

## 'Zindagi Tamasha Hai', latest casualty in the culture wars

By Irfan Husain

IT would need an extremely unintelligent person to launch a large-scale, unannounced censorship campaign in this era of open social media. Fortunately, there's no shortage of such people in Pakistan if we go by the spate of examples of this government's ham-handed attempts to conceal the truth. From books to TV chat shows to films to newspapers, the voices, words and vision of anybody speaking or revealing their version of the truth is immediately suspected of subversion.

Sarmad Khoosat's film, *Zindagi Tamasha Hai*, is the latest casualty in the culture wars. Cleared by the censors, it has fallen foul of the



Film *Zindagi Tamasha Hai* is unlikely to be released in near future

extremist lobby who have only seen a tiny bit of the trailer. As usual, this feeble government has caved in and has now referred it to the Council of Islamic Ideology. Other victims of this campaign against the freedom of expression include Mohammed Hanif, the celebrated author and journalist; Shuja Nawaz, the well-known chronicler of the Pakistan Army who wrote the eye-opening *Crossed Swords*; Adeela Suleman, the artist who showed the reality of our 'missing persons'; and, indeed, this newspaper.

And these are only a few examples of what's happening. For reasons of space, I have left out the many incidents involving TV where chat shows and interviews have been abruptly pulled off the air. When Imran Khan first came to power, the media was asked by his acolytes to give the new government 90 days to find its feet.

Many journalists were persuaded to suspend critical judgement for a while. However, as the days turned to months, and the incompetence of the PTI government was compounded on an almost daily basis, critics found their voices again.

Popular TV anchors, restricted by the electronic media watchdog, simply took to YouTube to express themselves. Online, they are just as popular, but no longer face the curbs placed on them by producers and owners. Of course, their viewership has shrunk, but the government has failed to stifle their voices. Articles deemed too risky by cautious editors can be read online, too.

So what's the point of this censorship? Normally, this compulsion to

conceal the truth is a sign of insecurity and incompetence. Rulers realise they are out of their depth, and do their best to block out reality for fear of losing support. But as Abraham Lincoln famously remarked: "You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time."

When I'm abroad, I am often asked by foreigners how Imran Khan is doing. His image as a sports superstar, a swinging party animal, and an Oxford graduate continues to resonate among the elite. I swiftly correct them by mentioning his mercurial changes and his inability to grasp simple economic truths. So much for Oxford, then.

Instead of taking the nation into confidence to explain why so many of its policies have backfired, the PTI often resorts to bluster, even untruths. More often than not, the



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prime minister's advisers misguide the public. But when you tell people they ought to eat less wheat because of a government cock-up, this becomes a hard sell, even for thick-skinned people like the prime minister's adviser on the media.

Clearly, there is much for this government to brush under the carpet. And we mustn't forget that a large part of the ongoing censorship campaign is driven by the security state. For this shadowy, unaccountable organ, no criticism of any kind is acceptable.

This combination of a self-absorbed prime minister and a hyper-sensitive establishment has led to worse curbs on free expression than any army dictator put in place. I suppose one reason we are so disappointed is that our expectations were so high: here was an educated, widely travelled politician who called for a 'new Pakistan', and spoke of social justice. Of course, many of us saw through this ever since his support for fundamentalists became apparent.

But having been elected – reportedly with help from his uniformed friends – we find that there is very little substance in his words. The seeming inability to focus on issues is proving to be a daily disaster. Like most Pakistanis, whatever my reservations, I wanted him to succeed. But I fear the drift and ineptitude on display provides little grounds for optimism. Nor, indeed, does his team of ministers and advisers inspire much confidence. For the PTI, it would appear that the end-all and be-all of power is to hound its political enemies. In its limited worldview, good governance and a thriving economy are relatively unimportant. But having locked up your rivals, what next? It would appear there is no Plan B apart from silencing critics whether they are writers or TV anchors. But as we are witnessing now, at some point, things start falling apart.

## Steven Del Duca's plan to remove barriers for those seeking to have 'foreign credentials' recognized

BRAMPTON – For too long we have heard about doctors driving taxis, and nurses working as cleaners. But how do we solve this problem in Ontario? On February 1, 2020, Steven Del Duca outlined his plan to fix credentialing in Ontario with a bold 'new plan'.

"My plan is to remove barriers for those seeking to have foreign credentials recognized", he said while talking to multicultural media representatives from across the GTA in Brampton. "We know that ensuring everyone has a fair chance to join the middle class and can build the career they want is the best way to strengthen Ontario, that's why we

associations and regulators produce standardized guidelines with 12 months that will be publicly posted and contain commitments regarding the stages and duration of foreign credential assessment process. We will work with organizations throughout those 12 months.

Continuing he said: "If associations have not demonstrated sufficient progress we will introduce legislation at the end of the 12 month timeline that will compel professional associations and regulators to create their standardized guidelines, improve outcome for new Canadians, develop a reasonable plan to raise or remove over-



*My plan is to remove barriers for those seeking to have foreign credentials recognized, Steven Del Duca told multicultural media representatives*

will take action to expedite and improve the foreign credential recognition process to ensure valuable skills are not being lost".

Del Duca, who is a former Ontario cabinet minister and is running for the provincial Liberal party's leadership said: "By the conclusion of a 12-month timeline Ontario will be a jurisdiction where professionals with foreign credentials that follow clear guidelines, pass the relevant test will be able to join the workforce without the constraints of caps on the number of new professionals or opaque certification process".

He further said: "We will immediately request that professional

all caps on the number of credentialed professionals, and address regional shortage for some professionals in Ontario."

"To ensure Ontario remains a leader in validating foreign credentials and workforce development we will also provide funding for five pilot programs with interested sectors, post-secondary institutions, employers, professional associations, and settlement agencies to test new models of foreign credential recognition programs in Ontario, with an emphasis on high growth sectors and research and information growth", Steven Duca concluded.



Rubina Faisal addressing the gathering at the introduction ceremony of her book – *Gum Shudaa Sa'ay*, in Mississauga recently

## Rubina Faisal's book – *Gumshuda Sa'ay* introduced at a literary event in Mississauga

MISSISSAUGA – Another book of Rubina Faisal, *Gumshuda Sa'ay*, (The missing shadows) was formally introduced at a well-attended literary event here with speakers praising the writing capabilities of the author. The event was held under the auspices of FOTH (Family of the Heart) – a group of creative people, including writers, journalists, students, artists, singers, poets, scientists. FOTH member meet regularly to share their ideas around a host of contemporary issues – science, music, art, culture, literature and religion at a dinner, usually once a month. At the very outset of Rubina's book launching ceremony, Dr Khalid Suhail introduced the 198-page book in Urdu. Entitled as *Gumshuda Sa'ay*, the book was the compilation of short stories which Rubina wrote from time to time. Several speakers, including Shahid Akhtar, Ahmed Rizwan and Hassa Haider greatly commended Rubina's writing work. A noted local Urdu poet Nasreen Syed presented an impressive poem on Rubina's achievement.

