

# DAWN



## *Editorials for the Month of November 2018*

**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**



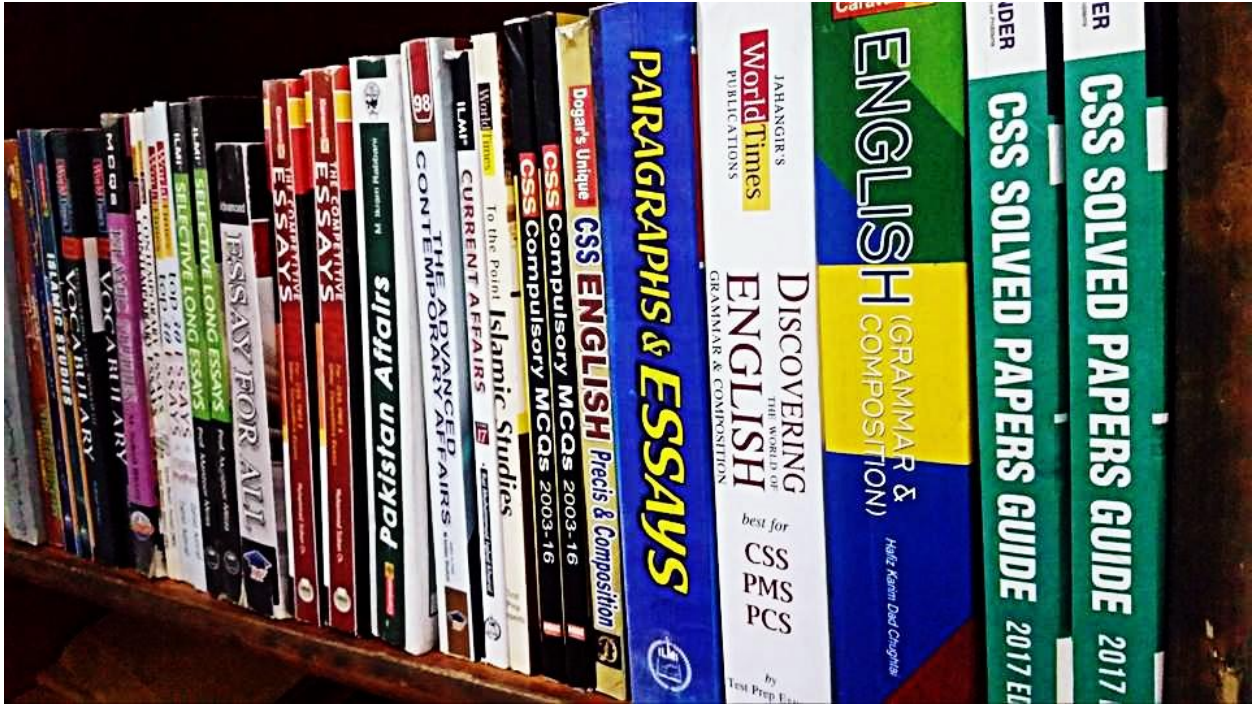
**THE CSS POINT**  
Yes We Can Do It!

**[WWW.THECSSPOINT.COM](http://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)

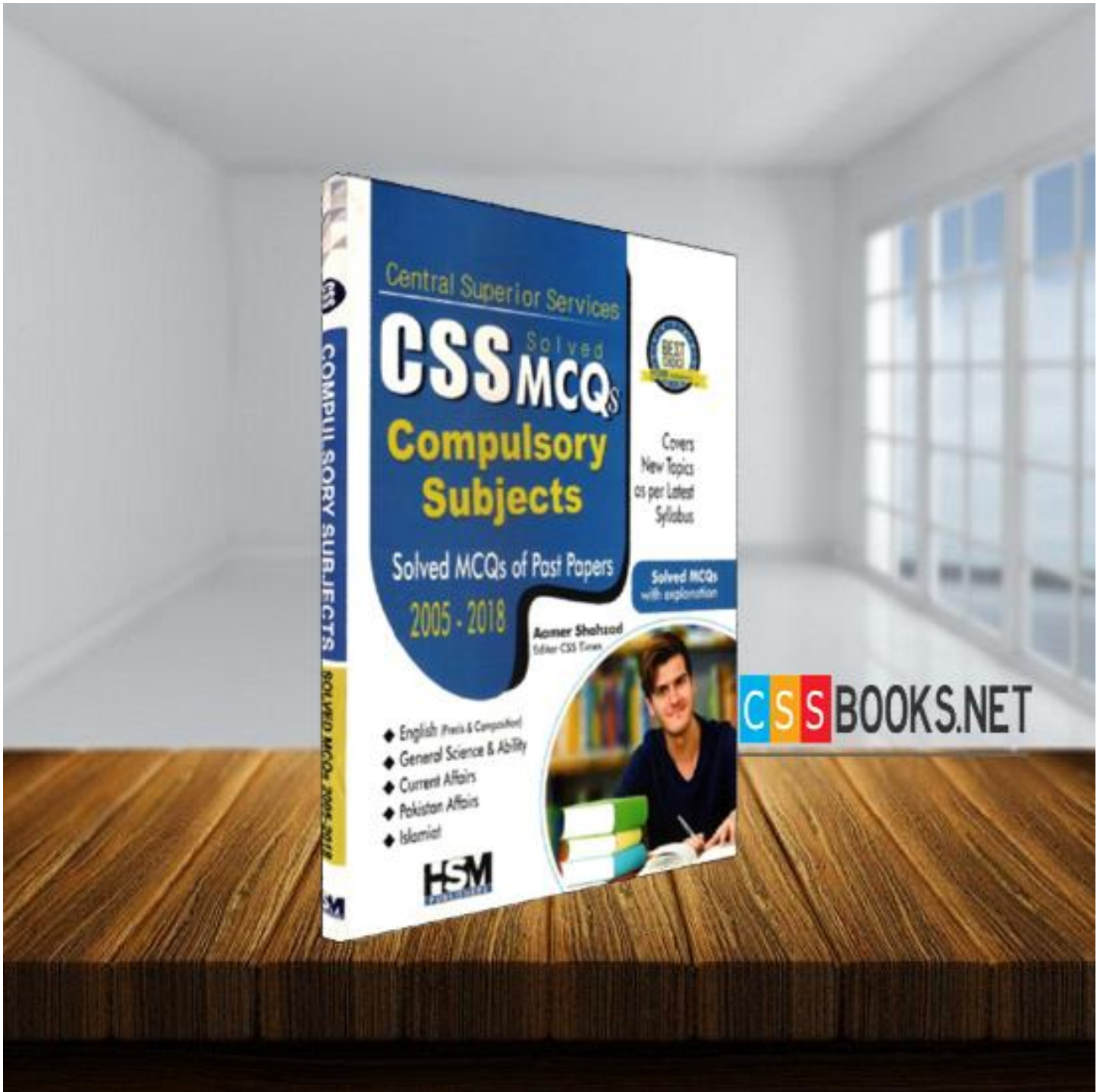
For Oder & Inquiry  
Call/SMS/WhatsApp

**0333 6042057 – 0726 540316**

# CSS Solved Compulsory MCQs 2005 to 2018 Updated

**Order Now**

Call/SMS 03336042057

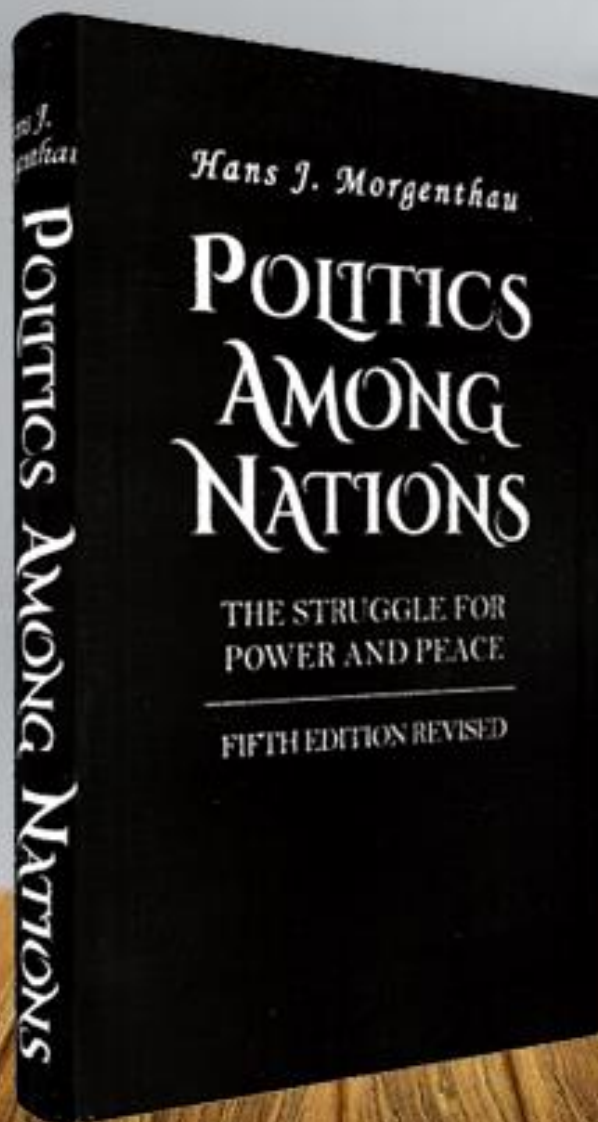




# Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power & Peace

By Hans Morgenthau

**Order Now**



**30% OFF**

CALL OR SMS  
03336042057

## Contents

A moment of reflection.....	10
Divided opposition .....	11
Conservation issues .....	12
Who’s the real enemy? .....	13
Cleaning up fuels.....	14
Workers under attack .....	15
Another surrender .....	16
Internet freedom .....	17
Child labour .....	18
Protective steps .....	19
Reforming SOEs.....	20
Maulana Samiul Haq .....	21
PM’s China visit .....	22
War against hunger.....	24
Transport dilemma .....	25
Cyber alarm for banks.....	26
Sanctioning Iran .....	27
T20 dominance .....	28
Parliamentary duties.....	29
Missing people .....	30
Climate change.....	31
Hacking alarms.....	33
After the mayhem.....	34
Smog city.....	35
Yemen dilemma .....	36
Mental health needs.....	38
Returning salaries .....	39
Absurd claims.....	40
Stunting in children.....	41
KPC incursion .....	42
NAB: lacking professionalism.....	43
Sas price subsidy .....	44

Farooq Sattar's ouster .....	45
The cost of perpetual war .....	46
War against polio .....	47
Eve of justice .....	48
No vision for tax reform .....	48
Emergency care .....	49
Cricket success .....	50
Another bailout for PIA .....	51
Out of school .....	52
Anti-encroachment drive .....	53
SP's murder .....	54
Food poisoning .....	56
Gaza ceasefire .....	57
Mudslinging in parliament .....	57
Yemen peace plan .....	60
Journalist in jail .....	61
Zardari's oblique warning .....	62
Revisiting LNG price .....	63
Lawyers' hooliganism .....	64
PM's defence of U-turns .....	65
Media unity .....	66
Sri Lanka's lawmakers .....	68
Poor lawmaking record .....	68
GB reforms .....	69
Women's cricket .....	70
Trump's latest salvo .....	71
Census verification .....	73
Polio-free Pakistan? .....	73
Harassing taxpayers .....	74
Day of the child .....	75
Among the 100 .....	76
Focusing on investment .....	77
Kabul bombing .....	78



Endangered mangroves ..... 79

Militants strike again..... 80

Kartarpur opening ..... 81

Illegal organ trade ..... 82

Stalling on economic recovery ..... 82

Crackdown on TLP..... 83

Food labs ..... 85

Rethinking Balochistan policy ..... 85

NAB’s tactics..... 86

Murder, not ‘honour’ ..... 87

A plan for the economy ..... 88

Karachi committee ..... 90

The price of coal..... 91

Pakistan’s own war ..... 92

Data on disabled ..... 93

Yasir Shah’s feat ..... 94

India’s intransigent approach ..... 95

Gas pricing decision ..... 96

Helmets for road safety ..... 97

After 100 days..... 98

Shameful numbers..... 99

South Punjab province..... 100

# **A moment of reflection**

A GRAVE injustice has been avoided and, in that, there is much to be grateful for.

Aasia Bibi's long ordeal, which constituted the most high-profile blasphemy case in Pakistan and could have culminated in her being wrongfully sent to the gallows, has finally ended.

The Supreme Court bench hearing her appeal acquitted her in a unanimous verdict yesterday and ordered that she be released forthwith. And yet, this case is about much more than the undeniable suffering that Aasia Bibi and her family have been put through, the years of solitary confinement she has endured, and the terror of not knowing whether she would ever be united with her family again or be spared the hangman's noose.

Take a look: 'Do not clash with the state': PM Khan issues stern warning to agitators after Asia Bibi verdict

This is also a moment to reflect upon what we have become as a nation, and how we have arrived here. Such is the emotive power of religion in today's Pakistan that the mere allegation of blasphemy, however flimsy, can trigger horrific violence. Even an acquittal by the apex court — as in the present instance — can provoke right-wing elements to threaten mayhem on the streets.

The verdict itself referenced one of the most savage murders provoked by allegations of blasphemy — that of Mashal Khan, bludgeoned and shot dead in 2017 by a mob of fellow students.

While Muslims comprise the largest number of those at the receiving end of such accusations, non-Muslims like Aasia Bibi are disproportionately targeted. Moreover, they are especially vulnerable, because paroxysms of faith-based violence can consume entire communities, as they did in the ransacking of Joseph Colony in 2013. Often victims are unable to ever return home; the hatred against them lingers long after the mobs have dispersed.

Indeed, many blasphemy allegations are rooted in personal enmity and a desire to appropriate the victim's property. But that is immaterial in the eyes of some sections of society; to them, those accused of blasphemy are guilty in perpetuity, legitimate targets for vigilante violence regardless of whether the criminal justice

system exonerates them. Indeed, even lawyers who defend such accused in court, and judges who find them not guilty, put themselves in peril. Some have paid the ultimate price.

The Supreme Court judges have shown courage and integrity by upholding justice in the Aasia Bibi case, as have others in similar cases in the past.

Parliament must now urgently consider how to prevent the abuse of the blasphemy law and end the impunity for those who make false allegations. Seeding bigotry in society for political gain has been ruinous for thousands of innocents in this country. Notwithstanding the protests against it, the verdict has also been welcomed by many; they are the key to a better tomorrow.

Unless we correct course, there will be more Aasia Bibis — and not all of them will be fortunate enough to escape with their lives.

## **Divided opposition**

THE ‘all-party conference’ that Maulana Fazlur Rehman is so keen to host has drawn much attention — for all the wrong reasons. The JUI-F chief has been pursuing a joint opposition front to take on the PTI government right from the moment he lost the two national seats he was contesting in the July election. However, some other politicians do not appear as enthusiastic. The politicians he is chasing, and who were once ready to oblige him at his slightest request, are moved by their own respective sets of realities that bar them from joining hands on a multi-party platform aimed at destabilising Prime Minister Imran Khan’s government.

Nawaz Sharif and Asif Zardari hold the key to this conference which is not likely to be held in the next few days. Mr Sharif has been dealing with the affair with typical evasiveness. His failure to yield to Maulana Fazl’s embrace has come on the heels of his long silence regarding politics in the country, which has been variously interpreted by political observers. In any case, Mr Sharif does not appear to mind speculations that he is on the watch list of those whose approval he must earn in order to be politically rehabilitated. In fact, those who think that he is refusing to enter into a combined opposition alliance in order to satisfy some old grudge that he holds against Mr Zardari may be mistaken. Mr Sharif is clearly led by his own interests. The politicians in the country, especially those in the anti-Imran Khan

camp, have enough challenges of their own to tackle at the moment to be thinking about settling scores with old rivals. Their focus right now is on how to survive the Imran Khan onslaught that many believe is going to pick up pace in the weeks to come. Maulana Fazl has resorted to conventional logic that the secret to staying alive lies in a unified opposition. Mr Zardari agrees but knows that any opposition alliance he rushes into has to include Mr Sharif. Without the presence of the top leadership of the PML-N, the impression of a weak and divided opposition will persist; it will not be perceived by anyone as a sign of danger to the young PTI government. It will take a lot more than shuttling by an energetic Maulana Fazl for Mr Sharif to realise that he needs Mr Zardari and others by his side.

## **Conservation issues**

THERE should theoretically be a limit to the damage that humanity has inflicted on the planet — but clearly there is not. According to a recent report by the WWF, involving upwards of 50 scientists from around the globe, man has managed to wipe out some 60pc of mammals, birds and fish in the past 40 years. Experts are now saying that the annihilation of wildlife is an emergency that threatens civilisation itself. To put that in perspective, as per Mike Barrett, executive director of science and conservation at the WWF, “If there was a 60pc decline in the human population, that would be equivalent to emptying North America, South America, Africa, Europe, China and Oceania”.

These are sobering findings. Countries such as Pakistan may not have a huge share in the global decimation of nature, but the fact remains that there are none that are not at least partly responsible. In the case of this country, for example, whether it is the snow leopards in the north or the houbara bustard further down south or any of the wildlife in between, not much has been done to put in place conservationist practices. The laws are there on the books, true, but implementation remains an intractable problem — to the cost of wildlife diversity. The reasons run from human encroachment leading to habitat shrinkage, to a lack of management, to a plain dearth of public knowledge and education that recognises the urgency of the need for urgent conservation measures. Even so, given this country’s rich biodiversity, it is a project that is worth taking up. Humanity alone does not occupy the planet, and it is all sorts of life that constitute a variety of ecosystems. While it may be too late to save what has already been lost — and

that is what the WWF report says — there is still time to ring the alarm bells so that further destruction of life on the planet can be halted.

## **Who's the real enemy?**

ONE speech does not a nation change and given this country's fraught history with religious extremism, the prime minister's address on Wednesday needed to be followed immediately with firm and decisive action.

Unhappily, the PTI government's flicker of resolve appears to have been extinguished overnight and a familiar set of excuses and justifications have been deployed to once again coddle and accommodate violent religious extremists.

Where a firm line needed to be drawn, obfuscation, pretence and denial have been delivered. At the heart of the state's vacillating response appears to be confusion or perhaps rejection of the foundational values of this country.

Also read: Jinnah's Pakistan?

Pakistan was meant to be and shall one day be a tolerant, progressive, inclusive and modern country. That was the vision of the founding father Mohammad Ali Jinnah and it is to his vision that the state ought to look for guidance and direction.

Instead, there is a tendency among elements in the state to do the opposite of what this country needs.

Contrast the state's actual response to the violent protesters in the streets to what others have been subjected to.

Prime Minister Imran Khan in his address to the nation directly mentioned the preposterous and unacceptable accusations and threats the protesters have made. From declaring justices of the Supreme Court to be liable for death to saying the COAS was a non-Muslim and calling for a mutiny in the armed forces, the protesters have committed any number of crimes against the Pakistani state.

But their reward is to be engaged in dialogue for the — alleged — greater good of the country.

Yet, the mainstream media here has found itself under ferocious attack simply for doing its job and reporting events, facts and information. Editors have been



threatened; the distribution of newspapers disrupted; news channels taken off air or consigned to anonymous slots; and, preposterously, a staff member of this newspaper has been summoned by a high court in a treason petition.

The protesters are misguided, but democratic dissent and media freedoms are undermining state and society — the obscene contrast between the seemingly friendly treatment meted out to the true enemies of the state and those championing democratic and constitutional freedoms is on full display.

A dangerous tendency by elements in the state to cast legitimate, constitutionally protected dissent as a threat to the nation and national security, while always seeking to appease violent religious extremists needs to be confronted and lawfully challenged.

Today is the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. Across the world, the professional media has been under siege in recent times.

Yet, it is wrong to argue that Pakistan is necessarily part of that wave — the threats to the media here are rooted in a long-standing intolerance of pro-democracy, liberal and progressive voices and legitimate dissent.

## **Cleaning up fuels**

THE government is sticking to its guns when it comes to the oil industry; it is demanding that they reduce the harmful manganese additive in petrol to acceptable limits, and that stand should be maintained. The new standards for reduced manganese content were to be enforced from Nov 1 onwards, though some quarters in the oil industry were busy lobbying for an extension of that date. A proposal to extend the date came before Ogra through one of its own members, but was rightly turned away by the chairperson, according to a report in this newspaper. Changing the terms of the so-called phase-out plan would require cabinet-level approval first, she is reported to have said, and the step cannot be taken as a regulatory matter alone. This might be a bureaucratic issue on the surface. But underneath powerful interests are at play to find a way to prolong the status quo and to continue with business as usual since easy profits are to be made with fuel additives. Instead, the investments necessary should have been made to ensure that vehicular fuels meet the country's RON specification at the same time as being environmentally compliant. The cheapest way to make that

possible is to keep environment regulations as loose as possible — a temptation that must be resisted.

The issue came to the fore last year when at least one large auto assembler complained that unusually high levels of manganese additive in local fuels was harming the engines of a new model car it had just introduced in Pakistan. Upon inquiry it was learnt that the oil industry had resorted to increasing manganese additive to fuels after the government ordered all fuels to be of a higher RON count, since this was the cheapest way to meet the new requirement. Upon discovery, the government mandated a cap on manganese content in vehicular fuels, a requirement that was absent until then. The regular practice of taking lower-quality fuel and simply raising the RON count by using the manganese additive is now going to be phased out. Whatever discomfort this causes for industry needs to be brushed aside, since the additive in question is very bad for air quality, and harmful for humans, especially children; its use in vehicular fuels needs to be strictly regulated. There must be no compromise on the phase-out plan.

## **Workers under attack**

MIGRANT labour in Balochistan has once again come under attack. Five construction workers near Jewani in Gwadar district were killed on Wednesday, while several of their co-workers were severely injured after unidentified gunmen fired at them. The labourers, who hailed from Sindh and Punjab, were not involved in any large public-sector construction, the kind which is often stated to instigate extremist sentiments in Baloch militant groups. They were reportedly working on the site of a private housing scheme. At the time of writing, no one had claimed responsibility for the attack. However, those familiar with the general situation in the province over the last many years, and those who are aware that there have been a series of such instances, will not find it difficult to observe a pattern of targeted killing here. The message is clear: separatist elements are aiming to scare away 'outsiders' and 'colonisers' who allegedly have no respect for the rights of the Baloch. In this great game, these migrant workers have become the unfortunate targets — perhaps seen as collateral damage by the state itself.

Several such attacks have taken place over the years, which must have shaken the administration at some level. However, no lessons seem to have been learned.

Are those in charge doing anything to prevent the almost routine deaths of workers in this high-risk zone — workers who are miles away from the safety of areas closer to home? Are private companies providing security for their vulnerable workers, or have they requested the local administration to do so? Distressingly, it seems that if security measures have been taken, these are not enough to provide even basic protection to these innocent outsiders against assailants who are hardly tracked down and held accountable for their acts. While drastic measures are called for, the situation also calls for a reassessment of the state's security policy in the province, as well as finding a solution to the genuine concerns of the local inhabitants.

## **Another surrender**

AFTER three days of protests, destruction of property, closure of roads and highways and massive disruptions to the daily life of citizens, the government appears to have found a solution: agree to the protesters' demands.

Seemingly already consigned to the dustbin of history is Prime Minister Imran Khan's speech on Wednesday; yet another government has capitulated to violent religious extremists who neither believe in democracy, nor the Constitution.

Take a look: Khan's finest hour

Perhaps the PTI government will argue that an agreement negotiated with the protest leaders does not make illegal concessions and the government has only pledged to let the law — and the appeals process — take its course.

Article continues after ad

But the law had already taken its course and an innocent woman was to be set free after a hellish, near-decade-long ordeal. It is the protesters against whom the law now needed to take its course.

Yet, the woman expressly declared innocent by the highest court in the land is to be kept in legal limbo, while the protest leaders have had to issue a half-hearted, one-line apology seemingly added as an afterthought to the agreement reportedly signed last night.

Perhaps Prime Minister Imran Khan and his government decided that, despite Mr Khan's nationally televised address this week, a hands-off approach that allowed the protesters to vent their rage would allow the country to return to a semblance of normality quicker than a confrontational approach and potentially bloody clashes between the protesters and law enforcement. And perhaps the murder, possibly assassination, of Samiul Haq last evening caused some in the government to panic and recommend a swift end to the original protests before JUI-S supporters possibly took to the streets.

But what is already apparent is that the first-time governments of the PTI at the centre and in Punjab are struggling to coordinate, decide policy and implement decisions.

The days ahead will reveal whether the dysfunction and uncertainty at the heart of government are carrying the country deeper into the morass of extremist violence. Other institutions will also have to look at their own conduct in recent days.

Despite the shocking and unacceptable allegations made by the protest leaders against the military leadership and blatant calls for mutiny in the armed forces, the institution remained, at least publicly, on the sidelines.

Yesterday, when the DG ISPR at last addressed the ominous security situation in the country, he spoke in relatively soft words and urged the protesters to follow a lawful course.

Meanwhile, and in stark contrast to recent times, the superior judiciary appears to have decided that it would speak only through written judgements and took no suo motu action against those who called for the execution of superior court justices.

Pakistan, it would seem, was a country with no real leadership while chaos and anarchy spread in the streets once again. The repercussions could quickly manifest themselves in the days ahead.

## **Internet freedom**

IN its 2018 Freedom on the Net report, the democracy watchdog Freedom House has once again found Pakistan 'not free' for a seventh consecutive year, indicating a gradual worsening of internet conditions in the country. Between June 2017 and May 2018, Pakistan's rating fell by two points since the year before, and the

country received an ‘internet freedom status’ score of 73 out of 100 (with 100 being the worst) — faring only marginally better than countries like Saudi Arabia and China. This is indicative of a larger, global trend to which Pakistan is not immune. Rising authoritarianism is being consolidated through the digital sphere, and threatening to destabilise both established and fledgling democracies. Disinformation and armies of online trolls and bots have weaponised digital spaces; at no time was it more apparent to Pakistani internet users than during the 2018 election season. Technical attacks targeting the media, NGOs, political opposition groups and activists have become increasingly common. Meanwhile, the non-transparent practice of blocking content without notification or means for appeal has continued unabated, enabled by the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016, which grants authorities broad powers to restrict and filter online content. Accessibility remains a significant problem, with connectivity marred by a number of issues: heavy taxation on broadband and mobile internet, poor infrastructure and inadequate coverage, and frequent shutdowns across the country during religious and national holidays. Connectivity still remains severely limited in parts of Balochistan and erstwhile Fata. Meanwhile, Pakistan’s internet users remain completely exposed without a data protection law in place.

This shift towards increasing restrictions on the free flow of information, unfettered access to personal information and mass surveillance — all under the guise of national security — has, far from keeping us safe, put us at greater risk. Without meaningful safeguards in place, such measures grossly infringe upon the fundamental rights of Pakistan’s citizens. Widespread censorship and criminalisation of political speech have a direct causation on the erosion of democratic norms. It is more urgent than ever that the government work proactively, and in consultation with ICT and digital rights experts, to amend Peca and introduce a holistic internet governance framework that recognises and upholds constitutional freedoms and protections, as well as international treaties that the country has ratified. There is tremendous economic and human potential in a free and accessible internet in Pakistan, but only if the state allows it to flourish.

## **Child labour**

AS many parts of the country came to a standstill, with loud mobs damaging property and blocking traffic, the news of a 15-year-old domestic servant being allegedly tortured and strangled to death in an affluent Karachi residence barely



created a ripple. Mohammad Imran's murder follows similar cases including that of a 10-year-old domestic help who had 20 torture marks on her body, with her hand burnt on a stove. We live in a casteist and classist society. The mistreatment of domestic help — and by extension, child domestic workers — is all too common in Pakistani cities. Domestic labour falls under the category of informal work, or 'invisible' labour. There are no clear laws to guarantee their rights, and no regulations to check whether the rights they are entitled to (eg minimum wage) are ensured. In Pakistan, we are not even sure who comes under the category of a 'child' due to the prevalence of contradictory laws. But just because they belong to the 'invisible' workforce does not mean we turn a blind eye to their mistreatment.

Article 11 of the Constitution states that "no child below the age of 14 years shall be engaged in any factory or mine or any other hazardous employment". Article 25-A makes it compulsory for governments to provide free education to all children between the ages of five and 16. Last year, Sindh also passed the Prohibition of Employment of Children Act, which establishes 15 as the minimum age for employment and 19 for employment in hazardous professions. But because none of these laws specifically cover domestic work, which is not considered a 'hazardous' occupation, cases of injustice (when reported) come under criminal law. While it's true that the problem of child labour is connected to desperate poverty, this is not a reason to not pass laws that will ensure the protection of young workers and punish those who subject them to violence and abuse.

## **Protective steps**

AS the speed of capitulation seemingly increases, there will be some despair among the right-thinking and sensible people of this country — but giving up is not an option. Jinnah's Pakistan was the dream upon which this country was founded and it shall remain its destiny. At this moment, finger-pointing may be less useful than trying to understand the enormous challenges that confront the Pakistani state and its people. After all, three consecutive federal governments and coalitions spread across the political spectrum have now failed to square up to the extremist challenge. The judicial and military institutions have had several changes of leadership over the past decade and each institution has undergone a great deal

of internal change — the judicial institution seemingly transformed by the lawyers' movement; the military institution having waged successful counter-insurgencies and counterterrorism campaigns across much of the country. It is unlikely that anyone in the national leadership is comfortable or at peace with the recent turn of events.

What went wrong? In the run-up to a historic Supreme Court judgement and the protests that broke out across the country soon after, there may be some lessons of coordination that could be learned. The legislature, the executive and the judiciary are separate but equal branches of government. Each has its own domain and should always guard its constitutional space. But, as was clear this week, on occasion a judicial verdict can have national — and security — consequences that may require special and temporary protective measures to be taken. Perhaps — and this would have to be debated and worked out by constitutional and legal experts — in potentially inflammatory contexts, the different arms of the state could take pre-emptive steps to maintain law and order in the country. If before the verdict or, more likely, soon after Prime Minister Imran Khan's speech, the state took steps to clear the streets in a relatively peaceful manner and lawfully detain the protest leaders, perhaps the protests would not have escalated into a true national crisis. If violent religious extremists have developed a template to hold the state and society hostage, surely the state can develop counter-measures to keep the peace.

Also to be reconsidered is the willingness of the state to negotiate written agreements with a certain kind of protester, extremist and militant. From Sararogha and Shakai in South Waziristan to Swat, from D-Chowk and Faizabad in Islamabad to now a deal with the both the federal and Punjab governments, each agreement has proved one thing: militants and extremists will come back for more, and the state's ability to enforce constitutional red lines will further erode. Pre-emptive measures could have been taken, but were not; the state should have stood its ground but did not. Lessons should be learned and a rearguard action urgently fought.

## **Reforming SOEs**

THE talks between the government and the IMF are advancing as the key date of Nov 7 approaches when the first delegation to begin programme negotiations is

scheduled to arrive. Already the IMF has met the railway minister to ask what plan the government has regarding the future of this key institution which is one of the largest bleeding enterprises in the country. Last year alone, the railways ate up Rs38.5bn of government money just to make up for its losses, and this year an additional Rs37bn has been budgeted for the purpose. It is not difficult to acknowledge that public transport, whether intra-city or long-distance, ought to be subsidised, but the problem with the state-owned companies goes far beyond the subsidies that they enjoy, as the example of the railways demonstrates. The persistent losses that these entities incur do not arise entirely from any public-service function that they perform. They arise in equal measure from gross mismanagement and incompetence, as well as political interference in the running of their affairs. The net result is mounting financial losses at these companies and escalating debt.

How does the government intend to fix this problem? The PTI made clear even before the election that privatisation was not part of its agenda, and the party has followed up on this since coming to power. That is perfectly fine because it is not a foregone conclusion that privatisation is the only way to improve the operations and financial health of the public-sector enterprises. But having ruled out one option, the government now needs to make clear what its path forward really is. Thus far, we have only vague, directional pointers such as the creation of a holding company and some kind of a sovereign wealth fund. Additionally, the finance minister has talked about reducing political interference. But then, we saw the appointment of a serving air marshal as the chairman of the board at PIA, which raised more questions than it answered. How is this appointment in line with the stated intention of the government to turn around state-owned entities, including PIA, without transferring management control or ownership to private parties? Perhaps the talks with the IMF will provide an opportunity to lay out a clear road map that the government intends to follow, but a few reform directions should have been apparent by now.

## **Maulana Samiul Haq**

IN the midst of countrywide protests called by leaders of various religious parties, Maulana Samiul Haq, one of the pre-eminent figures in Pakistan's religio-political landscape, was stabbed to death on Friday at his house in Rawalpindi.

From the facts that have emerged thus far, it appears that a 10-minute window afforded by the absence of the maulana's attendant from the scene was used to carry out the crime.

An investigation is yet to determine the motive for the attack, whether it was on account of personal enmity or driven by larger political objectives.

It may also reveal whether the killing coincidentally happened to occur during a period of domestic turmoil, or whether it was designed to take advantage of the charged situation on the streets, perhaps even exacerbate it.

Chief of his own faction of the JUI, the maulana was a vital cog in Pak-Afghan politics since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, even though his influence may have been somewhat on the wane.

His madressah in KP, Darul Aloom Haqqania, is known as 'jihad university' for its role in churning out thousands of jihadis to fight the invading forces — first the Russians, then the US — and counts many well-known militants including Mullah Omar and Jalaluddin Haqqani among its alumni.

The 'father of the Taliban' was often among the intermediaries in efforts to engage the insurgent group in peace talks, and was recently approached in that context only a month ago.

In fact, even former prime minister Yousuf Raza Gilani sought the maulana's help to intercede with the Afghan Taliban when they had kidnapped Mr Gilani's son.

More recently, he had given public support to the PTI's anti-polio vaccination campaign in KP — a creditable stance given that polio vaccinators were considered legitimate targets by violent extremist outfits at the time.

However, his hard-line views — he was among those chosen by the TTP to represent them at the short-lived talks with the Pakistan government — made him a controversial and polarising figure to the end.

## **PM's China visit**

WHEN Prime Minister Imran Khan chose to travel to China over staying in Pakistan as mobs and violent protesters took to the streets across this country, PTI officials defending the foreign trip amidst domestic chaos argued that the economy was in

dire straits and urgent assistance was needed. The implication was that Prime Minister Khan was required to go to China to secure quick money, loans, assistance and investments to shore up the Pakistani economy and state finances.

It is a norm in diplomacy that high-level meetings take place after the details are already agreed to by other officials, the top government functionaries meeting to sign accords in a ceremonial manner.

But Mr Khan was already in China for several days when on Saturday, a senior Chinese official, Vice Foreign Minister Kong Xuanyou, made a remarkable statement. Pledging that China has in principle decided to help Pakistan tide over its current economic difficulties, Mr Kong added: “As for the specific measures to be taken, the relevant authorities of the two sides will have detailed discussions.”

On Sunday, a joint statement marking the formal end of Prime Minister Khan’s trip to China appeared to confirm what was stated a day before by Vice Foreign Minister Kong.

In the joint statement, there is no assistance package announced, just boilerplate diplomatic language reaffirming the deep strategic ties between China and Pakistan.

At least two points need to be made here. First, if a formal assistance package had not been already agreed to, what was the urgency for Mr Khan to leave Pakistan in the midst of a national crisis?

Surely, Mr Khan was not going to negotiate in person with senior Chinese officials — the Chinese officials have themselves pointed to detailed negotiations needing to take place between the relevant authorities of the countries.

Second, and more importantly, given that it is an ongoing issue, why have the “detailed discussions” yet to take place? It is possible that China is driving a hard bargain, but that would not be unexpected.

However, did the Pakistani side prepare for hard negotiations? Or have the PTI government’s economic managers once again shown their inexperience and expected that a rescue package will be assembled because of Pakistan’s geopolitical importance or perhaps Prime Minister Khan’s political standing?



As Mr Khan comes home empty-handed, he will return to a country recovering from days of protests and yet another state capitulation to violent religious extremists.

The challenges are increasing, but the government's capacity to address these challenges does not appear to be increasing quickly enough. The three-month mark for Prime Minister Khan and his PTI government are fast approaching.

Mr Khan was right in demanding time to adjust to the responsibilities of high office. But the country needs the PTI to learn faster than it appears capable or willing to.

## War against hunger

FOR the first time, the four UN bodies — the FAO, Unicef, WFP and WHO — responsible for helping countries meet their food security goals got together to publish a report on hunger and malnutrition in the Asia-Pacific region. The findings are harrowing. Some 486m people in the region are undernourished. The figures relating to Pakistan are alarming — only 4pc of the country's children are getting a "minimally acceptable diet". While hunger is on the rise throughout the world, the war against hunger and malnutrition in Asia and the Pacific is particularly difficult to win, given the high population density in the region. The report also mentions the high rates of stunting in the region, as it reasserted the significance of adequate maternal nutrition and the timely introduction of a healthy assortment of food and protein in the diet.

In his victory speech, and then again in his first formal address to the nation, Prime Minister Imran Khan brought up Pakistan's human development challenges as he talked of stunted growth, mentioning that 44pc of all children in the country are stunted, quoting figures from the National Nutrition Survey (2011). Stunted growth occurs when children are poor nourished, fall ill frequently, and have insufficient psychosocial stimulation in the first few years of their upbringing. According to another report by the Ministry of Planning Development and Reform, Pakistan loses \$7.6bn each year due to malnutrition — that's 3pc of the country's total GDP. Like the previous government, the current government has vowed to make Pakistan a 'zero-hunger' country by 2030, as listed in the SDGs. Climate change and the frequent occurrences of natural disasters also impact the state of food security and nutrition, particularly in agrarian economies such as ours, affecting the livelihoods and food intake of many. A healthy population will lead to long-term

economic prosperity, and human and environmental development. But given the high rates of poverty, the constant political instability, the lack of clear economic policies (so far) and the threats from climate change to agriculture and livelihood, it is not certain if we will see this become a reality in the next 12 years. While it is said that Pakistan, along with other South Asian countries, has witnessed some progress in reducing the number of undernourished, it has not been at the speed and scale desired.

## **Transport dilemma**

IT is nothing less than tragic that Karachi, an ever-expanding city of millions, does not have a functional public transport system. It is a pathetic sight to see commuters packed like sardines in rickety, decades-old buses, jostling each other for space. Governments, both provincial and federal, have long discussed grand plans for rapid transit lines in the city, but commuters will believe them when they see them. At the end of last month, the president, along with the federal railways minister, inaugurated a local train from Karachi to Dhabeji designed to bring workers residing in the city's outskirts to the commercial and industrial heart of the metropolis. With smart-looking coaches, the local service is a welcome addition, though a drop in the ocean. Many more such trains, operating at rush hour, are required to ferry students, workers and travellers across this vast city in safety and comfort. Ironically, the same day the president had inaugurated the local train, the Sindh chief minister told reporters he hoped the Karachi Circular Railway — once a reliable option abandoned due to official neglect — “would see the light of day very soon”. Citizens of Karachi are sick and tired of hearing that the KCR will return ‘soon’ as state functionaries keep making such empty promises ever so often.

If the state is serious about solving Karachi's transport dilemma, all three tiers of government — the centre, Sindh and the municipal authorities — must put their heads together and decide upon a comprehensive transport plan for the city that merges the presently under-construction bus rapid transit lines with a revived KCR and local trains. As it is, construction on the bus lines is continuing at a snail's pace, with major thoroughfares in the city dug up. The deadlines for these projects always seem to be pushed forward by a few months whenever the state is asked about them. Unless the stakeholders come up with a well-coordinated plan, the nightmare of Karachi's commuters is unlikely to end.

## **Cyber alarm for banks**

THE first reported cyber attack on a Pakistani financial institution has just sent alarms bells ringing across the financial sector, and the lessons must be heeded quickly. The amount lost in the attack, which was the handiwork of hackers located abroad, is small — Rs2.6m according to the bank itself — but the figure could have been much larger. More importantly, the attack exposed the vulnerability of Pakistan's financial system to cyber attacks at a time when another similar technology-related breach was reported in the database of the Central Directorate of National Savings that holds up to Rs3.65tr in deposits from individual and institutional investors. The nature of the breach in the two cases is very different, but both have served to highlight the fact that the country's financial system has powerful vulnerabilities that could lead to large-scale damage if not plugged properly.

In the wake of the hacking attack on the bank, it was discovered that the entire security architecture of the financial system is flawed. For example, one would expect that an attack on one institution would trigger an alert for all other institutions so that they can take preventive steps. One would also expect that the alert would be shared with the State Bank and the payment operator in a timely manner so that they can put in place the measures necessary to plug the breach, as well as protect customers. But no such system for generating alerts exists, and individual financial institutions would prefer to bury the news of an attack and cover up its impact in the hope that nobody, save for a few customers who have been affected, will find out, so that they can return to business as usual.

Given the emergence of mobile banking and the fast growth of internet banking, it is all the more important for banks and other financial institutions to focus on cyber security and have industry-wide protocols on how to react when a breach is known to occur. Biometric verification can play a role in this, as it does in mobile banking, as well as real-time monitoring of the IT systems of all financial institutions. The State Bank is leading an effort in this direction, and deserves all the cooperation from the banks. But other institutions, like CDNS and the Central Depository Corporation also need to be brought into this effort, along with brokerages. Perhaps the State Bank can sit down with the management of the Pakistan Stock Exchange and the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan, along with FIA cybercrime experts and private-sector cyber activists, and lead a process to

determine the full scope of protections required to safeguard the financial system from future attacks. The threat should not be taken lightly because the next attack could be far bigger.

## Sanctioning Iran

WITH the latest set of sanctions targeting Iran, the US has just performed the last rites of the JCPOA, as the 2015 nuclear deal is formally known.

The measures are designed to hit Iran's banking, shipping and — most critically — the Islamic Republic's oil sector, in a strategy to bring Iran to its knees economically. Monday's reimposition of sanctions is, in fact, a follow-up of the American withdrawal from the multilateral deal in May.

While nearly all the signatories, including the IAEA, had confirmed Tehran was abiding by the deal, President Donald Trump decided to go after Tehran for its “malign” activities in the region, a euphemism for Iran's geopolitical manoeuvres, such as its support for Bashar al-Assad, Hezbollah and the Houthis.

America's aims here seem clear: to make Iran's “economy crumble”, as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was quoted as saying. Iran has struck a defiant tone, with President Hassan Rouhani terming the action an “economic war situation” and vowing to break the sanctions.

Article continues after ad

Interestingly, some of America's closest allies — eg the Europeans — have said they will help Iran continue to do business. The US has also granted its allies waivers to keep buying Iranian oil for the time being, perhaps realising that pushing Tehran completely out of the world market may destabilise the already fragile global economy.

The US efforts — guided by warmongering hawks — appear designed to provoke Iran into an open confrontation. Also, Israeli officials could hardly contain their glee over the latest developments.

This strategy is akin to playing with fire, for if the US starts a conflict with Iran, the Middle East as a whole may burn. Indeed, Iran is a central actor in many of the geopolitical games currently being played across the Middle East.

However, the countries of the region — the Arabs, Turks and the Iranians — need to shun inviting outside powers and, instead, must set their own house in order and come up with regional solutions to local crises.

Moreover, it is hypocritical for Washington to play global policeman and punish Iran for its 'bad' behaviour, when some of its closest allies in the region are guilty of violating human rights; the Jamal Khashoggi murder is a case in point.

Better sense should prevail in Washington and instead of beating the war drums, Mr Trump should think about engaging Iran.

## **T20 dominance**

COMING on the heels of a victory against the Aussies, Pakistan's 3-0 annihilation of a formidable New Zealand side in the UAE on Sunday was further proof that Sarfraz Ahmed and his men are the undisputed kings in the shortest format of the game.

Though the New Zealand side had themselves enjoyed an impressive run in T20 cricket until the beginning of this year, they could offer little resistance to the Pakistan juggernaut that has been clearly on a roll, having registered their 11th successive T20 series win in international cricket.

Buoyed by the phenomenal batting form of Babar Azam and old warhorse Mohammad Hafeez, who appeared transformed following his Asia Cup axing, Pakistan have managed to post winning totals on the board with remarkable regularity.

And just how well the bowlers have defended those totals can be gauged from the fact that Pakistan have bowled out the opposition 31 times, the most by any team T20 matches.

That said, how the side has fared in longer formats, such as 50-over ODIs and the five-day Tests, has drawn a mixed reaction; reservations have been expressed over the players' ability to concentrate beyond 20 overs.

The observation carries some weight since brilliant T20 performers such as Babar Azam, Shadab Khan, Faheem Ashraf, Hasan Ali and a few others have not really held their own in other formats, especially Test matches.

Critics often cite the lack of first class cricket experience for the failure of the cricketers to do well in the longer versions of the game. Most of the new players are a product of the Pakistan Super League, which is essentially a T20 league and does not provide the players with the kind of exposure that could groom them for the grind of Test cricket.

The selectors would be well advised, therefore, to give these players a good number of three-day matches in domestic cricket to prove their mettle in the longer format prior to selecting them for Test matches.

## **Parliamentary duties**

WHILE its members often struggle to fulfil the duties and responsibilities that the institution bestows on them, occasionally circumstances help the institution focus on the important issues of the day in a productive manner. Unhappily, after the PTI federal government surrendered to the mob in the streets last week, parliament on Monday put up an embarrassing performance as it ostensibly attempted to sift through the damage caused by the events of last week. Both the government and the opposition ought to recognise their role in allowing a parliamentary session to be suddenly adjourned overnight as a pair of MNAs from the treasury and opposition benches nearly came to blows on the floor of the National Assembly. A more muted session yesterday suggested that the custodians of the house on all sides recognised that the events of the day before were unparliamentary and ought not to be repeated.

With the new parliament less than three months into its term, it would be unfair to suggest that all the failings of parliament on show this week are entirely unprecedented. An 11th year of elected continuity in the country has failed to give a centrality to parliament that the democratic process requires. But there are several reasons why the current parliament appears to be veering off course and those reasons ought to be addressed. First, it appears that Speaker of the National Assembly Asad Qaiser is a parliamentarian out of his depth. While Mr Qaiser served as Speaker of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly in the previous term, when the assembly had a fractious governing coalition and significant opposition, it is apparent that he is struggling to impose his authority on the National Assembly. Senior and junior members of the National Assembly alike often appear to ignore



Mr Qaiser's orders and that can cause house discipline to quickly break down. Speaker Qaiser can and must do better.

Second, Prime Minister Imran Khan appears to be fast losing interest in the functioning of parliament and has not yet held a single session of prime minister's question hour that he had pledged to introduce. As with the previous two parliaments, when the prime minister and the ruling party chief himself shows scant interest in the house, ministers, heads of parliamentary committees and politicians soon also lose interest in performing their democratic duties. It is hoped that Prime Minister Khan will attend parliament this week and address his government's handling of the violent protests last week and his visit to China. Third, the opposition must begin to take its own responsibilities seriously. The difference between PPP leader Khursheed Shah's comments yesterday and the incendiary remarks made by a party colleague on Monday was that the latter was spoiling for a fight while Mr Shah skilfully made his point. Ugly scenes and ugly tones should be avoided in parliament.

## **Missing people**

BELATEDLY, there seems to be a willingness to address the fact that the practice of enforced disappearances reflects extremely poorly on Pakistan in the international arena. Human Rights Minister Shireen Mazari suggested at a Senate committee meeting on Monday that the prime minister sign the International Convention Against Enforced Disappearances — albeit with reservations over three of its clauses — to convey to the global community the seriousness with which Pakistan regards the issue. Notwithstanding the caveat, the very act of signing the convention is important if this country is not to continue appearing as an outlier in a matter that involves grave human rights violations. Dr Mazari also proposed a truth and reconciliation commission be set up so that affected families can find some closure. Meanwhile, legislation to criminalise enforced disappearances is on the anvil.

Although existing constitutional safeguards, such as the right to due process, should be sufficient to prevent people being disappeared, democratic institutions in Pakistan — perennially weak and on the defensive — have been unable to rein in unaccountable state elements allegedly behind most of the cases. The period during Iftikhar Chaudhry's tenure as Supreme Court chief justice, when even members of the security establishment were summoned to court to answer tough questions about enforced disappearances, was an exception. While the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances has done well to document the cases, and even traced the whereabouts of some of the missing, it has singularly failed to hold anyone accountable. Regrettably, its chairman, retired Justice Javed Iqbal, has even tried to downplay the matter, saying it had been "politicised", that most of the disappeared people had left the country while only a small number were in internment centres. Senator Jehanzeb Jamaldini at the same Senate meeting cited earlier asked very pertinently why, if that was indeed the case, were the relatives of the missing continuing to appeal to politicians for information. These families are entitled to answers and, where it is possible, to be reunited with their loved ones. A truth and reconciliation commission, with its concept of restorative justice, can only work in the aftermath of extended confidence-building measures, when those vulnerable feel assured that they will not be victimised, or re-victimised as the case may be. The new government has a chance to prove it will do right by such people. Signing the convention must be the start of a long overdue correction.

## **Climate change**

IN something of a heartening report, the International Panel on Climate Change said on Monday that the ozone layer in parts of the stratosphere has recovered at the rate of about 1pc to 3pc since the turn of the millennium. At the projected rates, according to this UN-commissioned study, the northern hemisphere and mid-latitude ozone layer may heal by the 2030s, followed by the southern hemisphere in the 2050s and the polar regions by the 2060s. This is the result of concerted action under the internationally agreed-upon action vis-à-vis the Montreal Protocol that came into being over 30 years ago, as an answer to the science that discovered that CFCs and other ozone-depleting substances are tearing up the vital ozone layer that protects the planet from ultraviolet radiation.

Encouraging while this may be, the same report also says that despite these gains, climate change is for real: more powerful hurricanes, worsening drought in many parts of the world, melting glaciers, and rising sea levels are just some of the anticipated outcomes. And, according to the IPCC report, these will be occurring at an ever faster pace until damaging activities around the planet are halted, and the effects eventually compensated for. This should come as sobering news for every country. Where Pakistan — which is not one of the major polluters that contribute to climate change but that is still one of the countries most vulnerable to it — it should be a clarion call for planning and taking action. On its way to becoming perhaps one of the most water-stressed countries in the world, Pakistan is amongst those that are likely to bear the brunt of climate change and its outcomes — particularly given its agrarian economy. And while there is a Ministry of Climate Change in place, action or planning appear to be precisely what are missing. At what point will real issues that affect millions be recognised as more pressing than political squabbling?

# Hacking alarms

WHILE there is certainly cause for concern, the FIA has acted in haste by issuing an alarmist warning about the hacking and breach of data from Pakistani banks; such actions are not helpful in crafting a response to the emerging cybersecurity threats faced by the country.

The director of the agency's cybercrime unit put out a statement that caused panic among millions of users of credit and debit cards. Former interior minister Senator Rehman Malik seized the opportunity to demand a report from the State Bank on the matter, further fuelling the news cycle on the issue.

The FIA's basis for the statement alleging a wide breach of data in Pakistani banks was a document put out by a private-sector company that describes itself as an IT security firm, as well as its claim that reports by consumers of misuse of their banking data have seen a sharp rise in recent weeks.

However, only one example was given of this sharp rise — that of an Islamabad-based resident who allegedly had Rs2.6m withdrawn from his or her account because of what the FIA claimed was a breach of card data.

Article continues after ad

It is hard to imagine, though, how Rs2.6m could be taken out from an account using card data, unless the withdrawals were spread over a longer period of time.

Cybersecurity in the financial system is an important matter, no doubt, and much more work is needed to ensure that the proper safeguards are in place going forward, given the growing role that technology is going to play for payments and settlements in the future.

Consumer protection is also crucial, and already the absence of appropriate data protection legislation is being felt. But spreading panic and stirring politics is not the answer.

If Senator Malik, and others in parliament who raised the issue, are serious in their concern, they should ask, instead, for a copy of the draft Personal Data Protection Bill, 2018, and look for ways to accelerate its passage. The provisions of that bill can go a long way in strengthening digital security in Pakistan.

Its implementation, of course, will be key.

Typically enough, we see a floundering, disorganised and sound-and-fury type of a response from the state to what is otherwise a complex and sophisticated challenge.

There is no reversing the growing role of digital architectures in the financial system of the country; strengthening digital security goes hand in hand with this phenomenon.

Sadly, an episode which should have awakened the state authorities to the important role they need to play in this regard has, instead, turned into another performance and opportunity for grandstanding in the headlines.

The State Bank needs to do more to provide leadership by providing a road map for cybersecurity in Pakistan's financial sector.

## **After the mayhem**

PRIME MINISTER Imran Khan, senior cabinet members and the top military leadership huddled on Tuesday in a National Security Committee meeting, and afterwards the Prime Minister's Office put out a statement claiming that the NSC "concluded that progress and prosperity in Pakistan lies in the peace, stability and rule of law".

If that reads as an inadequate and incomplete statement in the wake of the state surrender to violent religious extremists, it is. Surely, in his first official and public remarks since returning from China, Prime Minister Khan ought to have directly addressed the events of last week that have significantly damaged his government's standing and substantially undermined the state's authority.

Indeed, the contrast could not be starker between Mr Khan's apparent resoluteness in a televised address to the nation on Oct 31, in which the prime minister directly and firmly addressed the protesters, and his unwillingness to even directly refer to the events of last week following the NSC meeting.

Perhaps the NSC decided that for now the state's strategy to deal with the continuing threat that the protesters and their demands present ought not to be

made public. But that presupposes that the government and the state have a strategy at all.

Article continues after ad

Instead, the PTI government and state institutions could simply be in denial.

At a minimum, the NSC statement ought to have addressed the deep and near-universal public anxiety in the wake of last week's historic debacle.

The speed with which religious extremists took over the streets and blocked highways across the country and law enforcement was helpless in protecting law-abiding citizens and private property has shaken the country.

From the mainstream media to social media, the sentiments of the public are soaked in anxiety and fear. It is therefore necessary that the centre and state institutions go beyond boilerplate statements and demonstrate their resolve to enforce the law, and quickly move towards dismantling the networks that have become a clear and present danger to state and society.

Since the protesters withdrew from the streets last week, no government official responsible for dealing with the aftermath has made clear that the government is contemplating any kind of action whatsoever against the protest leaders.

It is simply not possible for the state to communicate any kind of seriousness in dealing with such protests if the chief instigators face no consequences for their actions.

## **Smog city**

THE dreaded 'fifth season' has arrived. Although the density of the smog has diminished thanks to sporadic rainfall — and perhaps the emergency steps taken by the government, such as shutting down of brick kilns that have not adopted zigzag technology — a light smog is nevertheless witnessed at dusk in Lahore. New research by FAO confirms the link between smog and the burning of rice stubble by farmers along Punjab's rice belt — but this is not particularly groundbreaking news. Environmentalists have bemoaned pollutants released into the air when farmers set fires each year: a quick and inexpensive way to deal with residue ahead of the harvesting season. Even though this method harms the soil



in the long term, and even though India has placed a ban on it, stubble burning is rampant across the states of Haryana, Punjab and UP. Much of this arrives at Lahore's doorstep, or airwaves, but it would be erroneous to place the entirety of blame on our neighbours. Images released by Nasa have shown crop-burning fires in Pakistan as well, though to a lesser extent.

Other causes for air pollution include small industries that cannot afford treatment plants and end up burning plastic and rubber for fuel, especially since power outages are frequent. Diesel emissions and the use of two-stroke vehicles such as motorcycles and rickshaws are another major cause. Then there is the residue of dust from large-scale development projects. All these factors combined lead to a health emergency each year. The smog also causes visibility issues, with an increase in road accidents. Globally, air pollution is now the fourth leading cause of death. Instead of adopting last-minute emergency measures that inconvenience many, the solutions have to be gradual and well-thought-out. Environmentalists have suggested improving fuel quality, introducing renewable sources of energy, planting more trees and improving public transportation services. Pakistan and India must also work together to strategise long-term solutions. Nature and its discontents do not recognise borders.

## Yemen dilemma

IT is seemingly a categorical assurance given to parliament and as such it ought to be welcomed.

Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi told the Senate on Wednesday that the PTI government will not send Pakistani troops to Yemen, where a Saudi-led war has wrought devastation and caused a humanitarian catastrophe.

The foreign minister also shared with parliament a few details about his government's offer to help mediate in the conflict in Yemen.

According to Mr Qureshi, Iran has suggested it would welcome a Pakistani mediation role in Yemen, while implying that Saudi Arabia has not yet responded in a positive manner.

Separately, also on Wednesday, Prime Minister Imran Khan met the Yemen ambassador to Pakistan Motahar Alashabi and, according to media reports, told

the envoy that Pakistan would continue to support the restoration of President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi's government. Therein lies a conundrum for Pakistan.

To be an effective mediator, Pakistan will perhaps require some semblance of neutrality recognised by all sides to the conflict.

However, because of the historically close ties between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, and the current Saudi leadership viewing Iran as an existential threat, Pakistan has thus far been able to signal a semblance of neutrality largely by resisting Saudi demands for Pakistani military participation in the Yemen conflict.

Furthermore, while Iran has now responded positively to both the PML-N and PTI governments' suggestion of Pakistani mediation, it is not clear if Iran believes Pakistan can, in fact, play a mediatory role, or if it is simply hoping to drive a wedge between the historical allies.

At its heart, what remains unknown is whether the major actors in the Yemen conflict see Pakistan as a credible potential mediator.

Perhaps, then, Pakistan ought to reach out diplomatically to other like-minded Muslim-majority countries with a stake in seeing the conflict in Yemen ended at the earliest and regional tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran reduced.

Eventually, a deal on Yemen at least could be reached under the auspices of the OIC if countries such as Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia work together.

Whatever the path taken, it is clear that the war in Yemen must be brought to an end at the earliest.

The humanitarian catastrophe and near-famine conditions in Yemen are intolerable in the 21st century, and are a direct result of Saudi-Iranian regional competition that is on track to cause further convulsions if not reined in with the help of the two countries' friends and allies.

The previous Pakistani parliament courageously staked out a neutral position on the conflict in Yemen; if the PTI government needs it, surely the current parliament will also assist in delivering a unified, consensus position on the conflict.

Whoever can mediate, whoever takes the lead, the Muslim world, the region and the world at large need the conflict in Yemen to end now.

## **Mental health needs**

In a written reply to a series of questions posed by parliamentarians, the National Health Services minister informed the National Assembly on Wednesday that there were no federal government-run dedicated mental health hospitals or institutes in the country.

Between Pims, Polyclinic, Federal General Hospital and the National Institute of Rehabilitation, only Pims has a functional psychiatry department.

The number of mental health patients registered at Pims is staggering: about 39,000 in 2017.

This figure accounts only for those able to access such services at one facility in the federal capital.

So when the minister states that the prevalence of mental health disorders is considerably less than commonly estimated (ie one-third of the population), the question that naturally arises is: are we stumbling in the dark when it comes to an issue that WHO considers a public health priority for developing countries?

The answer, to a large extent, is yes.

It was only in 2001, through the Mental Health Ordinance, that the issue was reframed as a disease, a shift from the colonial-era praxis of treating it as a sign of criminal deviancy.

Since devolution, most of the provincial legislatures have passed the MHO.

Yet, in the past 17 years, such laws have remained virtually unimplemented.

Between the stigma of mental illness, the lack of quality mental health provisions, and the threat of cruel, unsafe 'treatments' that still persist, and that are exacerbated by a range of psychologically destabilising socioeconomic factors, Pakistan will continue to suffer from a high disease burden and its concomitant impact on the economy.

A course correction away from this bleak path will require informed decision-making — through research, yes, but also through increasing awareness and sensitisation among public health policymakers, guided by mental health advocates.

While specialist capacity building is needed, any mental health policy ought to prioritise and approach this issue holistically by focusing on entire populations, instead of the medical needs of a particular subset of individuals.

Such a policy must focus not only on providing quality mental healthcare at the tertiary level, but also building capacity at the primary and secondary levels — from prevention, to early detection and treatment, to rehabilitation.

Speaking to the Assembly, the NHS parliamentary secretary said that this government is in the process of developing such a policy.

The hope is that this matter is treated with the urgency and importance it deserves.

## **Returning salaries**

THE Punjab chief secretary has reminded 54 government officers to return money paid to them in addition to what was deemed to be their fair and rightly earned salary. The reminder has come in the aftermath of a Supreme Court decision some time ago, focusing on appointments made in various public-sector companies and perks given to the employees by the Shahbaz Sharif government. Interestingly enough, the overwhelming majority of those asked had agreed to pay back the 'extra' sum. The cumulative amount runs into hundreds of millions, with one officer alone 'owing' the Pakistani public more than Rs50m. There are other, similar cases that are part of the expanding accountability exercise, for example, the appointment of the famous poet and author Ataul Haq Qasmi who was appointed chairman of PTV by the last PML-N government. In this instance as well, the Supreme Court is seeking to recover the money 'overspent' on him as chairman, by fining a number of people blamed for his appointment, including the then information minister. Mr Qasmi has been asked to pay some of it as well.

This may be one of the evolving formulas of getting back the 'riches', but it will surely tax the minds of jurists looking for a just system to perform what has traditionally been considered an impossible task, ie recovering resources already spent. In the case of the Punjab officials, who are perceived as not having actually 'earned' what they were paid, it must be said that they are being penalised for the last government's avowed desire of following market principles — pay good salaries and ask employees to be more responsible and efficient. Since it is going to be difficult to challenge this rule in a fast-changing world, it would be in

everyone's interest to have some kind of a policy in place at the federal and provincial levels in order to avoid more situations where the government has to knock on the doors of its own employees to reclaim salary slips.

## **Absurd claims**

THERE is political inanity and there is dangerous propaganda — and what the Senate witnessed on Friday was the latter.

Minister of State for Interior Shehryar Afridi has told the Senate that not only have the leaders of the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan denied that the violent protesters of last week belonged to the group but that the PTI government believes they were actually activists of mainstream political opposition parties.

The minister of state presented no evidence in support of his astonishing accusation against the parliamentary opposition.

Indeed, it is not even clear why TLP leaders are being consulted on who among the violent protesters belong to the party. Surely, the political or militant affiliation of violent protesters ought to be determined by law-enforcement authorities and state investigators rather than TLP leaders who have a clear incentive in disowning the protesters to avoid shouldering blame for the unacceptable events of last week.

Mr Afridi's absurd claims before the Senate suggest that the government has completely reversed course from Prime Minister Imran Khan's televised address of Oct 31. If true, that would be a very unfortunate turn of events.

While it remains unclear what the PTI's strategy to deal with the unacceptable threat posed by the TLP and its leadership is, it is quite evident what ought to be done.

The TLP as currently constituted has no right to exist within the constitutional and democratic framework of the country.

Take a look: How TLP got the attention of the state

Beginning with revoking its status as a registered political party, the senior leadership of the group should be charged and tried for a range of offences — from instigating violence to damaging property to fomenting insurrection.

The lawful instruments to charge and punish the TLP leadership already exist and failure to use them will surely embolden the organisation.

The mobs that took to the streets last week did not do so spontaneously and of their own accord. Not only were the protests encouraged by the TLP leadership, arguably the violence itself was instigated by them.

In all circumstances, the violent protesters and mob participants should also be prosecuted by the state — there is no justification whatsoever for damaging property and threatening citizens. But to deny the role of the TLP leadership in the violent protests is dangerously misguided policy.

What is also troubling about Mr Afridi's claims in the Senate on Thursday is the implications for the government's counter-extremism agenda.

While the government has claimed it intends to reinvigorate the National Action Plan, the latter's counter-extremism component will require the national leadership drawn from mainstream politics to work together.

But Mr Afridi's gratuitous and incendiary remarks suggest that the PTI is confused about who the enemy is. The enemies of peace, prosperity and the rule of law were on a rampage in the streets of the country last week.

The PTI must urgently reconsider the dangerous political brinkmanship it is engaging in.

## **Stunting in children**

IT seems that there is no end to Pakistan's water-related woes. But while we grapple with issues of water scarcity at a time of extreme climatic events and extreme politicking, water contamination continues to heavily burden the country's health and economy. A recent detailed report by the World Bank confirms the correlation between poor sanitation and stunting in the nation's children. Pakistan has one of the highest rates of stunting in the world. More than half of its under-five population suffers from stunting or wasting. According to the latest National Nutrition Survey figures, the rate of stunting in the country was 44pc — the third highest in the world. Despite making progress in reducing poverty over the past 15 years, despite better access to primary healthcare, despite success in combating other diseases such as polio, and despite a decline in open defecation, the rates of stunting have not declined. The report claims that the major cause is the mishandling of fecal waste due to the lack of proper sewerage systems and open



drains across the country. Lab tests reveal high rates of E. coli in ground and surface water, which is believed by some to permanently damage the small intestines of children, making it difficult for them to absorb the nutrients necessary for growth. Untreated fecal sludge and waste water mix with ground and surface water which finds its way into the irrigation system, while also contaminating the soil.

As urban and semi-urban areas deal with the hazard of open drains, the situation is even worse in the rural areas. It is believed that around 42pc of households in rural Punjab, 60pc in rural KP, and 82 pc in rural Sindh and Balochistan have virtually no drainage systems. There is also the issue of industrial, agricultural and municipal waste being dumped in canals and freshwater sources. With the population having swollen to 207m and expected to increase to 395m by 2047, the demand for clean water and proper sanitation will keep rising. And yet there is inadequate investment in the sector. Currently, water and sanitation come under the same budget. Experts complain that the vast majority of spending goes towards the supply of water, while less than 10pc is allocated for sanitation services. Local administrations need to be involved in overseeing water and sanitation designs, while areas with high rates of stunting and malnutrition must be prioritised for better services.

## **KPC incursion**

ARM-TWISTING tactics and violence against the Pakistani media are not new. In fact, scores of journalists have paid with their lives simply for doing their jobs.

However, it seems that state and non-state actors are apparently applying new tactics to put greater pressure on the media and browbeat it into acquiescence.

On Thursday night, a number of armed men in plain clothes stormed the Karachi Press Club and freely went through the facility.

According to those present, they had arrived at the KPC in a convoy of vehicles accompanied by a police mobile. The intruders pushed aside the club's watchman and harassed journalists.

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER AD

On Friday, the media fraternity reacted strongly to this unacceptable — and unprecedented — incursion, while state functionaries also scrambled to express solidarity with journalists.

A senior Sindh government official has said the raid on the press club was based on a 'misunderstanding'. This claim is open to question as the KPC is a well-known landmark.

From all available evidence, it appears that elements within the security apparatus were behind the raid.

It should be stated clearly that such behaviour is totally unacceptable and those behind it must explain themselves. As senior journalists have pointed out, even during the tenures of military strongmen — Ayub, Zia and Musharraf — such tactics were not employed by the security establishment.

In the current scenario, the media is facing pressure, threats and violence from extremists, militants as well as elements within the establishment.

There needs to be a thorough probe into the raid and those responsible must be brought to book. The matter was raised in the Senate, with the upper house asking the Sindh government to submit a report regarding the incursion.

If this incident goes unpunished, those elements creating obstructions in the functioning of a free media will be further emboldened.

In a democratic order, armed men cannot be allowed to go on a rampage wherever they wish. Unless there is a swift and thorough probe into the incident, the space for a free media in Pakistan will shrink even further.

## **NAB: lacking professionalism**

THE National Accountability Bureau appears to be more successful at courting controversy than holding public officials accountable. The latest controversy that NAB has engineered for itself may be the most unnecessary and needlessly damaging yet. Recently, the Lahore director general of NAB, Shahzad Saleem, gave a series of interviews to television news channels in which he attempted to lay out NAB's case against PML-N president and former Punjab chief minister Shahbaz Sharif, who is in the custody of the accountability bureau. Yesterday, Mr Sharif's custody was extended for a further 14 days by a NAB court in Lahore and it is likely that Mr Saleem's media blitz was conceived as an attempt to publicly justify the PML-N president's continued incarceration. Unfortunately for NAB, Mr Saleem has proved to be thoroughly ill-suited to make a public case against Mr Sharif and now NAB has been accused by the PML-N-led opposition in parliament of conducting a so-called media trial.

Where NAB needed to put its best foot forward and lay out a reasonable case against Mr Sharif, the DG NAB Lahore has contributed to a growing perception that the organisation either lacks professional competence or, more insidiously, has a political agenda that goes beyond the legal remit of the bureau. Given that Mr Sharif is now leader of the opposition in the National Assembly, it was apparent from the outset of NAB's attempts to prosecute him for the alleged misuse of authority as chief minister of Punjab that the accountability body would need to move carefully and with thorough preparation. Regardless of whether the allegations against Mr Sharif are true or not, the PML-N was always likely to allege a witch hunt and political persecution — so it was important for NAB to act in a transparent manner with scrupulous adherence to the rules. Instead, Mr Saleem delivered a series of television interviews that created more scandal for NAB and has called into question the accountability body's legal and professional competence to successfully prosecute Mr Sharif.

To be clear, Mr Sharif was a powerful chief minister of Punjab over the past 10 years and if there are legitimate questions to be asked of his record in office, he must answer them as required by the law. Accountability must take place at all tiers of government and among all public officials. What NAB seems to have failed to comprehend is that high-profile cases need to be handled with sensitivity. Moreover, Mr Sharif has at no point indicated that he will not cooperate with the law. NAB ought to recognise that its handling of the investigation of Mr Sharif thus far has only further soured the tone of politics. Media trials ought to be avoided.

## **Gas price subsidy**

IT was a bad idea all along for the government to try and subsidise the price of gas for Punjab-based exporters, but having made the promise with such fanfare, at least some obligation to actually deliver on it did exist. It was back in September that the finance minister announced, with a note of triumph, that he had approved a gas-pricing reform that would deliver Rs44bn worth of benefits to exporting sectors, particularly textiles. The idea was to equalise the price of gas across the country, since the Punjab industry claims they pay almost double what their peers in Sindh have to pay for gas, which is widely used as a fuel for captive power generation by industry. The vow to equalise the rates by bringing down the price of gas for industry in Punjab from \$1250 to \$600 per mmbtu was hailed by the business community immediately, which had lobbied hard for this step for years. They promised to double exports in the current fiscal year, and over 100 mills that shut were reopened.

But a nasty surprise awaited them in November, when the latest bills issued by the gas company were based on the old tariff. Jolted by the news, the mill owners reacted angrily, and were placated with a renewed promise that the government was unable to notify a reduced price due to bureaucratic reasons, but had now committed to providing a subsidy which would be activated by next month. It even shared with the exporters the mechanism through which the subsidy would be disbursed. But now, indications are appearing that the government may not be in a position to afford this subsidy either. As talks get under way with the IMF, which generally frowns on subsidies, and spending caps are about to become a standard feature of government financing, the fate of this promise hangs in the balance. It was a little unrealistic on the part of the finance minister to concede this point to exporters without carefully considering who would bear the cost. It was also a bit optimistic on the part of the industry representatives to build their expectations around this promise to such an extent. It is debatable whether there needs to be a uniform gas price across the country, but having made the commitment and celebrated it so publicly, the government is now bound to make a strong push to deliver on its promise.

## Farooq Sattar's ouster

FOR the past few years, the MQM has been in a free fall, riven by internal power struggles and failing to perform in elections. Now the split within the entity known as the MQM-Pakistan — to differentiate it from the London faction still loyal to party founder Altaf Hussain — has grown deeper as the coordination committee has expelled Muttahida stalwart Farooq Sattar. In dramatic developments unfolding on Friday evening, the party's Bahadurabad faction, headed by federal minister Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, announced it had revoked Dr Sattar's basic party membership; Farooq Sattar shot back by terming his expulsion "illegal and unconstitutional". Trouble had been brewing for the last few weeks, as Dr Sattar had talked of returning the MQM to its 'ideological' roots. In fact, the internal crisis in the Muttahida can be traced back to August 2016, when Altaf Hussain made his infamous speech attacking state institutions. From that time onwards, with much of the Pakistan-based leadership disassociating themselves from Altaf, a power struggle — sometimes behind closed doors, sometimes in the open — has been playing out for control of the party. However, the internal bickering has had an impact on the MQM's vote bank, as the party performed miserably during this year's general elections.

It will be interesting to see if the MQM can overcome its internal divisions and rise from the ashes. While it has had a well-earned reputation of using strong-arm tactics — both at the ballot box and on the street — much of the Muttahida's

coercive powers have been sapped due to the establishment's actions taken against the party, especially since 2015. It is also true that due to Altaf Hussain's iron grip over the party, no real second-tier leadership was allowed to develop. However, the Muttahida has enjoyed popularity with voters in Karachi, Hyderabad and other cities. In the post-Altaf era, urban Sindh's vote bank is up for grabs; can the MQM-P pick up the pieces, shed its violent past and rebuild, or will a new entity fill the void?

## **The cost of perpetual war**

THE 'war on terror' nomenclature may no longer be in official use, but the effects triggered by the 9/11 attacks and the responses chosen by the administration of US president George W. Bush have had a shattering effect. The Costs of War Project at Brown University seeks to "facilitate debate about the costs of the post-9/11 wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the related violence in Pakistan and Syria". In its latest report, the project estimates that "between 480,000 and 507,000 people have been killed in the United States' post-9/11 wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan". The tally does not include the more than 500,000 estimated deaths from the war in Syria since 2011. The project takes an American-centric view of the staggering human, economic and socio-political costs that war has inflicted on the conflict zones and also in the US, but the statistics assembled have a resonance for many countries in this era of what appears to be permanent conflict.

As the Cost of War Project notes: "Compelling alternatives to war were scarcely considered in the aftermath of 9/11 or in the discussion about war against Iraq. Some of those alternatives are still available to the US." Unhappily, the current US administration of President Donald Trump appears to be all too willing to introduce new risks and dangers to an already frayed world order. The peculiar combination of diplomatic isolationism and aggressive, militarised responses to the threats that the Trump administration perceives is surely carrying the world to the possibility of greater conflict, not less. Even in Afghanistan, where President Trump's 'America First' policy, which is ostensibly against wasteful foreign interventions, ought to have led to a reduction in the US military footprint, his administration chose to escalate the war rather than immediately seeking a path to end it, as he had indicated he would when campaigning as a candidate for the presidency.

The historic catastrophe that has been the US invasion of Iraq ought to have been paid heed to for generations. Instead, even as domestic politics in the US has repudiated former president George W. Bush's foreign wars, the Trump administration has embraced some of the neoconservative philosophy of conflict. Mr Trump's national security adviser, John Bolton, appears to be engineering a



return to an ultra-hawkish US policy on Iran. A devastating Saudi-led war in Yemen still appears to have US backing. From the cauldron of Syria to Libya, all manner of new transnational threats may arise. The Costs of War Project is an important reminder that “compelling alternatives to war” exist and ought to always be considered.

## War against polio

LIKE previous leaders, the current prime minister has announced his commitment to making Pakistan polio-free. Chairing a meeting of a national task force on polio eradication, Imran Khan said his government would take all measures needed to permanently eradicate the polio virus. Vaccinators have also been reassured by the army of its continued support in providing security to them — naturally, since the fight against polio is linked closely to the security situation. In 2013, Imran Khan was photographed giving polio drops to children in KP alongside the late Maulana Samiul Haq, who had to issue a fatwa urging parents to immunise their children. According to WHO, Pakistan will have to report zero cases of polio for three consecutive years to be declared polio-free. Pakistan, Nigeria and Afghanistan are the only three countries that have not eradicated the virus. In all three countries, religious extremism continues to hinder efforts. Nigeria claimed to have eradicated the virus in 2015, but saw four new cases in the conflict-ridden Borno state in 2016. Militants have continued to oppose polio vaccination drives, accusing them of being the covert propagation of Western science and values, a conspiracy plot to sterilise Muslims, or a cover-up for espionage. In Pakistan, specifically the CIA’s methods to trace Osama bin Laden’s whereabouts, dealt a blow to anti-polio vaccination. Although it was a fake hepatitis vaccination programme, the myth that it was a polio drive has persisted, and it fed into the Pakistani Taliban’s anti-vaccine narrative.

Despite the prevalence of this mindset that has led to repeated attacks on polio workers, there has been a steady decline in the number of polio cases reported, thanks to the sustained efforts of successive governments, the National Emergency Operations Centre for Polio Eradication, and the polio workers and security personnel who have braved the odds to provide vaccination in high-risk areas. When the Polio Eradication Programme was launched in the 1990s, there were nearly 20,000 cases reported each year. In 2014, that figure dropped to 306; 54 in 2016; and eight in 2017. In 2018, the total number of cases stands at eight: three from Balochistan’s Dukki district; one in Charsadda; one in Fata; two in Bajaur; and one in Karachi. Most of these were immunised children whose system was tough enough to not contract paralysis. However, environmental surveys taken in Karachi and Peshawar show children are still at risk. The fight continues.



## **Eve of justice**

JUSTICE delayed till the evening could indeed turn out to be justice expedited. The first evening courts in Pakistan have been set up amid much excitement. A pilot project under which family courts have begun to operate in the evenings in Lahore, in addition to the usual morning proceedings, was launched on Friday. One major objective of the arrangement is to ensure that the children who have to appear in courts as a result of being caught in family conflicts can do so later in the day without having to miss school. Those who are familiar with the proceedings in family courts will understand how big a relief this would be. It is also hoped that the experiment being carried out under the watchful eye of the superior courts can help in clearing the vast backlog of cases. The pile of pending cases has been a source of unending complaints by many litigants who will now have the choice of an evening hearing. In the next phase, the intention is to have evening family courts in any of the 36 districts of Punjab where the workload justifies the application of the formula. In time, it is expected that this new venture will be extended to the courts generally; it would necessitate the induction of more judges and associated staff for the smooth running of judicial affairs.

The experiment marks the beginning of a new era where the emphasis will be on how best to exploit the later hours of the day in aid of the people who have so far been crammed into a tight schedule without any respite. In the past, attempts have been made to break the routine and create choices for people wherever possible. Schools have functioned in the evenings and some public-sector hospitals have broken with tradition and tried to run outpatient departments in the evenings to complement their morning work hours. Successful evening courts could set a precedent that would be impossible to not follow.

## **No vision for tax reform**

AS talks with the IMF hit their stride, one glaring hole in the government's vision for reforms is on the taxation and revenue side. The last two governments can claim at least some semblance of a vision for the expansion of the tax base, even if that vision was criticised for its flaws or for not being implemented. The PPP tried to advance the idea of value-added tax to promote documentation and bring the retail and wholesale sector of the economy, which accounts for almost 20pc of GDP, into the tax net. That effort failed because the party was unable to get the votes in parliament for the so-called RGST (reformed general sales tax) bill. The PML-N did not agree to value-added tax, but implemented the Active Taxpayer List

and introduced penalties for non-filers of returns, an effort that can expand in the years to come.

It is not difficult to be critical of both attempts but less easy to suggest alternatives. Pakistan's tax-to-GDP ratio improved in the past decade, standing around 13pc today from a low of almost 8pc a decade ago. But much of the improvement has come from squeezing those already within the net, and the effort to actually broaden the base of taxation has not met with much success thus far. It is now for the PTI government to pick up the baton of tax reform and continue this journey. Before they can even begin, however, they must first advance a vision, some sense of how they intend to bring services into the tax net, and give more buoyancy to revenue collection. This is critical because without a vision to broaden the base of revenues, it is more likely they will meet their Fund-mandated fiscal deficit ceilings by adding to the burden of compliant payers.

At the moment, all we have from the government is a committee formed "to come up with a 'massive and comprehensive' reform programme", as per an announcement made in the middle of October. The names on the committee are tried and tested old hands, so there is little expectation that anything "massive and comprehensive" will issue forth. Besides, committees are better suited to come up with modalities of implementation when a vision for future reform is already present. For the moment, all we have by way of a vision from the PTI is tough talk of strengthening enforcement, as well as some tinkering of responsibilities in the tax bureaucracy. None of this will be enough to broaden the base and promote documentation. The government needs to take a serious view of this critical deficit in its reforms programme, and use the talks with the IMF as an opportunity to expeditiously decide on a future course of action for tax reforms.

## **Emergency care**

THE quality of emergency care in a country has a direct impact on the number of lives saved, whether in case of critical injuries or life-threatening illness. As a symposium last week at Karachi's Aga Khan University Hospital revealed, we fall far short of even a remotely reassuring situation. The statistics are downright alarming: for a population of over 200m, we have only nine qualified emergency medicine specialists. Shortage of resources, training in emergency care and accessibility for patients in need constitute major gaps in this branch of medicine, and worsen an already dire situation. In Pakistan, lack of awareness compounded by difficulty in accessing primary care providers can result in illness reaching a critical stage before medical attention is sought. We are also no strangers to mass

casualty incidents, such as road accidents and terrorist attacks that can overwhelm ill-equipped facilities in areas outside urban centres. The absence of a triage system, which prioritises patients according to the seriousness of their condition, costs dearly in such situations.

Emergency medicine should be an integral part of a healthcare system. In Pakistan, however, where the government spends a measly 0.9pc of its budget outlay on health expenditure, the system often from the outset fails those who do not have time on their side. First of all, most ambulances are rudimentary, essentially meant to transport patients to hospital rather than initiate life-saving measures en route. Second, most hospitals lack properly equipped emergency departments; CT scan and MRI facilities, ventilators, or even a functioning ICU may not be available. As a result, patients are referred to other, comparatively better-equipped hospitals, thereby losing precious time. Third, these departments — as mentioned during the recent symposium — are not usually run by personnel qualified to undertake this specialised task; instead, they are helmed by doctors belonging to other disciplines. Expense is also a vital consideration: most people cannot afford private hospitals that might, in some cases, have a higher standard of critical care, and they have to settle for government-funded facilities. Unfortunately, it may be some time before we are up to scratch. Emergency medicine is a relatively new field in this country, and the Centre for Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan's training programme in the discipline is still a work in progress. Healthcare reforms and policies must incorporate the requirements of this vital branch of medicine upon which hinges many a life-and-death situation.

## **Cricket success**

PAKISTAN'S remarkable run of success in international cricket this year has been heart-warming for fans and have made them front-runners for the 2019 Cricket World Cup to be played in England.

And though they were compelled to share the honours with New Zealand in the three-match ODI series on Sunday, after rain washed out the second half of the final game in Dubai, Pakistan clearly held sway over their rivals while making an impressive comeback in the series after losing the opening tie.

Riding the crest of a wave since their victory over Test debutants Ireland in Dublin back in May, the Pakistanis have drawn a fiercely competitive Test series against England, won the tri-series in Zimbabwe which also involved Australia, outplayed

the latter both in the T20s and Test series in the UAE last month, and humbled a full-strength New Zealand side 3-0 in the T20 series preceding the ODI contest.

It must be mentioned that the cricketers have barely had breathing space between the series, being constantly on the road during a gruelling season.

The hardship factor merits special mention; Pakistan is the only one among the leading Test-playing nations to have been forced to play all the international matches away from a friendly home environment ever since the 2009 terrorist attack against Sri Lanka in Lahore stopped all visits by foreign teams.

The run of success seems to have spurred the Pakistan side on to bigger things. With match-winning bowlers like Mohammad Abbas and newest sensation Shaheen Shah Afridi — who bagged Man of the Series against New Zealand — in their ranks, backed up by a prolific top order comprising Babar Azam, Fakhar Zaman, Imam-ul-Haq, Haris Sohail and Mohammad Hafeez, it is little surprise that Sarfraz Ahmed and his team are now setting their sights on their first-ever series win against South Africa in South Africa starting next month.

And, the next frontier is, of course, the World Cup.

## **Another bailout for PIA**

ANOTHER year, another bailout for PIA. This time the request for almost Rs17bn to help the ailing carrier stave off a debilitating financial crunch has arisen because of the currency depreciation, as per the new chairman who is a serving air marshal in the PAF. The amount itself is not very large, considering the past bailout packages that PIA has received, but what is almost certain at this point is that it is only the beginning of a string of demands for similar bailouts that are about to come from the carrier. The reason is simple: the losses at PIA have been mounting for well over a decade now, and despite numerous changes in the top management, and declines in the oil price along the way, nobody has been able to stem the bleeding. The net result is that the total liabilities of the airline have crossed the Rs400bn mark as of August this year, according to the aviation secretary, and its running losses each month are almost Rs2bn. Next to these figures, the Rs17bn disbursement approved by the latest decision of the Economic Coordination Committee is peanuts, to put it mildly.

Of course, this is not an argument to raise the amount set aside for the bailout. On the contrary, the history of PIA's mounting losses, its skyrocketing debt, and repeated bailouts should give the government pause. Where does this story end? This government campaigned on the promise of change, and the finance minister has repeatedly been saying that the state-owned enterprises can be turned around organically, without any strategic transfer of shareholding. The key, in his words, lies in separating the enterprises from political interference. But beyond this, we have very little idea of what the plan is for these enterprises, and PIA is as good a test case for the government as any. Without a plan to be activated soon, and without appointments of people with the right experience, whose track record inspires confidence in their ability to undertake a huge turnaround, we will simply see this cycle repeat itself endlessly.

Having approved the Rs17bn disbursement for the airline, perhaps the ECC should now ask how the government intends to stop PIA's slide. There are reports that the air marshal has submitted a business plan to the ECC to turn PIA around, but more details must be shared for a wider, comprehensive discussion. What is the 'plan' and who are the people involved in its drafting? How long was it worked upon before being forwarded to the ECC, attached to a request for Rs17bn as an emergency bailout? Tackling the ingrained problems of SOEs is one of the biggest challenges facing this government, and one can be sure the time to set the ball rolling has arrived when bailout requests start coming in.

## Out of school

THE figure is sobering: nearly 25m children in Pakistan currently do not go to school. This means that unless sincere measures are taken by the federal and provincial governments, as well as civil society, a whole generation of youngsters will grow up without the education and life skills needed to survive in a cut-throat world. Speaking at a news conference in Islamabad on Monday, the federal education minister said that the state will make all-out efforts to bring these children into the classroom. Noble as this goal may be, the state needs to unveil a concrete plan aimed at reducing the population of out-of-school children, reduce dropout rates, etc — ie it must come up with innovative solutions where earlier governments have not been successful. The girl child fares even worse than her male counterpart. According to a new Human Rights Watch report, the vast majority of out-of-school children are girls. It says, for example, that by the ninth grade, only 13pc of girls are still in school. That is an appalling figure that needs to be immediately remedied.

Where solutions are concerned, there is, of course, the issue of increasing government spending on education. Currently, Pakistan spends less than the 4pc to 6pc of GDP recommended on education. But beyond investing more funds in the education sector, there needs to be focus on learning outcomes. Getting children into school is one thing; making sure they are being taught — and taught well — subjects that will help them succeed in life is another. The education minister also hinted at improving quality in state schools, and talked of a uniform system of education. While uniformity in the syllabus may be important, it requires further debate amongst the federating units in the post-18th Amendment scenario. What both Islamabad and the provinces should immediately focus on is increasing enrolment and improving standards. Because the public school system has failed, parents who can afford it send their wards to high-fee private schools, while the poor have no option but to enrol their offspring in madressahs. True, the private sector has a role to play (without extorting money from parents), but it should not be a replacement for quality state schools that equip children with the tools to learn and thrive, and welcome both boys and girls equally in a conducive atmosphere.

## **Anti-encroachment drive**

JUSTICE is blind, and so it should be. Sometimes however, this can run counter to human needs and compulsions.

The ongoing anti-encroachment drive in Karachi can be seen as one example. Since the Supreme Court's Oct 27 order that encroachments be removed from Saddar within 15 days before the operation is extended to the rest of the city, personnel from the KMC and other civic bodies have demolished over 1,000 shops and other illegal structures in the area.

Signboards exceeding the mandated dimensions have also been pulled down. Mayor Wasim Akhtar has promised that the iconic Empress Market will be transformed into a model heritage site.

Regrettably, the demolition exercise caught most of affected vendors and the public off guard.



Protesting shopkeepers alleged that an agreement with the Karachi commissioner, which gave them a few days to remove their goods, furniture etc from the shops, had not been honoured.

No doubt that Karachi, groaning under the weight of a huge population dependent on dwindling resources and a crumbling infrastructure, has become an urban nightmare.

The free-for-all has to be arrested and the law implemented if a semblance of sanity is to be restored.

Saddar and the old city areas are a logical place to start because they are already extremely congested, where encroachments pose added risk to life and limb.

However, KMC, that has undertaken the task with such gusto is itself largely responsible for the mushrooming of encroachments.

If the law had been assiduously applied from the beginning, instead of matters being allowed to deteriorate in exchange for illegal benefits, such drastic action would not have been necessary, nor so many livelihoods threatened.

Surely, a reasonable grace period could also have been given, and legal recourse to alternative space offered to the affected vendors, many of whom have little to fall back on.

Illegality cannot be condoned, but such a ruthless enforcement of the law is discomfiting.

Moreover, will KMC ensure that such encroachments will not reappear once again?

## **SP's murder**

THE probable sequence of events and the reconnaissance and planning likely required to carry out the shocking crime are deeply disturbing.

With few, if any, established facts at the moment and the federal government attempting to deflect most questions, it is not clear yet how or why Superintendent of Police Tahir Khan Dawar was found dead in Afghanistan.

What does appear to be clear is that Dawar was tortured and that his death has been claimed by a hitherto unknown militant or splinter militant group as alleged retaliation against the Pakistani state.

According to media reports, Dawar was kidnapped from Islamabad on Oct 26, suggesting a weeks-long ordeal of kidnapping and torture.

He was serving as the head of Peshawar police's rural circle and, according to media reports, had survived at least two suicide attacks in Bannu.

If the PTI governments at the centre and in KP are aware of the circumstances of Dawar's disappearance and murder, they are not sharing it with the public at the moment.

Indeed, until photographs allegedly of Dawar's mutilated body surfaced on social media, nothing was publicly known about his whereabouts or the investigation into his disappearance.

On Nov 6, family members and elders from North Waziristan tribal district held a news conference at the Peshawar Press Club.

They demanded that the policeman be recovered and claimed neither had any information been shared with the family nor did the federal government appear to be taking the matter seriously.

There was no mention of the possibility of his being held in Afghanistan at the time.

If he was kidnapped from a residential sector of Islamabad, then taken outside the federal capital and smuggled across the border to Afghanistan, the implications for the security of the region are deeply troubling.

It would suggest there exists a militant network that is not only actively carrying out reconnaissance of potential targets, but has the capability to capture a veteran policeman and spirit him out of the capital and into Afghanistan undetected.

While it is possible that the security and intelligence apparatus did not share much information with the public about Dawar's kidnapping in order to try and recover him alive, the government ought to have also considered the cost of excessive secrecy.

The policeman's colleagues in KP have fought bravely on the front lines of the fight against terrorism, militancy and extremism and have made many sacrifices.

If the police are expected to continue to deliver exceptional counterterrorism results at great cost to their ranks, it ought to be clear that the state will do whatever it can to protect the police and, in the circumstances of a kidnapping, recover a missing policeman.

Obfuscating, denying, downplaying and providing no or misleading information are unacceptable responses.

At a minimum, the family of Tahir Khan Dawar and the police force he represented deserve a full and proper explanation.

## **Food poisoning**

FOLLOWING the postmortem report of two brothers who had died from food poisoning, an upscale eatery in Karachi was sealed off. The Sindh Food Authority raided the restaurant and claimed to have seized some 80 kilogrammes of expired meat. The SFA's director mentioned that the restaurant had already been served an improvement notice two months earlier. Although culpability has yet to be conclusively determined in this case, it is true that there are few inspections of eateries that are often the source for food-related illnesses.

The Sindh government has announced the formation of a committee to consult and review the SFA's performance. Earlier, the provincial assembly had also passed the Sindh Food Authority Act. But the problem doesn't seem to be in the passing of laws and the formation of new watchdog bodies — the rot lies elsewhere. Punjab also passed the Punjab Pure Foods Rules and the Food Authority Act in 2011. In recent years, it has also had the most active food regulatory body. Most notable was PFA officer Ayesha Mumtaz who conducted operations and sealed restaurants and factories across Lahore. She was removed from her position for dubious reasons in 2016. In her crusade to purify Lahore's palate, she managed to ruffle the feathers of those with power and influence. Politics got in the way. And perhaps this is where the problem lies: dishonesty and cutting corners cuts across class. Members of food regulatory bodies have been found to be complacent about adulteration or in an understanding with makers of substandard food. In fact, the quality of food, health and sanitation in Pakistan is highly suspect. The country's largest metropolis is filthy. Much of its population lives amongst open sewerage systems and mounds of garbage. There is a lack of awareness about basic hygiene and washing, and even the quality of water is suspect. There are high rates of E. coli contamination and fecal bacteria in surface and ground water, while untreated waste water seeps into crop irrigation systems, and then into markets, restaurants and households. Ideally, independent

regulatory bodies and experts should frequently test food from markets inside labs, conduct research, and publish their findings. But last year, when the Karachi mayor unexpectedly showed up at the KMC food quality control laboratory department, he found most of the testing machines to be out of order. Until strict actions are taken for criminal negligence, we will keep hearing of tragedies.

## **Gaza ceasefire**

FOR the Palestinians, particularly the hapless people of Gaza, these are strange times indeed. While Israel continues to unleash violence upon them, their 'Arab brothers' are clamouring to make peace with the Zionist state. Over the last few days, the coastal enclave of Gaza witnessed ferocious violence, said to be the greatest escalation since the 2014 conflict, much of it unleashed by Israel. The trouble began with an Israeli foray inside Gaza; Hamas, which controls the strip, and other Palestinian factions responded with rocket fire into Israel, which, in turn, invited air strikes. Around 15 people have been killed in the violence, most of them Palestinians, and the hostilities only stopped when a ceasefire was announced on Tuesday. However, the cessation of hostilities has not gone down well with extremists within Israel, who perhaps feel not enough Arab blood has been spilt. On Wednesday, Israel's hard-line defence minister Avigdor Lieberman tendered his resignation, saying that the truce amounted to "capitulation to terror". Perhaps Mr Lieberman wanted a repeat of the 2014 atrocities, in which the UN said Israel had killed nearly 300 children.

In these dark times, there seems to be little hope for the Palestinians. Israel knows it can get away with its excesses, thanks to powerful patrons and the silence of the world community. On the other hand, the Palestine question — once raised passionately by the Arab street — is being pushed to the margins by Arab rulers. In fact, Israel has of recent been on a charm offensive, courting the Gulf Arabs; both parties have been coming closer over the years thanks to a common aversion to Iran. Questions of a viable Palestinian state, the right of return, etc seem like a distant dream; right now, the prime concern is to prevent Israel from shedding Palestinian blood at will. Will the UN and all those across the globe who claim to respect human rights hold Tel Aviv to account? Or will Israel continue to display its repugnant behaviour?

## **Mudslinging in parliament**

THE war of words inside parliament between government representatives and opposition figures is threatening to spiral out of control, and senior figures on both

sides ought to intervene to restore order and put the business of parliament back on track.

Yesterday, Chairman of the Senate Sadiq Sanjrani moved to bar Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry from attending the ongoing Senate session for failing to apologise to the house as directed.

A day earlier, the information minister had once again been embroiled in an ugly slanging match with the opposition benches and was repeatedly warned by the Senate chairman to not use unparliamentary language.

An analysis of who provoked whom, however, is unlikely to produce a definitive answer, and Mr Chaudhry and the PTI will likely argue that it is the opposition that has contributed to an unhealthy parliamentary environment.

Indeed, it appears that neither the government nor the opposition is able to resist being baited by the other at the moment.

If the sour mood in parliament is to improve, the custodians of both the lower and upper house will likely need to improve their performance.

Speaker of the National Assembly Asad Qaiser has thus far proved woefully inadequate in his role at the national level, having been elevated from a term as speaker of the KP Assembly.

Chairman Sanjrani was even more inexperienced when he was catapulted from obscurity to high office and chosen to take control of an upper house in which no one party has anything approaching a majority.

Just as the previous PML-N government was not the largest party in the Senate during the first half of its term in government during the previous assemblies, the PTI faces an upper house where, despite being the governing party, it has fewer members than the opposition.

Chairman Sanjrani's controversial election in March may also have contributed to a sense among senators that they can behave in a manner that in different circumstances they would have avoided.

Could a more experienced and firmly in control Senate chairman have handled the impasse in the house skilfully?

Ultimately, however, it is the leaderships on both sides of the house that must bear responsibility for their members' words and actions.

The PML-N seems to believe that a war of words with the government is the right tactic for the party at the moment.

The PPP, caught between not wanting to fully align itself either with the PML-N in opposition or work with the PTI treasury benches, has seemingly taken to walkouts from the assemblies.

The PTI, apparently under siege for its stuttering start as a governing party at the federal level, continues to rely on opposition-style rhetoric.

All sides must urgently reconsider their approach to parliament and let good sense prevail.



# Yemen peace plan

THE ruinous war in Yemen is a blot on the global conscience.

What began as a foreign intervention in an internal conflict has turned into one of the biggest tragedies of the modern age, as one of the poorest Arab nations has been ravaged by violence, famine and disease — much of it avoidable.

Saudi Arabia, and the coalition it has assembled (along with its Western backers), shares a large part of the blame, as its attempts to shore up the Yemeni government and push back the Iran-aligned Houthis have failed.

Also read: Yemen war a ‘living hell’ for children: Unicef

There has been far too much ‘collateral damage’ as the coalition has bombed hospitals and buses full of children. However, there are signs that the Yemeni people’s long nightmare may be nearing its end.

There are reports that the Saudi-led coalition has ordered a stop to fighting in the key port of Hodeidah, while the UAE, a central actor in the coalition, has said it supports the “early convening of UN-led” peace talks to end the conflict.

While it may be too early to be optimistic, one hopes these signs mature into intentions to end the war and efforts to start rebuilding the shattered country.

While the war has more or less turned into a stalemate, it appears that a change of heart in the world community is responsible for the coalition’s recent moves, triggered by the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

One outcome of the gruesome killing is that Saudi Arabia’s role in the region is now in the spotlight, as there is strong evidence linking the journalist’s death to the security establishment in Riyadh.

While Yemen’s plight was ignored by the world for years, today, the brutality unleashed upon Yemen is being openly discussed.

Last week, the Saudis said they had ‘requested’ the US to stop refuelling their aircraft involved in the war.

Clearly, international pressure is building up for Riyadh and its allies to end the war and enable a negotiated settlement.

The Houthis and all other Yemeni factions must take advantage of the opportunity and come to the table to end this disastrous war.

It will, indeed, take many years to rehabilitate Yemen, as a whole generation has fallen prey to death, disease and malnutrition.

One hopes that peace talks are successful and that the states largely responsible for destroying Yemen help rebuild this forsaken country and facilitate the rehabilitation of its people.

## **Journalist in jail**

HIGH drama and a lack of self-restraint have often characterised the actions of law enforcers across the country.

Both elements were in full display recently in Karachi, when the provincial Bounter Terrorism Department arrested senior journalist Nasrullah Khan Chaudhry, who has been remanded to jail authorities on charges of spreading religious disharmony.

The circumstances of Mr Chaudhry's arrest, and the allegations against him, have caused quite a stir in media circles.

Indeed, an angry journalist community has been asking for details and questioning the sudden action that was preceded by a raid on the Karachi Press Club by unidentified men, presumably security officials.

The raid, evidently to arrest Mr Chaudhry, has been condemned as an attempt by the government to harass free voices in the media.

Meanwhile, nothing has emerged to justify the detention of the journalist who has been around for many years.

The arrest is linked to his being in possession of journals and booklets about jihad, which were reported to have been found during a raid on the suspect's house.

It defies logic how the presence of the cited material can be the basis of such extreme action — journalists are supposed to keep abreast of developments, whether in government, militant or other circles.

No concessions can be allowed when it comes to establishing the writ of the law.

However, in this age of frank discussions aided by the free flow of information, the investigators and prosecution have not been able to come up with a valid reason for the arrest.

Journalists' organisations have risen up against the arrest of their colleague in Karachi, and the chances are that in the days to come, this protest will pick up. Unless the government has proof to back up its initial assertions about the presumed 'guilt' of the man they took into custody, its actions will be seen as wrongful and unjust.

The charge of possessing jihadi literature, even if true, is not convincing enough.

## **Zardari's oblique warning**

THE tone has hardened, but the message is not yet clear. On Thursday, PPP supremo and former president of Pakistan Asif Zardari launched what appeared to be verbal attacks against two targets: Prime Minister Imran Khan and anti-democratic forces in the country that Mr Zardari alleged have helped propel the PTI to national power. Because Mr Zardari appears to have mastered the art of insinuation, indirect references and seemingly speaking in riddles, he has left himself with space to deny what may be attributed to him. There is also the likelihood that, at least for now, Mr Zardari would prefer not to repeat his outburst of June 2015, which led to his temporary self-imposed exile from Pakistan and plunged the PPP into a crisis. Nevertheless, in his speech in Badin on Thursday, Mr Zardari used some of his strongest language in recent times to denounce what he claimed is a failing governance experiment that will cost the country dearly. But it is not enough.

Perhaps Mr Zardari should consider speaking directly about what he perceives are threats to the democratic order in the country. In the past, when the PPP boss has talked of threats to the democratic project, his warnings have coincided with legal jeopardy for him and his associates. The coincidence inevitably reduced the impact of Mr Zardari's statements from a democratic perspective. Unhappily, Mr Zardari's latest salvo against anti-democratic forces in the country has also coincided with what appear to be stepped-up efforts to investigate the PPP leadership. So, if the party is serious about confronting these forces, then Mr Zardari and the rest of the PPP leadership should speak directly and clearly about what they understand to be the main threats to political stability and the democratic order. If, for example, Mr Zardari believes that long-standing tensions between sections of the national political leadership and unelected state institutions are undermining democratic

institutions and perpetuating a governance crisis, then it is surely incumbent on the PPP boss to not just say so but also suggest a road map to bolster democracy.

Democratic continuity is vital to the eventual and irreversible strengthening of the democratic process. Neither Mr Zardari nor other opposition leaders should be expected to recklessly plough ahead with attacks on an elected government. The ultimate lesson of the 1990s should not be unlearned: when civilians fight among themselves, it is the anti-democratic forces that benefit. But the path of self-interest, where the legitimate national political leadership only speaks out when it finds itself under investigation or the threat of attack, will not lead to any meaningful gains for democracy. Mr Zardari has an immense national platform, as do several other opposition figures. Why not use it for a persuasive democratic argument than grandstanding and brinkmanship?

## **Revisiting LNG price**

THE Competition Commission is preparing to recommend to the government that it should renegotiate the long-term supply deals for LNG signed by the previous government. The recommendation is in a draft report that has been circulated but not yet finalised. The report points out rising oil prices in global markets through 2018 and invokes the example of Indian companies that have renegotiated prices of their long-term supply contracts this year. It also presents an alternative pricing model that it argues is superior to the one being used in current contracts, and suggests that there ought to be a price ceiling in the agreement to protect the buyer in the event of large or abnormal increases in the price of oil during the contract period. The report also argues for greater flexibility in price, pointing out that spot markets are playing a greater role in global LNG supply, including in some long-term supply deals where a hybrid pricing regime is used, relying on spot prices for some of the cargo to be shipped in a contract year, and on an indexed price for other cargo.

The report deserves close study because it goes into considerable depth, and Pakistan's policy community needs to educate itself further on LNG pricing as the role of imported gas continues to grow in the economy. But there are some dangers to be borne in mind when considering the recommendations. First, the example of Indian companies renegotiating their prices may not be applicable to Pakistan, because India is one of the world's largest LNG importers and enjoys tremendous clout in the market that Pakistan does not have. Second, those renegotiations traded price reductions with volume enhancements, so unless the government can get more parties within the country to agree to LNG as their main source of gas, it will not be able to replicate the experience of Indian LNG companies. Third, trying

to renegotiate commitments made with international parties can land the country in another messy round of international arbitration. The reputational risk of attempting such a renegotiation needs to be carefully weighed against the perceived benefits, as well as the likelihood of success, before any decision is made. The first two long-term LNG supply agreements that Pakistan signed were its first ever, and tinkering with them should only be done as a last resort.

## **Lawyers' hooliganism**

IT seems that a section of the legal community in Pakistan is keen to exhibit how not to fight one's case. The latest demonstration of this was in Faisalabad, which has witnessed the rowdy behaviour of lawyers on many previous occasions as well. Footage released on the media shows a group of lawyers assaulting an apparently very civil deputy commissioner on Wednesday. The lawyers were demonstrating in favour of establishing a bench of the Lahore High Court in Faisalabad, Punjab's second largest city. The images have led to universal condemnation, and on Friday, lawyers belonging to a certain group regretted the occurrence. But local journalists say that chances of this 'apology' being the first step towards a guarantee that lawyers henceforth will shun violence when they protest are rather slim — tied as the latest act of hooliganism is to some political needs urgently felt by the honourable members of the bar.

The shocking physical attack on a government officer has been linked to the election of the bar in the city in the not-too-distant future. The period, it is said, always finds lawyers in a more agitated state than usual, and the urge among some candidates to prove their credentials for the bar council's office can lead to an awkward situation. In extreme cases, the poll-related activity can culminate in the kind of public scenes enacted on Wednesday. These assertions are backed by witness accounts that the deputy commissioner's attackers included a learned gentleman who is vying for one of the top slots of the Faisalabad bar association. The information suggests just how much may be at stake in a bar election and how desperate the lawyers are to score a point over others, or how impatient they may be to secure a Lahore High Court bench for themselves in the city. If ever there was a case of anyone paying the prohibitive price for their choice, this is it.

## **PM's defence of U-turns**

IN attempting to address a perception, he appears to have unwittingly further exposed the problem.

After a bruising few weeks for his government and with the 100-day mark for his prime ministership fast approaching, Prime Minister Imran Khan met a group of journalists on Friday to try and allay concerns in sections of the public and the media that his government is suffering from a lack of direction and that Mr Khan has thus far failed to rise to the mammoth task of being prime minister.

Mr Khan may not have anticipated that a few remarks of his would sensationally overshadow his intended message of accountability and economic stability.

But the prime minister surely ought to have known better.

According to media reports, Mr Khan defended decisions of his government that have been characterised by political opponents as U-turns.

And the prime minister made a rather startling comparison to Adolf Hitler's alleged unwillingness to reconsider the German invasion of Russia, which according to Mr Khan's understanding was a mistake that ultimately led to Hitler's defeat.

Were the prime minister's controversial remarks simply carelessly framed?

At least when it comes to the remarks about Hitler that have been attributed to Mr Khan, the prime minister should offer an adequate clarification.

As for the prime minister's claim that U-turns ought to be lauded as a sign of mature political leadership, the founder of the PTI was following a more familiar political course of blaming shifting circumstances for alleged changes in government policy.

But another explanation for the U-turns is that it is the PTI's and Mr Khan's understanding of the economy and governance that was inadequate to begin with, leading them to make claims in opposition that were never going to be fulfilled once in government.

A willingness to adjust policy to changed circumstances is a necessary and good attribute in a government.



But ignorance or a flawed understanding of a problem at the outset will inevitably require an adjustment to reality — which is the nub of the allegation against Mr Khan and his shaky start as prime minister.

There also remains a problem of clarity.

The 100-day plan of the government was originally seemingly billed as a set of achievements that the PTI would deliver in its first 100 days in office.

Yet, on Friday, Prime Minister Khan appeared to suggest that at the end of the first 100 days, a policy road map will be revealed.

Certainly, it is the government's prerogative to decide its priorities, and three months is a fraction of the five-year term of parliament.

If Mr Khan and his government do unveil a realistic governance and reforms agenda in the days ahead, the government still has a great deal of time to implement its programme.

But the PTI needs to demonstrate a greater capacity for delivering on the promises it has made and will make.

## **Media unity**

A CLEAR message of unity has been sent out by the journalist community in the US — one that the press in Pakistan would do well to reflect on.

Following the White House ban on CNN's chief correspondent, several media organisations have filed amicus curiae briefs in support of the channel's lawsuit against President Donald Trump.

The ban on Jim Acosta was just the latest assault by Mr Trump against what he labels the "elite media", which can lead to dangerous real-life consequences (eg the bomb package delivered outside CNN's New York office).

This time, however, what is encouraging is the right-wing Fox News' vocal support for CNN — an unlikely alliance between the leading 'conservative' and 'liberal' media houses.

Beyond competition for ratings, and beyond ideological divides, they sensed the threat to the profession — the common enemy of a free press is the fragile ego of an authoritarian.

In Pakistan, news channels have often stooped to pitiful depths to sabotage competition — from issuing traitor tags to levelling more sinister blasphemy allegations.

This has to stop.

The enemies of the press are powerful.

And they are armed.

In a recent report, Unesco documented the killing of 27 journalists in the Asia-Pacific region.

Pakistan, which in many ways has a more free — or at least a more vibrant — media than many other parts of Asia is no stranger to threats and violence against journalists.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, a total of 60 media personnel have been killed since 1992. Journalists hold the powerful accountable.

This inevitably ruffles feathers.

And certain truths will cause discomfort in certain circles.

But highlighting uncomfortable and often messy realities is necessary to identify the sources of suffering, if there is an intention to remedy them.

Those inconvenienced by the truth or the noise of multiple perspectives will take steps to remove that source of discomfort — whether through co-option or silencing.

While it's true that public opinion of mainstream media has sunk — this is partially the fault of the business model, clickbait culture, and 24/7 news cycles taking precedent over traditional journalistic norms and ethics — there has also been deliberate propaganda campaigns to silence criticism.

In the age of populism, and the rise of empty nationalist rhetoric, journalists face a common enemy that spreads misinformation, disinformation, fake news, rumours and outright lies.

They must unite against it.

## **Sri Lanka's lawmakers**

Sri Lanka's lawmakers OF late, some very ugly scenes have played out in the Sri Lankan legislature. According to details, the pandemonium inside parliament has been unprecedented. A second no-confidence vote against Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse had caused much commotion. Not only was the speaker of parliament prevented from entering the house for an hour, the decorated chair from which he presided over the proceedings was taken away. When another chair, obviously unfit and unprepared for the grand hour, was brought in as a makeshift arrangement it proved too weak to withstand the violence that was wreaked on it. The seat was broken and its parts then served as ammunition for the charged members to attack one another with. The high point in the drama came when some lawmakers found red chilli powder to throw into the eyes of their enemies. Quite rightly, the behaviour of the politicians has been labelled as "disgraceful if not disgusting".

Reflecting on the Sri Lankan parliamentary ruckus, perhaps we should thank our lucky stars for the small mercies that are sent our way. But for these gifts, we would be sulking at the ignominy of being the worst offenders in virtually every category of democratic rule. Indeed, it is often that our parliamentarians find themselves being publicly censured — justifiably so — for actions that are hardly befitting of those who should be setting an example of model conduct on the floor of the house, and demonstrating how dissenting views need not turn into acrimonious exchanges. As has been indicated in this space, the ugly war of words in recent days between government and opposition members has negatively impacted parliament's work. However, many would perhaps say that matters are still not out of control, and point to the projectiles in Sri Lanka's parliament. Be that as it may, it is incumbent to keeping raising the bar of mature, democratic politics and strengthening what is by no means an easy process.

## **Poor lawmaking record**

AS the federal government races to compile a list of achievements ahead of its first 100 days in office, there remains a glaring omission: legislation. There has been one legislative achievement of the government so far: the Finance (Supplementary) Act, 2018, which was arguably more of an economic necessity than a legislative success. There are several likely reasons for the PTI's failure to introduce new legislation, but the primary reason remains a procedural impediment: a dispute between the government and the opposition over the chairmanship of the Public Affairs Committee has prevented Speaker of the

National Assembly Asad Qaiser from notifying the parliamentary committees that form the basis of legislative work. With the PTI governing coalition a minority in the upper house of parliament, the only plausible route for legislation introduced by the government remains the lower house. However, without committees and their chairs being notified in the National Assembly, the core legislative duty of parliament is effectively suspended.

At least two points need to be made here. First, the PTI's refusal to nominate the Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Shahbaz Sharif as chair of the PAC is an unnecessary crisis. The PTI's rejection of a parliamentary tradition is ostensibly rooted in a concern that as PAC chairman, Mr Sharif would first examine the accounts of the previous PML-N government. However, it is possible for Mr Sharif to recuse himself from scrutiny of the previous PML-N government's accounts and, in the eventuality that he does not do so, it is highly unlikely that the PAC will be allowed to rubber-stamp clear examples of misuse of federal funds by the PML-N government. How realistic is it that in the presence of PTI members a Sharif-led PAC will be able to bury allegations of financial malfeasance by the PML-N?

Second, the PTI needs to adjust to the realities of parliamentary democracy. Effectively blocking the formation of parliamentary committees because of an unresolved dispute over the chairmanship of the PAC ultimately prevents the government from creating and advancing a legislative agenda. It is self-defeating. The PTI and its allies are well short of a majority in the Senate, so the governing coalition will inevitably have to reach across the aisle to legislate. The PTI's 100-day milestone is almost certain to pass without any legislative success in the two houses because of a flawed approach to parliament and the institutions of democracy. Without legislation, executive action is likely to yield only minimal governance reforms. The PTI must do better.

## **GB reforms**

TO deny a people their fundamental rights is to unduly test their patience, even their loyalty to the nation. One need look no further than our own history as testament to that. Yet we have allowed Gilgit-Baltistan to exist in constitutional limbo since Independence, wilfully blind to the mounting evidence of growing anger and a sense of alienation among its people. A seven-judge Supreme Court bench has taken up a number of petitions challenging the GB Order 2018 and the GB Empowerment and Self-Governance Order of 2009, and demanding the right of the people of GB to be governed through their chosen representatives. On Thursday, the apex court was informed that the government had formed a high-

level committee to consider constitutional, legislative and administrative reforms for GB. Chief Justice Saqib Nisar has put the government on notice that should it fail to follow through on its stated intention, the court would adjudicate on the matter.

The people of GB could scarcely have imagined that more than seven decades after their voluntary accession to the newly formed Pakistan, they would remain subjected to a quasi-colonial form of governance. Indeed, in many ways, the situation has actually regressed. Not only has their long-standing demand — that GB be given the status of the country's fifth province, if provisionally — fallen on deaf ears, they have found their hard-fought limited political empowerment severely curtailed. The controversial GB Order 2018 gave sweeping powers to the prime minister by reducing the status of the GB Council, from being a legal mechanism through which the federation exercised its authority over certain subjects pertinent to the region, to a mere advisory body. That deprived about 2m Pakistani citizens of even a semblance, however flawed, of representative governance. These one-step-forward-two-steps-back shenanigans have played havoc with the rights of the people. The simmering discontent exploded into public view recently after the government attempted to impose federal taxes on the area, an area whose undetermined federal status is the very crux of local grievances. It was another reminder that the stability of the region is vital to the viability of CPEC, and it cannot be secured if the state persists in treating GB like a vassal state. The PTI government should do right by a people who have waited far too long for the constitutional rights promised to them.

## **Women's cricket**

ONCE again, Pakistan's women cricketers failed to make an impression.

Ranked eighth among the 10 participating teams at the ICC World T20 being played in the West Indies, they bowed out of the race after losing back-to-back opening games against Australia and arch rivals India, while the match with New Zealand sealed their fate.

Pakistan's sole victory against the last-ranked Ireland, that enabled them to qualify for the next World T20, was the only high point, besides half-centuries by skipper Javeria Khan, Bismah Maroof and Nida Rashid.

Harsh as it may seem, the fact remains that during the past three to four years, the plummeting graph of teams such as Pakistan, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Ireland makes it abundantly clear that their respective boards

have hardly invested women's cricket, thus not allowing it to make an impact at the international level.

Indeed, it is hard to ignore the lack of resources and support for the women players here, compared to the men's teams.

Each time the women's team plays, it's a battle for survival rather than a case of carving a niche.

Of course, breaking societal boundaries is a huge hurdle that they must cross to compete in the first place.

Subsequently, the heavy odds that confront them include a lack of training and playing facilities, infrequent tours, poor media coverage and far fewer sponsors compared to men's cricket.

It is little surprise, therefore, that despite having featured in their fourth ICC World T20, Pakistan's women cricketers are struggling to rise above the amateur level.

Against this depressing backdrop, even to qualify for an international tournament or the World Cup is an achievement for women cricketers.

Thankfully, the Pakistan Cricket Board of late has demonstrated its intent to elevate the status of women cricketers by handing out central contracts to nearly two dozen players and organising tours to Australia and Bangladesh.

However, a year-round schedule of top-level training and international matches needs to be put in place for the women to be at par with the leading international teams.

## **Trump's latest salvo**

THE segue from condemning a domestic critic to rounding on Pakistan was in typical Trumpian fashion swift and bewildering.

In an interview with Fox News that was broadcast on Sunday, US President Donald Trump attempted to dismiss the criticism of retired Adm William McRaven, who has condemned Mr Trump's attacks on the US media, by attacking the former admiral's military career, which included overseeing the US operation that led to the killing of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad.



In his trademark stream-of-consciousness style of speaking, Mr Trump in a flash turned on Pakistan in the Fox News interview and uttered the fateful words: “Because they [Pakistan] don’t do anything for us. They don’t do a damn thing for us.”

Take a look: 'Appeasement does not work with US': Shireen Mazari claps back at Trump over tirade against Pakistan

A year which began with a notorious presidential tweet on Pakistan-US relations is drawing to a close on a similar, and surely unexpected, sour note. Serious policymakers in both countries will have to work to determine whether Mr Trump’s salvo against Pakistan is a sign of more turbulence ahead in the bilateral relationship or simply another peevish and self-centred presidential observation.

A US presidency that is nearly two years old has produced some consistently remarkable and shocking behaviour domestically and on the international stage, but it remains perplexing how a US president can so often be so at odds with the policy of his own administration.

Mr Trump’s gratuitous remarks have come just as his administration is seemingly embracing the possibility of a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan. Direct contact between the US and the Afghan Taliban has been re-initiated and publicly acknowledged, and once again the contours of a potential peace settlement in Afghanistan are being publicly debated.

The US State Department’s officials who are working on Afghanistan have engaged Pakistan in intense diplomacy in recent weeks and months, and at each step of the way those officials have sought Pakistan’s greater cooperation.

Pakistan has recently released several Afghan Taliban prisoners in what is surely a coordinated attempt to revive a moribund peace process and help bring the Taliban to the negotiating table at the earliest. It is — and this is no exaggeration — sheer madness on the part of the US president to undermine his own administration’s attempts at peace in this region that will allow the US to extricate itself from the longest war in American history, a war that Mr Trump himself long opposed.

Bizarre, too, is the US president’s reckless flirtation with stoking further anti-US sentiment in Pakistan.

Undoubtedly, this country needs an honest reckoning with its past support for jihad and militancy in the region. Recent events in the country have exposed that the space for rational discourse has shrunk further than ever. Into that cauldron when

hostile statements by a US president are poured, the results could be calamitous. Mr Trump's lack of self-restraint continues to be a danger to the world.

## **Census verification**

IT took almost two decades to hold a new census in this country — and it seems that another 20 years will go by before the results can be said to command a consensus. If the government is, indeed, considering finalising the numbers of the sixth population census without any verification exercise, the shadow of controversy will hang over the results until the next time a census is held, one whose results most parties are willing to accept. The previous government managed to conduct the census exercise, but it could not conduct a post-enumeration audit of 5pc of the census blocks. A consensus decision to have this audit was taken at the last Council of Common Interests meeting held by the previous government. But the exercise was never carried out, and with a considerable time lag between the census and the audit, the results will show a large discrepancy due to the migration of people in the interim.

A post-enumeration audit of the sort envisioned at the time when the census results were being discussed by the CCI is no longer the right way to verify the numbers. That much is clear. Any such audit will likely pick up the results of too many extraneous factors, and the ensuing discrepancies will needlessly fuel further divisive politics. But railroading the results through without addressing the controversies they have given rise to would be an equally big mistake. A faulty census whose results are not accepted by a fair number of the larger political parties in the country will be a thorn in the side of policymaking as much as an outdated census would be. The present government is left with few good options as a result. For now, perhaps it would be appropriate for the government to return the summary sent by the Statistics Division, which reportedly advocates doing away with the verification exercise and approving the census results as they stand. When returning it, the government can easily ask the Statistics Division to give more options and to recommend at least three courses of action going forward, one of which would be to disregard the verification. This would create the time and space for various parties to put their heads together and think of some alternative way by which the census results can be verified and the satisfaction of contending parties obtained.

## **Polio-free Pakistan?**

THE fight for a polio-free world might take a little longer to materialise. The Global Polio Eradication Initiative presented a pessimistic picture in its latest report. While type two and three strands of the polio virus have been eradicated, type one virus is still found in environmental samples taken from three polio-endemic countries: Pakistan, Nigeria and Afghanistan. In total, the number of wild poliovirus cases has increased to 25 from just 13 in 2017. Two of the major reasons for the delay include militancy and limited access. Afghanistan, in particular, faces a daunting task. The number of polio cases more than doubled at 19 (compared to eight in 2017). And around a million children have been missed since May 2018. In Pakistan, the blame often falls on Afghanistan and the free movements of people between the two borders. While this may be partially true, and the two countries must work together to combat the spread of the disease, a news report mentioned an 11-member polio team found to be faking data on the number of children vaccinated, while throwing away vaccines in Islamabad. The team was immediately sacked, but the fact that it happened is certainly a blow to efforts.

When it comes to polio, even one case is one too many. But this is no reason to lose hope. Over the years, the number of sites for environmental surveillance has increased to 57 in 30 cities — the largest national polio surveillance system in the world. And out of the eight reported cases from Pakistan, five had developed immune systems strong enough to withstand paralysis. The GPEI report also mentioned political instability and transfer of power as another hindrance, but the independent National Emergency Services for Polio Outbreak, formed in 2014, has helped overcome some of the problems. The polio teams are currently preparing to tackle the virus once and for all this winter season, with a target of 38.6m children. May they succeed in their noble mission.

## **Harassing taxpayers**

OF late, the tax authorities have taken to harassing those people who are already in the tax net, in response to pressure from the government to pick up the pace of revenue collection. Companies and individuals are finding themselves served with audit notices, and then offered the option of paying a nominal penalty to 'get off the hook'. The most egregious example of this is the announcement that one million individuals who filed their returns late in the last three years have been automatically selected for audit, and that they can pay Rs20,000 for 'closure of audit'. No doubt somebody in the bowels of the tax bureaucracy worked on a calculator to determine that such an exercise could yield up to Rs20bn in revenue — not a bad step towards plugging a reported hole of Rs100bn in the first quarter's tax collection target. But the exercise looks just like a racket, and a rather insidious one at that, considering it is unfolding while return filing season is in full swing, and

the government is trying hard to get more people to file their returns. In fact, it is sending out, in parallel, the wrong message that filing your returns makes you vulnerable to the arbitrary whims of the taxman. Perhaps, a million taxpaying parties are contemplating that they were better off not filing those returns in the previous years.

The story is similar when it comes to companies. Stockbrokers, for instance, have had to get a delegation together and pay a visit to the tax authorities in Karachi and Islamabad after receiving a flurry of new notices. The tobacco and sugar industries are finding out that they seem to have been identified as low-hanging fruit in a ramped-up effort to squeeze more tax out of compliant parties, as enforcement actions against them are similarly increased. Examples are now proliferating of tax-enforcement actions that are thinly disguised shakedowns of those who have honestly filed their returns.

It was never a great idea to use tax enforcement as the main driver for increasing revenues. The enforcement function is better used to promote a culture of compliance. For increasing revenues, tax reform is the path, or a vision for reform of the schedule of incentives so that potential taxpayers — ie those who are noncompliant at the moment — face the right mix of incentives and penalties to change their behaviour and consider becoming compliant. Shaking down salaried individuals who have filed their returns, and whose deductions are made at source in any case, is not the way, because it serves as an example for those outside the net to remain where they are. The racket should end, compliant taxpayers should be left alone, and the government should hurry up and reveal its vision for tax reform and the broadening of the tax base.

## **Day of the child**

YESTERDAY marked Universal Children's Day. Politicians reaffirmed their commitment to securing children's rights, while carnivals and walks were organised throughout the country to commemorate the day the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Despite being a signatory to these declarations, which clearly state that a child is anyone below the age of 18 years, Pakistan has a long way to go before granting the full list of rights spelled out in the conventions. A large number of children are out of school and in the workforce — both formal and informal. However, as recently stated by a PTI lawmaker, the lack of data and surveys on the topic presents a challenge in implementing policies. In the early 2000s, a survey conducted by Unicef estimated that nearly 8m children under the age of 14 years were engaged in some form of labour, including brick kilns, carpet-

weaving, agriculture, fishing, small-scale industries and domestic help. Another survey by FBR stated the number of working children in Pakistan was approximately 7pc of the total workforce.

The absence of strict laws and prevalence of contradictory laws leads to an ambiguous space which leaves room for abuse of the most vulnerable and helpless citizens of the state. Despite all this, we do not even have a nation-wide consensus on who is a child. The oft-cited Article 25-A of the Constitution, which makes it compulsory for governments to provide free education to all children from age five to 16, is usually used in arguments against the employment of children under 16. But when it comes to marriage, a child is anyone under the age of 18 in Sindh, and 16 in the rest of the country, despite the fact that even a CNIC is not issued until one has attained 18 years of age. When it comes to employment, Article 11 of the Constitution states that “no child below the age of 14 years shall be engaged in any factory or mine or any other hazardous employment”. This is corroborated by the Child Employment Act of 1991. But last year, Sindh passed the Prohibition of Employment of Children Act, which increased the minimum age for employment to 15, while 19 years is the minimum age for employment in hazardous professions. Before we can speak of the rights of the child, we should agree on who exactly is a child.

## **Among the 100**

GOING from a bonded labourer held in a private jail in Pakistan to the country’s upper house of parliament is a dizzying enough trajectory, but Krishna Kumari now has another feather in her cap.

The senator from an obscure village in one of the nation’s most deprived areas, Tharparkar, has been named among the BBC 100 Women for this year.

The list, as the BBC website describes it, pays tribute to “inspiring and influential women from around the world ... leaders, trailblazers and everyday heroes”.

It includes the likes of internationally celebrated South American writer Isabel Allende, but also people like Helena Ndume, an ophthalmologist who has restored the sight of 35,000 of her fellow Namibians free of charge, and our very own Ms Kumari.

She is evidence that in Pakistan even a woman from the downtrodden Kohli caste of ‘untouchables’ can find a place among the people’s representatives.

Yet, inspirational though her story is, Ms Kumari is an outlier, present in the Senate only because the PPP, to its credit, selected her as a candidate on a reserved seat for women.

It would be glossing over reality to suggest that most people from underprivileged backgrounds, particularly women belonging to minority communities, have anything more than a remote chance of scaling institutional barriers to social mobility.

These barriers are rooted in history, politics, class differences, and gender, ethnic and religious biases.

If parties were actually invested in raising women's profile in the political arena, they would opt to nominate on reserved seats women who deserve to be in parliament on their own merit.

That, after all, was the original purpose of having such a mechanism.

Instead, they use these seats to bring in assorted female relatives of elected legislators or as a favour to powerful political patrons, a form of opportunism that causes much resentment among genuine women political workers after every election.

Women like Ms Kumari who can make parliament a more inclusive and diverse space must become the norm, not remain an exception.

## **Focusing on investment**

AMONG all the themes that Prime Minister Imran Khan touched on during his visit to Malaysia, one deserves careful attention. Aside from his usual list of topics, from aggressively pursuing corruption cases to curbing money laundering, there was a new emphasis on facilitating investment in the country as a way to promote growth. The new emphasis on investment ought to be welcome in an economy that counts consumption as its main engine, and Pakistan's investment rate has bottomed out in the past decade. Until this is changed, no amount of economic growth will help to lift the country out of its cycle of balance-of-payments crisis.

The only question that is left to answer now is how the new government intends to go about this mammoth task. Even though he spoke in Malaysia, Mr Khan did not focus solely on foreign investors. He pointed towards his new chief at the Board of Investment as somebody whom he is counting on to create an environment that is



conducive for business for both local and foreign investors. That same chief, who is a former World Bank staffer, has constituted a committee to generate proposals on how to improve Pakistan's standing in the Ease of Doing Business indicators, and is seeking input from private-sector parties across the board. This is a good place to start, but as time goes on, far more is going to be required. For investment to take off, the savings rate needs to be raised, documentation of the economy needs to be advanced, banks need to be encouraged to venture into areas like agriculture and small- and medium-enterprise lending, and proper coordination developed with provincial governments on matters ranging from tax reform to land acquisition. On top of this, a strategic overhaul of tax policy is needed, as is the introduction of a trade and industrial policy.

This is just a small part of the spectrum of priorities that need to be addressed in pursuit of this goal. Otherwise, the government can focus its energies on generating interest in a few big-ticket investment deals through structuring incentives in a way that attracts international investors. Something along these lines was tried during the prime minister's visit to the so-called investment conference in Saudi Arabia last month. If Mr Khan's stated intention in Malaysia is to be taken at face value, then he has identified for his government a sprawling and ever-growing mission. The target is the correct one, but there should be no illusions about how much momentum will be needed for the effort to be credible and sustainable. If this is truly going to be the last IMF programme that Pakistan signs onto, as the prime minister claims, then working on this broad agenda will be crucial.

## **Kabul bombing**

ONCE again, militants in Afghanistan have shown that nothing is sacred to them. Over 50 people were killed as a bomber struck a wedding hall in Kabul on Tuesday where people had gathered to celebrate the birthday of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). At this point it is unclear who is responsible for this atrocity. However, while the Afghan Taliban have distanced themselves from the attack, suspicions have fallen on the local affiliate of the militant Islamic State group, which has been involved in a number of attacks in Afghanistan, aside from the violence perpetrated by the Taliban. IS is particularly known for targeting Muslims it sees as 'deviants'; its past attacks have had sectarian overtones, and have included violence against the Shia community in the country. While the Afghan Taliban are of course no stranger to violence, IS is a far more vicious and expansionist set-up, comparatively speaking, and has demonstrated its blood-soaked capability in the Middle East. Afghanistan is already a witness to massive levels of violence; as per one figure, nearly 3,000 people have been killed in militant attacks over the past two years. While that

unfortunate country has not seen stability for the last four decades, the IS threat cannot be underestimated as its propensity for violence and destruction is arguably greater than that of other militant actors.

The bombing comes as a sobering reminder that all principal actors — the government in Kabul, the Afghan Taliban, external players — must step up their efforts to bring about a negotiated conclusion to end hostilities in the country. While considerable gaps may exist between Kabul and the Taliban, these need to be bridged as IS is a common enemy. Moreover, if the self-styled caliphate were to establish itself in Afghanistan's ungoverned spaces, the security of neighbouring states, including Pakistan, would be increasingly compromised. Therefore, all players need to facilitate dialogue between Kabul and the Taliban, with the Americans, who maintain a military presence in Afghanistan, as well as regional states playing their role. The world has witnessed the mayhem IS caused when it occupied ungoverned spaces in Iraq and Syria. Now that it has been eliminated from most of its Middle Eastern strongholds, it is looking for a new foothold from where it can unleash turmoil and bring its apocalyptic dreams to fruition. No country must be allowed to become that foothold. The US, with its military muscle and technology, must particularly do more to flush out IS from its Afghan redoubts.

## **Endangered mangroves**

ANEW study by Karachi University's Institute of Environmental Studies shows high levels of pollution in the waters surrounding Pakistan's second busiest harbour: Port Qasim. Testing water samples for organic and inorganic waste, the researchers concluded that the high levels of pollution endangered the area's biodiversity. This is not news. It's a confirmation of established and oft-repeated fears by local fishermen and environmentalists. In the early 1970s, when the port was being constructed, eight species of mangroves flourished. Today, only four remain. While there have been efforts to make up for some of the lost mangrove cover by the Forest Department and IUCN, it might still not be enough, especially not for a city like Karachi, which has hardly any forest cover.

Not only do mangroves lower temperatures, they are the first line of defence against soil erosion and intrusions from the sea, including cyclones and tsunamis. But in recent years, toxic waste in the form of untreated sewage, industrial effluent, and bloodied water drained from the nearby cattle colony, have proved to be the biggest challenge to the survival of mangroves. On a daily basis, around 472m gallons of waste are released into the sea; which poisons the surrounding vegetation and marine life. A hatching ground for fish, and critical to sustaining the delicate ecological balance of the area, mangroves that fall under the authority of

the Port Qasim Authority and the Karachi Port Trust are the most endangered. The major coal-handling operations approved by the PQA this year will only add to the already considerable problems. Alarming, the board did not even wait for clearance from the Sindh Environmental Protection Agency before going ahead with its operations. Surely, our policymakers have to be more farsighted than this and to focus on the threat to the environment. After all, the well-being of our natural surroundings depends on more than just hopes and prayers.

## **Militants strike again**

A DEVASTATING sectarian attack in lower Orakzai district on Friday and an attack on the Chinese consulate in Karachi a few hours earlier on the same day have bloodily underlined that the country is still confronted by a complex array of militant threats. The attack in lower Orakzai district is likely to have originated from across the border in Afghanistan, with Jamaatul Ahrar or the militant Islamic State group being the likely perpetrator. The two groups are known to have sanctuaries in Afghanistan, and the attackers possibly entered Pakistan through an unfenced portion of the former Kurram agency. If the preliminary suspicions of the security apparatus are confirmed, there should be greater urgency to complete the fencing along the border with Afghanistan. Wherever possible, the Pakistani state should take whatever steps it can to prevent militants from crossing the border with Afghanistan. Ultimately, however, the issue of anti-Pakistan militant sanctuaries in Afghanistan will have to be addressed in a reciprocal manner with the Afghan government.

In Karachi, greater disaster may have been averted, but the seeming ease with which heavily armed attackers were able to reach their intended target has raised a number of questions from a security perspective. The quick reaction of the Sindh police and the paramilitary Rangers has been praised by government officials, and security personnel may have prevented more casualties and a nightmarish hostage scenario. But that should not obscure intelligence and security failures that may have allowed the attackers to arrive at their target undetected. If disaffected or separatist Baloch militants are responsible for the attack, it would be yet another sign that the state's policy in Balochistan is not delivering the intended results of peace and security. The longest-ever Baloch insurgency may have been contained through a militarised approach to dealing with the problem, but the attack in Karachi indicates that the militants still have the capacity to launch an attack that could undermine at least economic relations with Pakistan's key strategic partner, China. If Balochistan is truly to take advantage of the historic opportunity that is CPEC, the wrong-headed approach of the state in tackling what is at its core a political problem by military means will have to change.

Finally, while the attacks yesterday may have very different causes, a common thread is that the state's responses and strategies in fighting militancy will have to continue to evolve. The PTI federal government has been firefighting on the economic front and is mired in familiar political tensions with the opposition, as a result of which it has not yet turned its attention to the serious business of improving the capacity of the civilian side of the security apparatus nationally. It is about time Prime Minister Imran Khan turned his attention to domestic security policy, too.

## **Kartarpur opening**

IT was promised in August, appeared out of reach in September and was thought to be out of the discourse by October. But before the end of November, a new border crossing between Pakistan and India is just around the corner. That is how unpredictable the state of relations between the two countries is. The Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Narowal, one of the holiest sites for Sikhs, will be accessible to devotees from the Indian side soon. India has accepted the Pakistani offer to build a new border crossing to facilitate pilgrims. In this case at least, the two states have overcome their mutual distrust to give their people a chance to mingle. The gift marks the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith. The stimulus for it came in August when Navjot Singh Sidhu, politician and former Indian cricketer, came to Pakistan to take part in the swearing-in ceremony of Prime Minister Imran Khan. Mr Sidhu had a huge surprise waiting for him: an offer to open the Kartarpur border to facilitate pilgrims from India.

The proposal had been in the air since at least the 1980s but had been put on hold on some pretext or the other. This time, too, whereas the Pakistani side pursued the matter quite diligently, the Indian response was rather lukewarm. A decision by an Indian parliamentary committee was cited to suggest why the authorities still did not believe that the time was right for the opening of a new border crossing between the two countries. Better sense has since prevailed and perhaps the ruling BJP in India has realised that the step can win it goodwill in the run-up to the general election in 2019. During Mr Khan's oath-taking ceremony in August, it was none other than army chief Gen Qamar Bajwa who told Mr Sidhu that the Kartarpur border would be opened. And it is in the interest of long-lasting peace that India should heed his advice, given during his visit to the Line of Control in Azad Kashmir on Wednesday, to adopt dialogue as the way forward. Although the offer comes amid ceasefire violations and aggressive statements by the India military, as pointed out by Gen Bajwa, it is nevertheless a courageous one. The path to peace

may not be easy, but the destiny of billions in South Asia would be vastly improved if tensions disappeared.

## **Illegal organ trade**

FOLLOWING the petition filed by a Kohat resident against an alleged illegal kidney transplantation case last month, a Peshwar High Court bench has asked KP's health department and FIA to look into the prevalence of the illegal trade in the province. Mohammadullah Khan complained that a group, including doctors, performed a kidney transplant on his uncle, in return for Rs2.55m. He died within two days. The case serves to spotlight once again the illegal trade of human organs. One of the most disturbing consequences of globalisation, the demand and supply of human organs connects the wealthiest to the poorest through a vicious cycle of scarcity and exploitation. Its continued existence is dependent on a flourishing black market, exacerbated by economic inequalities and the desperation to survive. Sensing the urgency of the issue, made worse by the lack of data, the World Health Assembly urged member nations to "take measures to protect the poorest and vulnerable groups from 'transplant tourism' and the sale of tissues and organs" in 2004. Despite criminalising the trade in organs in 2010, cases of the illegal trade keep popping up in Pakistan, time and again. A large chunk of the population lives in multidimensional poverty. Many donors are bonded labourers, desperate to pay off oppressive debts. They rarely receive post-operative care, and some die from complications.

In 2016, a police raid in Rawalpindi found 24 'donors' holed up inside a dingy apartment, waiting for their surgeries in return for a few thousand dollars — a small portion of the total paid to the surgeons by wealthy benefactors. In 2017, a raid on a bungalow in Lahore uncovered an organ trafficking network that had been operating since 2009. At the time of the raid, an Omani national, a 'transplant tourist', was being operated on. For years, organisations such as SIUT and Edhi Foundation have campaigned for deceased organ donations. The state must now add to their efforts by diverting some of its resources to aid the awareness drive.

## **Stalling on economic recovery**

IF the intention behind Finance Minister Asad Umar's speech in parliament was to reassure the people that the country's economic predicament was being handled with a firm hand, then his words failed to ease concerns. In response to questions about the inconclusive talks with the IMF, Mr Umar said that his government was "not in a hurry" to enter into any programme with the Fund, and would resist all



“pressure to burden the country and its people”. He pointed to the assistance from Saudi Arabia, as well as other “friendly countries”, that has apparently given the government some breathing space, and to the jump in remittances in the first quarter. It was emphasised more than once that the government would only sign an agreement with the IMF “if it serves the interests of the country and its people”. Matters would have been clearer had there been more information on what exactly the sticking points were in the inconclusive round of talks that ended earlier this week.

Parts of his speech have fuelled anxiety that the government will resist taking the steps necessary to stabilise the economy. It is not unusual for a government to postpone the reckoning when faced with growing and unsustainable deficits in the economy, but there is hardly any instance when delaying the inevitable has worked out well. Emphasising that the government would not succumb to any pressure that would burden the people has other implications: the government is not doing the IMF a favour by asking for a bailout, and putting the talks off for a while is unlikely to change the country’s negotiating position. The pressure to undertake an adjustment is coming from the play of impersonal economic forces, not from any institution or individual. True, the pressure can be temporarily mitigated through assistance from friendly countries, but it cannot be wished away, and is unlikely to abate on its own as time goes by.

Going by the finance minister’s words, it is evident that the government is getting cold feet at the idea of undertaking an adjustment. There are good reasons to be apprehensive, since the fiscal and external-sector deficits are too large for the economy to sustain for much longer without triggering a financial crisis. For the moment, the external sector is seeing some respite due to the falling oil prices and the rising remittances, but these are not going to be sufficient to plug the massive trade deficit. The fiscal side has turned in a disappointing performance as evident in the latest numbers for the first quarter. This delay will not benefit the government as the clock approaches the hour when it must embark upon the road to recovery through adjustment and reform. The markets are watching, and trepidation has a price in this cold, cruel world.

## **Crackdown on TLP**

HAVING been encouraged by the state’s seemingly infinite patience with their inflammatory rhetoric and violent reactions, the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan may have gone too far this time.



In the wake of yet another call by TLP chief Khadim Hussain Rizvi for a rally, this time to observe ‘martyrs’ day’ in Islamabad, and the government’s unsuccessful attempts to dissuade him, the police took him into ‘protective custody’, as per the information minister.

That brought his supporters out on the streets, leading to a crackdown by law-enforcement authorities against the TLP in several cities in an effort to quell the rioting.

At last count, several of its leaders and over 300 workers had been arrested from various parts of Punjab and in Karachi.

More than 100 police officials were deployed at the Faizabad exchange to avoid a repeat of last year’s 20-day sit-in at the location which had ended with a craven and questionable surrender by the state.

Once again, the TLP has shown a predilection for flexing its muscles on the street.

Certainly, the right to protest is a part of democracy, but not when it constitutes spreading disorder, damaging property and assaulting people.

Such a protest has no place in a civilised society.

The violence on Thursday — including an incident in which police commandos had to rescue a senior police officer and his guards from the clutches of some TLP supporters — once again illustrates the group’s ability to disrupt the functioning of the state.

On more than one occasion, the TLP’s senior leaders, Mr Rizvi and Pir Afzal Qadri, have used incendiary language — with the latter unleashing yet another tirade on Thursday — that should attract some of the harshest provisions in the law.

These deal not only with hate-mongering to incite communal disturbances and encourage vigilante action, but also with fomenting rebellion against the state.

And yet, instead of taking the bull by the horns, filing the appropriate charges and following through, the government is engaged in firefighting, thereby virtually guaranteeing that such tactics will continue.

The TLP, which can mobilise its supporters within little time, unfortunately has good reason by now to believe that it can with impunity bring parts of the country to a standstill.

If the state does not use its authority to send a clear message to the leadership that their actions will have serious consequences, it will compound what was already a grave error of judgement in the way it chose to bring the Faizabad sit-in to an end.

## **Food labs**

AFTER the death of two children from suspected food poisoning in Karachi, the nascent Sindh Food Authority and provincial government have had to face an onslaught of criticism. Formed in May this year, following the Sindh Food Authority Act, 2017, the body has struggled to find the human resources and capital needed to tackle a city as vast as Karachi, let alone the rest of the province. Additionally, it has had to deal with administrative transitions, which has delayed its work. It still does not have a state-of-the-art laboratory to test food samples, a requirement under Section 25. Instead, it relies on a memorandum of understanding with third-party, private laboratories. Currently, talks are under way to inaugurate two mobile labs, equipped with modern technology. Such a move has been implemented with success in other countries; but one wonders why the SFA did not adopt the already equipped lab of KMC's (now defunct) Food Quality Control Department, which had previously been conducting sporadic lab tests on food samples in its jurisdiction. KMC had been working under the Pure Food (Amendment) Act, 1965, in its limited jurisdiction. While a visit by the mayor in 2017 found that most of the lab's equipment and machinery were out of order, and officers were caught taking bribes, a renovated and improved KMC food lab was relaunched three months later. What came of it?

One hopes the SFA improves its record, though it's already off to a tragic start. Following the 18th Amendment, food quality and control come under the domain of the provinces. So the creation of provincial food regulatory bodies is a relatively new exercise. In the SFA, Sindh has now, for the first time, a body to ensure the provision of safe and hygienic food, and to punish those involved in the production or sale of adulterated food or soft drinks. It needs to be given time. But how much time and at what cost is the worrying part.

## **Rethinking Balochistan policy**

THE shocking attack on the Chinese consulate in Karachi last week has turned a spotlight on the long-running, low-level insurgency in Balochistan. The language in the FIR registered by the Sindh Police makes clear the prism through which the state views the problems in Balochistan: hostile external powers are exploiting vulnerable elements within the Baloch population with the aim of undermining the

success of CPEC. Though there is indeed a strong possibility of foreign involvement, the security-centric perspective on Balochistan has failed to deliver peace and prosperity in more than a decade and a half. A fundamental rethink on Balochistan policy is required, though where pressure for positive change can come from is unclear at the moment. Certainly, the intelligence and security apparatus must continue to do their essential work, and where militant attacks can be thwarted or prevented necessary and proportionate action should be taken. But there is a need for the state to turn its attention once again to the political dimensions of the violence in Balochistan.

Even from the perspective of efficacy, the current approach of the state to Balochistan is problematic. CPEC is envisioned as a network of roads and railways connecting trading hubs and special economic zones, which must necessarily be open to the public in order to be successful. Every kilometre of road cannot realistically be protected, and excessive security would smother the economic potential of the trading hubs. Moreover, as the attack in Karachi has demonstrated, militants can strike in other regions of Pakistan in order to bring attention to the insurgency in Balochistan. The relatively small level of violence required to put the state on the defensive, draw international attention and unsettle foreign investors means that a low-level insurgency could continue almost indefinitely. All of those factors suggest that the only reasonable, long-term solution to the violence is to politically engage the disaffected Baloch population and restart a dialogue with separatist leaders in order to bring them back into the political mainstream in a peaceful manner. It is possible to do so if the state is willing to take bold and decisive steps to re-engage disaffected elements within the Baloch population.

With the Balochistan provincial government seemingly content to stay on the sidelines of this vital issue, perhaps Prime Minister Imran Khan can be encouraged to take a greater interest in the political dimensions of the long-running insurgency in Balochistan. Moderate, mainstream Baloch parties and leaders could potentially mediate between the state and the Baloch separatists. Whatever the path chosen, it should be different to what Balochistan has endured for more than a decade and a half.

## **NAB's tactics**

ONCE again, there have been complaints by the opposition in parliament that the National Accountability Bureau is using harsh tactics against individuals in its custody and under investigation — and once again the complaints have been rejected by NAB and downplayed by the treasury benches. The allegations by senior PML-N leaders in parliament that NAB is using heavy-handed, police-like

tactics and torture against individuals in its custody is troubling and ought to be transparently investigated. While the PML-N and other opposition parties have an incentive to exaggerate their claims in order to bring NAB into further disrepute and cast a shadow over ongoing accountability inquiries, the allegations made in parliament on Friday are specific and can be authentically proved true or refuted — if a fair and transparent inquiry is held. Strong denials by NAB and the government will not suffice at this stage, and both NAB and the ruling setup ought to keep in mind that the political onus is on the state to demonstrate that it is abiding by the rules and not mistreating individuals in custody. Indeed, because the opposition may be seeking to discredit the accountability process itself, NAB and the federal government ought to go the extra mile and re-establish the credibility of the accountability body.

What doomed the accountability exercise in previous eras was a strong public perception that it was used as a political weapon, as well as the failure to ensure due process. If evidence or a confession is obtained under duress from a suspect in custody, a conviction by a trial court is almost inevitably overturned on appeal. NAB authorities are surely aware of the history and potential for a vigorous accountability process to be derailed on political grounds. Yet, the accountability body appears heedless of the risks. Unhappily, the PTI-led federal government, too, appears to lack an understanding that the only effective and sustainable accountability exercise is one that fully ensures due process. The PML-N's calls for a parliamentary inquiry into the mistreatment of its leaders in custody may be rebuffed by the government, but even independent legal analysts have questioned the need or lawfulness of NAB's more severe tactics. Moreover, the Supreme Court itself has repeatedly called on NAB to exercise caution and better judgement in pursuing corruption allegations. If NAB fails to heed sensible advice, it may find that even its legitimate successes will be called into question.

## **Murder, not 'honour'**

IN Pakistan, the gap between the law's good intentions and the reality as experienced by citizens appears to be widening in many instances. One area where this is evident is the shocking crime of 'honour' killings, where the life of a woman (and sometimes a man) is extinguished for transgressing the mores of an intensely patriarchal society. From before Samia Sarwar to after Qandeel Baloch, the numbers of such cold-blooded murders over the decades run into the thousands. And the numbers refer only to cases that have been reported and recorded. How many other lives are being wiped out behind the silence of the chaddar aur chardiwari cannot be guessed — even though the country has enacted some reasonable legislation to curb this horrific custom. In 2016, for

example, parliament passed the Anti-Honour Killing Laws (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2014, giving the state the option to act against the suspected killers on its own to make it more difficult for murderers to be 'forgiven' by relatives of the victim.

However, at a news conference in Quetta the other day, women's rights NGO Aurat Foundation presented evidence that the existence of the law does not necessarily prevent the crime. According to data it had gathered, some 50 people — including 30 women — have been killed in Balochistan by their relatives in the name of 'honour' in 2018. It was pointed out that these findings rely on the cases that are brought to the attention of the authorities; the actual number could be much higher. The way forward lies in sensitisation and awareness-raising so that ordinary people are conscious of both their human rights and the law. Much depends on the stringent enforcement of the laws that have been passed. Were the perpetrators of the reported cases to be successfully prosecuted, it would send out a strong signal that 'honour' killing is a crime that the state will not tolerate. But do state institutions have the resolve to eliminate the practice once and for all?

## **A plan for the economy**

THE time for sunshine is over.

As the curtain drops on the first 100 days of the PTI government, the moment of seriousness is upon us.

The economy is running on borrowed time, and the word emanating from government sources is that a new 'plan' is being drawn up.

The news comes after talks with the IMF ended on an inconclusive note last week, and the finance minister briefed his cabinet, the National Assembly and the Economic Advisory Council about the nature of the talks and what lies ahead.

Clearly, the scale of the consultations undertaken by the finance minister, following the inconclusive end of the talks, suggests that something serious is afoot and that this is not a routine continuation of negotiations, as Finance Minister Asad Umar seemed to suggest in some of his television appearances of late.

To top it all, we now have conflicting messages coming out of these consultations.

We hear that a 'Plan B' is being worked out, though talks with the Fund will continue.

We hear that the cabinet and the EAC have both been informed that difficult decisions are now inevitable — but the National Assembly was given an assurance that the government would do nothing to burden the poor at this critical juncture.

Whatever it is, it must now become public.  
And what we all need to see is a plan, not talk of a plan.

One hundred days into its term, the government should now have specifics, not just a broad and directional statement of intent.

And there is a great deal to get specific about at this point in time.

What are the plans for the state-owned enterprises and for the labour force employed in them?

How do the rulers intend to raise revenues without burdening the poor or squeezing those already in the tax net?

What is their plan to address chronic power-sector recovery and liquidity issues, and how do they intend to settle the circular debt?

Should the exchange rate be free-floated?

How do they intend to boost exports without committing to more subsidies for this crucial sector?

Will there be more import substitution, a trade policy, an industrial policy, or will we move towards an export-led model involving greater market freedoms for investors?

The questions are in ample supply, and words of sunshine cannot answer them much longer.

The 100-day mark gives the government the perfect opportunity to shift gears away from the rhetoric and promises, towards action plans and outcomes.

It is time for the government to show its cards, and let us see the change it intends to bring about, beyond just the promises.

This includes the specific objectives that have been set for the medium term, as well as an action plan on how to get there.

Let's get this show on the road.



# **Karachi committee**

THE debate on where the centre's supervision of matters of national importance ends and where the provinces' jurisdiction begins is an old one.

In fact, even after the passage of the landmark 18th Amendment, which gave the provinces many powers over constitutional subjects, the controversy has refused go away as those in favour of centralisation have sought to recapture some of the lost space, while proponents of provincial autonomy have said that any attempt to roll back the amendment will be resisted.

In light of this tussle, there has been an exchange of notes between the Sindh governor and chief minister over a committee proposed for revamping Karachi.

Replying to the letter of the governor informing him of the committee's constitution, Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah has said the body is tantamount to subverting the Constitution and an encroachment of provincial rights.

Two key points need to be addressed here.

Firstly, Pakistan's commercial capital has suffered considerable wear and tear as governments — federal and provincial — have ignored Karachi and left it to fend for itself.

While law and order is better than before, the time when several people were killed on the streets on a single day can be easily recalled.

Moreover, while there have been spurts of infrastructural development (under mayors such as Niamatullah Khan and Mustafa Kamal), by and large the city has seen haphazard growth as encroachments, traffic and lack of planning have turned it into an ever-expanding conurbation with lack of direction.

Karachi needs all the help it can get to transform itself into a liveable, sustainable city.

Unfortunately, the Sindh government, which has taken over most of the powers of the local bodies, has not delivered.

The city's overflowing gutters, piles of trash and lack of a public transport system are just a few examples of neglect.

At the same time, while the federal government should chip in to rebuild Karachi, provincial autonomy must also be respected and the Sindh government taken on board.

Having said that, the provincial administration must also take the mayor and KMC into confidence, along with giving the local bodies the funds and powers necessary to efficiently carry out civic services.

Instead of working at cross purposes and becoming territorial, all three tiers of government must contribute to Karachi's revival while remaining within constitutional parameters.

## **The price of coal**

THE list of victims is never-ending. On May 6, 23 workers were killed when two coal mines collapsed near Quetta. On Aug 12, 15 perished in an explosion in Sanjdi. On Sept 2, two miners died from suffocation in Machh. On Sept 12, a gas explosion in Darra Adam Khel claimed the lives of nine miners. On Oct 14, five workers died from suffocation in Peshawar and Nowshera. And now, three more miners have died from inhaling poisonous substances in Dukki, Balochistan. The body count keeps rising. So routine are the deaths of coal miners that they barely make a ripple in the public's consciousness anymore. In the past eight years, more than 320 occupational deaths of coal miners have been recorded — around 57 of them this year alone.

Coal mines are death traps for the 20,000-strong labour force in Balochistan, and that is forced to toil in 2,500 mines. Miners are forced to work in conditions that resemble modern-day slavery. Many do not receive minimum wages, and there is evidence of debt bondage. The poorly equipped workforce also exhibits a high prevalence of respiratory illnesses. There are several reasons for the continued exploitation. First, the negligence of powerful owners — many of them hold political office — who do not invest in adequate infrastructure and training. Second, the attitude of contractors who force miners to work overtime. Third, the poor implementation of safety standards. Fourth, the total lack of effective unionisation. A lack of accountability allows private investors free rein to maximise profit on the back of exploited labour. Despite documented evidence, the chief inspector of mines in Balochistan has not prosecuted a single mine owner or contractor under the (admittedly outdated) Mines Act, 1923. It is imperative for Pakistan to endorse the ILO's Safety and Health in Mines Convention, 1995, and the Code on Safety and Health in Underground Coal Mines, 2006. The only impediments are the

interference of vested interests and the criminal indifference of those who believe the poor are unworthy of rights.

## **Pakistan's own war**

PRIME MINISTER Imran Khan has adjusted his rhetoric to several realities of high office, but in one crucial area he continues to cling to a flawed understanding of recent history.

During a visit to the North and South Waziristan tribal districts on Monday, Mr Khan told a group of tribal elders that an outside war had been imposed on Pakistan to fight, and that the PTI government would never allow for such a war to be fought again on Pakistani soil.

The prime minister's words were jarring both for their content and where he said them.

The Waziristan agencies were some of the hardest hit by the Taliban insurgency and are still struggling to return to normality.

It appeared that Mr Khan was belittling the tremendous sacrifices and losses of the very people on the front lines of a fierce war fought by the Pakistani state to defend the people against a vicious and determined enemy.

The occasion surely called for greater sensitivity than was displayed.

More troubling is Mr Khan's unwillingness to reassess his own flawed perceptions of the wars that have been waged in the region this century.

The war in Afghanistan was not, at least to begin with, comparable to the war in Iraq.

The war in Afghanistan may have been led by the US, but it was authorised by the UN, and dozens of countries participated in the effort.

The many mistakes that the US has made in Afghanistan and the historic disaster that was the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq have obscured a fundamental reality that the war in Afghanistan was a UN-sanctioned effort that Pakistan had a legal obligation to support.

If Mr Khan's view on the war in Afghanistan is wrong-headed, his views about the war against terrorism, militancy and extremism inside Pakistan are reckless.

From the Pakistani Taliban insurgency to the sectarian attacks inside Pakistan, the roots of militant violence in this country can be traced to the myopic and self-serving policies of the state itself.

Indeed, past and present civilian and military leaders have not only asserted that the fight against militancy is Pakistan's own war that must be fought for Pakistan's sake but many in the national leadership have also recognised the strategic and policy mistakes that allowed militancy, terrorism and violent extremism to erupt in this country.

Mr Khan's unwillingness to recognise the war being fought by the state inside Pakistan as a war of necessity and for the survival of this country is not a tenable position for the prime minister.

Particularly when it comes to the fight against violent extremism and the remnants of terrorist networks in the country, the civilian side of the security apparatus will need to lead from the front.

The prime minister's thinking about and approach to the fight against militancy must evolve.

## **Data on disabled**

ACCESS to gainful employment is one of the many challenges that people with disabilities face in a society where their needs and concerns largely do not register with policymakers. Hopefully, that challenge, at least for some of them, may become less insurmountable in the near future. The Punjab government on Monday informed the Supreme Court during the hearing of a case about the rights of the disabled, that it had approved a management information system for online registration and assessment of such individuals. According to the report submitted in the apex court, this will generate data enabling people with disabilities to more efficiently locate suitable jobs against the 3pc quota for them in the public and private sectors.

None of the provinces implement the official job quota for the disabled in a consistent manner, so it is encouraging that Punjab is putting in place a more streamlined and modern system. The crux of the problem, however, lies in our backward-looking attitudes towards disability of any kind. Our society considers people with disabilities — which can be physical, mental, cognitive, developmental, etc — an irrelevance, even a matter of shame. Until there is a change, they will continue to remain marginalised — indeed, invisible. For, according to the results

of the 1998 census, people with disabilities comprised only 2.38pc of the population. According to Census 2017, they number even less — 0.48 of the total, a drop of 80pc. How can policies be properly formulated or adequate funding allocated when the government is working with such implausible figures? In fact, the decision to count the disabled separately was taken on the first day of the census itself, that too on the apex court's orders; the UNFPA monitoring mission's report noted that enumerators seldom asked the question at all. Few commercial establishments, including educational institutions, offices, etc put any thought into facilitating the disabled, which increases their isolation; it is estimated that 90pc of children with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries do not go to school. Even high achievers among the disabled meet with institutional prejudice. Pakistan got its first visually impaired civil judge last June; until the Supreme Court intervened, the lawyer was being denied the chance of being elevated to the bench despite having topped the relevant exam. Only an inclusive system that affords them respect rather than pity, opportunity rather than charity, can tap the true potential of the disabled.

## Yasir Shah's feat

YASIR SHAH has done it again. The astute leg-spinner has won yet another Test match for Pakistan. However, this time round, Yasir has surpassed himself, claiming 14 wickets to equal a Pakistan record, and pounding the New Zealanders in Dubai to give his team a series-levelling win in the three-Test series. In more ways than one, the New Zealand series was seen as a watershed of sorts for Yasir. With some doubts about the Swabi-born bowler's fitness and form after a hip injury that forced him to miss the Ireland and England tour early this year, Yasir had a stiff challenge before him. But he has more than proved his merit. He claimed eight wickets in the first Test at Abu Dhabi where a dramatic New Zealand victory upstaged his performance with the ball. In the second Test in Dubai though, he became only the fourth bowler in the annals of the game to snap up 10 wickets in a single day. Hogging the limelight is nothing new for him. Since his Test debut against Australia in 2014, Yasir, who bears an uncanny resemblance to the legendary Abdul Qadir both in bowling and stature, has been in the habit of making the headlines — a 10-wicket haul at Lord's in a historic win over formidable England, a shock three-month suspension in 2016 following the inadvertent use of banned substances, a nasty hip injury early this year, and now a brilliant comeback.

Like all cricketing greats before him, Yasir has experienced a lean patch in his four-year career. However, consistency is his virtue, and his impressive career record is a testament to that. The leg-spinner, who raced to 100 wickets in 17 Tests and 150 wickets in 27 Tests, is just four wickets away from achieving the quickest 200-wicket haul in cricketing history. The third Test in Abu Dhabi will be Yasir's 33rd and he looks set to break the world record held by Australia's Clarrie Grimmet for the fastest 200 wickets in 36 Test matches.

## **India's intransigent approach**

THE inauguration of the Kartarpur corridor had many of the ingredients for what a normalised relationship between Pakistan and India could look like: the governments of Pakistan and India working together to facilitate people-to-people contact and religious tourism; Indian officials visiting Pakistan in a relaxed, even joyful manner; and a speech by Prime Minister Imran Khan that hit all the right notes of amity and regional peace and prosperity.

Mr Khan made no mention of the unfortunate diplomatic flap in September, when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi rejected in extraordinarily harsh language Mr Khan's offer to restart bilateral dialogue, and chose, instead, to focus on the theme of common responsibility.

"There have been mistakes on both sides ... We should not live in the past. It should be used to learn lessons," Mr Khan said yesterday.

Unhappily, the Indian government rushed to smother the goodwill generated by the inauguration of the corridor, and once again doused hopes that bilateral dialogue may be restarted soon.

Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj's extraordinary comments yesterday leave no doubt that the hawks in the Indian ruling party and establishment continue to control Indian policy towards Pakistan.

What is less clear is what Ms Swaraj is hoping to achieve with her fierce rhetoric against Pakistan.

Perhaps the Indian foreign minister wanted to counter the joyous scenes from Narowal district yesterday that would otherwise have dominated the news cycle in both countries.



It was surely a muddled approach to achieving a small, though highly symbolic, breakthrough.

Ms Swaraj has stated that there will be no bilateral dialogue while there are “terrorist activities” inside India, allegedly sponsored or organised by Pakistan, but that is a roundabout way of saying there will be no dialogue at all in any circumstances.

While India may have some legitimate complaints, as does Pakistan against India, there is no plausible scenario in which not talking to Pakistan at all will address the issues on both sides.

For Pakistan, the challenge will remain to keep open the offer of dialogue to India, while doing whatever can be done to reduce regional tensions.

The Kartarpur corridor is an example of how Pakistan may be able to slowly win hearts and minds in India, something that could eventually put pressure on the Indian state to restart dialogue with Pakistan.

However, Indian intransigence and bloody-mindedness risks the possibility of hawks in Pakistan demanding a response to India.

The earlier brash rejection of dialogue by India eventually elicited a strong and undiplomatic response from Mr Khan.

The PTI government is still finding its feet and has already suffered domestic blows to its mandate and authority.

Prime Minister Modi and his government should pause and reflect on what it is they hope to achieve by repeatedly slapping back a hand offered in peace.

## **Gas pricing decision**

RECENT decisions made by the government suggest that it is being tempted by the ‘easy’ path forward in a conundrum that it faces. As Pakistan’s reliance on imported gas grows, the fact that LNG is double the cost of domestic gas is becoming an increasingly severe problem. At the moment, the problem has been dealt with by shuffling the priorities on the merit order list, and relegating CNG stations to the bottom of the pile. But now, with the increasing resort to imported LNG to meet growing future demands, the huge price difference between the imported and locally produced product is becoming impossible to ignore. Recently, the issue thrust itself onto the government’s agenda when textile exporters from

Punjab brought it before the finance minister, asking for the price of gas to be equalised between Sindh and Punjab; it seems the finance minister was cornered into agreeing to subsidise LNG for Punjab-based exporters. The matter again came to the fore at the last ECC meeting when it was agreed that an uninterrupted supply of gas to all consumers in winter would be ensured, with the authorities relying on LNG to fill the gap that arises when demand from the domestic sector skyrockets as temperatures plummet across Punjab and KP. This time it was decided to use the 'gas bank' mechanism to smoothen out the price impact, but even with this there is no getting around the huge disparity in price between imported and domestically produced gas.

The temptation to use subsidies as a means of not facing the unpleasant decisions that price disparity presents is understandable. But the fact is that subsidising LNG is a terrible idea, for the same reason that subsidising imported petrol and diesel is a terrible idea and was done away with a decade ago. As the economy comes to rely increasingly on imported LNG, the policy thrust needs to be in the direction of closing the pricing gap through reforms in the gas sector, including pricing reforms, rather than growing reliance on subsidies. That is the hard road forward, but it is, unfortunately, the only road forward too. Over the decades, we have grown accustomed to taking natural gas for granted, but those days are now over. Industry must be weaned off its reliance on cheap fuel, no matter how tough the politics involved in doing so.

## **Helmets for road safety**

ON Dec 1, Punjab will move to the next stage in its campaign to ensure motorcyclists travel safely by making it mandatory for those riding pillion in Lahore to wear helmets. The rule will then be implemented province-wise. The step, urged by the Lahore High Court, has come after progressively stricter imposition of the helmet rule on motorcycle riders. During the latest drive, some 324,000 motorcyclists have been issued tickets for not wearing this essential, protective headgear while on the road. Along the way, there have been some innovative proposals. One suggestion is that district administrations should disallow the sale of fuel to bikers without helmets. Certainly, that may help if petrol pumps comply with instructions. And even as this step and other, more drastic measures are being debated, an ever-increasing number of helmet-headed bikers are visible on the roads.

The primary responsibility here lies with the bikers, and it should not have taken so much persuasion on the part of the authorities for them to don helmets. Yet, this has been far from a silent obedience of orders. In arguments similar to those

advanced in the first stage of making helmets mandatory for motorcyclists, many have objected to the extension of the rule to those riding pillion — in total disregard of safety and the fact that motorcycle travel comes with a set of restrictions. Those protesting against the mandatory use of helmets are now saying that besides the fact that this headgear is cumbersome, there is the weather to consider. Besides, they want children and women to be exempted from wearing helmets. They speak as if pillion passengers are less exposed to the risk of head injuries than the rider. They must disabuse themselves of this notion; riders and passengers face the same level of risk and the rules must apply to both. Either they should comply with the safety rules or not travel on motorbikes. There are no two ways about it.

## **After 100 days...**

IN truth, any federal government would struggle to make substantive achievements in its first 100 days in office. Moreover, the PTI's penchant for snazzy politics and perhaps Prime Minister Imran Khan's haste to demonstrate his government is prepared for the demands of high office put undue pressure on the ruling setup to deliver quick results.

That was evident in yesterday's PR-heavy, substance-light ceremony held in Islamabad to mark the PTI's first 100 days in office.

Nothing particularly new or meaningful about policy matters was revealed and the achievements that were mentioned are modest at best. Indeed, more notable are the crises that the government has had to contend with than its achievements so far. The financial crisis whose basic contours were set before the PTI government took office ensured a faltering start for the rulers — and was perhaps rendered somewhat worse by indecision on the part of the PTI's economic team.

The historic Supreme Court verdict that at long last delivered justice to a woman wrongfully sentenced to death led to a direct confrontation with violent religious extremists and caused the government to stumble badly. It remains to be seen if the crackdown in more recent days will continue apace or quickly lose steam.

Hostile governments in the US and India contributed to a difficult foreign climate, while Prime Minister Khan was forced to abandon his pledge to not travel abroad early in his term and had to tend to relations with Saudi Arabia, China and the UAE. The recognition of the importance of the foreign component of the prime minister's job, though, is perhaps a positive development for Mr Khan.

But not all crises were externally imposed.

The continuation of a bruising style of politics has brought the PTI rulers in conflict with the opposition in parliament and has kept the coalition government in a more precarious political position than it ought to be.

Yesterday, Mr Khan mentioned legislation that his government intends to introduce in parliament, but legislation will not be possible without notifying committees and opposition support, particularly in the upper house. Similarly, Mr Khan once again touted the tourism potential of the country, including religious tourism.

The prime minister is right, but tourism is unlikely to take off when violent religious extremists can effectively shut down the country and paralyse transport network for days.

Finally, there is a contradiction in Mr Khan's economic philosophy that could hamper his government's medium-term plans: is economic growth about bringing back allegedly looted wealth stashed abroad, or is it about creating a business- and investment-friendly economic climate?

Corruption certainly inflicts a high and unacceptable cost on the Pakistani state and people, and poor governance is tied to corruption. But wealth generation is the most reliable and obvious path to lift millions of Pakistanis out of poverty.

Prime Minister Khan will need to sharpen his focus in the right direction.

## **Shameful numbers**

THE grim reality is encapsulated in a new UN report — the ruling elite in Pakistan, more so than elsewhere, is shamefully, even criminally, neglectful of its people.

According to the Social Outlook for Asia and the Pacific, Pakistan is among the countries in the Asia-Pacific region that spend the least on social protection, education and healthcare.

So little does the country invest in its people in fact, that for the poorest 40pc of the population to see a reduction in the absolute income gap from the average of the population, it would take an astounding 150 years.

Not only is that a national disgrace, it also means we will be unable to meet our international commitment to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals 2030.

Social protection denotes policies and programmes that can improve the quality of people's lives and reduce their vulnerability to natural disasters and unforeseen events.

According to the UN report, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and the Philippines can eliminate extreme poverty by 2030 with "judiciously targeted investment in social protection"; Pakistan, one presumes from its absence from this list, is lagging too far behind.

Even within a group of countries with similar income profiles, notes the report, there are variations in the levels of social development spending.

The results are significant; the higher the investment, the lower the poverty.

Political will is key.

That is what makes the difference between a ruling elite preoccupied largely with one-upmanship and wheeling and dealing, versus one that has some sense of responsibility.

The numbers speak for themselves: nearly 23m children are out of school; Pakistan was in second to last spot, just above Yemen, in last year's global gender index; the country spends only 0.9pc of its GDP on health, etc.

There has undoubtedly been some progress in certain sectors but it is too scattered and gradual to make enough of an impact in the face of a burgeoning population, yet another critical issue that has received scant attention.

In fact, as per figures released by the UNDP earlier this year, Pakistan has the slowest human development growth among all South Asian countries bar Afghanistan.

The paranoia that has seized the state and led to many INGOs being forced out of the country will further drag down efforts to improve the provision of basic services.

Perhaps the PTI government, which has a strong social development agenda, can turn the tide.

## **South Punjab province**

FOR decades, there has been talk, but now the timing appears right to move towards the creation of a South Punjab province. The Executive Council on Creation of South Punjab has had its second round of meetings this week. Nothing really stands in the way of the PTI to fulfil its promise of establishing a fifth province. Other than PML-N's disagreement over whether there should be two instead of one province, there is largely consensus among the major political parties on the need for a new province along ethnic and linguistic lines. If implemented, the province would have three administrative divisions — Multan, Bahawalpur and Dera Ghazi Khan — and 11 districts: Multan, Khanewal, Lodhran, Vehari, Dera Ghazi Khan, Muzaffargarh, Layyah, Rajanpur, Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan and Bahawalnagar. Administratively, the creation of a new province in Punjab can lead to more organised and efficient governance. Before Independence, Punjab had been governed by two administrative centres — Lahore and Multan — while Bahawalpur remained an independent princely state. But the Seraiki-speaking belt now constitutes one of the most neglected and poverty-stricken parts of the country. The region also has one of the highest rates of violence against women, as well as deplorable infant and maternal mortality statistics. In the absence of progressive governance, health and education have suffered and lagged behind the rest of Punjab.

Since the 1970s, Seraiki-speaking nationalists have been pointing out cultural and historical differences between south Punjab and north and central Punjab. Their arguments do not stem from a xenophobic vision or an imagined sense of persecution, but are based on the right to political representation. The creation of a South Punjab province would lead to separate, and hopefully equitable, distribution of funding from the centre. A population of over 200m people spread across four provinces does not make sense administratively. If successful, the creation of the new province could be an achievement this government can boast about during the next election season.