

Realism **حقیقت پسندی** or pessimism **مایوسی**؟

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WE want every child in Pakistan to have **access** رسائی to quality education for 10 years of their life (five to 16 years). This is a promise that is **enshrined** درج شامل، in our Constitution (Article 25A). It is also **part and parcel** حصہ ضروری of a number of international commitments and goals we, as a nation, have **signed off on** جس پر دستخط کیے.

Some **20 million-odd** تقریباً بیس ملین children between five and 16 years are out of school in Pakistan currently. And this situation has not changed over the last many years. But, equally **tragically** افسوسناک طور پر, most of the children who are going to schools (madressahs, government schools and low-fee private schools) are getting a poor quality of education. We have **plenty** کافی of evidence, in terms of test results of the **'learning poverty'**. It is only the 'elite' high-cost private and public schools, that only two to three per cent of our school-going children attend, that are able to provide a **decent** معیاری quality of education.

We have known these facts for a long time. Nothing new to see and report here. The **tragedy** المیہ is that despite all the **rhetoric** بیان بازی of **successive** والے مسلسل governments

imposing 'education emergencies', creating 'demographic dividends', reforming education, imposing 'deliverology' and what not, nothing has changed. Enrolment rates have hardly moved at all and if we stick to the trend, we will not have universal enrolment at even the primary level for decades to come. Learning outcomes have been more or less static. Dropout rates remain very high. Gender gaps still persist.

Covid made matters a lot worse: learning poverty increased, enrolment rates took a hit and even dropouts went up. The floods this year have made matters even worse. Thousands of schools are closed, many have been damaged; many are being used as camps. It might be months before schools in the flood-impacted areas are reopened, and it might be years before all affected schools are rehabilitated or reconstructed.

It is not that other countries have fared similarly. Not at all. There are so many examples of countries, even around us – many that started with far less than what Pakistan had a few decades ago – who have passed us by. Bangladesh is a recent example. It is not a question of tough economic conditions; it has been a matter of priorities and choices.

Government after government has promised to raise education expenditure, as a percentage of GDP, to four per cent, a sort of minimum that international organisations recommend. But no government has been able to do it. But if you look at any set of comparative countries, you find they spend a lot more than 4pc on education. The poor educational outcomes

in Pakistan should not be a surprise. It is the outcome of decisions that we, as a nation, have taken and continue to take.

This is where the rethinking needs to come in now. Parents, civil society, development and policy professionals, and many others **concerned** فکر مند with the future of the country and the future of our children have continued to **argue** بحث کرنا for the 'right' to quality education to be extended to every child in Pakistan. And we should continue the good fight. But, do we need to set **realistic** حقیقت پسندانہ targets too?

This is a hard question to resolve. And it is hard to get the balance right too. We know that if Pakistan is to develop, if the future of the country is to look better, we need the youth to be educated, motivated, trained and involved in the affairs of the country. It is hard to see a future for Pakistan if we continue on the current trajectory رفتار. But given the **outcomes** نتائج and choices of the last few decades, should we continue to **argue** بحث کرنا for '10 years of quality education for every child'? If we step back from the demand for quality education for every child, will this not be a **travesty** تمسخر of justice as well? We know it is the children from the poorer households who will bear the **brunt** خمیازہ of the lowered demand.

If we decide to argue for education for all for five years only, the **transition** منتقلی from primary to higher levels for the children from poorer households is probably going to get even worse. And if education is the way to break the hold of **intergenerational** نسل در نسل poverty, reducing transition rates for children from poorer households would be the exact opposite of what we would want from educational outcomes.

If we say, let us focus only on foundational and/or **functional literacy** and **numeracy** اعداد و شمار for the millions who are out of school and not ask for 10 years of education, again, it will lead to the children from the poorest households being **segregated** گونا گونا into these programmes.

But, on the other hand, if we do not rethink the **strategy** حکمت عملی for the millions who are out of school and the millions who are getting poor quality education, will things continue as they are? What is the benefit of that? Would it not be better to work out some more 'realistic' targets? **Between the devil and the deep blue sea**, as they say.

What is the way forward ? The **status quo** موجودہ نظام is not working and is not **sustainable** پائیدار: outcomes will continue to **deteriorate** خراب ہونا with every passing year and with every **shock** صدمہ، جھٹکا that we **sustain** برداشت کرنا . To not **argue** بحث کرنا for change is not possible. The future of our children and our country depends on the investments we make today. But should we continue to argue for '10 years of quality education for all' which, it seems from all indicators, will not happen for many decades to come – if at all? Or should we start thinking through more 'realistic' targets? But is 'realism' another word for giving up on the minimalist dreams for a better and more **equitable** مساوی society?

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## The whole truth

### Editorial

THE war on truth has never been more **relentless** شدید، سخت than it is today. **Authoritarianism** آمریت is on the rise and **purveyors** علمبردار of 'alternative facts' have multiple channels of communication whereby they can **obfuscate** مہم کرنا, deflect and **deliberately** جان بوجھ کر misinform. World News Day 2022 is an occasion to celebrate fact-based journalism and remind people why this calling is so critical to democracy and human rights, to all those values that make the world a more **livable** قابل رہنے کے قابل place. When journalism is done well, when journalists can do their job without having to **second-guess** themselves for fear of putting a step 'wrong', they have the power to shine a light in the darkest corners and hold governments' **feet to the fire**. Granted, this may seem like a **utopian** مثالی معاشرت **fantasy** تصور, and many a time **vested** ذاتی interests do come in the way of this objective – but it should **nevertheless** بہر حال be at least an **aspirational** مند خواہش goal.

Unfortunately, in Pakistan we seem to be **drifting** بڑھنا, in reverse. With hugely **consequential** خیز نتائج decisions on the political **landscape** منظر نامہ happening behind closed doors, it is fertile ground for **conjecture** قیاس آرائیوں and **conspiracy** سازشی theories. To that, add propaganda and 'fake news'

wheeled out as 'journalism', and the result is a citizenry losing trust in mainstream media. Social media – the go-to news source especially for Pakistan's massive youth demographic آبادیاتی – erases context and shades of grey, fostering فروغ دینا a correspondingly سے مناسبت سے reductive thought process. Together, both have led to the extreme social polarisation that we can see today. Nevertheless, many journalists, despite threats and intimidation دھمکیوں, continue to do stellar شاندار work, uncovering facts and asking the searching questions that all those who wield استعمال کرنا power and must be held accountable جوابدہ should face as a matter of course. Perhaps the media as a whole must do more to showcase مظاہرہ دکھانا such journalism. It could also do a better job of explaining to its audience why they, the people, must fiercely سختی سے guard their right to information which, in turn, depends on the right to free speech exercised by the press. No trade-off is worth the price of being kept in ignorance لاعلمی، بے خبری.

Noxious دہ نقصان though some of its effects are, social media is the apotheosis اپنی مثال آپ of a process that began some two decades ago when Pakistani television news channels exploded on the scene. The frenetic جنونی news cycle reduced information to easily digestible, transient عارضی sound bites. As the audience, with advertisers following suit, shifted to the electronic medium, the circulation of newspapers went into steady decline. Sept 25 was National Newspaper Readership Day, an opportunity to appreciate the unique advantages that print journalism enjoys. An island of stability amid the din تباہی of digital and electronic media, print – especially newspapers of record – still inspires a certain level of trust. After all, the

**permanence** مستقل مزاجی of the medium demands a higher level of diligence محنت on the part of its **practitioners** پیشہ ور as well as the grace to **acknowledge** تسلیم کرنا errors. For those reasons alone, newspapers are more relevant than ever today.

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**Learning poverty** means being unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10.

**Demographic dividend** refers to the growth in an economy that is the result of a change in the age structure of a country's population. The change in age structure is typically brought on by a decline in a country's birth and death rates .

**deliverology** (uncountable)

A method that uses inspections, goal-setting, etc. to ensure that government departments implement لاگو کرتے ہیں desired reforms

The **enrolment rate** is the ratio of pupils, students and apprentices شاگرد in initial education of a given age, enrolled in an educational institution, to the total population of the same age

### **GDP**

Gross domestic product is a monetary measure of the market value of all the final goods and services produced in a specific time period by countries

### **Functional literacy**

Refers to the capacity of a person to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective function of his or her group and community and also for enabling him or her to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his or her own and the community's development

If you say that you are **between the devil and the deep blue sea**, you mean that you are in a difficult situation where you have to choose between two equally unpleasant courses of action

**Second- guess:** to guess what someone will do in the future or .to criticize someone's decision after it has been made, and say what you think is wrong with it.



To hold someone's **feet to the fire** means to pressure someone to do something, to hold someone accountable, to force someone to comply

**Wheel out:** to show or use something to help you do something, even when it has often been seen or heard before They wheeled out the same old arguments we'd heard so many times before.

### **Shades of grey**

idiom. the fact of it not being clear in a situation what is right and wrong: The film presents a straightforward choice between good and evil, with no shades of grey. Uncertainty غير يقيني صورتحال.

**Social polarization** is the segregation within a society that emerges when factors such as income inequality, real-estate fluctuations and economic displacement result in the differentiation of social groups from high- income to low-income

Definition of as a **matter of course**

—used to say that something will or should happen because it

is natural, usual, or logical You should take proper precautions as a matter of course. We went out to dinner on her birthday, and as a matter of course we paid for her meal.

A **trade-off** (or tradeoff) is a situational decision that involves diminishing or losing one quality, quantity, or property of a set or design in return for gains in other aspects. In simple terms, a tradeoff is where one thing increases, and another must decrease