

FM in UAE

MANY see Foreign Minister (FM) Shah Mehmood Qureshi's three days visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as an extraordinary one. It's his second visit to the UAE in the last five months. Moreover, FM Qureshi's trip coincides with his Indian counterpart's visit to the emirates as well. Given the presence of the two South Asian nation's foreign ministers in the Gulf nation, the reports of UAE as a mediator between Islamabad and New Delhi will gain more traction. After the UAE Ambassador to the United States' (US) Yousef Al Otaiba's confirmation of his country's role in "bringing Kashmir escalation down," it is natural that all eyes are on the two nuclear rival neighbours' "speculated shift" in bilateral ties. Although India and Pakistan have denied any meeting of FMs, many would still try to see beyond the veil of denial.

Nevertheless, irrespective of meetings direct or indirect, what is clear is that Pakistan will not change its stance regarding Kashmir and India. Kashmir remains the main point of contention in our relations with India. Hence, even if the ties between Islamabad and New Delhi get "back to a healthy level," an unsolved Kashmir will always remain the main irritant between the two sides.

Instead, peace on Pakistan's western borders, i.e., Afghanistan will also be on the mind of FM Qureshi in this upcoming visit. He probably will be stating Pakistan's reservations and conveying the same to the UAE about India's usage of Afghan soil against Pakistan. Given the historical ties between UAE and Pakistan, the leadership of the two nations frequently exchange such meetings to enhance bilateral relations. Islamabad's relations with UAE have been embedded with bonds of religion, history, culture and commercial linkages. FM Qureshi's visit to the site of Expo2020 Dubai and his meeting with Pakistan Business Council Dubai show that economic diplomacy is the top priority for Islamabad. Hopefully, FM's visit will open new vistas of economic and commercial collaboration between UAE and Pakistan.

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Online education

AFTER reaching a consensus on the matter, all provinces decided to continue with school closures for grade one to eight in light of the dire circumstances brought upon by the third wave. According to officials, the national positivity rate being as high as 8.53 percent warrants such measures to be adopted. Perhaps this is a necessity for now but what is being overlooked is that such drastic measures come from a panicked state of mind and are not viable for the long-term.

Education is one of the main pillars of a society and thus, to put a complete halt to it is detrimental to any and all future developments. The initial stages of the pandemic were met with comprehensive policies that served the purpose of protection but also allowed for important functions to resume. It was during this period that our government reverted to online instruction as a primary tool for education. Furthermore, socially distant learning was endorsed for in-person instruction, an alternative day attendance policy was adopted by institutions and the tel-school-instruction through specific television channels that broadcasted lectures to far-flung areas—was incorporated into the education sector's pandemic driven policies. These were good solutions that could be employed for an extended period of time, at least until the extremity of the situation declines. We must not neglect a perfectly feasible framework created during the first periods of the pandemic. A hybrid model that incorporated both online and in-person education served to secure the benefit of all school-going children who are to become the future of our country. We cannot add to the costs that the pandemic has incurred, the government must retain a platform through which education can be dispensed.

CoVID-19 control: Can Pakistan learn from China?

Mirza Abdul Aleem Baig



China's extraordinary organized and preventive risk management approach, established on coalition between government officials, virologists, epidemiologists and public health experts, has demonstrated to be successful in containing and controlling CoVID-19. The experience in China emphasized the significance of listening to science and public health experts during pandemic event. Firstly, China's response demonstrates the value of national research and public health capability

IT has been over a year since the first case of CoVID-19 was confirmed in Pakistan. The tally has reached 721,018 confirmed cases, 15,443 have died and 4,143 critical cases by 11th April 2021. Across many countries, since January 2020, a massive surge of research into CoVID-19 had enabled the scientific and medical community to better understand how to manage and eliminate the virus through public health interventions. Today, we have learned, CoVID-19 causes acute symptoms and death. We have learned, immunity lasts at least eight months and we also have five licensed vaccines. We have learned, the long-term effects of CoVID-19 and the morbidity attached to having this virus. We have learned, virus transmission occurs through droplets and aerosols spread through coughing, sneezing, breathing and speaking. We also have learned, stopping the spread of CoVID-19 requires people to avoid mixing through restrictions on social life. We have learned, the virus can mutate into various strains that can be more transmissible – and we also have understand cat-and-mouse game between vaccine and variants.

To alleviate the destructive effects of CoVID-19 on the economy, Pakistan has sought debt relief of slightly around \$2 billion from its G20 creditors. In addition to the G20 countries, China was the largest bilateral creditor with \$9 billion, followed by Japan with \$5 billion. By early April 2020, when there were just about 2,000 CoVID-19 positive cases in Pakistan, the World Bank approved \$200 million package to help Pakistan. Likewise, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had approved the payout of \$1.386 billion as financial support to Pakistan to meet its urgent balance of payment needs halting from the CoVID-19 outbreak. Further, to support Pakistan's public health response to the CoVID-19 and allow to meet the basic needs of the vulnerable and poor segment of society, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) approved \$500 million emergency assistance loan to Pakistan.

Similarly, The Islamic Development Bank (IDB) also provided a \$650 million financial package to support Pakistan in its efforts against the CoVID-19. All these grants were provided to Government of Pakistan to assist in effective and timely action in response to the spread of the CoVID-19. The objective was to strengthen Pakistan's public health infrastructure and to alleviate socioeconomic disruptions due to the pandemic. Despite huge grants and substantial endowments, Pakistan's response to the CoVID-19 has been unsatisfactory. Lack of basic healthcare infrastructure, disease surveillance and management system, and inconsistent implementation of policies and SOPs resulted in the rapid and incessant spread of third-wave of CoVID-19 throughout the county.

China's extraordinary organized and preventive risk management approach, established on coalition between government officials, virologists, epidemiologists and public health experts, has demonstrated to be successful in containing and controlling CoVID-19. The experience in China emphasized the significance of listening to science and public health experts during pandemic event. Firstly, China's response demonstrates the value of national research and public health capability. Huge investment in research and development rendered China much better prepared for CoVID-19. China's experience indicates the value of investing in national health and research scheme to boost laboratory capacity along with workforce. They are essential to a rapid and effective national response to health emergencies and to national health security. Secondly, a strong foundation of research and development cannot ensure effective control without powerful top-level political dedication to use science to confront the outbreak. Government and leaders must respect science, understand its significance, and act on science-based advice in a way that is best for society.

Thirdly, attaining speedy and successful implementation of control measures for CoVID-19

requires extensive community engagement. Public solidarity during the CoVID-19 outbreak in China had been unprecedented. Control measures that could sacrifice personal freedom were accepted readily by the nation. To be brief, cricket is to South Asia and football is to Europe. In fighting CoVID-19, everyone is equal. Everyone has the identifiability and shares the equal threat. The effective implementation of prevention and control measures in China is a model for Pakistan other parts of world to follow. From the beginning, a science-based, risk-informed and phased approach was taken, with a clear appreciation and enthusiasm. Today, China has restarted its economy, reopened and almost returned to normality. The key of success story is to make everybody responsible, get every single division involved and held executives accountable. These are the most prominent lessons Pakistan could learn from China at national and local levels. After the failure of "Smart-Lockdown" strategy, Pakistan needs to choose a strict strategy, should follow the example of China and continue the lockdown until the number of CoVID-19 infections is brought close to zero; the strategy should then be to maintain infection rates at very low level until vaccination is done. China's epidemic management provides an important experience from which countries such as Pakistan can learn. This applies in particular to Pakistan, which would risk to lose many of its achievements in case of a severe third wave of the epidemic. Government of Pakistan should involve not only public health experts, virologists and epidemiologists, but also scientist and respect science advice when making any decision that is required to keep the epidemic under control. The rest of the world can also learn from China's success in bringing outbreak under control.

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Pakistan's feminist renaissance

Sarah Khan



The sheer hate and abuse against feminism raises the question that do people have basic understanding of this movement? The flimsiest arguments leveled against feminism illustrates that gullible public is indoctrinated by propagandist information from social media and blissfully ignorant religious entrepreneurs

LIKE all rights based movements, indigenous women rights revisionism garnered colossal hatred of disgruntled status-quo powers. The overwhelming message of this year's Aurat March is still jolting the patriarchal landscape of Pakistan. Despite plethora of statistical and anecdotal evidence of plight of Pakistani women, stubbornly conservative society is hell bent upon condemning indigenous feminist awakening. Pakistan's 151th place out of 153 countries in 2020 Global Gender Gap index didn't provoke outrage. Adding insult to injury, legitimate Aurat March's manifesto was besmirched under veneer of custom, tradition, culture and twisted de-contextualized interpretations of religion. In retrospect, Leila Ahmad's emphasis upon "stubbornly egalitarian voice of Islam" challenges patriarchal interpretation of Islam.

Now the question arises that is indigenous feminism subversive to culture and religion? The answer is both in affirmative and negative. Feminism is challenging misogynist cultural traditions instead of rebuking religion. The discriminatory local culture prevails over religion in myriad aspects such as depriving daughters of right of inheritance, right to education, right to choose husband, female foeticide, institutionalized dehumanization, reducing marriage to glorified slavery, honor killing, dowry deaths, murder over giving birth to daughter, subjection to physical and mental violence and robbing her right to dignity as human being. Islam never ordained her to serve entire family of husband because nurturing her progeny is itself huge responsibility. Religion never commanded men to depend upon their sick or injured women for warming food. Its sheer duplicity that a society embroiled in epidemic of pestiferous moral policing and religious obscurantism goes thirsty to get link of a girl's leaked video. The sheer hate and abuse against feminism raises

"Culture does not make people. People make culture. If full humanity of women is not our culture, then we must make it our culture". Nigerian activist Adichie in her work "We Should All be Feminists"

the question that do people have basic understanding of this movement? The flimsiest arguments leveled against feminism illustrates that gullible public is indoctrinated by propagandist information from social media and blissfully ignorant religious entrepreneurs. These rogue elements are manipulating feminism's objectives as being right to parading naked in streets, sexual debauchery and moral wickedness. Whereby, jirgas paraded scores of women naked to avenge crimes committed by enraged men without whipping frenzy. Unfortunately, society pretends to having deep dream of slumber when women are brutalized, traumatized, dehumanized and degraded over petty matters. Status-quo powers are disseminating dubious profile of Pakistani feminist activists to garner collective backlash against them. So, it's very important to mainstream objective definition of feminists and for what they stand for. An immensely acknowledged 2012 Study by Dr Jaweria Shahid and Khalid Manzoor Butt accurately defined feminists by concluding: "Feminists are those who dare to break the conspiracy of silence about oppression, unequal relationships between men and women who want to change it". Pakistani women are now standing up for themselves by narrating harrowing accounts encountered by them throughout their lives. Unfortunately, a society that has always been indifferent bystander to plight of women formed tacit alliance against revisionist women. This illustrates that Mona Eltahawy was right when she declared: "The most subversive thing a woman can do is

talk about her life as if it really matters". Patriarchal conditioning of men dehumanizes them by "manufacturing" emotionally stunted insensitive creatures. The benchmark of their masculinity is projection of chauvinism against "the second sex". Feminism embraces men as emotional beings whose vulnerabilities and insecurities have to be celebrated. Indian developmental feminist Kamala Bhasin reiterated: "Men will have to change, not to support women but to save themselves from being brutalized by centuries of exposure to patriarchy". Instead of viewing feminine revisionism from prism of toxic masculinity, misogynist elements must dissect framework which permits brutalities and cruelties upon women behind impermeable four walls. Hilarious irony is that a society which practices collective moral policing immediately renders domestic violence private matter. Feminist awakening is only answer to Pakistan's deteriorating image as illiberal primitive pariah state. Demonization of feminism is further tarnishing our global portrayal and exposing our callous disregard for Beijing Declaration 1995. Gender sensitive institutional and cultural revolution would have to present mélange of both secular and religious strands. Rise of women is not tantamount to fall of men. Asma Barlas rightly propounded that: "Quran renders men and women not as two binary oppositions but as two complete differences".

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