

Risky business

A World Economic Forum report on the risks of doing business in Pakistan states what is already common knowledge to everyone in the country: the biggest challenges we face today are the water crisis, rampant inflation, terrorism and poor urban planning. Of these problems, the water crisis is the one that has the most ominous long-term implications. As global climate change accelerates, water shortages will become rampant and Pakistan stands to suffer more than most. The country receives very little rainfall – mostly restricted to the short monsoon season – and is mostly dependent on India abiding by the Indus Waters Treaty.

As the water needs of both countries have increased, India has undertaken an ambitious programme of dam construction that has allowed it to divert more of the water from the Indus' tributaries. Pakistan's planning has been poor as multiple dams and hydroelectric projects have lain dormant. There is now some impetus from the chief justice of the Supreme Court and the prime minister to raise funds for the construction of dams but even that will not solve the water problem by a long shot. We as a nation need to start practising conservation on a personal and collective level. Our precious water resources should not be sold to private companies so that they can sell it back to us in bottled form at a higher price. A national water policy is badly needed that better allocates water for agricultural lands and industry to avoid the current wastage, and better care needs to be taken of existing dams to reduce silting and sedimentation.

The problems of urban planning – which the WEF report also mentions – are legion in Pakistan. There is no master plan that is being implemented in any of our major cities. A hodgepodge of overpasses and transit projects are undertaken without any understanding of a city's needs. The poor are driven out of their homes and their shops are destroyed all in the name of cleaning up a city and attracting investors. On the terrorism front, recent attacks in Karachi and Orakzai show how much work is still to be done despite the undoubted successes of the war against militancy. But if we want to attract more foreign businesses, safety in all facets of life is essential. The WEF points out that Pakistan is one of the countries most susceptible to cyber attacks because of the archaic hardware and software it uses. We all saw during the elections how our electronic systems were not up to par and the recent news about private banks being hacked will certainly raise alarms. In an increasingly digital world, safety in cyber space has become as important as physical safety.

Editorial