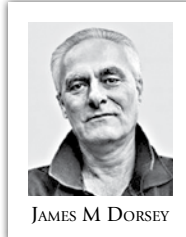


# Forging a future with rather than against Iran



**T**HE rise of hardline President-elect Ebrahim Raisi has prompted some analysts to counterintuitively suggest that it could pave the way for reduced regional tensions and potential talks on a rejiggered Middle Eastern security architecture but getting from A to B is likely to prove easier said than done.

Hopes that a hardline endorsement of a return to the 2015 international agreement that curbed Iran's nuclear programme will pave the way to wider security arrangements are grounded in a belief that Iranian domestic politics give Tehran a vested interest in a dialling down of tension. They also are rooted in a regional track record of hawks rather than doves taking the painful decisions that in the past have paved the way to an end of hostilities and the signing of agreements.

The analysts that see a silver lining in Iran's hardline electoral power grab compare the rise of Raisi to the late 1980s when Iranian revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini accepted a ceasefire in his country's eight-year-long war with Iraq at a time that then-President Ali Khamenei was preparing to succeed the ayatollah as Iran's supreme leader.

It was then that Raisi, a frontrunner in an undeclared race to succeed 82-year-old Ayatollah Khamenei, stands accused of his worst abuses of human rights, sparking fears that he will preside over a renewed period of transition marked by a brutal purge of perceived opponents.

By the same token, hardliners in Israel were the leaders that concluded peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan and peace initiatives like the 1993 Oslo accords with the Palestinians. They included Prime Ministers Menahem Begin, a leader of the right-wing Likud party and Yitzhak Rabin, who was often described as the voice of the Likud in the left-wing Labour Party.

Speaking in his first news conference after his victory in what was widely seen as an engineered election, Raisi insisted that Iran was "determined to strengthen relations with all the countries of the world and especially neighbouring countries. Our priority will be firming up relations with our neighbours."

Echoing his predecessor, outgoing President Hassan Rouhani, Raisi advocated a restoration of diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, broken off when protesters stormed the Saudi embassy in Tehran in 2016

conducted "in a good atmosphere."

Raisi needs a lifting of US sanctions and regional calm to shore up his credentials by making good on his electoral promise to boost the economy—the primary concern of ordinary Iranians.

Iranian state media this week quoted Mahmoud Vaezi, Rouhani's chief of staff, as saying that the United States had agreed to lift "all insurance, oil and shipping sanctions," imposed by former President Donald J Trump's administration, as part of an

and the world to growth and prosperity," Prince Mohammed said.

Dialling back belligerent rhetoric and engaging in dialogue that helps frame issues is one thing. Another is agreeing on sustainable regional security arrangements that will enable the parties to manage their disputes, even if they cannot resolve them.

That will ultimately require a paradigm shift in thinking that addresses deep-seated distrust, fears, and perceptions on both sides of the divide.

Iran's ballistic missile programme and support for proxies in Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen and for President Bashar al-Assad in Syria, seen by Tehran as a defence strategy in a perceived four decades-long overt and covert war, is viewed by Saudi Arabia and its allies as an effort to interfere in the internal affairs of others and export the Iranian revolution.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud suggested as much in his first response to Raisi's election. Prince Faisal insisted that "outstanding issues be addressed and be addressed seriously and that we hold Iran accountable for its activities and hold it to its commitments under the non-proliferation treaty and its commitments to the IAEA," the International Atomic Energy Agency, as part of ongoing multilateral talks aimed at reviving the nuclear agreement.

The Trump administration's abandonment of the nuclear deal in 2018 and policy of "maximum pressure" was the latest failed attempt in the past four decades to pressure Iran to change its policies. Iran proved to be more resilient than expected even if it paid a steep political, economic, and social price that most recently included the election of a leader, Raisi, who lacks popular legitimacy.

To be sure, Iran initially invited international isolation and sanctions with the 444-day occupation of the US embassy in 1979 and the Islamic republic's initial revolutionary zeal aimed at exporting its revolution to countries in the Gulf.

The Iran-Iraq war with Iraq's war effort funded by Gulf states and eventually

supported by the United States turned revolutionary zeal into a battle for survival and a defence strategy that relied on proxies in Arab countries and sought to shift the battlefield away from Iran's borders. It cemented the belief that Iran had no friends and that its enemies sought regime change.

The perception of US and Saudi intentions was cemented by Saudi Arabia's massive investment since 1979 in the global promotion of Wahhabi ideology with its prejudiced and discriminatory attitude towards Shiite Muslims.

Saudi moves since the rise of Prince Mohammed to curb the sharp ends of Wahhabism, the ultra-conservative interpretation of Islam that has long shaped the kingdom and improve the social and economic conditions of its long-disenfranchised Shiite minority have done little to convince Iranians that Saudi attitudes have changed.

Neither have anti-Shiite incidents in other Gulf states. Human Rights Watch this week accused authorities in the United Arab Emirates of forcibly disappearing at least four Pakistani Shiites since October 2020 and deporting six others without explanation, "apparently based solely on their religious background."

Conflict resolution expert Ibrahim Fraihat argues that Saudi Arabia and Iran need to recognise the real issues fuelling their conflict rather than focus on narratives designed to justify their entrenched positions. "What both parties refuse to acknowledge is that this conflict is...at least in part, about regime survival, legitimacy, and the desire of governments of both states to take a leading role in the Muslim world"—all of which make institutionalising conflict management mechanisms a sine qua non.

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A supporter of Ebrahim Raisi displays his portrait during a celebratory rally for his presidential election victory in Tehran, Iran June 19, 2021.

PHOTO: REUTERS

in the wake of the kingdom's execution of a prominent Shiite cleric. "We are ready to dialogue and strengthen relations with the Kingdom once again," Raisi said.

Iran said prior to the election that talks between the Islamic republic and the kingdom mediated by Iraq, the first since the rupture in diplomatic relations, were being

agreement to revive the nuclear accord.

Raisi's remarks followed a conciliatory note in April sounded by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. "We do not want for Iran to be in a difficult situation, on the contrary, we want Iran to prosper and grow. We have interests in Iran, and they have interests in the Kingdom to propel the region

# Renew and ramp up action to address noncommunicable diseases

Amid the Covid-19 response, opportunities to prevent, detect, control and treat NCDs must be fully harnessed



POONAM KHETRAPAL SINGH

**N**ONCOMMUNICABLE diseases (NCDs) kill 41 million people globally every year, more than a third of them prematurely. The four major NCDs—cardiovascular diseases, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes—account for over 80 percent of all premature

NCD deaths, of which 85 percent occur in low and middle-income countries, including in the WHO South-East Asia Region. Key NCD risk factors such as tobacco use, physical inactivity, harmful use of alcohol and unhealthy diets also contribute to and exacerbate mental health disorders, such as depression and anxiety. Amid the ongoing Covid-19 response, the time is ripe for all countries in the region to accelerate action to prevent, detect and control NCDs, and bring treatment to everyone who needs it.

People living with NCDs are at higher risk of severe Covid-19-related illness and death. They are among several groups who have been particularly affected by the pandemic, which has been marked by the interaction of SARS-CoV2 infection with a broad range of NCDs, which are themselves mediated by social and economic disadvantage. Amid ongoing waves of infection, WHO will continue to support countries in the region to aggressively respond, while also enhancing health equity and maintaining essential health services, including for NCDs. High-impact innovations such as telemedicine, extended prescriptions, and door-step delivery of medicines must continue to be leveraged, and all at-risk groups actively encouraged to get vaccinated, in line with national deployment and vaccination plans.

The region's progress against NCDs must not be halted, much less reversed. Since 2014, the region has intensified action to prevent and control NCDs as a flagship priority. All countries continue to implement national multisectoral NCD action plans. Even amid the Covid-19 response, they remain committed to achieving the global 2025

and 2030 NCD targets. Most countries have developed national mental health policies, which must continue to be strengthened in the months and years to come. For the region to protect and defend its many gains, and to catalyse more, several priorities require targeted attention.

First, taking full advantage of new initiatives. For example, in April, WHO launched its Global Diabetes Compact, which aims to ensure all people can access quality diabetes diagnostic

tools, medicines and other medical products, without financial hardship. The region has in recent years made significant progress on increasing access to quality-assured insulin, however barriers persist, especially for the most vulnerable. In coming months, the Compact is set to drive new innovations in technology and pricing, which all countries in the region must

harness and apply to maximum effect. Second, implementing "best buy" interventions that we know work. Evidence shows that by increasing taxation of unhealthy products, policymakers can drive down consumption, enhance overall health, and reduce individual and public health costs. In the process, they will increase fiscal revenue, which if allocated towards health, will help achieve a health and economic recovery from Covid-19 that is more

emphasises the need for all people to have access to quality, integrated NCD services at the primary level, including healthy lifestyle counselling, targeted screening for early diagnosis, and quality medicines and medical devices for effective NCD management. All countries in the region have made tremendous progress in each of these areas and more, which WHO's new Operational Framework for Primary Health Care can help accelerate throughout the Covid-19 response, recovery and beyond.

People-centred policy is the need of the hour. By intensifying community outreach and engagement, policymakers can ensure people from all walks of life understand the signs and symptoms of NCDs, and how to get tested and treated. Crucially, they can also increase health and NCD literacy more generally, inspiring people to take preventive action, such as regular and adequate physical activity, healthy eating and abstinence from tobacco and other unhealthy products.

Achieving whole-of-government, whole-of-society buy-in is essential. Policymakers should intensify engagement with key actors across sectors, and also seek-out the insights and perspectives of people living with NCDs, who can best identify existing gaps. WHO is committed to amplifying the voice of affected populations, and to ensuring they are invited to partner on, and continue to co-create, people-centred policy solutions.

Renewed and ramped up action against NCDs cannot wait. Amid the Covid-19 response, WHO will continue to provide all countries in the region critical support in all areas of health, including NCDs, a pressing threat to health, well-being and sustainable development. Together, we must reduce NCD risks and ensure all people have access to quality care and treatment that is equitable, comprehensive and affordable. Every opportunity must be grasped, and every innovation harnessed. No one can be left behind.

Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh, WHO South-East Asia Regional Director.

By intensifying community outreach and engagement, policymakers can ensure people from all walks of life understand the signs and symptoms of NCDs, and how to get tested and treated.



People living with NCDs are at higher risk of severe Covid-19-related illness and death.

equitable, resilient and sustainable. Restrictions on the marketing of unhealthy products are likewise essential, however must cover surrogate advertising, which aims to cultivate brand loyalty among the young.

Third, strengthening action to address NCDs within health systems, especially on the frontlines. The region's 2016 Colombo Declaration

## QUOTABLE Quote

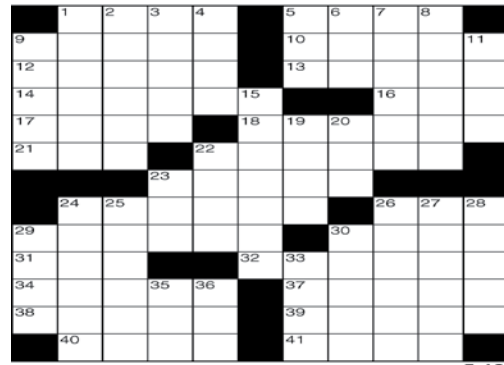


ROBIN WILLIAMS American actor (1951—2014)

No matter what people tell you, words and ideas can change the world.

## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Fashion
  - 5 Members of the force
  - 9 French novelist Albert
  - 10 Skilled
  - 12 Sports spot
  - 13 Baseball's Yogi
  - 14 Major highway accident
  - 16 Relatives
  - 17 Wallet bills
  - 18 Walks proudly
  - 21 Tennis court divider
  - 22 Pancake house choices
  - 23 Georgia city
  - 24 Indifference
  - 26 Mouse chaser
  - 29 Setting
  - 30 Baby's call
  - 31 Stretch of years
  - 32 Support
  - 34 So far
  - 37 Stood up
  - 38 Low card
  - 39 Crew members
  - 40 Like peas in --
  - 41 Winter glider
  - 42 Writer Truman
  - 43 Tinkled
  - 44 VCR inserts
  - 45 Anthropologist Margaret
  - 46 Principled
  - 47 Hailed vehicle
  - 48 Poem of praise
  - 49 Become cheerful
  - 8 Ship spars
  - 9 Poultry buy
  - 11 Works leather
  - 15 Excite
  - 19 Hector's home
  - 20 Baseball score
  - 22 Fill completely
  - 23 -- tai (rum drink)
  - 24 Like some Coast Guard rescues
  - 25 Emphasize
  - 26 Writer Truman
  - 27 Tinkled
  - 28 VCR inserts
  - 29 Anthropologist Margaret
  - 30 Principled
  - 33 Los Angeles team
  - 35 Green prefix
  - 36 TV's Danson



## YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



## BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER



## BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.