

The Truth International

1st November 2020

Regional Implications of US Election
In contrast with Trump's erratic & personalized policy, Biden wants to revive institutional norms

Trump's return to benefit Pakistan
Trump & Imran mutual understanding can ensure peace deal with Taliban

Will agitational politics work for PDM?
Establishment seems to be distancing itself from PTT's poor governance

Winner Takes All Battle for White House, Repercussions for the World



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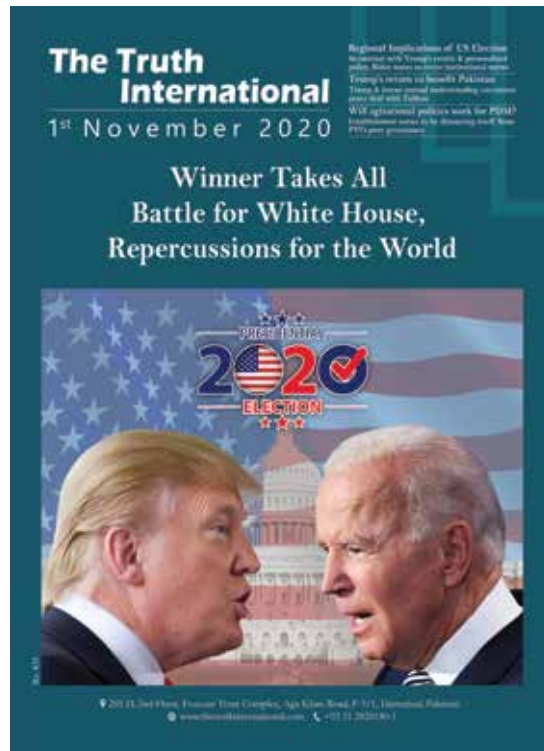


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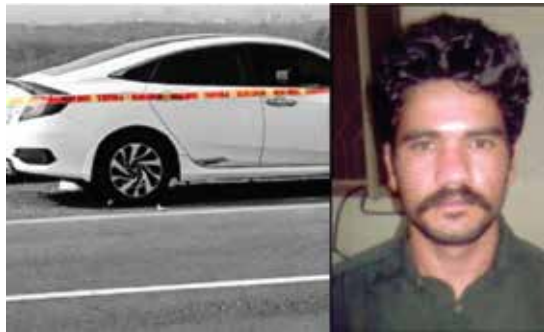
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Publisher: Muhammad Fahad
Editor: Zaheer ud din Babar

Printer: Masha ALLAH Printers,
Basement # 9, Ratta Mansion,
Fazl e Haq Road, Blue Area,
Islamabad

Questionable US elections?

By M. Ziauddin



No matter who would win this week's US presidential elections, it would hardly have any meaningful impact, one way or the other, on Pakistan's fortunes. The 73-year long history of our bilateral relationship tells us that this relationship has always remained nothing more than the one that exists between a master and his minion.

Successive US Presidents, no matter from which of the two Parties---Democrats or Republicans--- have always conducted their 'master and minion' relations with Pakistan driven only by the degree of asymmetry needed in their favor at that particular point in time to secure and/or promote their global/regional self-interests.

So, let the people of the US or the governments of those countries that stand to win or lose by the victory or defeat of one of the two candidates worry about the outcome of the forthcoming elections.

As far as we are concerned what seems to have intrigued most of us Pakistanis is, the outright doubts expressed by Trump about the veracity of the outcome of the election even before it had entered the contesting mode. Indeed, Trump sounded more like the leaders of Pakistani political parties who, driven by their suspicion that the establishment was trying to influence the results in favor of an opposing party, cast doubts about the authenticity of the yet-to-be announced results of an ongoing elections.

In his controversial performance in the only presidential debate with Biden that had taken place, Trump has even called for vigilantes to invade polling places and "watch very carefully," suggesting he might reject a "fraudulent election"

if many vote by mail. Before the debate, he had even refused to pledge a peaceful transfer of power. But mostly it sounded like bluster.

Still, add that to ongoing challenges of foreign interference and an election system strained by the pandemic, the fears that the election could break America seemed justified during the weeks leading to the poll day. And, to be sure, Trump has been doing all he could to undermine the vote and foment chaos. He has been shouting from the rooftops that the forthcoming elections would be stolen from him.

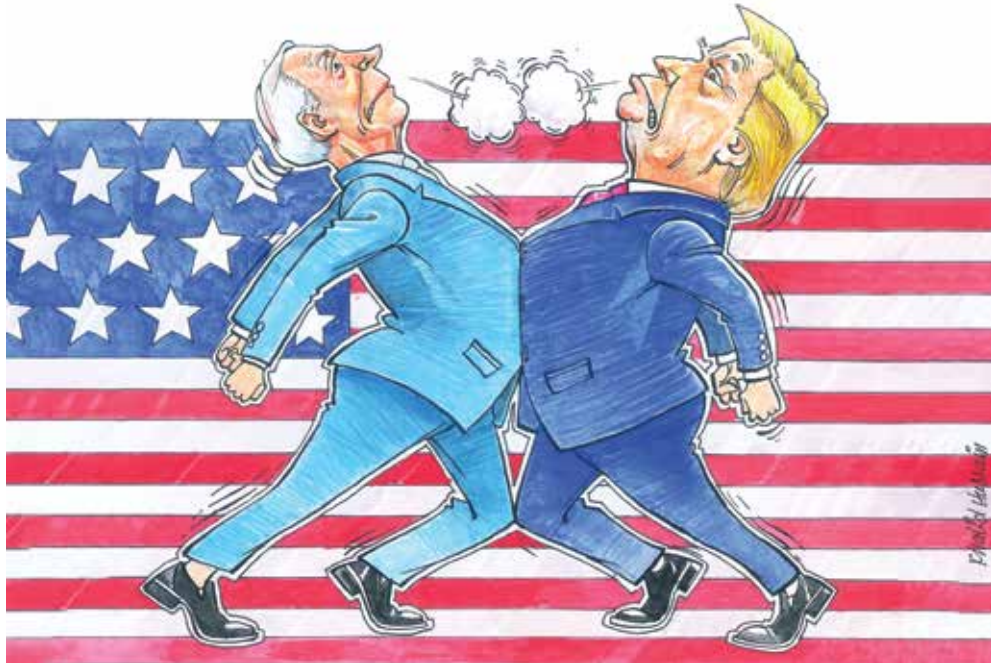
For most Americans it was terrifying to think about an Election Day full of chaos and disinformation, followed by false claims of victory and attempts to swap out electors. But US election officials claim that there are strong safeguards in place, and many ways for the system to block an illegitimate power grab. They further claim that there may be a plot against America, but a lot of people would have to break laws for the plot to succeed. They further claimed that an all-out attack can work only if all the institutional checks fail and the American people let it happen. One of the bulwarks which works against the grab is, they said, presidents don't run elections, states do.

Some fear that federal law enforcement agencies could swoop into cities on the pretext of protecting public property or quelling riots, to intimidate voters or seize ballots. However, under a federal statute on the books since 1948, anyone who sends "any [federal] troops or armed men at any place where a general or special election is held" faces five years in prison. And even with presidential encouragement, voter intimidation is said to be illegal. Also, public expectations of how long the vote might take have already shifted. By Election Day, it should be even more widely understood that this year, it will just take longer to count. They further claim that the system was now more prepared to vote counting. The Constitution, they claimed, places a heavy thumb on the scale toward counting every vote.

Still, harassed by the outcries of President Trump many in the US have started demanding legislations to ensure permanent, universal access to early and mail voting, arguing that it would modernize and upgrade the nation's election infrastructure and voter registration systems. They have also demanded of the Congress to pass legislation that enacts greater safeguards for the rule of law, so that future administrations cannot so easily weaponize the Department of Justice and other law enforcement bodies to target political opponents and sow doubts about the integrity of the election system.

Regional Implications of American Elections

In contrast with Trump's erratic and personalized policy, Biden portends a return to institutional norms



By Ibrahim Moiz

Commentary on the rancorous 2020-21 American election, contested by Donald Trump and Joseph Biden, has circled around domestic issues, but the United States' dominance in international affairs means that the result can have major repercussions around the globe. In contrast with Trump's erratic and personalized policy, Biden portends a return to institutional norms. While this signals a sharp shift in certain matters, in other areas the difference lies in style rather than substance. This article examines the implications of these distinctions on south-west Asia and northeast Africa.

Foreign policy rarely features highly in American public discourse; dominated by the influence of powerful lobbies, such as the Israeli and Armenian lobbies, it is strongly shaped by the personal preferences of the American leader and his immediate entourage. Trump's policy, centred on members of his clan and business networks – such as his son-in-law Jared Kushner, who has functioned almost as a parallel foreign minister – has ruffled career professionals in the American bureaucracy. Biden, if his years deputizing for Barack Obama and his own rhetoric are any indication, will likely remove this personalized style and bring the “adults” back in the room. But certain maxims of American foreign policy remained unchanged, if more aggressively framed, in Trump's tenure; these are unlikely to shift should Biden win. An additional question remains, given the pair's advanced years, in their running mates: Trump's unobtrusive deputy Michael Pence and Biden's deputy Kamala Harris, who enjoys a significant independent power base and is likely to exercise more autonomy.

A comparison of Trump policy and American conventions

Trump's volatile instincts, both their impact on American policy and their limits, should be well-known in Islamabad; a year after taking office, he fulminated against Pakistan in a manner indistinct from the Indian regime with whom he was on such good terms. Yet by the next year, he was waxing lyrical about Islamabad's value as a partner and promising, albeit rhetorically, to mediate on Kashmir. The difference lay partly in the new Pakistani premier Imran Khan's attempt to forge a personal link with his American counterpart. Its value was most obvious in Afghanistan, where Trump proved far more amenable to negotiating a withdrawal with the Taliban, a development that in turn made the American-installed government in Kabul nervous.

Yet such personal touch still had its limits: Trump remained sympathetic to India and made no protest at its annexation of Kashmir weeks later. India is a major trading partner and bulwark against China – no less for Trump, whose rhetoric against Beijing has been far sharper than others, than for his predecessors. It is unlikely that Biden and Harris, the latter strongly supported by Indian-Americans, will make much of a change when it comes to American support for India. In short, while Trump's decisions were coloured by his personal relations, here they did not veer far off the beaten, pro-India institutional path.

If American positions on India seem static, it is unlikely that Biden will replicate Trump's radicalism against Beijing.

China and the United States remain economically interlocked, and the bipartisan Washington position toward Beijing had been largely conciliatory for nearly a half-century. The United States may protest China's mass imprisonment of the Uighur minority and continue to take diplomatic steps against it; nonetheless, as in the case of Taiwan and Tibet, this policy is unlikely to escalate beyond performative criticism. This would mark a sharp turn from Trump's trade wars and escalatory rhetoric.

Israel is probably the most unquestioned of America's foreign partners. Trump's move to recognize Jerusalem as its capital – thus legitimizing the Israeli occupation – attracted only muted protest from his opponents. It belied the legal fiction that Washington was an equal broker between Israel and the Palestinians, but also culminated a resolution made as early as 1995 by an American legislature never been too concerned with international opinion. Biden would perhaps shift the embassy back to Tel Aviv, but his support to Israel is unlikely to be any weaker; indeed, he applauded Trump's superficial brokerage between Israel and two Gulf states, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. Fictions also abound elsewhere in American policy toward the Levant; despite finger-wagging at Damascus' excesses, the United States has long since left the Syrian regime to its devices in fear of an Islamist alternative.

The Syrian war is one of several – including Libya and to some extent Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan – that pitted Turkey and Russia on opposite sides; yet both Ankara and Moscow benefited from a flaccid American position during Trump's reign, enabling them to sort out differences bilaterally. Biden has been more aggressive against both; he protested Turkey's campaign against the American-backed communists in Syria, as well as their assistance to Azerbaijan. The array of countries, mostly close to the United States, pitted against Turkey in recent years – Armenia, Greece, Israel, France, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates – makes Ankara a useful common opponent on which to enhance partnerships. Russia, meanwhile, has been vilified in American liberal circles – not least as a puppetmaster behind Trump, but also over the Ukraine conflict in which Biden has personal stakes. It is unlikely that the tensions with Moscow that originated during Obama's term will thaw under a Biden regime.

The Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf are other areas of American attention. During Trump's reign several Gulf states led by the Emirates rounded on Qatar. The Emirates have sought to become America's primary Arab partner in the region to bolster their internal stability. As a result, they unlike Qatar reacted to the 2010s regional uprisings with a focus on limiting them, relying heavily on links with both Western countries and a pliable regime in Saudi Arabia. The Yemen war – where both Abu Dhabi and Riyadh fought the Houthis, but where the Saudi-backed exile government has been challenged by Emirati-backed separatists with little protest from Riyadh – illustrates this skewed partnership.

Trump favoured both Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, particularly when it came to an Iran that Saudi Arabia fears. By contrast, Biden has been harsher toward Saudi Arabia, and proposed returning to Obama's 2015 Vienna Accord with Iran that Trump subsequently scrapped. Biden's policy might ease tensions in Iraq, long a site of competition between Iran and the United States. This coupled

with his focus on alternative energy sources should make Riyadh uneasy, while increasing Abu Dhabi's considerable leverage over the Saudi government. It is possible that Riyadh will follow the Emirates and Bahrain in recognition of Israel as a shield against greater American censure under a Biden regime.

On the Red Sea's opposite shore Sudan, long under American sanctions, was offered a lifeline if it reversed its longstanding rejection of Israel and implemented state secularism – a deal that Biden is unlikely to withdraw. Egypt, whose Gulf-backed coup took place during the Obama years, is also unlikely to see a major shift. Yet Biden is likely to reverse or at least check direction on two major regional issues: Trump's threatening attitude toward Ethiopia over the Nile dispute, and his ruminations of withdrawing troops from the fight against Shabaab in Somalia, both of which ran counter to established American practice.

Review

When comparing Trump's foreign policy with conventional American practice more identified with Biden's camp, there are three rough distinctions. The first is the diametric difference, where Trump made radical shifts to American practice, such as a laissez-faire attitude toward Moscow and Ankara, and promised withdrawals from Somalia and especially Afghanistan. The second is the superficial shift, where a preexistent policy was made more bluntly evident or enhanced by Trump, but remained essentially constant. This is evidenced by policy on Israel; while Trump abandoned any diplomatic pretences of American brokerage, the policy runs constant with American support for Israel. There is similarly little besides tone and style to differentiate Trump's stances toward Syria and Egypt from the default American position. The third category is the entirely continuous policy; this includes unstinting support for India, the United Arab Emirates, and Israel.

The differences open up interesting possibilities; for example, Washington supported the Yemen war against the Houthis, but there is a difference in their attitude toward the Gulf protagonists – with Biden sharply criticizing Saudi Arabia but not the Emirates whereas Trump had supported both. Similarly, both set different terms for the power balance in the Fertile Crescent – Trump was indulgent towards Russia and hostile to Iran, while Biden is likely to prove the opposite. These disparities are likely to trigger major shifts in the involved coalitions: Iran and Russia are allies in Syria, but Tehran would be strengthened and Moscow weakened by a Biden regime; Saudi Arabia and the Emirates are allies in Yemen, but Riyadh would be weakened by a Biden regime that would nonetheless indulge Abu Dhabi.

Such distinctions also loom large for Pakistan. Trump's regime maintained closeness with India but adopted contrasting postures on India's rivals – sharply opposed to China but, eventually, friendly with Pakistan. A Biden regime is likely to tone down tensions with China to some extent while also maintaining ties with India; this might help China's economic projects in Pakistan, but can increase Beijing's leverage over Islamabad. It is unclear if Biden will continue the Afghanistan withdrawal, but if he does so it will probably be on more exacting terms than Trump, in order to guarantee the safety of the Kabul regime. In weighing the repercussions of the 2020-21 American election, Pakistan should keep the distinctions, however slight, between Biden and Trump in mind.

Trump's return will be a sigh of relief for Pakistan

Donald Trump and Imran Khan are in quid pro quo diplomacy. The approach has been conciliatory and collaborative.

If Islamabad delivers a deal in the Taliban context, there is much that will come in Pakistan's way as dividends of peace.



By Ishtiaq Ali Mehkri

Pakistan-United States relations are evenly poised, perhaps, for the first time in seven decades. Notwithstanding, an unending diatribe on what one expects from the other, it could be pleasantly said that there isn't any friction and ties are in an understandable mode.

Pakistan is one of the key partners in the US 'war on terrorism'; and at times a difficult nut to crack. Without Islamabad's goodwill and diplomatic leverage, the Americans would be wandering in a Waterloo syndrome, and Washington's strategic aspirations in Afghanistan will be in limbo.

The traditional approach in their ties is one based on institutional-input. The Pentagon and the military establishment, including the CIA, had always been at the vanguard in fomenting policies, rather than the White House calling the shots. The reason is that the relations were quite security-centric with Afghanistan and counter-terrorism being the focal points.

Keeping aside the crest and trough during the Cold War and in the wake of 9/11, there has been a departure under the first-term of

President Donald Trump. Administrations in Islamabad and Washington were seen purporting executive supremacy; and the chemistry between President Trump and Prime Minister Imran Khan is working.

One of the reasons for this quick-fix could be the personality cult of both the leaders. Trump's mindset is more of a CEO, who nurses a deal-making phenomenon, whereas Imran Khan is eager to live up to his doctrine of putting Pakistan's interests above everything. Their tête-à-tête is likely to reap benefits.

Islamabad has, thus, rightly counted on the largesse of the Republican administration during Prime Minister Imran Khan's debut audience with President Trump at the White House. The chemistry worked.

Trump's resolve to help address the Kashmir issue apparently comes as a quid pro quo in Washington's quest to clinch a deal with Taliban through the good-offices of Imran Khan. At the same time, Trump is relying on Islamabad's wisdom to play a conciliatory role in defusing tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Trump by virtue of his 'You are fired' executive approach had kept the American bureaucracy and institutions on tenterhooks and in a confused syndrome throughout his first-term. If Trump is re-elected, the relations will have smooth-sailing despite Pakistan leaning more towards China.

Factors such as Afghanistan, the Middle East and India will keep Washington and Islamabad glued up; both trying to extract the maximum of leverage from each other's influence in their respective arenas.

But it goes without saying that the new mindset in Pakistan's military establishment is no more pro-American. Pakistan Army has gained a plenty of space for manoeuvring, as it has articulately fomented a new paradigm with Iran, Russia, China and Saudi Arabia, respectively.

Before we go on to analyse whether Trump will retain the presidency or Joe Biden will be the next to be sworn-in at the White House, and what their policies will mean for Pakistan; let's take a cursory look at the stated positions of the Republicans and the Democrats.

The Democratic Party is indecisive in listing Pakistan either as a friend or an ally. Rather, it is more tilted towards India, as President Barack Obama had invested a lot in the long-term strategic relationship with New Delhi.

Donald Trump, the sitting incumbent, duly recognises the historic ties with Pakistan; and is eager to clinch a deal with the help of Pakistan in South West Asia for a broad-based peace, which will eventually lead to pull out of troops from Afghanistan.

If Biden is elected; he will purport a traditional approach. He believes in ending the war in the region, and interacting with China on a massive scale, unlike Trump who has Beijing-phobia!

But no US president will cross swords with India merely to appease Pakistan. This is the horizon where Islamabad will find itself more inclined towards Beijing to grab a territorial deal on Kashmir, per se! Looking at the Americans will be an exercise in futility.

Washington is one of the largest sources of foreign direct investment and is the largest export market, too. US-Pakistan trade in 2019 stood at \$6.5 billion, with Pakistan running a surplus of \$1.3 billion.

A trajectory of dependency shows that the US has poured in more than \$33 billion over the last 15 years, especially in wake of war on terrorism. Pakistan in reciprocity has defended American interests' tooth-n-nail, even at the altar of more than 70,000 civilian and combat casualties.

If media reports are to be believed, Imran Khan's government has put its eggs in the Republican basket, hoping Trump to retain his presidency. It reportedly signed an agreement with Republican lobbyist Stephen Payne to provide "strategic consulting services in support of Pakistan's diplomatic objectives in the US".

The US needs Pakistan's support to end the two-decades-old imbroglio. The US intention is that the withdrawal shouldn't look like a defeat, and this is where Pakistan can play a role by appeasing

the Taliban to jump on the bandwagon of governance to realise the Exit-strategy!

Prime Minister Imran Khan is playing a cardinal role, and with assured success till now. This is so because luckily Imran Khan is on the same page with the military establishment, who wield enormous influence in the Afghan episode, and by virtue of their successes in the War on Terrorism have become an indispensable part for any solution in the region.

In lieu, the Khan government is tactfully bargaining resumption of US military and economic aid -- frozen by the Trump administration as a jiff reaction to bomb blasts in Kabul in 2018, as well as pressure on New Delhi to address the Kashmir issue. Thus, it is little surprising that President Trump offered to mediate between India and Pakistan.

The ties between Pakistan and President Trump's first term can be characterized as satisfactory. Trump's approach has been conciliatory and collaborative. It is likely to remain so if Trump were to win re-election.

Whereas, Joe Biden with his un-impeccable service career, having served in the US Senate for 36 years and as Vice-President for President Barack Obama for eight years, could be a tough man to handle. He knows Pakistan inside-out, as he was instrumental in shaping the landmark Kerry-Lugar Bill in 2009, which provided \$7.5 billion of non-military aid to Pakistan from 2010 to 2014. But the point is that Biden is a great supporter of India, and foresees a role for it in Afghanistan, too.

Under the second Trump administration, the policy towards Pakistan will be influenced by a couple of tangible factors, such as US relations with China, India and Afghanistan, and correspondingly Pakistan's relations with China. If Islamabad succeeds in delivering in the Taliban context, it will go down in history as the 'Deal of the Decade', and will have dividends for a long-long time to come.



Pakistan in Uncharted Political Territory

High Hopes, Grave Fears

By Khalid Wasim

With an opposition coalition campaign for radical political change in high gear and the government admittedly furious and visibly jittery over it, Pakistan may be heading into a period of relative political instability.

The first three public meetings of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) that drew huge crowds have already elicited a series of forced errors from Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) led government.

Two most recent cases in point: Using an existing ban to prevent MNA Mohsin Dawar from attending the Quetta meeting, and announcement by Information Minister Shibli Faraz that the government might reconsider its decision of allowing the opposition to hold remaining public meetings after raising of what he calls separatist slogans at the Quetta meeting.

But the first and the most tell-tale of these forced errors came from Prime Minister Imran Khan himself the day after the opposition's first power show at its Gujranwala stronghold, when he dedicated his speech at the Tiger Force Convention in Islamabad to discrediting Nawaz Sharif and PDM.

This was followed by the high drama surrounding the arrest of Capt. Safdar, the husband of Nawaz Sharif's daughter PML-N Vice-President Maryam Nawaz Sharif from a hotel room the morning after the Karachi rally. It was seen as an attempt by the government to create a rift within the PDM ranks as some ministers were quick to lay the blame for the arrest at the PPP-led Sindh government's door.

However, the PPP handled the situation deftly, prompting the Chief of the Army Staff Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa to talk to Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on phone and ordered an inquiry into the incident. The PPP immediately welcomed the inquiry, although the response from the PML-N and the JUI-F was less accommodating.

While the act of Capt. Safdar of raising slogans at the Quaid's mausoleum cannot be appreciated, the way the federal government handled the situation was wholly uncalled for. Among other things, it provided an unnecessary spotlight to a person who is hardly a political stalwart even within his own party.

Despite the opposition apparently has so far succeeded in demonstrating unity within its ranks, there are reports of internal strife and lack of trust within the PDM leadership on major issues. The leaders of the three major opposition parties – the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI-F) – are allegedly suspicious of each other's intentions, each suspecting others to be ready to ditch the alliance after getting the right cue from the concerned authorities. The smaller nationalist parties in the PDM are likewise said to be unprepared to put their complete trust in the three major partners.

The PPP leadership is said to be wary of the aggressive tone adopted by the PML-N and the JUI-F leaders in public meetings against state institutions. This is said to be the reason why the PPP leadership allegedly disallowed Nawaz Sharif from addressing the Karachi public meeting.





That the PPP Chairman – who was in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) spear-heading the party’s electoral campaign – could not be at the Quetta meeting in person has also allegedly given rise to whispering within the PDM ranks. Some leaders of the smaller opposition parties were reportedly overheard saying in their private conversations that the PPP could ditch PDM if allowed to form the government in GB.

“The reason why Bilawal is missing from Quetta rally today is that he has a smart daddy,” tweeted an estranged PML-N leader Enver Baig, who has previously served as a senator on the PPP ticket, hours before the Quetta public meeting on October 25.

On the other hand, the actions and statements coming from the government in response to the PDM agitation can be considered an acknowledgement by it that the opposition’s power shows were impressive and successful. Exhibit A in this connection would be Prime Minister Imran Khan’s Convention Centre speech in the wake of the first PDM meeting in Gujranwala.

Hitting out at the PDM leaders, a livid Imran Khan vowed to get tougher on the opposition and to make an all-out effort to bring the PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif back to the country to send him behind bars.

“After Naya Pakistan, now you will see a new Imran Khan”, said the prime minister, declaring he would put Mr Sharif in a common prison bereft of VIP amenities after bringing him back from London. Sharif has been staying in London since November last year after getting bail from the Lahore High Court on medical grounds.

“Come back and see where I put you [Nawaz Sharif],” thundered the prime minister passing his hand over his face in a gesture of challenge, inviting criticism not only from the opposition parties but also from some senior political experts and saner elements of the society.

The prime minister also announced that no more production orders would be issued by heads of legislative chambers for incarcerated opposition leaders, including opposition leader in the National Assembly and PML-N President Shahbaz Sharif, to allow them to attend legislative sessions.

While making this announcement, Imran Khan completely forgot that he was actually undermining the parliament as under the constitution, it was the discretionary powers of the National Assembly speaker and the Senate chairman to issue production orders for any detained lawmakers.

The Prime Minister was angry not because of the opposition’s criticism directed at him or his government’s policies, but because of the references made to judiciary, the army, and the ISI in fiery speeches made by the opposition leaders, particularly by Nawaz Sharif.

The Premier accused the opposition of trying to create “a rift between the army and his government and a chaos within the army ranks”. He wondered as to why the Indian media was praising Nawaz Sharif’s speech and said Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was also using similar language against Pakistan and its army.

The Prime Minister recalled how Nawaz Sharif became a minister “while making iron bars” at the house of retired Gen Ghulam

Jilani and how he later became Punjab’s chief minister by polishing the boots of [the then army chief] Gen Ziaul Haq.

In his hard-hitting speech at the PDM’s opening meeting, Nawaz Sharif had alleged the security establishment had been behind his ouster before bringing Imran Khan into power through rigged elections in 2018. He went on to nominate Army Chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa and ISI chief Lt-Gen Faiz Hameed for wrongdoing.

Restrained by PEMRA directives, the mainstream media had completely blacked out Nawaz Sharif’s speech via video link from London. The next day’s newspapers published censored reports. However, it was Imran Khan himself who disclosed most of the contents of the speech in his raving response, leading large numbers of Pakistanis to watch Mr Sharif’s speech online. There have even been claims the speech received more hits that day than when it was telecast live.

The prime minister resorted to personal attacks against Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari and Maryam Nawaz Sharif, saying they were children brought up on their fathers’ ill-gotten money. He cited three books by foreign authors shedding light on the corruption of Sharif and Zardari families, emphasizing their veracity saying no one could write in the UK anything they could not prove [in a court of law].

Khan’s former wife Reham Khan ceased this opportunity to remind him her book “Reham Khan” was also published in the UK.

The Prime Minister also stirred controversy when he alleged that PML-N leader Khawaja Asif had made a telephone call to the army chief on the night of the election and sought his help winning his Sialkot seat. The opposition was overjoyed as the claim supported their allegations of poll rigging by the army chief.

Renowned human rights activist, IA Rehman in his recent article in Dawn has rightly said: “At present, the ruling party and the opposition are exhausting themselves in an exchange of abusive epithets. Each side is attacking the other for what it is presumed to be, instead of listening to what the other has to say.”

“This culture of confrontation must be replaced with issue-based posturing. Instead of concentrating on what the others are, efforts need to be made to understand and appreciate what they stand for.”

“Unfortunately, the functioning of all state institutions has been affected by the failure of political parties to grow out of the agitational phase of politics, in which a dispassionate assessment of issues is rarely possible. In a stable polity, political debate derives its richness from a knowledge-based assessment of issues and is not confined to an exchange of slander.”

The only thing certain amid this confusion is that Nawaz Sharif has taken Pakistan into uncharted political territory by openly opposing military leaders’ dominance of the polity – and especially by publicly naming the names of the serving generals he accuses of meddling in politics in violation of their oath and the constitution. While his followers have high hopes of achieving a more viable republic through this strategy, others fear it may throw the country into chaos.



The Last Battle

By Hammad Ghaznavi

Battle Royale is on. With Pakistan Muslim League supremo Nawaz Sharif declaring the 'final war' against the alleged Selectors of the Selected, Prime Minister Imran Khan, political mercury is rising with every passing day. As heated political arena suites Nawaz Sharif, he seems bent on fanning the flames till it all turns into one big political inferno. The system is also giving him opportunities, the latest coming through Islamabad High Court, directing Nawaz to 'surrender' and then the registration of sedition case against him in Lahore by a dubious applicant.

Since his All Parties Conference speech on September 20, Nawaz has delivered three more within a couple of weeks, reiterating his stance against the stolen elections and ensuing bad governance. Not even once in all these speeches, did he forget to mention those 'who violate their oath and meddle in politics'. This is unprecedented. No national political leader of 'West Pakistan' has ever named 'them' as unequivocally and consistently as Nawaz. Little wonder then that Nawaz is dubbed a traitor by the rival camp, the first one from the province of Punjab, as hitherto the title was reserved for the leaders of all provinces but Punjab.

In 1954 elections in Bengal, the Jugtoo Front decimated the League. The leaders of the Front including Fazlul Haq, Bhashani and Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardi were declared traitors fostering anti-Pakistan sentiments to garner votes, it was alleged. Insanity conquered new heights in the 1965 presidential elections when Madar e Millat Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah was termed a traitor by General Ayub Khan. Sheikh Mujeebur Rehman was a traitor too, and all those who followed him were mini-traitors, meaning, all Bengalis, the majority of Pakistan. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto were also labelled as traitors and security risks. All the above-mentioned politicians were non-Punjabis, Nawaz is not. He

is the first Punjabi to earn the status of a traitor. This is uncharted territory. Will it throw up surprises? Wait and see!

The Nawaz vote-bank seems to have rejected similar allegations against Nawaz after the 'Dawn Leaks' or his alleged meetings with Indian business tycoon Sajjan Jindal. The leaked content of infamous volume 10 of the Panama JIT, alleging Nawaz' business interests in India also failed to erode his support base.

What does Nawaz has in his arsenal against his powerful political and apolitical adversaries? It is the support of the people, he seems to believe, while the entire system apparently is loaded against him. Under this dispensation, unlike the lawyers' movement, he cannot expect to receive a decisive telephone call in the middle of a Long March. He will have to fight this battle until the very end.

Without fear of contradiction, it can be said that Nawaz Sharif has remained one of the two most popular politicians of Pakistan since three decades, first sharing the honour with Benazir Bhutto and then with Imran Khan. With his vote-bank intact, he still enjoys the same status. During these three decades, however, another fact has also remained constant – his supporters, come out in throngs to vote for him but do not opt to participate in protests or agitational politics. Nawaz wants to change that. How? Inflation, the killer of the common man, is perhaps his biggest asset at the moment. The planning is, insiders reveal, to underline the skyrocketing prices of almost everything, from medicine to essential food items; and gradually build the movement's momentum around it. Obviously, vote ko izzat do and the restoration of the sanctity of constitution will remain the main planks of Sharif's political rhetoric.





Unruffled Minister Flays Opposition for Attacking ‘Institutions’

By Palwasha Khattak

Until very recently, political opposition to Imran Khan's PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) led government has been all but toothless. That may be changing – as action by opposition's nascent PDM (Pakistan Democratic Alliance) gathers momentum.

Although the government continues to use the tough (and rough) rhetoric that has been its hallmark, there are unmistakable signs the government has been rattled after the eleven-party opposition coalition drew huge crowds at both its Gujranwala and Karachi rallies.

The Truth International correspondent sat down with Fawad Chaudhry, the incumbent Federal Minister of Science and Technology, for his take on the emerging political situation and the state and position of the PTI government against this backdrop.

A slick political operator who is the scion of a storied political family from Jhelum, Chaudhry sounded fairly unruffled by the opposition's progress – although he admitted the government's approval rating has plummeted due to the woes people are facing because of economic slowdown.

Q) What is your analysis of the developing political situation?

In Third-World countries, politics is volatile and people hardly agree on anything. However, the problem is that in a country like Pakistan if certain groups keep protesting and come out on the streets every now and then, it will be hard to find stability and the economy will suffer eventually. Pakistan's already weak economy has suffered a huge set back further due to COVID-19. This movement will no doubt add to the economic woes that Pakistan has been struggling with for decades.

Q) Opposition to political rallies and protests seems a bit strange coming from PTI, a party that rose to power on



the back of public rallies. Does that not appear as a contradiction to you?

Every movement has a moral currency. For example in the cases of Iceland and Brazil, the movements were justified due to the political leaders' involvement in major international scams. Those movements resulted in political change. On the other hand, if the nation does not start a movement against the political scams, that actually shows the moral bankruptcy of the nation. However, here in Pakistan the PDM's nefarious objectives – to compromise NAB cases, get NROs, and stage a political comeback – make this movement immoral.

Q) Do you think PEMRA should have banned Nawaz Sharif's speech from being aired? What is your perspective on censorship?

No, I do not agree at all. Advancement in Information Technology has made

censorship nearly impossible and something that cannot be censored seems useless to be banned. So the opposition political parties need to hold a strong narrative to convince the public and authorities. Also, the ban comes from PEMRA, not from the government, and PEMRA banned the address due to court decisions. PML-N should appeal the courts and get the relevant court order reversed. As far as I know, government policies do not support the ban.

Q) There has been no official statement from the Federal Government regarding the arrest of Captain Safdar. Don't you think there should have been a response?

Army Chief has already started an inquiry at all levels and a report is due soon. However, all this dramatic performance in Sindh where senior and junior police officials asked for leave, is merely the result of directions coming from Bilawal House.



If Sindh police were so principled, they would have acted the same and stood up for themselves in the Omni Group case, occupation cases, and extrajudicial killings in Sindh. The only apparent reason is that they are at war with institutions and they have tried to capitalize on this event to undermine institutions.

Q) Do you think appealing to the army for an inquiry into the incident was the right thing to do? Does conducting such an enquiry fall within the army's constitutional remit?

If we talk about the constitution, then we should appeal to the Prime Minister instead of the Army. Basically, this entire movement is completely unrelated to the constitution, democracy, and civil supremacy and the main agenda of this movement is personal empowerment and personal gains. The opposition wants to get relaxation from the government for the NAB cases against them. More than that, this movement has no other aim. Moreover, Bilawal appealing to the Army Chief has contradicted his entire narrative.

Q) An aura of mystery still surrounds Captain Safdar's arrest. Is it a ploy of

the government to create a rift between opposition parties?

If that was the case, it would be a political strategy not be lightly revealed.

Q) What is your personal view on how the government should take this entire matter further till January 2021?

They are protesting and addressing the nation which they can because that is their political right. The only problem is they should not target the institutions because institutions cannot respond like politicians and this inability creates problems. Apart from that, if they wish to air their differences or criticism, they have every right to do so and we do not have any problem with that.

Q) Would you say the performance of the PTI government has taken a toll on its popularity?

Due to COVID-19, the entire world's economy is shrinking and this inflation problem is not limited to Pakistan since it has increased in India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka along with other economies. Due to

the interdependency of economies, international prices have reached their peak in history. When the Coronavirus situation settles down with the availability of vaccine, only then can we expect improvement. But certainly, the government's popularity has been affected temporarily.

Q) What do you have to say about the performance of your Ministry?

Our three priorities right now are agriculture, electronics, and chemicals. We are running supplementary programs under these three categories. We are developing modern livestock farms in agriculture which will contribute to the technology input. We are promoting the manufacturing of drones and robotics in electronics along with the making of ventilators. We have also reserved 200 acres of land in Faisalabad and are planning to reserve some land in Sialkot for manufacturing ventilators to cater to the electromagnetic market. Globally, the electromagnetic market is around a few trillion dollars and Pakistan can make its mark in that market along with some programs of chemical replacement.





Bilawal vs Zardari: How leadership style has impacted PPP

The young chairman has revived the party through his energetic leadership and clear line of action, but he still gets a mixed score for mostly failing to deliver the goods



By Qurban Baloch

Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari has succeeded in reviving the Pakistan Peoples Party through his energetic leadership and clear line of action, but he is still struggling to provide relief to the common people, bring standard of governance of the party's government at par with advanced countries, fully control corruption and take action against violators of party discipline and corrupt elements. People who have been voting for the party since decades are waiting for him to control these problems. However, sometimes he faces resistance from some elements in this regard, show background interviews by The Truth International.

Bilawal was nominated chairman of PPP on the third day of the death of Benazir Bhutto on December 27, 2007, but did not take an active part in party affairs till 2015. After taking over command of the PPP, he spent some time to fathom political issues of the party and country.

During that period former president Asif Ali Zardari took all decisions regarding the party and Sindh government. Senior party sources asserted that the PPP government headed by Zardari followed a policy of reconciliation or compromise with the military establishment and the PML-N which caused damage to the party. At one stage the leadership started suggesting that the time had come to hand over decision making powers regarding the party and government to Bilawal. This was accepted by Asif Zardari.

Following this change, central party sources said, some differences of opinion cropped up but both personalities handled the issue successfully. If Asif Zardari had an opinion that differed from the majority in the party, Bilawal tried his best to convince his father but if the latter stuck to his guns then the son capitulated. However, Zardari was impressed by his son's rationale on many issues.

Farhatullah Babar, who remained spokesperson of the former president and is now secretary general of PPP Parliamentarians, said the main difference between the leadership style of the two is that Bilawal's tilt is towards basic party principles and he is very clear about democracy and human rights.

After becoming the chairman, he gave priority to implementing the party manifesto. "I am not claiming that the party has fully implemented its manifesto but I can say that many points have been implemented. In 2016, Mr Bilawal personally participated in preparation of the manifesto, something that Zardari did not do," according to Mr Babar.

Regarding the alleged corruption by PPP leadership, a central leader told that after assuming charge Bilawal clearly directed Chief Minister Sindh Murad Ali Shah that if any minister or advisor is involved in corruption or corrupt practices, he or she must be removed.

Party sources say Bilawal is very conscious about his personal image and doesn't want it to be tarnished due to corruption of



party members, but Zardari never cared about such allegations.

When Zardari was in command of the party, he only wanted to know the main points of policies and gave directions on that basis. In contrast, Bilawal personally oversees the implementation process, progress of provincial government and functioning of the parliamentary committees including progress under charter of democracy, sources claim.

A majority of the party leaders feel that one area in which Bilawal lacks is taking strict action against party representatives who violate party discipline. During the election of Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani some senators violated party discipline, but no action has been taken against them, although Bilawal may not grant them party ticket in future.

Party members believe that there is no doubt that Mr Bilawal is a true democratic leader. He was the first leader of a party to back Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) regarding their “genuine demands” when no one dared to speak about the organization, they say.

According to sources close to Bilawal, during the lawyers’ APC and the opposition parties’ conference in September the main issue was to distance army from politics. This is a clear result of steps taken by Bilawal to expand the principle of democracy and bring the opposition parties on one platform, they added.

The PPP leaders believe that Bilawal is delivering the goods. To substantiate their claim, they say that after assuming party command, on his directives the Sindh government gave priority to health and power sector, construction of hospitals especially cardiac facilities, and power generation from wind and coal plants.

Regarding the corruption perspective, a close party aide claimed that after Zardari stepped down from PPP leadership the sentiment in Punjab has started to improve from negative to positive. Earlier most provincial leaders were not ready to defend the main leadership, especially Zardari and his sister Faryal Talpur, but now situation is different.

A political analyst from Lahore said there is not much improvement in governance of the party under the command of Bilawal due to alleged corruption and many other factors but it is better than the era of Zardari.

A journalist from Johi, a remote area of Sindh, observed that after Bilawal took command, the party has a young face but its lower body is still paralyzed because all lower machinery from civil administration to party representatives are the same with a corrupt mindset. That’s why the party under the command of a foreign educated young and energetic chairman did not deliver any positive results, he added.

Most of the common people of Sindh, especially in the rural areas, while expressing their views said they did not feel any major change in the governance and delivery system under the chairmanship of Bilawal as the same people are running the show.

When the above perceptions were shared with a person close to the former president, he said many old or infamous people are missing from the picture; a few old guards are still there only due to the chairman’s decision. It was revealed that during the change

of command the party had decided that the new chairman will bring his own team, but after a lot of debate Bilawal said he will decide who has to be removed.

Commenting on this situation, Farhatullah Babar said a good decision for a political leader is to choose their own working team as this will clearly convey the message of change.

About the common perception that people from Asif Zardari to Faryal Talpur are taking benefits from different businesses such as Bahria Town, a high-level party leader claimed that from day one Bilawal isolated himself from any type of business, including family business.

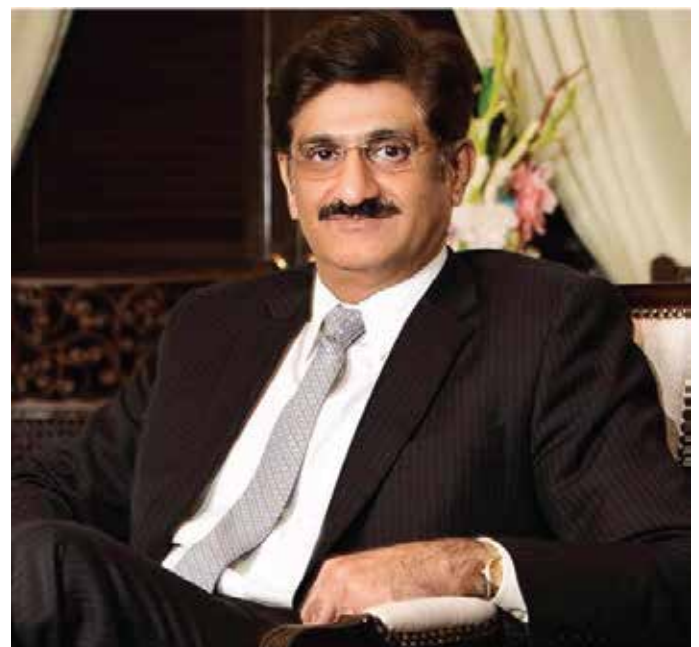
What is the perception of Bilawal about the role of establishment (military) and reconciliation with establishment? A party leader revealed that the chairman is strictly against the role of establishment in politics; he wants the army to be limited to its constitutional role.

Senator Aajiz Dhamra, information secretary PPP Sindh, claimed that Bilawal’s priority is party governance and he regularly questions ministers and party officials; he is not compromising on powers of the party or provinces.

Regarding the corruption issue, Dhamra said if anyone alleges the PPP government is involved in corruption then why other provincial governments are lagging behind Sindh in the development of educational and health institutions and construction of infrastructure.

When asked why Faryal Talpur is not active in the party, Dhamra claimed now that Bilawal himself is looking after most political issues of the party, consequently Faryal has curtailed her activities.

Bilawal has directed the provincial government that more powers should be given to the local bodies. A new local government draft law has been prepared in Sindh in which the matters of water, sanitation and sewerage have been devolved to local governments. Hopefully this will prove a major step in improving governance delivery in big cities, sources said.





Third Election in GB: Political Parties want Representation in Pakistan Parliament

By Umer Farooq

November 15, 2020, elections in Gilgit-Baltistan will be crucial for Pakistani state and security establishment from two perspectives. Firstly, it will pave the way for granting the region of GB—which so far has an extremely vague territorial status within the state of Pakistan—the status of provisional province within territorial limits of state of Pakistan, this will be a development which will contradict Pakistan's traditional and historic position on Kashmir conflict that sees Kashmir as a disputed territory status of which has to be determined under conditions set in UN Resolution.

Pakistan's traditional political groups, diplomatic circles and some retired military officials are opposed to this move of granting GB the status of a province within Pakistani state. Pakistan's two leading political parties including PMLN and PPP have expressed reservations about this move. Secondly, the elections will bring Gilgit-Baltistan under international, regional and local spotlight. It will be international spotlight because strategic communities in Washington and other world capitals accuse China of forcing Pakistan's security establishment to grant permanent territorial status to the region of GB in the constitutionally defined territorial limits of Pakistani state, thus allowing Chinese investors to invest freely in GB as part of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). So far the vague constitutional and legal status of GB region has prevented Chinese businessmen from investing in this area despite the central importance of GB region in the scheme of things under CPEC.

Originally, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan were a single territorial unit. In 1970, the latter was separated from the former and renamed as the Northern Areas. Political and community leaders in Gilgit-Baltistan have been demanding for decades that their region be integrated into Pakistan, but successive governments in Islamabad have resisted those demands. "The integration may give the signal that we have accepted the de facto division of Kashmir; it will weaken our claim on the entire former state of Jammu and Kashmir — this is how the Pakistan government had justified its decision to keep these regions outside the constitutionally-mandated parts of Pakistan" says a constitutional expert.

The Constitution, however, provides that Pakistan's geographical limits are not final yet. These, therefore, include areas which in the future may join the country "whether by accession or otherwise".

If and when, for instance, the dispute between Pakistan and India over Kashmir is settled, Pakistan may include the whole – or parts – of the former state of Jammu and Kashmir in its territorial limits — depending on how the dispute is settled, of course. The Constitution, therefore, provides that parliament "may by law admit into the Federation new States or areas on such terms and conditions as it thinks fit."



In 2009, the Government of Pakistan renamed the Northern Areas as Gilgit-Baltistan and promulgated an ordinance to provide for self-rule. The ordinance resulted in a 33-member Gilgit-Baltistan legislative assembly elected through adult franchise. The assembly then elects a chief minister. The other institution established by the ordinance is the Gilgit-Baltistan Council, headed by the prime minister of Pakistan and dominated by members nominated by Islamabad. It has the final authority to pass or reject laws. The Government of Pakistan has the power to appoint the governor of Gilgit-Baltistan. In any case, the most important subjects remain out of the purview of the regional government and legislature.

Pakistani government announced its decision to hold the Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly elections on November 15. Currently, Gilgit-Baltistan is not represented in either house of the parliament in Pakistan. Thus, the region is not entitled to be part of different state structures and government machinery and thus excluded from various government processes. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) completed its five-year tenure in Gilgit-Baltistan earlier this year but the election has been delayed due to the COVID-19 situation and other political issues. Apart from the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), PML-N has a strong political base in the region.

Six month back Pakistan's powerful establishment changed its mind as far as its position on the constitutional status of Gilgit-Baltistan region is concerned. And thus an idea to give GB the status of provisional province within the state of Pakistan was born. The idea has been controversial right from the very start as many influential people within Pakistan, while commenting on this move, said that it would be a poor and clumsy response to Indian move to repeal the special status of the state of Kashmir within Indian Union. Pakistan opposed and protested when India repealed the special status of Kashmir and integrated it into Indian Union. Now Pakistan was about to change the status of




Gilgit-Baltistan region and now India was protesting against the move. India's foreign office recently said that the upcoming election in Gilgit-Baltistan has "no legal basis whatsoever."

Now Pakistani security establishment seems to be part of the plan to bring change in the constitutional status of GB—two factors are important in this regards, firstly the west and the Indians are accusing that Pakistani government is changing the status of GB under pressure from Chinese business interests as they feel their investment to be unprotected in an area, which has vague constitutional and legal status. The situation for Pakistani security establishment gets complicated by the fact that traditional political groups and conventional segments of the society are opposing the move tooth and nail on account of the damage this move might cause to the Kashmir cause. Adding further complications to the situation are accusations coming from domestic political groups especially PMLN that November 15 elections in GB might be rigged, to deprive victory to traditional political forces in the area.

Remember that all this is taking place in the backdrop of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif direct accusations against the military establishment having rigged the 2018 parliamentary elections in Pakistan in a big way. PMLN has expressed the concern that GB elections might also be rigged in a similar fashion. There are already rumors that a "King party" loyal to

Pakistan's ruling party, PTI might be in the offing in the corridors of power in Islamabad. Local political pundits are predicting that PMLN and PPP might form a coalition government in GB after the November 15, 2020 elections. But in case as a result of some behind the close door decisions of powers that be "King's Party" comes into being in Gilgit-Baltistan and a government loyal to Prime Minister Imran Khan is formed there, then perhaps whole plan of granting GB a constitutional status of a province might be in jeopardy.






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Afghan Peace: A challenge for its nuclear neighbours

By Azmat Mumtaz Saqib

Afghanistan, an unstable country, surrounded by maximum number of nukes (Russia, China, Pakistan and India) found anywhere in the world, eyeball to eyeball with USA and Iran, an unpredictable escalation in oil prices, second wave of COVID-19 looming, makes all the neighbors of Afghanistan thirsty for peace, but, of their own liking.

China, in December 2019 was gliding ahead towards becoming the world's largest economy with its BRI initiative. Economically, it gets to benefit most from Afghan peace process. China's interest in Central Asia is far reaching and will look to use Afghanistan as a corridor for the 'March West'.

Presently, China is the largest trade partner of Afghanistan, whose natural resources are estimated to be worth US \$1 trillion. China has already invested in the world's second largest copper mines and several oil drilling ventures. But progress is sluggish due to instability in Afghanistan and the presence of the American military although, Beijing is talking with both Kabul and Taliban for further investment under BRI.

China supported the Taliban during US-Taliban peace talks eyeing them as a major player in the future of Afghan governance. However, China wants assurance from Taliban of denying Uygur Muslims and other terrorist groups establishing training bases in Afghanistan. In return, China offered to build highway networks for Taliban controlled areas.

An inevitable consequence of US withdrawal will be a power vacuum in Afghanistan. Russia, content on staying on the sidelines, is leaving the field open for China to fill the vacuum. But China can only reap the fruits if the whole peace process culminates into a stable Afghanistan. China's influence on Pakistan and Taliban as future partners in military and economic assistance will keep her a key player in intra-Afghan peace process.

Russia, views present day Afghanistan largely through the prism of security threats to itself and its Central Asian States. Some analysts in Russia say Taliban takeover in Afghanistan will have a domino effect from Tajikistan to the North Caucasus, but most believe Taliban will remain in their own borders.

Moscow's support for the Taliban has been more tactical in nature than strategic. More of a hedging strategy to push USA to talk peace with Taliban, facilitating US forces withdrawal from Russian backyard. Besides, Taliban for Russians are lesser of the two evil, who can neutralize the threat of Islamic State-Khorasan entering into Central Asian States. Russians calculate that having close ties with Taliban makes sense given the likelihood that they're going to play an increasingly important role in Afghanistan's future.

Post 2015, Russia increased its role geopolitically, hosted two unofficial intra-Afghan talks and one 'troika plus' meeting (USA, Russia, China, and Pakistan) in 2019. Although Russia's declared economic and military interests



in Afghanistan are modest, it is eager to remain at the center stage of intra-Afghan peace talks. Both Moscow and Washington ultimately have a converging strategic interest in a relatively stable Afghanistan that will not be a heaven for transnational terrorists. Russians do not want the U.S. to stay in Afghanistan, nor are they okay with a hasty withdrawal, followed by Afghan State's collapse into anarchy as in the 80's and 90's.

Future Afghan government, in Russia's view, should have political decentralization instead of Pashtun dominated strong center. They expect government to ensure blocking drug-trafficking. Presently, Russian consumption is 70 tons resulting in 30-40,000 deaths per year.

Russians are worried about Taliban's unclear nature; are they emerging Pashtun nationalists, irreconcilable Islamic revolutionaries or both? How strong are the links between Afghan and Pakistani Taliban? Will they respect Durand line or trample it for cross-border ventures. For them, clear answers to these questions are a prerequisite for any durable political solution. Taliban dominated Afghanistan with safe haven for international terrorists is a nightmare common to both Russia and USA.

Iran's close and diversified relations with many powerful political and military groups in Afghanistan gives it exceptional influence on the political dynamics of the country as well as Intra-Afghan talks. Especially notable are Iran's relations with the Taliban, their converging interests of resistance to the Western military presence, combating Daesh and other mutual foes. Previously, Americans remaining entangled in Afghanistan militarily suited Iran, since it discouraged USA to open another warfront with Iran. Tehran under US sanctions, has high stakes in befriending future Taliban dominated government in Kabul, which it expects will defy US sanctions in building trade relations. Also, water dams in Helmand region supply water to Iran's Khorasan and Sistan-Baluchistan province, and only a friendly government in future will alleviate Iran's water issues.

Despite US sanctions, Iran's official exports to Kabul is close to US \$2 billion annually, a third of total imports of Afghanistan, indicative of good relations with present Afghan government. In principle, Iran rejected the peace agreement of February 29, 'because they consider USA as an illegal invader. Iran believes only Afghans are qualified to decide their future. Tehran needs assurance from Taliban regarding non-interference in Sunni dominated Iranian Baluchistan, in case they come to power.

India wishes from the intra-Afghan peace talks were clearly stated by Jaishankar, Indian foreign minister, on the eve of Intra-Afghan peace talks at Doha. Following are the salient features,

- Afghan soil should never be used for any anti-India activities.
- India's massive infrastructure investments in Afghanistan must be provided safety and security by future governments.
- Any peace process must be Afghan led, Afghan owned and Afghan controlled.
- It has to respect Afghanistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity. It must promote values of human rights and democracy to foster development.
- Interests of minorities and women vulnerabilities must be ensured.

- The issue of violence both across Afghanistan and to its neighbors must be stopped.
- India urges all warring parties for immediate and comprehensive ceasefire in Afghanistan.

India considers Taliban as root cause of Afghan problem. It is the only country in the region which doesn't have any communication with Taliban. They are fully behind Afghan government, providing all sorts of assistance to Afghan security apparatus. India has invested US \$3 billion in development assistance and its trade hit around US \$1.5 billion.

Indians are worried about Afghanistan's fragile stability under the present government, US withdrawal and fear of Taliban-ISI nexus taking over future Afghan dynamics are key concerns. According to them, no clear mechanism exists in US-Taliban agreement regarding elimination of terrorism from Afghan soil. They are very conscious of Islamic State-Khorasan and Al-Qaeda Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) radicalizing Indian Muslims living in the Middle East and Afghanistan. Indians also fear the existence of base camps of Jaishe Muhammad, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Haqqani network, AQIS, all threats to India.

Indian think tanks are advising their establishment to open channels with friendly sections of Taliban; to create tri-nation joint cooperation with Russia and China against common threats emanating from Afghanistan.

Taliban trusted Qatar over other Gulf States to host peace talks. All the Gulf States want successful peace process leading to a stable Afghanistan. In turn, Taliban dominated future government would be keen to have commercial and financial relations with Gulf States.

To end, history is witness that no armed freedom struggle has been peacefully resolved unless the invader gets its terms fulfilled by the freedom fighters. Also, will the Taliban be able to evolve an advanced version of post revolution Iranian constitution for Afghanistan, only time will reveal.



PTI Govt in hot waters as inflation takes its toll on common man

By Oroba Tasnim Siddiqui

PTI government, realizing public pulse or political pressure build by Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) on inflation, has taken series of steps and announced to bring it down soon. Steps include import of commodities, which are short in market, reduce taxes and strict action against hoarders.

As the opposition gears up for rallies and continues to stage protests countrywide, one of the overwhelming notions behind this campaign is stated to be inflation. This is not the first time it has risen uncontrollably. Over several periods of governance, prices have skyrocketed rendering the common man hopeless and helpless in the face of rising prices.

In this context, politicians and experts have oft credited inflation as the driver behind rallying huge amounts of people for a particular cause. Because when hunger pangs hit a family, they have nothing left to do but to yelp in pain, seeking mercy. Before coming into power, Prime Minister Imran Khan would often attribute inflation to the corrupt practices of the governments run by corrupt politicians and bureaucracy. However, as prices continue to rise at an unsteady pace, a pertinent question regarding the transparency of the current government emerges.

Before making a shabby claim, attached below is a table that details the rate of inflation, core inflation and sensitive price index in the past five years.

A cursory look at the table above presents a clear indication to the sudden rise in inflation during the year 2020. Whilst government officials attribute it to the tainted

Year	Rate of Inflation	Core Inflation	SPI
2020	14.6% (Jan)	8.25% (Jul-Apr)	14.3% (Jul-Apr)
2019	10.58%	5.5%	4.2% (Jul-Apr)
2018	5.08%	7%	0.9% (Jul-Apr)
2017	4.09%	5.07%	1.5% (Jul-Mar)
2016	3.77%	4.1%	1.4% (Jul-Apr)
2015	2.53%	6.9%	1.9% (Jul-Apr)

economic activity following COVID-19, it is pertinent to note that the rate of inflation recorded prior to the first coronavirus case is 14.6 percent which is significantly higher than 10.58 percent from the previous year. A general trend over the past five years displays a pattern of increasing prices.

Dissecting it further, core inflation which excludes the food prices too stands at a hefty 8.25 percent whilst the sensitive price index which comprises of essential commodities is 14.3 percent as compared to 4.2 percent in the same period last year. Since taking over, the PTI government has found it hard to keep a control on all kinds of prices, be it food items or non-food commodities.

As per the Pakistan Economic Survey 2019-20, the first seven months of the fiscal year faced high inflation associated to food prices. As per government claims, these were accredited to temporary supply disruptions in perishables, weather changes and higher transportation costs. However, it is important to note that the complacency of the government, its vested interests and the failure of price control committees has added to this dilemma.



Continued at page 24

Elan,
an exclusive
clothing brand,
presents first ever
fashion show
after the Covid-19
pandemic
lockdown





Musical Evening “Meri Pehchan Pakistan” at PNCA

To celebrate the 74th Independence Day of Pakistan, a musical concert entitled “Meri Pehchan Pakistan” was organized by Pakistan National Council of the Arts. This was the first live musical concert after the relaxation of restrictions imposed for COVID-19. The concert was dedicated to the national songs and folk dances of Pakistan which is a great source of inspiration and patriotism among the youth.



Speaking to residents and shopkeepers in and around twin cities, the findings suggested that all segments of the populace were disappointed by the performance of the PTI government. Each one of the interviewees identified inflation as the core issue of Pakistan and whilst some were ready to wait out the government, most believed they would be unable to tolerate this trend of rising prices.

Most of the respondents believed the cause of this sudden rise was due to the government's incapacity because they continued to provide benefits to the elite whilst disregarding the poor. Demanding an end to corrupt practices, the respondents stated that it was imperative upon the government to provide monetary relief to the public.

A widowed woman shared her ordeal mentioning that she had to think twice before purchasing a carton of milk for her children. This is not just one example but reflects upon the overall state of affairs within Pakistan. Speaking of the government, a respondent said that he had lowered all his expectations from the government because they had gathered the same 'garbage' from the previous governments.

Nevertheless, it must also be brought into notice that a minority held the view that previous governments had amassed such heavy amounts of debt that the PTI government had little choice left but to raise commodity prices. They say because of severe financial crunch PTI government had signed an agreement with IMF to avoid default on balance of payment. By adopting IMF programme government was forced to increase the price of gas and electricity and devalued the rupee against dollar substantially.



They say these factors contributed significantly in price hike of all essential commodities. Conclusively, an overview of the interviews taken suggests that the majority of the people were unhappy with the handling of affairs and saw little hope of any improvement.

Recently, Prime Minister Imran Khan reiterated his commitment to providing fairly priced goods for the poor and promised that his Tiger Force would intervene to keep a strict check on prices. In this scenario, it is important to note that the functions of district administration, price control committees and the relevant institutions have been conveniently set aside as voluntary force (Tiger Force) are being assigned to act in contravention of the constitution.

Shopkeepers in Islamabad believe this will only lead to further chaos and destruction and requested the government to take this decision back for the greater good of the trading community. They mentioned that retail prices can only be lowered if the supply end of the problem is dealt with.

While the government may sprout economic lingo to try to defeat any sort of opposition that comes their way, it is significant to mention that the public will not be satisfied by these technical terms. For a normal citizen, it is becoming increasingly difficult to make the necessary utility payments and still be able to afford a decent meal and education.

Comparisons may be struck and statistics splashed on wide television screens but at the end of the day, once the public starts going to bed on an empty stomach, civil unrest and chaos will become the destiny of the incumbent – for which warnings must be paid heed to before it is too late.



FATF status quo triggers critical phase for Pakistan

Implementation is key as without effective enforcement of new laws, the government will have to show its political will and capacity to prosecute banned outfits and ensure their conviction through courts

By Mehtab Haider

Despite a deafening chorus predicting ‘good news’ by key members of the incumbent regime just ahead of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) plenary session at Paris, the anti-money laundering/terrorist financing watchdog unanimously decided to keep Pakistan on its grey list until February 2021.

Although Pakistan was found largely compliant on 21 items of the 27-point action plan for graduating from the list of jurisdiction under increased monitoring but the decision on grey list remained unchanged. However, Pakistani authorities are overjoyed at the claim that they foiled Indian attempts to place the country on the black list. Indian government and media lobbied at all levels to see Pakistan slip into black list but all their efforts ended in failure.

Setting aside all technical, legal, procedural and other demands, it is a purely political decision taken by FATF to keep Islamabad on its toes because Washington and its Western allies want to pursue their dictated policies for the whole South Asian region, especially in context of the ongoing efforts to strike a peace deal for Afghanistan among the US, Taliban and Afghan government. The US wants withdrawal of its troops and that cannot happen without full-fledged support of Pakistan so the sword of FATF will continue hanging over the heads of Pakistani policymakers till the desired objective is achieved.

Another important aspect that should be kept in mind is that FATF requirements are in the best interest of the country provided framed laws and regulations are not being used as tools for the purpose of political victimization. The documentation, tracking down transactions, book-keeping, and taking action against money laundering and terror financing are in the interest of the country and the government enacted piece of legislation. Now the critical phase lies ahead in the shape of implementation where we lack because without effective enforcement of newly placed laws the government will have to demonstrate its political will and capacity to prosecute banned outfits and ensure their conviction through courts. Otherwise the Mutual Evaluation Report run through Asia Pacific Group (APG), a regional body of FATF, could turn into another action plan for keeping Pakistan on the grey list for a longer period.

The FATF had placed Pakistan on the grey list in June 2018 after finding deficiencies in implementing its 40 recommendations. The FATF came up with 27 action plans and nominated Pakistan for International Co-operation Review Group (ICRG) evaluation to gauge its progress on a biannual basis. Pakistan was given a one-year deadline to comply with all 27 conditions but owing to political transition – the outgoing PML-N-led regime, then



caretaker setup and finally PTI-led regime – Pakistan could not make much progress till September 2019. Then FATF extended its review period up to February 2020 but the Covid-19 pandemic granted another extension till October 2020. However, Pakistan had started implementing the FATF action plan and was found in compliance on 14 points out of total 27 action plans.

After the recent FATF plenary virtual session from October 21 to 23, the watchdog declared Pakistan largely compliant on 21 items out of 27 action plans but kept the country on the grey list till February 2021.

The FATF President Dr Marcus Pleyer said in a press conference that Pakistan would have to do more to be excluded from the grey list. “Pakistan must comply with the remaining six items then the FATF will send its onsite team to verify progress on the ground. After completion of this process, the FATF will consider Pakistan to be excluded from the list of jurisdictions with increased risk of terror financing that is called grey list. There is no discrimination against Pakistan as the globally accepted rules are applied in its case,” he said.

When Pleyer was asked about Pakistan’s standing after implementing 21 points out of the 27-point action plan and whether pursuing the Mutual Evaluation Report from APG was discriminatory, he replied that even though Pakistan had made progress, it needs to do more. Pakistan cannot stop now as it needs to carry out reforms in particular to implement targeted financial sanctions and prosecuting sanctions against those financing terrorism.

“We urge Pakistan to implement the remaining six items of the 27 action plans, then our onsite team will visit to verify progress on

ground before excluding Pakistan from the grey list,” he added.

The FATF members, he said, had nominated Pakistan for the list of high-risk jurisdictions so the process of review through ICRG had kick-started. The FATF plenary removed Iceland and Mongolia from the grey list. North Korea and Iran would remain on the black list.

According to a statement issued by FATF after the meeting, since June 2018, when Pakistan made a high-level political commitment to work with the FATF and APG to strengthen its Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) regime and address its strategic counter-terrorism financing-related deficiencies, the country's continued political commitment has led to progress in a number of areas in its action plan. These include taking action to identify and sanction illegal money or value transfer services, implementing cross-border currency and bearer-negotiable instrument controls, improving international cooperation in terrorist financing cases, passing amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Act to increase the sanctioning authority, financial institutions implementing targeted financial sanctions and applying sanctions for AML/CFT violations, and controlling facilities and services owned or controlled by designated persons and entities.

Pakistan should continue to work on implementing its action plan to address its strategic deficiencies by: (1) demonstrating that law enforcement agencies are identifying and investigating the widest range of terror financing activity and that terror financing investigations and prosecutions target designated persons and entities, and those acting on behalf or direction of the designated persons or entities; (2) demonstrating that terror financing prosecutions result in effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions; (3) demonstrating effective implementation of targeted financial sanctions against all 1,267 and 1,373 designated terrorists and those acting for or on their behalf, preventing the raising and



moving of funds including in relation to non-profit organizations, identifying and freezing assets (movable and immovable), and prohibiting access to funds and financial services; and (4) demonstrating enforcement against targeted financial sanctions violations, including in relation to non-profit organizations, of administrative and criminal penalties and provincial and federal authorities cooperating on enforcement cases.

The FATF took note of the significant progress made on a number of action plan items. Pakistan has made progress across all action plan items and has now largely addressed 21 action items. As all action plan deadlines have expired, FATF strongly urged Pakistan to swiftly complete its full action plan by February 2021, the statement concluded.

Federal Minister for Industries Hammad Azhar in his tweet stated: “FATF acknowledges that any blacklisting is off the table now. Pak has achieved impressive progress on its FATF action plan. 21 out of 27 action items now stand cleared. Remaining 6 rated as partially complete and within a year, we progressed significantly.”



Circular Debt Bedevils Power Sector, Again

An Old Specter Returns to Haunt Pakistan's Economy



By Khalique Ahmad

Nearing PKR 2.3 trillion as of this writing, the circular debt of Pakistan's power sector has spiraled beyond manageable proportions yet again, posing a major risk to the country's financial and economic stability.

Circular debt is a huge and recurring drain on the nation's scarce fiscal resources. The periodic one-off fiscal adjustment necessitated by it every few years remains the single largest budget liability in the form of subsidy and a sizeable add-on to Pakistan's sovereign debt.

Circular debt pushes the cost of electricity up, which in turn puts an upward pressure on costs for Pakistani households, business, and industries alike – taking a toll on the country's competitiveness in export markets. It exerts a drag on economic growth and lends an edge to the already substantial sociopolitical challenges facing the nation.

Small wonder then that roadmaps for its resolution – including structural adjustments to power sector – have been part of a number of international lending programs, including those from multilateral donors like the IMF, the World Bank and Asian Development Bank.

Prime Minister Imran Khan's PTI led government authorized substantial increases in electricity rates in its first year in office but put a freeze on power tariff in its second year. That freeze may now be seen as the biggest challenge to the revival of the US\$6 billion IMF program stalled since February.

"The accumulation of circular debt is a serious issue confronting the power sector and the country as a whole", the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) noted last week. "It is not only affecting the liquidity of the fuel supplier, generation, transmission and distribution companies but also increasing the cost of electricity for the end-consumer".

Circular debt is an outcome of overall system losses that have remained mostly unchanged at around 30-32 percent over the past decade. Successive governments have tried to offset these losses through tariff increases. However, in the absence of any sustainable effort to cut those technical losses, the quantum of revenue shortfall continues to balloon as time passes and as power tariffs rise.

According to the regulator's record, circular debt had grown to PKR 2.15 trillion as of 30 June 2020. Official data recently

presented to the federal cabinet shows it shot up by another PKR 87 billion in July-August 2020.

According to NEPRA, the total circular debt amounted to PKR 689 billion in fiscal year 2015-16 which increased by PKR 10.75 billion per month to PKR 818 billion in FY2016-17, showing an 18 percent increase. It again increased by PKR 25.75 billion per month to touch PKR 1.127 trillion by end of FY2017-18, a year-on-year increase of 38 percent.

Over the next fiscal, it rose by PKR 41 billion per month to reach PKR 1.618 trillion by end of June 2019, marking a year-on-year increase of 44 percent. It further soared by PKR 44.34 billion per month to reach PKR 2.150 trillion by end June 2020, translating to a year-on-year increase of about 33 percent.

The circular debt has two main components: old stock, which is parked in a shell company of the power division called Power Holding Private Limited (PHPL); and the flow that accumulates every year because of the 30-32 percent system losses plus unpaid electricity bills.



Over time, both these streams have spiraled upwards. The debt parked in PHPL stood at PKR 368 billion in 2015-16, but increased to PKR 439 billion in 2016-17, PKR 583 billion in 2017-18, PKR 806 billion in 2018-19, and PKR 1003 billion by end-June 2020.

The fresh flow – the build-up of new payables – that stood at PKR 321 billion in 2015-16 increased to PKR 379 billion in 2016-17, PKR 544 billion in 2017-18 and then rose to PKR 812 billion in 2018-19 before climbing to PKR 1.147 trillion by end June 2020.

The regulator blames the receivables from public and private consumers as well as the delayed payments of subsidies for this inexorable rise in circular debt, raising serious questions over the performance of distribution companies (DISCOs) on the one hand and the government on the other.

Pakistan struggled with crippling load shedding over much of the last decade due to power shortfall. The addition of substantial generation capacity under the previous government significantly improved availability. However, an array of factors – including high T&D (transmission and distribution) losses, low recovery,

circular debt, huge capacity payments, currency devaluation, fuel cost and under-utilization of efficient power plants – have since pushed the consumers' costs up.

The inability of the DISCOs to curtail their T&D losses has been the major reason behind circular debt. Seven out of 10 DISCOs have double-digit T&D losses, as high as 39 percent in case of Peshawar Electric Supply Company. Only three DISCOs – Islamabad, Gujranwala and Faisalabad – have single-digit T&D losses. On the whole, the distribution subsector has utterly failed to overcome this problem despite heavy investments, which are inevitably charged to consumers.

Also, the increase of T&D losses beyond the allowed limit of NEPRA is causing increase in circular debt. Reduction of these losses is only possible through best engineering practices and good governance.

The DISCOs' consistent failure to fully recover amounts billed to consumers is also part of the problem. As of now, accumulated power sector receivables have burgeoned to above PKR 1.44 trillion. The biggest chunk of this amount, of about PKR 690 billion, is recoverable from private consumers. About PKR 180 billion is outstanding against K-Electric while the remaining PKR 567 billion is payable by various federal and provincial departments. In 2019-20 alone, these receivables increased by PKR 480 billion.

These shortfall in recovery also add up to the circular debt. The total average recovery of bills by all DISCOs has remained lower than 90 percent of the amounts billed.

Power sector remains one of the key areas in which Pakistan has to undertake structural reform with a lasting impact. The sector stands out as one of the major failure of governance. Past efforts

at reform have more or less addressed immediate fiscal and economic challenges on occasion but holistic reform to put the sector on the path to sustainability has remained a distant dream.

Under the IMF program, the incumbent government is committed to transferring about PKR 850 billion of the old circular debt stock to the nation's public debt. However, this is unlikely to be helpful in the medium to long term unless ways and means are found to plug the gaping 30-32 percent revenue hole in the power distribution system.

The threefold path to recovery from this recurring issue would involve reducing power theft, improving recoveries, and addressing technical losses. In the absence of such a solution, the circular debt would continue to return to haunt Pakistan's power sector again and again, irrespective of how many times consumer tariff is increased or accumulated debt stock is shifted to the budget.

Meanwhile, the honest consumer will continue to foot the bill of these short-term adjustments, all sectors of the national economy bearing the brunt of high power costs, leading to a stunted GDP growth.

A sinking feeling as exports remain stuck in drop mode

Pakistan's global market share has slumped by 23% since 2003 due to twists in economic policies, global slowdown, COVID-19, high cost of doing business, lack of products and market diversification



By Abdul Moiz

During the last two decades, the global epicenter of growth has been gradually shifting to Asia, specifically in Pakistan's proximity. Since 2003, India, China and Bangladesh have increased their market share by 111 percent, 120 percent and 163 percent respectively. The South Asian region has also increased its share in the world market by 88 percent.

On the other hand, Pakistan is an outlier in the high export growth zone as its share in the global market has decreased by 23 percent since 2003. Had Pakistan's exports grown at the SAARC region's average growth rate, its export value should have been \$66 billion in FY2019, instead of \$23 billion.

In the global ranking of exporting countries, during the past 15 years China has improved its ranking from fourth to first, India from 30th to 18th and Bangladesh from 68th to 54th. On the other hand, Pakistan's ranking has dropped from 59th in 2003 to 69th in 2018.

Pakistan's export performance during the last decade has been inconsistent. During 2008-10, exports remained at \$18-19 billion; in 2010-11, the tailwind of international commodity bonanza (cotton and rice) enabled a quantum leap in exports from \$19.3 billion to \$24.8 billion; for the next three years (2011-14), exports remained range-bound between \$24 billion and \$25 billion.

Pakistan's exports are almost stagnant or registering very marginal growth for the last five or six years due to distortions in economic policies of successive governments, global slowdown and now Covid-19.

The country's Commerce Ministry is run by a successful businessman, Abdul Razak Dawood, as Advisor to the Prime Minister, but his performance with respect to export growth has been unsatisfactory.

Pakistan's exports touched \$25 billion in 2013-14 during the PPP government but in 2014-15 dropped to \$23.8 billion followed by \$20.8 billion in 2015-16, \$20.4 billion in 2016-17, \$23.2 billion in 2017-18, \$22.9 billion in 2018-19 and \$21.4 billion in 2019-20.

Exports performance in the first quarter of current fiscal year has also been disappointing due to both the policymakers and private sector as the textile sector has not performed well.

Pakistan's exports key destinations are the US, European Union and Middle East as trade with neighboring countries is either under restriction or has declined due to regional politics.

The country's exports are concentrated in a few products exported by few companies to few markets. The textiles sector accounts for around 61 percent of the total exports. The share of non-textiles

in exports is less than 40 percent.

Officials have identified seven non-quantifiable and quantifiable factors that are hindering exports. These are: (i) high cost of doing business; (ii) lack of export products and market diversification; (iii) liquidity problem due to pending export refunds; (iv) non-compliance of quality standards; (v) poor market access; (vi) low level of technological advancement and research and development and; (vii) less educated and low-skilled labor.

They have also pointed out quantifiable factors, i.e. GDP, low Foreign Direct Investment in export industry, high inflation, low saving rate and higher average applied tariff rate.

The Commerce Ministry maintains that growth in exports is not only its responsibility but also that of Finance Ministry, Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and provincial governments.

The FBR's Faster System has disappointed exporters as it still has many glitches due to which exporters' refunds are stuck and they are facing liquidity issues.

The Commerce Ministry is giving final touches to its Strategic Trade Policy Framework 2020-25, which has projected three variables for the next five years. For FY21 exports under scenario one are projected at \$22.81 billion, which will reach \$28.13 billion in five years or by FY25. Exports under scenario two are projected at \$23.68 billion and are expected to touch \$33.89 billion in five years. In scenario three, exports will amount to \$24.14 billion and reach \$37.36 billion by 2025.

According to the World Bank, the negative impact of global lockdown due to Covid-19 could go beyond FY20 and the growth rate of Pakistan's exports is likely to contract by 5.3 percent during 2020-21.

The government has extended incentives to the coronavirus-hit domestic industry. The SBP has allowed banks to increase the time period for the realization of export proceeds from 180 days to 270 days if the delay is related to Covid-19. This has helped exporters to provide extended time to their buyers for payments.

Exporters were required to show their performance under the EFS schemes by end of June, which has now been extended by six months to December 2020.

Exporters who wanted to avail credit under LTFF were required to have exports worth 50 percent or \$5 million of total sales to become eligible. The SBP has reduced this to 40 percent or \$4 million for all borrowings under LTFF between January 1 and September 2020. The requirements of the annual projected exports performance for four years to avail LTFF for new projects has also been extended by another year.

Commerce Ministry officials claim that current trade figures indicate that Pakistan's exports are rebounding while textile exporters say major exports are recovering.

Dawood is of the view that exports are down due to low economic activity and government policy of squeezing imports. He says Pakistan is facing anti-export bias and the government devours Additional Customs Duty (ACD) and Regulatory Duty (RD) instead of refunding it to the importers.

"I asked the FBR if they refund duties to the exporters, they replied in the affirmative. When I asked which duty is refunded, they said customs duty only. They do not refund ACD and RD as the government swallows it," he acknowledged at a recent meeting in the Parliament House.

He said now refunds would go directly to the exporters from the SBP. "I have asked the SBP not to release refunds to FBR as they would gobble up the amount," he added.

In order to leverage the tariffs as an instrument of trade policy, Ministry of Commerce is now implementing a tariff policy with the following major objectives: (i) make the tariff structure a true reflection of trade policy priorities; (ii) improve competitiveness of manufacturing, especially the export sector through duty free access to imported raw materials; (iii) rationalize the tariff structure for enhancing the efficiency of the existing domestic activities, especially in the manufacturing sector and for improving resource allocation; (iv) reduce the relative disincentive for the exporting activities; (v) improve the growth potential of the country and increase employment opportunities by attracting investment into efficient industries; (vi) encourage value addition through the principle of cascading of tariffs; (vii) remove anomalies in the tariff structure which are causing distortions between sectors and in the value chain of the same sectors.

The Commerce Ministry is also working on "Make in Pakistan" policy, drafted by the deceased chairman of Habib Group, Syed Ali Habib.

In order to achieve this objective, import duties on 1,623 tariff lines pertaining to basic raw material and intermediate goods have been reduced to zero through the Finance Act, 2020. In continuation of this policy, ACD and RD on 164 items related to textile sector, not manufactured in Pakistan, had been recently removed by the Federal Cabinet. The Commerce Ministry is also finalizing another list of 152 tariff lines for removal of ACD so that cost of doing business could be reduced by providing cheap raw materials to the industrial sector. This would also help to improve competitiveness of exports vis-à-vis trading partners of Pakistan.

According to officials, policy interventions will be made by Ministry of Commerce for following diversifications: (i) horizontal diversification that entails adjustment in the national export mix by adding new products to the existing export baskets within the same sector will be pursued; (ii) vertical diversification into processing of domestically manufactured goods through a shift from the primary to the secondary or tertiary sector by means of increased value-added activities such as processing, marketing and other services, is essential to increase the export earnings.



Stealing the thunder in Punjab police style

It reflects badly on the province's law-enforcement agencies that they failed to arrest the main accused of the motorway gang rape case until he turned himself in to save his detained family

By Rozeena Faraz

It took 33 days for the police and law-enforcement agencies numbering in the thousands to arrest the main accused of motorway gang rape case Abid Malhi. In fact, the accused surrendered before the police but the law-enforcement agencies wanted to steal his thunder. Earlier the police dragnet somehow managed to locate him but he gave them the slip four times. The arrest was finally made possible by the family members of the accused.

Since Abid was in touch with his family, his father Akbar Malhi begged him to come home and then handed him over to a local notable Khalid Butt so that the police would not harm him. Butt then handed him over to the police.

Earlier, after the motorway incident, Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar, IG Punjab Inam Ghani and Law Minister Raja Basharat held a press conference to announce that the accused has been identified but unfortunately could not be arrested as he managed to escape before the police raid. Normally a press conference is held to announce the arrest of accused in high-profile cases but this was the first one held to reveal the escape of the accused with claims that he would be nabbed soon.

However, Abid himself surrendered before the police to save his family members, including his wife, sisters, brother and parents, who had been illegally detained for a month.

Following this development, the Punjab chief minister hastily announced a Rs5 million reward for the team which had arrested the accused. However, after the real facts come to light even the chief justice of Lahore High Court questioned the purpose of reward since it is the duty of police to catch the criminals. Due to the controversy, the Punjab government is now maintaining complete silence in this matter.

The motorway incident took place on the night of September 9 when a woman along with her two children was travelling from Lahore to Gujranwala via Motorway Eastern Bypass where her car ran out of fuel. While she was waiting for help, Abid Malhi and his accomplice Shafqat Ali robbed and raped her before fleeing.

As soon as the news broke, it caused widespread outrage and all the departments concerned jumped into action. The role of Punjab Forensic Science Agency remained significant in the case. Its officers collected blood samples of the accused from the crime scene and fortunately these matched the DNA of Abid since his samples were already in the forensic laboratory's databank. He was charged in a similar case in Bahawalpur where he had raped a woman and her daughter in 2013. The case was resolved as the accused reconciled with the family of the victims. Later, he was thrown out of the community due to his criminal





activities. The accused has been charged on eight counts of rape and other crimes from 2013 to 2017. He was arrested several times but was released on bail every time.

He was last arrested on August 8, 2020, but was again released on bail. The accused was clever enough to escape arrest after the motorway incident despite multiple raids conducted following reports of his presence. To escape detection, he used a face mask, changed his appearance and also grew a beard.

The accused reached Chiniot after traveling through different cities and took a lift from a motorcyclist on Satiana Road. Abid told him that he had left home due to domestic issues and asked him to help him get a job. The man got him a job with a man named Abbas in a slum area of Chiniot where he worked for several days.

Meanwhile police had laid the trap all over Punjab, especially at shrines, for his arrest. His pictures were splashed at police stations and various public spaces. The pictures released by police depicted Abid's appearance in disguise; with shaved head and mustache, with shaved head and French beard, and with only shaved head. Police also contacted the authorities of other provinces and shared the details of the accused. They also issued strict blockade orders at the entrance and exit points of the province and teams were deployed in different cities to arrest him.

Police had detained seven relatives, including his sister and brother-in-law, to reach Abid. The IG Punjab also sent letters to police officers of all districts for arrest of the accused and informed them that he may be hiding at shrines, mosques, Imambargahs and other public spaces. The letter directed broadcast of video clips of the accused on cable TV and guaranteed anonymity of those helping in his arrest.

After his arrest Abid was interrogated by CIA Model Town DIG Investigation Shahzada Sultan, SSP Investigation Abdul Ghaffar

Qaisrani and other officers including SP CIA. During investigation it was revealed that Abid, Shafqat and Bala Mistry had left Karol village on the night of September 9 with the intention of committing robbery. Bala Mistry left midway and Abid and Shafqat went to Karol forest and robbed two to three tractor trolley drivers. Then they saw a car with its hazard light blinking parked on the motorway. A woman was inside the car and they asked her to come out. On her refusal, they broke the car's window and forced her out.

After taking the woman's watch, jewelry and cash, they commanded her to come with them away from the motorway. The woman refused and they took her children instead. When the woman came to save the children, they raped her. They fled when the Dolphin Force officers arrived and fired some shots in the air.

Abid went to Nakana Sahib and Shafqat went to Depalpur. Abid revealed during investigation that from Nankana Sahib he went to Bahawalpur where he moved around freely wearing a face mask and traveled to different cities on public transport for a month. When he ran out of money, he contacted his father and was later arrested.

The next day CIA Police presented him in Anti-Terrorism Court which remanded him in custody for 14 days and ordered an identification parade to be held in jail.

The accused, Shafqat, had already been arrested earlier. Due to the sensitivity of the case, the identity of the victim is being kept confidential. The victim identified Shafqat during his judicial remand at Camp Jail. He was handed over to the police on physical remand till October 28 during which time pistols and stolen goods would be recovered.

An inquiry was initiated on the orders of Chief Minister Usman Buzdar as to how the information and picture of accused Abid was leaked before his arrest but that inquiry report is still pending.

The Curious Case of Adhi Gawahi --- Is She the Lesser Human in Islam?

By Oroba Tasnim Siddiqui

The notion of 'Adhi Gawahi' is thrown at women in Pakistan from time to time to undermine the value of their worth and contributions. It is purportedly derived from a verse in the Holy Quran, which states:

"And call to witness, from among your men, two witnesses. And if two men be not (at hand) then a man and two women, of such as ye approve as witnesses, so that if the one erreth (through forgetfulness) the other will remember." (Surah Al-Baqarah)

The context of aforementioned verse is not only conveniently ignored but the jurist opinion too is completely admonished and the cultural deficiencies of proclaiming women as a meek and inferior gender convoluted without any sort of regulation. This article seeks to explore the biological, psychological, empirical and legal dimensions of the argument so as to bring clarity to the matter.

The feminine gender is often seen as the psychologically and biologically deficient gender. To quote Fakhr al-Din al-Razi:

"And the meaning is that forgetfulness predominates in the physiology of women due to the abundance of moisture and coldness in their physical constitutions."

However, the most rudimentary research makes plain the idea on which this argument is predicated is of Western and not Islamic

origin: It was the Greek physician Hippocrates (c. 460 BCE – c. 370 BCE) who argued that the man body was superior to the woman due to the presence of comparatively greater heat and dryness. Moreover, numerous Islamic jurists have argued the Quranic injunction was based not on the ontological differences between the genders but on women's exposure to the ways of the world in the social milieu of revelation.

There is plenty of historical evidence to establish that the principle of a woman's testimony amounting to half that of a man was not applied universally. Its use was restricted to circumstances where women were unfamiliar with the matters and dealings at issue. In fact there is no dearth of precedents in Islamic jurisprudence where a woman's testimony was considered equal to or even better than that of a man. A popular reference is that of Umm Salamah's testimony before Muawiyah who passed a housing judgment based on her sole witness account.

Hadith is a primary source of Islamic jurisprudence second only to the Holy Quran. The narrators of hadith have therefore been subject to strict standards of integrity and reliability. However, we see that women narrators of hadith were not required to produce a second woman to vouch for them before their narration would be considered valid. The only precondition recorded in this exercise was that of integrity and reliability of memory – equally applicable to men.



To be sure, there were those who would reduce the issue to the reliability of women versus men, but they were unable to substantiate their claims on epistemological grounds. Al Qarafi tried to argue his case based on the assumption that women were 'deficient in reason and intellect' but was countered by Ibn al-Shatt who commented that this premise could not stand based on the allowance for women to narrate Hadith, a core element of Islam.

Fadel demonstrated that scholars including the Maliki jurist al-Qarafi and the Hanafi jurist al-Tarabulsi were unable to base their claims on the inherent deficiency of the woman, and were forced to base their arguments on the difficulty women faced attending courts and on women having no exposure of political and economic affairs.

On the contrary, in matters pertaining to feminine life such as childbirth, menstruation, chastity, physical defects and nursing, al-Mughni maintains that the testimony of a man was not acceptable on its own while that of a woman was.

religion, then the purpose [of testimony] is attained through her statement just as it is in her transmissions [in] religious [contexts]"

Cited as examples in this connection were the testimonies of Umm Attiyah and Umm Salamah among several other women whose witness accounts were considered more reliable than of ordinary men. There remains no doubt that Islam's emphasis is on empirical evidence and memorial data rather than gender.

Numerous scholars have argued that in cases where sociological circumstances and daily activities of a woman are similar to that of a man, that particular woman's testimony will be considered equal to a man's in all circumstances. This is dated to the primary concern of self-interpretation of the verse whereby there is no indication of any sort of ontological/biological difference in the capacity of men and women.

This view is not only empirically unsubstantiated but is also considered by Mahmud Shaltut as less of a judicial stipulation and



While some scholars make much of the dichotomy of public and domestic life, scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim reject these categorizations arguing that if testimonial discrimination were to be accepted on these grounds, it should have been applied to the narration of Hadith with much greater rigor since it dealt with the sayings and actions of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) himself.

Therefore, if a woman's transmission is equally admissible in narration of Hadith, there are no grounds to believe otherwise for any other purposes. The issue of requiring two women witnesses for contracts referred more to matters of future disputes, upon which Ibn al-Qayyim commented:

"There is no doubt that the reason for a plurality [of women in the Qur'anic verse] is [only] in recording testimony. However, when a woman is intelligent and remembers and is trustworthy in her

more of a recommendation to pursue a personal practice. Based on enough evidence and a scholarly take on the matter, it is deemed by scholars themselves that the proper application of this ruling in the contemporary world has nothing to do with women being lesser than men in intellect, integrity or wisdom.

The upshot is that a woman's 'Gawahi' was as good as that of a man in narrating hadith, the second primary source of Islamic jurisprudence, from the early days of Islam; and Islamic jurists through the ages have interpreted the intent of the verse as being applicable to very specific set of circumstances.

This begs the question: What is the origin of the degrading notion of women's 'Adhi Gawahi' so widespread in the Pakistani society? The answer may lie closer to our indigenous patriarchal sociocultural milieu than to Islam.

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Pakistani Media's Hollow Uproar Desensitising Rape Issues

By Palwasha Khattak

Overlooking an uncomfortable glare on the street, learning the art of leaving abominable conversations, taking the long route to avoid dark alleys, rejecting that dream job because it requires late sittings, is just a few of the gazillion precautionary decisions women make every minute. They are not born to reject opportunities for safety, society makes them learn it laboriously. On a road, while driving, during the night and imagining the unimaginable is not a new normal for women.

Pakistan now ranks 6th in the list of the World's most dangerous countries for women. From not letting the specialised doctor's practice to killing the women for giving birth to a daughter, Pakistani society has rusted, and unfortunately, the only visible action by the decision-makers is tweeting. In Pakistan, rape is a crime with a prison sentence of 25 years and death penalty in some cases. Amongst the reported cases, the conviction rate is only two percent. This is as alarming and frustrating as it sounds.

The recent gang rape on a Motorway link road shocked the entire nation but the upsurge of the number of rape cases on everyday Television news is an alarming situation that is being conveniently ignored by the authorities. The provision of safety and security is the state's responsibility, and our government cannot be free of this obligation despite their claims of economic downfall.

If we look at the major causes of this sudden rise in rape cases' news on media every other day, the mind boggles. Either the media is exploiting the issue, or the victims have gathered enough strength to stand up. In both cases, justice is not being served. A handful of journalists did come forward and voice the issue to some extent. But unfortunately, the business of morning shows could not hold themselves from making more money and blatantly exploit the victims and their parents. Without going into the details of the media's history of monstrosity, let us highlight the idea of victim-blaming which still prevails strongly in every socio-economic status.

Studies show that blaming the woman for being raped was initially a myth in various societies and eventually, took a form of an unsaid norm where if a woman is raped, she has caused it herself, and going to authorities will only prove futile.

Be it a Panchayat's decision to rape a woman, killing the child after abduction and raping him or being raped by a very police officer, everything that we are witnessing is prompting one solution, to hold the culprit accountable.

Even though the only cause of rape is the rapist, most of the victims are frightened to report a rape case. Not only because it is

a social stigma but more so, the socially insensitive vocabulary inculcates the entire responsibility on the victim and the abuser is easily forgotten, e.g. 'She was raped' rather than 'he raped her'. The victim is not only blamed but also questioned in a disgraceful manner and faces harassment while reporting the case.

Dragging the claims of converting the 'Islamic Republic of Pakistan' into 'Riyast-e-Madina' here seems primitive already. Therefore, we will stick to how such moral downfall should be handled by any government's administration and families.

In Pakistani society, being harassed or abused by a relative or close friend is commonplace. The origin seems to be the communication gap, the untaught concept of consent, and the so-called label of Badtameez (rude). Very rarely do the victims stand up to their abusers in case they are close relatives or family members and when they do, they are asked to stay silent to maintain the family's Izzat (honor). This encourages the abuser and the evil never stops. Here, counseling will be effective for the children and confrontation for the adults.

Besides, it is high time to teach children about self-defense and self-awareness and schools should introduce mandatory classes for self-defense trainings. If we want to see the younger generation

making better choices, this is the time. Counseling at a young age can do miracles and, in these circumstances, we as a nation, desperately need one.

Moreover, the process of collecting medical evidence by using the baseless and disrespectful two-finger test after the rape is a further trauma waiting in line to torment the victim.

The way Pakistani media has played a role in the desensitization

of violence against women, we are too close to become numb. Calling rape cases fake, money making attempt, and a way to get foreign nationality is few amongst many statements that are not only part of our daily discussions but is used as an excuse to divert public's attention from the actual perpetrator. It is so far fruitful because all we discuss are the parameters the victim should have taken to instead of blaming the rapist for his heinous act, which is a crime by law; a law that does not serve its purpose.

A while ago, Prime Minister Imran Khan called for chemical castration of rapists. As soothing as it sounds, it is more of a temporary solution to a permanent problem. It is done so to calm the raging public rather than fix the system that is broken at every step. Some people believe awareness has created unfavorable circumstances for the rapists whilst others fear for their daughters – a harrowing reality in the Pakistan we live in today.

A group of women from the capital city of Islamabad shared their fears after the motorway rape incident. One woman said that before this incident, her major fears revolved around getting robbed but now she fears that anyone with ill intentions can easily destroy the life she has spent years building. Another young girl cannot go out for a walk or a run comfortably. One young girl said that they feel very insecure while traveling now since the entire incident has taken away women's freedom in some way. Although it is all psychological, it makes a substantial difference. They feel that the idea of raping someone and getting away with it easily prevails.

Is Pakistan going to face COVID-19's second wave in the coming winter?

By M. Waqar Bhatti

Since the last week of September, hospitals in Karachi started receiving patients on a daily basis who were critically ill with COVID-19 symptoms and now in the second week of October 2020, some of the hospitals have started refusing patients who need ventilators for survival after getting tested positive for the coronavirus infection.

This is happening at a time, when a vast majority of people in Pakistan believe that the threat of Covid-19 is over. Except for those whose relatives and loved ones require hospitalization, the majority thinks COVID-19 was a bad dream – which is over once and for all.

“We have started receiving COVID-19 patients whose condition appears to be very critical. The infection rate is rising in Karachi and this time we are seeing very sick patients whose survival often seems very difficult keeping in view their health condition,” said Dr. Asim Hussain, Chairman of the Ziauddin Group of Hospitals, while talking to this scribe in Karachi on Wednesday.

At this moment, said Dr. Hussain, he was not sure whether a second of COVID-19 had started affecting Pakistan. He, however, added that cases had definitely started rising and now educational institutes, wedding halls and restaurants were being closed and sealed throughout Pakistan, which indicated that the situation was becoming serious.

“Now everybody has started reporting and pointing out at an increase in COVID-19 cases in Pakistan, even Punjab’s health minister has also conceded that cases are gradually on the rise, although they were reporting the least number of daily COVID-19 cases in their province. Same is the situation in Islamabad, Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan, which require immediate attention and adoption of precautionary measures,” Dr. Hussain added.

Some other experts also point that COVID-19 cases had been on the rise in the country as the weather had started getting colder and people had abandoned all Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), believing that they were either immune to the infectious disease or the virus had left the country.

“Last Friday, not a single person was wearing a mask at one of the largest mosques in Karachi where hundreds of people gather five times a day to offer prayers and hundreds on Friday afternoon to offer Jumma prayers. Everybody – from a three-year-old child to elderly people in their 70s and 80s – were standing in rows shoulder to shoulder, without any social distancing,” said Dr. Zeeshan Ansari, a pathologist and molecular scientist based in Karachi who is conducting research on the SARS-COV-2, which is the official name of coronavirus.

He said despite a gradual rise in COVID-19 cases in Pakistan, schools were open and thousands of children are daily attending



classes in small and crowded rooms, restaurants were buzzing with people of all ages enjoying the food without any fear, large gatherings were being held on the occasions of weddings and, most importantly, large rallies – both religious and political – had started taking place throughout the country as if there existed no lethal, infectious disease that had killed over a million people, including 6550 in Pakistan alone.

Have we really gotten rid of COVID-19 in Pakistan?

Special Assistant to Prime Minister (SAPM) on health Dr. Faisal Sultan says the threat of COVID-19 is not over yet for Pakistan.

He believes that crowded restaurants and weddings halls as well as large gatherings are a serious cause of concern for the authorities as people have started ignoring all the precautionary measures, including ensuing social distancing, wearing masks and avoiding social gatherings.

“Some countries of the world are facing the second wave of COVID-19, while some are still struggling grappling with the first wave. In Pakistan, if the situation remains same, we fear that strict restrictions could be imposed again to prevent the spread of the infectious disease once again,” Dr. Sultan added.

He, however, concedes that not only the cases are increasing, but also the percentage of positive COVID-19 cases. In Karachi, the ratio of positivity is on the rise and it is now around 5 per cent. Leading indicators too are on the rise, which means that the number of critical patients could also rise in the weeks to come if this trend continues.

“Neither the SOPs regarding restaurants are being followed nor are they being taken seriously by the people. We are reviewing the situation and soon some strict guidelines would be announced regarding the gathering of people at restaurants and wedding halls. At weddings and funeral gatherings, people come and greet the host, either to congratulate on marriage or offer condolence on the death. This is very risky situation and this can lead to spread of virus to a large population,” Dr. Sultan added.

As life comes back to normality the way it was at the start of this year when hundreds were working in the crowded factories, universities were open and people were travelling in buses, trains and vans that packed to the capacity, epidemiologists believe that COVID-19 is making a return and its cases would increase unprecedentedly in the coming winter as hardly 12 to 15 per cent population of the country has yet contracted the infectious disease in Pakistan.

“A few days back, the World Health Organization (WHO) said it estimates that only 10 per cent of world’s population has so far contracted the coronavirus infection while the former director of the Center for Disease Control (CDC) of United States, Dr. Tom Frieden, believes that the actual infections in the US, the most affected country with COVID-19 in the world is roughly 40 million, which is not more than 12 per cent of the total population of the world,” says Dr. Rana Jawad Asghar, a renowned health expert and epidemiologist said, wondering as to how 40 to 50 per cent population could be immune to Coronavirus in Pakistan.

Claiming that the coronavirus infections have started rising in Pakistan like the rest of the world as the weather starts getting cold and dry in most parts of the country, Dr. Asghar says it is believed

that this infection spread rapidly in countries where weather remains cold and dry and even in the United States, it spread rapidly at meat processing plants where temperature remains very low and dry conditions are maintained to preserve the meat, so in this winter, it is going to strike back as conditions would be favourable for the virus to multiply, spread and infect humans off guard.

“Israel is the first country to re-impose national lockdown. The UK has started seeing a steep increase in hospitalisations after a good interval. Similarly, new cases are increasing in France and Germany after an apparent control. It looks like the second wave has hit Europe,” he said and added that cases have “definitely started rising in Pakistan after the weather has started getting cold”.

“This is evident from the data from Islamabad and Sindh while Gilgit-Baltistan and Balochistan are already showing higher number of daily COVID-19 cases as compared to other parts of the country. Unfortunately, it appears that Punjab is under-reporting the cases as they are in the habit of doing so for last many years,” Dr. Rana believes.

He fears that difficult days are ahead, not only for the entire world but for the people of Pakistan also, especially at a time when they have thrown back their masks, started living in the pre-Covid era and believing that nothing is going to happen to them. “This is very alarming situation,” Dr Rana Jawad,” that by the time vaccine to prevent from COVID-19 will be available a lot of damage will have been done.”

“Development of one or two vaccines to prevent COVID-19 is at least two to three months away. Even after its development, its availability would take a few more months. Most importantly, convincing people to get vaccinated would be another uphill task. There is no proven treatment or antiviral drug available so far so the only option left is sticking to the preventive measures – wearing masks, avoiding social gatherings, maintain social distancing – but nobody is taking them seriously,” he added.

On the other hand, there are experts, especially Dr. Tahir Shamsi, a renowned hematologist, who believes that half of Pakistan’s population is now immune to COVID-19 and now it is a matter of few weeks when herd immunity would be achieved and then there would be no need for even the vaccine as majority of the would be carrying COVID-19 antibodies, which would prevent them from infections and re-infections.

But keeping in view that versatility of the coronavirus infection, which has killed millions of people around the globe but has largely spared Pakistani people for unknown reasons, nobody knows for sure as what is actually going to happen in Pakistan.



Umar Gul Hangs his Boots for Good

By Ali Abdullah

On 14TH April, 1984 a boy was born in Peshawar and who knew this little boy would do wonders for Pakistan. Like every Pakistani kid, Umar Gul initially played street cricket.

At that point of time he had no idea that this game will bring him fame, money, and respect for him in future. Gul's friends advised him to start playing the game professionally as he was way too good for street cricket.

Umar Gul was selected for Peshawar domestic team in 2003 and due to his outclass performance he debuted for Pakistan national side in August 2003 and played his first one-day international against Zimbabwe in April. Few months later Gul played his first Test match versus Bangladesh in August.

While playing four one-day matches at the Cherry Blossom Sharjah Cup against Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Sri Lanka where he took four wickets, and he was in and out of the one-day team after that tournament. In his debutant home series against Bangladesh in 2003 he performed impressively and took 15 wickets in the three Tests, and emerged as second highest wicket taker for Pakistan. Gul was retained for the ODIs against Bangladesh, taking a List A best five for 17 in nine overs in the third match, and ended with 11 wickets in the 5-0 series win. However, he could not get permanent slot in the one-day side. Because of inconsistent performances he was dropped from the one-day side.

Umar Gul after performing impressively on the domestic circuit again catch the attention of selectors. He was picked for the second Test against India in 2004. He returned with vengeance and took 6 wickets against the arch rivals and played a pivotal role in Pakistan's victory at Qaddafi Stadium. However just after this match unfortunately he was diagnosed with stress fractures in his back. After a lengthy injury lay-off, which kept him out of international cricket for nearly two years, Gul returned to the Pakistan fold in 2006. Firstly with quiet away series against Sri Lanka then followed by a tour to England in 2006. Though the series was disappointing for Pakistan but Umar Gul spearhead the pace attack in the absence of senior bowlers who were sidelined due to injuries. In this series he took 18 wickets in four tests and justified his selection.

In February 2009, Gul recorded his best test figures in the Pakistan team, taking 6 for 135 on a flat pitch against Sri Lanka. In July 2010, Pakistan faced England at Trent Bridge and was 147 for 9 in their first inning when Umar Gul came to bat and surprisingly destroyed the English attack with cameo inning of 65 not out. Umar Gul was given the name "Gull-dozer" because of his lethal destructive yorkers. He was compared with a bulldozer because his bowling was equally destructive.

With injuries limiting Gul's Test cricket participation, he made a distinct change to his bowling set-up, making a



focus on bowling in the late overs of T20. He got his opportunity with the absence of Sohaib Akhtar and Abdul Razzaq in the 2007 ICC World Twenty20 held in South Africa. He bowled from the 13th over onwards and finished the tournament with 13 wickets, becoming the leading wicket-taker ahead of Shahid Afridi and RP Singh. He was named in the 'Team of the Tournament' by Cricinfo for the 2007 T20I World Cup. Umar Gul became the first bowler to take 5 wicket haul in T20.

He was also part of the Pakistan team that lifted the trophy at Lords while also finishing as the leading wicket-taker of the tournament for the second consecutive time. He gained a lot of wickets bowled, in particular with late reverse swinging yorkers, which dip late to slide under the bat and leave little room for batsmen to maneuver the ball. Consequently, he has also an excellent economy rate in this format of the game. Internationally, Gul has taken 47 wickets in 32 games at an average of 14.65. He is the second leading wicket-taker in Twenty20 internationals behind teammate Shahid Afridi.

Gul appeared in all three of Pakistan's group matches in the 2007 World Cup taking four wickets. He also appeared in all of Pakistan's matches at the 2007 ICC World Twenty20 taking 3/15 off 4 overs in the semi-final victory over New Zealand. He took three wickets in the final to finish as the tournament's leading wicket-taker.

Recently in the domestic tournament "National T20 Cup" Gul played for Balochistan and decided to take retirement from all forms of cricket. Umar Gul served Pakistan and other teams including Quetta Gladiators (PSL), Kolkata Knight Riders (IPL) and other teams from different leagues.

Umar Gul will definitely will be missed by his team mates and fans as well. Gul said he still loves the game and wants to play forever but everyone has to leave one day. in an interview with a news channel, Gul also stated that 2011 World Cup defeat against the rivals India was still is the biggest regret. Everyone wished Umar Gul best of luck for his future endeavours.

Entertainment & Trending

John Cena marries girlfriend Shay Shariatzebah in Tampa

World famous WWE star who is also rapper and actor, John Cena, tied the knot with his girlfriend, Shay Shariatzebah, who isn't a public figure or a model but an Engineer, leaving his fans and the media in awe. The couple began dating in March 2019, after John Cena broke off his engagement with Nikki Bella in 2018, keeping their relationship low profile until recently when their pictures went viral. Mr. and Mrs. John Cena were spotted together at the tourist resorts and famous restaurants at Tampa after which they announced their small private wedding ceremony on 12th October held at Tampa. The two say that their relationship grew fast and everything in between felt and still feels 'just right'. The couple met in Canada when Cena was working for his film, *Playing with Fire* while Shariatzebah was working on a project for Avigilon, 'I just couldn't take my eyes off her.' Says Cena in an interview. Shortly after they began dating, they decided to get engaged in February and filed a wedding suit this October.



Novel Raqs e bismil now dramatized co-starring Imran Ashraf and Sara Khan



Raqs-e-Bismil, a Nabeela Aziz novel, is popular among many readers, especially the Urdu readers. The Novel, based on social romance, was published in Shuaa Digest on 23rd July 2013 in short segments, the last of which was published on May 2017. It was then so admired by the readers that it is available on Google Play Store as an e-book, having more than 10,000 installations and soon will be aired as a drama on Hum TV starring Imran Ashraf, Sara Khan and Anoushay Abbasi. Imran Ashraf shared a picture on Instagram on 14th October revealing his new look of his character Moosa in Raqs-e-bismil, 'Let me introduce you to my next character Moosa, I have been waiting for this script for a while. Thank you Hashim Nadeem for giving me a chance to be a part of your masterpiece script,' ending the caption with #raqsebismil. It is a Momina Duraid production having co-directors Wajahat Rauf and Shazia Wajahat. The series release date is yet to be announced but is predicted to be somewhere in 2021.

Grammy winner music producer Noel Fisher arrested for sexual assault and Felony



Noel Fisher, a popular music producer who has worked with Wiz Khalifa, Nikki Minaj, Lil Wayne and almost all the big names in Hollywood, famous for featuring Jay-z and Beyonce in one screen, was arrested for felony and sexual assault—testified by many celebrities such as Bebe Rexha, Jessie Reyez, and Tinashe who claimed to have been his victims in the past. Fisher Got arrested on Wednesday, 14th October by the Los Angeles County Sheriff, being filed for 15 sexual assault charges along with 5 felony assault charges, setting his bail at \$6.3m. The aforementioned allegations occurred between 2010 and 2019. Kristina Buch and Peyton Ackley, who happened to artists, were the first two of the many victims to speak out about Fisher and successfully file restraining order against him, after which many other celebrities named and shamed him for his act, some as victims and some as witnesses.

Express TV launches its first ever digital game show, Kasoti Online

Kasoti Online, as explanatory from the name, is an online game show hosted by the talented, comedian and actor Ahmed Ali Butt, sponsored by Express TV which aired its' first episode on 26th September 2020 on the Express TV YouTube channel wherein 2 celebrities video conference with Ahmed Ali Butt playing the '23 questions guess game' called Kasoti alongside lively conversations. The game show, with exaggerated hilarious edits and insightful conversations, is kept engaging for its' entirety.



8-year-old Israeli girl befriended a python during the Lockdown

Inbar, an 8-year-old Israeli girl from an animal loving family, who has tamed almost every animal there is finds snakes most amiable, spending most of the lockdown enjoying their company. "I really like to hang out with snakes and sometimes I help snakes shed (their skin) and I help them to be happy during coronavirus," Inbar said. Her favorite out of the snake lot is an 11-foot-long yellow Python who she named after the iconic Disney Princess, Belle, from Beauty and the Beast. Inbars' mother, Sarit Regev says that Inbar's fondness for snakes is nothing new to them but instead something they see as really natural because she grew up with snakes. "Inbar was raised with all these animals and she was raised with the snakes. When Inbar was little she swam inside the bath with the snake and now she has grown up and the snake got bigger, so they swim together in the pool. It's very natural for us," she said.



Dog swallows engagement ring



We see creativity, evolution and innovation on social media either through different skill sets or events such as different surprise parties, creative ways of gender reveal and so on. Recently, couple decided to announce their secret engagement on social media, really differently; not by simply posting rings pictures with a caption as a clue but by putting it in their dogs' nose, only to see it for the last time, watching it being swallowed by the dog. The couple went live on their social media account, placing the ring on the dog's nose to announce their engagement and just while they were doing it, the dog gobbled it up without giving them any reaction time.

Belgian city finds its first mayor's heart in a fountain



Pierre David, the first mayor of Belgium, in 1800, died in 1893 upon falling from a building. It was rumored that to honor him, his heart was preserved in an ethanol-filled metal box, buried under a fountain. This rumor lasted for a series of decades until October 2020, the construction workers stumbled upon the metallic box during renovation of Belgium's Ornate Stone fountain. "Today the legend is no longer a legend. It's a reality", said Verviers city councillor Maxime Degey. The metallic box is now moved to Verviers Museum of Fine Arts and Ceramic until the renovation completes, after which it will be returned to the city's Place Verte.

Cheetah and dog at Metro Richmond Zoo celebrate one years' friendship

Kumbali the cheetah and Kago, the yellow Labrador Retriever met at the zoo as toddlers and have been friends since which is surprising for not just the common public but also for the zoologists namely because, according to traditional research, cheetahs come from the cat family and thus there has always been a 'dog chasing cat' relationship between these animal classes. However, recent experimental studies have shown that both have similar behavioral pattern and needs. Just like dogs, cheetahs crave affection as well as the capability to be tamed. Kumbali was 6 weeks whereas Kago was 12 weeks when they first met. 'From their first interaction till their present interaction, their meetings have been supervised so that each interaction is safe and positive', says their supervisor from Cheetah Run team. 'While many believe that these two instantly clicked, it was actually one year of blood and sweat that got them to travel together, go on planes and have a positive interaction each time they met.' This particular friendship however is restricted to their species since so far only a Labrador retriever is said to have a calming influence and tolerance of cats.

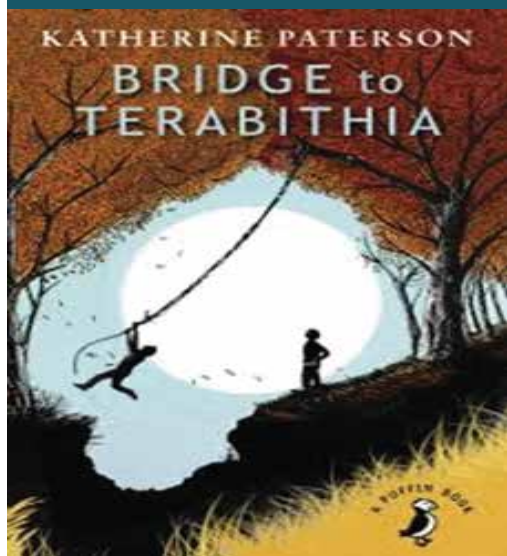


120,000-year-old and animal footprints found near Alathar Lake in Saudi Arabia

Archeologists and anthropologists recently discovered 376 humans as well as animal footprints altogether dating back 120,000 years in the ancient Alathar Lake which is now dried up and a part of the Nefud Desert in Saudi Arabia. These distinguishable fossilized footprints belonged to elephants, horses, sheep, goats, camels and of course humans wherein the elephant footprints traced back about 400,000 years. According to Fossil and Anthropological records, these footprints indicate migration to Africa because of deteriorating environmental conditions in Saudi Arabia. One of the archeologists, Stewart says "It is only after the last interglacial [period] with the return of cooler conditions that we have definitive evidence for Neanderthals moving into the region."

Bridge to Terabithia

Reviewed by: Alizay Ashraf
 Author: Katherine Paterson
 ISBN: 978-0-141-35978-6
 Publisher: Puffin Books
 Pages: 178



The Bridge to Terabithia is a book written by Katherine Paterson about Jess Aarons, an eleven-year-old boy living in a rural area of the South who loves to run. He dreams of being the fastest boy in the fifth grade when school starts up in the fall, feeling that this will for once give him a chance to stand in the spotlight among his five sisters, and might win him the attention of his preoccupied father.

He practices all summer and can't wait to see his classmates' faces when he beats them all. But on the first day of school, a new girl boldly crosses over to the boys' side and outruns everyone. Jess and Leslie Burke become inseparable. Together, they create Terabithia, a magical kingdom in the woods where the two of them reign as king and queen, and their imaginations set the only limits. Then, one morning a terrible tragedy occurs. Only when Jess

is able to come to grips with this tragedy does he finally understand the strength and courage Leslie has given him.

The themes of this book are that friendship is very important, spend your childhood in the best way possible, gender role is a motif that plays off the idea of conformity and that education is super important for everyone. It also looks deeply at dealing with feelings of being an outsider and dealing with the pressures of the pre-teen world, which, though it was written about 30 years ago, have not changed too much.

This book is suitable for children above the age of 12 as there is inappropriate language used and it may give children a negative view of life, due to a beloved character's death, and it has some profanity.

The Ice Monster

The Ice Monster is a book written by David Walliams about a young girl, Elsie who frees an ice monster from a museum. Elsie is searching for a place where she can live. She soon finds herself in the Natural History Museum, where she helps bring to life the Ice Monster which is currently frozen and appearing in a new display at the world-famous museum.

Elsie and her new friends set about freeing the frozen Mammoth in the most creative of ways – enlisting the help of the infamous Sticky Fingers Gang. This is where the adventure truly begins as all of them go out on returning their defrosted friend to the North Pole.

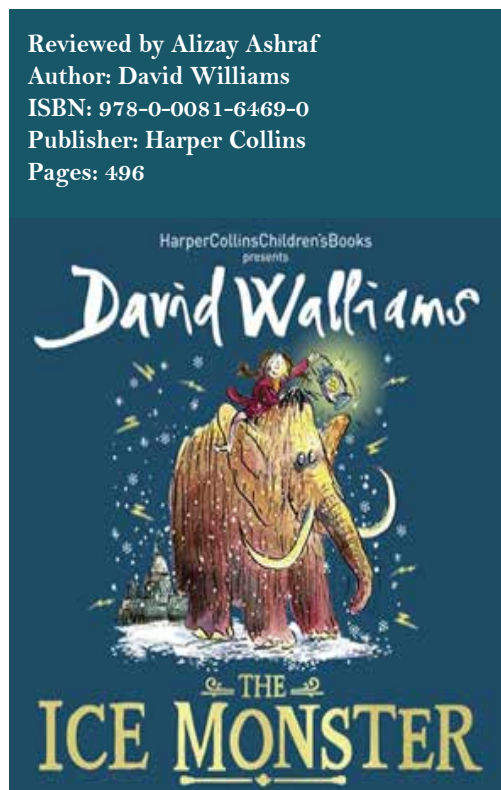
The Ice Monster is both educational and fun to read. The writer wonderfully brings this history of ours to life, offering children an interesting way to learn about our history. This book

would be a great teaching resource for parents and schools.

This book is hilarious to read with just the right balance of comedy and scenes that are, real-life facts, and touching themes of kindness and friendship. The message of the book is explained by the writer quite well. The book in a way is about belonging, finding your way in a difficult and unpredictable world, it is about family and fighting for what you believe is right and honorable.

The Ice Monster is journey of discovery, an adventure tale so rich and so detailed. But the true wonderment of The Ice Monster is seeing Elsie discover that she is so very special, that through her dangerous journey she brings people together, giving people hope who have no one and a sense of belonging to those who feel that they don't belong. I think this book is suitable for children above the age of 6.

Reviewed by Alizay Ashraf
 Author: David Walliams
 ISBN: 978-0-0081-6469-0
 Publisher: Harper Collins
 Pages: 496





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