young are subjected to.

In recent days, the chief minister has been quite active in his effort to clean up places such as infamous brick kilns, using both administrative and legal means in his duly publicised attempts to rescue the children employed at these bhattas.

The latest ordinance will over time draw suggestions for implementation. However, the new step indicates sustained movement in the right direction, which is going to draw applause from everyone, bar those who have been benefiting from the exploitative system in place for long.

The process needs to be accelerated and expanded into a full-scale campaign against malpractices and violation of rules by employers.

These violations are rampant since the government is not too keen to look inside a factory or any other workplace for evidence of wrong, illegal practices.

Apart from the law, there must be a will to give the workers, young and old, the respect and protection they deserve.

## Misbah's magic

MISBAH-UL-HAQ's brilliant century in the first Test against England on Thursday could not have come at a better time.

Making his maiden appearance in a Test in England, it was only befitting that the cricket veteran's distinguished career come full circle at Lord's — the home of the game — as he became the oldest player to have scored a century in the last 82 years.

In an era when Pakistan cricket has become synonymous with controversy and below-par performances, Misbah is one of a rare breed — his reluctance to hog the limelight and his serious approach to his responsibilities as captain of the Test team have earned him the respect of fans and critics alike.

Taking over the reins in 2010, soon after the Pakistan team had experienced its darkest hour with the infamous spot-fixing scam involving Mohammad Amir, Salman Butt and Mohammad Asif, Misbah proved a virtual saviour for the players, a leader with the right mix of skill and discipline.

It is little wonder then that while Pakistan continues to flounder in ODI and T20 cricket, Misbah's Test side is impressively listed as among the top three in world ICC rankings.

On Thursday, he yet again emerged as the man of crisis for Pakistan, taking his team out of the woods with an innings that had the stamp of class and authority.

Though in the twilight of his career, Misbah, who takes much pride in his fitness at the ripe old age of 42, demonstrated he was in fine form as he did press-ups on the field to celebrate his century before a packed house. By his own admission, his retirement may not be too distant an event now.

But with 2016 set to be the toughest year for Pakistan in decades as they face England, the West Indies, New Zealand and Australia within a span of six months, Misbah is determined to make his swansong a memorable one. Hopefully, the team under him will achieve many victories that will boost its credentials.

## Reforming the courts

SPEAKING at an event in Rawalpindi on Thursday, Lahore High Court Chief Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah raised a pertinent matter where judicial reform in Pakistan is concerned.

He highlighted the need to reform the courts — specifically the district-level judiciary, which he said was his “primary focus” — and to eliminate corruption from the bench. Justice Shah also spoke of the need to improve the competence of judges.

Anyone with a fair idea of Pakistan’s judicial system will agree with the importance of these remarks. To say Pakistan’s judicial system is barely hobbling along would not be incorrect. And while much discussion has been dedicated to matters related to the higher judiciary, especially the Supreme Court, it is the local courts which perhaps need the greatest reform, for it is these institutions the common litigant interacts with most often.

The fact that there are just over two million cases pending in our judicial system perhaps makes the strongest case for reform.

The judiciary is sometimes portrayed as a saviour which can address all the country’s woes. But as the learned judge pointed out in Rawalpindi, and as many commentators have highlighted, the judiciary must first set its own house in order so that it can dispense speedy and transparent, not to mention affordable, justice to litigants.

In this regard, judicial reform of the lower courts is essential. One major step to tackle the huge backlog of cases is to appoint more judges to the district and high courts. But this exercise should not merely be about filling in numbers; as Justice Shah pointed out, efforts must be made to improve the competence of the bench. Therefore, district-level judges need better training.

Not too long ago, ‘judicial activism’, as manifested by the Chaudhry court, was all the rage. While that style of jurisprudence may have had its advantages, what is most needed to truly change the way Pakistan’s justice system works is a grass-roots, dedicated reform of the judiciary, starting with the lower courts.

Honest, competent judges, in considerable numbers at the district courts, are arguably key to bringing about a much-needed change in the system. Along with a proactive bench, better trained lawyers and more capable prosecution departments, and investigators are other invaluable components of a justice system that delivers.

The judicial authorities in other provinces should also consider similar moves to reform the courts within their respective jurisdictions.

# Carnage in France, once again

TERROR has once again struck France, a country that has been bludgeoned by a wave of militant strikes since December 2014.

The date of the attack — July 14, the French national day — suggests a motive to strike at the heart of the identity of modern-day France.

The location — a well-known tourist spot, Nice — and the modus operandi — driving a 19-tonne truck into crowds of families and tourists — were meant to inflict maximum damage and sow the widest horror.

The identity of the killer, a French resident from Tunisia, suggests a now all-too-familiar source of violence inside France and parts of Western Europe.

What is not yet known is whether the suspect acted alone, a so-called lone-wolf attack by a disaffected individual with a petty crimes background, or if he was inspired by or coordinated with the militant Islamic State group.

Sadly, though perhaps not unsurprisingly, before the facts have been established, French President François Hollande has already vowed “real force and military action in Syria and Iraq”. France, it appears, will continue to suffer violence as its leaders struggle to understand the nature of the threat confronting the country today.

IS, whether or not it is directly responsible for the latest French atrocity, is a global menace. The colossal damage it has inflicted directly on Syria and Iraq and the violence it has sponsored or inspired in far-flung areas of the Muslim world render meaningless the claims in some Western quarters that there is an existential battle between the Western world and extremist Islam.

France has clearly suffered and in open societies the psychological impact of terror can be traumatising in ways perhaps not understood by denizens of countries more familiar with violence in their streets. Yet, it is difficult to understand how a response such as that by the French president can be helpful in the complex fight against IS.

After the horrific November 2015 Paris attacks, President Hollande made a similar vow to take the fight to IS in Syria and Iraq. IS did indeed claim the Paris attacks, but all the perpetrators were from the EU.

Surely, a two-pronged response is needed: domestically, for European countries to examine the causes for their own citizens turning against their countrymen; internationally, for a concerted response, including by the leading Muslim countries, in the fight against IS.

Anything less and the so-called clash of civilisations that the terrorists are hoping to trigger may inadvertently become a reality.

For Pakistan, still contending with its own terrorism and insurgency problems, there are no easy lessons from the Nice carnage.

IS has not made its presence felt inside Pakistan in a significant way yet; but as the French attacks demonstrate, there is much chaos that can be caused by even a few individuals. So, counterterrorism operations must continue, but counter-extremism should be taken up with vigour too.

## An abortive coup

TURKEY may have entered a turbulent and uncertain phase in its history, but until the events of this weekend there had appeared to be at least one certainty: the military had been returned to the barracks and the threat of a coup permanently eroded. The chaotic events of Friday evening, however, suggest that there are sizeable elements inside Turkey's military that still do not accept the constitutional authority of a legitimately elected government and that continue to believe it is their duty to protect the state from the people's elected representatives. If that threatened to create further instability in a country and region already convulsed by wars, terrorist violence and frightening sectarian rivalries, the response of the Turkish people, the full spectrum of its political class and the civilian apparatus of the state has been nothing short of historic. It was remarkable to witness a nation and polity divided come together immediately in defence of its democratic process — the need to defend the representative system being of more fundamental importance than any partisan view of a particular government.

The Turkish people and their political leaders have acted in a manner inspirational for many countries struggling with their own anti-democratic forces, but is President Recep Tayyip Erdogan willing to show the necessary humility and flexibility to protect the democracy that he is chief custodian of? A purge within the military may be inevitable and necessary, but there is more than a whiff of political machinations in the Turkish president's accusations against former ally and moderate cleric, Fethullah Gulen. Mr Erdogan has a reputation for seeing enemies everywhere and his authoritarian approach to ruling seems to only exacerbate his problems. Clearly, the people of Turkey want Mr Erdogan as their leader; surely there's no reason for him to constantly alienate and antagonise his colleagues and create unnecessary problems for the country. Moreover, the Turkish president often uses the very democratic process that has conferred on him popular legitimacy for undemocratic ends. In fact, Mr Erdogan's net contribution to democratic institution-building frequently appears to be in the negative.

Here in Pakistan, the failed coup in Turkey has some important lessons for the military leadership. With some sections of the public, media and the political class criticising the elected government, its governance record and some of its policy choices, there may be a temptation to justify decreasing the political and governance space of the incumbent PML-N — or even to contemplate the unthinkable and return Pakistan to the dark days of military rule. But such short-term thinking is precisely what contributes to long-term governance malaise. Pakistan is a constitutional democracy for a reason: it is the only path towards finding sustainable and lasting improvements in the quality of governance. First principles must never be compromised in the quest for ill-conceived fixes.

## Qandeel's murder

THE shocking 'honour' killing of popular social media celebrity, Qandeel Baloch, must be condemned in the strongest possible terms. In her brief moment in the spotlight, she breezily pushed the boundaries of what in Pakistan is considered 'acceptable' behaviour by women, and her death highlights the perils that such a path entails. Outspoken and fearless, she chose to live life on her own terms — as a woman whose antics unnerved her many moralistic critics, most of whom were both enthralled and repelled by her. That in itself was an act of courage. In fact, in a sense it was the very exaggerated nature of her persona — that many saw as controversial and that she flaunted in her risqué videos — which got the message across: women have a right to be themselves even if they offend conventional sensibilities. And the state's response must unequivocally demonstrate that they do not deserve to be murdered for it. For this reason too, her murder must be immediately investigated and the perpetrators — allegedly her brothers — apprehended and punished.

It is regrettable though that the state has a weak record when it comes to prosecutions because quite often the murderers of women go scot-free. They are forgiven and even supported by regressive patriarchies after killing 'disobedient' female family members increasing the impunity factor — this is reason enough for removing punishment waivers and compoundability provisions from the law. And although filmmakers, activists and legislators have lobbied for revised laws, there has been zero headway. Why the lethargy? When will parliament be jolted out of its stupor to pass the anti-honour killing bill? Now that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is back, he must deliver on his pledge to amend the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2004, by removing the clauses that make such murder a private offence instead of a crime against state and society. Furthermore, when a citizen asks for protection it must be provided by the state. In this case, the interior ministry was gravely at fault to have ignored the young celebrity's request for security. The death of Qandeel Baloch conveys an insidious message: that women will be kept back at all cost; murdered, if they dare nurture ambitions to break the glass ceiling. Her murder, therefore, must serve as an impetus for legislators to

renew demands for legislation to protect women who are threatened under false notions of 'honour'.

## Azad Kashmir polls

THE national parties of the country have taken their usual electoral shenanigans to Azad Kashmir ahead of the polls there later this month. In fact, it is an action replay of the normal Pakistani tendency to push people's issues to one side in order to allow opportunistic politics to take centre stage. There has been violence including deaths and injuries. There have been firebrand speeches, often delivered and reacted to away from Kashmir in some perennially interested quarters in Islamabad, Lahore and elsewhere. Those who report from Kashmir describe as 'thinking people' the group that is aghast at the antics on display during the poll campaign. This thinking lot, it seems, does not include politicians.

There is definitely a trophy at stake and there are many claimants. The tone has been primarily set by old rivals PPP and PML-N. The former thinks it has a traditional and emotional link with Azad Kashmir which should help it retain power in Muzaffarabad. But instead of highlighting an achievement or two of its latest term in Kashmir, the PPP has been turning to anti-India slogans to woo voters. These chants ring hollow when the party's latest commander, Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, does not follow up on them, and does not suggest measures that could bring peace to India-held Kashmir. Short of that, the anti-Modi refrain appears little more than an emotional ploy to secure a poll victory. On the other hand, the PML-N, too, has not been overly interested in showcasing any Kashmir-specific initiatives since it came to power at the centre in 2013. At best, it promises the expansion of its familiar, road-centric model to Azad Kashmir; its poll campaign speakers have so far betrayed little interest in taking up the bigger, more crucial issue of real autonomy. There are other important players such as the PTI and Muslim Conference; unfortunately, while they may be contributing to some basic ideal of pluralism, they are not participating in a meaningful debate about Kashmir's issues and their resolution.



## Government's missing strategy

A PHONE conversation will not change foreign policy. Nor will strong statements in favour of a foreign government. Nevertheless, now that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has returned to Pakistan, there is some semblance of leadership being displayed by the political class once again. The telephone call from Afghan President Ashraf Ghani to Prime Minister Sharif was officially about confirmation of the killing in eastern Afghanistan of the mastermind of the APS Peshawar tragedy. Yet, it was also an opportunity to further a fresh attempt at stabilising ties between the countries after a period of turmoil. Likewise, the official government response to the failed mutiny and coup in Turkey carried the unmistakable voice of the PML-N government, which has long cultivated close ties, especially in Punjab, with the government of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Perhaps the two greatest disappointments, even among a litany of other compromises and setbacks, has been the PML-N's marginalisation in key foreign policy decisions. Some of this has clearly been because of the forceful intervention of the national security and foreign policy establishment. Yet, a great deal of it has been self-inflicted by the PML-N.

The decision by Mr Sharif to not have a full-time foreign minister and, instead, to divide the job between two advisers who are rivals has created confusion and dysfunction in the foreign ministry. More fundamentally, the present government has appeared to have no real strategy on Afghanistan, India or the US. The dominance of the security establishment does not mean the automatic irrelevance of the political government. At least it should not. Consider the case of Afghanistan, where recent statements of the military leadership suggest that the reluctance to squeeze the space inside Pakistan enjoyed by anti-Afghan militants has finally been overcome. Now is the time for the political government to add its voice to the debate, especially since recent developments chime with the PML-N's overall approach to Afghanistan.

Ultimately, however, ad hoc and piecemeal interventions and additions by the government will not lead to it recovering the overall space it has ceded and lost to the military establishment. Prime Minister Sharif's huddles with his political aides will not change direction. The Cabinet Committee on National Security needs to be convened and the secretariat asked to contribute to the agenda items beforehand. The world over, the only realistic option for deciding policy matters is through detailed and informed discussions. Pakistan is surely no different.

## Delayed census

AFTER months of dithering, the government has definitively told the Supreme Court that it cannot propose a schedule for the population census without overarching security on a “man-to-man level” being provided by around 167,000 army personnel. And that number, it has said, simply cannot be spared at the moment due to the demands of Operation Zarb-i-Azb and other security-related tasks. This was stated in a report submitted to the court by the additional attorney general on behalf of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the federal body responsible for planning and executing the population census. The apex court had taken suo motu notice on the delay in holding what is the largest logistical exercise in peacetime, which involves the mobilisation of 200,000 people, including 167,000 enumerators, and entails considerable expense and detailed advance planning. It is also a constitutionally mandated activity that has been repeatedly shirked by the government since 1998 on one pretext or the other.

In the last few years, security has provided a convenient excuse to kick the can further down the road. The actual problem is a lack of political will to undertake an exercise that could uncover inconvenient truths about population increase and movement of people, including rural-urban migration, inter-provincial and inter-district migration etc, which in turn could potentially shrink and fragment power bases unwilling to cede control. That being said, the failure to conduct an activity that underpins all socio-economic planning is mind-boggling and demonstrates the extent to which governance is subservient to power in Pakistan. Even more so, considering the fundamental link between the war against terrorism and the pervasive socio-economic inequalities in the country, and the fact that the latter cannot be addressed in any meaningful way without the data only a census can provide. With Operation Zarb-i-Azb in its final stages and the improved security situation on the whole, security arrangements of the magnitude demanded by FBS are unnecessary. Even though certain parts of the country still pose a threat, there are ways to work around such concerns, as have other countries. After all, the government has managed to do so while carrying out its nationwide polio eradication programme: surely it can do the same while executing a census. As with the polio campaign, security can be provided by dedicated teams of police rather than army personnel in most areas. A population census is far too vital an exercise to be kept on the back-burner.

## Nutrition crisis

THAT Pakistan has a serious problem where malnutrition is concerned has been highlighted by several studies over the years. But as a recently released report has revealed, the extent of the problem is truly staggering. The study, launched by the Planning Commission and the World Food Programme, says that two out of every three households in Pakistan cannot afford a proper diet. The statistics for Balochistan are particularly disturbing: 83.4pc of households in the province are not getting the requisite nutrition. Experts say there are several reasons behind this deplorable situation, namely people's lack of ability to afford nutritious food, accessibility to food as well as diet preferences. While there may be enough food in the country, not everyone has access to it; as per the WFP, food insecurity exists even though food production is sufficient. Expectedly, rural communities are the most affected, as many cannot afford even one proper meal. But even in urban areas, the situation is not encouraging; there are said to be over 2.5m children showing stunted growth in Pakistan's cities.

Like many other sectors — security, education, healthcare — the nutrition crisis in Pakistan needs to be dealt with on an emergency basis. Far too many people in this country are going hungry, even when there is apparently enough to eat. As some officials have suggested, 'food fortification' programmes — adding nutrients to staple foods such as wheat flour — may be one way to supplement diets. It is also true that malnutrition affects women and children the most; therefore, school feeding programmes could be encouraged so that youngsters can have at least one balanced and nutritious meal a day. Malnutrition is a major health concern, as it can lead to lower learning outcomes, amongst many other deficiencies. The state needs to ensure that its most vulnerable citizens have access to sufficient nutrition and don't go hungry simply because they cannot afford to buy food. Tackling malnutrition is possible should the state display its intention to do so.

## Imran's odd logic

HE has done it again. Misreading current events, recent history and the will of the people, Imran Khan has claimed that there would be celebrations in the country if a military coup ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif from office.

Astonishingly, the PTI supremo made his comments at an election rally in AJK — an event that is intrinsically about the democratic process and that took place adjacent to India-held Kashmir, where the Indian security forces are brutally suppressing protests against India.

It is perhaps too much to hope that Mr Khan did not mean what he said and got momentarily carried away. He is now far too experienced a politician to be given the benefit of the doubt and he has accumulated a record of anti-democratic statements over the years.

Mr Khan must not only be told that he is emphatically on the wrong side of history, but that he is positioning himself as a threat to the democratic order itself in Pakistan.

No politician ought to be able to use the cover of free speech to call for undemocratic politics without being emphatically denounced for his betrayal of the Constitution, democracy and the will of the people itself.

Nearly as offensive as Mr Khan's thoughts is his grasp of international events. Clubbing together the ousters of Saddam Hussein, Hosni Mubarak and Muammar Qadhafi, Mr Khan suggested that the reason for their fall was that the people had turned on them.

While all three were deeply problematic leaders and categorically not democrats — indeed, each of the three relished their reputation as a dictator — their fall was because of a variety of reasons.

In fact, given that Mr Khan has opined on the recent Chilcot report, it is strange that he appears to believe that Saddam Hussein was ousted because he had lost the support of his people.

Mubarak and Qadhafi were indeed turned on by their people. But what does a legitimately elected prime minister who will face another election in 2018 and who has made no attempt to undermine the Constitution to prolong his rule have in common with military dictators who ruled for decades and were reviled by large sections of their people?

Bizarrely, Imran Khan does not even appear to understand what transpired in Turkey over the weekend.

Mr Erdogan is a deeply divisive leader and the only reason he is not the all-powerful president he wants to be is because the electorate has balked at giving him the majority necessary to amend the Constitution.

But when a coup was attempted, the Turkish people and political class came together to defend the democratic process, not simply save Mr Erdogan. The Turkish public has realised what Mr Khan has evidently still not grasped: democratic continuity is non-negotiable.

Indeed, it is political leaders like Mr Khan who appear to be a persistent threat to the democratic process.

## IHK media blackout

PROTESTS in India-held Kashmir, sparked by the killing of separatist fighter Burhan Wani, have now entered their second week. But instead of appealing for calm and making conciliatory gestures towards those out on the streets confronting the centre, New Delhi has responded with brute force.

Over 40 people have been killed in the clashes, while more than 3,000 have been injured. Amongst the heavy-handed methods employed by the state is an 'information blockade' in the disputed region.

As per reports filtering in from the held territory, newspapers have been seized and shut down — over 70 according to one count — while cable TV network transmissions have also been disrupted.

Similarly, mobile phone and internet services in the region have been affected, as parts of Kashmir remain under curfew. One official in IHK has been quoted as saying that the media curbs have been necessitated due to "Pakistani channels ... fomenting trouble".

Clearly, this view is detached from reality as the curbs placed on Kashmiri media are designed to foil independent reports from emerging from the troubled region, and to prevent communication among demonstrators.

How can such moves be reconciled with India's image as a democracy? Freedom of expression — including a free and vibrant media — is a key pillar of the democratic structure.

By muzzling the media, New Delhi cannot expect to permanently keep a lid on the trouble brewing in this unfortunate land.

Reports that the security forces are using so-called non-lethal pellet guns are disturbing, as numerous protesters struck by pellets in their eyes may be left without vision for the rest of their lives because of these hideous weapons.

The Indian leadership — together with their partners in Srinagar, namely the PDP — needs to pacify the anger and to listen to the Kashmiris' grievances.

Unfortunately, these qualities have been absent in both New Delhi's and Srinagar's approach to the current crisis.

Crushing the protests with an iron hand and enforcing media blackouts in the held territory will not change the mood on the street; brutality will engender even more hatred against India's rule in the region.

These are the biggest protests the occupied territory has seen since 2010. The sad cycle of violence and unnatural calm will repeat itself endlessly unless India realises that a long-term solution is a necessity — one that is to be worked out with Pakistan and the representatives of the Kashmiri people.

## Lord's victory

PAKISTAN'S well-earned victory over England in the first Test at Lord's on Sunday reaffirms the players' status as members of a front-ranking Test team.

More importantly, the win has lifted the national morale. The victory has come as an encouraging prelude to a gruelling season of competitive cricket that will see the team play non-stop cricket against leading sides until the end of the year.

For keen observers, though, the spring in the players' feet and the change in attitude are very noticeable. At Lord's, there was a method to their game in which they displayed aggression and maturity in equal measure and hardly concealed their ambition to win. For this, the credit ought to be given to the new team management led by coach Mickey Arthur and the excellent team selection by Inzamam-ul-Haq and others.

In the recent past, there were reports of the overbearing attitude of the then coach Waqar Younis that stifled the players' enthusiasm. Glitches in team selection and chief selector Haroon Rasheed's failure to stand up to pressure also proved discouraging to the players.

In hindsight, the camp at the Kakul Academy prior to the tour also did the players' morale and fitness a world of good as evident from their post-win celebrations.

England, on the other hand, erred by focusing all its energies on Mohammad Amir making a much-debated comeback to Test cricket. Its players were clearly stupefied by the threat posed by Yasir Shah who showed his class by bagging 10 wickets in the match.

Alastair Cook's men had also grossly underestimated the strength of this Pakistan squad and paid the price for their complacency in the aftermath of their victory over a beleaguered Sri Lankan team last month. That said, England will surely be boosted by the return of its best bowler Jimmy Anderson in the next match and will be desperate to exact revenge on Pakistan.

Misbah's men, therefore, will be well advised to guard against a resurgent opposition.

## Road to CPEC

THE China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a double lifeline for the country. The purported \$46bn of investment will not only dramatically increase north-south connectivity, but could also jump-start overall economic activity and end chronic electricity shortages in the country.

It is in conceptual scale and real-world size a vast project that has the potential to change the future of millions of Pakistanis. But between now and 2030, the future will be necessarily shaped by the quality of leadership that Pakistan is able to provide on CPEC.

A report in this newspaper on Monday has suggested that the political leadership is failing to provide the kind of cross-government coordination and efficiency that the Chinese government is seeking and that the military leadership is urging.

To try and resolve the problems with execution and project management, a so-called CPEC Development Agency has been mooted to take over responsibility for CPEC projects from the special cell currently operating from the Prime Minister's Office with the assistance of the Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform.

Unsurprisingly, the PML-N denies that there is a problem and argues that not only is the political government capable of overseeing CPEC but that it is doing a commendable job.

To be sure, some of the criticism directed at the government appears to be a thinly veiled attempt to transfer further control of national policy to the military.

It is also unlikely that the leadership of China, which has stressed from the outset that it does not want CPEC to be dragged into national controversies here, would suggest a scheme that could exacerbate civil-military tensions inside Pakistan.

However, there are two realities that ought to be considered here. First, the reality of the security situation in Pakistan and the national scope of CPEC, means that the military will have an important role to play in providing security to the projects and the personnel, foreign and local, involved in executing them.

It is one thing for the PML-N government to claim that it is coordinating across government agencies and institutions and quite another to demonstrate that through sustained action. Thus far, it does appear that, at least as far as security is concerned, parallel set-ups appear to be in operation.



Second, the PML-N seems unwilling to accept that the criticism of its handling of CPEC goes well beyond partisan attacks or narrow institutional interests.

No amount of briefings or press releases or TV appearances by ministers have been able to dispel the impression that the PML-N is not being transparent about its true plans for CPEC and that the PML-N is not committed to ensuring all provinces have a stake in CPEC that is commensurate with the needs of their respective populations.

Inevitably, a government in denial ends up eating into the goodwill it may have with the public, and with political and other institutions. The PML-N needs to do better.

## Judge's son rescued

THREE high-profile kidnappings — Shahbaz Taseer, Ali Haider Gilani, Awais Ali Shah — and all of them, thankfully, have ended in the victim being reunited with his family.

The last, the son of the Sindh High Court chief justice, was recovered in the early hours of Tuesday from a vehicle that came under fire from security forces for refusing to stop at a checkpoint in Dera Ismail Khan.

According to DG ISPR Asim Bajwa, the kidnappers were not affiliated with any political party but were part of a TTP splinter group with Al Qaeda elements. They were, he said, on their way to Tank with their captive when they were apprehended and the chief justice's son found bound and gagged under a burqa in the backseat.

All three kidnappers were killed in the shootout. While the information so far disclosed is sketchy, the young lawyer's rescue appears to have been the result of an intelligence-based operation, with the DG describing the agencies as having worked at a 'surge rate' in order to ensure a successful outcome.

It is understandable that the general public will not be privy to a full and detailed account of the kidnapping in the immediate aftermath of the rescue and the debriefing of the victim, as the intelligence so gleaned may well prove instrumental in the capture of further criminal elements.

Nevertheless, a fuller account must be supplied at a later stage if only to address some obvious questions: for example, why did the kidnappers choose such a central location in a high-security area of Karachi, in broad daylight, to carry out the abduction? What was their motive? That being said, the rescue of Mr Shah within about a month of his kidnapping is commendable; it has spared his family the years-long agony suffered by the other two victims and their families.

Although it has not yet been made public whether the objective behind the young lawyer's abduction was ransom or something quite different, anecdotal evidence points to an alarming rise in kidnappings for ransom in Karachi once again.

The instances, mostly involving individuals who are not 'high-profile', have gone unreported because their families opt not to involve the police or media for fear of endangering the victim's lives further.

The law-enforcement agencies must ensure that they ferret out all those elements involved in this heinous crime so that no citizen, irrespective of status, is subjected to such an ordeal.

## Post-coup Turkey

WHILE last weekend's abortive coup in Turkey highlighted the fragile nature of democracy in that country, the aftermath will have long-term consequences if the government chooses to act in anger and ignores the demands of justice.

So far, thousands of soldiers, including 112 generals and admirals, have been suspended or arrested in what obviously is a purge of the armed forces. In addition, an astonishing number of police personnel, estimated at nearly 9,000, and a large number of judges, have been sacked, with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan pledging to obliterate the 'virus' responsible for the attempted putsch.

The brains behind the failed coup had focused on the personality of Mr Erdogan and appeared determined to oust him even if it meant eliminating him physically. But that should not colour his view of the situation.

The eyes of the world are on Turkey, a country bordering Syria, hosting 2.7 million refugees, facing a renewed Kurdish insurgency and having problems with the European Union on the refugee trek.

Such a situation demands a commitment to democracy and due process rather than moves to revive the death penalty — something EU leaders have denounced in strong terms.

The military clique responsible for the night attack on democracy must, no doubt, face the law, but the government shouldn't give the impression that it is using the traumatic events of July 14-15 as a cover to crush all dissent. Instead, the suspects should be tried in a manner where the judicial process conforms to international standards.

America and EU leaders have cautioned Ankara against “retribution”, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel has criticised the “revolting scenes of caprice and revenge” against soldiers in the streets.

Flawed trials guided by a revanchist spirit will hurt rather than strengthen Turkish democracy, and the president should draw heart from the spontaneous support he received from the people irrespective of party loyalties in crushing the mutiny. As Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said, the government would refer the issue to parliament and not act in haste.

## Rangers’ mandate

THE contentious relations between the Sindh Rangers and the Sindh government have once again deteriorated to the point of open rancour.

The chief minister, directly contradicting an assertion to the contrary by the DG Rangers a few days earlier, has said that the mandate of the paramilitary force’s policing powers extends only to Karachi and not to the rest of the province.

The latest skirmish between the two sides was triggered last week when the Rangers picked up Asad Kharal — said to be a close aide of a key Sindh cabinet member — in Larkana for allegedly facilitating hard-core criminals in the area. However, their attempt to interrogate him at a local police station was thwarted, they said, when certain influential individuals in the provincial government intervened in the proceedings.

Matters became even more fraught when the Larkana residence of the Sindh home minister was cordoned off by the Rangers the next day.

It can be argued that Chief Minister Qaim Ali Shah’s stance is disingenuous, and calculated to limit the fallout of the Rangers’ operations on alleged transgressions by some members of the PPP government.

Even if restoring law and order to Karachi is the Rangers’ specific remit, to do so effectively necessitates disrupting criminal networks whose tentacles, in the form of abettors, facilitators, sanctuaries, etc may lie outside the metropolis.

After all, when circumstances require, the police can also pursue criminals in jurisdictions other than their own, provided certain protocols are followed.

Thus, to suggest that the Rangers treat Karachi as a self-contained silo is unrealistic. But the statement is also an attempt by the provincial government — a civilian power

centre — to reassert its authority over its law and order function that is steadily being usurped by a federal force that, despite technically reporting to the interior ministry, in reality operates as an arm of the military from which its officer cadre is drawn.

Unfortunately, the Sindh government is reaping its long-sown harvest of treating the police as a handmaiden in its sins of omission and commission, instead of building even a moderately depoliticised, competent force that serves the people.

Consequently, the Rangers have by default acquired a certain 'legitimacy' in the eyes of the wider public — even while their footprint has expanded from their original mandate of tackling terrorism to investigating white-collar crime, a very different beast in many respects.

At the same time, one must also reiterate that this 'legitimacy' is unwarranted. The many instances of abuse of power by the Rangers, aside from the violation of human rights that they entail, have further exacerbated the ethnic divide in Karachi.

One must also remember that even during times when the establishment directly controlled the levers of power, it made little effort to improve the Sindh police. The truth is that it suits neither side for the police to be truly empowered.

## Organ donation

EVER since the passing away of Abdul Sattar Edhi, there has been much discussion about the great man's legacy.

While it has correctly been pointed out that his fleet of ambulances, network of charitable services and various other philanthropic projects run by his organisation will ensure his name and spirit live on, one particular 'gift' Edhi gave needs to be increasingly highlighted: donating his eyes.

In his lifetime, Edhi had pledged to donate his organs; following his death, his eyes were transplanted in two recipients.

In Pakistan, where organ donation levels are very low, publicising this fact and encouraging others to follow Edhi's example to donate organs after death can perhaps change the situation.

Organ donation can save the lives of countless patients with end-stage organ failure. As Dr Adeeb Rizvi — director of the Sindh Institute of Urology and Transplantation and

long-time campaigner for the cause — noted, “tens of thousands” of donations are needed in the country.

Over 50,000 people die every year in Pakistan due to end-stage organ failure; many of these lives could be saved if more people pledged to donate their body parts after death.

There are, of course, cultural barriers and misunderstandings preventing greater donations. For example, many Pakistanis may not be aware that there is religious sanction for the practice.

They need to be informed that many Muslim states, including Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt, allow cadaveric organ transplants, and that many Islamic scholars belonging to different schools of thought approve of it.

This information can be critical in countering the misperceptions that are at times deliberately spread by some amongst the clergy. Moreover, the campaign to enlist donors would get a major boost if more public figures pledged that their organs be donated after death.

Major politicians, sports stars and other celebrities, for example, can lead the way in order to convince the public that organ donation is a noble act that can save many lives.

The legal cover is in place, although more needs to be done to crack down on illegal transplants. What is needed immediately is a concerted campaign involving the state and activists to inform the public, and encourage citizens to donate their organs.

There has been a genuine outpouring of affection for Edhi across the country. Now, these feelings should be channelled into convincing people that amongst the best ways to pay homage to the late social worker is to emulate his act of donating organs after death.

## Kashmir cause in danger

THE surest way to taint a legitimate, necessary and morally correct protest is to involve illegitimate, unnecessary and morally reprehensible actors.

The violence in Indian-held Kashmir against ordinary Kashmiris rising up in protest against the Indian state is a significant event in the disputed region's troubled history.

This is also the moment for Pakistan to throw its diplomatic weight behind the people of Kashmir and to mobilise domestic and international support for them.

It may be a long time before Pakistan can expect to be heard fairly on the international stage given global narratives about this country, but what is fair and right must be pressed at every opportunity.

Unhappily, internal events are already tainting what ought to be a national, legitimate push for recognition of rights of Kashmiris.

The so-called Kashmir caravan led by Hafiz Saeed from Lahore to Islamabad and onwards to AJK has already grabbed attention in India and other parts of the world, while protests by banned organisations, such as the ASWJ, in favour of the Kashmiris will certainly have raised eyebrows internationally.

Instead of rallying even the sympathetic parts of world opinion to the plight of the Kashmiris, protests by banned militant groups inside Pakistan may only end up tainting by association the Kashmiri cause.

There are at least two questions that need to be raised here. Given that banned outfits on watch lists are openly holding rallies it is reasonable to ask if elements within the state apparatus have given the green light to such events.

Have those elements considered the costs of their actions, not least in terms of international opinion, which matters in the case of the Kashmir dispute?

The other question is for civil society and the political leadership across the country, including AJK: why have they left the field open to militant groups to once again raise their profile and identify themselves with the Kashmir struggle? A muted response by peaceful well-wishers and concerned citizens only opens the door to non-peaceful elements.

# Foreign policy and parliament

WHY is Pakistan's foreign policy adrift and the country seemingly once again on a path towards regional and international isolation?

On Wednesday, senator after senator spoke from the floor of the Upper House about the country's troubled relations with the outside world.

From Afghanistan to Iran and India to the US, foreign policy tensions are defining our engagement with strategically important countries and it is perhaps time for parliament to debate issues that the political government and the country's national security architects seem unwilling to debate.

While the Senate debate was inevitably dominated by members of the opposition, the government should note that even some political allies felt compelled to speak.

In the absence of a full-time foreign minister and a prime minister who only yesterday returned to the capital after two months away, the link between parliament and the foreign policy establishment has nearly been severed.

It is right that some parliamentarians have taken it upon themselves to rebuild a vital connection between elected representatives and foreign policy decision-makers.

Part of the problem is obvious: the civilian government is ostensibly responsible for crafting foreign policy, but the reality is that the process is dominated by the military establishment. The PML-N government has also suffered several self-inflicted wounds.

The early decision by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to keep the defence and foreign ministry portfolios for himself suggested an intention to try and recalibrate crucial foreign and national security policies. But neither any plans nor any actions materialised.

On India, there seemed to be interest in pushing a trade agenda, but then the PML-N hesitated to engage a final-year Congress government in India.

Ever since, it has been one setback after another — for the political government and for foreign policy. Indeed, the more the military leadership asserted control, the worse the overall foreign policy situation appeared to become. Was it a cause or effect?

The military leadership would claim that its interventions were necessitated by a deteriorating international climate; critics would contend that those interventions helped worsen the international climate the country today faces.



Who is to blame perhaps matters less at present than how to recover the situation. As the Senate debate has indicated, the PML-N government has allies in parliament who both want the government to reassert itself in the foreign policy domain and are willing to help it with advice and debate.

With the backing of parliament and in consultation with the military leadership, Prime Minister Sharif and his cabinet can try and chart a new course. There are clearly no easy answers nor quick fixes.

Afghanistan and India, for example, are hardly foreign-policy challenges that can be resolved unilaterally by Pakistan.

But the drift towards unaccountable and undemocratic institutions making opaque decisions about this country's national security and its relationship with the outside world needs to be reversed.

## Pro-women legislation

Yesterday's developments offer a sliver of hope where preventing violence against women is concerned.

A parliamentary committee reached a consensus on the long-pending anti-honour killing and anti-rape bills that will shortly be submitted to a joint session of parliament for voting.

The renewed prospect of such legislation being enacted, mentioned by Maryam Nawaz in an interview less than a week after the shocking murder of Qandeel Baloch, is a welcome step.

The PML-N faces mounting pressure — both domestic and international — to address the lacunae in the law pertaining to honour killing that makes it difficult for perpetrators to be punished.

In fact, with activists, legislators and the media relentlessly highlighting atrocities against women and demanding justice for the hundreds of women and girls who die at the hands of family members every year in Pakistan, it is surprising the ruling party has waited so long to reform the law.

Perhaps Qandeel's death has proven to be the catalyst for the government to act.

It was March when the prime minister had pledged amendments to the law so that perpetrators of honour killings could no longer be ‘forgiven’ by family members, thereby making the offence a non-compoundable one.

However, when the Anti-Honour Killing Laws (Criminal Laws Amendment) Bill and the Anti-Rape Laws (Criminal Laws Amendment) Bill — tabled by a PPP senator in 2014 and passed by the Senate in 2015 — were presented in a joint parliamentary session that same month, elements from the religious lobby objected, saying they were contrary to Islamic injunctions.

Since then there has been no headway, at least until this point. Pandering to the right-wing over an issue of utmost gravity must now end and the impunity associated with the crime done away with.

When more than 500 women are killed each year by family members over perceived transgressions of ‘honour’, the state must urgently send the message that those who are guilty of such murders merit the severest punishment and lengthy jail terms.

As the Supreme Court Bar Association fact-finding mission investigating the suspicious death in June of 19-year-old Maria Sadaqat stated, “the accused finds much sympathy ... in the criminal justice system.”

The legislature must not only pass both draft bills on schedule but closely monitor their implementation, including ensuring watertight investigation of crimes against women so that justice is done.

The criminal justice system must dispense punishment that is commensurate with the crime.

## Candidate Trump

IT’S official: Donald Trump is now the Republican Party’s candidate for US president in November’s elections.

In the year since the brash, billionaire business mogul announced his candidacy, few would have imagined that this rank outsider would storm the citadel of the GOP and emerge victorious. However, politics is an unpredictable sport and along with domestic factors, the mood prevailing globally — with a world reeling from terrorism, conflict and economic slowdown — has surely helped Mr Trump seal the nomination.

For all those who favour progressive politics, the prospect of Donald Trump at the helm of the world's sole superpower is a disturbing one.

For one, Mr Trump has made some outlandish statements most mainstream politicians would recoil from. Among his policy prescriptions are building a wall on the US-Mexico border (to be paid for by Mexico) as well as banning the entry of Muslims into the US to keep an eye on militancy.

On the foreign front, he has said he may reopen what he has termed the “disastrous” Iran nuclear deal — a deal that was reached after painstaking negotiations involving major world powers.

This reflects a foreign policy direction guided by recklessness and confrontation. Moreover, Mr Trump's divisive campaign rhetoric has made it ok to hate, ok to blame the ‘other’ for all problems.

The road to the White House is a long and winding one, and anything can happen between now and November. While probable Democratic candidate Hilary Clinton still leads according to most pundits, Election Day can produce surprises; the Brexit experience immediately springs to mind.

The question is: will Mr Trump adopt more sober positions now he is the official Republican candidate, or will he continue with his inflammatory trumpetry?

Also, even if he fails to win the presidential election, the fact is that Donald Trump has brought a style of shrill, ugly and divisive politics to the mainstream. Unfortunately, this type of politics — emphasising hatred and exclusion over tolerance and acceptance — seems to be the dominant global trend currently.

## AJK elections

THE PML-N has secured a resounding victory in Thursday's elections for the Azad Jammu & Kashmir Legislative Assembly, and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was in Muzaffarabad yesterday to celebrate.

While AJK usually votes for the party in power in Islamabad, this time round the N-League's victory has been emphatic, with the PPP — which led the outgoing administration — and PTI trounced in most constituencies.

Campaigning saw nasty verbal exchanges between the leading contenders, as well as violence, with at least two deaths, though election day itself was largely peaceful. Local observers have said polling was, by and large, transparent and secure.

The campaign saw PPP chief Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari take a leading role, but it seems the PML-N's incumbency in Islamabad helped carry the day in Muzaffarabad.

Now that the PML-N has secured a 'heavy mandate' in AJK — perhaps even beyond its own expectations — the real test of governance will begin.

Among its leading challenges will be running a lean government, especially controlling the size of the cabinet to ensure it does not get too large and unwieldy, and introducing much-discussed austerity measures in government departments.

As it stands, many of AJK's major problems are economic, and the ruling party will need to deftly handle these over the next five years.

For one, the new government will have to tackle unemployment, which is considerable in the region, head on. Most locals depend on government jobs, so job creation, especially in the private sector, will be a major challenge for the incoming administration.

There will also be a need for greater emphasis on good governance; for instance, under the watch of earlier governments, many Kashmiris complained that those who were supposed to be running AJK's affairs were more often than not found in Islamabad rather than Muzaffarabad.

This attitude will need to change and the new administration should dedicate itself to solving local problems.

Moreover, progress will have to be made on initiating constitutional change so that more power is shifted from the AJK Council, which takes its cue from Islamabad, to the elected government in Muzaffarabad. Such demands have been made in the AJK legislature, based on the process of devolution initiated in Pakistan under the 18th Amendment.

And the administration in Muzaffarabad must take the lead in promoting the cause of the Kashmiri people across the LoC at global forums; AJK needs to raise its voice against Indian atrocities in India held-Kashmir.

# Cleaning up Karachi

A CITY of 20 million like Karachi generates at least 20,000 tonnes of solid waste per day, calculated as per the internationally accepted formula.

The Sindh chief minister was thus either deluding himself or pouring salt on the wounds of Karachi's citizens when he gave officials a three-day deadline to clear garbage from a city that has not witnessed a clean-up operation of the municipal kind for an extremely long time.

He reinforced his instructions by saying that he had provided sufficient funds for the purpose to the KMC, the District Municipal Corporations and deputy commissioners and threatened to terminate the officials concerned and the sanitation employees who "do not perform despite drawing salaries".

Of course, no one has attempted to undertake the Sisyphean task that has been demanded. Since then, in fact, there has been talk of outsourcing garbage collection to a Chinese company.

Even for a city that has long been a byword for urban decay, the decline of Karachi over the last few years has been marked, particularly since the local government system has been in abeyance.

Entire streets are being encroached upon by piles of garbage that grow by the day.

A serious effort to tackle this chronic problem entails getting down to the brass tacks and first setting up a committee with relevant, informed members to assess the situation so that a well-thought-out course of action can be devised.

Contrary to the chief minister's assertions, the funds allocated to waste collection and disposal are grossly inadequate. Moreover, for years there has been little investment in equipment and training, and manpower consists almost solely of political appointees who work to further their party's objectives rather than discharge the duties they are being paid to do.

Therefore, plans for proper personnel induction and SOPs need to be drawn up. There is no quick fix — not even a Chinese one — for such a prolonged dereliction of duty that has reduced Karachi to a vast, urban slum.

# Property valuations

THE government will try and spin the decision as a victory for the taxman and a step towards the further documentation of the economy.

But it is nothing short of a climbdown and a backtracking on a flagship budgetary promise of Finance Minister Ishaq Dar.

Next week, government negotiators and real estate representatives will meet once again and compare the valuations of the property market in 18 cities across the country that are now to be drawn up separately by the FBR and the private sector.

The original scheme, announced with much fanfare by Mr Dar in his budget speech, had aimed to drive a stake through the property scam in the country: a capital gains tax was to be levied at 10pc for properties sold within five years of purchase and, crucially, the value of the property was to be determined by a panel of State Bank-approved valuers.

If implemented, that scheme would have had a triple effect: raising billions in revenue for the state; deepening the economy's documentation; and driving speculators out of the property market, thereby possibly reducing the cost of home ownership for millions.

The sheer ambition of the original scheme was itself a red flag. A weak state led by a government with a poor record on reforms was always going to struggle to implement the plan unveiled in the budget.

Yet, what is perhaps most dispiriting about the ongoing negotiations with the real estate sector is how the government is leaning towards giving fresh legal cover to the patently illegal.

Drawing up separate valuations for 18 cities means that the government will now negotiate with the private sector to fix land prices that both sides know to be false — the real estate sector's fundamental aim being to avoid declaring the true market value of properties in official documentation.

Indeed, following the climbdown on bringing traders into the withholding tax net, the government is sending a signal to the market that its edicts are, in fact, only the start of a negotiating process with the private sector and that the latter will eventually emerge victorious if it remains organised and unified in its opposition to the government's agenda.

Perhaps the real flaw in the government's approach is that it appears to see everything through the prism of short-term revenue generation.

Certainly, the net gain from this clash with the sector may be a few extra billion rupees for the exchequer. But those gains pale in comparison to the net social losses of a property sector that is skewed immorally towards the richest in society and that has become a haven for the unscrupulous.

By pretending to take on powerful vested interests with an ill-conceived plan the government may unwittingly be allowing those interests to further entrench themselves.

## PM's task

AFTER weeks — months, really — of speculation, it was a reassuring signal: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif chairing a meeting of the National Security Committee, with the country's military leadership and senior cabinet officials in attendance. A trip to Muzaffarabad to address a post-election rally also suggested that Mr Sharif is regaining the stamina necessary for the demanding job of leading this country. An elected prime minister attending to his duties of governance and policymaking is the right kind of disinfectant for the noxious rumours and thinly veiled assaults on the democratic process that have been unleashed in recent times. Clearly, the PML-N has contributed to the recent climate of political uncertainty through its unwillingness to share timely and clear information with the public and its over-willingness to attack political rivals. Perhaps now Mr Sharif will be able to impose some discipline on his party and reinvigorate his cabinet to focus on the task of governance.

Unquestionably, this country needs democratic leadership in all spheres, domestic and foreign. The PML-N has electoral legitimacy, but has struggled to impose its political and wider democratic legitimacy. Political legitimacy will receive a boost once the PML-N finds a way to create a nationally endorsed judicial commission to investigate the revelations in the Panama Papers. It is not simply a question of the political opposition demonstrating the will and capacity to sustain its anti-government protests. The Panama Papers raised some important concerns about the finances of the first family and until those are addressed fully and transparently before an authentically independent and powerful commission, it is the Sharif family itself that must bear primary responsibility for the simmering political crisis. Certainly, there is also an onus on the opposition politicians to seek a fair outcome, but few, if any, of the opposition demands thus far have been fundamentally undemocratic or unjust. Mr Sharif must find a way to break the impasse soon.

Wider political legitimacy will come from the government recovering the space it has surrendered to other institutions in its first three years. That process can only begin if the government is willing to reactivate and re-energise the various constitutional and administrative forums that have become dormant under the PML-N. A National Security



Committee after a prolonged absence of the prime minister from the country can send the right signal, but it will mean little in the medium term unless two other questions are also answered. Does the PML-N intend to hold regular NSC meetings? Will it approach such meetings in a structured manner and contribute meaningfully to both the agenda for such meetings and the substance of the discussions? Be it the CCI or the NSC, Mr Sharif must embrace institutional forms of decision-making. If not, the trends established in the first three years of this administration will continue over its last two.

## Bloodshed in Europe

SPATE of attacks over the past few days has left Europe reeling. Starting with the Bastille Day rampage in Nice in which a French resident of Tunisian extraction drove a 19-tonne truck into a crowd killing more than 80 people, to a knife attack in Germany that left several injured on board a train, to the Munich shooting on Friday in which at least nine people died, the nightmare has been unending. Pending further investigations, it appears that in at least two of the cases there were no accomplices. The train attack was carried out by a teenaged Afghan migrant who had apparently no links to the dreaded IS that often claims, or is accused of inspiring, such attacks. Again, in the latest attack on Friday, the perpetrator, a German-Iranian teenager, has not been linked to IS, though he might have been inspired by Norwegian mass killer Anders Breivik. The suspect was reportedly receiving psychiatric care. The attacks present a new security dilemma for Europe: how to prevent lone-wolf attacks.

In today's insecure, terror-afflicted world, it is difficult to come up with a calibrated response to such attacks. What is clear is that in many of them the perpetrators suffered from mental and personality disorders; militancy was perhaps the conduit for their pent-up rage. For example, the Nice attacker, whose links to terrorist groups have yet to be established, was not religious and had behavioural problems. Similarly, some of those involved in the earlier Brussels attacks — though these were apparently coordinated — were petty criminals and didn't fit the usual jihadist profile. Deeper studies — involving European governments, academics and law-enforcement specialists — are needed to uncover why these individuals 'snap'. Is it merely the escape or 'redemption' from a life of 'sin' that IS offers, or is it their existence on the margins of European society that causes them to carry out unconscionable acts of violence? Perhaps it is a mix. Whether these people were radicalised by militant Islamist ideology, or pushed over the edge due to psychological problems stemming from their backgrounds — Europeans of Islamic heritage or migrants from Muslim countries — all Muslims in Europe will be tarred with the same brush. These acts will fuel Islamophobia and anti-migrant sentiments. Europe must strike a balance between solid counterterrorism efforts, and ensuring that entire communities are not ostracised, and that those fleeing war and persecution are still able to find refuge.

## ‘Closure’ of schools

PAKISTAN is in a tough spot. More specifically, a complication has resulted from the country’s close relationship with the Turkish government which has just survived a coup attempt, and is now bent upon rooting out all elements it considers hostile to President Erdogan. It is a measure of the speed at which the purge is being carried out that just over a week after the failed takeover bid, Turkey expects the Nawaz Sharif government to close institutions it says are being run by Fethullah Gülen in Pakistan. Mr Erdogan has named Mr Gülen, a former ally who now lives in the US, as the prime suspect behind the coup attempt. Organisations associated with him are said to have stakes in some businesses here, but more prominent are a dialogue forum and a chain of schools. The demand for their closure raises the spectre of all the investment made in these schools over time coming to naught and creating serious problems for the large number of students enrolled.

The chain has denied links with Mr Gülen, while others familiar with its workings have indicated that no attempt is being made at these schools of basic learning to impose any extreme views or to promote the image of a single individual. Keeping this in mind, it would be unfortunate if these schools suffered on account of any rushed action. It will no doubt be very difficult for the Pakistan government to say ‘no’ to a call by such a close friend in such an angry mood at this moment. But hopefully, the authorities here would want to and be able to plead the case of the students enrolled in these institutes. An abrupt closure is not the answer, and it is too early and utterly unnecessary at this stage to discuss options such as a fresh banner or new ownership for the school chain. Instead, Pakistan may want to try and set its Turkish friends’ minds at rest by conducting a close scrutiny of what takes place at these schools.

## Carnage in Kabul

KABUL is bleeding again and the mosaic of terror that Afghanistan has to contend with has become yet more complicated. The beleaguered Hazaras in Afghanistan have long been victims of bigotry and violence. But an attack on this scale — more than 80 people have been killed and 200 injured — in the Afghan capital on peaceful Hazara demonstrators demanding economic inclusion suggests a motive to stoke civil unrest and deepen ethnic and sectarian divisions in the country. This just as the Taliban insurgency appears to be struggling with internal divisions and the post-Akhtar Mansour intensity of Taliban attacks has waned. Stability in Afghanistan remains as elusive as ever.

Pakistan, which has witnessed its own share of horrific attacks against the Hazaras in recent years, ought to take the Kabul bombing very seriously for at least two reasons.

First, the militant Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for the attack and, from initial details provided by Afghan officials and presented by IS media, the assertion appears to be credible. Specifically, the claim by Afghan officials that the suicide bombers had been dispatched from Nangarhar province by an IS commander should trouble officials here because that is also the region in which anti-Pakistan TTP militants are alleged to have found sanctuary. Indeed, the militant presence of IS in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region is mostly traced to breakaway factions of the banned TTP. IS elements entwined with TTP in eastern Afghanistan pose a threat to the whole region, and with the Kabul attack they may have proved they are capable of launching distant attacks in well-protected areas. The attack also confirms why Pakistan needs to work with the Afghan government to progressively make the border impenetrable for militants and terrorists on both sides. Neither country will truly be safe until they acknowledge the fundamental and reciprocal responsibility to the other to eradicate terrorism from the region.

In addition, the attack in Kabul should serve as a warning to the security apparatus inside Pakistan that there is no room for complacency in the fight against IS. The latter is both a terror outfit and an inspiration for would-be terrorists seeking motive and looking for direction — this means it can function both like traditional militant groups and also a diffuse threat by undetectable so-called lone wolves. Any justifying and violent rhetoric after the Kabul attack should be closely monitored and swiftly acted against. Hazaras inside Pakistan deserve special protection because of the violent array of threats against them. Moreover, IS intends for its ethnic and sectarian campaign to trigger copycat attacks and deepen societal divisions. The recent successes inside Pakistan against TTP and Al Qaeda remnants should not cause vigilance against other possible emerging threats to drop.

## Child abuse scandal

ANOTHER horrific case of child sexual abuse has surfaced in the country, this time in Kot Addu in Punjab. According to police, at least 26 children were preyed upon by a gang that made videos of the victims being violated and then used them to blackmail their parents and prevent them from going to the police. It was only after the parents of one victim decided to take recourse to the law that the crime was uncovered. There are obvious similarities between this case and the one in Swat that came to light in May this year, as well as that in Kasur that sent shockwaves across the country when it was uncovered in April 2015. In the earlier instances too, the perpetrators used the threat of social humiliation by making pornographic videos of their depraved actions to ensure the victims' silence.

After the depredations in Kasur triggered a vocal campaign by activists, politicians and media, legislation was enacted to protect children against several serious offences. The Criminal Law (Amendment Act) 2015 criminalised child pornography and the act of exposing a minor to sexually explicit material, and expanded the definition of sexual abuse. As Swat and now Kot Addu have demonstrated, while legislation is extremely important as a deterrent as well as to ensure that victims get some closure, children remain vulnerable to exploitation of the kind seen in the aforementioned cases. The biggest advantage for perpetrators is this conservative society's reluctance — notwithstanding sporadic and reactive outcries — to address issues of sexuality with the required maturity and openness. Empty denunciations of 'vulgarity and obscenity' made for political profit by some quarters only drive the real problems further underground. Pemra's recent notice to the producers of a TV serial for scenes depicting child sexual abuse is a case in point in which even a sensitive exploration of the issue raised alarm in official quarters. Aside from this, when victims pursue cases in court, the tortuously slow legal process exacerbates their trauma, leading many to drop their cases. The accused thus go free, at liberty to repeat their crimes. The argument for speedy justice could not be more persuasive than in such instances where social pressure works to the advantage of the perpetrators. Moreover, this society must come to grips with the sexual violence that exists in its midst. There is no greater shame than allowing it to fester through our silence.

## Failing the refugees

ACCORDING to a recent Oxfam report, Pakistan hosts 1.56 million refugees — the fourth highest number in the world. Listed with five developing countries taking the lead as refugee hosts, Pakistan has provided a safe haven for Afghan refugees for the past three decades — shouldering a burden of humanity beyond its political and economic limitations. It is this kind of taking on of a far higher share of the world's burden than those countries with the biggest economies which needs to be remedied. That said, Oxfam unequivocally criticises the world's six wealthiest nations that comprise over half the global economy for hosting less than 9pc (2.1m) of the world's refugees at a time when the number of displaced is at its highest after the Second World War. The disinterest shown by Europe, America, China and Japan is shameful. Regrettably, the rising anti-refugee sentiment in the richer economies has left countries such as Jordan, Turkey, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Pakistan, Lebanon and South Africa to pick up the burden of 12 million refugees.

Considering that more than 65m are displaced globally, the richest countries should not only host additional refugees but commit more help to the developing nations sheltering them. True, many in Europe view the refugees as a destabilising factor threatening the social fabric. Yet, the fact that the global migrant crisis is partially the outcome of the

myopic policies of wealthy nations contributing to wars in developing countries not only makes the richer states morally bound to protect humanity but also culpable. Richer nations must be reminded of their responsibility towards upholding international refugee covenants — the right of all refugees to seek protection from persecution. Inequitable burden sharing leads to increased poverty and internal discontent which, in turn, influence regional stability — an outcome developed nations have miscalculated in their bid to protect their own borders. Clearly, wealthier nations must forge global consensus on protecting those displaced because of a man-made crisis perpetuated in large part by their own policies.

## Change in Sindh

AFTER eight years at the helm, Qaim Ali Shah has been relieved of his position as Chief Minister Sindh by the PPP high command.

The decision was announced after the senior politician, along with other party leaders, was summoned to Dubai by Asif Zardari over the weekend. The move appears to be the outcome of pressures exerted by the security establishment on the Sindh government, as well as the PPP's internal politics.

In fact, the real reason behind the dismissal may be Mr Zardari's desire to make peace with the establishment. While his advanced age was often cited as an impediment to effective governance, the manner in which Shah Sahib was removed was unedifying; the removal of the senior politician who belongs to the PPP old guard — going back to the Zulfikar Ali Bhutto era — should have been handled in a more dignified manner.

This was Shah Sahib's third stint as the chief minister, beginning in 2008 and continuing after the 2013 elections. While there were no allegations of corruption or other misdeeds against Qaim Ali Shah, it is clear that Sindh was hardly being run in an exemplary manner under his watch.

The popular perception — perhaps not too far from reality — was of a province suffering from neglect. A politicised police force; lack of local governments; law and order issues; and unenviable health and education figures all strengthened this perception. But, how much of the province's governance was really in Mr Shah's hands?

Sindh, apparently, was being run from two power centres, both unaccountable: the establishment exercised its control through the Rangers, while Mr Zardari, along with his family members, was calling the shots from the rarefied environs of the UAE. It is likely that the clash of egos between these two power centres cost Qaim Ali Shah his job.

Now that a new individual will take up residence in the Chief Minister House, Karachi, will Sindh's governance improve, or will it simply be a change of face?

The fact is that the province's myriad problems will not be solved unless its top elected official is answerable to the provincial legislature, not external actors. For example, where the law and order issue is concerned, police reform should be so thorough that the help of the Rangers is no longer needed to keep the peace in Sindh.

We hope the new chief minister takes up the province's many challenges in a proactive manner, and is given the space to take independent decisions.

Foremost amongst the province's issues are the tackling of lawlessness in Karachi and other districts, giving the green light for empowered local governments that can address the civic issues that plague Sindh's cities and towns, as well as addressing health and education needs.

But until the style of governance changes — whether it is the establishment's 'oversight', or long-distance governance from Dubai — nothing will change.

## Indian FM's remarks

A war against the people in India-held Kashmir has now also expanded into a war of words against the Pakistani government by the Indian foreign ministry.

The two statements of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif that have raised hackles in India are his direct mention of Burhan Wani, the insurgent leader whose killing triggered the latest protests in IHK, in a statement after the National Security Committee meeting over the weekend and his comment at a post-election rally in Muzaffarabad that Kashmir will one day become a part of Pakistan.

The comments were fairly anodyne and it should be noted that the PML-N election campaign in AJK focused more on that region's needs and the party's political opponents in the recently held elections than a debate on the future status of an undivided Jammu and Kashmir. Indeed, as noted in these columns, the plight of the oppressed people of IHK did not feature as prominently as it could have at the end of what had seemed to be a very competitive election campaign.

Yet, India's foreign minister, Sushma Swaraj, has launched a highly personal attack against Mr Sharif, alleging that the Pakistani prime minister was "delusional" in thinking that Kashmir would one day become a part of Pakistan.



The problem with Ms Swaraj's comments is that their undiplomatic tone is almost designed to shut down bilateral diplomacy, which is already in limbo.

The Indian foreign minister must surely have sought clearance from Prime Minister Narendra Modi before personally attacking his Pakistani counterpart, and it can only be assumed that the Indian government is seeking to further complicate ties.

After all, Mr Modi himself recently cast doubt on the prospects for bilateral dialogue by questioning the internal powers dynamics of Pakistan.

Meanwhile, the brutal suppression of protesters in IJK and the Indian state's arrogant assertion that the disputed region is a so-called internal matter for India suggest an undermining of the core dialogue process that India and Pakistan must eventually hold.

For its part, the Pakistani state, and the political government in particular, have taken a largely sensible line on events in Kashmir so far with an emphasis on diplomacy and the plight of ordinary Kashmiris under Indian rule.

Foreign affairs adviser Sartaj Aziz's response to Ms Swaraj that the future of Kashmir is for the people of Kashmir to decide is in keeping with a sensible approach.

Perhaps the Indian government will ratchet down its unnecessary and undiplomatic language.

## Doping scandal

THE Russian note of thanks to the International Olympic Committee can hardly mask the asphyxiating bind international sports finds itself in where the rampant use of drugs by athletes is concerned.

Indeed, Russia's athletes could well have been barred from the Rio Olympics next month after it was found that a large number of samples belonging to individual players from the country and meant for lab examination had been tampered with.

Instead of imposing a blanket ban, the IOC has said that the 28 sports federations associated with the Summer Olympics would decide who will compete in Rio.

This is revealing of the very weak nature of scrutiny needed to prevent the use of drugs for performance enhancement. There have been a series of instances that have worried the IOC and the anti-drugs WADA.



There is today undeniable evidence that much of the research at sports' top level is dictated by a desire to find enhancement substances less likely to be found out in a lab.

There are so many who have been stripped of their medals after it was ascertained that their flight to glory had been aided by illegal drugs.

If this has failed to act as a deterrent it could lead to one conclusion: the competing athletes know that others are using similarly unfair means to improve their showing without ever getting caught.

This is the worst scenario the world of sport can be faced with. This is a direct outcome of the general tendency of the times which call for the fiercest competition in all areas of human endeavour.

The sports grounds that are famous for offering their cut-throat fare now were once teaching participants the value of fair play. Those who cheated were always around but genuine endurance and honour always helped the best participant stand out.

Maybe that appears too idealistic today, but the OIC does have its task cut out for it: it must attempt to save the Rio Olympics from the grievous scandal threatening it.

## ECP selection

CONSENSUS on the new Election Commission of Pakistan members from each of the four provinces may have proved elusive, but at least the selection process has been completed without any great controversy and the ECP can resume its work.

While the PTI has claimed that its nominees were ignored and the PTI member in the parliamentary selection committee abstained from voting for the ECP members from Punjab and KP, the rules appear to have been followed scrupulously and an immediate challenge to the composition of the new commission is unlikely.

Perhaps the PTI, which runs the provincial government in KP and aspires to topple the PML-N in Punjab, will rake up the matter nearer to or in the aftermath of the next general election, but that is an issue for the future and by then the ECP members from Punjab and KP will have had adequate opportunity to demonstrate their independence and professionalism.

Welcome as it is that one of the new members is a woman and the monopoly of retired justices has been broken — the ECP member from Sindh is a retired bureaucrat — there are several questions worth considering if the ECP is to be strengthened further, as surely the democratic project needs it to be.

The ECP nomination process was completed virtually on the last day that the rules allowed and only after significant pressure from the Supreme Court, while the electoral body itself was allowed to lapse into dysfunction because parliament did not think to start the process of finding replacements until after the previous four ECP members retired.

Just days before those retirements in mid-June, parliament was hastily convened to pass the 22nd Amendment, which amended the ECP membership criteria and allowed for non-judicial candidates to be considered.

Moreover, the selection process itself was shrouded in unnecessary secrecy, with neither the government nor the opposition revealing the names that had been sent to the parliamentary committee for consideration.

The new ECP members may well be legitimately elected, but the selection process has surely to be infused with yet more transparency, efficiency and wider debate — after all, why did a constitutional amendment yield only one non-judicial ECP member?

There is also the broader issue of electoral reforms. With parliament patting itself on the back for a job well done in selecting new ECP members, now may be the time for it to also take up the much-delayed matter of comprehensive electoral reforms.

Competent and professional leadership of the ECP can only go so far if the rules of the electoral process are not overhauled and the ECP is not given the power and resources it needs to ensure that elections are free and fair.

The country does not deserve another contested election that leads to one of the biggest parties taking to the streets. Now is the time to act.

## Gas allocations

THE proposal to treat all household consumers of natural gas across the country equally when it comes to allocation may sound correct in principle but is a bad idea if pursued in the teeth of opposition from the provinces.

The growth of domestic consumers of gas is highest in Punjab, where SNGPL — the company responsible for gas distribution in Punjab and KP — has just added more than a quarter of a million new domestic consumers, as per the latest annual report on the company's website.

In the year before, it had added more than 280,000 new domestic consumers. With election season not far off, it appears the government is in a mood to enhance these numbers, and put in place arrangements to ensure that gas flows through these connections when campaigning begins.

Ironically, when listing the reasons for the high levels of losses being suffered by SNGPL, the directors put a substantial portion of the blame on an “[u]nprecedented extension in the distribution network on the basis of GOP socio-economic agenda”.

Now the petroleum ministry is asking the provinces to support a measure that would give domestic consumers across the country equal entitlement to gas — going against the principle enshrined in the Constitution which states that consumers in provinces where the gas is produced have the first right over its use.

Not surprisingly, the provinces resisted the move in their meeting with the petroleum minister on Monday, and, instead, used the opportunity to table their own grievances about gas allocations.

It is understandable that upcountry domestic consumers have a greater need for the vital fuel in winter since temperatures there are lower, but even the government of KP resisted the move, and its citizens have to endure some of the lowest temperatures in the country.

The provinces have a valid point that the proposed revision of the gas allocation formula would benefit Punjab more than the other provinces since the growth of domestic consumers there is the highest.

If the government is serious about the proposal, it should realise that it touches on powerful interprovincial politics and that it must work at a higher level to first build a consensus, failing which it would be a mistake to try and advance the proposal through executive fiat or via administrative gimmickry.

Leaving it to the ministry and the Council of Common Interests to ensure the passage of such a proposal is a recipe for failure.

## Saudi-Israeli ties

THE fluidity of the situation in the Middle East is creating strange bedfellows.

Over the weekend, a Saudi delegation, led by a retired general, was in Israel to discuss, amongst other things, the Palestine problem.

Considering that the kingdom has no official ties with the Jewish state — which continues to occupy large swathes of Arab territory — the high-profile visit is significant as it reflects a possible new strategic understanding in the region.

Though the Saudi delegation was visiting in an unofficial capacity, it is highly unlikely the trip was undertaken without the royal palace's approval.

Also, the fact that high-ranking Israeli foreign ministry officials received the visitors reflects the importance of the trip on both sides.

Saudi-Israeli backchannel contacts have reportedly occurred several times, albeit in third countries; this would be the first major interaction on Israeli soil.

Anwar Eshki, leader of the Saudi delegation, stressed that Israel must make peace with the Palestinians before normalisation of ties with the wider Arab world.

He was also critical of Iran, criticism which must have been well received in Tel Aviv, as both the Saudis and Israelis have a common foe in Tehran.

If the Saudi initiative is designed to seek a just deal for the Palestinians, it should continue. However, Israel's track record does not leave much room for enthusiasm.

Senior Israeli leaders, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, have ruled out the Palestinians' right of return to their homeland, as well as vacating the occupied territories, including Arab East Jerusalem and Syria's Golan Heights.

With such rigidity on display, as well as Israel's penchant for unleashing frequent, brutal violence upon the Palestinian people, can a fair deal be expected?

Moreover, if the Saudi outreach is designed to cement an anti-Iran alliance with Israel, it will only further destabilise a region on edge.

Riyadh should move forward with its attempts at peace as long as the Palestinians are on board, and their rights, dignity and just demands are protected.

# Cybercrime bill

EVEN after months of back and forth over the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Bill 2015, there seem to be few signs of saner counsel prevailing in the country's legislature.

Now, with the bill having been adopted by the Senate Standing Committee on Information Technology on Tuesday, and set to be put before the upper house during the ongoing session, time seems to be rapidly running out.

From digital rights groups and IT experts, the various iterations of this piece of legislation have attracted controversy, much of it well deserved; the criticism has been based primarily on the fact that earlier versions of the bill betrayed a dangerous unfamiliarity with the realities and ramifications of the digital world, turning minor transgressions that could be committed in error or ignorance into offences with hefty jail terms and/or fines, and containing overly broad categories and sweeping statements.

And while it is true, as legislators including the Senate IT committee chairman, have pointed out, that a process of discussion was held with individuals within parliament as well as digital rights groups outside of it, the fact remains that this was after hectic lobbying by the latter.

More pertinently, there is too much in the proposed bill that still raises serious doubts about its long-term efficacy — thus requiring a further, prolonged and open-minded conversation between those who are attempting to rush the proposed legislation through and those voicing concern over it.

Part of the problem seems to be that those quarters in government that are pushing for the early passage of this legislative formula into law appear to have taken an unnecessarily adversarial and uncompromising position on the issue — the reason being difficult to ascertain.

Consider, for example, what the state minister for IT, Anusha Rehman, had to say: local NGOs were demanding that people be allowed to self-regulate. But this is far from the case and would at any rate be highly inadvisable.

Indeed, there is no argument at all that laws to regulate all manner of cybercrime, ranging from data theft to the malicious invasion of privacy, are needed. But by all accounts, this version of the draft remains flawed and contentious.

From as high a forum as the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has come an open letter warning that the adoption of the law would have immense ramifications on constitutional rights and fundamental freedoms.

Amongst the reservations it cites are vague formulations, contradictions and points of conflict with other laws.

Time may be short, but a softening of stance can achieve the desired reboot.

The Senate needs reminding that this legislation, if and in the form it is passed, would become a basic building block of subsequent law on the cyber world and the internet.

Getting this first step wrong would be perilous for Pakistan.

## Attack on soldiers

EVERY few days, residents of Karachi are reminded in particularly disquieting ways that peace continues to elude this metropolis.

On Tuesday afternoon, two army soldiers in a military vehicle were ambushed in Saddar, one of the busiest districts in the city, by gunmen on a motorbike who made their escape through the narrow streets in the vicinity.

One of the victims died shortly after, while the other succumbed during treatment.

The incident bore striking similarities to an attack in December last year that took place on M.A. Jinnah Road, one of Karachi's busiest arteries, also in Saddar, which claimed the lives of two military police personnel when their vehicle got stuck in traffic.

When army men in uniform are singled out in this manner, it sends a sinister message to the rest of society: no one, anywhere, is safe.

Despite the nearly three-year long Rangers-led operation to restore law and order in Karachi, criminal elements are still moving about freely, waiting for a chance to strike wherever they can. And by undertaking these comparatively low-risk, hit-and-run operations, they succeed in pushing the state on to the back foot and belie its claims of being in control of the situation.

According to statistics announced recently, terrorism is down by 80pc and targeted killings by 50pc as a result of the operation. However, targeted killings are showing an uptick; some of the more prominent instances among them include the murder of Amjad Sabri in late June, and that of two members of the Ahmadi community in the weeks preceding.

The latest incident illustrates the challenges of policing a complex, urban labyrinth like Karachi where on-ground intelligence is a vital component of the fight against splinter groups of various shades.

Only an able, truly independent and well-equipped police force, with its organic structure that has links deep within local communities, can ferret out such intelligence.

Conversely, the Rangers are by the very nature of their organisational framework at a remove from grass-roots dynamics, contained within their pickets, and they act on the basis of centralised intelligence.

While they may be effective in controlling crime for limited periods, they are not a long-term solution.

To improve the law-and-order situation, a number of proposals have been made to empower the police, including the recruitment of additional personnel and enhanced training. Included on the list should also be a time-specific exit for the Rangers.

## Dangerous buildings

RAIN often has a magical effect on some government departments. The lists roll out of the closets, old plans beckon with an urgency after a prolonged dry run, and new schemes unravel, sometimes at a speed that is hard to keep pace with.

Officialdom in Lahore traditionally celebrates the monsoons by coming up with yet another list of buildings that are too fragile to be allowed to stand without remedial action.

A large number of 'dilapidated' buildings have been deemed fit for summary razing, obliterating with their fall all the sentiment and history attached to them. There is a larger number that, government experts believe, can still be salvaged.

There are three different authorities in Lahore tasked with keeping an eye on the condition of structures in their area. There is LDA as also the town municipal administration and the walled city authority. Each deals with buildings in its domain, and the combined numbers that the three have to deal with may be quite large.

For instance, TMA Lahore alone has 451 dangerous buildings on its list, 155 of which have to be pulled down. The hazardous buildings marked by LDA and those listed inside the walled city are in addition to this.



The first category of buildings runs into many hundreds and soon enough thousands of others in Lahore and adjoining towns will see labourers and masons attempting to ensure more secure living and heritage conservation. How soon, we don't know because the government has not yet given us a time frame for the commencement of repairs.

It is hoped that the magic that dictates emergency treatment for these constructions will not disappear when the wet season ends. Many of the buildings that have now been condemned and will be pulled down could have been saved had action been taken earlier to save them.

The project must be undertaken immediately to prevent more of these old structures that map our journey through time from being marked for mercy killing.

## May 12 tragedy

May 12, 2007, will live long in infamy. A dictator fending off a populist challenge from a deposed chief justice had turned to his political allies to stage a show of strength.

Rawalpindi saw Pervez Musharraf address a rally alongside the PML-Q leadership and punch the air in defiance. But it was Karachi that witnessed tragedy and violence as the city appeared to be under siege from the very political party that was running the provincial capital at the time, the MQM.

Waseem Akhtar, the swaggering provincial home adviser to the chief minister, played a frontline role in the May 12 catastrophe and surely has many questions to answer.

But the manner in which Mr Akhtar was recently arrested and has now been accused of orchestrating attacks that led to the deaths of a number of individuals on May 12, 2007, is wholly unsatisfactory.

Once again, it appears that politicians are being made the scapegoat for the misdeeds of a military misadventure.

To be clear, and to reiterate the obvious, the MQM has a great deal to answer for when it comes to May 12, 2007.

The party may have been in an alliance with the PML-Q at the centre and in Sindh at the time, but May 12 was about a personal favour to a political patron fighting for survival. Had Iftikhar Chaudhry been allowed to lead a rally in Karachi that day as the lawyers' movement had intended, it would surely have added to the momentum to reinstate the deposed chief justice.

But the extraordinary violence unleashed that day after law enforcement was virtually suspended set a new low even for a city that has witnessed grim and endless bloodbaths in recent decades.

May 12 stands out as a day that politics, always fierce and competitive here, was turned into a nakedly violent struggle for ascendancy.

It should not be forgotten and the perpetrators should not be allowed to escape justice. Nine years on, the absence of justice has only reinforced the need to draw a line again that politics must not cross.

Yet, whatever the role of the MQM, it is undeniable that Karachi was plunged into chaos on May 12 because Pervez Musharraf desired that Iftikhar Chaudhry not enter the city.

The now-retired general's speech in Rawalpindi on the night of May 12, after a day of violence in Karachi, and his comments in the days after, made it clear that he had no regrets about what had occurred in Karachi on May 12 and, indeed, saw it as necessary to protect his rule.

Mr Akhtar may have been one of the protagonists, but he was neither alone nor remotely the most senior of officials involved in the planning and execution of the violence.

So, by all means, investigate May 12 — but start with those who instigated and cheered that violent day, Pervez Musharraf and his henchmen.

## More rain havoc

The rains that just hit Punjab and parts of KP were not as intense as they have been in the past, but the havoc they wreaked was nevertheless severe.

Given the pattern of intensifying monsoons over the past five years, it is becoming imperative that our cities be built with adequate drainage, and that nullahs are in proper condition prior to the commencement of the monsoon season.

However, this is clearly not the case, as the residents of Lahore, Sialkot, Abbottabad and Rawalpindi, amongst many other cities, know.

Even the slightest rainfall is enough to clog our cities and cause nullahs to overflow, and the heavy rains that we saw on Tuesday and Wednesday only made things worse.

In Lahore, what aggravated matters was the construction under way for the Orange Line train, where the dugout route has turned hazardous. In some cities, such as Gujrat, the quantity of rainfall set a record, but in most precipitation was not at record levels.

What will it take for the authorities to realise that preparing for the monsoon season is an important priority? The obsession with high-visibility projects is coming at the cost of many other civic responsibilities that the federal and provincial governments owe to their citizens.

The drainage of rainwater is not rocket science. It requires a little investment, and some government capacity to put in place by-laws and ensure that appropriate space is allocated on roads for the purpose of maintaining storm water drains.

Yet, time and again, we have to experience the same spectacle as roofs collapse, roads turn into rivers and nullahs overflow, washing away villages. We are not even halfway through the monsoons but are already feeling the vulnerabilities that the season brings.

It will be a tragedy if later in the season another climate-related calamity strikes, catching us off guard while the authorities chase priorities other than those required to build resilience against adverse weather events.

Building drainage systems in our cities, preventing encroachments on storm water drains, unclogging nullahs are all crucial priorities that have sadly been ignored.

Even more important is building proper early warning systems in the shape of improved forecasting and issuing alerts for potentially affected populations, along with SOPs for coordinating the response to an adverse weather event.

The provincial governments have to play their part in this scheme, and should not be allowed to escape accountability for their failure.

## Clinton's nomination

There were tears and cheers at the US Democratic National Convention on Tuesday when Hillary Clinton was selected as the first woman ever to become a major party's presidential nominee.

A look at Ms Clinton's political trajectory shows that her path to the White House is strewn with controversy and is under public scrutiny — Libya, the email server scandal, Iran, her association with big money, etc. All this makes her nomination an achievement of sorts for a career politician, a wife and grandmother.

She has had strong support. Michelle Obama reminded her audience in her Convention speech of Ms Clinton's 'get up and keep moving' attitude, and focused on her as a determined glass-ceiling cracker.

President Obama said of his former secretary of state: "No matter how daunting the odds, no matter how much people try to knock her down, she never ever quits."

Yes, tenacity is her strength, a survival tool in male-dominated politics. But, more importantly, at a time when American politics has become reactionary given its cultural, racial and social divisions, Ms Clinton's temperament, competence and experience will be tested.

Although she was an unpopular choice, Democrats are now rallying around her to draw traditional constituencies. Highlighting Ms Clinton's strong faith has been one way of showing she's grounded. This can be taken as a positive signal.

Party disunity would be troubling for the campaign. And this is what dissenters must realise even when questioning her track record (on healthcare, gender wage gap, tax cuts, foreign policy, Iran sanctions).

On her part, Ms Clinton's first task must involve removing the trust deficit to win over disillusioned voters. She knows she is not without controversy, making her a tough sell even if her political experience came during one of the toughest periods in international politics when diplomacy and measured reaction were critical to decision-making.

Given the two choices Americans have in November, it might be best to remember that history has lessons demonstrating that change comes slowly despite perseverance.

## Indian minister's visit

SAARC may be an organisation that has historically under-delivered, but it continues to be a forum in which the bilateral Pak-India relationship can be attended to — if the governments of the two countries so desire.

With Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh set to visit Islamabad next week, the regular schedule of Saarc ministerial meetings will yet again provide an opportunity for India and Pakistan to discuss cooperation rather than simply talk past each other.

Whether the Indian home minister and his Pakistani counterpart, Nisar Ali Khan, will meet separately has yet to be announced, but if they do the ministers will find there is ample space for dialogue on issues covered by the Saarc meeting, especially on counterterrorism cooperation and mutual assistance in criminal matters.

For that to happen, however, both sides will need to resist the temptation to lecture each other and play to their respective domestic galleries.

Clearly, the Pak-India relationship is at a low ebb. Just this week, Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj criticised Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in unusually direct and undiplomatic terms and the Pakistani foreign policy establishment has been in overdrive to try and bring international attention to the protests and violence in India-held Kashmir.

While Pakistan's stance on the recent Kashmir unrest has been principled and in line with diplomatic norms, India prefers to focus on the lack of movement on the Pathankot investigation and the long-stalled Mumbai attacks-related trials.

It is an old conundrum: what Pakistan wishes to discuss, India does not; what India wants of Pakistan, Pakistan is reluctant to cooperate on.

Yet, it is possible for both sides to reiterate their fundamental positions while looking for opportunities at the margins to create a better political and diplomatic environment between the two countries.

As ever, much will depend on the political will of the two governments and their ability to navigate internal challenges.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi must surely recognise that an iron-fisted approach in IHK will only instil further resistance to Indian repression; instead, the Indian centre needs to reopen the lines of communication with Kashmiri leaders as recommended by the BJP's regional partners in IHK.

As for Pakistan, there must be recognition that the repression in IHK it should rightly protest is a separate matter from the ongoing terrorism investigations.

Proceeding with the seemingly stalled Pathankot investigation would not alter the dynamics of Pakistan's support for the Kashmir cause.

If those internal challenges can be addressed, the prime ministers of both countries have already demonstrated their ability to surprise and seek political solutions to long-standing problems.

Consistent as Prime Minister Sharif is in his India policy, however, he also needs to demonstrate his influence over this country's overall India policy.

As for Mr Modi, he needs to recognise mercurialness cannot amount to statesmanship, and he must demonstrate more consistency in his Pakistan policy.

## Sindh mayoral polls

THERE is often talk, much of it justified, of the myriad challenges democracy in Pakistan faces. But lost amidst the chatter is the fact that for long stretches during this country's history, the elected third tier of government — some would say the basic structure of the democratic edifice — has been missing.

Take the case of Sindh: the province has been without elected local governments for over six years.

Though the election process concluded in December, till now the local bodies have failed to start functioning because mayoral elections have not been held — due to legal wrangles and procrastination by the provincial government. But on Thursday, the ECP made a welcome announcement in this regard, saying that mayoral elections in Karachi and most of Sindh's other districts would be held on Aug 24.

We should mark the date and hope no further hurdles are placed in the way of functional local governments.

Perhaps more than any other level of government, it is the local bodies that citizens interact with the most, whether it is matters of sanitation in the neighbourhood, or other civic issues.

Hence it is unforgivable that the people of Sindh, particularly the megacity of Karachi, have been deprived of elected representatives at this level for so long.

The results of this neglect have manifested themselves in unsightly ways, as the mounds of putrid garbage, rivulets of sewage and potholed roads in Karachi testify.

The civic situation in other parts of Sindh is hardly any better. Therefore, to address these cases of extreme urban decay, it is essential that Murad Ali Shah, the new chief minister of Sindh, give the local bodies the powers they need.

The PPP government had earlier deprived the third tier of many key powers; for example, solid waste disposal is currently being looked after by the province. Should picking up the trash from the roads of Karachi, Hyderabad and Larkana be the responsibility of the honourable chief minister or local government minister? Or should it be a job for the town and municipal governments? The answer is self-evident.

Moreover, the revival of the Karachi Development Authority has been seen by some quarters as a move to further disempower the next city mayor.

The provincial government micromanaging civic affairs flies in the face of devolution of power. Which is why the mayors and elected officials of Sindh's cities and towns must have the powers to run their jurisdictions.

## Turkey's media crackdown

AMONG those who have borne the brunt of the sweeping purge in Turkey after the failed coup attempt there is the media.

The crackdown has included the arrest of several journalists critical of the government and has seen the authorities shut down over 130 media outlets including 45 daily newspapers and 16 TV stations.

Nearly 50 arrest warrants were issued for former staffers of the Zaman newspaper on Wednesday.

Earlier this week, 42 arrest warrants were issued for journalists 16 of whom have been detained.

While President Erdogan's actions herald a wider crackdown on political opponents given the struggle between the AKP and Fethullah Gülen's Hizmet movement is clear, the current media witch-hunt has only accelerated the purge against a press that has held up a mirror to Mr Erdogan on multiple occasions.



As he continues with his purge of journalists and others, it would do him good to recall that it was the people who firmly defended his democratic credentials on the night of the attempted coup.

More disturbing are reports of beatings, severe torture and rape of coup plotters in arbitrary detention as revealed by Amnesty International. True, the authorities must investigate the plotters but a crackdown far beyond its acceptable remit will further polarise Turkey.

Mr Erdogan must not backslide on human rights and infringe on the public's right to information in any attempt to bring to book those guilty of trying to subvert democratic rule.

The imposition of a state of emergency, partial withdrawal from the European Convention of Human Rights, extension of detainees' detention period and contemplating the reinstatement of the death penalty are not actions befitting a democracy.

Meanwhile, Turkey's Western allies must stop cushioning Mr Erdogan just because he hosts Syrian refugees and assists the West in the fight against the IS. Their message must be plain: compromising the rule of law, human rights protections and a vibrant civil society, including a free media, is intolerable and must be stopped.

## Saved from death

DIPLOMACY notched up a partial victory this week as Zulfiqar Ali, a Pakistani citizen sentenced to death by firing squad in Indonesia, was included among the 10 individuals whose executions have been suspended by Indonesia. A trial that was marred by evidentiary and due process flaws, according to human rights activists, should never have been the basis for his long-term incarceration, let alone grounds for his execution. This paper opposes the death penalty in all its forms and, given the grim record of executions here in Pakistan over the past 18 months, it is an altogether welcome development that Ali's case appears to have sparked a national conversation on the potential unfairness of judicial systems. Indeed, that conversation should be extended to the problem of draconian punishments against alleged drug offenders inside Pakistan and abroad. Saudi Arabia, for example, has a terrible and insistent policy on alleged drug smugglers that has seen several Pakistani citizens executed over the years. The full-throated and wholehearted defence of Ali — morally correct and laudable — should be extended to all Pakistani citizens facing the tyranny of flawed justice in all countries.

Indeed, one of the travesties of the Pakistan criminal system is the range of crimes for which the death penalty can be handed down. While the long fight to have capital

punishment abolished in all its forms here continues, attention over the medium term also needs to be paid to the scope of the penalty. Kidnapping and drug trafficking are just two of the crimes that can result in a death sentence even if no one was killed while the crime was being committed. Can it really be said that the death penalty deters drug smuggling or drug-related crimes in Pakistan? Is the criminal justice system really punishing major drug offenders, or are those caught and punished by the state individuals at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder and without access to adequate legal representation? Ali has rightly become a cause célèbre, but there are many Zulfikar Alis languishing in Pakistani prisons and on death row. At the very least, there ought to be a review of the scope of the applicability of the death penalty here.

There is also the issue of due process: the right to a fair trial and reasonable standards of justice applied right from the investigation phase all the way through to appeals and clemency requests. The 21st Amendment has virtually obliterated due process for terrorism suspects tried in military courts and the appeals process in the Supreme Court thus far has brought to light disturbing testimony of victims' families and their lawyers. Fundamental rights are non-negotiable as ought to be due process, especially when the death sentence is a possibility. Zulfikar Ali must be saved and so should many other Pakistanis in prisons abroad and at home.

## Communalism in Sindh

FOR some time now, the pluralistic Sufi ethos of Sindh has been under threat from the forces of bigotry. The recent disturbances in the district of Ghotki appear to be part of this ugly trend. On Wednesday, two teenagers belonging to the Hindu community were shot while at a tea shop in the district; one of the victims, Sheetan Kumar, died on the spot. Tensions in the area had been high as earlier reports had emerged about the alleged desecration of the Quran. Local police officials say the suspect involved in the alleged desecration, and who had apparently embraced Islam, was mentally unstable. As is the case whenever matters of such a sensitive nature occur, the reported desecration and the murder sparked communal tension in Ghotki, with protest demonstrations and closures of markets.

When cases of this nature transpire, it is essential that the state and community members immediately act to calm the situation and not let extremists exploit sentiments. Otherwise, tragic consequences can ensue, as in this incident with the senseless murder of the teenager. The case needs to be pursued and the killers of Sheetan Kumar must be brought to justice. But in the longer term, there is a pressing need to address the overall issue of extremism in Sindh. While some groups did hold demonstrations to condemn the communal violence, which should be appreciated, more sustained efforts are required in this regard. The Hindu community in Sindh has been targeted before,

with temples and other buildings belonging to the faith group being desecrated and attacked. The forcible conversion of Hindu women is another issue that has fuelled communal divisions. Amongst the factors that have led to this situation over the years is the fact that militant and sectarian groups have made inroads in many of Sindh's districts. This, along with the growth of madressahs — with some seminaries affiliated with hard-line groups — has contributed to the changed social and religious ethos of Sindh. It is important that members of the community — intellectuals, ulema, elders — reinforce the traditionally tolerant nature of society in Sindh. However, the state can perhaps make the most difference in stemming the extremist tide in two major ways. First, it must punish those involved in the murder, harassment and intimidation of minority citizens. Second, the authorities must clamp down on the activities of banned groups across the province before they do even more damage to Sindh's fabric.

## Merkel's admirable stance

RARELY has a politician adhered so unwaveringly to principles when his or her political survival itself is possibly at stake. But Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, has proven herself to be of stronger mettle than most. On Thursday at a news conference in Berlin, she robustly defended her open-door refugee policy that has seen Germany take in more than one million asylum-seekers in 2015, mostly from war-ravaged Syria. Even as she described the recent attacks in her country and across Europe as "shocking, depressing and terrifying", she insisted that Germany's stance must continue to be based on humanity and compassion and that those committing acts of terrorism wanted to create divisions in society based on differences in culture and religions.

Ms Merkel's steadfastness is commendable, as is her long view of the situation — particularly given the circumstances in which she has expressed them. Europe has been rocked by a series of terrorist incidents in the last few months. In Germany itself, the last two weeks have been particularly harrowing with four attacks in different parts of the country; the perpetrators in at least three, according to German police, were either asylum seekers or refugees inspired by Islamist ideology. Since then, the xenophobic, racist impulses that have long been on the boil — and which gained further traction when waves of desperate asylum seekers began to arrive on European shores in 2015 — have found more takers. The revulsion and fear among the public has also given ammunition to Ms Merkel's political opposition as well as some of her own party colleagues to denounce her policies. Nevertheless, Ms Merkel has stood her ground. Earlier, she countered the massive anti-migrant protests that erupted in the wake of her welcoming attitude to refugees, with her determined 'wir schaffen das' (we can manage it) mantra, even while acknowledging the challenges that the influx posed. She continues to demonstrate that a true leader is guided by principles that are not held hostage to political expediency or narrow populist sentiment.