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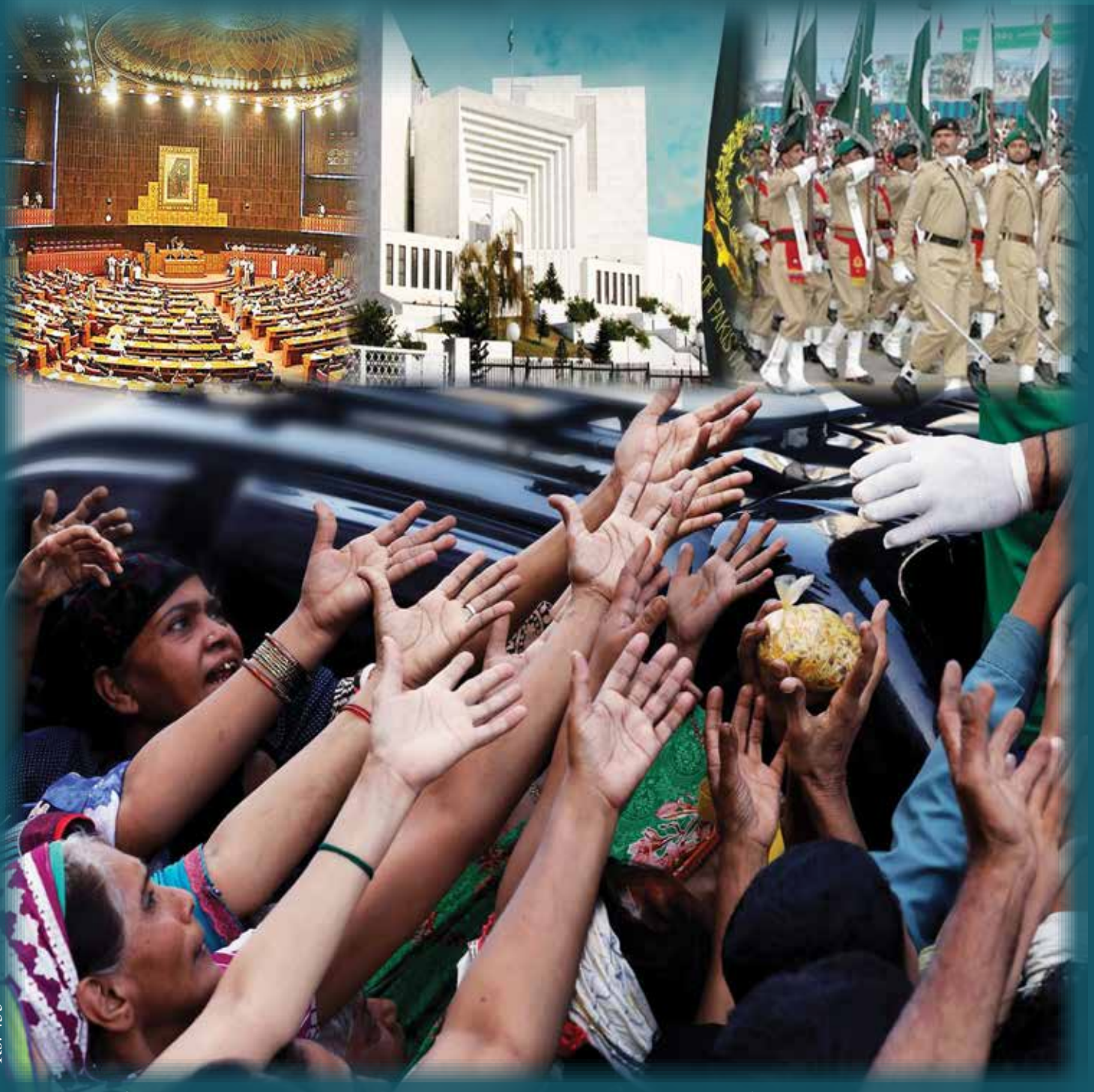
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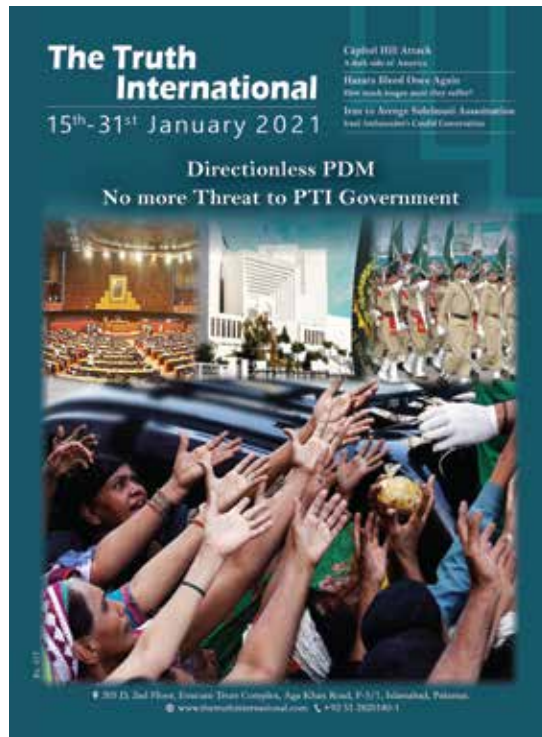
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Seeking Political and Economic Stability

By M. Ziauddin



A broad-based national political consensus on the kind of state that the majority of Pakistanis would like their country to be is the first prerequisite for achieving political and economic stability in the country. Such a consensus has continued to remain elusive all these 75 years of our existence because the ruling elite comprising feudal aristocracy, big business, politicians and civil-military bureaucracy do not wish to leave the gravy train that they had boarded at the time of independence.

Still, a subliminal broad-based national consensus can be detected across the manifestoes of our mainstream political parties which seek to turn Pakistan into a social welfare state. This impalpable consensus can be turned into a palpable draft of socioeconomic and political charter if the PTI-led coalition government were to shun its non-political approach to the politics of governance and set up a broad-based Parliamentary committee on the lines of the one that drafted the 18th amendment comprising members from all the political parties represented in the elected houses and tasked to get such a charter signed and sealed.

The PTI did not lose any of its voters when it teamed up with PML(Q), the MQM (P) and GDA to form federal and Punjab governments and, it is not likely to lose any if it is seen by its voters consulting in a Parliamentary committee with the PMLN and the PPP for developing a consensus charter on turning Pakistan into a truly social welfare state or a state designed on the lines of what the PTI calls Riyasat-i-Madina. As the purpose is loftier, the PTI is likely to win back even those voters it had lost over the first half of its term because of its failure to stop hoarding and black marketing of essential food items.

The formula: Deploy state capital for promoting inclusive economic growth by increasing provision for health, education, and public amenities. Also the state should get involved on the side of workers in the process of collective bargaining over wages

and working conditions. And in order to ensure equitable distribution of the fruits of socio-economic development autonomous statutory regulatory bodies independent of line ministry should be established forthwith.

Most of the revenues currently being collected are through indirect taxation which is a regressive practice and a big chunk of direct taxation is collected through what is known as 'withholding taxes' which amounts to no more than a minuscule residual of huge settlements made through black cash in most of the major transactions.

All attempts to document the economy over the last so many years have been foiled by the personnel of the FBR with the connivance of the ruling elite. In this digital age, there is no reason why there should be any physical contact between the taxpayer and the tax collector.

Another impediment to socio-economic growth has been the IMF. The Fund in order to ensure that it would get back its loan imposes a lot of austerity conditions on the borrower assuring the loan seeker at the same time that in the long run its economy would not only stabilize but would also start growing at an accelerated rate.

'In the long run we are all dead,' so said John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946). But the fundamentalists of the so-called 'Washington Consensus' have been coming up with their own self-serving definitions of the term 'long run' so as to sell 'austerity' to the poor countries as the panacea for all their economic ills. But the austerity formula has proved, in the long run, to be a stagnation trap for countries that went to the Fund seeking help.

There is a lot of economic sense in investing the limited resources we mobilize through various means, including costly borrowing in public-sector projects aimed at expanding the much-needed physical infrastructure, like irrigation systems, power plants, roads, bridges, housing schemes, motorways and metro buses, etc. Such projects generate all kinds of jobs and most of these are highly labor intensive. Also, such projects do give a fillip to the manufacturing sector as demand for building material, such as cement, electrical fittings, plastic materials, solar panels and windmills etc., goes up. More jobs would mean more money in the hands of more people belonging to all classes. More money in the hands of more people would mean steep escalation in the demand for all kinds of essential and non-essential consumer goods, necessitating expansion in production capacities of the goods in demand leading to significant growth in the real economy.

Maintain as well an equitable balance in the allocation of limited resources between physical and social infrastructure so as to make the two develop in a way that the opportunity cost is not too high. The notion of opportunity cost plays a crucial part in ensuring that scarce resources are used efficiently.

Can PDM Oust the Establishment from Politics?



By Umer Farooq

While the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) has yet to come with a viable strategy to unseat the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan, political mobilization by the opposition coalition has inflicted severe damage to the country's powerful military establishment and its painstakingly constructed myth of omnipotence.

The three main components parties of PDM – Pakistan Muslim League (PMLN), Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam (JUI) – all have tasted power in their political careers and are familiar with Islamabad's power culture.

They have cooperated with the military establishment while in government and interacted with the powerful establishment while in opposition. In other words, they have seen both sides of the power equation in Pakistan's political system.

All of them are now annoyed with the way the military establishment is now supporting the PTI government and in their own words how the military establishment had stolen the 2018 parliamentary elections to install PTI in power.

They launched a campaign to mobilize public opinion against the PTI government and military establishment some two months back and held rallies in most of the major urban centers of the country.

All of their political leaders are aggressively attacking COAS general Bajwa and his military associates for their alleged role in the 2018 parliamentary elections and the subsequent government formation. They are less critical of Imran Khan and more vehemently attacking General Bajwa in their speeches.

PDM campaign's most lethal impact has been its direct criticism of the military leadership. While criticism of military leadership is a norm during military rule, Pakistani politicians have always desisted from directly naming and criticizing military leadership during civilian tenures.

The current PDM strategy of attacking Gen. Bajwa and his senior associates is therefore a departure from the established norms of the country's political discourse.

The only precedents of this kind of criticism in the country's history were Benazir Bhutto going after the then military establishment after her ouster from power in 1990 and 1996.

A key difference between Benazir's critique of the military's involvement in politics and PDM's frontal attack on the Bajwa-led military establishment is that there has been strong popular response in the case of the latter.

In sharp contrast with the lukewarm response Benazir Bhutto received, PDM's rallies in major urban centers have garnered large crowds.



The military has not responded to accusations – especially from the hard-hitting speeches of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif – coming from PDM rallies. Some of the pro-military politicians and media men have instead floated the idea of Grand National Dialogue (GND), which can bring all the stakeholders under one roof for dialogue.

The problem is that PDM leadership is unanimous in rejecting any offer of dialogue with Imran Khan, still in power in Islamabad. They do not say who should oust Prime Minister Khan or what mechanism should be evolved for ousting the PTI government. It is difficult to say if they will be satisfied if extraconstitutional means are adopted for ousting the government.

The path of moving a no confidence move against Imran Khan seems to be anathema to some of PDM leaders. The coalition is undecided, even confused, on the question of resignation from parliament and provincial assemblies.

Amid this indecision, the momentum of PDM's protest movement is flagging. Some key alliance leaders have already said cold weather is not optimal for a Long March on Islamabad.

They have already covered major urban centers and now have moved towards holding rallies in periphery where even large gatherings will be unable to send shock waves to Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

Analysts say PDM's indecision on the question of resignation and Long March may turn out to be a catalyst for its falling apart.

The most decisive factor that is keeping opposition parties within the fold of Pakistan Democratic Movement is state machinery's high handedness in dealing with the cases of alleged corruption. Top leaders of PPP, PMLN and JUI-F are all at the receiving end when it comes to NAB's probe against alleged corruption.

As the state machinery seems hell bent on pushing the prosecution of top leadership of PDM, forcing leadership of all the three political parties to dig their heels and fight back. This fightback could come in the form of resignation from parliament and provincial assemblies or a Long March towards Islamabad.

But what exactly can they achieve through these acts, apart from displaying their aggressiveness? Can they bring the government down through this? Will they be able to put more pressure on the military through these acts? Who exactly is their target, Imran Khan or Gen Bajwa – or both?

Short analyses of three major component parties of PDM and their relations with the military in historical perspective may shed some light on these questions.

JAMIA ULEMA-E-ISLAM

There are reports in the media that NAB is about to arrest Maulana Fazlur Rehman, which is enough to explain why he is so desperate in convincing his fellow leaders to resign and launch long march towards Islamabad.

Historically Maulana Fazlur Rehman and his JUI have cooperated with the military establishment during Musharraf era and even later in deal with the Taliban militants in tribal areas. A large

number of his cadre are based in the recently merged areas of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa.

These cadres have enduring relations with Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, and many times this cadre of second-tier leadership of JUI have acted as a channel through which the military negotiated with tribal militants.

Until recently, the state machinery sought the help of Maulana Fazlur Rehman in dealing with thousands of Deobandi madrassas in Punjab, KP and Balochistan provinces. Most of the Punjab based militant organizations are either the offshoots of JUI or are offshoots of its offshoots.

The JUI, therefore, has many uses for the military establishment and its intelligence agencies in dealing with the threat of terrorism, militancy and extremism. The moderate face of JUI projected by the moderate and urbanized Mullahs like the Maulana himself consider themselves of great value for the state for more than one reason.

It is abundantly clear that the JUI turned against the establishment only after it was deprived of every vestige of the patronage it had enjoyed until the middle of last decade. It should not be much difficult for the military establishment to arm-twist JUI into accepting a new arrangement.

PAKISTAN PEOPLE'S PARTY

PPP's importance and significance for country's political system and military establishment could be judged from the fact that after the demise of every military regime in Pakistan, it was always PPP that came to power.

PPP under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto rose to power following the ouster of the Yahya regime; PPP under Benazir Bhutto rose to power after the demise of the Zia regime; and PPP under Zardari which rose to power after the Musharraf regime retreated.



The PPP is considered a mainstream political party which has stakes in the system even if it remains in the opposition in the parliament. Secondly, PPP is part of the government structure as it is in government in Sindh province. Its leadership has a long enduring liaison with the power structure.

The amicable settlement of the alleged kidnapping of IG police Sindh at the hands of military officials two months back should be an indication of how adept the party is at dealing with the establishment. It is clearly not a party infatuated with revolution.



PAKISTAN MUSLIM LEAGUE – NAWAZ

The story of its significance and importance to the political system is not very different from the story of PPP. It's a mainstream political party with stakes in the system and many of its second tier leadership is in close liaison with the top military leaders.

However, there is a problem: The interest of its top leadership got in deep conflict with the military leadership and the system of which the military leadership is the guarantor. The upshot: The system could expect more shock waves coming from Nawaz Sharif.

Nawaz Sharif has in fact introduced an anti-military narrative into the political discourse of Pakistan while there is still a civilian government in power in Islamabad. This would have serious ramifications for the country's political system.

It will be useful to remember that Nawaz Sharif is a leader of Central Punjab, where the largest number of the country's middle class resides and which is the home of Pakistan's military establish-

ment as the officer corps in Pakistani land forces are drawn from central Punjab.

Nawaz Sharif is unlikely to sheath his sword unless he gets a relief from the country's judicial system – which he has accused of taking dictation from military and intelligence bosses for giving him jail sentence.

The political leaders in the periphery – like Baloch separatists or Sindhi nationalists – have always been direct in criticizing the military leaders in their role in politics. But these leaders of the periphery hardly get any space in the mainstream media.

Nawaz Sharif is unlikely these leaders of the periphery – he has been a darling of the media in Punjab and perhaps the most popular leader in central Punjab after ZAB. Analysts say his new narrative has already caused a lot of damage to the military's hegemony over politics – although its repercussions are as yet imperceptible.

The writer is an analyst based in Islamabad.

Track-II Dialogue: Myth or Reality?

By Khalid Wasim

For the past few weeks, the country has been abuzz with the talks about backdoor contacts between the establishment and the opposition parties and the need for a grand national dialogue.

Although such developments cannot by definition be officially confirmed, some recent happenings analysed against the backdrop of the country's chequered political history give credence to this perception.

Vice-President of the Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) Maryam Nawaz, who has become the de-facto head of the party after the arrest of party president Shahbaz Sharif in September last year, has been claiming that “her party people and the PDM (Pakistan Democratic Movement) have been approached”.



Leaders of the other opposition Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) are also confirming such “contacts” in their private conversations and some say that Senator Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar has resigned from the position of the official spokesperson for party chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari also because of the ambiguous party policy in this regard.

Moreover, the meetings of Pakistan Muslim League-Functional (PML-F) Secretary General Muhammad Ali Durrani with Shahbaz Sharif at Kot Lakhpat Jail and with Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) President Maulana Fazlur Rehman and then another meeting between the Maulana and Abdullah Gul, the son of former ISI chief Gen (retired) Hameed Gul, in Rawalpindi are being cited as evidence by those asserting that the opposition parties have finally been approached and a way out of the current impasse is being discussed.

In their meetings, the two pro-establishment men have reportedly asked the PDM leaders not to make the country's state institutions controversial by dragging them into politics as, according to them, not only will such an effort be detrimental to the institutions, it can also endanger whatever fragile democracy we have in the country.

Durrani is presently in the PML-F which is an ally of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) and like many other such characters in the country, the establishment is known to be his only constituency.

The PML-F leader, who had served as a federal minister under military strongman Gen Pervez Musharraf, after his meetings with the opposition leaders had categorically stated that the “collision course” the PDM was going to adopt would have “serious consequences”.

In a TV interview, Durrani later said some “unfelt characters” were working behind the scene to broker peace between the government and the opposition parties. He didn't reveal the identities of the characters, but said these could be from the establishment or judiciary or even from the agencies.

Durrani claims that he met the incarcerated Shahbaz Sharif to deliver an important message from his party leader



Pir Sibghatullah Rashidi. He has reportedly asked the younger Sharif to play his role in stopping the opposition lawmakers from resigning from the assemblies, warning that a collision course could result in the wrapping up of the democratic system.

Talking to reporters outside Kot Lakhpat Jail after meeting Sharif, Durrani said, "Pakistan's institutions and political parties need to start a track-II dialogue."

"The beauty of this [dialogue] is that it is not exposed [to the public] but its results will be exposed. The current situation demands immediate start of 'track-II' dialogue."

"A grand dialogue will be better for the establishment, the government and the opposition. However, it will be wrong to push anyone to the wall in the name of accountability. If opposition leaders are arrested, the door for a dialogue will be closed. Leaders in the parliament must be freed".

Durrani added that a Charter of Democracy, a Charter of Tolerance and a Charter of Parliament had now become indispensable.

He quoted Shahbaz Sharif as saying he could not play any role as long he was in jail – implying the younger Sharif had in fact supported his initiative.

The media has already been reporting that Shahbaz Sharif had been advocating for a policy of reconciliation in the party, but his views had been dominated by the aggressive stance of deposed premier Nawaz Sharif and his daughter Maryam.

Before Durrani's initiative, some members of the federal cabinet had already extended the dialogue offer to the PDM, which was declined straightaway despite the fact that Shahbaz Sharif had himself once called for a national dialogue to steer the country out of the present crisis.

The rejection of the proposal came directly from PML-N's supremo Nawaz Sharif through his newly-created account on Twitter. The former premier declared that those who brought Imran Khan to power by stealing votes were now suggesting a grand national dialogue.

"Becoming part of such a dialogue will be tantamount to stepping back from our sacred objective," Mr Sharif had tweeted.

His daughter and political lieutenant Maryam Nawaz has expressed her annoyance over the Durrani-Shahbaz meeting, categorically declaring that the time for any dialogue was long past. She claimed the establishment had arranged this meeting without the consent of Shahbaz Sharif or the party.

The PDM leaders after their last marathon huddle at the Jati Umra estate of the Sharifs on the New Year's Day 2021 declared that its target was not Prime Minister Imran Khan as he was a mere pawn and the real culprits were those who had imposed him on the nation.

They then announced that the PDM had chalked out a plan to hold demonstrations outside the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and National Accountability Bureau (NAB) buildings.

Setting 31 Jan as the deadline for Imran Khan to resign, Maulana Fazlur Rehman threatened that if it did not happen, the PDM would announce a long march either on Islamabad or Rawalpindi.



"The target of our criticism will now be the establishment which set up a fake government. We respect the army and generals, but now they have to decide to step back and focus on their constitutional responsibilities," the Maulana had said and asked why Pakistan was mentioned as an example of deep state.

When the opposition's supporters and some analysts present the Maulana's statement as an argument to support their claim that the opposition has in fact taken a hard-line stance by hinting at holding a long march on Rawalpindi, where the army headquarters are located, still there are a few who believe that it is perhaps an attempt by the opposition to gain attention of the real game players in the country.

It is also unclear if Mr Durrani really means business and doing all this under some "given mandate" or he has become active only to gain attention of the media and the kingmakers ahead of the Senate elections hoping to make a re-entry to the parliament's corridors.

Dawn's Islamabad Resident Editor Fahd Husain in one of his weekly columns quoted a PML-N leader as claiming, "There were some initial contacts from the establishment regarding the personalised attacks from Nawaz Sharif.

"However, there was no substantive follow-up and the contacts subsequently dried up – as did prospects of the establishment distancing itself from the PTI."

"In the world of power politics, the PDM appears to be struggling with the plot. According to the original plot, three months of public pressure and agitational momentum should have forced the government, and the establishment, to the negotiating table. If not, the long march to the capital should have done the trick.

"The establishment – bruised from incessant pressure of publicly uttered rebukes – would have agreed to some settlement that would have either led to the fall of the government in the centre, or in Punjab, or a deal advantageous to the PDM.

"At the dawn of 2021, the plot is nowhere near fruition. Instead, the political landscape looks something like this: The PDM will shelve its policy of boycotting polls, participate in the by-elections as well as the Senate elections, keep the resignations card on hold and let the events take their natural course till at least March," writes Mr Husain in the column captioned "Plots and Plans for 2021", and rightly so.

The writer is senior journalist.



Holy Warrior or Hatchet Man?

Parsing the JI Chief's Policy of Attacking all Sides of the Political Equation

By Ahmad Waleed

Jamaat-e-Islami chief Siraj-ul-Haq has been on the campaign trail for a while – criticising the government and opposition with equal ferocity at public meetings in several parts of the country.

Political observers are drawing some very interesting conclusions from this apparently directionless but incessant mudslinging by the party long known to be in cahoots with the establishment.

The largest Islamist political party of Pakistan has a long history of politics of protests and it has been a key component of many political movements in the country. On occasions, Jamaat-e-Islami has tried to impose the party agenda very aggressively and violently through mass movements and street power. It would use its street power to stage huge protests on the issues ranging from Kashmir, Palestine and 'anti-Islam' actions by the international community.

For the most part, Jamaat-e-Islami has tried to contest national elections as a separate entity. It, however, joined hands with Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) to oust Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government and contested election under the banner of the nine-party PNA in 1977.



It also remained part of Islami Jamohri Ittehad (IJI), a right-wing conservative alliance formed in 1988, to oppose Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). For many years, Jamaat-e-Islami and Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) have been making seat adjustments in elections. However, it stayed away from Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD) spearheaded by PPP to oust the military dictator Gen Zia-ul-Haq.

Although it has been part of major political movements in the past, this time the Jamaat has decided to go solo against the present regime by launching a parallel agitation to that of Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM).

The current Jamaat amir Siraj-ul-Haq has staged big public gatherings in various cities of Pakistan to condemn the policies of PTI government which has resulted in worst ever economic slowdown and skyrocketing prices of daily use commodities. At the same time, he roundly criticises the opposition.

The Jamaat only woke up to the bad governance of PTI govern-

ment only after the PDM launched its country-wide agitation campaign to oust what they call a hybrid regime. The 11-party opposition alliance is out to challenge not only Prime Minister Imran Khan but also the backers of the present regime.

On the other hand the Jamaat leader hitting both the PIT government and the opposition which is creating doubts among the critics if the JI protest plan has the support of the powers that be to undermine the PDM movement.

By going solo, the Jamaat is trying to target the lot of masses who are perhaps fed up with the existing major political parties – PML-N, PPP, ANP, JUI-F, etc. Some see it as an attempt to create a narrative among the anti-democracy elements in the society that the current political system has failed to deliver and the country needs a new system to get rid of all ills the country is facing for decades.

Lately, the Jamaat has been opposing both the parties in the Parliament too to maintain its identity and sat on the fence during the passage of some important bills. Critics are confused as to what objective the Jamaat wants to achieve by opposing the government as well as the opposition.

The JI has been an important ally of PML-N. But, during the previous rule of PML-N, the JI leaders targeted its government with withering criticism and during Panama Papers case, the JI supremo Siraj-ul-Haq had filed multiple petitions in the Supreme Court against the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

He would attend every hearing and address press conferences outside the court until Nawaz Sharif was disqualified from holding public office for life.

Many critics believe the Jamaat is caught between a rock and a hard place and now it is treading this path of opposing all sides simply out of frustration over losing political ground. Now it wants to regain some public support that has been lost lately. Being a religious-political party, it has distanced itself from the major religious parties of the country even though being part of Mutahida Majlis-e-Aml (MMA) which merely exists in Election Commission records.

But some think the Jamaat is again out to muster support of the powers that be by serving their agenda of casting out all the major



politicians of the country and paving the way for a new system more suited to the needs of the country according to some.

Campaigning for systemic change, incidentally, harks back to the formative years of JI as a political force within the Pakistani political milieu. Launched by Muslim scholar and socio-political philosopher Abul A'la Muadudi in Lahore in 1941 as an Islamic movement, the JI opposed the creation of a separate state for the Muslims of India.

However, in an attempt to offset this anti-Pakistan image after Pakistan came into being, it started to advocate the need for an Islamic state through its four-point agenda: reforming the life and

mind at the individual level; organizing, motivating, and training virtuous individuals; reforming society more broadly; and reforming the government and political structure.

While Muadudi himself was a staunch opponent of the military's political shenanigans including jihad by proxy, the JI under his successors was pulled into a permanent embrace with the establishment. Today, it is impossible to parse the party's policies and workings without reference to that embrace.

Abmad Waleed is a Lahore-based journalist who has worked for The Nation, The News, Geo News, and DawnNews and is currently associated with 24News.

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Modernday Nero

By Hammad Ghaznavi



It was the location of the incident that made it big news. It was not Burkina Faso or some godforsaken boondocks of civilization: it was the United State of America, the paragon of liberal democracy, the only super power on the face of the planet. For banana republics all around the globe, it was a great day as Donald Trump supporters staged an insurrection at the US Capitol building in Washington DC, storming the House and Senate, clashing with armed police resulting in four deaths. 'Americans are just like us,' was the feeling that day among billions of citizens of poor and unstable third world states, many of whom consider US responsible for most of their ills.

It was the worst security breach in US history, much worse than the attacks on Kamra airbase Karachi or GHQ in Rawalpindi. We, in fact, defended our parliament building much better when some zealots incited by the 2014 dharna leaders, attacked the 'citadel of corruption.' Those 'patriots' believed that their election had been stolen. Trump also told his supporters that 'they had won' and urged them to storm the Capitol to reverse his defeat and 'Make America Great Again'. Uncanny resemblance!

Washington DC and Quetta had almost the same freezing temperatures last week, but that couldn't deter protesters in both the cities. The visuals emerging from the two cities were shameful, but Quetta's scene was much uglier. Ten Hazara mine workers were killed in the Much Mayhem but that didn't surprise many as hundreds of them have been killed during the last decade in attacks, including bombings in schools. Hazara are Shias, look like Chinese, have origins in Mongolia. (We are deeply in love with the Chinese but not Hazaras, perhaps because the Chinese are communists and not Shias)

Anyway, the Hazara community refused to bury their dead and a long sit-in of thousands ensued. Courtesy the freezing tempera-

tures, the bodies didn't putrefy. Quetta became one big mortuary, so to speak, with the temperature lower than that of a morgue. The Hazara community wanted the prime minister to come to Quetta and listen to their demands and ensure an end to decades-long persecution of their community, but the PM thought he was being 'blackmailed' and refused to visit the 'morgue'. He wanted deceased be buried immediately then he would visit Quetta and listen to grievances of Hazara. Immunity.

The PM is certainly a busy man looking after a myriad of issues of governance. During the Quetta sit-in, he has been particularly busy. On the first day of dharna he headed a meeting of his media handlers, discussing in detail various ways of countering the misleading propaganda of the PDM leadership, and concluding that the opposition must be fiercely confronted. The next day he met the Turkish team of Ertugrul wherein it was decided that a tv play on a famous character of Caliphate Movement 'Turk Lala' would be produced to further cement the Pak-Turk friendship, and save our new generation from following the Western culture. Then there was a meeting on the unprecedented price-hike which the PM thought was artificial and a conspiracy against his government. The meetings continued. The sit-in went on.

The skyrocketing prices remind one of Fateh II, a guided rocket with 140 kilometer range that Pakistan successfully experimented the other day. 'It will strengthen our defence,' said the prime minister. Meanwhile, in the world passport index the position of our passport plummeted to 107th position. One can only wish that one day Pakistani passport will fly high like its missiles.

Let's move from the missiles to the bullets that riddled the body of an innocent 22 years old boy Osama Nadeem Satti in Islamabad. His body had 17 bullet wounds. His crime was that he didn't stop his car when the police asked him to. So he was killed. Yes, that's the official version. Osama's father in a press conference asked the Supreme Court to take suo moto action on his son's brutal murder the way it took suo moto on the issue of Karachi drainage system. In its infinite wisdom, however, the Supreme Court decided to prefer the sewers.

Amidst worsening law and order, political tribulation, and unprecedented inflation, Usman Buzdar has strictly ordered to promote Qawali at division, district and tehsil levels.

Allah Hi Janay Kon Bashar Hai, Allah Hi Janay

The writer is an analyst with keen interest in politics.



Axis of Terror Rears Ugly Head in Balochistan

Mach Killings May Portend More Attacks from an Unholy Nexus of IS, LJ-A and TTP

By Shahzada Zulfiqar

After a break of two years, once again Persian speaking Hazaras, the vulnerable community of Balochistan was targeted on 3 January 2021, when unknown gunmen butchered 10 of its members, mostly young in the oldest town of Mach, some 70 km southeast of Quetta.

The group of coalminers were asleep when the armed men who are believed to be a dozen in number broke into their compound and held all of them on gun point. The video and photographs the perpetrators released show that the attackers blind folded all miners after tying their hands behind their backs and slaughtered them one by one. A few dead bodies were found with gunshots as well while three others were found beheaded.

The proscribed Daish terrorist group claimed responsibility for this gruesome incident. Earlier it has been involved in suicide and bomb attacks in Balochistan, but it is the first time that it has adopted the mode of terrorist act of slaughtering innocent persons in front of video camera that is common in Iraq and Syria for execution of members of Shia community.

A decade ago, the members of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi abducted two members of Shia community and after a month slaughtered them in front of camera before making them read under duress a written statement of their involvement in anti-Sunni activities.

In the gruesome incident of Mach, the attackers who appeared calm executed victims without any fear of being caught despite shooting their guns at three of the victims. The armed men are suspected to have escaped through a road dotted with checkpoints manned by Frontier Corps, Police and Levies personnel.

According to an estimate of government organizations, four hundred of labourers out of total two thousands working in 54 mines at Mach belong to the Hazara ethnic group. Each of these mines has 8 to 10 seams and the area has a strong presence of Frontier Corps' personnel.

The government deployed Frontier Corps in Bolan and Mach area to provide labourers and mine owners security after incidents of extortion by banned Baloch militant organizations mainly Baloch Liberation Army came to light. Mine owners and contractors pay Frontier Corps PKR 450 per ton of coal for the security.

The January incident is not the first of its nature. Hazara community members have been targeted in the past and as a result 60 percent of Hazara population (approximately 500 persons including a few dozen families) migrated to Quetta. After improvement in law and order in Quetta during the past two years, Hazaras started moving back to Mach, resuming their livelihood.



Activists of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi that is dominated by Baloch ethnics established Daish with active support of Tahrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and started terrorist activities in Balochistan besides abduction for ransom to generate fund for their attacks.

They were involved in attacks against Frontier Corps personnel, police and government officials, lawyers, and Hazara community. The BLA has been very much active in Mach and Bolan area and involved in attacks on security forces and Punjabi labourers traveling in buses.

However, after deployment of Frontier Corps, their activists moved to difficult mountainous area of Bolan. Banned Baloch organizations remained active in different areas of Balochistan, but Islamic militants went underground after action against them.

A number of activists including commanders of Daish and Lashker-e-Jhangvi Al-Alami have been killed in different IBOs (Information Based Operations) in Quetta and Mastung districts. The biggest operation of this kind was in Koh-e-Maraan (Mountain of Snakes) in June 2017, in which some 12 Daish local commanders and activists were killed while in cross firing a teenaged abductee lost his life.

The boy, the son of a business man was abducted and held in a cave for PKR 50 million in ransom. When the family refused to pay this heavy amount, the abductors chopped off the toe of teenage victim and sent it to family as pressure tactics to accept their demand.

After a few months, nine more activists of Islamic State were killed in same area while its Sindh Ameer whose name was not made public was arrested in these operations and IS Balochistan head Imran Bungalzai was killed.



The same group was involved in the abduction of a number of government officials and a Chinese couple on a preaching mission of Christianity to Quetta. However after Koh-e-Maraan operation, the slaughtered bodies of the couple were found from another place.

The security forces claim that Baloch militant group BLA and Daish activists are involved in the gruesome incident of Mach, maintaining Much and Bolan area have never been the area of Daish so it must have operated with active support from BLA activists in the area. However, independent observers doubt these two terrorist organizations can join hands.

Officials say that Farooq Bungalzai, the IS Balochistan Ameer who escaped unhurt from one of the operations in Mastung and went to Afghanistan along with another of his commanders Mumtaz Sumalari recently came back to conduct terrorist attacks against security forces and Hazara community.

Another top man wanted by security forces is Abdul Karim who is said to be the coordinator of militants of central Asian countries and Afghanistan. Umar Farooq who is in the custody of Afghan government is said to be one of the top IS commanders and Pakistan has already demanded of his extradition.

Security agencies warn of an uptick in terrorist activities in Balochistan by IS, Lj-A and TTP in the coming days. Military sources say these terrorist networks operate out of Afghanistan with Indian and Afghan support.

After the Mach incident, all the Shia groups and parties agreed in their joint meeting to perform funeral of these dead on the same day, but next morning Majlis-e-Wahdat Muslimeen staged a sit in along with the bereaved family members by putting the bodies on western bypass linking northern Balochistan with rest of the country.

All the other groups – Hazara Democratic Party, Hazara Tribal Jirga, Shia Ulema Council and Balochistan Shia Conference – neither supported nor joined the protest but kept opposing this extreme step.

Provincial and federal ministers kept visiting these protestors assuring them that all their demands are accepted except dismissing Balochistan government and Inspector General of Frontier Corps.

However, the protestors led by Shia Ulema and former MWM MPA Agha Raza kept refusing to end their sit in until the Prime Minister Imran Khan visited them. On the second day of the protest, the activists of different Shia organizations also staged sit in in other provincial capitals and a number of cities of interior Sindh. The hours-long meetings of Interior Minister Sheikh Rasheed and PM's two special aids Ali Zaidi and Zulfi Bokhari with MWM leaders did not bear any fruit.

PDM leaders Mariam Nawaz and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari also air dashed to Quetta to show their solidarity with mourners. Both excoriated the Prime Minister for not showing empathy towards them.

Chief Minister Balochistan Jam Kamal who was on personal visit to Dubai assigned the task to his ministers to tackle the situation. His officials say that on 5 July, the Chief Minister landed in Karachi where he had to confine himself in quarantine for a couple of days. Had he rushed back after the incident and engaged the protestors, they would have ended their protest in a day or two.



The delay on the part of provincial government in consoling the bereaved families created an impression that the Jam government is apathetic to the Hazara community's sufferings. The protestors felt ignored as district administration was negotiating with protestors in the first 48 hours while the Wahdat Mulimeen's followers were not ready to listen to their arch political rival Abdul Khaliq Hazara, a provincial Minister. Agha Raza, the MWM candidate who lost 2018 elections to Khaliq Hazara seemed to prolong the protest for political gain by eroding the latter's political support in the community.

The PPP dismissed its own government led by Nawab Aslam Raisani by imposing Governor Rule in February 2013 on the demand of Hazara protestors who placed the 91 dead bodies of those killed in an explosive laden water tanker on the road. Raisani who was on a private visit to London refused to come back despite the pressure on PPP government to handle the situation.

The Prime Minister Imran Khan has been under fire in TV talk shows for adopting a stubborn attitude of not visiting Hazara mourners, but earned praise in serious circles which view that if Prime Minister of a country visits to a protest, it would become a bad precedent and tomorrow, the protestors from any part of the country would expect the same from him.

However Prime Minister's remarks of not to be blackmailed by such demand annoyed Hazara protestors on one hand while on the other shattered resolve of organizers to continue the protest.

In the early hours of Saturday and the sixth day of protest, a six point agreement was reached between Balochistan government and the Shuhada Committee. The accord does not include the removal or dismissal of Balochistan government and IG FC and his senior officials.

In the given circumstances, the protestors agreed to perform the last rites of their dead, paving the way for the visit of the Prime Minister, who accompanied by Army Chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa and cabinet members met the bereaved families to commiserate in person.

What is Hazara Genocide, let's have a look

February 9, 2001:

8 passenger were shot dead & five severely wounded when they were traveling in a van en route from Hazara Town to Alamdar road. Later, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi claimed responsibility for the attack.

June 8, 2003:

Twelve Young Hazara police cadets were killed when two assailants opened fire on their vehicle. The attack occurred on Saryab Road and left nine others injured.

July 4, 2003:

Quetta mosque bombing: Fifty five people were killed and over 150 were injured in an attack on worshippers during Friday Prayers on Mekongi road Quetta.

March 2, 2004:

At least 60 people were killed and more than 100 critically injured when a religious procession of the Shia Muslims was attacked with extensive open-firing which followed an explosion by rival Sunni extremists at Liaquat Bazaar in Quetta on Tenth of Muharram.

January 10, 2007:

Agha Ghulam Ali, aged 25, owner of the famous fruit juice outlet in Pakistan. His father Agha Abbas Ali had also been murdered by the same Sunni Muslim terrorist organization in May 2002.

September 3, 2010:

At least 73 people were killed and 206 injured when a bomb exploded during a rally.

May 6, 2011:

Hazara Town shooting: Eight died and fifteen were wounded in the early morning when armed men fired rockets at Hazara people playing outside in an open field. Children were also among the victims.

June 16, 2011:

Abrar Hussain, the Pakistani Olympian boxer and Chairman Balochistan Sports Board, was assassinated near Ayub National Stadium in Quetta.

August 31, 2011:

Thirteen died and twenty-two were wounded when a suicide bomber blew himself up in the morning of Eid near Hazara Eid Gah. Four women and two children were also among the dead.

September 20, 2011:

A bus carrying pilgrims to Taftan was stopped in Mastung near Quetta, after identifying Hazara passengers they were massacred leaving 26 dead. Three more were shot dead when they were on their way to collect the bodies.

September 23, 2011:

Five more Shia Hazara were killed in an attack when unidentified gunmen opened fire on a van.

January 26, 2012:

Three Hazara men were shot dead in Quetta. Two of the victims were public servants and the third one Abid Ali Nazish, was a television artist.

March 29, 2012:

A taxi carrying passengers from Hazara Town was sprayed with bullets, which killed seven and injured six. Three women and some children were also among the casualties. This was the third attack on the community in just one week.

April 3, 2012:

Two Hazara men were shot dead in Mekongi road, Quetta, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) claimed responsibility for the attack.

April 9, 2012:

Six men were killed by unidentified gunmen on Prince road.

April 12, 2012:

Three businessmen, one Tea trader and two Ice cream parlour owners, were gunned down in the busiest bazaars of the city, in two separate incidents.

April 14, 2012:

Eight Hazara men were killed on their way to work when armed assailants opened fire on a taxi carrying them on Brewery road.

April 21, 2012:

Two brothers were shot dead on Brewery road near SBKW University adjacent to Hazara Town, Quetta. The Pakistani paramilitary force of Frontier Corps later arrested three suspects with the help of locals.

May 15, 2012:

Two brothers were killed when unidentified gunmen opened fire on them while they were standing in the line outside Passport issuing office on Joint road, Quetta.

June 28, 2012:

15 people were killed and 45 others injured, when a suicide attack occurred on a bus in Quetta which had just returned from Iran carrying 60 pilgrims including scores of women and children belonging to the Hazara community.

November 6, 2012:

"Assailants on a motorcycle opened fire on a yellow taxi cab on Spinny Road": 3 Hazaras killed, 2 injured.

10th Jan 2013:

115 people killed in total and wounding more than 270 in a blast. It was, according to one Hazara leader, the worst attack in Quetta in 14 years. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, a sunni terrorist organization, has claimed the responsibility of these attacks.

16th Feb 2013:

A big bomb blast at Kirani Road near Hazara Town of Quetta killed 73 and wounded at least 180 people from Shia community. Banned sunni terrorist outfit Lashkar Jhangvi (LJ) claimed responsibility for the bombing.

30 June 2013:

At least 33 Hazaras were killed (including 9 women and 4 children) and over 70 seriously injured (15 in critical condition) when Al-Qaeda affiliated terrorists carried a suicide attack and exploded an improvised explosive device in a crowded area.

October 10, 2017:

Two unidentified attackers on a motorcycle opened fire on a van heading for a nearby vegetable market, killing the driver and four others, continuing the trend of attacks against Hazaras in Quetta.

March 7, 2018:

1 Policeman killed, 1 injured, during ISIS terrorist attack on Hazara Vegetable Sellers in Hazaraganji.

April 1, 2018:

Terrorists open fire on Hazara-owned yellow cab, killing one and wounding another. The attack happened on Qandahari bazar in the heart of Quetta's business district.

April 12, 2019:

20 killed, 48 injured in attack targeting Hazara community in Quetta.

4 January 2021:

Terrorists slaughtered 17 Hazara persons who were working as miners at Mach, Balochistan.



All Set for an Evenly Split Upper House

By Wajih Abbasi

While Prime Minister Imran Khan's PTI is likely to emerge as the largest party in the Upper House after the upcoming Senate elections, all seems to be set for an evenly split house in which small groups and individual members of provincial assemblies exercise the casting vote.

Political pundits see the strength of Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf taking swelling to twenty-eight or more Senate seats. The PPP (Pakistan Peoples Party) will be another gainer, overtaking the PML-N (Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz) to become the largest opposition group in the house.

Particularly amplified will be the position of members of provincial assembly from Balochistan, whose whims may end up deciding the winner in a motion.

The Prime Minister's request for early Senate election has already been rejected by the Election Commission of Pakistan, meaning forty-eight new members of the Senate will be elected in first week of March for a six year term.

There will be no election for FATA this time around as the region has already been merged with the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province. The four members from FATA elected in 2018 will, however, continue till end of their tenure in 2024.

This year, twelve members each, including a Non-Muslim will be elected from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan while Punjab and Sindh will elect eleven each. One member each from women and general categories will be elected by National Assembly to represent Islamabad – a bizarre arrangement where citizens of Islamabad are neither the voters nor the candidates.

Currently, the PMLN has twenty-nine seats in Senate, seventeen of them set to retire this March. Looking at the present composition of the provincial assemblies, Nawaz Sharif's party can expect to win five seats in Punjab and one in KP. Its total strength in the new house will thus be eighteen – eleven seats less than its present strength.

PTI on the other hand can expect to win nine or even ten out of twelve seats on offer from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, five from Punjab, two each from Islamabad and Sindh and one from Balochistan. Together with the eight members elected in 2018, the party will have about twenty-eight seats in the new house.

In Sindh, PTI is the largest opposition group with thirty seats followed by MQM (21) and GDA (14). If they synchronize their electoral strategies, they can win three seats from general category and one each from women and technocrat categories. PPP can thus be restricted to four generals and two women and technocrat seats from the province.

With a smaller and perpetually fragmented provincial assembly, Balochistan is likely to remain true to its reputation to buck trends and defy predictions. Voting contrary to party lines has been quite a common practice in the province. If the tradition holds, anything can happen.



If, however, votes are cast along party lines and both the ruling and opposition coalitions can agree on seats adjustments among themselves then ruling coalition can win eight or more senate seats from the province and opposition can get four.

Although it has joined the opposition PDM alliance, the ANP (Awami National Party) continues to be part of the government coalition in Balochistan. The party's four seats in the provincial assembly can influence the outcome of the exercise.

Apart from ANP smaller groups in Balochistan Assembly including BNP-Awami, Jamori Watan Party and Hazara Democratic Party with combined strength of six votes will have to be satisfied by PTI and BAP, failing which they can join the opposition JUI-F and BNP-M and cost the ruling alliance the provincial government as well as the majority in the Senate.

However, if all is managed well by the ruling coalition in the Balochistan Assembly, Balochistan Awami Party can expect to get five or six seats from the province and emerge as fourth largest group in the Senate with twelve/thirteen seat.

Due to its majority in National Assembly, which is the electoral college for members of Senate from Islamabad, PTI can win both seats on the offer from Islamabad. However its razor-thin majority will have a real test in the secret ballot and it will have to offer many concessions to its allies to get the votes and avoid embarrassment as well as loss of secure seats.

PTI lead alliance will still be short of absolute majority in the upper house of parliament which will be reduced to 100 from present 104 after the March elections.

On the other hand, the PPP can safely expect to win six seats from Sindh while the PMLN can win five seats from Punjab and one from KP. The JUIF can expect to win two seats from Balochistan and one from KP. BNP will win two seats from Balochistan.

With one Baluchistan seat going to ANP the PDM parties can expect to have 47 seats in the upper house of the Parliament. Ishaq Dar's vacant seat will bite the opposition here. Four remaining FATA seats will however decide the majority. They are expected to go with the government. However any unexpected results in any of the electoral colleges in favour of the opposition can tilt the balance against the ruling coalition.

If, however, the PDM parties follows through on their threat to quit the assemblies before the Senate elections, the ruling coalition will get a walkover, securing a two-thirds majority in Senate.

A Day to be Remembered



By Ashraf Jehangir Qazi

January 6, 2021 will go down as “a black day” in the history of the USA. The storming of the Congress on Capitol Hill by a crowd of “terrorist thugs” at the behest of the President of the USA appalled the world and reduced the “oldest democracy” in the world to a laughing stock.

The US has prided itself on being the “shining city on the hill,” the “New Jerusalem,” the aspiration of peoples all over the world, “the melting pot of the world,” the land God has blessed “from sea to shining sea,” America the Beautiful, the Home of the Free and the Land of the Brave”, the natural leader and exemplar for the rest of the world, etc.

While obviously couched in patriotic superlatives this description did not sound so ridiculous to many people around the world for much of US history. It was indeed a fabled land of opportunity, many freedoms, and where no dream was considered impossible. Its constitution articulated the values of the European Enlightenment and the political philosophies of John Locke, Baron de Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, etc. The welcoming poem by Emma Lazarus inscribed on the Statue of Liberty said it all to those who sought to realize their dreams in America: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless tempest-tost to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door.”

Nevertheless there was always the “dark side” of America. It was founded on the progressive genocide of the Native Americans which was by and large, directly and implicitly, endorsed by White Churches. The country, moreover, was largely built and developed on the basis of Black Slavery whose victims were hunted, bound and transported from Africa, often by Arab Muslim slave traders, across the Atlantic to America. The Founding Fathers who wrote the much admired US Constitution were mostly slave-holders.

For census purposes the US Constitution counted Afro-American slaves as only three-fifths of a person. After the American Civil War and the abolition of slavery so-called Jim Crow laws continued to limit the rights and freedoms of former slaves. Moreover, with the development of the US economy and the emergence of Comprador Capitalism wage slavery became the norm which was in some ways worse than actual slavery since the capitalist owner had much less interest in the survival of his wage slaves than previous slave owners who bought their human slaves and had an economic interest in their physical survival.

Apart from genocide and slavery, the third factor in the emergence of the US as a powerful state at home and abroad was war and violence abroad beginning with Latin America and gradually spreading to other areas of the world. Nevertheless, the US was by and large able to pose as an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist country which had successfully thrown the British out, and this played a significant role in the generally positive perception of the US by many political leaders whose people and native lands had been colonized and settled by European imperialist countries. The US often appeared to be understanding and even supportive of the freedom struggles of the people against their colonial masters. On this basis the US was able to co-opt many of the political elite of post-colonial developing countries as allies and friends in the Cold War against the Soviet Union and, to a lesser extent, China on the one hand, and as beneficiaries of international corporate capitalism against the economic and social interests of their own people, on the other.

These two contradictory but complementary aspects of the US continued until the end of the 1970s, when the Reagan era in the US and the Thatcher era in the UK commenced in opposition to the democratic liberalism of the Democratic Party in the US and the democratic socialism of the Labour Party in the UK. By the twenty first century, political conser-

vatism in the US degenerated into political populism reinforced by racism in response to immigration from developing countries which successfully competed for low paid service and highly paid hi-tech jobs. In addition US Corporations began to export manufacturing jobs to low wage developing countries abroad.

The Democratic Party in the US moved rightwards, away from the post-war New Deal Keynesian economics, to occupy what was once the moderate Republican stance, while the Republican Party ceased to be a political party and, instead, became an “insurgency” of the far right that was enraged by the export of manufacturing jobs which were its bread and butter. Industrial belts became rust belts. The Republicans began to recruit the extremely conservative but hitherto relatively non-political Evangelists to their cause. They thereby gave a religious cover to their increasingly racist politics and resentment against college educated CEOs who tended and pretended to be Democratic liberals while moving towards an elitist and exclusive conservatism of the super-rich.

It was the instinctive genius of Trump to take advantage of the hypocrisy of both major parties in order to sell his political snake-oil of instant solutions to all the political, economic and social grievances of the inhabitants of the Bible, corn and manufacturing belts of America. They had been taken for granted and ignored by the establishments of both major parties. Trump, who had no political ideology other than himself, found it easier to take over the relatively unsophisticated Republican Party by serving the interests of its fellow billionaire corporate bosses while pretending to lead an insurrection by its political base.

The problem turned out to be that Trump was an unstable egotistical maniac and a narcissistic child who could not contain his whims and sought to hide his governing incompetence through bullying, lying and showmanship. Nevertheless, had it not been for his disastrous mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic he would have won a second term since he was able to transform himself from a snake-oil salesman into a charismatic cult figure for almost half the electorate. While this may testify to his political genius it also testifies to the extraordinary political naiveté of the American people and the perversity of its political system. January

6 exemplified this ugly truth. The soft political power of America appears dead for the moment without which its undoubted military and economic power will be severely compromised.

Will January 6 turn out to be a turning point for the US? Will it turn towards healing the disastrous political polarization that has been deepening over the past 40 years? Or will the polarization further deepen towards a second civil war and a conceivable break-up of the US? The danger is that the US under the non-descript leadership of the likely one-term Biden Administration will neither have the courage to prosecute Trump nor rise to the domestic challenge of consensus re-building. It will instead find it easier to distract domestic attention and build temporary enthusiasms for campaigns against alleged threats from China, Russia, Iran, the Muslim world, etc. Such a kinetic policy would ensure increased trillions of dollars in profits for the Corporate-Military-Media-Government complex, still greater inequality and police brutality, and a continuing refusal to finance a Green New Deal which is the only way to keep at bay the imminent and irreversible prospect of global climate and environmental disaster.

The US must return to being a more or less functioning democracy, which it has long ceased to be, if its global influence is to be restored. The two party system and first past the post in collecting state electoral votes in Presidential elections are now serious obstacles to the kind of domestic reforms that are essential for the US to be a viable democracy, and a possible role model for the world in the 21st century. Moreover, the role of money in the outcome of elections in the US has to be seriously reduced if democracy is to be anything other than a hoax and a pretence. Trump's packing of the Supreme Court will need to be countered by increasing the number of Supreme Court judges for this to be possible. Once again Biden, who is as beholden to Wall Street as previous presidents were, is unlikely to do much in this regard. All he may be counted on doing is to restore a measure of courtesy and decency in the conduct rather than content of policy making and implementation. That will never be enough to halt and reverse the fatal trends in current US and global developments.

The writer is a former ambassador to the US, India and China and head of UN missions in Iraq and Sudan.

Resignations since attack on Capitol

Name	Title	Announced
Betsy DeVos	Education secretary	Jan. 7
Hunter Kurtz	Assistant secretary for public and Indian housing, HUD	Jan. 7
Elaine Chao	Transportation secretary	Jan. 7
Tyler Goodspeed	Acting chair, W.H. Council of Economic Advisors	Jan. 7
John Costello	Deputy assistant secretary for intelligence and security, Commerce Dept.	Jan. 7
Ryan Tully	Senior director for European and Russian affairs, NSC	Jan. 7
Mick Mulvaney	Special envoy to N. Ireland	Jan. 7
Matt Pottinger	Deputy nat. security advisor	Jan. 6
Stephanie Grisham	First lady's chief of staff	Jan. 6
Sarah Matthews	W.H. deputy press secretary	Jan. 6
Anna Cristina Niceta	W.H. social secretary	Jan. 6

A Widening Gulf?

Pakistan's history with the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council



By Ibrahim Moiz

Recent years have seen an unusual strain in the traditionally close relations between Pakistan and monarchies of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Over India, Iran, and Israel, and over Turkey and Yemen, the preferred policies of Islamabad and the Gulf monarchies have repeatedly diverged since the mid-2010s. The Pakistan-Gulf relationship has often been influenced by extant concerns about other parties – especially mutual neighbour Iran.

The relationship with the Gulf states is often touted as a particularly Islamic link. Certainly Islam plays a role, especially regarding the Haramain in western Saudi Arabia. But it does not explain why the Gulf in particular has been so attractive a partner for a Pakistan whose relations with other Muslim countries have been far more mixed. Bahrain, for instance, is hardly more Islamic or for that matter more Arab than Iraq.

Several other factors suggest themselves. Firstly, the rentier economies of the Gulf, whose own populations are relatively modest, attract both technical and menial labour from Pakistan. Secondly, Pakistan's military ranks highly in the "Global South", among whose states it has often provided military support; the Gulf states, with their impressive wealth and unimpressive militaries, are thus a prime market. A third reason is geopolitical: Pakistan has repeatedly found itself sharing enemies with some Gulf monarchy or other.

Pakistan-Gulf links in the early Cold War

At Pakistan's independence from Britain, the Arabian Peninsula was under British rule – with the major exceptions of Saudi Arabia and the smaller southern monarchies of North Yemen and Oman. Oman, with a sizeable Baloch population, also had among its Indian Ocean holdings the Baloch port Gawadar until 1958, when it was sold to Pakistan. Muscat had been particularly reliant on Britain against Saudi raids on its border. In the earliest episode of a recurring pattern, Omani sultan Saeed bin Taimour started to employ Pakistani troops among his guard. These included their commander, Sakhi Raja, who narrowly beat off an assassination attempt against the sultan.

Britain approved the Oman-Pakistan link as well as Pakistan's major project of the 1950s – the Baghdad Pact between Pakistan, Turkey, and the monarchies of Iran and Iraq, each fearful of Soviet influence on their northern border. Pakistan tried to persuade Saudi Arabia to join, but its monarch Saud bin Abdul-Aziz – closer to the Washington than London – was flirting with a dalliance with Egypt, whose rivals included Turkey, and thus refused. The Baghdad Pact soon turned out a damp squib after a military coup unseated the Iraqi monarchy and with it the coalition's seat.

The increased insecurity of Arab monarchy, as epitomized by the Iraqi coup and another coup against the North Yemeni imamate in 1962, prompted Riyadh to distance itself in the 1960s from Egypt, whose adoption of socialism galled the monarchies. This chill peaked when Egypt and Saudi Arabia backed opposite sides in the North Yemen war. Aiming to counter Egyptian regional influence abroad, Saudi ruler Faisal bin Abdul-Aziz emphasized, funded, and supported pan-Islamic themes, which fit neatly with both Pakistani self-perception and interests.

Politically further than Egypt but geographically closer as a threat to the monarchies was a Marxist trend that suddenly emerged in the southern Arabian Peninsula. In the late 1960s a Marxist coup took newly independent South Yemen and threw its support behind a small but stubborn insurgency in Oman's Zufar province. Both Riyadh and the British-protected sheikhdoms of the Gulf, who had backed earlier revolts against Saeed, balked at this latest episode. Because Britain was on its way out, these princes hurriedly prepared for the aftermath. Not only did they fear Marxists, but the fact that Oman had invited Iranian forces to Zufar also unnerved the sheikhs, who feared that Iran's imperial monarchy would dominate the region.

Increased clout and opportunity: Pakistan and the Gulf in the 1970s

This led to a flurry of action in the 1970s. Hoping to placate popular antipathy, Omani crown prince Qaboos overthrew his father Saeed, with the approval of the other Gulf sheikhs. Kuwait had been independent since 1961; in 1971 Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates followed suit. Their insecurity prompted a need for military expertise, which Pakistan eagerly supplied. The Bahraini navy was founded, and led for a decade, by future provincial governor-general Captain Khalilur-Rahman from Pakistan. The Emirati airforce was dominated by Pakistani officers – including its first five commanders, Sadaruddin, Ayaz Khan, Ghulam Haidar, future Pakistan airforce commander Jamal Ahmad, and Feroz Khan. And ties with Saudi Arabia flourished, as Faisal quietly bankrolled the Pakistani nuclear program.

Yet Pakistan did not share Gulf fears about Iran. To the contrary, the Iranian monarchy remained a prized supporter against both the Soviets and Baloch rebels, whom Tehran helped Pakistan defeat in the mid-1970s. Zulfikar Bhutto was related and particularly close to Iranian royalty, and attempted to mediate between Tehran and the Gulf. Thus their cooperation in the 1973 oil blockade suited Pakistan well. The resultant boom in the Gulf economy drawn in an enormous expatriate population of Pakistani workers, both technical and manual labourers.

But any illusions that the oil blockade represented a genuine coalition soon collapsed as both Iran and Saudi Arabia entered a furious bidding race, essentially over who would be the United States' closest regional partner after Israel; this competition was given an edge by Tehran's friendliness to Israel as opposed to Arab rejection. Eventually, it was an internal uprising that lost the Iranian monarchy this contest. Yet the resultant clerical regime led by Rohollah Khomeini proved more dangerous.

Pakistan and the Gulf amid revolution and wars

When Iraq escalated the stakes by invading Iran in the early 1980s, the Gulf monarchies formed a political-economic coalition to safeguard their interests. But the coalition's military vulnerability

became evident in 1982 when Iran ousted the Iraqi army, and – rejecting a panicky Saudi offer of reparations in return for peace – invaded Iraq and thus came within a hairsbreadth of the Gulf. Pakistan again filled the military void; the ensuing decade saw the closest links yet with the Gulf.

At about the same point as the Iranian monarchy was overthrown, Bhutto had been toppled by a more conventional method – a military coup led by Mohammad Ziaul-Haq. Opposition included, among others, Shia groups backed by Iran; Ziaul-Haq's brand of conservative Islam was far closer to the Gulf than to revolutionary Iran. Shortly after the Iranian invasion of Iraq, Pakistan dispatched a large military force to garrison the Saudi city Tabouk, soon led by future army commander Jehangir Karamat. They remained till 1987, when Ziaul-Haq refused a Saudi directive to purge Shia troops following a Saudi crackdown on Shia pilgrims in Makkah.



Saudi friendship was not without costs, tending to back Ahli Hadith sectarian groups in the region much as Iran backed Twelver groups and exacerbating sectarian tensions in Pakistan. Iran and Pakistan replicated this in Afghanistan, backing different insurgent groups against the Soviet occupation. This competition spiralled in the 1990s, eventually resulting in Iran's support for a militia coalition against the Taliban emirate backed by Pakistan. Along with Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates offered diplomatic recognition to the emirate, only withdrawing it in 2001 when the United States invaded.

Pakistan and the Gulf during the Twenty-First Century

More dangerous for the Gulf was the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, which was backed by Iran and brought its militias again to the Gulf. American troops had garrisoned Saudi Arabia for a decade by then, since the brief Iraqi conquest of Kuwait. Though Iraq had been routed in 1991, the Gulf powers had feared that Iran would benefit and lobbied Washington not to topple the Iraqi regime. Their fears materialized in 2003; to add insult to injury, American forces blithely used Kuwait and Qatar as expeditionary launchpads. After a brief Saudi attempt to back a Sunni Arab insurgency, the Gulf states instead opted to protect themselves against Iran by drawing closer to the United States and making it their protector.

Relations between the Gulf and Pakistan meanwhile persisted; military dictator Pervez Musharraf was close to the Saudis, who mourned his ouster in 2008 and disdained his successor Asif Zardari. The 2013 election of conservative prime minister Nawaz Sharif, historically close to the Gulf, gave them more room for optimism. They were thus indignant when Pakistan abstained from entering their war in Yemen. This campaign, a Gulf affair planned

by crown princes Mohammad bin Salman and Zayed of Saudi Arabia and the Emirates respectively, targeted the pro-Iran Houthis who had seized northern Yemen. Abu Dhabi was particularly histrionic and upgraded its relations with India to positive romance.

Once more Pakistani military clout maintained the link. Pakistani mercenaries had already assisted the Gulf campaign in Bahrain against a Shia uprising in 2011. Now recently retired army commander Raheel Sharif took over a military coalition founded by bin Salman – a symbolic role whose main purpose seems to have been to influence Riyadh. Though bin Salman – given clout by the large Pakistani expatriate population he ruled – successfully intimidated Islamabad from a Turkey-Malaysia coalition in 2019, Saudi Arabia refrained from following the Emiratis from openly condemning Pakistan. The Gulf powers also condemned the Indian annexation of Kashmir.

Yet Pakistani links with Iran also slowly improved; not only had Zardari enjoyed solid relations with Tehran, but Pakistan made no attempt to stop Shia militants from joining Iran's paramilitary forces. Moreover, the resurgence of Baloch secessionism, largely supported by American-occupied Afghanistan, in both countries gave them a further basis to cooperate. Pakistan and, to a lesser extent, Iran supported the Taliban insurgency, but Gulf diplomacy also entered the fray. Both Saudi Arabia and an increasingly assertive Qatar attempted backroom negotiation efforts between the Taliban and the United States.

More contentious was the 2017 Emirati-Saudi blockade against Qatar, which split the Gulf coalition and lasted until this past week, as well as the Emirati-Bahraini rapprochement with Israel. The unprincipled bin Zayed has lobbied hard to embrace Tel Aviv. Such a move would be massively unpopular in most of the Muslim world, not least Pakistan; even Riyadh has refrained from joining suit. Both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan lack the security and conviction in this controversial step that a cushioned and heavily autocratic Abu Dhabi can afford. Given that Arab-Israeli rapprochement hinges heavily on mutual fear of Iran's nuclear program, such a step would also risk for Pakistan hostility against a sizeable, litigious, and dangerous neighbour with nuisance value. On both principle and pragmatism, the Emirati line falters.

Overview

Pakistan's long history with the Gulf has not been without its tensions. But a combination of frequent mutual enemies and friends, and in particular the marriage between Gulf economic and Pakistani military clout has helped the partnership survive Pakistan's political upheavals and the Gulf's recent partisan splits. Its major tension remains an Iran that is both the scourge of the Gulf but an unavoidable, interdependent neighbour of Pakistan.

Ibrahim Moiz is a writer on politics and history. He graduated from the University of Toronto and studies modern history in the Muslim world, particularly in Afghanistan and Syria.

Pakistanis 'already living the foundations of democracy'

A conversation with Muhammad Ali Houmed, President Djibouti National Parliament and Acting Chairman of African Union

TTI Exclusive Interview

A stalwart advocate of democracy in Africa, the head of Djibouti's National Parliament Muhammad Ali Houmed recently visited Islamabad heading a 12-member Union delegation. The visit came on the invitation of Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani, and involved wide ranging talks with top Pakistani government, parliamentary, and military leadership.

The Truth International had a conversation with the esteemed leader. Here is a transcript of the conversation.

TTI: How are the working relations between the President and the Parliament?

MAH: In Djibouti, we have a Presidential system. The President is head of government and the Prime Minister coordinates the policy defined by the President.

It is the Prime Minister who represents the government in Parliament.

This gives great political stability and also allows great flexibility of control over government's action.

The President of the Republic has always supported parliamentary strengthening.



He agreed to a significant financial effort in this regard both in terms of equipment (buildings and installations) and in terms of the training of our elected officials and the influence of parliamentary diplomacy in general.



We are very satisfied with this encouraging state of mind and we support it in all areas falling within our prerogative.

TTI: What do you think is the major problem of the Muslim Ummah these days?

MAH: The major problem of the Muslim Ummah, if I have to name just one, is the lack of unity of our "Ummah".

Our Muslim Ummah suffers from many superficial divisions. It is a handicap that prevents us from benefiting from the forces and other advantages that we can exchange with each other.

The wealth of some does not benefit other Muslims in need. The technological strength of some of our countries is underestimated by others and sometimes we wage war on such meaningless differences.

What a pity !

TTI: Muslims are suffering in Palestine, India, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Sudan and many more countries. How do you think Muslims can come out of this situation?

MAH: How can we bring our brothers out in the many countries that you have just cited from the many daily sufferings? I am sure you are forgetting many others unfortunately.

If only I could give you the solution

"The Muslim is the brother of the Muslim" as we were taught by our Prophet (Peace and Greetings to his soul). It would be enough to conform to these teachings to promote Peace and Prosperity not only in the Muslim world but in the whole world!

TTI: Africa is rich with natural resources from gold to agriculture. Despite that African countries are underdeveloped. What do you think is the reason?

MAH: The underdevelopment of our African countries despite the abundance of natural resources is a question of time. We have come a long way since independence. African countries are eman-

ating themselves from the tutelage of the former colonial powers that have done everything to delay this in order to continue the exploitation of this wealth.

The great strength of Africa is its demography and the youth of its population!

Many countries are leading by example and filling us with hope!

The future is ours and soon Africa will be the engine of global growth!

In shaa Allah!

TTI: How has been your tour of Pakistan?

MAH: Personally, I enjoyed everything during this official visit. I was very pleasantly surprised by the quality of the meetings and the quality of the organization. The visits were very enriching. Pakistani hospitality, culture, dishes, landscapes and especially the friendliness of Pakistanis will remain for me and my delegation an excellent memory engraved in our memories.

On each of our travels, a warm and solemn welcome was reserved for us. We have welcomed the rapprochement that Pakistan wants with our country through parliamentary diplomacy and we have responded positively.

TTI: What is your comment on functioning of the democracy in Pakistan?

MAH: My impressions of how democracy works in Pakistan?

Masha Allah! God is big ! Pakistan is a source of pride in the Muslim world!

We have been following the elections [in Pakistan] for a long time. This visit was very fruitful. We have learned a lot and we will certainly use it to improve our own democratic system. Each democratic system can be improved and corresponds to the particular history of each country.

Gone are the days when some could boast of giving lessons to others!

You have every interest in keeping the harmony that reigns between the majority and the opposition because you perfectly symbolize the democracy that all countries seek.

TTI: What do you think our two countries (Pakistan and Djibouti) should do to increase political and trade relations?

MAH: How to improve political and trade relations between our 2 countries? It's simple since they are already very good!

Our two countries are fraternal countries that share a lot in common.

It is true that we can always strengthen our historical links.

Our Pakistani brothers can bring us a lot thanks to their know-how and their products are of very good quality with affordable prices!

On the political level, my visit is a very good way of bringing together and together we must follow up on increased and mutually beneficial exchanges.

We could organize a special Pakistani Products fair in Djibouti. We will put our chambers of commerce in touch for this!

Already many Pakistani products are selling very well in our country such as fans, textiles, cloth towels, etc. to name a few examples.

Many Pakistani brothers have lived in Djibouti for a very long time.

I am sure that we will open a new chapter in our common history! In shaa Allah

TTI: What can Djibouti import to Pakistan?

MAH: That's a good question, but I'm not the best person to answer such a question. Indeed, it is our merchants and our businessmen who will know how to answer them.

Let's give them the chance to meet!

This is what political leaders must serve: to offer opportunities to their citizens!

TTI: People to people contact in between-two-countries is always considered the most powerful connection. Will you advise your government to improve people-to-people contact between Pakistan and Djibouti?

MAH: As I told you before, our two peoples know and appreciate each other. In the first place, the tabligh is the densest link between the two peoples!

It is not by chance that Pakistan is called "the Land of the Pure"! Brotherhood in Islam is not theoretical among our Pakistani Muslim brothers!

Many Djiboutian brothers come every month and every year here in Pakistan! Masha Allah.

On the other hand, we can improve academic relations and send Djiboutian students to train in Pakistani universities and colleges! At this level, we can improve things.

In any case, there is a lot to do and we must continue to nurture our relationship to enrich it over time.

TTI: Your Parliament has signed an agreement with Pakistan's company The Truth International. What is this MOU about?

MAH: You know protocols, states, institutions, and political parties' signs all the time. And if you ask me how it will be different, I would tell you that the age-old connections that unite our two peoples are simply unique. Unique because Pakistan and Djibouti have a lot of similarity. Unique because we share the same religion and a similar culture. And this visit, in the middle of a pandemic period, also demonstrates the interest and willingness of the two parties to work together. And to top it off, I would say that we are very late and we don't want to waste any more time.

TTI: How will this MOU benefit the Djibouti Parliament?

MAH: This agreement will serve as a leverage to set up other partnerships in different business sectors. We hope that our country can benefit from exchanges with all those who are willing to cooperate with us, on a fair and profitable basis.

We have acquired over time, a certain expertise in the port field and we are ready to share our experiences and remain open to receive experiences in certain areas that we do not currently master.

This Agreement will serve as a framework for our two nations and a benchmark for the beginnings of successful cooperation.

TTI: Sometimes MOUs are signed and they are not followed up by agreement. How will you ensure that this MOU is converted into agreement?

MAH: That's a very good question. First of all, allow me to tell you that since my election as head of [Djibouti National Parliament], I have noticed that in terms of parliamentary diplomacy we have not made the necessary efforts.

This is why and de facto I have decided that priority should be given to strengthening parliamentary cooperation. And believe me, it paid off. We have succeeded, in record time, in placing our parliament on the international stage and we are reaping the rewards today.

This is the historic first speaker of Djiboutian parliament visit to Pakistan and the second official visit in more than 40 years. The will and determination of my counterpart Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani can only encourage us to move forward and consolidate the links between our two peoples and our two institutions.

Finally, to answer your question, we need to implement the protocol first, and I'm confident for the rest.

TTI: Any message for the government and people of Pakistan?

MAH: The Pakistani people are a brave and hospitable people. Above all, they are the pride of the Muslim world. For my part, I will tell them to continue on the same path, bearing in mind that [an upright] and considerate nation is already living the foundations of democracy. I believe that the government must continue its efforts to maintain the stability and unity of its country.

Soleimani, Fkhrizadeh to be Avenged, Says Envoy

A tête-à-tête with Iran's Ambassador to Pakistan Seyed Mohammad Ali Hosseini

Iran's Ambassador to Pakistan Seyed Mohammad Ali Hosseini is one of the leading lights of the social and intellectual circles of Islamabad. The Truth International recently had an opportunity to sit down with him for a wide-ranging conversation. Given below for your reading pleasure is an abridged transcript of the interview.



By Zarghon Shah

TTI: One year after the assassination of IRCG Al-Quds Force Commander Gen Qassem Soleimani, how would you assess the regional situation?

SMAH: Gen Qassem Soleimani fought against terrorists throughout his life and he was the biggest impediment in the establishment of the ISIS government. Gen Qassem's assassination by the US was in fact helping the terrorists. The way Donald Trump boasted Gen Qassem's assassination truly reflected state terrorism. It is evidence the US is [not a force for] peace and stability in the region but for chaos and turmoil. The presence of US forces in our region is the root cause of all evils and Iran will resist them to the last. We will not let the US expansionist and Israeli Zionist designs to succeed.

TTI: Has Iran avenged the assassination of Gen Qassem or it is yet to come?

SMAH: Iran's retaliatory strikes in this regard were only a sort of instant and token reaction. We have resorted to other means too and we will do so specifically by using our internationally recognised rights. We want the perpetrators of this act of terrorism brought to justice.

TTI: Does Iran think it was only Trump involved in Gen Qassem's assassination or some other regional actors played as collaborators?

SMAH: The government and people of Iran think that Trump, his like-minded and some countries of the region are involved in

this heinous crime. But our focus is on our archenemy – the United States.

TTI: Should Iran expect improvement of ties with US in the wake of Mr. Joe Biden's election as President?

SMAH: Our experience suggests we should rather see action, and not election of the US president. Trump used a considerable part of his tenure in Iran-bashing. He brazenly assassinated our military commander when he was in another host country. Trump shamelessly and unilaterally withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal. Joe Biden needs to right Trump's wrongs and first of all restore the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

TTI: Iran recently announced to enrich its uranium to 20 percent, don't you think it would cause further complications?

SMAH: Our nuclear agreement is unilateral and multilateral as well. So all parties have to fulfil their obligations, you cannot put all responsibility on one party. The nuclear watchdog IAEA is witness to the fact that Iran has fulfilled all its responsibilities hundred percent. The US has also been forcing European parties to the accord to pull back in an effort to jeopardize it. Under the circumstances, Iran has decided to lessen its level of responsibilities. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has forbidden the attainment of nuclear weapons through [a decree].

TTI: Iran holds Israel responsible for assassinating top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh. Should Israel wait for Iran's retribution?

SMAH: Yes we hold this Zionist and terrorist Israeli government responsible for this act. Not only this, but Israel has been involved in the assassination of a number of our scientists and scholars too. This Zionist regime must make no mistake that Iran will give a solid, manifest and timely responses to its criminal act once our investigations are completed.



TTI: UAE and Bahrain have recognised Israel while other Gulf States stand in line. How does Iran view the Israeli entry into the Gulf?

SMAH: The Presence of the Zionist Israeli government in the region is the only cause of instability, lawlessness and chaos. Not only countries and nations of the region but the entire world now knows that Israel is an unlawful, unjust and a terrorist state and recognition of Israel means giving it opportunity for all these evils; Iran would resist the developments that are against the nations and states of the region.

TTI: A general perception is that Gulf States, specifically the UAE, have recognized Israel to contain Iran. Do you agree?

SMAH: The Zionist state of Israel has been conspiring and striving hard against Iran for the last four decades with the connivance of the US, and some countries of region have also contributed to it, but they could achieve nothing. Iran's stance is based on principles and we abide by it. Countries of the region must understand that they can gain nothing from siding with Israel.

TTI: Referring to Pak-Iran relations, the gas pipeline project is languishing for many years despite the fact that Iran has completed its part of the project. Don't you think it's frustrating for Iran?

SMAH: Pak-Iran gas pipeline project is a vital economic endeavour. It was carried out on the basis of the fact that Pakistan was an energy-deficient while Iran was energy exporting country. Iran has completed its part of the gas pipeline project despite economic hardship caused by sanctions and has brought the pipeline close to the border with Pakistan.



TTI: Do you expect the current government of Prime Minister Imran Khan to complete this long delayed bilateral project?

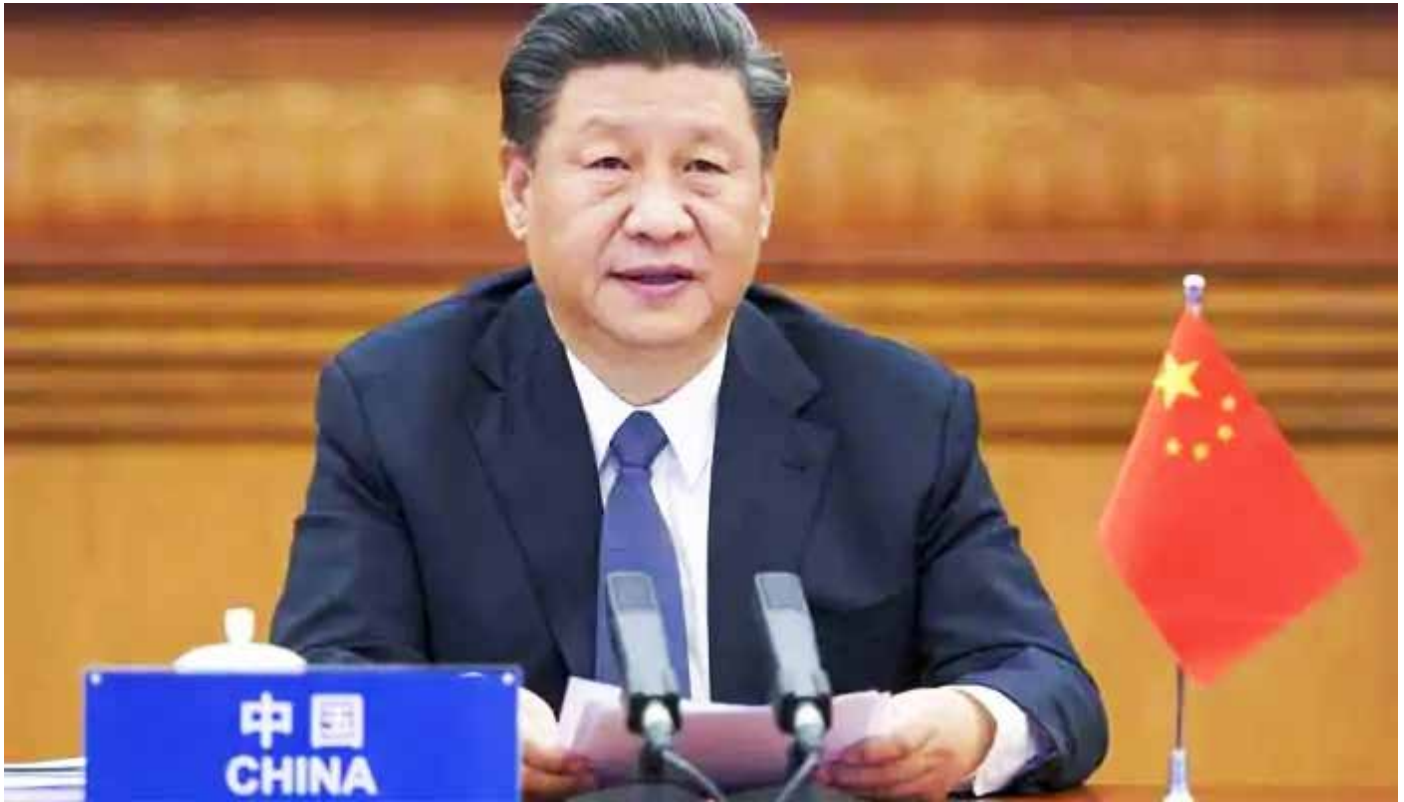
SMAH: We hope that the gas pipeline project would be completed during the current Pakistani government, we hope Pakistan soon overcome its difficulties [and finishes construction of the section inside Pakistan] so that this highly significant project sees completion. This gas pipeline project would in fact usher in a new era of economic prosperity and stability primarily in Pakistan and secondly in Iran.

TTI: How do you see Pak-Iran trade and tourism in a post-COVID-19 world, specifically with regard to Pakistani Zaireen wishing to visit Iran?

SMAH: Like other countries, Iran and Pakistan have been hit by the Coronavirus pandemic in terms of trade and tourism, but it has also provided us with opportunities. Amid this pandemic we have opened a new border crossing terminal at Rimdan Gabad, which is the second after Taftan and Mirjawa. We had a 900-km border but we had only one border crossing since the creation of Pakistan. Now we have two. This development would lead to the emergence of border markets on both sides. We are not issuing any tourist or Zaireen visas right now because of the pandemic but once the situation returns to normal, we would gladly do so.

The writer is a senior journalist based in Islamabad.

On its 5th anniversary, the YREB continues to be a comprehensive plan for China and beyond



By Hamzah Rifaat Hussain

This January marks the 5th anniversary of the 2016 promulgation of the Yangtze River Economic Belt Development Plan by the Chinese government. President Xi Jinping announced the project with the stated aim of ensuring that a sustainable economic project along the Yangtze River focuses on environmental protection rather than economic growth. This think 'green' strategy acts as a model for the developing world which seeks to strike a balance between preserving the environment and promoting industrialization simultaneously which has an impact on GDP growth rates, economic performance and international economic influence. The YREB plan encompasses an array of projects and prospects which bodes well for both the future of China and its generations.

The 'one axis' of the YREB refers to the Yangtze River as the locus of economic activity while the 'two wings' of the plan refers to the Shanghai- Chengdu and Shanghai- Ruilli Highway which encourages connectivity, population linkages and industrialization along its routes. The 'three poles' are city groups situated in the Yangtze River Delta, the Poyan Lake along with Chengdu-Chongqing, Changsha- Zhuzhou- Xiantan and Wuhan with multiple points constituting other cities. The significance of the categorizations of the YREB is self-explanatory as it envisions a nation

where economic activity is supplemented with the preservation of the environment in a location which supplies 36% of China's freshwater resources and is also home to 580 million people. Spanning 11 provincial regions and covering 2.1 million square kilometers, with 21% of the land area in the third largest country in the world, the YREB acts as a model for other developing nations to follow. Many newly industrialized countries endeavor to ensure rapid industrialization which can be implemented through the dual circulation strategy centering on both dissemination and consumption for the Chinese population.

The YREB's significance cannot be gauged by numbers alone. The year, 2021 marks the planned commencement of the 14th Five Year Plan for National Social and Economic Development with Long Range Objectives planned for the year of 2035. The aim is to ensure that innovative platforms and growth poles in the region materialize which has an impact on populations residing in the cities within the Yangtze region and is critical for rapid urbanization. In a visit to promote China's modernization drive, President Xi visited the locality of Pudong in Shanghai which is one of the largest financial centers in the world. The President encouraged the district to become a pioneer of reform with key breakthroughs in technology. With major technological hubs such as Shanghai,

the YREB attempts to strengthen domestic capabilities to ensure that a new development pattern emerges based on domestic and international market considerations which benefit China and the international community.

Beyond modernization, YREB places heavy emphasis on establishing the 'Green Corridor' which is a reference to mountains which are in close geographical proximity to the Yangtze River and provide a significant source of water ideal for urban development. The plan also deals with equitable water resource allocation which through North- South integration allows for onsite water conservation as well as providing an agricultural boost for cities along its route. The financial and agrarian value of the YREB promises much for populations allowing them to become well integrated as China continues to witness economic prosperity on its shores. The Water Financing Partnership Facility, through the Multidonor Trust Fund with contributions from Australia, Austria, Spain and Switzerland amounting to \$200000 co-financing will ensure that projects such as the Anhui Huangshan Xin'an River Ecological Protection, the Green Development Project and the Henan Denzhou Integrated River Restoration and Ecological Protection Project of 2020 would materialize.

The YREB underlines the importance of rural and urban linkages through rivers, land and water. Basin- level interventions, dealing with water resource management challenges and ensuring that prosperous cities also become climate resilient demonstrates the holistic approach with which President Xi Jinping envisions to develop China along the Yangtze River. History is replete with examples of how prosperity along river routes has been witnessed

yet issues related to linkages, innovation and technology had remained prior to technological revolutions. As a testament to the concept of a civilizational state which is undergoing economic transformations, President Xi's YREB plan aims in ensuring that prosperity and environmental resilience is witnessed along the Yangtze's banks.

The YREB also ensures that China's reliance on the global financial system decreases. Tapping into domestic industrial potential inevitably has an impact on employment rates, income levels and the productivity of the Chinese labor workforce. A strong domestic industrial base would result in an increase in exports having a positive impact on a nation's current account balance, which is critical in the post pandemic economic environment. Furthermore, the attraction of foreign direct investment allows for companies and brands to set up their operations along the Yangtze without jeopardizing China's position as an export oriented economy. Both domestic and international capacity building measures are enshrined under this comprehensive plan.

Environmental protection, economic prosperity, innovation, creativity and productivity all characterize the YREB development plan on its 5th anniversary. President Xi Jinping's vision is to cement prosperity through a multipronged strategy which is not limited to infrastructural development alone. Lessons from the YREB can be drawn for newly industrialized countries, particularly those with untapped potential along its tributaries. Alongside the Belt and Road Initiative internationally, the YREB is truly a complete, comprehensive package for China and beyond.





Lux Style Awards 2020

Webcast For The first Time

As the year 2020 saw many firsts in following the SOPs of the COVID 19 pandemic, it also gave many initiatives to the entertainment world like online fashion shows and interviews in zoom and skype. This year, Pakistan most prestigious style awards 'Lux Style Awards 2020' set an example to present its 19th edition digitally.

LSA 2020 awards were given for 28 categories in four genres; fashion, film, music and television. In addition, two lifetime achievement awards were also awarded.

The historic event started with a singing and dance performance. Red carpet was hosted by emerging and talented model Mushk Kaleem while the main hosts of the event were none other than stunning Mehwish Hayat and witty Ahmed Ali Butt.

A few winners participated in the show while rest appeared via their already recorded video messages. A congregation of stars were also on the show to present/announce. Besides, an interesting comic skit on film segment was presented. The event ended with a Lux signature song by Jimmy Khan featuring Mehwish Haya.

The show was webcast on <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoGrbQTwc-FUsollkVoS76DA> on New Year Eve and telecast on Geo Entertainment two days later.





The winners of 19th LUX Style Awards are as follows:

Fashion

Model of the Year – Male: Hasnain Lehri

Model of the Year – Female : Zara Abid (posthumous)

Achievement in Fashion Design – Pret: Generation

Achievement in Fashion Design – Luxury Pret: Sana Safinaz

Achievement in Fashion Design – Bridal Couture: Sana Safinaz

Best Menswear Designer: Ismail Farid

Best Fashion Photographer: Shahbaz Shazi

Best Makeup and Hair Artist: Saima Bargfrede

Best Emerging Talent- Fashion: Sachal Afzal for Male Model

Music

Best Song: Raavi by Sajjad Ali from Raavi

Singer of the Year: Hadia Hashmi – Bol Hu

Best Emerging Talent: Big Foot Music – Hamad Khan, Sohaib Lari

Best Playback Singer: Ali Tariq for Behka Na from Parey Hut Love

Best Original Sound Track: Ranjha Ranjha Kardi by JB Sisters/

Rahma Ali Composed and Produced by Sami Khan

Television

Best TV Play: Mere Paas Tum Ho

Best Play Director: Kashif Nisar for Ranjha Ranjha Kardi

Best Play Writer: Faiza Iftikhar for Ranjha Ranjha Kardi

Best TV Actor – Critics: Zahid Ahmed for Ishq Zah e Naseeb

Best TV Actress – Critics: Iqra Aziz for Ranjha Ranjha Kardi

Best TV Actor – Viewer's Choice: Imran Ashraf for Ranjha

Ranjha Kardi

Best TV Actress -Viewer's Choice: Yumna Zaidi for Inkaar

Best Emerging Talent TV: Shees Gul for Meray Paas Tum Ho

Film

Best Film: Laal Kabootar

Best Director Film: Kamal Khan for Laal Kabootar

Best Film Actor- Viewer's Choice: Ahmed Ali Akbar for

Laal Kabootar

Best Film Actress- Viewer's Choice: Mahira Khan for Superstar

Best Film Actor Critics: Rashid Farooqui for Laal Kabootar

Best Film Actress Critics: Mahira Khan for Superstar

Lifetime Achievement Awards

The Unilever Chairman's Lifetime Achievement Award:

Anwar Maqsood

The Lifetime Achievement Award in Fashion: Tapu Javeri



Is a Permanent National Finance Commission the Answer?

7th NFC Award Seen Threatening Macroeconomic Stability

By Dr. Ashfaq Hasan Khan



The 7th NFC Award has drawn criticism from diverse quarters ever since it became effective, including from IMF, who IMF termed this Award unbalanced and inflexible and making the country's macroeconomic management difficult with serious consequences for overall socio-economic outcomes.

It is generally argued that if no correction is made to the Award that came into force on 1 July 2010, Pakistan will continue to experience large fiscal imbalances leading to the acceleration of public debt. The present government is trying to address the challenges posed by the Award.

An effective system of intergovernmental fiscal transfers is the cornerstone of strong and stable public finances in a country.

The purpose of having a sound fiscal transfer mechanism is twofold. First, to minimise the vertical imbalances caused by the inadequacy of revenues of provincial governments to meet their expenditure requirements. Second, to alleviate horizontal imbalances caused by disparities in the revenue capacity of the constituent units of the federation – viz., provinces – so as to enable them to provide basic public services to their citizens at a reasonable level.

In recognition of the need to redress these two imbalances in a fair and orderly fashion, Article 160 of the Constitution of Pakistan provides for the establishment of a National Finance Commission (NFC) at intervals not exceeding five years.

The NFC provides recommendations to the President of Pakistan on the distribution of resources between the federal and the provincial governments and among the provinces. These recommendations are implemented through a Presidential Order.

In Pakistan, over 90 percent of taxes are collected at the federal level, and less than 10 percent at the provincial level. Provinces thus rely heavily on federal resources to meet their expenditure requirements.

In a federal state like Pakistan, fiscal decentralisation is essential to improving quality of services provided to the masses. However, badly managed fiscal decentralisation can create serious difficulties for the provinces and the federal government.

Let us examine the salient features of the 7th NFC Award. Firstly, during the first five years of the Award, a sum of PKR 6,671 billion was transferred to the provinces as against PKR 2613 billion during the five years under the previous (6th) Award — 2.6 times more resources.

Second, the share of the divisible pool as a percentage of the total tax collected increased from 41 percent in 2008-09 (the last year of the previous Award) to 58 percent by 2012-13.

Third, in order to address the issue of horizontal imbalances, inter-provincial resources were also adjusted. If we look at provincial shares, Balochistan appears as the main beneficiary of the 7th NFC Award with its share increasing from 5.11 percent to 9.09 percent — an increase of 3.98 percentage points.

Also gainers were Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) although marginally. Punjab, on the other hand, witnessed its share decline from 57.36 percent to 51.74 percent — a decline of 5.62 percentage points.

Fourth, while population used to be the sole criterion for revenue sharing prior to the 7th NFC Award, the current Award is based on multiple criteria. This is one of the most significant features of the 7th NFC Award. These criteria include population (82%), poverty or backwardness (10.3%), revenue collection or generation (5.0%) and inverse population density (2.7%).

Fifth, special attention has been given to improving the financial health of Balochistan for its socioeconomic development.

Sixth, recognising the role of the KP as a frontline province in the war against terror, the Award provided an additional one percent of the net divisible pool to KP to meet its expenses.

WHAT WENT WRONG IN THIS AWARD?

To begin with, it was finalised in haste by holding a few meetings in a short span of four to five months. Therefore, no proper homework was carried out and it lacked a sound economic foundation. Revenue projections for the duration of the Award were grossly unrealistic and as such created serious difficulties for subsequent macroeconomic management.

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The scope of the Award was too extensive and its implementation too rapid to manage fiscal decentralisation in an orderly manner. Massive resources were transferred to the provinces in a short period without giving due consideration to their capacity to spend huge amounts of money prudently.

Thus, it not only compounded macroeconomic instability, but also adversely affected the provision of public goods and services in the provinces. For example, net enrolment at the primary level, the overall literacy rate, and various health indicators, instead of improving, have deteriorated in the provinces.

The timing of the 7th NFC Award was also inappropriate. Pakistan was already facing serious fiscal challenges; interest payment (a budgetary item) was rising at an unsustainable rate, doubling in just three years; the security environment was deteriorating due to the war on terror, which required more resources; power sector subsidies were rising at a greater pace and the public sector enterprises were bleeding profusely.

All these subjects fall under the domain of the federal government and require large resources. At a time when financial requirements of the federal government were accelerating, the 7th NFC Award drastically cut its resources, increasing Pakistan's reliance on borrowing.

The provinces, on the other hand, were given so much resources that they were encouraged to pursue lax expenditure policies, thus contributing immensely to the rise of the overall fiscal deficit (the fiscal deficit rose from 6.2 percent of GDP in 2009-10 to 8.8 percent in 2011-12 and remained at 8.2 percent in 2012-13.)

None of the growing financial needs of the federal government were taken into account when determining the shares between the federal and provincial governments.

It is strange that the bulk of the taxes collected from across Pakistan were transferred to the provinces and yet the responsibility to maintain financial discipline remained vested in the federal government.

In other words, a federal government controlling only 40 percent of resources from the divisible pool cannot possibly maintain financial discipline in the country all by itself, nor be answerable to the IMF for achieving revenue and deficit targets.

Because of the imbalances in the resources and responsibility of the federal government, it was forced to indulge in ingenious accounting. For example, the federal government was not releasing resources to the provinces on time; it gave perverse incentives to the provinces to not spend money; started holding back refunds/rebates to show higher revenue collection and treating privatisation proceeds and foreign grants as non-tax revenue instead of as financing items.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

How can this Award be salvaged without violating the Constitution?

First, it must be kept in mind that the present Award should not weaken the federal government's ability to reduce the fiscal deficit and public debt. Provincial governments need to improve either their own revenues and curtail unnecessary expenditure.



Second, the revenue collection charges should be reverted to 5 percent from the current level of 1 percent. This will immediately increase resources for the federal government.

Third, under the 7th NFC, almost three times more resources are being transferred to the provinces. Why then should the federal government with its depleted resources undertake federal projects in the provinces? Let the provincial governments finance development projects on their own.

Fourth, interest payments on public debt and defence spending are currently the responsibility of the federal government. Public debt is not incurred by the federal government alone, and similarly defence should be the responsibility of the entire country. Provinces should therefore be asked to share the burden of interest payments and defence to the extent of their shares in the divisible pool.

Fifth, in the case of federal projects executed in the provinces and any debt so acquired, the respective provincial governments may share debt servicing costs with the federal government.

Sixth, in order to achieve fiscal deficit targets without resorting to accounting tricks, some hard binding constraints may be put in place. Provincial governments should be bound to deliver surpluses to meet the consolidated fiscal deficit. The Council of Common Interest (CCI) or the National Economic Council (NEC) look like promising forums to decide the level of surplus that the provinces need to generate.

Seventh, we may consider a Permanent National Finance Commission headed by a renowned economist, with representation from each province. The purpose of the Commission would be to conduct research with a view to improving the fiscal decentralisation process; to monitor the specific fiscal reforms at the provincial level and to ensure service delivery in each province.

Eighth, a performance-based revenue transfer mechanism needs to be developed. 75 percent of the divisible pool can be released to the provinces on the basis of the NFC formula and the remaining 25 percent of the divisible pool may be linked with the performance of the provinces in service delivery. The high-powered PNFC should set up a mechanism, with provinces duly represented, to monitor performance.

Lastly, the provinces should set up Provincial Finance Commissions to make fiscal decentralisation a success.

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The Taxman's Bonanza at Everyman's Expense

How the Government Milked the Energy Market for Revenue, Denying the Consumer the Benefit of Historic Low Energy Prices



By **Khalique Ahmad**

Pakistani consumers had to cough up almost PKR 1.85 trillion in taxes and higher prices of petroleum, electricity and natural gas in 2020 even as international oil prices plummeted to historic lows.

About PKR 1.3 trillion worth of the total burden was in the shape of various taxes – mainly sales tax, customs, federal excise and petroleum levy. A significant portion of these taxes – particularly petroleum levy – were mopped up when crude prices went down to \$15-20 per barrel in the international market.

The remaining PKR 550 billion pertained to additional recoveries from the gas and electricity consumers during the year ending 31 December 2020. This was despite the fact that prices of natural gas and electricity remained mostly unchanged between February and September 2020 in the wake of COVID-19.

The government generally maintained a middle approach. It maximized the petroleum levy rate when crude prices hit the rock bottom and suspended monthly fuel price adjustments in power rates for almost eight months. In both cases, it mopped up revenues.

For example, the petroleum levy on diesel and petrol hovered between PKR 8-15 per litre until January 2020 as the prices of two products ranged PKR 85-120 per litre. By March-April, the government increased the rate of petroleum levy on both items to

PKR 30 per litre – maximum allowed under the law.

To its political good fortune, there was still room for the government to bring down diesel and petrol rates to PKR 73-80 per litre range at this time and still charge over PKR 43 per litre in taxes. As such, the government is estimated to have collected slightly over PKR 400 billion in petroleum levy alone between January-December 2020.

Almost half of this amount was a windfall as the higher POL prices would have made it difficult to charge higher taxes in tough economic conditions.

However, the government has reported that it was able to make reasonable recoveries from electricity consumers through prior year adjustments. This included about PKR 309 billion in FY2019-20. That means roughly half (about PKR 153) of this was between January and June 2020. Another PKR 213 billion on same account accrued between July and November 2020.

Moreover, a tariff increase allowed by the government for K-Electric after some delays to ensure uniform rates across the country is also estimated to have about PKR 106 billion revenue impact.

On top of that, the government did not allow reduction in natural gas rates recommended by the Oil & Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) on account of indexation of gas producer price with

lower crude prices in international market. In this way, the gas companies were allowed to recoup some of their previously unrecovered costs worth about PKR 80 billion as windfall. The consumers could not benefit from this PKR 80 billion reduction in gas cost.

According to estimates based on FBR data, the government collected about PKR 790 billion in sales tax, federal excise and customs duties during the year. This included about PKR 150 billion domestic GST on electricity, about PKR 165 billion GST from oil refineries, about PKR 85 billion on oil and gas exploration and about PKR 22 billion from oil refineries.

In addition, about PKR 255 billion were recovered as GST on POL imports and about PKR 110 billion as customs duty and federal excise on imports. These taxes do not include withholding taxes, GIDC, Royalties and windfalls retained on local production of crude oil.

At the same time, however, the oil and gas industry remained financially under pressure. The power sector circular debt increased as government tried to postpone electricity bills for some industries and recovered in instalments from residential consumers. The recovery rate of power companies, as a result, dropped from about 90 percent to about 70 percent during peak COVID months.

Slower economic activities following the pandemic hit the entire energy sector - oil, gas and power sectors. Nasty moves by oil companies to recover some inventory losses amid declining global prices caused historic shortage problems even though demand and consumption plunged. Local producers suffered equally as their producer prices crashed. In both cases though, the Pakistani consumer could not benefit from the historic oil bonanza.

In overall terms, no visible improvement could be seen in the energy sector as promised reforms remained unrealised. The country witnessed ballooning circular debt, petrol and gas crises and failure in finalizing power sector reforms.

The main development of the outgoing year include record spiralling in circular debt, a petrol crisis in June, a gas crises in previous and ongoing winter season, signing of MoUs for review of agreements with IPPs, failure to use the idle capacity of LNG terminals, and paying capacity payments to IPPs instead of increasing the use of electricity.

The power sector circular debt crossed PKR 2.306 trillion – the highest in country's history. Just before the start of 2020, government ministers promised to eliminate circular debt by the end of 2020 and claimed to have arrested the upward trend, bringing it down to around PKR 10 billion-12 billion per month from around PKR 38 billion in pre-election days of the PML-N government.

In practice, the PTI government had made the highest ever monthly addition to the Circular debt in the range of around PKR 44 billion per month during 2020. In August 2020, Federal Minister for Energy Omar Ayub Khan had announced to introduce power sector reforms within three weeks. However no reforms were announced by the government till December 2020.

The historic global oil crash provided a lifetime opportunity to the policymakers to have higher imports and longer term contracts in oil and LNG business. The government kept moving summaries here and there but ultimately failed to ensure hedging of oil prices when global market hit rock bottom.

Similarly, it had the opportunity of having LNG for \$2.2-3 per MMBTU on yearlong contracts but inordinate delays and incorrect consumption estimates led LNG bids at \$20 per MMBTU and beyond in December.

Some analysts have extrapolated the losses on account of botched LNG imports to be around PKR 122 billion. However, these appear to be just guesstimates – even though the public accounts committee of the parliament has taken cognizance of the reports.

The writer has been watching national economy for two & half decades.



The Strange Case of Untouchable Robber Barons

No Political Will to Act Against Grift as Sugar, Wheat, Cement Cartels Run Amok



By Azeem Waqas

Notwithstanding Prime Minister Imran Khan's long history of excoriating corruption, his government seems to have no appetite to bring to book those who hoodwinked the nation out of at least PKR 300 billion through shady business practices over the past year or so.

Pakistani consumers had paid PKR 300 billion excess due to spike in prices, cartelization, monopolization, and hoarding of the wheat, sugar and cement by unscrupulous robber barons in 2020.

The data collected by The Truth International (TTI) shows that during 2020, the sugar, wheat and cement mafia had burdened the poor man and have pocketed PKR 300 billion and created an artificial shortage which forced the Pakistan PTI (Tehreek-e-Insaf) government to import the two commodities at higher prices putting an extra burden on the week national exchequer.

Monthly consumption of Sugar in Pakistan is about 0.45 MMT to 0.50 MMT. According to the data of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) an additional burden of PKR 160 was put on the sugar consumers which cost them PKR 65 to PKR 70 billion in 2020.

Prime Minister Imran Khan made a committee in February and later on a commission to probe the price increase in sugar. The Sugar Inquiry Commission made its report public in May 2020, which found massive market manipulations, tax evasion, and anonymous (benami) transactions.

The Commission in its report determined the production cost of per kg sugar at PKR 38, PKR 40.60, and PKR 46.04 in the years 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20 whereas the mills were showing PKR 51, PKR 52.6 and PKR 62 per kg respectively.

Inquiry Commission finds that "for every extra rupee of cost overstated, the sugar mills of Pakistan earn approximately PKR 5.2 million x 1000 (the total production of 5.2

million tons) which equals PKR 5.2 billion – all at the expense of the consumers".

These are the windfalls that the sugar mills enjoy before the sugar has even left the gates of the factory.

The Competition Commission of Pakistan in its report highlights that an increase in price by PKR 1/kg results in gain of PKR 450 Million (approx.) in a month to the mills based on average monthly consumption of 0.45 MMT of sugar.

The PBS data shows that in January 2020 average national price of sugar was PKR 73.45/kg which went up to PKR 101.49 in November and rose to 87.17 in December 2020. The cumulative price increases strapped the consumers with an additional burden to the tune of PKR 70 billion. During 2020, Pakistan imported 0.267 MMT of sugar at the cost of about PKR 20 billion.

The Commission is of the opinion that the Sugar Advisory Board failed to take a timely decision to ban the export of sugar. The price hike and the export continued till February 2020.

International trade expert Dr Manzoor Ahmad says the Sugar prices increased because of mismanagement on the part of the federal government. Pakistan did not have sufficient stocks of sugar, contrary to the claims of the Pakistan Sugar Mills Association. It also delayed sugar import and could not stop its export as well, which provided an opportunity to the market forces to increase prices every month.

The Commission says that there is ample evidence of market manipulation for profiteering by certain sugar mills through forward contracting, non-lifting of sold sugar and facilitation to favoured brokers.

It also finds "sufficient evidence of hoarding of sugar at the level of sugar mills in connivance with brokers/investors".

During the subsidy scheme period from January 2015 to February 2020, sugar mills were paid more than PKR 29 billion in subsidy.

The Commission says that the entire sugar industry declared total sales of approximately PKR 124 billion. Out of this PKR 43 billion were sold to the registered persons. If the sales made to Income Tax registered persons worth PKR 14 billion is taken out, then the rest of PKR 58 billion sale have been made to un-registered persons who are suspected to front anonymous players.

Similarly, the sugar industry reported suspected benami transactions to the tune of PKR 71.054 billion from October 2019 to February 2020.

Pakistan witnessed wheat crisis and had to import the food staple after more than a decade, owing only to the mismanagement and inefficiency of the government, which cost the consumers more than PKR 120 billion in 2020.

Pakistan has been self-sufficient in wheat from 2009 to 2019. Prices of wheat flour went up at the end of 2019 which triggered a crisis in the country. Federal and Punjab government panicked and could not handle the situation properly.

Federal Government set a target of 27 MT for wheat production but it could not achieve it, mainly because of heavy rain in Sindh and Punjab. Wheat production remained 1.8 MT below the target, at 25.2 MT in 2020.

Later on, the federal government could not achieve wheat procurement target as well. Wheat procurement remained 6.6 MT against the target of 8.2 MT, short of the target by 1.7 MT.

Pakistan's average wheat consumption is about 2.3 MT per month.

Federal minister National Food Security, Syed Fakhar Imam has admitted that some investors knew that international wheat prices were up and they made billions in windfall profit.

PBS data shows that, just after the arrival of new wheat crop in the market in April 2020, prices of the wheat flour started increasing. In May wheat flour was available at the average price of PKR 43.23/kg but all of sudden it spiked to PKR 48.63/kg, registering an increase of PKR 6.54/kg.

This put an additional burden on the consumers to the tune of PKR 18.65 billion in June 2020.

From June 2020 to December 2020, wheat prices increased cumulatively by PKR 28.98/kg, making consumers pay an excess PKR 48 billion. During June to December 2020, Pakistan spent PKR 70 billion on wheat imports at higher prices from the international market, denting the national exchequer.

According to an estimate, delaying wheat import costs the people about PKR 23 billion.

Says Dr Manzoor Ahmad: "The government failed to take timely decision on wheat import. It took almost five to six months to reach the decision. Wheat was available at \$220/ton in the international market but when Pakistan imported its price increased and crosses \$290/ton.

"The government knew the country was facing a shortfall of around 1.5 MMT import was the only option to meet that shortfall. They should have acted sooner".



PMLN leader Muhammad Zubair says, "Imran Khan had accepted his failure by himself, admitting that there was no data available on wheat stocks in the country which led to delayed import. The people of Pakistan ended up paying the price for PTI failure".

Dr Manzoor Suggests that Minimum Support Price fixation and wheat procurement system should be abolished and prices should be left to the market forces.

THE CEMENT INDUSTRY

The Competition Commission of Pakistan says that cartelisation and price fixing in cement industry has burdened the people with PKR 40 billion annually just by increasing the prices of 50-kg bag by PKR 50 by the cement manufacturers.

A CCP report says the decisions to increase MRP by the cartel in April 2020 alone resulted in an estimated increase in price per bag (50 Kg) of cement of PKR 50 (collectively in Islamabad, Lahore and Peshawar).

If we multiply this increase with local dispatches for the year 2019-2020 the economic impact as a result of price increase alone amounts to approximately PKR 40 billion. The mentioned loss amount is computed by using a conservative approach and is based on the evidence of fixing MRP alone.

If we take into account price increase at each point in time and damages borne by consumers as a result of price fixing, quota fixation, division of markets and other anti-competitive practices through concerted activities i.e., cartelization, the impact is much higher.

The consumers' loss is the cartel members' gain – which is basically why cartels are formed.

PMLN leader Muhammad Zubair, says that PTI government did not take any action against those involved in wheat and sugar scams. Sugar Commission has identified that Jahangir Tareen, Khushro Bakhtiar, Abdul Razak Dawood and CM Punjab Usman Buzdar failed to fulfil their responsibilities. Cabinet and ECC allowed export of one MMT of sugar which caused price increase but no action had been taken any cabinet member.

Zubair alleges Khan cannot take any action against his own cabinet members, because he has been convinced by them that for long term politics, they should be given a free hand to amass wealth through corruption.

The writer is an investigative journalist.

A Royal Mess or Much Ado about Nothing?

Nawaz Sharif's Vanishing Passport



By Asif Malik

While the news of a government decision to effectively cancel the passport of Nawaz Sharif created plenty of shock and awe, the move – if it actually materialises – may amount to little or nothing in the final analysis; unless of course it backfires magnificently, strengthening the hand of Mr Sharif instead of weakening him.

The federal minister for interior Sheikh Rashid Ahmed has disclosed the government's intention to cancel the passport of Nawaz Sharif, thrice-elected prime minister of Pakistan, on 16 February 2021, a couple of days before the passport is due to expire.

Sheikh Rashid announced this government decision at a press conference last month. He said that the diplomatic passport of Mr Sharif will be cancelled on 16 February.

Bearing number BV5128363, Sharif passport is due to expire on 18 February. It was issued with five-year validity on 18 February 2016. Sheikh said this was the only valid travel document held by Mr Sharif and its expiry on 16 February 2021 would render him stateless.

Pakistani passports are issued to Pakistani citizen for the purpose of international travel and are typically valid for 5-10 years. They are issued by the Directorate General of Immigration and Passports (DGIP) of the Ministry of Interior.

If the government cancels the passport of Mr Sharif, he will become the second Pakistani leader living abroad left with no travel document after Gen Pervez Musharraf.

The former military strongman's computerized national identity card and passport were cancelled in June 2018 because he was absconding in high treason case. The interior ministry had taken the measure on the express direction of the special court seized with Musharraf's high treason trial.

However, the then Chief Justice of Pakistan Saqib Nisar had intervened to restore these documents while hearing another matter related to Gen Musharraf. The chances of Sharif extracting a similar favour from the superior judiciary are vanishingly slim.

While hearing a petition of anchors and journalists against the ban on the coverage of Mr Sharif and former finance minister Ishaq Dar, Islamabad High Court (IHC) recently made it clear that state can cancel the CNIC and passport of an absconder.

The court said an absconder neither believes in the law of the land nor shows respect to courts; such a person disowns the justice system and therefore, the state can cancel his citizenship by depriving him of his CNIC and passport.

Will Mr Sharif lose Pakistani citizenship after expiry of the passport? There are two different answers to this question. Some say the national identity is attached with passport and its cancellation renders the holder stateless. Other says the passport is a travel document and its expiry has no effect on the holder's citizenship of a country.

The family of ex-premier is said to be consulting with the UK lawyers regarding the next steps in this matter.

Former law minister Barrister Zafarullah Khan said that denying a citizen proof of his identity is unconstitutional and against the

fundamental rights. He said that the conviction and absconson of an accused does not justify cancellation of his or her passport.

According to him, such a move would create legal complications for the government since Mr Sharif went abroad for medical treatment and with the consent of the PTI government. He further said any case for Mr Sharif's extradition will be weakened if his passport is cancelled.

The Pakistani government is said to have taken up the matter of Mr Sharif's extradition with the UK authorities on a number of occasions but such efforts have failed to elicit a favourable response.

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) spokesman Mohsin Nawaz Ranjha said that cancellation of passport would entitle Mr Sharif to political asylum in the UK. He said that there are many options in UK for a person facing such a situation.

A lawyer familiar with the British law said the UK had a policy on stateless individuals who were normally allowed to continue to stay in the country. He said in a case involving a high-profile political personality like Nawaz Sharif, there were bright chances of his stay being extended.

He further said one could apply to stay in the UK as a stateless person if he/she was not recognised as a citizen of any country, was unable to live permanently in any other country and was

currently in Britain. He said that those who could not return to another country because of fear of persecution there were required to claim asylum first.

Nawaz Sharif has been living in London since November 2019 after he was allowed to leave the country for medical treatment.

Earlier last month, the PML-N supremo was declared a proclaimed offender in two cases – Avenfield properties and Al-Azizia – by the Islamabad High Court after he failed to appear before the court.

An IHC bench had on 15 September issued a non-bailable arrest warrant for Nawaz Sharif after he failed to appear before the court during the hearing of his appeals against conviction in Al-Azizia and Avenfield cases. The bench later started the process of declaring the PML-N supreme leader an absconder and ordered the authorities concerned to publish advertisements – or proclamations – in London-based newspapers, summoning Mr Sharif on 24 November.

The IHC had remarked that if Nawaz Sharif does not appear before it within 30 days after the publication of advertisements, he would be declared an absconder. The court had also ordered the authorities to post the notice outside his London and Lahore residences.

The writer is a senior journalist.

Where is the Outrage?

Osama Satti is Dead but What about the Rest of Us?

By Oroba Tasnim Siddiqui

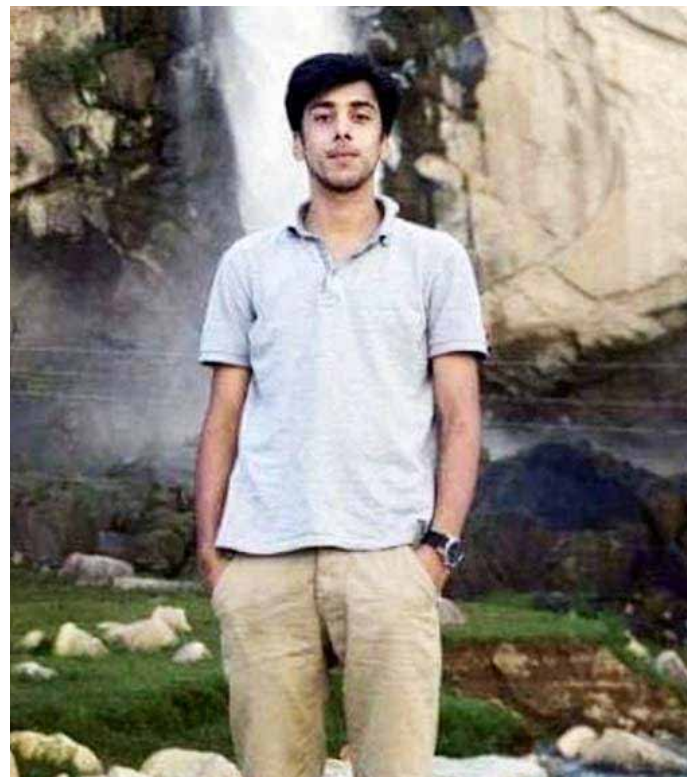
Initial police statement said that a young motorist died in a police encounter after he was suspected of robbery when he fled a police checkpoint. But circumstantial evidence speak another story. He had been shot from the front, through the windscreen of his car with 16 or 17 bullets.

Osama Satti – the 22-year-old who was killed on 2 January 2021 at 2 AM in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. The incident brought to the fore yet again the deep-seated systemic malaise that has caused incessant bloodshed by our law enforcement agencies.

According to the Human Rights Watch 2020 report, 'Pakistani law enforcement agencies were responsible for human rights violations including detention without charge and extrajudicial killings'.

Because there are discrepancies between the number of reported cases and those that are actually occurring, it is difficult to authentically assess how widespread this problem really is, but the frequency of reports of extrajudicial killing is indicative of the magnitude of the problem. SSP Rao Anwar may be an extreme example, but it is nevertheless instructive to know he is accused of involvement in an astounding 444 extrajudicial killings.

Despite the persistence of this layered cruelty, there has been no substantive movement to structurally reform the state of Pakistan



and the continued lawlessness that law enforcing authorities partake in. Some cases of extrajudicial killing have garnered national attention but the nation has not been able to summon the outrage requisite to bring about change.

On 13 January 2018, a 27-year old model Nageebullah Mahsood was killed in a police encounter in Karachi, when he was shot in the back twice. Reports soon surfaced saying he was picked up along with his two friends by the squad of the famed SSP, Rao Anwar, who freed the other two after three days in captivity. While it became a fiery issue, the victim's father died in the process of acquiring justice and the perpetrator continues to live unscathed.

On 19 January 2019, a couple along with their teenaged daughter and neighbour were shot dead in an alleged police encounter on a highway near the city of Sahiwal in Pakistan. Cell phone video footage that emerged later showed they had been murdered in cold blood. While there was some hue and cry over the incident, nothing of substance emerged and the accused were acquitted in late 2019.

Contrast this with the killing of George Floyd on 25 May 2020 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He was reported for allegedly using a counterfeit bill at a gas station. A police team arrived in response to a distress call from the sales clerk. An altercation followed and one of the police officers knelt on Floyd's neck for about nine and a half minutes, leading to his death.

Protests broke out across America as a video of the incident went viral. Throngs of Americans took to the streets in protest galvanizing a movement upon the slogan of 'Black Lives Matter', transforming the dynamics of the American society.

A cursory look at the reforms that have been instituted following the case of George Floyd are enough to truly understand the seriousness that the matter garnered – made possible only due to the diligence of protestors parked outside crucial state authorities in the United States.

Why cannot Pakistanis launch and run this sort of a movement? It is important to understand that along with the lack of reforms and implementation void, the apathy of the populace is an essential element of the system. We are quick to pay lip service to standing with the oppressed, but we spend no time in returning to our lives

regardless of the tragedies that continue to befall the victims of these tragedies.

If the same reaction as that of the Black Lives Matter movement was replicated in Pakistan, how much longer would it take for those in power and position to ignore the plight of those that go unheard?

As the noose tightens, it is indeed a heart-breaking sight as they come closer and closer. With the voices calling out in agony, what we fail to realize is that sometimes, voices may be heard but it is in fact physical agitation that paves the path.

What arguably became the distinctive feature of the American response was the strength of its people to spring forth in massive numbers and stand for a cause that could not be deferred any longer.

Consolations and condemnations are mandatory but not adequate. Until they physically stood before the concrete structures of power, there was little glimmer of hope for Americans. What, then, are we waiting for?

Perhaps, a messiah to steer us away from the gruesome details of the reality that we live through today. Or mayhap, an elusive mirage to sabotage the stupefying reality we are hostages to.

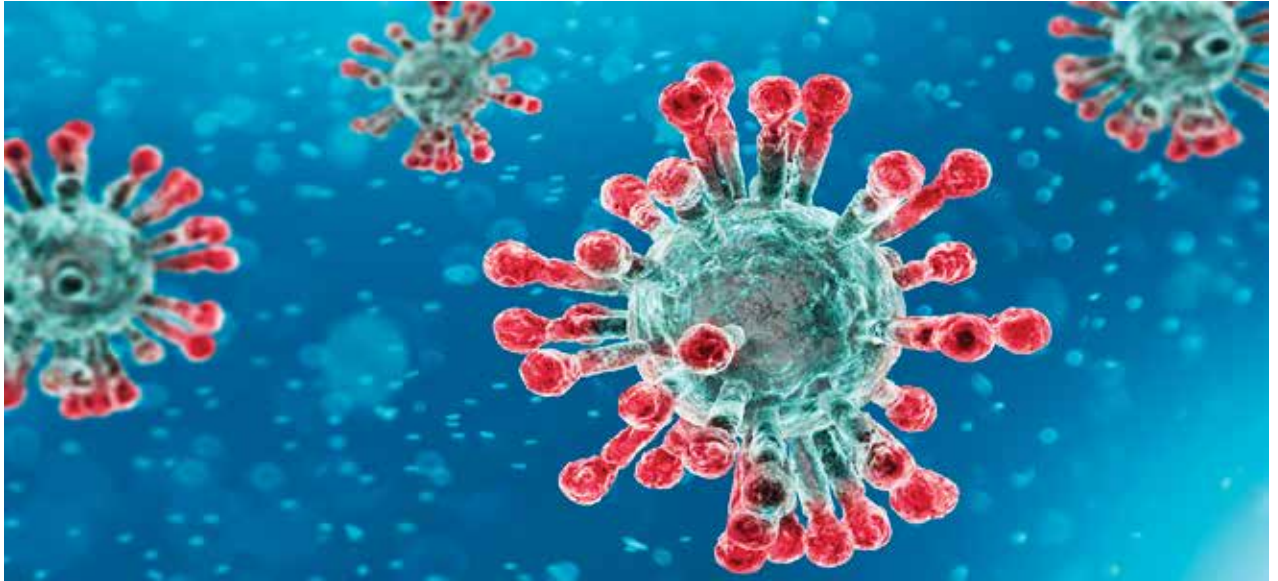
At the end of the day, allegations may be levelled on the governments and administrations, but what truly matters is the capacity and empathy of the people to stand together as one. It would be foolhardy to expect real change as long as the movements to challenge the status quo erupt out of socially constructed tragedies.

For change comes from within when keyboard warriors transmit into dynamic revolutionaries, donning idealism and embracing the vision to bring about a change. We must join our hands together in a grand national accord to commit to the credo of resistance to injustice.

We must speak up for the first victim of injustice henceforth. For if each of us continues to condone injustice against another, nobody will speak for anyone – until nobody is left untouched by injustice.



Why has the world turned a blind eye to COVID-19 re-infections?



By Haider Rifaat

The world may have gotten used to the COVID-19 pandemic but there is still very little we know about the origins of the virus and what it is capable of achieving. Earlier this year, the World Health Organization ruled out that experiencing fever, dry cough and tiredness indicated the presence of COVID-19. A few weeks later, the debate about asymptomatic patients surfaced and took precedence. It was made clear that people experiencing no symptoms could also be carriers of COVID-19. Fast forward to December and we have potential vaccines under development.

Countries like Mainland China have made conscious efforts to roll out the Sinovac COVID-19 vaccine in Indonesia – confirming a solid 97 percent seroconversion rate. The United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Philippines are among other countries to have followed suit with the lattermost having ordered a whopping 25 million doses.

However, on the flip side, what the world has clearly downplayed is the possibility of contracting COVID-19 again. Just over two months ago, it was reported that a 25-year old man from Nevada, United States became the first to have caught COVID-19 again, this time requiring oxygen support. Since the United States has topped the list of most cases all year round, the chances of re-infections are more likely.

India, the second country behind the U.S., is also seeing a steady increase in COVID-19 re-infections. A report by the Assam Medical College in India concluded that individuals who are re-infected with the virus experience more severity than their initial diagnosis. More research is underway pertaining to the correlation between stronger immunity against COVID-19 and getting re-infected. But nonetheless, research has substantiated that the chances of catching the virus again is possible.

In light of the recent evidence surrounding re-infection rates, we now know that many countries and health organizations have turned a blind eye to COVID-19 re-infections. Countries were so focused on helping patients recover from coronavirus that they negated the aspect of re-infections completely. Could 51 million recovered COVID-19 patients get re-infected? If yes, is this an indication that the pandemic would not subside any time soon until a vaccine is fully developed?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cited that cases of re-infection have been reported but are rare. However, even if half of the 51 million people get re-infected with coronavirus, the cases would double or quadruple the second they come in contact with others.

It is well-founded that asymptomatic individuals are “super spreaders” of the virus, showing no symptoms at all. Those who have fully recovered from the virus would not bother getting tested again if they experience no symptoms. Hence, the chances of them spreading the virus in their households and workplaces would increase as a result. Then there is a false negative test that would make people believe they are free from COVID-19 when in fact, they are carriers of the disease.

Countries around the world are already having trouble with testing, poor governance and negligence towards the pandemic in general. The lack of knowledge about COVID-19 re-infections would only make matters worse. Cases would resurge and people would have no hope left. The pandemic has already caused a lot of anxiety and fear this year. As families band together to pull through a global crisis, the last thing anyone would want is to relive a more severe form of COVID-19. To ensure safety and prevention of the virus, patients should maintain safe distance with their family members at least two weeks after recovering.

Climate Smart Healthcare

By Maheen Dhanani

Pakistan is no stranger to the drastic painstaking effects of climate change and now, one can certainly hear the anecdotes. It enjoys diverse seasons dispersed across the country but also reaps the detrimental varieties of extremely divergent climate change concerns including excessive heat, droughts, and floods.

Worsening heat stress and shooting temperatures put Pakistan in a defenseless position as it faces a rise in water scarcity, malnutrition, and vector borne diseases that target the most vulnerable. Child bearing women, children, people with pre-existing conditions, and people in poverty are more so than others stuck in a cycle of degrading health and environmental decay; this will only have a worse impact with time.



In recent events we have seen the influence of climate change in Pakistan interrelated with infections and vector borne diseases. Droughts and excessive rainfall have promoted malaria and dengue, both deadly and fast growing diseases Pakistan is prey of. In 2019 Pakistan had an estimate of 1 million cases and 300,000 reported cases of malaria concluding it as the region with the highest burden of vector borne diseases. According to World Health Organization, 98% of Pakistan is at risk of malaria.

The current climate has an adverse effect on crop yields and it poses a huge risk on adding to the under nutrition of the population of Pakistan. Elevated carbon dioxide levels in the air and soil result in crops with significantly diminished nutrient profiles and reduces overall food production. This loss is even more acute in Pakistan as a huge percentage of the population in the country is least able to afford animal protein. This nutritional impact on human health will be detrimental and it hosts many more challenges that Pakistan is not in a position of tackling.

Pakistan's population is only growing and thus the impact of climate, disease, and nutrition on our dragging economy. The Pakistani government must think hard about climate change and the biodiversity crisis, and take operational steps towards climate influenced healthcare development and fund health promoting

systems that work towards reducing diseases and adapting to the new demands of services of quality healthcare. Investing in health care is investing in a rapid growing economy.

The challenges of climate change are multi-sectoral and it is very critical at this time to address and mitigate the ongoing and potential health risks. The Covid-19 pandemic is an added stressor to these conditions. Stuck to climate change, there is poverty, political conflicts, inequality and corruption, and now a pandemic tightly forcing migration which has its own short and long term consequences. Places are getting wetter, dryer, hotter, colder and unlivable for most. People testing positive have more problems to worry about than just the virus itself. Terrible climate and living conditions go hand in hand with and are a causing factor of lack of access to health care. It is complicating the already choking health system now more than ever.

Some people living in many rural areas might be privileged enough to venture out to big cities for treatment, if not, they are left with the dismay of possibly having to migrate there for long or short term post care treatment or therapy. This brings us to the question; should treatment be made convenient for the provider or for the patient? The government is not focusing on the latter. Internal migration which is now more of a necessity than an option for many results in increased nutritional deficiencies due to disproportionate delivery of nutrition, increased infection as a result of overcrowding and no basic sanitary infrastructures; and this slippery slope leads to an array of mental health concerns. The healthcare sector is the forefront of climate impacts and healthcare professionals are the first responders in preventing fatalities caused by climate change. Mitigating a majority of health concerns falls in the vector of mitigating climate change.

Pakistan is disproportionately exposed to the impacts of climate change and we are now seeing this driving the mortality rates even higher with the pandemic. COVID-19 is a learning opportunity and It has allowed us to see that people are most motivated when the situation becomes personal, we must now realize that climate change isn't just restricted to affecting polar bears and the arctic glaciers, it is endangering our health every single day causing increased risks for cancer, lung and heart disease, malaria and the list is endless. Universal healthcare is a possible opportunity which will help weaken the burden Pakistan faces as a climate sensitive nation and it will prove to be beacon for effective access to healthcare with equal opportunities for the masses.

Separating climate change and healthcare is a jeopardizing delusion and our health is entirely dependent on it. We must work at both provincial and federal levels and with enough changes in the management of agriculture, water, and other industries, we are sure to see an acceleration in healthcare and thus a in turn the economy of Pakistan.

The writer is a specialist in healthcare services administration currently working in the telemedicine industry in Pakistan.

Ice on Fire



By Eric Shahzar

Pakistan faces massive turbulence every time a natural disaster takes place, with many blaming our ineffectual disaster management. One cannot erase the horrific memories of the 2010 floods in which millions were displaced and the economy took a \$10 billion loss. While we have faced several disastrous floods throughout our history, with climate change accelerating, scientists predict that the country will soon be hit by 'super floods', causing unprecedented damage. Our glaciers are vanishing; we must take action before it is too late. Pakistan's ice is on fire.

The destruction caused by climate change is being observed in all remote and cosmopolitan parts of Pakistan. Most of the damage is irrevocable, but minimising the effects of climate change must now be our top priority. Even with collective international effort to keep global warming within 1.5 degrees Celsius, Pakistan's glaciers will still shrink by 36 % by the end of this century. The Hindu Kush and Himalayan Assessment report warns that ice loss at this scale will have grave consequences for billions living across South Asia — rising food insecurity, irreparable losses to the economy and intensified natural disasters.

From our fragile economy to the climate, the PTI government has to contend with major challenges. Even after initiating the 'billion-tree tsunami', Pakistan still has one of the fastest deforestation rates in the region — our forest cover has shrunk to an abysmal 1.9%. As per the UN's standards, countries must have a forest cover of at least 25% of total land, while urban areas must have a forest cover of more than 10pc. Policymakers must understand that trees act as carbon eaters, and are extremely pivotal for a sustainable ecosystem.

Even more worrying is that our current water woes are intensifying at alarming rates. Imminent super floods will result in substantial destruction in every key development sector. And while authorities are overwhelmed trying to control the damage, there will be further turmoil to overshadow even this — a situation in which the whole country will be hit by extreme drought. These grievous conditions will coincide with scarcities of nutritional food and potable water, leading to disease epidemics as well as large-scale migrations.

One of Pakistan's most pivotal internal security challenges is its population bulge. High rates of rural-urban convergence

will only put more load on the already stressed urban cities. Take Karachi, for instance, where 90% of the water is unfit to drink and its water shortage felt most acutely by the working classes. With droughts predicted in the coming years and our population expected to become the fourth largest in the world by 2030, do the authorities have a comprehensive plan?

The world's marine life is also in great peril. Scientists estimate that for decades, the ocean has been absorbing more than 90% of the sun's heat which has resulted in ocean acidification. As the oceans absorb more heat, acidification threatens the existence of marine animals and plant species. Not to forget, more than 50% of the world's coral reefs have disappeared due to global warming. Coral reefs have the ability to protect coastlines from the damaging effects of wave action and tropical storms. Coral reefs provide shelter for many marine organisms. Today, it faces an existential threat

So what is the way to mitigate this impending climate-induced fiasco? Many environmentalists have stressed the importance of promoting renewable energy and rejecting fossil fuels. Fossil fuels are non-renewable because they draw on finite resources that will eventually dwindle, becoming either too expensive or too environmentally damaging to retrieve. Conversely, several types of renewables — such as wind and solar energy — are constantly replenished. Renewable energy is not only cheap in the long run but also an inexhaustible form of energy.

Pakistan has ample potential for sustainable and clean energy for the future, and if plans work out well, it can realistically be an energy-surplus country. The Solar Energy Research Centre says that 70pc of our population lives in 50,000 villages that are distant from the national grid. Connecting these remote villages to the national grid would be very expensive, but giving each house a solar panel would not only be cost-effective but also empower people economically and socially.

The rise in carbon emissions has been directly linked with global warming and the impending melting of our glaciers. To curb the ever-growing increase in carbon emissions, climate scientists have promoted the idea of carbon tax on big corporations and industries. Carbon pricing would make fossil fuels expensive, inexorably making renewable

energy sources such as solar and wind ideal alternatives. It is high time for parliament to initiate debates on the idea of carbon pricing, because a carbon tax would be much easier to administer than any other dormant climate change policy.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed fault lines in Pakistan's emergency preparedness capacity. How will authorities cope with the pressure when climate change will strike us hard? While climate diplomacy is the need of the hour, Pakistan must also focus on a robust national level response on climate change, where all provinces are on the same page. If provinces are at a constant daggers drawn, ecological disruption will only gain more momentum. Only a unified narrative will help mitigate the impacts of ecological disruption on our daily lives

Climate change is a reality that will terrorise our present and future generations. In the coming years, Pakistan must brace itself for some calamitous events in the shape of super floods and intensified droughts, as accelerated global warming is taking place right now. We must explore different avenues on how to minimise Co2 in the air, paving the way for temperatures to go down. Our future relies on robust climate-friendly policies, which must be properly implemented. Reversing climate change is urgent and indispensable.

The writer is an environmentalist and a PhD candidate for climate change and ecological disruption in Pakistan.

5 Years after Paris, Climate Change Crusade Remains Short Changed

By Mishaal Ashraf

Five years after the Paris Agreement, the world's richest nations are yet to make good on their promise of funding the emerging economies' efforts to fight climate change and mitigate its socioeconomic impact.

Developed countries who made a commitment to deliver USD 100 billion annually to help developing countries fight climate change eleven years ago have fallen short of the target. Experts say that the inability of these countries to cough up the funding to the poor regions will disproportionately affect South Asia, which unfortunately is a region already prone to natural disasters and is deeply dependent on carbon intensive energy, which is why it needs significant support to tackle both these vulnerabilities in union.

On 12 December 2020, the Climate Ambition Summit – a virtual conference co-hosted by France and the UK in partnership with Chile, Italy and the United Nations (UN) – marked the fifth anniversary of the Paris Agreement. The event was seen to provide an opportunity to take stock of the mitigation and adaptation promises which were made 5 years ago in 2015, announce further commitments to reduce carbon emissions and count the money spent or pledged since the 2009 UN Climate Talks in Copenhagen.

In line with terms of the Paris Agreement, countries like China, Britain, South Korea, Japan, and others have moved forward with their plans for aggressive decarbonisation of their economies despite the crisis caused by the global COVID-19 outbreak, which pushed key climate talks to next year.

However, observers warn that if climate finance is neglected for long, it may hinder action in emerging states.

Kashmala Kakakhel, the climate expert from Pakistan noted that 2020 was supposed to be the year which would have been marked as a milestone for climate finance. She further said, "When the US\$100 billion goal was set in 2009, we just set this 2020 deadline. Countries discussed public and private finance, but nobody really went into the details of it".



When the Copenhagen Conference took place, the then US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, had said that the rich countries would start paying the poor countries to help them tackle the climate change problem, ramping up the financial support to 100 billion USD a year by 2020, and thus, it became one of the UN Climate Agreements.

Harjeet Singh, a global climate change expert says that South Asia is a disaster hotspot and the lack of vigorous progress on climate finance is a big worry. Major South Asian economies including India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are all prone to natural disasters and depend highly on fossil fuels like natural gas and coal. India has the world's fourth largest share of carbon emissions, and even though it is working towards adapting renewable energy, it is struggling to phase out coal and decarbonise cement, steelmaking and other sectors.

Climate negotiations will resume next year in Glasgow, where members of UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will deliberate transitioning the planet to a low carbon economy.

If the conference is unable to bring climate finance under the spotlight, it will be a reflection of the inability of the richest and the most polluting nations of the world to realize their responsibility towards the only planet in the cosmos known to be hospitable to human habitation.

God's Mistake or Man-Made Mess?

A Transgender Pakistani's Search for Identity

By Amna Shoaib

"Do I have my mom's eyes and my dad's nose or is it the other way round? And why don't they ever come see me?"

"Would they have protected me – as other parents pull their kids away when they see me approaching with Rani Baji?"

Who am I?

While most of us embark on a journey of self-discovery trying to wake up with a sense of purpose each day, there are people who wake up to an existential crisis centered around their identity. Even though they cannot find the answers, they are harassed because of it.

Their bruises heal with time, but the trauma becomes a part of them and they become numb to words which once cut them. They feel nothing when people avoid them like the plague. They are called 'intersex': humans born with any of several variations in sex characteristics that "do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies".

When Shezadi was born, her family's celebration turned into mourning within seconds – as the intersex baby had brought disgrace upon the entire family by being born.

The only person who did not scorn her was her mother who wept a tear of joy when her eyes met with Shezadi's angelic hazel eyes. The strength of motherhood made her feel nothing but boundless love for her child.

The mother was roundly beaten as the baby was handed over to a servant with the command, "It is up-to you whether you dump this thing in the trash or give it to one of those hijra beggars but just get this filth out of my sight."

"Once I decided to go and beg at my own house just to see my mother and siblings but my fathers' hate for intersex scared me", says Shezadi wistfully.

"I was 13 years old when I mastered my passion for dancing, and it was that very month I performed my first mujra," says Shezadi wiping a tear.

"It was that day I was exposed to all the horrors of the world. Middle aged and older men looked at me with such wicked lust in their eyes and some came closer to me like hungry dogs."

"In the middle of the dance I decided to leave the room and just then one of them violently grabbed me and threw me on the other men who seized my body and starting tearing off my clothes.

"I wept, wailed and screamed in horror as Rani baji came in asking them to leave at once. They did, but each of them spat on me before doing so. My friends rushed to hug me and helped me heal my bruises."

"That night, I decided to run away, not caring where, for I just couldn't stay. The walls, the doors, the music from the other rooms reminded me of what had happened and it was unbearable".

Shezadi took a deep breath and covered her face with her hands. After a sip of water she continued, "I'm so happy I



made that decision. That night I crept out of the house and went to my servant's house. I begged him to let me stay for a night and take me to my actual house.

"After hearing what happened he said, 'You have become impure and I cannot tolerate impurity anywhere near my house but I'll take you to your parents' house anyway and leave you at the doorstep and whatever happens afterwards is not my problem.' I thanked him profusely.

"On our way there, he didn't talk to me once but told me to follow him at a distance so no one would notice I was with him. I was hurt but I complied. We reached my house, a rather large mansion like those in the movies.

"I could hear chattering in Pushto. My servant left me and I rang the doorbell. A very beautiful woman answered it and somewhat seemed familiar."

That woman was Shezadi's mother, who says, "From the moment our eyes met I knew it was my precious little angel. I hugged her and cried 'Mera bacha! mera bacha!'

"I brought her in and knew now that I would not let her go even if it cost me my life. Yes, there was a complete family drama, a lot of breaking and bashing, slapping and punching, but I did not let go of my child's hand as she watched everything in horror."

Shezadi says she offered to leave right away if only they would stop making her mother cry. "The next day my father called for a lawyer and my parents were divorced. This day my fate changed completely."

The mother moved to her parents' house taking Shehzadi with her. "We were welcomed there with open arms and my siblings decided they would tutor Shezadi and that their children would be her friends."

Shehzadi now has a Masters' degree and works for the social rights of the intersex community – but hers are circumstances that are the exception rather than the rule. Thousands of intersex individuals continue to suffer what Shezadi escaped from.

Islamic jurisprudence accords full rights to intersex individuals. Under the British colonial rule, however, being intersex became to be viewed as a deviance. Social inertia continues to hinder progress to a society where feelings of compassion and respect toward the intersex can be translated into concrete action to alleviate the sufferings of this marginalized community.

Jabbi Syedan: The AJK Village with 100% Literacy



By Danish Irshad

Tucked away in the mountains of Azad Jammu and Kashmir is a hamlet with hundred percent literacy and more than one MPhil degree in every household on average.

Azad Jammu and Kashmir is definitely backward in development but it is first in Pakistan in terms of literacy. However, the story of Jabbi Syedan, a village of about five hundred and fifty households in district Haveli, named Jabbi Syedan, is inspirational even for Azad Kashmir.

The beautiful district of Haveli, also known as Forward Kahuta, is an area where life thrives in the shadow of fear because the whole district is bounded by the Line of Control (LoC) on three sides so that no point in the district is more than five kilometres away from it.

When the LoC hots up, the village can come under Indian shelling from three sides, making people miserable. Life here is also very difficult because temperature stays below freezing for four months in winter.

Due to the tense situation of the Line of Control and unavailability of facilities, the people also face difficulties on a daily basis. Despite this, this village in this district tops Pakistan in educational achievement although there is no high or middle school here. There was once a primary school for boys and girls, but it has long since closed down.

The high school in this area is located about five kilometres away in another village named Soli. Despite all this, everyone of this village is educated, thousands of villagers are employed and also hold high positions in the government sector in Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

This village has a unique position in Pakistan in two respects: The literacy rate is 100 percent and the crime rate is zero. In this village of five hundred and fifty families, mosques have played a key role in promoting literacy.

Jabbi Syedan has six mosques and one madrassa. Jamia Masjid of this village is one of the earliest Jamia Masjid in the district. The madrassa has hundreds of students and Hufaz who are associated with mosques and educational institutions across the district teaching Qur'an.

The villagers are highly educated and involved in agriculture and cultivating fruit trees and vegetables. The egalitarian culture of the village means even those holding high government offices do the housework themselves. The people teach Qur'an to young children in their own homes.

All over the world in general and in the Third World in particular, it can be seen that women generally lag far behind men in the field of education and employment, but in this village, women are abreast of men in education and employment.

There are women with degrees like MA, BEd, MPhil and MSc in every home. The majority of men and women are employed and most of these employees are associated with the education sector.

All the families in this village belong to the Bukhari lineage of the Sadat family.

To mention the deprivations of Jabbi Syedan and the surrounding area, more than half of the villages are without

a paved road. The four-kilometre long paved road forms a circle connecting the villages on two sides. Interestingly, half of this road, which is about two kilometres long, was built by the local population on their own.

“We have our ancestors to thank for the love of education permeating the village”, says 84-years-old Syed Zainul Abidin Bukhari, a resident of the village.

Syed Ali Raza Bukhari, a resident of Jabbi who is a member of the AJK Legislative Assembly, says that people used to travel to Poonch for education in olden times. “That city of Poonch is under Indian occupation now. It was far away from here, travel was difficult, resources were scarce but large numbers of villagers went there to receive education.

“Education of one generation tends to also educate the later generations. Due to this continuity, the literacy rate is 100 percent today”.

Former Chairman Azad Jammu and Kashmir Textbook Board Abid Hussain Bukhari also belongs to the same village. He says, “There is no doubt that our ancestors belongs to a scholarly and literary family and we have inherited the love of knowledge and awareness of its importance.

“Our teachers have played an important role in the education and training of the new generation. In fact, the most important role of our teachers was to create awareness in the new generation.”

“Now the time is for scientific and literary development. There was a time when this was not the case. During this period, teachers from our villages played an important role in creating an academic

environment throughout the district”.

Syed Riaz Haider Bukhari is serving as Assistant Inspector General (AIG) in the Azad Kashmir Police Department. He said, “Our ancestors were more inclined towards education and literature. The second major reason is that securing government jobs was considered necessary here because there was no alternative, so people remained attached to education.

“Another important reason is that Poonch city was the cradle of knowledge and literature in its time. From there writers like Chirag Hassan Hasrat, Prem Nath Bazaz and Krishan Chandar came forward and there were government and non-government schools where our ancestors were educated. They created a culture that educated their descendants without any discrimination”.

Syed Ijaz Haider has been associated with various television channels as an anchor. He says that he has observed that many people in the villages have been associated with the education sector. “The education of boys and girls is debated in Pakistan but in our area the education of boys and girls has never been differentiated and the education of girls has been arranged in the same way as the education of boys.

“At the same time, the people of Jabbi Syedan stayed away from politics and focused on getting government jobs, as education was necessary to get jobs, therefore education was given priority. Apart from this, the people here also used to write poetry. They were particularly fond of literature due to which the tendency to read and write increased.”

The writer is AJK based journalist.

Gorakh Hill: A Patch of Heaven in Sindh

By Qurban Baloch

When God made Sindh, He added a patch of heaven to the tapestry to provide the people a respite from the scorching summer heat. It is called Gorakh Hill.

In the sizzling summer months of June and July, when the average temperature in the province hovers around 48-50 °C, Gorakh Hill remains chilled at around 20 °C. In winter, the mercury plumbs the sub-zero region. Small wonder the locals call Gorakh Hill the Murree of Sindh.

Situated at an elevation of 5,689 feet (1,734 metres) in the Khirthar Mountains about 90 km northwest of Dadu city in Johi Tahsil on the Sindh-Baluchistan border, Gorakh Hill has long been valued by the people of Sindh for its pristine natural beauty and chilly summer weather.

Access to Gorakh Hill is not for the fainthearted: The 30-km journey from Johi takes up to two hours and requires a four-by-four vehicle. Particularly testing is the zigzagging two kilometre patch through mountainous terrain called Khawal Luk.



Locals and tourism experts say the only impediment in the way of Gorakh Hill becoming a bustling tourist spot is the non-existent infrastructure.

During Shaheed Benazir Bhutto's first tenure in 1989, when Abdullah Shah was chief minister of Sindh, development of a modern town was planned at Gorakh Hill. However, her government was sent packing before the plan could materialise.

A second initiative to develop the location came under military strongman Gen Pervaiz Musharraf in 2003-4. Electricity was provided to the site and small road was also constructed.

The government constituted Gorakh Hill Development Authority in 2007 to help develop the location as a tourist destination. Its first chairman was former Sindh Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah. PPP's Member National Assembly Rafiq Ahmed Jamali has been the chairman of the Authority since 2014.

Much of the Authority's budget goes to maintaining its two offices – a head office at provincial Karachi and a camp office at Dadu, the home city of the Authority's current chairman.

However, the fortunes of Gorakh Hill remain unchanged by and large. Cell phone coverage is patchy and power outages are the norm. The region has huge wind and solar power potential that remains untapped.

A modern restaurant was built here in 2014, making the location slightly more tourist-friendly. But that is about all the authorities have been able to do more than three decades after Shaheed Benazir Bhutto's first tenure, which is a crying shame.

The 25,000 acre site has only one view point for tourists to enjoy the spectacular sunrise and sunset. The sitting area of Benazir

View Point is in poor condition furnished with only a few wooden benches.

Contacted by the Truth International, Authority Chairman Rafique Ahmed Jamali expressed his satisfaction over the Authority's role, although he admitted development projects are moving slowly due to paucity of funds allocated under the five-year plan. He lamented the federal government failed to meet its commitment to provide development funding.

Jamali said expansion and widening of the 30-km road from Johi was a priority to make the site more accessible by motor transport, and claimed the project was expected to reach completion this year.

A chair lift project had been scrapped on account of high project cost and lack of funding, said the Authority Chairman. "We have enough residence capacity [for tourists], the restaurant is functional and security is available twenty-four hours", he said.

Locals believe drive and dedication can go a long way towards uplifting Gorakh Hill from virtual anonymity to become a popular tourist destination – as illustrated by the example of Juman Jamali, the restaurant contractor and a local of Johi.

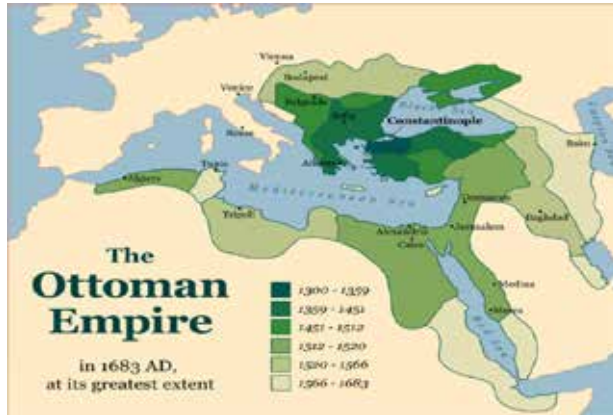
"Not only has he made the restaurant a success, he has put in a dedicated effort to make Gorakh Hill more popular", said a local of Johi who frequents the spot. "He attracts educational institutions and tourist companies, he organises musical events and mountain trekking campaigns - he does all he can to attract tourists from big cities of country".

The writer is Islamabad based journalist, contributing with digital and electronic media.



Constantinople: From Conquest to Capitulation

By Azmat Mumtaz Saqib



Why do international analysts raise alarm about Ottoman legacy whenever President Erdogan of Turkey speaks out against oppression in Palestine, Rohingya or Kashmir? Why does an economically stable Turkey reflecting upon its Islamic past haunt the region surrounding Turkey?

To find answers to questions like these, let us peep into 1453, and be part of the army of the young Sultan Muhammad – the 21-years-old monarch charged with the fervor of Prophet of Islam's Hadith, "One day Constantinople will be conquered. Great is the commander who conquer it. Great are his soldiers."

As he prepared his land and naval forces for the challenge, the Sultan got the world's largest cannon built by the Hungarian gun maker Orban, whose bid was too high for the cash strapped Byzantine King Constantine XI.

The Sultan was looking for a cannon which could breach the three-walled fortress of the Byzantine Constantinople, famed as the jewel of the world.

Despite the two-and-a-half feet diameter cannonballs visiting destruction on the fortifications, the siege extended to fifty-five days with almost daily military and naval engagements. It took the extraordinary feat of Turkish naval ships sliding over land bridge of oiled wooden planks into the Golden Horn to overcome King Constantine XI, who defended the city valiantly and laid down his life on 29 May 1453.

When Europe was passing through the middle ages, Iberian Peninsula Muslim Spain (711-1492 AD) was the intellectual lighthouse of Europe till the year 1492, when the Muslims were ethnically cleansed and expelled.

Martin Luther's Protestant revolt in 1517 against Catholic exploitation embroiled European powers in religious wars which lasted till late eighteenth century. Ottoman rule spread from Anatolia to Eastern Europe, Middle East and North Africa during the reigns of her first ten outstanding Sultans from Usman Bey (1299-1327) to Suleiman the Magnificent (1512-1520).

The Ottoman Navy established its dominance in the Mediterranean under the Admiralty of Khairuddin Barbarossa. Sultan Selim I brought Egypt and Hejaz under his rule and was also handed over Khilafat from Abbasids.

During the reign of next ten weak Sultans, power struggles raged involving Valida (mother) Sultan, Grand Viziers and the elite Janissary force. The Sultanate still expanded its territories reaching 2.3 million square kilometers in 1672.

The Ottoman Empire was a multinational, multiethnic, multilingual empire controlling most of Southeastern Europe, Central Europe, parts of Eastern Europe, Western Asia, the Caucasus, North Africa and the Horn of Africa.

The Ottomans' spectacular expansion was due to her Warrior Sultans of the first three centuries. They developed a very advanced system of governance with Central and Provincial Administrations. Sultans were advised by their Divan (cabinet), headed by the Grand Vizier. The ruling nobles were called Askeri.

The main administrative branches at the center were the military, the courts, and the clergy. The judicial and executive branches were separate. The Kazi was the Chief Judge who could hear both civil and military cases.

The Sultan's mother was head of the harem, where all the royal females, concubines, and slave girls lived. Sultan's wife was second in command. The harem had its own schools for education and training. If the new Sultan were too young, Valida Sultan would be the de facto ruler.

Reaya were the taxpaying lower classes, and below them were the slaves, both males and females. Slavery was legal all over the world back then.

Janissaries were the world's first organized standing army units created by the second Sultan Orhan Ghazi (1327-1362). They formed the Sultan's elite fighting force. The rest of the cavalymen (Sipahis) were managed through Timar system – a system in which projected revenue of a conquered territory was distributed in the form of temporary land grants among Sipahis and other members of the military class including Janissaries and other slave warriors of Sultan. Instead of pays, the earnings were the compensation of their services.

Ottoman forces were the first ones in Europe to use gun powder and matchlock muskets. Besides foreign minister and finance minister (Raes ul Kitab), there were tax collectors. Tax farming was prevalent in the first three centuries, a system where collection of agricultural tax was outsourced to notables of regions.

Beside the Palace schools and training centers for Janissaries, the Ottoman Empire had traditional style schooling. The primary schools were mekteps and secondary schools were medreses. Many such schools were within masjids.

Accordingly the operators of the masjids served as the headmasters of the mekteps. Medical and engineering schools were also introduced 1830s onwards.

The empire continued to maintain a flexible and strong economy, society, and military throughout the 17th and much of the 18th century. However during a long period of peace between 1740 and 1768, the Ottoman military system fell behind their European rivals, the Habsburg and Russian Empires.

The Ottoman period of rise occurred between 1300 and 1700, Stagnation between 1700 and 1800 and Decline from 1800 to 1908.

The Ottoman stagnation could be attributed to royal fratricide, i.e., killing of Sultan's brothers to eliminate the threat to the ruling Sultan.

Power struggle involving Valida Sultan, Janissary force and the Grand Viziers weakened the Sultans' grip on power and weakened central control of autonomous border regions. Tax farming system also became corrupt and large sums of taxes were retained by the nobles.

Janissaries became more interested in power struggles at Istanbul than far off war fronts. Meanwhile, a resurgent Europe equipped with mass education due to printing press, industrialization and mass production of military equipment became ever stronger financially and militarily.

Enlightenment, French and Industrial revolutions, and secularist revolts against the clergy propelled the once decadent Europe into the modern era, resulting in scientific progress and enhanced military might. Colonies of Europe provided raw material and consumer markets for the newly mechanized Western Europe.

The old Empires with stagnant monarchical systems were no match to the dynamism and military might of Western European onslaught. The Ottoman Empire sat astride the shortest trade routes to African and Asian markets, both for European colonialists and Tsar's Russia.

In diplomatic history, the Eastern Question was the issue of the political considerations of the European Great Powers in light of this. The Eastern Question encompassed a myriad interrelated elements: Ottoman military defeats, Ottoman institutional insolvency, the ongoing Ottoman political and economic modernization program, the rise of ethno-religious nationalism in its provinces, and Great Power rivalries, especially Western Europe against Russia.

Britain and France wanted the fruits of Ottoman collapse to fall into their laps exclusively and keep the Russians at bay. Financially weak Ottomans were lured into the Crimean War of 1856. The basis for the war was the struggle to control two of the holiest Churches in Jerusalem between Roman Catholics (French backed) and Orthodox Christians (Russian backed).

Britain, France and the Ottomans won the war but the Ottomans came under European debt and in 1875 declared bankruptcy.

To reverse the decline of Ottoman power, young Turks were sent to Britain, France and Germany for modern education as well as military and administrative trainings in early 1800s.

Upon their return, Young Turks impregnated with western ideas pressured the Khaliah and his government for military, administrative and legal reform on the lines of Western institutions, especially, post revolution France.

The Khalifa introduced Tanzimat (meaning reorganizations) reforms between 1839 and 1871. The objectives of the programme included modernization, centralization, increasing revenue and forestalling fragmentation of the empire.

Modern concepts of secularism, patriotism equal citizenry prevailed over the centuries old Sharia-based caliphate system. In peripheral regions of the Sultanate, struggle for national rights proliferated. London and Paris became centers for Young Turks and Arab nationalists' political activities.

Autonomous regions of Egypt and Syria were infiltrated by Christian missionaries with the permission of Governor of Egypt Muhammad Ali and his son Ibrahim Pasha in Syria. Schools and colleges were established. American University of Beirut started as Protestant College by American missionaries. By the late 19th century, young Arabs had become more nationalist than Ottomanized.

In 1876, a new round of reforms was introduced by the new Khalifa Abdul Hamid II, including the arrival of a bi-cameral parliament and an empowered Grand Vizier. However, the Khalifa abrogated the constitution in 1878 and ruled as an Ottoman monarch.

In 1881, a secret society called Committee for Union and Progress (CUP) was established for reinstatement of the 1876 constitution. Young Turks and the CUP infiltrated the army ranks, quietly promoting like-minded members to key posts in military and Administration.

In 1908, Sultan Abdul Hamid II was forced to abdicate since the Sultanate had again gone bankrupt. Sultan Muhammad was made constitutional Khalifa. Elections were held and CUP eventually dominated Turkish politics till the start of WW1.



General Talat Pasha, Enver Pasha and Jemal Pasha dominated the Turkish Politics till the end of WW1 (1918). The trio were responsible for Turkey's Alliance with Germany. Colonel Mustafa Kemal Pasha (later Atatürk) opposed them openly, professing to join the British side.

The alliance comprising Germany, Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire was defeated in WWI. British Forces entered Istanbul in 1918 and Ottoman caliphate became subservient to Allied Powers of Britain, France and Russia.

To be continued.

O Glorious Past!

The Downfall of Pakistan Hockey



By Ali Abdullah

Few international hockey teams have a history as storied as the Pakistan men's side. Four World Cup titles, the most by any nation in the history of the sport. Three Olympic gold medals, including the first to break the six consecutive golds won by neighbours and arch-rivals India. For anyone growing up watching hockey, as recently as during the 1990s, few teams personified big match temperament and swagger like the Pakistanis.

Today, though, that swagger has faded and the entire edifice on which Pakistan hockey rests lies teetering on the edge. For a nation with three Olympic golds, and consecutive appearances at the Games between 1948 and 2012 (broken only by a boycott in 1980), they run the risk of a heavy decline.

As dramatic as Pakistan hockey's slump may seem, it was anything but sudden. It has been a painful decline for the most successful team in the history of hockey, which began when Pakistan not only failed to win the 1986 World Cup in England but finished 11th in a 12-team event.

The team that had won three out of its five previous WC outings suddenly finishing at the bottom was perhaps the biggest shock in the world of sports at that time. In the following event, which was organized in their backyard, Pakistan again failed to lift the trophy.

This was perhaps the most crucial time because two years after the 1990 Hockey World Cup, Pakistan found another hero in Imran Khan who marched on to make history as he lifted the Cricket World Cup.

This shift was especially significant because after 1992 despite Pakistan again winning the hockey World Cup in 1994 the media attention that once belonged to hockey was now riveted to cricket in Pakistan.

For the last many years, the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) has been unable to give maximum international exposure and facilities to senior as well as junior players. What is more disturbing is that the crippling financial state of the sport has finally struck a killer blow to the country's national game.

However, such has been the state of Pakistan hockey over the past two decades that it came as no shock to anybody when the team failed to qualify.

For the mandarins who run the hockey show, though, the priorities lay elsewhere. The harsh truth is that the national sport has been reduced to a game of musical chairs, where the officials and Olympians of yesteryear have taken turns to deprive hockey of both prestige and funds.

At the same time, the country's obsession with cricket and the government's indifferent attitude have not helped as the corporate sector and well-wishers have switched their loyalties to the gentleman's game, the highly successful Pakistan Super League being a prime example, relegating the national sport to the background.

It is also very unfortunate that the PHF has become politicized and nepotistic over the years, just like its cricket counterpart. In the national sphere and the sporting arena

the root of our dilemma is the notorious system of patronage and imposed cronies, to the exclusion of merit and professionalism.

Under the powerful patron's benevolent gaze, the pick and choose appointees can survive scandals and failures that would crush an ordinary mortal. These are times when one fails to figure out what is keeping Pakistan hockey alive.

In other countries, the people running the hockey affairs contribute by taking professional decisions and by executing them with competence rather than on the basis of personal preference and bias. But, frankly, we are not such a nation.

The statements given by the top PHF officials in the national media aim at to make people believe things are headed in the right direction and that there is light at the end of the tunnel. The fact is that the way things are being conducted, the days ahead are anything but bright.

Pakistan hockey, which remained up in the clouds for more than three decades, is not the same force that it used to be. Hockey structure lacks in terms of skills and competitiveness. The very base of the game has shrunk beyond belief.

Pakistan hockey's slow and painful decline began after 1994. Cricket, with better financial rewards and glamour, slowly replaced hockey in schools and colleges. For the last two decades, the government has done nothing seriously for promotion of the national sport of the country but wants results. What a pity.

The downslide coincides with the advent of artificial turf that gained currency in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It changed the dynamics of Asian hockey, rendering the dribble-and-dodge game of short passes that Indians and Pakistanis were so good at completely obsolete.

It also cut the careers of players by half, and demanded greater physical fitness than before. The Asians have not been able to match the fitness levels of Western players. Also, the International Hockey Federation (FIH) has over the decades changed some

basic rules of the game that the Asians had mastered in their heyday. This also proved to be a disadvantage.

Building a strong team is not an overnight process and it takes years to put together a balanced side keeping in view the modern approach to competitive international hockey, and the exacting scientific preparations that the international teams cannot do without.

The standard of the game is changing so rapidly that the gap between the best and the second in line has narrowed considerably. In fact, the difference between the four top teams has become so small that whenever any two of them meet it is very difficult to predict the outcome of the game.

Failure to qualify for the Olympics is the most forgetful incident for Pakistan hockey. What is worse, Pakistan hockey seems to be on an inexorable downward slide. And realistically speaking, it is difficult to harbour any hopes of the national team doing any better or revive itself to its former glory in coming years with the cronies running the show and incapable officials handling the affairs of the national sport of the country.

The future of hockey in Pakistan heavily depends on paying attention to grassroots hockey structure. Pakistan was once a fantastic hockey nation that ruled at the international level for decades on the power of their talent and skill. Now they are struggling to make their mark at the highest level of the game.

Pakistan hockey needs adequate hockey activities at early level which is only possible by evolving a system which could ensure that hockey gets due attention among the youth.

To rise from the ashes, Pakistan hockey requires strong financial backup, commitment and self-belief. Only hard and consistent effort leads to success. To mount a hard and consistent effort, Pakistan hockey needs improvement all over at every tier of the game at the domestic level to show an upward graph.

In the absence of these, we should not even dream of reaching for the sky.



Shaan Would Love to Play Allama Iqbal

A Conversation with Pakistan's Evergreen Silver Screen Idol



By Hasan Kazami

Shaan Shahid is one of those stars of Pakistani film industry who keeps shining even after a new galaxy arises before them.

A household name in the 90s when Pakistani film industry was called Lollywood, Shaan started his career in 1990 with a feature film *Bulandi* opposite Reema Khan at the age of 19. He has since starred in almost 300 Urdu and Punjabi films.

Shaan came into a new avatar in veteran Shoaib Mansoor's debut film *Khuda Ke Liye* in 2007 and since then he is also doing big-budget films of the new Pakistani cinema, but believes Pakistani film industry is still struggling for its revival.

Knowing the art of changing with the time, Shaan continues working in films selectively and has bigger plans to create space for the new generation to keep the industry back on its feet. He recently met with Chairman Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir, Shehryar Khan Afridi and vowed to work with the committee to help preserve, project and proliferate Kashmir issue with its cultural aspect.

The Truth International (TTI) talked to Shaan Shahid about his upcoming venture, a feature film *Zarrar* and other projects he has started. He talked candidly about many

things which are very dear and close to his heart and which he is very enthusiastic about.

Shaan is hopeful that he would release his film in 2021, which was supposed to be released this year but faced delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The post production of my film was scheduled in London but it is delayed too", he added.

Zarrar is a spy thriller in which Shaan is playing the detective. "This kind of spy thriller has never been made in Pakistan before. It is a combination of fiction and reality. The storyline is based on some facts and the villains are derived from real life individuals, who are actually doing a lot against Pakistan."

On his objection to the dependence of Pakistani cinema on Bollywood for so many years, Shaan said he had been misunderstood.

"I am not against it but I think unless we have our art and culture thriving in our country, we should not promote others' on such level. We should give opportunities to our young directors and writers and promote our own craft instead of depending on Bollywood."

The Waar star also clarified that he never thought Pakistani stars who have gained fame and made money in Bollywood were disrespecting their country in any way,

“I am not against them if they think they can have better opportunities anywhere in the world but it is not always to just be famous and make more money. Right now, I think my country needs me more. I want to create a platform and do infrastructural reforms in the entertainment industry of Pakistan.”

When asked if he would prefer to work somewhere else other than India, he was quick to reply, “Yes” but not for stereotypical roles like if they need a terrorist, they look to hire actors from Pakistan or India. Moreover, he wishes to work in collaborative projects in which they also come to shoot in Pakistan and benefit its economy.

On film industry’s apparent move from Lahore to Karachi since its recent revival, Shaan said it was because these days, investors were from Karachi and they hired talent from Karachi.

“These days 80 percent film production is in Karachi and only 20 percent work is being done in Lahore, while in past this ratio was opposite”, he said. “I think there is a need to create a harmony and balance in this proportion, so those who really know how to make films can come forward and the industry can flourish”.

“I am not saying that the present industry is not doing well but there is a technique and treatment for everything just like the pace and rhythm of a 50 overs match and 20 overs match. Presently, the films which are being made only cater to the elite class which is just a fraction of society consisting of merely 20 thousand people. I want to make cinema the entertainment of the masses again.”

The star of blockbuster Khuda Ke Liye doubled down on his tweet objecting to drama serial Ertugrul being aired on the state television as he thinks PTV should project more on the stories of the subcontinent – like how Islam came to this region.

“I think this part of our history still needs to be documented. I would be more connected to it than any Turkish play. Ertugrul is indeed a good play but my connection with it only starts when it is dubbed in Urdu. I think PTV has the responsibility to do what Turkey is doing on their state channel TRT.”

Asked who he would like to play if such a period piece was produced, he says, “I would love to play Allama Iqbal”, but adds. “I don’t know how much of it is relevant to the Islamic history of this region.”

Shan feels strongly that Pakistan should get its own OTT platforms.

“It is a part of creating the infrastructure. I have given many proposals to the government. We also need our own OTT to get out of the control of Indian lobby in this region especially on Netflix and Amazon. They appoint an Indian as CEO of this region and consider Pakistan as a part of it.”

He added that if our government reaches out to Netflix and Amazon and deals with them on our own terms, there is more opportunity there for our films, dramas, music and sports productions.

What is his stance on the recent statement by the PM blaming private channels showing content against our values and putting negative effects on society? “We can’t control the content of private channels. I want to see if PTV produces the content that the Prime Minister thinks should be on television channels.”

Asked whether he would like to collaborate with any of the middle-eastern countries, he says, “Sure, but I think for showbiz, you have to have a vision. They have to decide and come forward to invest into the areas where it is easier to build a narrative. It should be on the government level in a balanced way where the economies of both the countries benefit.”

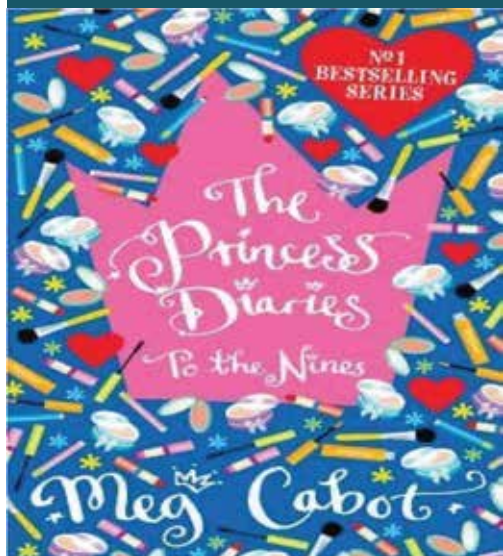
On defending every decision of present government and not criticizing them like he did previous ones, Shan was asked if he would defend those who he considered wrong or to be an addition in the thousands of people criticizing the government day and night on television and social media.

“I am not a member of PTI or any other political party. I think it is my right to tell who I voted for. I admit that at present there is nothing on which I defend the government but the race is not yet finished. Give them due time. As a Pakistani I feel that this is the last hope for democracy in the country.”



The Princess Diaries to The Nines

Author: Meg Cabot
Reviewed by: Alizay Ashraf
ISBN: 978-0-330-44855-0
Pages: 269
Publisher: HarperCollins



The Princess Diaries are a book series written by Meg Cabot about a young girl Mia, who has hit an all-time low. Her friend Lilly is not speaking to her; someone is posting horrible things about her online and because of that, the love of her life Michael, has dumped her.

Mia's life is crashing down around her, Michael has left to work in Japan, Lilly isn't talking to her and her grandmother is trying to give a speech at a big charity event. School is getting harder and she is behind on nearly every class. Mia has well and truly hit rock bottom.

I really liked this book, Mia seems to be growing up, she still has the witty comments and silly humor but she is more grounded. Lilly isn't in it as much and I actually enjoyed it more. Her controlling presence overwhelms the story a bit and Mia blossomed without her. I love that J.P. is becoming more

permanent, he is such a great character, and I love Tina too. I actually found myself gripped to this one, laughing out loud and even sad a little bit. I could really feel Mia's heartache and thought it was well written. There seemed to be a firmer plot to this one and so flowed better.

She really learned to take responsibility and took wise decisions. She realizes that having a love life is not as important as keeping yourself happy and because of that, she stops asking Michael to come back. I almost think she's more relatable now that she's gone through her transformation. Her breakdown was believable and consistent with her character through the book.

I personally like this book and would definitely recommend it. The book was very relatable and enjoyable. I think children above the age of 8 would love it and would be laughing throughout.

The Death Cure

The death cure is written by James Dashner about a boy, Thomas who has been running around ragged during the first two books of The Maze Runner series: first he had to escape the Maze with his Glader friends in Book One; then, in Book Two, he had to endure the Scorch Trials, a deadly trek through a hot, barren wasteland.

I had mixed feelings throughout the novel. There were thrilling moments that made my heart rate pick up and stopped me from putting the book down in gripping, fast-paced action sequences and heart-breaking decisions. However, there were also moments that went by so fast that they felt emotionless and bleak. It is sort of the same issue I've had throughout all of the books whereby I felt more character development was needed. I got the impression that Thomas, Minho and Newt were supposed to be the 'golden trio' of the series, but their relationships felt weak and, well, underdeveloped. One thing I

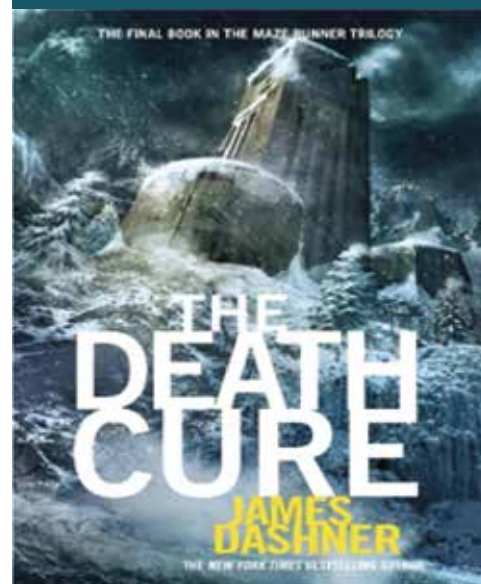
did love was the references to the first book. It was both strange and wonderful to, amongst the chaos, stop for a second while Thomas remembers his short but eventful time in the Glade.

This book was pretty enjoyable, I never felt that I was completely lost while reading, nor did I ever get bored of the plot. I'm also pretty glad and somewhat surprised that my favourite character made it to the end of the book, because there were times where I was almost certain that he was toast.

The main themes of the book are, death, suffering, madness, lies and trust, memory and manipulation, hate, friendship and morality and ethics.

There have been ups and downs, in both action and emotion, as well as my opinions about the book, but I don't regret reading it because I enjoyed them and had fun. I think children above 13 should read this book due to violence.

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Reviewed by: Alizay Ashraf
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Publisher: Dell Publishing



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