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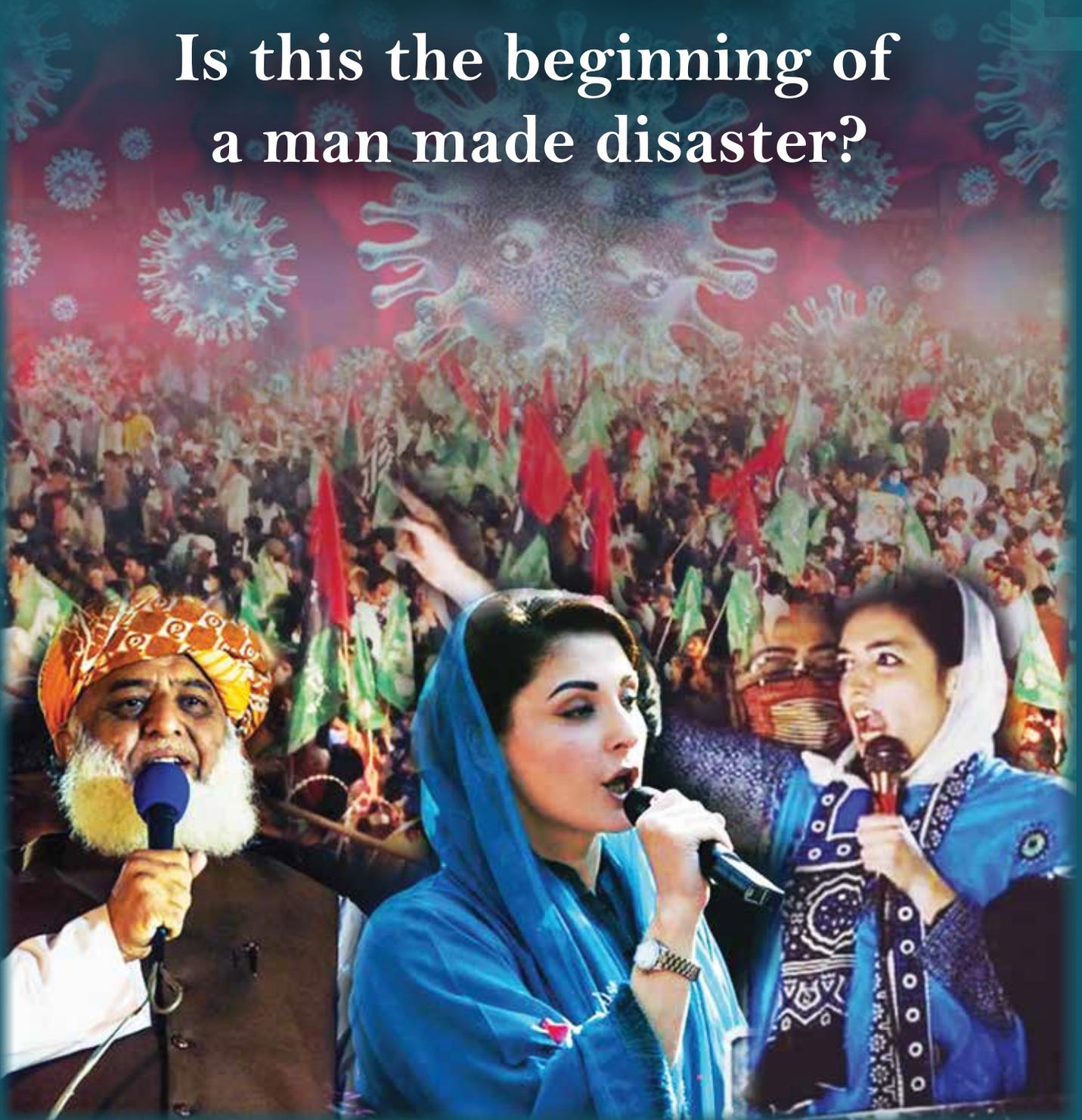
15th-31st December 2020

The Bewildered Herd
Will America become a global leader once again?

Energy sector in shambles
Privatisation of three Power Plants on Cards

Down but not out
Why a Born-Again MQM may yet take Karachi
by storm

PDM Protest Is this the beginning of a man made disaster?



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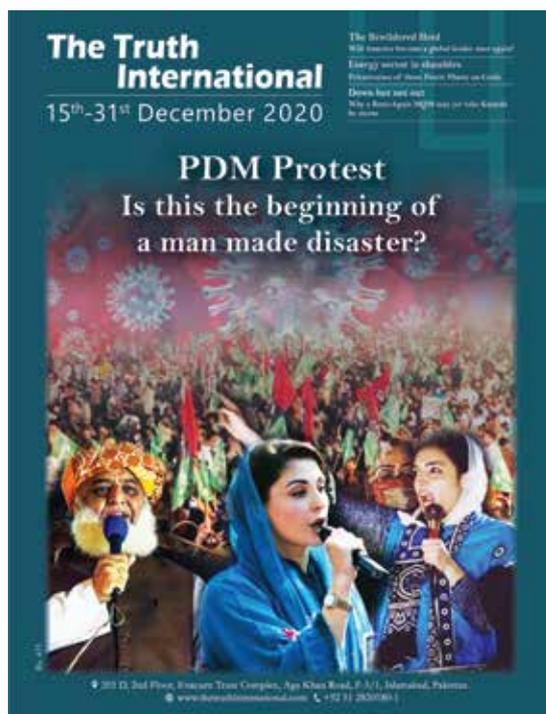
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In insensitive politics?

By M. Ziauddin



Both, the PTI-led coalition government and the 11-party opposition alliance--the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), seem responsible in equal measure for turning Covid-19 into a political football. Indeed, the two appear equally guilty of being insensitive to the health hazards the population at large has been exposed to since the country got hit by the severer wave of the life-threatening pandemic.

The PDM has pursued its three-month long, six-city public protest tour seemingly completely ignoring the pandemic threat. On the other hand, the government rather than seeking cooperation of the opposition in meeting the lethal national challenge in the offing has been provoking the PDM accusing it, instead, of fueling the pandemic by not calling off its protest campaign while at the same time whenever it felt it necessary the ruling Party itself seemingly did not hesitate organizing public meetings of its own, violating the NCOG prescribed code.

There is, however, an immediate context to this seemingly deadly football match going on between the government and the opposition dating back to Prime Minister Imran Khan's egoistical response to opposition's early offers of cooperation.

On March 20 PPP Chairman, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari declared that in view of the serious threat posed by the pandemic he would put on the back burner his political differences with the ruling coalition and accept Imran Khan as his PM without any reservations. This gesture of Bilawal received nation-wide appreciation but the PM disdainfully ignored the offer.

Rather, on March 25 the PM provoked the Opposition further by walking out abruptly, without informing the other participants or even seeking the permission of the chair from a parliamentary

parties' meeting called on-line via Skype by the NA speaker Asad Qaisar. The meeting had been called specifically for developing a consensus across the party lines with regard to the official plans to meet the challenge of the pandemic.

Oddly enough, it was the PM himself who kicked-off the point scoring pandemic football match against the opposition when Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah on March 22 announced that he would 'lockdown' the province for a fortnight from midnight. He was to announce around 4PM the same day the details of how the lockdown would be observed. But at 3:30 PM on the same day the PM forestalled the Sindh CM with his own address to the nation on the same subject announcing his 'smart' prescriptions for meeting the challenge.

Traditionally, whenever presidents and prime ministers felt like addressing the nation the fixture would always be timed well past 7PM. But PM in his desperation to speak before Murad Ali Shah did, ignored the tradition and addressed the nation at 3:30 PM. Again, in his desperation he also forgot that the appropriate day to address the nation, if at all there was a need, was the next day---March 23, the Republic Day.

And straining credulity he said in his March 22 preemptive address that he was opposed to enforcing 'complete' lockdown which to him was like imposing a 'curfew' which he thought would adversely affect the poorest of Pakistan's poor, mostly daily wage earners, vendors and small shop keepers.

But he was only deliberately circumnavigating the fact that even the trial lockdown that was being gradually enforced since March 17, in Sindh and Balochistan had been done with appeals to the population to confine themselves to their houses, keep a reasonable physical distance while interacting with friends, colleagues and family (educational institutions and most government and private non-essential offices, big market places, shopping plazas, hotels and restaurants were already being closed down). And the PM had also ignored the fact that the Sindh enforced trial lockdown was certainly not a curfew as grocery shops, medical stores, Karachi port and oil transport system had remained open for business.

However, when the very next day the rest of Pakistan including the PTI ruled Punjab and KPK provincial governments and Islamabad enforced lockdowns identical to that of Sindh's (the written orders issued by Sindh and Punjab governments were word for word identical) the PM and his spin doctors were found resorting to one falsehood after the other trying to show what was happening in the rest of Pakistan which they labelled as 'shutdown' was different from Sindh's 'lockdown'!!!

And now with the death toll rising steeply because of the severe second wave of the pandemic, the PM is talking of complete lockdown while the Sindh government is resorting to smart lockdowns.

Covid crisis and opposition rallies



By Umer Farooq

Since October 17, 2020 opposition alliance, Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) have held six public rallies in big urban centers of all the four provinces, attracting hundreds of thousands of people to the sites of these political gatherings, where jam packed assemblies could have acted as potential “Super Spreaders” of deadly COVID-19 virus. COVID-19 epidemic being more of an urban phenomenon as crowds, gatherings and assemblies are primarily a regular feature of city life. Before the start of second wave of this pandemic the health officials and experts were warning the general public to avoid crowds, advice was offered to the government to close all educational institutions, which detectably were acting as “Super Spreaders” of the disease in big urban centers and lastly the government was advised to reach out to the opposition political parties in order to avert an agitation that could be more deadly from a health perspective, instead of acting as a source of fear of a full-blown political crisis with the potential to dislodge the government.

Parallel to opposition’s preparation for rallies in big city, the PTI government launched propaganda campaigns to bring home the point that these rallies could act as a “Super Spreaders” of the COVID-19, which continued in the background until the rallies were held in Gujranwala, Karachi, Multan, Quetta, Peshawar and Lahore. The government entreaties fell on deaf ears—the opposition parties organized rallies as if there was no pandemic hitting Pakistani society and as if everything was normal.

This government media campaign continued till the rally in any particular city was held, as after that there was no follow up from the government side. Precisely speaking the government didn’t inform the public as to what specific impacts these rallies caused in each city. For instance, before Peshawar rally was held on November 22, 2020 the government exerted full force of its propaganda machinery to portray the impending rally as a “Super Spreader” of COVID-19. However once the rally was held the government focus shifted elsewhere and they didn’t inform the public about the impact this rally caused on COVID-19 situation in the city.

Perhaps the government was more interested in targeting the audience, which in this case was the masses of Peshawar city, before the rallies were held in order to persuade them not to attend the rally. Subsequently the government felt no responsibility to inform the public about the impact of the rally on a pandemic situation in the city. The government didn’t feel the responsibility to keep track of the situation in each city after the rallies were held. This scribe has made his best efforts to collect some data from government quarters about the exact impact these rallies had on COVID-19 situation in each city where opposition held rallies. But to no avail.

Opposition on its part acted completely recklessly in its efforts to dislodge the PTI government before upcoming elections 2021.



The display of this traditional and self-obsessed thinking at the time when the country is facing, perhaps the deadliest pandemic in modern human history could be described as criminal. But then the government is no less reckless in its efforts to create a permanent gulf between political forces by insisting on selective accountability that is getting nowhere. This permanent gulf has led to competition between the country's elite groups, thus weakening the national resolve to tackle a national emergency such as COVID-19 pandemic.

Situation of conflicts among Pakistan's elite is a norm rather than aberration—persistently we see a pattern in our history, where different segments of Pakistani elite could be seen settling scores among themselves or engaged in a cutthroat competition. The present political situation is again a repetition of the same pattern in our politics—a segment of Pakistani political elite could be seen making an attempt to dislodge other members of the elite who form other segments of political and military elite.



There was a very thin veneer hiding the pathological antagonism that the former Chief Justice Saqib Nisar displayed towards Nawaz Sharif, who, in turn was quite open in his harsh criticism of the judiciary and the judges. In those days Army chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa voiced his clear support of the judiciary in the face of frontal attack on the Supreme Court by Nawaz Sharif. General Bajwa's off the record comments in support of the judiciary were widely reported in the national press. Now, Nawaz Sharif has launched another agitation campaign of which General Bajwa and his close associates are the prime targets.

In 2017 it was clear that elites of Lahore and Gujranwala divisions are fighting it out among themselves—Chief Justice, Saqib Nisar and Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif were from Lahore and COAS, General Bajwa was from Gujranwala division. In this intra-elite competition, one segment was badly humiliated, ousted and forced into exile through naked use of coercive machinery of the state by the leading and dominant group. There is another distinction between these rival groups—the humiliated elite group's political power is based on popularity among the masses, whereas the elite groups that ousted the first group derive their power from bureaucratic and legal mechanisms of the state.

A cursory look at stable political systems across the globe will bring forward the point that elites in these societies agree on some basic rules of the game. Political conflicts among national elites can be highly destabilizing for the system and the society and can prevent national development and progress from taking place for a prolonged period of time.

Elite of Lahore and Gujranwala divisions fighting it out among themselves—Chief Justice and Prime Minister were from Lahore and COAS from Gujranwala division. The present scenario clear indicates that the elite conflict that could bring instability to the heart of Pakistan has three key players—Prime Minister Imran

Khan and his close associates drawn from the middle and upper middle classes of urban Pakistan, General Bajwa and his close associates and former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his associated group comprising of the same crony capitalists and members of urban middle and upper middle classes.

The ousted and humiliated group now is striking at the very roots of stability, which provides basis to the continued grip of ruling elite groups on the power structure. Ousted and humiliated elite groups are clearly threatening to destabilize (or at least mobilize) the region of Central Punjab and its immediate periphery—the home of Pakistani military establishment. If they succeed in destabilizing Central Punjab then we may perhaps see a massive re-adjustment or may be a reshuffle in the power structure of the country. Pakistani security planners have a long-cherished dream of keeping central Punjab—the home of Pakistani establishment and industrial hub as well as breadbasket—stable and politically calm. Any prolonged agitation could shatter this dream.

Elite conflicts usually never lead to anti-status quo solutions—at least this is what Pakistan's political history tells us. There are in the final analysis a number of publicly visible and hidden mechanisms of interactions among the elites and possible go-betweens who can always bring about compromise solutions among the warring elites. Pakistan's recent history in the post-Zia period is replete with numerous conflicts among the elites that turned nasty but nevertheless influential people and groups brought about a compromised resolution of the conflicts with everybody getting a face saving. The only person, who would not be satisfied with a pro-status quo resolution of this conflict, is none other than former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif himself. A compromise solution that offers nothing to Nawaz Sharif in terms of judicial relief from criminal conviction would leave him high and dry. Therefore, this crisis or conflict will test Nawaz Sharif's ability and political endurance to sustain a popular upheaval for a prolonged period of time that can destabilize rival members of the elite.

Persistent pattern of conflicts among the elite groups is a clear indication that there exists a vast chasm between rival elite groups on question of ideology and management of the state resources. There is no consensus on the core issues facing the nation. The voices complaining about one institution controlling the state's coercive machinery and using it against its opponents whimsically are growing in the society. There are no agreed upon rules of the game, causing repeated conflicts and power struggles. In such a situation we can easily predict that this is not the last elite conflict that we are witnessing. There are many more to come. In the meantime, the dreams of national cohesion and national development can wait for an indefinite period.



No Fireworks at PDM's Lahore Rally

Opposition messaging betrays lack of consensus, clear roadmap

The first phase of PDM's drive to unseat Prime Minister Khan concludes without a clear way forward



By Khalid Wasim

The opposition Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) might have put on a convincing show of power in their drive for the ouster of the incumbent coalition government led by Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) but it again failed to articulate a clear cut strategy to mount the kind of pressure needed to trigger early elections or force in-house change.

In fact, the 11-party coalition's mildly massive public meeting at the Minar-e-Pakistan was widely expected to crystallize the opposition intended pathway to change. Instead, it turned out to be a venue for regurgitation of what has already been said by PDM leaders at their previous five public meetings.

There is no denying that the number of people at the hometown of the PML-N (Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz) was impressive but it was nowhere near enough to send chills down anybody's spine, whether the government or its patrons.

However, it will be enough to keep the opposition movement going, at least for now. Whether it can unnerve the government remains to be seen. For now, the government appears to be holding and holding out strong.

The plan of long march on Islamabad by the end of January or early February as announced by Maulana Fazlur Rahman clearly indicates that the PDM leadership is seeking more time to bring its house in order before giving a final call to the masses.

In addition, it also indicated that the opposition might not have been getting the kind of assurances from the powers there be that could encourage it enough to put in their resignation before the Senate polls. Premature resignations may just allow the PTI and its allies to hog almost half of the seats that are going to be up for

grabs, effectively establishing a majority in the Senate that may last until 2027.

In fact, the impact that was created by the speech of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif at PDM's first public rally in Gujranwala appears to be not only losing esteem but is also becoming purposelessly repetitive since it has not become a shared narrative of the eleven parties that form the combined opposition.

His speech at the Lahore rally clearly was a diluted version as he stayed away from naming any single person for being responsible for his political ordeal since 2017, although his repeated referral to "some generals" for holding the democracy hostage and establishing a proxy rule through the PTI-led government was clearly an expression of his hope of some ethical conduct by personnel within institutions as happened several times in the past.

Notwithstanding his watered down outburst against the PTI-government and its patrons in the establishment, his speech overshadowed other PDM leaders who did not even come close to lines that he crossed.

Following in the footsteps of his father, PML-N's Vice-President Maryam Nawaz appeared to be more willing to cross the red lines, which are arbitrarily drawn and altered by Pakistan's powerful military establishment, but PPP's Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari continues to be more circumspect as far as naming and shaming of personnel among Pakistani establishment are concerned.

While Maryam added a former chief justice to the coterie who, she said, rigged the general elections in favour of the PTI by keeping her and her former prime minister father out of the contest,



Mr Bhutto-Zardari again implicated “selectors” and “umpires” instead of naming individuals, clearly indicating the differences among the opposition parties on future pathways to change.

The PPP seems to be willing to keep the channels of dialogue open with the incumbents in powerful institutions as against the PML-N which appears to need more categorical assurances and changes before initiating any dialogue. It is, however, not clear what any such dialogue would achieve considering the fact that the 18th constitutional amendment had effectively closed all doors to the ouster of the government through extra-parliamentary means unless otherwise the dissolution of assemblies is advised by the respective leaders of the house, which does not appear to be possible.

Prime Minister Imran Khan during a conversation with senior journalists from print media in Islamabad on Dec 8 declared that he would go for by-elections in the country if the opposition members resigned from the assemblies. The prime minister also stated that he was ready to hold talks with the opposition on every issue, except the corruption cases against its leadership.

However, many in the ruling PTI believe that the government has already lost the opportunity of politically engaging the opposition parties and now it is too late for them to make such an offer to the opposition. They believe that making a direct offer to the opposition for talks now would be seen as a retreat on the part of the government and a victory for opposition parties.

And their misgivings were vindicated when hours after the media aired the prime minister’s remarks regarding holding of by-elections in the country and his talks’ offer, the PDM leaders categorically stated they were not ready to hold any dialogue with an “illegitimate government”.

After presiding over a meeting of the heads of the PDM parties in Islamabad, Maulana Fazlur Rehman also announced that all the national and provincial lawmakers belonging to its constituent parties would hand over their resignations individually to their respective party heads by 31 December 2020.

The PDM leadership, however, failed to come up with an agreed plan regarding the use of their most lethal weapon of en masse resignations and its timing because of the forceful opposition to the resignation move by the PPP. Maulana Fazlur Rehman simply announced the PDM’s steering committee would meet the next day “to decide the schedule for further rallies and demonstrations and the date for the long march towards Islamabad”.

The Maulana didn’t take the reporters’ questions and abruptly ended the news conference in less than 10 minutes.

The next day, however, before the steering committee’s meeting, the heads of the PDM parties again gathered at the residence of the Maulana in an effort to sort out differences within the alliance over the resignation issue, but they failed as later Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari announced that any decision regarding the resignations would be taken by the party’s Central Executive Committee (CEC).

This announcement was a clear indication that the PPP was not ready to sacrifice its provincial government in Sindh.

And when the steering committee met late at night, it neither announced any date for the long march nor did it come out with any plan of agitation after conclusion of the first phase of its anti-government campaign with the Lahore public meeting on 13 December.

It was perhaps to avoid possible media grilling over their failure to come up with a clear roadmap that the PDM leaders hurriedly left the venue telling the reporters that the decisions they had made would be announced at the Lahore public meeting.

Reportedly, Asif Zardari who attended the meeting via a video link, opposed Nawaz Sharif’s proposal to hand over the resignations to Maulana Fazl for future use and it was on his proposal that finally other parties agreed on the suggestion that the resignations should be collected by the party heads.

Earlier, Nawaz Sharif had rejected the PPP’s proposal of moving a no-confidence motion against Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar and approaching the PML-Q. Mr Sharif reportedly told the participants that they should make efforts to mobilise the people of Punjab who for the first time in the country’s history had “anti-establishment feelings”.

The PML-N’s supremo also reportedly floated the idea of converting the PDM into an election alliance, at least for the next elections, but other heavyweights did not consider the proposal worth a discussion. The smaller parties in the PDM, however, welcomed Mr Sharif’s proposal in the hope they might get a chance to reach the Parliament.

The PPP leaders in their private conversations are now openly opposing the idea of resigning from the assemblies, saying that after boycotting the 1985 non-party based general elections in the country, the party has learnt a lesson that it should never leave the field open for the opponents. On the other hand, the PML-N and other PDM component parties are of the view that the government will not be able to sustain the setback due to their resignations and come down crumbling.

Some political experts are predicting that there is even a possibility that the PML-N, JUI-F and other nationalist parties can come out of the assemblies even if the PPP does not support the idea, which would mean a division of the PDM. Nobody knows where such a situation would leave the country.

Presently, the opposition alliance continues to huddle together despite all the establishment’s pressure tactics. What it lacks, however, is a more precise enunciation of its agenda, which is required to rally support of the fence-sitting middle classes.

If the opposition is sincere in its desire to insulate our electoral democracy from extra constitutional influences, as the partners agreed together in their multiparty conference this September, they will have to demonstrate their seriousness by sharing a concrete roadmap to change.

Ambiguous, vaguely revolutionary rhetoric and fuzzy slogans that politicians usually use to rally the masses will cut no ice with a public that has every right to know the magic ingredients the opposition’s recipe to eliminate the role of establishment and intelligence agencies in politics.



Down but not out

Why a Born-Again MQM may yet take Karachi by Storm

Enough of the shenanigans: Karachi's crisis of political representation must be addressed.
The MQM and PTI are in for a test of mettle.

By **Ishtiaq Ali Mehkri**

Inexplicable as it may sound, Karachi, a bustling metropolis of around 25 million people, lacks a political voice in its own affairs. It has been a theatre of grotesque political experimentation for the last four decades.

The state took a backseat and the city became a breeding ground for mafias and gunrunners. A bunch of opportunists clad in political attire were given free rein to engage in all kinds of gimmickry – and they took the multitudes of educated Karachiites for a ride. Political representation – and thus politically guided civic development – became myths in this era.

But all that changed at the drop of a hat on 22 August 2016. A demigod who commanded millions, the Mohajir heavyweight Altaf Hussain instantly turned into a pariah nobody wishes to associate with. He overstepped the fine line between criticism and treason – and he became history.

Today, he is a spent force. His legacy will always be remembered for its plethora of missed opportunities. He overshot himself and crossed swords with his own creators. He is now a footnote to a tale that will remain forever unfinished.

This turn of events has left Karachi's 20 million Urdu-speaking people embarrassed and baffled as their promised sense of identity and pride has slipped from their fingers.

MQM's end was as convenient as its origins were mysterious. Along the way it morphed from Mohajir Qaumi Movement to Muttahida Qaumi Movement. But MQM, the political party primarily of Urdu-speaking people whose starry-eyed ancestors had migrated from India, had to bite the dust as the state moved in to assert its writ.

The party's critics call its rule of city an era of unparalleled reign of terror. The grassroots movement that began in the 1980s with the seductive slogan of empowering the downtrodden Urdu-speaking populace soon turned into a mafia-style cabal.

The three main promises that had catapulted MQM to power were outlawing of the quota system, working for the glory of the city, and crafting a new sense of belonging with fellow Pakistanis. None of them were realised.

Looking back, it is easy to see how Karachi struggled in the clutches of fascism. Mohajir-Pakhtun riots in 1985-87 and again in 2009-10 as well as simmering Mohajir-Sindhi fissures betrayed the dark nature of MQM's rule. As it turned out, it was all to allow a coterie of people to amass enormous wealth and clout while the citizenry waited for realization of their dreams.



But there was no dearth of saner elements in the MQM. From Akhtar Rizvi, Raees Amrohvi (the legendary poet), Kunwar Khalid Younis, Farooq Sattar (the first Mayor of MQM) to countless selfless souls, the party was a great collection of social activists, thinkers, poets, artists, public servants, and academics who stood for nurturing the people's sense of belonging to Pakistan and subordinate their cherished new identity to it. They did all within their power to breathe life into this new identity. But the cold fact remains that the party revolved around the toxic personality cult of its fallen leader.

Although the MQM successfully emerged as an indispensable third political force in the country, its methods and machinations were always questionable. The party leadership tapped into mob psychology to command and mobilise street power, becoming the very antithesis of its intellectual origins. The saner voices in the party were soon side-lined and chauvinists had things their way.

Karachiites have a lot to regret about the failure of MQM. Perhaps the greatest loss of all is that there will never be a reckoning for a generation of Karachiites consumed by the flames of ethnic unrest, arson, extortion and targeted killings. The state is silent and the perpetrators go scot-free.

To be fair, the blame for the unending spree of killings from 1980s until the army-led operation of Radd-ul-Fasad that cleansed Karachi of its underworld and terror nexus does not belong to the MQM alone. All political and sectarian parties played their due role in wreaking this devastation.

The MQM, nonetheless, remains a latent political force for the simple reason that 20 million Urdu-speaking people still long to identify themselves with a party, or any party, which can cement their claim to their lost identity.

Wedded to its Sindhi-speaking, rural power base, the PPP (Pakistan Peoples Party) is unlikely to make any inroads on the



Urdu-speaking urban support base of MQM. In fact, its embrace of a narrow Sindhi identity was instrumental in the rise of the ‘Mohajir’ identity in the first place.

The Jamaat-e-Islami and its distinctive brand of religious politics has never been popular with Karachiites, although the Jamaat did give Karachi one of its best Mayors: Abdus Sattar Afghani – the man who relentlessly worked for a proactive local government.

The Pakhtuns were always a divided force. They were seen as ‘encroachers’ by hard-core MQM ideologues, which ushered in an era of ethnic tensions in Karachi. With the settling in of millions of Afghans in Karachi – thanks to the myopic domestic policy attendant to our Afghan policy, Karachi exploded as a bastion of gunrunning and drug and human trafficking.

Today there are at least four splinter factions of MQM – each more confused than the other. None has the broad acceptability the MQM enjoyed in its heyday, and all find themselves tainted with allegations as former party comrades engage in a blame game. Two of these – the PIB-faction of Farooq Sattar and Bahadurabad-group of Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui – hark back to the early days of MQM.

The MQM-Pakistan is the new name given to the erstwhile MQM minus Altaf Hussain and his London-based coterie. This faction that enjoys representation in the parliament and is an ally of Prime Minister Imran Khan, is irked with all other factions, and terms them as ‘men in cahoots with the establishment’.

MQM-P convener Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui has conveniently dislodged Dr Farooq Sattar, who was listed as MQM leader on party registration with the Election Commission. Siddiqui now sits at the pinnacle of MQM power politics and is busy rewriting the priorities of a party that once ruled the roost.



Another of Karachi’s former mayors, Syed Mustafa Kamal heads his own faction of MQM styled Pak Sarzameen Party. He was once hugely popular in Karachi as he ushered in innovative civic developmental schemes.

Since his return from self-exile in Dubai, Kamal is testing the rough tides of city politics, hoping to bag the lion’s share of the MQM vote bank. But he too is blamed by the MQM-P for striking a deal with the powers-that-be.

The MQM’s story will not be complete without a mention of MQM-Haqiqi of Afaq Ahmed. In fact, it was the true opposition to the party from the inside – and was responsible for the first military operation against the party in Karachi as well as for denting the mythical aura of Altaf Hussain’s personality cult.

A difficult nut to crack, Afaq Ahmed is tight-lipped these days, but he has always been a dark horse of sorts. His following – traditionally silent but ready to stand up and be counted at ballot time – may still be substantial. To write him off would, therefore, be a grave mistake.

Last but not the least is the Washington-based former MQM convener, Nadeem Nusrat – who once called the shots from London. On and off, he makes public his plans for reorganising the ‘Mohajir’ vote bank. But he has proven a non-starter to this day.

So much so for the MQM, which has lost its clout in Karachi – a city it once used to electorally sweep with no eyebrows raised. Prime Minister Imran Khan’s PTI (Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf) has moved in rapidly to fill the void. In the 2018 general election, the PTI won thirteen out of Karachi’s twenty-one National Assembly seats. Although it suffered a major setback, nobody was surprised when MQM still secured a face-saving six seats.

Karachi went the PTI way not because of love for Imran Khan or the PTI’s popularity, but because the citizens were sick of MQM and desperately wanted a change. Imran Khan’s doctrine to change the modus operandi of governance resonated with the Karachiites, and they were generous enough to hand a stunning win to the PTI.

That the PTI is still struggling to make its presence felt in the world’s seventh largest city and its elected legislators cut a sorry figure in the process is a story for another day.

The PTI was generous to name MNA-elect from Karachi, Dr Arif Alvi, as the head of state, apart from doling out a gigantic bail-out plan of development to the tune of PKR 1.1 trillion to address the chronic municipal and infrastructure issues of Karachi.

Yet the city is in doldrums as competing interest groups squabble on for share of booty and political leverage. The realisation that Karachi faces a crisis of ownership crisis seems lacking, as none of the quibbling factions has risen to the occasion.

The cosmopolitan city – a major hub for foreign immigrants, especially from India, Bangladesh, and Burma – is equally threatened with a waning ecosystem. Water has become an expensive and rare commodity, electricity is costly, and the infrastructure is paralysed at the hands of a jaundiced supply system. On top of all these ills, Karachi is perhaps the only city in the world with no public transport.

Waseem Akhtar, MQM’s outgoing Mayor, has admits he has only 12 percent administrative control of the city, and his administration remains hobbled by a severe lack of funds. This is all about a city that generates almost 70 percent of the nation’s revenue.

The resource distribution system is managed through an upside-down funnel with the provincial government and the Cantonments running the show at the expense of Karachiites needs and aspirations. The system seems to have been designed to ensure pilferage of funds and misappropriation.



Presently, Karachi has three major political players: a rampaging PTI, a lame-duck MQM, and an inefficacious PPP. Karachiites are on a honeymoon with PM Khan and his men. If they succeed in delivering the basic amenities of life and resurrecting the city infrastructure, they certainly stand a fair chance of taking Karachi by storm.

The PPP has never been a serious contender in Karachi politics, its support limited to its restive vote bank in the peripheries of the city. The presence of Jamaat and other religious and sectarian outfits is merely symbolic.

That leaves us with a born-again MQM: A party rising from the rubble of the erstwhile MQM, espousing its just and politically

significant causes, but free of any association with Altaf Hussain's toxic leadership.

Such a party could well unite the splintered Mohajir vote bank because Karachiites still long for a sense of belonging and an identity all their own. The fires stoking MQM's stellar rise the first time around are far from spent.

Karachiites still need a shoulder on which to cry, an ear in which to whisper their ordeals of the last seven decades. For better or for worse, a born-again MQM still fits the bill better than any other party – including PM Khan's PTI.

Formerly an opinion editor at Khaleej Times, Ishtiaq Ali Mehkri is an Editorial Writer/Consultant based in the UAE.

Bad Government, Worse Opposition

Sindh's double trouble

By **Qurban Baloch**

Bilawal Bhutto's PPP (Pakistan Peoples Party) is one of the most ardent critics of Prime Minister Imran Khan's performance at the federal level, but how has the party delivered at the provincial level in Sindh where it is in power? Background interviews with several players from across the political spectrum on the subject boil down to a big no.

What is worse, the Khan's PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) has neither played a constructive part as the main provincial opposition party nor shown any promise as an alternative.

That works for the PPP: After years of bad governance, corrupt practices, and lack of vision, the province is in ruins but the party responsible for it all is securely in the driving seat. Founded by Shaheed Zulifkar Ali Bhutto on 30 November 1967, the party commemorated its 53rd foundation day this November but remains clueless in terms of governance after all these years.

The PPP has been in power in Sindh without a break since it stormed into power in the 2008 General Election following the martyrdom of Benazir Bhutto on 27 December 2007. Unhappily, however, the circumstances of the people of the province have only gone from bad to worse over this time.

It is unfortunate that no new or old political party had emerged during this period to seize the opportunity opened by the ruling party's bad governance and corrupt practices.

A TTI survey by phone or face to face conversation found Sindhi analysts and politicians unanimous in calling out PPP's twelve-year rule of Sindh gave the province nothing but failures.

The party has failed to protect the province's demography as people from rural districts continue to move to urban areas for greener pastures, putting a huge pressure on the provincial capital Karachi. Equally, the party failed to tap the indigenous natural resources like gas and coal for the benefit of the citizenry. The local government system is in shambles and the education situation has worsened especially primary to college level.



The party failed to introduce a policy to promote agriculture, to utilize natural resources for development, and almost criminally handed over natural resources to federal government without any resistance.

For example, although several new power generation projects (e.g., Thar Coal Power Project, Jhimpir Wind Power Corridor, etc.) have come online, the province continues to grunt under the burden of power outages. The province produces almost seventy percent of the country's natural gas, many areas are still without gas and gas load-shedding or low gas pressure is routine in many areas even during summer.

Nor have the increased share of financial resources due to the 7th NFC (National Finance Commission) Award and increased autonomy made possible by the historical 18th Amendment to the Constitution been able to have any positive impact on the common citizen of the province.

During its long rule, the party with its traditional power base in rural areas has failed to formulate any comprehensive agriculture policy. Nor has any industrial policy introduced during the period, and whatever policies are announced remain un-implemented.



Nothing has been done to tackle irrigation or drinking water issues and no water management policy has been introduced. That's why farmers and common citizen are facing acute water shortages, cultivation practices remain outmoded. As a result, provincial farm production has not increased but population of the province is growing rapidly.

Achievements of the PPP government include establishment of National Institute Of Cardiovascular Disease (NICVD); improvement of Jinnah Postgraduate Medical College (JPMC); upgradation and improvement of Gambat Institute of Medical Sciences (GIMC); and reform of Peoples Primary Healthcare Initiative (PPHI).

The PPP, however, vehemently dismisses the impression its government has failed to deliver. "Is corruption an issue in Sindh alone?" says PPP Information Secretary Senator Mukhtiar Ahmed alias Aajiz Dhamra, and goes on to ask: "If so, how come a province ruled by a corrupt government performing better than other provinces?"

He believes the narrative of corruption has been weaved by certain forces to discredit politicians and alienate the masses from the electoral process.

Asked about what his party has delivered, Senator Dhamra responded with a long list of development projects including building of seven cadet colleges and university campuses; establishment of trauma centre, liver transplant centre, and free cancer treatment centre at the JMPC; construction of Islamkot airport and Mula Katiyara Bridge, the longest ever build to span River Indus; and NICVD.

These, he adds, are just a few examples of the PPP's contributions to the betterment of Sindh. He then turns his gun on the PTI's government in KP. "PTI is governing KPK for the last eight years but has failed to complete the Peshawar BRT project, and the billion tree project was the worst example of corruption."

A parliamentarian belonging to the PML-N (Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz) put his approval rating of the PPP's Sindh government at twenty percent.

"As a citizen my clear opinion is that governance is the main challenge facing the PPP government", said Mr. Kheal Das Kohistani. "The Sindh government didn't deliver what it potentially could. It could do better but unfortunately didn't."

He lavishes the party with accolades for NICVD, Gambat Liver Institute and some other healthcare projects, and directs withering criticism at the federal government for what he sees as its non-cooperation with Sindh government. He also believes Murad Shah's Sindh government is doing much better than Usman Buzdar's government in the Punjab province.

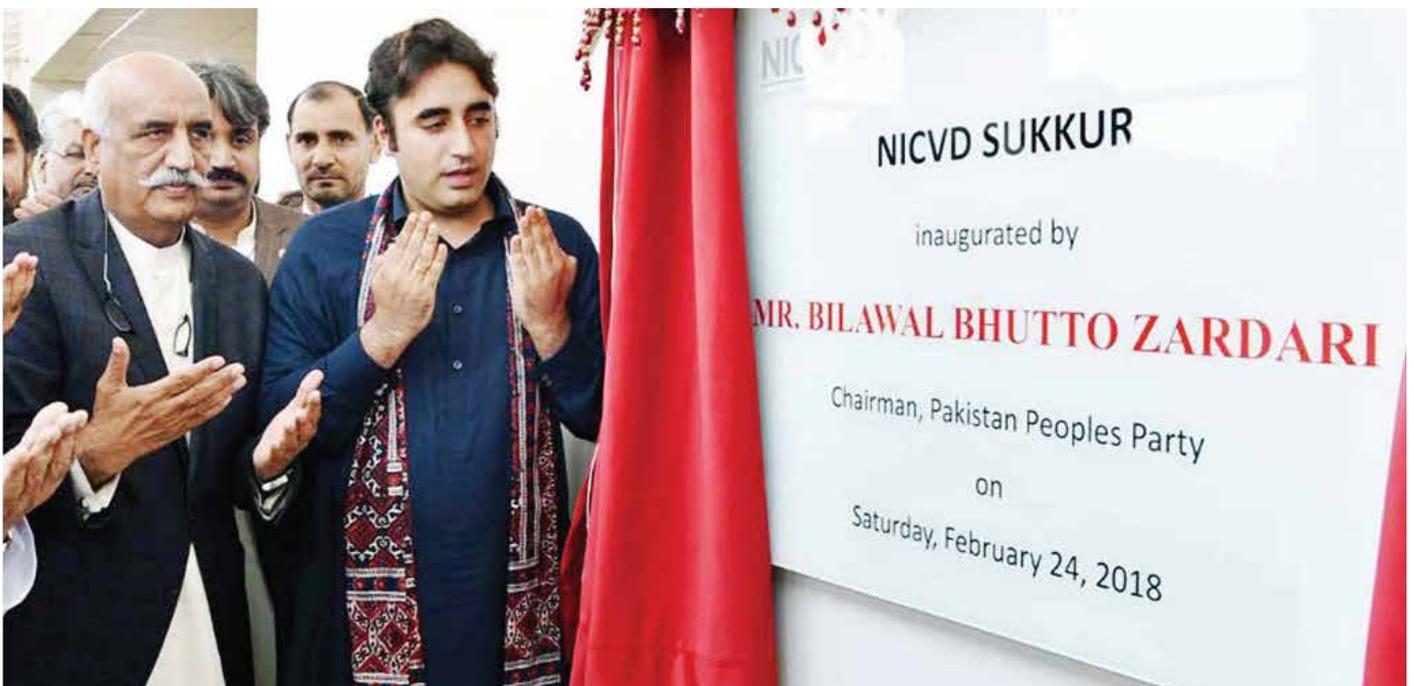
A PTI lawmaker, on the other hand, saw the PPP rule a failure "in all fields from Islamkot to Larrkana" even though it is a much empowered provincial government after the 18th Amendment. Lal Malhi is an MNA from an Islamkot constituency in Sindh.

Malhi accuses the Sindh government of politically victimizing constituencies of PTI voters, and says the weak and corrupt local government system has left the cities of the province in ruins.

"But I have no hesitation in admitting that opposition in the province has also failed to resist the wrongdoings of the provincial government and to offer an alternate strategy for the betterment of the people".

According to him MQM's political overtures aimed at dividing the province and other parties' positions on the islands issue alienated the majority of the Sindhi voter from these parties. This worked to the benefit of the PPP, allowing it to cement its position.

"Opposition in Sindh failed to live up to the people's wishes", says Malhi. "The PTI didn't focus on Sindh after taking reins of power at the federal level. The PPP succeeded to manage the situation and capitalise on the inefficiency of the opposition in the Sindh Assembly. This is why there is no alternative to the PPP in Sindh".





PTI names 20-Strong All-Male Cabinet

Precious Little left of GB Budget for Development

By Abbas Khaksar



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party seems to have said goodbye to its much touted narrative of austerity to accommodate all but one members and allies in the Gilgit-Baltistan government.

The party which recently formed government in GB after the election has formed a record-breaking 20-member cabinet consisting of twelve ministers, two advisors, three special assistants to the Chief Minister, two coordinators, and the Chief Minister.

Added to these are the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Assembly and the total number of public office holders in GB comes to twenty-two. The ruling alliance has a total of twenty-three members in the Gilgit Baltistan Legislative Assembly (GBLA).

This supersized cabinet has been formed to rule the 1.6 million population of the region, where traditionally a four- to five-member cabinet has been considered adequate.

The Constitution of Pakistan says a cabinet membership may not exceed 11 percent of the total strength of the respective assembly. However, under the Self Governance Ordinance of GB 2009, introduced by Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in 2009, the size of GB cabinet was set at nine members, including six ministers and two advisers in addition to the chief minister.

The PML-N (Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz), which formed its government in 2015, expanded the size of cabinet to fifteen through the GB Reform Order 2018 to accommodate more party members. The PTI has now bested that record by inducting 20 members in the cabinet – representing 63 percent of the membership of the GBLA.

To accommodate a maximum number of elected members of the assembly the previous ministries were split. A ministry held by a minister of PPP during 2009 to 2014 will now be managed by two ministries and two advisers.

A new ministry of Labour, Industry and Commerce was created to accommodate an elected member of PTI from Hunza Col (R) Abaidullah Baig.

The revenue function of the Finance Department has been spun off as a Board of Revenue under an adviser to the chief minister.

The Social Welfare, Women Development and Child & Human Right, which was previously created as a separate department to accommodate an adviser was divided into two departments to accommodate two coordinators of the chief minister.

A separate department was created to accommodate a special assistant to the chief minister. Similarly another special assistant was also accommodated by granting him a department of Minerals.

“This is highly unjustified to burden the small budget of the poverty stricken area by forming such a large cabinet as expanding the administrative set up without any output and performance would only cause a major cut in development budget of GB,” said Shahidullah Baig, former federal secretary while talking to this scribe.

“Besides the expenses on the government team, their perks and packages, the additional salaries and perks of the bureaucrats in the area are also a major drain on the finances of the region which received limited grants from the federal government,” he said.

According to Baig, who hails from GB, the budget is net spent on development, especially in the education and health sector.

Former chief minister Hafeezur Rehman, while talking to this scribe, however, defended the expansion of the cabinet saying that the media has been critical of accommodating some political workers.

“If they perform well there should be no objection to giving portfolios to more people,” said Hafeezur Rehman, who also expanded his cabinet previously, adding that the actual burden on GB's budget was the unnecessarily large number of bureaucracy.

“The PTI government, while violating set rules, has granted departments to Special Assistants and Coordinators of chief minister,” he added. Hafeez, however, claimed that the constitutional obligations of limiting the cabinet to 11 percent of total number of assembly is not applicable in GB.

In previous government there at least 15 departments including Home & Prisons Department, Finance Department, Law and Prosecution Department, Services and General Administration, Information and Cabinet Department, Revenue, Usher and Zakat, Excise and Taxation and Cooperative Department, Food and



Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Husbandry Department, Forest, Wildlife and Environment Department, Education, Social Welfare and Women Development, Health and Population Welfare Department, Works Department, Local Government, Rural Development and Census Department, Water and Power Department, Tourism, Sports, Culture and Youth Department, Mineral Development, Industries, Commerce & Labour Department and Planning and Development Department.

PTI government has jacked up the total number of departments to 19 by bifurcating the existing departments or adding new ones.

The ministers, advisers and special assistants and coordinators of the government enjoy high salaries, allowances, vehicles, security guards, fuel and many others.

BUDGET OF GB GOVERNMENT

As per official documents available, the government of GB receives a total grant of PKR 32 billion as per the budget of 2020-21 out of which PKR 26.381 billion are earmarked to be spent on employees related to expenses during this financial year leaving only PKR 5.6 billion for development activities.

With the increase in administration and employees related expenses, the expenditure on education and health sectors (including both development and non-development budget) were continuously reducing during the past few years.

The budget for education and social welfare was fixed at PKR 9 billion in 2019-2020 but was reduced to PKR 8.32 billion in the current financial year. Similarly the budget for the health sector was reduced to PKR 5 billion in 2020-21 from PKR 5.5 billion in fiscal year 2019-2020.

NO FEMALE MEMBER INCLUDED IN CABINET

Surprisingly the PTI government which granted 22 portfolios to the male dominated assembly has not bothered to give a single post to women members of the assembly despite the selection of four out of six reserved seats of the women in the assembly.

PPP and PML-N got one reserved seat each in the assembly. Both PPP and PML-N in their previous government had included at least one woman member in the cabinet.

Unluckily for the four female candidates who contested in this year's election, all of them lost the polls again. It was a close call, however, for PTI's Amina Bibi, who lost with 3,180 votes to independent candidate Abdul Hameed.

In 2009, four women were in the running to be elected in GB. That number fell to three in 2015. This year, again, only four women jumped into the fray.

The women were: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's Amina Bibi, Pakistan Peoples Party's Sadia Danish, Jamiat Ulema-e Islam-F's Mehnaz Wali, and independent candidate Shahnaz Bhutto, contesting from GBA 20 Ghizer.

1	CM	Khaled Khursheed	Law & Prosecution
2	Speaker	Amjad Zaidi	
3	Deputy Speaker	Nazir Adv	
4	Senior Minister	Col. Obaidullah Baig	Industries, Labour & Commerce
5	Senior Minister	Raja Zakria Maqpoon	Forest, Wildlife & Environment
6	Minister	Fatehullah Khan	P&D, Information
7	Minister	Javed Manwra	Finance
8	Minister	Kazim Mesim	Agriculture
9	Minister	Wazeer Saleem	Works
10	Minister	Raja Nasir Abbas	Tourism, Sports, Culture & Archeology, Youth Affairs
11	Minister	Raja Azam	Education
12	Minister	Haji Shah Baig	E&T, Zakat & Ushr
13	Minister	Haji Gulber	Health
14	Minister	Mushtaq Hussain	Water and Power
15	Minister	Haji Abdul Hameed	LG & RS
16	Advisor	Sohail Abbas Shah	Board of Revenue
17	Advisor	Shams Lone	Food
18	SACM	Haider Khan	Population Welfare
19	SACM	Mehboob	Livestock and Fisheries
20	SACM	Ilyas	Minerals
21	Coordinator to CM	Noshad Alam	Social Welfare
22	Coordinator to CM	Shams-ud-Din	Women Development and Child & Human Rights



Why we need to enact Direct Election for Senate

By Wajih Abbasi

Prime Minister Imran Khan has announced that the coming Senate elections will be held through show of hands. He said there are always accusations of rigging at the time of Senate elections and to end the same he has decided that the elections will be held not by secret ballot but by show of hands. To come into effect the proposal will need amending the constitution which requires two third majorities in both houses of Parliament. Ruling PTI lacks such a majority in any of the houses. That is the reason that Imran Khan has thrown the ball in the court of the opposition.

Elections for half of the seats in Senate are scheduled to take place by coming March. Show of hand can be used in simple yes and no type referendum but voting in multiple seat constituencies to be filled through multiple choice votes, which Senate elections entails, through such a simplistic voting procedure is difficult to visualize.

Having said that let's accept that present system being used for election of senators is highly abused, non-representative, and undemocratic and does not reflect the actual choice of people of the provinces which Senate is meant to represent. Above all there have always been unfortunate accusations and reports of votes being cast by electoral college members for nothing but monetary considerations.

Under the Constitution, all elections should be held by secret voting. This is done to ensure that the voter can cast his/her vote freely without any pressure, threat, coercion, intimidation or lure. These are noble principles in cases where votes are being cast to represent the personal opinion of the voter.

However, voters in Senate elections are members of the national and provincial assemblies. These members are representatives of the electorate who voted them to these assemblies because of the fact that they represented a particular political party. The voting power they have is a trust to them from their electorate which has to be used in accordance with the wishes of their electorate.

As people express their wishes by voting a particular political party during general elections those elected through these elections have to reflect these wishes of their electorate while using any power they have by virtue of being a member.

However, here is a situation where we see no particular emphasis on members necessarily following party lines during these elections. It seems the framers of the constitution never wanted total submission of the members of the national and provincial assemblies to their parties during Senate elections.

During their tenure, members of national and provincial assemblies cast three types of votes. Firstly, during election of President, members of Senate and while electing or removing the Speaker of assembly concerned or Chairman of Senate. Second is vote cast for ascertaining the majority leader in the house for



his/her subsequent elevation as Prime Minister in center and Chief Minister in the province concerned or removal of the same. All these occasions come only a few times during the tenure of a house. Third is normal day to day voting on legislative proposals and resolutions.

Significantly, the framers of the Constitution envisaged secret ballot for deciding matters in the first category (including election of President, senators and custodian of the house concerned) but required a show of hands for voting on legislative proposals and resolutions.

The distinction becomes even clearer when we realise Article 63-A while defining defection only mentions voting against party lines at time of vote of election or removal of Prime Minister or a Chief Minister or at times of a constitutional amendment. Votes cast during election of President, senators or custodian of the house concerned are neither investigated nor is there any penalty if anyone is found casting his /her votes against direction of the party concerned.

This clearly means the framers of the Constitution intended to give some freedom of choice to the members elected on party tickets while casting their votes in those elections but follow the party lines while voting in the leader of the house and on legislative proposals. Unfortunately that freedom is increasingly being misused for ostensibly monetary considerations and will have to be checked and changed.

Secondly, the Upper House in a bicameral system is by definition meant to give representation of all hues of public opinion from across the country. The current system is unmistakably weighted in favour of the party majority of a provincial assembly. It is common for a party getting a third of votes in a general election for a provincial assembly to secure majority in the house concerned. The party uses that majority to get almost two third of the Senate seats allocated for that province. That means one third of the electorate in a province get two third representation in the senate and two third of the electorate remain voiceless. That is highly undemocratic and unrepresentative and must be remedied.



Thirdly, there are two Senate elections during the tenure of a provincial assembly, the second taking place close to the end of its tenure. Public support for the majority party at that time may not be the same as it was when members of the provincial assembly were elected. A house reflecting such an outdated mandate can never be called representative.

The remedy lies in changing the current system for Senate elections and allowing general public in the province concerned to elect their Senators directly. For this, a proportional representation system based on party lists could be adopted. All seats from a province including general, women and technocrat can be amalgamated.

The electorate can vote for party lists with each party getting seats in Senate in accordance with percentage of votes it receives in the province concerned. Each province can also be divided into two Senate districts, each going to polls at the end of its six-year term.

This system can also empower the citizens of Islamabad to have a voice in who represents them in the Senate. Presently, the whole National Assembly elects Senators from Islamabad and the citizens have no say in the matter. It is common for the majority party in National Assembly to 'import' Senate candidates from a province to represent Islamabad. A direct election will change that and citizens from Islamabad will have their own representation.

Two Deaths, Two Interviews and Two Lists of Journos

By Hammad Ghaznavi

Corona has killed two controversial judges recently, Waqar Seth and Arshad Malik. The Establishment and the government, to put it mildly, had reasons to hate both. For totally different reasons though, both will live for a long time in our history.

With his boots on as the Chief Justice of Peshawar High Court, Mr Seth was catapulted to fame for his historic decision convicting Musharraf in a high treason case. He was hailed by many as an independent, intrepid judge while the then ISPR chief and certain PTI ministers dubbed him a traitor, working for the enemy, and mentally unfit. Amidst this grand controversy, the hand of Corona intervened, and took him away.

Accountability Judge Arshad Malik convicted Nawaz Sharif in the Al-Azeezia reference case and was later found admitting, in a video recording, of the pressure he was under to convict Nawaz. His confession embarrassed his handlers. He, like Musharraf, was great at waltzing with a goblet full of wine on his head without spilling it; hence, capable of spilling yet more beans. But then the virus silenced him.

Twitter is a dodgy platform where people say all kinds of nasty things. Responding to one such horrible allegation, General (R) Ghulam Mustafa in a Youtube video said that the Establishment doesn't have anything to do with these deaths, and that such ideas were detrimental to Pakistan. General sahib is spot on.

However, looking at the choices covid-19 is making, Qazi Faiz Essa needs to be super cautious. Social distancing one doesn't know, but judicial distancing he is not observing as he has filed yet another petition pointing out the undeclared or dubious assets of various PTI men including Imran Khan and former information advisor to the PM, Asim Saleem Bajwa. Mr Essa in his petition mentioned about a dozen properties of Mr Bajwa in the USA. Prime Minister Imran Khan, a certified sadiq and amin himself, however, exonerated Mr Bajwa of any wrongdoing, as Mr Bajwa fully satisfied him in an interview. Hence, there was no need for further probe through a JIT.

Besides the two deaths, two interviews have also attracted attention recently. Stephen Sackur interviewed former Finance Minister Ishaq Dar in HARDtalk, wherein he was found stuttering while answering questions about his properties. A PML(N) friend thought Mr Dar was financially as clean as a whistle but his English let him down. Many disagree. After all, Dar is no Meera. He was perhaps caught unaware; prepared to talk about Pakistan economy and not his personal financial empire. The second interview was that of Imran Khan by a local Sackur (spelt right?) Mr Hamza Ali Abbasi. Mr Abbasi is a PTI member and his services for journalism are no less than those of Shehbaz Gill in the spread of truth and decency in society. It was SOFTtalk, every inch. The lengthy interview covered almost every issue of importance, including drug addiction. Let's give the PM his due – he talked well on the topic.

The world is full of all kinds of Sackurs (correctly spelt?) Little wonder then that the PTI Lahore twitter handle shared two lists of journalists, The Good and The Bad. The latter, the tweet read, 'build narratives for the corrupt' while the former was a bunch of 'brave and bold journalists fighting the war of truth and justice'. The list of bold and beautiful included Chaudhry Ghulam Hussain, Sabir Shakir and Imran Riaz, aka The partridge. While The Bad list included the likes of Hamid Mir, Talat Hussain and Najam Sethi aka The sparrow. No comments! Later, like the droppings of a bird, the tweet was removed.

Talking of birds, a hawkish statement by Imran Khan came to mind, wherein he said anybody who provided the chairs, tents, sound system, etc. to the PDM jalsas would face criminal charges. Going by this logic, Mr D.J. Butt should have been serving life imprisonment for arranging sound in PTI's 126 days dharna. Rationality should be left alone though when talking about Pakistani politics and politicians. Remember, Firdous Ashiq Awan recently breaking a stack of tiles with a punch at a ceremony said she had broken the tiles with PDM in her mind.

Propitietur Deus omnium!

Disease in any Country to affect every Country

COVID-19: The greatest equalizer of them all?



By Oroba Tasnim Siddiqui

The vaccines have arrived.

Ever since the COVID-19 took the world by storm, reports of scientific endeavours focused on the development of a vaccine for the deadly virus have come from various corners of the globe. As the year 2020 draws to a close, announcements of successful trials by more than one group of researchers are filtering in.

Very well, then: The first generation of vaccines is here. It is time to understand that there is still a need to ascertain the safety and long-term side effects of these vaccines.

Equally, it is time to start worrying about the nuts and bolts of the mass production and distribution infrastructure and financial arrangements required to take one or the other vaccine to every last human being on the planet.

For, to stamp out the virus from the face of the earth, all nations of the world will have to work together to chalk out a plan to produce billions of vaccine doses, and facilitate their delivery to every corner of the world.

It is believed that the cycle of the virus can only be broken if 60 to 70 percent of the world population is able to develop immunity against it. The need for an introspection into the research particularly evaluating the longevity of its protection cannot be overemphasized. It is vitally important that we figure out how long a round of vaccination affords protection.

Whilst various companies announced successful trials, it is important to pay heed to the fact that not all vaccines may be appropriate for individuals worldwide. With the varying conditions of weather and governance accentuated by the complicated mutations that microbiologists have witnessed in the virus, there may still be complexities that companies must cater to.

As the US and UK move towards the procurement of vaccine doses for their citizens, there is a feeling that

developing countries may be at a disadvantage in securing vaccine doses for their citizens in a competitive environment.

One hopes the cutthroat free market competition does not break out this once because unless each and every country across the surface of the globe is given the right amount of vaccines, the risk of the virus staging a comeback will continue to linger.

COVID-19 has shown us that disease in any country is disease in every country. Suddenly, it is clear that human equality and a common human destiny are more than mere slogans. The challenge now is for the international system to craft and execute a gargantuan solution, a great collective heave-ho to cover every region, every country across the world without discrimination.

Can the leaders of the world rise to the occasion and do the needful remains to be seen?

If they do, the human kind will have found a working model for beating back common enemies like poverty, hunger, poor health & education, and discrimination that have plagued us for millennia. And COVID-19 will rightly be remembered as the greatest of equalizer of human history.

Pfizer/BioNtech vaccine

- ◆ 95% efficacy
- ◆ Given in two doses, three weeks apart
- ◆ Stored at -70 degree Celsius

Oxford University/AstraZeneca vaccine

- ◆ 90% efficacy
- ◆ Given in two doses
- ◆ Does not need very cold storage

Moderna vaccine

- ◆ Protects 94.5% of people
- ◆ Given in two doses, four weeks apart
- ◆ Stored at -20 degree Celsius

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Life will never be the same again

Surviving the Covid-19 global pandemic

By Khalid Bajwa

Tuesday, 8 December 2020, is a landmark day for the UK and the world. A 90-year-old woman, Margaret Keenan, from Northern Ireland has become the first person to be vaccinated at University Hospital Coventry, England, outside the trial conditions marking the onset of the UK's mass vaccination programme.

The COVID-19 pandemic has ruined economies, destroyed people livelihoods, resulted in the deaths of millions, and crippled many people with physical and mental scars. The pandemic is at its peak and is continuing to wreak havoc. Aviation, hospitality, tourism, sports, entertainment, manufacturing, agriculture industries and high street retail bear the brunt of the devastation unleashed by the pandemic.

With the start of the mass vaccination programme, there appears a silver line and people are euphoric in the hope that life will return to normal soon. But it's not going to happen. Returning life to normal is still a long way off for reasons humanity has never encountered before.

Around 200 vaccines are in advanced stages of trial and many will make to the market but that's just one aspect of the issue. The manufacturing of vaccines, glass vials, syringes, needles and so on pose daunting challenges.

Then there are the problems of logistics: Storage, safe transportation, availability of trained staff, keeping tabs on the timing of the doses and ensuring access to remote areas all pose new problems. The human civilization has no experience of carrying out such a coordinated operation at this gigantic scale.

Therefore, life will return to normal not by tomorrow but in at least couple of years if everything goes well but even then, it will not be the normal life as we know. It will be a new normal with new norms.

London's mayor, Sadiq Khan, is worried about the pandemic's effect on the future of London city. The London's Central Activities Zone (CAZ) and Northern Isle of Dogs (NIoD), which hosts London's major business, commercial and cultural activities is in grave danger of losing its appeal because of huge rise in working from home, unprecedented restrictions on cultural venues and events, and the collapse of international travel both for business and tourism.

It is feared that the life we know in London may change forever. To understand the impact of Pandemic on London, the mayor has commissioned a major new research to study the challenges and opportunities in the future. The London scenario could be true for all the major cities of the world.

Online business has thrived during the pandemic and is one of the few gainers during the pandemic. The high street has been losing ground to online trading for many years now. The pandemic might have dealt it a death blow to it as online retailing is likely to be the predominant shopping habit of consumers.



The pandemic has taught the businesses that it is not essential for them to bring all the people to one place that is called the 'office' as allowing people work from home is not only cost effective but has also proved to be more efficient. There is no need to waste time in stressful commuting. It provides better work-home life balance to the employees that make people stick to their jobs for longer.

There are societal, cultural, and psychological effects of the pandemic that are likely to endure in the future. Social distancing, avoiding crowds, crowded places, indoor venues, increased awareness of hygiene practices will continue to play on peoples' mind with serious consequences for many businesses that thrive on social mixing of people.

People are likely to be lonelier in the future with increased mental illnesses. Depression could become a plague itself and with negative connotations attached with mental illnesses could ruin countless lives. As has been reported by the law enforcement agencies, the domestic abuse and violence has increased during the pandemic both symptomatic of mental stress people are going through.

Different societies can experience different level of social discord and unrest during and after vaccination programmes, depending on the structure of the relevant societies, centred on race and class relationships and inequalities as was evident even during the pandemic.

The ease of access to vaccine may open latent structural imbalances and fissures of the various societies having long term political and societal consequences. It can have a destabilising effect on the governments and the societies.

The health systems of the world have never experienced suchlike thing in the past and were under huge strain and in the beginning clueless to deal with the situation and the disease.

However, the pandemic has proved to be a steep learning curve for the health systems, and they are now better prepared to tackle any new pandemic both logistically and in terms of staff training. This is extremely important as some scientists claim that COVID-19 is

just the beginning of succession of pandemics resulting from climate change and increased interaction between wild-life and human beings.

High fiscal deficits, increased unemployment, increased debt to GDP ratios, higher expenditure on fiscal policies, business closures, and restructuring of economies will define the economic scenario in the post pandemic world. To cover the cost of bailout packages, decreased collection of taxes due to dramatic falls in GDP, and to finance new investment in public sector to bolster the economy and employment, the governments are left with no other option than to increase the taxes.

Some countries with very low interest rates like the UK and members of the EU may have the option of continuing to borrow money as the cost of borrowing is very low and they may not run into repayment problems for some time. Which way the governments will go depends on the individual governments. This leaves a room for ambiguity and uncertainty about future government policies.

The governments all over the world need to chalk out and launch special programmes designed to tackle negative effects of the pandemic on the society.

Prolonged pandemic, extensive domestic abuse against women

By Haider Rifaat

COVID-19 continues to take flight in many of the hotspot countries such as the United States, India, Brazil, Russia and France, where the rate of positivity has significantly increased over the past few weeks. Owing to extended lockdowns, families at large have had to stay indoors for months to avoid the potential spread of the virus, enabling domestic abuse against women to take precedence.

According to sources, Australia and Italy have reported an uptick in domestic abuse against women this year. A survey found that 10 percent of Australian women were victims of domestic abuse during the pandemic. ISTATS (Italian National Institute of Statistics) uncovered that domestic abuse helplines saw a 75 percent increase in users this year, which only raises more alarm for women and their safety.

Women and children remain one of the most subjugated and oppressed groups in the world today. Even women in the most developed countries have to validate their existence and merits in a society let alone those who are stripped of their basic rights in other parts of the world.

Women are more vulnerable and that makes them easier targets, especially considering the circumstances of the pandemic. Families have been living indoors for nearly a year, therefore, an increase in abuse against women is more likely. Psychological and physical suffering are bound to take a toll on them and their general well-being.

Additionally, the overall family dynamic has changed since the pandemic emerged in March. Couples are working from home and are in company of each other throughout the day. Therefore, anxiety and stress can translate into anger and frustration, causing men to displace their negative emotions onto their spouses or immediate family members.

We also know that the global economy has experienced a major blow this year and millions are out of jobs or are heavily in debt. In times of immense financial strain, the pressure of making ends

meet can trigger individuals to commit verbal or physical violence against their significant others, or at least the probability of doing so may increase.

Women are largely thought of as caregivers. They are expected to look after their families every day. This also holds true for working women with families of their own. Not being able to live up to those expectations in times of greater responsibility can pit couples against each other.

The divorce rate has shot up during the pandemic as well. The United States saw a 34 percent increase in divorces as compared to last year. We can attribute this factor to varying forms of abuse, intolerance towards each other and other irreconcilable differences.

It is important for women in particular to recognize the difference between having arguments and letting abuse take precedence over you. Couples should take the time to invest in their relationships, and engage in couple therapy sessions to make their marriages work.

If, for some reason, your partner is abusing you every other day, report to your immediate family members or to the local authorities. No woman should continue living in an environment that threatens her safety. Know that enduring abuse is encouraging abuse. So, take a stand for yourself. As an alternative, make use of domestic abuse helplines to voice your concerns. Ask representatives on call what you can do next and they will guide you accordingly.

Domestic abuse can affect anyone, anywhere. Victims have to put up with the worst of psychological, emotional and physical trauma to the point that they hit rock bottom. Therefore, it is crucial that women rely on helplines that render mental health services. More importantly, they should muster the courage to flee a toxic relationship. The longer you choose to stay in an abusive relationship, the more violence you would suffer. So, make a conscious decision that favors you.

Online Classes in the Time of COVID-19

When Access to Education depends on Internet Access

By Mishaal Ashraf

From economy to global mobility to social life to the educational sector, the outbreak of COVID-19 has left serious repercussions on all spheres of life. With the closure of educational institutes, first in March 2020 and then again in November 2020, uncertainty looms about whether and when life will return to normal.

The education system of Pakistan was already on precarious footing when the pandemic arrived – the reason being lack of quality teachers, inadequate infrastructure, unavailability of equipment, reliance on obsolete technologies, and so on. With the spread of coronavirus, it was natural that such a system would be hit hard.

Currently, one of the biggest challenges that the educational sector is facing is that of online classes. The senior management of schools, colleges and universities are working hard every day to come to a decision relating to the resumption of on-campus classes, and ways to ensure effective online teaching.

There is no denying that remote learning and remote working works very well for a large number of populations globally, and even boosts productivity for some. On the other hand, not every individual feels satisfied with their work and learning by sitting at home poring over a screen.

The number one challenge that Pakistani students are facing is the unavailability of computers. Education is a luxury in Pakistan which most people struggle to gain access to. The problem is compounded now that these people are burdened with the cost of purchasing expensive devices like desktops, laptops, smartphones etc., to attend classes.

Many bright students who would be class toppers otherwise are lagging just because of their financial inability to purchase expensive equipment. Background interviews with parents reveal many families are facing the issue of not having enough computers at home.

If, for instance, there are three school-going children in a family and all of them are having online classes, it becomes impossible for parents to ensure that all three of them can attend online classes with just once device at home.

Secondly, if a student somehow manages to get their hands on a device to take classes, the second major problem that they have to face is of Internet connectivity. Around 60 percent of the Pakistani population resides in rural areas, and it is no secret that the rural areas of our country have little to no IT infrastructure.

This lack of infrastructure is a hurdle in guaranteeing that the whole country is linked to the Internet. In urban areas, where internet is available, the connection is so poor that to maintain a connection throughout a 40-minute class becomes a challenge in itself.

Thirdly, Pakistan cannot spend much on technology advancement and development of human capital. With the sudden outbreak, the teaching staff could not get the much-needed training to operate and use technology. Many teachers are unfamiliar with ways to use computers to teach in an effective manner. This not only results in



teachers being unproductive, but also affects the learning of students to a great extent.

Fourthly, educational institutes have to face the difficult question on how to conduct online examinations, especially if laboratory work is required. Making sure that students do not cheat in exams and coming up with unconventional methods of testing is an emergent challenge.

Moreover, since both teachers and students are new to the concept of online classes in Pakistan, they are facing a huge communication gap. Teachers are unable to deliver lectures properly, and students find it difficult to voice their queries and concerns. This leads to lack of teacher-student interaction which has a negative impact on the overall learning achievement for students.

Last but not the least, homes do not provide an optimal learning environment for students, and for teachers to teach. It is quite difficult if not impossible to solely focus on productivity with so many distractions around. This results in side-tracking of students, and teachers' inability to ensure that their students remain focused throughout classes.

None of the foregoing is to say online classes are useless. They benefit some if not all students. The new system of education gives time to students to complete courses where they were falling behind, gives flexibility of timing and the chance to revisit lectures if recorded. Students also take advantage of learning from a comfortable environment at home, so they can truly focus on their academics.

The long and short of the matter is that online classes are proving to be a big challenge for everyone in the country. The alternative – losing an academic year in the middle of the pandemic – is not even thinkable, especially when students around the globe are not lagging as much.

The responsibility to ensure both teachers and students have access to the necessary equipment and training to make online classes work rests squarely with the government.

Equally important, the government needs to ensure stable Internet access to every nook and corner of the country so students from all parts of the country have equal access to education. It may not be an easy task to accomplish, but it must be a government priority.

Budget Deficit seen Escalating to 9% of GDP

Additional Revenue Measures worth PKR 250 Billion key to Revival of IMF Programme

By Mehtab Haider

Amid rising political temperatures against the backdrop of Pakistan Democratic Movement's campaign to oust Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) led government, the risks to Pakistan's beleaguered economy are multiplying even as Islamabad makes a last ditch effort to revive the IMF's stalled \$6 billion program.

The PDM has announced its plans to hold a long march towards Islamabad and collectively quit the National and Provincial Assemblies, triggering a full-fledged political crisis around the New Year 2021.

Pakistan's economy has been in crisis mode for some time because of large current account and budget deficits. There is a need to seriously analyze these two deficits in detail to ascertain their nature and take corrective action.

The PTI government, however, has resorted to chest thumping with a deafening chorus of turning the current account deficit into surplus, all the while ignoring worrying developments on the macroeconomic front that are deepening the crisis with the passing of each month.

The Current Account Deficit (CAD) that had ballooned to \$20 billion two years ago turned into surplus four months into the current financial year. The reasons behind this change were a sharp drop in imports due to the economic slowdown and remittances from expatriate workers.

However, there are some major risks arising out of the situation. International POL prices are on the upswing with Brent prices rising by ten dollars a barrel. This could cause Pakistan's petroleum import bill for the year to surge by \$1.5 billion.

Secondly, Pakistan is set to import around 7 to 8 million bales cotton, 2.5 million tons of wheat, and vast quantities of sugar. Together, these could push the country's import bill upwards by approximately \$4 billion.

Thirdly, the outflows on payment of principle and mark-up of foreign loans continued at a time when Islamabad had exhausted its program loans from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank and project loans had dried up. All these developments could accelerate pressures and the government's much touted current account surplus could be turned into a deficit by the end of the fiscal year.

The capital account was already in red in the first four months (July-Oct) of the current fiscal year – a worrisome symptom that portends a full blown crisis within the next few months.



The yawning budget deficit – the gap between revenues and expenditures – climbed to PKR 900 billion or 2 percent of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) during the first four months (July-Oct) of the current fiscal year.

This clearly shows that the expenditures were increasing at a supersonic speed while FBR's revenues showed a growth of just 4.5 percent in first four months of the current fiscal year.

Take a closer look at FBR's revenue collection, it becomes clear that the tax collection only achieved growth of 3.8 percent in the first five months. On non-tax revenue front, the profits of SBP dropped so overall tax and non-tax collection could not be increased at desired pace.

The government had envisaged a target budget deficit of PKR 3,195 billion or 7 percent of the GDP for financial year 2020-21. In view of the performance of first four months, it is amply clear we are headed for a much higher budget deficit. This fiscal imbalance cannot fail to pose a major threat to the economy.

The FBR collected PKR 1,688 billion in the first five months (July-November) of the current fiscal year against PKR 1,623 billion in the same period of the last fiscal year, registering net growth of just 3.8 percent.

The FBR envisaged an annual tax collection target of PKR 4,963 billion for whole financial year 2020-21 against tax collection of PKR 3,997 billion for fiscal year 2019-20. This means the FBR need to achieve around 20 percent growth in order to realize its tax collection target by 30 June 2021.

Planning in the middle of the COVID-19 outbreak, the FBR had distributed its target on lower side for the first half (July-Dec) period on the basis of the assumption that economic activity would return to normal in the second half (Jan-June) of the year. Unfortunately, however, the

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pandemic has returned with a vengeance to wreak fresh havoc on the economy.

At the current pace, it seems that the FBR would be able to touch PKR 2,000 billion mark till end December, rounding out the first half of the current fiscal year. It would then be left with the task of collecting PKR 3000 billion in the second half (Jan-June) of the fiscal year. On average, the FBR will be required to collect PKR 500 billion every month.

It is usual for the FBR to set higher targets for the last quarter (April-June) every fiscal year.

The IMF has so far estimated that the FBR requires additional revenue measures to the tune of PKR 250 to 300 billion to achieve its tax collection target of PKR 4,963 billion. The revival of the IMF program will depend upon the government's ability to come up with additional revenue measures through a new finance bill or presidential ordinance in the coming months.

However, in a worrying development, the FBR missed its monthly revenue collection target consecutively for the last three months. Clearly, as the year progresses, it is becoming more and more difficult for the tax machinery to achieve the annual target of PKR 4,963 billion.

With expenditures on the rise and revenue growth sluggish, the economists are suggesting that the budget deficit might escalate beyond 8.5 percent to 9 percent of GDP for the current fiscal year.

So far, the primary balance excluding mark-up obligations demonstrates movement in the right direction but worsening fiscal position in months ahead could easily turn this dream into a nightmare.

Another risk to the economy stems from the severity of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, which could cause inflation to jump, especially on account of food supply disruptions.

The government would do well to focus on avoiding the inflationary shock because all economists agree that for things to take a turn for the better, the CPI inflation must ease with passing of every week and month.

Special Secretary to Ministry of Finance Kamran Afzal who is also the official spokesman, when contacted, brushed aside all these challenges, saying that the government was focused on convincing the IMF to holding review talks soon with a view to reviving the \$6 billion program.

Privatisation of three Power Plants on Cards

Energy sector in shambles after endless string of bungles

By **Khalique Ahmad**

Prime Minister Imran Khan's government is preparing to privatise three gas-fired power plants – likely to help pay off part of the power sector circular debt, TTI (The Truth International) can report.

Egged on by Privatisation Commission, the Power Division has been pushing for the last three years to exclude these plants from mandatory purchase of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), well-placed sources say.

The LNG import plans since 2005-06 were conceived, followed, stumbled, and then completed successfully to replace expensive Furnace Oil imports. About \$5-6 billion investments were made in LNG processing terminals, pipelines and gas-fired power plants for which binding international agreements were signed. The government, therefore, must have a strong motivation to wean these plants away from LNG.

In the first phase of the initiative, privatization of two power plants is expected to yield PKR 300 billion as part of an IMF programme to pay off part of power sector circular debt that has risen from PKR 1.2 trillion at the end of June 2018 to PKR 2.3 trillion now.

Meanwhile, the economic slowdown that saw the country's GDP growth rate to dip from 5.8 percent in FY2018 to -0.4 percent in 2020 has caused the country's power consumption to drop. This



has rendered a large fraction of the country's power generation capacity redundant – causing LNG demand to drop. Sector insiders say gas pipelines were filled with excess LNG supplies, on the verge of ruptures as linepack exceeded permissible levels.

The Power Division started its push to get rid of the “must run” status of LNG plants and resultant 66 percent “take-or-pay” LNG supplies and found a natural ally in Privatisation Commission. The push culminated in a decision of the Cabinet Committee on Energy (CCOE) led by Planning Minister Asad Umar on 18 September to exempt three Punjab-based power plants of 3,900 MW from compulsory purchases of LNG quantities starting January 2022.

The Power Division's impact analysis of ‘must-run commitments’ of three LNG based power plants suggested that due to the

devaluation of currency, transition of generation mix towards cheaper and local resources, and addition of efficient and low variable cost fleet of power plants rendered LNG-based GPPs uneconomical.

Also, the upcoming addition of nuclear and renewable plants would further reduce the overall unit cost of national pool and lead to under-utilisation of LNG power plants.

A power sector expert speaking on background said: “If these trends in prices continue and the current load forecast holds, the existing minimum guaranteed offtake of 66 percent for three plants would translate to a loss to the tune of PKR 143 billion up to 2023”.

On the other hand, the Petroleum Division said the losses to be faced by the oil and gas companies (about PKR 100 billion per annum for many years) would be many times the savings in the power system. It said the decision to end the LNG commitments was being taken “while completely ignoring the financial implications for the RLNG supply chain considering back-to-back agreements attached with the transaction”.

This was the time the relevant stakeholders and CCOE should have finalized arrangements for LNG imports for peak winter months if at all it was required in the power sector or the government had policy for diverting expensive imported gas towards the subsidized domestic sector.

At least this was the case last year. For example, the LNG import tenders were last year given a gap of 3-4 months in August for October-December, in October for January, in November for February.

This year, however, the gas companies delayed import orders as Power Division kept changing its LNG demand for July through March 2021. Also, the orders placed left a limited supply window of two months e.g, November for January and December for February.

This pushed the bid prices upwards as international demand of LNG rose and prices soared. The terminals would be running at near-full capacity but supplies would now go to residential consumers.

Inexplicably, Khan’s PTI led government has not been able to ensure a steady energy supply since it rose to power in August 2018 – and missteps have resulted in supply hiccups for both petrol and diesel.

Ironically enough, power shortages seen back in peak demand summer season continue to dog the system in winter despite claims of surplus capacity and unsustainable capacity payments.

The government had to shut down indigenous oil and gas fields to let refineries exhaust the stockpiles of their selective products. It banned petroleum imports to keep local refineries running and yet the storages were empty after the global oil prices hit rock bottom. The nation failed to benefit from the historic oil price bonanza.

The same happened with LNG. The country had been importing maximum (over 1,200 million cubic feet per day) liquefied natural gas (LNG) in last winter when its landed delivered costs went beyond \$12 per million British thermal unit (mmBtu). Yet, the



government was unable to import even half of this quantity when prices plunged below \$2 per mmBtu in the international market.

During the period, the government lifted the ban on the import of expensive furnace oil by the private sector to meet electricity requirements and instead kept paying capacity charges to LNG terminals without utilising their full capacity while similar private firms were pleading to let them bring in cheaper and cleaner LNG for transport, power generation and even industry, including textiles.

As if that was not enough, the authorities asked power plants to switch to diesel – the most expensive fuel for power generation – because of a gas shortage when stocks were insufficient for transport. At that point, the government could have maximised LNG imports or allowed production from local fields to return to normal. That happened at a time the government’s narrative revolved around the surplus capacity and resultant unaffordable capacity charges.

There were also days and weeks when major power plants dedicated for gas or LNG were providing base load generation on diesel as fuel involving a cost difference of PKR 7-8 per unit on RLNG to PKR 20-21 on diesel.

Meanwhile, natural gas and RLNG pressures dropped so low that linepack was not enough to let the industrial units operate because of limited import arrangements. The textile industry formally protested with the government for low gas pressure and the resultant loss of export orders.

This year again sufficient LNG imports were not arranged in advance even though import bids in August amounted to as low as \$2.2 per MMBTU (5.7 percent of Brent) from Azerbaijan. The delay resulted in bids for LNG imports above \$6 per MMBTU (almost 17 percent of Brent).

These are just a few glimpses of disconnect in planning and economic energy modelling. Almost every element enumerated above involved losses worth billions of dollars.

Interestingly, the creation of the Ministry of Energy with the merger of Petroleum and Power ministries was the key feature of the PTIs manifesto. Yet, now that the Ministry of Energy has come into being, Petroleum and Power Divisions appear more fragmented than ever before. They are run by two federal secretaries. They are led by two Special Assistants to the Prime Minister (SAPMs) even though on top is a common federal minister for energy.

PM Khan backs Reform Agenda, says Revenue Czar

Revenue Targets off after Second Wave of COVID-19

By Ashraf Malkham

With the COVID-19 global pandemic wreaking economic havoc around the world, Pakistan's economy is said to have taken less of a pummeling than most. On the other hand, the COVID-19 emergency found the Pakistani economy in a fairly bad shape – which makes recovery more challenging by that much.

The Truth International (TTI) sat down with Dr Vaqar Masood, the Special Advisor to the Prime Minister on Revenue, for his take on the situation and direction of economy.

TTI: What evils have we visited upon our economy for it to reach the state it is currently in?

VM: The truth is that this government inherited high deficits of current account and fiscal balance. Initially, the government took time to decide which delayed the crucial decision-making process. Once we embarked on the reformative and stabilization path, the outcome was quite good. The level of revenue was rising, current account deficit fell, and a boost was observed in remittances.

We were on course to post growth when COVID struck our economy. While we were fortunate not to have faced the full brunt of the pandemic, it was still quite burdensome. But we tried our best to reach the needy through the Ehsaas program. We expected things to return to normal after July, but then the second wave came up.

Now, even though the situation looks challenging, but we have improved on all accounts. Perhaps the least effective has been the [government's] control on food prices. Since farm prices are based on a demand-supply mechanism, supply distortions introduced by unexpected rains caused prices to soar and our calculations proved wrong.

TTI: How much of the current inflation can be attributed to poor governance?

VM: While we can complain about governance, it is pertinent to note that we learned from our mistakes quickly. Therefore, the prices of both sugar and wheat have come down. The crops for potatoes, onions, and tomatoes saw partial harvest failures but fresh supplies are now coming in from KP and Balochistan. In contrast to international prices, Pakistan has been successful in curbing the sudden increase seen early on.

TTI: How important is it to revive the IMF programme and where do we stand vis-à-vis the IMF concerning its revival?

VM: The programme was halted due to COVID-19 but let's appreciate how much the IMF helped Pakistan during this pandemic, specifically with regard to its Rapid Finance Instrument of \$1.4 billion as well as the leverage provided on account of the ongoing programme. There is news circulating regarding their mission coming next week, of which their meeting may be virtual, but the final dates are yet to be announced.



TTI: What leniencies will you be requesting regarding the IMF programme conditions?

VM: Rather than focus on conditionalities, I would like to argue based on the global economic havoc wreaked by the pandemic. The annual meetings of World Bank and the IMF have already emphasised the need to maintain demand to ensure that economic activity does not dissipate. We will be asking for leverage to stabilize the economy. Due to COVID-19, we had to make hard decisions and some strict measures which will hamper daily life and subsequently, economy. We are ready for reforms but at our own pace.

TTI: Do you think FBR's current targets are realistic?

VM: When we were setting these targets, we assumed COVID-19 was on its way out, allowing for a return to normal social and economic activity. Because of the second wave of the pandemic, we have to deal with unforeseen sluggishness and inflation, because of which our targets now appear to be unrealistic.

TTI: Are any FBR reforms on the agenda?

VM: Currently, Pakistan's federal revenue is 9.3 percent of the national GDP. Provincial revenue rises slightly to 11 percent. We are currently concerned with raising it to 18 percent, even though a report from the World Bank says that Pakistan can raise to approximately 26 percent of GDP from revenues. We are building a database of information and allowing people to disclose information on their incomes and assets. We are working in close collaboration with the relevant stakeholder and are signing MoUs with several key organizations. Technological advances, the pressure of FATF, and the elimination of Benami all lead to the creation of an environment in which concealment of assets and incomes becomes unfeasible and tax fraud becomes impossible.

TTI: Doubts have been casted on the government's political will to move forward with reform. How do you comment on that?

VM: From what I have heard, even Shabbar Zaidi admits he had full confidence of the Prime Minister and faced no obstacles. Initially, I was wary of assuming this responsibility, but I agreed on the Prime Minister's insistence, and have only received trust and complete support on all accounts.

In Memory of a National Tragedy

16th December 1971

Close to fifty years after the 1971 war, our nation consciously chooses to forget what actually happened and rather perceives it as a defeat on political, diplomatic and defence front without acknowledging the actual causes. Woefully, we are still giving the international community our weak spots and continue to be taken advantage of. Nonetheless, the tragedy has left in shambles.

The tragedy apparently changed Pakistan's psyche to 'never again' but the current game of power between political opponents and presumed military involvement might not only repeat history but this time the divide will result in a catastrophe. It seems that the characters have changed but the roles remain the same. Presently every segment of society is worried on current situation prevailing in the country.

What started as a refusal to accept Bengali as a state's second language of Pakistan highlighted by Quaid-e-Azam. This announcement led to the history's worst divide that only proved futile for Pakistan. The war of power in spite of winning election, Yahya Khan's inability to handle the crisis, failure to transfer power to winning party Awami League of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, seems quite familiar to Pakistan's current situation when Opposition is not willing to accept election results and accept government. It looks we have become our own enemies now. The desire for power has blinded everyone involved leading to only one outcome. Mostly political leaders have established their empires and settled their kids abroad.

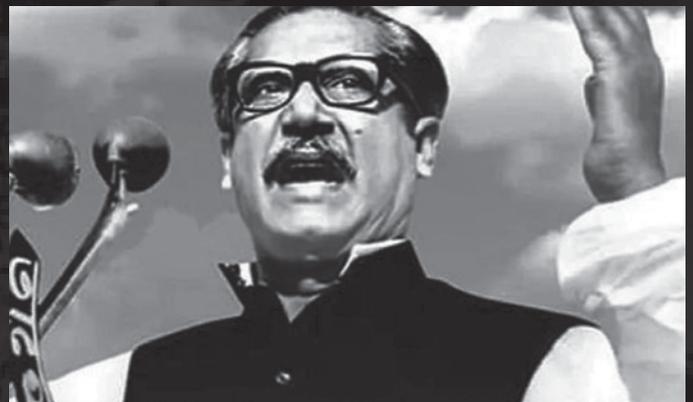
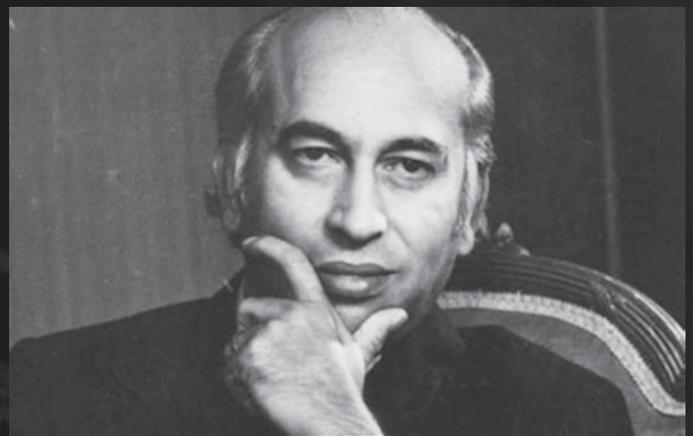
After the specific targeted attacks on Bihari community and Supreme Court's judgment that extended citizenship rights, made clear that the crimes against Bengalis were only remembered. As of today, thousands of Biharis continue to live in camps with multiple imputations.

Each year, Pakistanis recall December 16 as the fall of Dhaka or dismemberment of Pakistan. After the loss, Pakistan strengthened its defense with successful launching a nuclear program resolving to never let that happen again. Apparently the lessons learnt from 1971 shed light on the stronger military to avoid any such defeat in future.

Every child in their school must have learnt; 'United we stand, divided we fall'. Unfortunately, these lessons are easily forgotten and the current state of affairs are leading to somewhat similar consequences but this time we might not be left with a home to call Pakistan.

Today we stand divided on political, ethnic, religious and regional bases. We, being the best brains of the world, could not promote patriotism among new generations. Unfortunately we are the only country where pride is taken by speaking against the state on mainstream media. None of the successive governments did serious effort to put the house in order. Government always worked on adhoc basis instead of adopting long term policies in the best national interest.

Our situation demands to adopt national unity, correct our way of governing, get rid of evils like nepotism and corruption in order to live a strong, respectful nation in this global village. Pakistan first-Policy should be adopted to be an emerging nation.



Eulogizing the Slain

16th December 2014

The dawn of 16th December amid the haze of memories struck individuals separately. As a parent, it jolted their emotional conscience, as a teacher, it ignited the resolute will to sacrifice and as a student, it hardened the resolve to move forward. But amidst all this, the security and political leadership surrendered to the trauma inflicted upon mere children at schools, faculty members with the temerity to lay down their lives to safeguard those of their younger ones. Or was it surrender after all?

In the quest to eulogize the fallen warriors, most of whom were far too young to have passed on, there is a need to arouse the collective conscience of the community. Six years following the tragedy, the memory is still just as fresh as if the blotches of blood have still not dried up, as mothers patiently await the return of their children and as adolescents seek an end to their misery.

The images of splattered pages and bruised furniture may have been memorialized into history, but the fact remains, that amidst the cruelest of wars and the harshest of times, it took a sacrifice of 144 young people to finally jolt the nation into awakening. While the nation treads upon the path to healing, the message from the terror outfits was loud and clear, your future lies in our hands and we will do out utmost to destroy it.

Yet, Pakistan is recovering, the scars may be visible, but the situation is on the road to improvement – a befitting response to those viciously toiling in enmity against the state and future of Pakistan.

Testimonials

“The teacher asked us to recite from the Koran quietly. When we came out from the back door there was a crowd of parents who were crying. When I saw my father he was also crying.”

“I have resigned from my job. I don't enjoy life anymore. I go everyday to my son's grave as I find peace nowhere.”

“I want them to be punished with slow death so they would feel the pain we are feeling.”

“When he shot at me, I pushed back my head slightly. The bullet rubbed past my forehead. There was a slight burning sensation, but no real pain. But later when I touched my head, it was bleeding.”

“My son was alive for 26 minutes and waiting for me to rescue him. But I was not allowed by forces there.”

“We rushed inside the classroom, our teacher closed the door, she was trying to lock it when the terrorists kicked on the door and forced it open. All 10 of my classmates and our teacher died, only I survived.”

“So what if we can't get justice here, there is a bigger court up there to hold the trial.”

“As soon as we hid under tables, they fired bullets at our legs and our heads and then they burned our madam. They burned our madam. The firing continued but we didn't move because whoever moved got shot at.”

“One of my teachers was crying, she was shot in the hand and she was crying in pain. One terrorist then walked up to her and started shooting her until she stopped making any sound. All around me my friends were lying injured and dead.”

The Bewildered Herd

By Ashraf Jehangir Qazi

In just over a month the Biden Administration will commence. Biden promises “America will be back to global leadership.” But after the one-term Trump Administration and the global Covid-19 pandemic the world will be a very different place. The US will need a complete makeover to exercise global leadership. Far more than the long-term after-effects of Covid-19, Climate Catastrophe ensures the world can never be the same again. Scientists around the world warn human civilization as we know it could cease to exist by the end of the current century unless a radically different global leadership and global agenda soon emerges. The United States has been the most powerful obstacle to any such prospect.

Biden’s sympathies for the working classes will represent a significant improvement on the attitude of the Trump Administration. American workers’ wages have stagnated for almost 50 years. However, Biden does not support healthcare for all, free higher education, writing off student debt, a Green New Deal, etc. all of which would have to be paid for through moderately increased taxes on millionaires and billionaires. He does not intend to be a cause for concern to Corporate America which massively funded his campaign.

Nor does Biden demonstrate much awareness of the extent and speed with which climate calamity is approaching. He has refused to include Bernie Sanders in his cabinet and seems to have ignored his reform package for the first 100 days to prepare for a post-pandemic but climate challenged world. Biden’s explanation is that he needs Sanders in the Senate because he may not have the votes to push his legislation through although he has no apparent intention to push a Sanders reform agenda at all. Instead, he intends to have a cabinet “as diverse as America” although he has yet to appoint a Muslim to a major position. Moreover, as Cornel West observes diversity is not so much a matter of colour, race, religion and gender as it is of a range of approaches, views and commitments. While Biden will bring a more adult style to his leadership, he is likely to be a cop-out as far as substantive domestic reform is concerned.

On foreign policy, Biden will similarly remain on the right side of Corporate America and the Pentagon by engaging Russia, China and Iran “from a position of strength” and maintaining US-Israeli hegemony in the Middle East in alliance with regional monarchs and dictators fearful of their own people. Accordingly, he is selecting a team of old Obama hands, including several neo-liberal lady-hawks, even though he says his administration will not be “a third Obama term.” Trump pushed confrontation with China and cooperation with Russia. Biden is more likely to slide into a new cold war including confrontations with both China and Russia. He is also likely to further strengthen the “Indo-Pacific” Alliance against China; ignore a developing genocidal situation in Indian Occupied Kashmir which threatens to pit two nuclear



armed countries, Pakistan and India, against each other; use Afghanistan and Central Asian states to target China and Russia; threaten the viability of Iran which would de-stabilize the entire Middle East and Southwest Asia region; and as a consequence divert attention, priority and resources away from averting irreversible climate catastrophe and all its fatal derivatives.

During his 47 years in Congressional and White House politics Biden has been a pillar of support to US Corporate Global Hegemony, perpetual war, and the dominance of the Corporate-Military-Media-Technology Complex. He has interfaced with Wall Street, the Pentagon, Silicon Valley, Big Tech, Big Banks, Big Oil, Big Pharma, etc. all of whom regard him as reliable. He has never effectively challenged the ideology of limitless greed, comprehensive inequality and white violence at home and abroad which define the new American Exceptionalism. On the contrary, he has been an integral part of the process which today threatens the planet and human civilization with climate catastrophe, nuclear conflict and fake news technologies that render democratic governance and rational, responsible and informed responses to global challenges almost impossible.

In the US, as indeed in so many assumed “democracies,” including Pakistan and India, the people are by and large duped, induced, constrained and compelled to “elect” representatives who do not really represent their needs and interests. Instead, they represent the interests of their “masters,” including paymasters, who facilitate and finance their electoral campaigns, and whose interests are more or less diametrically opposed to those of the people.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to “predict the future” and somewhat unfair to do so before Biden even enters the White House. However, if he does not win the two Senatorial runoff elections in Georgia on January 5, 2021 he will not have control of the Senate and his legislative agenda may come unstuck very quickly. This could set him up for a major reverse in the mid-term Congressional elections of 2022. That could cost him control over both the House of Representatives and the Senate which would render him a lame-duck President for the rest of his single term presidency. Any dreams he may entertain of becoming a second FDR and implementing a New Deal-like set of reforms would vanish, setting the scene for a major Republican come-back which would be calamitous for America and the world.

Only the multi-racial progressive youth of the Democratic Party and other smaller parties have any chance of educating American public opinion to understand and avoid such a scenario. Unfortunately, Biden and his likely cabinet have little time or inclination to listen to the advocates of basic reforms. They will be more engaged in enticing “moderate” Republicans to join them in a reform charade which keeps the ruling 0.1 percent in relatively good humour while fake news and mainstream media keep climate catastrophe and other impending disasters out of the picture for as long as possible.

Most of Biden’s likely cabinet members are competent professionals who have high level government experience unlike many of Trump’s advisers and cabinet secretaries. However, many of those in key posts have corporate and defence establishment ties which will significantly determine the policy advice they offer the President. They have become very wealthy and dependent as a result of these ties and have, by and large, adjusted their “policy values” accordingly. This has become an integral part of US corporate capitalist governance, irrespective of whether the government is that of the Democratic or Republican Party. It is the basis of a two party system which in reality has become a single Corporate America owned party with two wings: one pretending to be progressive and the other not making any such pretence.

Though not nearly as gifted as Obama, Biden could do his legacy a great favour if he can somehow initiate an exit process from the thoroughly corrupt and obsolete political system and the thoroughly corrupt and unjust economic system that prevail in the US today. The polarization these twin systems have bred now threatens the political coherence and unity of the US which in itself could pose great danger for the rest of the world.

The foregoing, unfortunately, suggests relatively less optimistic responses to the following questions: Under Biden will the concerted campaign continue against alleged Russian interference in US elections without any credible supporting evidence now that the Democratic Party has won the Presidential elections? Will US trade sanctions against China be lifted? Will Obama’s military Pivot towards China be moderated or will it be upscaled and intensified? Will the ban on Huawei and other Chinese tech companies be lifted or extended? Will Biden maintain US hostility towards China’s global BRI-based strategy including its CPEC-based regional strategy? Will he rejoin the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran or will he insist on additional Iranian concessions to lift US sanctions which Iran will almost certainly refuse? Will the European members of the JCPOA continue to cravenly follow the US lead? Will the US in conjunction with Israel and Arab Gulf countries provoke a war-like situation with Iran in order to bring about regime change in Tehran? (Arab potentates, according to recent reports offered to bear the costs of a US military imposed regime change in Syria.) Will Biden continue Trump’s policy of looking for a via media with North Korea? Will he restore Obama’s normalization policy with Cuba? Will he restore the international arms agreements with Russia that Trump walked out of? Will his generals allow it? Will US weapons and military equipment manufacturing corporations put peace before profits? Will Senator Bernie Sanders who, according to some progressive polls, is the most popular political leader in the US, finally try form a third party that unlike the two major parties will advocate a political, economic and foreign policy agenda that most

Americans would support against Corporate America and the Military Industrial Complex?

Will the four foundational US-India military agreements be fully implemented to formalize and activate their strategic alliance against China, and by implication, against Pakistan? Will Biden in any way pressure India to change its Kashmir policy in order to make possible a principled compromise settlement with Pakistan that is acceptable to the people of Kashmir? Will he make constructive and realistic proposals for such a settlement? Or will he pressure Pakistan, through threats of FATF blacklisting and withdrawal of IFI financing, to improve relations with India and refrain from any assistance to the Kashmir resistance which will be equated with abetting terrorism? If India is still unable to control the political situation in the Valley, and moves towards the final stage of genocide, will Biden do anything to stop it as Clinton stopped Indonesia in East Timor? Or with tacit Indian support, might he shift towards supporting an independent Kashmir - which could undermine the territorial contiguity of Pakistan with China through AJK and GB - as strategic compensation for India? Will Biden, unlike Obama and Trump, visit Pakistan?

Will Biden withdraw troops from Afghanistan in accordance with the 14 month time schedule that Trump agreed with the Taliban? Or will he continue to insist on a conditions-based withdrawal, which means an indefinitely continued active US military presence in Afghanistan, which in turn would indefinitely delay peace in Afghanistan with all its consequences for Pakistan? Will Pakistan follow America’s lead in the hope of securing some contingent or special interest advantage? Or will it develop an independent national and foreign policy? Will it build, consolidate and develop a mutually beneficial and comprehensive strategic relationship with China? Or will it continue to “never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity?”

Will a soft and failing state, like Pakistan is fast becoming under the dysfunctional governance of elected and non-elected leaderships alike, ever be able to adopt a national transformation policy beyond empty rhetoric to deal with the accumulating, converging and lethal challenges that beset it? Will it learn anything from the largest General Strike in history that took place in India on November 26 in which 250 million workers and farmers all over India protested against the predator capitalist policies of the Modi government? Or do we have no such problem?

Far too many of the ruling elite and intelligentsia in Pakistan knowingly or implicitly bank on or resign themselves to negative answers to most of the foregoing questions. Incremental and marginal changes that are too little too late, yes; but fundamental nation-building and nation-saving reforms, no! Not that they don’t want progress in Pakistan; but because they think it foolish and a costly waste of time to attempt to achieve much progress given the political and power realities in which Pakistan appears trapped. The people of Pakistan are regarded by their unhelpful elites - to quote the famous American political commentator Walter Lippmann’s reference to the American people - as a “bewildered herd.” They should know their place as “enlightened” people in the know provide the “leadership.” Pakistan is unfortunately brimful with such people in the know. But losing hope is a sin and countering those who deny hope is a duty.

One Hundred Years of Servitude

How the West Hoodwinked Palestinians into Statelessness

By Azmat Mumtaz Saqib

Part I

It is impossible to think of the plight of Palestinians at the hands of the Free World and not recall the childhood fairy tale of Little Red Riding Hood and its dark if obscure underpinnings.

Are the Western powers intent on reinterpreting the tale, equating the wolf with the grandmother? They are telling the little girl to celebrate the wolf for his focused and dynamic approach to achieving his objectives convincingly – and to try and negotiate a settlement with him in the best interest of peace.

The grisly tale begins about a hundred year ago. Europeans in general and Russian and Germans in particular have a history of persecuting Jews, which they felt guilty about. European justice kicks into action. The deprived Jews are compensated at the expense of poor Palestinians, who would eventually be dispossessed of the land of their forefathers per force.

More than 700,000 Palestinians were granted international refugee status. A century later, the civilized world does not recognize their right to return to their ancestral homeland. On the other hand, in the 1990s alone, Israel welcomed and integrated 100,000 Russian Jews and 39,000 Ethiopian Jews.

A hundred years on, why is the world still unable to rid itself of this lone surviving colonial project of Israel? To answer that question, we must dig up the annals of history to see how the project began in the first place.



It all started actively in 1896 when Theodore Herzl, the father of modern Zionism, conceived the Idea of a Jewish state. A vast majority of the Jews of the time rejected the idea, fearing that they will lose the European countries' nationalities and be expelled to such a Jewish State.

Conservative Jews considered it a sacrilege since only the Messiah can establish the sacred state. Both Baron Hirsch (Germany) and Baron Rothschild (UK) disliked the idea.

The same year, Herzl met Sultan Abdul Hamid in Istanbul, with a request for a grant of some land to the Jews in Palestine, promising that all the financial burdens of Ottomans will be taken care of

in return. Well aware of the Zionist plans, the Sultan rejected the request saying the land belonged to the Palestinians who had shed sweat and blood for it for millennia.

Herzl presented the idea in the first World Zionist Congress held in Basel, Switzerland in 1897. After the death of Herzl in 1904, Chaim Weizmann and other Zionists kept pursuing their case. In 1917, Lord Balfour, the pro-Zionist British Foreign Secretary, and Prime Minister Lloyd George obliged by issuing the Balfour Declaration to Lord Rothschild.

Now the Rothschilds and Hirsches came on board. In return British leaders wanted Jewish influence in other Europeans capitals to convince them to remain on Britain's side in the First World War.

Anticipating defeat of Ottomans especially in the Middle East, UK committed herself to facilitating Zionists in the Secret Sykes-Picot agreement for the land east of the Mediterranean. Quietly the British allowed Jewish emigration into Palestine and that came under their control.

Formed immediately after WWI, the League of Nations granted Britain a mandate to administer more than half of the conquered Middle East and later grant right to self-determination – the other half going on similar terms to France.

Part of the mandate called on Britain to establish a Jewish national homeland. Palestine was the only area of the region where the right to self-determination was not given to the local population.

Britain directly administered these regions from 1928 to 1948. First British High Commissioner to Palestine Sir Herbert Samuel was a Zionist Jew. He inducted better educated Jews in administering the land. By the end of the mandate the Jews were better prepared to administer Palestine than the less educated and under-privileged Palestinians.

It is of interest to note that secretly and separately Britain made conflicting covenants with Hussein Sharif of Hejaz, the Jews, the French, the Arabs, the Saudis, and the Palestinians in exchange for revolts rendered against the Ottomans Empire.

From Egypt to Iraq, nation states would always go to the some power for dispute resolution i.e., Britain (later to be replaced by USA). One hundred years on, it is still the same.

For more than hundred years Zionist with their financial tycoons, behind the scene manoeuvring and making and breaking of leaders have achieved their goals, a feat unmatched by other ethnoreligious groups in the world. The civilized world call this track two diplomacy and lobbying.

Emigration to 'the Promised Land' was slow early on despite incentives, but the rise of Hitler in 1933 and then the Holocaust accelerated the process manifold.

In 1947, Jews were less than 10 percent of the population of Palestine according to Palestinians. Jewish claims put the proportion at more than 30 percent. Ownership of Jewish landholdings were less than 6 percent.

After WW2, UK declared that it would terminate the Administrative Mandate on 14 May 1948. The UN passed Resolution 181 on 29 November 1947 for the partition of Palestine. Fifty five percent of the land was given to ten percent Jews and 45 percent land was for ninety percent Palestinians.

Arabs rejected the resolution because it violated their right to self-determination recognized under the UN charter. Civil war broke out between Jews and Palestinians which lasted for the next six months.

Drawing financial support from Jewish communities from all over the world, the Jews amassed around \$180 million, whereas the Palestinians did not even receive the one million pound committed by the Arab league.

Under the leadership of Mufti Ameen Al Hussein they gathered funds from local Palestinian communities. Initially the Palestinian Fedayeen fought well but with time the Jews improved on their war capabilities with volunteers joining them from overseas. Within six months Haganah, the main paramilitary force of Jews became better organized and better equipped and got the upper hand in the civil war.

On 14 May 1948, Israel declared Independence. The next day Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon supported by manpower and ammunition from Saudi Arabia and Iraq attacked Israel. In order to match the Arabs' superior arms and air force, the Jews bought used aircrafts and military equipment's discarded after WW2 from Europe.

The Arab-Israeli War continued until the 1949 Armistice Agreement under the auspices of the UN. The upshot was that Israel came into existence taking over even more land than was originally granted by the UN.

Due to the self-centred leadership of Arab states and desire to grab maximum land for their own country, the combined force lacked coordination and unity of command.

King Abdullah I of Jordan was secretly in cahoots with the Jews. His interest was only in Jerusalem and the West bank. He was opposed to an independent Palestinian State at his western border. The Egyptians occupied the Gaza strip. As a result the Palestinians ended up in worse state than what was granted by the UN in 1947.

The most important consequence of the First Arab Israeli War was the establishment of Israel superiority over the combined arms of the Arab states.

More than 700,000 Palestinians became refugees. Their children and their children's children remain homeless and stateless to this day. (To be Continued)



Taliban Agree to Deny Space to Foreign Militants

By Tahir Khan

Taliban cannot allow their allied foreign militants any space to operate from Afghanistan after making peace with the United States, a senior Taliban leader has announced.

The announcement by Maulvi Abdul Hakeem Sharee, a member of the Taliban's powerful "Rehbari Shura" or leadership council, comes at a time when Taliban representatives and Afghan government negotiators have opened discussions on preparation of an agenda for intra-Afghan negotiations to decide the future political roadmap for Afghanistan.

An audio recording of the Pashto-language statement, delivered to a gathering of the Taliban officials, has been released by the Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid in a WhatsApp group. It seems to spell out policy about key issues including the fate of the Taliban-linked foreign militants in Afghanistan.

This is the first time a senior Taliban cleric has publicly spoken about the future of the foreign militants in Afghanistan.

The Taliban have committed in their agreement with the United States signed this February not to allow al-Qaeda and other foreigners to operate against the US, its allies and any other country.

Policy statement by a senior Taliban cleric about the fate of the foreign militants, Taliban continuation of war against the Afghan forces and the Sharia perspective of the Taliban deal with the United States.

In the audio recording titled "Doha agreement's status in Sharia", Hakeem, who is also the Taliban chief justice, is heard explaining: "We have committed [in the agreement] that we will not give [foreign militants] space. We have not promised to hand over any Muslim to them. But it is binding on us not to give them space"

He adds: "This agreement is based on expediency as its advantages outweigh its disadvantages."

Hakeem's comments have arrived as the Taliban and the Afghan government's negotiation team are involved in what Dr Abdullah Abdullah, Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation has described as "serious discussions."

The Taliban spokesman Dr Mohammad Naeem told The Truth International this week that a joint committee of the Taliban and the Afghan government have opened discussions on the possible key items on the agenda of the negotiations.

The following are excerpts from Hakeem's address to the Taliban leaders in which he has tried to convince them that the agreement with the US is completely in accordance with Sharia.

"One issue is about the foreign Mujahideen, which is mentioned in the agreement with the US. [The foreign militants] are Muslims and the other side (US) is non-believer. Muslims fight against the



non-Muslims because of faith. Allah has stopped you that you cannot help these Muslims against the non-Muslims because of an agreement," Hakeem said, while citing some verses from the Holy Quran and Hadiths and precedents about agreements between the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and non-Muslims.

"Now we have committed to the agreement on the basis of expediency and the expediency is that the US wants to end invasion but [on the condition] that your internal and external [militants] will not pose a threat to [the US and allies]," the Taliban says.

He said if the Taliban shelter only 10, 100 or 1000 foreigners in Afghanistan it will only benefit them but then the US will not quit Afghanistan and the war will continue.

"On the one hand, a foreigner Mujahid will feel comfortable if we give him space in Afghanistan but if you do not give him a place only an individual would face some difficulty. But if invasion of Afghanistan prolongs then how much moral degradation will affect the people and even it can endanger the beliefs of the people, how many people would convert to Christianity and become Jews", he said.

"No doubt foreign Muhajid is my Muslim brother and he has rights but [because of the agreement with the US] only few people will face problems that means harms to a minority [foreign militants in Afghanistan] but if the Americans stay and if the invasion prolongs its damages are more and for majority", he said, and posed the question, "So who should be defended?"

Hakeem said that religious clerics within the Taliban had looked into all these issues and they had long discussions so there should be no suspicions in mind.

Talking about Mullah Omar's decision not to expel Osama bin Laden despite the danger of the US war and invasion of Afghanistan, he said the problem of Osama could not be resolved as the US was "arrogant" because Americans would demand the Taliban

should hand over the al-Qaeda leader to them. He recalled that the Americans neither talked directly to the Taliban nor sat with the Taliban on the Osama issue.

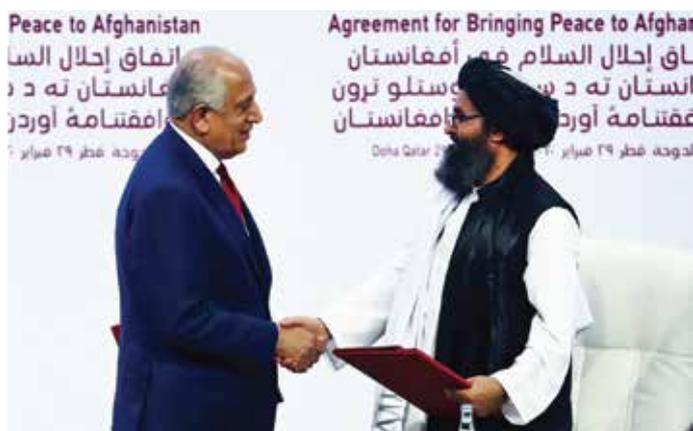
“If they had sat with the Taliban and considered them as a power, the problem would have been resolved like the problem is resolved now through negotiations that paved the way for signing of the agreement.

“The problem that time was of sovereignty and subjugation. The Americans would insist that the Taliban would accept whatever they want. The second issue was the handover of Osama. There is no surrender of a Muslim to non-Muslim.

“So the surrender of Osama was considered against the principles of Islamic sharia,” Hakeem said, adding the deal involved no commitment to hand over a Muslim to the US. “But the agreement is that we will not allow [foreign militants] space.”

NO CEASEFIRE AGAINST AFGHAN FORCES

Hakeem defended the Taliban policy of continuing to fight the Afghan forces despite the ceasefire with the US-NATO after the Doha agreement, maintaining Afghan government leaders had welcomed foreign invasion and also signed an agreement for the invaders’ stay in Afghanistan.



“When you (Afghan leaders) brought the Americans and insulted Muslims’ houses by the Americans. You signed a deal with them, insulted the honour of Afghanistan. You not only brought them to Afghanistan but signed a deal for invasion,” the Taliban leader said.

“The Taliban sat with them and struck a deal to end the invasion. You insulted the women at the hands of the Americans, killed children, elders and you said the Taliban system is brutal, you called chopping hands and punishment to adulterers as cruelty. This is infidelity to call the Islamic injunctions brutality. Our fighting is jihad”.

PEACE DEAL IS US SURRENDER TO THE TALIBAN

The Taliban leader says that the Doha agreement is not an agreement but a “surrender of the US.”

“What the Taliban have signed with the US, it is in fact not a peace agreement but it is a surrender by the US to the Taliban. Peace is one thing and surrender is another. This is a surrender. The US accepted the power of the Taliban, they accepted the power as they sought safe passage. [They said] we will end the invasion but give us a safe passage”, says the statement.

“The US has asked the Taliban not to come to the US when they quit Afghanistan. [They said] you should not come nor allow your people to come to the US. It was a clear recognition of the strength of the Islamic Emirate.

“The international media would have seen that the Americans bowed before the Taliban and surrendered. The US signed the agreement and recognized the Taliban as a power and sought peace for itself. So the deal is a reward in hand”.

PRISONERS’ RELEASE A MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT

Hakeem says the second achievement of the deal with the US was the release of 5,000 prisoners as per the Doha accord.

“All prisoners were our heroes. It was clearly stated that the Taliban will not sit in intra-Afghan negotiations unless 5,000 prisoners are released. So what have we lost in the agreement? Only two benefits have been given to the US. One, the US will be given a safe passage and no one will shoot at them. And two, no one will pose a threat to the Americans from Afghanistan – neither we nor [foreign militants].

“The Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him) in all his agreements stated the two sides would not fight each other and that we will not cooperate with your enemy and you will not help our enemy. The same is mentioned in the peace deal [signed with the US in Qatar in February]”.

Who is Hakeem Sharee?

Abdul Hakeem Sharee, who has studied in Madrasa Haqqania, Akora Khattak, is one of the few most influential clerics within the Taliban ranks and even the Taliban founder Mullah Mohammad Omar and personalities like Jalaluddin Haqqani would frequently visit him, according to one of his classmates.

Hakeem has thousands of religious students in Afghanistan and Pakistan including senior Taliban leaders like Maulvi Abdul Kabeer, Anas Haqqani and Maulvi Mohammad Nabi Omari, all members of the Taliban negotiation team. He has served as head of the Taliban education and training unit. He was deputy minister at the Ministry of Justice during the Taliban rule (1996-2001) when Maulvi Nooruddin Turabi was heading the ministry. He currently owns a big madrasa in Afghanistan and his sons run this religious school.

He is a close confidant of Sirajuddin Haqqani, known as Khalifa among the Taliban. American officials call Sirajuddin as head of the Haqqani Network but the Taliban insist Haqqani Network does not exist and Sirajuddin the deputy chief of the Taliban.

The Taliban chief Sheikh Haibatullah had once appointed Hakeem as deputy chief justice of the Taliban but he had refused to accept apparently because of his several other assignments, according to a Taliban leader. He had also served as a police commander in Afghanistan’s eastern province Khost before the Taliban rules. He spent a 13-year jail term in Saudi Arabia after he went to the Kingdom when the US dislodged the Taliban government in late 2001.



China will choose peace over coercion as the findings of NATO 2030 are revealed

By Hamzah Rifaat Hussain

The report 'NATO 2030- United for a New Era' was released on Tuesday and focuses among other areas on ensuring that the Atlantic Alliance stays relevant in the face of new challenges from countries such as Russia and China. Despite emphasis on evolution and speedy decision making, the 138 proposals enshrined are contentious given that the strategies envisioned are less about reform and more centered on countering 'adversaries' such as China on account of the latter's growing military might. The report is based on numerous fallacies and preconceived notions and is more of an attempt to augment threat perceptions and treat China's rise as a threat. The world can ill afford such polarization as Beijing continues to call for dialogue, peace and security.

The 60 plus page report mentions how the alliance did brilliantly in boosting military deterrence after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 by Russia and considers a similar threat emerging from a perceived resurgent, ambitious and authoritarian China. One such recommendation is to pursue a similar strategy politically by reaching out to Asian allies who are 'anxious' of China's expansionist designs. This assessment is nothing short of a provocation and ironically buttresses French President Emmanuel Macron's claims in 2019 that the alliance is actually 'brain dead.' Instead of stressing on real reform centering on addressing lack of intellectual capacity which has been visible in conflict torn regions such as Afghanistan with an everlasting political solution being elusive, the focus is more on adopting an assertive role globally.

One NATO diplomat seen in the report pointed at Chinese activities in the Arctic and Africa as well as its investments in Europe and claimed that Beijing is less of a benign trading partner and more of a threat. This bland assessment makes no mention of how the Trump administration's pernicious trade policies on tariffs contributed to the increased acrimony between China and the United States, nor does it substantiate claims regarding the vagaries of Chinese infrastructural projects in Africa or its contributions to spikes in sovereign debt in those countries. Numerous countries in different parts of the world benefitting from Chinese investments in critical infrastructure debunk the myth of considerable impending harm to domestic economies caused by increased Chinese influence.

Former US Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and co-chairman of the 10 member group of experts, A. Wess Mitchell spoke about NATO's adaptation towards strategic rivalry with China and for a return to geopolitical competition which includes a military dimension. Recent history is replete with how such strategies have only fomented discord and widened trust deficits between countries despite calls for de-escalation and cooperation. Outlandish claims have also been made regarding Chinese intimidation of

other states which belies the strict abiding towards the policy of non-interference that Beijing has historically pursued as part of its foreign policy. The findings also fail to account on how China never pressurized states to do more or join alliances, as is the case in the Middle East, where the Trump administration's intervention has contributed to tensions between rival powers Iran and Saudi Arabia and also offered little headway in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian quagmire. These pressing security quagmires in the Middle East are not a product of Chinese intimidation but the result of frail strategies adopted by the United States and its allies.

The report goes on to mention how a consultative body to coordinate Western policy towards Beijing is to be set up to highlight perceived rogue activities such as spying, supply chain disruptions, arms build ups and information warfare on part of China. Other areas deliberated upon include the need to counter investments in new weapons given that Beijing was coming closer to 'us'. The use of terms such as 'us' and 'them' are cold war binaries and are inappropriate in times when multilateralism, cooperation and globalization for the promotion of peace and stability is needed in a pandemic affected world. As a proponent of the Belt and Road Initiative which seeks to connect Eurasia with the rest of the world, not once can Chinese investments in special economic zones or industrial sectors in developing countries be equated with espionage or disruption of supply chains. In truth, the fact that NATO is mulling the option of including China in its master strategy document as well as in its 'Strategic Concept' underlines the internal insecurities given that several of its own diplomats have refrained from declaring Beijing as an adversary.

The findings of NATO 2030, united for a new era which glaringly features China- have also been revealed amid a backdrop of disturbing developments which need to be factored in. Reports of the Trump administration poised to add China's top chipmaker, SMIC and national offshore oil and gas producer CNOOC to a defense blacklist have contributed to festering tensions, yet despite measures aimed at curbing China's access to American investors, Beijing continues to express hope that the United States will not resort to erecting further barriers towards potential cooperation between both countries. The usage of the term by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Hua Chunying at a news briefing in Beijing, lays bare the limitations of not rightly labeling China as a rising threat as has been brazenly done so in the report.

The irony of the revelations in this NATO report is the fact that neither Beijing nor the world wishes to witness a polarized world in the post Trump era. Reforms focusing on comprehensive strategies for the Atlantic Alliance in light of its own shortcomings should feature prominently instead of provocations which are aplenty.

The Ghazi Saga

The Plucky Pak Sub that Dared India in Two Wars

By Brig. Raashid Wali Janjua

“Each year he grows more restless, the salt flows through his veins
But the depths are for the young, not the old with many pains.”

- Soul of a Submariner by John Chaffey,

The above couplet sums up the self-immolating temerity of those silent prowlers who risk death and discomfort by moving intrepidly across the ocean currents in the stygian gloom of sea depths. Life under the sea is not for the fainthearted; it takes a special breed to come up to the verity of John Chaffey’s poetic tribute to the submariners.

For a country like Pakistan – which is faced with the threat of a much larger and aggressive Indian navy – submarines are the ultimate levellers.

The Tench-class fast-attack diesel electric submarine called Ghazi by the Pakistan Navy was leased to Pakistan in 1963. The result of Ghazi’s aggressive deployment was the bottling up of the Indian fleet that did not dare to sail out of its harbour, deciding to sit out the war due to fear. S N Kohli, the Indian deputy naval chief, writes in ‘We Dared’ about the infuriation and shame of the Indian sailors who felt belittled by the timidity of their high command.



The memory of such pusillanimity rankled with the Indian military planners who set about raising the stock of their navy during the inter-war years. The upshot of the 1965 humiliation was the comprehensive modernisation and development of the Indian navy that effectively tripled its size by 1971. The Indian naval build-up in the shape of four submarines and eight OSA-class missile boats, was not matched by Pakistan where a phasing out plan of the WWII vintage surface fleet was in progress.

The 1971 war that was mostly fought in the eastern half of the country saw a daring action by the Pakistan Navy that was outmatched on the surface by the Indian Navy. In order to keep the Indian fleet confined to its coast, the Pakistan Navy deployed three submarines on nodal points along India’s Western coast.

The Daphne-class submarine Hangor prowled the sea along the coast opposite Bombay. It came across a mouth-watering opportunity to sink the Indian fleet, which was moving out of Bombay on the night between 3 and 4 December. But it restrained itself due to the rules of engagement given by the Pakistan Naval Headquarters to not attack any warship unless it attacked first.

However, in subsequent duels, when permission was granted, Hangor sunk an Indian anti-submarine frigate INS Khukri off the coast of Kathiawar on 9 December. Hangor defied Indian attempts to destroy it through 150 depth charges and remained instrumental in bottling up the Indian fleet.

In order to hunt Vikrant and also relieve pressure on depleted naval resources in the eastern theatre, the Pakistan Navy decided to send the only submarine with pluck and range to accomplish the arduous mission: the redoubtable veteran of 1965, the Ghazi.

In the eastern theatre, the Indians had a decisive superiority with a Task Force comprising aircraft-carrier Vikrant, two frigates, a destroyer, a submarine and a few patrol vessels. Pakistan had just four gunboats and a few small riverine crafts. Some war historians also report that Indians had hidden the INS Vikrant, their much-vaunted aircraft carrier, in the backwaters of the Andaman Sea as they feared Pakistani submarines.

PNS Ghazi, under the command of Commander Zafar, embarked upon its daring and hazardous 2,000 miles trek from Karachi to the eastern theatre on 14 November 1971. On the scent of the Vikrant like a bloodhound, it bypassed Vishakapatnam, the Indian Navy’s eastern base.

However, as Vikrant had moved far ahead by that time to hide in the Andaman Sea, the submarine couldn’t locate its intended prey. It doubled back and came towards the Vishakapatnam Port for the second part of its mission to lay mines in the narrow approach to the harbour. The intention was to bottle up Indian heavy naval concentration in its strategic eastern port base.

During the day, the Ghazi successfully laid mines in a linear fashion. It returned during the night to finish off the task, most probably due to the obstreperous post-monsoon heavy tides. As the musical whirl of the diesel engines and the sweet purr of electronic gadgets created an auditory sensation akin to a lullaby, the intrepid crew of the Ghazi prepared to lay the second string of mines.

The Ghazi’s mission was tantamount to tempting fate from the word go. That night, however, proved to be too much of a temptation to fate. The dangerously aggressive gambit backfire as the storied submarine accidentally struck one of the mines it had laid by day.

A deafening crescendo of sound heralded the martyrdom of brave souls as the Ghazi went up in a blaze of glory, striking terror in the hearts of Indian sailors at Vishakapatnam. It was a classic act of self-immolation by a daring crew that had defied Indian surveillance and sea hazards on one of the most hazardous and daring war patrols in naval history.

The Ghazi saga reminds us what a single daring submarine can achieve – a fact we ignore at our own peril when according due diligence to our naval development.

Rendezvous with Excellence

Meet the QAU Professor who Ranks among the World's Top 2 percent Scientists

By Azka Gouher

Pakistan's Dr Muhammad Zaman has been featured in the Stanford University's list of 2 percent of world's top scientists. An Associate Professor and Chairman of Department of Sociology at Islamabad's Quaid-i-Azam University, Zaman holds two post-doctorates, one from Poland and another from Zurich, Switzerland. He earned his doctorate in Sociology from Leipzig University, Germany.

Below is the transcript of a conversation TTI (The Truth International) had with him for your reading pleasure.

TTI: How do you feel about making it to Stanford's 2 percent top researchers in the world?

MZ: I feel that I have been blessed by God. I reckon there are a number of good sociologists and social scientists who have more publications [than I do]. They have more citations but this is God's special blessing that I got to be chosen by Stanford University.

TTI: Regarding your research portfolio, what has been your greatest achievement so far?

MZ: As far as theoretical contribution is concerned, it is the "Adequate Social Exchange". It's a concept which has not been picked by a many academicians. There are a number of other things that I can mention including Methodological Gravitism, which is another term that I used in one of my research articles that have been published by TQR (The Qualitative Report). I also wanted to write another article on the "Procedures of Adequacy". Above all, road safety – although it was not my research area but I think that was the best contribution.

I started off in 2012 when I came to Pakistan along with the Plantation Campaign, which was very well received. The Prime Minister, President, and the Chief Justice are now working on the Plantation Campaign. We also started the same campaign on campus back in 2012.

Here are a few achievements of our Road Safety campaign:

1) National Transport Authority in Islamabad was launched in the past 2-3 months. As per official news aired on Geo News, Punjab government, too, has set up a road safety authority. A lot of work is being done by our research team.

2) A huge consortium has been developed – Dr. Murtaza Ali Shah of Punjab Consortium also joined in and supported and played a role in the development of the Authority.

I am thankful to all those who have been a part of this initiative. My research and work is now focused on this topic and is a mission for me. A lot of criticism has been



faced by myself and my team when it comes to this topic when compared to other societal issues across Pakistan.

TI: What are you currently working on and what is the future course of action?

MZ: I am working on Road Safety as the top priority area – once the Government takes over we may start another project which is 'Overpopulation'.

We have also started a study on Exchange Marriage System – a longitudinal study. I might also cover Children's Wellbeing. My first priority is road safety, followed by exchange marriages, and overpopulation.

TTI: Do you feel that your inclusion in this list reflects the quality of research that Pakistan is producing despite it not being so well-known?

MZ: To be very honest, I feel that Pakistan does produce good quality research. The number is small – young academicians are trying and struggling. There is now a competition for sure which creates hope for good quality work.

TTI: In the field of research, why has Pakistan been unable to produce names like Emmanuel Wallerstein, Noam Chomsky, etc.?

MZ: Our professors in the past did not share their work, whereas researches now are initially published online and shared. Plagiarism has been an issue and publications do not include authentic citations. People are reluctant to read and there is a lack of networking amongst our research community in Pakistan.

I made it a priority on my trips overseas to interact and network with international researchers – after which I initiated collaborations with multiple institutes and professors. I have also offered and given lectures and seminars to international students for free. These practices helped me get citations for my research. I was luckily able to be recognized in twenty-seven countries' research networks and that has played a key role for my selection in Stanford's list I believe.

TTI: Are the facilities in Pakistan conducive to research or is there a lack of facilities which contributes to Pakistan lagging behind?

MZ: Honestly, people working in the field of social sciences or natural sciences are neither sincere nor professional. Sadly, we expect the government to provide resources of funding on the fake fieldwork being done, and therefore, we have no credibility or standing in policymaking. Only when international donors push our government, a small handful of consultants with fluent English draft reports as per the government's requirements.

In Pakistan, academicians are worth nothing and the academicians have brought it on themselves. In the field of natural sciences, one might get recognized after ten or fifteen years but in social sciences, it takes thirty to forty years of work to be recognized. Many good academicians that I know personally can produce research acceptable on an international level but for that, they have to get out of their comfort zones and give full dedication without derailling from their commitment.

TTI: What does Pakistan lack: Willingness, skills, potential or the facilities to carry out world-class research?

MZ: We can only get world-class facilities once we prove ourselves to be worthy [of such facilities]. The global knowledge economy has resources and I believe they exceed the demand but we lack capable talent. Erasmus, DFID Germany, and DAAD scholarships offer handsome monetary benefits. It's just a matter of having the skillset to get access to them and make something for yourself.

I believe it can test one's patience. For example, this news was removed from the Website of Quaid-i-Azam University only after five minutes and I am not aware of the reason since the news didn't just mention my name but it also mentioned the name of the university and my country. I feel that amongst other factors, jealousy, incompetence, and lack of the requisite skills is dragging us down.

Research is basically about patience and capacity. Unfortunately, people have stopped writing articles. Specifically for the field of Sociology, consumption is mandatory for production. It's very rare that the government of Pakistan acknowledges any research and we are striving for our name to be included in the global knowledge industry.

TTI: Do you think there are preconceived notions surrounding researchers in Pakistan and the reality is far from the negative light painted around them?

MZ: I have thought about it and my conclusion says that we can interpret it in many ways. See, many people are still in this struggle in their personal capacity. In many research journals, 98 percent of content sent by Pakistani researchers is plagiarized, which overshadows the remaining 2 percent. How many Pakistani researchers' genuine works do you find during any literature review and how many of them can you cite confidently?

The main reason for my name included in this list is the citations and I know very well that very few people in Pakistan have cited me and those don't include my colleagues. People here cannot appreciate someone else getting ahead of them in any field of life. Moreover, many good researchers have not been publishing their

work but now few of them have made some movement finally.

TTI: What do you think is important for an effective and authentic research study?

MZ: Any study that is being conducted following scientific norms, I feel that could be an effective and authentic study. I generally spend a reasonable time in the field and take whatever hardship that comes along with it.

For example, during my study on youth violence, my colleague and I went to Layari gang areas where Rangers put guns to our heads and we had to justify our presence there. You won't find a cosy environment in the field. Going through and following each step of conducting research lends your work authenticity.

My analysis of Pakistani research capacity is that we don't go beyond narrative and descriptive research. If we work on analytical research, only then do we have a chance to get noticed at the global level.

One of my old students was doing research on beggars in Pakistan and she herself dressed as a beggar and roamed around on the traffic signals and experienced all that a beggar experiences daily. This is the dedication and passion that is required to conduct research which is rarely found here.

TTI: For the youth that is interested in carrying out research, what advice would you give them?

MZ: Honesty, dedication and mission are very important. Whatever they are inclined towards needs to be done with hard work and commitment. Later on you must knock on the doors of the international community to be recognized.

TTI: Why do you think not many Pakistani universities make it to top rankings in the world?

MZ: The reason why we are not able to make our mark in Asian or world rankings is that Asia's economic knowledge is expanding. The Japanese market has been overshadowed by the Chinese market, which is now competing with the Indian market.

We do contribute to the knowledge market but it is not significant and the government too has dropped its investment. Higher Education Commission's (HEC) budget under the previous government went up to PKR 70 to 100 billion but has now been slashed to PKR 40 to 50 billion in 'Naya Pakistan'. That definitely affects the rankings.

People had travel grants and presenting a paper on an international platform was easier but now that opportunity is also gone contributing to the decline in our capacity to be recognized globally.



Ishaq Dar under Fresh Scrutiny after HardTalk Interview

By Abdul Sattar Khan

After Ishaq Dar's recent HardTalk interview, powerful quarters within the incumbent government are deliberating whether to take a fresh look at a NAB (National Accountability Bureau) inquiry into the former finance minister's affairs that was initiated in 2000 but closed in 2016.

The NAB initiated a probe against Ishaq Dar in 2000 on the charges of misuse of authority and assets beyond means including PKR 23 million plus GBP 3.488 million plus USD 1.250 million.

Keeping the importance of the enquiry above the then 'norm of the day' routine, the enquiry was initiated on a source report and instead of opting for a process of converting complaint into enquiry, the complaint was directly authorized to be converted into enquiry.

The enthusiasm shown by the authorities in the infancy stage of the enquiry started to wane after obtaining Ishaq Dar's statement under section 164 against the Nawaz Sharif family and Hudaibiya Paper Mills.

Ishaq Dar is said to have swiftly shifted to a comfortable place bringing both the then Chairman NAB Gen (R) Amjad and then deputy Chairman NAB Inayatullah Niazi at loggerheads.

The aspects of the matter likely to come under scrutiny include how and why the NAB closed the enquiry against Ishaq Dar; if the FBR (Federal Board of Revenue) was in earnest when it told the JIT it did not have Ishaq Dar's income tax records pertaining to the period from 1981 to 2002; and if the JIT had any inkling the records missing from the FBR were in the possession of the NAB.

An important aspect of the issue is that later on the enquiry remained an enquiry and could not progress to investigation and then reference filed in a NAB court despite the passage of 16 long years.

Another interesting aspect likely to come under the spyglass is that the inquiry against Ishaq Dar was closed down in July 2016 after 154 days of the release of Panama Papers on 3 April 2016, a time when parliamentarians of both government and opposition had substantially raised their tax contributions.

On average, tax contributions by Senators rose by 30 percent; by Members of the National Assembly by 26 percent; and by cabinet ministers by 70 percent. Prime Minister Imran Khan – who at that point was running a hard hitting campaign against the then PML-N government – himself paid income tax 109 percent higher than the previous year and a surge of 42 percent was witnessed in the income tax returns of Jehangir Tareen.



This was the situation when the longstanding enquiry against Dar was closed by NAB to the surprise of many.

However, a new enquiry against Ishaq Dar, which was initiated on similar charges with a slightly different aspect, witnessed a massive pace and progress unprecedented in the history of NAB.

The newly initiated enquiry against Ishaq Dar raced to investigation and then to reference and the case was heard before an accountability court in a matter of months. Ultimately, Dar was declared an absconder in this reference after he repeatedly failed to appear before the court.

The incumbent government may wish to look into the backgrounds of the NAB inquiry and investigating officers (IOs) and the supervising officers of the earlier enquiry against Dar; why and how they failed to establish anything substantive despite the passage of sixteen years; and what ultimately convinced them to close down the enquiry.

As a matter of fact, NAB itself is responsible for creating contrasting situation as the earlier enquiry lingered on for sixteen years and new enquiry went on the floor of accountability court within months – passing through the stages of enquiry, investigation and reference.

Similarly, when JIT filed its nine volumes in the Supreme Court, it mentioned that the FBR had expressed its inability to provide income tax returns of Ishaq Dar pertaining to the period 1981 to 2002. FBR said the records were missing or could not be traced, as per the claims of the JIT.

The process received a decisive jolt when the then finance minister holding administrative control of FBR, Dar came out with a startling disclosure that when he came to know that FBR expressed its inability to provide requisite information about his income tax returns, he personally collected income tax returns from NAB and delivered it to FBR for its onward transmission to JIT.

This disclosure was made by Dar when he addressed the press conference the day after the JIT submitted its nine

volumes to the Supreme Court. He told the media at the time: “I told the JIT that I will take disciplinary action against those FBR officials who did not provide the requisite documents and I will send the documents”.

Ishaq Dar then detailed his “hectic efforts” to dig out old records from NAB Lahore and Islamabad offices and send the same to FBR.

“I told them that my tax guy told me that after Gen Pervez Musharraf’s coup, my tax record had been seized by NAB. I told them that NAB is your institution and you should find it and if you cannot find it then I will find it on my own. I retrieved my tax records and sent them my returns on the same day”, Dar had claimed.

Surprisingly, the JIT was unable to include Ishaq Dar reported claim of providing his missing income tax details in its volume at the time of presenting it before Supreme Court. The JIT volumes carried the details of Dar’s wealth tax returns from 1981 to 2016,

yet it carried income tax returns only from 2003 to 2016 not from 1981 to 2016.

Another question likely to emerge is if Dar’s tax records were indeed removed or the FBR used this as a pretext to deny JIT access to these records. It is possible that the FBR officials needed time to get clearance from Dar, their boss at the time, before releasing his tax records to the JIT.

What was the benefit of keeping such information away from the JIT which was later on supplied to JIT through the claimed ‘personalized hectic efforts’ of Ishaq Dar. Whether Ishaq Dar or for that matter PML-N could be able to criticize JIT for projecting a scenario on “incomplete information” as JIT was able to include the portion of information which, as per the claim of Ishaq Dar, was provided by him to JIT.

It would also be a matter of concern how Ishaq Dar managed to retrieve his income tax records from NAB Lahore and Islamabad offices and supplied it to FBR for the JIT.

You are on your own

Contracted COVID-19?

By Azeem Waqas

Working at a public hospital at Islamabad, Doctor Zeeshan felt high temperature along with severe body aches in the last week of March 2020. He suspected COVID-19 infection but to be sure, went to a private laboratory to give a swab for the COVID-19 test.

The results came back two days later. The 40-year-old had indeed contracted COVID-19.

“As I shared news with my family, everybody was shell shocked”, he said. “Everyone was crying like it was the end of their world – it was a really difficult time for us”.

At that time, public hospitals had little or no expertise to treat COVID-19 patients. “The conditions in public hospitals were very poor”, says Dr Zeeshan. “People were afraid of being admitted in those hospitals. There were no ventilators, no oxygenated beds, and no medicines for the patients. Doctors were also advising patients personally to go to the private hospitals”.

So he admitted himself to a privately run hospital of Islamabad. “There was only one option left to save my life and I took it”, says Dr. Zeeshan.

Doctor Zeeshan remained admitted in the hospital for 20 days and it cost him around PKR 200,000. The hospital charged him PKR 20,000 a day for a room, medicines, tests and food. He was kept isolated during the treatment. He ended up spending all his savings on his treatment.

This is not the story of Doctor Zeeshan alone. It is the story of virtually every Pakistani who has suffered from COVID-19. They are bearing the brunt of treatment burden on their own pockets because government has left them to fend for themselves.



More than 300,000 patients have tested COVID-19 positive in Pakistan but federal and provincial governments have failed to provide any assistance to bear the treatment expenses.

Also, the pandemic has exposed exorbitant and inconsistent billing in private hospitals of Pakistan, a sector regulated sparsely if at all. Although the treatment expenditures vary from one patient to the other according to the age, severity and needs, there is no doubt that private hospitals are fleecing COVID-19 patients.

Treatment in private hospitals is going to be a very costly affair for the common man. It is easier to recover from COVID-19 than from the financial blow dealt by the hospital bill.

In Islamabad, the posh Maroof International Hospital is charging PKR 150,000 to PKR 200,000 per day and PKR 500,000 in advance from a COVID-19 patient. Shifa International hospital is charging PKR 60,000; Kulsoom International, PKR 50,000; Quaid-e-Azam International, PKR 70,000 and PAF Hospital is charging PKR 20,000 per day.

“During the first wave of COVID-19, if anyone tested COVID-19 positive, it cost them about PKR 150,000 to PKR 200,000, to be treated in private hospital”, says Dr Zeeshan. For example he had to test himself at a private laboratory which charged him PKR 5000, for a PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) test.

Medicine and food expenditure would cost him PKR 10,000 and he had to get a CT Scan or X-ray test three to four times which would be PKR 20,000 in two weeks’ time. The treatment concluded with a PCR test showing the patient COVID-19 negative.

On an average, treatment of a normal COVID-19 carrier, without ventilators or other life-saving equipment, costs between PKR 20,000 and 25,000 daily, a senior doctor at a private hospital says.

The 14-day treatment of a patient costs between PKR 100,000 and 150,000. Usually, patients are discharged after three to five consecutive tests turn negative. In some cases, tests will go up to eight to ten to get a definite result, doctors state.

The COVID-19 virus has increased the health expenditures of a poor man, who already has no resources for better treatment.

During peak of the pandemic, prices of COVID-19 medicines were increased. Some medicines vanished from the market and a shortage was created by the medicine companies.

According to Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP), there are more than fifteen approved medicines for the treatment of COVID-19 in Pakistan.

These are, ACTEMRA 80 mg concentrate solution and its retail prices is PKR 15,874.73/vial, ACTEMRA 200 mg at PKR 39,689.47, ACTEMRA 400 mg is available at PKR 79,378.94 a vial and REMDESIVIR injection price is PKR 10,873 a vial.

Railways Minister Sheikh Rasheed once said even he could not find Actemra injection in the market and had to seek help from Lieutenant General Muhammad Afzal, Chairman NDMA.

Junnaid Ansari, another patient of COVID-19 said: “An injection namely dexamethasone – synthetic steroid which has shown to be effective in the treatment of critically ill COVID-19 patients requiring oxygen therapy or ventilation – was not available in the open market and its [black market] price was not affordable for a poor patient lying on the bed”.

It is important to note that most of the politicians who tested COVID-19 positive were either treated in military hospitals or in private corporate hospitals – which shows their lack of trust in the public run civilian hospitals.

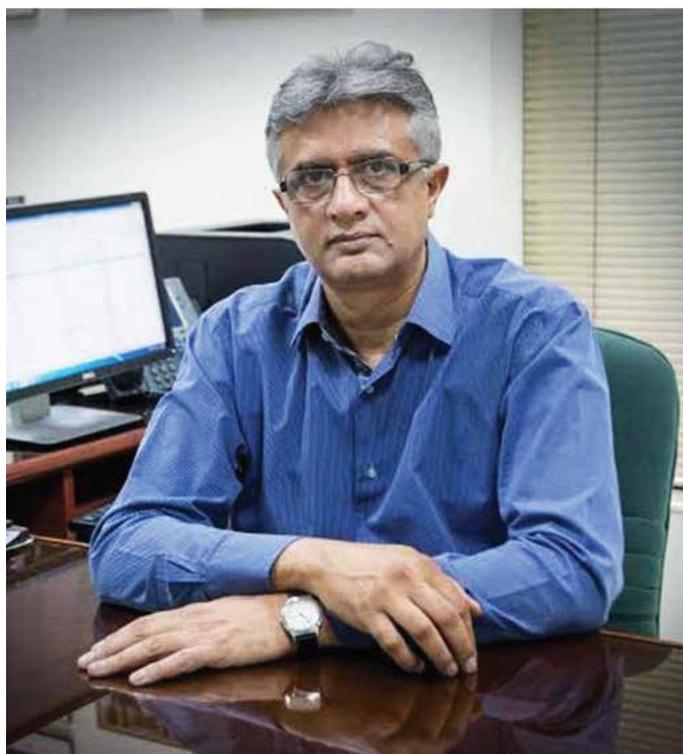
Nevertheless, at least 80 percent of the COVID-19 patients across the country are being treated at government hospitals. However, leading private hospitals do have better treatment facilities for people who can afford to pay or are directed by the health department or government turn to them in special cases.

In the federal capital Islamabad, there is no check on private hospitals. The Islamabad Healthcare Regulatory Authority (IHRA) is a dysfunctional and toothless entity which has no power to implement its own decisions.

Chief Executive Officer of IHRA, Mr Syed Ahmar Naqvi said: “Discussions with private hospitals are going on through the NCOC platform. The government has very limited control on private hospitals but it has control after all. We believe that there should be no price douching – they are here to help COVID-19 patients”.

“We were expecting that during the second wave of COVID-19 private hospitals would add the numbers of beds for patients. We are checking to see what they have done, and they are regularly updating NCOC and the district magistrates”.

Syed Ahmar Naqvi said that Government does not want to press them for fear they may refuse admission to COVID-19 patients and stop treatment. “We are deliberating on different proposals to manage the price and they will be given a chance to rationalize the prices. Consultants are being engaged to rationalize the prices”.



While talking to The Truth International (TTI), Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on health Dr Faisal Sultan said that it may be counterproductive to fix prices. “By capping the charges of private hospitals they will either cheat or refuse to take care of the patients”.

Dr Faisal said that the fees charged have to bear some relevance to costs but capping is not practical. “What would you cap it at? There will be patients that will go well over 500,000 [e.g, if they stay four weeks on ventilator in ICU]. It also depends on the quality of staff, training, equipment and consumables they use.

“The healthcare commissions need to regulate quality and then cost automatically comes to a proper level. The only real solution is very robust competition, shared risk and insurance – but that actually drives the costs up, like in the US”.

Are Islamabad's Water Woes Invented by the Tanker Mafia?

By Palwasha Khattak

Islamabad is Pakistan's most expensive city to live in – be it in terms of housing, education, health facilities, or utilities. But by far the most perplexing is the city's chronic water problem. The residents of the main sectors have to fight the government for this basic necessity even though it is exorbitantly over-priced.

Waking up early to register complaints about water supply, getting water supply for only a few hours every day, and paying double or triple the amount to the blood sucking private water tanker companies has become routine. One can only imagine the magnitude of this crisis in other cities and far-flung areas of the country if the capital is in such a turmoil.

The reason for private water tanker companies capitalizing on this glitch is the inefficient water tanker offices under the Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad (MCI). Registering a complaint does not necessarily ensure a timely water supply next time. Only a few lucky ones are able to succeed in their toil. Many assume it's the inefficient staff, whereas it's the unavailability of water tankers.

MCI and the Capital Development Authority (CDA) are responsible for the steady availability of water but instead, the sprouting number of complaints is another upcoming challenge for the government. The water woes of newly developed sectors of Islamabad are no less harrowing from those of the older sectors.

Many middle and lower-income areas of the city have aligned their routines with the limited water supply window. Now, a lower-middle-class breadwinner cannot fathom the root cause of such a primitive argument of why successive governments have failed to resolve this issue, while citizens are expected to pay taxes under all circumstances.

However, the decision-makers are well aware but have given up in front of the government as the mayor of Islamabad told The Nation that the poor conditions of water pipelines waste 35% of water supply to the capital from Simli Dam and the problem of over a million people still prevails due to the lack of funds. Even an innocent local can understand that this cannot be it.

This brings us to the underground situation of water pipelines. The decades-old pipelines have never been fixed or even considered such by the authorities, losing 50 percent of the water supply and contaminating drinking water.

These broken pipes are a blessing in disguise for those who would pilfer the scarce commodity at the expense of those who pay for it. Are some of the Authority's officials being bribed by water thieves to keep the pipes broken? Who knows.

Another burning issue is the illegal pumping despite the ban. There are no checks on illegal water pumps and connections at private residences, the residents unwillingly get water from street taps and filtration plants, if available.

Since the mafias don't stop at anything in taking advantage of any emergency, it would be wise to consider their involvement here. A



senior journalist, Azam Khan Niazi says the corrupt management is behind this artificially created water crisis in Islamabad. He points the finger at the police and the CDA officials for the festering issue.

A few officers in the Water Management Wing secretly own private water supply businesses impede the water supply to increase the demand for private water tankers. A private water tanker can cost anywhere from PKR 1,000 to 2,500. Compare this with the PKR 150 per tanker fixed by the CDA, which may go up to PKR 700 after adding the flexible bribe called 'refreshment fund'.

After covering this obstacle-filled path to running water, the water that runs in the majority of the houses is contaminated. Safe drinking water is only available to 36 percent of people in Pakistan. You would expect Islamabad's situation to be comparatively better. But those with firsthand knowledge of the situation say most of the supply pipelines pass through the drainage systems and become contaminated.

Former Chairman of Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR) Dr. Aslam Tahir says the city has no strategy to prevent contamination of the water supply, and stresses on tree plantation and water treatment plants.

The authorities need to finally pay heed to the causes and solution of bad water management. In 2018, Pakistan developed its water policy and earlier, the government launched the Clean Green Pakistan Movement (CGPM) which explore institutional strengthening, behavioural change and availability of safe water and sanitation to its people.

The Pakistan Economic Survey 2018-19 says, "Only 10 percent of the poorest groups have access to piped water supply, compared to 39 percent of the rich and 35 percent of the richest groups." These statistics clearly show we are far from achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – according to which the country needs to provide 95% of its population safe drinking water and 72%, access to safe sanitation by the year 2030.

This will be only possible if the concerned authorities put an end to the blame game and the government takes strict action against the corrupt officials involved with mafias.

Home-Based Women Workers See Good Times Coming

New sindh law rare triumph for informal sector workers

By Zofeen T. Ebrahim

Jameela Abdul Latif will soon be elevated from her hazy status as a home-based worker (HBW) to be counted among Pakistan's labour force.

"This is truly a historic moment for all of us," said Latif, who has been working from home embellishing glass bangles for the last 18 years.

The mother of seven (a son and a daughter already married) is optimistic her "struggle for fair wages" are at an end. "The Labour Department will realise the dreadful circumstances we work and live under and will do something to make it easy for us".

Latif's three-room rented "quarter" in Hyderabad's Liaquat Colony is just a stone's throw from the Choori Bangle Para, the hub of bangle business. Her eldest daughter helps out with work and on a good day, the mother-daughter duo are able to make PKR 120.

On such a day, they work for up to twelve hours to embellish about fifteen sets. A set – comprising four bangles and two karas – fetches between PKR 150 and 550 on the market.

Latif is among an estimated 12 million HBWs across Pakistan, 80 percent of whom are women. These people are a part of this country's economy, says Zehra Khan, the general secretary of the Home Based Women Workers Federation (HBWWF).

She laments the HBWs' contribution to the national economy goes unrecognized because they work in the informal sector, which is neither registered nor regulated. The upshot is that these workers remain unprotected by the country's existing legal or regulatory frameworks.

According to the Labour Force Survey 2017-18, Pakistan's informal sector (which includes HBWs) accounts for 71.7 percent of the employment outside agriculture with a larger share in rural areas (75.6 per cent) than in urban areas (68.1 per cent).

Two years ago the Sindh government had passed the Sindh Home-Based Workers Act of 2018 making Pakistan the only country in South Asia to recognise HBWs as workers and labourers.

"Sindh is the leader in progressive welfare legislation," says economist Kaiser Bengali. "The rest of Pakistan should follow".

However, the law has remained dormant to date. Fortunately for many women HBWs, all that is about to change.

This January, the Sindh act's rules were passed under which the first step was for the government to get all the



HBWs registered. However, due to lockdown the labour department was unable to initiate the survey and it was put off until August.

August came and went and still, nothing happened.

Tired of waiting for the provincial labour department to begin the registration drive, Latif and three million HBWs of the province of Sindh decided to take matters into their hands.

Last month, an agreement was signed between the HBWWF, comprising 3,500 members and Sindh government's Labour and Human Resource Department.

But it may take some time as it was important the forms are filled accurately and honestly so that only HBW are included. It will also mean going door to door to inform other women about this registration drive and the benefits attached to it as not everyone is aware of it, explained Khan.

"Through this exercise, the true number of women HBWs will emerge since we have only had estimates up until now" said Khan. The registrants will then be able to claim social security benefits and minimum living wages, for which the federation had been fighting since 2009 when it was founded.

"Now they exist officially," concurs Bengali, a former head of Benazir Income Support Programme, but he cautions against over optimism in terms of protection and privileges that come with governmental recognition, noting these remain missing for formal sector workers.

But Bengali's scepticism fails to dampen Latif's spirit. In fact, for her the victory means "I, too, will get pension in my old age, like those working in factories." In addition, she expects access to free healthcare, scholarships to put her kids through college and monetary support for kids' marriages or for any other eventuality, even death in the family.

Had the registration gone according to the original plan, says the 55-year old Shamim Bano, she would have been able to avail free healthcare for her daughter-in-law who has a lump in one of her breasts that needs to be removed.

“She left home and has gone to her mother's taking the kids with her saying we don't have money for her treatment. She is right, but it still hurts because she is our responsibility after all,” said Bano, who along with her daughter makes a living cropping off loose ends of the thread to give garments a finished look.

She is not sure the HBWs will get all the promised benefits in her lifetime, but said she was happy to have been in the forefront of the struggle. She hopes she will be remembered when history of the Pakistani HBWs' struggle is written.

Even 22-year old Shazia Yaqoob, living in Karachi's Godhra colony, cannot wait to get herself registered as a HBW. “I will be able to complete my studies,” said the young woman who works stuffing baby nap mats with her mother.

For each mat stuffed they get PKR 2.50. “My mother and I stuff and stitch up to 500 mats a day,” said Yaqoob. This means the duo makes earning PKR 1,250 for eight hours of work each day. They also embroider Balochi and Sindhi ladies suits.

“Each suit takes us a month and it's really a strain on my eyes,” she said. And for all that work, they earn PKR 3,000 for an adult suit and PKR 1,200 for a child-sized suit. “We do not haggle much for fear of losing work,” said Yaqoob.

Latif has been haggling with middlemen for fair wages ever since she became a member of the federation eight years ago. “We also fought for unionising, dispute resolution through setting up of arbitration committees and universalisation of security benefits for all, not just HBWs,” she said.

“ [The employers] would always tell me not to bring up the issue of wages in front of other workers as it was getting increasingly difficult to pacify the rest of choori mazdoors,” she said adding they try to “placate us by increasing our rates by 50 paisas annually”.

For the last one year, though, thanks to the relentless struggle waged by women like Latif, the home based bangle workers are getting the same wages as their factory counterparts.

In addition, these women, many of whom had never stepped foot out of their homes before, have found a collective voice – and they have started to use it to resolve issues including domestic violence, inheritance, and divorce. They have ensured their area's civic problems are attended to.

“They write applications to the municipality and meeting counselors and if nothing happens, go to government offices in groups and demand their problems be resolved,” said Khan, and it has always worked.

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic earlier this year followed by a lockdown of business and the uncertainty surrounding it hit the HBWs hard. The worst part is that they are not eligible for the government's emergency cash disbursement programme because they have still not been registered and do not fall within the category of daily wagers.

“Many among us who were already living hand to mouth and badly needed this hand-holding were not able to gain access to help from the Ehsaas programme,” rued Zahida Perween, 55, the president of the HBWWF.

“I took loans to be able to buy groceries and we were unable to pay house rent of PKR 7,000 or the electricity and gas bills,” said Bano.

The recent skyrocketing food prices have not helped either. Her family of nine (her husband, 2 daughters, 1 son, 1 daughter in law and three grand kids) have also had to cut down on meals.

“We take a late breakfast of tea and bread and skip lunch. Then we have an early dinner,” she said, and quietly added. “But there have been days when we've had to go without dinner”.

With no work coming her way, this enterprising woman who never let her circumstances get the better of her has started going to nearby schools to sell home-made samosas during recess. And on Sundays and Tuesdays she sets up stalls at the weekly bazaars selling under garments, bangles, and shoes.

Life at the Latif household is not easy either. Recalling the lockdown, she said: “I would make dahi phulki and send my son to sell it in the street. From whatever little he was able to sell, we managed our meals,” said the bangle maker whose health is suffering.

“Some chemical used in my work is causing irritation near the skin of my eye, and my face is all itchy too,” she said. But more than that the electricity and grocery bills and her husband's poor health cause her immense stress which she said have taken a toll on her heart. “I get medicines for my treatment when I have money to spare. Otherwise it gets neglected,” she said resignedly.

However, despite being in the middle of the second wave of COVID-19 and with food inflation sky high and little work, these HBWs have something to celebrate. “It is a small but important victory,” agrees Bengali, adding, “The larger battle for the human rights of workers must continue”.



Before the Flood

Time to Tackle Climate Change



By Eric Shahzar

Former US President George H.W. Bush once famously said his administration would curb the Greenhouse effect through the power of the White House effect. It is fascinating to read this quote from the late 1980s – when very few actually believed in climate change.

More recently, with everyone talking about the perils of accelerated climate change, President Donald Trump had rejected it – by calling it a hoax and a money-making industry. It is disturbing how the narratives change at the world stage.

However, today, with Joe Biden due for inauguration as the new President of the United States, the global climate change narrative is sure to revive. Biden promised to re-join the historic Paris Climate Agreement of 2015 which President Trump had opted out of. Biden’s plan to tackle accelerated climate change has been labelled as the most ambitious of any former US president’s.

Climate scientist have long argued that human activities are unquestionably the main source of climate change. Today, rising sea levels, intensifying droughts and unprecedented increase in wildfires are all unmistakable indications of accelerated climate change.

In early 1900, burning fossil fuels produced about 2 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂). Today, the magnitude of CO₂ pollution is nearly 20 times greater. As populations, economies and standards of living grow, so does the cumulative level of carbon emissions. We live in an era where climate change has reached the tipping point. The future generations will remember our times as the age of climate crisis.

According to a UN report, this year is on course to be one of the three warmest years ever recorded and could even top the record set in 2016. It is indeed astonishing, considering how global emissions had dipped by 17 percent during the lockdown earlier this year.

The global heatwaves are triggering severe droughts and a rapid increase in wildfires. The fires in the Amazonas are one example. Despite the 2015 Paris Accord – where commitments were made to limit average global temperature this century by 2 degrees Celsius – global carbon emissions have gone up – increasing by 2.7 percent in 2018 alone. This clearly – and shockingly – demonstrates how environment indicators are worsening notwithstanding the global efforts underway to limit global warming. The future trends look even more calamitous.

Recent nationwide events organised by the civil society clearly show Pakistan’s willingness to curb the effects of accelerated climate change. Last year, Climate Action March simultaneously took place in more than thirty cities of the country, attracting large audiences. People from all walks of life participated in these powerful demonstrations.

The irrevocable damage caused by climate change is now well-acknowledged by the civil society. The good news is that we are seeing a whopping increase in the number of climate activists. These are constructive developments.

On the other hand, the government’s reliance on coal-fired power plants will be detrimental for our already paralysed ecosystem. The authorities have vowed to eliminate Pakistan’s energy crisis by building more coal power plants.

However, dependence on coal will only lead to the rise of carbon emissions.

The romance with coal-fired power plants must therefore end. As a responsible state fighting for global climate security, Pakistan must refrain from coal energy projects. Instead it must initiate country-wide renewable energy programmes, such as solar and wind energy, which are sustainable and profitable at the same time.

Many countries have turned to renewable sources of energy in a bid to restrain global carbon emissions. Take China for example. The country was once regarded as the world leader in emitting carbon into the atmosphere. However, today, China has taken a lead in renewable energy and is now the world's biggest producer, exporter and installer of solar panels and wind turbines.

Although the Chinese still rely on fossil fuels, they seem to be transitioning to renewables much faster than anyone anticipated. The underlying question however is: can less developed countries make the same transition?

Have we ever wondered how much CO₂ is emitted by our own vehicles? A standard passenger car emits about 4.6 metric tons of carbon a year. Traffic flow in major metropolitan areas is on the rise.

The Sindh government, in collaboration with Sindh Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), has recently launched a commendable initiative to address this issue. Vehicles which emit smoke and harm our environment will now be fined by the authorities. Moreover, vehicles clearing the test would be given a green sticker. We need this initiative to be followed in the rest of the provinces as well.

We have long had alternatives to fossil fuels but more recently we have actually discovered how to pull carbon out of our deteriorat-

ing atmosphere. It gives us a slim hope of reversing climate disruption. The Switzerland-based Climeworks has become the first company to capture CO₂ from the atmosphere.

It is estimated that machines can capture around 900 tons of CO₂ annually. The captured carbon can be used in greenhouses for boosting plant growth. Investing in CO₂ removal technology has now become more important than ever. We must introduce creative strategies like these for reducing carbon emission from the atmosphere.

The US re-joining the Paris Accords is a highly welcome prospect for environmentalists around the world. Why is the historic agreement crucial for tackling ecological disruption? The target of lowering the global temperature by 1.5 degree Celsius target could prevent island and coastal states vulnerable to sea level rise from sinking. It could ensure millions of people are safe from extreme weather disasters. Moreover, it would reduce chances of an ice-free Arctic in the summer time, something witnessed only this year.

But the Paris Agreement is not enough to tackle accelerated climate change. Today's world requires a new type of international collaboration where all countries are united in a common framework and are actively involved.

The effects of climate change are undoubtedly global in scope and unprecedented in scale. The world is suffering from severe natural disasters that are becoming progressively more destructive and unpredictable. And all of this is beating scientific projections.

The rise in CO₂ will only intensify climate disruption and cause havoc in the globe. South Asia remains one of the most vulnerable regions to climate change. Reversing climate change must be Pakistan's chief priority.



The Hand of God

In memory of Diego Armando Maradona



By Ali Abdullah

Diego Armando Maradona was born on 30 October 1960, at the Policlínico (Polyclinic) Evita Hospital in Lanus to a poor family that had moved from Corrientes Province he was raised in Villa Fiorito, a shantytown on the southern outskirts of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

1976, Maradona made his professional debut for Argentinos Juniors. Maradona spent five years at Argentinos Juniors, from 1976 to 1981, scoring 115 goals in 167 appearances before his US\$ 4 million transfer to Boca Juniors. Maradona received offers to join other clubs, including River Plate who offered to make him the club's best paid player. Nevertheless, Maradona expressed his will to be transferred to Boca Juniors, the team he always wanted to play for.

After the 1982 World Cup, in June, Maradona was transferred to Barcelona in Spain for a then world record fee of £5 million (\$7.6 million).[34] In 1983, under coach César Luis Menotti, Barcelona and Maradona won the Copa del Rey (Spain's annual national cup competition), beating Real Madrid, and the Spanish Super Cup, beating Athletic Bilbao. On 26 June 1983, Barcelona won away to Real Madrid in one of the world's biggest club games, El Clasico, a match where Maradona scored and became the first Barcelona player to be applauded by arch-rival Real Madrid fans. Maradona dribbled past Madrid goalkeeper Agustín, and as he approached the empty goal, he stopped just as Madrid defender Juan José came sliding in an attempt to block the shot.

Due to illness and injury as well as controversial incidents on the field, Maradona had a difficult tenure in Barcelona.

First a bout of hepatitis, then a broken ankle in a La Liga game at the Camp in September 1983 caused by a reckless tackle by Athletic Bilbao's Andoni Goikoetxea nicknamed "the Butcher of Bilbao" threatened to jeopardize Maradona's career, but with treatment and rehabilitation, it was possible for him to return to the pitch after a three-month recovery period

Maradona was directly involved in a violent and chaotic fight at the 1984 Copa del Rey Final at the Santiago Bernabéu stadium in Madrid against Athletic Bilbao. After receiving another hard tackle by Goikoetxea, as well as being taunted with racist insults related to his father's Native American ancestry throughout the match by Bilbao fans, and being provoked by Bilbao's Miguel Sola at full time after Barcelona lost 1–0, Maradona snapped.

During his time with the Argentina national team, Maradona scored 34 goals in 91 appearances. He made his full international debut at age 16, against Hungary, on 27 February 1977. Maradona was left off the Argentine squad for the 1978 World Cup on home soil by coach César Luis Menotti who felt he was too young at age 17. At age 18, Maradona played the 1979 FIFA World Youth Championship in Japan and emerged as the star of the tournament, shining in Argentina's 3–1 final win over the Soviet Union, scoring a total of six goals in six appearances in the tournament. On 2nd June 1979, Maradona scored his first senior international goal in a 3–1 win against Scotland at Hampden Park. He went on to play for Argentina in two 1979 Copa América ties during August 1979, a 2–1 loss against Brazil and a 3–0 win over Bolivia in which he scored his side's third goal.

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An advanced playmaker who operated in the classic number 10 position, Maradona was the first player in football history to set the world record transfer fee twice, first when he transferred to Barcelona for a then-world record £5 million, and second when he transferred to Napoli for another record fee of £6.9 million. He played for Argentinos Juniors, Boca Juniors, Barcelona, Napoli, Sevilla, and Newell's Old Boys during his club career, and is most famous for his time at Napoli and Barcelona, where he won numerous accolades

Diego Maradona will be remembered for many things. He was a sublime footballer ferociously talented, relentlessly driven. But Maradona wasn't just a footballer. He was a force of nature, a presence who made himself felt, for good or ill, no matter where he was or what he did. It's appropriate, then, that perhaps the most iconic moment of his career came when he opted to transcend the sport entirely.

GOD'S HAND

This is not, on the face of things, a particularly remarkable goal. Sure, Maradona's run implodes the whole England midfield, turning Glenn Hoddle into paste and creating the situation in which Steve Hodge hedges what should have been a clearance into the Zone of Pure Chaos. But it's a scrappy goal, bundled in under pressure from Shilton, and it has nothing, from the purely aesthetic perspective, on the second.

Upon replay, however, it became obvious that the 5'5" Maradona hadn't somehow headed the ball past his far taller opponent. He had jammed the ball in with an upraised fist. England protested furiously (and rightly) for handball. The referee ignored them and the goal was allowed to stand.

On 2 November 2020, Maradona was admitted to a hospital in La Plata, supposedly for psychological reasons. A representative of the ex-footballer said his condition was not serious. A day later, he underwent emergency brain surgery to treat a subdural hematoma. He was released on 12 November after successful surgery and was supervised by doctors as an outpatient. On 25 November 2020, at the age of 60, Maradona suffered a cardiac arrest and died at his home in Tigre, Buenos Aires Province, Argentina. Maradona's coffin – draped in Argentina's national flag and three Maradona

number 10 jerseys (Argentinos Juniors, Boca Juniors and Argentina) was lying in state at the Presidential Palace, the Casa Rosada, with mourners filing past his coffin. On 26 November, Maradona's wake, which was attended by tens of thousands of people, was cut short by his family as his coffin was relocated from the rotunda of the Presidential Palace after fans took over an inner courtyard and also clashed with police. The same day, a private funeral service was held and Maradona was buried next to his parents at the Jardín de Bella Vista cemetery in Bella Vista, Buenos Aires.

According to reports, former Argentine footballer Diego Maradona has left many such valuable things in his inheritance after his death.

He died at the age of 60. We used to hear many such things about his personal life, but now the future of his financial legacy looks complicated.

There has been speculation about his assets since his death, and it is being speculated that it will not be easy to distribute them among his heirs.

Maradona's family is very large. He has at least eight children after dating six different women. It is expected that their inheritance will be distributed equally among all children.

The officials think there will be more family disputes, DNA tests and more parental claims before the inheritance is distributed. But for now, lawyers are estimating the total value of Maradona's total assets. Eliasson Joff, a lawyer in the capital, Buenos Aires, says "I think it will take a long time."

In Maradona's colorful life, parental claims have become commonplace.

One of his daughters once joked that if the former footballer wanted, he could form a football team of 11 people at once due to this growing family.

6 of his children were confirmed in Maradona's life, according to the reports at least he has 2 more children in this world. Once the DNA tests are done his will, will be distributed equally among his children.



Pakistan's Social Media Sensation

Inconversation with Minal Khan

By Hasan Kazmi



The glitz and glamour of the celebrity world often measures by the number of followers one has on their respective social media accounts. If that is taken into consideration, the 5th most popular Pakistani star on Instagram is Minal Khan who now has over 6.5 million followers on her Instagram.

However, she is in news these days because of her interesting, yet unconventional character Nisha that she played in drama serial *Jalan*.

Banned twice by the PEMRA, drama serial *Jalan* is the talk of the town nowadays. The ban and constraints couldn't survive long as the apex court ordered to on-air it again.

The central character of the serial is "Nisha" that has been played by Minal Khan, a young actress instilled with top-drawer skills. She has achieved huge fame on country's social media circle and is widely known for her remarkable acting skills. Minal has massive followers on Instagram - around 6.5 million - making her the fifth biggest Instagram personality of the country.

To know more about Minal's perception and thought on the character, and to know her stance about the storyline, we interviewed her on the very last day of *Jalan*'s shoot.

Doing such a negative character wasn't a walk in the park. When she was asked about the "Nisha", did she hesitate or fear to do such a negative character or she thought for a while about the social acceptance and viewers' judgment - she responded back with a smile on her face, saying, she enjoyed every bit of the character with no fear. Few characters get so much exposure and Nisha's character is one of them, she added.

According to Minal, the drama serial is not produced with a negative intention, and she doesn't consider it a negative character, for her, it is just an ordinary character. She further added that, "the key behind the success of this serial is its unplanned production and execution, had it been produced with huge expectation, it could not have achieved what it has. It was executed without an iota of fear that is crystal clear.

Minal condemns ban culture

Jalan was banned twice by PEMRA, which was countermanded by the Supreme Court of Pakistan. Meanwhile, Minal was perplexed and worried for the viewers and fans, who were waiting desperately to watch the episodes. She said, she was gladdened and cheered when the ban was lifted.

Minal said, she is against the "ban culture" in Pakistan while adding that it is not just her problem - but it is troublesome for the entire team - to avoid any uncertain outcome, the producers and directors should be aware of the repercussions of any particular content. Every second day, anything faces ban, how can you give this authority to anyone, she questioned.

On criticism over the drama for violating social, cultural and religious norms and ethics, Minal avoided to make any comment, saying, this is a sensitive issue, and she preferred silence.

Criticism on social media, not a big deal!

When asked about the criticism over social media she said, she didn't take it seriously and her personal life has a separate place.

According to Minal, she is an actor, and all the actors face this. When people like someone, they laud the efforts and applaud, when they dislike anything, they show a reaction. One should see both love and criticism equally.

Nisha is favorite in contrast to Rabi

Nowadays, another drama serial is infamous in which Minal is playing the role of an oppressed girl. On that, Minal responded with a smile, saying, "That girl is so repressed, and when I do it, I feel oppressed ". She said that the plus point was she got an opportunity to know her potential by doing diverse characters.

When we asked Minal about her favorite character, precisely, *Jalan* or *Nand*, she explained that *Rabi*'s character was common and repeated while *Nisha*'s is an uncommon and different character. She ultimately voted in favor of *Nisha*.

Minal stated that her role in *Jalan* was so negative, but her team played a significant role, who worked day in and out and rehearsed to make it a success. The director *Ruha Abbas* helped her in rehearsals, and her role was imperative. Furthermore, Minal said that she had not been approached for any such character again, because *Nand*'s *Rabia* had also been seen simultaneously.

Minal Khan also expressed her wish and interest to step in the film industry, saying, she is not ready for it for now. Minal clarified that she would not do the same role as *Nisha*'s even in a movie, as she had done it already with such dedication, and had experienced both the love and criticism of the audience. Minal added that she had not been approached for any movie yet.

Spotify in Pakistan

Is access to music finally becoming easier?

“Spotify” has brought a ray of hope to the music industry of Pakistan. The eminent Pakistani artists have welcomed it with great enthusiasm and hope. Spotify is a global music streaming app with more than 60 million songs.

Although, Spotify has not issued an official statement about its launch in Pakistan, however, verified Facebook and Instagram accounts of Spotify has surfaced having no post so far. It is pertinent to mention that Spotify has separate social accounts and pages for various countries. Moreover, Spotify owns a LinkedIn account, where a job was posted for South-Asians to work in Dubai. The nature of the job was to capture markets of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Last year in February, the global music streaming app Spotify set its feet in India, before making an official entry in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Maldives. The people in these countries use the app via Virtual Private Network (VPN), however, several features are limited through VPN.

Price Range of Spotify:

Spotify is available in ninety-two countries of the world. It can be used in two days. The users can register themselves on the app and listen to the song of their choice. The user will not be asked to pay any charges, however, the ads will pop-up in the start and at the end of the song. The music quality is also not high – it fits class average. The second method to use the app requires some amount from customer’s pocket. The user can subscribe to the app by paying some amount to get the quality audio and avoid interruption by Google ads.

The subscription charges vary from country to country. Spotify charges 10 dollars a month in America while in Britain it charges ten pounds, in Turkey and India, It charges ten Lira and one thousand Rupees respectively. Currently, the scenario in Pakistan’s music industry is worrisome. It lacks the record label or company. Consequently, the artists do it on their own to make and release the songs.

Pakistani Artists Reaction

Shani Arshad, a well-known music director expressed that the launch of Spotify in Pakistan would be fruitful, since they saw a ray of hope to get the profit worth the hard work – which they deserve. The music streaming app will play a role of distributor for the Pakistani artists, which can help them in getting international exposure, he added.

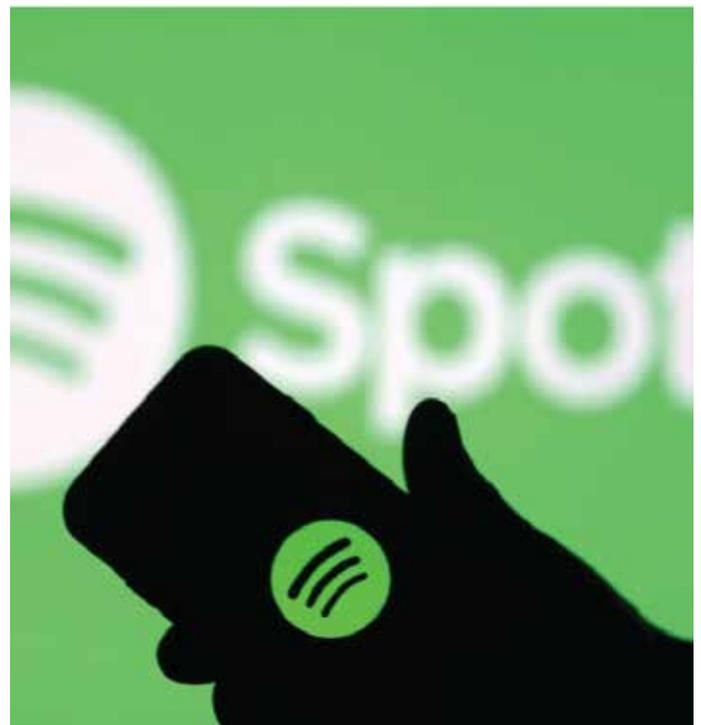
“The country had record labels in past. The artists used to get some reward of their hard work while in the current scenario, the artists sing and release their songs on YouTube”, said Shani Arshad while adding that the Pakistani artist can get international exposure through an agent who can introduce their talent to international platforms, where they can get some royalty. Furthermore, he contrasted Spotify to other platforms – explaining - on other platforms that songs can be purchased which pays off royalty in grains, whereas the royalty amount in Spotify is directly

proportional to streaming, the more the song is listened to, the more amount you get in royalty.

An eminent singer and music director, Shiraz Uppal, who has gained popularity across the border said, “Pakistan lacks international platforms, so anyone showing a will to work here is encouraging”. He said that due to unavailability of record labels, the artists were left with no option other than to invest their own money.

Shiraz Uppal expressed hope, saying, “Spotify is an international company, which may also invest in the music produced on ground, and help the artist in getting an international exposure”.

Moreover, he requested Pakistani artists to adopt professional attitude while dealing with Spotify, so that they are not disappointed.



Natasha Baig, a music artist explained the benefits of Spotify, saying it is more organized in contrast with other apps. Spotify’s fans request it to add songs on the app, due to its unavailability in Pakistan, the artists get their songs uploaded through the agents, of which the royalty is not worth the hard work. She expressed hope that after the launch of Spotify, the artist might be able to work without any intervention.

She said that the biggest hurdle in the entire process is to reach the audience, adding that, it is not easy to reach the audience via a YouTube channel as the platform is full of content.

“The artists in Pakistan do not get the royalty and if they do, they are in peas, Spotify has shown a light and a great hope even if it takes time”, she added.

Entertainment and Trending

By Amna Shoaib

The celebrated couple, Farhan Saeed and Urwa Hocane, Split after 3 years of marriage

After 3 years of what seemed to be a successfully happy marriage, the two celebrities have decided to part ways for the time being. The news broke out on 24th November via social media and has been going viral like wild fire since. Even though the couple hasn't publically spoken about the ongoing situation and their decision to opt for separation, sources say that they decided to split on the account of irreconcilable differences over the past four years and will be opting for divorce soon, ending their marriage on a good note, without any grudges or bitterness.



The weekend in bandages on AMAs to educate on drunk driving

The worldwide famous Canadian singer, Abel Tesfaye, known as The Weeknd was seen in bandages at the American Music Awards the entire event, inclusive of his performance and even while receiving the award. It was then, during his 'Thankyou speech', he revealed the reason behind his bandages, which was to educate on drunk driving, explaining how his hit single, 'Blinding Lights' is about the adverse effects of drunk driving. "How you want to see someone at night, and you're intoxicated, and you're driving to this person and you're just blinded by streetlights. Said the award winning singer, "I don't want to ever promote drunk driving, but that's what the dark undertone is." He concluded his speech by dedicating the award to the late singer, Prince. "Last time I received this award, it was given to me by the late great Prince, and you know, he's the reason I get to constantly challenge the genre of R&B, and I'd like to dedicate this award to him. Thank you."



Ayesha Omer tears up at 'Her Lamha Purjosh' while talking about her sexual harassment with Waseem Badami



Ayesha Omer appeared as a guest celebrity at Waseem Badami's game show, Her Lamha Purjosh, hosted for PSL5 wherein during a question/answer session about the celebrity's personal and professional life, she was asked about the time she opened up about her sexual assault. The actor began telling that when it first happened, she was 23 years old, it was just the beginning of her career and even though she wasn't the only victim of her harasser nor did she have any financial crisis at home, she still decided to stay quiet about it until 13 years later, when the #metoo campaign took over. 'I didn't take any action because the man was at a powerful position and I feared he would harm me in many different ways. However, when I first opened up 13 years later it was to my mother who told me that I shouldn't expose the person because she won't be able to face the backlash I get.'" While answering how the incident changed her, she began crying. Wiping her tears, she said, 'It has made me stronger but I wish I could go back in time and do something about it. Whoever the person is, he is not in the position to hurt me or anyone anymore.'

Artist of the year award- Taylor Swift



Celebrated international country singer Taylor Swift, along with winning best female pop singer and best music video for her song Cardigan, the melodious artist won the highest honored award, Artist of the Year. These awards added up to the singers' previous 30 AMA awards, which without a doubt she wins annually. Taylor however could not show up to receive the award as she was re-recording her old songs in the studios she first recorded them. She sent a video message thanking her fans, saying, "This is a fan voted award, which means so much to me," said Swift. "You guys have been beyond wonderful. All the years of my career, but especially this one, when we've been so far apart, we haven't been able to see each other in concert, but I still feel connected to you."

The keeper of the lost things

Reviewed by: Alizay Ashraf
 Author: Ruth Hogan
 ISBN: 978-1-473-67365-6
 Pages: 307
 Publisher: HarperCollins



The Keeper of The Lost Things is a book written by Ruth Hogan about a boy Anthony Peardeew who has spent half of his life collecting lost objects, trying to atone for a promise broken many years ago. He realizes that he is running out of time and leaves his house and all its lost treasures to his assistant - the one person he can trust to reunite the thousands of objects with their rightful owners.

The story is interesting and complex enough to carry itself in a realistic setting. However, it enters the realm of fairy tale by involving the supernatural. Sunshine's convenient works with Therese's ghost to drive the earthbound characters to fulfill Anthony's mission down to the last object, as well as to resolve their own affairs.

The book is charming, has a bit of mystery to it plus a ghostly presence, and it's like life itself. There are things that will make you happy and things that

will make you a bit sad because the characters become real to you. The story is a bit of a tapestry in that it weaves together various threads of the stories of various people's lives to create a beautiful garment.

In my opinion, the best aspect of this book was the artfully constructed vignettes attached to many of the misplaced treasures. They were deftly woven, delightful little windows of possibility and I savored each one. When all was said and done, things came together quite nicely, and I closed the book wondering if I should read it again from a less befuddled perspective.

I highly recommend this book to anyone who appreciates gentle stories with an ultimate happy ending. The theme is love for others, animals, and yourself; and I'd like to share that feeling with other readers. I think this book is suitable for children above the age of 9.

A midsummer tights dream

Tallulah Casey is an ebullient, chaotic Irish girl and she's fizzing with excitement because she's returning to the perfect school, Dother Hall performing arts college, a crumbling mansion in Bronte country, where the teachers are engagingly barmy and there are endless opportunities to engage with the boys at the school next door.

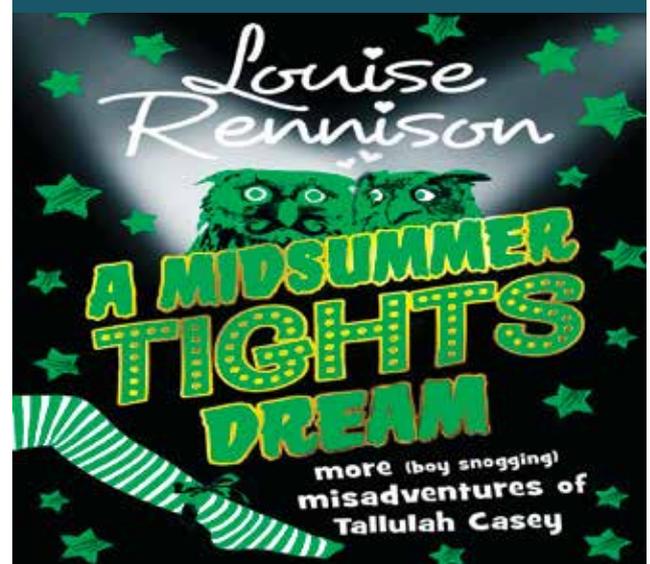
The book is a wonderful cocktail of slapstick and wish-fulfilment, spiked with just enough seriousness to make it more than forgettable froth. Readers will enjoy Tallulah's use of hilarious British slang, her vibrant personality, and off-kilter descriptions perfectly capture the exuberance and awkwardness of early adolescence.

Girls will relish the breakneck plot, inventive language and knock about comedy. Rennison's writing is so lively and reading her book is quite joyful. The writer sticks with a drama theme in this hilarious follow-up to Withering tights. Great fun book very fast-moving and inventive.

The characters are really interesting and funny especially Tallulah and reading about her misadventures was always interesting.

This book made me laugh very much because it was so silly, fabulous and hysterically funny. This is one of my favorite books and I will definitely recommend reading this book if you want to read something delightful. I think this book is suitable for children above the age of 12.

Reviewed by: Alizay Ashraf
 Author: Louise Rennison
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 Publisher: HarperCollins



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