**During much of my childhood and adult life spent in Pakistan, I watched banners, signs and billboards around Peshawar, Charsadda and other cities advertising a promise of going to foreign countries. Study in the UK, work permit in Italy, and so forth. Usually, those signs would have a student sitting out in the open in the greenest possible grass looking and smiling at a book surrounded by a bunch of blonde girls. I never grasped the idea of how one could study and smile at the same time. Many people wouldn't be able to study with a bunch of blonde girls sitting around. But, those signs never failed in convincing the youth that they could be that guy sitting among the blondes.**

That image forms in the mind from the outset: that a better everything is out there on the other side of the planet. Sort of like the Neeli Jheel story by Shafiq-ur-Rehman. In American society, teenagers desperately wait to get to the age of 18 so that they can leave their parents' house and be legally able to live independently. While it has become a culture in this society, it also speaks volumes about the kind of environment their parents create around the house. Drinking, drug addiction and physical abuse are some of the common habits of parents where these teenagers live and grow up.

Every year more than a million Pakistanis leave Pakistan. The passport making body of the Government of Pakistan is receiving applications by a number they can hardly keep up with. Close to my house in Islamabad, there is a new mega office being constructed right now. That office has built their business around their expertise in helping people send their passports to foreign countries' embassies. And the business of exit has never been better. My neighbours complain about how that will bring so much traffic, noise and trash around this otherwise sleepy and leafy neighborhood. But I like to wonder what perhaps nobody else does: the bigger issue here is not the condition of this neighborhood after these aspiring escapers will come here but the conditions that will make them come here.

I too had left Pakistan due to financial insecurities and a realisation that perhaps there was no future for me in a society where the rule of thumb has been the survival of the fattest. But the Pakistan that I had left back in 2009 was a much better Pakistan than the one we see today. Back then, people had a hope that things would get better. That Pakistan was a state that could stand up to India's aggression. There was a hope that with the right people in charge, Pakistanis would still be able to get justice and equality or some semblance of those things. What is different around this time is that that very hope is gone.

Pakistanis were leaving for Western countries in search of the ability to work and make money. But eventually, they wanted to return back to their homeland and live here. Many of the houses in Islamabad are owned by such Pakistani Americans and other overseas Pakistanis. Pakistanis today are leaving on a one-way ticket, burning their boats this time around. I left in 2009 and I bought a house in Islamabad because I planned to return one day. The guy who is leaving today is not going to buy a house in Pakistan when he gets rich.

The hopes of overseas Pakistanis returning back to Pakistan reached a great height when the legendary cricketer became the prime minister in 2018. Those hopes have come crashing down badly today. And that is why overseas Pakistanis don't even travel to Pakistan on a Pakistani passport anymore. They take pride in getting a Pakistani visa using their foreign passport. Something would break inside of me if I ever landed in Islamabad flashing my US passport with a Pakistani visa in it. I am considered old school not for my age but for that very belief.

rule of thumb

**Guideline**

**General principle**

**Common practice**

**Standard procedure**

**Practical rule**

**Working principle**

**Default method**

**Best practice**

So forth

 **And so on**

 **Etc. (et cetera)**

 **And the like**

 **And similar things**

 **And other such things**

 **To that effect**

 **And so forth**

**Outset** **Beginning**

 **Start**

 **Commencement**

 **Onset**

 **Inception**

 **Initiation**

 **Origin**

**Sort of like**

 **Somewhat like**

 **Kind of like**

 **Similar to**

 **Resembling**

 **In a way like**

**Teenager**

 **Teens**

 **Adolescents**

 **Youth**

 **Young adults**

 **Juveniles  
desperately**

 **Urgently**

 **Frantically**

 **Intensely**

 **Despondently**

 **Recklessly**

 **Hopelessly**

Able

 **Capable**

 **Skilled**

 **Competent**

 **Proficient**

 **Qualified**

 **Efficient**

 **Adept**

**Keep up**

 **Maintain**

 **Stay on track**

 **Stay informed**

 **Keep pace**

 **Continue**

 **Follow along**