

## How to manage water conflicts in Pakistan?

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By: **Dr Moonis Ahmar**

Will climate change and diversion of water by India and Afghanistan turn Pakistan dry? Is Pakistan's largest and biggest city, Karachi, vulnerable to water riots?

Pakistan's water predicament is two-fold. First, conflict between provinces over the distribution of Indus River water; and second, climate change which tends to deepen water scarcity particularly during winter, summer and autumn seasons. In view of the gravity of water crisis and conflict, Water Apportionment Accord (WAA) was signed amongst the provinces of Pakistan on March 16, 1991 and approved by the Council of Common Interests (CCI) on March 21, 1991.

Under the WAA, Indus River System Authority (IRSA) was established with its offices in Islamabad to regulate and monitor the distribution of water sources of Indus River. IRSA is a landmark arrangement to manage water issues among the provinces of Pakistan, particularly the three beneficiaries of Indus River: Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P), Punjab and Sindh. Punjab and K-P are upper riparian provinces whereas Sindh is downstream or lower riparian and often complains about the shortage of water from the Indus system.

Recently renowned water and environmental experts from Sindh, as reported in a section of the press, warned that "Punjab's obduracy might inflict serious damage on Sindh's agro-economic if the province was allowed to get away with its pilferage of water." They lamented that "all field canals in Punjab are regularly fed with water in spite of acute shortage in the Indus River and drastic decreases in the flows at Kotri barrage, causing drought-like conditions in Laar-region of the province." During the meetings of CCI and IRSA, representatives from Sindh regularly complain about less water released to their province and more to K-P and Punjab.

On May 6, "the Sindh Assembly was told that there was acute shortage of water in the province as it was not getting its due share as per the Water Accord 1991 and it could also lead to water crisis in Karachi and other parts of the province if the situation persisted for 10 more days." Furthermore, provincial minister for Culture, Tourism and Antiquities Syed Sardar Shah, while speaking during a debate in Sindh Assembly, lamented that "there was an over 22 per cent shortage of water in Sukkur Barrage and 44 percent in Kotri Barrage. Federal harmony would be sabotaged if there remains the monopoly of one province [Punjab] on Indus water." Sindh government also threatened that under the leadership of PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, they will stage a sit-in in those areas where water for Sindh is stolen.

IRSA has, however, denied the allegation that it is diverting Sindh water share to Punjab. On May 16, the authority announced enhancing the water quota for Sindh so that its canals can ensure the supply of water to agricultural lands. IRSA also made it clear that the supply of water is Sindh's internal affair and it should stop blaming the federal government for water crisis in Karachi which is also the capital of Sindh province.

It is not only Sindh-Punjab conflict over water resources which tends to deepen water controversy in Pakistan. In fact, the mega city of Karachi, the country's financial hub having a population of around 30 million, is highly vulnerable to water riots. Karachi is like a water time bomb whose per day requirement is one billion gallons, but it hardly gets half of it. Despite contributing around 65% to the federal revenue and 80% to the provincial revenue, Karachi is so short of water that its citizens spend Rs22 billion annually to buy water from tankers. Water mafia is deep-rooted in Karachi and is well connected with state institutions ranging from police, rangers and bureaucracy. The water business in the city thus involves large-scale corruption and nepotism.

Outside Karachi, water crisis is also serious in terms of water available for irrigation and daily use. Sindh water woes have already been mentioned because as a lower riparian province, it is the worst-affected because of the reduced supply of water from Indus River. The underground water level in Pakistan's second largest city, Lahore, is depleting fast and is a forecast to meet ground zero situation by 2025 like Cape Town.

Balochistan is already dry and its capital, Quetta, is facing a dangerous situation in view of the reduction of snowfall on the mountains and an alarming depleting level of underground water resources. As a result, Balochistan — like other provinces of Pakistan — is also facing severe water shortage.

That the water crisis in Pakistan is assuming dangerous proportions with each passing day is not debatable. It is the need of the hour to manage the looming water crisis in Pakistan. Four measures need to be considered here, as follows.

First, IRSA must take steps to remove Sindh's reservations against Punjab over lack of water available for irrigation. It is for the federal government to make sure that complaints made by provinces are entertained on merit. Why is it that Sindh's objections about less availability of water for irrigation are increasing with time?

Second, the dispute over the construction of Kalabagh Dam on Indus River at Mianwali also needs to be resolved. Balochistan, K-P and Sindh have raised objections over the construction of that Dam for a variety of reasons. Technical experts say that if Kalabagh Dam had been constructed, bulk of water shortage should have been overcome. But the project was politicised and thus shelved. The Diamer-Basha Dam located in K-P and Gilgit-Baltistan is vulnerable to natural disasters, including earthquake. The last mega dam constructed in Pakistan was Tarbela Dam in 1974. Since then the population of Pakistan has quadrupled and water resources are diminishing.

Third, Karachi is a major test case as far as management of water conflicts in Pakistan is concerned. In September 2020, Prime Minister Imran Khan had announced Rs1.1 trillion worth of Karachi Transformation Plan which also included the completion of Karachi Bulk Water Supply called K-IV. Even though K-IV, which is estimated to provide 300 million gallons of water to Karachi from Haleji Lake, will not be enough to meet the growing water needs of the city, it will certainly help fill in the gap in demand and supply of water. Karachi is the only city, after Los Angeles, which gets water from at least 100 kilometers away. Los Angeles gets water from Colorado River and Karachi from Indus and Hub rivers. It is feared that if the government fails to manage water crisis in Karachi, it may lead to large-scale urban violence.

Fourth, if India and Afghanistan construct dams — as feared — on rivers entering Pakistan, it will lead to severe water crisis in the country. Water management in Pakistan also needs to consider water conflicts particularly with India and Afghanistan so that the double jeopardy of inter- and intra-state water conflicts is managed.

All stakeholders must realise the gravity of the situation before the war of words between Sindh and the Centre takes an ugly turn, and resolve the conflict by addressing genuine grievances of Sindh province.

The writer is former Dean Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Karachi and can be reached at [amoonis@hotmail.com](mailto:amoonis@hotmail.com)

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## Poor health in a country among largest milk producers

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By **Dr Hasan Dawood**

The numerous instances where Prime Minister Imran Khan emphasises on growing poverty and poor health outcomes remind me of how a poor family is caught in an unending poverty trap.

Every time I hear the PM talk about stunting or infant mortality, I'm reminded of the obvious factors contributing to these worsening health indicators. Milk (with all its nutrients), a necessity for an expectant mother, is difficult to be acquired by the poor stratum. There is a great number of maternal and infant deaths due to malnutrition in Pakistan that keeps increasing compared to other neighbouring countries. Rates of malnutrition, stunting and wasting remain alarming and impact the lives of many children. Nearly half of all deaths among children under five are attributable to undernutrition. Poor nutrition in the first 1,000 days of life can lead to stunted growth, impaired cognitive ability and reduced school and work performance.

Despite being among the largest milk-producing countries and having the largest number of milk-producing animals, Pakistan faces severe malnutrition and milk shortage. It is estimated that only 45% of the milk produced is available for sale in the country. Of the milk sold by farmers, 15-19% is wasted due to improper cooling, storage and transport systems.

A unique obstacle to access safe and hygienic milk products in Pakistan is raw milk adulteration. In a country where more than 90% of the dairy market is informal and unregulated, adulteration is an alarming practice and poses serious health risks for consumers and for expectant mothers and children, particularly. Studies associate unsafe milk consumption with undernutrition among women and sub-optimal growth among children. The interaction between undernutrition and infection due to unsafe milk can create a potentially lethal cycle of worsening illness and deteriorating nutritional status. Knowing this, loose milk consumption should be out of the question. There are effective control measures that can minimise the risk of milk-borne diseases, of which minimum pasteurisation is key.

However, on a broader public health spectrum, consuming safe/processed milk is also not an affordable option for families living below poverty line. It is pertinent to understand here that the price hike is an expression of the problems the packaged industry faces in terms of quantity, quality and cost involved in milk processing.

As we mention about quantity, demand for milk is growing faster than its supply, creating a substantial deficit. The small herd size, lack of selective breeding and nutritional deficiencies further reduce animal productivity. With this disequilibrium, the law of demand plays its role leading to an increase in price until the demand for milk comes at par with its supply. Quality has its own set of problems; unhygienic animal environment, feeding practices and low mechanisation in dairy farming augmented by poor infrastructure, contaminated water and power outages. It poses a cost to the dairy industry for ensuring that the milk coming from small or medium-size farmers is in line with set quality parameters. Furthermore, the ever-increasing input cost and the abolition of zero-rated tax policy lead to a hike in milk prices, making it unaffordable and resulting in overall decline in the sales of packaged milk.

Eventually the packaged milk turns out to be an unlikely choice for consumers generally and the poor particularly. Access to safe milk, like safe water, is everyone's priority and it should be made available easily.

It is time to eradicate the root cause of the problem and do something beyond just mentioning the poor in our talks. Such rhetoric does earn us popularity, but we need to do better on our health indicators. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), that Pakistan is a signatory to, also talks about ending hunger (SDG-2 on zero hunger). Ensuring the availability of safe milk can improve our health and poverty indicators significantly. Not all poverty comes from wealth, some come from deteriorated health conditions too.

Being poor in terms of health is the most threatening type of poverty.

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## Creative teaching

By **Neda Mulji**

AS a nation, we are obsessed with chasing grades and distinctions at every level of schooling and, in fact, schools have built their reputation based on the board results they produce. A necessary professional hazard for teachers, in this grand pursuit, has been the need to cover extensive content in limited periods of time. Often, teachers who start out with the best of intentions, run into this roadblock. There seems to be a tug of war between how much to teach and how to teach it. If teachers opt for the student-centred approach and allow time and space for collaboration and creativity in the classroom, let the students dig deep into learning in their own unique styles, they seem to run out of time to reinforce content that is expected of students in traditional exams.

This begs the obvious question: are the two aspects of teaching — covering content and student-centred approaches — mutually exclusive? Or do we simply need to devise more creative ways to cover content, perhaps with a bit of experimentation and exploration of alternative ways of conducting classes? How we attempt to create a post-pandemic learning environment, incorporating the new digital literacy skills acquired by our students, accommodate their need for peer interaction, spur their creativity through new dimensions of hybrid student-led approaches may well determine how many doors of opportunity we can open for our next generation.

There are different ways of being an effective teacher.

In a recent conversation with colleagues about 'what makes an effective teacher', the punchline that emerged is that there are different ways of being an effective teacher. The content and accompanying activities must be contextualised with the aim of engaging and motivating students who are, in the current climate, mostly left on their own to accomplish the learning outcomes set out for them. Can we even imagine our students who have learnt alternative ways of learning content during the pandemic to go back to the traditional classroom where they sit passively to listen to a teacher talking at the front of the class?

Transformative teaching is not about letting the reins loose for students to carve out a path for themselves, struggling to make sense of what is being taught, and figuring out how to achieve the aims set out for them. In fact, it is more of a strategic process of determining what and how much each student may be capable of learning without losing motivation. Education is more about engagement and intellectual stimulation giving way to motivation and achievement, rather than exam-taking skills where everyone is tested according to the same yardstick.

A recent study hinted at setting curriculum requirements to what a student is ready for, rather than what they should know at a certain age, and then shaming them if they can't reach those benchmarks. How many of us remember the awful feeling of struggling with



a formula, a definition or a piece of factual information that we could not recall while others around us were fast and efficient at reproducing the material? Almost all students go through the consciousness of 'not being good enough' at various stages of schooling. Not only does this call for a necessary shift in models and styles of facilitating students, it also implies that our techniques need to be geared towards developing a variety of skills, while accepting and celebrating differences between students. After all, when our students become professionals, they will be working as part of diverse teams where not everyone will share the same level and skill — teams are created to bring together pieces of a puzzle that look nothing like each other, but they join beautifully to complete a vision. Coupled with a realisation that not everyone can be great at everything, a systematic approach towards helping students collaborate with each other, using visuals, writing, speaking or drawing can get so much out of content that does not need to be passively listened to. Departing from the traditional homework approach may also help bring out motivation and creativity. Input from students doesn't necessarily have to be textual — in today's technology-driven system of education, students can create videos, podcasts, interviews, songs and so forth — there is a world of possibilities to assess learning. Recently, for example, online tests and exams have not been working for some schools, particularly those that have a large number of students to manage. However, restructuring the assessments to include shorter 'vivas' — one to one — with the teacher has been very useful.

We may also like to make way for a shift towards open-ended questions which have no right or wrong answers but are testing analytical and critical thinking skills. Students will welcome the change, and adapt to it quickly, if led by capable, motivated and effective teachers.

The writer is senior manager, professional development, at Oxford University Press, Pakistan.

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## Israel's forever war

By **Maleeha Lodhi**

THE ceasefire announced between Israel and the Palestinian organisation, Hamas, does not erase the memory of the chilling and heart-wrenching images from Gaza during the 11 days of violence. Refugee camps bombarded by Israeli forces, children killed in missile attacks, buildings targeted and destroyed, people watching helplessly as bodies of family members were pulled out of the rubble and thousands left homeless and traumatised. The humanitarian crisis unleashed by Israeli aggression affected every Palestinian.

The Israeli military onslaught against the Palestinians added another grim chapter to over 70 years of brutality and suffering inflicted on a dispossessed and displaced people by an occupying power. Palestinians have been forced out of their homeland, deprived of their land and subjected to unceasing repression, arbitrary arrests and collective punishment. They have seen entire neighbourhoods being demolished and people uprooted to make way for illegal Israeli settlements. Gaza's two million inhabitants have suffered 14 years of a blockade and cruel restrictions imposed by Israel.

Against this backdrop of historical injustice, it took only a spark for the situation to erupt in which the occupying power rained havoc but was met by resistance from people armed only with an unshakable belief in their cause. The trigger for the latest flare-up was a combination of factors — an unprovoked police assault on worshippers at Al Aqsa Mosque during Ramazan and eviction of Palestinians from their homes in occupied East Jerusalem's neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah.

A ceasefire has brought the latest Israeli aggression to an end but this will only be a lull before the next storm.

What followed were mass protests by Palestinians in Gaza, in cities and villages across the West Bank and in Israel. They were ruthlessly crushed by Israeli forces. Rocket attacks by Hamas followed and then indiscriminate Israeli airstrikes that claimed the lives of more than 240 Palestinians including over 65 children.

While this carnage continued for 11 days, the OIC issued a statement of condemnation but contemplated no collective action. The statement was long on rhetoric but short on action. Arab countries that recently established diplomatic relations weren't asked to suspend those ties. In fact, their so-called normalisation policy towards Israel may have emboldened Tel Aviv to act with impunity.

The US and its Western allies were blindsided to the Palestinian plight by their unflinching support for Israel. US leaders called for "de-escalation" after days of crisis. An emergency UN Security Council meeting was delayed for days, because of Washington. When it met, the US repeatedly blocked a statement that all other 14 members of the Council agreed on, which called for de-escalation, an end to evictions of Palestinian families and respect



for international humanitarian law. This left the US isolated at the UN but did not persuade Washington to modify its stance.

None of this was surprising. The US, as Israel's principal benefactor, has long protected its closest ally and shown little of the concern for Palestinian rights that it routinely voices about human rights violations elsewhere. Many Western governments echoed the US in voicing support for Israel's right to self-defence against attacks by Hamas. Nevertheless, countries like Norway and Ireland, both non-permanent members of UNSC, voiced concern for civilian casualties including children from Israeli airstrikes and asked that Israel cease its settlement activities. Russia warned Israel that more civilian casualties in Gaza were intolerable and called for an end to violence.

While the latest eruption in Palestine's long and tragic history has familiar echoes, some dimensions of the crisis were a departure from the past and could prove consequential. The first difference was the scale of protests by Palestinians that simultaneously took place across the occupied territories and in Israel. Never before had Palestinians living in Israel joined the protests in the numbers witnessed. Even otherwise biased reports in the New York Times acknowledged that the protests were "finding new footholds and threatening the veneer of Israeli society in ways not seen before". The Guardian noted that the outpouring of support from Israel's Palestinian citizens created a "new front" inside Israel rarely witnessed in the past. The unprecedented anger 'within' was widely attributed to what Human Rights Watch in a recent report called Israel's apartheid policies towards Arabs who constitute a fifth of its population.

Another unprecedented aspect of the crisis was the show of popular solidarity with Palestinians across the world, that too in times of a pandemic. In Muslim nations this was to be expected but the scale of protests was significant, while Western countries, including the US and UK, also saw big demonstrations. This wave of global public support contrasted sharply with the positions adopted by governments especially in the West, although bold voices in the US Congress and other Western parliaments were a call of conscience for them. President Biden faced growing criticism from progressive Democrats for his stance. It also prompted prominent American opinion makers to assert that the "unshakable bonds of friendship" with Israel were shaking in America "especially in the Democratic party". A Gallup poll for example found that over half of Democrats felt the US should lean on Israel to make concessions rather than the Palestinians.

While a ceasefire has brought the latest Israeli aggression to an end this will only be a lull before the next storm. The ineluctable reality is that the unresolved Palestinian issue remains a collective failure of the international community. Scores of UNSC and General Assembly resolutions have called for an end to the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestine. There are 88 Security Council resolutions on the Palestine question. The answer to the dispute, the oldest on the UN agenda, has long been spelt out in several resolutions — a two-state solution that ensures a viable and independent State of Palestine. But in recent

years Israel was encouraged by president Donald Trump's policies into abandoning the two-state 'solution' and sought instead to impose a one-state 'solution' while expanding illegal settlements in violation of UNSC Resolution 2334 and in defiance of international demands to cease this activity.

Inaction on these resolutions is an indictment of those members of the global community who possess the power to effect change but are unwilling to act because of a blind commitment to Israel and contrary to their claims to respect international law and abide by a rules-based international order.

The writer is a former ambassador to the US, UK & UN.

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## UN credibility at risk

By **Muhammad Zahid Rifat**

The United Nations was established following World War 1 in 1945 to facilitate international cooperation and resolve world conflicts. However, it has miserably failed to settle the lingering, burning and bleeding Kashmir dispute between the neighbouring nuclear powers of India and Pakistan. Resultantly, its credibility as a world body has remained questionable for more than seven decades.

The UN has failed to implement Security Council resolutions that call for a free, fair and transparent plebiscite in Illegally Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK). The Kashmiris' fundamental right of self-determination for which they have been struggling and suffering for at the hands of occupying Indian security forces is being denied altogether.

India continues to pursue its own evil and devilish agendas. It started with the revocation of the special status of IOJK on August 5, 2019. Then they enhanced the strength of the occupying security forces, giving them a free hand to crush and kill Kashmiris, they placed the entire population under a complete lockdown for more than 20 months, resorted to genocide and even issued fake and unlawful migration certificates. The UN, as well as the international community, is looking the other way and is not going beyond simple condemnation of gross human rights violations to apply pressure to the Indian government to stop this interference.

May 21 is significant because it is the Martyrdom Day during which all Kashmiris and Pakistanis commemorate the martyrdom of Mir Waiz Farooq Shaheed and Abdul Ghani Lone Shaheed in 1990 and 2002 respectively. Observance of the Martyrs Day on May 21 will be yet another occasion to remind the UN and international community of their obligations to ensure the implementation of the Security Council resolutions and ending flagrant violations of human rights in IOJK.

Pakistan has been extending political, diplomatic and moral support to the Kashmiris in their just, indigenous and unarmed struggle for freedom from Indian occupation and exercising their birth right of self-determination.

On all martyrs days that the Kashmiris observe, the civil and military leadership of Pakistan reiterate their continued support to the Kashmiris and call for the United Nations and its Security Council to honour their own resolutions and get India to agree as earliest as possible. At the initiatives of Prime Minister Imran Khan, who had been raising the Kashmir issue not only at the UN General Assembly but also all other international forums, the Kashmir issue has been activated during last couple of years pulling it out of the cold storage of the world body where it was lying for more than past five decades.

The civil and military leadership of Pakistan has been urging the international community to honour their obligations towards the Kashmiris, force the Indian government to reverse the revocation decision and restore the special status of occupied Jammu and Kashmir and play an active role in ending the ongoing bloodshed, violence and killings of innocent Kashmiris at the hands of Indian security forces. The Kashmiris should be able to exercise their self-determination right in UN supervised plebiscite in accordance with many UNSC resolutions.

The international community is being reminded time and time again that the Kashmir issue is a nuclear flashpoint between India and Pakistan and without its resolution, durable peace and stability in the region remains in danger. If the UN fails to act immediately, its credibility will continue to be questionable.

No words are strong enough to condemn ongoing brutalities and oppression perpetuated by the Indian occupying security forces in IIOJK. We must deplore the indifferent attitude of the international community towards Jammu and Kashmir as they seem to be more interested in their trade and economic relations with India. We must continue to avail every opportunity to remind the world body to wake up from its deep slumber, realise it has persistently ignored obligations towards the oppressed and suppressed Kashmiris and force India to stop the ongoing killings in the occupied territory and instead, implement the Security Council resolutions. This will help it save its credibility which otherwise will continue to be at risk in the face of denial of all international laws by India.

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## The significance of Jerusalem

By **Masud Ahmad Khan**

For Christians, the Holy Sepulchre is holy because according to them the site is related to Jesus' crucifixion, his empty tomb and resurrection. According to Jewish traditions the remnant of the wall of the Solomon Temple is the site where Hazrat Ibrahim prepared to sacrifice his son Hazrat Ishaq. The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) made the miraculous journey from Makkah to Jerusalem and led all the earlier prophets in prayer and then ascended to heaven. This is why it is significant for the Muslims as well. In the end, the Temple Mount is a holy site for all.

The temple was first destroyed by the Babylonians and second by the Roman Empire commander, Titus. Jews were forbidden from entering the city and the Romans used the site as a garbage dump. In 636, an Islamic force consisting of 4000 Sahaba led a siege to Jerusalem. It continued for six months and the Patriarch Sophronius of the Greek Church decided only to surrender to Caliph Umar Ibn Khattab. In 637, Byzantine's army surrendered to Muslims and Patriarch Sophronius presented the keys of the holy city to Hazrat Umar.

Hazrat Umar invited 70 Jewish families from outside to settle in Jerusalem and allowed them to build a synagogue to worship for the first time in over 500 years. Crusade was the concept of pope Urban-II and on November 27, 1095, he demanded the conquest of Jerusalem from the Muslims. It was also a sign of the rise of the West after centuries of Muslim superiority. It was during the first Crusade that Jerusalem fell after a siege of a week. According to the book, Lost Islamic History by Firas Alkhateeb, "For the first time since Umer entered the city in 462 years before, Jerusalem came under Christian control". Salahuddin Ayubi entered Jerusalem and in 1187 laid the siege of city. Later the city succumbed to his pressure and surrendered. After 88 years of Crusade control, Jerusalem was captured. A peace treaty was signed after the fall of Jerusalem in 1192. In it, Salahuddin promised to give free passage to the Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem and also allowed them to retain all the land he had conquered. The Seljuk Turks conquered Jerusalem in 1073 and later on in 1517, the Ottoman ruler Selim arrived to take possession of Jerusalem. The Ottomans allowed the Jews to pray at the Wailing Wall and made it an exclusive Jewish enclave. According to an Israeli paper, Haaretz, it was Theodore Herzl who talked of a Jewish state during his address to the first Zionist congress. He was the one who proposed a plan to declare old Jerusalem an international city. Therefore, in 1897, Jews in Europe decided to make Jerusalem a Jewish majority land.

In 1897 Jerusalem had a three percent Jewish population, 87 percent Muslim population and rest Christian and in 1997, the population of Jews rose to 75 percent. After the

holocaust forced Jews to seek a new home outside of Europe, Britain offered them Palestine which was under the British mandate. It was the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, which paved the way for the state of Israel. As a result, a large migration of Jews into Palestine took place and the Jewish state was established in the heart of Arab world in 1948.

Some 750,000 Palestinians were expelled from their homes, a stage set for ethnic cleansing. Israel took control of Western Jerusalem immediately after the 1948 war. It captured East Jerusalem during the Arab-Israel war of 1967 and in 1980, declared Jerusalem as a unified capital which is not recognised by the UN and international community. East Jerusalem and the old city remained in Jordanian hands for two decades before they were captured by Israel in 1967. The Palestinians want East Jerusalem to be the capital of a future Palestinian state. The ultimate mission of Israel is to construct another temple at the place of Masjid Al-Aqsa by hook or by crook.

Muslims ruled Palestine for over 12 centuries whereas Christians ruled only for 88 years. Recently, the Israeli government ordered a number of Palestinian families to leave their homes of Sheikh Jarrah after a so-called court verdict and this was followed by preventing large gathering of Palestinians at the Damascus gate. Even praying at Al-Aqsa masjid was prohibited. Presently, Israel has built illegal settlements in occupied areas to further strengthen its control after the expulsion of several Palestinian families from their homes. The Israeli Defence Forces stormed Al Aqsa masjid ahead of Jerusalem Day to mark the capture of East Jerusalem during the Arab-Israel war in 1967.

Israeli terror attacks have left over 300 dead, including 70 children, and thousands injured. Majority of the analysts are of the view that attacks on the innocent Palestinians is also due to political reasons. Recently, after the elections in Israel, Netanyahu was given a chance to form the government but he failed. There are also several cases of corruption against Netanyahu, his wife and his son. The aim of these attacks is to divert the attention of domestic audiences from cases and to gain sympathies by targeting Arabs. The international community and international organisations have failed to stop Israeli terror attacks as they, including the OIC, EU, UN, UNSC, are only condemning it but refrain from taking any concrete action. Turkey's president Erdogan has suggested an international protection force to be sent to the occupied areas to protect Palestinians and that seems to be viable option. The international community must react immediately to stop brutalities against unarmed Palestinians.

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# New Social Media laws in Europe and reaction of Czech Society

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By **Shazia Anwer Cheema**

The European Union has drafted the Digital Services Act (DSA) that is considered a document that is contrary to the basic right of freedom of expression ensured by democratic norms because this Act will empower social media operators to choose what content they deem permissible or not through notice-and-action mechanisms.

The DSA is a legislative proposal by the European Commission submitted to the European Parliament and the European Council on 15 December 2020. European Digital Rights fears that the DSA's strong illegal content removal requirements will create a chilling effect by incentivizing companies to remove all content flagged as illegal, whether or not it actually is illegal.

Europe is going through a changed period where France introduced a law to compel social media operators to take down hateful content flagged by users within 24 hours. However, the French Constitutional Council a month later struck down most provisions of the law as they were deemed unconstitutional, for violating freedom of speech.

Famous European writer David Hutt said that the Network Enforcement Act of Germany requires social networks to remove content that infringes on hate and defamatory speech. What is defamatory? That is of course would be decided by the government. Such laws can blur the right of freedom of speech and expression in Europe.

When EU countries are thinking to impose indirect bans on the right of expression, the Czech Republic is an exception where the debate is opposite because Czechs consider that controlling social media is an act disrespecting EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights and an act compromising the future of democracy.

We should remember that global monitoring agency vpnMentor in the year 2017 said that the Czech Republic had one of the lowest rates of internet censorship in the world. This fact creates a desire to understand that why do Czechs respect the right of expression so much and why they are interested to know and respect "the Opposite".

The independence of the Czech Republic was not the outcome of only the Velvet Revolution, rather resilient Czechs had been fighting for their identity and freedom for many centuries and used the Theatre and Literature as two major tools to keep their language and culture alive, and they know that freedom of expression is the most important gift one enjoys under independence and democracy. Czechs respect

democracy because they had been fighting against subjugation for centuries, first under the Austro-Hungarian Empire and then under the former USSR. Czechs love democracy and the right to freedom of expression and believe that democracy is not achievable without freedom of expression.

If someone reads the history of Czech theatre and culture, one can understand the freedom of expression is very important for every citizen of the Czech Republic. Even under the extreme subjugation of Austro-Hungarian and Soviet rules, Czechs did not stop fighting back for expressing their dissatisfaction against the foreign rules and used the theatre of the absurd, mimes, and other techniques to express themselves.

On the night of August 21-22, 1968, the former USSR invaded Czechoslovakia when 200,000 troops and 2,000 tanks entered the country and Czechoslovak forces were confined to their barracks, which were surrounded until the threat of a counter-attack was over. In April 1969, the USSR started a phase of "Normalization" that was actually a reversal of all reforms and freedom of the press and retrogressive for the Czech land to 1948 Soviet invasion.

However, the resistance movement did not die and former students from Prague, intellectuals, and theatre practitioners who were able to escape outside the country continued to advocate for human rights, freedom of speech. Since Czech theatre had been matured under subjugation but never bowed down in front of invaders therefore it found unique ways to survive post-Prague Spring repression and for the next two decades, it operated in the provisional spaces of culture houses, studios, gymnasiums, bars, trade union halls, art galleries, and living rooms. Strategies were devised and implemented to bring freedom back to the theatre and society.

A strong sense of justice and ethics intensified the mutual commitment of theatres and audiences, leading the way to the Velvet Revolution of 1989 and the installation of a playwright as the first President of the independent Czech Republic. The underlying need to explore the peculiar realities of Czech character and Czech history formed the single most consistently present element in all these plays. Such realities included the memories of repeated defeats, humiliations, or simply mistaken choices, all of which led to life under various forms of subjugation including the loss of the First Republic at Munich, 1938, and the years of Nazi occupation; the Communist takeover of the postwar Republic, 1948, and the subsequent Stalinist era; the Soviet intervention and suppression of Socialism with a Human Face, in 1968, and the following bleak era.

One can say that Czech theatre kept on survival mode during a slow revival of theatre by performing those Soviet plays that were critical of problems in their society, in effect prepared the way for the Czechs themselves to initiate tentative modifications of their play-it-safe repertoires. In the 1980s, the technique of "irregular" dramaturgy was opted by theatre practitioners as a tactical move for creating difficulties for authorities in monitoring their vague and informal communication with the audience remained an

important feature of the performance, whether that communication was verbalized or not. Music became a significant component of theatre, often performed by the actors themselves, as did mime and dance, or sheer physical byplay among the performers or with the audience.

Czechs gave a very cost for freedom of expression therefore they hate words like "Censor" or "Ban".

There is a popular proverb in the Czech language that says:

*Critical views and opposite thoughts are healthy approaches for society because the absence of criticism is like a situation when the cat is not home, the mice have a party.*

**Note:** The writer Shazia Cheema is an analyst writing for national and international media outlets. She heads the DND Thought Center. She did her MA in Cognitive Semiotics from Aarhus University Denmark and is a Ph.D. Scholar of Semiotics and Philosophy of Communication at Charles University Prague. She can be reached at her: Twitter @ShaziaAnwerCh Email: shaziaanwer@yahoo.com  
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