Fool me once. . .B Y I R FA N H U S A I N | 3/7/2020

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| IMRAN Khan is a truly lucky man. Not just because he attained his present position with a little help from his friends, but because the chaos next door has distracted opponents who have muted their criticism of his government`s miserable performance.  Firstly, it was the Indian aerial attack at Balakot following a suicide bombing at Pulwama that killed 40 Indian security personnel. This gave our prime minister the opportunity of assuming the role of peacemaker by releasing the Indian pilot who was shot down over Azad Kashmir.  And as Pakistan stood at the brink of war, opponents were forced to rally around. The prime minister was thus given a platform to appeal to the world to rein in Narendra Modi.  Again, more mundane things lil(e the price hil(e caused by this government`s policies were pushed to Page 5.  And now, as inflation has really begun to bite, the fight-back against Modi`s recent anti-Muslim law has again diverted the Pakistani media and opposition. The killings in New Delhi, and the widespread support for Modi, have pushed any chance of a discussion on Kashmir off the table.  Judging from the scores of emails I have received from Indian readers after a couple of recent columns, hatred of Pakistan, and the support for the Hindutva philosophy are growing rapidly. However, many Indians have also written about their dislike for Modi, and the extremist genie that he has released from the bottle.  All this has allowed Imran Khan to play the statesman, urging the world to intervene in order to save Indian Muslims, and restore human rights in Indian-occupied Kashmir.  This is ironic as in the past, it used to be Indian leaders who condemned Pakistan for aiding jihadists to sow mayhem next door.  Clearly, Modi has allowed Pakistan to grab the moral high ground it once occupied.  Given all this, nobody is asking the ruling party what happened to all of its campaign promises. We all remember that the PTI had promised to create 10 million jobs. What happened to them? With a third of his term behind him, could it please tell us how many have been created? The real tally would indicate that the economy has lost far more jobs than it has created.  With factories shutting down or cutting down production, workers are being laid off at an unprecedented rate.  And how many trees have actually been plante d? Remember that the PTI had pledged a `tsunami of a billion trees`? Could it please let us know how many have been planted, and how many have survived? A billion trees need a lot of water and considerable care.  Any amount budgeted for this ambitious initiative?It was announced with great fanfare that the Prime Minister House would be converted into a university. This was then reduced to a research institute. I welcome this lowered ambition, but could we please get an update on the progress made? Educational and research institutions are not just about bricks and mortar: they need highly qualified staff, and Pakistan is already short of them.  Then, government guesthouses were going to be transformed into luxury hotels. To the best of my knowledge, there has been no progress on this front either. I doubt if there has been any interest in the hotel industry, given the lack of tourists wishing to come to Pakistan.  Even though terrorist activity has been reduced, I`m afraid foreigners except for mountaineers and trekkers don`t wish to travel to a country with harsh restrictions on drinl( and dress. They would rather spend their holidays in places where the family can have a relaxed time.  In fact, tourism was supposed to be the engine driving Imran Khan`s job-creationpolicies. Over a year and a half after he was parachuted into power, this initiative, like most others, has remained moribund.  All politicians make tall promises to win votes, but the prime minister has taken this to a whole different level. If one were to believe himand many gullible people did `naya Pakistan` would be a land where rivers of honey and milk flowed. Sadly, hunger, illiteracy and disease stalk our actual Pakistan, thanks to a succession of awful leaders. So I`m not blaming Khan alone for the state of affairs, but he has done none of the things he promised.  While constantly blaming the government`s allegedly corrupt predecessors, he forgets that when he came to power, our economic indicators were far better than they are today. Inflation was considerably lower, as was the volume of our loans. Industry was doing reasonably well, and the exchange rate was far better than it is today.  The civil servants who could have implemented the government`s policies are either locked up on corruption charges, or too scared to take strong and swift action. So they are avoiding signing documents that might incriminate them in a future NAB inquiry.  I have received many emails from readers who say they have been fooled by the government. m irfan.husain@gmail.com |