BUDGET 2019 IN VIEW ...
The Budget Day

Dr. Abid Qaiyum Suleri

It is the budget day again. Some say today the PTI government will present its third federal budget since coming into power; this group also counts the two mini budgets presented by Asad Umar and hence considers Budget 2019-20 the PTI’s third budget. Others are saying that none of the three budgets reflect the PTI’s economic vision and its electoral promises. According to the second group, the two mini budgets were actually mid-course corrections in the Miftah-Abbasi budget, whereas today’s budget is prepared to meet the prior actions for an IMF agreement. They argue that the PTI government will not get a chance to present its own budget till the conclusion of, or premature exit from, the next IMF program.

Call it the PTI’s budget or an IMF-directed budget, to me the federal budget being presented today will not be much different from the first five budgets of the PML-N government. I am saying the first five because the May 2018 budget presented by Miftah Ismail was a bit unrealistic. Like the earlier five budgets, the entry point for today’s budget will be fiscal deficit agreed by the Fund. Expected revenue and expenditures would be balanced so as to remain within the agreed fiscal deficit.

GST, withdrawal of non-targeted subsidies, increase in rate of taxes for non-filers, and increase in rate of taxes on items/services used by the upper middle/upper class would be the major revenue generation tools. Prices of electricity, gas and petroleum are no more part of the budget numbers. They are determined by quasi-independent regulators, Nepra and Ogra respectively, at frequent intervals so there will be no surprises on energy prices today. The subsidy on energy and energy circular debt make part of the government’s liabilities. However, the PML-N government stopped giving energy circular debt numbers in the budgeted expenditures. A deflated energy subsidy figure was provided among budgeted expenditures to remain within the fiscal deficit target. The same tradition will be followed this time too.

Budgets are just estimated numbers of income and expenditures so they cannot be pro- or anti-people. However, if the earlier five budgets were anti-poor or anti-business, then today’s budget will also be anti-poor or anti-business and vice-versa.

In order to assess how close today’s budget would be with the PTI’s economic vision, let us recall what PM Khan is aiming for. He wants to turn Pakistan into a welfare state, a replica of ‘Riasat-e-Madina’. This needs to be reflected in the expenditure side of the budget. The revenue generation side needs to be assessed against the PTI’s election manifesto which talked of reviving the economy through curbing corruption, improving governance, bringing in economic reforms, changing the elite capture culture and introducing a transparent tax system where the tax burden would be equally distributed to all.

It implies that on the revenue side, the PTI – not only to fulfil its electoral promise, but also to complete the prior actions for an IMF deal – would attempt to break the status quo, which is always difficult and upsets many.

In order to stop elite capture and to distribute the burden of taxes equally, the PTI would be ending tax exemptions and reliefs given in the name of export promotion, food security, and job creation to a select few. The end of the zero-rated regime would upset owners and consumers of the beneficiary industries. Today’s budget could also upset non-filers as they will have to pay more at the time of property or vehicle registration, and or while buying business and first-class air-tickets. It would upset benami account holders as in order to comply with the FATF action points, government will be tough on benami account holders. The budget will likely also upset non-targeted subsidy recipients since, if they don’t fall below a certain income threshold, they will have to pay more for the goods and services they utilize. And it will upset salaried persons because the unsustainable relief given to them in the last budget through revised tax slabs and tax rates will be reverted.

On top of everything, the budget will upset the PTI’s own supporters and voters as they voted for a PTI that, in opposition, termed going to the IMF, increase in energy prices and depreciation of rupee as extort policy measures that are used by corrupt governments to compensate for their corruption.

PM Khan has rightly realized that his correlation between tough economic policy measures and corruption was based on a false binary. That is why,
after initial reluctance, he approved of taking tough economic policy measures to improve fiscal and current account deficits. Currently he is trying to break the status quo, which would require both change management and perception management. One of the problems with Pakistan’s previous IMF programmes was that none of the governments politically owned it, as they felt they were compelled to reach out to the IMF because of the follies of their predecessors. On the revenue side, the program is tough and its pace and sequencing is even tougher. However, it is quite close to the structural reforms the PTI wanted to bring which is why the party should politically own it.

On the expenditures side, the IMF talks of strengthening social safety nets and emphasizes on targeted subsidies. Lack of fiscal cushion will not allow PM Khan to turn Pakistan into a welfare state in the next couple of years. However, in the medium run, a more equal and transparent distribution of tax burden, a comprehensive plan for cost-recovery in the energy sectors and state-owned enterprises will help save and divert scarce government resources towards a substantial increase in social spending.

The PTI wrongly stigmatized economic structural reforms in its 'anti-corruption' campaign during its days in opposition and is now facing the music. The current opposition parties should also keep in mind that they should not over-stigmatize fiscal discipline under the forthcoming IMF program. If fiscal discipline is not achieved and the chronic issues facing Pakistan’s economy are not addressed, then the opposition as ‘government in waiting’ should be ready to go to the IMF whenever it gets a chance to come to power.

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**Unravelling the budget**

*Dr. Vaqar Ahmed*

In several ways, the Budget 2019-20 is a deviation from PTI’s manifesto which promises making Pakistan’s manufacturing exports competitive. The inputs of export-oriented sectors namely textile, leather, surgical items, carpets and sports goods, which in the past fiscal year were allowed zero-rated sales tax will now face a standard rate of tax. The zero-rating of utilities allowed for these sectors has also been withdrawn. Higher prices will now also be seen in the case of LNG and CNG fuels.

This axe falls on the export-oriented sector at a time when manufacturing exports could not see much increase even after currency depreciation. Additionally, high policy rate announced by the central bank has made the cost of accessing the working capital and credit for fixed investment expensive. Despite alternate arrangements, such as the launch of promissory notes, a large part of liquidity of exporting entities remains stuck with Federal Board of Revenue in the form of delayed tax refunds, duty drawback of taxes, duty drawback of local taxes and levies, withholding tax refunds, and customs duty rebate.

Some of the sector-specific taxation measures could also negatively impact the foreign direct investment (FDI). For example, while the new investment regime in the auto sector had created some interest of foreign vehicle manufacturers, the Budget 2019-20 has now slapped duties on vehicles of all engine sizes. Again, this is one sector which is already getting stifled due to the falling value of the rupee. Likewise, some of the costs faced by the construction industry will also see an increase. Most notably, the hike in duties faced by the cement industry will be easily passed on to the end-consumer, ultimately leading to reduced demand. Negative implications could also be seen of the Prime Minister’s ambition of providing low-cost housing.

Perhaps the most startling and unexpected taxes have been seen in the food and food processing sector. The increase in duties imposed on cooking oil, sugar, cream, milk and other household items shows the desperation of a government which is willing to tax even the most essential needs of the citizens. Of course, such actions have implications for the future of food security and nutrition in the country.
The local industry, particularly real estate, building, iron, steel, cement, construction services and accessories, and consumer durable goods, has traditionally benefited from the infrastructure disbursement under the public sector development program (PSDP).

Unfortunately, the PSDP for the fiscal year 2019-20 has been slashed by almost 25 percent with negligible allocation for projects falling under China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) program. This situation could have been averted had the government taken early decisions to reduce the size of the federal government and its affiliate departments; and had it pulled out its resources dedicated to keep the loss-making public sector enterprises afloat.

Incentives to become an exporter in industries other than the traditionally zero-rated sectors seem weak. The Competition Commission of Pakistan, which could have helped in increasing the pace of competition policy reforms, desired enterprise-level learning and market development of non-traditional products, today faces issues of its own.

Instead of moving towards consolidation and merging the existing ministries and divisions, the government still seems in an expansionary mode. To reduce poverty, the government came up with the idea of forming a new ministry for poverty reduction. One wonders, what is the objective of having a Ministry of Planning, Development & Reform?

This milieu will be particularly challenging for new exporters, potential exporters, small and medium enterprises (SMEs). With rising cost of electricity, gas and oil there will be a clear increase in the cost of production. The government’s own plan to expedite the ease of doing business lost speed once the Chairperson of Board of Investment at the Prime Minister’s secretariat recently resigned, citing the government’s inability to operationalize a one-window operation for current and potential investors.

The budget also remains silent on how compliance costs faced by honest taxpayers could be reduced. Currently, Pakistan has one of the highest man-hours dedicated to tax compliance. With new and multiple tax authorities emerging in all provinces, corporate taxpayers are required to file multiple returns (within a single tax year) with multiple tax bodies and also face audits and hearings at multiple desks within each of these bodies.

The future growth of SMEs and potential exporters will critically hinge on the availability of credit. The reality, however, remains that even at high policy rates, accessing credit still remains a challenge for most SMEs. Even the access to Export Finance Scheme and Long Term Financing Facility is not without its own intricacies.

The government’s narrative in the budget also advocates that the ambition to pursue low-cost housing program will kick start the local industry. However, industry representatives have informed that even acquiring land for such projects could hit a snag, as seen in the case of special economic zones (SEZs) across the country which even after several years of CPEC’s initiation could not be operationalized. According to the doing business ranking by the World Bank Group there remain over a dozen administrative processes requiring over 250 days to get the permit before starting a construction on-ground.

The same ranking puts Pakistan among the poorly performing countries in terms of ‘trading across border’ and the costs of both border- and documentary-compliance remain higher than competitors. The budget speech suggested that the government aims to help Pakistani enterprises integrate in global value chains. However, this in reality is not possible in an environment where taxes on imports are being increased. The ‘Made in Pakistan’ or ‘Pakistan first’ slogan is not helped by the imposition of taxes on imports of raw material, machinery, and other intermediate inputs.

The author made an attempt to ask industry players what in fact are their expectations from the PTI government? This should be taken not just as a proposal to give final shape to Budget 2019-20 but may also help PTI’s future fiscal policy.

None asked for tax exemptions! All, in fact, wanted ease in tax compliance and reduction in costs associated with interfacing with tax departments. Second, they would like to see uninterrupted supply of energy and related utilities in industrial areas and overtime reduction in business costs allocated to energy. Third, a reduction in regulatory costs is desired.

Currently, all expenses related to municipality, building, environment, labor, worker safety, health safety, and consumer rights regulations go much beyond the statutory costs due to the element of corruption. Fourth, the progressive industry players want the government to share the financial risks associated with research and development, and introduction of new technologies.
On the same point, it was stressed that some sharing of costs to improve quality of labor should also be a future priority. The Export Development Fund could have helped achieve this. However, considering EDF to be fungible in the budget has often allowed the government to use this for deficit financing and not for the uplift of industry.

Fifth, incentives to become an exporter in industries other than the traditionally zero-rated sectors seem weak. The Competition Commission of Pakistan, which could have helped in increasing the pace of competition policy reforms, desired enterprise-level learning and market development of non-traditional products, today faces issues of its own which overtime has weakened the writ of the commission. Lack of incentives for self-discovery by private enterprises can also undermine Pakistan’s pursuit to effectively embrace the fourth industrial revolution. – Courtesy The News, International – Islamabad, dated June 16, 2019.

Inflated Expectations

Sajid Amin Javed

Despite multiple rate hikes, SBP-IBA Consumer Confidence Index [CCI] of March 2019 suggests that people in Pakistan are expecting inflation to soar in next six months-till Sep 2019. They expect rise in overall, food, energy and other areas. Most importantly, highest inflation is expected for energy where index increased to 63.3 in March from 59.0 in January. This is followed by food inflation showing an increase in index from 59.9 in January to 62.4 in March, 2019. Higher value of index shows that people expect higher inflation in next six months.

One of the primary factors determining inflation is people’s expectations of future inflation. People estimate future inflation based on ongoing inflation rate, past inflation trends, economic outlook of the country and monetary policy credibility. Higher current and past inflation would make them to expect higher inflation in future. They will expect a low inflation in future if they trust in central banks credibility to control inflation. And so on.

You must be thinking that why inflation expectations matter for SBP and what can it do to manage these expectations. Let me first briefly explain how inflation expectations translate to actual inflation. Assume you are a laborer and meeting your employer for a job contract. Don’t forget that contract is at least for one year. Next twelve months you will get the wage what is decided now, at the time of contract. What wage will you demand?

Definitely, you will be asking a wage which covered expected rise in prices in next twelve months. Higher the inflation you expected higher will be the wage demanded. This wage is direct contribution to cost of production. And, the cost push inflation is there as you expected. This channel however seems to be weak in situations where mass unemployment prevails because of slowing economy. Workers, in this situation, may not be in a position to bargain and implement their demand of higher wage. More or less, this is the case in Pakistan.

However, expectations of firms or employer are driving the present inflation in Pakistan. SBP, in its last monetary policy statement, confirmed higher inflation in future because of depreciating rupee, further hike in interest rate and future increase in utility bills. Businesses are increasing the prices of their product now in order to keep their future profits intact. Also, uncertainty about future inflation pushes the lenders to charge higher interest rate to avoid any financial losses. Cost of investment increases. Cost push inflation is there. The circle, if not checked, goes on.

Central banks control inflation through tight monetary policy aka increasing interest rate and through managing the expectations of individuals and firms about future changes in prices. The latter is almost missing in Pakistan. The SBP seems to have decided to speak through interest rate hike only. It seems to have put itself in a difficult chase. Interest rate seems to be following the inflation. And, inflation continues to surge. Very clearly, SBP has not been able to anchor low inflation expectations so far.

To every odds of inflation, the bank is responding through interest rate. The higher it perceives inflation, the higher the interest rate hike is. But SBP needs to understand that there is going to be limit to interest rate hikes. Will SBP keep reacting through higher and higher interest rate? It is not possible. I believe that
SBP has already used the space available. It may maintain the 12.25pc rate for next two to three monetary policy announcements — six to nine months. Otherwise, investments will dip, consumption will fall and cost of production will rise. It will fasten economic slowdown exponentially.

The interest rate hike policy of bank seems exclusively focused on “controlling the inflation” through controlling “central bank financing of deficit”. Let’s agree it does well on the later. Will it stop inflation? It may not. What alternatives sources of revenue the government has? Obviously, it will further increase prices of energy, petrol and gases. Or, will cut subsidies. It will create almost same scale of inflationary pressure. Not only that it may yet again “dilute the impact of last monetary policy” but will also reinforce the higher future inflation expectations. This is already cemented by last part of the statement where future surge in utility prices is mentioned. What are the options then?

SBP has to manage the expectations of people. Better to start now. It needs to speak through monetary policy statement to manage the expectations. A reading of the statement of 20th May clearly suggests that the bank is actually anchoring high inflation expectations. The statement broadly concludes that we are raising another 150bps because of “recent exchange rate depreciation; (iii) an elevated fiscal deficit and its increased monetization, and (iv) potential adjustments in utility tariffs. These reasons are self-fulfilling prophesies for further rise in inflation.

Clearly, the bank needs to speak through its policy statement more than through interest rate. Monetary policy statement needs to go beyond conveying the decision of monetary policy committee. The right reasons for the interest rate changes need to be clearly spelled out. For example, experts and masses believe that present rate hike is the IMF’s condition. But the statement is silent on it. This may create questions on credibility of the statement and the bank which directly contributes to inflation expectation of people.

Similarly, SBP needs to speak on reasons for depreciation of rupee clearly. Experts yet again believe that rupee was allowed to fall flat to create room for interest rate hike. This may have served the purpose, but has added to uncertainty about rupee rate. Uncertainty about future interest and rupee rate are clearly creating inflation uncertainty in Pakistan. This will push people to expect higher inflation in future. Firms/investors are not able to calculate real interest rate with confidence.

These factors then feed into contract and pricing of firms. Unchecked, it may leave the monetary policy ineffective to achieve the goal of price stability and stable interest rate yet again. Periods of higher inflation erode confidence of people in predicting future inflation. Management of inflation expectations during these times demands a careful communication. The credibility of monetary policy should therefore be improved through better communication strategies. – Courtesy The News, International, Islamabad, dated June 9, 2019.

Economy on a Rocky Road

Dr Vaqar Ahmed

Earlier this month, the then Finance Minister Asad Umar, on the launch of a ‘draft’ medium term economic framework, said that the roadmap still requires consultation which will be finalized after the IMF program. Two weeks later, under pressure from all quarters, he resigned from his position as the finance minister. I would argue that the much-promised economic roadmap (and that too, half cooked) came very late, and at a time when markets were not willing to believe the PTI government’s narrative. For a moment, let’s recap the ‘economic sins’ committed during the past eight months.

From day one the government exhibited poor understanding of the current account gap and fiscal deficit. With both at record high level, the economic managers could not reach a consensus whether to approach IMF or not. Ultimately by the time IMF was engaged, there was a complete chaos in the financial markets.

The oil and utility prices were increased without a plan in place to bring about structural changes in the power and gas supply chains. Instead of allowing the currency to find its new value once and for all, the
episodes of rupee nose-diving continued in a very erratic manner adding to the uncertainty faced by the business community. The declining value of currency was termed necessary for boosting exports — a naïve argument at a time when the interest rates were being amplified and fiscal measures to control imports of input and raw material were in place. Ultimately exports also could not post an uptick.

The growing fiscal deficit needed urgent remedial measures. Tax revenue targets were missed. The government announced two mini-budgets which again exhibited inexperience and in the end could not deliver the desired tax-related gains. On the expenditure side, the government’s decision to wait long for the energy sector taskforce to devise a plan, rather than immediately take the painful measures (known to most experts) and curb circular debt, proved to be a mistake.

Similarly, no credible plan to manage losses of public sector enterprises was in place. Sarmayah-e-Pakistan Limited was established to stop PSEs from further bleeding — a measure which will only deliver in the longer term. Pakistan Banao Certificates were launched at a time when diaspora had lost confidence in the government’s capacity to turnaround the weak economy. Clarity on way forward — for PSEs dormant, large receivables of energy companies, and debt restructuring at these enterprises — was never there. The result was an expansion in fiscal deficit and record high inflation in the month of March.

With the finance minister gone and significant reshuffling of the federal government, the question remains where should the new finance head start from? Putting in place a strong economic team can certainly act as a confidence booster for donors and foreign investors. The important positions at Planning Commission, Ministries of Finance, Commerce, and Energy and tax authorities remained vacant this year.

Second, to end the utter economic uncertainly all around, bring the IMF agreement to a closure. This will require some compromises which in the short term may be painful. However, such an agreement can help Pakistan raise medium to long term assistance from other multilateral and bilateral sources. This will also instill stronger confidence in business community aiming to lock themselves in long term investment contracts.

Third, no unmitigated cheques for energy generation and distribution companies and other public sector enterprises. Those with weak probability of revival require a disposal plan immediately to stop further bleeding of exchequer. The time to think about other possibilities, including public private partnerships and outsourcing management of these entities, is long gone. The confidence in the new plan will come through strengthening of Fiscal Responsibility and Debt Limitation law.

Fourth, revival of growth will require stronger public investment, at least in the short term. This can happen through boosting of tax revenues by: a) doing away with DC rates in the real estate sector and allowing transactions on market value, b) collecting (tax) liability from agriculture incomes just like any other form of income, and c) rationalization of exemptions
from income tax, customs duties, and sales tax. At the same time, provincial governments would need to be convinced to improve their own tax effort so that greater room for welfare spending can be created under provincial annual development plans.

Finally, while these reforms and adjustments remain critical to Pakistan’s future economic stabilization and growth, perhaps most important today is the task of putting food on the tables of the poorest of the poor. In this regard, the new finance minister will need to take measures that can help the PTI government deliver on the demands of the economically unprivileged population. Therefore, budget allocations for social protection and social safety nets as committed under the ‘Ehsaas’ program need to be protected and expanded overtime. – Courtesy The News, International, Islamabad dated April 21, 2019.

The disillusionment driving the yellow vests

Dr. Nathalene Reynolds

There can be no doubt that the tenacity of the protesters, who started the yellow vest movement in November 2018, and who have so far achieved only meagre success in terms of direct outcomes, has astonished the French politicians.

Historians of the Left, anxious to portray the French Revolution of 1789 as a glorious phenomenon in which ordinary people led the nation to a new era, often refrained from a more critical review of that period.

A peasant revolt (or jacquerie) was the result of a crowd expressing their rejection of the established order before submitting to it again, giving up fatalistically on the hope of overthrowing it. The revolution, on the other hand, reflected the will of the propertied, in this case, the bourgeoisie, who already holding a few privileges, intended to increase them by overthrowing the old elite of the ancient régime, because the former’s economic situation allowed them to envisage a better future by so doing.

The French government, which judges the claims of the yellow vests to be utopian, expects, for its part, that they will sooner or later acknowledge the realities of the 21st century globalized market. It rejects their vision of the future on the grounds that it fails to take into account the course of national and international events.

This article, looks at the recent work of François-Bernard Huyghe and Damien Liccia, in the mind of the yellow vests, which provides useful insights into this movement.

The two researchers indicate that since November 2018, a forgotten question has emerged: that of a “just society” based on “the social contract.” However, they seem to forget the hope that the En Marche movement of the soon-to-be-president Emmanuel Macron aroused on the eve of the elections of May 2017. The near-unanimous positivity across French media already seemed unfounded, and although some in the foreign press did draw attention to Macron’s fairly privileged social background and the time he had spent in banking, few in France seemed to pay attention.

Huyghe and Liccia recall that the people no longer have trust in “their representatives, their media”, in short the “techno-structure.” They no longer adhere to the “European promise”. They reject “the moralizing oligarchy.” They oppose “democracy, in its etymological sense” (i.e. “command by the people”) to the “norms of the liberal rule of law.” The hike in the price of fuel, many felt, was only a symptom of a deep malaise. They worried about a lack of prerogatives they claimed on the basis of their citizenship and, finally, rebelled against the contempt they felt the elite was showing towards them.

During the second phase, the yellow vest movement addressed the issue of tax justice, and, finally, that of political representation. The debate has shifted, opposing “democracy of the people (in the sense of a capacity to fully achieve their will, without mediation)” and “liberal democracy, that of the rule of law guaranteeing the protection of the rules and freedoms.” Defenders of the latter were quick to resort to arguments portraying the people as a potential source of danger, who might behave unrealistically if granted the prerogatives contained in the Citizen
Initiative Referendum they demanded. This is an instrument of direct democracy that would, were it to be adopted, allow citizens who gather a number of signatures set by law to bring about a referendum.

In any case, the yellow vests have rediscovered “two traditional forms of social confrontation.” The first is the strategy of the slowdown; people “certainly very honorable in everyday life” decided to slow down the traffic, and to break traffic speed radars (to prevent the state from collecting revenue from speeding fines), thus taking over public space. “And some of them, amazed at being gassed or baton-charged, who consider themselves honest people, have also thrown a few punches… One defines oneself by one’s adversary… We thrive by staging confrontation.”

The authors do not refer here to rioters who represent, according to them, a marginal group. The state, meanwhile, continues to have the power to repress, reinforcing the lack of understanding that divides the masses, to use a Marxist concept, from the elite. In this way, the population has rediscovered the second traditional form of confrontation: it is no longer unaware that at each demonstration (or to use the terminology in vogue “act”), the yellow vests will be up against the forces of law and order.

Bernard Huyghe and Damien Liccia look into a phenomenon to which the European media may give too much importance: that of populism, “the political insult par excellence.” The latter, varying from case-to-case, blame yellow vests for: “the violence of their speeches (or indeed of their actions), their hatred of the elites, the claim to embody a genuine people without respecting their legal representatives, their disregard for norms, law or humanity when they contradict the political will of the people… or their naiveté: demanding the immediate implementation of their selfish claims, without taking into account hard facts, not least economic ones.”

They conclude: “Condemned for its style, its hostility, its fantasies and its unrealism, populism is the ideal bogeyman…”

The concept of populism has evolved over time. But a political class “in full ideological disarray” resorted to it, for lack of being able to respond to a population that expresses its “political refusal of the System, of ‘right-thinking’ and of political correctness […] at each election.”

“At every [yellow vest] demonstration, commentators highlight the lack of education of the masses, the insufficiency of explanation of the historical movement supposed to lead each one to conquer his autonomy and bring prosperity to all. So there is a problem of pedagogy – [the elite having perhaps robbed the masses of their sense of history].

Populism is said to comprise three typical characteristics: its supporters refuse to accept reality, they believe in conspiracy theories and false promises (thus leaving space to demagogy) and in “false hierarchies, [amounting to] a refusal to recognize the skills of experts, professionals and intellectuals.” They are “prey to selfish, narcissistic passions (fear of the foreigner, obsession with ethnic purity).” “Finally, they cultivate an attachment to outdated values”, refusing “modernity, progress, Europe, cultural openness, etc.” and would be “destined to end up in rubbish bins of history”.

Such a reading ignores an important dimension: “France from below” nurtures even more a feeling of hostility toward the political, economic and media elites which, in its opinion, are one and the same and which aim at perpetuating their position at the top of society’s institutions. It is convinced of the existence of a “cosmopolitan and oligarchic class” anxious to maintain its “financial power” and its “moral hegemony.”

Moreover, the movement of yellow vests reflects “a struggle of the periphery” (rural France and small towns) against the bobos [bourgeois bohême or Bohemian bourgeoisie, or very loosely translatable as ‘Champagne socialists’] of the city centers… of those who are less and less able to benefit from social mobility (especially through schooling”). They “rebel against the opportunities enjoyed by the few” who jump from a foreign university into a new job and who dare to consider themselves tacitly as “superior minds.”

Edwy Plenel is the president and co-founder of Media part, an independent news and information website, which has shed light on many of the mysteries of high politics. In a recent, and appropriately titled, essay Victory of the Vanquished, Plenel attempts an analysis of the yellow vest movement that challenges the “established order”, “its immobility” and its certainties; the “yellow vests”, he writes, “opened the door of a history that had previously been padlocked.”

Criticizing “the class morgue that has been unleashed against a people lowered to the rank of crowd”, he adds: “Why should the Fifth Republic [the republican system that has governed France since 1958], remain as it is when any honest observer would agree that it is slowly suffocating French democracy, diminishing
parliament, undermining checks and balances, enslaving the state itself?”

Thus, the two years of the Macron presidency, according to the author’s analysis, reveal the decadence of an obsolete system, demonstrating the illusory commitments of the En Marche movement, with a new government that has adopted practices no better than those of the monarchic ancien régime. Plenel adds that “the violence to which the police forces resort is an echo of a great fear of the haves.” This violence is reminiscent of “the almost unanimous opprobrium” of which the Paris Commune (1871) was the object, even by novelists such as George Sand and Emile Zola. In the words of the latter, the “bloodbath which the people of Paris have just taken was perhaps a horrible necessity to calm some of their fevers.” – Courtesy The Daily Times, Islamabad dated May 3, 2019.

Tug of War between Tobacco Board and Tobacco Control Cell

By Syed Ali Wasif Naqvi

In its most generic form, the process of governance entails enactment of laws and social norms in an organized society. For the smooth functioning of everyday life, it is essential to ensure the safety, security, health and economic well-being of individuals. Consequently, certain institutions, government bodies, boards, cells, offices and structures are set up to enable the flow of functions. These structured governances must be observed extensively in order to obtain the greater good of the country and its people.

According to experts, two contending institutions cannot operate under the same government, so one of them has to go. It means a 'sensible' government never promotes an agenda using one of its organs and trying to defeat its purpose with another organ, which could result in being conflicting to the rational aspect, and create unnecessary financial and social burden on the national exchequer. Another aspect of efficient governance is that multiple committees and boards could be formed from time to time, and when the desired results are achieved, such bodies are conveniently dissolved. The center of gravity of governance and ensuing policies, however, remains to meet the very basic human needs.

Moreover, in relation to sectors trying to meet human requirement, public health remains a neglected domain; the inadequacy of government hospitals is a predominant testament to this. The Devolution of power to provinces through the18th amendment rose rage, which impacted many vital issues retreating to obscurity. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Imran Khan exhibits his interest in public health by wanting to achieve a safe and healthy environment, his aspirations are advocated through the display of an under nourished child’s brain. Thus, the chaotic evidence that is provided only enables the belief of wanting to secure a stronger health care department... Relatively, the perplexity of understanding the issues at hand, two of Pakistani governments sub departments, Pakistan Tobacco Board at the Ministry of Commerce and Tobacco Control Cell at Ministry of National Health Services Regulation and Coordination are the prime examples of paradoxical governance. Tobacco Board was established in 1968 for the “promotion of cultivation, manufacture and export of tobacco and tobacco products, marketing, fixation of prices and other information”. In his message, the board chairman clearly states: “We take measures in the interest of tobacco industry”. The government of Pakistan is fostering a department, which is clearly working in the interest of tobacco industry, which in turn is producing tobacco products and destabilizing the system by initiating a burden of billions of rupees annually, back on the shoulders of same government; facilitated by the Tobacco Board.

On the other hand, Tobacco Control Cell, was established in 2007 to resist the unchecked spread of tobacco and its products. Its main aim is to accelerate the “tobacco control activities in Pakistan through multifaceted efforts starting from planning, resource mobilization, institutional strengthening, and public-private partnership and monitoring”. After the decentralization of Ministry of Health, the Tobacco Control Cell was placed under the organization; one of these departments’ work to promote tobacco, tobacco products and its exports, whereas, the other
The Role of Social Media

Hassan Murtaza Syed

Among 4.39 billion Internet users across the world, nearly 90 per cent use various social media tools. In many countries, social media is used for education, knowledge-sharing, online lectures, business growth and social networking. Business communities conduct online business meetings using active social media networks. Business promotions and social service messages are also some of the frequent uses of social media. Almost all survey takers use social media tools for various types of surveys. In Pakistan the picture is a little different. Pakistan has 159 million cellular phone users, out of which 66 percent are 3G or 4G
There are almost 4.39 billion Internet users. Nearly 90 per cent of them use various social media tools. In many countries social media is used for education, knowledge-sharing, online lectures, business growth and social networking. Business communities conduct online business meetings using active social media networks. Business promotions and social service messages are also some of the frequent uses of social media. Almost all survey takers use social media tools for various types of surveys.

In Pakistan the picture is a little different. Pakistan has 159 million cellular phone users, out of which 66 percent are 3G or 4G users, 68 million broadband users, including those who use Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Almost 50 per cent of the social media use is anything but productive. Given the lack of awareness and proper guidance, a majority of the users

Digital Pakistan: an ambitious goal?

Amna Sarwar Sandhu

There are almost 4.39 billion Internet users. Nearly 90 per cent of them use various social media tools. In many countries social media is used for education, knowledge-sharing, online lectures, business growth and social networking. Business communities conduct online business meetings using active social media networks. Business promotions and social service messages are also some of the frequent uses of social media. Almost all survey takers use social media tools for various types of surveys.

In Pakistan the picture is a little different. Pakistan has 159 million cellular phone users, out of which 66 percent are 3G or 4G users, 68 million broadband users, including those who use Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Almost 50 per cent of the social media use is anything but productive. Given the lack of awareness and proper guidance, a majority of the users

users, 68 million broadband users, including those who use Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Almost 50 per cent of the social media use is anything but productive. Given the lack of awareness and proper guidance, a majority of the users in the country are not deriving optimum benefit from social media. For several years now, the social media channels have been used by extremist groups of all descriptions for propaganda purposes. Many users are sharing and promoting fake news.

Most fake users use social media in negative ways. There are no effective controls or ways to track such users. This has allowed some of them to cause hype, panic and disruption with impunity. Some of the fake users are involved in cyber terrorism, electronic forgery, harassment, cyber stalking and spamming.

Some of the major political parties too have been circulating and posting baseless reports through their social media teams. Some of the fake accounts are being used regularly to initiate baseless posts. Some of the similarly fake accounts regularly share only fake news. There is a pattern of deliberately causing unrest and anarchy.

To prevent the negative use of social media networks, the parliament passed the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act in 2016. Following serious harm, including damage to property and loss of lives, resulting from such activities the government has decided to regulate social media networks.

Back in early 2000s, the issuance of SIM cards against fake documents led to a spate of criminal activities. Once the government improved the regulation of the SIM card issuance system, and linked it to the NADRA database and biometric system, there was considerable improvement in several classes of crimes. Now we have a very strong mechanism for SIM card issuance; only verified SIMs are used, and in case of a criminal offence relevant authorities can track down and catch criminals.

So how we can track and control fake social media users involved in causing panic and disruption by sharing and posting baseless reports? This ought to be rather simple. Nearly 95 per cent of the cellular users in Pakistan are verified. The authorities can request the social media companies to make it mandatory for social media users to provide a cell phone number at the time of sign-up. The regulation can be extended to the existing users as well. The system should not allow new ID with the same cell phone number. The contact number should not be visible on a user’s profile on any social media network, but in case of an emergency, it should be available to the law enforcement.

This will allow the authorities to track down and handle social media users who are involved in criminal activities. Some social media networks already ask for verification using a cell phone number or email address. Making the verification mandatory and linking a user ID to a unique cell number can reduce criminal use of the IDs. In the rare case of persisting criminal use the offenders may be tracked and punished.

The government should also start awareness programmes at all levels, especially for children and students in schools, colleges and universities about the responsible use of social media. Awareness raising activities should also be taken up on print, electronic and social media. – Courtesy Daily Times, dated May 3, 2019.
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**Mercury Dental Amalgam Research in Pakistan – A Review**

*By Shahmir Ali and Dr Mahmood A. Khwaja*

Dentistry is the science concerned with the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of diseases of teeth, gums, and related structures of the mouth. Dental amalgam is used as restorative materials in dentistry which is a combination of metals, comprises of liquid (elemental) mercury (around 50%) and a powdered alloy composed of silver, copper and tin. Mercury (Hg), the 3rd most toxic substance, emissions/releases from the dental amalgam and the resulting health impacts, have been the subject of enormous research, published from time to time world around. Amalgam has also been used by dental professionals in Pakistan for many decades. However, for this review, despite direct contact with many dental teaching institutions/hospitals, several requests to individual dental professionals and all the efforts, for thorough search of publications in the literature on mercury dental amalgam use related issues in the country, it seems either not much research work/studies have been carried out or were not published.
In 2009, the “Preliminary Report on Mercury Inventory in Pakistan (MoE/GoP, 2009)” was compiled and published. In this report, the use and emissions/releases from dental health care sector have been sub-categorized under “Other Intentional Products/Processes Uses,” with an estimated use of 65 Kg Hg/annum. Mumtaz et al. (2010) and Iqbal et al. (2011) published their research work, which was followed by a few more publications on dental amalgam use.

However, follow-up to the start of intergovernmental negotiations in 2010, under United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), on the text of Minamata Convention on Mercury, like many other countries, research on mercury exposure and its health-related issues (including mercury dental amalgam), also enhanced in Pakistan. In the period between 2013–18, several research publications on issues related to mercury dental amalgam use in the country, were published by SDPI mercury research teams at Sustainable Development Policy Institute (Khwaja et al. 2013 – 2018). This article is an effort to review & summarize SDPI publications as well as all other earlier reported research work/publications on the use of Mercury dental amalgam restorations in Pakistan and the recommendations therein, to minimize mercury exposure towards safeguarding public health, especially children in the country.

Mumtaz et al. discussed an environmental perspective of “amalgam use and waste management by Pakistani dentists.” It was emphasized that among the largest end-users of mercury, are the dental professionals and therefore, if amalgam waste management is not strictly regulated, it could lead to the risk of occupational hazardous exposure and due to mercury toxicity may also cause environmental pollution. From another study carried out to evaluate amalgam use and its waste management protocol practiced by dentists in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, (n= 239 dental professionals), it was concluded that amalgam filling was most frequently used and was the first choice of the patients due to their financial constraints. Though 90% of dentists perceived amalgam filling a potential health risk, only 46% considered it a serious environmental hazard. Majority of the dental professionals disposed of amalgam waste in the trash or down the sink (Mumtaz et al. 2010).

A survey conducted in Karachi by Iqbal et al. in 2011, assessed any deviations in practice from the hand mixing manual procedure of mercury and alloy mixing in a pestle/mortar and the mercury encapsulated form. A questionnaire was sent to around 250 dental professionals selected randomly in Karachi. From the survey findings, it was concluded that the hand mixing method was the most commonly used technique (57%) whereas 55% of the dentists used sink, 25% used bin and only 20% used other methods for mercury waste disposal (Iqbal et al. 2011). From a follow-up study by Iqbal et al. on the uses and effects of mercury in medicine and dentistry, it was quite evident that mercury could cause several issues if exceeded the safe limit. It has many therapeutic uses, including various medications, dental fillings, ointments, cosmetics as well as in different healthcare instruments like thermometer and blood pressure measurements. Mercury compounds tend to be more toxic than the elemental form of mercury and organic compounds of mercury (e.g. dimethyl-mercury) are extremely toxic and might be responsible in causing liver and brain damage (Iqbal et al. 2012).

In Karachi and Peshawar, studies were conducted which evaluated the procedure/s of amalgam waste disposal at dental hospitals (Iqbal et al. 2012). According to the survey results, none of the studied dental hospitals in Karachi followed the American Dental Association (ADA) or International Standards Organization (ISO) protocol of mercury disposal and recycling. Only 10% of dental hospitals used chair side traps and amalgam separators and 70% were inclined to use hand-mixing technique. In ten dental hospitals, the number of fillings performed and removed per month was 600 and 400 respectively (Iqbal et al., 2012). In Peshawar also, the results showed, none of the dental teaching hospitals followed the standards set by ADA and ISO, for the recycling and disposal of mercury amalgam waste. Chair side traps and amalgam separators were used by only 9% of the hospitals and 64% used the hand mixing mercury procedure. Number of amalgam fillings done and removed by three dental hospitals per month were 2027 and 267 respectively. From the research, it was concluded that 3kg/year of amalgam waste was generated in the three dental hospitals (Iqbal et al., 2012).

In 2013-14, Khwaja et al. reported first part of the still on-going research on dental amalgam related issues, carried out to measure the mercury vapors concentration of indoor & outdoor air at dental sites in Peshawar, Lahore, Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Abbottabad. Prior to this study, no such data was available on indoor/outdoor mercury contaminated air at dental sites or other mercury emission/release sources in Pakistan. The study was conducted at 34 dental sites, including teaching institutions, private
clinics and hospitals. At each site, Mercury vapour levels were measured on three sampling points, i.e. dentistry ward, adjacent corridor, and the open air. The high precision RA-915+ mercury analyzer (Lumex), calibrated by the supplier was used to measure levels of mercury in air at the selected dental sites and for interpretation of the results, US EPA reference level of 300 ng/m³ was used. Among all the monitored dental sites, 11 sites indoor air were most contaminated with mercury levels many a times exceeding the recommended US EPA recommended reference. Level of mercury in air of operative dentistry (OPD) at 15 out of 17 dental teaching institutions studied, was also found to be higher than the recommended US EPA reference level. Similar high mercury levels were observed in 5 out of 7 general hospitals as well as in all the 10 private dental clinics monitored. Highest levels of mercury in OPD air at teaching institutions, private clinics and general hospitals were observed to be 44,067, 1,800 and 17,172 ng/m³ and the lowest levels were 109, 333 and 174 ng/m³, respectively. Generally, mercury contamination was the highest in teaching institutions, followed by general hospitals and private clinics. The findings were also compared to the data of dental sites of 16 other countries (Khwaja & Abbasi 2013; Khwaja & Nawaz 2014).

Follow up to the study described above, a need was felt to review the BDS curriculum of dental teaching institutions in the country with the main objective to identify the course contents for the general practices of mercury amalgam use in dentistry and to assess whether the curriculum provides potential information to the students about the mercury amalgam risks and hazards. The survey carried out at 38 dental teaching institutions in Pakistan indicated that the dentistry curriculum offered to BDS students does not provide adequate training and knowledge about the mercury use, its waste, exposure & health hazards due to mercury amalgam wastes. For a comparison, BDS curriculum offered at dental teaching institutions in India and Bangladesh were also reviewed which indicated that the curriculum offered by Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council (BMDC) does not mention mercury related environmental, health and safety issues. However, Dental Council of India (DCI) recommended syllabus includes health hazards related to mercury toxicity and exposure but no mention of mercury waste management. The curriculum offered by Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) did include mercury hazards but not specifically with respect to mercury amalgam (Khwaja et al. 2013; Khwaja & Ali 2015).

Dental professionals are constantly exposed to high levels of mercury vapours and a questionnaire-based study was conducted to find out the extent of mercury amalgam use and related issues at 90 private dental-care facilities in Gilgit, Hunza, Peshawar, Rawalpindi and Islamabad. This was a follow-up to an earlier study by Khwaja et al. according to which the concentration of indoor mercury vapours at dental sites was reported to be higher than the US EPA reference level (Khwaja et al. 2013). According to the finding of the survey, dental amalgam use was least used (12%) in Islamabad and was highest in the cities of Gilgit-Baltistan (73%). Compared to 27% in Gilgit-Baltistan, 97% of the visited private dental clinics in other studied cities, preferred the use of alternatives non-mercury amalgam for pregnant women and children. 64% of all the dental professionals interviewed supported a ban on mercury amalgam use. 67% of all the respondents were also in support of the review and revision of the current BDS curriculum, offered at the dental teaching institutions in the country (Khwaja & Ali 2015; Khwaja et al. 2016).

Kalhoro et al. (2016) conducted a study to highlight the use and clinical handling of tooth filling techniques and use of amalgam in dental institutes of Pakistan while drawing a comparison between mercury amalgam and resin composite. On average, 23.3 amalgam and 13 composite restorations were done in public sector dental colleges per day; while on average 13.3 amalgam and 17.8 composite restorations are done in private dental colleges daily and the latter was being used more frequently (17.8 fillings/day) in private institutes as compared to dental amalgam (13.3 fillings/day). Method of trituration used included 20% by hand mixing, 25% by encapsulation, and in 55% cases combination of these two methods was being used. There were different methods used for the disposal of excessive mercury and mercury containing amalgam particles. Thus, immediate steps need to be taken to avoid the use of mercury dental amalgam fillings in order to prevent from potential health hazards. (Kalhoro et al. 2016).

Gul et al. (2016) reported a study conducted to quantify the distribution and excretion of mercury with time in the biological samples collected from mercury dental amalgam users. The individuals with pre-mercury amalgam dental filling were identified and their biological samples (plasma, hair, urine, RBCs and nails) were collected on first, third and twelfth day of the amalgam fillings. Mercury concentration in the
biological samples of amalgam users was found to be 6 to 8 times higher than the mercury level of non-amalgam users. On the first day of filling, mercury levels in the RBCs (4 µg/L), plasma (3 µg/L) and urine (23 µg/L) were comparatively higher than the concentrations observed on the third day (2, 1, and 12 µg/L for RBCs, plasma and urine respectively). The correlations were found to be significant (p 0.05) between mercury levels in the biological samples of amalgam users and biological variables (fish consumption, number and surface area of fillings), while no significant correlations were observed for mercury concentrations in the biological samples with age and weight of amalgam users (Gul et al. 2016).

According to another study carried out by Jamil et al. (2016) in Lahore, evaluation of the occupational exposure to mercury in dentistry and the associated environmental emission/releases in wastewater were assessed. A total of 98 blood samples were collected which comprised 37 dentists, 31 dental assistants, and 30 controls. Results showed that the dentistry personnel had significantly higher levels of mercury in their blood samples (dentists: 30 µg/L and dental assistants: 23 µg/L) as compared to the controls (3 µg/L). The highest mercury concentration (63 µg/L) was found in the samples of older age group dentists and 44 µg/L in dental assistants. The comparison of mercury level among dental assistants and dentists (based on age) revealed that the mercury level increased with experience and age. Moreover, mercury level in all the monitored wastewater samples collected from 22 dental clinics was found to be higher than the recommended discharge limit of 0.01 mg/L. (Jamil et al. 2016).

In 2017, a survey was conducted in Karachi to assess the knowledge of dentists with regard to dental treatment of pregnant patients. A total of 215 practicing dentists took part in the survey. 47% of them considered the use of mercury amalgam safe during pregnancy. 71% of the dentists supported the use of composite and glass ionomer, 34% opted for the second trimester to perform endodontic treatment while 32% felt that it was safe to perform any time. The study concluded that the dentists in Karachi lack knowledge with regard to the dental treatment of pregnant patients (Nasir et al. 2017). In another research study in Karachi, carried out to evaluate the mercury hygiene practices of dental professionals, it was found that high power suction for amalgam removal was practiced by only 50% of the respondents. During polishing and removal of failed amalgam restorations, the use of water was by 60% and 75% respondents, respectively. Regarding training of the chair-side assistants; hardly 16% of the respondents trained their assistants to handle amalgam, especially the spillage of mercury. 89% of the assistants triturated mercury in mortar and pestle, resulting in more mercury vapour emission than using amalgam capsules (Mirza et al. 2018).

A questionnaire-based research study was carried out by Iqbal et al. in 2018 to evaluate the dental amalgam waste practices at teaching institutions and private clinics of Islamabad, Lahore, and Rawalpindi. It was observed that most of the dental staff at private clinics and hospitals did not follow the International Standard Organization (ISO) guidelines for the proper disposal of amalgam waste. According to the research findings, private clinics disposed of amalgam waste in the sink while the hospitals dumped it in the trash cans. Furthermore, only 38% of the total sites visited used the manual or hand-mixing technique while 59% followed the ideal encapsulated amalgam procedure. The use of photographic fixer solution was the least popular method for storing amalgam waste at both the clinics and hospitals (Iqbal et al. 2018).

A recent study carried out by SDPI described and discussed “Research Based Advocacy” efforts and activities towards bringing in some change in national health policy for protection and safeguarding children health in Pakistan, resulting from the use of dental mercury amalgam (Khwaja et al. 2018; Khwaja et al. 2019). During the survey in three cities, a total of 125 dental sites were visited (private dental clinics, teaching institutions and hospitals) and a total of 261 dental professionals (F 37: M 63) were interviewed. According to the overall findings of the survey in the three cities, 89% of the dentists did not recommend amalgam filling for children under the age of 15 and 79% of respondents favoured a ban on mercury dental amalgam filling for children. The results also showed that 65% of the parents preferred glass ionomer and 91% of the visited dentists considered it most comfortable dental material filling for the children. The overall average cost of material filling/teeth, charged by the dentists for Hg amalgam was Rs 1100, for glass ionomer Rs 1300, and for composite Rs 1800 in the decreasing order Hg amalgam < glass ionomer < composite. A comparison of data, for the selected similar questions that were asked in the present (n=261) and two earlier SDPI surveys, in 2015 with n = 95 (Khwaja & Ali, 2015) and last year, n = 54 (Khwaja et al. 2018) has also been done in the present study. The overall combined data of the 3 surveys (n =
410) indicates that 58% respondents do not use mercury dental amalgam and majority of them (67%) supports a ban on its use for children. In the present study (Khwaja et al. 2019), 85% supported a ban on mercury dental amalgam use for children in the country compared to 64% in 2015.

Threat to human health, especially children, resulting from mercury exposure due to mercury dental amalgam use in the country and the likely degradation of environment from mercury waste at dental sites, is very evident from the studies and data summarized above. As also generally emphasized earlier, it is strongly recommended that dental mercury amalgam use should be banned for children, in the first phase, to safeguard their health, mercury free alternative dental filling material (already in use) be promoted and further developed to reduce cost, encapsulated methodology, mechanical mixing and mercury waste separator use be made essential at dental sites and the present BDS curriculum be revised to include these topics and training on the same.

The above control measures would have to be adopted soon, as Pakistan has already signed the Minamata convention on Mercury phase out and is expected to ratify the same early next year.

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The Malaysian model

By Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri

To me, the Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) signed during visits by heads of states and governments are really good, if they are institutionally followed up. Otherwise, they are mere photo-ops.

However, I am optimistic about the MoUs signed between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia because certain institutional mechanisms were agreed to follow. Likewise, the MoUs signed between Pakistan and Malaysia will materialize because the private sector on both sides is already engaged in the automobile sector (assembly of ‘proton’ car), halal meat export, and cooperation in the telecom sector. In a joint Press conference, Malaysian President Dr Mahathir Mohamad showed optimism that trade and investment opportunities between the two countries would increase as, in his words, “we now have outlined the measures that we should take” (in this regard).

Pakistan is keen to learn from Malaysia on corruption control, tourism promotion and technological innovations. These things Pakistan can learn from many other countries. What we need to learn from Malaysia and from the life and policies of Dr Mahathir Mohamad is how he turned an ethnically, culturally and religiously fragmented population of Malaysia into one nation, and how he turned around the Malaysian economy.

It was the result of the inclusive policies of Mahathir’s vision 2020 (that he presented in 1991, when he was elected prime minister from 1981 to 2003) that all ethnicities and nationalities in Malaysia’s population – which comprises Malays (68 percent), Chinese (23.2 percent), Indians (7 percent) and other groups (one percent) – are living amicably. The followers of Islam (61 per cent), Buddhism (19.8 per cent), Christianity (9 per cent), Hinduism (6.3 per cent) and others find state policies conducive enough for them to live a life which is ranked as “very high” on the Human Development Index (HDI). Just to remind readers, Malaysia’s HDI score is 57 (among 189 countries).

Keeping their individual identities intact, 32 million Malaysians have assimilated into a very productive workforce. With total workforce much less than
Pakistan, Malaysian GDP is much higher than ours. The country is included in the list of emerging economies and is aiming to be a developed economy within the next six years (i.e. by 2025; Mahathir’s original vision was to be among developed economies by 2020. He says that corruption by some of his successors has delayed this journey by five years).

Prime Minister Imran Khan has a desire to turn Pakistan into an Islamic welfare state. Here he can again learn a lot from Malaysia. Malaysia is one of the few developing countries where education and healthcare are heavily subsidized. Malaysian citizens are entitled to free public education up to the secondary level and public tertiary education fees for them are subsidized by up to 90 per cent. According to the UNESCO, Malaysia has an adult literacy rate of 93.12 per cent; male literacy rate is 95.43 per cent whereas for females, it is 90.75 per cent.

In 2018, the Malaysian government set aside approximately $6.75 billion, or 10.4 per cent of the annual national budget, for public healthcare. No wonder according to the ‘International Living Annual Global Retirement Index’, Malaysia, with a score of 95 out of 100, ranked first in the ‘Best Healthcare in the World’ category. There is universal health coverage in the country. Basic healthcare services at government-run clinics with prescription cost only one Malaysian ringgit 1 ($0.25). Disabled persons, senior citizens and public-school students are entitled to free healthcare. The UNDP called the Malaysian healthcare system “a model to (sic) other developing countries”.

To know how Malaysia, which got its independence 10 years after us, and was facing all sort of challenges that Pakistan is facing today, turned around its economy and society under the first stint of Mahathir Mohamad, we need to understand Mahathir’s vision 2020.

In 1991, Malaysia adopted an export-oriented economic strategy. Under this strategy, the country pursued a policy of industrialization to increase the productivity and quality of its exports. It also pursued policies of privatization and corporatization.

To do the needful, Mahathir was very clear that Malaysia was not only in need of financial capital but also human capital, which is why he invested in people. He envisaged nine challenges (which he turned into opportunities) to his Vision 2020.

His first challenge was to create a united Malaysia. The second was to create free individuals who were progressive, calm, self-confident, and possessed a national pride that would be respected by others. The third was to create and develop a stable democratic society that would become a model for other developing nations. The fourth was to create a moral and ethical society.

The fifth challenge was to create a liberal and tolerant society where all Malaysians could practice their own beliefs, but remain loyal to their nation. The sixth was to create a scientific and progressive society that not only used technology but also contributed to technological development. The seventh was to create a caring society and caring culture. The eighth was to create a just society through equal distribution of income. And the ninth and last challenge was to create a prosperous society that had a competitive, dynamic and stable economy.

It is evident that of these nine challenges, the first to the fifth, and the seventh, focused on mental aspects and social values, while the sixth emphasized science and technology, and the eighth and ninth addressed the economy. Thus, in terms of focus, Vision 2020 primarily emphasized the human aspects of development.

The Malaysian model may not be a perfect one and may have its loopholes. However, looking at where Malaysia was in the 1990s and where it has reached today, it is very clear that investing in human development, a shared narrative (mental aspects) and social values pays off.

The Malaysian model reminds us that for nations and societies to develop, financial capital is not the only prerequisite. In fact, what matters in this case are social and societal values. If PM Khan is serious in turning Pakistan into a welfare state then he needs to focus on creating a ‘United Pakistan’ where progressive, calm, self-confident Pakistanis with national pride can be the role model for other nations through their moral, ethical, and tolerant values. Doing this would not require billions of dollars but a change management for behavioural change that may turn the 220 million inhabitants of this country to a one nation with shared values.

Challenges first till fifth, and the seventh, in Malaysia’s Vision 2020 did not require any IMF bailout package, nor any external assistance but a realization from within. However, Mahathir had to lead it from the front. The same thing one expects from Prime Minister Imran Khan, who calls Mahathir one of his role-models. Let’s hope he follows in his ideal’s
How Balochistan can develop sustainably?

Syed Shujaat Ahmed

Balochistan is the province with vast roads and infrastructure indicating higher connectivity. The province with a population of 12,344,408 is rich in resources and has connectivity not only through roads but also has a port in the form of Gwadar, a key pillar of China Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Economy of the province or any state cannot be only sustained by the availability of infrastructure and investment focusing on it. For any sustained development focus needs to be shifted towards inclusive economic growth, social justice, and protection of environment and natural resources.

To achieve these objectives both programmes and projects with sustained efforts by the Federal and provincial government of Balochistan need to focus on development of sustained educational policy followed by political stability and sustainability and focus on human development. For this purpose, only, dialogue between citizens and public officials will enable both to fulfil their responsibilities towards sustainable development and ensure accountability and trust focused on the social contract and state-citizen relationship.

After announcing implementation of agenda 2030 at global level by United Nations with signatures by countries including Pakistan, provinces are trying to come up with their own implementation framework. Keeping this process intact, the province of Balochistan is also working on its own implementation framework.

In a recently concluded survey by Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) with the core objectives of seeking answers to the question i.e. how Balochistan can develop sustainably? it somehow identified the core challenges.

Firstly, to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and implement policies according to it, there is a dire need for identification of all the failures through which the country in general and the province in particular will achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Those identifications should be the starting point in formulating any policy working on sustainable development of the policy.

Secondly, within the initial framework and with more autonomy to the province there was no strong concept of localization i.e. policy framework till district level there is need to assess each division separately as per the needs while keeping into the account cultural ingredients into the context along with the local needs.

After these identifications priorities need to be set starting from the educational policy revolving around the quality services. Sustainability in the educational policy is one the keys to develop human capital which itself will help in ending unemployment leading to ending poverty, hunger and quality service provision. Therefore, from here it can also be identified and judged that framework for Sustainable Development Goals is interlinked and each goal is connected to others either directly or through targets. This thus also brings in the concept of inclusivity in economic growth.

Further digging deep into poverty and hunger, they are connected to each other via the concept of monetary terms. I.e. if there is no poverty, there will be zero hunger; which further has connections to environment and water related goals. Within this whole framework the alarming situation province of Balochistan is facing is in case of water as one of the Additional Commissioner also said in conversation “Sorry Sir, we don’t have water, so on water related goals cannot comment or say anything”.

This water related goals thus have impact on the economy as it is more dependent on the farming, growing fruits and livestock hit by drought. This therefore reduced the earning capacity of the family thus resulting in failure to achieve goals linked to hunger and poverty.

Third, when one talks about the economy and its related goals there is concept of productivity in terms of labor which can only be achieved through provision of quality health services. For example, in district Nushki major surgeries and other major health
problems are difficult to tackle and being one of the closest districts to Quetta, cases are referred to Quetta. Similarly, within the Rakhshan division, one of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) routes of 300 KM is passing with only facility and economic activity present is in the form of Basic Health Units (BHUs) with low quality and service provision.

Fourth, governance is another major challenge within the province leading to a crisis type of situation within the division.

Fifth, knowing the boundaries, culture and other constraints to work directly on development of soft skills another approach which is missing in this case is development of aesthetic sense. This development of aesthetic sense was the case best developed by Turbat district. Within Turbat district example can be observed in the form of one road corner named Taleemi Chowk with some concrete present depicting education, hospital has same some concrete construction outside depicting health services and indicating hospitals. These types of approaches are also missing in many parts of the province which itself can enable people to focus on more softer skills.

Sixth, to address the above-mentioned challenges capacity of Bureau of Statistics at provincial level needs to be dealt with followed by Bureau of Statistics at national level in order to deal with data against all targets and all goals because without data and strengthened institute making policies and targets backed by data will be difficult task to approach. So, to address the above challenges how things should work in order to achieve sustainable development, there is need to look from bottom to up approach with more say and support at local level. This objective can be achieved while capacitating the stakeholders as per requirements while keeping local contents into the consideration. The policies in this regard by the province and for the province should have integration within and should stress upon inclusion of SDGs. This itself will also allow to map and formulate local policy framework. But this can be achieved only if backed by numbers for which progress of Bureau of Statistics at provincial and national level need to be monitored. There is also need to come up with plans which can translate into monetary and financial terms in the long run with the involvement of local and district level administration.

Further, looking into the province with harder structure present, there is need for more trained and capacitated human resources which itself will strengthen the local institutions.

Thus, to simplify the sustainable development strategy for Balochistan province, there is need for softer skills and sustained policy framework. The province being rich with infrastructure needs to focus on softer skills with the local involvement in meeting the needs. – Courtesy Daily Times, Islamabad, dated January 27, 2019.
Poster Competition for 22nd Sustainable Development Conference

A poster competition for SDPI's Twenty-second Sustainable Development Conference titled "Sustainable Development in a Digital Society" was held on 30 April 2019. A formal announcement letter was sent to students of different institutes, including Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, National College of Arts, Rawalpindi, Hunerkada, Islamabad, and National University of Science and Technology, Islamabad to participate in this competition. Students were asked to share their original designs reflecting the overarching theme of SDPI’s Conference.

A total of 15 designs were received. Jury Members included: Dr Arjumand Faisel from Gallery 6, Ms Shireen Gheba Najib from Shireen’ s Studio, and Ms Imrana Niazi from SDPI, who shortlisted three designs. First position was clinched by Ms Mehak Jamal, second position was won by Ms Sunnia Ibrar and third position by Ms Zainab Naeem. All the three were from FJWU.

Afterwards a prize and certificate distribution ceremony was held on 3rd May 2019. Dr Shafqat Munir, Research Fellow at SDPI, and, Ms Shireen Gheba Najib handed over the prizes and certificates to the students. - By Tayyaba Hanif