

Orange Line inauguration

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AFTER over six years since the project was launched, Karachi got its second multicoloured bus rapid transit line to chug off on Saturday. The Orange Line, named in honour of iconic social worker Abdul Sattar Edhi, will ferry commuters over a stretch measuring nearly four kilometres between Orangi Town and North Nazimabad. It follows the launch of the Green Line BRTS that hit the road in January of this year, connecting Karachi's northern suburbs with Numaish, the gateway to the city's commercial area. However, both the Orange and Green lines were massively behind schedule, while in the case of the latter the cost ballooned to double the Rs16.85bn original estimate. Yet in a city where the public transport system is highly inadequate for the needs of a modern, bustling metropolis, we must be thankful for these small mercies.

The federal government, which planned and executed the Green Line, and the Sindh administration, which is responsible for constructing the Orange Line, must not rest on their 'laurels' and speed up work on the other bus corridors. Work is underway on the Red Line, while the Blue, Yellow and Brown lines are still on the drawing board. Meanwhile, a modernised Karachi Circular Railway, or an alternative commuter train system, remain the stuff of dreams. The Sindh government has launched a Peoples Bus Service, but there are serious questions about the reliability and punctuality of this facility. The fact that the megacity of Karachi — or as some have put it, a conglomeration of cities — has for decades not had a modern transport system is criminal, and both the federal and Sindh governments are equally guilty of

the sin of neglecting this forsaken metropolis. Citizens should not be happy with the status quo — a bus line every decade or so, rickety buses and ‘Qingqis’ for a city of millions. They must demand that the rulers give this city a 21st century public transport system that puts emphasis on comfort, affordability, connectivity and dignity.

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Opinion

Deep divisions - Newspaper - DAWN.COM

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SOCIAL hyperpolarisation, gradually becoming apparent not just in developing democracies but also in the more evolved ones, has emerged as a matter of grave concern for policymakers worldwide. The Human Development Report 2021-22, issued by the United Nations Development Programme, explores it in detail, finding that the deep divisions we see in our communities today are borne of human insecurities that have metastasised due to the rapid economic, social and political shifts brought about by advancements in information technologies. The report's findings will seem quite familiar to anyone in Pakistan who has noticed with concern the alarming rise in political polarisation, deepening social divisions, religious and general intolerance and deepening mistrust between the citizenry and the state. Indeed, our country, with its many systemic problems, seems to have provided particularly fertile ground for social polarisation triggered by the arrival of digital media. The chasm between the haves and the have-nots had always been wide, but digital media shone a light on it like never before, in the process triggering the insecurities that underlie the general malcontent and disillusionment we see in today's youth.

The report finds that those who suffer from higher insecurity are attracted to more extreme views about the government's role in the economy. This, it warns, "hampers public deliberation in uncertain times when insecurity is higher". In a country where every economic decision is now looked at as a conspiracy by a government in cahoots with the IMF or some shadowy world power, this rings particularly true. The report also notes that

“people with greater intolerance of uncertainty are likely to bond with politically like-minded peers and less with opponents, fuelling the formation of polarised beliefs”. It warns that this can be exploited by politicians who can come up with attractive, extreme political ideologies that also impart a sense of moral superiority to those who ascribe to them. One does not need to name names to see where this is happening in our society and who is responsible for it. Clearly, we are living through a period of great social flux. Instead of leading their followers down a destructive path, there is a dire need for leaders of all shades to come together and formulate a shared vision of the future that is built on mutual respect and tolerance. In exploiting the worst of human nature, they are playing with a fire that will one day burn them too.

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Political calculus

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FEW will be unfamiliar with the ‘minus-one formula’. Talk of it or one of its iterations seems to have coincided with the peak of every period of political turmoil in our history. The measure has usually been taken as a signal that a political leader may be close to being declared persona non grata by the powers that be and that those around the said individual should seize the opportunity and fill the vacuum that is about to be created.

It is an attempt to turn a political party against its own leader, usually in return for a survival guarantee. The ultimatum is one of several unconstitutional means that have been employed in the past to sabotage Pakistan’s civilian leaders when other measures fail.

For the nth time, the ‘minus-one formula’ has allegedly been reinserted into the calculus of power, with yet another civilian leader apprehending forced removal from the political equation. This time, it is the PTI chairman who claims that the forces opposed to him — ie, the “imported government” and its “handlers” — want him removed from the picture over fears he may return to power stronger than he was before.

Read: *What next for the PTI?*

This alleged ‘conspiracy’ was a recurrent theme in Imran Khan’s addresses to supporters over the weekend. It appears that as he feels the wrath of the establishment building, the former prime minister wants to use the public’s sympathies as a shield. However, it is difficult to say whether his fears are real or if he’s

just creating noise to put the state under pressure to give him relief. One cannot simply ignore the fact that he started talking about the ‘minus-one formula’ just a day after the Islamabad High Court decided to indict him for contempt of court, and that particular bit of trouble was entirely his own doing.

However, the allegation also cannot be completely disregarded. There are many precedents for the ‘minus-one formula’ and ‘technical knockout’ in Pakistan’s political history. Several civilian leaders perceived as having become too big for their boots have been sidelined or forced out through questionable means. Prime ministers, presidents, and even lesser politicians deemed ‘undesirable’ for defying red lines have found themselves on the receiving end of ‘minus-one’.

Therefore, even if the threat of it being applied is being exaggerated, it is certainly not unthinkable given the downward trajectory of Mr Khan’s relationship with the state in recent months. If such a proposal is put forward, the PDM must resist the temptation to go along with it. Both Asif Ali Zardari and Nawaz Sharif have been targeted in the past under different ‘minus-one’ schemes, and they ought to realise the patent unfairness of it. No other entity except the people should have the power to decide the fate of a political leader. Any transgression of this rule is unacceptable in a democracy.

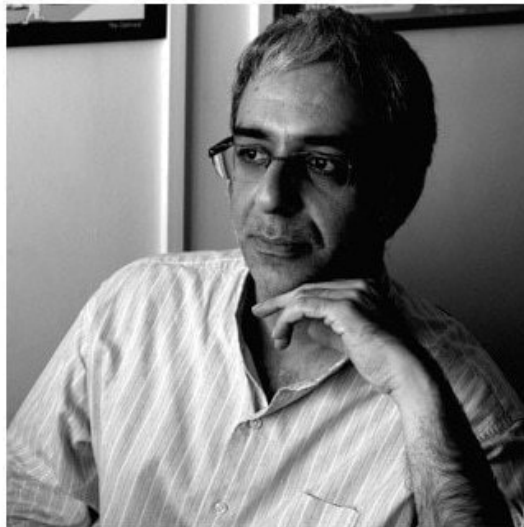
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Opinion

Learning to fight - Newspaper

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IN terms of sheer devastation, it may well emerge that Pakistan has suffered more damage during this single flood than in any war that we have fought. Whether we look at the amount of land inundated or the millions of people displaced, or if we try and calculate the growing economic cost — already said to be in the billions of dollars — and the hunger and disease that comes in the wake of super floods, it becomes clear that this is a catastrophe like no other.

It is only in terms of the absolute casualty count, which is nonetheless upwards of a thousand and growing, that the comparison fails. As is common in conflicts, it is those who are already most vulnerable that suffer the greatest, and this is exacerbated by the fact that this war is one that will not be

contained to a single front or a defined border. This is not a localised battle but an existential conflict that will be fought everywhere, all at once, and in perpetuity. With that in mind, let's extend the metaphor and ask what army we are planning to fight this war with.

How do armies win wars? At the most basic level it involves a chain of command, clearly defined objectives and a logistic chain that allows critical supplies and material to get to where they are needed, before they are needed. Critical to this is organisational structure which, in the case of most armies, starts with the unit or section. Three sections combine as a platoon and a company is made up of three platoons and so on until we reach the division level. Of course, it does no good to have an excellent organisational structure if the various components do not coordinate and work together like parts of a well-oiled machine.

The governmental body tasked with dealing with such disasters is the appropriately titled National Disaster Management Authority which is mandated to “[lay] down the policies, plans and guidelines for disaster management”. It does not and cannot work in isolation, of course, and so the NDMA must work in tandem with the provincial disaster management authorities which, in turn, must delegate ground responsibilities to the district disaster management authorities, that are meant to be present and functioning in each district of Pakistan. The DDMA's have an impressive mandate, tasked as they are with preparing district response plans while identifying vulnerable areas, adhering to NDMA and PDMA guidelines and also laying down guidelines of their own.

| Wargaming is crucial to victory.

As far as structure goes, it's not bad at all, and works perfectly ... on paper. In reality, however, the lack of coordination is painfully evident, and we know that effective coordination becomes all the more important when you have a paucity of resources, as we undoubtedly do.

Pakistan's response to the floods, once the magnitude of the crisis became evident, was also uncoordinated: not only were we caught by surprise by the massive amount of rainfall we received (which is understandable), we were clearly not able to effectively deploy resources in a timely fashion, and the spectacle of people going hungry in relief camps is evidence enough of that. It's not that there weren't enough supplies of food and water to go around; the problem is that those supplies didn't get to those who needed them in time. And time is crucial: it does no good for a battalion to receive crucial ammunition after the battle is over; it also does no good for a division that desperately needs spare parts to receive food rations instead.

And here is where not just coordination, but wargaming takes on a crucial role, because as the Prussian field marshal Helmuth Karl Bernhard Graf von Moltke said: "No plan of operations extends with any certainty beyond the first encounter with the enemy's main force." Any plan must take into account not only contingencies and worst-case scenarios but also be practised enough that those on the ground and in control rooms have a chance to train and adjust on the fly. This is a point that Churchill agreed on, saying: "Plans are of little importance, but planning is essential." The only possible way forward then, is to practise and, equally crucially, ensure that your logistic chains and the people who man them are able to deal with multiple eventualities.

Critically, our managers have also failed to fully capitalise on the one resource we can count on: organisations like Alkhidmat, the Edhi Foundation and many others, big and small, who always rise to the occasion. Talk to any of these groups and you'll hear the same story repeated: no organised coordination between relief groups or between the groups and the government, with the result that an area that may no longer need tents is still getting supplied with tents while too many others remain shelterless. We may not have the resources we need, but tragically, we are not even properly using the resources we have.

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GB's vulnerability

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FLOODS in Pakistan have led to widespread devastation in many parts of the country. It has been extensively debated that although the rains were many times higher than expected, poor governance and lack of disaster preparedness exacerbated the destruction. Many lives and infrastructure losses could have been averted had our disaster management authorities been efficient and proactive.

The region of Gilgit-Baltistan is more vulnerable to the effects of climate change both for natural and political reasons. GB has the highest number of small and large glaciers outside the polar regions. This ecologically fragile part of the world is now facing the grave threat of glacial lake outburst floods (GLOF).

A report issued by the GB government on Aug 28 should be an eye-opener for authorities. Between June 30 and Aug 26 this year, 110 flash floods were reported in GB. Seventeen people lost their lives while six were injured. The infrastructure losses in the region — already underdeveloped and dependent upon the centre for its budget — are also enormous.

According to the report, 418 houses were completely damaged and 257 houses partially so; 22 powerhouses were destroyed; and 78 drinking water supply schemes and 500 irrigation water channels were damaged. Moreover, 56 bridges and 49 roads were washed away, severely affecting people's mobility and transportation of food supplies that are brought in from Rawalpindi. While most of the damaged facilities have been temporarily restored, including 19 of the powerhouses, the rains and floods have exposed the region's feeble infrastructure.

| Failure at the policy level must be questioned.

Although the rains seem to be over, the threat of GLOF is still looming primarily due to the environmental degradation. The reasons are numerous but the failure at the policy level must be questioned. Promoting mass tourism in this ecologically fragile region without proper planning has led to an influx of tourists and increase in ground and air traffic. The absence of eco-friendly tourism policies and infrastructure have aggravated this situation.

What are the political reasons for GB's vulnerability? The region acceded to Pakistan in November 1947 and was linked to the Kashmir issue. The arrangement was made to gain more votes in the plebiscite that was supposed to decide the fate of Kashmir and its people. Since then, GB is administered and governed by

various regimes and federal governments of Pakistan on an ad hoc basis. The region neither has representation in the national legislature nor has its assembly been given complete autonomy in local affairs. The bureaucrats appointed by the federal government have more say in the administration as compared to the elected members.

The priorities of the local leadership stood exposed in the recent disaster. During the peak of flash floods, some GB ministers including the chief minister were present in Islamabad in a display of loyalty with their party chief who was appearing in court for the contempt of court case against him. Having been largely disappointed by the bureaucrats, people seem to be also losing trust in the local leadership, which is facing criticism on social media mostly from GB's educated youth who highlight their incompetence and skewed priorities.

The opportunity that seemed to open up after the 2009 presidential order was passed, whereby their assembly was empowered — at least to a little extent — appears to have been elusive. Since most of the elected members of GB belong to mainstream national parties, it is believed to be difficult for them to deviate from their parties' policies. Recently, the GB Assembly passed the Revenue Authority Bill with a majority. The infamous act will impose various taxes on the population in an otherwise tax-free region. All previous efforts by the centre to impose taxes have failed due to massive protests and strikes. The move has already sparked demonstrations and sit-ins in GB.

The federal government's track record is not encouraging when it comes to the region's upliftment both politically and economically. Inaugurating the Jutial Sports Complex in Gilgit recently, GB Chief Secretary Mohiyuddin Ahmed Wani said that

the GB government's dream was to provide a freelance workforce from the region to the world in the IT sector, which he described as the future of Pakistan. Mr Wani perhaps overlooked two fundamental requirements for the IT sector to boom: one, availability of uninterrupted and high-speed internet and two, electricity. Both are rare in GB. Given that the region is facing chronic power outages for years now, this vision only looks like a daydream.

GB needs practical solutions from both federal and local governments. People are living in a constantly life-threatening situation. There is an urgent need to formulate and implement sustainable policies for the protection of the people and the environment.

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Prioritising Pakistan

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IT is heartbreaking to see over 30 million people affected by the floods. As both a scientist and a development professional working on climate and environment for the last 30 years, unfortunately it is too familiar watching Pakistanis go through the range of emotions from despair to frustration to anger as they try to grapple with climate change. It's the usual story about producing less than one per cent of the emissions and yet being disproportionately affected by the consequences.

Yes, life is unfair, but it is also time to stop complaining about being dealt a bad hand and do something about it. Not just firefighting every time, but to put in place a long-term plan to minimise the impact of these disasters.

Just over five years ago, Shahid Javed Burki asked me to contribute a chapter on climate and environment to a book he was writing on Pakistan at Seventy. My chapter was titled ‘The downward spiral of the quality of life in Pakistan: Is control possible, or even desired?’ In it, I discussed the situation of poor air and water quality and its consequences on quality of life. At that time, I did not have the data on stunting that is currently reported by Pakistan’s Demographic Health Survey, and on which I wrote in July. I also presented what the climate models were saying about increased heat and humidity, as well as flooding and drought, noting that for many observers “the two catastrophic floods in Pakistan in 2010 and 2012, where more than 20 per cent of the country’s land area was covered by water, were a harbinger of things to come”. The government of Pakistan had repeatedly been given the same message by development agencies since 2010, and even earlier, warning of these once-in-a-century events happening much more frequently. My chapter also prompted the head of the Planning Commission at the time to invite me to speak to the entire commission’s staff in February 2018 about what the government (then led by the PML-N) could do to be better prepared next time.

For me, as a development professional, it was a matter of choices that were entirely in Pakistan’s own hands. I argued that Pakistan needed to act for three reasons. Primarily, I saw it as a moral issue, given that the poor were disproportionately affected. Today, on some fronts, such as air quality and stunting, all income levels are now suffering. Second, the world was moving to a new set of norms (namely on the Sustainable Development Goals and climate), and Pakistan could be left far behind. Today, Pakistan is ranked 125th (out of 163 countries) in terms of its progress on the SDGs. Third, the country’s future

growth depended on it, as reducing climate risk exposure and being an early mover in climate-smart technologies and products positioned Pakistan better to be a player in future markets. This still holds true.

— The country still has choices, that, if made, could halt the current path and take it in a different direction.

The current floods really bother me. I attended a presentation over 20 years ago by Robert Watson, then chief scientist of the World Bank, in which he discussed the impacts of climate change. He explained there were a few tipping points on climate, which could take us to a much worse scenario, where all hell would break loose and all bets were off in terms of what could happen. It makes me wonder whether the high-pressure areas over Central Asia (as well as US, Europe, China), and the consequently low-pressure area over Pakistan held in place for so many months is a consequence of the jet stream being affected by climate change. If that is the case, this is really only the beginning.

So what can we do about it? I still stand by my conclusions to that chapter: thinking about Pakistan's future is both sobering and exhilarating. Sobering because Pakistan is on a downward spiral that could lead to much worse devastation. Exhilarating because the country still has choices, that, if made, could halt the current path and take it in a different direction. What are those choices?

The first choice is simply prioritising the improvement in quality of life of its own citizens, including addressing stunting, so that Pakistan's children are given a better opportunity at life.

Healthier, more informed, economically stable citizens are far better equipped to deal with adversity. The second is to take a Pakistan-wide look at the problem, and to formulate a long-term

strategy and action plan. This is akin to the NCOC in Covid-19 times, in that there needs to be universal agreement on what needs to be done. Then each of the parties, be it the provinces or the federal government, or the private sector or NGOs, can move forward with their part of the comprehensive nationwide strategy. It is crucial that this climate NCOC also include technical experts on climate, so a more informed plan can be formulated.

Why is a Pakistan-wide approach important? Ironically, Pakistan's provincial diversity, which is often the cause of conflict, is a great strength that can help us better handle the challenges of energy, water and food security, all linked with climate change. Taken together, the very different conditions in each province allow for the creation of a more resilient system, one to which each province can contribute, but also benefit from. For example, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's ability to protect watersheds upstream through managing deforestation and better land use planning, coupled with constructing rainwater storage capacity in Sindh, could lead to better flood management of agricultural areas in Punjab, ensuring adequate food production nationally.

Hence Pakistanis thinking and acting as one country, and prioritising improvements in the quality of life of citizens could put us on a very different path. It could lead us ultimately to a country that is more resilient, because it is more united. Isn't it high time we prioritised Pakistan?

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Collision or coexistence?

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A SERIES of provocative actions by the US suggest it is intensifying its confrontation with China. Announcement of a billion-dollar arms package for Taiwan, on the heels of controversial visits by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other congressional members to Taipei, prompted an angry response from Beijing. China's foreign minister described Pelosi's visit as "manic and irresponsible" and Beijing warned relations would be "seriously jeopardised" by the arms sales. Washington also stepped up the tech war with fresh curbs on US exports of chip technology to Chinese companies. This led Beijing to accuse the US of imposing a "technological blockade" out of an exaggerated notion of national security.

Rising tensions now have the hallmark of a new cold war. Despite their economic interdependence the two global powers are locked in a dangerous confrontation. The US is embarked on a policy to contain China while Beijing has made it evident that while it doesn't want a crisis it will act assertively to protect its interests and counter American actions.

China's heightened military activity and exercises including firing conventional missiles around Taiwan in response to US actions, has signalled it is prepared to mount military pressure on Taiwan. The US, for its part, has been increasing its military presence there.

In the two years of his presidency, Joe Biden has pursued a hawkish line on China, quite indistinguishable from his predecessor Donald Trump's approach that saw the US impose wide-ranging trade tariffs on Chinese exports, deploy belligerent rhetoric and take actions seen as provocations by Beijing. This hardline policy has been driven by Washington's growing fear of a rival superpower's increasing economic, military and technological power, seen as a threat to US dominance. Biden's stance also reflects political consensus in the US that views China not just as a competitor but an adversary to be contained. The upcoming midterm congressional elections may be an added factor in the Biden administration's combative stance to make the Democratic Party look tough on China.

The world's most consequential relationship between the US & China needs to be managed responsibly.

Tensions over Taiwan have been taking a perilous course. Chinese leaders have repeatedly warned Washington of a tough response if Beijing's red line is crossed — encouraging 'separatist forces' towards the independence of Taiwan, which China

regards as an inalienable part of its territories. The US insists its 'One China' policy remains unchanged but Beijing sees willful violation. Meanwhile American officials continue to voice opposition to “unilateral efforts to change the status quo or undermine peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait”. During his visit to Japan in May, Biden declared he would be willing to use military force to defend Taiwan if it was invaded by China. This evoked strong condemnation from Beijing that accused Biden of “playing with fire”.

Opinion is divided among experts over whether present tensions can escalate and eventually result in military conflict between the US and China. Several former American officials and Western analysts warn against such an outcome. Henry Kissinger for one has cautioned the Biden administration against “endless confrontations” and letting domestic politics overshadow “the importance of understanding the permanence of China”. He warned that the two can drift into conflict which will produce a catastrophe on the scale of World War I. Former Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd also believes any conflict would be disastrous. In his book *The Avoidable War*, published earlier this year, he makes the case for “managed strategic competition” between the two superpowers and says that evolving a “joint strategic framework” might help them find a way to coexist without compromising their fundamental interests and thus avert the risk of war.

Ian Bremmer offers the compelling argument that a US-China collision, with other countries expected to choose sides, would prevent the world from addressing the three impending global crises — pandemics, climate emergency and life-altering disruptive technology. A cold war, he reasons in his new book

The Power of Crisis, is not inevitable. A partnership between rival powers, who engage in “well-coordinated competition”, could help meet the world’s most pressing challenges.

These hopeful scenarios are not yet playing out in Sino-US relations. If anything, expectations of de-escalation of tensions and stabilisation of ties have not materialised. Developments point in a different direction. Last year the US forged a new trilateral security pact with the UK and Australia named AUKUS. This aims to enhance Australia’s naval power by nuclear-powered submarines to counter China’s military ascendancy in the western Pacific. Apart from its nuclear proliferation implications, this further reinforced in Beijing’s mind that Biden had embarked on a strategy to contain China.

More recently, Biden’s five-nation May trip to Asia was designed to cement the anti-China coalition as well as offer so-called Indo-Pacific states an ostensible alternative to their close trade and investment ties with China. The second in-person meeting of Quad countries — US, Japan, India and Australia — also took place in Tokyo in May. The Quad was resuscitated with the express purpose of countering China. The statement issued after the summit did not name China but the reference was clear when it declared resistance to “any coercive, provocative or unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo” in the Indo-Pacific. Similarly, the announcement that Quad nations would invest over \$50 billion in developing infrastructure in the Asia-Pacific region was also aimed at offsetting China’s growing influence.

While there is no confirmation yet, a summit meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and President Biden is likely on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Indonesia in November. This will

be their first face-to-face encounter. Their previous conversations, by phone or video, have helped clarify their positions and sought to build what Biden called “guardrails” to prevent an inadvertent drift into conflict. But they did not produce a lasting thaw in their frosty ties. Whether the meeting in Bali can help stabilise fraying relations is yet to be determined as both global powers do not want any military collision. What is apparent is the need for the world’s most consequential relationship to be managed responsibly to avert a breakdown, even conflict. The future course of Sino-US relations has far-reaching consequences for the global economy, international peace and security and dealing with a range of shared challenges.

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