

# DAWN



## *Editorials for the Month of August 2019*

**Note:** This is a compiled work by the Team The CSS Point. The DAWN.COM is the owner of the content available in the document. This document is compiled to support css aspirants and This document is NOT FOR SALE. You may order this booklet and only printing and shipping cost will be incurred.

**Compiled & Edited By Shahbaz Shakeel (Online Content Manager)**

[www.thecsspoint.com](http://www.thecsspoint.com)



10012345678902



**BUY CSS BOOKS ONLINE**

**CASH ON DELIVERY**

**ALL OVER PAKISTAN**

**<https://cssbooks.net>**

**ALL COMPULSORY AND  
OPTIONAL SUBJECTS BOOK  
FROM SINGLE POINT**

**ORDER NOW**

**03336042057 - 0726540141**

# DOWNLOAD

**CSS Notes, Books, MCQs, Magazines**



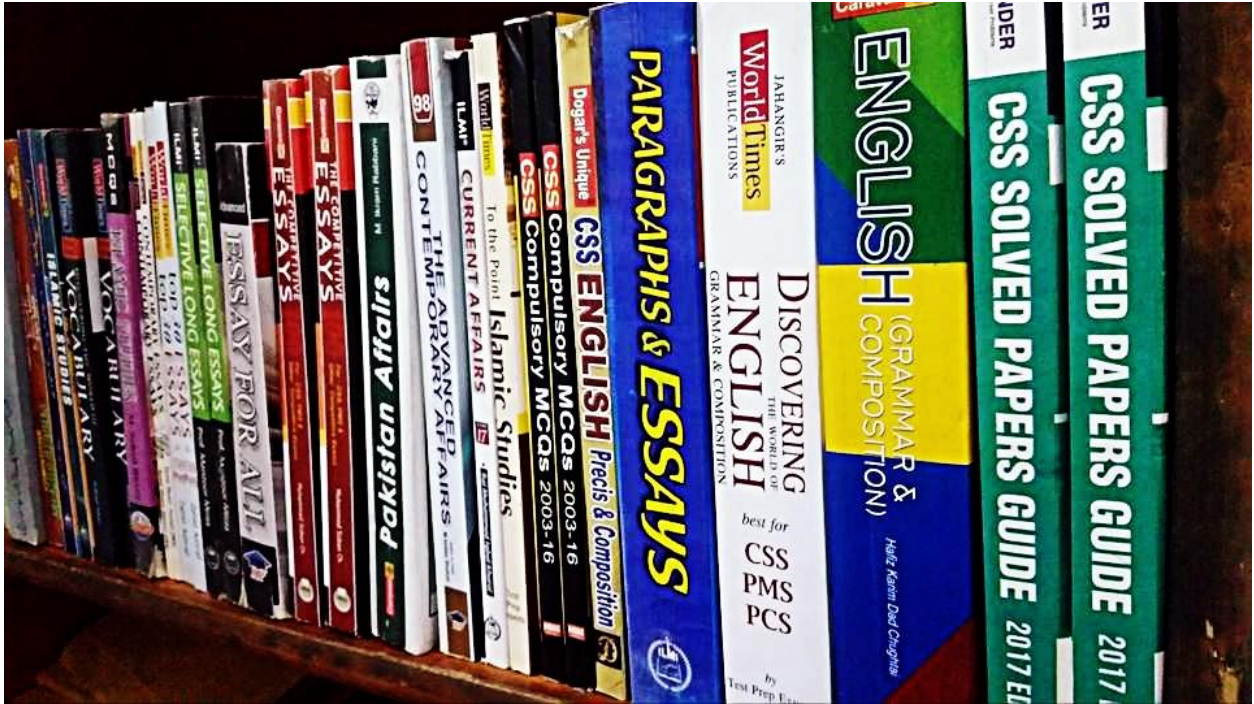
**THE CSS POINT**  
Yes We Can Do It!

**WWW.THECSSPOINT.COM**

- **Download CSS Notes**
- **Download CSS Books**
- **Download CSS Magazines**
- **Download CSS MCQs**
- **Download CSS Past Papers**

*The CSS Point, Pakistan's The Best  
Online FREE Web source for All CSS  
Aspirants.*

Email: [info@thecsspoint.com](mailto:info@thecsspoint.com)



BUY CSS / PMS / NTS & GENERAL KNOWLEDGE BOOKS  
ONLINE **CASH ON DELIVERY** ALL OVER PAKISTAN

Visit Now:

[WWW.CSSBOOKS.NET](http://WWW.CSSBOOKS.NET)

For Oder & Inquiry  
Call/SMS/WhatsApp

**0333 6042057 – 0726 540316**

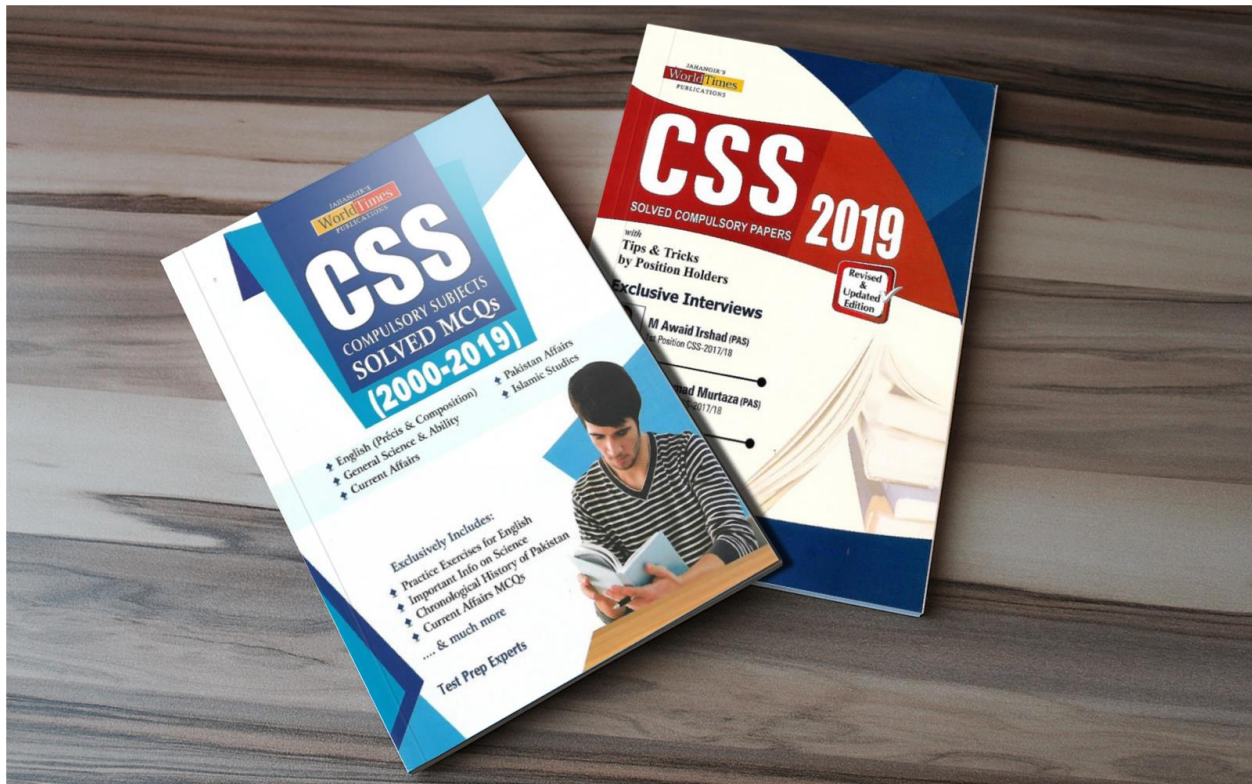


# CSS Compulsory Solved MCQs from 2000 to 2019

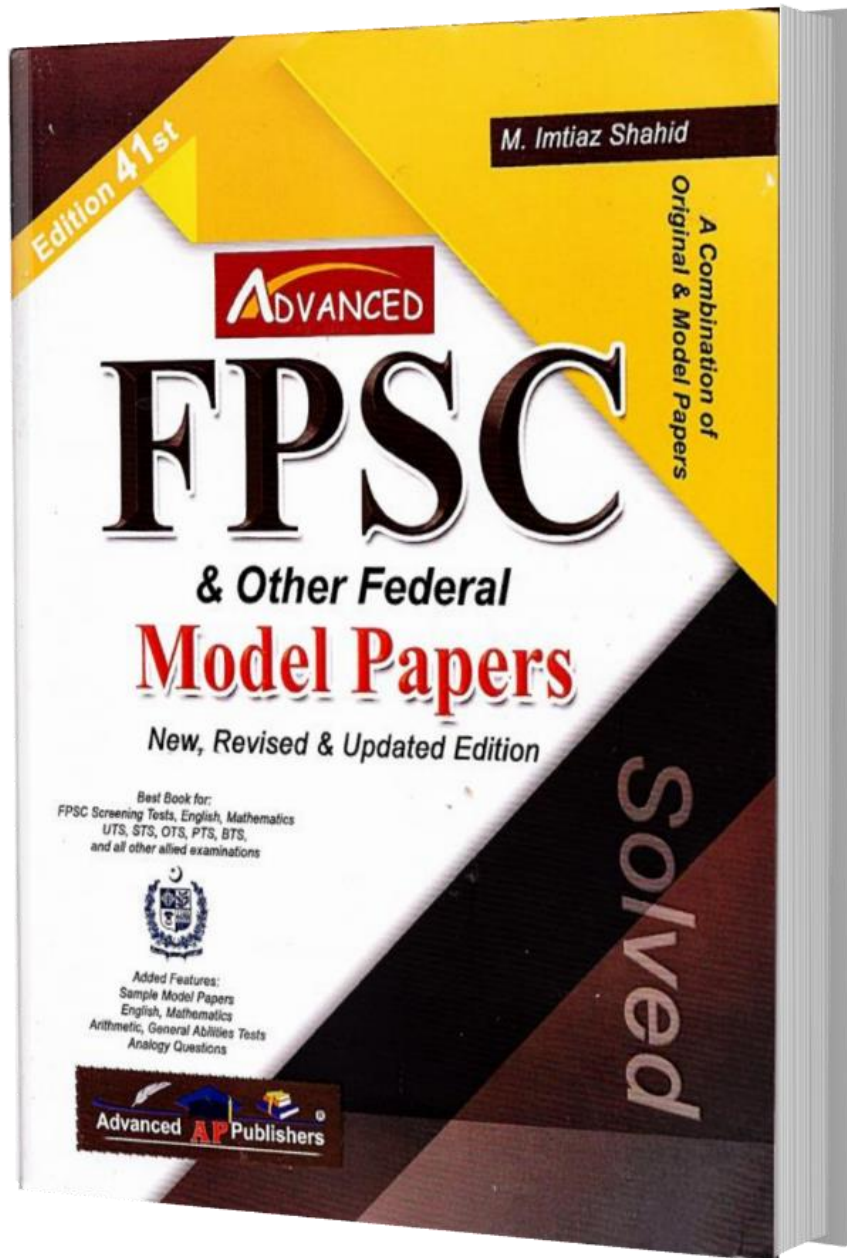
&

# CSS Compulsory Solved Subjective Papers from 2016 to 2019

**ORDER NOW!**



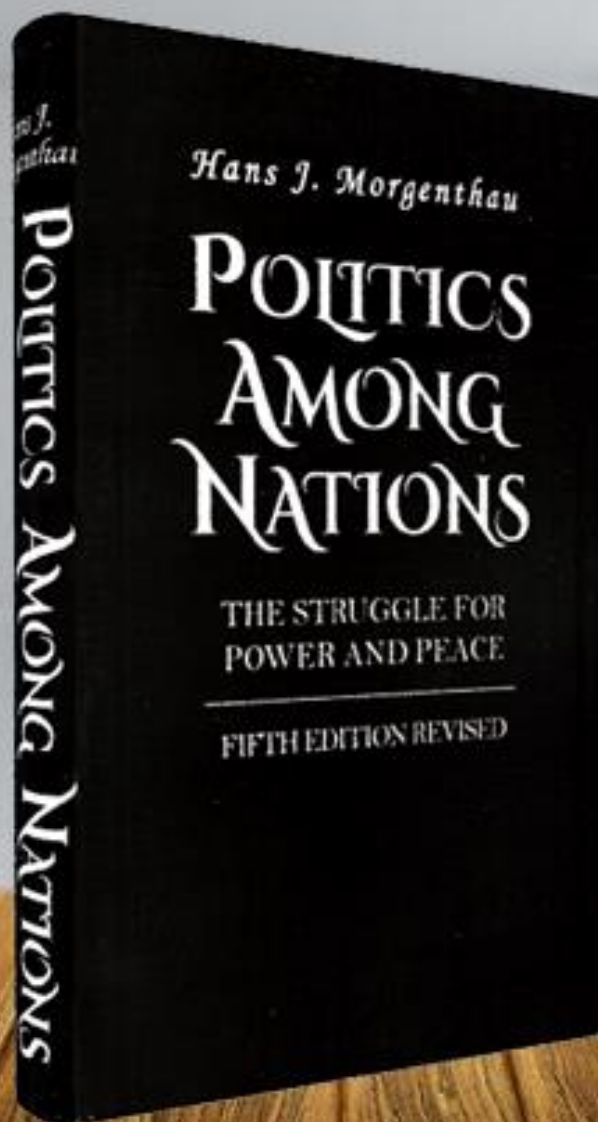
FPSC  
Model Papers  
41<sup>st</sup> Edition 2019  
Imtiaz Shahid Advanced Publishers



# Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power & Peace

By Hans Morgenthau

**Order Now**



**30% OFF**

CALL OR SMS  
03336042057

**Contents**

Civilian deaths in Afghanistan.....	11
Minority question .....	12
Rawalpindi crash .....	13
Kashmir mediation.....	14
Taxing doctors.....	15
A dam misstep.....	16
Senate drama.....	17
Protecting the poor.....	18
Waterborne diseases .....	19
Ominous signs.....	20
Police-Levies merger .....	21
Saudi women’s rights.....	22
A plastic world.....	23
Revenue challenges .....	24
Hong Kong protests.....	25
IHK’s grim reality .....	26
Peace Path to Afghan.....	27
‘Clean Karachi’ .....	28
Playing with fire .....	29
Reviving steel mills.....	31
Ban on CNG and LPG.....	32
NSC on Kashmir .....	33
Anti-polio propaganda .....	34
Higher education funds.....	35
A tepid response .....	36
Water crisis .....	38
Coaches sacked .....	39
Pak-India trains stopped .....	40
Maryam’s arrest.....	40
Rejected degrees .....	42
State of the Muslim world .....	43
Car tax .....	44



Hide collection & offal .....	45
The road ahead .....	46
Media in IHK.....	48
Tax returns .....	49
An economic plan?.....	49
Internet shutdowns.....	50
Yemeni infighting .....	52
Modi's actions .....	53
Coal dumping .....	54
Dream called tourism.....	55
UNSC meeting on IHK.....	56
Kuchlak attacks .....	57
Sexual assault cases .....	58
Mixed signals from Taliban .....	59
Stock market blues.....	60
Traffic accidents .....	61
Economy, one year on .....	62
IS in Afghanistan .....	63
Mob mentality .....	64
Another term for the army chief .....	65
Trump's efforts .....	66
More than statistics .....	68
Restraining NAB .....	68
Deficit declines.....	70
'Dirty' politics .....	71
ECP appointments.....	72
Blacklisting rumours.....	73
Davis Cup setback .....	74
Resistance in IHK.....	75
Eradicating polio .....	76
Congo virus .....	77
The JUI-F's October revolution .....	78
Zarif at G7 summit .....	79

Blowing smoke .....	80
PM on Kashmir .....	81
CPEC authority .....	82
From English to Urdu .....	83
Fiscal blowout .....	84
Airspace closure .....	85
A royal mess .....	87
Bahria settlement dues .....	87
Human trafficking .....	89
Sheikh Rashid's 'war' .....	90
Gas sector reforms .....	91
Awards for judges .....	92
Apocalypse now .....	93

# **Civilian deaths in Afghanistan**

FIGURES published in a UN report released on Tuesday depict a grim picture of civilians in Afghanistan. While the government in Kabul and its Western backers continue to fight the Afghan Taliban (with the Americans simultaneously pursuing dialogue with the militant group), ordinary Afghans are dying in high numbers in the crossfire. What is most shocking is the fact that in the first half of 2019, the majority of these Afghans were killed by Nato and government forces. As per the UN's figures, over 1,200 civilians were killed in acts of violence in the first six months of this year; more than 700 of these casualties were the result of air strikes and night raids carried out by Afghan forces and their foreign backers. However the Taliban, as well as the self-styled Islamic State group, which has a considerable presence in Afghanistan, have directly targeted 300 civilians. Unfortunately, attacks are a frequent occurrence in Afghanistan. On Wednesday over 30 people were killed when an IED went off targeting a bus in the western part of the country. The government says the Taliban are responsible for the atrocity, while the militia has denied involvement.

At a meeting held in Doha last month, members of the Taliban, civil society figures as well as Afghan politicians attending the event in their 'personal' capacity pledged to bring civilian casualties down to zero. Clearly, if the latest UN figures are anything to go by, a lot needs to be done in this regard by all sides. While the Afghan state has a responsibility to protect the country, such a high number of civilian casualties in government offensives are unacceptable, especially when Kabul is backed by the highly advanced military machine of its Western backers. The Taliban will also not win any hearts and minds if they continue to target non-combatants. The path to peace in Afghanistan is marked by the strange dichotomy of fighting and talking at the same time by the belligerents. A conscious effort needs to be made by all sides to live up to their pledges of protecting civilians and reducing collateral damage. Although terrorist groups like IS cannot be expected to have such scruples, the Afghan state, as well as the Taliban, needs to stop targeting non-combatants.

As the Afghan peace process continues at a relatively moderate pace, even while the stakeholders continue to fight each other, a major confidence-building measure can be a pledge to not kill civilians. This must be the target for Kabul, for the Americans as well as for the Taliban. Unless all stakeholders pledge to

protect the lives of the Afghan people, and actively work towards the goal, their efforts to pursue peace will look hollow and appear to be little more than machinations to capture (or keep) power.

## **Minority question**

DURING his appearance at the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C., Prime Minister Imran Khan said his government would be remembered for being “the most inclusive government in Pakistan” when it came to ensuring protection for minorities.

Momentarily, he brought up the “one element, where we still have a problem”, before quickly moving on to speak about his government’s role in ensuring the safety and freedom of Aasia Bibi.

He reiterated his stance again on National Minority Day in Islamabad — this time for a local audience, referencing religion to condemn the practice of forced conversions.

How history will judge this government remains to be seen, but for now it has indeed taken some positive steps in this regard. For instance, images of 500 Indian Sikhs crossing the border to make their way to Nankana Sahib on the birth anniversary of the founder of Sikhism certainly helps boost the country’s reputation and promotes tolerance for the beliefs of others, especially at a time when India is making headlines for the wrong reasons, ie the poor treatment of its minority citizens, particularly Muslims and Dalits.

This is perhaps part of the government’s desire to promote religious tourism in the country.

Last year, the prime minister laid the foundation stone for the construction of the Kartarpur Corridor, which would connect the second holiest site in Sikhism with the Dera Baba Nanak shrine in Gurdaspur, India. Recently, there has also been an announcement of reopening a 1,000-year-old Hindu temple in Sialkot, sealed since 1947. According to one report, the decision came from the realisation that the Hindu families of Sialkot had no communal place to gather and worship.

Most places of worship of non-Muslim minorities are pre-Partition structures, and many are under constant vigilance due to threats of vandalism and extremist

attacks. Then there is the issue of land grabbing, which also uses religion as a cover for material greed. So while on one hand, correct steps are being taken to ensure protection for some minority groups, the climate of fear persists for many others. Minorities are targeted disproportionately in false blasphemy charges and continue to be subjected to forced conversions.

Again and again, the prime minister has reiterated his belief that all citizens of the state must be treated equally. One can only hope he is sincere in ensuring that they are, including that “one element” he mentioned. Only then, can we truly celebrate a progressive Pakistan.

## **Rawalpindi crash**

TUESDAY’S crash of an army plane in Rawalpindi has cast a pall over the nation. At least 18 people were reported to have lost their lives in the incident, among them five army personnel — two of them of officer rank. The civilian casualties included seven members of a family who were hit as the aircraft came down in a village next to a phase of Bahria Town in Rawalpindi. Many others are fighting for their lives in hospitals after suffering serious injuries in the accident, including burns that are most difficult to treat. Initial investigation hinted at a technical fault as the cause of the crash. One of the engines of the plane apparently stopped working; this will entail a protocol whereby all aircraft belonging to the same fleet will undergo inspection before they are cleared for flying. Eyewitness accounts say the ill-fated plane was flying at an unusually low altitude and its movement was erratic before it fell. It struck houses most of whose inhabitants were asleep at the time. It could well have been that, faced with the inevitable, the pilot did attempt to take the plane towards an open, unpopulated or less-crowded area.

The loss of lives on the ground, including those of women and children, as well as the severe injuries caused by the crash, is extremely distressing. It also raises the question of the possibility of an even greater tragedy had the crash occurred in a more densely populated area of the city. Apart from discussion on the points more directly related to this specific incident the incident is going to stir debate on many aspects of general aviation safety. Among them is the issue of maintaining a safe distance between populated areas and flying zones used by all kinds of aircraft. There has been just too heavy an increase in recent times in overhead



traffic in thickly populated, often poorly planned urban areas. The issue has to be looked at closely and on an urgent basis.

## **Kashmir mediation**

THE Kashmir issue has been a source of acrimony between Pakistan and India for over seven decades, yet Indian obduracy and refusal to recognise it as the core issue and adopt out-of-the-box solutions has left this wound festering.

While New Delhi keeps harping on about militancy in South Asia, it turns a blind eye to the appalling human rights situation in the held valley, which in many ways provides impetus to armed groups.

Moreover, its frequent ceasefire violations along the Line of Control have resulted in unacceptable losses of human life in Pakistan — both civilian and military — while adding to the risks of conflict between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

On Wednesday, a minor boy was killed in Indian shelling in Azad Kashmir, while a day before two persons lost their lives in the Neelum Valley.

The Foreign Office has summoned the Indian deputy high commissioner and protested the unprovoked ceasefire violations by his country.

Also, there are reports that India is moving an additional 10,000 troops into occupied Kashmir.

The fact is that unless the Kashmir issue is addressed, peace in the subcontinent will be a distant dream.

And it is also a fact that bilateral attempts to address the Kashmir question and restart dialogue have hit a brick wall, thanks mainly to Indian arrogance and intransigence.

Therefore, perhaps the time is right to take up US President Donald Trump's offer of mediation between Pakistan and India, specifically focusing on Kashmir.

In comments that grabbed global headlines, Mr Trump had said — in a meeting with Prime Minister Imran Khan during the latter's US visit last month — that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had asked him to help mediate the Kashmir dispute with Pakistan.

While the comments raised a storm in India, with furious denials emanating from the BJP-led government, a Trump staffer remarked that the American president “doesn’t make things up”.

As bilateralism has failed to bring peace to the subcontinent, perhaps Imran Khan should launch a diplomatic push and approach Mr Trump to deliver on his offer to mediate.

The US is the world’s sole superpower, and despite appearing tough and pretending to pursue an independent foreign policy course, India cannot afford to annoy America.

That is why if the Trump administration gave a ‘push’ to the peace process, it would be very difficult for India to ignore such ‘friendly advice’ from Washington.

The US itself claims to be leading the global charge against militancy; if Washington succeeds in facilitating a negotiated settlement to the Kashmir dispute, it would take the wind out of the sails of terrorist groups in South Asia.

Indeed, it is only Pakistan, India and the Kashmiris that can reach a lasting settlement.

But facilitation by foreign powers and multilateral bodies can certainly help all three parties achieve this goal — if India were to shed its arrogance and rigidity.

## **Taxing doctors**

THE latest move by the Federal Board of Revenue to demand more information from hospitals about the private practice of doctors and surgeons to cross-check against their returns is a welcome development. The action should be broadened to include other professions as well, such as law, consultancy and accountancy. Doubtless many of those who are impacted by this move will express puzzlement since they are long accustomed to taking their tax obligations for granted. But most doctors and other medical practitioners maintain a private practice in addition to their formal assignment at the institution where they work. It is common practice to pay the doctor’s bills in cash after each consultation, and these incomes are underreported to the tax authorities on a large scale. Tax evasion and underreporting are rampant in most professions where the self-assessment regime has been abused to the hilt. The comfort level that all

practitioners in these fields have developed with tax evasion must end, and a culture of declaring one's income truthfully must be ushered in.

There are good reasons to believe that the FBR can succeed in this effort today whereas it would have looked like a long shot even a decade ago. The amount of information that is available to the authorities about the spending habits of individuals provides the clearest signal of whether or not they are declaring their incomes honestly. This is what the FBR is using to its advantage in the current drive, asking 30 hospitals in Karachi to provide details about the doctors who work there, with the intention to expand the effort to other hospitals and other cities too. Professional service providers are important because they may be liable to pay tax on two counts, first on their incomes and second on the sale of a private service. The first has to be paid to the federal government and the second to the provincial authorities. It is true that many such professionals will protest this double imposition, but there should be little doubt that compliance is necessary. In time, this drive needs to be broadened, not only for revenue purposes, but also to create a culture of compliance among citizens, especially those who habitually evade taxes or mis-declare their incomes. For his part, the FBR chairman should fast-track credible reforms in the tax machinery to restore trust in the system and simplify the rules of compliance.

## **A dam misstep**

EVEN for a polarised society such as ours, the Kalabagh dam project is particularly divisive. Indeed, the very definition of patriotism and treachery can hinge upon which side of the divide one is on. Federal Minister for Water Resources Faisal Vawda has stepped into this minefield with all the finesse of the proverbial bull in a china shop. On Wednesday, at a press conference held to highlight yet more alleged misdeeds by Shahbaz Sharif and his family, Mr Vawda — as reported by several media outlets — hinted at revisiting the project. Resorting to a flamboyant metaphor to drive home the point, he said the matter “has been declared dead in the ICU but now that I am the doctor in charge, I have asked that preparations be made for me to re-examine it. I haven't asked that it be buried”. Yesterday, the government issued a rebuttal, saying that Mr Vawda had been quoted out of context.

It is not surprising the government has moved swiftly to deny any suggestion it may be looking to revive the highly controversial project. Contrary to Mr Vawda's assertion that the project had been targeted by 'enemies of Pakistan', the Kalabagh dam proposal has been comprehensively rejected over the years by the KP, Balochistan and Sindh assemblies. It should be considered well and truly put to rest, unless there is some dramatic change in circumstances. While KP's objections are largely on account of the displacement of the local population that building the dam would cause, the other provinces' reservations are those of lower riparian consumers who are more susceptible to water shortages. Sindh has already lost millions of acres of farmland on account of seawater intrusion into its parched peripheries. The water crisis in Pakistan is real, but it needs creative thinking and modern solutions, instead of being mired in the Kalabagh stalemate. Any suggestion of reviving the project understandably stirs nationalist sentiments and causes the smaller provinces to rise in protest against what they perceive as yet another instance of high-handedness by the country's most populous province.

## **Senate drama**

IT was a scene from a Byzantine drama, no less. As 64 senators stood up to show support for a no-confidence resolution against Senate chairman Sadiq Sanjrani, no one, least of all the joint opposition that had submitted the motion, could have foreseen the bizarre denouement. The cheerful thumping of hands on the tables appeared to be a hearty endorsement of the opposition's wish to dethrone Mr Sanjrani — and the numbers translated into an easy win for their candidate Senator Mir Hasil Bizenjo; only 53 votes were required to oust the chairman. But the mood abruptly changed after the results of the secret ballot were announced: Mr Sanjrani had maintained his position by a whisker — a mere three votes. That meant that 14 senators had betrayed their leadership through resorting to what was widely alleged to be deliberate sabotage, by either wasting their votes, or directly voting against the motion. The ruling party burst into loud cheers, the stunned opposition cried conspiracy. Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Shahbaz Sharif and PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari vowed to hold accountable those within their parties who had "sold their conscience" and "harmed democracy" for their personal interests. Not one for mincing his words, Mr Bizenjo squarely laid the blame for his defeat on the DG ISI, an allegation denied by the ISPR.

But was the outcome really unexpected in the context of our political history? Whatever the reasons — pressure from the powers that be, monetary inducements, a genuine distrust of their own leadership, or even ties with those across the aisle — for the opposition senators to go against their word, ‘horse-trading’ is very much part and parcel of how the game of politics is played here. And it is one that should be familiar enough to the PPP — that had earlier reposed its trust in the controversial Mr Sanjrani during his election as Senate chairman — and the PML-N. Both have played the game before.

In fact, in earlier times, when the then underdog PTI had spoken out against political horse-trading, the parties had ignored appeals to reform the system. Now, as they suffer from their own lack of foresight, they would do well to acknowledge that if casting a secret ballot is unprincipled in their books today, it should have been so earlier as well, when they benefited from it while others cried foul from the sidelines. Indeed, there is a lesson for all parties over here; one look at the current government, that is composed largely of former Musharraf and PPP loyalists, exposes a stark lack of principle and ideological conviction. While it is time to debate the logic of having a secret ballot in the first place, it perhaps more essential for party leaderships to look within and reflect on the culture of political opportunism that they have themselves nurtured. Without such introspection they can expect horse-trading to go on.

## **Protecting the poor**

THE reality shaping up for the poor is a dire one. Inflation has hit double digits for the first time in almost six years, while the price of petrol and diesel has seen another major hike, even though international crude prices are dropping. It is common knowledge that the poor are hit hardest by inflation, and that the government must attach importance to their interests and vulnerabilities when it formulates its economic policies. For the moment, it is apparent that the march of inflation is set to continue as the impact of the recent fuel price increase will now work its way through various price levels. In fact, further fuel and power tariff hikes lie in wait in the months ahead. The government is projecting average inflation for the current fiscal year to come in at around 13pc, which means the Consumer Price Index, which hit 10.3pc in July, could rise far above this level before it begins to taper off. There is a steep and rocky hill to climb in the months



ahead, and the government needs concerted focus on the most vulnerable groups in society as it charts its course forward.

Such a concerted focus is clearly absent at the moment. This was more than evident when the prime minister ordered that gas tariffs for tandoors be brought back to the level they were at before July, in an effort to bring the price of bread down again. What this action betrayed was the fact that the poor are merely an afterthought in the calculus of power that drives the government. This is not right. It has been known for many months now that the state of the economy will force the government to undertake difficult adjustments, which will necessarily fuel inflation and make interest rate hikes inevitable, thereby contributing to unemployment as well. Such stop-and-go steps are not what qualify as sound governance in these times. The commitment to social protection schemes that the government has given to the IMF is also little more than window dressing, considering the scale of the difficulties that are being hoisted upon the poor. Close to 55m Pakistanis live below the poverty line, while the programmes mentioned in the IMF agreement cover only a few million at best. Far larger thinking is required to protect this group from the ravages of the adjustment that the government has launched.

## **Waterborne diseases**

DURING the monsoon season, although the weather turns pleasant, most people dread the approaching storm clouds as the devastation wrought on civic infrastructure — particularly in a large, congested city like Karachi — is extensive. Apart from the near-total collapse of the urban system after a few millimetres of rain, an equally worrying issue that emerges is that of vector-borne and waterborne diseases, resulting from pools of stagnant water. In particular, a debilitating bouquet of mosquito-borne diseases, such as dengue, malaria and chikungunya, pose a major threat to public health if the work of draining stagnant water and lifting garbage is not carried out by the civic authorities. The figures from the past year, for example, are not encouraging. Last year, according to the National Institute of Health in Islamabad, there were over 2,000 dengue cases in Sindh; the figure for malaria crossed 100,000. Similar is the situation with chikungunya, a painful vector-borne disease that affects the joints. While not all these infections result in death, the quality of life and the long-term health of victims is severely compromised.

Considering the forecast for more rains during the current monsoon season, civic authorities across the country need to up their game and eliminate the breeding grounds for vector-borne and waterborne diseases on a war footing. While some experts have called for raising public awareness, it is the civic authorities that need to be particularly active in draining out stagnant water in the aftermath of rains. Furthermore, spraying must be carried out to eliminate the breeding grounds of mosquitoes. Of course, the local government and waste management system in Karachi are largely dysfunctional. But this cannot be used as an excuse by the authorities concerned to sit back and do nothing. Both the Sindh government and KMC must coordinate to clean up the city in the aftermath of showers, while municipalities in other parts of Sindh, as well as in the rest of the country, must do the same to prevent the emergence of diseases.

## Ominous signs

From the looks of it, the Hindu nationalist BJP government in New Delhi is preparing to up the ante in the occupied territory by pouring in troops.

Read: India's troop buildup triggers panic among residents in occupied Kashmir

According to media reports, Delhi recently sent 25,000 military personnel to the held region; this is in addition to the 10,000 troops that were reportedly stationed in IJK last week. Moreover, tourists and Hindu pilgrims have been told to leave the region due to 'terror threats'.

Naturally, this disturbing series of events has created alarm in IJK. There have been calls to stock up on food and fuel, which has led to panic buying, while in another development, details were recently leaked of an order to police from the rulers in Delhi to keep an eye on mosques and preachers. To this explosive situation we can add the fact that India is regularly violating the ceasefire along the Line of Control, while the BJP intends to scrap a crucial article of the Indian constitution that prevents outsiders from buying property in IJK. The signs, therefore, do not inspire hope.

It is no secret that the ideological fountainhead of the BJP is the Hindu fascist RSS. Are the worrying developments in Kashmir a reflection of the Sangh Parivar's intentions in the occupied region? Does Prime Minister Narendra Modi plan to throw all democratic conventions to the wind in order to fulfil the agenda

of his ideological parent, and appease his populist voter base? There are many indications of this. By doing away with Article 35A of the Indian constitution, the BJP will open up the floodgates for massive demographic changes in IHK, as the native population will be overwhelmed by outsiders. If the hardliners in Delhi think this will be a masterstroke through which they will 'conquer' Kashmir, they are mistaken. Such moves will only take Kashmiri disaffection with India to new heights; already cries for azadi are ringing out in the held valley. Perhaps fearing massive resistance from Kashmiris to its malevolent intentions, the Indian state is further strengthening its military presence in the heavily militarised region.

Unfortunately, the Indian establishment appears to have traded in reason and sagacity for arrogance and brute force in IHK.

The increased troop presence and the plans to alter Kashmir's constitutional status will be a recipe for disaster. Kashmiris — especially the youth — have had enough of India's brutality and are willing to sacrifice their lives in their quest for freedom and dignity.

But there is still time; if Mr Modi and his cohorts so wish, they can pull back and extend the hand of dialogue to the Kashmiris and Pakistan. Sanity demands that India reject confrontation and adopt negotiation and peacemaking instead. Will those who matter in Delhi pursue the course of sanity?

## **Police-Levies merger**

THE process of dismantling an old, colonial legacy in Balochistan has begun. Three districts of the province — Quetta, Gwadar and Lasbela — have been converted from 'B' areas into 'A' areas, with police taking over Levies stations in these locations. This follows the provincial cabinet's decision in May to merge the Levies, responsible for maintaining law and order in rural 'B' areas, with the police, tasked with the same in urban 'A' areas. The arrangement had clearly been obsolete for a long time, even more so after terrorism began to pose unique challenges not encountered earlier. In such a vast province, where violent extremist outfits and separatist organisations were rapidly acquiring a foothold, the police's footprint was limited to only 5pc, while the writ of the ill-equipped and poorly trained Levies extended over 95pc of Balochistan. Even though the Frontier Corps was given policing powers in 2012 to counter increased

lawlessness in the province, the situation demanded an increased presence of a structured law-enforcement agency, like the police.

This is the second time such a merger is taking place. It had been initiated earlier in 2002 during Gen Musharraf's time, until all the Levies had been absorbed into the police, but was reversed in 2008 during the PPP government. Then, as now, many of the sardars and tribal elders were against the merger. After all, Levies personnel are a locally raised force, beholden to the local tribal chief for their appointment rather than the government; shorn of any real authority, the Levies are reduced to performing little more than watch-and-ward functions. Even though during the first merger, they had been trained alongside the police by the army's Special Service Group and are no longer the same ragtag force they once were, the pressure of tribal affiliations was once again a major stumbling block to their performance when 'A' and 'B' areas were revived. The arguments in support of retaining an archaic system designed to strengthen the feudal setup in service of the British Empire's security needs do not hold water. Consider, for example, the perception that the incidence of crime goes up in areas where the police is deployed; the fact is, crimes committed in 'B' areas are often settled through the jirga system — presided over by tribal influentials — instead of being proceeded against through formal channels. Such parallel, regressive systems of 'justice' or policing have no place in today's world.

## **Saudi women's rights**

SAUDI ARABIA has just announced fresh measures to empower its female citizens. Saudi women over the age of 21 are now legally free to travel without the permission of a male guardian. Earlier, even an adult Saudi woman had to get her guardian's consent in order to apply for a passport. That is not the only progressive move; because of a series of royal decrees, Saudi women now have the right to register childbirth, marriage and divorce, and can be guardians themselves to minors. The steps are part of Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman's initiative to introduce reforms in the conservative kingdom — by ushering in some semblance of equality between the genders. The actions that form part of the royal agenda have drawn support from not only Saudi women, but also the international community. The repercussions of these steps taken to free women from archaic means of control will no doubt be widespread, both in terms of the actual impact on women's movements — especially in the Arab-

speaking world and other Muslim countries — for greater liberties, and the image of Muslim women in their relationship with the Islamic state.

Many parts of the Muslim world that have traditionally sought inspiration from the cradle of Islam have been watching the prince's moves closely. But, as in Saudi Arabia, in these places too there are traditions and regressive mindsets to contend with on a daily basis. In fact, Saudi women may well remain bound by convention and custom and be unable to quickly claim what is legally due to them. There will be many Saudis not ready to allow them the use of their new freedom, as guardians of the old order try to cling to the powers they accumulated over time and prevent women from driving, travelling alone and going to concerts. Meanwhile, these efforts at greater liberty cannot be complete without a review of other human rights of Saudi citizens, including women. Even as sisters gain new confidence, some Saudi women activists who campaigned for their rights remain behind bars.

## **A plastic world**

IN 2017, a team of scientists published their findings on global plastic production, the first such attempt at measuring the scale of the problem since 1950. The study revealed that by 2015, a whopping 8.3bn metric tons of plastic had been produced, out of which 6.3bn tons became waste. Only 9pc of that waste was recycled, while 12pc was destroyed. The remaining 79pc was simply dumped into the environment and landfills. And it can take anywhere from 100 to 1,000 years to disintegrate. Perhaps the most disturbing finding was that approximately half of all the total plastic waste was produced only since the turn of the century. To say that humanity has an addiction to plastic is an understatement. Without large-scale, long-term intervention, the problem will keep escalating.

By 2050, an estimated 12bn metric tons of plastic waste is expected to be deposited in landfills or thrown into the environment, wreaking havoc on natural life, clogging waterways and drainage systems, and spelling disaster for human health. Around 8m tons end up in the oceans, which contain the vast majority of all life forms on the planet. The news of whales and other majestic marine life dying due to their consumption of plastic is becoming more and more frequent. Divers have found plastic in the deepest points of the ocean. A study conducted earlier this year found microplastics inside amphipods in six of the deepest-



known parts of the ocean, including the Mariana Trench. Undoubtedly, this human-created material finds its way into our diet as well, and this has been proven in several studies.

Like much of the rest of the world, Pakistan too suffers from its addiction to plastic since it is cheap to manufacture and durable, particularly single-use plastic bags and wrappings that are used and discarded at whim. According to the Pakistan Plastic Manufacturers Association, approximately 55bn plastic bags are used each year in the country. In the most recent effort to cut down on the use of plastic bags, the climate change ministry announced Aug 14 as the cut-off date for using such bags in the capital city. Failure to comply will result in heavy fines for the manufacturers, and the ministry has warned that it will be conducting raids. Whether the authority is successful or not remains to be seen. In the past, there have been several efforts by provincial governments and municipal authorities to outlaw their use, but law enforcement remains weak. There is also an outcry from plastic bag manufacturers that employ thousands in factories. While there are no easy, quick-fix solutions — and even though it may be hard for some to imagine a world without plastic — it is important to remember just how recent a phenomenon plastic is. It is not a necessity, and its long-term damage to the environment and human health far outweighs its temporary convenience.

## **Revenue challenges**

AND so it begins. One of the most vigorous revenue collection drives in the country's history was launched on July 1 — but the end of the month brought the familiar news of a shortfall in the collections for the first month of the fiscal year. The amount of the shortfall is not alarming — Rs14bn — but if the collections do not pick up pace by the end of this month, the government will undoubtedly be pushed into announcing a so-called mini budget before December. The vigorous exercise to broaden the tax base and to pull traders into the net has also been launched, but there are good reasons to be sceptical of this effort as it is not clear whether it will help plug the revenue shortfalls that are inevitably emerging. It is one thing to get undocumented enterprises to register themselves with the tax authorities, and quite another to actually extract revenue from them in the amounts required to keep pace with the targets set in the IMF programme once they have registered themselves.

Now it is becoming a little clearer why the government has quietly put away the numbers from its latest amnesty scheme. Even though the scheme attracted 137,000 declarants, and close to Rs3tr worth of assets was declared through it, the government has chosen to not tout the scheme as a success. A closer look reveals why this might be the case. The total revenue collection under the scheme was Rs70bn, smaller than what the last such scheme under the previous government achieved, even though the number of declarants is comparable. Clearly, the authorities were expecting a far larger outturn from the exercise, with some reports suggesting that the expected revenue contribution from the scheme was four or five times of what has been collected. This was the first step of the massive revenue plan the government is trying to implement for this year in pursuit of an ambitious Rs5.55tr target. Having failed to collect the expected amount, the effort to meet the target now falls back on the aggressive documentation drive that the FBR is currently pursuing. If this too does not yield revenues in the quantity required, the government will have no option but to squeeze existing taxpayers, perhaps through an increase in the rate of sales tax. Clearly, the challenges on the economic front are mounting. The government must place itself on a more secure footing to meet its commitments.

## **Hong Kong protests**

HONG KONG'S political crisis shows little sign of abating. It has been triggered by a move to introduce an extradition law that critics argue would put anyone in the city at risk of being prosecuted for crimes under China's arguably flawed legal system. Earlier last month, Chief Executive Carrie Lam announced that the controversial legislation was effectively 'dead', but stopped short of pledging a formal and permanent withdrawal. It is indicative of the level of distrust among the protesting public — joined this week by many of the city's civil servants — that her words failed to put an end to the mass demonstrations, which have continued in scorching heat and heavy rains, and despite police crackdowns and vigilante attacks.

Under the 1997 handover agreement, the former British colony is to be ruled under the 'one country, two systems' principle until 2047. Yet, the recent unrest clearly demonstrates an overwhelming anxiety among citizens that Hong Kong's autonomy and unique freedoms are being hastily and systematically eroded by Ms Lam's Beijing-backed government. Tensions have been simmering for years,

particularly since the 2014 umbrella protests erupted following a proposal for electoral 'reforms'. Pro-democracy legislators have been disqualified; booksellers critical of China have been allegedly disappeared; and journalists, activists and artists are increasingly complaining of being forced to self-censor dissenting opinions. Beijing's response to recent events has been disquieting to say the least; on Wednesday, it released a video widely seen as a warning of possible military intervention. This, coupled with remarks by the authorities painting the protests as foreign-backed, runs the risk of escalating matters to a point of no return. No observer can reasonably argue that the highly organised protesters are not motivated in large part by a deep sense of civic responsibility. Thus, any excessive action at this juncture threatens to not only tarnish China's image as a global leader, but also to expose the limits of Chinese-style governance when applied to a populace that has known greater freedoms. The Hong Kong government must try a different tack.

## **IHK's grim reality**

THE dire predictions of Kashmir observers and human rights groups have proved correct. The special status given to India-held Kashmir under Article 370 of the Indian constitution has been all but removed through a resolution in the upper house of parliament, in a move to avoid the lawful route of a constitutional amendment. India is poised to forcibly convert occupied Kashmir into a Union Territory in violation of all its commitments, including those made at the UN.

The resolution and a presidential order were used to deprive the Jammu & Kashmir assembly of the right to have a say in any changes desired in its status. Meanwhile, a bill in parliament called for separating Ladakh from J&K, but if this amounted to justifying the division of areas on the basis of faith, it was not something that the BJP leaders were likely to lose sleep over, reassured of their own powers of intimidation after their election win earlier this year. Not just that, they also drew strength from India's image in the international community as a prospering capitalist model.

The changes reduce IHK to the status of a colony. The special status the region enjoyed since 1954 was basically a measure that guarded against any attempt at changing the demography of an overwhelmingly Muslim Kashmir. Its abolition

could mean an invasion of the Valley sponsored by the BJP in its current belligerent mood.

The move will have violent consequences. The Kashmiris have shown in recent months that, although abandoned by many supporters, their ability to take on the might of the occupiers has far from diminished. In fact, it is the subterfuge, the force, the tricks employed by the BJP that have stoked the fires.

Pakistan has vowed to campaign against the new developments, which the world must have known were in the making. Serious concern of the latest Indian action in IJK was being expressed for some time. Pakistanis will be asking their government as to what exactly transpired, and in precisely what context did Kashmir feature, at the recent meeting between Prime Minister Imran Khan and President Donald Trump.

Indeed, Islamabad is being advised to link its support for the normalisation of Afghanistan in a post-American pullout scenario with Kashmir. That is easier said than done given the current sense of global indifference towards IJK. The world watched in silence as thousands of troops moved into the disputed occupied valley in recent days. Few took notice — even though there may be no cruder version of how a majority living by the tenets of an ideology built on fear of a minority than the one present today in Kashmir.

The hatred inherent in such a brand of politics has been formally accepted as fair and correct by a parliamentary decree in the biggest democracy of the world.

## **Peace Path to Afghan**

IT is unrealistic to expect a miracle ending to the long-running Afghan conflict. The US has been in that country for the past 18 years, and if the history of the conflict is stretched back to the Soviet invasion, then we have several decades of turmoil that will not be undone in weeks. However, with the Americans suffering from obvious combat fatigue and the Afghan Taliban also looking to take the battle to the negotiating table, the outlines of a possible endgame may be in sight. The Americans and the Taliban have met recently in Doha, the latest meeting in a long series, and there are efforts underway to arrange a rendezvous between US point man on Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, and the Taliban's political supremo, Mullah Baradar. Moreover, as a senior Taliban official told this

paper recently, the hard-line movement and the Americans have reached an agreement on “80pc of issues”. And while the Talibs maintain their traditional ambivalence towards the US-backed Ashraf Ghani government in Kabul, there are signs of a thaw, for as the Taliban spokesman told Dawn: “We don’t recognise the government in Kabul. But we do recognise it is a party to the conflict” ... and that down the road “it too will be engaged in an intra-Afghan dialogue”.

Of course, the withdrawal of foreign troops tops the agenda of the Afghan Taliban. And it is also a fact that the Trump administration wants to get American military personnel out of Afghanistan at the earliest. Pursuing and achieving Afghan peace will be a delicate act for all involved — the Taliban, Mr Ghani’s government, the US, as well as Afghanistan’s neighbours. While the principal actors, the Afghan government and the Taliban, continue to fight, a parallel peace process also continues. The immediate goal should be a truce and a commitment from all sides to stop the targeting of civilians. According to UN figures released recently, most non-combatants killed in the first half of this year died in attacks by Nato and Afghan government forces. While the Taliban insist on an American withdrawal, they must shed their rigidity and talk to the government in Kabul. With presidential elections due in Afghanistan next month, perhaps the militia is waiting to see how the dust settles before deciding its future strategy. The goal, however, for all Afghan factions should be a democratic state that ensures rights for all of the country’s sects, tribes and marginalised and female citizens.

## **‘Clean Karachi’**

ON the instructions of Prime Minister Imran Khan, PTI MNA Ali Zaidi launched a federal government-led effort to clean Karachi before the Eid holidays begin. Working alongside the MQM, the Frontier Works Organisation, the National Logistics Cell, and an army of volunteers, the first of the two-stated phases of the operation is to de-silt the city’s multiple drainage sites. Given Karachi’s economic and historical importance — and its undeniable neglect over the years, marred by periodic bloodshed with various groups fighting for supremacy — the cleanliness drive will surely be welcomed by the city’s residents, regardless of who they voted for in the last elections. Karachi’s problem with pollution and waste management came under the spotlight once again after just two days of heavy

rainfall, with much of the city experiencing flooding and unnecessary deaths caused by electrocution, highlighting the city's weak urban planning and poor infrastructure. The flooding that happens time and again after the monsoons was largely blamed on the solid waste that is dumped directly into the city's natural waterways and drainage systems, blocking the rainwater from trailing into the rivers and then the sea.

The world's fifth-most populous city is said to generate around 12,000 tons of waste each day, a major cause of disease, but responsibility for collecting and disposing garbage falls on various governing bodies. And so, expectedly, before the rains had even subsided, the finger-pointing that follows each catastrophe to befall the city began, with the Sindh government-controlled water and waste-management bodies bearing the brunt of criticism. While cleanliness drives are necessary, and have been conducted in the past as well, they are short-term, cosmetic solutions to the long-standing, structural problems of waste management. If Karachi belongs to everyone, as is often claimed, then all parties with a stake in the city's affairs must rise above petty political point-scoring and come together to find long-lasting solutions.

## **Playing with fire**

THE BJP's reckless and dangerous move to revoke the special status of India-held Kashmir as enshrined in the Indian constitution has raised the threat of turmoil in the subcontinent to significant levels.

In effect, the hard-line Hindu zealots who surround Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi have convinced him to dismiss international opinion — which firmly considers Kashmir a disputed territory — and forge ahead on this destructive path by subsuming the occupied region into the Indian union.

While this nefarious aim has long been on the BJP's agenda, it is after the last Indian general election that Mr Modi and company gathered the confidence — some would say foolhardiness — to press ahead with it.

Drunk on power and ambition, the Indian establishment has decided to risk playing with fire for petty political gains.

However, the question that must be asked is: where are those who, not too long ago, were willing to mediate between Pakistan and India on the Kashmir



question? Indeed, the American reaction to India's moves in Kashmir has been massively disappointing.

The US State Department spokesperson issued a wishy-washy statement on the matter that glaringly left out Pakistan's position on the issue.

The statement, instead, appeared to indirectly support New Delhi's outrageous claims, observing that "... the Indian government has described these actions as strictly an internal matter. ..."

Whatever terms the Indian government may use to justify its malevolent actions in Kashmir, the US should have the moral courage to call a spade a spade and take a balanced view of the matter.

US President Donald Trump's offer to mediate between Islamabad and Delhi seems to have disappeared into thin air, as the US has offered a clichéd statement to address a critical issue.

However, one positive development that has emerged from the events of the last few days is that the leadership in occupied Kashmir has been united against India's dubious designs.

While Hurriyat leaders such as Ali Geelani, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and JKLF head Yaseen Malik have openly challenged India in the region, even some of Delhi's erstwhile loyalists in IHK have clearly rejected moves to annex Kashmir.

Mehbooba Mufti, former chief minister of IHK, termed the decision to revoke Article 370 as "the darkest day in Indian democracy", while Omar Abdullah, another former chief minister, has also slammed the move.

Perhaps now the time is right for Kashmiri leaders of different persuasions to bury their differences and join forces to confront India on this dire issue; this is beyond politics and indeed concerns the very survival of Kashmir as a distinct entity.

Moreover, Pakistan has done well to contact foreign leaders, including the Malaysian and Turkish leaders, and take them on board regarding Kashmir.

It is time that the OIC took a strong stance and pursued Kashmir's case on the world stage.

Pakistan's voice alone may be drowned out; but were the OIC to lend support to the suffering Kashmiris, the world may well listen.

## **Reviving steel mills**

LESS than three months after the Economic Coordination Committee decided to place Pakistan Steel Mills on the list of entities to be privatised, Prime Minister Imran Khan has now announced that his government intends to save and restore the loss-making enterprise. This change of heart has come when the government must prepare to enlist the services of 'reputable international auditors' to carry out a new audit of the enterprise and publish the results by the end of December 2019 as per the commitment given to the International Monetary Fund in the latest programme. Earlier in the year, we saw the government debating various options regarding the PSM, including entering into a 'public-private partnership' with Russian or Chinese companies. In April, the minister of industries said that a minimum injection of \$100m would be required to revive the steel mills, concluding that it would be better to simply privatise the entity. On this basis, the industries ministry prepared a summary for the appointment of a transaction advisory consortium to help draft the privatisation process, and a month later the summary was agreed to during an ECC meeting chaired by the finance adviser.

By saying that his government would not privatise the steel mills, but would instead work for its 'revival', Mr Khan has overruled the ministry and the ECC, as well as complicated the commitments that had already been given to the IMF in July. The ECC decision of May had itself overruled an earlier ECC decision against privatisation that was made in November 2018, by the same government but a different finance team. So we now have two U-turns, not one, in an important policy matter that is also the subject of commitments given to the IMF. Having made this announcement, the government must now answer some basic questions. Who will pay for the costs of this revival? Who will draft the roadmap for this revival? And more to the point, did the prime minister consult the ministries of industries and finance, both of which were involved in the earlier decision to move ahead with privatisation, before deciding? And why this sudden about-face in the matter? What prompted the prime minister, who must surely be busy with other very important considerations weighing down upon his office, to make such a decision about the steel mills? With this announcement, indications

are growing that the government lacks the wherewithal to see the IMF programme through.

## **Ban on CNG and LPG**

IN recent weeks, CNG-operated vehicles have been in the news for the sudden spike in prices that have impacted public transport in parts of the country, but the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority has now placed an outright ban on the use of CNG and LPG in all public transport vehicles, including school vans. The measure has been taken for the stated purpose of reducing “risk to public life and property” in the wake of several horrific accidents involving CNG-run vehicles in recent years — the consequence of a dire lack of safety standards and procedures. In June, three people were killed when their vehicle caught fire due to a cylinder explosion in Ziarat. Earlier in May, five passengers (including two children) were killed and several others critically injured in another cylinder explosion in a van in Kashmore. In September 2018, two students died in Muzaffargarh when the driver of the school van reportedly stepped out to light his cigarette and did not notice the gas leak from the tank. And in May 2013, 17 schoolchildren and a teacher were killed when a fire erupted inside their school bus in Gujrat — one of the most horrific accidents in a list of many of a similar nature.

Given all these tragic deaths, it is not surprising that the government now wants to outlaw CNG-run vehicles used for public transport altogether. But not too long ago, Pakistani governments championed CNG as the locally produced, environmentally friendly alternative to petrol and diesel. The cheaper costs quickly made them popular amongst consumers. Even now, despite the price hike, CNG and LPG remain the more economical options for a large section of citizens. The unauthorised spread of filling points, stations and workshops operating without any regulations or standardisation is largely to be blamed for the rise in accidents, or the accidents waiting to happen. Instead of resorting to an outright ban — which is unlikely to be successful in the long run — perhaps the government should consider addressing this aspect.

# NSC on Kashmir

THE Indian-authored narrative that the recent moves by Delhi in India-held Kashmir are an 'internal matter' is a blatant falsehood, and it was only a matter of time before Pakistan reacted to this ill-advised action with steps of its own.

While a joint session of parliament, addressed by the prime minister and opposition leaders, was held on Tuesday, a clearer, firmer policy emerged yesterday as Pakistan's response to the new crisis manufactured by the Indian establishment.

In a meeting of the National Security Committee chaired by the prime minister and attended by the military top brass, it was decided that Pakistan would downgrade diplomatic relations with India, suspend bilateral trade and take the matter to the UN, among other steps.

These are necessary moves that send a strong message across the border that Pakistan does not take India's shenanigans in the occupied territory lightly.

From here on, Pakistan should mount a strong diplomatic offensive and take its message to world capitals.

Kashmir is internationally recognised as a disputed territory, so India's chicanery — by attempting to 'localise' the issue through amending its constitution — should fool no one.

However, where strong diplomatic efforts are essential, Pakistan should not fall into the trap of exchanging bellicose rhetoric with India.

Prime Minister Imran Khan brought up the possibility of war during Tuesday's parliament session; while there is justifiable anger in Pakistan over the Indian subterfuge in Kashmir, the leadership must carefully choose its words to respond to Delhi's provocations, lest its statements be misconstrued.

The atmosphere in South Asia at the moment is highly tense and volatile.

Therefore, the Kashmir crisis needs to be handled with sagacity, firmness and far-sightedness.

Warmongers in India would love to trap Pakistan in a heated exchange of rhetoric that can spiral into actual hostilities.

Pakistan's leadership must resist this ruse and handle the situation with utmost care.

The battle for the rights of Kashmir must be fought primarily on the diplomatic front.

While the prime minister has constituted a team to look at legal, political and diplomatic ways of handling the situation, the effort would be best left to the Foreign Office that has the challenge of steering the issue before it.

There are experienced hands at the FO with deep knowledge of the region and decades of diplomatic experience; their combined wisdom should be used to counter Indian propaganda and express Pakistan's narrative on Kashmir on the world stage.

The OIC must be convinced to move beyond insipid statements of support for Kashmir towards more concrete action, while some of our Arab brothers, who have supported India's move, must be asked to consider Pakistan's stand on the crisis.

The bottom line is that the international community cannot sit and watch silently as India attempts to devour occupied Kashmir and crush its inhabitants.

## **Anti-polio propaganda**

THE effects of the harmful rumours that spread like wildfire during the anti-polio vaccination campaign a few months ago are really being felt now. With five new cases reported in KP, the total number of polio patients in the country has climbed to 53 — already higher than the figure that was expected to be announced at the end of this year. While polio has been eliminated in other parts of the world, Pakistan has the misfortune of being one of only three countries that still contains the virus; the other two being Nigeria and Afghanistan. But Nigeria is now on its way to being declared polio-free, while Pakistan is still struggling. When in 2017, the country counted its lowest number of polio cases, there was great optimism that Pakistan too was on the verge of being declared free from the virus once and for all. Now, it is becoming increasingly apparent that this battle will continue for a much longer period. And in order to be successful, it has to be waged alongside the struggle against anti-vaccine misinformation, disinformation and outright lies that are exacerbated with greater access to

modern technology. The vast majority of all polio cases exist in KP, which has recorded a total of 41 cases this year. Meanwhile, Punjab has five cases, including three from Lahore; Balochistan has four; and Sindh has three. In 2018, eight cases of polio were recorded in KP. In contrast, Balochistan had three cases; Sindh had one; and Punjab had none. The sudden increase is largely being blamed on vaccine refusal by parents after widespread anti-vaccine propaganda was disseminated through social media, even by some mainstream media outlets, which strengthened the falsehood that polio was damaging for childrens' health, or part of a Western conspiracy against Muslims.

After students in Badhber complained about feeling sick on being administered polio drops (the episode proved to be a hoax) during a province-wide vaccination campaign in April, there was an 85pc rise in vaccine refusals across KP. So, along with vaccination efforts on ground, there must be an aggressive countrywide campaign to counter these harmful myths. While the authorities have made some efforts in this regard, much more needs to be done, and action must be taken against those who propagate such nonsense as it has cost this country heavily.

## Higher education funds

A FEW months ago, the country's public-sector universities were rocked by the news of an impending cut in government spending on higher education. The latest information confirms just how drastic the change has been. A vice chancellors' committee comprising the heads of some of Pakistan's top-notch universities has called for an additional official grant of Rs10bn for these centres of higher education to cope with a worrisome situation. The call, made on Tuesday at a press conference after a meeting at the Higher Education Commission Secretariat in Islamabad, has come amid reports of stalled programmes and the cancellation of many important initiatives, all resulting from the budgetary cut. The recurring budget for public universities was cut from Rs65bn in the last fiscal year to only Rs59bn this year. The consequences have been severe. So much so that some of these universities are struggling to pay staff salaries, and it appears that all — or at least a majority of — the fancy schemes through which the universities were supposed to raise their own funds have failed to take off.



Experts had pointed out that the cut would limit students' access to research and knowledge and adversely affect the salaries of teachers. It is feared that scholarships will dwindle and that the reduction in the budget will spell disaster for those students who have few resources. As it is, the country was already spending a paltry sum per student. The latest information from the campuses is alarming and the VCs are demanding some quick measures to avoid the system from falling apart. They want to invite the relevant ministers for urgent discussions regarding the funds that are needed to course correct quickly, together with arranging some emergency fund-raising activities. The outcome of this two-pronged advance that engages the government at one level and simultaneously seeks to identify sources of funds is crucial to the future health of higher education institutions in the public sector. However, the final responsibility of sustaining the universities rests with the state.

## **A tepid response**

THE crisis in India-held Kashmir could trigger global consequences, yet the world has not responded to Pakistan's urgent exhortations with the level of robustness the situation warrants. Instead of full-throated condemnation, there is language of equivocation.

Indeed, some countries, most notably the US and UAE, have even gone along with India's brazenly false assertion that stripping Kashmir, an internationally recognised disputed territory, of its special status is an "internal matter". Saudi Arabia's bland reaction thus far avoids expressing any opinion whatsoever. China, Pakistan's all-weather friend, issued a forceful statement, but one that pertained solely to Ladakh where it has a territorial dispute with India. Turkey expressed "concerns" over the situation and undefined "steadfast support" to Pakistan.

Read: India calls actions in Kashmir internal matter: US

New Delhi's depredations in India-held Kashmir, particularly egregious under the Modi government, have been exposed for the world to see in more than one UN report, the most recent just a month ago.

Indeed, on Thursday, UN chief Antonio Guterres called upon India “to refrain from taking steps that could affect the status of Jammu and Kashmir”, recalling the Shimla Agreement.

Read: UN chief calls for ‘maximum restraint’ in occupied Kashmir

Despite this, the fact that the latest act of naked aggression by India against the hapless Kashmiris has met with such a tepid response speaks to a failure of Pakistan’s diplomacy, not only in the recent past, not only during Mr Modi’s premiership, but over decades. Seasoned diplomats were sidelined and input by pragmatic politicians and opinion makers was ignored in favour of ruinous policies that garnered ill-will in the international arena and allowed hostile powers to discredit the Kashmiri cause.

Moreover, in the present context, why did Pakistan appear to have been taken by surprise when the Indian government scrapped Article 370? After all, one of the main planks of Mr Modi’s hyper-nationalistic re-election campaign was the promise to do away with Kashmir’s special status.

Yet there was no effort by the Pakistan government to lobby foreign governments to push back against any such attempt. A fait accompli is far more difficult to counter than an action still in its incipient stage. Even during Prime Minister Imran Khan’s recent visit, an unexpected offer by President Trump — entirely of his own volition rather than due to any effort by the Pakistani delegation — to mediate on Kashmir, sent a wave of elation in government circles.

Given what has transpired in the few weeks since then, it was clearly a premature reaction, shorn of context and without considering the limited scope of what the world wants at present from Pakistan.

There is, however, little doubt about what this country must do for itself. Much introspection is in order, an assessment of how we have arrived at a point where we appear to be isolated and lack for staunch allies, that too for a cause that is undeniably just. Now that Pakistan is decisively acting against the militant groups that have hobbled its foreign policy and compromised its standing in the world, it should develop a far more effective diplomatic strategy, executed by those best suited to the task.

## Water crisis

WHEN the 1,000 to 1,500 protesters from Kharo Chan completed their 'long march' to Thatta in July, cries of "Karbala, Karbala" could be heard from amongst them. This was reportedly the third march of its kind since January — all part of an attempt to draw the government's attention to the acute water crisis that is being faced by the coastal communities of Sindh. Marchers complained about the difficulty they had in simply accessing clean drinking water for themselves. For years, the Indus delta region has suffered from freshwater shortages and loss of land due to soil erosion. With a rising population, unequal distribution of resources and the pain of climate change being felt throughout the land, their cries turned louder. Sadly, they continue to fall on deaf ears. However, it seems that this predicament is not unique to them, but part of a worrying global trend. According to new data released by the World Resources Institute, 17 countries around the world have to contend with "extremely high" water stress — in other words, a quarter of the world's population is at risk of running out of water. Besides Pakistan, the list includes Qatar, Israel, Lebanon, Iran, Jordan, Libya, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Eritrea, the UAE, San Marino, Bahrain, India, Turkmenistan, Oman, and Botswana. Several of the countries that are identified as 'water-stressed' face the dangers posed by two extremes of nature: floods on the one hand; and droughts on the other. For agriculture-dependent economies such as Pakistan, such erratic weather and rising temperatures spell disaster.

In the past decade or so, we have witnessed both natural calamities. Together, they have created scores of climate change refugees in their wake and destroyed lives and property. But the reality of these extremes only further highlights the fact that the current water shortages are very much an issue of mismanagement of resources and the unnecessary wastage of water caused by shortsighted planning that does not take worst-case scenarios into account — until it is too late. For instance, groundwater is depleting at an alarming rate as it is not stored sensibly to see through difficult times. In a recent, rare appearance in parliament, the prime minister advised that we should "hope for the best, prepare for the worst" in the context of the increasingly hostile relations with India. One hopes that our policymakers extend this philosophy to the country's water crisis as well.

## Coaches sacked

IN a rare display of wisdom and prompt decision-making, the PCB has shown the door to head coach Mickey Arthur and three others on the recommendation of its cricket committee after the Pakistan team failed to reach the semi-finals in the recently concluded ICC Cricket World Cup.

The decision, a bold one, has been well-received in cricketing circles and was on the cards after the national team's below-par campaign at the quadrennial event. For once, it was not a knee-jerk reaction and the performance of each coach was thoroughly debated by the cricket committee comprising legendary names such as Wasim Akram, Misbah-ul-Haq, former women's team captain Urooj Mumtaz and others.

Besides Mickey Arthur, bowling coach Azhar Mahmood, batting coach Grant Flower and trainer Grant Luden all came under the spotlight for their inability to motivate or train the players well enough for some tough international assignments, the most challenging being the World Cup.

Ultimately, coaches are judged by the balance sheet of the results they achieve; sadly, for Arthur & Co, they showed too many debits and too few credits which eventually led to their ouster. The greatest moment for them was the Champions Trophy victory in England in 2017 that led many to believe that the country had finally unearthed a group of young match winners who would be a force to reckon with at the World Cup. Instead, a downward spiral was witnessed in the past year and a half as Pakistan struggled to put together a winning combination, both in Tests and ODIs.

At the brink of the abyss, retracing one's steps is always a challenge. Mickey Arthur and the others had enough time to overcome the shortcomings but that did not happen and Pakistan did not make it to the semi-finals.

At this point, Pakistan cricket needs coaches who can inculcate a team culture, work on the players' mental strength and develop their tactical nous. Talent abounds. It simply needs to be groomed and channelled for success.

## **Pak-India trains stopped**

IN a highly questionable move, the Samjhauta Express and Thar Express train services to India have been abruptly halted by the railways ministry after the Modi administration scrapped the constitutional article that had allowed autonomy to the people of India-held Kashmir. At the same time, the information ministry has decided to ban all cultural links with India, including the screening of films from across the border. Why punish the people? Pakistan's move to downgrade diplomatic ties might make sense at such a time, but the Indian government will not be hurt by the clamp-down on cultural activities and exchanges, and train services. In fact, it will only embolden the administration in Delhi to increase its anti-Pakistan rhetoric. The ban on travel — announced by an impetuous railways minister instead of the foreign ministry — is particularly distressing, when we consider the divided families on both sides of the border, and the many Sikh pilgrims who want to visit holy sites on this side of the fence. It is a sure way of playing into the hands of the Modi government that has left no stone unturned to defame this country. As photographs of teary-eyed passengers boarding the last Samjhauta Express train in Lahore are circulated, one cannot help but feel sorry for the ordinary people caught in the crossfire. Unfortunately, the railways minister has said the ban will stay as long as he remains in charge of the ministry.

The Thar Express had made it quicker and more convenient for travellers from Sindh to visit the states of Rajasthan and Gujarat, instead of travelling all the way from Punjab, to visit their families and religious sites at a fraction of the cost it takes by air. Now they don't have that option. The Samjhauta Express had been suspended before, notably after the 2007 bombings. But train services were restored later. For the sake of the people, one hopes that the current suspensions will be of short duration.

## **Maryam's arrest**

MARYAM Nawaz's arrest by NAB on Thursday has further raised political temperatures in the country.

NAB contends that this is a routine matter, a point of view that has been vociferously endorsed by a battery of PTI government spokespersons.

The official side relies on the principle of 'equality before the law' as it asserts that the latest catch includes one of Ms Nawaz's cousins.

The accountability bureau has a simple explanation: that the arrest took place after the PML-N vice president was unable to respond in time to certain questions sent to her in the Chaudhry Sugar Mills case.

The refrain has been repeated in the media just as comments abound regarding a resourceful family of the past supposedly finding its nemesis after years of avoiding the inevitable.

Going by the number of voices willing to lend themselves to this point of view, the chorus has resonated with many Pakistanis.

But then, there are other contexts not entirely alien to this land of long-running feuds that will have to be taken into account for a fair assessment of the rather surprising arrest.

Ms Nawaz's arrest was unexpected not necessarily because of any embargo on detaining women in the country.

Contrary to what an agitated Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari would have us believe, it is quite normal for NAB and other authorities to pick up women 'suspects' without discrimination.

We all know that.

Mr Bhutto-Zardari could well have adopted his angry posture since he understands the potential of the arrest as a stimulus that could add impetus to the opposition's protest against the government.

The PPP leader could have been additionally motivated to act in an unparliamentary way because of the recent allegation that his party let down the PML-N during the no-confidence move against the Senate chairman.

However, what is clearer is the fact that Ms Nawaz was doing very well in her role as a builder of public momentum against the Imran Khan government with her rallies in various parts of Punjab.



Ms Nawaz was doing a good job as a crowd-puller, although there was reluctance this time — for a variety of reasons — on the part of the media to report on a Sharif feat, as compared to instances in the past.

She was able to display to a large extent that the PML-N still had deep-rooted support among the masses, thus highlighting the breach that exists between the pro-PTI, ‘anti-corruption’ Pakistanis and those who are still willing to support the new or old faces with which the Sharifs are associated.

It is an intriguing fight that could persist for a long time.

As per Pakistani tradition, Ms Nawaz’s detention in a corruption probe might not lead to an en masse rejection of the PML-N and its politics.

Instead, it could fuel allegations of selective accountability.

## **Rejected degrees**

THE response of the Ministry of National Health Services to reports of the recent sackings of several hundred doctors with MS/MD degrees working in the Gulf countries lacks the seriousness, urgency and force with which Islamabad should have pursued the issue. Merely taking ‘serious note’ of the termination of contracts of Pakistani doctors working in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states will neither help the affected doctors nor redeem the respect of the postgraduate medical training programmes offered by various universities in the country. The matter requires the ministry to mobilise all available resources and use diplomatic channels via the Foreign Office to reach out to the health authorities of these countries and put to rest their concerns over the quality of university postgraduate training programmes, instead of wasting time on the ‘verification of the problem’. Also, it should have set up a committee of reputable medical practitioners to look into the concerns of the foreign employers of Pakistani doctors and suggest changes in the MS/MD programme — if required — to meet international standards of postgraduate medical training. Such a committee could also have been given the task of probing the allegations of affected doctors against the College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan for having presented “distorted facts about Pakistan’s university [postgraduate medical training] programme to maintain the monopoly of [doctors with] FCPS qualifications” offered by it. If these accusations are found to be true, the CPSP administration

should be taken to task for damaging the country's reputation at the international level.

Not only has this wholesale rejection of the postgraduate MS/MD degree programme in Pakistan rendered doctors working in the Gulf jobless (many have returned or are facing the threat of deportation), it is also a national embarrassment. Meanwhile, the concerns raised over the quality of medical education and training imparted by our institutions must be addressed. While many of these may be unfounded, the fact remains that the standards of medical education in the country have slipped along with the quality of healthcare facilities available to the people. Issuing an official statement in defence of our medical education or giving verbal assurances to those who employ Pakistani doctors in other countries will not be enough to restore confidence in the major medical degrees. The government will have to take serious measures to revamp the domestic medical education infrastructure, including training and research programmes, to bring them at par with globally recognised standards.

## **State of the Muslim world**

Hajj, the most important annual gathering of the world's over 1bn Muslims, is of course a religious obligation. But beyond the acts of worship, this event where Muslims gather regardless of their sect, national origin and political persuasion should be used to address the many critical problems that today confront the world of Islam.

Though the Saudi authorities that oversee Hajj frown on any political activity during the pilgrimage — and there have been numerous incidents where Saudi forces have confronted mainly Iranian pilgrims for holding protests — the forum of Hajj can certainly be used in a constructive way to address social, political and economic issues facing the Muslim world.

Indeed, in these times of global tumult, there are many challenges confronting the followers of Islam, whether living in Muslim-majority states, or in non-Muslim societies. Topping the agenda are crises such as Kashmir, Palestine and Yemen.

In India-held Kashmir, Delhi has unleashed a fresh wave of brutality after doing away with the region's special constitutional status. Indian excesses have been continuing against the Kashmiris for decades, but many economically powerful

Muslim states — particularly the petrodollar-fuelled Arab sheikhdoms — have rarely shown an inclination to highlight Kashmir's plight internationally.

Pakistan, it seems, is the only one raising its voice for IHK's people. In Palestine, Israel continues to devour Arab land and trample over the Palestinians. Shown the green light by the US, Tel Aviv has grown even more confident about illegally annexing Arab land in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Golan. Unfortunately, here too the Arab monarchies have turned their backs on the desperate Palestinians, and are in fact reaching out to Israel.

As for Yemen, dubbed the worst humanitarian crisis in the world by the UN, a fruitless war continues to be fought between the Yemeni government, backed by Arab states and the West, and the Houthi rebels. In the meantime, thousands of Yemenis continue to die in the crossfire, starve to death, or fall victim to disease.

Moreover, tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran have not subsided, threatening to increase sectarian fissures across the Muslim world should this rivalry enter a more confrontational phase. Also, millions of Syrian refugees await the return of peace in their homeland, while the Rohingya still dread returning to Myanmar.

Haj offers a perfect opportunity — and democratic environment — where Muslim leaders and common believers can discuss ways out of these multiple crises.

With so much suffering across the Muslim world, simple statements of regret by toothless bodies such as the OIC are not enough. The spirit of unity that Haj demands can help evolve more practical solutions.

As we in relatively peaceful environments reflect over the message of Haj and celebrate Eid with our loved ones, let us not forget the millions across the world suffering from death, disease, poverty and war.

## Car tax

THERE are no marks for guessing who has the toughest job in Pakistan right now. Few would come close to competing with the person tasked with collecting Rs5.5tr in taxes during the present financial year. The job is well nigh impossible at a time when economic growth is projected to slow down to 2.4pc from over 5pc in the last fiscal year. So we can see why FBR chairman Shabbar Zaidi is

desperately tapping every opportunity that comes his way to net revenues to achieve his target, which is around 35pc higher than the tax collected last year. Now, taking advantage of the lifetime token tax collection by Punjab, Sindh and Islamabad on the small cars with engine size of up to 1000cc, according to a report published in this newspaper, the tax authority has decided to also recover lifetime (advance or withholding) income tax from their owners. This means that the car owners on the active taxpayers' list who are already required to pay Rs10,000 as lifetime token tax will also have to deposit an equal amount to discharge their lifetime advance tax liability at the time of registration of their vehicles. (The advance tax liability will decrease at the time of renewal of registration according to the age of the car though.) Those who do not file their tax returns will have to make a further payment of Rs10,000. The decision is effective from July 1, 2019, and payment of advance tax will be mandatory, thus adding to the burden on the pockets of car buyers with limited, fixed incomes.

Desperate times require desperate measures. But will such revenue generation actions help the FBR achieve its ambitious target? Although the FBR was successful in collecting around 95pc of the tax revenue target for July, the first month of the present financial year, and increasing the number of tax return filers by 67pc to 2.5m last year, few believe that the board will be able to achieve or even come close to its target for the entire year in a shrinking economy. In reality, certain new tax measures and increased rates of indirect taxes will only further dampen the prevalent negative consumer and business confidence. Taxation should not be just about collection of higher revenues. It must also spur economic growth. Only by growing the economy can the government and the FBR achieve their revenue targets.

## **Hide collection & offal**

WITH the sacrifice of animals during Eidul Azha in Pakistan, legitimate questions arise about the hides and skins of sacrificial animals ending up in the wrong hands, as well as the post-qurbani clean-up in cities and towns. Given the large number of animals sacrificed — industry figures from last year suggest between 7m and 8m were sacrificed in the country — there is significant income to be generated from hides and skins. People usually donate the hides to mosques, charitable institutions and NGOs. But militants — both of the extremist and political variety — also look to cash in on this bonanza. Goat skins sell for a few

hundred rupees and cow hides go for over Rs1,000. Significant money can be made by malevolent actors who snatch sacrificial skins that should be going to the needy. While the situation in Karachi is much better compared to a few years ago, when thugs working for political parties snatched hides at gunpoint, there is no room for complacency. Political administrations in the provinces must ensure that people are free to donate hides and skins to legitimate charities of their choice, and militant outfits must not be allowed to make money from this religious obligation.

Coming to the matter of cleaning cities and towns after the sacrifice, local bodies must go beyond lip service and ensure that offal is picked up in a timely and efficient manner over the Eid days. Left to rot, the waste from the sacrifice attracts stray dogs, kites and crows, while also providing a reservoir for disease. It should also be considered that torrential rainfall has been forecast in some parts over the Eid days; overflowing drains and flooded streets, combined with tons of offal, do not create a pleasing picture in the mind. Therefore, the challenge before the authorities this Eid is two-fold: to clean drains and prevent urban flooding, and to remove offal quickly before a royal mess, and obvious threat to public health, is created.

## **The road ahead**

AS flags flutter and the melody of patriotic songs pervades the air on Independence Day, Pakistan faces colossal challenges in the domestic and foreign policy realms. These challenges need a response commensurate with the gravity of the crisis.

The redeeming feature in the all-pervading gloom is the continuity of the democratic process — despite its fragility. The people responsible for this frailty are precisely those whose job it is to lend stability and respectability to the state and give hope to the people.

Regrettably, both the government and the opposition have shown a shocking proclivity for recklessness, as reflected in the political idiom they use in and out of parliament, without realising that this only adds to the electors' contempt for the elected.

A year of rule by the government headed by Prime Minister Imran Khan has seen intermittent additions to the number of advisers, besides a reshuffling of the cabinet, but one is hard put to find evidence of worthwhile progress towards implementing the countless promises the PTI chief made during the election campaign. Fiascos and U-turns have been many, the dam fund was a fiscal joke with the nation, the accountability process stands tainted, and the economy is in the doldrums.

The opposition, of course, has gloated over the governance chaos, but politically, it has proved itself equally dilettantish as seen recently in the Senate no-confidence vote. The reason is obvious: this motley group of leaders lacks a coherent strategy to make itself relevant because its fat cats have little in common, except for their hostility towards the government. Besides, the corruption mud has stuck. No wonder that with politics reduced to an epithet-laden theatre of the absurd, the chafing rise in prices and a steady decline in the quality of life have added to the people's despondency. All this at a time when Indian perfidy in held Kashmir and the Afghan peace talks demand a stable Pakistan headed by a mature leadership that is capable of navigating the nation's ship.

It is, of course, a ritual on Aug 14 to call for unity, but the latter is an abstract concept unless it is translated into a national asset as a cohesive force. This element of power can be actualised only when our leaders show an unswerving commitment to the rule of law.

Pakistan was achieved through a constitutional struggle, and that was one reason why the Quaid repeatedly exhorted the nation in the little time he had to uphold democratic values. Also, Jinnah never stooped low while criticising his detractors. The nation thus expects its representatives to stop being hecklers, and, instead, conduct themselves with a sangfroid that evokes the voters' admiration and lends sanctity to parliament.

As flags flutter and melodies fill the air, let those who claim to be our leaders rededicate themselves to the values Jinnah bequeathed to his people.



## Media in IHK

THERE could not be two more starkly opposed media environments. Indian news outlets that parrot the government line on India-held Kashmir and the scrapping of Article 370 that stripped the territory of its special status a few days ago are in full cry. On the other hand, the media in IHK has been gagged in a manner taken straight out of a fascist's playbook with a total communication blackout in force since Aug 4. Media persons are smuggling out information and images on flash drives to be hand-carried by people travelling out of the area. Photojournalists, given the nature of their work and the overwhelming security presence on the streets, are quite literally first in the line of fire. A report on the situation by the Committee to Protect Journalists quotes the one editor it could reach on the ground as saying that a group of journalists were thrashed by Indian police when one of them took a photograph of a security barricade in Srinagar. For the rest of the accounts in its report, the CPJ has had to rely on journalists who have travelled out of IHK. The snippets of information paint a dire picture of a media unable to do its job, except by resorting to subterfuge akin to an underground resistance. For instance, the few papers still publishing, which have cut down their pages drastically, are being circulated mostly at night. Reporters are gathering information surreptitiously; moving around without a press card is easier than with one, which instantly restricts mobility and carries the risk of physical violence.

A sham democracy is never more exposed for what it is than when it treats journalists as the 'enemy'. Preventing the voices of the Kashmiris from reaching the wider public is evidence that India knows its actions in the territory are immoral and illegal, and will be judged so by the world. Depriving the local population of their right to information, that too at such a catastrophic turn of events, is equally reprehensible. Compounding the injustice is that the narrative, as detailed in a report in this paper recently, is being hijacked by a deluge of misinformation and half-truths on social media. There is no on-the-ground reporting from Kashmir or sources of information available for fact-checking websites to debunk fake news. The result is a vicious free-for-all between the two sides of the divide where the truth is the biggest casualty.

## **Tax returns**

THE fact that more than 2.5m people have filed tax returns for the last fiscal year is indeed a good sign that the FBR wants to project. Especially considering that in the previous tax year, this figure was just under 1.5m. So there is an increase and an appreciable one. But the fact that it took eight extensions of the deadline, and that the filing season of the last fiscal year has continued into the present one, takes some of the shine off the claim. Getting people to file their returns is an important exercise, and whenever the number of individuals stepping up to fulfil this crucial responsibility goes up, it is a marker of success. But further questions must still be asked because simply filing paperwork is not an end in itself.

The most crucial question is, of course, how much incremental revenue has been earned as a result. This data is still awaited and the FBR should make it a point to release it too. If it turns out that a large number of the incremental returns are from nil filers, meaning those who declare no taxable income, but are only fulfilling a formality to get their name on the Active Taxpayer List, then it clearly indicates that the real uphill task of broadening the base and getting recalcitrant parties to declare their incomes remains to be done. And if an appreciably large number of the incremental returns is from those who are salaried people whose taxes were already being deducted and deposited, but were simply negligent in their duty to file their returns, then once again the amount collected as incremental revenue through the exercise will not show as appreciable an increase as needed. The ultimate test for the FBR in these trying times is to realise actual material revenue, without resorting to gimmicks, and by spreading the burden of the incremental revenue effort to other parties. That test remains to be passed.

## **An economic plan?**

THE State Bank governor, Reza Baqir, used the occasion of a flag-hoisting ceremony on Aug 14 to try and breathe a little life into the economy by assuring the country that the direction in which things were moving was the correct one. He acknowledged the difficulties faced by firms and people in the form of rising inflation and unemployment amid a slowing economy, but sought to reassure his

audience that the government was working on a 'plan' to help the economy turn the corner and return to the path of growth. No indication was given of the time that was required for this, nor was there any hint of what the plan looked like. For the moment, it seems the message is that there is nothing to be done except let the medicine administered by the new economic team take effect.

Missing through all this has been the voice of the adviser to the prime minister on finance. Hafeez Shaikh has now retreated into the background from where he silently calls the shots. As layoffs sweep the country, companies teeter on the edge of bankruptcy and people find their livelihoods squeezed almost to breaking point, the doctor supposedly administering the medicine is barely seen or heard from. There is little doubt that difficult decisions have to be made, and that the pain will continue for a while longer. But Mr Shaikh's job is also to breathe confidence into the economy during this period of painful adjustment. To not be visible, then, surely amounts to a dereliction of duty.

If what Mr Baqir said about the economic team's working on a plan to help revive the economy is correct, we should also hear this directly from the finance adviser. Important questions must be answered. Who is putting together this plan? Is it being developed by a small group of people in a closed room somewhere? Is there any stakeholder consultation involved in drawing it up? And more importantly, what will be the pace and direction of economic growth once the time comes to implement this plan? Pakistan's economy has been through far too many short-lived spurts of growth, followed by catastrophic busts that land the country at the doorstep of the IMF. The government has promised on numerous occasions that the current IMF programme would be Pakistan's last, so perhaps it would be helpful to know whether the so-called plan that is in the works is part of delivering on this promise. It is important to share the details with the public, and to know from those in charge of the economy where they stand on the promises made by the last finance minister. Adjustment is not the only thing the economy needs. It also needs transparency and visible leadership — both of which are missing at the moment.

## **Internet shutdowns**

ONE of the singular characteristics of a country's drift towards autocracy is an increasing curtailment of citizens' access to sources of information and

communication. When the flow of diverse opinions and ideas is restricted, state propaganda is allowed free rein.

Read: India tops world with most internet shutdowns: report

The findings in a report by an advocacy group working on a free and open internet, and a global coalition that tracks internet shutdowns across the world, gain heightened relevance in the context of recent regional developments.

According to the document, India was responsible for 134 out of 196 internet shutdowns across the world in 2018 — a whopping 67pc of the total. The country heads the list of deliberate shutdowns since 2015: that, significantly enough, is only one year after Narendra Modi, no champion of democratic ideals, first became prime minister.

Consider the frequency of shutdowns and the signs of an unravelling democracy become even clearer.

In 2018, as per the report, there were twice as many internet shutdowns in India as in 2017 and nearly three times that in 2016. The tactic was employed more often in India-held Kashmir and the states of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra than in 22 other states combined; IHK is currently enduring its 53rd shutdown. (A recent Stanford University study found that 47pc of shutdowns that occurred last year targeted IHK.) Asia and Africa account for the most shutdowns worldwide; Pakistan is a distant second after India with 12 such events.

The fact that governments, even ostensibly democratic ones that espouse the right to freedom of speech and information, acknowledge the shutdowns less than 40pc of the time illustrates an inherent and growing tendency towards authoritarianism.

When states do seek to justify such actions, the most common pretexts according to the report are “public safety, ‘fake news’ or hate speech and related violence, national security, and school exams”. More often than not, however, these stated justifications — most of them ostensibly for the public’s own ‘good’ — are a fig leaf to suppress coverage of protests and prevent human rights abuses from coming to light.

Despotic governments indeed have much to fear from the internet — after all, Twitter and Facebook help propel the discontent in the Middle East into what became the Arab Spring. In IHK, previous internet shutdowns as well as the

continuing communications blackout that encompasses internet, mobile and telephone services jive perfectly with a government determined to crush the Kashmiris' freedom struggle through brute force.

## Yemeni infighting

THE conflict in Yemen has often been described as a confrontation between the Iran-backed Houthis, and the country's internationally recognised government backed by Saudi Arabia. While Yemen may indeed be a battlefield in the wider Saudi-Iran confrontation, it should not be forgotten that there are conflicts within conflicts brewing even in the ranks of supposed allies. The fact is that Yemen is a patchwork of tribal and confessional alliances, and external intervention has only internationalised what is basically a domestic struggle for power. And indicating the complexity of Yemeni politics is the recent takeover of Aden — Yemen's second major city and de facto capital of the Mansoor Hadi-led government — by a militia backed by the UAE. On Saturday, the Security Belt, a secessionist militia which supports the re-establishment of erstwhile South Yemen, took control of Aden, displacing government forces. This has put the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which backs Mr Hadi, in an odd position as Yemeni allies of the two coalition partners are now at daggers drawn. In another development, a top Houthi official was in Tehran on Tuesday to call upon Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The ayatollah reaffirmed Iran's support for the Houthis and called for steps to prevent the division of Yemen. The meeting would reaffirm the view of Iranian support for the Houthis.

Where the developments in Aden are concerned, while the government-Houthi conflict shows no sign of ending soon, the split within the coalition ranks threatens to add a violent new angle to the ruinous Yemeni civil war. To prevent the situation from degenerating into one of complete anarchy and violence, the Saudi-led coalition must cease fire and help end this disastrous war. Iran should also encourage the Houthis to adopt the path of dialogue. Without an internationally backed effort to bring all of Yemen's warring parties to the negotiating table to hammer out a Yemeni-led solution, the chances of this conflict ending soon are slim, to the detriment of the Yemeni people.

## **Modi's actions**

IN attempting to illegally annex India-held Kashmir and then mocking its people with claims that it was for their own good, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has only ensured that the cycle of violence in IJK will intensify in the months and years to come. There are fears — mostly based on gross and vulgar utterances of saffron zealots, including the chief minister of Haryana — that IJK would now be turned into a Bantustan on the model of occupied Palestine. For decades, the Palestinians have suffered at the hands of their Israeli tormentors — just as the Kashmiri people have been subjected to an unspeakable ordeal with long spells of Indian military control over their lives. And just as the Palestinians have been let down by so many world leaders — including their own Arab brethren whom they trusted — the Kashmiris too have seen few actively support their cause.

Pakistan has always stood by them in their quest for azadi from the Indian yoke. China has also expressed its outrage at Mr Modi's rash move. In fact, China's officially patronised Global Times noted in an editorial on Monday that India is "too reckless on border issues" and keeps on breaking "status quo", impacting the regional situation. It also said that India continued to challenge the surrounding countries' interests, and expected them to "swallow the provocation and accept the new facts made by India", and that it was unimaginable for Pakistan not to take "strong countermeasures". But other than a few voices of protest, there has been a lukewarm response from the world community to India's hubris and the recent events in the occupied region. As indicated in these columns earlier, the demands of realpolitik and global economics have taken precedence over human rights, justice and fair play. Unless Pakistan and other parties that have a feel for democracy step up their efforts to engage robustly with the diplomatic community on the issue, Mr Modi's reckless act is unlikely to be challenged.

Meanwhile, the debate on the reasons for Mr Modi's move continues. It could be that Mr Modi needs a distraction from the severe economic crisis looming over India. It is possible that he sees in IJK a potential to plunder virgin territory on behalf of high-profile tycoons who had shored up his candidature to become prime minister in 2014, and who financed his controversial re-election last May. Another obvious motivation for inflicting more pain on Kashmir is that it helps his party spread the virus of Hindu chauvinism by framing the issue as one



concerning 'Muslim terrorism'. Mr Modi may have calculated that there are too many distractions in the world currently with its myriad problems of right-wing surge, ascendant racism and troubled economies for people to take notice of the perfidy in occupied Kashmir. It is unfortunate that the latter assumption may be correct.

## Coal dumping

THE Sindh Environmental Protection Agency recently gave permission for a 23-acre coal storage facility at Bin Qasim Town in Karachi. The move is deemed controversial as it goes against the Supreme Court's orders, when it disallowed open coal storage in the city last year. The apex court ruled that the fossil fuel can only be kept in warehouses; and when being transported, blankets and moisture must be provided to limit the pollution created by dust. Furthermore, the decision was taken by Sepa on the basis of a simple Initial Environmental Examination, which meant it could bypass public review and conveniently ignore concerns raised by residents in the area. But according to a report published in this paper yesterday, some residents who live close to the site complain of breathing problems due to the large amounts of coal and its residue being dumped close to their homes. Studies have shown that even if coal is kept in storage, it is still hazardous to human health as it continues to transmit fine particulate pollution in the air, which leads to an increase in cardiovascular and respiratory complications. Secondly, it is a widely acknowledged fact that coal generation is harmful for the environment, and it is one of the largest producers of global greenhouse gas emissions. In this age of unpredictable weather patterns and their devastating implications for agrarian economies such as Pakistan, which ranks seven on the list of countries most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, alternative forms of energy must be considered. For instance, solar energy and wind power have enormous potential in this country, and more efforts are needed to harness these.

Unfortunately in Asia, dependency on coal for power generation has not subsided, despite repeated warnings by environmentalists about its various hazards. While one cannot deny that it is a cheaper and more stable form of energy, which provides employment to thousands of workers in the industry, the health and environmental costs of storing, handling, transporting and burning this fossil fuel cannot be ignored any longer. And the voices of those who raise

concern cannot be drowned out by powerful industries and government — which is the case at the moment. It is apparent that the more sensible countries have started phasing out coal as a source of power generation. But many in Pakistan continue to endorse it as the solution to the country's energy and employment problems.

## **Dream called tourism**

AS popular refrains go, Pakistan has much to offer tourists. Consequently, the relevant authorities are being asked to make efforts to properly showcase the excitements the land has in store for visitors. Official lack of enthusiasm is routinely condemned, often drawing a halfhearted response from the provinces. But now, Punjab can perhaps claim that it has tried to address the issue in earnest by coming up with an ambitious tourism policy which got the provincial cabinet's nod last month. Sadly, the circumstances under which it was presented shows just how casually the tourism sector is viewed in this country. It was introduced by a minister who had only recently been relieved of the charge of tourism — apparently because as holder of the higher education portfolio, he couldn't do full justice to both at the same time. In the past too, the formula has been to entrust the tourism ministry as an additional charge to someone who has already been assigned a more fulfilling portfolio.

Little has been done in practical terms to justify the self-edifying melodies sung in praise of Pakistan's tourism potential. The new Punjab policy is also full of grand words about developing sites; this needs quite a lot of field effort. In essence, it is based on a rather old realisation that the private sector has to be roped in to play the role of the partner Punjab seeks in order to develop its "landscape, ecology, history, festivals, cuisines and its religious heritage and archaeological assets" for tourists. So far, there have been few clues as to how the Punjab government wants to pursue its wonderful vision. Whenever it has time, it must remember one principle that is globally applied to promoting tourism: there has to be a balance between looking after one's guests and rules for their entry and movement in the country. There is no reason why a government which claims it has so much to offer should be so strict with visitors.

## UNSC meeting on IHK

A CLOSED-DOOR, single-point agenda meeting that excludes the parties to the dispute from the deliberations, allows much room for interpretation — at least until matters become clearer.

Read: UNSC Kashmir moot gives lie to Indian claim

Notwithstanding the premature gloating from across the border, there are some positive takeaways from Friday's UN Security Council meeting on India-held Jammu & Kashmir.

For one, this was a rare event, the very first such gathering to exclusively discuss the disputed area. By doing so, the global body has indicated that the revocation of India-held Kashmir's status is not India's 'internal matter' as the latter would have the world believe, but a development with dire implications for the region and beyond. In fact, what little has emerged from those privy to the discussion is that the UNSC is concerned over the situation spiralling out of control. Several diplomats at the meeting said as much in remarks to the media later, with the Chinese envoy asking Pakistan and India to "refrain from taking any unilateral action that might further aggravate the tension there since the situation is already very tense and very dangerous".

Nevertheless, calls for restraint — while eminently pragmatic given that IHK has long been a bone of contention between two nuclear-armed neighbours — fall far short of a robust response, although China was comparatively more forceful than other countries in its support for Pakistan's position. And while joint statements are not expected from informal consultations such as the one on Friday, the participants refrained from calling an emergency session, something that Pakistan had wanted. The UNSC members are correct in urging Pakistan and India to resolve the dispute in a peaceful manner. However, for the world to accept India's stance that this be done bilaterally would be to deny the facts on the ground, including the obduracy with which Pakistan's repeated attempts at talks have been rebuffed, especially under the Modi government.

The apathy is deeply disappointing though not unexpected.

As Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said in a press conference last week, the international community — in thrall to its financial interests — is

unlikely to come out with guns blazing against India's revocation of Article 370. So it has proved, at least thus far.

As for Pakistan, it has not over the years laid the diplomatic groundwork that could sustain its position on IHK when push came to shove — such as now. Instead, flawed, myopic policies that clear-sighted politicians and opinion makers repeatedly warned against, compromised its standing in the world and gave India space to discredit the Kashmiri freedom struggle. As matters stand, it can be argued that Pakistan should have taken the time to engage with the international community and build up more pressure on the diplomatic front before asking for a UNSC emergency meeting. Nevertheless, the only way ahead is to continue to press for a just hearing on IHK from the world.

## **Kuchlak attacks**

BALUCHISTAN faces multiple security challenges. While violence against the Shia Hazara has come down from where it was several years ago, when members of the community were massacred in the hundreds, the Hazara still do not have complete freedom of movement and security of life even in the provincial capital Quetta. Elsewhere, the secessionist Baloch insurgency is in a low phase, but the militants remain active. However, it is difficult to say who was responsible for the two attacks on Friday and Saturday in Kuchlak, located on the outskirts of Quetta. Both attacks claimed the lives of prayer leaders. In Friday's attack that targeted a mosque, at least four people lost their lives. Perhaps the most high-profile victim was mosque imam Hafiz Hamdullah, said to be a brother of Afghan Taliban supremo Mullah Haibatullah.

While both attacks must be strongly condemned, they do raise several questions. If it is indeed proven that amongst those who died on Friday was a close relative of the Taliban chief, we must ask what the man was doing just a few kilometres outside Quetta. Rumours have swirled for years of a so-called Quetta Shura of the Afghan Taliban operating out of Baluchistan, though the state has denied that Afghan fighters found sanctuary on Pakistani soil. While the dynamics of the Afghan war may well be changing as the Americans try to woo the Taliban, Pakistan, for its own security, must ensure that no foreign militant outfits are using its soil as a refuge. Moreover, if investigations reveal that foreign intelligence was behind the Kuchlak attacks, then the state must explain how

hostile forces were able to carry out an act of terrorism with relative ease on Pakistani soil. Balochistan, as indicated above, is prone to instability, which is why the security establishment must ensure that no hostile actors are able to exploit vulnerable areas. Whether it is foreign militants finding refuge in far-flung areas, or intelligence agencies of hostile states operating inside Pakistan, in both cases the state and the security establishment must maintain extra vigilance to prevent militants from using this country as a base against others, and to ensure internal security. These are times of tension, especially on the eastern border; there is no excuse for security lapses that can lead to loss of life in the country.

## **Sexual assault cases**

FORTY-FIVE girls preyed upon in the space of two years in a living, bustling town — for the umpteenth time, another abduction-and-assault case, reported from Rawalpindi, has unveiled the demons that lurk unchecked in our midst. The alleged perpetrators are a man, with knowledge of IT, and his wife of two years. The two would reportedly lure young girls to their home where the man would rape the hostages and his wife film the act. It took a courageous student to break the silence earlier this month and set the police in pursuit of the husband-wife team. The investigators are as yet unsure of the motive. After the man's confession, the police effort to get more victims to record their statements has hit a blank. They say they do not have the technology to analyse laptops and other gadgets that have been used. The police lacking the required equipment in this day and age, and having to call the FIA for help, is simply absurd.

It is a rather sad reflection on our primary line of defence against all and any kind of crime. A force so lacking in resources can hardly inspire feelings of security among those the police are charged with protecting. Not just that, it seems that whereas the absence of new tools to perform police functions is generally a worrisome issue, the force is fast forgetting something which it once was quite good at: monitoring what went around in a neighbourhood through its officials and net of informers. It was the 45th girl who spoke up and brought the serial crime to an end in this case. There would have been more victims had she not broken the silence. Those on watch and guard duties seemingly had no way of seeing anything suspicious going on. This is a very scary picture. We have had Kasur earlier and now we have Rawalpindi's name being flashed across TV

screens. How many more such episodes will it take to get the officials to shed their apathy?

## **Mixed signals from Taliban**

THE business of negotiating peace — especially in a theatre as complex as Afghanistan — is not easy.

While at times it appears that the Afghan peace process is on its way to a resolution, at others it seems as if there are miles to go before stability and calm can be achieved.

This is especially true whenever there is violence in the war-torn country, such as Saturday's horrific blast at a wedding hall in Kabul that killed over 60 people.

However, while talking to this paper recently, Suhail Shaheen, the Afghan Taliban's chief spokesperson, indicated that all is not lost where the peace process with the Americans is concerned.

In fact, he spoke in optimistic tones, saying that "90pc" of issues between the Talibs and the Americans had been resolved.

The spokesperson was responding to a question regarding reports that the latest round of negotiations had broken down.

He added that some "technical issues" remained, and that the talks were only suspended for "consultations".

Interestingly, in his Eid message Taliban chief Mullah Haibatullah used a more aggressive tone, calling the US "disingenuous" and accusing it of issuing "contradictory statements".

Perhaps the difference in the Taliban spokesman's and chief's statements can be attributed to the strategy of good cop, bad cop.

While the spokesman is telling the world that all is well and the militia is still willing to talk, the Taliban chief is playing the hard man, indicating that the Talibs are ready to continue the fight. Such tactics are par for the course in war and peacemaking.



Though the Taliban maintain a rigid position in two key areas — declaring a ceasefire and talking to the government in Kabul — their willingness to continue negotiations with Washington shows that the militia is also interested in an end to the conflict, even if it wants to project an image of toughness.

Of course, the Taliban are also buying time and waiting to see what sort of dispensation emerges in Kabul after next month's presidential election.

If the Taliban themselves are saying "90pc" of matters with the Americans have been resolved, then it is hoped that the remaining 10pc are hammered out soon as well.

However, whatever agreement is reached with the US, complete peace in Afghanistan cannot be achieved unless all Afghan stakeholders are on board where a peace agreement is concerned.

Considering the fact that the country is a patchwork of tribal and linguistic groups, all Afghan parties must reach amodus vivendi where no one is left out, and everyone has a say in ensuring that Afghanistan is run in a representative, democratic manner.

The Americans have tried, and failed, to import democracy into Afghanistan; now the challenge is for all Afghan groups — including the Taliban — to work out a representative system free from outside interference which all Afghans can own and participate in.

## **Stock market blues**

THE stock market is seeing one of the most protracted bear runs in recent memory. The last trading session on Aug 16 saw the benchmark KSE100 index drop to below 29,000 as it fell by 664 points in a single day. There was a time when such large drops would be big news, but recent months have seen falls of this magnitude so often that they barely register as significant events. At the moment, there is no panic selling considering that the lower locks are not being activated on a regular basis except for a few scrips. The sell-off is also broad-based with all sectors caught in the net. The latest bout of selling saw the oil and gas sector in the line of fire, while on other days, banks and insurance companies or automobiles have also led the way. What is happening on the trade floor is not, clearly, an unnatural event and cannot be said to be driven by

speculative or manipulative trades. Rather, the stock market appears to be reflecting the overall downturn that is crippling the economy.

For this reason, the government must steel itself to resist all demands for intervention that may come from the community of brokers who are on the front line of the losses. Back in May, this same community managed to convince the government of the need for a Rs20bn bailout. At that time, the benchmark index had just dropped below the 40,000 level after having touched highs of close to 55,000 in 2017. The slide has been ongoing since May 2017, with no respite in sight, and it is likely as it continues that the temptation to yield to the brokers' demands for government intervention will build. At a time when the government is trying to convey a message of sacrifice and austerity to the country, it will be very difficult to justify the need for a bailout for the stockbrokers. If the government's message, that the economy has to undergo a period of painful adjustment in order to rectify its imbalances, is to be believed, then there is little to do except let the stock market find its own level in the new reality that is sweeping across Pakistan's economy. There is no shortage these days of industry complaints, and if government support is to be used, then the priority should be for the real sector, particularly exports.

## **Traffic accidents**

WHAT starts as a time for celebration quickly turns into sorrow for many families in Pakistan. Over the three-day Eid holidays, a staggering 4,677 road accidents were recorded across Punjab. Tragically, 33 lost their lives while another 5,500 people were injured. Most of the deaths occurred on Independence Day that coincided with the Eid holidays. In Peshawar, two youngsters lost their lives; 400 accidents took place between Aug 13 and 14. Meanwhile, in Karachi, at the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre, there were 1,155 patients between Aug 12 and 17 due to traffic and road-related accidents. The vast majority of these deaths and injuries were attributed to speeding motorcyclists and impatient drivers trying to get to their destinations quickly. During such festive occasions, it is also not unusual to see motorcyclists doing tricks on their bikes or children behind the wheel. While it may be exhilarating for some, the brazen disregard and violation of traffic rules endangers not only their own lives but also the lives of those around them. The sheer number of casualties from such incidents is far too high to not be taken as a major public health concern.

According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, there were 5,958 fatalities throughout the country in 2017-18 — the highest in a decade — while another 14,489 others sustained injuries. Despite having comparatively better roads, highways and services, Punjab had the highest fatalities at 3,371. This was followed by KP, which recorded 1,295 deaths. Meanwhile, Sindh witnessed 802 deaths and Balochistan 313. And whether it is due to the increased number of vehicles on the roads, a growing population, or other factors, the Edhi Foundation considered 2018 to be the worst year for road fatalities in Karachi, with 797 deaths and 16,980 injuries documented. Enforcing preventive measures such as the wearing of seatbelts and helmets, constructing new pedestrian bridges, and ensuring working traffic signals, appropriate speed breakers and road signs, while being vigilant of corruption in the ranks of the traffic police, are just a few steps in the right direction.

## **Economy, one year on**

ONE year into its term in power, and the PTI government has much to answer for. Take the management of the economy. There is little doubt that the new government that took power after the July 2018 elections inherited an economy with severe stresses that had to be addressed rapidly and decisively as they were propelling the country towards a balance-of-payments crisis. At the heart of it were the rapidly depleting foreign exchange reserves that at one point fell to a level barely sufficient to cover a month's worth of imports. If that level had continued to drop, Pakistan would have entered a financial crisis of the sort that we saw in 1998 and in 2008. Averting the slide was the top priority as was bringing the fiscal deficit under control. The deficit was touching 6.5pc of GDP, pushing government debt up, and complicating the effort to build up reserves.

This was a very serious situation, undoubtedly, and left to itself, the country was drifting dangerously close towards a crisis point. The government's response took long to take shape, giving rise to protracted uncertainty. There was resort to emergency financing measures worth just over \$7bn from countries including Saudi Arabia, the UAE and China. On almost all fronts it seemed as if the government was in a state of policy paralysis, with the circular debt continuing to rise, the stock market plummeting, the debt markets frozen, CPEC in limbo, key decisions on more LNG terminals left dangling, revenue collection falling to historic lows — despite two mini budgets, no major legislation on any subject,

and so on. Meanwhile, the government's indebtedness shot up and net reserves plummeted to negative \$16.8bn by May 2019, despite the emergency support provided by Saudi Arabia, the UAE and China.

Given the numbers, it is not possible to argue that the delay in formulating a robust policy direction was in any way beneficial to the economy. Ultimately, the decisive step of removing the PTI's core point man on the economy was taken in order to put policymaking on stronger rails. Nevertheless, many have questioned the appointment of Hafeez Shaikh as finance adviser to the prime minister, arguing that he represents the thinking of 'purana' and not 'naya' Pakistan. Aside from a ferocious macroeconomic adjustment, the budget brought no new ideas. The result is now there for all to see — skyrocketing inflation, rising unemployment and collapsing investment and growth. Meanwhile, the economic managers are averse to disclosing the reality and continue to insist that things are moving in the right direction. It took one whole year for the PTI government to find its feet amid a sinking economy. In the year ahead, it must find the rest of its body too, and realise that running the economy requires more than slogans and loud claims.

## IS in Afghanistan

BACK-TO-BACK acts of terrorism in Afghanistan once again highlight the treacherous road that lies ahead in the war-racked country's quest for peace. Multiple bombings struck markets and public squares in Jalalabad on Monday, causing dozens of casualties. No one had claimed responsibility until the time of writing. On Saturday, a suicide bomber found his way into a wedding hall in Kabul packed with guests, mainly from the Shia Hazara community. In an instant, a joyous occasion became the scene of carnage: over 60 people were killed and more than 180 injured. The Afghan Taliban, who are in the midst of negotiating an agreement with the US, denounced the attack, which was claimed by the militant Islamic State group. In the chronology of horror unleashed by IS, any place where men, women and children can be found going about their daily lives — markets, educational institutes, hospitals, mosques, etc — constitutes a legitimate target.

Aside from the fact that bringing an end to this protracted war is desirable in itself, the urgency of doing so is compounded by IS ambitions in Afghanistan

which are aided by a situation where various power centres remain in a state of flux. The extremist group, relieved of the financial demands involved in administering and defending its so-called caliphate in Syria and Iraq, sees Afghanistan as a potential base to attract foreign fighters. It has even managed to attract some Taliban elements who were unhappy with their leadership's talks with the US or were drawn to IS's more extreme, transnational ideology. Facilitated by assets of around \$300m it is believed to still possess, IS now has a presence in four eastern provinces: Nangarhar, Nuristan, Kunar and Laghman. The region comprises rugged terrain with high-altitude posts from where, as the US troops found when fighting the Taliban forces, it is fiendishly difficult to dislodge combatants. For Pakistan, this constitutes a menacing development, as three of the four provinces where IS has found a foothold are contiguous with its western border. This country has already experienced the outcome of a nexus between the terror outfit and its homegrown violent extremists. When militancy was at its peak in Pakistan, groups such as the Lashkar-i-Jhangvi as well as several TTP factions had pledged allegiance to IS and jointly carried out several attacks. It is critical that the situation on the ground not allow old links to be revived and facilitate a resurgence of militancy.

## **Mob mentality**

“MEN, it has been well said, think in herds; it will be seen that they go mad in herds, while they only recover their senses slowly, one by one,” a Scottish journalist wrote in the 19th century. In modern-day South Asia, we have witnessed the insanity of the herd, time and again, whenever it rears its ugly head. In the most recent instance, a 16-year-old child, accused of stealing, was beaten to death by a mob in Karachi's Bahadurabad neighbourhood. He was stripped off his clothes and had his entire ordeal filmed on camera. This was not the first episode of its kind, and it is unlikely to be the last either. Who can forget the public killing in 2010 of two young brothers, Mughees and Muneeb, lynched on the streets of Sialkot with the police urging on the mob, while a crowd of spectators watched? Or the lynching of a Christian couple, Shama and Shehzad, accused of blasphemy by rabid villagers in Kot Radha Kishan, in 2014? Or the murder of Mashal Khan — a bright, young man full of promise — by his fellow students at Mardan University in 2017?

When face to face with an enraged mass, individuals stand little chance of survival, let alone of getting justice. The names and locations of the victims may change, but what all these incidents point to is the brutalisation of society and a seething anger and frustration in the public psyche exacerbated by the steady erosion of its faith in the state's justice system. But that is no excuse for the violence perpetrated by the collective against vulnerable others, and that too on the mere basis of accusation. Perpetrators of this recent act of violence in Karachi have been booked under the Anti-Terrorism Act, which some argue is not the appropriate definition for the crime. Nevertheless, those who take the law into their own hands to brutalise others deserve harsh punishment to make it clear there is no place for mob 'justice' in civilised societies.

## **Another term for the army chief**

The extension of tenure given to army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa had been predicted by many observers.

The move, when it came, was justified by a reference to the 'extraordinary circumstances' that apparently could not allow another general to be elevated to the position of chief at this juncture.

However, even though it was an expected decision, the move was certain to draw criticism over a couple of important points that have long been a hot topic of debate in the country.

The first of these involves the absolute necessity of establishing a tradition of uninterrupted succession in an institution which is widely hailed as probably the finest in the country.

The principle of a smooth change of command merits utmost respect, otherwise there would have been no room in the rulebook for the provision of succession.

But it seems that instances of a routine transition are hard to come by in our case.

When Gen Ashfaq Kayani got an extension in 2010, the country was in the middle of a terrible war against militants for everyone to see and factor into any discussion related to Pakistan's security.



However, even today, the situation is far from peaceful.

The Americans may be planning to withdraw from Afghanistan, but we now have a very tense situation with India, especially with the Kashmir crisis exacerbated by the Modi government.

Given the long history of turmoil in the region, it is unlikely that the situation will ever be perfect, but if regular, unhindered succession at the top is a worthy enough objective, the political leadership and the country's arguably most organised and efficient institution will have to learn the ways of allowing the normal process to go on, even in times of regional troubles.

The second, much-discussed point pertains to the political class.

In 2010, the then-PPP government drew a lot of flak for allowing Gen Kayani to stay for an additional three years.

Among the strongest critics of the move was the current Prime Minister Imran Khan, who argued that under no circumstances was such a departure from principles justified. That was then.

In power since August 2018, Mr Khan has taken so many steps against his own, earlier principled positions that indulging in any kind of defence of his stance now would be a sheer waste of time.

He has indeed come a long way since the days when he struggled to appear unhurt by criticism about his alleged U-turns. At this time, his government has a number of pressing concerns to deal with.

Surely, it must try and live up to its own vision of itself as a powerful setup that is capable of taking on all challenges that previous governments before it dared not — not least because of the proximity between the prime minister and the army chief.

## **Trump's efforts**

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump's advice that Pakistan and India must "work towards reducing tensions" in the wake of the abrupt cancellation of the special status and autonomy of India-held Kashmir shows just how grave the situation is between the two nuclear-armed states.

For historically, the Americans have only woken up and rushed to the region when the two neighbours have been on the brink.

And this is exactly where, Pakistan insists, the problem lies.

“A tough situation, but good conversations”, is how Mr Trump described the current state of affairs in this region through his tweet on Monday, after speaking by phone to the leaders of the two countries in the space of a few days.

Many on this side of the border would have taken Mr Trump’s latest attempt to disentangle Pakistan and India as a rudimentary effort at firefighting — not quite the mediation he offered over Kashmir during Prime Minister Imran Khan’s visit to the White House last month.

It is intended to de-escalate present hostilities to avert a potential war in the region that would have long-term repercussions for the entire world.

It is not aimed at facilitating a resolution to the decades-old Kashmir dispute.

This is not for the first time that America has intervened to ward off possible military conflict in the region. But this time, Washington should play a more proactive role and make good on Mr Trump’s ‘offer’ to mediate on the Kashmir dispute for long-term peace.

A constructive American engagement with both sides focused on finding a solution to the Kashmir dispute is important to ensure lasting peace in South Asia for the sake of its people as well as for international security and order.

The world has seen the two sides not being able to resolve the issue bilaterally.

The composite bilateral dialogue initiated in the late 1990s with the active facilitation of the world powers, including the US, is dead with no chance of its resurrection.

There is no doubt that India, which has always been averse to any suggestion of mediation over the Kashmir dispute by a foreign power or even by the UN, will put up strong resistance to such efforts.

Nonetheless, it is important to convince New Delhi to listen to the voice of reason once the international community, led by America, realises that peace and an improved relationship between India and Pakistan is in the best interest of all those with stakes in this region.

## **More than statistics**

TODAY, the second International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism, represents an opportunity to recognise, honour and support the individuals, families and communities impacted by this evil scourge. The world over, terrorism remains a serious challenge to lasting peace and security. In countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq, deadly attacks continue to plague all aspects of civilian life — from markets to workplaces, schools to places of worship, sporting to election events. Only days ago, the Shia Hazara community in Kabul was targeted yet again; turning a wedding celebration into a mass tragedy in an instant. It is not inaccurate to say that the world will soon forget about these casualties. All too often, we hear statistics, and move on.

So it is within Pakistan too. While terrorism in our country has decreased significantly in recent years, tens of thousands of lives have been cut short or forever altered by the lasting impacts of such attacks. Yet, while the apparatus exists for supporting the families of our fallen servicemen, a holistic, institutionalised response mechanism for civilian victims still eludes us. Pakistan often prides itself on its resilience, but it might be more accurate to say that we are inured to violence. If one of the objectives of terrorists is to alienate and divide communities, a befitting response would be to honour our bonds by providing long-term financial, legal, medical and psychosocial support for survivors and victims' families. If terrorism thrives in the absence of justice, it is our moral duty to not only provide peace, but to preserve and protect the rights of victims by upholding the rule of law, ensuring transparency and accountability, and building victim-centred mechanisms into our criminal justice system. And, if individuals and communities scarred by terrorism are made involuntary experts by virtue of their experiences, including their voices in conversations about counterterrorism is essential. Today, let us pay tribute, pledge support and justice, and listen to victims of terrorism.

## **Restraining NAB**

UNTIL now, the government had been in total denial that it had any control over NAB's 'anti-graft' drive, which has created a culture of fear that many see as affecting the economy.

But at long last, it appears that the government is going to admit that it has some influence over the movement of the accountability bulldozer.

The federal cabinet has acknowledged the reality — though not in so many words — that the bureau's campaign is crippling the economy, hampering investment and causing administrative inertia.

It is explained that following a recent discussion on allegations by businessmen about harassment by NAB, the cabinet has decided to 'make some procedural changes' in the bureau's working to stop it from scaring and threatening investors.

The government has conceded that the business community is anxious because of the investigations launched by the bureau (into past contracts and deals between the government and private investors — local and foreign both).

Clearly, there is no spending or investment in the country to speak of, for which the prevalent 'climate of fear and harassment', has been repeatedly blamed.

As the economy gasps for fresh air, the anti-corruption agency hogs the headlines with its feats — mostly the sheer humiliation it heaps on opposition politicians or those businessmen and bureaucrats linked with them.

It seems anyone even remotely connected with these decided villains risks a probe by NAB.

There are also allegations that intense pressure was exerted on certain businessmen and bureaucrats to turn approver in corruption cases against opposition leaders.

The frequency of these allegations has led to calls for restraint, despite the large support for the anti-corruption drive in the country.

The bureau's work in recent times has smacked of a selective campaign and political vendetta, jeopardising the fairness of the entire accountability process.

Steps such as the constitution of a debt commission comprising officials of the military intelligence agencies and NAB to investigate the projects and agreements that are believed to have led to the rapid accumulation of public debt since 2008 are being viewed suspiciously as a tool to be used against the government's opponents.

The government is yet to make public the details of the actions it plans to implement in order to restrain NAB officials from harassing the business community and civil servants.

But it is clear that simple 'procedural changes' in the working of the bureau are not going to help restore business confidence or break the administrative inertia essential for economic recovery.

The NAB law requires a wholesale review by parliament to restrain it from opening an investigation without proper inquiry and sufficient grounds, and arresting suspects without hard evidence against them, as well as to bar it from encroaching on the territory of other state agencies with a similar mandate.

For this to happen, the Imran Khan administration must tone down its anti-corruption rhetoric and agree to sit down with the opposition.

## Deficit declines

THE continuous declines being seen in the external-sector deficit of the country are perhaps a reason to believe that the economy is finding its equilibrium after years of ballooning deficits that have depleted the foreign currency reserves. The latest data released for the month of July shows an accelerating pace of contraction in the current account deficit, indicating that a trend that began earlier this year is finally gathering pace. The decline is sharp compared to the corresponding month last year. July this year saw a current account deficit of \$579m whereas it was \$2.13bn in July last year. This is a sharp and appreciable drop, and coming on the back of continuous declines since earlier this year, shows that the economy is indeed turning the corner after the unsustainable deficits it was saddled with when the PTI government began its term in office.

But there are grounds to be cautious about celebrating this outcome. For one, the State Bank's latest quarterly report, which covers the period July to March of the previous fiscal year, notes an accelerating contraction of the current account deficit but attributes much of it to a decline in oil prices, contraction in imports of LNG, and tapering off of machinery imports as CPEC projects come to an end of their construction phase and begin commercial operations. A small part of the overall contraction in the third quarter of the last fiscal year was attributed to government policies, and even that part was possible mainly because the

stabilisation policies adopted by the government caused a sharp and severe slowdown in the pace of economic activity. In short, contingent factors and collapsing demand explain the declining current account deficit until March, developments that are hardly worthy of celebration. And in that report, the State Bank was also careful to point out that despite the contractions, the current account deficit remains elevated, meaning further contraction will be necessary. We will have a clearer picture of what to make of the continuing declines in the deficit since March when the State Bank releases its next analysis for the period April to June. In the meantime, it is enough to say that the government's policies have played a role in helping rein in a runaway external deficit, but this role has been helped in large part by global factors, a little luck, and significant strangulation of the economy.

## 'Dirty' politics

THE sanitary situation in Karachi is far from perfect. To put it mildly, Pakistan's largest city and economic heart presents the picture of a giant garbage dump, with streets overflowing with sewage. In the aftermath of the recent rains and with the leftovers of the Eidul Azha sacrifice, the situation has worsened considerably, with mountains of trash spoiling the city and the sewage situation seemingly out of control. And, expectedly, instead of combining forces to tackle this grave situation head-on, the PPP-led Sindh government and the MQM-steered city administration have been indulging in an ugly blame game about who is responsible for the state of affairs in Karachi. To make things more interesting, the PTI-led federal government has also jumped into the fray, taking potshots at the Sindh administration for its lack of performance. However, a statement by the Karachi mayor on Tuesday, asking the people to stop paying taxes to the Sindh government, is ill-advised. While the mayor is understandably frustrated because the provincial government controls the Sindh solid waste management body, as well as the water board in Karachi, asking citizens to stop paying taxes is not the right way to lodge a protest. Imran Khan advocated similar tactics while the PTI was in the opposition; suffice to say, elected representatives should not be advocating such a course of action, considering the fact that already there are major issues with below-target tax collection in the country.



Interestingly, the federal government, aided by the MQM, has launched the Clean Karachi campaign to spruce up the city. Perhaps realising that this may make them look bad politically, the Sindh government has launched a Blue Jacket movement of its own to prevent littering. All these initiatives are fine, as long as they are not designed simply as political gimmicks. More than gimmickry, what Karachi really needs is an empowered local setup accountable to the people and that has the funds, manpower and mandate to keep the city clean.

## **ECP appointments**

THE two gentlemen who arrived at the ECP headquarters on Friday hoping to be sworn in as members of the election commission should have known better.

With all due respect to his office, President Arif Alvi should have been better advised and more careful in his reading of the law before nominating the two to ECP vacancies a day earlier.

Read: President Alvi appoints two new ECP members, invites opposition's ire

Prior to that, Prime Minister Imran Khan and his government must have realised the unconstitutional nature of their step; so why did they choose to ignore both law and procedure, and try and push through candidates of their choice?

Such a move will only tarnish the reputation of the electoral body that must be seen as fair and independent at all times.

In the end, they left the chief election commissioner, retired Justice Sardar Mohammad Raza, with only one option: refusal to administer the oath of office to the 'new appointees'.

The CEC quoted a 2013 Supreme Court ruling, which reminds the president that he cannot appoint ECP members — or for that matter the CEC — at his discretion (and without fulfilling certain criteria).

In a letter to the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs, Justice Raza "made it clear that he would not administer oath to the 'unconstitutionally' appointed members".

There is no ambiguity in the procedure for the selection of an ECP member.

After two members retired in January, under the Constitution, the process of replacing them must begin with consultations between the prime minister and leader of the opposition in the National Assembly. That condition was never met amid criticism by both sides. This spoke volumes for their inability to rise above petty issues and fulfil national obligations. Justifiably, much of the blame was placed at the government's door as it is the prime minister's responsibility to initiate consultations with the leader of the opposition. This was not done, even though the National Assembly had done its job of constituting a parliamentary committee as required by the law.

Under the law, the prime minister and the opposition leader are supposed to discuss and then send three names they have agreed upon to the committee for further action. In case there is no agreement, the prime minister and the opposition leader must send three names each to the parliamentary committee.

Notwithstanding parliament's long experience of such joint deliberations, the scheme was perhaps considered too cumbersome by a 'new' party that has made little effort to hide its contempt for past collective endeavours to improve the democratic system. Instead, it chose the deceptively easy path of arbitrary nomination, and in the bargain, opened another front with the opposition.

The alarming part is that the government has done all this knowingly. It appears to be purposefully moving towards a showdown with the opposition over certain provisions of the Constitution. This is a dangerous course and must be avoided.

## **Blacklisting rumours**

It is by now sufficiently obvious that rumours of Pakistan having been 'blacklisted' by the regional affiliate of the Financial Action Task Force was malicious fake news, floated initially by the Press Trust of India. From there, the word was amplified by prominent Indian journalists on social media, and it then echoed large in various other Indian news outlets. The news was deliberately angled to make the real outcome of the meeting appear to be something that it was not. The language used by the Indian media was that Pakistan was placed on an 'enhanced blacklist' by the Asia Pacific Group, the regional affiliate of FATF, whereas the reality was that Pakistan had been placed in a category called 'enhanced follow up'. The word 'blacklist' was added to warp the meaning of the story into something altogether different. In fact, the APG does not

maintain any 'blacklist', and FATF is not scheduled to make any decision on Pakistan until October.

In the meantime, the rumour spread like wildfire in Pakistan. The stock market, which had seen a bull run for four days, opened on a positive note on Friday, but then took steep losses right after the 'blacklisting' story broke. Market players confirmed that investor anxiety about a possible blacklisting was behind the declines. By the close of trade, a weeklong bull run had ended, with the market falling by 534 points. The government was slow in responding, given the speed with which the rumour spread. The first word we heard from the finance ministry came around 12:45pm, when a short, single-line ticker was released for TV channels denying the news. That had no effect. Less than an hour later, local media outlets began uploading the correct version of the story based on their own reporting, again to little effect. A more detailed contradiction was issued by the finance ministry shortly after 2pm, which too had little effect till the day's end. It is worth asking now why investors and the wider public in Pakistan no longer know whether or not to believe what the government and the local media tell them. The current atmosphere of censorship has created a gulf between Pakistani institutions — both the media and government — and their audience, in a way that the country has become vulnerable to fake news attacks originating from outside. Restoring this trust and credibility between the government and media is now key to thwarting a similar episode.

## **Davis Cup setback**

THE International Tennis Federation's decision to delay next month's Davis Cup Asia Oceania Group I tennis tie between Pakistan and India to November has come as a big setback to the hosts who had been looking forward to staging the landmark contest in Islamabad. Citing "exceptional circumstances" for the postponement — a euphemism for escalating border tensions between the two neighbours — the ITF insists that its first priority remains the security and safety of the players, officials and spectators. Unlike cricket's governing body, the ICC, which rarely shows any spine on contentious issues and is easily influenced by some quarters, the ITF deserves a lot of credit for not bowing to repeated requests and demands from the All India Tennis Association to shift the Davis Cup tie from Islamabad to a neutral venue. In July, too, the ITF security team that toured Pakistan to inspect the venue and security arrangements amid constant

pressure from India to shift the tie, gave its wholehearted clearance to Islamabad and has not budged from that position to date.

Islamabad has always been a secure city for sporting events, and the Pakistan Tennis Federation has hosted no less than five Davis Cup ties in recent times, including against Iran and South Korea. India's tendency to mix sports and politics — especially in the case of Pakistan — is most unfortunate. There have been countless occasions when India has backed out of firm commitments to play matches in Pakistan, something that has dismayed fans on both sides of the border. This time, however, India is well aware that an Indian boycott of the Davis Cup tie would lead to a Pakistan walkover, and the ITF's tough stance has deterred the arch-rivals to cross that line. It is regrettable that matters should have come to this pass, especially considering that not too long ago, Pakistan's Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi and India's Rohan Bopanna were doubles partners. India should recognise that politicising sports only deepens distrust and acrimony

## **Resistance in IHK**

AS chinks of light pierce through the stultifying communication blackout in India-held Kashmir, the furious backlash by its people against the Modi government's revocation of the area's special status is unfolding before the world's eyes. This is not a situation 'returning to normal', as the Indian government would have it; this is the outcome of a powder keg set alight — and the ramifications are only just beginning to be felt. Earlier last week, posters appeared overnight urging citizens to join a march to the office of the UN Military Observer Group for India and Pakistan after Friday prayers, the first such call to the local populace by the Kashmiri leadership. After the weekly congregations, protests erupted in Srinagar's Soura district for the third week running despite a ban on public gatherings; hundreds of stone-pelting youth confronted Indian paramilitary forces. Another locality in Srinagar saw a rally with participants, some holding Pakistan flags, vociferously chanting anti-India slogans.

At least 152 people are known to have been injured by tear gas and pellets. India, however, has been silent on casualty figures except to say that no one has been killed, as though the state has thus far acted with admirable restraint. When people are willing to defy tens of thousands of security personnel and risk life and limb to protest against an illegal action that has placed them at the mercy of a

fascist state, the fiction of normality — to any degree whatsoever — cannot be sustained. The Palestinians' protracted freedom struggle, almost as long as that of the residents of IHK, has not been thwarted by the violence unleashed against them. Indeed, even as Israel's brutality has intensified, so their resolve has been further strengthened. That is the nature of a just and indigenous struggle for freedom, and so it will inevitably prove in the present case.

The fractured Kashmiri leadership must set aside their differences and quell the opportunism some of them have displayed in the past. There cannot be a more compelling situation than the present for them to represent their people with one voice. In fact, if they were to join hands with the thus far rather quiescent Kashmiri diaspora, they could more effectively project their cause on the world stage and counter the Modi government's lies and sophistry in downplaying its actions in IHK. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Imran Khan has once again warned the international community that India may carry out a false flag operation to divert attention from its human rights violations in occupied Kashmir and justify a military strike against Pakistan. The urgency in his words must be heeded. India, riding a wave of triumphalism stoked by hyper nationalist rhetoric, needs to know the world is not indifferent to the consequences of two nuclear-armed countries inching closer to a tipping point. That could presage a crisis of unimaginable proportions.

## Eradicating polio

LAST week, Nigeria celebrated three years of no new wild polio cases being reported in the country. For years, the West African nation had struggled to eradicate the virus as its anti-polio efforts were derailed by Boko Haram militants who falsely propagated that polio vaccines were a Western conspiracy to sterilise Muslims. Nigeria is inching closer towards its goal of being declared polio-free; the rest of the world eradicated the virus years ago. India with its much larger population that confronts serious health and sanitation challenges managed to be declared polio-free in 2014. Other countries in Pakistan's vicinity, such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan, were declared polio-free that same year. In contrast, Pakistan has reported 53 new cases of wild polio virus eight months into 2019. Afghanistan has recorded far less — 13 cases within its borders so far this year. The vast majority of the cases in Pakistan are from KP. Taking note of the alarming surge in cases, Prime Minister Imran Khan has

pledged to lead the anti-polio effort in the country. In December 2013, with a newly elected PTI government in KP, Mr Khan had been part of the anti-polio drive alongside Maulana Samiul Haq. Like Nigeria, Pakistan too has grappled with religious militancy that targeted such campaigns with threats and violence. Several health workers and security personnel have been killed by militant over the years, and we must always honour their brave efforts.

But it is also important to remember that other conflict-stricken regions in the world still managed to eradicate the virus. What has caused the greatest harm to efforts are rumours and conspiracy theories, particularly following the Abbottabad raid of 2011. News that the CIA-led operation used a hepatitis — incorrectly mistaken as polio — drive as a cover for information gathering helped strengthen the militants' disinformation tactics. It is true that militancy has subsided considerably — but disinformation campaigns have not. In April, thousands of parents refused vaccination for their children in KP, following rumours of students complaining of feeling sick after they were administered polio drops in Peshawar. It has also come to light that several parents themselves put black ink on their children to mislead polio workers into believing that they had already been immunised. And while public health should never be a bargaining ground, we have recently seen traders in Bannu use polio as a tool to blackmail the government to meet their demands. It is not an easy challenge.

## **Congo virus**

LAST week, the Sindh health ministry confirmed that more than half of 26 patients diagnosed with Crimean Congo haemorrhagic fever died in various hospitals of Karachi. Such cases are not uncommon during the Eidul Azha festivities, when a large number of livestock enters the cities. The majority of dead are believed to have contracted the virus during this time. The tick-borne disease typically lives on livestock and can be transmitted to humans through bites or close contact with the infected animals, including handling and slaughtering them. CCHF can also be spread through bodily fluids in human-to-human contact. A highly contagious virus, patients have to be kept in isolated conditions during treatment. According to the World Health Organisation, there is a 30pc chance of fatality after being infected; this typically occurs within the first two weeks of contracting the virus. Some of the early symptoms include fever, nausea, headaches, along with pain in the muscles, neck and back areas.



Patients also experience sensitivity in their eyes and towards the light. After a few days, they may report vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach pain and a sore throat. Others report a rapid heartbeat, skin rashes and bleeding. Psychologically, the sufferers exhibit mood swings and confusion. This can then progress to lethargy and depression. In the final stages, the kidneys weaken or there is sudden liver failure.

CCHF is a silent killer as infected animals do not exhibit any obvious signs that would point to an infection. While there is no vaccine for this disease, treatment is available for humans. More importantly, preventive measures can be taken if there are efforts to spread greater awareness about the spread of the disease, especially during the Eidul Azha holidays. Animals should be sprayed with tick repellents, and humans must wear protective equipment when handling them. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, we take health and hygiene practices far too lightly, until there is no choice — or it is too late.

## **The JUI-F's October revolution**

EVEN as the results for the 2018 general election were trickling in, Maulana Fazlur Rahman knew that he would be 'soon' running a campaign to dislodge the Imran Khan government that had not yet been formed. He alleged, amid a slight nod of approval by well-wishers and some independent observers, that the JUI-F had been hard done by in the polls. He must have also intuitively understood that if he decided to not protest against what he calls a 'fake' government, his party risked being eliminated in its old bastion of KP. One year later, at the end of a JUI-F executive council meeting in the capital, he is sticking to his guns. He has threatened a 'decisive' long march in October to remove the Khan government, and expects the opposition parties to join him at a politically inopportune moment when the country is locked in a tense stand-off with India. Maulana Fazlur Rehman has warned the government against any attempt at disrupting the opposition move, his words of caution coming in the wake of an interview with Interior Minister Ijaz Shah, who took a swipe at the opposition's 'long march', predicting that the procession would not be able to cross Attock, and that people themselves would stop the protesters with force.

Having fulfilled the formality of delivering a crushing riposte to the minister, Maulana Fazlur Rehman will try to build momentum towards the October action

after Ashura. This is the time of the year when, with the hottest of the summer months behind them, the politicians start fluttering about, readying themselves for combat. The JUI-F chief may have this in mind. He is also right in implicitly conveying that from among the various players out there, the JUI-F has the organisational skills to bring out the numbers on the roads. The crucial aspect he must give some thought to, however, is whether a big enough section of the people are ready to take part in or endorse yet another oust-the-government move? He may look to Mr Khan's long dharna for inspiration but must also keep in mind the sit-in of Dr Tahirul Qadri, who gathered the crowds around him, but lacked the support of crucial political 'elements'.

Above all, is the opposition ready to launch such a big movement? It could try and test the waters by picking up issues to protest, before it gets down to discussing Maulana Fazlur Rehman's October revolution in earnest. There are so many issues, such as the one-sidedness of the accountability drive or the controversial appointments to the ECP, that need the opposition's attention. The 'joint' opposition should be sufficiently chastened by the stunning defeat of its move to topple the Senate chairman recently, and bear in mind that it could be courting a disaster if it is unprepared and irresolute.

## **Zarif at G7 summit**

THERE have been several close calls in the Gulf over the past few months, as the US and Iran have crossed swords in the strategic waterway following Washington's withdrawal from the nuclear deal last year. Perhaps the closest call came when the Iranians shot down an American drone in June, which they said had intruded into their territory. This was followed by the seizure of an Iranian oil tanker by the UK in Gibraltar last month; Tehran struck back by seizing a British tanker in the Strait of Hormuz a few days later. However, after this geopolitical high drama — much of it sparked by America's policy of 'maximum pressure' — things seem to be calming down. One indication of this was the unexpected appearance of Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif at the G7 summit in France over the weekend. While the Americans said the Iranian top diplomat's visit "was a surprise", the French government indicated that Mr Zarif had been invited to the summit to "de-escalate the tensions and create breathing space for negotiations".

The Europeans have, of course, been treading a more careful path on Iran, compared to the bellicosity coming out of the US. Perhaps they realise that if tensions give way to open war, the results could be disastrous for the global economy, and global peace. It will be interesting to see what follows the apparent peace overture. For their part, the Americans have appeared lukewarm and ambiguous about engaging Iran afresh. However, while the threat of immediate conflict in the Gulf may have been postponed for the time being, miscalculations by any of the parties involved can exacerbate matters very quickly. That is why it was a smart move on the part of the Europeans to invite Iran to the G7 conclave in France. From here on, there must be concrete efforts to de-escalate the crisis, beyond photo ops. For one, both the European states and the US must ease financial restrictions that are choking the Iranian economy. Once CBMs such as these take effect, the mood in Tehran — which has only hardened — may mellow and allow for constructive negotiations. As of now, Washington's policy of 'maximum pressure' may lead to 'maximum disaster' in the Gulf and beyond. The need then is to prevent a new escalation, and re-establish the channels of dialogue.

## **Blowing smoke**

NEWS of what could be the first-ever vaping-related death comes as a shock to many. The Illinois patient had contracted an unexplained respiratory illness, with symptoms similar to those afflicting nearly 200 other patients admitted to US hospitals since June. Health authorities speculate that the sudden illness may have been caused by vaping or e-cigarette use, something common to all the patients. A relatively recent phenomenon, marketed as the 'slightly better' alternative to cigarette smoking, vaping has grown in popularity in recent years, especially among younger people. But without any long-term studies on its harmful effects, its supposed benefits have always been questioned. In Pakistan, the vaping trend is not growing rapidly as an alternative to gutkha, cigarette and sheesha smoking due to its much heavier price tag. Unlike the former, however, the harmful effects and long list of respiratory, pulmonary and heart diseases caused by the latter three is well-established. And yet, due to reasons of greater accessibility and cultural acceptability, their sales continue to rise. Politicians and public figures continue to be photographed with cigarette or cigars in their hands, despite all the documented evidence of the harm they inflict on public health.

Not only is tobacco use damaging the health of private citizens, it also has an adverse effect on the economy, regardless of the narratives that tobacco companies propagate to counter growing public health concerns. In light of these well-known costs, the government must push for stronger tobacco-control measures, which includes heavily taxing cigarettes, running anti-tobacco awareness campaigns and curtailing the sale of loose cigarettes, especially to minors. However, some argue that raising the price of cigarettes can lead to an increase in the demand for cheaper cigarettes, thus encouraging smuggled trade. Without a sincere crackdown on the illicit trade of cigarettes, all other measures may prove to be futile.

## **PM on Kashmir**

IN his televised address to the nation on Monday, there was plenty of justified rage against Indian atrocities in India-held Kashmir from Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Some of his suggestions included weekly demonstrations to express solidarity with the people of the held region, as well as a promise to take world leaders into confidence about the situation in IHK. It was important for the prime minister to highlight this critical issue, especially when there is an eerie silence from the world community where the sufferings of the Kashmiris are concerned.

And while these suggestions may be worth pursuing, the question is: will they be enough to influence international opinion and make the world act to hold India accountable for the violence it has unleashed in IHK?

The fact is that a coherent policy is needed to tackle this issue and raise it at the international level. The unfortunate truth is that we have not succeeded on the international front to convince the world to take action against Indian barbarity in Kashmir. In fact, some of our closest Muslim 'brothers' have chosen to garland Narendra Modi, even in the aftermath of the decision earlier this month to scrap IHK's autonomy.

Meanwhile Donald Trump, who had earlier offered to play negotiator between Pakistan and India, now with Modi by his side at the G7 summit, told a press conference that "I think they [Pakistan and India] can do it themselves". India has even managed to deflect international criticism despite the fact that its human

rights abuses in IHK have been highlighted in the international media. Though this is partly due to Pakistan's inability to project the Kashmir cause positively in the international arena, it is also due to India's economic prowess. Sadly, in a world governed by realpolitik instead of scruples, might is right and the cries of the weak are often smothered by the strong.

Be that as it may, Pakistan should have pre-empted the Indian move, especially when the BJP had pledged to do away with Kashmiri autonomy in the run-up to India's general elections earlier this year. Pakistan's response has been reactive where it should have been proactive. Of course previous governments have been equally ineffective in projecting the Kashmir cause. But if the prime minister wants to change the status quo, there must be a robust and cohesive policy to counter India's belligerent attitude in IHK and convince the international community that violence against Kashmiris is unacceptable.

Holding rallies in the country will not be enough; our best diplomatic hands need to be mobilised to brief global capitals of the situation in IHK, so that the world — specifically those states who claim to be champions of human rights — can convince India to back off in the held region. The voice of Kashmiris needs to echo around the world, and their fundamental rights must be defended.

## **CPEC authority**

IT is a little puzzling to hear repeated mentions from government officials about their intention to create what they have termed a "CPEC authority". Presumably, this means some sort of body to oversee all CPEC-related work for the government, but it is hard to understand how this can be done without creating a massive parallel bureaucracy that significantly usurps powers from the provincial governments as well as the regulators. For example, would the so-called CPEC authority perform only functions related to coordination, or would it be empowered to make decisions on matters ranging from corporate governance, gas allocations, PSDP releases, power tariffs, custom duties and trade? Thus far, the repeated mentions of such an authority from government officials are scant on detail, but it is important that all this is known before the matter is taken any further.

If a parallel bureaucracy is being contemplated, one which is empowered to make final decisions on all matters related to and arising from CPEC-related

investments, then an obvious question becomes unavoidable. Would this not amount to special treatment for one class of investor? What about those investors, whether foreign or domestic, who are not in any way directly connected to CPEC and therefore not eligible for treatment at the window of the CPEC authority? Does this mean that one class of investor will receive white-gloved treatment whereas the others will have to queue up and fend for themselves? It would be wholly unacceptable for such a standard to be developed. The second obvious question that the matter begs is how, and to what extent, the government has adapted and reformed the contours of CPEC considering the nature of the criticisms leveled at the former government as it advanced the venture. For one, greater transparency remains a pressing priority, with the latest discussions on a CPEC authority being the best example of how decisions are being deliberated upon in private, with very little idea of what exactly is in the works. More disclosure is now critical before the government decides to advance this idea further. Long before any such proposal is finalised — should it come to that — it should be discussed in parliament and given an adequate public airing before it is sent to the federal cabinet. There is a long history in this country of decision-making with short-term horizons in mind, and this risks becoming the latest example on that timeline.

## **From English to Urdu**

THE Punjab government recently announced that, come March 2020, the medium of teaching at government primary schools will switch from English to Urdu, reversing a system introduced by the Shahbaz Sharif setup a decade ago. The details of the survey this decision was based on have now come to light, confirming just how difficult it is for young learners to deal with the ‘alien’ language. The survey was conducted in 22 districts, all of which favoured a shift to Urdu. Experts have spoken in support of a move away from English, arguing that imposing a mode of instruction in a second or foreign language on students in their early developmental years hampers their conceptual understanding and cognitive development. Even in higher education, teachers often resort to lecturing in their mother tongue if not proficient enough in English. The emphasis here, though, is on ‘mother tongue’, which may or may not be Urdu.

The survey presupposes Urdu as the mother tongue of both teachers and students, as it helps build an easy case against a more intimidating, more



'foreign' instruction in English. Yet, in an age of awareness and eager assertion of ethnic identities and the right to speak native languages, it is remarkable how Urdu — the national language of Pakistan — is conveniently passed off as a kind of universal mother tongue of all Pakistanis. This may be far from the truth in the case of the areas surveyed. Indeed, such a casual assumption about the mother tongue of the majority in historically more sensitive parts of the country may well have been a source of controversy. The debate does ultimately remind us of our inability to promote our multilingualism by developing national languages to a level where they may automatically serve as medium of instruction, and how it has made us lag behind in achieving universal basic literacy. This is where even the more privileged Urdu will struggle as it is set to replace English as the medium of primary level learning in Punjab.

## **Fiscal blowout**

THE numbers are screaming to be heard by now.

All last fiscal year, the government careened from one policy priority to another like a child in a dodgem car while then finance minister Asad Umar talked one day about an inherited crisis, the next day about industrial revival packages, and the third day about borrowing from friendly countries.

All the while the fiscal deficit grew rapidly, and the data from the latest quarter that has just been released, covering the period April to June 2019 — which completes the full year's picture — shows that the growth in the government's expenditures accelerated throughout and revenue growth stagnated.

Not only that, in rupee terms, the FBR actually collected slightly less revenue in FY2019 than in the previous year, despite a raft of regulatory duties, two mini budgets, and a massive devaluation which usually boosts recoveries under custom duties.

But none of that helped, and perhaps for the first time ever, we had slower revenue collection in rupee terms than in the preceding year.

This is nothing short of a blowout.

One might have to travel more than four decades back in time to find another year in which the fiscal deficit — the gap between revenues and expenditures of

the federal government — was larger than 8.9pc of GDP, which is where it landed by end of FY2019.

The brunt of the curtailment in expenditures during this year was borne by development spending, which is one big reason why economic growth ground to a near halt as well.

And the major portion of the budget deficit increase came in the fourth quarter.

Where the total deficit came in at Rs3.445 trillion, almost Rs1.5tr of that was accumulated in the last quarter.

This shows the massive pressure that had built up in the economy throughout the year was released in one go towards the end of the fiscal year.

All through the year the government reminded us incessantly of the difficult economic situation it had inherited, often describing it in apocalyptic terms, such as the “worst economic crisis in history”.

But at the end of the fiscal year, the blame for the dismal outturn lies in one place only: with the government in power.

There was a lack of focus on economic priorities throughout, repeated entreaties for more time, repeated reminders that tough choices lie ahead followed by repeated U-turns on whether or not to approach the IMF, and even rhetoric of some sort of revival underway from February onwards.

All that now lies in ruins.

The record setting fiscal deficit is the cost of losing focus on the economy.

It results in higher borrowing, higher debt service costs, and further crowding out of the private sector from the country's debt markets.

In short, it has cascading consequences that can take years to pay off.

The rhetoric must now end

## **Airspace closure**

INDIA'S brutality in held Kashmir needs a firm response from Pakistan, one that helps highlight the Kashmiri cause around the world. By all means, this country

needs to continue its moral, political and diplomatic support to the Kashmiris, especially in this dark hour when the people of the occupied region have been strangled by Delhi, their fundamental rights trampled underfoot. However, the response to India's provocations must be mature and calculated; emotionalism must be eschewed in favour of effective diplomacy. Yet some of the suggestions coming from the government may add to Pakistan's isolation instead of holding India to account before the world. On Tuesday, Federal Minister for Science and Technology Fawad Chaudhry said the government was considering banning the use of Pakistani airspace for flights from India. In the aftermath of the Pulwama episode earlier this year, both countries closed their airspace, which threw the schedules of many global airlines out of gear. According to the federal aviation minister, the closure cost Pakistan over Rs8bn, though India suffered a larger loss.

The proposed airspace ban is similar to other actions already taken in this country, such as the severing of rail and bus links with India. There has also been a proposal floated in official circles to ban the import of Indian medicine and raw material. These moves, rather than censuring Delhi for its belligerence in Kashmir, will only cause suffering to ordinary people in the subcontinent. There are many divided families who will be unable to meet because of these restrictions, while a fresh airspace closure will irk international airlines using routes that cross over both India and Pakistan. Moreover, India will definitely institute reciprocal closure of its own for Pakistani aircraft. Also, can Pakistan afford the considerable losses it will suffer due to the closure? The sensible thing at this point in time is not to overreact and instead handle the situation with foresight. While a strong message must be sent to the Indian establishment that crushing the Kashmiris is definitely not acceptable, people-to-people contacts should not be severed. The window for peace must not be shut from Pakistan's side, even while emphasising a just solution to the Kashmir crisis that is acceptable to the people of the occupied region. The hateful bigots that form the ideological backbone of the current government in Delhi would want nothing more than permanent conflict in the subcontinent. Pakistan must resist falling into this trap.

## **A royal mess**

POLITICS is a dirty business. It is an oft-repeated cliché, but recent events in Karachi only confirm it. The monsoon rains that lashed the city in the previous weeks caused large-scale flooding and tragic loss of life and property. Even now, days later, some areas continue to be submerged in overflowing sewage water as a consequence of the heavy rainfall. Understandably, this failure of governance has created much resentment, with the public laying the blame at the door of the multitude of stakeholders in charge of the city, particularly the provincial government which presides over the Sindh Solid Waste Management Board, and the various municipal bodies. Besides the shoddy construction and design of roads, the poor maintenance of Karachi's various drainage sites was a major cause for the flooding. These natural and man-made storm drains are choked due to overflowing garbage and the informal settlements that have gradually come up on them over the years as authorities turned a blind eye or abetted land grabbing and illegal construction thereon.

Following the outcry, the various 'owners' of the megacity lost no time before they began chastising one another in public. To highlight the PPP government's failure, the PTI launched the Clean Karachi drive with the MQM, its coalition partner at the centre. In response, the PPP launched the Blue Jacket movement and criticised the PTI for creating an even bigger mess by not transporting the garbage to designated landfill sites, leading to a stench in the city and an infestation of flies. But perhaps the most peculiar exchange occurred between the former and current mayors of Karachi. PSP head Mustafa Kamal said he could clean the city in a matter of three months. In an unorthodox move, MQM-P's Wasim Akhtar designated him Project Director Garbage, "on voluntary basis" — only to retract his statement less than 24 hours later, when Mr Kamal issued some harsh statements against him. In the midst of all this petty politicking, the city's problems pile on. What a waste.

## **Bahria settlement dues**

NO individual or organisation pronounced guilty of a crime should be able to profit from it.

Recent developments in the Bahria Town Karachi case present a situation where the possibility of precisely such a travesty of justice can arise.

On Wednesday, the Sindh government submitted an application to the Supreme Court, asking that the amount due from Bahria Town as settlement for 16,896 acres of government land, illegally acquired in district Malir for its housing project in Karachi, be deposited in the provincial account.

In March, the Supreme Court's implementation bench accepted the real estate developer's offer to pay Rs460bn over seven years in order to acquire the rights to the land.

The Sindh government in its application assured the apex court it would use the money for its development projects in a transparent manner under a committee appointed by the chief minister.

Some days ago, the federal government filed a similar application, except this one asked that the money be deposited in its public account. A tussle seems to be shaping up between the centre and the Sindh government: after all, Rs460bn — nearly \$3bn — is nothing to sneeze at.

While Sindh appears to have a justifiable claim to proceeds from the settlement of land within its jurisdiction, it is instructive to revisit the Supreme Court's May 4, 2018 verdict. The judgement took several government bodies to task for colluding with Bahria in its wholesale theft of state land; for instance, it denounced the Malir Development Authority's role as "a brazen betrayal of the trust of the state and the people" and that of the provincial government as a "collaborator". In short, it made no bones about what it described as a "backdoor understanding" between Bahria and the relevant authorities. Therefore, if the court does give the money to Sindh, it must ensure an ironclad monitoring mechanism so that the funds can be transparently disbursed, in part to investors, and for various development projects.

The question as to where the money is spent merits careful consideration.

In 2015, the Sindh government earmarked over 14,000 acres in Malir for low-cost housing. Instead, as we now know, many of its functionaries immersed themselves in facilitating a for-profit housing project. Giving concrete shape to those 'planned' low-housing schemes, of which there is a dire shortage all across the country, thus seems a logical option.

Lastly, amid all the talk of third-party interest — meaning the investors in BTK — in the subject land, the rights of the indigenous communities who have lived there for generations have gone virtually unacknowledged. Their assent was neither sought nor freely given in the ‘sale’ of their small patches of agricultural land, and they must be adequately compensated. However, one may well ask, what is fair compensation for being driven from one’s land that provided both shelter and livelihood?

## **Human trafficking**

THIS week, a seminar in the capital city highlighted that a disproportionate number of Pakistani women and girls were trapped in the human trafficking trade. Speakers informed participants that the ages of the victims ranged between two and 50 years old, and underscored the need for greater, nationwide efforts to create awareness of the presence of human trafficking rings, while providing survivors the help and tools they needed to reintegrate back into society. The illegal trade of people through the use of deception, coercion or force remains one of the most pressing issues of our time, but it is by no means a new phenomenon in human history. It may be talked about more now, but not enough, when keeping in mind the scale of this evil practice. While boys and men typically get entangled in vicious rackets for the purpose of forced labour, young girls and women in particular are susceptible to sex trafficking, lured by promises of employment and new wealth awaiting them in other lands, or through the use of brute violence and kidnapping. The shocking revelation of Pakistani brides being tricked into sexual slavery in China was perhaps just the tip of the iceberg. Mostly from poor Christian families in Punjab, the women married Chinese men in the hopes of a better life, only to find themselves sold into sexual slavery once they reached their new home.

While it is difficult to collect accurate data on such undercover activity — a fact acknowledged by all organisations working to end the practice — the UN released a report on global human trafficking trends in 2018, noting that a growing number of girls were the victims of this illicit trade. According to their findings, girls accounted for 23pc of all trafficking victims in 2016, while women made up 49pc. Many of the victims hail from conflict zones, and as they try to escape oppressive conditions of violence, discrimination and poverty, they become vulnerable to predators lurking in their midst. Eradicating human



trafficking is on the list of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals for 2030. While Pakistan has made some progress when it comes to legislature — most notably, passing the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act last year — implementing the law on ground remains a challenge. According to estimates, thousands of Pakistanis become prey to traffickers each year, and with rising poverty and income disparity, the challenge will only rise.

## **Sheikh Rashid's 'war'**

A railways minister should mind the phenomenon that is the rail line, especially in Pakistan, where some of its 12,000 kilometres-long tracks are rusting. War and peace do not fall in his domain, except to ensure that the system is maintained at all times.

Sheikh Rashid Ahmad, however, seems to have his priorities wrong, for we often find the loquacious minister making forays into issues that do not concern him. The other day, he criticised the minister for science and technology for tweeting about a proposal, later clarified by the foreign minister, to deny Pakistan's airspace to India. He said it was not the science minister's job to talk about cabinet decisions. We wish the railways minister applied the same principle to himself.

Speaking at a function in Rawalpindi on Wednesday to express solidarity with the people of India-held Kashmir, Mr Ahmad said he foresaw a war with India in October or November. It is of course true that Narendra Modi's recent actions in IHK poses a serious threat to regional peace, but what made the minister come to this rather precise conclusion, and was it really his duty to potentially create a public scare?

Those whose duty it is to keep the gunpowder dry to meet any eventuality know their job — they proved it well in February. For a government official to talk recklessly about war is an act of gross irresponsibility.

The minister ought to leave war and peace to the right quarters and instead paid attention to the issues plaguing Pakistan Railways, of which there are many. Wide sections of the tracks have been damaged by the ongoing monsoon, not to mention already crumbling infrastructure and chronic system failures that have resulted in all too many rail accidents in the months since he took charge of the

portfolio. The minister once promised to revamp the railways within 120 days. His zeal would be best applied towards fulfilling this much-delayed pledge.

## **Gas sector reforms**

THE government has taken some bold decisions in the recently announced reforms of the gas sector, though some crucial gaps still remain. Two of the steps announced by the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Nadeem Babar are the elimination of the role of the government in future contracts for setting up LNG terminals, and the offer made to the industry to pay half of their outstanding amounts due under the Gas Infrastructure Development Cess in return for a sharp discount on the remaining amount. Aside from this, there is a great deal of emphasis on reforms related to “ease of doing business” to cut down the number of approvals and other red tape required to invest in the oil and gas sector. The thrust of the reforms is to generate investor interest and unclog the payments pipeline in the matter of the GIDC, where outstanding dues have crossed Rs400bn and become the subject of a grinding dispute between private power producers and the government.

Now we will wait to see how the power sector responds to the government’s offer, especially with the IPPs. If there is uptake on the offer regarding the GIDC payments, it will be a good start, since the matter has already gone into extended litigation. But this solution could be short-lived. Next, it will be important to note how much interest the five global companies that have been cleared to build the next LNG terminal show in the new framework announced by Mr Babar. The government is no longer offering any sovereign guarantees, capacity charges or off-take commitments for future LNG terminals, and operators have been told to arrange their own buyers, as well as third-party access to pipeline capacity. If interest in the proposition is weak, we will know that Pakistan’s LNG markets still have a lot of growing to do before the sector can stand on its own feet.

Missing in all this is any mention of price reform, especially for domestic gas. The growing role of LNG in Pakistan’s economy is forcing some pricing reform of its own, but until a more comprehensive shift towards greater market based pricing of the precious resource is not brought about, the true potential of private sector investment in the gas sector will not be unlocked. Granted this is likely to make gas more expensive, reflecting its true cost rather than a subsidised one. But

without this price reform, easing the path of approvals for new investors, and facilitating one-off settlements of outstanding payments, will have limited and short-lived impact. The gas sector is in the midst of a critical transition as LNG imports grow, and it is important that the government's hand is not being driven by the force of circumstance when navigating the new terrain it has entered.

## Awards for judges

SHOULD the judiciary be incentivised in terms of the quantum of cases decided or the quality of justice dispensed? That is the question. It recently emerged that presiding officers from 24 out of the 167 model criminal trial courts in the country are to receive awards from Chief Justice Asif Saeed Khosa for disposing of the highest numbers of cases before them. Altogether, according to the official data, the MCTCs decided 4,897 cases of murder and 7,687 of narcotics since they were established in April. A total of 55,619 witnesses were examined during the course of the trials. Among the awardees is the presiding officer of the Charsadda MCTC who decided 185 murder and narcotics cases and the Islamabad-West MCTC that disposed of 69 murder cases. Some women judges have also made the list.

There is no doubt the country's justice system needs a shot in the arm. The shoddy, leaden-footed workings of the courts make a mockery of justice and often exacerbate the anguish of litigants. From the outset of his tenure, Justice Khosa had made it clear that one of his principal objectives as the country's top judge was to tackle the interminable delays between the institution of cases and their final disposal. To this end, he announced the setting up of MCTCs in every district, headed by judges who would conduct expeditious trials without adjournments. However, presenting awards to the presiding officers who have closed the most number of cases in these courts could inadvertently distort how the concept of justice is viewed. Certainly, procedural delays are a huge problem and must be addressed. They increase the costs for litigants; encourage corruption, especially at the lower court level; contribute to the over-crowding of prisons; expose under-trial prisoners, who may be behind bars for minor offences, to the sordid influence of hardened criminals, etc. In other words, such delays are the root cause of many of the issues that plague the system. But there is another, equally pernicious, aspect to this scenario. As the outcome of many court proceedings has illustrated, substandard investigations defeat the ends of

justice in several ways. At times, they result in perpetrators of serious crimes going free, if they are apprehended at all; at others, they lead to innocent people being convicted, even sent to the gallows. While fair-minded, hardworking judges must be appreciated, justice should be about substance rather than form.

## Apocalypse now

WE live in precarious times. Volatile, changing climate spells disaster for human civilisation, and the threat is not in some distant future. It can be felt presently, right now, all around the world, with glaciers melting at a rapid speed, sea levels increasing, and rising ocean temperatures and acidification. Earlier this month, Iceland residents held a funeral for the first glacier they lost to global warming. Scientists estimate that the small island nation will lose all its glaciers in the next 200 years. While most scientific reports have highlighted human-caused destruction of the mighty oceans in the past several years, the recent draft of a 900-page report on the world's oceans and cryosphere by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns of the threat posed by the oceans to human life. Their predictions for the future are near apocalyptic.

Unless current levels of carbon emission are brought under control, the world will steadily witness the loss of delicate ecosystems and fish supply, a source of sustenance and income already threatened by overfishing and plastic pollution. There will be a “hundred-fold or more increase” in the devastation caused by powerful superstorms; and rising sea levels will lead to the displacement of millions of people, causing a massive refugee crisis. One glaring example of how countries are adapting to the havoc posed by climate change is in Indonesia, which is shifting its capital from Jakarta — sinking by up to 6.7 inches a year — to the Borneo island. The relocation will cost the country a massive \$33bn. With all these obvious changes and warnings, it should be clear that the world economies cannot continue to operate the way they have since the turn of the century. Yet some of the most powerful world leaders continue to remain in denial, as witnessed in Brazil after the devastating Amazon fire. And the president of the biggest global greenhouse gas emitter on the planet, the US, says he will not jeopardise “wealth” for “dreams”