

# WORLD TIMES INSTITUTE

## **Indian media rumormongering risks sparking conflicts, damaging ties**

Since Friday afternoon, fake news reports have been circulating which claim that Taiwan shot down a Su-35 fighter jet of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Facing this false claim, Taiwan's "Defense Ministry" hurriedly issued a statement refuting the claims. The report was first published by Indian media outlet called "News Line IFE" on Twitter. Then some other Indian media, including ABP News and Times Now, quickly joined in to spread fake news. News Line IFE deleted the tweet after it was pointed out to be fake, but it has not made any further clarification as of press time.

The Indian media made groundless speculations and published fake news based on a video circulating on social media, which has caused a negative impact and even risked triggering misjudgments on the situation across the Taiwan Straits. The incident has fully reflected Indian media's rumormongering tendency and their wish for a tumultuous cross-Straits situation.

Some Indian media and reporters have repeatedly spread malicious rumors targeting China. In February, an Indian reporter claimed that people in Wuhan were shouting for help after being locked in their homes. But in the video he posted on Twitter, Wuhan people were actually chanting slogans to encourage each other. Indian media also fabricated information about PLA casualties after the China-India border clash in June. Such ridiculous, unprofessional reports aim at smearing China, regardless of facts and logic and bringing shame to Indian media themselves.

Against the backdrop of the China-India border clash, Indian media may want more than ever to stir trouble against China. Thus, they spread rumors to drive a wedge between the mainland and Taiwan, hoping to entangle cross-Straits situation in a mess.

However, Taiwan's "Defense Ministry" strongly condemned "this malicious act" in both the Chinese and English statements. The Taiwan military is well aware of the consequences of misjudgment which could easily be caused by untrue information.

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The situation across the Taiwan Straits is highly tense, and there is a high possibility of unwanted military conflicts being sparked in the region. The Taiwan authorities urgently refuted the Indian media's rumors, which shows that the island cannot bear the consequences of such provocation. Democratic Progressive Party authorities must be vigilant against this.

Both China and India are populous countries. Facing the different situation of China and India's COVID-19 fight, and the two countries' gap in economic, technological and other achievements, India has a mixed and complicated mentality. However, the unrestricted smearing and spreading rumors against China will only damage the credibility of the Indian media. Media outlets of a major country should have a vision of the big picture. But some Indian media obviously do not have it. They serve nothing but their narrow economic or political interests. To catch people's eyes, they have ignored social interests and basic professional standards.

Indian media have played a significant role in the deterioration of China-India relations, as well as New Delhi's worsening relations with other neighbors. Indian media must be reined in if the country truly wants to improve relations with its neighboring countries.

**By: Li Qingqing**

**Source: Global Times**

## **The forgotten victims of the Beirut explosion: domestic workers**

It is just over a month since the Beirut port explosion, and the footage from that day remains as shocking as it was when it first began to appear on our TV screens and social media. In fragments of video, the world saw Beirut life freeze in confusion at the unfamiliar sound of the explosion, then shatter as its impact hit. Among those bits of film we saw one scene, captured on domestic CCTV, that was replicated across the city – an African nanny instinctively scooping children up out of harm's way, and protecting them with her body.

Many of these nannies are now sleeping on the streets of Beirut. Most are starving. Even before the explosion, an economic crisis exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic meant that Lebanese employers could no longer pay their domestic workers. And so they made them gather their belongings, drove them to their embassies, and dumped them outside. Last June alone, more than 100 Ethiopian domestic workers were left outside their home country's consulate. They live out of suitcases, and share mattresses. Some still try to maintain the discipline of wearing masks even as they sleep cheek by jowl on the unsanitary pavement.

Last week I spoke to Christine, a West African nanny and domestic worker who didn't want to use her real name for fear of reprisals from her employer. A veteran of the Beirut labour market, she told me that she was trying to raise some money to help abandoned African women go back to their countries of origin. But that journey can't be the priority. First, the women sleeping in the streets need to eat. If there is any money left over, it will be spent on shelter.

Travel from Lebanon to destinations in Africa is expensive, so the golden ticket home is reserved for the very sick who need to be with their families. She counts herself as one of the lucky ones, as her "madam" has kept her on, giving her a place to stay, and only reducing her salary by half.

The consulates, even when they are predisposed to helping, have to negotiate a labyrinth of Lebanese government bureaucracy, already infamous for its corruption and inefficiency. In order to secure the necessary paperwork for exit, hefty fees are levied by the ministry of labour, and then there are the travel costs. Ethiopian migrant workers are often told to try to return to their employers.

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At the heart of this human rights crisis is a system of migrant labour that remains a stain on many countries in the Arab world. Known as kafala, or “sponsorship”, it effectively hands the fate of workers to their employers, who often withhold their passports to maintain control, and then demand that fees paid to employment agencies be repaid if workers want to leave before their contracts are up. This forces some workers to run away and become undocumented.

Anna, a nanny from the Philippines, told me how she managed to slip away from her abusive employer by layering three sets of underwear, tops and trousers on top of each other. That way she managed to bring with her a change of clothes without carrying a bag. She had lost so much weight by then, she jokes, that she could wear that much stuff without raising suspicion. She left everything else, including her passport, behind.

The cruelty of this kafala system isn't an unfortunate outcome of bureaucracy, it is the result of a racist hierarchy in which black workers find themselves at the bottom. Of all the nationalities that jostle and hustle for a living in the Middle East and the wider Arab world, dark-skinned African women are the cheapest to hire, the most desperate, and the most abused.

All migrant workers in Lebanon are struggling, Christine told me, but African women suffer the most because “we are not considered human beings, everybody ignores us. We are invisible.” Employers who can no longer pay their workers' salaries can still house and feed them, but they choose not to, even though many maids and nannies offer to work for free.

As with any crisis, the most vulnerable are pushed off the cliff edge. Lebanon is struggling with a corrupt and incompetent political class, and now the aftermath of an explosion that would challenge the most robust infrastructure. The size of the rebuilding process that Beirut faces means that hungry African women sleeping rough on Beirut's streets are rendered invisible twice – first by Lebanese society, which treats them as subhuman, and again by a global community that cannot see so many layers down into Lebanon's ranking of victims.

For now, Beirut's migrant workers are sticking together and sharing whatever meagre resources they have. They also try to warn others to stay away from the country. Christine fears they will still come in any case, because they believe they

may be the lucky ones. “When you are poor you think, ‘Let me try,’ she says. “We just want to try.”

**By: Nesrine Malik**

**Source: The Guardian**

*The writer is a Guardian columnist and the author of *We Need New Stories: Challenging the Toxic Myths Behind Our Age of Discontent**

Mega Lecture

## Confused Kashmir strategy?

On August 24, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi addressed a news conference to inform the people of Pakistan about what he termed “unprecedented development” with regard to the longstanding Kashmir dispute. Just two days before this, six pro-Indian political parties in the disputed territory gathered at the Abdullah family’s residence in Srinagar. After their meeting, they issued a joint declaration called “Gopkar Declaration 11”. Gopkar is the name of the road where the Abdullah family’s residence is located. The six parties — the National Conference (NC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Indian National Congress, J&K Peoples Conference (PC), Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M) and the Awami National Conference (ANC) —unanimously opposed the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35(A) of the Indian constitution that gave the disputed territory a special status. All parties demanded restoration of the pre-August 5, 2019 status of Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. Remember leaders of these parties, which issued the declaration, remained under detention for a year before they were freed by Indian authorities.

According to Foreign Minister Qureshi, this was an extraordinary development that even pro-Indian political parties in Kashmir now sought the reversal of the Modi government’s August 5, 2019 move. He was of the view that this was a vindication of Pakistan’s stance.

His statement immediately raised eyebrows with some retired diplomats and Kashmiri leaders questioning the Foreign Minister’s jubilation over the Gopkar Declaration. Their concern was that Pakistan’s stance has never been the restoration of the special status of the disputed territory. Qureshi’s statement suggested as if the Kashmir dispute started on August 5, 2019. Interestingly, a day after the Indian government’s move to change the decades-old special status of the disputed territory, a meeting of corps commanders was held. A statement issued after the meeting had said: “Pakistan never recognised the sham Indian efforts to legalise its occupation of Jammu & Kashmir through article 370 or 35(A) decades ago, efforts which have now been revoked by India itself.”

This naturally merits a question as to why Qureshi was then so excited over the Gopkar Declaration. It was important to raise this pertinent question as Pakistan never recognised the pro-Indian political parties as true representatives of the

Kashmiris. Also, no matter what these pro-Indian parties publicly say, they will never abandon their stance on Kashmir. And just days after the Gopkar Declaration, Umar Abdullah, the former chief minister of occupied Kashmir, confirmed this. In an interview he made it clear that although his year-long detention made him bitter and angry, he would never change his time-tested stance on Kashmir. He said Kashmir would remain an integral part of India.

This indicates that either the Foreign Minister has no knowledge of these pro-Indian parties and their history or he has not been given a proper brief on the current situation in Kashmir. Even a layman can understand that these pro-Indian Kashmiri leaders were freed as part of an understanding with New Delhi. Therefore, they will never change their stance or loyalty towards India. Few statements here and there by these leaders showing anger and frustration over the abrogation of Article 370 are only meant to appease the Kashmiri public. Endorsing the pro-Indian parties has also not gone down well with the genuine representatives of the Kashmiris who have been struggling for the right to self-determination. More importantly, such statements by the Foreign Minister only adds to the conspiracy theories and make people believe that perhaps Pakistan has abandoned its principled stance on Kashmir!

**By: Kamran Yousaf**

**Source: The Express Tribune**

## Let Pakistani girls fly

Equality between men and women was an unquestioning feature in Quaid's vision of the state. While addressing the Muslim University of Aligarh on March 10, 1944, he said in a sky-high way, "No nation can rise to the height of glory unless your women are side by side with you. We are victims of evil customs. It is a crime against humanity that our women are shut up within four walls of the houses as prisoners. There is no sanction anywhere for the deplorable condition in which our women have to live." Contemporary Pakistani society is not much different from the above stated description and contains full male biases which cause women to face discrimination at multiple levels and experience a loss of opportunities.

Former World Bank country director, Illango Patchamuthu, during Human Capital Summit 2020, said that women's economic power and education is essential for the sustainable development of the country. Furthermore, an additional schooling year adds up to nearly 10 percent in their future income. Also, he emphasised that giving access to information, finance, assets, and expanding their skills would boost 30 percent in the economy. Thus, Pakistan must focus on this untapped potential by working on an inclusive framework, policies, and practices to let women in the labour force.

Sadly, a majority of Pakistani girls experience societal pressure, especially about marriage. As per UNICEF, with an estimated 2 million child brides, Pakistan ranked as sixth highest country in terms of child marriages. Forced marriages and early aged marriages have contributed to female dependency, a vicious cycle of domestic violence, and loss of an economic resource. According to a research, putting an end to child brides' culture could add \$6229 million dollars to the economy.

Career and education is at stake when girls get married early and its repercussions are high on a socio-economic level. Out of the total population, 49 percent are women but they only contribute 24 percent to the labour force while men's contribution is 76 percent. The unemployment rate of women is also double in comparison to men and stands at 9 to 10 percent. In urban areas, this unemployment graph goes upward to 20 percent. Our employment to population ratio is also devastatingly low, that is, 20 percent in the case of women. In contrast, men's employment to population ratio is 64 percent. Therefore, there is no doubt



in Pakistan's ranking at 151 amongst 153 countries as per Global gender report in terms of equality between women and men.

In Pakistan, 21 percent of girls get married before 18 years while 3 percent before 15 years of age. In contrast, women of economically sound nations get married in their late twenties. For instance, Denmark 28.2 years, Japan 29.4 years, Korea 30.2 years, and England 35.5 years. Furthermore, their female population has access to education, liberty, equal opportunity, and employment facilities. However, the Pakistani situation is very daunting. Traditional customs like bartering for girls, marrying girls off before their birth, patriarchal norms by fixing honour boards on girls, family and tribal marriages, and pseudo beliefs like marrying off girls at the start of puberty are adding fuel to fire.

No doubt, Sindh was the first province to enact laws for restraining the child bride culture in 2014 by declaring marriage before 18 as a crime. Contrastingly, the recent decision of the Sindh high court in February, 2020 in case of Huma's abduction, forced conversion, and marriage at age of 14 by his abductor, Abdul Jabbar has set precedence and allowed men to marry women after their first period. Furthermore, most violent cases that fall under criminal courts are transferred to family courts at district level courts. These developments are institutionalising domestic abuse and tearing the societal fabric.

In this distressing scenario, it's high time for the nation to wake up and act towards inclusivity otherwise the future seems bleak. Reconstruction of thought on gender norms across all levels can help in curbing ill practices. First of all, knowledgeable skills and training must be imparted intensively to judicial magistrates and police officials for better handling of violence and abuse matters rather than dismissing as family matters. In addition, embedding gender equality ideas in the national curriculum would help children in recognising and rejecting abusive behaviour. The state ought to promote literature and media projects (dramas, films, documentaries and more) that depict women as autonomous and intolerant to any kind of abuse.

**By: Usman Ghani**

**Source: The Nation**

*The writer is a columnist and affiliated with PSPP, PIDE.*

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## **Trump faces new character tests as campaign enters final stretch**

Maybe the biggest surprise about allegations President Donald Trump uttered rude dismissals of American war dead was how unsurprising it really was. The remarks, reported first in *The Atlantic* magazine and corroborated by several outlets, including CNN, seemed so in character with Trump's public persona that even an onslaught of denials from current and former officials did little to negate the impression that Trump is a man who sometimes says terrible things.

When excerpts soon followed of his former attorney and fixer Michael Cohen's book portraying Trump as a cheat, liar, fraud, bully, racist, predator and con man, the surprise again failed to materialize -- even though Cohen had worked intimately with Trump for years.

Now, as the presidential campaign begins its post-Labor Day finale, the question has become less about what Americans know of Trump's character but whether they care.

Trump appears to be betting they don't. He's continued his attacks on war heroes and generals, even as he tries to claim utmost respect for the military. And he's dismissing efforts to reckon with the country's racist past, even as he works to convince suburban White voters he's not racist himself.

Just as voters' threshold for bad behavior was tested in the final days of 2016, when Trump's vulgar on-camera comments about molesting women rocked the race, Americans this time around find themselves again forced to decide whether Trump's character really matters to them. In the broad scheme of things back then, it didn't and he won.

But 2020 could be different: since that race, voters have been bombarded with more examples of the President using crude, sexist or racist language, erasing any notion the office might change him and throwing the country's politics into turmoil.

### **An election about character**

At its heart, the 2020 presidential campaign has always been about character. Even a life-altering pandemic, an economic calamity and a national racial reckoning have become tests of the incumbent's constitution: Whether Trump cared enough to confront a health crisis, whether he understood the suffering of out-of-work

Americans and whether he could speak with compassion to those who have historically been oppressed in the United States.

Former Vice President Joe Biden, the Democratic nominee, has expressly made Trump's character the central argument of his campaign, and has been candid that he might not be running for president right now if the incumbent were a traditional Republican and not someone who -- in Biden's telling -- lacks the moral authority to lead the country.

He's sought to cast himself as Trump's moral opposite -- and on Sunday, a few minutes after the President arrived for the 296th visit of his presidency to one of his golf clubs, Biden was arriving at church services at St. Joseph on the Brandywine in Wilmington, Delaware.

Even Republicans appeared to acknowledge that character will play a central role in voters' decision-making in November, programming their convention last month with personal testimonies to rebut suggestions that Trump is uncaring, sexist or racist in the hopes of wooing suburban voters who have been turned off by the President's behavior.

Yet based on polls, which have remained mostly steady since the convention, those arguments did little to reverse what have become hardened views of Trump as uncaring, disrespectful and churlish. And it's that impression of the President -- which he hasn't always attempted to rebut -- that makes the allegations lodged this week so difficult for him to shake.

"If this is true it's really reprehensible. The problem is, it is believable given the President's past behavior and statements he made, most notably about Sen. McCain," former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said on CNN.

After The Atlantic article published, CNN's Jim Acosta reported that a former senior administration official confirmed Trump referred to fallen US service members at the Aisne-Marne cemetery in France in crude and derogatory terms during a November 2018 trip to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I.

A person familiar with Trump's views also said he has repeatedly questioned why Americans who served in Vietnam went to war, suggesting that veterans of that conflict didn't know how to exploit the system to get out of serving. Trump received

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a draft deferment for bone spurs. The same source said Trump has also questioned why Americans would sign up to go to war in Iraq and Afghanistan, wondering aloud, "What did they get out of it?"

Trump has been so enraged by the article that aides began lining up statements of denial nearly as soon as it published, people familiar with the matter said. Trump himself issued a forceful denial standing on a pitch-black tarmac Thursday evening, not seeming to notice there were no lights to illuminate his statement.

"Absolutely not," Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert Wilkie said when asked by CNN's Dana Bash on "State of the Union" Sunday whether he'd ever heard the President disparage veterans. "And I would be offended too if I thought it was true."

### **Hardly anything new**

But despite the coordinated chorus of current and former administration officials insistent the President has never been anything but reverent toward American service members, it remains true that some of what is contained in the article has either happened in public or echoes things the President has said in the past.

Even in his attempts to rebut the allegation he disrespects US military members, Trump lashed out at his former chief of staff John Kelly -- a decorated retired Marine Corps general -- and took a swipe at the late Sen. John McCain, whose treatment by Trump was a central element to The Atlantic story.

Similarly, the depictions of Trump as racist contained in Cohen's book would seem more revelatory if the President hadn't fomented a racist conspiracy theory about his predecessor or repeatedly insulted his Black critics' intelligence.

In his book, Cohen recounts Trump ranting about Barack Obama after he won the presidency in 2008, quoting him as saying, "Tell me one country run by a black person that isn't a sh\*thole...They are all complete f\*cking toilets." After Nelson Mandela died, Trump allegedly said of South Africa that "Mandela f\*cked the whole country up. Now it's a sh\*thole. F\*ck Mandela. He was no leader."

It's accounts like that which prompted Republicans to line up a roster of African Americans during their convention last month to insist the President is not a racist and cares about racial harmony.

But since then, Trump has dismissed the idea that structural racism even exists in the United States -- including during a controversial visit to Kenosha, Wisconsin, where police shot Jacob Blake, a Black man, seven times in the back. Asked by a reporter whether he believed systemic racism exists, Trump chose to focus instead on violence occurring during demonstrations.

On Friday, Trump seemed to codify that view into federal policy. His budget chief instructed heads of federal agencies to dramatically alter racial sensitivity training programs for employees, saying funding would be pulled from sessions related to "white privilege" and "critical race theory," which he deemed "un-American propaganda."

And on Sunday, Trump said the US Department of Education would investigate whether California schools are using the New York Times' "1619 Project" in public school curriculum. The Pulitzer-Prize winning collection reframes American history around the date of August 1619, when the first slave ship arrived on America's shores.

The moves follow the President's pattern of lampooning attempts to process or reckon with the country's fraught racial history.

In the view of Biden's running mate, Kamala Harris -- the first Black and South Asian American woman on a major party ticket -- the avoidance of the issue exposes a character flaw.

"I don't think that most reasonable people who are paying attention to the facts would dispute that there are racial disparities and a system that has engaged in racism in terms of how the laws have been enforced," said Harris, a California senator and former state attorney general, in an exclusive interview with Bash on CNN. "It does us no good to deny that. Let's just deal with it. Let's be honest. These might be difficult conversations for some, but they're not difficult conversations for leaders, not for real leaders."

**By: Kevin Liptak**

**Source: CNN**

## Two Japanese giants

With the resignation of Prime Minister Abe (ahbay) Shinzo, a long chapter in Japanese politics is coming to an end. He first became the longest-serving prime minister of post-WWII Japan when he crossed his great uncle Sato (sahto) Eisaku's record and then also broke the record of tenure since the office of PM was established in 1885.

Since our interest in – and understanding of – world history and politics is too West-centric, we tend to be more inclined towards America, Europe, and the Middle East while ignoring the Far East. The result is that we hardly have any experts, say in history or journalism, specializing in Japan. Perhaps it is about time we looked at countries in East Asia to get a better grasp of world politics, and to explore more opportunities for our labour force which Japan is keen to hire under its new policies to attract foreign workers.

In this column we look at Abe and Sato, the two giants of post-WWII Japan. We may start by reminding ourselves that Japan was the only country in the world that experienced a devastating blow at the tail end of the Second World War when the US dropped two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The US displayed a complete disregard for human life by using the most destructive weapon on Japanese civilian population. The Japanese showed remarkable resilience by rebuilding their country within a short span of time, and were able to host the Olympic Games in 1964.

That was the time when Sato became prime minister of Japan. Even before that, Sato's brother Kishi, who was the grandfather of Abe Shinzo, held this position from 1957 to 1960. Three premiers from the same family – Kishi, Sato, and Abe – ruled over Japan for two decades. This in itself is a marvelous feat in a country where prime ministers appear to file in and out in quick succession. In the remaining 43 years since 1957 Japan has seen 23 prime ministers making it less than two years for each prime minister.

Kishi ruled for three years whereas Sato for eight (1964-72) and Abe for nine years – 2005-06 and then 2012-20. Abe and Sato have some interesting differences and similarities. Perhaps the first similarity is that both Abe and Sato formed their first government after a relatively stable period of prime ministers who had ruled for

more than four years. Sato took over from Akeda who was prime minister from 1960 to 1964. Abe formed his first government in 2006 after Koizumi had ruled for five years from 2001. Though Abe's second government followed an unstable three-year period from 2009 to 2012.

Sato was the first prime minister of Japan who was born in the 20th century (in 1901), and Abe was the first prime minister born after the Second World War (in 1954). Before becoming PM, both Abe and Sato held the office of chief cabinet secretary for one year; Sato from 1953-54 and Abe 2005-06. Both formed their first governments without leading their parties to win general elections. In Sato's case, elections had been held in 1963, and in 1964 it was a change in party leadership that made him prime minister.

Abe formed his first government after his party had already won general elections in 2005 under the leadership of Koizumi. In their eight-year consecutive rule, both Abe and Sato formed three governments each: one for two years and two governments for three years. The Olympic Games appear to be another similarity between them: Sato was the minister of state in charge of the 18th Olympic Games in 1964 before he became prime minister. He also oversaw as PM the Winter Olympics held in Sapporo, Japan, in 1972. Abe's role was crucial in winning the 2020 Olympics for Tokyo, cherishing a wish to preside over the Games. (The Games have been postponed by a year to 2021 because of the Covid-19 pandemic).

Internationally speaking, both Abe and Sato had to address the three primary concerns of relations with America, China, and the Koreas. Since the US is responsible for providing overall protection to Japan, all American friends and foes end up becoming friends and foes for Japan also. In that sense, Sato had to manage Japanese relations with the Soviet Union too during the bitter cold war. Both had to deal with two US presidents for four years, each belonging to the Democratic and Republican parties.

When Sato became prime minister of Japan in 1964, US president Johnson belonged to the Democratic Party. Republican Nixon replaced him four years later in 1968. When Abe became PM of Japan for the second time in 2012, the US had a Democratic president, Obama, replaced after four years by Republican Trump. Abe had also been PM for one year (2006-07) when Bush Junior was the US president. Interestingly, both Abe and Sato dealt with two Republican presidents who faced

impeachments – Nixon and Trump – though Nixon resigned in 1974 before his impeachment and that was after Sato had left his office in 1972.

Contrarily, they dealt with just one Russian or Soviet leader each: Brezhnev and Putin. Abe and Sato also have the unenviable distinction of having to face new nuclear powers at their borders. Sato became prime minister in Dec 1964, just two months after China detonated its first nuclear device in October 1964. Whereas Abe, within two weeks after becoming PM, had to see North Korea test its first nuclear weapon in October 2006. Abe had to withstand the pressure from North Korea, Sato had to bear the brunt of a nuclear China at his doorsteps.

Abe and Sato had to deal with nuclear matters as Sato first argued that Japan needed nuclear weapons to match those of China, but the US opposed such. The Johnson administration pressed Japan to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, ending, for then, Japan's nuclear ambitions. During Sato's tenure, the US was trying to woo China to establish a good relationship with it. In Abe's time, the US has been attempting to isolate China. While Sato was not happy with Nixon meeting Chinese leaders, Abe had reservations about Trump meeting the North Korean leader.

During both periods, the US was entangled in prolonged wars in Asia and trying to extricate itself from them. Sato had to side with the Americans battling in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Abe provided his tacit support to the US in its prolonged presence in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. Another unique similarity between Abe and Sato is that the only two Nobel Prizes in literature that writers of Japanese origin have received were during their tenures.

The first Japanese writer to win the Nobel Prize in literature was Kawabata who won it in 1968 when Sato was prime minister. Ishiguro was the second writer of Japanese origin to win it in 2017 when Abe was PM. Abe and Ishiguro are exactly the same age, but Ishiguro became a British citizen in 1983. Still the Japanese people love him as their own and take pride in him.

Both Abe and Sato remained the president of the ruling party for nearly eight years each and both were members of the Japanese House of Representatives for over 25 years: Sato, 1949-74; Abe, 1993-2020. In short, both played unusually long innings by Japanese norms and provided much needed stability in national and international affairs.



Arguably, Abe was a notch higher in his performance with his efforts to reform the economy and bring more women into the workforce; and also maintain a delicate balance internationally with visible efforts to also improve relations with Pakistan.

**By: Dr Naazir Mahmood**

**Source: The News**

*The writer holds a PhD from the University of Birmingham, UK and works in Islamabad.*

Mega Lecture

## **'Strategic ambiguity' about Taiwan must end**

The Biden administration's first grave test approaches, not silently on little cat's feet but in the noisy stomping of totalitarians' boots. In 2021, Taiwan might provide the most perilous U.S. moment since the Cuban missile crisis of 1962.

The U.S. policy of "strategic ambiguity" regarding Taiwan has become untenable, as has Joe Biden's 2001 stance. President George W. Bush, asked that year if the country has an obligation to defend Taiwan against an attack by China, said: "Yes, we do, and the Chinese must understand that." Bush was asked, "With the full force of the American military?" He answered: "Whatever it took." Bush's national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, said "the Taiwan Relations Act makes very clear that the U.S. has an obligation that Taiwan's peaceful way of life is not upset by force.

Biden responded: "No. Not exactly." In a Washington Post op-ed, Biden reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to preserving Taiwan's "autonomy" under the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, and to providing Taiwan with "defense articles and defense services" necessary for "sufficient self-defense capability." But he said the United States "has not been obligated to defend Taiwan since we abrogated the 1954 Mutual Defense Treaty" in 1980.

The act, Biden said, makes it U.S. policy that "any attempt to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means would ... be of grave concern." But Biden stressed "a huge difference between reserving the right to use force and obligating ourselves, a priori, to come to the defense of Taiwan." He said that neither Taiwan nor Beijing should have "the ability automatically to draw us into a war across the Taiwan Strait."

But even 19 years ago, it was essentially unthinkable that Taiwan would "draw us into" a war by attacking the mainland. Today, time is Taiwan's friend. A 2001 poll measured Taiwanese versus Chinese identity among Taiwan's residents. It found that 10.6 percent identified as Chinese, 41.6 percent as Taiwanese, 43.1 percent as both. Today, 66 percent identify as just Taiwanese, 28 percent as both, and just 4 percent as Chinese. Although a majority of Taiwanese favor independence someday, today's threat to the status quo comes from Beijing.

The "one China policy" — the diplomatic fiction that the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the People's Republic of China are parts of the same entity — has been made a mockery in Hong Kong. In 2001, China was just beginning the military buildup produced by a 900 percent spending increase between 1990 and 2017. In 2001, China's gross domestic product was 12.7 percent of U.S. GDP. Today, it is almost 70 percent. (The Soviet Union's GDP never exceeded 60 percent of U.S. GDP.) In 2001, China had not begun aggressively claiming, in defiance of international law, sovereignty over the South China Sea's 1.4 million square miles, through which \$3.4 trillion of global commerce passes annually. In 2001, Hong Kong's autonomy was presumed to be secure until 2047 under Beijing's 1984 commitment to Britain, which ceded control in 1997. Today, Hong Kong's liberty is a guttering candle because Chinese dictator Xi Jinping meant what he said in 2017: "The wheels of history roll on, the tides of the times are vast and mighty." Tides with wheels? Never mind. Xi said: "History looks kindly on those with resolve, with drive and ambition, and with plenty of guts; it won't wait for the hesitant." From the bloodshed on the China-India border to the lawless aggressiveness in the South China Sea to the coarse bullying by China's "Wolf Warrior" diplomats, especially in Europe, China is demonstrating the arrogance that begets recklessness.

Furthermore, a regime's internal dynamics often presage external behavior, so it is ominous, the New York Times reports, that Xi's regime is directing the security agencies to "drive the blade in" and "scrape poison off the bone" as they "resolutely put absolute loyalty, absolute purity and absolute dependability into action" to make everyone "obey Xi in everything." Xi has suffocated Hong Kong because he could, and because free people on China's periphery threaten the mainland with a destabilizing political virus. Regarding Taiwan's 24 million free people, he said last year: "We make no promise to renounce the use of force and reserve the option of taking all necessary means." To Xi, Taiwan's autonomy means that the communist conquest of China in 1949 remains incomplete. Completing it would secure his place in Chinese history. If he considers attacking Taiwan, or even just one of its nearby islands, will he know President Biden's intentions? Ambiguity is useful in diplomacy, until it becomes dangerous.

**By: George F. Will**

**Source: The Japan Times**

## Will Trumpism survive election?

An important debate underway in the US and beyond is whether Donald Trump's defeat in the upcoming election will also spell an end to Trumpism. Some cast the election as a referendum on Trumpism. What constitutes Trumpism is itself at issue in this conversation.

With the presidential election less than two months away the Democratic contender Joe Biden is leading in the polls. Just as one day is a long time in politics, 60 days are even more so for an election whose outcome remains wide open. Despite the uncertainty, discussion has intensified about the implications if Trump fails to be re-elected.

Views differ about what Trumpism stands for even though there is general agreement that it doesn't represent any coherent ideology. It is too wrapped up with an egotistical and demagogic personality to be regarded as an intelligible or consistent set of ideas. Nevertheless, Trumpism has come to be identified with a syndrome of characteristics and attitudes, some of which have long been present in American society, that Trump did not create but are embodied in him.

In the debate Trumpism has variously been described as 'right-wing nationalist, anti-establishment populism', an "amalgam of a narrative of Trump's business career and articulation of right-wing populist rhetoric mixed with previously fringe conservative philosophies", a form of 'plutocratic populism' and a 'zero-sum view of politics and the world'.

Consideration of four interrelated aspects from the cluster usually associated with Trumpism would enable an assessment of whether these will fade away with his defeat or survive beyond the election. They are: authoritarian right-wing populism, anti-establishment outlook, thinly veiled racism infused with white supremacist notions, a xenophobic, anti-immigration stance, and a unilateralist America-First paradigm of dealing with the world. The point about these strands of thinking is that they didn't emerge with Trump but were manipulated and mainstreamed by him — and magnified. The question is will they vanish that quickly?

If we consider right-wing populism, it appears that while Trump's defeat will be a setback to the phenomenon it will hardly end its appeal in the US or elsewhere in the world witnessing similar populist movements. In America it has deeper roots

than Trump's revival of ideas associated with it, previously found mainly in fringe thinking. Its invocation by Trump has partly been a reaction to America's relative global decline and erosion of its economically predominant position. 'Making America Great Again', Trump's slogan in the last election, aimed to address a 'weakness' he attributed to Obama and his policies rather than to changing structural realities in the US and global and domestic shifts in economic and political power.

The rise of Trumpian populism is also often regarded as reflecting public alienation with traditional political parties and the establishment for their inability to meet expectations especially in times of disruption caused by the uneven impact of 'elitist' globalisation. It seems that the underlying factors that fostered Trump's political rise are not going to easily fade away as they now inform attitudes of significant sections of American society.

What about anti-establishment sentiment which Trump has also mobilised? Again, there are reasons for the emergence of popular disaffection in recent decades as manifested in eroding trust in public institutions, which Trump has played off and fuelled by his portrayal of the deep state's anti-people conduct. Having sought to delegitimise public institutions, can that trend be reversed if Trump loses? Probably not in the near term, while the longer-term outlook will depend on what the next president does to revive this trust. As examples from elsewhere show, once institutions are undermined it takes a long time and much effort to restore confidence.

As for the racial component of Trumpism this has long been a troubling though enduring aspect of America's social landscape, with racism a systemic problem. The centrist policies pursued by both political parties in recent decades prevented racism from rearing its head. But with Trump appropriating and according respectability to white supremacist ideas a resurgence of racism occurred — evidenced in the most serious civil unrest that recently swept the country in over half a century. Again, Trump fed off and fed into the unease among a section of white society who felt that minority numbers were rising so fast as to eventually swamp them. The Trumpian slogan in the previous election of 'Taking our country back' was an unsubtle way of conveying this — taking it back from minorities who ostensibly 'seized it' in the Obama era.

If Trump loses, a President Biden will certainly try to play a healing role, as he has repeatedly affirmed, and seek to unify the country after the polarising and divisive Trump years. But race will continue to be a complicated issue in a country where racism remains deep seated, especially when a racist minority has amplified its voice in national affairs.

Trumpism, like right-wing populism elsewhere in the world, is strongly infused by xenophobia and a viscerally anti-immigration stance — illustrated by Trump's desire to build a wall along the Mexican border to shut out 'illegal' migrants. Its xenophobic and Islamophobic attitude is also exemplified by Trump's infamous 'Muslim travel ban', which suspended travel from several Muslim countries. One of Biden's campaign statements was that he would end this ban on his first day in office. But little change can be expected in America's tighter immigration policies as this remains a politically charged issue, even if polls show a majority of Americans believe migrants make positive contributions to their economy.

On engaging with the world, a Trump defeat would likely mean a departure from extreme unilateralism as a Democratic president would return to multilateralism, rejoin global bodies, restore partnerships and repair ties with allies. Washington would arguably start dealing with the world with some respect. Perhaps on this Trumpism would see the most significant reversal.

But of the domestic trends evaluated above, only some and not all, will likely wane if Trump loses. A decisive defeat and bold actions by his successor may set back some ideas of right-wing populism but they would not disappear. It remains an open question whether America has been transformed — and deeply divided — by Trumpism in ways that will endure much beyond the election.

**By: Maleeha Lodhi**

**Source: DAWN**

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## **FBR: reforms, refunds & cleansing**

“If we realise that the FBR cannot be fixed, we will create a new FBR. This is because Pakistan’s survival is linked to it. It’s not about our liking or disliking: if our tax collection authority does not function properly, it could lead to a security risk. No nation that relies on loans can maintain its pride and independence”-address of Prime Minister to the 11th All-Pakistan Chambers President Conference in Islamabad on March 7, 2019

After 18 months of the above statement by Prime Minister and telling the nation that “reforming FBR is essential”, things have changed from bad to worse. The claim of exceeding target by Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and celebrated as great success by the coalition government of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) is now exposed as refunds of Rs. 710 billion are admittedly outstanding. If from collection of Rs. 3.9 trillion, this amount is deducted, the actual collection comes to Rs. 3.2 trillion (7.9% of GDP).

The PTI Government removed the third head of FBR on July 4, 2020 giving “additional charge” to Member Customs for 3 months. Till today, it has failed to find any suitable candidate for at least a term of three-years to undertake and complete comprehensive reforms for which a separate wing was recently created discussed in Modernising & reforming FBR, Daily Times, August 30, 2020. Everyone asks: How long will FBR remain a house in disorder?

In FBR’s collection and unpaid refunds, Daily Times, August 9, 2020, FBR’s claim of exceeding the target of Rs. 3908 billion was exposed showing that refunds payable were not subtracted to give the correct net collection figure. Surprisingly, the data released by Ministry of Finance in respect of federal and provincial fiscal operations for fiscal year 2019-20, is still showing collection of FBR at Rs. 3998 billion. FBR on September 2, 2020, before the National Assembly Standing Committee on Finance [hereinafter “the Committee], confessed that actual liability of income tax and sales tax refund as on June 30, 2020 was Rs. 710 billion (sales tax Rs. 142 billion and income tax Rs. 568 billion).

The misrepresentation of figures when we are under \$6 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) programme of International Monetary Fund [IMF] is quite amazing. After its first review and seeing that FBR was far behind the original target of Rs.

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5555 billion, the IMF revised it to Rs. 5238 billion, then to Rs. 4803 billion on the eve of incomplete second review, held prior to Covid-19 pandemic, and after coronavirus outbreak, finally to Rs. 3908 billion.

The need of the hour is to reduce the huge tax expenditure by withdrawing exemptions available to the rich and mighty, give relief to taxpayers and pay all outstanding refunds, which is their right and not a favour

The target fixed by the PTI Government for the current fiscal year 2020-21 for FBR is Rs. 4963 billion, amid heavy economic toll of Covid-19 endemic and minus growth. Interestingly, even according to Adviser to Prime Minister on Finance and Revenue, Dr. Abdul Hafeez Shaikh, it is not achievable! In a statement, he" advised the provinces not to make their budgets on the basis of proposed Rs. 4.963 trillion tax collection target fixed for FBR for fiscal year 2020-21" and added: "The provinces should make their budgets while keeping in mind the Federal Board of Revenue's past performance and difference between performance, projections and reality". It can only happen in Pakistan where the head of Finance Ministry is openly admitting that budget is prepared on exaggerated revenue figures!

Instead of blaming FBR's officials, the PTI Government must admit lack of will to reduce exemptions, concessions, waivers and amnesties to powerful segments of society. Total tax expenditure was of Rs. 1.5 trillion in fiscal year 2019-2020 as per own admission of FBR in Annex-II appended to Economic Survey 2019-20. In fact, more exemptions and benefits have been given to the influential, while proudly claiming "no new tax" is levied in budget for 2020-21". If only 40% of taxes waived/forgone in fiscal year 2019-20 were recouped in Finance Act 2020, there would have been a fiscal space of Rs. 600 billion to reduce taxes. But It showed apathy towards the weaker sections of society and small/ medium enterprises (SMEs), facing the unbearable toll of Covid-19 outbreak/lockdown by not reducing exorbitant sales tax, withholding taxes and high cost of utilities and oppressive 12.5% advance income tax from mobile users. The total number of cellular subscribers as on July 31, 2020 was 167 million that included 81 million 3G/4G subscribers and 83 million broadband subscribers. They also pay 19.5% sales tax on services to provinces and 17% federal excise duty if based in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT).

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The need of the hour is to reduce the huge tax expenditure by withdrawing exemptions available to the rich and mighty, give relief to taxpayers and pay all outstanding refunds, which is their right and not a favour. According to a Press report, before the Committee, “FBR showed its inability to release the refunds from its revenue collection and sought a supplementary grant to clear the backlog”.

The Committee also took detailed briefing from Adviser to Prime Minister on Institutional Reforms & Austerity, Dr. Ishrat Husain, about FBR’s reforms. The Committee, headed by PTI MNA, took strong exception to unpaid tax refunds and pilferages in Afghan transit trade and issue of “the monopoly of one company over tracking of Afghan containers”, according to the Press report. The report further says that the Committee dominated by treasury members, termed FBR’s reforms agenda “more of a talk than having substance”.

Dr. Ishrat told the Committee that he was assigned the job of reforming the FBR about six months ago and at that time, “there was no clarity about the reforms process and various organisations were doing different things. He aptly said: “Without fixing the tax system, Pakistan’s dependence on IMF will keep on increasing”. He added. “If there is one bipartisan issue, it is the FBR reforms where all the political parties have to come together.”

Dr. Ishrat exactly repeated what was emphasised in Modernising & reforming FBR, Daily Times, August 30, 2020, that automation and digitisation alone could improve transparency and end interaction between taxmen and taxpayers. He added that there was a need to simplify the tax codes, procedures and rules, as “the current tax-related documentation is so complex that hardly a few people could claim to know it”. He admitted that “the FBR does not enjoy a good reputation because of a few black sheep in the organisation-we want to weed them out”.

It is heartening to see that the issue of FBR’s cleansing and unpaid refunds have been taken up seriously by the Committee. If the PTI Government is really sincere to reform the tax system, it must dismantle FBR as it is simply incorrigible! It must be reconstructed as suggested in Towards Flat, Low-rate, Broad and Predictable Taxes (PRIME Institute, Islamabad, 2016], the second revised edition of which will soon be made public giving a roadmap for holistic reforms in all areas to boost growth, leading to tax collection of Rs. 12 trillion, cumulatively at federal and

provincial levels, getting rid of IMF and heavy dependence on domestic and foreign loans.

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**Source: Daily Times**

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Mega Lecture