

The Truth International

15-30th November 2020

US no longer the world superpower
Shift to a multipolar political system amid a range
of influential players

Macron's faltering support
An insight into Macron's Islamophobic approach
to revive lost popularity

Clash of titans on the rooftop of Pakistan
Will new GB government get status of province?

Finally Joe Biden enters White House



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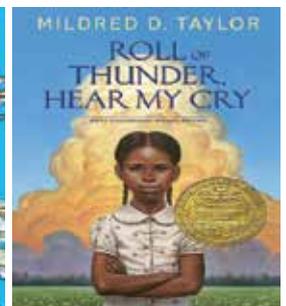
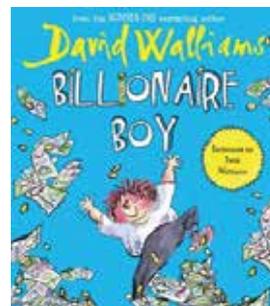
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A divisive vote

By M. Ziauddin



It was too close a call. And the number of votes that each of the two contestants polled make it more of a clash between pro-Trump and anti-Trump voters rather than between the candidates of two political parties--Republicans and Democrats--subscribing to two different manifestoes. Indeed, it were seemingly the anti-Trump voters rather than pro-Joe Biden ones that seemed to have decisively hauled the Democratic candidate across the tape edging out Trump.

This becomes even more glaringly evident in the opening remarks uttered by the President-elect in his first national address. He vowed to heal a deeply divided nation, and reaching out to the millions of people who voted against him to say, "Let's give each other a chance."

His calls for reconciliation at a Saturday evening victory celebration came even as President Donald Trump continued to argue that the election had been stolen from him, an indication that the divisive politics that have gripped the US over the past four years are far from over.

Given the Democrat's numerical strength in the Senate the administration of US President-elect Joe Biden is more likely to reverse a number of President Donald Trump's controversial policies on Palestine and the broader Middle East. Democrats are committed to a two-state solution and oppose annexation and settlement expansion.

In Syria a Biden-led administration is once again likely to stand with civil society and pro-democracy partners and help advance a political settlement where the Syrian people have a voice. And it will certainly reassess the U.S. relationship with Saudi Arabia and end support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen.

It will also hopefully rescind the un-American Muslim travel and refugee bans and make America, once again, a welcoming

destination for immigrants and refugees, including by raising the refugee admissions cap.

Biden has already signaled he is ready to rejoin the landmark nuclear agreement struck in 2015, including the Paris climate accord, and normalize its relations with NATO allies.

During the Cold War days Pakistan was regarded as the most allied ally of the US. And during 9/11 related terror war Pakistan was designated as the non-NATO ally of the US. However, relations went South during the Obama administration as concerns grew about Pakistan's safe havens for the Taliban and the presence of al-Qaeda in the country. Things soured further in January 2018, when Trump accused Pakistan of "lies and deceit" in its relationship with America, tweeting that it took U.S. aid for nothing in return. The administration cut off \$1.3 billion in U.S. security assistance following Trump's tweet.

With the FATF, the Trump administration had chosen an economic tool more effective than aid to encourage Pakistan to crack down on terrorist groups.

In its bid to avoid being blacklisted, Pakistan has since 2018 taken actions against militant groups—including placing economic sanctions on Lashkar-e-Taiba and sentencing the group's leader, Hafiz Saeed.

Consequently, taking a U-turn Trump wrote Prime Minister Imran Khan a letter in the fall of 2018 asking for help with the Afghan peace process. Khan, who had long argued for political reconciliation in Afghanistan, was forthcoming.

Pakistan considers the U.S.-Taliban deal signed in February a product of its help, and Zalmay Khalilzad has publicly acknowledged Pakistan's help with the process numerous times.

In a presidency where personalities have mattered a great deal, it was clear that the two (Khan and Trump) celebrity-turned-populist politicians enjoyed meeting each other.

China's growing presence in the region, and the United States' willingness to tolerate Beijing's close economic and strategic ties to Pakistan, has also reassured Pakistan that major powers value its partnership.

But Biden is likely to bring about no substantive change in the Pakistan-US relations. It is going to remain largely transactional.

The US has been at war since 2001: thousands of American soldiers and civilians have been killed, and trillions of taxpayer dollars spent, but stability and security remain elusive. The situation is likely to remain more or less the same following the entry of a new man in the White House.

The outgoing administration's response to the pandemic has painfully exposed the shortcomings of President Trump's flair for governance. The more experienced incoming administration is likely to overcome the crisis adopting smarter moves.

Saud Sahir - The Journalist, The Activist, My Loving Father

By Umer Farooq

For the journalists of Islamabad and Rawalpindi he was Shahjee, his pen name was Saud Sahir and for me he was just Abu (father). Islam was a political ideology for him and he remained committed to those who espoused this ideology. Once I read out for Abu, from Hossein Nasr's—Iranian-American scholar—book "Islam and the modern world" about the notion of treating Islam as an ideology as opposed to observing Islam as a religion. He says that the classical languages of Islam-Arabic and Persian, in their classical forms—don't have any word to describe the western political term, "Ideology". Hossein Nasr is one of the most brilliant minds in Muslim World. Iranian born Nasr teaches Islamic studies at George Washington University in Washington D. C. He has written extensively on Islamic history (from a sociological perspective), philosophy and religion.

Abu disagreed strongly, "I think it is time for you to reread Maulana Maududi" he quipped. In his opinion anyone who has any doubts about Islam being a political ideology for Muslim societies, an ideology which shows the way forward, must consult Maulana Maududi's book, "Islami Ryasat (Islamic State)", "It is written in simple language and delve on complex political and ideological problems in a language, which is understandable for ordinary reader" Abu suggested to me in his forceful argumentative style. Although I have heard this advice from Abu many times since I attained political consciousness, I promised him I would go through the book once again.

He was in love with Maulana Maududi's intellectual achievements and was always full of praise for them. He introduced me to Maulana Maududi's books at a very early age. He presented me Maududi's book, Khutabaat (speeches) when I was in class 8th. And since both of us were in a profession in which observing and analyzing politics became our trade, we remained focused on Maulana Maududi's political writings in later years of his life.

But he was an ardent reader—it was very easy to find him in the study of our home in Media town, Islamabad. If he was not doing anything else, he would be reading anything that he would get hold of—a magazine, novel, serious religious writing, history, poetry, newspapers columns, books about Islamic history, Indian history or Pakistan's political history, you name it. After he was diagnosed with liver cancer and became bed ridden, I bought him a novel by Amrita Preetam on partition, "How did you find the novel?" I asked him the next day, "I read it in one go and it was simply marvelous.....I thoroughly enjoyed it" he replied.

Abu immersed himself in trade union activity for the journalist community at an early stage in his career—his personality was defined by trade unionism and groupthink. The Bhutto era in the 1970s was the defining period for him, which defined his political thinking as well as his journalistic career. Besides being inspired by the religious and political thought of Maulana Maududi, the highhandedness demonstrated by the Bhutto regime pushed him into political activism on the right side of the ideological spectrum of Pakistani society. He was chased and harassed by Bhutto police



and intelligence. When Zia staged a coup, he became acquainted with him and later a friend. It's a paradox (or may be a contradiction) of his life that he remained opposed to the military's involvement in politics, and yet he wholeheartedly supported Zia's martial law.

He remained committed to politics of the right and till the last day of his life was ready to do anything for his group—the Dastoor Group. Abu started journalism in the times in Pakistan's history when people used to mix journalism with political activism—I found his journalism to be a derivative of his political activism. In the initial phase of his life, he was associated with National Awami Party (NAP) in Rawalpindi. In later life he came under the influence of Maulana Maududi and Jamat-e-Islami. Nawaz Sharif was his last political romance, which lasted till his last breath. He had a deeply religious world outlook, but there was a temporal or secular element in his attitude towards rights of journalists' community or for the downtrodden generally. Even his ideological opponents recognize that he supported them in the time of ordeal during the military government of General Zia-ul-haq.

It's not that Abu didn't have any favorites on the left side of the ideological spectrum—he was in love with Faiz Sahib's poetry and always mentioned the name of Habib Jalib with respect and reverence. He used to explain to me that romantic portrayal of poverty in Faiz poetry is not inspired by Marxist thought, "Romantic portrayal of poverty and poor in Faiz poetry is inspired more by Islamic history and culture" he used to say. His explanation for this was that Marx had a very unromantic attitude towards poverty and poor. Marx used to call poor counter revolutionaries, whereas in Islamic culture and history both poverty and poor are romanticized, just like in Faiz's poetry.

Abu's was a happy life—he used to find happiness in small and tiny things. He started his life as a lower middle class manual worker and rose to become one of the most prominent and fairly well off journalists. He left behind him a legacy of success and happiness—two sons (including me) and a daughter, all of them fairly wealthy. Eight grandchildren, all of them are on the path to achieve success in their lives. Abu died a satisfied and happy man.

So little time, so much to do!



By Ashraf Jehangir Qazi

What is it that ails my country?

What is it that I may do?

Why is it I fear an answer

That all I fear may be true?

President-elect Joe Biden won the US Presidential elections by almost 5 million votes. He has inherited “a mud sandwich” from Trump in the shape of an unprecedentedly divided US. Given Trump’s criminally irresponsible Presidency, Biden should have won by a landslide. He did not. He will now have to wait until after January 5 to know if he controls the Senate. He barely held on to the House of Representatives. He will face a Trump packed conservative Supreme Court. Trump’s legal challenges and refusal to concede is supported by tens of millions of Americans. He got 71 million votes. The transition could be anything but smooth.

However, the problem the US faces today is not so much Trump’s tantrums as it is its advanced corporate capitalist system which is based on extreme inequality, institutionalized discrimination and perpetual war in the name of ideals it systematically violates. The US is an island unto

itself as well as a continent exercising global power and influence. It sees itself as a beacon of hope and promise while much of the world today sees it as a curse and a menace.

Nevertheless, the US is still the mightiest country. On an international exchange rate basis it has the largest economy. It is by far the number one military power and has well over 1000 military bases around the world with most of them in the vicinity of China and Russia. Its cutting edge technology still has the widest spread underpinning its economic and military power. It has the best science and technology based universities, institutes and research centers. Moreover, the US is blessed with the richest diversity of natural resources. Its space explorations wow the world and the vitality of its people, culture and arts is truly remarkable. And yet its politics today is that of a third world failing country. This makes it the world’s most dangerous country.

Until recently, the US clearly wielded more “soft power” than any other country. It was seen as the land of opportunity, freedom and democracy, a “melting pot” of the greatest diversity of peoples sharing the American Dream of limitless possibility and setting norms for the world.

Its reputation for generosity and assistance was nonpareil. After the US victory in the Cold War Francis Fukuyama wrote his book “The end of history.” Henceforth, according to him, history would merely recount the varying degrees of success with which lesser peoples and nations were able to follow the US liberal democratic course and emulate its scientific and technological prowess.

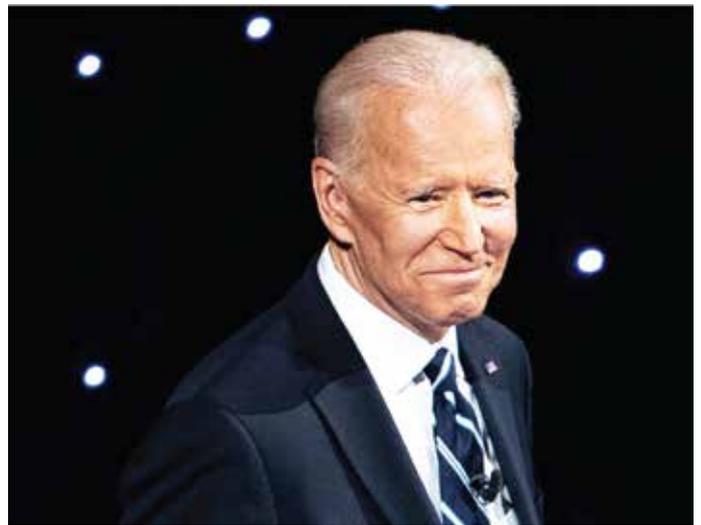
But since 9/11, Mark Anthony’s Shakespearean lament increasingly describes the US: “what a fall there was my countrymen!” The US has forfeited much of its soft power. This in turn has begun to erode its global political hegemony and also - with the breath-taking multi-dimensional rise of China and the military resurgence of Russia – its global military hegemony.

Under Trump, the political discourse plumbed the depths, further tarnishing the global image of the US. Domestically, his direct and indirect appeal to white supremacy, racism, sexism and fascism; his apparent tolerance of police murders of black Americans; his immigration travesties against Mexicans and travel ban on Muslims; his massive tax concessions to the ultra-rich at the expense of basic services for the poor including pandemic relief; his presiding over the loss of 10 million jobs; his attempts to dismantle healthcare; his scuttling of environmental protection in favour of fossil fuel producing corporations; his refusal to accept climate change as a man-made imminent threat to mankind; and his wanton mishandling of the Covid-19 pandemic resulting in the deaths of a quarter of a million Americans make him the worst US President ever.



Externally, Trump unilaterally walked out of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change; withdrew from the World Health Organization, denounced the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran horrifying major European allies; tore up critical arms agreements with Russia thereby increasing the risk of nuclear conflict; and launched a trade war and possibly a new cold war with China which would guarantee international instability for the foreseeable future. Notwithstanding his efforts to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan and his relatively less belligerent foreign policy towards the Muslim world than that of Obama, his generally deplorable performance on the domestic and external fronts appeared to set the scene for his elimination as a political force forever. In the event, however, it looked for a while that he might actually win a second term! If he does not end up in jail he may still be a very disruptive political force.

Biden was a weak and deeply flawed Presidential candidate. He supported every American war. By and large, Americans voted against Trump rather than for him. Bernie Sanders was a much more credible candidate. But the Democratic Party establishment is even more pro-Wall Street than the Republican far right. If Sanders were nominated, his own party would probably have worked with Wall Street and the military-industrial complex for a Trump victory! However, the educated and progressive youth of America still supports Sanders’ “New Deal” agenda. This could augur well for the future of the US, possibly under the leadership of the brilliant young Latino American Democratic Congresswoman, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC). Biden said he intends to be a one-term transitional President since he will be past 80 by the next election. Biden’s Vice-President, Kamala Harris, will succeed him if for any reason he is unable to continue in office. Her appeal to progressive young Democrats, however, is non-existent.



After Obama engineered the defeat of Sanders in the Democratic Party primaries, Noam Chomsky urged the US electorate to vote for Biden as “the lesser evil” compared to Trump whom he regarded as “worse than Hitler” and “a cancer in the White House.” But it is far from clear that younger Democrats will in future vote for a candidate or a party that does not represent their interests and aspirations. If the younger progressive Democrats do not take over the party, as was expected of Sanders supporters after 2016, it will split. So too might the Republican Party if its Congressional leadership, no longer controlled by a maniac in the White House, can assert its independence from the Trump-besotted loonies who have had a strangle-hold on the party.

A Biden Administration will certainly do better than Trump on Covid-19 and the looming Climate Catastrophe. He has promised carbon neutrality by 2050. Biden will immediately rejoin the Paris Agreement. He will improve relations with Europe. His immigration policies are likely to be less arbitrary, discriminatory and anti-Muslim. He may rejoin the JCPOA thereby easing tensions with Iran while maintaining longstanding US hostility towards its independent foreign policy. Iran long ago offered to forego developing a nuclear weapons option if the US and Israel agreed to a Middle East Nuclear Weapons Free Zone. The US, however, refuses to do so because that would render illegal its assistance to Israel which has an undeclared nuclear arsenal. Biden might also alleviate current tensions with China while trying to thwart its

emergence as an independent global power which offers a more attractive, non-hierarchical, and shared-development based alternative world order.

On the US economy it is not clear how well Biden would manage a moving balance between security, economic and health imperatives in a pandemic and climate disrupted world. However, his saner Climate, Covid and China policies might help. But he will neither end Fracking for shale oil and gas nor will he support a Green New Deal both of which are essential to combat climate catastrophe. He will also not accept Medicare for all with a single payer plan although Covid-19 could threaten millions of American lives.

With regard to Afghanistan and Pakistan, if Biden follows his former boss, Obama, he could be more aggressive than Trump in attempting to force an Afghan peace settlement. But the Taliban are too entrenched, the Kabul government is too fragile, and US public opinion wants out of Afghanistan ASAP. Biden might, accordingly, blame Pakistan for his failure. He will look askance at CPEC and Pakistan's embrace of China. He will further strengthen strategic cooperation with India. He is more likely than Trump to equate assistance to Kashmiri resistance against Indian genocide with terrorism. He will, accordingly, increase FATF and IFI pressures on Pakistan. Biden may voice criticisms of Indian human rights violations in IHK. But he will do nothing to reverse India's August 5, 2019 decision. He will not reduce the US military budget citing Russian and Chinese threats.

The US is doubly divided. There is the relatively superficial divide which grabs all the headlines and there is the real divide which mainstream corporate media barely mentions. The superficial divide is between the two Wall Street financed parties: one, the unsophisticated but more straightforward Republicans who see themselves as salt-of-the-earth patriotic Christians and hate assumed liberal elite conspiracies against the common folk, and two, the more sophisticated but devious Democrats who pretend to represent the grievances of the downtrodden but within parameters that rule out any real reforms that would upset Corporate America.



The real divide, however, is between the 0.1 percent which is made up of corporate bosses and CEOs, hedge fund managers, media barons, party bosses, congressional committee and subcommittee chairpersons, lobbyists, generals, senior Administration officials, etc. on the one hand, and the rest of the country which is largely controlled through Artificial Intelligence based surveillance

technologies and Big Data assisted manipulation of perceptions and manufacture of consent for elite agendas, on the other. This divide between the 0.1 and the 99.9 percent is one which Biden, like Trump, will preside over rather than seriously address. After Biden's victory, Sanders summarized a "first 100 days" reform agenda for his Administration. But Biden wants to "reconcile" progressives and Wall Street "moderates" in his party and to "reach out" to Republicans. So much for Bernie's agenda!



The perennial question among Pakistani observers about which American Presidential candidate or political party will suit Pakistan is irrelevant. Pakistan faces colossal domestic and external challenges. Only a comprehensive and rapid national transformation can enable it to deal with them. Tragically, apart from rhetoric, there is no sign of this happening. Nor is there any discernible intention among the ruling political and institutional elites for it to happen. Accordingly, many observers see Pakistan as its own biggest problem, which it is not even allowed to address.

Such observations might appear to overstate the dilemma Pakistan faces. But unless it is seen to be seriously and effectively dealing with challenges on its domestic and external fronts, its views and complaints – however valid – will not be taken seriously. If the people of Pakistan are seen as resigned to their fate and its rulers are seen to be no friends of the people no country, including China, will care to strategically invest in its future. Only a seriously and successfully governed Pakistan – which requires the organized ownership and active participation of its own people – can command the respect of friend and foe alike, and maximize its policy options vis-à-vis the several simultaneous existential challenges it faces.

Should this begin to happen, it will not matter who rules in Washington, Beijing or Delhi. Should it not, then for an opposite set of reasons, it will similarly not matter. Many in Pakistan may go along with these observations. But there are far too few who are able and committed enough to undertake the rigours and stress of joining and participating in grass-roots movements for the implementation of mutually reinforcing measures to transform Pakistan. This is the fundamental challenge that has yet to be taken up. Moreover, impending climate catastrophe has drastically shortened the time in which this challenge has to be met. The great "Satchmo," Louis Armstrong, sang: So little time; so much to do!

Ladies and Gentlemen, President Biden

One of the world's richest nations has picked one of its poorest politicians to lead

By Mishaal Ashraf

“America, I’m honoured that you have chosen me to lead our great country. The work ahead of us will be hard, but I promise you this: I will be a President for all Americans – whether you voted for me or not. I will keep the faith that you have placed in me.”

These are the words with which Joseph Robinette Biden Jr., who goes by Joe Biden, hailed the networks calling the 2020 United States presidential race for him.

Biden has been projected to be the 46th President of the United States of America, due for inauguration Wednesday, 20th January 2021. The incumbent President Donald Trump, known as a representative of rich Republicans, is on his way out.

The former vice president entered the race as the underdog, his Democratic party all but expecting to lose the race and hand the Republican Trump a second term in the White House. It is difficult to say what fuelled this come-from-behind victory for Biden: His personal luck or the groundswell of widespread hatred for Trump in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Biden was born in November 1942 in Scranton, a blue-collar city in Pennsylvania. Joseph Biden Sr., his father, was a used car salesman, and managed to raise a middle-class family. As a child, Biden struggled with a stutter for which he was bullied in school. He overcame this condition in his later years, and has been very vocal about speech and stutter counselling on various platforms.

After getting his early education from Saint Paul’s Elementary School, Biden attended the Saint Helena School, until he was accepted into the Archmere Academy. To help finance his tuition fee, Biden earned some extra cash by washing the school windows and weeding gardens in the neighbourhood.

For college, Biden attended University of Delaware, and enrolled in their History and Political Science program. During his college years, he developed a keen interest in politics and was especially stirred by John F. Kennedy’s inauguration in 1961. After graduating from University of Delaware, he was accepted in Syracuse University Law School in 1965 and married his first wife, Neilia Hunter, the next year.

Upon graduation from law school, Biden moved to Wilmington, Delaware, to start practicing at a law firm in 1968. Soon enough, he became an active member of the Democratic Party and in 1971 he was elected to the New Castle City Council.

Biden started his own law firm in 1971 while serving as a councilman. By this time, he and his wife had three children: Joseph Biden III, Hunter Biden, and Naomi Biden. The next year, he won the Delaware Democratic Party nomination to run for the United States Senate. His upset victory against the popular Republican incumbent J. Caleb Boggs made the 29-year-old Joe the fifth youngest US Senator ever.

Biden was visited upon by sudden and grave tragedy a week before Christmas 1972 when his wife and one-year-old daughter were killed and both his sons severely injured in a car crash. Devastated beyond measure, Joe even considered suicide at this point in his

life. However, close family support and his deep sense of responsibility held him together. Unable to show up at the swearing-in ceremony for new Senators at Washington DC, he took the oath of office from his sons’ hospital room.

Once in the Senate, Joe never found a way out of it and served as a Senator from 1973 to 2009 for six terms back to back to become Delaware’s longest-serving Senator. During this period, he also became a leading expert in foreign policy affairs and served as chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations for many years. Some of his foreign policy positions include advocating for the strategic arms limitation in USSR, expanding NATO to absorb former USSR nations, promoting peace and stability in the Balkans, and opposing the troop surge in the Iraq War, especially in 2007.

Biden wanted to run for the President of United States for a long time. He first eyed the 1988 Democratic presidential nomination – but dropped out after several of his speeches were found to be plagiarised.

In 1988, Biden was diagnosed with two lethal brain aneurysms. He had to undergo a complicated surgery which resulted in blood clots in his lungs, for which he had to go through another surgery. Nevertheless, Biden remained resilient and returned to the Senate after a seven-month break.

Twenty-years after his first unsuccessful presidential bid, Biden once again decided to run for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination, this time conceding in favour of the much more popular Barack Obama. Months later, when Obama clinched the nomination, he chose Biden as his running mate, and the duo went on to defeat the Republican pair of John McCain and Sarah Palin.

In January 2009, Obama became the 44th President of the United States, and Joe Biden the 47th Vice President. In 2012, when Obama ran for re-election, he retained Biden as his running mate and they once again defeated the Republicans to become the 45th President and 48th Vice President, respectively, securing almost 60 percent of electoral vote.

Tragedy found Joe Biden once more in 2015 when he lost his 46-years-old son Beau to cancer. President Obama delivered a moving elegy for Beau Biden. The blow took a devastated Joe months of grieving to overcome. By the time he did rise above it, he had run out of time to mount a successful campaign for the 2016 nomination.

In 2019, however, Biden once again announced he would be running for presidency in the 2020 election. In many of his public addresses, Biden hinted at having a female running mate and in August 2020, Kamala Harris was announced to run with Joe Biden. Later in the same month, Biden officially became the Democratic presidential nominee.

On 7 November 2020, at the age of 77, Joe Biden finally achieved his lifelong dream of leading world’s sole (if waning) superpower, becoming one of the oldest Presidents of the United States of America.

US no longer the world superpower: Dr. Rifaat Hussain

By Oroba Tasnim Siddiqui

As the uncertainty surrounding world order and various dimensions of democratic processes and foreign policy persist, The Truth International sat down with leading foreign policy expert, Dr. Rifaat Hussain to discuss the emerging security environment. Dr. Hussain has not only authored several books but is also the Head of Department for Public Policy at the NUST School of Social Sciences and Humanities where he continues to serve an illustrious career. Openly speaking of the transforming dynamics, this report presents a one-on-one interview with Dr. Rifaat Hussain.

How will the world transform following the US Election?

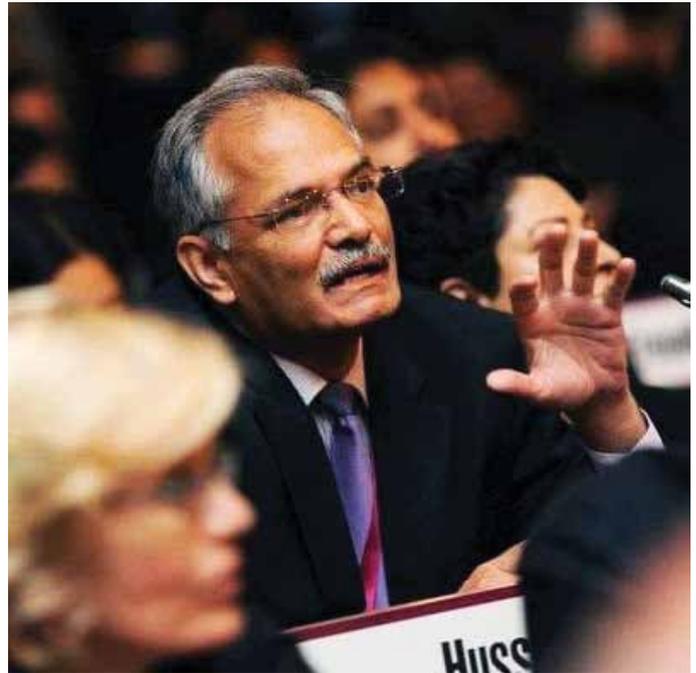
It is too early to tell the ways in which the world will be impacted by this change of guard in the White House. This is because there is a lot of controversy particularly from the Republican side to delegitimize the electoral exercise and this is not going to die out anytime soon. This represents the deep fracture in the American polity, represented by the fact that over 70 million people casted their vote for the outgoing Trump Administration and 75 million voted for the democrats. This voting pattern indicates that the American society is highly polarized and divided. Unless this is brought to a significant halt, I do not think America will be able to play a major role in guiding the world transform in the next couple of years.

How will Biden's presidency impact the Afghan conflict and subsequent peace process?

There is very little that Biden has said about what kind of foreign policy agenda he is likely to pursue, except to say that he wants the U.S. troops to come back but he has not given a clear indication as to how many forces would be left behind and how soon the withdrawal process would be conducted. It is a fair guess that some of these troops will continue to stay back in Afghanistan, perhaps a couple thousands of them. I am not sure what the contours of Afghan peace process are going to be. This is because Zalmay Khalilzad, whose stint, brokered the peace process particularly the February '19 deal between the Taliban and the US and prolonged involvement is still uncertain. The conditions on the ground particularly Taliban's continued attacks and the response of the security forces will have a huge impact on how the situation would evolve but in terms of the conflict dynamics, the situation will remain very fluid and it is hard to tell whether the new administration under Biden will have any significant impact on the immediate dynamics of the conflict.

How will Pakistan's relationship with the US evolve in the next couple of years?

From Pakistan's standpoint, Biden's presidency is a positive development because democrats have generally lent support to the democratic processes in Pakistan. They have also used a value based human rights perspective which will help Pakistan vis-a-vis



India as New Delhi under Modi has been brutalizing Kashmiris and violating fundamental rights of their own citizens. As PM Khan is fond of saying, we have a extremist Hindutva ideology in power India. Given the fact that Covid pandemic has played havoc with the Indian economy and its devastations have diminished India's status as a rising economic power, there is frankly no hope that the Indian economy will be able to grow beyond anywhere above 2 to 3 %. If this continues to happen, India's desire to be recognized as a rising power and a major player will get a severe setback. From Pakistan's perspective, there is also a flip side to Joe Biden Presidency. Democrats are likely to raise questions regarding India's allegations about Pakistan's territory being used to promote terrorism in India and Afghanistan, a long standing Indian allegation, to which Pakistan has to figure out a way of responding. In case, there is an attempt to redefine US relationship with Iran and if the sanctions are lifted or mellowed down, that will be good for Pakistan because under the previous Trump administration, immense pressure was exerted on Iran so much that Pakistan stayed away from any sort of meaningful bilateral of cooperation with Iran for fear of coming under secondary US sanctions. A softer approach by Biden Administration towards Tehran could possibly be a great benefit for Pak-Iran relations.

Do you see an end to Kashmiri miseries any time soon, specifically with the change in US administration?

The general perception is that Kashmir may get greater prominence under Biden administration and even though they have previously made noises and statements. But in terms of the substance of US policy on Kashmir, these statements mean very little. There is no indication that Washington would be willing to

exert pressure on India to make New Delhi change its draconian Kashmir policy. I also think that the incoming Democratic dispensation would neither be willing nor able to exert enough pressure on India to restart dialogue with Pakistan in the first few years. We have heard similar noises being made by the Trump administration in which they offered to mediate between India and Pakistan but these remained only verbal pronouncements. Kashmiris will have a greater chance to look to the international community as well as the US in trying to help them move away from the clutches of Indian brutality but they cannot expect any material support either from the new democratic administration or the Western world in general.

In Pakistan, what is the process that must be undergone to reach the state of democratic utopia that is envisioned by struggling democrats?

I think Pakistan has to be very careful in not trying to derail the democratic processes within the country because we often have heard PTI leadership particularly PM Khan that corruption is the key issue which is indeed important. However, you cannot delegitimize the entire opposition as corrupt and credibly claim that they are good for nothing and need to put in the dock. There needs to be some sort of reconciliation between the opposition and PTI government who unfortunately seems to be on a warpath right now. This is an internal matter for Pakistan and we should be extremely careful if there is an attempt to impose a presidential form of government or clip the wings of democratic processes in Pakistan.

How should Pakistan pursue its foreign policy narratives in the current global scenario?

Pakistan should stand for a liberal international order based on equality and respect for human rights. That should be the main plank for Pakistan's foreign policy. Imran Khan has been talking about the rights of the Kashmiri people, but I think we need to enlarge our focus and talk about the rights of the Muslim people and oppressed people all around the world. Pakistan should not shy away from engaging in diplomatic advocacy of the rights of the people to be free. I do have my doubts about whether there is room for Pakistan to do something meaningful in the South Asian

context. America's desires and its geopolitical compulsion to have India play a counter balancing role to China is going to be an overarching theme and that leave little room for Pakistan to pursue an activist and independent agenda of its own. Regarding China, unfortunately, there has developed a bipartisan consensus within the US congress in the past two to three years, in how to deal with China as a US strategic competitor. If the new democratic administration decides to reengage with China and brings normalcy to Sino-American relations, it will be a good omen for Pakistan. Such a reengagement posture will not let Pakistan be pulled apart by the conflicting pulls of China on one hand and US on the other.

How will China and US relations be established in the future?

I do not see any substantive difference between Trump administration's approach towards China and the democratic dispensation. The possibilities for a strategic reset with China and US appear to be limited. The Biden administration has sent out a message to the Chinese leadership that they would like to reengage with China so the unnecessary and unwanted trade wars between US and china will come to an end. While the kind of hostility that the Trump administration displayed towards China will melt away, no substantial change is likely to take place in the first six months to one year. The critical role here would be the selection of Biden's team, more specifically the experts on China. Names like that of Susan Rice, the former National Security Advisor has been floating around regarding the next Secretary of State. We also have name of Michele Flournoy as the next of Secretary of Defence. A lot will depend on the temperament and disposition of the new people entering alongside Joe Biden.

Do you think the US is till the single superpower of the world?

The US is no longer the superpower. Even though they remain the greatest county in terms their power but they are not the superpower that we have traditionally known. In fact, the world is moving towards a multipolar system where major players will be contributing and competition with one another and at times, will fall into conflict. The US will remain an important power but its influence in the world is declining with the passage of time.



Joe Biden – Standing at the Threshold of Ideologies

By Umer Farooq

In February, 2008, a team of American Senators visited Pakistan—the team included John Kerry, who later served as President Obama’s Secretary of State and Joe Biden, who has just been elected as the President of the United States. The aim of the visit was to assess the economic, financial and military needs of a key ally in “War against Terror”. The team of senators held meetings with key military and political leaders in Islamabad before embarking on a tour of neighboring Afghanistan and India. Pakistan was holding parliamentary elections in the same month the team of senators visited Islamabad. The country was about to transition into a full parliamentary democratic setup after nine years of dark military rule. From every perspective, Washington’s South Asian ally appeared highly unstable—this was a period of rampant terrorism as Pakistan security forces were still reluctantly pursuing militants in the tribal areas and as a reaction the militants were carrying out terror attacks in the urban areas. The high point of terror campaign was witnessed in Rawalpindi—the military headquarters—when former Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto and a serving Lt General of Pakistan Army were killed in a suicide attacks in the garrison city, in two separate incidents.



Pakistan was in dire need of military and financial assistance to cope with the rising threat of militancy and the associated dangers of financial meltdown. In this situation American media and experts started to report that the team of senators that included Senator Joe Biden (Now President-elect) has concluded, “that the United States had to make a large-scale aid commitment to Pakistan”. American media described that visit of American Senators to Islamabad as the origin of the legislation ultimately known as “Kerry-Lugar-Berman” that committed \$1.5 billion annual in financial aid to Pakistan. The Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) came to power in Islamabad as a result of the February 2008 parliamentary election much before the aid bill was presented in the US senate. Within a year Joe Biden was elected Vice President of the United States as an election-mate of President Obama, so the Kerry-Biden Bill was converted into Kerry-Lugar Bill. But Vice President Joe Biden continued to be the driving force behind

the bill even after it was presented before the US senate for passage.

In 2008, Pakistan was making a transition towards parliamentary democracy and the then Bush Administration in Washington and its key officials remained actively engaged in making this transition a possibility. Bush Administration’s key officials were acting as a go-between the military dictator, General Musharraf and PPP leader, Benazir Bhutto to provide a political base to this period of transition, which was about to take place in Pakistan after the scheduled parliamentary elections. The then senator and now President-elect, Joe Biden was not part of the Bush administration at that time, but he was prominent in making parallel efforts in US legislation to revive democracy in Pakistan. This he did by making financial and military assistance conditional with the principle of civilian supremacy.

Original Bill—a product of President-Elect Biden’s thinking as a senator—included a provision for the US Secretary of State’s to certificate about civilian supremacy in Pakistan before the disbursement of financial aid to Pakistan. Actually the Bill involved the issuance of three pre-disbursement certifications by the US Secretary of State. The first certification clause was the one warranting Pakistan’s continued cooperation “on the dismantling of nuclear weapon-related supplier networks and providing relevant information from or direct access to Pakistani nationals associated with such networks.”

The other certification pertained to Pakistan’s commitment to “combating terrorist groups, ceasing support, including by any elements within Pakistan military or its intelligence agency to extremists and terrorist groups, preventing Al Qaeda, the Taliban and associated terrorist groups from operating in its territory or launching cross-border attacks into neighboring countries and dismantling of terrorist operation bases on its soil including Quetta and Muridke. Perhaps the last certification requirement was the one to assure the Congress that Pakistan’s “security forces are not materially and substantially subverting the political or judicial processes of the country.”

President-elect Joe Biden is considered a “Liberal Internationalist”—a school of thought in Washington that sees managing and policing the international system of states and its crises as a moral responsibility of the United States of America—within the ideological spectrum of American political thought. His diatribes against dictators, racist rulers and human rights violations have been doing in the round on social media since his victory became obvious. And in Pakistan’s media and political circles, President-elect Joe Biden’s policies towards democracy and its possible impact on Pak-US relations have already been a subject of discussion.

Unlike 2008, Pakistan, at present, is a full fledged parliamentary democracy. There, however, are voices within the society which are questioning the quality of democracy in the country. Similarly there are strong voices in Pakistan accusing the government of curbing media freedoms in the country. How will Washington under President-Elect Joe Biden see the situation in Pakistan? Is there a possibility that Washington may pressurize Islamabad on the question of granting more freedom to the media? Can the new situation in Washington ensure that the prosecution of opposition political forces in Pakistani society comes to an end as opposition is accusing the government of witch hunt? Or more broadly speaking how the new "Liberal Internationalism" political philosophy of Washington would impact countries like Pakistan? These similar questions will require answers as President Biden assumes office in Washington.

In Islamabad people who matter did have favorites in American presidential elections. But unlike the 1980s, when conservative political forces in Pakistan publicly sided with Republican presidential candidates, this time Pakistani political and official circles were keeping their preference secret.

In the 1980s and 1990s, immediately after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, when Pakistani political environment was highly tense on account of the ideological conflict in the region, Pakistan's right wing political forces used to express their preference for Republican candidates in US Presidential elections more openly. This was the time when some of the right wing newspapers openly supported the candidature of former President George Bush, the elder one.

That is primarily because Republicans most wholeheartedly supported Afghan Mujahideen's war efforts in Afghanistan with generous material and financial support. The time has changed as now one hardly finds anyone in Islamabad openly or publicly expressing their preferences in US Presidential candidates. But Pakistanis are keenly observing the presidential race and do have favorites.

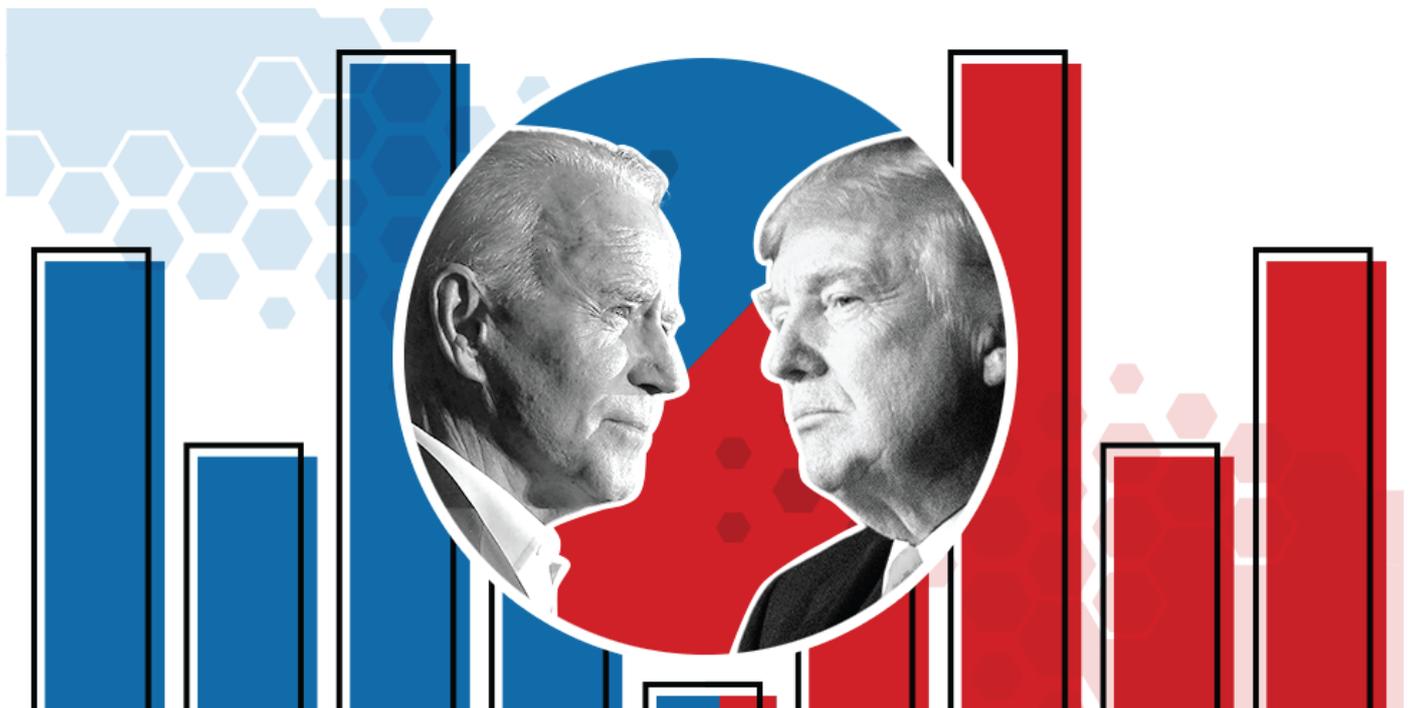
President-elect Joe Biden knows this region and intimately knows Afghanistan and has been engaged in the Afghanistan peace process. "But if the expectation is that Biden's reliance on officials experts would make him more predictable and a better option for Pakistan, then I think we must keep in mind that American officialdom doesn't keep any good view of Pakistan" says Fahd Hussein.

Pakistani Foreign Policy Establishment was more inclined towards Joe Biden as their favorite candidate in the presidential elections.

Ambassador Abdul Basit, who served as Pakistan's High Commissioner in New Delhi for three years, says right from the very start Pakistani establishment was more inclined towards Biden and "wanted him to win as it is expected in Islamabad that Biden will be more in tone with the American security establishment, which at the practical level would mean that he would take a more realistic view of the problems in our region.

However Pakistani officialdom this time was inclined towards Biden because they think that Biden was expected to be more in line with the security established of Washington, especially on Afghanistan issue, "We are facilitating US talks with Taliban and in return we expect that they should influence India not to create trouble for us in Balochistan and other troubled areas on the border with Afghanistan. We will be expecting that the US will get us off the hook as far as FAFT is concerned. We are certainly in talks with Washington in this connection".

Ambassador Jilani, however, expressed the hope that Pakistan would be playing a crucial role in the region after Presidential elections. "We have brought China and the United States closer in 1971 and we can again play a role in normalizing their relations in case security situation deteriorates considerably.....There is another issue of Iran-United States relations which have deteriorated to a considerable degree during the past two years. Our embassy in Washington has been watching Iranian interests in Washington in the absence of Iran-US diplomatic relations. Perhaps we can play some role in bringing the two countries to a point where they can resolve their differences".



Shock & Awe as Friendly Fire Rocks PDM

Has Maryam Nawaz Stars in a Deft All-Hands Damage Control Effort?

By Qurban Baloch

The opposition Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) experienced the first instance of mistaken blue-on-blue fire this week but survived relatively unscathed after a deft mitigation effort put in by the alliance leadership, especially vice president Maryam Nawaz of PML-N (Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz).

In a video clip from a BBC interview that immediately went viral, Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari of the PPP was seen apparently distancing himself from PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif’s policy of blaming COAS Gen. Qamar Bajwa and ISI chief Gen. Faiz Hameed for installing Prime Minister Imran Khan’s PTI in power through rigged elections.

The bombshell development triggered a major controversy in the ranks of the eleven-party alliance and caused instant jubilation in the government camp.

In the interview, Chairman Bhutto seemed to question Sharif’s policy of naming army leadership and asking him to produce evidence of wrongdoing against the military officials he blamed.

In his hard-hitting speech from his London abode video link to PDM’s first public rally at Gujranwala, Sharif had spoken of unspecified wrongdoing by mentioning names of army officers to oust him from power and then to rig general elections to bring Khan to power, asserting they would be held to account for it.

It later became clear the clip had taken Bhutto’s words somewhat out of context to give the impression of divergence. In the fuller video his intent is clearly different. He said he was shocked by Sharif’s naming of the generals in his Gujranwala speech, he had voiced his full confidence the elder politician who had thrice served as the prime minister of Pakistan would never name anybody without proof.

An opinion survey of opposition politicians and senior media persons on the episode conducted by TTI (The Truth International) surfaced a widespread unease over the Bhutto position. There was a feeling that although the young PPP chairman only pointed out a difference between the varying lines of attack of the two heavy-weight parties of the opposition coalition, the timing and the forum he chose were not appropriate for it.

Mr. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari told the British broadcaster he was shocked when he heard Nawaz Sharif blaming two top generals for conspiring to oust. The eleven-party opposition alliance was founded in September in Lahore, the capital city of the Punjab province in all parties conference hosted by PPP.



Sharif’s Gujranwala speech was indeed a shocker for every citizen of the country. In a candid discussions with TTI before the Bhutto interview, a PML-N legislators said almost no one from the party knew beforehand or expected Sharif would take the line he took in the speech.

Even as the viral clip from Bhutto’s interview gave rise to instant jubilation in the government camp, shell-shocked opposition leaders started an immediate damage control exercise. Some even felt young Bhutto’s remarks amounted to an allegation against Sharif of the violating the APC resolution that mandated the PDM movement.

Chairman Bhutto was seen explaining in the interview how the APC had discussed whether to blame one institution or the entire establishment. He said the decision the forum reached was to blame the establishment without singling out any institution.

He further said that when he heard Nawaz naming different names, he was shocked because, “Typically, we don’t talk like this at rallies. But Nawaz heads his own party so I can’t control what he says, just like he can’t control what I say.” He took pains to couch his words in positivity, but nevertheless distanced his party from Sharif’s narrative.

PPP leadership was quick to sense the damaging potential of the interview and jumped to action mitigating it. President of the party’s Central Punjab chapter Qamar Zaman Kaira released a short video on Twitter in response to the viral clip, in which he tries his best to minimize severity of interview.

A seasoned political operator, Kaira in his clarification highlighted how Chairman Bhutto had emphasized Sharif’s political stature as a thrice-elected prime minister of Pakistan, clearly meaning the elder Sharif was a responsible person who would never make baseless allegation in such a sensitive matter.



“We also took some names of officers during general election and by-election because we had proof of [wrongdoing on their part] and we believe Mr. Sharif would likewise be careful to not take names without proof”, said Kaira. “PPP is standing with twenty six points of PDM charter of demands including an end to establishment’s role in the politics of country”.

Shortly after Bhutto’s interview was telecast, Nawaz Sharif spokesperson Mohammad Zubair issued a statement claiming what Bhutto said was his personal opinion but what Sharif said at the Gujranwala rally was the experience of the whole PML-N party.

He conceded that the matter did not come up for discussion with the allied party but said it was necessary that past experiences are shared with people of the country for supremacy of democracy and to obviate such incidents in future. “What [Sharif] said it is not a story but the reality and he revealed the real situation”, he said.

Giving reaction on interview of Mr. Bilawal

Federal Information Minister Shibli Faraz ceased the moment by tweeting to the effect that Bhutto’s remarks were proof enough that PDM has a shared narrative, and that the PPP leader has no confidence in Sharif. It was proof that PDM was a forum of the greedy and the power hungry, he said.

Newly come back as Advisor to the Chief Minister of Punjab on Information, Dr. Firdous Ashiq Awan also tried to hit the opposition coalition hard and said Bilawal’s statement had put the final nail in the coffin of the opposition alliance.

PPP’s parliamentary leader in the Senate of Pakistan Senator Sherry Rehman clarifying position said that PPP was fully committed to the PDM program on a common agenda. She said, “There is no change in our political position from the comprehensive joint resolution adopted during the APC. We will continue to host and attend and play our full role in the alliance we helped build”.

But interestingly PPP’s senior leader and former Prime Minister Raja Pervaiz Ashraf during the meeting of PDM on 8th Novem-

ber talking to journalist said something different from what his party leaders said after interview of Mr. Bilawal as mitigation the situation. In the office of host party PML-N talking with journalists, Ashraf said it was decided on day one the establishment will be blamed for the wrongs, which was why his party was naming the establishment. He further said if any change in that stance was required, it would happen only in a meeting of PDM.

PML-N Vice President Maryam Nawaz showed great political acumen during a brief chat with media persons at Islamabad International Airport when she said Bhutto’s remarks had been twisted for political purposes, adding she and Bilawal were not kids to be fooled by anyone. Her handling put a damper on the controversy.

The controversy started to die out when she issued directions that no one from the party was to react to PPP chairman’s interview except the authorised official spokespersons. On her direction, party spokesperson Maryam Aurangzeb and Nawaz Sharif’s spokesperson Mohammad Zubair issued brief and calculated statements.

Equally effective in putting the matter to rest was the finesse of PDM chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman at both a PDM meeting at Islamabad and the media briefing afterwards.

To a question about Bhutto’s remarks, the Maulana brushed aside the matter claiming it was not an issue at all as everyone knew what was meant by establishment. He said he respected the country’s institutions, but if names of politicians could be taken, then the name of someone belonging to any institutions could be taken.

In sum, PDM was able to overcome the controversy in short order thanks to deft handling and timely action by political leadership from both PPP and PML-N, aided substantially by a robust contribution from the Maulana. Nevertheless, this was only the first of many hurdles on the path of PDM, which at the 8 November meeting decided to finalize a new charter for future action at a meeting slated for mid-November.





Did they Cut Loose – or Were They?

Nawaz Sharif and the Double Coup at PDM's Quetta Rally

By Shahzada Zulfiqar

QUETTA-Although the opposition's power show at Quetta was a success as expected, events centered on the rally led to the exit of two stalwarts of provincial politics from Nawaz Sharif's PML-N (Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz) – the prime mover of the opposition PDM (Pakistan Democratic Movement).

Those who flew the coop are Nawab Sanaullah Zahri, a former Chief Minister; and Abdul Qadir Baloch, a retired general who served as the Corps Commander and then as the Governor of Balochistan.

Sources with knowledge of the situation blame a falling-out between Zahri and Sardar Akhtar Mengal – another former Chief Minister and leader of his own faction of Balochistan National Party styled BNP-M – who they say caused unspecified differences between Zahri and party leader Mian Nawaz Sharif.

Mengal and Zahri developed serious differences after the killing of the former's son, brother and nephew in April 2013 in a bomb attack. Despite claiming the responsibility by the banned Baloch Liberation Army for the killing, Zahri nominated late Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri and his sons, Sardar Attaullah Mengal and his sons Akhtar Mengal and Jawad Mengal.

A court later expunged these names from the police report due to the prosecution's failure to produce evidence.

Akhtar Mengal's BNP-M played host to the opposition's Quetta public rally. He is said to have been nervous about Zahri's participation in the event because of the feud related above. He shared his reservations with the PML-N leadership and regretted to attend the event.

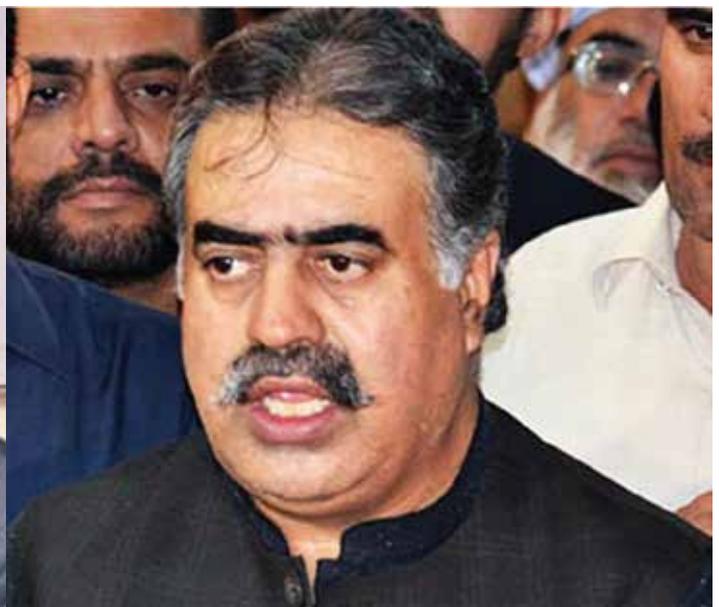
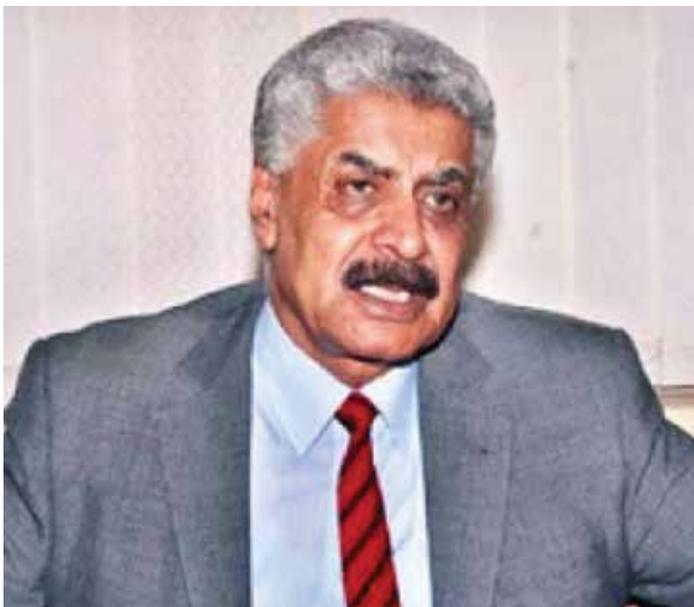
The leadership accepted Mengal's point of view and asked Qadir Baloch to stop Zahri from attending this mega event.

"To avoid any mishap in the public meeting in the presence of Nawab Amanullah's sons (who was killed in an armed attack in August last year and his sons blamed Sana Zahri for this murder), I asked PML-N leadership either [Sana] would participate or I and they disinvited him", said Sardar Akhtar Mengal. He wondered why Sana was pointing a finger at him for the episode instead of taking up the matter with his leadership.

Sana Zahri flew in from his Dubai abode to participate in the PDM mega show at Quetta. He mostly lives abroad and is inactive in the party affairs for his limited movement due to tribal feuds. In 2018 he had stepped down as the President of his party's Balochistan chapter, nominating his political lieutenant Qadir Baloch to the position.

An explanation did come from the party in the event, whether or not Zahri had asked for it. In a video message PML-N central leader Ahsan Iqbal clarified that Sana Zahri remained inactive in the party and the issues of ongoing movement of PDM and its components were more important than giving Zahri a seat on the stage in the public meeting, declaring that the exit of two individuals (Sana and Qadir Baloch) from the party makes hardly any effect on PML-N in Balochistan.

Sources in the party's provincial chapter say the provincial president Gen. Qadir requested the party's central leadership to reconsider the decision of bar on Zahri, but it clearly said that the party has to run movement for non-interference of military establishment and it needs anti-establishment parties like BNP instead





of those elements (read Zahri and his ilk) who never stood with the party at times of trial.

BNP has 10 MPAs in the house of total 65 and four members including its head Akhtar Mengal in national assembly. Mengal who remained in jail under the Musharraf regime for eighteen months on the charges of keeping two intelligence personnel in his custody at his residence in Karachi heads his party for the last twenty years, having strong roots in the Baloch population.



Meanwhile, no PML-N party office bearer turned up at the workers convention called by party's provincial President General Qadir Baloch except for two divisional Presidents and a large number of Zahri tribesmen.

Contrary to earlier claims by Baloch, no list of party office bearers leaving the party was presented to the media at the convention. Baloch in his remarks tried to backpedal from his earlier position that he was leaving the party because of how Zahri was treated. Instead, he claimed, he had left in protest over Nawaz Sharif naming high military and intelligence chiefs in his speech.

And yet Baloch took the time out at the convention to go after Nawaz Sharif, his daughter Maryam, and the party's lady workers for their shabby treatment of Zahri.

In his turn, Nawab Sanullah Zahri left no doubt that he took the episode as a personal insult and spoke as a tribal chieftain targeting party leader and his rival Akhtar Mengal. In his remarks being broadcast by some news channels, he made derogatory remarks against Nawaz Sharif and even Akhtar Mengal's forefathers.

The Pakistani social media took a dim view of Zahri's speech. Contacted for remarks, BNP sources claimed Sana Zahri was a non-political entity and devoid of even the basic moral compass, adding neither BNP leader Sardar Akhtar Mengal nor any other party member wished to respond to him.

Sana Zahri who is the only PML-N MPA in Balochistan assembly resigned as member central executive committee of the party, but not from the basic membership, probably to avoid disqualification over floor crossing. He was elected as MPA on PML-N ticket but lost to Akhtar Mengal on national assembly seat.

"If the party files a reference to the Election Commission for my disqualification, it is welcome to it", Zahri said to a question. "I will contest the by-election because the people of my constituency voted me in not because of my party affiliations but as the Chief of Jhalawan".

PML-N sources say the party has no plans to seek disqualification of Sana Zahri as it is a petty issue unworthy of its attention.

Both Zahri and Baloch are tight lipped as to their future line of action, but analysts say they are likely to join a pro-establishment party. Their options are limited because no PDM party is likely to accept them – particularly not JUI-F (Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam – Fazl) – with the possible exception of PPP (Pakistan Peoples Party).

Under the circumstances, the best option open to the duo may be to join the ruling Balochistan Awami Party headed by Chief Minister Jam Kamal. Nothing stands in the ways of Qadir Baloch taking that course, although Sana Zahri faces the jeopardy of disqualification over floor crossing.

On balance, it is not at all clear if these two heavyweights of PML-N cut loose of their own volition or they were cut loose by the party – especially with moves already afoot to anoint diehard party loyalist Sardar Yaqub Naasar as the next president of PML-N's Balochistan chapter.

So much for the first coup originating from PDM's Quetta rally. The second coup of that vintage concerns Hafiz Hussain Ahmed of JUI-F, who appears to have made a habit of dissing PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif. Bizarrely, he steers clear of any criticism of his own party chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman – who vouches for Nawaz Sharif's every word.

The former MNA and senior JUI-F leader has apparently started targeting PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif for his diatribe against Army Chief and DG ISI. Apparently, his brew is in demand at the talk show circuit because he has quickly become a daily-prime time fixture.

JUI-F circles say that Hafiz is angry with his leader Maulana Fazlur Rahman who at the eleventh hour cancelled his visit to former residence to condole the death of his mother. They alleged Ahmed violated the party discipline at the behest of military establishment, which is poised to exploit the slightest mistake or dissenting voice within PDM and its components.

"It is a joke that you inform me the Maulana is coming and all security arrangements are made by the police and even the party's local leadership shows up in time", an angry Hafiz Hussain Ahmed says. "But suddenly I am told the Maulana reached our doorstep but returned when nobody opened the gate".

Ahmed accuses the PML-N of falsifying medical reports for Nawaz Sharif to have him sent to London. He further alleges that Mohammad Zubair called upon the army chief General Qamar Jawaid Bajwa to seek withdrawal of corruption cases against the Sharifs, but were rebuffed. This, he maintains, was why Nawaz Sharif and his daughter Maryam started their endless tirade against the army that was tantamount to instigating mutiny.



PDM's Fraught Road to Peshawar

By Ghulam Dastageer

After Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) put on three convincing shows of power in quick succession, all eyes are on Peshawar, the next stop on the campaign trail of the opposition coalition agitating for radical political change.

In October, the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) held three main public meetings in less than ten days, the first at Gujranwala (16 October), the second at Karachi (18 October), and the third at Quetta (25 October), completing the first leg of its announced schedule of public meetings.

The second leg of the schedule is set to commence with a public meeting at Peshawar on 22 November, and continue with a meeting each at Multan (30 November), Lahore (13 December) and Larkana (27 December).

The success of the Peshawar meeting, therefore, will be pivotal to the success of PDM's cause. But what will be the factors feeding into the success or failure of the Peshawar meeting?

First and foremost will be the seriousness and sincerity of the two regional stalwarts of PDM, Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) and Awami National Party (ANP).

For example, a multi-party public meeting held on 25th July last year at Peshawar was for all intents and purposes a sheer disap-

pointment – notwithstanding participation by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Qaumi Watan Party (QWP), and National Party (NP) besides JUI-F, ANP.

However, another meeting held the same afternoon in the same city presented an altogether different spectacle. The 'Namoos-i-Risalat Million March' organized solo by the JUI-F meeting was a mammoth power show. Invited to attend, other opposition parties had conveyed their regrets days before.

In retrospect, it is easy to see what happened: The JUI-F allowed a limited number of its activists to attend the coalition public meeting, leaving the lion's share of the responsibility to other partners – none of whom, it seems, took the responsibility seriously enough. The result was a bungled show of power to the mortification of all partners.

In this way, the JUI-F chief Maulana Fazl ur Rehman – widely regarded as a shrewd politician – made a point for the benefit of his coalition partners: At least so far as Peshawar was concerned, his party was a crowd-puller to reckon with.

The PDM would therefore do well to forge unity this time around to make the coming public meeting a success, in terms not just of headcount but also of representation.





For only then can they deliver a clear message to the powers-that-be that the myriad political forces of the country are united and firm in their stand against any encroachment of the political space.

In the aftermath of the July 2018 general elections, the JUI-advocated a hard line against rigging by rejecting the results. The Maulana ran from pillar to post to canvass other opposition parties to his position and force snap re-election – eventually to no avail.

The two major opposition parties did not agree with the Maulana back then, each for its own reasons. They have since come to regret the slip up – Nawaz Sharif for one is on the record having said they should have listened to the Maulana.

In any case, more than two years down the line, PDM parties have come round to the Maulana’s position. They are mounting an aggressive campaign against not only the PTI but also the military establishment, widely-believed to have rigged the previous general elections to install Imran Khan’s PTI in power.

A traditional stronghold of Pashtun nationalism, KP has long harboured deep-rooted anti-establishment sentiments.

The military’s antiterrorism operations in the province in the recent past – which brought peace to the conflict-hit areas but also caused civilian deaths, mass displacement, destruction of civilian properties, and enforced disappearances – further cemented those sentiments.

These grievance coalesced to bring forth the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM) – a grassroots organisation campaigning for the rights of the Pashtun conflict zone.

In Quetta, the administration successfully manoeuvred to prevent the eloquent PTM leader Mohsin Dawar from addressing the gathering. Nevertheless, the presence of the families of the missing persons on the podium was a clear message to the military establishment that the opposition was now prepared to go to any extent to bring the all-powerful Army to its knees.

Like Balochistan, the number of the illegally-detained people in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa runs in thousands. Stories of the missing persons narrated through their relatives at PTM rallies was one of the major strategies to win support for PDM’s anti-establishment discourse.

In the Peshawar event, set for November 22, the opposition parties can play the card of missing persons to strengthen their narrative of army ‘highhandedness’ besides its ‘political engineering’ which, they say, is tantamount to violating the soldiers’ oath.

There is no denying the fact that the unprecedented inflation during the last two years is a catalyst to turn the masses against PTI government, which may make them turn up in the PDM public meeting in Peshawar. It may prove a platform to vent popular anger against the PTI government even for the people having no affiliation with any political party.

The opposition has finally found the opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. Like other public meetings of the PDM, the Peshawar event would be used to mobilize the masses not only

against the PTI government, but also against the military’s political adventures.

It can credibly put the onus of runaway inflation, deteriorating economy, and poor governance of the PTI on the military establishment or ‘selectors’, whom they accuse of installing PTI in power through a rigged election.

Ironic as it is, the ANP seems to be confused at this juncture – unless it has deliberately adopted a policy of running with the hare and hunting with the hounds.

In a party gathering in Swabi’s Yar Hussain town on 27th September 2020, the head of KP chapter of the ANP Aimal Wali Khan categorically distanced his party from the PDM position, saying he will not let the opposition “shoot their gun from our shoulder”.

Taking Nawaz Sharif to the task, the young scion of the Baacha Khan family said delivering online speeches from abroad made no difference. “If he (Nawaz Sharif) is indeed concerned about his people, he would have to make an early comeback”, said Aimal.

However, exactly a week later, Mian Iftikhar Hussain of the ANP was made secretary information – the official spokesman – of the PDM.

Since PTM has opted to remain apolitical, the ANP is eager to convert the massive grassroots support for this Pashtun nationalist movement into its own vote bank. Probably this is why a section of the party leadership vocally espouses an anti-establishment discourse.

Still, there are appearances at this point to the effect that in sharp contrast with PML-N, JUI-F and PkMAP (Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party), the ANP is unlikely to take a daggers-drawn posture against the army.

The question, then, is, what consequence will this ambivalence on the part of ANP leadership have for PDM’s Peshawar rally? There are two answers to this question.

The first answer deals with quantity: In terms of numbers, the JUI-F has the required street power and to spare – not only to make the Peshawar event a success but also to bear the brunt of the entire movement all by itself. In fact the JUI-F’s massive and disciplined street power is believed to be the reason why the feared National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has left the JUI-F leader well alone, at least up until now.

The second answer to the above question concerns quality: For any political gathering organised by a coalition, sheer numbers tell only half the story, representation telling the other half. The credibility of the PDM as a truly national actor hinges on all coalition partners pulling their weight. Any partner shirking responsibility is a potential crack in the alliance.

In sum, PDM would do well to get their act together to make the Peshawar event a success in terms of both quality and quantity. For, only then can it deliver a loud and clear message of nationwide support for civilian supremacy – and exert a pull on any fence-sitting pockets of anti-establishment sentiment to join in.



Clash of Titans on the Rooftop of Pakistan

Why were main political parties suddenly keen on GB's 2020 election?



By Abbas Khaksar

In a sharp break with the past, Pakistan's mainstream political parties have rolled out the big guns for the 2020 Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly elections, the third since the region was granted quasi-provincial status just over a decade ago.

Given that the region has no representation in the National Assembly and Senate, the first two elections to the Assembly attracted only perfunctory attention from the political heavyweights, leaving the local players to fight it out among themselves. But that was then. This time around, central leaders of both PPP and PML-N remained in GB leading high-octane electoral campaigns in addition of course to several federal ministers from Prime Minister Imran Khan's PTI.

The trend began with Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari of the PPP landing in Skardu on 22 October 2020 to spearhead his party's election campaign. Accompanied by a gaggle of party stalwarts, he drew huge crowds wherever he went in GB— and he is still in the region as we go to press, determined to lead from the front to the last.

PML-N Vice-President Maryam Nawaz Sharif adopted a similar if abridged strategy when she arrived Thursday 5 November 2020

for a seven-day electioneering tour, likewise accompanied by a constellation of central party leaders and likewise drawing large crowds.

Also part of the trend are senior PTI leaders who are taking turns visiting GB and holding large public rallies to shore up their own party's prospects.

Apart from the two major opposition parties, the PTI also sent Ministers, party chief organizer Saifullah Niazi and other office bearers to GB for leading the election campaign. The main focus of the all political parties had been the longstanding demand of GB, the constitutional rights. As he had earlier made headlines in both national and international newspapers by claiming that PTI government had made all arrangements to make GB constitutional province of the country, PTI leaders repeated the same in speeches.

Among other national players putting in their own efforts are PML-Q (Pakistan Muslim League Qauid-e-Azam), MQM (Mutahida Qaumi Movement), JUI-F (Jamiat Umla-e-Islam Fazlur Rehman), MWM (Majlis-e-Wahdatul Muslimeen), TIP (Tehrik-e-Islami Pakistan), PSP (Pak Sarzameen Party), etc also remained active in election campaign.



If and when GB becomes a full province under the Constitution, it will have representation in the National Assembly as well as the Senate. This will give the region a say in the nation's affairs like any other province.

“This is why not only leaders of PTI but also the heads of PPP and PML-N are making announcements regarding the constitutional rights to GB in their political speeches and corner meetings across GB,” said Shabbir Hussain, a local journalist and analyst.

The PPP Chairman has announced that in case his party forms government in GB, the region would be made a full-fledged province of the country. “Making GB the 5th province of the country is our manifesto. It was very clearly mentioned in our party manifesto in the general election of the country in 2018,” Bilawal Bhutto said addressing a large gathering in Skardu.

Accusing the ruling party PTI and Prime Minister Imran Khan of making hollow claims of granting provincial rights to GB, Bilawal has been repeating his commitment about the constitutional rights to GB in his every speech. He has visited every constituency to campaign for his party candidates.

The PML-N won the 2015 election and completed its five-year rule in June 2020, during which it did introduce some development projects but it could not benefit from these developments properly. Political culture of GB has been similar to that of Azad Jammu and Kashmir in that whichever party has the reins of power in Islamabad tends to win the regional elections.

Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had made similar promises of mainstreaming GB ahead of 2015 elections. Subsequently, he constituted a high level committee, which worked for two years. The initiative culminated in a presidential order, GB Governance Order 2018.

This time around, however, the situation is different. Not only is the ruling party making such bold announcements, the security

establishment also seems to be amenable to the idea of granting the provincial status to GB, apparently in view of the geopolitical situation of the region.

After the Indian push for demographic shift in Occupied Kashmir after revoking the autonomous status of the region, the importance of the strategically located GB has increased manifold. Indian activities in Ladakh and other attempts to show GB as part of India have apparently alarmed policymakers in Pakistan. Analysts say this is the backdrop for the decision of making GB a province of Pakistan.

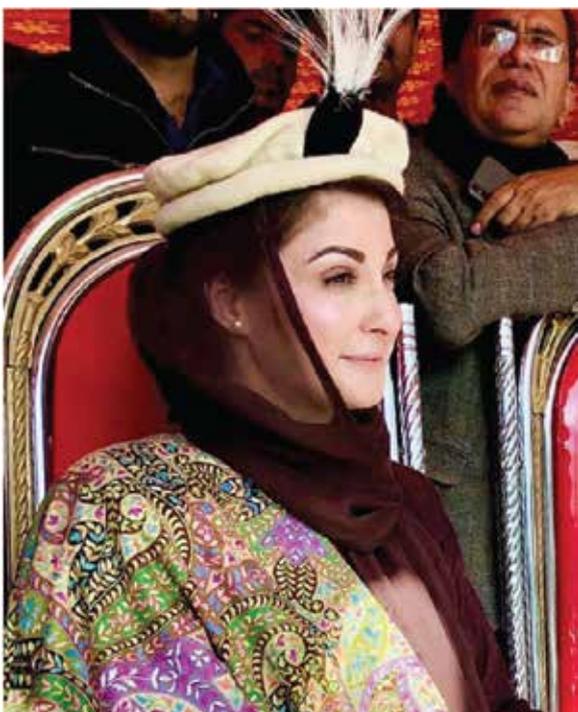
Another major reason to formalise the status of GB as a province is the foreign investors' reluctance to invest in a region seen in a limbo.

International financial institutions have remained shy of funding major infrastructure projects like Diamer Basha Dam in GB notwithstanding Pakistan's repeated efforts in that direction. Though a Chinese firm has formally come to invest in the multibillion dollar project, many other projects are still waiting for foreign investment. Despite being the gateway of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) not a single project has been initiated so far in the region. Several projects announced for GB under the umbrella of CPEC remain on the drawing board as of now.

Analysts also see the Chinese wishes behind Pakistan's intention to mainstream GB through making it a constitutional part of the country which could ultimately secure the investments in the region.

CPEC passing through GB has stoked debate over constitutional rights of people in region.

Now this is a test for the new government to get the promise during election campaign to give GB status of province and representation in all major forums like NFC, CCI, NEC etc.



Mountains of gold or shifting sand dunes?

Why FBR Won't Touch Swiss Accounts Anymore

By Azeem Waqas

ISLAMABAD-In stark contrast with Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf's vociferous lip service to bringing back looted money from abroad, Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) administration seems to have silently stonewalled Pakistan's efforts to bust 'looters' with Swiss bank accounts. PTI rose to power in 2018 on a platform of fighting corruption and repatriating stolen funds siphoned abroad back to Pakistan.

Pakistan is entitled to receiving Swiss cooperation over tax avoidance under multiple multilateral and bilateral covenants, especially since September 2016 when the country officially became a signatory to the Multilateral Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

The following year, Pakistan signed the Multilateral Convention to implement Tax Treaty Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit (BEPS) and the Multilateral Competent Authority Agreement on Automatic Exchange of Financial Accounts Information (MCAA).

The MCAA is the framework agreement in pursuance of Article 6 of the Multilateral Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters. The Convention offers concrete solutions for governments to close the gaps in the existing international rules which allow corporate profits to disappear or be sneaked to low- or no-tax jurisdictions.

Also, in 2017, Switzerland and Pakistan signed a revised double taxation agreement (DTA) that came into force from 29 November 2018 and was to have effect in Pakistan for any fiscal year beginning on or after 1 July of the next year. Under the revised accord, the contracting states were barred from declining to supply information solely because the information is held by a bank, other financial institution, nominee or person acting in an agency or a fiduciary capacity or because it relates to ownership interests in a person.

In February 2019, Minister of State for Revenue Hammad Azhar said the government was seeking foreign bank account data of Pakistani citizens from ten more foreign tax jurisdictions including Switzerland under the OECD arrangement.

"So far we have received details on about 150,000 bank accounts from twenty-nine jurisdictions under the OECD treaty", the Minister was quoted as saying. "We also made another request to Switzerland for exchange of information in [the previous month] and they are willing to share data."

Apparently, that was the last the government agitated the matter as background interviews with officials reveal



Pakistan has made no requests for data under these treaties since January 2019, TTI (The Truth International) can report.

A former top tax official speaking on condition of anonymity said a lack of political will was why there has been no movement on this matter. "[The PTI government] knows it has nothing to gain from pursuing the matter, especially nothing against the opposition".

On the contrary, there were unmistakable apprehensions such a line of enquiry may lead to some influential PTI members, he said. "Many PTI members have foreign bank accounts and money held abroad". He opined this was yet another instance of party interest coming before national interest.

The Truth International (TTI) sent a questionnaire to the State Secretariat for International Financial Matters (SIF) of Switzerland, seeking the number of Pakistanis holding bank accounts or assets in that country, and the time they would require to respond to a data request from Pakistani authorities.

"The treatment of the request happens according to the international standard in this matter, i.e. in principle 90 days", said SIF in response to the questionnaire. However, it declined to share any information about the number of Pakistanis holding bank accounts or assets in Switzerland, saying, "Due to the principle of confidentiality we are not able to share the data of Pakistanis having assets in Switzerland".

The official alleged the incumbent government had promoted an incompetent officer, who was responsible for inking a flawed agreement with Swiss authorities in 2017. "The flawed [Convention on Avoidance of Double Taxation between Pakistan and Switzerland] caused an array of problems for Pakistan including upsetting a friendly country", he said, adding the said officer had inserted a clause in the agreement which increased tax on profit of debt to 20 percent, which dismayed the friendly country.

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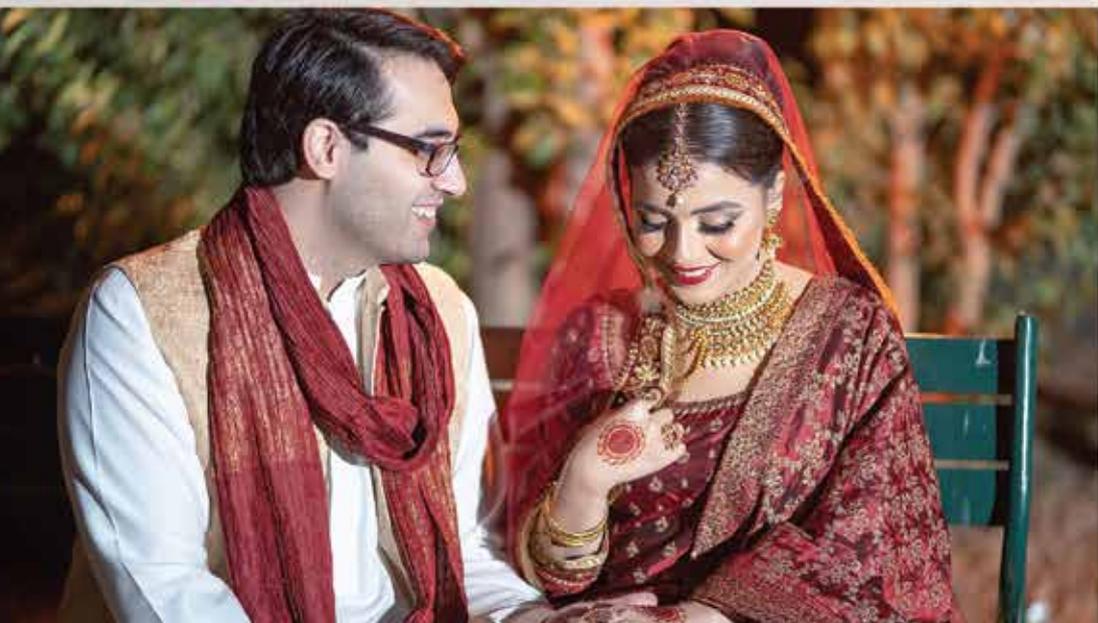


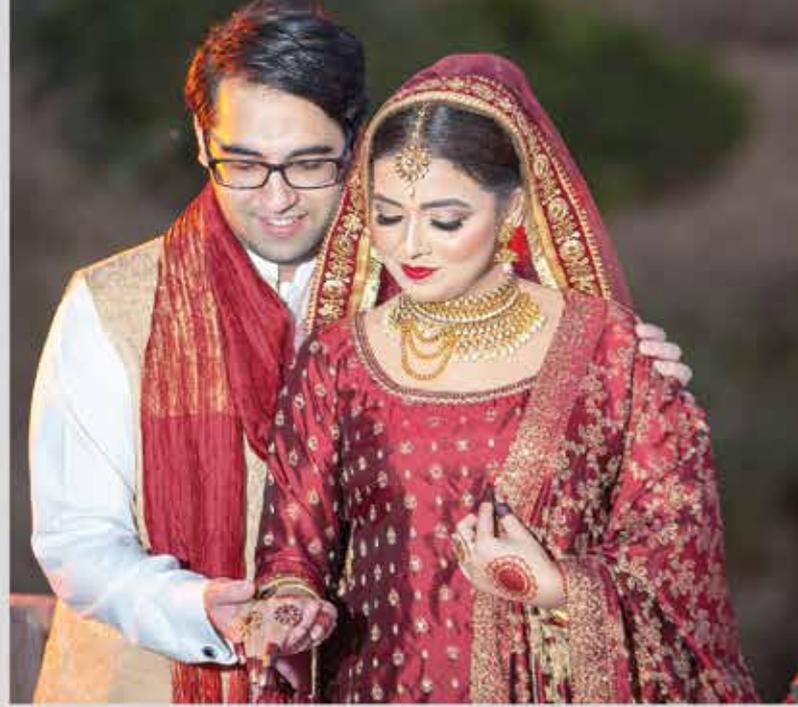
PALWASHA
WEDS
FARHAN

Photshot By



the leading photographers





He further alleged that the officer had signed the agreement for which he had no lawful authority – and which was hurtful to Pakistan’s interests, adding, “In any other country, an officer overstepping his authority like this would have been sacked from his job, but the PTI government has promoted an incompetent officer to Member Inland Revenue Operations (IR Ops)”.

TTI also contacted a former member FBR, who also confirmed that the previous agreement was hurtful to Pakistan’s interests. “It lowered tax rate on dividends from 10 percent to 5 percent, which if implemented would have halved the tax revenue of Pakistan”, he said. “The Pakistani Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N) government increased the tax from 5 percent to 10 percent under a revised agreement”.

According to the Article 25 of the Convention, it is understood that an exchange of information will only be requested once the requesting party has exhausted all regular sources of information available under the internal taxation procedure.

An international tax expert interviewed by TTI concurred, “The Swiss agreement is not going to help Pakistan in getting any solid data”, he said. “The world is changing, many European countries are facing economic challenges, their banks are getting revenue on holding the money of non-residents and they would not share any concrete data with Pakistan”.

The expert further said most Pakistani citizens who had bank accounts in Switzerland had moved to other, lesser known tax havens. “Swiss authorities may not be able to provide data on more than thirty or forty cases – which means Pakistan has no hope of making a major money haul from Switzerland”.

“PTI has been in power for more than two years now. It could request the Swiss authorities to provide details of those Pakistanis who had parked money in Swiss Banks. It could also seek the record of assets and bank accounts or the tax information, but it is not pursuing the matter. It has dropped the matter deliberately because it knows that it will create problems for ruling parties too”.

He said that the PML-N government had revised the agreement under pressure from PTI, which was in protest mode back then, staging its famous sit-in in front of the Parliament but never framed rules to implement agreements.

A former member Policy FBR who was part of these developments said, “It was a well-known fact the Swiss treaty would not yield a major money haul for Pakistan – even PTI stalwarts know this. But they kept making a ruckus for the sake of point-scoring and petty politics. Now when they are in power, the matter has come to nothing”.

He added, “The PTI government is in-charge – no one can stop them from seeking record of any one. But they would not, because they know it will yield nothing to show to its voters”.

According to a report Pakistan has received details of about 150,000 bank accounts from 29 jurisdictions under OECD treaties. It has also made a request to Switzerland, but nothing has been shared. TTI repeatedly contacted the FBR Spokesman Syed Nadeem Rizvi, enquiring if the Swiss authorities had shared any data. His steadfast response was, “It’s a confidential area”.

Revenue Division
Federal Board of Revenue
 Government of Pakistan



Salaried Individual Taxpayers

Filing Made Friendly

One Window Access

FBR's Website reshaped with specific icons to give taxpayers prompt and easy access to all online filing portals under following Link:
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New Simplified Return

Tax Return Form for Salaried Taxpayer has been made more simplified and easier



Wizard Based Interface

In order to make tax return user-friendly and self-explanatory a new Wizard Based Interface has been introduced which also provides navigational help for convenient filing.



Updated Tax Asan mobile App

Which contains:

- New Simplified Returns
- Wizard Based Interface
- Tutorial Help
- Income Tax Registration
- E-Payment
- My Education



Taxpayers' Guidance

Watch tutorial videos available at FBR's website Or call helpline 051-111 772 772 For any guidance regarding online filing of returns.



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Remember! Filing of Income Tax Returns is mandatory for persons with annual income of Rs. 600,000 and above.



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INTERLINK

Promises of heavy incentives as government launches its LPG policy



By Ashraf Malkham

Islamabad-Government bowing before pressure of important personalities sitting in the government has principally decided to design a new LPG policy promising heavy incentives which include downward revision of the tax structure on the import of Liquefied Petroleum Gas to meet the challenge of declining gas reserves in the country resulting in gas load shedding in winter. Proposed LPG policy will also be to the detriment of the domestic LPG production and supply chain.

As per details under discussion, LPG policy will be a move towards deregulation of the LPG market in Pakistan, and among other measures, will remove the 5.5 percent withholding tax on the import of LPG currently in place. It is worth mentioning that in 2018 the PTI government reduced sales tax on import of LPG from 17% to 10% and also removed regulatory duty on the import of LPG, a source handling the policy draft confided. He further said that the domestic production continued to be taxable at 17% GST besides PDL of Rupees 4669/- per ton, which has already resulted in high profit margins for importers while the consumers continue to pay for these concessions from their pockets.

Further, an earlier proposal moved by the ministry of Petroleum suggested that that the government should consider reduction of the GST on imported LPG from 10 percent to zero for public sector importers (SSGC, PSO and PARCO) and 2.5 percent for the private sector. Similarly, reducing advance income tax from 5.5 percent to zero for the public sector and 2 percent for the private sector was also considered. A senior official pointed out in the meeting that if approved, this proposal has the potential of completely shutting down the domestic LPG industry. The new proposal however keeps the GST at 10% for the import but the proposal continues to heavily favor the import.

This is being done despite the fact that many summaries by OGRA have continuously been sent to convince the ministry that the proposals of the ministry will destroy local production and level playing field and rationalization of taxes does not favor imports. Many E&P companies and local producers of LPG have also raised their concerns with Minister Omar Ayub and Special Assistant to Prime Minister Mr. Nadeem Babar.

One source in the Committee set up to devise LPG policy said that “There seems to be a special agenda for favoring imports in the name of improving energy supplies while ignoring market dynamics and local production of LPG”. Even the revised proposals as discussed in the last meeting of the LPG if implemented will create havoc in the LPG market, he added. The share of LPG in Pakistan’s current energy consumption is a mere 2.1 percent. With dwindling domestic gas reserves and a limited LNG import capacity, there is no denying the fact that Pakistan needs to switch to LPG as a fuel. However, in their efforts to remove market distortions from the LPG sector, the government seems to be introducing new distortions which will not only fail at the government’s stated objective of making the LPG market more efficient, but they will disproportionately harm domestic producers and cost us Pakistani jobs, said a senior official on condition of anonymity. The new proposal at the one hand has argued in favor of deregulating the local LPG industry and then proposed 15% PDL on Saudi Aramco Contract Price. This will increase PDL on the local product by almost 3000 to 4000 rupees per ton, which will increase the market price of the product.

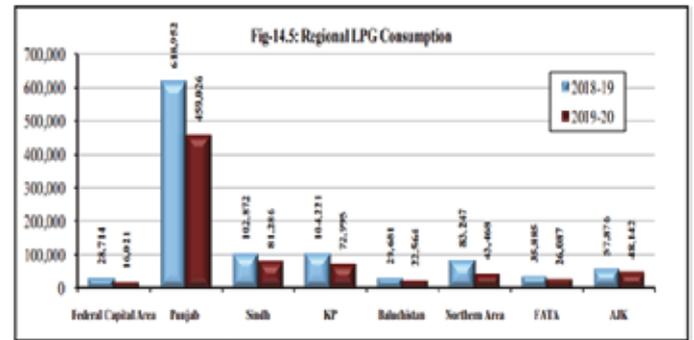
This is also known fact that Pakistan’s current tax regime already considerably incentivizes LPG imports. The Competition Commission of Pakistan in its 2019 competition assessment study of LPG sector states that since there is no petroleum levy and lower general sales tax on LPG imports, the government has considerably incentivized the private sector to import LPG. The report also pointed out that the LPG imports suffer from substandard LPG import through land route, under invoicing, use of hundi and hawala system in LPG import through land route and lack of LPG quality testing lab for land imports.

But advantages to importers do not end here. The government benchmarks import taxes on the basis of the Contract Price (CP) of Saudi Aramco for LPG. In the meanwhile, importers buy LPG significantly cheaper than the Aramco CP from Iran and make significant gains that are not passed on to the consumers. Domestic producers on the other hand are forced to pay the Petroleum Levy based on the Aramco CP for their production.

Industry sources said that by giving new tax breaks to importers, the government is not helping the consumers switch to LPG. They

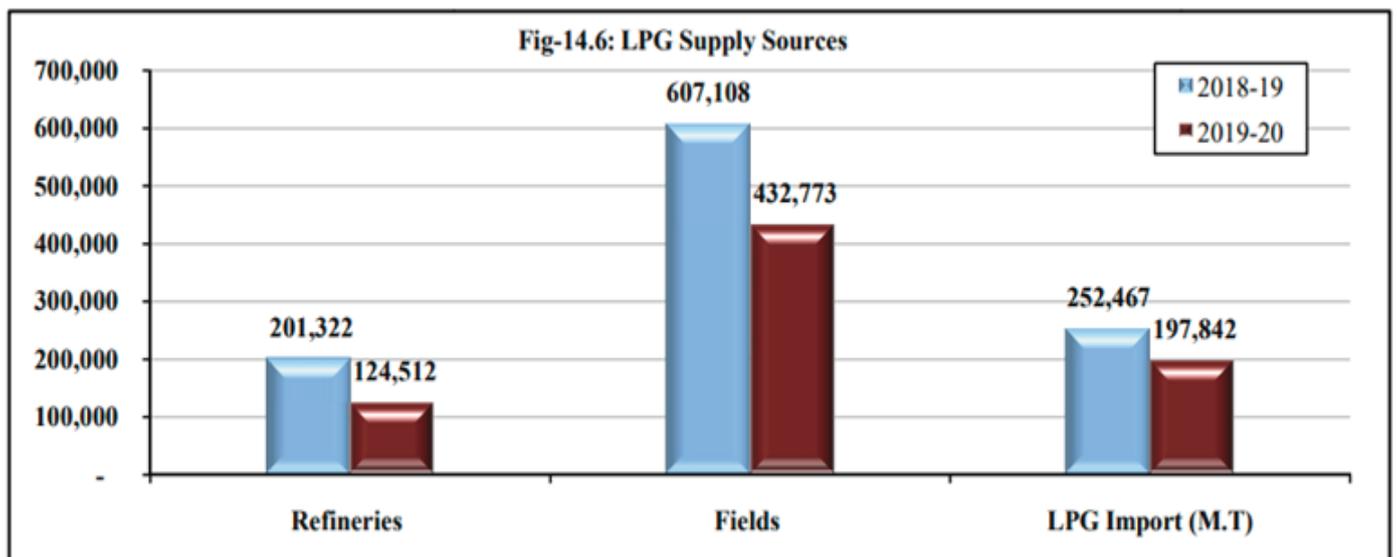
are just making domestic LPG production less competitive. Over the past two years, tax concessions to LPG importers have accrued an amount of PKR 6.5 billion to the importers in enhanced profitability. Yet, as the following graph shows, overall consumption of LPG declined between FY2019 and FY2020.

The government’s notion that LPG is used in the far-flung areas of the country is also not backed by consumption patterns. Only about a quarter of the consumers in this country have access to piped natural gas. Punjab consumes more than half of the total LPG available in the country. OGRA does not have the mechanisms to price imported and domestically produced LPG differently.



Industry experts talking to the correspondent said that the deregulation of this market with an import advantageous tax regime simply means you are telling your producers to shut down their well. This is not a case where for example, a Pakistani textile manufacturer cannot compete with the imported textiles and the government is telling them to invest in better production. This would be a case of wasting our own natural resources just because the tax structure is skewed.

More than 75 percent of the LPG consumed in Pakistan is produced domestically. If the government wants to expand domestic consumption of LPG, it needs to introduce a tax regime that makes LPG cheaper across the board. The current proposal only makes the domestic production less competitive and the benefits are only going to end up in the pockets of the importers rather than the consumers.



Gleaming shine spirals out of reach as gold prices peak

By Oroba Tasnim Siddiqui

Reaching an all-time high of USD 1953.92, gold prices shocked even the wealthiest of traders. While gold has always been an important store of value, its sudden rise came as a surprise as it escaped the grasp of ordinary citizens. In Pakistan, gold traders observed a plunge in sales as consumers grappled to make their ends meet, shying away from the gold market. A cursory look into the traders' predicament suggests it to be a consequence of rising international prices, the cause of which local traders are unable to comprehend.

Theoretically, the fundamental structure of economic theory is based upon the notion of demand and supply whereby, a rise in demand for a product or commodity leads to an increase in its price. Subsequently, all markets are formed upon this phenomenon with occasional upheavals that are beyond the comprehension of ordinary economists.

Amongst the various markets that exist in the world today, there is one that legitimately drives the essence of global economies: the gold market. Its importance stems from its ability to stabilize the currency of an economy for which it is oft conjured. Whilst its significance stretches far, there are various factors which contribute to its rising prices.

One such factor is the decision by central banks on the rate of interest that is appropriated within an economy having an immediate effect on inflation and the price of this metal. This also encompasses the argument for exchange rates where a weaker dollar value term is likely to cause a rise in gold rates. Moreover, there is a direct supply and demand mechanism for gold itself, which is a caricature of the costly mining activities associated to the market.

This significantly addresses the concern for a long-term rise in prices which impacts investors' decision to buy or sell gold or the exchange-traded funds (ETFs) trading in the community indices. However, whilst there has been immense research in this field, experts have failed to exact with certainty the primary cause for the rising gold prices attributing it to economic fundamentals as well as the behavioral pattern of speculators and ETFs.

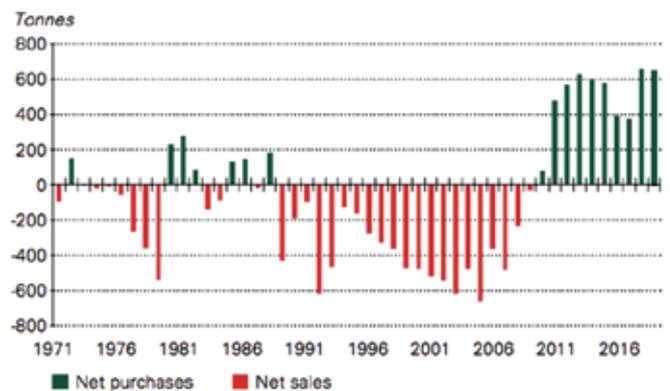
As per intermittent reports based upon crucial economic indicators, the US economy appeared to be at the brink of collapse after over 11 years of surging economic growth since the financial crunch in 2008. This growing expectation of recessionary procession piqued a stark interest in gold even before the coronavirus pandemic hit the world. But with its emergence, COVID-19 became the last straw in things going haywire as prices for gold rose uncontrollably amidst the recessionary outlook of the global economy.

As consequence of a 40% crash in benchmark equity indices in the US and India, the US Fed was forced to announce liquidity injection and bond buying of over \$3 trillion. With these measures leading to an expansion in paper currency, a general tendency of

rising gold prices is observed. Furthermore, leading central banks of China and Russia have engaged in the purchase of gold for the past two years, lending value to gold rates.

According to Business Today, "The uncertainty over US-China trade talks, developments in the global market and talks surrounding recession are some of the key reasons that have triggered a rise in prices of gold". Commenting on the intensified US yield curve, Ravindra Rao stated, "Gold prices are indicating that global worries are still intact. If we compare gold with S&P and gold with bond yield, still the ratio is very low, so gold has a lot of steam left to go much higher".

In 2019, central banks added 650 tons to their reserves which became the second highest shift in half a century.



Clamoring for gold reserves, this spree is led by countries like China, Russia, Turkey, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. With reports suggesting a stockpiling of gold reserves for several months, these countries are attempting to move towards a world where dollar no longer remains the reserve currency in a bid to obstruct the dominance of the US financial system.

With citizens stumbling to acquire answers, this sudden dash indicates the significance of geopolitics and economics serving as a patch mark of nationalist identity. As per the Governor of the National Bank of Poland, "gold symbolizes the strength of a country". While countries continue to deny gold as money, there appears to be a growing trend towards alienating the status of dollar domination as central banks engage in greater purchase of gold since the end of its standard in 1971.

Worldwide, uncertainty remains the only constant. Amidst this lack of predictability, countries are changing behavioral patterns leaning towards gold as the next big investment. The question is, will this ultimately lead to the annihilation of the US currency or is this merely a short-term attempt to artificially raise gold prices for monetary benefits?

Either way, gold is no longer within the reach of the common man.

Has CCP Got the Claws to Tackle the Cartels?

Stars Align to Stop Sugar Barons Laughing All the Way to the Bank

By Hamza Habib

Pakistan's commodity market is the world's best place to make a quick buck – at least if you do not have too many scruples about gaming the system. Toothless regulatory regime, institutions working at cross purposes, and eager accomplices in the corridors of power throw the field wide open to anti-competitive practices.

This leaves the consumer reeling under the burden of price fixing, bid rigging, and other shady practices to satiate the greed of a few unprincipled tycoons. This may be a theoretical rant for another time and place but for Pakistan, this is the reality of life.

Take for example the sugar and wheat markets. Prime Minister Imran Khan has repeatedly warned the market players to keep the prices down or else. The result has been a 40 percent price hike for sugar and a 20 percent price hike for flour within a year.

Experts say a price increase of PKR 1 per kg translates into a PKR 450 million revenue jump for sugar millers. That sugar prices rose by PKR 18 per kg between February and September 2019 means a revenue surge of PKR 40 billion for the sugar industry revenue.

Yes, this is how much money our sugar barons raked in over this seven-month period over and above their already healthy profit margins.

Not one to take it lying down, the government cried foul. The finger was pointed at CCP (Competition Commission of Pakistan) for failing to check cartelization and questions were raised over the competence of its leadership. Advisor to PM on Accountability & Interior Shehzad Akhbar blamed the then chairperson of CCP Vadiyya Khalil for not properly pursuing the cases against cartels in courts.

Khalil has since been shown the door, and Rahat Kaunain Hassan – who boasts prior experience as Chairperson CCP – has been brought in to lead CCP. Over the past thirteen years, the CCP has uncovered a series of deceptive market practices and cartels but its exertions have had no success in discouraging anti-competitive practices.

The penalties imposed by the CCP on various market players over this period add up to PKR 27 billion. However, every last one of the offenders has been able to mount a successful legal challenge to the CCP ruling, going virtually scot-free. Then they upped the ante by challenging the legal basis for the CCP's existence.

The government prodded the Attorney General's office to take up more vigorously the matter of stay orders granted to various industries by the higher courts of the country.

Late last month, the Lahore High Court dismissed a long pending sheaf of petitions filed by a bevy of industries challenging the establishment of the CCP and the competence of parliament to enact a law on the subject of competition.



The initial petition before LHC (Lahore High Court) against the CCP had come from the LPG (Liquefied Petroleum Gas) Association of Pakistan in 2009 when the regulator first started taking action against price manipulation. On 27 May 2009, a single bench granted stay to the Association and suspended the CCP proceedings.

Later, other industries including cement, sugar, oil and gas, power, fertilizer, healthcare, education, telecom, real estate, infant milk, and beverages also approached the LHC on similar grounds and secured stay orders against the Commission's actions.

The LHC bench in its recent order ruled the Parliament was competent to legislate on the subject of trade, commerce, industry and intercourse so as to keep it free throughout the country and in the interest of a competitive marketplace.

The bench also ruled the show-cause notices and proceedings by the CCP were valid as adequate legal basis for these lay in Section 62 of the Act.

Egged on by the government's enthusiasm, the CCP recently conducted a probe into the affairs of the sugar industry. The investigation found that PSMA (Pakistan Sugar Mills Association) – the representative body of the sugar barons, was prima facie a cartel that had manipulated the market to orchestrate the recent price hike.

It uncovered evidence to show that this shady endeavour was spearheaded by a senior officer of JDW Sugar Mills Group, owned by Jahangir Khan Tareen.

The report goes on to show the millers worked behind the scenes to influence the PTI government to allow export of 1.1 million tons of sugar, which also caused 48 percent increase in the prices.

This is the second time in a decade that the CCP has called out the PSMA as a cartel. This time around, however, the nature of the "crime" appeared to be more serious.

Export data obtained from FBR (Federal Board of Revenue) and price data from PBS (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics) shows a decision to export sugar had always resulted in a spike in domestic sugar prices. In 2019 alone, the prices surged by as much as PKR 18 per kg or 48 percent following a decision to export sugar.

In February 2019, the price of sugar was PKR 60 per kg, which according to the CCP increased to PKR 98 per kg as of September, showing an increase of PKR 38 or 63 percent.

The inquiry committee had requested eighty-two sugar mills to provide information about cost audit reports, quarterly sugar stocks, average monthly ex-mill prices of sugar starting from the FY 2016-17 to date, and audited financial statements for the last three years.

The inquiry report mentions the name of Muhammad Rafique, Group Director Finance of the JDW group, at least eighteen times.

The report notes that Rafique was nominated by PSMA in its AGM dated 21 October 2012 as the focal person for coordinating sugar stock positions. The CCP also found JDW group role in coordinating activities for the export and local stocks management.

A series of documents impounded from the premises of JDW group titled “Co-Ordination Committee PSMA-Punjab Zone” indicates these committees were formed for periodically coordinating stocks and sales positions.

The CCP said that JDW Group had the highest share in terms of production at 16 percent, followed by Almoiz Group with a share of 7 percent. Other producers include RYK Group with 6 percent, and Tandlianwala and Shakarganj each with 5 percent share in sugar production.

The CCP concluded that no mill or group of companies held a dominant position to act as price leader so they colluded through the PSMA to dictate prices.

The CCP has followed up the probe with show cause notices to PSMA and its eighty-four members. The CCP’s inspections seem to suggest these anti-competitive activities have continued since at least 2010.

The PSMA’s platform is also being used by member sugar mills to collectively make commercially sensitive decisions such as reduction in domestic stocks or supplies of sugar, leading to an increase in or maintenance of desired price levels in the relevant markets, says the report.

In the crushing season 2019-20, 15 sugar mills in Punjab acted in concert to delay sugarcane crushing, leading to reduction in quantity supplied in the market. In Punjab, forty-five sugar mills used PSMA’s platform to share business sensitive information with each other.

Collusion over government’s bulk purchase tenders is another area where sugar barons have been caught on the wrong side of the line. The CCP probe found the PSMA and sugar mills divided quantities of sugar in tenders issued by Utility Stores Corporation on various occasions.

The CCP found nineteen mills in Punjab to have violated the Act with reference to a tender in 2019, while thirty mills from all over Pakistan have been issued show cause notices for similar collusion over an earlier tender.

The PSMA and its members have been provided an opportunity to plead their case with reference to the anti-competitive and unfair practices uncovered by the probe.

Rahat Kaunain Hassan, who is leading the CCP at this juncture, imposed penalties on various industries to the tune of PKR 21.63 billion during her previous term. Compare this with the paltry PKR 1 billion in racked up in penalties imposed over the last seven years. While the amount of penalties imposed may not be a perfect measure of effectiveness, it does reflect work done and enforcement action taken.

One circumstance that renders the considerations almost moot is that CCP’s orders involving penalties worth billions of rupees are pending with the Competition Appellate Tribunal (CAT), the forum that reviews the Commission’s cases on merits and procedural fairness.

Mandated by section 43 of the Act, CAT has been dysfunctional since January 2019 because the appointment of its two permanent Members is still pending although a chairman has been appointed. Given the high priority PM Khan attaches to busting cartels, it is to be hoped his administration would resolve this matter sooner rather than later.

Nonetheless, the CCP chair sees no reason why pendency before CAT should deter enforcement. “While the true impact of the decision may only be visible after judicial review, the Commission must carry on its work”, she told TTI in a recent meeting. “What falls within its domain and what is due”.

On the jurisdiction of CCP after 18th Amendment is in place, she said the CCP’s position was that there could be no effective regulation of trade and commerce in Pakistan unless competition in trade and commerce is regulated at the national level.

Hassan said the governments need to be sure never to engage associations in negotiating prices or encouraging directly or indirectly any such practice which may subsequently be exploited by the associations for exchange of sensitive data. In the past the Commission has cautioned on such aspect through its policy notes.

Hot on the heels of her giant slayer sugar inquiry, the old cartel buster has set in motion a similar probe into the wheat sector. All things considered, stars may finally be aligning for the CCP to take on cartels with success, bringing goodness to the markets and relief to the consumer.

There, however, remains one potential roadblock that could stand in the way of the law taking its course: political influence. Fat cat businessmen who indulge in anti-competitive practices boast highest-level access to power corridors – precisely why all past efforts to bust them have run aground.

In the final analysis, the success of any anti-competitive action remains hinged on political will.

Peace building in Afghanistan

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

By Azmat Mumtaz Saqib

1973: Russia/China vs. USA; theatre Vietnam
 2020: Russia/China vs. USA; theatre Afghanistan
 Vietnam: Communist freedom fighters, 10 years of final struggle against USA.
 Afghanistan: Islamist freedom fighters, 19 years of final struggle against USA.
 Greatest challenge for Afghans and global stakeholders is peace building post 2020 US-Taliban Peace agreement. Let's start the journey by revisiting the past.

WAR I:

- April 1978 – March 1979:
Pro-communist rule of President Hafizullah Amin
- December 24, 1978 – May 15, 1988:
Soviet Army in Afghanistan
- April 14, 1988:
Geneva Accords between Afghanistan and Pakistan

WAR II:

- 1989 – 1992:
Russian supported Dr. Najibullah sustains Afghan government
- 1992 – 1996:
Civil war among Mujahideen & Warlords
- 1996 – 2001: Taliban rule

WAR III:

- October 7, 2001 – December 17, 2001:
Operation enduring freedom
- December 2001 – February 29, 2020:
US led coalition forces in Afghanistan
- February 29, 2020: Doha Peace Agreement:
USA-Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Taliban)
- March 2020 – May 2021:
US withdrawal/draw down plan
- May 2021:
Afghanistan; stability or civil war?

On May 15 1988, exhausted Russian forces were relieved to cross over Amu Darya Bridge out of Afghanistan, cutting further losses in an unwinnable war. Russians' hasty withdrawal created a power vacuum in Afghanistan, leaving behind a black hole for armed militias and the weakened Afghan government forces.

No power sharing formula was left by the two super power guarantors of the Geneva Accords. Seven groups Mujahideen alliance supported by USA, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, Kabul government and North Afghanistan warlords supported by Russians, embroiled into struggle for domination of Afghanistan. Russians airlifted arms and food supplies to Kabul while Americans supplied arms and cash to Mujahideen through Pakistan; Iran armed Shia groups. After three years of ruthless and bloody civil war, Mujahideen Alliance took over Kabul in 1992. For a generation grown as fighters with tribal underpinnings, fighting became the most lucrative profession in war torn Afghanistan. Weakened by civil wars, the seven Mujahideen groups, Ahmed Shah Masud, Rashid Dostum, the Hazaras, the Nuristanis etc., all grabbed maximum land mass transforming them into armed garrison fiefdoms, erecting check posts, governing people under their control using various forms of extortion techniques in lieu of pseudo-peace. Afghanistan's neighbors were not strong enough to wield any decisive power for conflict resolution. Afghan people fed up by divisive handling of multiple armed fiefdoms welcomed the rise and take over by 'puritan' Taliban in 1996. Taliban practically provided peace and stability in the areas under its control. Their rapid successes sucked in lots of fighters from other militant groups and their ranks swelled. Al-Qaeda also became a significant part of Taliban war machine by this time.



But the Afghan people had to pay a price for this peace in the form of strict implementation of Islamic Sharia throughout Afghanistan. Taliban made Afghanistan arms free and poppy free but in exchange criminals had to face lashes, cutting of hands and firing squads for crimes. Females in public were forced to remain in purdah and faced restrictions on higher education and job seeking. Men were strongly urged to grow beards and act upon strict codes of Islamic ethics in public. More than a million died under Russian occupation, and tens of thousands died in civil wars (1989 – 96), a large number tortured, maimed and faced sexual violence.

Now that Russia has evened the score with USA, as did USA in 1989 with Russia. The peace builders in 2020 should take note of the fault lines of 1989 – 2001 era Afghanistan:

- Primary cause was a hasty Russian withdrawal without streamlining mechanisms for peace building once they left a power vacuum.
- The superpowers kept arming their proxies for domination of Afghan political scenario.
- War hardened militiamen in a war torn country with no employment opportunities had no choice except going for armed conflicts to grab more land.
- Weak government in Kabul resulted in ethnic and religious groups organizing into armed garrisons to protect their people, land and financial assets. Whole of Afghanistan became hotbed for militant groups vying for greater control of areas.
- In the absence of strong national government with scarce financial resources, infra-structures, institutions and services collapsed. Militias invented variety of extortion techniques to keep the cash flow flowing for retention of fighters.
- Powers of field commanders made the population helpless and had no escape from all sorts of demands by the armed men. Human rights abuses became commonplace.
- Religion was being used to subdue and compel common man to obey the orders of militia commanders.
- Girls were kept away from schools, either by force or due to fear of sexual assault and dishonor.
- Civil war worsened because USA, China, India, Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia all had their own favorites who were supplied cash and arms in return for greater influence in Afghanistan.
- No serious efforts were done by these countries to force their proxies go for a consensus based united government. Countries as well as their proxies favored solutions of their own liking. The two Super powers' priorities had shifted away from Afghanistan.

Sadly, Joe Biden in September 2020 said: America bore “zero responsibility” if the Afghan Taliban come back to power. “The responsibility I have is to protect America’s interest and not put our women and men in harm’s way ... that’s what I’d do as President.” Implying that USA like Russia of 1989 may also abandon Afghanistan to self-heal its wounds.

Irony of modern times is that superpowers invade weaker nations like Afghanistan, ransack the infra-structure, destroy the semblance of societal harmony and on failure to achieve its objec-

tives leave the destroyed nation and wish to be remembered as facilitators of peace.

Loopholes in 2020 US-Taliban peace agreement are;

- No agreement on a timeline for a responsible and measured US troops’ withdrawal.
- No mechanism to ensure a credible and sustainable ceasefire binding on all, viz., USA, Taliban and Afghan government. Further complicated by American-Afghan government accord signed in February for security support and Indo-Afghanistan strategic partnership (October 5, 2011)
- No guidelines for USA and Taliban to make intra-Afghan dialogue a result oriented interaction, except that it should be Afghan led and Afghan owned.
- No parameters defined to gauge whether Taliban are denying safe havens for terrorist groups with international agenda.

Given more than forty years of war torn Afghanistan and loopholes mentioned above, fastest way to bring peace and stability is that USA fully support Taliban (from whom they took power in 2001) in governing future Afghanistan. In return, Taliban should be convinced to incorporate as many democratic reforms and female rights achieved in the past two decades. Corruption ridden Afghan government, originally installed by USA must be made to realize that they should cooperate with the victor, the Taliban for peace building in Afghanistan. Taliban, who have been running a shadow government for the past several years, under their controlled area, are a much reformed group unlike pre-9/11, hungry for international acceptability.

USA, Russia and China must chalk out a combined “Marshal Plan” urging India, Pakistan and Iran to go for competitive cooperation in rebuilding Afghanistan. Strategic dominance and competition between Islamabad, Delhi and Tehran will only create havoc in the region. Every stakeholder should realize that there is never a winner in a civil war, only war continues till a balance of power is achieved.

In the words of Dr. Maria Effendi from PolicyEast, the phenomena of post conflict resolution peacebuilding is governed through five R’s: Reconstruction of war torn infrastructure, Rebuilding of institutions, Reconciliation between or among war factions, Rehabilitation of survivors and perpetrators and Reintegration of former combatants.



Macron's Islamophobic approach to the French Muslim community will not help address radicalisation

By Ali Saad

More than a week after the gruesome murder of French teacher Samuel Paty by a Chechen refugee, France remains gripped by shock, hatred and despair. The terrorist attack, which followed Paty's decision to show the controversial Charlie Hebdo caricatures of Prophet Muhammad in class, has intensified anti-Muslim sentiments.

Once again, France's Muslim citizens find themselves at the heart of a debate that holds their religion and its symbols in contempt and smears and vilifies them in the political sphere, mainstream media and social media networks. And once again the ruling elite and a large part of the French society are in denial about the true roots of radicalisation.

But this time around, it seems the head of state is particularly intent on fanning the flames of Islamophobia. President Emmanuel Macron feels his electorate is abandoning him and thinks the only thing he that can save his political career is taking a page out of the far right's playbook.

Macron's faltering support



It is worth pointing out that the attack comes as France is suffering from a long-term social crisis that has been made worse by the failed policies of Macron's government. Popular anger has reached the boiling point and manifested itself in street protests. In the spring of 2018, major public sector strikes took place followed by the Gilets Jaunes (yellow vests) protests in fall.

Then throughout 2019, there were major demonstrations against pension reforms, fuel-price hikes, police violence, and unemployment. The year ended with one of the longest public transportation strikes in French history, which paralysed the country.

This upheaval brought Macron's ratings from approximately 60 percent when he was elected in May 2017 to 23 percent in December 2018. Before the pandemic mobilised French society earlier this year, the French president had the approval of about 33 percent of the people.

The slight gains Macron made at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis did not help his party in the June municipal elections, where it suffered a crushing defeat by the Greens movement in a number of large French cities.

The presidential election is scheduled for April 2022, and the French president is seemingly running out of time to come up with something that can help secure his re-election. His latest desperate attempt at gaining political ground – specifically at the expense of the far right – seems to be his decision to come after the Muslim community in France. He knows that anything that has to do with attacking Muslims galvanises the supporters of the far right and its racist and anti-Muslim agenda, as well as perhaps a good segment of the French left.

Thus, in early October, Macron made a special address to the nation in which he insisted that Islam “is in crisis” and that he was going to “liberate” it from foreign influences.

When the murder of Paty took place less than two weeks later, the French president was quick to seize the moment and declare he was going to take action to eradicate “Islamist extremism” in France.

A kneejerk reaction

In the aftermath of the attack, Macron and his government launched a crackdown on Muslim civil society – or what they called “extremists”. Among the measures they took were “several dozen concrete actions ... against organisations, associations or individuals who carry a project of radical Islamism”.

As a result, more than 50 charities – including the Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF), a mainstream organisation that combats Islamophobia – dubbed by Minister of the Interior Gerald Darmanin as “enemies of the Republic”, may face dissolution.

Throughout the process, Macron and his government have kept up their Islamophobic rhetoric, setting the tone for the public debate on the terror attack.

Thus a chorus of media pundits and politicians across the political spectrum have apparently united in the conviction that the French “values” are under threat and that the general population needs to mobilise for a fight. “It is wartime!” declared one magazine on its front cover. “To arms, citizens” tweeted MP Meyer Habib, deputy chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee at the National Assembly, using a phrase from the French national anthem.

The “weapons” some suggested should be used in this “war” include the rescinding of citizenship, obligation to adopt French first names, the reinstatement of the death penalty, etc.

This belligerent rhetoric did not spare public figures who have come out in defence of the French Muslim community. In a TV debate, writer Pascal Bruckner accused journalist Rokhaya Diallo, whom he identified as a “Black Muslim woman” of having, through her words “led to the death of Charlie Hebdo’s 12 cartoonists”.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon, head of the France Insoumise (Unbowed France) party, has also faced a smear campaign since he has been warning against the stigmatisation of Muslims. He has been accused by the political establishment of being an Islamo-leftist in an attempt to undermine the Left by associating it with “Islamism”, which has a very negative connotation in the minds of the French majority.

Coincidentally or not, Mélenchon had emerged as a potential challenger to Macron in the next presidential election. If this character assassination campaign against him succeeds, Macron may have an easier time securing re-election.

The real problem

Amid this cacophony of Islamophobia and electoral scheming, the crux of the matter has not really been addressed.

For well over two decades, the French state has been moving in a vicious circle in its relationship with its Muslim citizens.

The state still does not acknowledge the fact that Islam is a religion of France, that it is not wise to systematically remind or refer to French Muslims by their racial or geographic origins, and that French Muslim issues are inherently French issues.

The state does not want to recognise the fact that there is no empirical evidence to suggest that religion is a primary motivator for violent extremism and that radicalisation is a social phenomenon.

It continues to use terrorist incidents as a distraction from its own failed policies towards French Muslim citizens which have led to the marginalisation and alienation of an entire community.

The state has done little to address job and housing discrimination, police brutality, poverty and everyday racism and yet it accuses the French Muslim community of failing to “integrate” or even of “separatism”.

It has relied on a security-centred approach in which Islam has been systematically perceived as an evil that society should confront, and Muslims as a threat to the way of life and to fundamental rights, such as freedom of expression.

For the majority of Muslims, the most blatant bias is that when it comes to criticising or mocking Islam and its symbols, the establishment’s definition of freedom of expression is universal, absolute and indisputable. While insisting that Muslims embrace criticism and mockery of what is sacred to them, it has very little tolerance for criticism of Israel, Israeli policies and Zionism.

If anything, it appears that it is the state rather than the Muslim citizens that is “separating” itself from a segment of society and is insisting on treating them as outsiders. It clearly does not want to acknowledge that multiculturalism is an integral part of French society and should be embraced as such.

Unfortunately, as long as the French state considers its Muslim citizens a “fifth column” and excludes them from its battle against extremism; and as long as the political establishment uses heinous terror attacks to make political gains ahead of elections, we will continue to be light years away from the Republic’s core principles of social cohesion, civil peace and dialogue.

Source: Al Jazeera



Glimmer of Hope amid Claims of COVID-19 Vaccine Success

By Azka Gauher

After extensive trials on thousands of people, the much awaited COVID-19 vaccines have been successfully developed. There are three major companies in the world claiming to have developed vaccines with more than 90% success rate. The companies which have announced their success and anticipate launch by the end of the year are Pfizer Inc., an American multinational pharmaceutical corporation, BioNTech SE, a German biotechnology company. Both Pfizer and BioNTech jointly developed the vaccine while Sputnik V, a Russian COVID-19 vaccine candidate developed by the Gamaleya Research Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology has made similar assertions. All three of the companies have claimed efficacy over 90%.

BioNTech & Pfizer projected the launch of the vaccine by the mid of next year. But the launch is now expected sooner than later. Explaining the modus operandi and the success rate Pfizer mentioned that the case split between vaccinated individuals and those who received the placebo indicates a vaccine efficacy rate above 90%, at 7 days after the second dose. This means that protection is achieved 28 days after the initiation of the vaccination, which consists of a 2-dose schedule. As the study continues, the final vaccine efficacy percentage may vary. The DMC has not reported any serious safety concerns and recommends that the study continues to collect additional safety and efficacy data as planned. The data will be discussed with regulatory authorities worldwide.

“Today is a great day for science and humanity. The first set of results from our Phase 3 COVID-19 vaccine trial provides the initial evidence of our vaccine’s ability to prevent COVID-19,” said Dr. Albert Bourla, Pfizer Chairman and CEO. “We are reaching this critical milestone in our vaccine development program at a time when the world needs it most with infection rates setting new records, hospitals nearing over-capacity and economies struggling to reopen. With today’s news, we are a significant step closer to providing people around the world with a much-needed breakthrough to help bring an end to this global health crisis. We look forward to sharing additional efficacy and safety data generated from thousands of participants in the coming weeks.”

“The first interim analysis of our global Phase 3 study provides evidence that a vaccine may effectively prevent COVID-19. This is a victory for innovation, science and a global collaborative effort,” said Prof. Ugur Sahin, BioNTech co-founder and CEO. “When we embarked on this journey 10 months ago this is what we aspired to achieve. Especially today, while we are all in the midst of a second wave and many of us in lockdown, we appreciate even more how important this milestone is on our path towards ending this pandemic and for all of us to regain a sense of

normality. We will continue to collect further data as the trial continues to enroll for a final analysis planned when a total of 164 confirmed COVID-19 cases have accrued. I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to make this important achievement possible.”

Along with the efficacy data generated from the clinical trial, Pfizer and BioNTech are working to prepare the necessary safety and manufacturing data to submit to the FDA to demonstrate the safety and quality of the vaccine product produced.

“Based on current projections we expect to produce globally up to 50 million vaccine doses in 2020 and up to 1.3 billion doses in 2021,” said Pfizer’s official statement.

On the other hand, the Russian COVID-19 vaccine candidate Sputnik V also announced their success rate same as Pfizer and BioNTech. It announced that Phase 1 and 2 clinical trials of the vaccine have been completed on August 1, 2020. All the volunteers are feeling well, no unforeseen or unwanted side effects were observed. The vaccine induced strong antibody and cellular immune response. Not a single participant of the current clinical trials got infected with COVID-19 after being administered with the vaccine. Post-registration clinical trials involving more than 40,000 people in Russia and Belarus were launched on August 25, 2020. A number of countries, such as UAE, India, Venezuela, Egypt and Brazil will join the clinical trials of Sputnik V locally. The vaccine has received a registration certificate from the Russian Ministry of Health on August 1.

Alexander Gintsburg, director of Moscow’s Gamaleya Institute which developed the Russian vaccine candidate, said he welcomed the Pfizer’s announcement about their success rate.

“In the near future, we expect to publish interim results of the post-registration trial of the vaccine Sputnik V, the so-called Phase III trials. I am sure that its effectiveness level will also be high,” he said.

Russia is gearing up to publish preliminary results of an ongoing large-scale human trial, known as Phase III, in the month of November.

It is indeed good news for the world that very competent scientists have been able to concoct a solution to the ongoing global threat which not only took lives but also wrecked the global economy. The fear that had been developed and following despair will finally be threatened for people to feel safer than before. With the hope that the vaccines are accessible and affordable for all races and strata of society, we finally put COVID-19 to bed.

میرا پاکستان، میرا گھر



Under the vision of the Government of Pakistan to provide affordable housing to millions of Pakistanis, National Bank of Pakistan shall extend low cost housing finance plans through its mortgage products.

Through this ground-breaking initiative we are committed to build a prosperous future for the Nation.

Details will be announced shortly.



Climate Change: A need to Introspect

By Mishaal Ashraf

Climate change has rapidly affected the whole world, particularly South Asian countries because common residents in this region are considered highly vulnerable to climate change impacts whereas their common awareness to adapt and mitigate these impacts is very low. Among South Asian countries, Pakistan is among the most affected and as a result experiencing several impacts namely; temperature rise, drought, pest-diseases, health issues, seasonal and lifestyle, reveals a study conducted by prominent experts from Pakistan and published by Journal of Cleaner Production.

In Pakistan, climate change is essentially caused by greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and the foremost sources of rise in the GHG emissions are human activities, such as deforestation and emissions from various sectors; transportation, industrialization, urbanization, waste, agriculture livestock & forestry and energy usage. All of these have a significant impact on climate change in all areas and provinces. The study determines that all the areas in Pakistan played an increased role in climate change, but rural, peri-urban, and small cities turned out to be in worst situation due to lack of attention and ignorance.

Pakistan formulated the National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) in 2012, which was operationalized a year later. The policy provides a proper mechanism of monitoring the implementation activities in the country. But like all other sectors, implementation has been a problem in climate change sector. If the government fails to take this up actively and implement it effectively, Pakistan's natural treasure (glacier) will melt down in the coming years. This is likely to cause water crisis, which ultimately will negatively affect economy specially agriculture.

When it comes to solving the problem of climate change from an economic point of view, different economists have different approaches towards it. Tol and Bosello et al. use an intuitive approach as they compare the aggregate cost of climate with global benefits, which takes the form of avoided climate damages. Having said this, most of the economists support the argument that the issue of climate change is too large and too complex to be dealt with by a single formula or an approach; factors like inter/intra generational equity, social systems, natural systems all contribute towards making it quite a complication. Some economists like Stern and Weitzman believe that the issue of climate change has its roots in the issue of risk management, as the persistent climate change would uncover the world to such climate systems that are/will not be experienced for millions of years.

For an issue to reach the masses, and come up with a solution, it is crucial to ensure how the issue is framed and communicated. Frames have the power to make ideas and



messages more noticeable and can change the point of view of the audiences. Similarly, it is important how the message for climate change is framed to educate the public. When it comes to climate change, we have noted that most adults learn about this issue from the media. Therefore, by studying the media frames, environmentalists can see how the public reacts to it and come up with climate change policies accordingly.

The need is not only to understand the impact of human development/destruction, but also to use efficient energy sources to minimize the effects of greenhouse gas emissions and replace non-renewable energy with renewable energy. Climate change and energy problems also give rise to other environmental issues like acid rain, air pollution, floods, droughts, and the list can go on. It is important to understand that the significance of this issue not only lies in environmental problems, but heavily influences political, economic, and social factors as well.

To prevent climate change, the first thing that governments can do is to help societies adapt. By adaptation, it is meant that societies need to be educated about risks that climate change can pose to social systems, and then improve the impacts to decrease the negative effects on the society. At this point, it is important to note that until and unless governments step into this matter and take the solutions to a national and ultimately the global level, the individual efforts made by the communities will keep on failing. Moreover, this will also become a hindrance for governments to follow through with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as economic activities that were previously sustainable under the contemporary climatic conditions may no longer be tenable as climate change effects ecosystems that sustain human life at a large scale.

Due to the complexity of the nature of this issue, governments need to put in place strong monitoring, evaluating, and learning (MEL) systems. This process should be taking place at a sub-national, national, and international level for it to be effective throughout. In short, governments need to invest in integrated monitoring and evaluation systems. The impacts of these systems can be studied

to help the governments get a stronger grip on understanding how their country is benefiting from the system and what can be done to maximize the effects.

Secondly, there is a need to address climate change is the concept of climate financing. Climate finance refers to the financial amount that specifically must be used for combating climate change issues like reduction of greenhouse gases, using efficient energy sources, maintaining human resilience to negative climate change impacts etc. Post 2015, many countries have now started incorporating climate financing into their national annual budgets and are making way to planning stage. If this practice is continued and adopted by all counties, a major contribution will be made not only towards climate change adaptation and carbon development, but also to the universal economic resilience and development in developing countries.

Thirdly, the energy-economy model is discussed which suggests that if the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gas emissions is limited to 450ppm, it will be equivalent to the cost of one and three percent of GDP over the next forty years, provided there is a near-perfect policy in place. This proposes that our policymakers need to play an active role in forming environmental policies so that in the long run, citizens do not have to face the adverse effects of climate change. The abovementioned limit is a rational figure, and the cost is reasonable to pay, in comparison to climatic catastrophes. Again, it is crucial to note that in this, the policymakers have the most significant role to play.

Fourthly, while we have discussed the roles that governments have to play to solve the climate change issues, it should be noted that this burden can also be shared by the private sector in countries. To contribute towards coming to a solution for climate change, the

private sector needs to cut down its transactional costs. The private sector needs to work hand in hand with the government to come up with innovative ideas to reduce consumption, pollution and decrease their carbon footprint. In most countries, private sectors are able to influence the government decisions to a great extent, hence it is important that the sector which is one of the biggest drivers of any economy, plays its part in conserving the environment.

Last but not the least, where we have talked about the steps that the government and private sector can take, it goes without saying that international institutions must also play a major role in addressing the issue of climate change at a global level. International institutions can help in the implementation of mitigation and adaptation efforts, that have been previously discussed in the paper, on the ground. Technical training, capacity building, funding, and other support to governments to strengthen them and their policies can be provided by international bodies like the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). The World Bank can help with funding and financing to countries which are having trouble with monetary issues to overcome environmental issues. Institutions like World Health Organization (WHO) can help countries steer in the right direction and offer them guidance, rather than acting themselves.

In conclusion, the threat of climate change is real, and must be addressed at an international level. Moreover, governments need to ensure that they are not only making relevant policies, but also implementing them at the grassroot level. The danger of climate change is an international problem, which means there is added responsibility on international bodies to take appropriate steps and take the lead in providing guidance and support to countries in any way possible.



Pakistanis on Roads: Some Food for Thought

By Azka Gauher

Traveling is an indispensable part of urban life. Thousands of people travel daily on roads. Consequently, the occurrences of road accidents are witnessed. According to the estimates of World Health Organization published in 2018, the number of deaths occurred due to road accidents were 30,046, while 50,000 of the people who meet accidents end up experiencing disability for the rest of their life. This adds to the emotional trauma and to the depression of the people who lose their loved ones. When the bread winners lose their lives to road accidents, the families left behind experience social and economic dependency. Behind every accident, there is a story of a mother or a father, a son or a daughter, friend or a colleague whose life transforms in an instant. The grieving families have no option but to bear the agony for the rest of their lives.

The lives lost in road crashes are not just a loss of human capital but it is also a huge burden on Pakistan's economy. Through road crashes alone, Pakistan loses about 9 billion dollars annually which is approximately 1400 billion rupees, a report in 2018 by Ministry of Communications stated. This amount of money is utilized in treating post-accident treatments such as vehicle repair, medical treatment of the injured, repair of the other damages caused by accidents. 9 billion dollars is a big figure which is actually more than our national defence budget. This is the amount of money we waste due to road traffic accidents alone. On the contrary, the ratio of deaths due to road traffic accidents (RTAs) in high-income countries is low, which is not the case in developing countries. A country like Pakistan which is a struggling economy, cannot endure such enormous economic losses. We can actually save the amount we lose in this unfortunate way and put it to better use.

Before placing the blame on the government, let's discuss commuters' practice and knowledge about traffic rules and regulations. According to a report by Center for Disease Control and Prevention USA, fastening seat belts reduces the risk of death by 45%, and cuts the risk of serious injury by 50%. While people of Pakistan remain ignorant of its importance and keep violating the law and risk their own and others' lives. A research conducted by Arshad Ahmed Klair in 2014 found that the use of seatbelts is only 20% on average. While 53% percent of those who fasten seatbelts use them on motorways and only 5% use seatbelts on rural roads. The major reasons for doing so are unawareness of the law/usefulness, seat belt not fitted, discomfort, forgetfulness, low speed, and careless attitude. This not only points at the lacunas in the enforcement of laws but also at the disinclination of road users who are responsible for their own conduct. It's about time that we take the responsibility and play our role in responsible use of roads.

It is not just the citizens who are lagging behind in practicing laws but the government of Pakistan also needs to improve their policies on road safety laws. For instance, in case of law for using seatbelts while driving, the current law



mandates seatbelt wearing by the driver only and not the passenger. Part II Section (v) of the 8th Schedule to the National Highways Safety Ordinance states that a driver shall not drive a vehicle without seatbelts fitted. Similarly, Section 89-B (1) of the PMVO states that a person driving a motor car, motor cab, light or heavy transport vehicle must have a fastened seatbelt. The penalty for a driver detected not wearing a seat belt is a mere 300 rupee fine. Although, current law only requires drivers to wear a seat belt, during a crash or sudden harsh braking event the use of seat belts by front and rear seat passengers directly affects the level of injury to themselves, to other passengers and to the driver. An unrestrained passenger poses a serious threat to any restrained person. Front and rear seat passengers who use seat belts not only reduce the likelihood and severity of injury to themselves, but also to others travelling in the vehicle. This situation calls for revision in seatbelt laws in Pakistan and enforcement of those laws to raise the use by commuters.

Another highly sensitive and ignored facet of road safety is the concept of child restraints. Most people in Pakistan don't use child restraints and risk the lives of their young ones to a greater extent. A research in Karachi was conducted to gauge the attitude of people towards the use of child restraints (CRs). The results revealed that although 79.2% participants had some knowledge about CRs, only 22% had CRs in their cars. 38.7% participants got the knowledge about CRs and seat belts from media. Among them, mothers were more concerned about the use of CRs than fathers. Only 6.6% parents used both adult and child seat belts all the time. Children restraints reduce the likelihood of fatal crash by approximately 70% and 54-80% among young children (WHO). Use of CRs is the simplest and the most effective way to save the lives of infants and young children and minimize injuries resulting from a road crash or sudden harsh braking event, a swerving evasive manoeuvre or a door opening during vehicle movement.

It's about time we take responsibility and make roads safer for ourselves and for others. Let's obey laws and save everyone.

The Cosmic Calendar

By Dua e Zahra

What if I ask an 8-year-old kid how much older his elder sister is, he'd probably tell that the difference of age between them is 4 or maybe 5 years. However, that age difference looks huge to his 8-year-old self. However, it might not seem like a big deal to him when he's fifty and there is no observable difference between his and his sister's age.

The Sun is older than the Earth, but it's difficult to comprehend the massive age difference. Saying that the Earth's age is 4.5 billion years, while the Sun's age is 4.6 billion years, doesn't actually seem to express how large that gap really is! It's difficult for humans to wrap their heads around such time intervals thanks to our short lifespan of barely 100 years.

Similarly, wouldn't it be easier if we had the whole history of the Universe condensed down to a more relatable time scale so that we could actually appreciate the time differences between cosmological events?

The concept of the cosmic calendar was popularized by famous astronomer Carl Sagan to help people understand just how far apart on a time scale events in the Universe are. He chronologically arranged the 13.8 billion years of the Universe's age into a single year. In this visualization, the Big Bang took place on January 1st at 12 a.m., while the present moment is 12 p.m. on December 31st.

The Cosmic Calendar is a scale in which the 13.7 billion year lifespan of our universe is mapped onto a single year. In this mapping, the Big Bang took place on January 1st at 12 a.m., while the present moment is 11:59 p.m. 59 minutes 59 seconds on December 31st.

Let's get to know about the important milestones in the cosmic calendar, starting from midnight 1st January to midnight December 31st.

January 1: 13.8 billion years ago: Big Bang.

The farthest the cosmic calendar can go, is the Big Bang, the phenomenon known to scientists as the big explosion that caused the creation of the universe.

March 16: 11 billion years ago: Milky Way

After less than 2 billion years, our home galaxy, the Milky Way was formed.

August 28: 4.57 billion years: Solar System

Our solar system and our sun was born on the same day. Over time, the gravity of the Sun tossed and turned cosmic rocks into the planets of our solar system.

September 6: 4.54 billion years ago: Earth.

This was the time the blue planet, our very own Earth was formed.

September 7: 4.53 billion years ago: Moon



Our Moon is just 1 day younger than the Earth.

December 25: 0.23 billion years ago: Dinosaurs

We would think dinosaurs were so old that they existed on the cosmic calendar as far back as at least October. But that isn't the case, they strolled the Earth just 5 cosmic days before current time - A whopping 165 million year ago. Exactly when Christmas is celebrated.

From here on out there comes all of recorded history of humans, starting from the birth of the very first humans till the time you are reading this article.

December 31 - 14:24 hrs – Primitive Humans were born.

22:24 hrs – Stone tools were used by humans and fire was domesticated.

23:59 hrs and 48 seconds – The Pyramids were built by the Egyptians.

23:59 hrs and 54 seconds – Buddha was born and the Roman Empire was formed.

23:59 hrs and 55 seconds – Christ was born, which marked the beginning of the Roman calendar (0 AD).

23:59 hrs and 58 seconds – Christopher Columbus discovered America

23:59 hrs and 59 seconds – The world as we know it today.

However, this doesn't mean that the Universe is going to end in this final second; the scale just continues condensing itself to accommodate the increasing age of the cosmos. Obviously the condensation of 13.8 billion years into 365 days causes calendar time to speed up – a lot! At this rate, there are 438 years per second, 1.58 million years per hour and 37.8 million years per day.

This means according to the cosmic calendar, birthdays of everyone we know should be celebrated exactly on 31st December at 12:59 pm. Wouldn't that be a never ending new year's eve?

Khabib Nurmagomedov: A Muslim Hero of Modern Times

By Ali Abdullah

Every generation has its sports heroes, some of whom transcend the sports they are famous for and use their platform to do well that is far bigger than them. For a globally persecuted community, reviled and degraded at every turn by politicians and the mainstream media in the West and elsewhere, Muslims have often sought comfort and a sense of sharing in the glory of sports legends who share their faith – and have managed, despite the odds, to force the public consciousness to acknowledge them and their efforts and to recognise that they are clearly Muslims.

In today's world, perhaps no other athlete represents the ideals of Islamic piety, humility, and being a master of one's craft more than mixed martial arts legend Khabib "The Eagle" Nurmagomedov.

On 24th October 2020, he once again proved that he is the most dominant fighter to grace the cage after defeating top contender Justin Gaethje, bringing his undefeated record to 29-0. Now one step closer to fulfilling his father's plan of crafting an unparalleled martial artist with a clean 30-0 record, he is an athlete all Muslims can admire both for his prowess and his behaviour in and out of the cage. He is also the kind of champion his late father and trainer Abdul Manap Nurmagomedov would have been proud to say is his son.

Khabib, born in the mountainous and rugged climes of the Dagestan region of Russia, has been raised to be a warrior, and not simply just a prize-fighter. Throughout his entire career, his father Abdul Manap had been by his side, guiding him to success even when he was denied visas to corner his son's UFC bouts in the United States.

Abdul Manap's Islamic faith used to shine through in all his interviews, as his son would emulate, and he also clearly had faith in the training he gave his son, knowing he would reach the top.

Sadly, and as a result of the coronavirus pandemic that has ground the world to a standstill, Abdul Manap fell ill and died at the age of 57 in July. The fight was the first time that Khabib had to compete without the comfort a son feels by having his father's guidance and wisdom to hand.

However, the lightweight champion showed his mettle and demonstrated that he had absorbed his late and great father's lessons and would continue to honour his memory by achieving at the very highest levels. He proved to do so by establishing a sporting legacy inside and outside the cage. His father could not have been prouder.

The keys to Khabib's success are not a secret. Every fighter who has ever fought against him knew well in advance what he was going to do, yet remained incapable of



stopping him from executing Abdul Manap's tried and tested formula of hard work, discipline, technical excellence, and spiritual conviction.

Khabib's training regimen is legendarily rigorous, bringing together the sheer toughness Caucasians are renowned for, sustaining the technical excellence his father's Sambo martial arts imparted upon him, as well as keeping himself mentally and spiritually strong by finding comfort and strength in Islam.

The Eagle has spent his entire life honouring his father's mission, showing what he was capable of, and defeating the very best the world had to offer. He not only dominated the Combat Sambo world championships two years in a row in his early twenties but has also fought against some of the toughest fighters in the world in MMA competition. He became the lightweight champion in April 2018 after defeating "Raging" Al Iaquinta, a tough-as-leather New York brawler. He has since defended his title thrice with Gaethje as the latest to fall before him.

Notably, he defended his title once against disgraced superstar Connor McGregor who spent much of 2018 insulting his whole family only to be smashed by the Dagestani champion, and once in a more respectful but nevertheless decisive bout against Dustin Poirier in 2019.

Abdul Manap's plan for Khabib was for him to at least reach a pristine of 30-0. By all accounts, it seems that the Dagestani is just one step away from fulfilling his father's dream.

After the fight Khabib talked to the media and announced his retirement. Khabib said that he promised his mother that this is going to be his first and last fight without his father and that he is never going to fight again. The world wanted to see 30-0 but Khabib's career has come to an end at 29-0.

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Pakistan vs Zimbabwe:

A post COVID beginning

As the pandemic hit globally, cricket stages were left abandoned but with the coronavirus becoming a usual feat, cricketing activities began springing up again. In the wake of decisions made by the ICC, the Zimbabwe tour to Pakistan was scheduled such that both teams were ready to play the three One Day and T20 internationals. They were kept in a bio secure bubble due to the coronavirus but it was finally time for both teams to showcase their performances. Fans around the world were excited as the teams locked horns in what was considered a historical post pandemic event.

Initiating with ODIs, the new appointed captain of the Pakistan cricket team was hopeful to win his first series and get off the mark. This series was comparatively an easier one hence the management decided to let youngsters take the lead. Haider Ali who had played a T20 in England this summer was retained and given another chance to show his talent to the world. Similarly, Khushdil Shah who performed in the National T20 and PSL was also selected in the team. Other than these two outstanding talents, Usman Qadir was also picked in the team. He is the son of the great Pakistani legend late Abdul Qadir. Usman is also a leg spinner who is confident to continue his father's legacy. Haris Rauf the pace machine was part of the team as well.

Coming back to the three ODI's, Pakistan won the series by winning two out of the three ODIs matches. Zimbabwe made a good effort in the third ODI and secured a win. Babar Azam, the Pakistani skipper led from the front and was the leading scorer in the series.

After a short break, the T20 series began. In line with empirics, Pakistan won the first T20 by six wickets in hand dominating the guests from the start to finish and never felt endangered. It was a thorough team effort. Worthy of mention here is Babar's knock of 82 runs where he truly played a captain's innings. The second T20 was also won by the hosts in which the youngster Haider Ali scored a brilliant half century alongside the skipper. Usman Qadir and the paceman Haris Rauf took three wickets each.



The pattern was followed in the third T20 as well where the game turned out to be a one-sided affair. As Pakistan had already won the T20 series with one match remaining, the management decided to try more youngsters in the playing 11. Alongside Haider Ali. Kushdil Shah, Musa Khan and Usman Qadir, Abdullah Shafiq was finally given a chance. Abdullah Shafiq let his bat talk and apprised the selectors of his gleaming talent reiterating his determination to perform in a greater number of matches, if given the opportunity. He played a fiery innings of 41*.

In the final ODI, Usman Qadir too deserves immense praise as he took 4 wickets and showed the class that he possessed. In pursuance of these performances, the team might just make a pair of Shadab Khan and Usman Qadir. Young guns in the team really showed what they are capable of and are now vying for permanency in the squad.

Before the series, Elton Chigumbura, captain of the Zimbabwean cricket team also announced his retirement, stating that this would be his last series. In 2015, when international cricket returned home following the gruesome attack on the Sri Lankan team in 2009, Chigumbura was also part of the team. He is the only player who played all T20 matches for his team with Pakistan since 2015.

In other cricketing news, Pakistan Super League is also close to resumption. The league was postponed in March due the coronavirus. The playoffs will be played on 15th November whereas the final will be played on 17th of November. Due to smog in Lahore, the remaining matches will be played in National Stadium Karachi.



Contours of shifting trends of the Pakistan film industry with Senator Shibli Faraz

By Hassan Kazmi

Minister for Information and Broadcast Shibli Faraz has said that the government plans to announce National Film Policy in March 2021. “We have prepared the first draft and the work on a concrete policy is in progress”, he said.

Recently, Prime Minister Imran Khan has also emphasised on the need for the betterment and revival of the film industry of the country and directed all concerned departments to play their roles in this regard.

The Truth International in a recent interview with Shibli Faraz discussed in detail what steps this government is taking for the revival of the film industry especially with respect to the problems that most of the film makers are facing.

Faraz said though film making had been given the status of an industry in Pakistan in 1992 but unfortunately it has never been implemented. Now, according to the direction of the Prime Minister, it is being overviewed from the start to come up with a concrete plan which can facilitate the industry in various ways.

Faraz stated that the government is also working on a system through which film makers could get easy loans from banks. “Being a former banker myself, I can suggest that filmmakers and producers can get the loan in exchanging guarantee with their property or any other asset.” The Information Minister admitted that it was not right to waive tax from cinema owners while filmmakers had to pay twice in taxes. “Our government is also working on to solve this issue”, he added.

On the problems faced by film makers during the shooting especially in getting permission from multiple departments to shoot at certain sites, the minister replied that he realized the fact so this angle has also been included in the upcoming film policy. He added that shooting on beautiful and historical sites of Pakistan would also attract tourism to the country.

On providing electricity to cinema owners at industrial rates, the minister was concerned about a rise in circular debt if everyone was going to be given leverages and discounts. “Instead we are discussing the creation of some fiscal space for upcoming filmmakers in new film policy, but in my personal opinion, complete waiving would be difficult for the government”.

Building cinemas should not be the responsibility of the government, rather facilitation in its operations, he said. Regarding the genre and content of the films, the Minister stated that alongside commercial films, it was important to



include more artistic material to promote the cultural and historical heroes of the region.

Shibli Faraz was of the view that due to the creative nature of the field, censorship should be avoided. “We should only observe if a film is appropriate in line with the fundamental social and religious norms of our country. I don’t support any unnecessary ban on films as they are the true depiction of life.”

The minister said that the 18th amendment in the constitution was a menace for governance, creating difficulties in centralizing the film censor board as there are censor boards in Sindh and Punjab as well. “All previous governments believed in blocking others from working productively. That is what every government department is quick in; how to delay things instead of speed them up.”

He also reiterated the need to cut down on the bureaucratic hurdles and reduce red tapism in a bid to attract film makers, as part of the upcoming film policy. Faraz spoke of the committee formed on government level consisting of cinema owners and film producers to solve the disagreements among them but it was unable to meet its objectives. “I think these disputes must be solved by all the stakeholders themselves,” he added.

The Truth International correspondent inquired regarding the demands of the film industry from the government to announce awards or national awards. To which the minister assuredly replied that in order to send a softer image of Pakistan across the world, the present government was willing to go beyond crossable limitations.

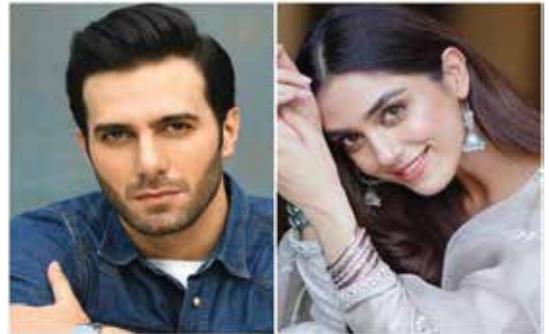
Conclusively, the minister added that it was important to produce local content instead of importing films. “I also request the people related to the film industry to not always look towards the government for solutions as I believe that creativity finds its own way. So, I think that this period of restrictions and absence of Bollywood, is the right time and a chance for Pakistani filmmakers to develop themselves.”

Entertainment & Trending

By Amna Shoaib

Maya Ali and Emmad Irfani to share the Cinema screen for a Shoaib Mansor Film

The popular, atypical director Shoaib Mansoor excites the Pakistani cinema again with the ongoing buzz of his new project, a feature film casting Maya Ali and Emmad Irfani for the lead roles. The director has only disclosed the two leading roles of the film, who undoubtedly make an interesting couple as they have barely shared the screen before. As much as the fans are excited for the duo, they have already set high expectations for the film. Emmad Irfani is thrilled for his first leading role in a film, and that too, for Shoaib Mansoor. "I'm really excited and looking forward to working with someone of the stature of Shoaib sahib (sir). To me, it is an opportunity of a lifetime as he is a colossus when it comes to modern Pakistan cinema," Irfani said in an interview. The film is set to release its trailer in December.



Ishtiaq Ahmed's 'Inspector Jamsheed' gets a web-series



Renowned Detective Novel writer, the late Ishtiaq Ahmed author of Pakistani famous novels such as Shoki Brothers, Inspector Kamran and Inspector Jamsheed, is being tribute with a web series on his novel, Inspector Jamsheed which will air on YouTube. The release date is yet to be disclosed however the trailer is released, escalating the expectations and excitement with cinematography and character depiction. The web series, produced by Adnan Butt and directed by Fahad Noor, focuses on "building locally relevant and meaningful content to empower parents with improving the moral and ethical values of kids, wherein Mr. and Mrs. Jamsheed along with their kids, Farzana, Mehmood and Farooq, save the day" says CreatorsOne, the production house.

'If the Quran said French is the best language, French would stop speaking French.' Trevor Noah

The popular and admired South African comedian, writer, producer and host Trevor Noah addressing islamophobia in France after the recent on a video he uploaded on his social media, which got viral on twitter. According to the political commentator and analyst, the intensity of islamophobia is so ingrained in the French that if the Quran stated French as the best language, they would stop speaking French. Trevor Noah who is popular for his amusingly satirical is one of the few international celebrities who has used his Stand Up comedy show and The Daily Show to defend Muslims from the Islamic stereotypes quite often.



Kanye ready for standing in 2024 elections



Kanye West all set to comeback for 2024 elections after his much predicted landslide defeat in the 2020 elections. The international singer, producer and fashion designer won less than 60,000 votes appearing on only 12 state ballots. This disappointed him with his fanatics but did not shatter his morale. The fact that he even made it around 60,000 votes boosted his morale for the next elections. According to the singer, many states even legally barred him from appearing and there was a lot of struggle making it to the ballots of many states. Kanye announced this news himself on twitter, uploading a picture of himself with a disappointed face, standing next to the electoral map composed primarily of Democrat and Republican wins captioning, 'welp. Kanye 2024.'

Strange World

95 Years Old Indian Has Never Cut His Hair

Doddapallilah, a 95-year-old Indian man residing in Molakalmuru, Chitradurga district has never had a single haircut all these years and intends to continue growing his 24 feet (7 meters) long hair to keep his 'human deity'. Doddapillah who, because of his massive, bulky hair cannot walk properly without assistance, believes that his hair length distinguishes him from rest of humans, securing him the status of a sacred deity. He has his entangled locks bundled around his head in the form of a huge ball, slightly outweighing him causing hindrance in his body movements yet he finds it a blessing, as they make him feel sacred and superior.



Chinese Girl surprises her Matchmaking Date with 23 Guests to Test her Potential Boyfriend's Generosity, who refused to Pay



A man and woman, introduced to one another by their families who found them as potential matches, agreed to go on a date. On arriving to the restaurant, the man got startled when he saw 23 other people on the same table, who happened to be the girls' relatives and had already ordered food. The girl on telling him that this was a test of generosity, asked him if he would pay for the food, to which he clearly refused and left. She then proceeded towards her relatives, asking them if each would pay for his/her own meal and they all refused too. The bill totaled around 198000 Yuan.

German man sets world record with 516 body modifications



Rolf Buchholz set the first Guinness World Record for maximum body modifications, which are 516,453 of them are piercings, 158 of which are around his lips. Apparently, neither the world record nor the 516 modifications fill the brim for Buchholz's enthusiasm for body modifications. 'I'm not finished altering my body', he says. This began when Buchholz was forty, he got his first tattoo and hasn't stopped experimenting with tattoos, piercings and implants since then and doesn't intend to do so anytime soon.

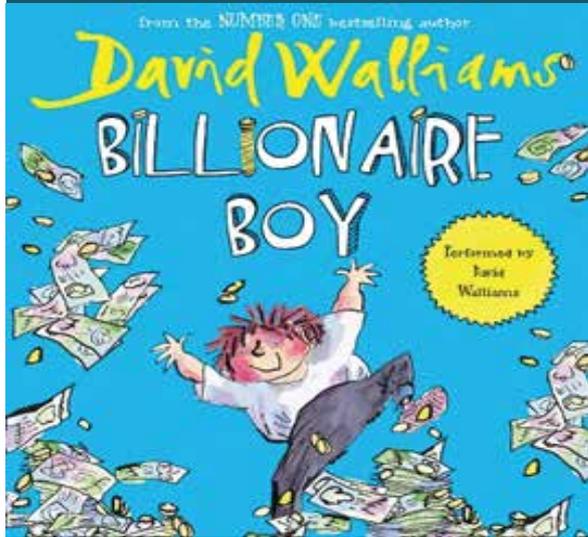
Bride refuses to let her nephew attend wedding in spiderman costume



A bride has received mixed reviews after announcing her nephew could no longer be part of her wedding. In her defence, she explained how her seven year old nephew was to be the ring bearer at the ceremony which was decided several months prior. However, with the big day coming up, her sister called to inform her that her son was going through a phase where he was refusing to wear anything other than his spiderman costume. His mum further said that he had been wearing the same costume to school and throws a fit at the slightest insistence to wear something else.

Billionaire Boy

Reviewed by: Alizay Ashraf
 Author: David Walliams
 ISBN: 978-0-737108-2
 Publisher: HarperCollins
 Pages: 279



The book Billionaire boy is a book written by David Walliams about a young boy who is a billionaire and has more than his needs. The reason he is a billionaire is because his father makes different kind of loo rolls which everyone uses. That makes him extremely rich. He lives in a huge mansion and goes to a school where only extremely rich people go. Even though he has everything, he has no friends. Not a single one.

Billionaire Boy is a book about how money and fame can change people, as well as how it makes people act differently towards you if you're the rich one. This might not sound like the most interesting topic for a kids' book, but in the hands of David Walliams it is both touching and very funny.

You'll fall in love with the characters and not just Joe and his misguided dad, Mr. Spud. The supporting characters are great too, with a pair of bullying twins, a dinner lady who has quite an extraordinary talent for making vomit inducing school dinners, and a shop owner Raj who is industrious and wise. This book made me realize being rich isn't always easy for some people. With illustrations and a bit of an adventure, this book is also flowing with emotions.

The book manages to be heart warming and hilarious at the same time. It's a really special tale that makes you want to read more and more because it is full of tension and surprises. This is a great book very witty and grips you to the story, probably aimed mostly at 8-10 year olds.

Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry

Roll of Thunder is a children's book written by Mildred D. Taylor and the narrator, Cassie Logan, is a smart, bold and resourceful 9-year-old girl. Cassie is aware of racism against the black to some extent but her parents try their best to shield their children from it. As the plot unfolds however, Cassie is faced with scorn, intimidation and bullying from white people; she also learns from adults about much scarier stuff like beatings and night riders.

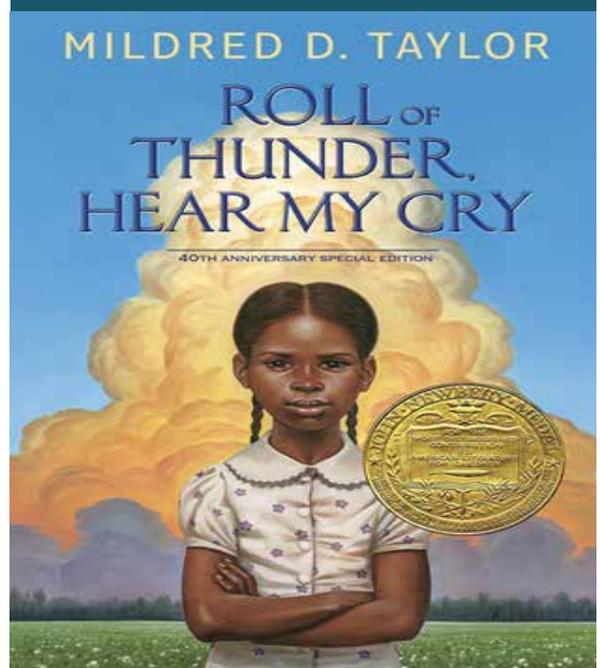
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry is the inspiring story of the Logan family in Depression-era Mississippi. Based on her own family's history with enslavement, the writer's story about one Black family's struggle to keep their land, their independence, and their pride amid racial discrimination creates a compelling and emotionally rich experience for middle - grade readers. The writer is telling us about the Logan kids regarding

some local white men who lit members of a black family on fire.

Although the Logans own their own land, many in the black community are sharecroppers. Sharecroppers are farmers who do not own the land they work. In exchange for the use of the land, the farmers must give a certain percentage of their harvest to the owner. The themes of this book are also very powerful. Throughout this novel, many themes emerge such as racial injustice, poverty, and land ownership.

The writer portrays the racial and economic climate during this period in American history. Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry can easily be used for studying social studies lessons on the Great Depression, segregation, slavery, and Reconstruction. I would recommend this book for children above 13 as there is extremely inappropriate language used and also has some violence.

Reviewed by Alizay Ashraf
 Author: Mildred D. Taylor
 ISBN: 978-0-141-35487-3
 Publisher: Puffin Books
 Pages: 339



CandyLand

HAR PAKISTANI
KI JAAN MAIN MILI!

