

The Business

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Sugar prices

This supply and demand determine the price in the business throughout the world, but do not prevail in Pakistan's sugar market. One such factor could well be market perception, particularly the sellers perception, on possible actions the government may take to bring prices down by appropriately dealing with widespread imperfect market conditions that include: smuggling across Pakistan's over 2000km-long porous borders, particularly when price is cheaper in Pakistan relative to countries with contiguous borders including India, Afghanistan and Iran; cartelization that allows the manufacturers to manipulate prices through manipulating supply; and in this particular instance there has to be collusion by the wholesalers and retailers that has rendered an injection of the commodity into the market via imports ineffective. The question asked time and again is why has the Khan administration been unable to check price of sugar and wheat/atta given the fact that imperfect market conditions in these two commodities have prevailed since decades even though in most other countries these commodities operate in perfect market conditions where the buyers and sellers are in large enough numbers not to be able to influence price?

The explosive sugar and wheat inquiry report did not contain any surprises though it was hailed as the first time ever that the influence of the sugar barons and the wheat mafia on domestic prices through the country's federal and provincial governments was acknowledged. Subsequently, the government succeeded in vacating a stay order requested by the sugar mill owners thereby allowing it to proceed against their alleged illegal activities, the changing of the guard in the Competition Commission of Pakistan to ensure appropriate action, and allowing imports to check the price rise. All these appropriate steps aside, the price of sugar continues to rise. The present government has shown a poor approach towards monitoring prices, an activity that was undertaken on a weekly basis during previous administrations both at the federal and the provincial levels and which allowed the government of the day to assess a possible shortfall of any commodity in a timely manner and to take appropriate measures. The PM's repeated claim that he would personally monitor prices, a claim that should increase the public's comfort level, has been badly eroded because each time he claims to do so the price of sugar has risen. This careful and regular monitoring has been lacking during the past two and a quarter years. A better option would be not to reinvent the wheel and use the system existing at the time his tenure began to monitor prices and consequently take decisions in a timely manner. The problem has been exacerbated by frequent delays in setting the minimum support price, in allowing imports and in holding those responsible for extending an export subsidy when there is a shortage in the domestic market.

A case for cultural reconstruction



RAFIA ZAKARIA

On Nov 2, 2020, a small ceremony was held at the consulate general of Pakistan in New York City. The occasion was an unusual one: a ceremonial handing over of 45 antiquities recovered by the Manhattan District Attorney's Office. The artefacts, most of which date from the Gandharan era, were smuggled out of Pakistan. The Department of Homeland Security — which, in past decades, has only concerned itself with catching terror suspects it alleged were Pakistani — had found them. The ceremony marked the official handover of the objects (valued at approximately \$250,000) to Pakistan's consul general in New York Ayesha Ali.

In her remarks, she noted that the repatriation was particularly important because Pakistan has recently been promoting cultural tourism and that the return of the objects would assist in attracting more cultural tourists to the country. Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr, who happens to be a former diplomat and current prosecutor, responded by saying he would love to visit Pakistan once the pandemic is finally over. To actually attract cultural tourists, Pakistan needs to develop the historical and archaeological facets of its history. This sort of development has not yet taken

place. The repatriation of these recently looted antiquities would be a cause for celebration if it were known what would happen to these objects once they are returned to Pakistan.

Indeed, wondering what is going to happen to these artefacts from Gandhara raises the question of what Pakistan is doing with the antiquities that are already present in the country. After all, Pakistan has hardly any museum dedicated to its own history, let alone the history of the Buddhist era and the Gandhara civilisation that predated the advent of Islam.

One of the reasons for this paucity of museum heritage dedicated to national history is because no govern-

menting cycle, the lack of historical consciousness means that there is no national plan to construct museums that provide venues for this history to be understood, and the inability to understand this history in turn means no one cares if such a venue is created. Instead, ancient objects are left to be bought and displayed in the homes of the ultra wealthy and well connected, or smuggled outside the country, or blown up by dynamite. As vaccines for the novel coronavirus are developed, the world will inevitably experience a resurgence of cultural tourism. All those who have been cooped up at home will turn back to the world with even more zeal and enthusiasm. If

model itself as the cradle of the world's oldest civilisations. It is tragic that the insecurities of obscurantists have made this story alien to its own citizens. The repatriation of antiquities, a movement that is gaining traction in recent years, is crucial if the deleterious effects of Western conquest are to be corrected. Pakistan's distorted history is in no small way an effect of the divisions sown by the British that led to a fanaticism which threatens to erase everything that does not connect to its Islamic heritage. Erasing the destruction wrought by colonialism involves making the population secure enough in its identity that it does not feel threatened by the existence of a story that began and ended before the story of Pakistan's creation and even before the arrival of Muslims on South Asian shores.

In the particular case of these antiquities that have been returned to Pakistan by the Americans, several questions remain. The government could announce where these antiquities will be kept, if Pakistani citizens will be able to see them and also whether they will be part of some larger project of cultural and historical reconstruction. As a matter of fact, it would be useful to know where the thousands of other objects from the Gandhara region are being stored and kept.

The consulate general in New York has done a commendable job in pursuing and then receiving the antiquities that have been returned. It is now the government at home that must reveal its plans, including those for attracting to Pakistan interested persons who want to learn more about the Gandhara civilisation. The rich history and archaeological wealth of Pakistan is an asset, but it is one that loses its value if it is not contextualised and presented as a narrative driven by historical truths.

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ment has been able to solve the conflict between religious obscurantism and historical reconstruction. The narrow-minded antipathy towards everything and anything that existed in the region prior to the coming of Islam has meant the active destruction of objects that are thousands of years old and represent important bits of the past not just of Pakistani but also of human history. This truth has a direct impact on both the possibility of cultural tourism in the country and the ability of Pakistanis to truly understand the role of the land they walk and breathe and live on in the larger panorama of human civilisation. In a tragic self-per-

Pakistan is pursuing the goal of attracting cultural tourists with any seriousness, it must be able to offer a historical and cultural story that is cohesive and not stymied by extremism. The development of a museum, and of groundbreaking exhibits that are properly curated can become the basis of such a story. The world is not interested in the hang-ups of a country that is uncomfortable with its own history; it is even less interested in one that is afraid of or instrumental in erasing portions of that history.

Situated as it is on the Indus River, a fertile area rich with ancient heritage, Pakistan has all the potential to

Pending dire obligations

MUHAMMAD USMAN

ADG ISPR's press release revealed that officials of ISI and Pakistan Rangers Sindh, involved in Karachi incident have been relieved of their positions pending further departmental disciplinary action for acting overzealously. One finds it suffocating when he sees nothing in immediate air to bring real malefactors to book from the desecration of Mazar-e-Quaid to staging a police mutiny. Both are unthinkable. Sadly, our response is equally incomprehensible and reprehensible. The unsavoury drama started when on 18 October, Captain Safdar (retired) instigated PML (N)'s workers to indulge in slogan mongering /hooliganism, inside the Mazar-i-Quaid. It became even a more repulsive sight when people saw his spouse, Maryam Nawaz, convicted of perjury and forgery, standing beside him and feeling triumphant inwardly by this heroic performance while being oblivious of the fact that it was a sacrilegious act, not a heroic act and she was an accomplice in its perpetuation. They all were to be hauled up and punished severely for violating sanctity of Quaid's mausoleum bizarrely.

Alas, PPP which is in power there, wilfully chose to abdicate its responsibility and stood in solidarity with perpetuates, not for disrespect displayed at Mazar-e-Quaid only but also used it an opportunity to malign Army as a state above the state. Underlying purpose was of not only to serve political agenda of corrupt ruling elite but also of their overlords abroad. Following despicable incident, there was an acute sense of disgust and outrage across the country particularly, emotions were running very high in Karachi, being custodian of Mazar-e-Quaid. People were desperate and wanted an immediate action against the desecrators. To the contrary, apparently, under a diktat from their political masters, Sindh Police dragged its feet. Assessing timid and implausible response of Sindh Police in a fast developing volatile situation and constrained by mounting public pressure for a right cause, officers of ISI and Rangers decided to step in to get the needful done. Given conditions, it was neither first time nor very unusual occurrence. For the last twelve years, Sindh has been under a government, unabashedly involved in protecting criminals, plundering public money and playing politics under the rubric of guarding provincial autonomy.

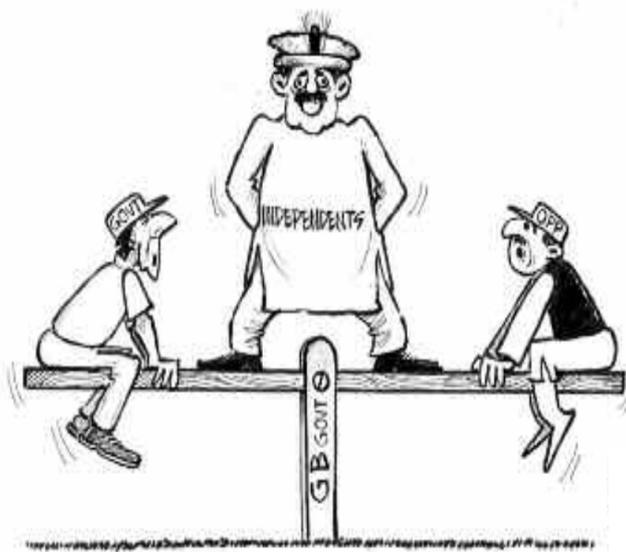
Over a time, Sindh Police has fallen in their lap as a cat paw. It has rather become a legal instrument to help them in advancement of their subterfuge and sly moves to attain their ends and purposes. Karachi was in tatters when under diverse pressures, Rangers were tasked to restore sanity in the city in aid of civil power. The target killing, extortion, abductions for ransom, political violence and no go areas synonymised the city. The purging of all these stark ills was a task of Herculean proportions and Rangers did it

quite splendidly. People of Karachi acknowledged it with acclaim and developed trust upon them for deliverance of their immediate and pressing problems. It is naive to believe that task was accomplished without friction. The authority remained invested with civil government and it was hugely averse to altruism, populism and good governance. Rest could be deciphered without reading too much between the lines. Probably, this was an imperative for overhauling the city. In instant case too, people looked towards Rangers without inhibition of any kind, being a normal recourse available however, instead of seeing the reason, Sindh government conspired with IG Police to take advantage of it while making it an exception. A number of pointers suggests this hypothesis.

IG Police, Mushtaq Mehar is a man of PPP. He was accused of harassing witnesses in investigation of Omni Group for its misdeeds by no less than CJP himself. For his appointment as IG Police, Sindh government created a lot of fuss. The Police hierarchy led by him applied for leave, citing reason of low morale following episode of registration of FIR against Captain Safdar (retired) wherein, their high command has been ridiculed and mishandled. All applicants used one text which further reinforced hypothesis of an arranged mutiny. Under no event, a police officer has a right of protest. He forfeits it day he joins police force. He has a redress of grievances only. They clearly infringed upon their limits. Instead of taking them to task and get train moving, Bilawal championed their cause however, Army took right decision and ordered inquiry.

On its conclusion/action taken, he gloated as he has achieved a major breakthrough for cause of democracy while forgetting dire obligations at hand. Their achievement would definitely bode well for rule of law in the country. He has to bring quality of desecrating sanctity of Quaid's Mausoleum and main accused are Safdar and Maryam Safdar. The hierarchy of Sindh Police has committed a grave offence and needs to be dealt with severely. The mention of a similar mutiny may not be out of place here. In 1972, Punjab Police went on strike. Mustafa Khar of PPP, was Governor Punjab. He thundered that if they do not call off strike and come on duty by tomorrow, they would stand dismissed. This worked miraculously and they rejoined the duty much before the deadline. This was legacy of PPP. Now it has fallen in hands of a corrupt and numbskull Zardari and a novice of low stock, Bilawal. It is futile to lay hopes upon them. This is for others with high offices or without to forge ahead and get aforementioned dire obligations fulfilled before they recede into background. Given gravity of situation, Army inquiry is far less than a half job done. The half measures constitutes pain and no gain.

— The writer, a retired Lt Col, is freelance columnist based in Islamabad.



COVID-19 and global supply chains

HASSAN MUJTABA

The year 2020 has been characterized by great turmoil: political upheavals, polarized elections, economic downturns, lockdowns, and job layoffs. In fact, in most cases, we can establish direct causation between the COVID-19 pandemic and the lamentable political-economic outcomes of the year, with any divergences from this trend arising in large part due to better leadership, good governance, and efficient administration.

Despite certain heterogeneities in outcomes—which are outliers at best—the downward spiral of all economic variables has been widely noted, with the developing countries bearing the brunt of this corona-induced recession. Indeed, according to a recent communique of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the decline in global output due to COVID-19 has been the worst in the last eight decades, i.e., since the Great Depression. Little wonder then that the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is projected by the IMF to contract by 4.4 percent in the last quarter of FY 20, with food inflation in double digits, and unemployment at record levels with 400 million people who have lost their jobs directly due to COVID-19.

Although countless journal articles, policy briefs, and op-eds have focused on the fiscal and monetary 'levers' that might be used to jumpstart the pandemic-ridden economy, most have not touched upon the interlinkages between COVID-19 and Global Supply Chains (GSCs), especially of multinational agribusinesses.

On the surface, GSCs and a

zoonotic virus may appear as disparate subjects, but in reality, they have a deeply intertwined connection that is not perceptible at first glance. After all, the supply chain is a complex process that involves different people, businesses, processes, production nodes, logistics, etc., the sole aim of which is to produce a good/service and deliver it to the final consumer. With the acceleration of globalization, supply chains have also become more intertwined, resulting in a convoluted web of commercial activity over which no business or

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multinational corporation (MNC) has complete control. In fact, a recent study conducted at the University of Munich revealed that a single large MNC has on average a whopping 1.25 million suppliers. The entire process is so intricate that no CEO can accurately trace the flow of capital of her MNC's supply chains. For example, when the coronavirus started spreading early in the first quarter of 2020, 51,000 MNCs had a direct supplier located in Wuhan, while five million companies had at least one indirect supplier physically located in ground zero. By February, almost 90% of the GSC network was affected, with many MNCs experiencing major bottlenecks in supply

and timely delivery of goods and services.

Since the start of the 21st century, corporate agribusinesses have been expanding aggressively in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), mainly motivated by cheap labor and natural resources as many of these countries are naturally endowed with vast swathes of fertile land, forests, rivers, natural lakes, and mineral resources. The lust for natural resources and business expansion is such that it galvanizes these agribusinesses to go deep inside the forests where

they come into contact with wildlife—often displacing them—thereby raising the probability of contracting a zoonotic virus strain. If a virus breaks out in this manner, it quickly spreads along the routes of supply chains, which because of their transnational nature, facilitate its speedy and large-scale spread. Thus, the virus jumps ship from the depths of the forests to the world's largest cosmopolitans in no time!

Although researchers are not unanimous about COVID-19's origin, what we do know is that it is a bat virus that likely spread via the illicit trade of pangolin, which in all probability acted as an intermediary. It is a pity, however, that most scientists, policymakers, and

other experts—particularly those in the West—ignore this dialectical connection between global capital and the zoonotic viruses and seek other plausible explanations. For instance, they conveniently choose to blame the people of the 'Orient' for their exotic cuisine, cultural preferences, lack of education, and overpopulation. The American epidemiologist Rob Wallace, in his prophetic book titled Big Farms Make Big Flu written in 2016, termed this as the view of 'Absolute Geographies' which identifies China, India, Pakistan, Vietnam, etc. as hotspots for future virus outbreaks. However, if one traces the flow of capital or money—the view of 'Relational Geographies'—then suddenly New York, London, Singapore, and Hong Kong emerge as hotspots for potential viruses as these cities are the international centers of global capital and home to the headquarters of nearly all large corporate agribusinesses.

Thus, if humanity as a whole is serious about curtailing the outbreak and spread of future zoonotic viruses, then it is imperative to devise a mechanism to regulate international capital while simultaneously imposing greater restrictions on the destruction of forests and displacement of wildlife. Left to its own devices, global capital will continue to destroy the planet while privatizing the profits and socializing the costs. We should realise that, it is not the virus that comes to us, but we that go to the virus.

The writer is a researcher in the economic affairs section of Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS).