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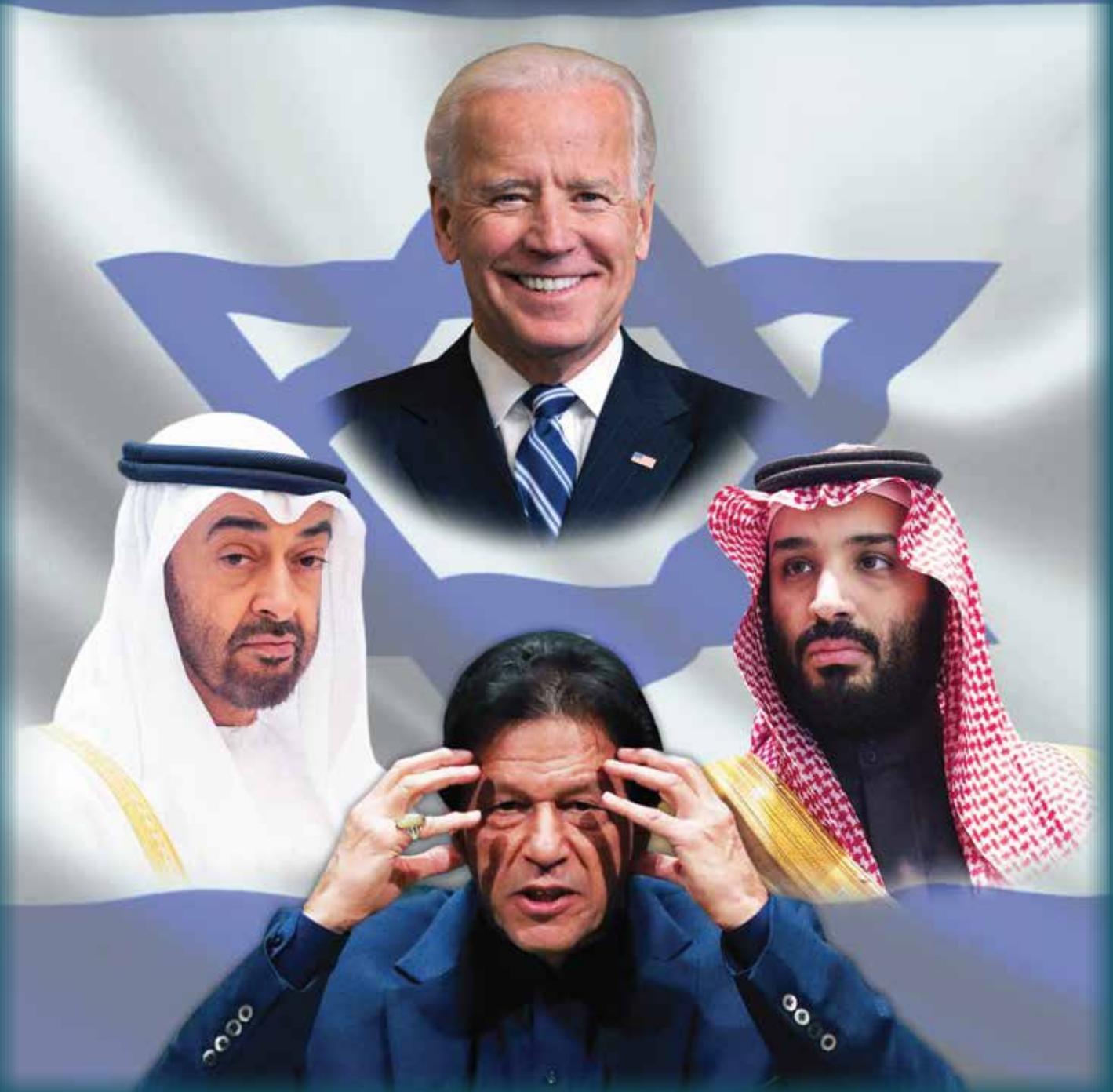
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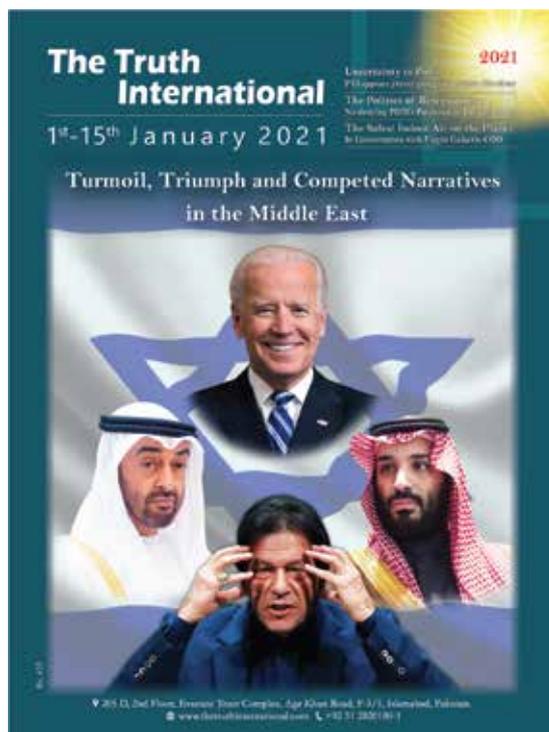
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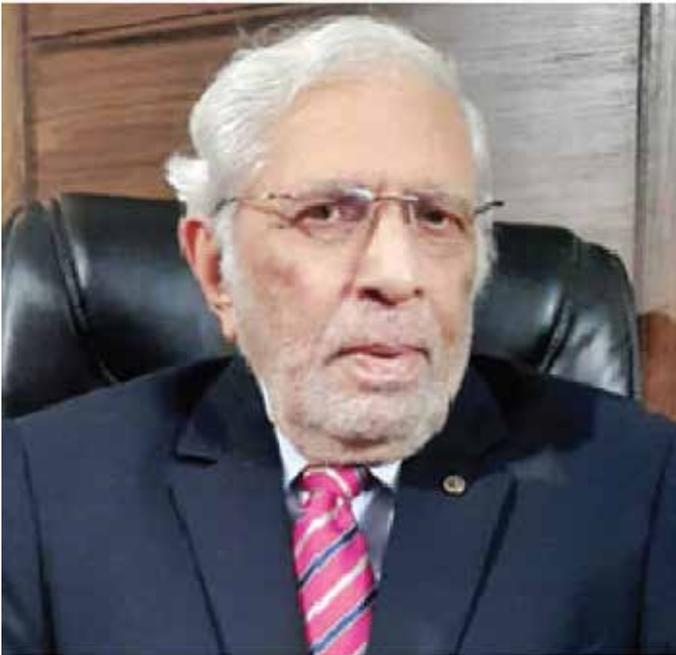
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Coping with the New Normal

By M. Ziauddin



To our rude shock we suddenly find our friends are not as friendly and at the same time the belligerence of our enemy number one even more warlike. Therefore, the sooner we recognize the process of normalization of relations between Israel and Arab countries as Middle East's new normal and India's aggressive wooing of Arab world as an existential threat to our very existence, the less problematic it would be for Pakistan to ward off the dangers being posed, as a result, to our sovereignty.

Lately, our relations with United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) have been traversing from good to bad and then finally to worse. The immediate provocation seems to have been provided largely by our emotional outburst at what we thought to be OIC's insensitive response to the unilateral assimilation of India Held Kashmir into the Indian Union on August 5, 2019. Reacting, Riyadh demanded we repay part of a loan Pakistan had taken from the kingdom. The promised oil facility has also been cancelled. In the past such responses from Riyadh were unthinkable. Also, KSA has cancelled a proposed \$20b investment for setting up a refinery in Gwader. Likewise, the UAE has stopped issuing work and visit visas to Pakistanis presumably costing us some 800-1000 jobs on daily basis which are likely to go to the Indians who continue to be welcomed into the Emirates. Last year the Saudis perhaps seemingly wary of seeing the formation of a bloc including Pakistan, Malaysia, Iran and Turkey lest it challenge Arab 'leadership' of the Muslim world successfully pressured Pakistan to stay away from a summit in Malaysia that Riyadh saw emerging as an alternative to the OIC. And that our

parliament did not permit our Army to join the KSA/UAE military campaign against Yemen in 2015 too had caused a slow burn in the two countries against Pakistan.

Ominously, at this very juncture India is being seen expanding its footprint in the region. Prime Minister Modi has visited the region eight times since 2014, going to UAE three times and to KSA twice. Saudi Arabia is investing \$42 billion in setting up a refinery in India. Bilateral trade between the two amounts to \$27 billion. Both KSA and UAE have held joint Naval exercises with India. KSA has signed two important agreements with India, one a Strategic Partnership Council and the other a Joint Committee for defence cooperation under which KSA officers would be provided training by India. And to top it all, for the first time ever India's Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General Manoj Mukund Naravane visited the UAE and KSA recently. Meanwhile, a deadly network of terrorism built by India's premier spy agency, the RAW has been uncovered recently. This clandestine network is said to have been working over the last 15 or so years to destabilize Pakistan, especially disrupting the CPEC and defusing the on-going freedom struggle in India assimilated Kashmir.

Pakistanis have a special regard for the KSA as the custodian of Islam's holiest cities and the Kingdom currently hosts over a million Pakistani workers who send home approximately \$6billion annually while our workers in UAE remit annually around \$5b. So, going forward, Pakistan should by all means work towards improving and strengthening the bilateral relationship with KSA and UAE. However, this should not come at the cost of our sovereignty; this country must remain free to take decisions regarding foreign policy (like recognizing or not recognizing Israel) that are in its best interests. This should be sorted out when the Saudi foreign minister visits Pakistan next month.

Moreover, we must focus more on building lasting foreign relations on the basis of economic interdependence rather than being known as a country whose only endowment is its Army and which is available to friends on rent. We must lessen at the earliest our dependence on 'free lunches' from friends who are no more as friendly and try to stand on our own two feet, no matter how feeble, so that no one is able to exploit our weaknesses, the biggest one being the Kashmir dispute. Modern slaves are not in chains; they are in debt. That is the kind of slavery Pakistan has been suffering from all these over seven decades of its existence. And we must unchain ourselves from this slavery at the earliest. The best way to do it is by acquiring knowledge economy and helping in the process our predominantly youthful population in learning the skills needed to modernize our economy, discarding at the same time the so-called Washington consensus and the failed theory of 'trickle down'.

The “Arab Spring” Decade

Turmoil, triumph, and competed narratives in the Middle East



By Ibrahim Moiz

A decade has passed since the beginning of the uprisings that convulsed the Middle Eastern region and defined the 2010s. Like a line of dominoes, revolt after revolt rocked the region's largely autocratic regimes in 2010-11, and a new string began in the late 2010s. The full consequences are as yet unclear, but the foretaste in the 2010s has been dramatic enough – from democratic transition to brutal war. Both proponents and opponents of the uprisings have coined macronarratives – respectively cheering a popular awakening among the Arab-majority societies, or bemoaning the instability and violence of a supposedly backward people that only an iron fist could suppress. Yet the contexts of different countries hit by the “Arab Spring” varied enormously. This article will review their actual record.

At the turn of the decade, the region was ruled by a variety of regimes, that ranged from foreign-protected rentier monarchies – such as the Gulf states – to officially “republican” dictatorships dominated by security apparatuses – such as Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Syria. Theoretically democratic Lebanon was in fact divided into a highly corrupt and unstable confessionalist system, as was Iraq – which, with such a system force-fed by an American bayonet, was additionally at war. Also intermittently at war were Yemen and Sudan, whose relatively weak military

regimes faced threats from regionalist or ideological opponents and reacted with a mixture of cooption and force.

Insofar as there was any common regional factor, it was that narrow elites operated in a climate dominated by the narrative of the 2000s' global “war on terrorism” to undercut internal opposition – especially when opposition could be painted in sweeping terms as “Islamic radicals”. Still, elite responses varied, from repression as in Syria and Tunisia to cooption as in Yemen and Sudan. Clearly, such a varied field would have varied types of and responses to popular unrest.

TUNISIA. Tunisia, the “cradle of the Arab spring”, represents the only unqualified success story of a transition to representative rule. Dictator Zinelabidine Benali (1987-2011) fled without a fight; a political arrangement was reached whereby the old elite –reorganized in the secularist Nidaa Tounes party founded by former foreign minister Beji Sebsi – competed with the Islamist Nahda party led by Rachid Ghannouchi. So far, major tensions between such camps have been contained; Tunisia's main challenges have not been political, as elsewhere, but economic. The election of a respected outsider, lawyer Kais Saied, to replace Sebsi in 2019 prompted optimism for a lasting change in Tunisian politics.

EGYPT. The uprising of early 2011 ended the thirty-year dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011); important factors included the belated support of both the major Islamist Ikhwan party and the long-dominant military establishment. The 2012 election saw the military's choice, former airforce commander Ahmed Shafik, lose to the Ikhwan's candidate Mohamed Morsi. Within a year, however, Morsi faced opposition bankrolled by the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. This encouraged his defence minister Abdelfattah Sisi to mount a coup and a crackdown that began, savagely, against the Ikhwan and has steadily expanded across society in a regime repressive even by the standards of its predecessors.

BAHRAIN. Resource abundance, foreign protection, and small citizenry meant that most Gulf monarchies rode the 2010s without significant disturbances; the exception was Bahrain, whose largely Shia population had long chafed at the ruling Khalifa family. In spring 2011, the monarchy's position was sufficiently untenable for the Gulf Council, led by Saudi Arabia, to send in a military force that crushed the opposition. Largely held together by foreign mercenaries, the Khalifa family retains power, its ruthless prime minister Khalifa bin Salman passing away last month, just short of fifty years in the position.



LIBYA. Muammar Qaddafi's regime ended abruptly after four decades when he threatened to crush a revolt initially limited to the Mediterranean ports Benghazi and Misurata. His veteran interior minister Abdelfattah Younis crucially defected and seized Benghazi, where a diverse coalition rapidly formed with support by a North Atlantic Treaty Organization that used Qaddafi's vitriolic threats as a casum belle for humanitarian intervention. Yet after Qaddafi's overthrow and lynching, the coalition unravelled. The maximalism of the longstanding rebels – including Islamists who felt insecure after the 2013 coup in neighbouring Egypt – combined with regionalist opportunism, competing agendas of foreign backers, and the highly militarized polarization of politics to produce a civil war by the mid-2010s. When the revolutionary camp seized Tripoli, their opponents rallied around opportunistic general-turned-warlord Khalifa Haftar in Tobruq in what were essentially competing coalitions of militias. International negotia-

tion brought a compromise candidate, Fayiz Sarraj, to formally lead the Tripoli government, but in 2019 the tension snapped as Haftar mounted a brazen and ultimately failed attack on Tripoli.

SYRIA. The Syrian war has been the bloodiest war of the 2010s; the minoritarian Baath regime's survival has come at the cost of half a million lives and the flight of half the country. In 2011 Bashar Assad authorized a particularly brutal crackdown that provoked an insurgency, largely among the long-suppressed Sunni majority, backed by Turkey. The revolt, which included Islamists of various types, soon seized most of the country, but the arrival from Iraq of Daaish – with whom both regime and rebels had hitherto flirted – reinforced Assad's claim to power; so too did pitiless foreign intervention by Iran, Russia, and such militias as Hezbollah, which by 2018 had recaptured much ground. The United States intervened to form an enclave in northeast Syria dominated by Kurdish communist rebels from Turkey. Twin pressure by both Russia and the United States threatened Turkish support to the insurgency; the costly loss of Aleppo in 2016 prompted splits between the rebel organizations – between those, such as Ahrarul-Sham, who favoured cooperation with Turkey and those, such as the Qaida-originated Nusra Front, who opposed it – and by the end of the decade, Syria was partitioned between different spheres of influence guarded by foreign powers.

YEMEN. Unlike the above cases, Yemen was already at war entering the 2010s. Ali Saleh's three decades in power had featured constant manoeuvre between factions – “dancing,” as he put it, “on the heads of snakes” – most recently when, alongside commander Ali Muhsin, he had fought an on-off war with the Houthis in the north during the 2000s, and to a lesser extent a Qaida offshoot in the south. Tensions between the Alis had long simmered, however, and when Muhsin abandoned Saleh by supporting the 2011 revolt, it took a Gulf-mediated accord to shift Saleh out in favour of his deputy Abdrabbuh Hadi. Yet the cynical Saleh then allied with the Houthis to oust Hadi and Muhsin from Sanaa in 2014-15. Resurfacing in Aden, Hadi became a figurehead for an anti-Houthi coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which relied on mass bombardment. The complication was compounded by Saleh's desertion of, and murder by, the Houthis in 2017, and by the contrast between Riyadh – who favoured Hadi – and Abu Dhabi, who favoured the southern separatist Intiqali coalition that repeatedly tried to oust Hadi from Aden and break away. The upshot was that as factions continued to shift in the civil war, Yemen was stricken by war and famine.

IRAQ. Like Yemen, Iraq entered the decade at war, after the 2003 invasion by the United States and Britain installed a sectarian government heavily dependent on two divergent suzerains – the United States and Iran. The tyranny of Nouri Maliki compounded the alienation in particular of Sunni Iraqis, who rallied to either the practically autonomous Kurdish region in the north or around insurgent groups, most bloodthirsty among them the millenarian Daaish. Daaish's takeover of much of Iraq, and the announcement of its so-called caliphate, in 2014 sent shockwaves through the region; though it forced Maliki's belated resignation, the ensuing campaign was dominated by both brutal American airpower and by sectarian militias. Daaish was destroyed by the end of the decade, but Iraq remained little more than a vassal of two powers – America and Iran – whose competing agendas were reinforced when, at the start of 2020, Donald Trump assassinated Iranian

generallissimo and powerbroker Ghassem Soleimany. That some avenue for popular revolt remained was attested by major protests in Baghdad and the south in 2018-19, but it is very unlikely that anymore will come from these than came out of the earlier, repressed Iraqi uprising.

ALGERIA. Algeria, no stranger to revolt, had a precedent to the 2010s revolts; its only free election, in 1992, had seen the victory of an Islamist party that was crushed by the military; the 1990s saw a ferocious crackdown against both mainstream Islamist opposition as well as a Daaish-style millenarian cult, and ended in a military-dominated regime led by Abdelkader Bouteflika (1999-2019). It was surprising, given Bouteflika's obvious dotage and the history of Algerian unrest, that the decade passed by without much incident. In 2019, however, Bouteflika's attempt at yet another election provoked a widespread, nonviolent uprising that brought down the government. The military shepherded the transition, and the election in December 2019 saw a fairly establishmentarian winner, Abdelmajid Tebboune. Though grievances have yet to be meaningfully addressed, Algeria appears to have enjoyed a relatively stable transition.

SUDAN. Meanwhile, Sudan's own dictator Omar Bashir (1989-2019) fell from power. He was somewhat unusual among Arab dictators in that his regime had officially espoused rather than opposed political Islam; this coupled with years of bloody counterinsurgency against the south – which seceded, with major economic consequences, in 2011 – and in Darfur had rendered Sudan a near-pariah state on the international scene. Bashir constantly flitted between fighting and negotiating with rebels, some of who entered the corridors of power with their militias: the military regime was uneasily bolstered by such militia commanders as the bloodthirsty Hamidati Dagolo. When a round of protests erupted in April 2019, general Abdelfattah Burhan formed a transitional government that aimed to expunge the ancien regime before elections. Some changes clearly reflect popular sentiment; others, such as the separation of Islam from politics and the recognition of Israel, reflect foreign pressure.

CONCLUSIONS.

We have seen several patterns. Firstly, the populism of the uprisings was insufficient to guard them against both regime crack-downs and manipulation by foreign powers – whether in favour of regime or revolt. Syria's regime was saved by Russia, Iraq's by the United States, and both by Iran. Turkey backed the Syrian revolt, while Saudi Arabia crushed the Bahraini regime. Qatar reflexively backed the revolts in Libya, Syria, and Egypt; by contrast the United Arab Emirates, with its general suspicion of political Islam and its promotion of the “war on terrorism” paradigm, backed autocrats and aspiring autocrats in Syria, Libya, and Egypt.

It is clear that the 2010s revolts were neither an inspiring tale of awakening that the Qatari outlook suggests or the grim lesson of popular villainy that the Emiratis claim. The aims and trajectories of various uprisings varied, some peaceful and others violent; as in any populist movement coalitions formed and broke. No faction claiming to exclusively represent the “people” at large can be taken seriously; the decisive influence of three generals called Abdelfattah – the pro-revolt Libyan Younis, the prevaricating Sudanese Burhan, and the anti-revolt Egyptian Sisi – shows that a few people in high places can still affect decisive change.

On the other hand, rhetoric of regime stability is equally misleading. Foreign intervention repeatedly rescued client regimes from collapse, often at horrendous cost; Libya, where foreign intervention ousted a regime, was the exception to this rule. The decade exposed the weaknesses and often savage survival techniques of state apparatus in the region. Yet it is clear that an organized, considered response – the sort that the Ikhwan unsuccessfully tried in Egypt – is required for a meaningful change, and that such a response cannot overhaul the system overnight. The corruption and cruelty of their regimes forced much of the region into revolt; yet the international order usually disadvantages such revolts in favour of the devil that it knows.

Ibrahim Moix 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.



Qatar, Saudi Ready to Bury the Hatchet?

Pakistan on the Horns of Dilemma after Sunni Camp's Recognition of Israel

By Umer Farooq



In its last six to eight months Trump Administration in Washington was particular putting pressure on two fronts in the Muslim world. First it was asking the member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Kuwait, the so called Sunni majority to reconcile with Qatar, an outcast and though an Arab Sunni country but on a path to normalize relations with Shia Iran. Second it was exerting a lot of pressure on leading Muslim countries including Pakistan to recognize Israel.

Both of these acts of US administration reinforced the Sunni orthodoxy and the sectarian gulf that splits the region into two warring factions. The first pressure was meant to consolidate the Sunni bloc in the region and second had the intended consequence of reinforcing Shia-Sunni divide in the region.

There is a sectarian dimension to the issue of awarding recognition to the Zionist state of Israel. All those Muslim countries of Middle East which have recognized Israel or are moving in this direction are Orthodox Sunni states.

On the other hand, Iran, an orthodox Shia state has remained steadfastly opposed to establishing any kind of diplomatic relations with Israel. Also, all non-state actors politically opposed to extending recognition to Israel or militarily fighting the Israeli state adhere to the orthodox Shia faith. This includes as an example of first type the Shia population of tiny Gulf sheikhdom of Bahrain and as an example of second type the Hezbollah Militia of Lebanon.

This is not just about diplomatic division in the Middle East over the question of recognizing or not recognizing Israel. Rather, it is about the ferocious sectarian civil war in Arab world, with financially powerful backers providing financial and military assistance to their co-religionists in the active fighting in several countries including Syria, Yemen, and Iraq.

This civil war has the potential to spread to countries including Bahrain, where a Sunni dynasty is ruling over a Shia population and which has only recently extended diplomatic recognition to Israel. This sectarian civil war can extend to countries with relatively calmer social and political conditions and strong and stable states.

The tensions between Qatar and three of her Gulf neighbours in particular have been visible for two decades. Qatar pursues a series of policies which simply do not fit into the rigid orthodoxy expected by most of the others, notably Saudi Arabia, the major Sunni power in the region.

Qatar's unconventional foreign policy is seen as a threat to the Sunni solidarity, particularly because the emir and his ministers promote dialogue and a search for good relations with the Shia Iran, a regional rival to Saudi Arabia with whom Qatar shares the world's largest gas field. Saudi Arabia is deeply hostile to that approach.

Qatar has long pursued an ambitious foreign policy with different priorities to its neighbours but there are two key issues which have angered them in recent years. One is Qatar's support for Islamist groups. Qatar acknowledges that it has provided assistance to some, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, but denies aiding militant groups linked to al-Qaeda or so-called Islamic State (IS).

The sectarian civil war obviously is not about the question of extending diplomatic recognition to Israel. However, conservative Arab sheikhdoms awarding diplomatic recognitions to Israel cannot fail to heighten tensions in the already tense sectarian relations in Arab and Muslim societies – especially with this neat division on the question between Sunni states embracing the Zionist state and Shia state and non-state actors opposed to recognition to Israel.

Kuwait announced in the middle of December, 2020 that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) would meet 5 Jan 2021 in Saudi Arabia as hopes rise for a resolution to the years-long row between Qatar and its Gulf neighbours. Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Ahmed Nasser al-Mohammed al-Sabah “expressed his willingness that the Gulf summit be held in Saudi Arabia” on 5 January 2021,” said a statement from the ministry.

The annual summit of the GCC member states – the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait and Qatar – is usually held in December. Last year, Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser Al Thani attended the meeting, marking Doha's highest-level representation since its regional rivals began their boycott.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt imposed an air, land and sea embargo on Qatar in 2017. The so-called Anti-Terror Quarter severed ties with the oil-rich Gulf

peninsula nation, accusing it of supporting terrorism. Doha denies the allegations.

Earlier this month, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud said “significant progress” toward resolving the Gulf row had been made.

The GCC authorities have announced that the GCC summit will play a role in reconciling the leading countries of the regional organization with Qatar, but there is no clarity as to what the Qatari state will do with its project of normalizing relations with Shia Iran.

Will Qatar continue with its policies of normal relations with Iran after reconciliation with its Sunni states in the region? Will it continue with its policies of strong relations with Fundamentalist groups in the region including Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt? And what will happen with Al-Jazeera Television which has annoyed Sunni orthodox states in the region?

These are difficult questions to answer at this stage and may continue to confuse the regional diplomatic situation in the years to come. However, it is clear that the Sunni states are about to take the outcast Qatari state back into the fold without the resolution of major diplomatic problems that exist.

There are reports that these rival sectarian states are aiding and abetting their respective co-religionists in sectarian civil war in Syria and other war torn countries. Saudi Arabia is aiding and abetting the Bahraini monarchy in instituting draconian measures to control their rebellious Shia population. Iran is helping the Syrian regime, which has a sectarian character, against the Sunni rebels. Iran is also aiding and abetting Houthi rebels in Yemen.

How will this sectarian civil war affect the question of extending recognition to the Israeli state? Or, conversely, how this question of recognition could affect the civil war? Not very difficult to judge or assess: The act on the part of Sunni states in the Arab world awarding recognition to Israel would further sharpen the ideological division between Shia and Sunni groups in the Middle East. It might also fan flames of civil war in countries like Syria, Yemen and Iraq and civil strife in countries like Bahrain.

The Iranian-backed, Lebanon-based Hezbollah militia is not only fighting Israeli state across the Lebanon-Israel border, it is also providing military assistance to the Syrian regime fighting Sunni rebels. Though the Houthi rebels in Yemen are at a great distance from them, Hizbullah and its leaders, nevertheless, provide political support to them.

Saudis have shown no reluctance to seek American support against the Houthis and Hizbullah. With Israel joining the fray with its vast experience of fighting urban fighters, the already vicious sectarian wrangling in the Arab world may become even more vicious.

The Arab Sheikdoms’ recognition of Israel will lend legitimacy to the potential Zionist actions of intervening militarily in conflicts in the Muslim world.

Israel is already opposed to the Bashar-al-Assad regime in Syria and has been providing military assistance to rebel groups in that



country. Will it escalate its involvement to bring down the Syrian regime? This could bring disastrous social and ideological conflicts to Muslim societies across the region.

Pakistan cannot remain aloof to this ideological and sectarian strife in the Middle East. We have a sizable Shia population with ideological links to radical groups in Iran, Iraq and Syria. Both Pakistani Shia and Sunni groups have been fighting in Syrian civil war on the respective side of sectarian divides in that society.

Pakistani officials confirm that these Shia and Sunni groups have recently started returning home after a prolonged participation in Syrian civil war. This could mean more sectarian fighting in Pakistan.

Now, the issue of recognizing Israel could further radicalize the conflict and strife in Pakistani society with respective sectarian sides receiving funds and training from their foreign masters and friends. No government in Pakistan can ignore the sectarian dimension of the issue of extending diplomatic recognition to Israel.

If we recognize Israel on the cajoling of Arab sheikdoms, we will certainly be entrenching more comfortably in Sunni camp, with the possibility of further radicalization of Shia opinion in our society.

It is not yet clear what role Israel will now play in Muslim world. Will it carry on with its Anti-Iranian rhetoric? Will it continue with its secret plans to bomb Iranian nuclear sites? And perhaps most importantly, will the insecure Arab Sheikdoms allow Israel a military role in the Arab world?

All in all, recognition of Israel by some Arab powers has opened a big can of worms. There is no telling how this will develop and change power dynamics across the Arab region and the Muslim world.

Pakistan’s situation is particularly precarious because the slightest misstep in this matter threatens to ignite in the country the Shia-Sunni sectarian fires raging in several Muslim countries with devastating effects.

The writer is an analyst based in Islamabad.

Why Is PTI Jittery Going into Senate Polls?

Opposition Set To Lose Control of Senate to PTI Whether They Resign or Not

By Khalid Wasim



The present Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government appears jittery going into the upcoming elections of the Senate, especially if they are to be held through secret ballot as required by the Constitution and the elections laws.

This jitteriness has led the government to make imprudent and mutually contradictory moves which only have exacerbated the uncertainty that already surrounds the upcoming elections to the Upper House of the Parliament against the backdrop of opposition's protests and the impending en masse resignations of its members from the National and provincial assemblies which constitute the electoral college for the Senate.

The government's latest move seeking the apex court's opinion on holding the election to the Senate through open ballot by amending the election laws through an ordinance instead of introducing an amendment of the constitution that has broadened the potential of institutional discord, potentially pitting the Supreme Court against the Parliament.

President Dr Arif Alvi has invoked the Supreme Court's advisory jurisdiction under Article 186 of the Constitution on the question of law of public importance, a question that is already under consideration of the National Assembly in the shape of the Elections (Amendment) Bill 2020 and Twenty-Sixth Constitutional Amendment Bill, which were introduced in the Lower House of the Parliament as treasury bills on 16 October and 29 October 2020 respectively.

More specifically, the former seeks amendment to Section 122(6) of the Elections Act to provide for Senate elections through show of hands and the latter seeks to amend the Article 226 of the Constitution to exempt Senate elections from secret ballot just as the case with the elections of the prime minister and chief minister.

The government's position in the Supreme Court that the Senate elections are not held under the Constitution and, therefore, their mode of elections can be changed from

secret balloting to show of hands through an amendment to the law is merely misleading as it has moved amendment to the Constitution for the same purpose in the National Assembly, an admittance that the elections of the Upper House fall under the constitutional ambit.

While the two positions clearly show a wide gap of understanding between the government's legal eagles and parliamentary advisers, it has also exposed the government's utter lack of confidence in how its members might vote in the Senate elections, if conducted through a secret ballot.

The previous Senate elections in 2018 had created unsavoury situation of the PTI, a couple of whose members in the Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa Assembly appeared to have voted against the party line. The same betrayal may be re-enacted on a rather wide scale now that the PTI has substantial representation in all the provincial assemblies as well as the National Assembly.

While the government's bid to seek a favourable ruling from the Supreme Court is focused on short-term political gain, it is putting pressure on the fault lines between two key national institutions. The apex court has already come under criticism for admitting petitions over matters that would best be settled politically.

On the other hand, this will perhaps be the first time the Supreme Court has been invited to rule on a matter already pending with the National Assembly.

"I can see the merit in the spirit of the government's move in the context of firmly dealing with illegalities and corrupt practices that have marred the Senate elections in the past", said a representative of the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN).

"However, going to the Supreme Court for a change in the mode of election is not only inappropriate but also reflective of the government inability to convene a political dialogue for election-related reform which otherwise should be a democratic prerequisite,"

The representative emphasised that election reforms should only result from a broad-based political dialogue and only through parliamentary sanction.

But what is at stake is huge. The government desperately needs numbers in the Senate to improve its ability to legislate. Its reliance on ordinance has been hurting its ability to deliver on its election promises and impairing the longevity of its measures, impairing performance as well as public image.



The government has been unable to optimally legislate since its inception in August 2018 primarily due to an opposition-controlled Senate but also due to its inability to engage with opposition parties constructively. The upcoming election to the Upper House of the Parliament, also known as the House of Federation, may change the situation to the advantage of the ruling coalition, giving it the kind of numbers that may improve their chances of clearing legislation from parliament with less difficulty.

The PTI, which got representation in the Senate for the first time in 2015, is not only set to improve its representation but also has the chance to become the single largest party in the house due to its numerical strength in the Punjab and KP assemblies.

Besides the open ballot, the government has also announced that it wants to hold the Senate elections in February 2021 instead of March, in an apparent move to scuttle the opposition's plan to hold a long march towards Islamabad as part of its final and decisive phase of the anti-government campaign launched by the opposition parties in October from the platform of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM).

On their part, the opposition parties too seem to lack a clear strategy and appear to be backtracking on their earlier announcement of resigning from all assemblies en masse. Behind this appearance of vacillation is because of the PPP's reluctance to resign as well as the realization that the opposition's resignations cannot stop the PTI from acquiring majority in the Senate.

Legal and constitutional experts in the country are found to have unanimous opinion in this regard because laws and the Constitution are silent on any specific requirement related to number of lawmakers to be present in the house for voting. The experts say that the absence of the members from the provincial assemblies does not matter in the Senate polls.



In the laws and mode of elections for the Senate, it is mentioned that those in attendance in respective provincial assemblies may cast their votes to elect senators and, therefore, despite resignations of the opposition members, the electoral college will remain intact. They believe that tendering resignations will not benefit the opposition with regard to the Senate elections and such a move can be counterproductive.

It was after perhaps realizing this fact that PDM President Maulana Fazlur Rehman after presiding over an informal meeting of the

opposition parties had stated that breaking the electoral college was a part of the democratic process, but at the same time declared that the Senate elections, if conducted through the present legislatures, would be "fake".

He said the opposition parties were consulting constitutional experts to seek their opinion about the legitimacy of the Senate elections if conducted through an 'incomplete' electoral college after en masse resignations of opposition lawmakers from the assemblies.

Of the total 1,090 lawmakers in the national and all the four provincial assemblies, 494 belong to the PDM member parties indicating that the Senate will lose 45 per cent of its electoral college if all the opposition members in all the assemblies submit resignations in line with the PDM plan.

The term-wise list of the senators shows that the opposition is all set to lose its control over the Senate as over 65 per cent of the senators who are set to retire on 11 March 2021 after completing their six-year constitutional term belong to the opposition parties.

Given the party position in the national and provincial assemblies that form the electoral college of the Senate, the opposition parties will not be able to retain their majority in the upper house of parliament.

The term-wise data of the Senators shows that out of the 52 members retiring from the present 103-member Senate in this March, 34 belong to the opposition parties and 18 to the treasury benches.

The PML-N will be the biggest loser in terms of representation in the Senate as 57 per cent of its members — the largest number belonging to a single party — are set to retire this March after completion of their six-year term. The data shows that 17 out of its 30 incumbent senators are due to retire in March. The party can also lose the office of the leader of the opposition, if the PPP plays intelligently.

Leader of the Opposition Raja Zafarul Haq, party's parliamentary leader Mushahidullah Khan and former information minister Pervaiz Rasheed are prominent among the PML-N senators due to retire. In contrast, only eight of the PPP's 52 senators will be completing their six-year term in March.

Deputy Chairman Senate Saleem Mandviwala, parliamentary leader Sherry Rehman, former interior minister Rehman Malik and former law minister Farooq Naek are prominent among the eight PPP Senators due to retire.

Another distinction between the PDM heavyweights is that unlike the PML-N, the prospects of all the retiring PPP senators to return to the Senate are bright due to the majority of the PPP in the Sindh Assembly.

This largely explains why the PPP and PML-N have divergent approaches towards the upcoming Senate elections despite being united under the banner of the PDM.

The writer is a political commentator based in the UK.



To Resign or Not to Resign?



By Hammad Ghaznavi

‘To resign or not to resign’ seems to be the key question facing the opposition alliance Pakistan Democratic Movement. Strong indicators suggest, the alliance parties are divided on the issue. The government that appeared under reasonable political pressure during the first phase of the PDM movement, comprising jalsas, looks like breathing more freely now. What next? The clock is ticking. The first month of 2021 is crucial for the two sides, government and opposition. Will the PDM be able to build the momentum for the February Long March, or further suffer from the internal incoherence? If the government manages to reach the month of March sans the Long March, it will most likely ensure the completion of its 5 years’ term.

This unto itself is the success of the government that the PDM MPs’ resignations from the elected houses has become the focus of political debate. The opposition should have always known that the resignation issue was a dodgy one, and needed to stay out of the political limelight for as long as possible. It was a known fact

that different components of PDM had different levels of stakes in the present political set up, and the difference of opinion was bound to surface once the issue was tabled. For instance, among the bigger political parties, Pakistan Muslim League (N) had not many stakes in the present setup while the case of Pakistan Peoples Party, well saddled in Sindh, was different. Undoubtedly, the issue proved to be a momentum breaker for the PDM, at least for the time being.

PDM was holding a few jalsas in the first phase; a strategy that was okay for starters. But there were gaps between the big jalsas, and there was not much political activity in between. When the big political meetings ended, again there was no scheduled political activity till the start of Long March in February. There were no constituency level gatherings in the entire country, no strikes, no lockdowns, no wheel-jams, no nothing. Inactivity, obviously, does not help build momentum. It was this vacuum that has helped the government wrest the initiative and play up the issue of resignations.



The government has an interesting strategy to deal with the opposition from day one, and it remains unchanged even after the formation of the opposition alliance. In one word, the strategy is to stay on the front foot, to attack, to keep the political temperature high. Inflexibility seems to be the hallmark of the present government. The mantra of ‘chor, daku, lutairay’ and ‘no NRO for the opposition’ is constantly repeated by the government, from the Prime Minister to a myriad of spokespersons. The opposition leader Shehbaz Sharif and his son, the Punjab opposition leader are still in jail. Against all the notable political leaders of the opposition, there are cases while many have served time. Ironically, not a single case against the opposition leaders has been concluded in the last two and a half years.

In the same vein, the government has approached the issue of resignations. The premier himself is daring the opposition to resign. “We will hold elections on the vacant seats,” Prime Minister Imran Khan has said more than once. No democratically elected government in our recent political history has been that hawkish in dealing with the opposition. This confidence perhaps comes when the government is on the much touted same page with the powers-that-be, many analysts suggest.

Who has chosen the timing of the JUI internal strife to put pressure on the party chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman? Is it Hafiz Hussain Ahmed himself? Why has Maulana Shirani come out in the open to criticize Maulana Fazal, a month before the announced Long March? Is it a coincidence? Or the advantage of being on the same page with the powerful? For sure, the government itself doesn’t have the clout to orchestrate these dissensions.

Likewise, who arranged the meeting between Muhammad Ali Durrani, considered close to the mighty of the land, and Shehbaz Sharif in Jail? The government doesn’t even know Mr Durrani well, an inactive and inconsequential politician of Pakistan Functional League. Certainly, the architects of the present hybrid dispensation are making the last ditch efforts to defuse the ongoing political tension which is bound to multiply in the coming weeks. Meanwhile, the Khan government can afford to play cool.

The government was certainly not interested in any kind of dialogue with the ‘thieves’, while the whispers from the opposition ranks kept emerging underlining the need of a grand national dialogue. Recently, the opposition has also stiffened its stance, categorically stating that it is not interested in sitting at the table with the government. In the past, in such crises some ‘neutral’ institution intervened to make some kind of negotiations possible, and played a guarantor. No More. The opposition believes there is no arbitrator left in the country whose guarantee can be accepted. Jamiatul Ulmae Islam chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman has openly alleged that he wrapped up his 2019 Azadi March on the unmistakable guarantee that the general elections will be held in the country before March 2020, but the guarantors backed out. His allegation was not answered.

This is an unprecedented situation. Rather dangerous. Politics seems to have entered a cul-de-sac. How to get out of this blind alley? Obviously, there are no readymade answers.

What are the options the opposition can think of? It doesn’t have many. The opposition actually is convinced that the present system



has tried to bulldoze it; major political parties have not been allowed to play the role of an effective opposition, what to talk of running some future government; there is no room for the ‘second’ party in this hybrid dispensation. All dissenting voices, the opposition argues, have faced NAB, FIA, Anti-Corruption, FBR, ANF and so on; all ‘uncooperative’ elements have experienced jails, exiles, legal cases, threats and humiliation. The Long March seems the only option for the opposition, do or die. And the Senate elections in March has set the deadline.

It seems the Long March is inevitable. The opposition is all set to make the final effort, seriously questioning, not only the government, but this ‘arrangement’. There may be some differences among the PDM parties but all are sincerely focused on one point – this government must go. The biggest supporter of the Long March, the opposition is convinced, is the government’s lackluster performance. Inflation is a killer. There are corruption scandals galore – medicine, wheat, sugar, dollar, petrol, LNG, and many more. One minister has single handedly grounded the national carrier. And the result of accountability drive is zilch.

If Maulana could manage a huge crowd in Islamabad last year, he could do it again on his own. This time he will also be fully supported by PML(N) and PPP. Resignations before the final countdown is another matter, but the PPP will not dither one bit if it comes to the Long March – the final shove. Unlike the Azadi March, the crowd this time may not stay confined to the designated areas. This scenario sounds unnerving.

The scare of Corona wave-II is not enough to halt the March, neither a threat alert to PDM leaders by NACTA. Some modern-day Chankia, as a last resort, may advise to use raw force against the opposition and its workers. The problem with this approach is that our police force is not equipped to handle such large scale political activity. Yes, certain other law enforcing agencies have the resources to quell the ‘quasi-rebellion’. But the involvement of those agencies in such unsavory business may unleash dangerous processes.

Sanity is a rarity?

The writer is an analyst with keen interest in politics.



Mayhem if Sharif Can Mobilize the Middle Class

An Impossible Leader's Impossible Quest



By Umer Farooq

In the more than 73 years of its existence, the Pakistani polity has vacillated between military authoritarianism and party based autocracy. Both systems held elections to legitimize their hold on power. While every military dictator created a King's party which invariably swept an election or two, the party against which coup was staged in the first place always won the post-dictatorship elections.

Exhibit A: When General Zia died in a plane crash in 1988 marking the end of his 11-year iron-fisted military rule, the PPP (Pakistan Peoples Party), the party ostracised by him, staged a huge come back, rising to power in Islamabad.

Exhibit B: After nine years of military government under General Musharraf, when in 2008 parliamentary elections were held, two major political parties – PPP and PML-N – formed a coalition government in Islamabad after sweeping the elections and inflicting a humiliating defeat on King's party, PML-Q.

Both Zia and Musharraf regimes put together Kings' parties with help from Punjabi, Sindhi and Balochi electable, feudal and tribal chiefs and a range of crony capitalists who joined hands with the military governments in an effort to defeat populist forces like PPP and PMLN.

On the both occasions, these electable switched sides in the nick of time, when the demise of military government became too obvious, and joined hands with the populist forces by securing party tickets for parliamentary elections.

This endless cycle that keeps repeating itself again and again in Pakistan's political system. The feudal, tribal Sardars and local influential join hands with the military at the time of ouster of

populist governments and when the time of demise of military governments come near they again shift their allegiance back to the populist parties, swelling their ranks again.

In April 2017, at the time of ouster of another populist Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif – through non-parliamentary means (through a court ruling to be precise) – there was widespread speculation that the his party, PMLN will disintegrate into many factions.

This didn't happen for two reasons: Firstly, the military did not go all out to get Nawaz Sharif and force his party to shift allegiance towards any newly constructed King's party. And secondly, despite clear signs that State machinery had chased the latter out of power, the developments in the wake of Supreme Court verdict didn't cause any dent in the popularity of Nawaz Sharif.

After a passage of three years and many half-hearted attempts to force PMLN to disintegrate, Nawaz Sharif's hold on his party structure remained firm.

But political pundits in Islamabad are pointing out that the time of feudal, tribal chiefs, crony capitalists and local influence to shift allegiance from Nawaz Sharif's party towards some political entity – about to be formed – which would be more pliant towards the government and military establishment has arrived. Nawaz Sharif has crossed all lines in his aggressiveness towards the military and its leadership and he has to pay the price.

In olden times, some thinking political leader once opined that the last battle for the emancipation of Pakistan's political system will be fought and led by Punjabi leadership. At the time, mainstream wisdom considered it impossible for Punjab to throw up such leadership.



Now, however, some political pundits are saying the prophecy has come true – a thrice-elected time prime minister and admittedly the most popular leader from the Punjabi heartland, Nawaz Sharif is mounting a campaign against those who have brought Prime Minister Imran Khan to power.

Nawaz Sharif has repeatedly clarified that his battle is not against Imran Khan but against those “who installed him in Islamabad” – an obvious reference to the military top brass. So, is this indeed the proverbial last battle of which the sage referenced above spoke?

A cursory look at the country's history reveals that the military and central bureaucracy's stranglehold of power structures has always been challenged by political leaders from the smaller provinces. Baloch nationalists challenged it in the 1970s, Sindhi nationalists, especially those popular with a rural support base, challenged it in the 1980s. Those from urban Sindh got into a fight with the military in the 1990s and Pashtun nationalists remained active in anti-establishment politics in a low key manner throughout this period.

But none succeeded. One potent reason for their failure was that they always failed to mobilize Punjab.

Smaller traders and lower and middle classes in Punjabi cities mobilized against Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government in 1977 but the upheaval was used by General Zia-ul-Haq to stage a coup and grab power.

In the intervening period, Punjab did mobilize for religious causes but quite paradoxically recognized only two popular leaders in electoral contests – Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. Benazir Bhutto started losing her standing in Punjabi heartland after the 1996 dismissal of her government when she became a vocal and potent voice against the military's dominance of the nation's power structures.

Nawaz Sharif's rise as an electoral success in Punjabi politics has remained uninterrupted since the 1980s. But he has never tested Punjabi waters as far as his capacity to mobilize Punjabi middle classes – his main power base – for agitation politics.

At the conceptual level Nawaz Sharif's idea of launching a protest movement in the Pakistani heartland of Punjab against the military establishment is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, Nawaz Sharif will be testing his popularity in a geographical area where the military and its top brass has traditionally held sway over the public opinion.

The public opinion as reflected in the media and in the streets of Punjab tends to be jingoistic in nature and content and generally paints the military in the light of a national saviour. The establishment has painstakingly cultivated this public opinions with the help of a vast propaganda machine that shows the military as a source of the country's strength and stability.

In this situation, Nawaz Sharif seems to be banking on the disillusionment of the Punjabi middle classes with the existing political arrangement that has increased their economic hardships manifold during the past two years. Prices of essential goods are running amok and unemployment is rampant and as many businessmen in this part of the country are saying, the economy is in a state of recession.

In this situation, Nawaz Sharif doesn't need to ensure that each one of his followers believes what he believes. He only has to assemble thousands and thousands of them and deliver an anti-establishment speech in front of them.

Carefully drafted official speeches aside, the stories of the government's achievements are failing to find takers among the middle classes of Punjab who are meanwhile being laid off by the hundreds.

Nawaz Sharif, therefore, has a relatively easy task ahead of him. A disgruntled political leader finds easy partners among middle classes, which are fast shrinking in strength and financial capacity.

However Nawaz Sharif's clarion call for democracy is problematic from another perspective. Suppose Nawaz Sharif succeeds in bringing thousands and thousands of his supporters to D Chowk in January, as he plans to do in coming months. What then?



Governments do not fall spontaneously as a result of hundreds of thousands of people gather in front of their offices. Governments fall as a result of some powerful intervention. Traditionally this has been the model in Pakistani politics in the recent past: Either the Supreme Court – in case of Yousuf Raza Gilani and Nawaz Sharif or the military and intelligence services – in case of Nawaz Sharif only – intervened to send the government packing.

So will Nawaz Sharif demand some kind of intervention when his protest movement reaches maturity? If he does, it will be a total reversal of his stance. If Imran Khan's government falls as a result of some kind of intervention, will it not cause embarrassment to Nawaz Sharif – who is ostensibly advocating for stabilization of democratic institutions?

Confrontation and disruption of public life has in the past led to military intervention in the country. But more than intervention this protest movement will raise the question of integrity and unity of institutional structures of the Pakistani state. Already in the past six months there have been sensational rumours about a power struggle in Islamabad.

Not to forget, this will be an agitation movement against the establishment launched from the heart of Punjab – the fortress of the establishment. If Nawaz Sharif succeeds in mobilizing lower and middle classes of Central and Northern Punjab, we are in for turbulent times.

The writer is an analyst based in Islamabad.



The Politics of Resignations

There is No Denying PDM's Potential to Rock the Boat



By Ahmad Waleed

The million-dollar question being discussed by all and sundry all over Pakistan these days is whether the 11-party alliance Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) will ask its members of the Parliament to tender resignations to oust the incumbent government.

If yes, then what are the chances the government submit to the pressure and go home. Is that so easy? Will Prime Minister Imran Khan be ready to give in? Then another question comes to mind if such movements and politics of resignations have had any impact on politics.

While many believe the opposition's movement is destined to fail as the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government has the full backing of the powers-that-be, there are people who think even without any visible outcome every movement does leave a mark on the society.

The PDM leaders of 11 political parties may have different policies and ideologies to follow, but they have gathered at this platform on a single agenda – to uphold the sanctity of the Constitution. This very agenda makes the movement unique from all other movements of the past as for the first time in the political history the opposition is out to challenge a 'hybrid regime' which managed to take the reins of the country through one of the most controversial elections of the nation's history.

The nine-party Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) launched a movement to oppose Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD) was formed to dethrone military dictator General Zia ul Haq. The Islami Jamhoori Itehad (IJI) was formed against PPP government in 1988. The IJI was by far one the most infamous alliances in the electoral history of Pakistan which has remained surrounded by controversies that still haunt the bigwigs of political dynasties including the Sharifs.

The opposition movement has entered the second phase where the PDM parties are in a fix how to reach a consensus over submitting resignations to the Parliament ahead of Senate elections. The government is sticking to its guns despite over a month of protest gatherings in several major cities of the country.

The PDM leaders used the rallies to give vent to their anger against the government policy of political victimisation, poor governance, one of the worst economic meltdowns, skyrocketing inflation and bad foreign policy. During all this campaign the opposition has seems to have somehow succeeded in weakening the government as well as its powerful backers.

But Prime Minister Imran Khan apparently seems to be unmoved and feels confident that the opposition's movement or the resignation threats will fail to bring his government down. On the contrary, the prime minister has 'welcomed' the opposition resolve to offer en bloc resignations, saying his government will hold by-elections on all the seats falling vacant in no time.

Now the government is trying to play its cards as it plans to hold Senate elections ahead of schedule while the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has decided hold by-elections on eight National and Provincial Assemblies that fell vacant and were pending due to Covid-19. These two moves have dashed the PDM plans and put the opposition in a tight spot – to contest by-elections – or they have to take the decision on resignations as quickly as possible.

In their speeches, the opposition leaders including Maulana Fazl ur Rehman of Jamiat Ulema Pakistan (JUI-F) and Maryam Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) have openly expressed their resolve to submit en-mass resignations to put pressure on the government to step down.



However, there are signs the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) is reluctant to follow the other PDM parties in this matter, fearing that if they resign from Sindh government, the government may resort to taking over the Sindh province through Governor’s rule or by holding elections.

When in opposition, the PTI had also submitted en-mass resignations in 2014. The PML-N government used same old delaying tactics of not accepting all those resignations and managed to avert the crisis. Similar tactics are likely to be used this time as it would be a big challenge for the incumbent government and it may not be able to afford re-elections on such a big number of seats.

Even if the PDM fails to dislodge the PTI-led government, the establishment, visible party to the ‘hybrid regime’, has been placed in an awkward situation as it is sharing all the blame for the economic and governance blunders that have made peoples’ lives miserable.

The PDM agitation, therefore, does have the potential of creating a political and constitutional crisis if they march towards Islamabad, stage a sit-in and tender resignations.

American anthropologist Ralph W. Nicholas says, “Political and social movements may have varying degrees of success (or, for that matter, failure) but they leave behind societies that are never quite the same.” The present regime has offered many opportunities for the challengers in the shape of PDM. Even if this ferment fails or is crushed, it is bound to open avenues for future challengers.

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.

He can be reached @abmadwaleed

Karachi Package: Novel Allocation; Dubious Muscles

Put Karachi under the Supreme Court hammer to realise its genuine development

By Ishtiaq Ali Mehkri

MAI KOLACHI, a sleepy fishermen village on the coast of Arabian Sea, is now Karachi. Today it is the world’s seventh largest city and the biggest revenue generator for Pakistan. With its diverse ethno-lingual characteristics, it is home to at least 25 million people. But the ‘Paris of Asia’ in the yesteryears of British Raj, nowadays is no less than a ghetto and jungle of misconstrued constructions. Nothing is planned in Karachi, and it marvels as a perfect case of haphazard urbanisation.

To quote an observation of the Honourable Supreme Court, Karachi Branch Registry, which is seized with suo moto litigation on Karachi’s developmental ordeal, Chief Justice of Pakistan, Mr Justice Gulzar Ahmed remarked, “It seems everyone takes out their chunk and abandons the city.” The Justice went on to observe that “the Sindh government and the local bodies are enemies of the city”. So much so for what Karachi is today!

Before we go on evaluating the Rs 1100 billion Karachi Transformation Package unfolded by Prime Minister Imran Khan’s government, let’s peep into the epic of claims on Karachi.

Pakistan Peoples’ Party – whose second home was Karachi after Larkana during the heydays of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto -- wanted to build Karachi into Paris. But the constituency (Lyari) that elected two prime ministers Bhutto and Benazir, respectively, was devoid of drinking water and became a breeding ground for mafia and gun-runners.

The Muslim League of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif wanted to run a Bullet Train from Karachi, but the city lacks public transport.



The MQM ruled the City of Lights in a monarchical manner for 30 years, but couldn’t figure out how to develop it till to-date!

Even the ruling Tehreek-e-Insaf would have had the audacity to ignore Karachi, had it not become a major political stakeholder by winning a lion’s share of National and Provincial assembly seats. It is pitched against two adversaries: an aggressive Sindh government and an erstwhile politburo of MQM.

To make the mosaic more interesting there was a debate in the media on ‘federalising’ the city. No one knew for sure what it was all about! But as the Centre kept on threatening the Sindh government on scrapping the 18th Amendment, which by design empowers the provinces, Karachi’s plight and backwardness resurfaced in the limelight.



But the tables were turned by the Honourable Supreme Court of Pakistan. These days it monitors minutely the civic plateau and is quite conscious of its development. The suo moto hearing on Karachi's plight has made a difference. It is now not easy to get away as the apex court had summoned all the stakeholders and authorities to listen to their side of the story in the mess that is called Karachi.

Karachi today is ugly and hard. But its resilience works, somehow. The circus of blame game has ruined it to the core. Gutters overflow, sewage is at a free-mix with potable water, hydrants mint billions of rupees from Karachiites, electricity is a luxury, and waste disposal an enigma, and public transportation is a missing word in its dictionary. Roads are filthy and full of pot-holes. No manicured gardens and public playgrounds, if any, are symbolic in essence.

No one owns the city but all stake their claims when it comes to reaping the booty, as rightly observed by the top judge. Its dilapidated infrastructure is a tale of a failed city. In such a scenario, the logical question is what will be the fate of Karachi's new developmental package? Will it be implemented? If yes, then by whom? Are there any guarantors – and what is their credibility?

These questions can best be answered by looking at the nomenclature of the body that will see through this package. The Prime Minister has appointed Sindh Chief Minister as Chief of the Provincial Coordination Implementation Committee. This is seen by pundits as the first ray of hope in putting an end to skirmishes between the federal and the provincial governments, who had been at loggerheads all these years.

The members of the committee are: Chief Secretary Sindh, Commissioner Karachi, Administrator (Mayor) Karachi, Secretary Local Government, Secretary Transport and Mass Transit Department besides Headquarters 5th Corps Karachi, the National Disaster Management Authority and one representative from the Federal Government.

In other words, superior civil and military bureaucracy is at the helm of affairs; and the least political involvement is either of the chief minister or the Mayor. This, many say, has revived hopes that Karachi will find its glory – if the committee goes by the book and the deal is implemented in letter and spirit.

Nonetheless, the package, unfortunately, seems to have hit snags. Announced in September 2020, it is yet to be approved from the Economic Coordination Committee. The ECC in its meeting on Dec 17 again deferred its approval without citing any tangible reasons. Insiders say the federal government faces cash constraints.

Out of the Rs1.1 trillion package, the federal government would contribute Rs739 billion and the remaining Rs372 billion will be generated by the Sindh government.

This allocation chronicle has drawn draggers. The ruling parties at the centre and the province have locked horns. They are busy in point scoring, and are unmindful of mapping a way out to realise what could turn out to be Karachi's Marshall Plan.

A dissection of Karachi Transformation Package reveals that it includes Rs 92 billion for water supply projects; Rs 267 billion for

solid waste management and cleaning and opening of drains; Rs 141 billion for sewage treatment projects; and Rs. 572 billion for mass transit, rail and road projects.

Issues like water, electricity, sanitation, encroachments, infrastructure and transport, thus, sit in limbo. Plus the multitude of Cantonments, Housing Societies (both fake and namesake) as well as a plethora of and Developmental Authorities are little bothered, as they have their own axe to grind.

The prime minister himself is conscious of bickering in the woods. He admits that different land-owning agencies are operating in Karachi, and working for the city's uplift is not going to be an easy task. Issues of jurisdiction or land control are likely to keep authorities bogged down in litigation and undesired explanations.

Moreover, there are mafias that act in the disguise of public contractors, and their only agenda is to fleece money by delaying projects; and then reinstate the same with the help of cahoots for an exorbitant tag.

The Karachi Circular Railway is a perfect example of this quarrelling. The 60-kilometre track has been out of service since 1999. Plans to revive the commuter rail service off-and-on had ended up in dog-fights between authorities over jurisdictional affairs. Petty issues such as removing encroachments and making the contractors fall in line are too messy to address in real time.



Despite clear cut standing orders of the Supreme Court to revive the track before the end of 2020, little progress has been made to this day. Pakistan Railways in collaboration with the Sindh government and the Karachi city's administration was able to retrieve only a 12-kilometre portion of the track from Karachi City Station to Manghopir.

Moreover, it is no less than a joke that four trains – with less than six bogies -- are plying on the 12-km track and that too after an interval of three hours each. Irrational to even imagine how can authorities consider it as a solution to Karachi's 15 million work-force commutation -- which is devoid of a public transport? Look at Mumbai and Tehran, or even the tiny Tbilisi in Georgia, and we are shamed! Karachi Package has allocated Rs 300 billion for KCR revival, and the pace of work is a laughing stock, to say the least.

Initial planning estimates say that the Karachi Transformation Plan should be completed in the next three years. In other words, before the PTI government completes its tenure, the Karachi package should have become a reality on the ground. But that is unlikely to happen primarily owing to squabbling between political stakeholders.



From PTI's side Sindh Governor Imran Ismail, Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Syed Ali Zaidi, Minister for Planning Asad Umer and a few other stalwarts are seen busy making ends meet to realise the gigantic project.

But there are fissures deep inside the party. PTI MNA Najeed Haroon, who enjoys impeccable credibility and the only one who hasn't drawn his entitled salary as a parliamentarian, had submitted his resignation in protest. He thinks nothing is moving forward, and Karachiites are being taken for a ride.

MNA Alamgir Khan, who got fame from his 'Fix It' cleansing campaign in Karachi, sits fingers crossed. His constituency from where Prime Minister Imran Khan initially won in Karachi is in tatters! Heaps of garbage are all around in his constituency, and the KCR track is duly encroached.

Another proactive MNA and televangelist Amir Liaquat Hussain has taken a backseat for reasons of political exigency, and is seen more preoccupied in countering claims from his erstwhile colleagues in the MQM.

Then there is the PPP battery comprising of provincial ministers Saeed Ghani, Syed Nasir Hussain and Murtaza Wahab who leave no stone unturned in indulging in point-scoring business, and are seen flanked with PPP Chairperson Bilawal Zardari and Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah in negating anything that the PTI pitches for Karachi. So much so for coordination on the Karachi Package!

At the state level too there is inertia of sorts. There is severe confusion as to from where funds shall be generated for the Rs 1.1 trillion mega deal. The federal government already sits on a budget deficit with little to spend in the developmental context. This is why the government is pinning hopes to draw money from the Supreme Court fund on Karachi. It wants the apex court to allow the use of some of the Bahria Town Settlement Fund (up to Rs 125 billion) during the next three-years.

Likewise, the Rs739 billion target is all up in thin air as chunks are supposed to be generated from the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP), public-private partnership as well as financing from foreign sources. To describe in simple words, the cart has been put before the horse.

To give the devil its due, the Karachi Transformation Plan if implemented will change the face of the metropolitan. It is ambitious but realistic. In the first phase, the Centre and Sindh government will work on the Greater Karachi Water Supply Scheme, also called K-IV.

The second riddle is more serious and involves a lot of administrative muscles. Removing encroachments on nullahs has always drawn ire. This is why the government has mandated the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) to cleanse Karachi of illegal encroachments. The good point is that the NDMA is making inroads.

The next meticulous job is of reinstating the city's sewerage system and solid waste disposal. And then last but not the least is addressing public transport.

Notwithstanding the good intentions of the federal government, the Karachi Package is in need of stringent implementation muscles and viable funding avenues. Both are lacking at the moment. The need of the hour is to raise an indigenous consortium of local funders from public-private stakeholders and mandate them under the Supreme Court of Pakistan. Chief Justice Mr Justice Gulzar Ahmed, a proud Karachiite, knows the inside-out of his city. It is only under his watchful eyes and hammer that Karachi could transform for good.

Ishtiaq Ali Mehkri is Ex-Opinion Editor Khaleej Times, Dubai; and presently an Editorial Writer/Consultant in the UAE



One Sleazy Market, Zero Strategic Storage

Consumers Suffer at the Hands of OGRA, the Cartel Anointed as Sector Regulator



By Khaliq Ahmad

In the heat of the rising sugar and wheat prices, the government made public the reports of the two inquiry commissions in April last year. The reports identified massive wrongdoings, manipulation of markets and systems, cartelization and so on. The government ordered further investigations and departmental proceedings.

The final conclusions of such processes are nowhere in sight and the prices of both commodities have continued to rise despite massive imports at further public expense besides the burden on consumer pockets. The price of sugar, nevertheless, fell with the arrival of crushing season.

Based on these outcomes, it would be not difficult to conclude that real action on recommendations of the inquiry commission on shortage of petroleum products would be visible anytime soon. On its part, the federal cabinet has constituted a committee comprising ministers for planning, human rights, education and railways to study the report and come up with specific recommendations. How the Lahore High Court ceased with the matter reacts to the developments so far is to be seen on the next date of hearing.

What matters more at this point in time is the fact that oil prices touched the lowest ebb in the international market twice in five years and on both occasions the people of

Pakistan could not fully benefit from the oil bonanza. In fact, the products were sold at the highest ever rates on the black market.

The inquiry commission on petroleum shortages thus rightly concluded that in sharp contrast to the world at large which seized the days of lowest international prices of petroleum products from the months of March to May 2020, the crisis of shortage erupted in Pakistan in the month of June 2020.

“Sad story of how an opportunity was transformed into a crisis starts in March 2020 with the irrational decision of 'import cancellation' by MOEPD (Ministry of Energy Petroleum Division) spanning over a month whereby the Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) were asked to cancel their cheap international purchases”. Instead of enforcing the OMCs to lift their local quota of purchases from refineries, the MOEPD went for the blanket import ban. Regardless of this so called 'ban', it is an admitted fact that six oil carrying vessels belonging to private OMCs did dock and decant during the days of import embargo.

Consumers had to pay dearly for the failure of MOEPD to implement decisions of the Product Review Meetings (PRMs). Lifting of import ban in the end of April coincided with the gradual rise of international prices of petroleum

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products. May and June witnessed the apathy of certain culprit OMCs which imported oil but hoarded or slowed down the supply to their retail outlets till the government increased the prices on June 26, 2020. General consumers, thus, were hoodwinked out of their rightful savings.

The OGRA inherited the regulatory functions of oil industry in 2006 from erstwhile ministry of petroleum and for the next 14 years, the new petroleum rules were put in place to replace the old petroleum rules of 1971. This era of legal ambiguity on the division of powers between MOEPD and OGRA continues.

From the year 2006 to 2020, OGRA became the breeding ground of OMCs the number of which has now touched 66. OMCs got unlawful provisional marketing licences without developing the mandatory storage and stock facilities.

The Pakistani market could not cash in on cheap oil days due to criminal and deliberate omission of duty by 90 percent of the OMCs operating in the country to maintain minimum mandatory stock – worth 20 days of supplies.

As if that was not enough, the sector witnessed mushrooming of illegal retail outlets and their regularisation, illegal joint ventures or hospitalities, unlawful private storage companies. This period saw frequent unpunished violations of licensing conditions by OMCs.

Today, Pakistan stands with no strategic storage of petroleum fuels, outdated refineries, and a ceremonial petroleum division which has outsourced its decision making to Oil Companies Advisory Council – a cartel of oil companies. The rest of the damage was done by the Department of Explosives, Port Authorities, smugglers and adulterers.



The Inquiry Commission picked OGRA on top of the list for being responsible for the petroleum sector mess, failing to ensure monitoring and verifications of operations and stocks and imposing symbolic fines (instead of revoking their licences) on delinquent oil companies that manipulated import and supply systems, failing to develop storage and build stocks.

Therefore, the Commission concluded that formation of a regulatory body like OGRA, perhaps in line with modern markets of developed countries was not aligned with the ground realities of Pakistan and hence OGRA should be dissolved through an act of the Parliament within the next six months and penal action or investigations should be initiated against all incumbent and former members and chairpersons of the OGRA.

The Inquiry Commission also concluded that petroleum division also did not fare better during the last decade and in the June crises in particular. “The story of MOEPD is also rife with apathy, incompetence flavoured with malpractices, and disregard to laws/rules” and thus “the dire straits of oil industry can only be straightened out with a unified authority”.

The Commission strongly recommended departmental or penal action against the incumbent Director General of Oil for passing flagrantly illegal orders regarding allocation of import/local quotas. Strong departmental/penal action is also recommended against his other associates as all such 'Stand-out-bad-characters' must not go unpunished.

The commission said the role of secretary petroleum could not be ignored. “Apparently, he remained encapsulated in a vacuum, both prior to and during the crisis period. No satisfactory explanation has been offered as to why the word rationalization, approved by Cabinet, was transformed into ban/cancellation of imports. Likewise, how would the flagrant violations of OMCs spread over a prolonged period, could be ignored by him?”

The commission also recommended strict action against officials of Department of Explosives who were found involved in issuance of unlawful clearance certifications to retail outlets and storage depots.

The commission also recommended a penalty on OMCs to equitably recovered from them the monetary losses they forced upon PSO, a state-entity, and for creaming off unlawful profits through hoarding, slowing down or drying out their retail outlets during the days of shortage.

The commission wanted creation of a cell in the government to collect all relevant data from OMCs relating to import, local uplifting, daily and monthly sales of OMCs, refinery import and production programme so that all data has legal sanctity and the OMCs can be held accountable in case of spurious figures.

It is also important to revive the role of deputy commissioners to inspect and examine any premises, facility or installation owned or operated by an OMC or refinery and to conduct enquiry so as to find any infractions or violations as required under Rule 54 of the Pakistan Oil Rules 2016 but conspicuously absent from the scene during the acute shortage of petroleum products in the month of June 2020.

On top of that, it would be more important to close down or bring under scrutiny more than 1500 illegal petrol pumps currently operating in the country mostly on smuggled products besides automatic gauging devices at all retail outlets and their online link to government monitoring.

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

Charles Branson's Virgin is Loving Pakistan

Virgin Galactic COO Corneel Koster Promises 'the Safest Indoor Air on the Planet'
Virgin Atlantic became the second British airline to fly Pakistan in December 2020. Truth International (TTI) sat down for a heart-to-heart with Corneel Koster, its Chief Customer and Operating Officer, to mark the occasion. Here is an abridged transcript of the interview.

By Zarghon Shah

TTI: Please tell us in brief about Virgin Atlantic

CK: We feel proud for connecting the world for 36 years and we are so proud and delighted to be here in Pakistan. We just started three new routes in only four days, and we now offer 290,000 seats in a year between the UK and Pakistan which can connect you to UK but also to North America and Europe

TTI: What's the size and composition of your fleet?

CK: We operate 37 long-haul wide-body aircraft, so big aircraft only; and here in Pakistan, we just started with our 787 Dreamliner which has 262 seats: the Economy Cabin, the Premium Cabin, and the Upper Class Cabin, which is our fantastic award-winning business class. We love looking after our customers, our crew are so hospitable and we adapt our products to local tastes as far we can.

TTI: Would you like to elaborate on what you say 'the local tastes?'

CK: We offer hot Hilal - chicken biryani, channa and we are going to offer karak chaai onboard very soon; our menu changes every month and so, so we keep evolving to understanding of tastes, we have channa, biryani, and we will be loading mango juice because we learnt about your taste for mango juice; so we keep listening to and understanding of tastes of our customers.

TTI: What really made you think of starting Virgin operations for Pakistan?

CK: Yes, we always have had Pakistan on our network list and we were planning to come here may be next year or the year after; and because there are 1.6 million people of Pakistani heritage in the UK, so it's a great market to-and-from Pakistan, and there is a connection to the US as well where we normally offer seven flights a day between Heathrow and JFK. We connect it to New York, to Boston and where we want to go; so we always start where there is an interesting opportunity and there is lot of cargo demand to-and-from Pakistan too.

TTI: Why would Virgin decide to open up new routes like Pakistan amid Covid?

CK: Covid actually sped-up our interest into this market. As there was a demand from friends and relatives for such flight operations amid Covid and it wasn't being served; so we thought let's go and serve with our product.

TTI: Covid, no doubt, has hit the airlines business very hard. How it impacted Virgin Atlantic?

CK: Yes very true, Covid has impacted life and livelihood around the globe like never before. And yes it has impacted aviation as a



sector very hard, and travel and hospitality, but we are all fighting back. Virgin Atlantic took some early decisive measures at the beginning of the pandemic. We downsized our company unfortunately, we stopped certain routes, we even didn't fly passengers for like 90 days and were only flying cargo and we have had very good opportunity to fly 3,500 cargo sectors around the world; and we started growing back, so we are here to stay, we have refinanced privately and we are here to stay.

TTI: Again with reference to Covid, what are the prerequisites for Pakistani passengers to fly via Virgin Atlantic?

CK: In aviation, there are so many layers of safety and we are very serious about those, so right now if you are coming to Pakistan, you need to be PCR tested before flying; we apply social distancing on the ground, we provide our customers on-board with a health kit where we give them medical grade masks, we have to wear masks all through the journey, we sterilise all our cabins with special sterilisation process, we sanitise everything a customer sees and touches, the filters on-board filter 99.999 percent of all bacteria, viruses and contaminants and clean the air.

TTI: Some people believe the air in aircraft cabins is still and static. If true, don't you think it's hazardous in a situation like Covid?

CK: Yes many people think so but it's not true. The air a Virgin cabin gets refreshed every two minutes using the kind of filters you see in a modern hospital's operation theatre. It is actually the safest indoor air on the planet. So aviation is safe because of all the precautions we take, we keep our customers safe.

TTI: Virgin calls it 'fly safe, fly well'. How do you ensure it?

CK: We really care about our customers, we are known as really a safe airline. We have taken lot of precautions throughout our

journey to make sure that our customers are so confident that they feel safe and secure with us.

TTI: British Airways has also resumed its flights to Pakistan after a considerably long gap. How would you compete with it?

CK: I tend not to talk about other airlines but I believe competition is good. It will give more options to consumers to choose the airline they want to fly with. And we offer great value for money, we have some amazing introductory fares - 94,000 rupees for initial returns, great introductory fares; the customers feel from the heart.

TTI: Flying Pakistani diaspora to Pakistan, are you meeting up with the kind of local needs?

CK: We aspire to be the world's most loved airline. Our crew and our team loves looking after our customers. We are trying to understand local needs and you will see the difference.

TTI: To what extent could the Virgin Atlantic help showcase Pakistan as a great tourist destination?

CK: Its always good to offer more connectivity to the world and to show that Pakistan is open for business we hope that more tourists would start to understand and enjoy the beautiful scenery, the hospitality and rich traditions here. And Virgin Atlantic will be your best ambassador in the UK and around the world.

TTI: What was the feedback from Virgin's first flight to Pakistan?

CK: It was fantastic, we had 92 percent of what we call 'load factor', so we were nearly full. And from the moment I walked up to the jetway in Heathrow and I saw our crew welcoming our customers with assalam-o-alaikum from their heart. The people had fantastic feedback from the food offered onboard. Next month we are going to offer Urdu entertainment and movies and everybody seems to have enjoyed the Virgin Atlantic experience.

TTI: How flexible will your booking and cancellation processes be, specifically for Pakistanis?

CK: We have a local team here that is actually very experienced and understands local needs to look after our customers. And if you look at flexibility that's what a customer requires most particularly in the times of COVID-19, so we offer fantastic flexibility if you need to change your travel [plans] due to Covid. At the moment we offer complementary 'Covid cover' where we ensure you for free, it's paid for by us. Should your travel anytime be disrupted, should you quarantine or should you plan some change, we have got you covered. So we offer great flexibility and a very good insurance offer.

TTI: As an airline executive, how do you find Pakistani airports?

CK: This was my first travelling to Islamabad, but it's a fantastic terminal, really modern and convenient; and I hear many good things about it. I would like to thank Pakistani authorities and our ground partners as well, and specifically the British High Commissioner in welcoming us.

TTI: What's Virgin's policy about minors under 14 travelling alone?

CK: We don't have that offer right now. We currently don't accept

unaccompanied minors under 14. We are currently looking at the right time to reintroduce that offer, but right now with all the extra precautions that are taken in traveling, we don't accept minors traveling alone. But clearly we should be looking at whether we could extend this offer in future.

TTI: Tell us a bit about Virgin's connectivity?

CK: We have got great connectivity from Heathrow. We can connect with our partners: Air France, KLM and Alitalia. We also have connections for instance with SAS in Europe and then we have our own connections into the rest of the world, particularly North America where we have our partners Delta. We can serve 200 destinations in North America and you look at for instance at the diaspora that live largely in the New York region. Pre-Covid we had seven flights a day to New York, and we could do Boston, Washington and beyond.

TTI: What would you say about Virgin's alliance with other airlines?

CK: Yes, our partnership with Delta is really important and on the Transatlantic, we have a joint venture Air France, KLM and Delta, we have Alitalia as a partner and in fact we have many partners around the world but specifically our four partners, Delta, Air France, KLM and Alitalia would be very valuable vis-à-vis Pakistan connections.

TTI: Any plans of Virgin's founder Sir Richard Branson visiting Pakistan?

CK: Sir Richard Branson – normally he really likes to come with us and celebrate when a new route like this is inaugurated and do some very special party, but that wouldn't be the right thing in these circumstances with Covid, so we thought it was a responsible behaviour to avoid it. So unfortunately Sir Richard Branson could not make it this time, but he has already sent a message that he really looks forward to be in Pakistan, so we can hope to get him here in the future, Insha Allah.



TTI: As an airline executive what would be your advice to PIA?

TTI: We tend to not give advice to other airlines, we do what we do best, we value partners and competitors and we all are trying to do our best for this industry. Virgin Atlantic thinks that when we go into a route normally, people start to level-up and we give great offers to our consumers and we do it from the heart which is sometimes for some airlines hard to copy. So if PIA wants some advice, I just recommend they buy a Virgin Atlantic ticket and come on board, they will be most welcome.

The writer is a senior journalist based in Islamabad.

How Solid Global Foundations can be laid for a Post Pandemic World

By Hamzah Rifaat Hussain

The 16th Joint Council for Bilateral Cooperation meeting between China and Singapore chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat and Vice Premier Han Zheng resulted in both countries signing an array of MOUs dealing with subjects such as health care provision and increased connectivity. The highest level bilateral meeting between both countries provides a framework for other states which can capitalize on bilateralism and multi-lateralism and ensure that tangible solutions towards dealing with the pandemic without political wrangling or coercion are ensured.

The JCBC resulted in ten memorandums of understandings and agreements reached on food, healthcare, environmental protection and security between the two countries in a virtual apex meeting. Strategic visions on economic revival for the societies of China and Singapore while being cognizant of the importance of regional connectivity, trade and infrastructural development all came under the purview of the agreements inked. This foresight from both nations was also devoid of lingering differences and an understanding by their respective leaderships on the importance of economic development and prosperity. Both DPM Heng Swee Keat and Vice Premier Han Zheng reviewed cooperation under the Beijing sponsored Belt and Road Initiative as part of efforts to promote sustainable development as well as the China- Singapore Guangzhou Knowledge City which came under discussion as per a statement issued from the Prime Minister's office.

The understandings reached are significant in light of the current COVID-19 global environment where digitalization of national economies is of utmost importance. Innovative ideas were already a product of the legacy of Singapore China ties given that the solid foundations were already established by the respective leaderships and successive generations of JCBC. On digitalization, the Singapore-China Shenzhen Smart City Initiative will benefit after taking on from an earlier MOU signed between the Communications and Information Ministry in Singapore and the Shenzhen Municipal People's Government in Chongqing last year. The commitment expressed can be encapsulated in the words of Singapore Communications and Information Minister S. Iswaran who said that the aim is to ensure that cross-border data management, entrepreneurship and innovation would characterize the Shenzhen Smart City Initiative. It would be ideal if other countries do follow suit.

Building linkages between countries instead of adopting isolationist positions internationally is critical for a comprehensive, global post COVID-19 strategy. Populist leaderships across the world have prevented joint mechanisms to tackle pandemic issue, a fact decryed by various researchers. Singapore and China have demonstrated that joint initiatives



are possible through existing mechanisms in place. For example, on travel measures, Mr. Heng mentioned the utilization of 'fast lanes' which was agreed upon in June this year and entails travelers from both sides being exempt from directives requiring serving quarantine periods for up to 14 days. Utilization of fast lanes will be complemented with attempts to increase flight frequencies between the two countries and exploring ways of restoring people to people exchanges. Economic exchanges between populations and immigration have a key role to play in ensuring the people's livelihoods are kept intact as mentioned by DPM Mr. Heng, which stands in stark contrast to anti-immigration stances adopted by the Trump administration as well as attempts to sanction and prevent Chinese initiatives from taking hold in the United States

The fact that pacts regarding a comprehensive health partnership have been signed is also an antithesis to the narrative that China's response to the COVID19 pandemic has been substandard to the point of denial. The United States has often accused Beijing of intimidating nations in its neighborhood with flare ups in the South China Sea being attributed to Beijing's expansionist designs instead of American provocations. Two of the agreements signed at the JCBC dealt with the subject of health with Singapore's Health Ministry signing a pact with its counterpart, the National Health Commission to prevent and control both communicable and non-communicable diseases. There was also a renewal of the 2013 memorandum of understanding which allows for health researchers to work in institutions dealing specifically with disease prevention.

Singapore's Health Minister, Gan Kim Yong claimed that establishing this collaborative platform is critical given that the possibility of new pandemics emerging looms large. This fact challenges the Donald Trump administration's claims that China lacked sincerity while dealing with the pandemic and its lack of transparency jeopardized prospects for a comprehensive response to the virus. Additionally, biomedical companies from Singapore and the Suzhou Industrial Park in China would enable cooperation in areas such as the commercialization of products and the testing of new concepts in a free-trade zone in the Jiangsu

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province, allowing Singaporean firms to expand beyond their shores. It is clear that there is no aversion to free trade exchange of ideas or transparency from Beijing's end.

Dylan Loh, Assistant Professor of public policy at the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore mentioned how this island state wishes to become a willing partner and supporter of Beijing's efforts to tackle the pandemic which stood in stark contrast to China being censured by other capitals on the world stage. There is appreciation on part of China for these agreements as well. Prominent Singapore political scientist Chong Ja Jan mentioned

how China is receptive to 'uncoerced' cooperation between itself and its neighbors which is in contrast to the United States under the Donald Trump administration castigating China and rebuffing numerous calls for dialogue and negotiations to diffuse tensions.

The JCBC has provided a roadmap for extensive bilateral and multilateral cooperation for other countries to follow in the post pandemic world, due to the strategic vision of the respective leaderships of both Singapore and China. It is hoped that in pressing times, better sense prevails.

Spirituality is Key to Wellness in Times of COVID-19

By Mustaneer Gauher

The ongoing pandemic outbreak of COVID-19 has globally affected 213 countries and territories with millions confirmed cases and more than 1.6 million casualties. Experts have warned from the start the outbreak has the potential of adversely affecting the psychological health at both individual and community level. Hard evidence is now piling up to confirm the pandemic is leading to intense psychosocial issues while pushing mental health off the global health agenda all around the world, relegating to a secondary health concern.

Few realise and fewer can care the compelling emergency calls for comprehensive research work on psychological health and mental well-being of the community.

While scientists, clinicians, local and international health organizations and authorities, epidemiologists and virologists are working on many unanswered questions of the outbreak, the general public, global media and opinion-makers are responding to this uncertainty based on a limited and sketchy knowledge. This has further elevated the repercussions in the lives of people in the wake of COVID-19.

Health organizations and healthcare professionals are focusing on controlling the COVID-19 pandemic by recommending self-isolation, social distancing and quarantine, with the slightest emphasis on the impact of psychological health. Extended period of incubation longer than usual due to public uncertainty is the by product of infiltrated misinformation and disinformation on social media.

This worldwide public health emergency concerns the role and responsibility of medical workers, global impact of infection, impact of economic activities on travel and trade restrictions, and equitable care of public welfare and individual rights during the spread of pandemics.

Psychological health effects could be minimized by avoiding excessive exposure to COVID-19 media coverage and maintaining positive lifestyle and compassionately consoling others as well. Resilience training programs for medical staff, law enforcement

agents and general public to cope with the aftereffects of the pandemic of this severity and intensity should be introduced.

Such a program would incorporate (a) family-work life balance; (b) reliable, authentic and timely incorporated information about the infectious disease and its consequences on psychological health; (c) educating and preparing communities for pandemics and epidemics in the future; and (d) and validating and valuing frontline's staff's contribution.



All efforts should be directed toward minimizing the negative effects of this traumatic pandemic event on 'survivors'. Vulnerable population are susceptible of not just contracting the coronavirus but the psychological trauma as well. Such populations include children, older adults, pregnant women, people with existing physical and mental illnesses, victims of abuse and violence, people living with abusers and perpetrators, people living below the poverty line, etc.

Many people are going through interpersonal traumatic events as well in addition to the collective trauma of COVID-19: Domestic violence (gender-based violence or GBV), abuse, financial burden, loneliness, emotional and behavioral problems, grief and bereavement, fear of losing family, mental health issues, and physical injuries or fatalities.

Mental health services, facilities and specialized psychiatric treatment teams including psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychiatric nurses should be established to address psychological health concerns of the general public. Individuals and communities

Jinnah, a Giant Among Leaders: Are We Still Worthy of Him?

“Few individuals significantly alter the course of history. Fewer still modify the map of the world. Hardly anyone can be credited with creating a nation-state. Mohammad Ali Jinnah did all three.”

Stanley Wolpert, Jinnah of Pakistan

Besotted with the idea of greatness, Muhammad Ali Jinnah was a man who left no stone unturned. From a charismatic, young and successful lawyer to an eager enthusiast committing himself to the cause of his motherland, a man of words but more a man of actions, Jinnah has been noted down in history as one of the greatest leaders ever to have lived.

Born on 25 December 1876, he was a leading barrister and politician who served not just as the leader of the All-India Muslim League but also the Indian National Congress. It was only after his return to British India when he practiced law at the Bombay High Court, that he keenly engaged in national politics to a degree that it completely overtook his prior profession.

Initiating his political rise with a united Hindustan built upon the bond between Hindus and Muslims, Jinnah soon discovered that such an idea was merely a mirage – a far-fetched dream that he was forced to relinquish.

Once he saw the true colours of the Hindu leadership, Jinnah never turned back, isolating himself and measuring his mission towards acquiring and sustaining a separate homeland for the Muslims of Hindustan.

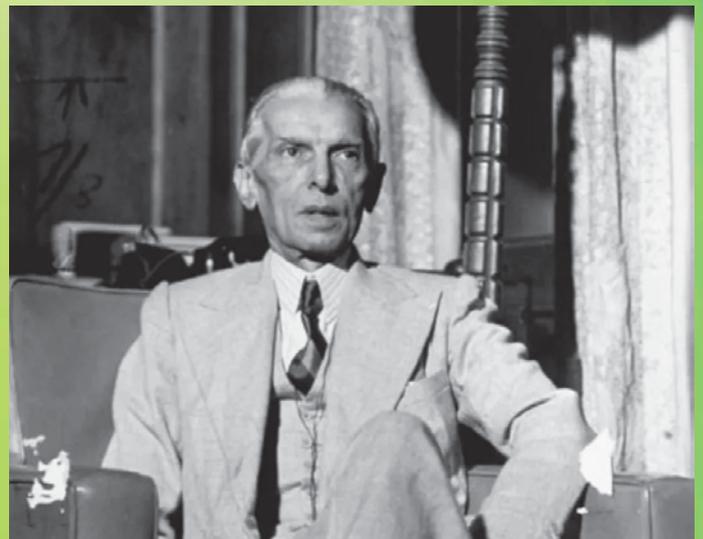
Despite a tough marriage, one that took an emotional toll on him, and extreme health concerns, Jinnah refused to hold back. Wholeheartedly dedicating his life to the service of his nation, Jinnah eventually able to redraw the political map of the world.

In Jinnah, the Muslims of British India sought the savior they had for centuries longed for. The giant of a man who galvanised the entire subcontinent, the greatness he achieved later was written all over every feature of his form, every detail of his conduct, and every trait of his personality from the beginning.

His iron resolve and the refusal to surrender won him the community's total devotion for the vision he had intricately woven – of freedom, compassion and plurality.

Through his politics, lessons of selflessness, resolve and the passion to excel beyond heights seeped through to his people. In his professional life, diligence, dedication and determination glistened but in the man he personified, we see a character of integrity, a stoic discipline and a sheer beauty of a man bent on providing endlessly for his people.

But all good things come to end. Will this be no different? Is Jinnah's presence slowly fading away? Of course his glorification is a ritual and eulogies continue to roll in but what about the tenets of unity, faith, and discipline upon which he structured Pakistan?



There certainly is a need for us to introspect and revert to the glorious mission forged by the Quaid we so love and adore, for in his true memory lies the compass of Pakistan, a nation never to be undone - but we are not there yet.

And until we get there, it is okay to ask: Are we on course?

Or, how far off course have we strayed?

Or, how far along the path are we?

And able all, are we still worthy of the leader who sacrificed his comfort for us and whose quest in our behalf won him glory among the greatest leaders known to history?

Assassinated But Not Extinguished

Benazir Bhutto (1953 – 2007)

“My father would always say, "My daughter will go into politics? My daughter will become prime minister", but it's not what I wanted to do. I would say, "No, Papa, I will never go into politics." As I've said before, this is not the life I chose; it chose me ... But I accepted the responsibility and I've never wavered in my commitment.”

Into the politically illustrious family of the Bhuttos, Benazir (known to her friends and family as Pinky) was born on June 21, 1953 in Karachi. Following her pursuit through Catholic schools in Pakistan, she studied at the prestigious Radcliffe College at the age of 16 ending her tenure at Harvard University with a cum laude degree in comparative government in 1973. For her further studies, she went to Oxford University where she became the first Asian woman to become the president of the Oxford Union. In 1977 when she graduated, her aim was to join the foreign service in the government led by her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto but fate had other plans.

At the zenith of her youth when she was ready to steer her life towards the fulfilment of her dreams, the untimely execution of her father and political urgency struck her. In her words, “I have led an unusual life. I have buried a father killed at age 50 and two brothers killed in the prime of their lives. I raised my children as a single mother when my husband was arrested and held for eight years without a conviction - a hostage to my political career.”

And whilst nothing went as per her plans, she was still able to surpass the conventional bounds constructed not just within the society she inhabited but the general environment that surrounded the world. At the age of 35, a few months after the birth of her daughter, she became the youngest Prime Minister worldwide, becoming the first female Prime Minister ever to be elected.

In Benazir, the nation found the strength and calibre that had gone extinct following the repressive Zia's rule. In her, they found the soul and empathy that the regime had carefully destructed and through her struggle, a new dawn arose, one that sparked a renewed hope for democracy.

Despite multiple threats to her life and an inborn premonition she would be assassinated, her commitment to the cause of democracy, to reconciliation, and to the honour bestowed upon her by the people, remained unwavering. Amidst the compromises, even in the darkest of times, when death seemed like her only companion, she sought its embrace wholeheartedly, budging only for what she thought was right.

Tragically assassinated on 27 December 2007 following her return to Pakistan, one cannot help but trace out her journey as that of an unwavering warrior. Thrown into an abyss she was not inclined towards, Benazir showed the world death could not defeat her.

In the end, her assassins could extinguish neither her strength nor her legacy, proving she was right when she said, “You can imprison a man, but not an idea. You can exile a man, but not an idea. You can kill a man, but not an idea.”



would do well to cultivate resilience, healthy coping strategies, mindfulness and well-being.

The potential for resilience, coping, mindfulness and well-being are neither unique traits that one possesses (or not) nor outcomes of absence of post-traumatic stress. The capacity for resilience is a process of adaptation. Coping mechanism is a learned pattern of behavior which one develops over a period of time. Mindfulness is the psychological process of purposely bringing one's attention in the present moment which one develops with practice. Well-being is the experience of being comfortable in their situation.

These all are processes that can be acquired with practice. These are not single dichotomous outcomes. Strengthening these processes calls for deliberately reinforced practice by experiencing and learning dynamically.

Conspiracy theories are only exacerbating the mental composure of the public. The authorized health organizations and state should enforce and ensure reliable online information through reliable sharing platforms to provide and promote tele-psychological counseling and psychotherapeutic treatments to reduce psychological distress during the pandemic.

A large group of people seems to think the pandemic lockdown is a holiday or vacation. They are intent on having a goodtime and would go to any lengths to draw out others. This is dangerous behaviour heightening risk of exposure to infection.

Another group would burden everybody with additional, often steep occupational or academic routines. There are social media campaigns goading all and sundry with quotes saying if you don't come out of this quarantine with a new skill, your side-hustle started, or more knowledge gained, then you never lacked time, you lacked discipline. Such activities are putting additional stress on the mental health of individuals and society.

The psychological pressure of competing in collecting maximum tasks than other peers, harnessing herd of followers and subscribers, producing occupational and academic outcomes under the coercion of work or family, and downplaying the trauma in oneself and others will have devastating effects on mental well-being.

Spirituality is recognized as an essential aspect – even one of the most important ones – to psychological wellness. Spirituality is understood to be the central core in various models of holistic wellbeing or wellness.

Religion and spirituality are both rooted in understanding the meaning of life and, in some cases, how a relationship with a higher power may influence that meaning. Both can help a person tolerate stress by generating peace, meaning and purpose and forgiveness.

Spirituality also incorporates healthy practices for the mind and body. Individuality, mindfulness and unity with surroundings are some of the benefits it offers. It provides inspiration and motivation, meaning and purpose for other dimensions – such as intellectual, physical, occupational, emotional and social.

Spirituality practices have been recognized as a powerful coping mechanism for dealing with life-changing and traumatic events. Research has shown that families rely on their spirituality for emotional, mental and physical well-being.

During COVID-19, does spiritual care contribute as a coping strategy for practitioners and families? seems to be a least addressed question till the date.

The question how spirituality factors into the global and national endeavour to cope with the pandemic has been missing from public discourse. In the time of COVID-19, does spiritual care contribute as a coping strategy for practitioners and families? It certainly can – and in a big way.

Healthcare workers need to create a supportive environment to promote interdependence through a transformative approach of spiritual care. Patients and their families should be treated with dignity and be allowed a voice irrespective of gender, religion, culture, race, sexual orientation, and disability.

There is no denying that spiritual wellness leads to psychological wellbeing. It is well known that people with high scores on spiritual wellness scale tend to have better capacity to cope well with calamities, failures, and uncertainty.

Spiritual care is based on an integrative bio-psycho-socio-spiritual model that requires a specific set of skills including spiritual assessment skills and the ability to refer patients to pastoral care or other types of intervention services focused on spirituality.

Spiritual care comprises activities to promote the quality of life and well-being. Activities include compassionate presence, active listening to patients' fears, hopes and dreams, being attentive to all spheres of patients' lives and their families.

However, in terms of COVID-19, some of the activities, such as the involvement of religious scholars or chaplains and spiritual practices can be limited because of precautionary measures. For this reason, under the current circumstances, healthcare professionals and families should be extra-sensitive to the spiritual needs of their patients and their own, as studies have reported that patients' reliance on spirituality increases during life-changing events.

This, however, may be challenging, because while many health professionals agree spiritual care is important, many are ill-equipped to provide or orchestrate it. A collaborative effort may be required to draw on the expertise of practitioners of spiritual care to support the spiritual care needs of families.

Spiritual wellness is vital to a stronger immune system. "Having a better level of mental health will boost your immune system," says Dr Hannah Reidy, CEO Mind HK. "When we are low in mental health, we have a weaker immune system".

The riddle of providing spiritual support

Amid all the restrictions necessitated by the pandemic, spiritual assistance can be provided by counsellors, spiritual psychologists, scholars and other mental health professionals over telephone of the Internet.

Self-help techniques can also be introduced to patients, their families and general public such as prayers, meditation, rituals, contemplation, exploring their belief system, reading and pondering on their religious books, charity, direct or indirect involvement in public service.

The writer is a psychologist based in Islamabad.

Mutant Coronavirus Taking Over London

Fingers Crossed Vaccines Will Hold Up Against New Strain

By Syed Humza Imam

With a new mutant strain of coronavirus seen fast replacing older versions of the virus in London and the United Kingdom closed off from the rest of the world, experts and manufacturers are expressing hope the vaccines already out will work equally or nearly equally well with the mutant.

Up to 70 percent more infectious, the new variant of the coronavirus, has triggered new national restrictions in the United Kingdom and prompted over 50 countries – including Pakistan, India, Germany, and France – to block travellers from the UK.

France's blockade has left over 6,000 lorries stranded in the UK, leading to supermarkets warning of upcoming food shortages, while lorry drivers have spent the past week in their vehicles.

Total deaths in the country passed 70,000 on Christmas Day. The number of people who tested positive for Covid-19 in England and Scotland increased by 36,804 last Friday, the highest increase at any point in this pandemic.

Total levels of infection are continuing to rise in England, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has said, with figures for the week to 25 December estimating nearly 650,000 people have the virus, up from 570,000 the week before. Some 2 percent of Londoners are estimated to have the virus at present.

Peter Horby, chair of the New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG), said that scientists were "pretty certain" that the new variant is "spreading faster than other virus variants."

First detected in England in September, the new variant is blamed for sharp rises in levels of positive tests in recent weeks in London, the east of England and the South East.

In November, around a quarter of cases in London were the new variant. This reached 60 percent of cases in mid-December. About two-thirds of people testing positive currently could have the new variant, the ONS says, clarifying this is only an estimate.

Three things are coming together that mean the new variant is attracting attention. Firstly, it is rapidly replacing other versions of the virus. Secondly, it has mutations that affect the parts of the virus likely to be important. Finally, some of those mutations have already been shown in the lab to increase the ability of the virus to infect cells. All of these come together to make a virus that can spread more easily.

Scientist Neil Ferguson, a member of NERVTAG, said that the variant may also be more infectious for children. "There is a hint that it has a higher propensity to infect children," he told a press briefing organized by the Science Media Centre (SMC), though he cautioned that more data was needed.

However, it is important to note that there is no evidence currently to suggest that the new variant is more deadly, according to Whitty



and the WHO, only more easily transmissible. Several experts have noted that in some cases, virus mutations that increase transmissibility are accompanied by a drop in virulence and mortality rates.

"As viruses are transmitted, those that allow for increased virological 'success' can be selected for, which changes the properties of the virus over time. This typically leads to more transmission and less virulence," Martin Hibberd, professor of emerging infectious disease at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, told the SMC.

The new, highly contagious variant of coronavirus has now been detected in a number of European countries, as well as in Japan and Canada. In Spain, Switzerland and Sweden cases have been linked to people who had travelled from the UK.

But in Ontario, Canada, an infected couple had no known travel history or high-risk contacts. Japan, which has reported infections in five passengers from the UK, has said it will ban most non-resident foreign nationals from entering the country for a month from Monday.

Though concerns have been raised over the effect of the new variant on vaccines, there are no signs yet that the current vaccine frontrunners won't work, according to experts and drug makers.

The companies behind the first two vaccines to gain authorization in the US, Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna, are testing their shots to double-check that they are effective against the variant.

The coronavirus has mutated before, and both firms say their vaccines worked against other variations of the virus. BioNTech's CEO Ugur Sahin said he has "scientific confidence" that the current Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine could work against the new variant, but full data will only be available in two weeks.

Some US-based scientists, however, have said that it's possible this new variant might, to a small extent, undermine the vaccines. Trevor Bedford, an associate professor in the vaccine and infectious disease division of the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, said: "You could imagine some modest hit to vaccine efficacy, which wouldn't be good, but I don't think it will break the vaccine."

One Hundred Years of Servitude

How the West Hoodwinked Palestinian into Statelessness



By Azmat Mumtaz Saqib
Part 2 of 2

WAR AND PEACE (1949-1982)

The Suez Crisis (1956), the Six-Day War (1967) and the Yom Kippur War (1973) resulted in Israel taking over Sinai Desert, East Jerusalem, West Bank and Golan Heights and defeating the combined forces of Egypt, Syria and Jordan. Throughout its history the Zionist state always had strong support from Britain and after WW2 from the United States.

In 1964, Palestinian resistance groups Fatah and PFLP joined hands to form Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) with headquarters in the West Bank. After Israel overran the West Bank in the 1967 War, the PLO HQ shifted to Jordan. The prospect of a joint PLO-Jordanian Army offensive became a nightmare for Israel.

Unfortunately, some factions in PLO started planning to overthrow King Hussein of Jordan. Consequently, the Jordanian Army crushed the PLO and forced them to leave for South Lebanon, from where they kept up attacks on Israel from 1971 to 1982. In 1982, Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) invaded Lebanon and forced PLO to leave Lebanon for Tunis, signed a Peace treaty with Lebanon, created a Security zone and withdrew to Israel.

Since 1948, Israel and Arab countries were in a state of war. Israel in mid-seventies offered peace to Arab States. Egyptian President Anwar Sadaat accepted the offer and signed a peace Accord in 1978, brokered by US president Jimmy Carter. Israeli withdrew from Sinai Peninsula, state of war between the two countries ended and full diplomatic relations was restored.

This was the first time a leading Arab country had recognized Israel's sovereignty and accepted its boundaries. Egypt gave up demand of an independent Palestinian state, committed not to support violence against Israel, and agreed to talks of Palestinian self-rule.

The allowed Egypt to cut defense spending by ten times. Trade with the US and Israel got a boost, and Egypt became a major recipient of US aid. The barrier to Israel's trade with Egypt was removed. Safe passage for Israeli ships through Suez Canal were granted.

The arrangement provided a fig leaf of international legitimacy for Israel and its international trade experienced a significant boost. Simultaneously, it successfully isolated Palestinian from Egypt, their bastion of Arab support. The Camp David accord became a model for future regional peace deals and Israel-Arab conflict slowly came to be framed as Israel-Palestine conflict.

In 1981, after Anwar Sadaat was assassinated as a result of the unpopular peace treaty, Israel's treatment of Palestinians became harsher.

GREATER ISRAEL PROJECT (1982 – PRESENT)

Jordan and the PLO sided with Saddam Hussain in the 1991 Gulf War. After his defeat, both Jordan and PLO fell out of favour with USA, Israel and Arab States, who stopped funding of PLO. Under pressure, the PLO in 1993 signed a peace agreement after secret negotiations with Israel. As a prerequisite for talks, PLO i) accepted two state solution, ii)

renounced terrorism in 1988, and iii) agreed all disputes would be resolved only mutually. Israel in return accepted PLO as the representative of Palestinians in lieu of Palestinian Statehood.

After the agreement, the world recognised the Palestinian Authority (PA) as the official representative of all Palestinians. The Palestinian Authority was granted self-rule in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, although it was allowed only policing powers within the Palestinian areas. Israeli settler's areas were kept outside of PA's ambit.

Israeli Military was stationed in the West Bank and Gaza. Israeli Military & Security agencies started dealing with Palestinians directly. PA practically became a handmaiden of Israel for arresting anyone identified by the Zionist officials as a terrorist but was not allowed to interrogate any detainee.

A significant number of Palestinians living inside and outside Israel considered the deal a sell-out, giving up on seventy-years-old right to self-determination and an independent Palestine. Palestine Authority was recognised the world over as an independent entity with its embassies dotting the globe and foreign assistance and international trade started flowing.

Israel's gains were significant, being received as a peacemaker rather than an illegal occupier. Away from public eye, many Arab countries warmed up to their Zionist neighbour. Only 22 percent of Palestinian territory came under the PA, while 60 percent of the West Bank remained open for Israeli development besides settler areas.

Between 1993 and 2000, bypass road networks outside Palestine towns were developed. Parallel electricity and water systems as well as goods transport infrastructures were developed for the settlers. This resulted in mushrooming of new settlements despite international condemnation. Nevertheless, Israel's international trade and foreign direct investment continued to soar.

Jordan approached Israel for a peace deal in 1994 to appease the US and to secure Israel's endorsement for resumption of defence supplies blocked due to siding with Saddam.

Jordan soon became the third country to end the state of war with Israel after Egypt and Lebanon, restoring full diplomatic ties. The formal administrative boundary between Jordan and the Israeli-occupied West Bank was accepted. Cooperation against border attacks, work towards resolution of the issue of Palestinian refugees, establishment of a free trade zone, and a water committee for dispute resolution were part of the agreement. Jordan was granted a special role in administering the holy Islamic Shrines in Jerusalem.

However, official rapprochement notwithstanding, all peace agreements deals signed by Arab rulers with Israel are still unpopular among the Arab masses even in 2020.

Trump's deal of the century is a major step towards Greater Israel. It denies the Palestine all its territorial rights. Israel plans to annex the entire Jordan River valley as well as illegal settlements in the West Bank. It derogates Palestinians right of return by naturalizing them as citizens of Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Iraq and elsewhere regionally where they reside.

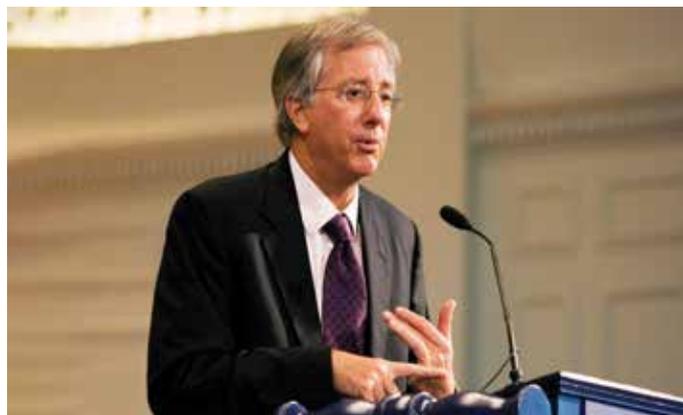
Some say that Greater Israel design is not strictly a Zionist Project for the Middle East, it is an integral part of US foreign Policy, and its strategic objective is to extend US hegemony as well as fracture and balkanize the Middle East. Trump's decision to recognize

Jerusalem as Israel's capital is intended to trigger political instability throughout the region.

According to the founding father of Zionism Theodore Herzl, the area of the Jewish state stretches "From the brook of Egypt to the Euphrates". According to Rabbi Fischmann, The Promised Land extends from the River of Egypt up to the Euphrates. It includes parts of Syria and Lebanon" when viewed in the current context including the siege on Gaza, the Zionist Plan for the Middle East bears an intimate relationship to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the 2006 war in Lebanon, the 2011 upheaval in Libya, and the ongoing turmoil in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, not to mention the simmering political crisis in Saudi Arabia.

The Greater Israel Project consists in weakening and eventually fracturing neighbouring Arab states as part of a joint US-Israeli expansion project, with support from NATO and Saudi Arabia. In this regard, the Saudi-Israeli rapprochement is a means to expanding Israel's sphere of influence in the Middle East as well as confronting Iran.

According to famous US Diplomat and Bipartisan US Middle East Envoy Denis Ross, "The UAE and Israel share a perception of threat from Ikhwan Ul Muslimoon and Iran. Emiratis are demanding a freeze on settlement and annexation in lieu of [Israel's] recognition, hence doing a service to the Palestinian cause. They are implying to the Palestinians to come out of their mind-set stuck in the past, be creative, and grab the window of opportunity."



The reported resignation of Hanan Ashrafi, a member of PLO executive committee, over Palestine Authority first severing ties in May 2020 and restoring a month back reflects the hopelessness of the situation of Palestinians.

Looking back, what has changed in the Middle East is the hand wielding the biggest hammer. In the 1920s, the Zionists prevailed over the nascent Arab states with help from the Britain. As the 2020s start, the Zionists are winning all over again over a much diminished Palestinian power with help from the US.

Might is right is the inevitable moral of the heart-breaking story of one hundred years of Palestinian servitude at the hands of Zionists. It is a tale of deception, bigotry, and betrayal drenched in blood and tears that drives home the point promises are to be kept if one is not mighty.

To return to the fairy tale of Little Red Riding Hood, the wolf has eaten the grandma, adorned her attire, and is now waiting for Little Red Riding Hood to enter the final trap.

The Brexit Has Arrived



By Dr Khalid Bajwa

With signing of the trade deal on the Christmas eve, the EU and the UK parted ways amicably without involving acrimony and blame game. Boris Johnson, the UK prime minister, is jubilant in delivering the Brexit promise to the nation. He described the trade deal as some sort of gaining independence: the new independent United Kingdom having gained control of its sovereignty, borders, waters and laws.

The Businesses heaved a sigh of relief on getting rid of uncertainty and the possibility of trading without a deal under WTO rules that would have rung the death knell for many businesses with the imposition of massive tariffs.

The trade deal envisages no tariffs and quotas for imports and exports of goods, though both will be subject to customs checks and additional declarations which will not only increase the cost of doing business but also involve red tape as it will not be seamless as was before.

The deal covers the trade volume of £668 billion. According to ifo Center for International Economics, 47 percent of all the UK exports and 50 percent of its imports are to and from the EU whereas the UK constitutes only 4 percent of the EU exports and 6 percent of its imports. Considering these numbers, it is clear that any trade deal that replaces frictionless trade is likely to burden businesses more in the UK than in the EU.

However, most of the people including labour leader Sir Keir Starmer have welcomed the deal, with the warning that the government will be held responsible for the consequences of the deal, as any deal is better than no deal.

The deal does not cover the vital services sector and deprives passporting rights for financial services and will block the free movement of people with social and political consequences.

Johnson came under fire immediately for allegedly forgoing fisheries rights to seal the deal thus surrendering sovereign rights of the UK on its waters. The deal consists of 1246 pages and businesses and experts will be poring over it in coming days, weeks and months to find the devil in the detail, as was hinted by Boris Johnson himself.

According to government's Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), the kind of Brexit deal that is signed will shave off 4 percent of the GDP in the medium term, whereas, without a deal, it could have taken off 6 percent of the GDP (These estimates predate the agreed deal). The long-term trend remains downward.

According to Brexiteers, the Brexit may not be good in the short run, but it will be great for the country in the long run. It seems that Britain has done a great exercise in self harm though.

The world has changed significantly since the UK voted for Brexit on 23 June 2016. The world has become more nationalistic and protectionist since then. There is a mushroom growth of narrow nationalism in a number of countries under the influence of Trumpean era of America first, heightened US-China trade war, building perception in the EU for its self defence in the face of the weaker US commitment, and not least of Brexit itself.

This all make the Global Britain Project fraught with difficulties. The UK government needs to move quickly to reach out the other great economic powers of the world to seal the trade deals as it may become difficult as the time pass by unless the trends reverse.

From the speech delivered by the UK prime minister, it is clear that the Brexit is not about economics but rather it is about making a political choice.

In the coming days and months, the businesses will keep adjusting, counting the cost of trade deal but what really needs to be watched very carefully is the political evolution of Global Britain. Broadly speaking, it can take one of the two routes. Firstly, the businesses on both sides keep seeking more smooth mechanism of trade and interaction, putting pressure on the political class to work towards that end thus forging closer relationships between the UK and the EU than envisaged by the Brexit deal and Brexiters. Under the pro-European leadership this gradual process can lead to undoing of Brexit resulting in full membership of EU.

However, if the leadership passes onto in the hands of nationalistic forces, the gulf between the two is likely to expand which considering the history of Europe does not bode well for the peace and security of the region.

The deal ended the free movement of the people and their right to work and permanently settle across the border. The issue of immigrants was the *raison d'être* of the Brexit and apparently the Brexit deal has resolved this issue for the Brexiters. But it may not have for the country.

The Covid19 pandemic has shown the ineptness of the present point-based immigration system of the UK. The immigrant nurses, carers and care home workers are the heroes who are helping to fight off the pandemic and taking care of Covid19 patients risking their lives do not qualify under the new point-based immigration policy.

This can result in two things. Firstly, the UK could face shortage of essential workers seriously affecting the health system and other essential services. Secondly, bringing in only educated people with a potential to grow and displace middle and upper t jobs can result in a new wave of backlash against immigrants. Farm labour is another issue that can weigh heavily on the farming sector. The government needs to revisit its immigration policy, a more flexible policy may suit better to the UK.

The deal itself and the time and effort it took to secure it, is likely to discourage other EU members to follow the path of the UK. However, the UK union is under stress in the face of opposition of Scotland to Brexit and erection of border between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is time for the UK government to resolve these issues amicably to preserve the union and the unity of the nation. The road is now clear for Boris Johnson and his government to embark upon the sovereign Global Britain project to the benefit of nation and the world. No excuses left.

Fencing creates acrimony

Baloch protest against fencing in Gwadar

TTI Reports

Gwadar- Amidst mounting security concerns, regarding workers of the development projects reigning in the coastal city, the administration has decided upon the use of fencing to curb the threat posed by terrorists having foreign backing.

An investigation conducted by The Truth International revealed that authorities' found strong evidence that attack on the Pearl Continental Hotel (Gwadar) in May 2019 was an eye opener. Law and order enforcing agencies had gotten the clue of foreign forces' involvement in this attack so that CPEC related project can be brought to a stand still.

Following that, for the security of the area and workers of development projects, the decision was taken to completely eliminate the weaponization culture in the area to safeguard the lives, livelihoods and the ongoing projects under the constant eye of miscreants.

It is believed that the fence would stretch up to approximately 24 sq. km of the city surrounding the deep seaport built, and operated by the Chinese because they are the main target of the miscreants.

Some elements knowingly or unknowingly are playing in the hands of anti-Pakistan and anti CPEC forces who are bent upon to obstruct CPEC, which is going to play an important role in the prosperity of Pakistan as well as the region due to its perceived significance in improving communication. Such forces are misguiding local youth by familiarizing it to an agenda against the interest of Balochistan and its people.

As a result, this development has been met quite harshly by local politicians and the civil society. In a recent press briefing, the 11-party coalition under the Pakistan Democratic Movement (locally in Gwadar) termed it a blatant violation of free movement of people and goods through Gwadar and demanded an immediate suspension of the fencing work.

Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi talking on the issue said that this was merely a move to prevent illegal crossings and reduce the infiltration by terrorists. But this poses an alarm bell for those whose means of earning relied on the free flow of trade whereby multiple families now fear joblessness.

While there are valid concerns emerging from both sides, it is important to evaluate the strength of the argument regardless of political inclinations that have marred the authenticity of the security debate. As politicians ride the high horse of populism, what must not be overlooked is the greatest interest of the people of Gwadar and the Belt and Road Initiative that vows to transform not just the destiny of the Baloch community, but the entire regional populace.



Push for Parliamentary Oversight of Justices



By Asif Malik

A senate committee deliberating ways and means to strengthen accountability of superior court judges is consulting the stakeholders on the possibility of an amendment to the Constitution to institute parliamentary oversight of justices.

There is a feeling that the powers of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) to hold the justices accountable have practically been scuttled because of the successive litigation against its proceedings.

The judges accused of misconduct resorted to filing petitions before the Supreme Court under Article 184/3 of the Constitution, which empowered the apex court to administer complete justice. This extraordinary jurisdiction authorizes the Supreme Court to pass any order against any legal provision.

Recently, a number of judges of the superior judiciary filed petitions before the Supreme Court against the SJC's proceedings. They included Supreme Court judge Justice Qazi Faez Isa, Lahore High Court (LHC) Justice Mazahar Ali Akbar Naqvi (who has since been elevated to the Supreme Court), and retired LHC judge Justice Farrukh Irfan Khan. Justice Khan tendered resignation to avert SJC's proceedings.

Interestingly, if a judge accused of misconduct resigns or retires, he can evade accountability, withdrawing pension other post retirement perks and privileges.

However, ex Judge of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui was the first ever judge who has been sacked by the SJC in recent past. In 2018, the SJC took up a reference against Justice Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui and ordered his removal for passing controversial remarks during his address to the Rawalpindi District Bar Association.

Since its establishment in 1973, another judge was Justice Ikhtlaq who was sacked through SJC.

There were over 300 complaints with the SJC in 2015. Most of the complaints became infructuous since the accused judges retired.

In 2015, the then chief justice of Pakistan Anwar Zaheer Jamali had disclosed that around 90 percent of the complaints filed against judges of the superior judiciary had become outdated because the SJC was dormant.

He said the complaints filed against the conduct of judges of the superior courts had become infructuous since most of those judges had retired after completing their terms in office.

Under Article 209, the SJC may initiate proceedings on a reference against any judge on account of misconduct.

According to Article 209, after proceedings, the SJC “reports to the president that it is of the opinion that the judge is incapable of performing the duties of his office or has been guilty of misconduct and that he (judge) should be removed from office”.

The famous case of ex Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry dented the SJC’s proceedings and set the precedent of challenging the proceeding of this forum.

In 2007, the SJC took up a reference against the then chief justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry. Justice Chaudhry, however, filed a petition before a Supreme Court bench, headed by Justice Khalilur Rehman Ramday, which quashed the SJC proceedings. More recently, Supreme Court also quashed the Presidential reference against Justice Qazi Faez Isa.

However the bench with the majority’s decision asked the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to probe the properties of spouse of Justice Isa and submit report to the SJC.

Although the legal fraternity favours accountability of superior court judges, however, it seems to have become an uphill task due to the legal loopholes.

A Senate Committee on Law Reforms headed by Farooq H. Naek has termed the existing mode of accountability of judges of superior courts dormant and stressed the need for evolving a transparent and effective mechanism to hold them accountable over the allegations of misconduct.

Senator Naek is of the view that under Article 209 of the Constitution, the SJC took up complaints against judges of superior courts. However, he observed that there was no hard and fast rule and set procedure to entertain and dispose of the complaints.

A lawmaker said that the existing system was redundant as the judges tried to politicize the reference filed against them. He suggested changes in the composition of the SJC and proposed that parliamentarians might also be made part of the council.

Legal expert and a member of the committee suggested parliamentary oversight in the judges accountability. He said that there is a need to amend the relevant provisions of the law in this regard. He suggested that the composition of the SJC should be changed and some senior parliamentarians should be added in the SJC.

However another member of the committee said that instead of including parliamentarians in the SJC, there should be a parliamentary committee to examine complaints against judges of the superior courts. Moreover, he said, SJC reports should be tabled before the parliamentary committee first before their submission to the president.

The parliamentarians, however, are not hopeful for effectiveness of such legislation, saying that the apex court may strike down any such move. Some suggested that the judiciary should have been taken on board before introducing such legislation.

Senator Anwarul Haq Kakar also endorsed parliamentary oversight of the SJC proceedings.



The committee decided to seek views from the Ministry of Law and Justice and other stakeholders on the possibility of an amendment to the Constitution to change the existing mechanism for accountability of judges of the superior courts and introduce a more open and effective system that involves parliament, in the light of the international best practice.



Senator Naek invited the stakeholders for an open discussion on these proposals. The committee invited former chief justice of Pakistan Nasirul Mulk, Pakistan Bar Council vice chairman Abid Saqi and Supreme Court Bar Association president Syed Qalb-i-Hassan to its meeting scheduled for next week.

The senators present during the meeting gave their point of view on the issue and finally agreed to adopt a mechanism for consultations with all stakeholders to make solid recommendations.

They underscored the need for benefiting from the international best practice and agreed that there was a need to strengthen the check and balance mechanisms in the light of Articles 175(A) and 209 of the Constitution.

The participants of the meeting included Senators Rana Maqbool Ahmed and Anwarul Haq Kakar and senior officials of the Ministry of Law and Justice.

The writer is a senior journalist.

Bifurcation of PCAA to Achieve What Exactly?

By Hamza Qureshi

It was 7 December 2020 when the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA) was established as an autonomous entity. From its very beginning, PCAA distinguished itself as best performing aviation in the world. Pakistan's aviation industry was on its peak.

But now 28 years later, this large organization of more than 10,000 employees is on the verge of splitting into two units. An improvement plan on cards looks to outsource its major profitable air stations so that declining performance can be reinforced.

Despite all adversities, PCAA stands as one of the most profitable institution in the country. Unfortunately, it has reached the worst period of its history. The institution is unable to survive because it has remained for too long in the hands of functionaries appointed ad hoc, or on contract or deputation. After nearly three decades of its establishment, it is now finally subject to international sanctions as well.

The Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority is probably the wildest case study of an inverse proportionality between declining performance and increasing profitability. Quite an oxymoron!

This has not happened all of a sudden. Continued mismanagement is a major reason behind the decline in PCAA's performance. The responsibility rests with all from top its executives to its lowest level staffers. Equally it is the outcome of the strategic compromises by high-ups sitting in aviation ministry and air headquarters. Decision makers remained satisfied with high profitability and never fretted much over falling performance levels.

Today, when all major government institutions are caught up in losses, the PCAA continues to earn more than PKR 180 billion annually. Its net profit is about PKR 36 billion annually. Unsurprisingly, the major chunk of this profit comes from Air Traffic Control Branch i.e., fixed charges of planes overflying Pakistan's airspace.

Experts say international bodies such as the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the European Union Safety Agency (EASA) and the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) have downgraded CAA and barred Pakistani airlines from operating in Europe and the United States. The reason for the ban is simple – CAA is not operating in accordance with international standards of civil aviation.

Some say a tug-of-war in the Establishment over the control of PCAA is to blame for its poor performance. Key positions in the Authority are either vacant or occupied by handpicked officers on additional/acting charge basis, deputation or on contract.

The post of Director General of CAA, for example, remained vacant for three years. Finally, Khaqan Murtaza, Principal Secretary to Governor Sindh and a grade 21 officer, was appointed as Director General on a court order. However, his appointment was challenged in Islamabad High Court due to lack of required qualifications and experience.

This sensitive sector regulator has been without a qualified head for two years. Its responsibilities include regulating civil aviation activities and issuing licenses to pilots, engineers and aviation personnel. It is currently headed by a mechanical engineer with an additional charge of deputy DG. The incumbent too have no prior regulatory experience.

The post of Deputy DG of CNS (Communications, Navigation and Surveillance) is vacant for the last two years. The acting charge of Director Operations is also held by a Junior Officer. Another vital post of Director Air Transport is being looked after by an officer with no relevant experience.

Similarly, junior or underqualified officers have given additional charges of the most important posts like Director Safety, Quality and Management Services (SQMS), Director CNS, Director Training Institute CATAI and Director HR.



The Directorate of Flight Standards is usually headed by an on-duty pilot from PIA and other airlines because CAA does not have the pilots of required caliber. The additional charge of the CAA Board of Directors lies with an engineer as Board Secretary is under suspension for opposing changes to the Services Regulation Rules.

The irony is that since its inception in 1982, no officer of the CAA has ever been appointed to the post of Director General PCAA. All DGs were on deputation from the Pakistan Air Force or from the Civil Services of Pakistan. Consequently, even the senior most officers of the CAA, who have vast experience in commercial aviation and relevant educational qualifications, retire midway.

In short, CAA is being run on the basis of deputation, additional charge and ad hoc appointments against almost all important posts including that of Director General.

An example of flagrant ad-hocism is the Aero-Medical branch which is responsible for medical checkups of pilots. Several pilots who are

overweight and suffering cardiac diseases and therefore unfit to fly have been cleared to fly because of corruption in this branch.

The morale of PCAA executives and employees is at the lowest ebb at this the most confused point in the history of their service.

The Cabinet has approved to bifurcate PCAA into regulatory and airport services. PCAA earns high profits from its regulatory branch. Sources in government say that less profitable airport services is most probably to be privatized. Observers say this could potentially put malefactors in-charge of PCAA's valuable lands and airport facilities.

More often than not, privatization in Pakistan means vultures gathering to feast on the carcass of a state- or government-owned asset. In any case, the purpose behind this new experiment is incomprehensible.

Hamza Qureshi writes about political science, international relations, aviation, society and economy, defense and cybersecurity.

Water, Politics, and a Million Dollar Industry

By Palwasha Khattak

Water scarcity for state means policymaking with little to no intention of implementation but the real sufferers are the poverty-stricken Pakistanis surviving at the mercy of state's egoistical greed which follows no conscience and makes millions of dollars out of such a primary need.

According to the World Health Organization, it takes between 50 and 100 liters of water per person per day to ensure that the most basic needs are met.

Pakistan is at risk of acute water shortage despite being located in the Indus River Basin and having more glaciers in the world. Pakistan's sweeping agriculture sector utilizes flood methods of irrigation to produce water-intensive crops which is either much underpriced or largely untaxed. At the same time, the poor and primitive water infrastructure in Pakistan dissipates even more water and little is stored due to a lack of reservoirs.

Poor governance and management are the cherries on top. The laws are archaic, some dating back to the colonial era. Any attempts to bring water management reforms are hijacked by political interests, often further exacerbating the crisis.

In 2018, the National Water Policy was introduced which stated that 10 percent of funds from the national Public Sector Development Programme would be used for water infrastructure. But just like other policies, this one too is yet to see implementation.

Any consideration of the water supply landscape of Pakistan's biggest metropolitan city, Karachi, would be incomplete without water tankers. More than 10,000 tankers operate across the city and many utilize illegal hydrants to steal water. The stolen water is

then sold right back to the same people it was stolen from. The tanker's one trip costs an average of PKR 3,000. If the tankers make 50,000 trips every day, they make PKR 150 million – USD 42.3 million. How much the industry is worth should not be hard to estimate.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) ranks Pakistan third among other countries facing drastic water shortage. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR) reported that the country could run dry. Researchers have envisaged that by 2040, the region will become the world's most water-stressed country.

According to a 2016 PCRWR's report, Pakistan met the "water stress line" in 1990 and crossed the "water scarcity line" in 2005.

No other country's economy is more water-intensive than of Pakistan, the country with world's fourth-highest rate of water use. IMF states that Pakistan's water availability per capita is 1,017 cubic meters which are severely close to the shortage threshold of 1,000 cubic meters. The same was around 1,500 cubic meters in 2009.

Hydrologists believe that every year, Pakistan's groundwater is receding a meter primarily due to groundwater extraction for drinking and agriculture. Climate change, poor water management, and the absence of political will further aggravate the crisis.

Around 1.2 million tube wells juice out groundwater for agriculture and Punjab hosts 0.8 million of them. The quality of available water to the lucky few is also degrading. Bacterial and metal contamination is endangering the lives of 50 million Pakistanis in

addition to arsenic poisoning. Moreover, Pakistan is the third biggest groundwater user in the world contributing 9 percent to groundwater extraction worldwide.

These heart-wrenching numbers tell another devastating tale. Pakistan is among the top 10 countries where access to clean water near home is the lowest as only 36% of Pakistanis have safe drinking water. The shocking figure of 21 million people trips over long distances to collect water.

The Federal Budget of Water Resources Division for 2019-20 was PKR 85 billion and for 2020-21, it is PKR 81.2 billion. The Directorate General Agriculture allocated budget for Farm Water Management in the financial year 2020-21 is 4 billion which was 1.3 billion for the financial year 2019-20. Therefore, the budget does not seem to be a problem but the management and authorities do.

Says Mian Ahmed Naeem Salik, an environmental expert and research fellow at the Institute of Strategic Studies in Islamabad, "The monsoon season has become erratic in the past few years. The winter season has shrunk from four to two months in many parts of the country. On top of it, Pakistan cannot save floodwater due to a scarcity of dams. At the time of Pakistan's birth in 1947, forests accounted for about 5 percent of the nation's area, but they have now dropped to only 2 percent. Pakistan must invest in building water reservoirs and plant more trees."

Former PM Shahid Khaqan Abbasi announced Pakistan's first National Water Policy during his tenure but the actions clearly suggest that the state or opposition's priority list conveniently ignores the water crisis.

According to ADB's latest report, the Asian Water Development Outlook 2020, countries need to invest thoroughly in water, sanitation, and other water-related infrastructure in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

In Sep 2020, UNESCO Islamabad in partnership with the Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR), and in collaboration with The Asia Foundation, and the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) launched two reports; the UN World Water Development Report 2020, and PCRWR's Groundwater Investigations and Mapping in the Lower Indus Plain.

These reports highlight the climate change impact on availability and need for safe water globally and providing information about areas where groundwater has reached lower and the availability of useable groundwater which will be helpful for groundwater management in the future.

Chaudhry Fawad Hussain, Federal Minister for Science and Technology in this meeting said that the state has substantially increased the water resources development budget of the country.

Perveen Rehman, former director of the Orangi Pilot Project (OPP), was killed in Karachi. Her crime was standing up for the rights of Karachi's working-class communities, particularly land titles and access to water. Before her murder, while speaking to a documentary crew, she said, "It is not the poor who steal the water. It is stolen by a group of people who have the full support of the government agencies, the local councilors, mayors and the police. All are involved."



Realization of PTI's Wet NFC Dreams Unlikely

By Azeem Waqas

The Federal Cabinet has decided to devise a mechanism for “expenditures efficiency” of the provinces under the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award 2010. Federal government is proposing to make “conditional transfer” of funds in order to make them more accountable. It is also mulling to link the funds transfer with provincial receipts.

A source familiar with the developments said the Federal government has a right to make “conditional transfer” of funds for “national priority projects” under the NFC award but for this it has to achieve a consensus of all provinces.

TABLE - 3
DETAILS OF PROVINCIAL SHARE IN FEDERAL TAXES

| Classification | (Rs in Million) | | |
|---|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | Budget 2019-20 | Revised 2019-20 | Budget 2020-21 |
| A. DIVISIBLE POOL TAXES | 3,153,770 | 2,300,482 | 2,817,212 |
| - Income Tax | 1,176,770 | 941,574 | 1,156,193 |
| - Capital Value Tax | 2,234 | 1,461 | 1,744 |
| - Sales Tax (Excl. GST on Services) | 1,206,911 | 851,912 | 1,098,916 |
| - Federal Excise (excl. Excise Duty on Natural Gas) | 199,770 | 174,001 | 198,403 |
| - Customs Duties (excl. Export Development Surcharge) | 568,086 | 331,534 | 361,957 |
| B. STRAIGHT TRANSFERS | 100,756 | 101,598 | 106,506 |
| - Gas Development Surcharge | 9,800 | 9,799 | 15,867 |
| - Royalty on Natural Gas | 50,627 | 53,949 | 52,736 |
| - Royalty on Crude Oil | 24,179 | 25,126 | 23,199 |
| - Excise Duty on Natural Gas | 16,149 | 12,724 | 14,705 |
| C. Less | | | |
| Tax Refund | 0 | 0 | 50,000 |
| TOTAL (A + B - C): | 3,254,526 | 2,402,080 | 2,873,719 |
| PROVINCE - WISE SHARE | | | |
| Punjab | 1,611,364 | 1,135,447 | 1,439,116 |
| Sindh | 814,916 | 592,321 | 742,030 |
| Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Inclusive 1% War on Terror) | 533,261 | 379,097 | 477,519 |
| Balochistan | 294,983 | 295,214 | 265,054 |
| Tax Refund | 0 | 0 | -50,000 |
| TOTAL PROVINCIAL SHARE: | 3,254,526 | 2,402,080 | 2,873,719 |

The federal cabinet has decided to devise a mechanism to monitor the expenditure of provinces and to check where the money is being spent, in fact it wants to check expenditures efficiency of the provinces, he told.

The federal government can put such proposal in the meeting of NFC for discussion and to evolve a consensus among all stake holders, the sources added. He recalled that Federal government had been making “conditional transfer” of funds under the 4th and 5th NFC award.

Sindh and Punjab have unreservedly rejected this proposal of the federal cabinet terming it a “crazy dream” of the PTI-led government.

The government and opposition are loggerhead on the new NFC award. The opposition had already rejected the proposed Terms

of Reference (TORs) of newly constituted NFC. Opposition parties have also rejected the proposed conditional transfer of funds by the federal cabinet and announced to challenge it at every level. They have asked the federal government to first present its own plan of expenditures efficiency so that provinces can learn from this experience.

While talking to The Truth International (TTI), Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz Member National Assembly, Dr Ayesha Ghouse Pasha, said that Federal government cannot approve such an insane proposal to make conditional transfer of funds under the NFC award. She said that the federal government can transfer grants to the provinces conditionally but these grants cannot be substituted by the funds under divisible pole.

There is no mechanism to check the expenditures of provinces under the constitution, she added, maintaining it would be unconstitutional if the federal government tried to encroach on provincial rights and it would be challenged in the courts.

Dr Ayesha Ghouse said that provincial assemblies are the representative of people. They have a right to decide about their expenditures for which they present their budgets in their assemblies, where budget debate takes place before any expenditures are approved.

She said that constitution has laid down the rights and responsibilities of the federation and its units. NFC funds are the rights of provinces. The federal government is not doing them any favour by transferring these.

Dr Ayesha Ghouse Pasha said that national projects could be made part of the NFC award only through consensus. For this NFC secretariat should be made vibrant, it should collect all data from the provinces and analyse it. The federation and provinces should sit together in the NFC and reservations of provinces must be addressed. She said that only national consensus would strengthen federation, democracy and accountability.

A member of the Sindh government said that NFC award is not concerned with sharing revenues and has nothing to do with how the provinces spend those funds. He said these are all assumptions of the federal government and the provincial authorities have not been intimated of any such proposal by the federal government.

He argued that the Counsel of Common Interests (CCI) was the highest forum for deliberation over such matters, and the federal government could approve such proposals on its own without the consent of provinces.

Former Secretary Finance Wajid Rana said there cannot be any amendment in the NFC award 2010, adding that if the federal government wanted to amend the award it had to be through the new NFC Commission by consensus.

He says that even new proposal cannot be put in the TORs of new commission, adding there might be a proposal from the Finance Ministry for discussion, in the meeting of new NFC where Federation and all provincial governments sit together, to review expenditures and receipts of all stakeholders.

After General elections 2018, the 9th NFC was reconstituted in consultation with provincial governments. The reconstituted NFC held two meetings on 6 February 2019 and 29 March 2019 at Islamabad and Lahore respectively. The NFC also set up six Subgroups which are working as per the ToRs assigned to them and it is expected that the working groups would be able to finalize their recommendations.

On 22 July 2020, after the Islamabad High court decision, the federal government reconstituted the NFC commission having four non-statutory members from each province. The Ministry of Finance has announced that NFC award will be revisited. The provinces will be asked to fulfil its funding commitment made at the time of merger of erstwhile FATA.

According to the Ministry of Finance the provinces will get PKR 2.87 trillion in the current fiscal year from their share in the federal revenues under the NFC Award and straight transfers. In 2019-20 provinces got PKR 2.4 trillion against the budget estimates of PKR 3.25 trillion. Punjab will receive PKR 1.43 trillion, Sindh PKR 742 billion, KP PKR 477 billion inclusive 1 percent for war on terror, and Balochistan will receive PKR 265 billion during current years.

Provinces could not get their share according to the estimates of the federal government. Punjab received PKR 1.13 trillion against the estimates of PKR 1.6 trillion, Sindh received PKR 592 billion against the estimates of PKR 814 billion, and KP received PKR 379 billion against the estimates of PKR 533 billion. Balochistan was the only province to receive its allocated share in full.

According to the NFC award formula, the federal government's share is 57.5 percent in the divisible pool taxes while 42.5 percent is divided among the provinces. The formula says that allocation

of share to the provinces will be based on Population 82 percent, Poverty 10.3 percent, Revenue collection 5 percent and inverse population is 2.7 percent. Consequently Balochistan's share is 9.09 percent, KP's 14.62 percent, Punjab's 51.74 percent, and Sindh 24.55 percent.

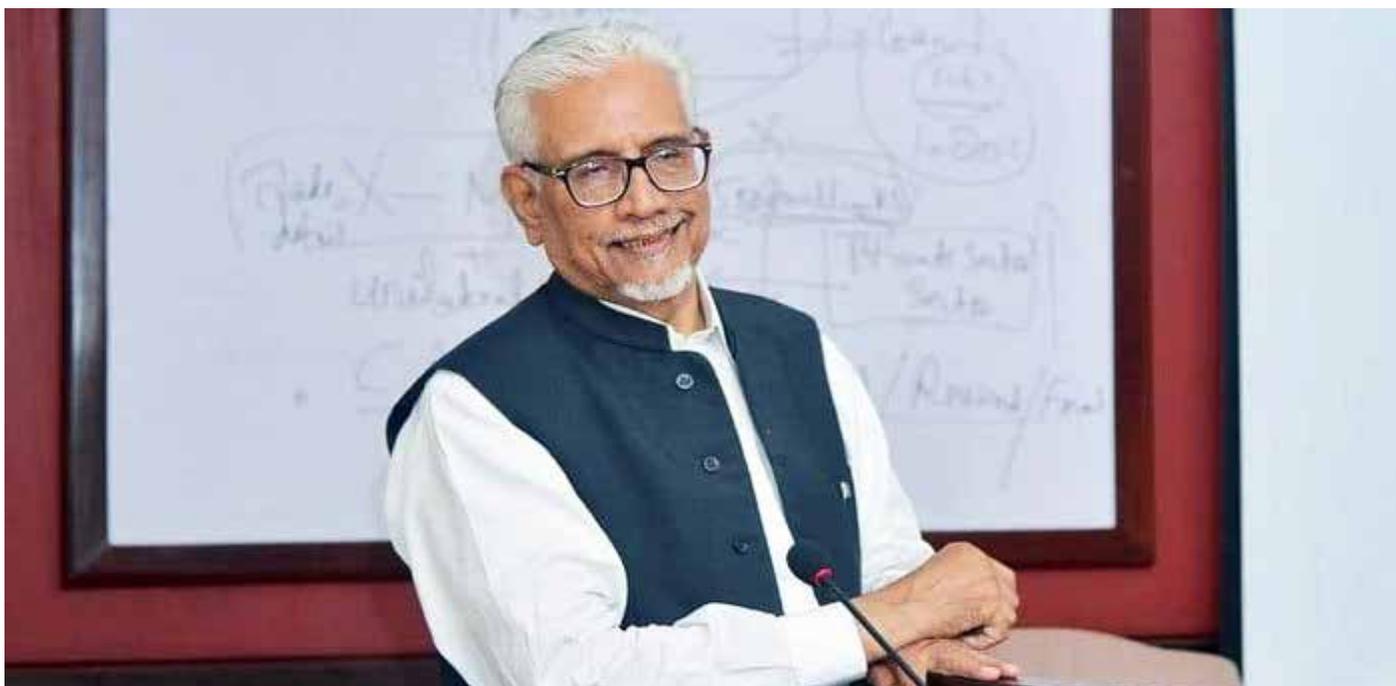
An economist, Dr Vaqar Ahmad has proposed that the NFC award must go beyond the need for a consensus and start acting as a tool to promote efficient provincial expenditure and incentivize progressive taxation by replacing the existing indicator of absolute tax revenue with tax collection efforts – i.e., the difference between the revenue collected and the estimates of revenue potential. He also advocates an increased weight for this indicator to 10 percent in the next two awards which is currently at 5 percent.

He emphasized that for a formula to be judicious, the choice of parameters should not be narrowly and sub-optimally focused on a single factor such as population which is based on a national census which, in turn is conducted after decades and has always had problems involving internal migration and the political and parliamentary dividend of demography. Due weightage, therefore, must be given to some other important indicators which are already being adopted by the rest of the world.

Dr Vaqar Ahmad recommended that to guide provincial expenditures towards development, essentially without regulating these expenditures, there is a need to think about some transitory indicators that may include (i) changes in the provincial forest cover to tackle environmental challenges, and (ii) social expenditures to promote development efforts in the provinces.

TTI sent several messages and tried to contact with the spokesman of the Ministry of Finance, Mr Kamran Ali Afzal, to have his point of view but he did not respond.

Political temperature is rising in the country and there seems no chance of NFC meeting in the near future. In the prevailing political atmosphere, there is little chance the government and opposition would sit together to discuss a new NFC award.



Police Reform Need of the Hour

By Mishaal Ashraf



The police department is expected to be the most trusted and one of the most important departments a state can have. Citizens expect to be treated fairly and with respect every time they come across with police personnel. This places a lot of responsibility on the police force.

For the police force to act efficiently, and to ensure the safety and security of the people living in a particular region, it is important that the police force puts in maximum effort to counter issues like terrorism, as well as address issues like rising street crime rates, harassment of any sort (physical, sexual, mental), domestic violence etc., and to put in appropriate efforts to improve the law-and-order situation of the country. For these issues to be addressed properly, however, the department must evolve with changing times.

At the moment, the police force in Pakistan is highly understaffed. There is a lot of political influence in the force which allows the powerful to get away with crime and have no respect for the law. There is lack of modern technology as far as forensic services are concerned, and there is a lot of bureaucratic corruption in the police department, as is the case with most of the public bodies in the country. Moreover, there is lack of technical and field training and support provided to the officers in the force which creates hurdles for them.

Further adding on this, the police force has started caring more for money than protecting their communities, hence making them greedy. It is no secret that the Pakistani police force often abuses its power, tortures detainees, misbehaves with victims – all to line their pockets.

Ultimately, the citizens no longer have faith and trust in the police department, and when a challenge arises, people try to handle it themselves, with their own links and connections, rather than reporting to the police. The abovementioned flaws in the police department display how badly this department needs reform, not only for their own force, but also to restore the trust of Pakistanis into its law enforcing agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICE REFORMS IN PAKISTAN

First of all, in order to decrease political involvement in the force, the police force needs to be unlinked from politics. This is one of the most important changes that need to be made. The department of police needs to be an independent body which treats all citizens equally.

Secondly, an independent committee should be set up, whose role should solely be of keeping a check and balance on the police department and holding the police officers accountable if they ever cross a line that they should not have.

Thirdly, the government needs to allocate adequate funding for the police department, so they can get the appropriate training and support. Moreover, the technology used in this department needs to be upgraded.

Fourthly, the recruitment system of the police needs to be re-evaluated. There should be a proper merit system established through which only deserving and competent candidates are allowed to be a part of the police force.

Fifthly, the salaries of the police officials should be increased so the factor of greed can be eliminated, and there is no motive for them to accept any kind of bribes big or small, monetary or non-monetary.

Last but not the least, there should be very clear set of laws in place regarding the treatment of detainees and prisoners so the officers cannot abuse their power by torturing them. There should also be a proper system of penalties and punishments in place so if a police officer does go beyond his authority, he or she is can be held accountable. This would also set an example for other officials that even the law enforcement personnel can be punished if they do not obey the law.

If reform along these lines is implemented successfully, the police can serve as an example for other departments. In the words of President Ronald Reagan, “Evil is powerless if the good are unafraid”. Hence, an effective police force can not only regain the trust of the community but can also help in ensuring a safe and protected environment by bringing the deviant behind bars.



Free Healthcare Costs the Nation the Least

Observing the Universal Healthcare Coverage Day

By Maheen Dhanani

We observed Universal Healthcare Coverage Day this month and it is important to note why universal healthcare is so pivotal and why Pakistan would have been better placed to tackle Covid-19 had it adopted Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

Pakistan is one of the many UN member states that have agreed to achieve universal health coverage by the year 2030 as part of sustainable development goals (SDGs). WHO had predicted that this virus would cause more damage to South Asia than any other region in the world and it definitely did. These unprecedented times have brought the nation to its knees and paralysed the society.

UHC is not a new concept. It has been around since at least the introduction of the National Health Service in the United Kingdom in 1946. However, it is only in the past few decades that UHC has developed significant popularity. What is universal healthcare? It means assured access to healthcare without encumbering the citizenry with unrealistic financial burdens.

Health has been high on the national new agenda recently because of the raging COVID-19 pandemic and Pakistani healthcare workers have indeed demonstrated extreme courage and exemplary fortitude in mounting a robust struggle against the deadly virus. Before this, Pakistan's policymakers have scrupulously ignored the healthcare sector. Shockingly, the nation spends less than one percent of its GDP on health – the lowest even in South Asia.

Even more worrying is the fact that despite increasing demands of healthcare and the abysmally low quality provided, health spending as a percentage of GDP has declined over the years from an already ridiculously low value of 1.12 percent in 2017.

This pandemic is warning for Pakistan. Calling it a high time for action would be an understatement because issues of healthcare accessibility and infrastructure should have been addressed a long time ago, especially as the majority of Pakistan's population is low-income and vulnerable to change.

Pakistan's health system is dominated by the private health sector and seventy-five percent of Pakistan's population resorts to the utilisation of private healthcare facilities (out-of-pocket) that prove to be more patient-centred and are outperforming the public sector with better accessibility and quality of care.

However, looking beyond this silver lining, private sector healthcare is a privilege and squeezes people dry with its high costs for even the most basic services. Of course we are talking about the everyman Pakistani, not the minuscule percentage that can afford to travel abroad for medical treatment.



In a country of 220 million people, the hospital-bed-to-population ratio is less than one per 1,000 when the recommended average by WHO is five per 1,000. Pakistan lacks the strategy to analyse this data and implement policies that would allow the public sector to set priorities and better fund and allocate resources.

However, this pandemic has helped Pakistan see the potential of investing in healthcare. There remains no doubt that the way forward is to take steps towards implementing universal health coverage. It will reduce the financial adversity with prevention, treatment and rehabilitation – all vital if ignored aspects of healthcare.

Since healthcare is now a provincial function, priorities must be set by each province and a consensus must be achieved to pursue UHC.

The first step towards introducing universal health coverage would be to ensure a well-functioning healthcare administration with good governance and then focusing on revisiting the nation's primary care for further development.

Universal healthcare will improve the well-being of the population as a whole. Accessibility to healthcare will increase with a consequent increase in the percentage of population receiving satisfactory healthcare from public facilities with a mere drop in the overall expenditure per household on healthcare.

The National Health Vision 2016-2025 states that Pakistan will nationally move towards universal health coverage to meet the various health challenges it is facing.

The Sehat Insaf cards in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are a positive step towards revolutionizing the healthcare system. It works in favour of the poor and marginalized communities providing confidence to seek treatment at quality hospitals.

Reforms have also been made to improve the management and administration systems of poorly run hospitals.

This year signifies the importance the government of Pakistan must attach to signifying national and provincial healthcare strategies and for developing primary care towards a universal health system which will improve health service delivery and reduce financial burdens on the population.

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

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Damning Report Fixes Responsibility for December Tragedy

Four Hospital Directors Named in Khyber Hospital Oxygen Interruption Probe

By Ghulam Dastageer

On 30 May 2015 – exactly two years after the Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaf (PTI) government took the reins of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa coalition government – Shahzada Khurram took his critically-injured mother to the largest tertiary-care hospital of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province—Lady Reading Hospital, Peshawar.

"We were referred to a private hospital because out of five ventilation machines at neurosurgery ICU only one was in working condition [which was] already occupied by a patient while the rest were out of order."

His mother Shabana Shaheen, a 55-year-old primary schoolteacher, was hit by celebratory fire while on her way back home after performing local bodies' election duty as presiding officer at a local polling station. She later succumbed to the severe head injury.

The situation, even after the lapse of five and a half years, seems to not have taken a turn for better. The death of six patients at the second largest tertiary-care hospital of the province—Khyber Teaching Hospital (KTH) Peshawar—due to the interruption of oxygen supply 5 December 2020 substantiates this.

Established in 1976 and stretching over an area of 962,000 square feet, the hospital provides healthcare facilities to 500,000 patients yearly.

As per the inquiry report of the BoG, at the time of incident, as many as 90 patients were under treatment in the isolation ward of the hospital. It states that the central alarm system in the oxygen tank room was non-functional which could help avert the tragic incident as the initial alarm raises as soon as the level of oxygen drops to 300-liter. "This would have saved many lives."

At 12:40, the level dropped to zero.

The next day, the Board of Governors (BoG) in a hurriedly-called meeting decided to form a three-member fact-finding committee, comprising KTH doctors, to delve into the matter. Simultaneously, another three-member committee of the BoG was also constituted to draw up a detailed inquiry report fixing responsibility for the incident.

The fact-finding committee submitted its report on the same day, stating that the oxygen storage tank of 10,000 cubic meter capacity had no backup system as recommended by the Health Technical Memorandum. "Ideally, there shall be either a primary backup (another tank) or secondary backup (manifold)."

As per the available record, the supplier never filled the tank to the required level. A day before the incident, the company supplied the tank with only 3,040 liters, far below the required storage.

The Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for a well-functioning hospital make it binding on the administration to ensure a system



of first and second-line backup facility of the oxygen supply. The KTH had also an adequate oxygen backup, which, according to the inquiry report of the BoG, was decommissioned in the backdrop of construction work in the hospital back in 2017. But the three consecutive directors of the hospital since, including the incumbent one, did not bother to re-commission the backup system.

Oddly enough, as a backup system 260 oxygen cylinders were present in the hospital, but they could not be utilized as the required accessories, oxygen flow meter and pressure gauge, were found to be grossly deficient on the night of the incident. Adding insult to the injury, the oxygen plant assistant was also found to be lacking the requisite qualifications and skills for such and assignment.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the hospital had an oxygen system capacity of 5,000 litres provided through a Vacuum Insulated Evaporator (VIE) oxygen tank facility, which was increased to 10,000 litres in August 2020.

The hospital management, also requested in mid-June to install a second VIE Oxygen tank of 10,000 litres capacity. But it was not feasible as, replied by the oxygen-supplying firm Pakistan Oxygen Limited, because the capacity expansion required a shutdown of the current oxygen supply system which could not be done due to the continuous presence of oxygen dependent patients and non-availability of backup oxygen system.

The average oxygen supply to KTH ranges between 3,000 to 3,500 liters per day. The contract with POL expired on 30 June 2020 and was never extended, renewed or tendered out. On 4 December, the supplier only supplied 3,040 litres of oxygen resulting in a sub-optimal utilization of the tank's capacity which could have provided greater backup supply if kept fully filled.

But the supply company cannot not be held responsible for that because it was providing oxygen without having any contract, piling up liability even though its contract with the hospital was expired on 3 June.

ROLE OF THE BOG

The BoG held two former hospital directors (HDs) in addition to incumbent one responsible for not taking timely measures to ensure uninterrupted supply of oxygen. But it was kind enough to exonerate two other HDs.

As per the MTI Act 2015, director of the hospital is responsible for the maintenance and development of all ancillary services, including but not limited to pharmacy, nursing, materials management, human resources, clerical, communications and security services.

Dr. Muhammad Zafar Afridi, one of the censured HDs, has already petitioned the Peshawar High Court, challenging the decision of the BoG to appoint a candidate as HD having less marks than him. The board is defending its appointment of another candidate over Dr. Afridi as Hospital Director in the Court.

The documents available with The Truth International reveal that the five-member selection committee recommended three names for the position of HD with Dr. Zafar Afridi on top of the list with 88.2 marks, followed by Dr. Tahir Nadeem with 79 marks. But the BoG appointed Dr. Tahir Nadeem as the HD of KTH.

In retrospect, it was the same BoG which approved the appointment of incumbent director of the hospital, Tahir Nadeem Khan, who took the charge of his duties on July 01, 2020 for a period of five year on a fixed salary of Rs. 600,000. Being a respondent in the writ petition filed by Dr. Zafar, the recommendations of the board against him cannot be termed as unbiased by any stretch of imagination.

In this perspective, the board should also be held responsible for the tragic December incident for appointing a person in the responsible position in clear violation of the the recommendations of the selection committee and merit.

THE OVERALL SITUATION

Within the first year of the PTI government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during the party's first stint in power in the province, the charges of corrupt practices surfaced in the media when the then provincial health minister Shaukat Yousafzai reportedly refused to give World Bank-funded programme to party's stalwart Jahangir Khan Tareen's People's Primary Healthcare Initiative (PPHI). The 'stubbornness' of the minister cost him his job.

The annual health budget of the province has since jumped manifold – from PKR 7.845 billion in 2012-13 (the last annual budget Awami National Party's coalition government presented) to PKR 105.928 billion with an additional PKR 26.591 billion for merged tribal districts in the current budget.

But despite such a huge budget allocation, the recent incident of the oxygen interruption at the second largest tertiary hospital reflects the overall view of the healthcare situation in the whole province. During the last seven years in government, the PTI could not establish a single new hospital anywhere in the province.

The lone cardiovascular ward of the province at the Lady Reading Hospital in Peshawar was closed two years back, citing the reason that the mortality rate at the ward was too high.

A representative of the Provincial Doctors Association, Dr. Saleem Khan, tells The Truth International that the BoG decision to shut down cardiovascular ward is beyond comprehension. This ward deals with critical patients and the death rate would obviously be high, he argues.

Also closed for the last six months has been the gastroenterology ward of the LRH. As many as four senior doctors of the ward were suspended after they complained to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief secretary about the decision of the BoG to re-appoint a professor of the ward on the very next day of his retirement. They were of the opinion that the post could be filled through promotion of the existing staff or through advertising the post.

Taking strong exception to the doctors' approaching the chief secretary, the BoG suspended all the four complaining doctors, resulting in the closure of the ward.

Detractors of the PTI plan to govern the tertiary hospitals through BoG under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Medical Teaching Institution Reforms Act, are of the view that it will become a tool to accommodate their favourites not only to the board but also to key positions at these hospitals. Looking at some cases of irregularities that have surfaced recently, there apprehensions are well-founded.

(Board of Governors have since resigned)

Chronology of the Annual Health Budget

2011-12

6651 million (6.651 billion)

2012-13

7845 million (7.845 billion)

2013-14 Health budget

22807 million (22.807 billion)

2014-15

25,237.123 million (25.237 billion)

2015-16

29,794.75million (29.794 billion)

2016-17

Budget Estimate 43,000.759,
Revised Estimate 46,066.663 (46.066 billion)

2017-18

BE 51,971.095
RE 58,406.971 (58.406 billion)

2018-19

BE 58,065.175
RE 53415.4 million

2019-20

BE 66822 million settled
3219.9 merged (Total 70,113.9 m)
RE 122,347 million

2020-21

BE 105,928 million
Merged (26591 million)
Total 132,519 million

Ghulam Dastageer is a Peshawar-based freelance journalist, mainly focusing on governance, militancy, human rights, politics and sectarian issues.

The New Silent Killer

By Eric Shahzar

When it comes to mitigating climate change, South Asia's, and specifically Pakistan's track record has been well below par. We are the 5th most vulnerable country to climate change, two places up from last year. Global climate change is having an adverse impact on already climate stressed regions and with the second COVID-19 wave disrupting economies and crippling healthcare systems – little attention is being given to the climate crisis. The PTI government has been complacent and congratulates itself of many occasions for introducing progressive initiatives. However realistically - the crisis is far from gone.

In 2017, a report by Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) indicated that by the year 2100, deadly chronic heatwaves could turn some parts of South Asia completely uninhabitable. We may not be too alarmed by this report considering that humankind has more than 8 decades left to do something about ecological disruption. However, there is even more serious trouble ahead in our present times. In Pakistan all efforts have been in place to contain the COVID-19 crisis, and with political instability looming large, no one is talking about the relentless rise in air pollution levels - which is the new silent killer.

Traditionally, Lahore is considered as the most air polluted city in the country, with visible smog for almost quarter of the year. However, in the first week of December, Karachi's Air Quality Index (AQI) ranking, which measures air quality – placed the city as the most air polluted in the world. Lahore was way down at number 5, which usually wins the air quality charts. Despite the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, all the big metropolitan cities of the country are experiencing unprecedented levels of air pollution.

It is important to highlight that annually around 135,000 deaths are attributed to air pollution in Pakistan while 5.88% of GDP is the estimated economic burden of this silent killer. With substandard economic policies already manifesting, accelerated climate change in full swing and a relentless rise in air pollution levels is only adding fuel to fire.

Travelling on the motorway, especially in the Punjab region – we notice a chimney shaped building which releases black carbon without any pause day and night. These are called brick kilns, and around 20,000 of these kilns exist in Pakistan. They add to the staggering levels of air pollution. Black carbon is a powerful contributor to global climate change, possibly a close second to carbon dioxide. The brick kiln sector is highly unregulated and no proper mechanisms are in place to tackle this.

Today, a brilliant zig-zag technology has been introduced that reduces coal consumption by 20% and carbon emissions by 40-60%. The smoke from kilns that employ zig zag technology is almost white in color with significantly low air pollution levels. Pakistan must move towards this new technology without any hesitation.

Deforestation is one the pivotal reasons behind the incessant air pollution levels in Pakistan. Even after the billion-tree tsunami project, Pakistan still has one of the fastest deforestation rates in the region, and our forest cover has shrunk to an abysmal 5.7%. As per international standards, countries must have a forest cover of at least 25% of total land, while cities must have a forest cover of at least 10%. In addition to this, let's not forget how the billion tree tsunami project has been marred with corruption allegations. Recently, the Supreme Court of Pakistan ordered for a comprehensive report on the project with highlights of the exact number of trees as well as the areas in which they have been planted.

For any progressive climate change initiative to become a reality – we need a robust budget for the ministry which is, as of now, being downgraded to a whole new level. In the federal budget of 2020-21, not only did the climate change ministry funding get cut by over 34%, it also did not receive a single penny for any new initiatives. In other words, budgetary allocations for the ministry came down from Rs 7.5 billion in 2019-20 to Rs 5 billion in 2020-21. The lion's - Rs 4.9 billion – almost 98% of the budget - will go to the tree planting programme which is already under hot waters.

Unless and until the civil society changes its lifestyle and public transport is made more mainstream, chances of tackling air pollution seem remote. Why can we not introduce congestion charges for areas with heavy traffic flows? Many countries have a congestion tax in place which is not only reducing carbon emissions but is also generation tax revenue for the government. In 2019, under the supervision of Murtaza Wahab Siddiqui, the Sindh government with the collaboration of Sindh Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) launched a constructive initiative to cut carbon emissions but it has vanished in thin air today. Vehicles emitting smoke and harming the environment were supposed to be fined by the authorities. What has the progress been so far? Do we have any statistics on this since last year? What we know is that an extremely detrimental air pollutant by the name of PM 2.5 is emitted during the combustion of liquid fuels, such as for power generation, and in vehicle engines. This type of an air pollutant can get deep into the lungs and some might even enter the bloodstream. Exposure to these particles can affect a person's lungs and heart, which can be fatal.

With the new vaccines coming in, the COVID-19 crisis will fade with time, but air pollution is here to stay. In a time in which people are already struggling to cope up with the COVID-19 crisis, rising air pollution clearly adds more fuel to fire. We must not, at all costs, downplay the long-term consequences of neglecting this silent killer. Reversing the relentless rise in air pollution is definitely the urgent need of the hour.

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

Happy New Year to Pak Cricket Fans

South Africa Due in January for 2 Tests, 3 T20Is

By Ali Abdullah

South Africa will tour Pakistan for the first time since 2007 for two Tests and three T20Is in January 2021. The Pakistan Cricket Board has confirmed the tour will comprise two ICC World Test Championship fixtures.

South Africa will arrive in Karachi on 16 January and will play the first Test at the National Stadium in Karachi from 26-30 January. The second Test will be in Rawalpindi from 4-8 February.

Lahore's iconic Gaddafi Stadium will be the venue of the three T20Is, scheduled for 11, 13, and 14 February.

This will be South Africa's first visit to Pakistan since the 2007 tour when it won the Karachi Test by 160 runs to clinch the series 1-0. Two subsequent series were played in the United Arab Emirates in 2010 and 2013.

Since 1995, the two sides have played 11 Test series with South Africa winning seven and Pakistan one in 2003. Against this background, Babar Azam's side will be determined to end the 18-year series win drought and move up on the ICC World Test Championship ladder.

CSA Director of Cricket, Graeme Smith said: "It's pleasing to see so many countries making a return to Pakistan – a proud, cricket-loving nation. Cricket South Africa is delighted to be counted among them.

"As someone who has toured the country on more than one occasion back in my playing days, I know how much passion the people of Pakistan have for the game as well as the love and support that the Proteas enjoy there as a team."

Pakistan captain Babar Azam said: "I am delighted that South Africa have confirmed their tour to Pakistan and I look forward to captaining my country for the first time in a home Test at a venue where we recently won our maiden HBL Pakistan Super League title.

"Looking at the calendar of international cricket in 2021, I am pleased we are playing more against the sides which are ranked above us. Not only is this critical to our learning and development, it is also an opportunity to improve our rankings across all formats.

"With the amount of cricket that is lined up in 2021, I am excited that a number of promising and budding cricketers will get opportunities to break into the national side and cement their places. This is critical to Pakistan's future in developing a strong and formidable nucleus of players who can step up and challenge any opposition anywhere in the world.



After the tour is finished it can be said that cricket has finally returned to Pakistan as South Africa will be the first top rank team to visit Pakistan after a 2009 security incident. Cricketing nations are finally convinced that security is good enough to send their teams to Pakistan.

At this historic juncture, the COVID-19 global pandemic is imposing a two-fold toll on cricket. One: Upon their arrival in Karachi, the South Africa side will remain in quarantine for a time in the lead up to the first Test, following which they will hold training sessions and play intra-squad practice matches. And two: Pandemic safety protocols dictate against allowing spectators – whose animated throngs are half the glory of the game.

All five matches will be played in empty stadia behind closed doors – with fans sequestered in front of their screens.

South Africa touring Pakistan on the quick heels of Zimbabwe is a good omen for Pakistan cricket. As more cricketing nations come to see Pakistan as a safe cricketing destination – and the pandemic subsides – Pakistanis can hope to watch more cricket firsthand and cheer their favorite stars.

Until then, cricket fans will have to make do with livestreams and telecasts.

SOUTH AFRICA IN PAKISTAN 2021 – TOUR SCHEDULE

26-30 January: 1st Test, Karachi

4-8 February: 2nd Test, Rawalpindi

11 February: 1st T20I, Lahore

13 February: 2nd T20I, Lahore

14 February: 3rd T20I, Lahore

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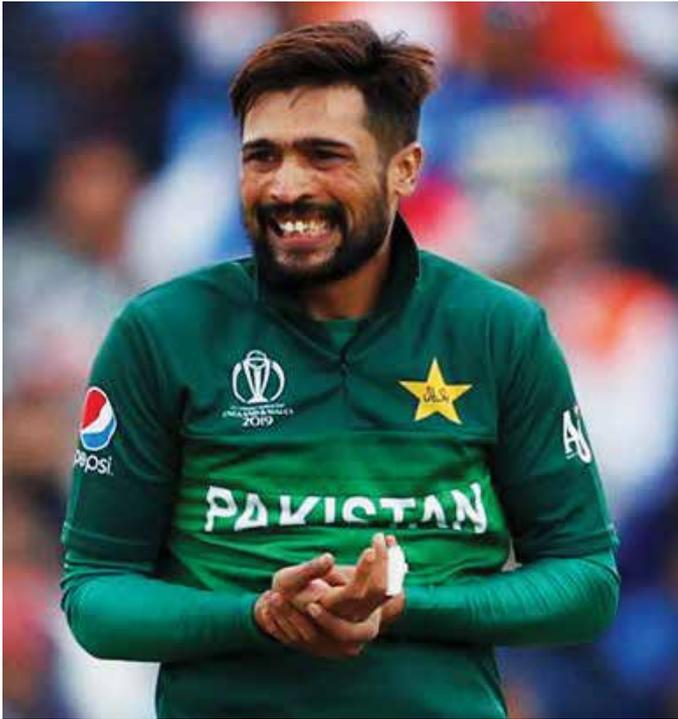
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Amir Says Quit Cricket Because of Bullying



Speed merchant Mohammad Amir says he retired from all formats of international cricket because of nonstop bullying by unnamed Pakistan cricket officials and former national players over his decision to retire from Test cricket last year.

Days after announcing his decision to retire from international cricket, Pakistan fast bowler Mohammad Amir opened up on the reason as to why he chose to take this decision at the age of 28.

Earlier this month, a video went viral in which Amir was seen announcing his retirement from international cricket, saying he is not able to handle the mental torture he has been subjected to by the current Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) management and some former Pakistan players.

Later, the PCB confirmed that Amir has indeed retired from international cricket.

Amir has now clarified that his decision to retire was not based on him being dropped for the New Zealand series – it was because of how some members of the PCB management kept berating him about his decision to not play Test cricket for Pakistan.

"The issue started when I announced my retirement from Test cricket. All was fine after the 2019 World Cup, then-coach Mickey Arthur was fine with it and he understood the decision. However, some members in the PCB management once they took charge selected me for white-ball leg, and we even went to Australia", said Amir on his official YouTube channel.

"But when Pakistan lost the Test series there, the head coach and bowling coach started giving statements against me not playing

Tests, some PCB management members said that Amir ditched us, they said I left Test cricket for T20 leagues. I put up with [this torment] for one year".

"I never said that I would not play ODIs and T20Is for Pakistan just because of T20 leagues. These members of PCB management kept on saying that I left Tests for T20 leagues. Their nonstop accusations proved crucial in destroying my image and people started talking about it.

"I am not weak, if I was I would have never been able to make a comeback after 2010. I do not have issues with Wasim Khan and Ehsan Mani, I just have a problem with the current PCB management who are dealing with the players".

The 28-year-old left-arm paceman also cleared the air regarding why he chose to play for Galle Gladiators in the Lanka Premier League. He also said that he got to know about his omission from the Pakistan squad through social media and there was no one who explained the reasons behind his exclusion for the series against New Zealand.

"When you dropped me for the New Zealand tour, I wanted to showcase my skills and Lanka Premier League was around the corner so I took the opportunity to play for Galle Gladiators. Haris Rauf came into the Pakistan team through Big Bash League. So as a player, this is what we can do, we can perform and make a comeback", said Amir.

"In the current system, I get to know through social media that I have been dropped from the squad. You could have told me why you are dropping me, but you are sitting back and talking about Test cricket".

"I wish the PCB management understood why I left Test cricket, I never left it for T20 leagues. It just frustrated me how the management kept on talking about me leaving Test cricket for T20 leagues. I have always wanted to play for Pakistan, I was available for two formats".

Amir, who played his first international match during the 2009 T20 World Cup, played 36 Tests, 61 ODIs, and 50 T20Is. He racked up 259 wickets across three formats of the game.

A big turning point in his career came in 2010 when Amir was arrested for spot-fixing. He was handed a five-year ban for bowling two deliberate no-balls in a Test match against England.

Last year, Amir announced his retirement from Test cricket in order to focus on white-ball cricket. He called time on his career after playing just 36 Tests, in which he took 119 wickets.

In November 2020, Amir was dropped from Pakistan's T20 squad for the three-match series against New Zealand. He was last seen in action in the Lanka Premier League where he represented Galle Gladiators.

All about Alamdar Khan

“Have casting calls rather than promoting some relative’s kid”

By Haider Rifaat

Introducing Alamdar Khan – an actor plus singer. He is steadily trying to make his mark in the entertainment business with roles that would likely challenge his artistic drive. You would probably recognize him best as the powerful politician Saif in the hit drama *Anaa*. Now is your chance to finally meet Alamdar in an exclusive interview with Haider Rifaat of *The Truth International*.



Alamdar, give our readers your background.

I was born on November 3, 1983 in an armed forces family. I left my house for a boarding school in Sargodha – PAF College – at the age of 11 and have been on the go ever since.

How did you begin your journey in the show business?

My teachers at the boarding school always used to tell me that I have a spark in me when it comes to singing, so that kind of got into my head. I started doing radio on FM100 back in Peshawar then after completing my Bachelors, I went to Karachi to explore the potential of hosting for channels.

I didn’t know a single person in the industry back then however, after leaving multiple auditions, I managed to get myself on board for Channel G for Indus TV. I further hosted for Indus Music and MTV for a span of a year in Karachi and was offered a few dramas during that time.

After that, my exploration towards music began. I released my debut English track back in 2008 and have been learning the art of being an artist in all the fields of modern day art.

What triggered the idea of acting for you?

I didn’t really see myself as an actor back in the day as a host. As I spent more time facing the camera as a host and started reading more online about the types of acting, actors and their methods, by 2016, I came to realize my potential as an actor and started focusing on it fully.

What has your struggle as an actor been like?

The struggle is real. I don’t have relatives who are senior or junior actors. I have purely made my mark as an actor on my own. I believe anyone can. It is just the willingness that has to be there. My music videos and experience hosting different television shows allowed me to make my place and get noticed.

Is your acting graph progressing as you had anticipated?

I wish it had been better but then again, I am still hopeful. I am sure there is a long way ahead towards my journey.

What kind of stories do you hope to be a part of but haven’t been offered or gotten the chance to star in yet?

I would love to do more psychological thrillers. I am an out of the box kind of person and believe the more challenging roles I would get, would polish my skills as an actor. I prefer sending audition tapes to different international shows (whatever I am offered via my IMDb profile through agents in the West). Most of these tapes are for Hollywood productions but you never know, someday I may make my biggest mark on the other side of the world!

With acting comes the uncertainty of what will follow once a project wraps. What is that feeling like?

The feelings are mixed. Obviously the team becomes a family to you and saying goodbye is not a nice feeling. I never feel down once a project is complete and the idea of what would follow next. I know I would get more work and recognition. I never let negativity take over. Also, I can’t fully rely on acting only. I need to do other things to get my kitchen up and running.

What is your next television gig?

I just finished a serial for HUM Television called Be Adab.

Besides that, I am working on an interfaith harmony web series, hoping that it would make all the difference.

What is your music style?

I love rock and pop even today and these are the best genres that can define me as a singer.

According to you, why are there fewer avenues for newbie artists to thrive in Pakistan?

It is the world of social media and to get noticed is literally just a click away. I still think one can be a famous Instagram influencer or a TikToker but for newbies, that is not it. Everyone is a star in their own field but yes, to take out time settling in Karachi to begin with is not an option the newbies opt for. Sometimes, to get somewhere, one has to leave his or her comfort zone. Those who manage to do so, always stand out.

How do you want our industry to progress in terms of launching new talent?

The first step would be to have casting calls and auditions rather than promoting some relative's kid.

Who has helped you get where you are today?

I have had a lot of amazing humans who have supported me to the core. Those who believed in me and still do. They don't have to be with me to believe in me. I am sure there would be a list of people and if I start writing down their names, it would take me forever! But once again, thank you to all those who helped me become what I am today.

What other activities apart from singing and acting do you enjoy?

I learnt playing guitar a few years ago and truly enjoy playing it. I make compositions and always look for inspiration. Besides that, hitting the gym on a daily basis is something I truly cherish.

Through our magazine, what advice would you render to newcomers in the field of performing arts?

Never give up on your dreams.

More on Alamdar Khan

Two words that best define you?

Always smiling.

Nepotism is...?

Unfortunately everywhere.

Your breakthrough role?

Saif in Anaa

A sport you like?

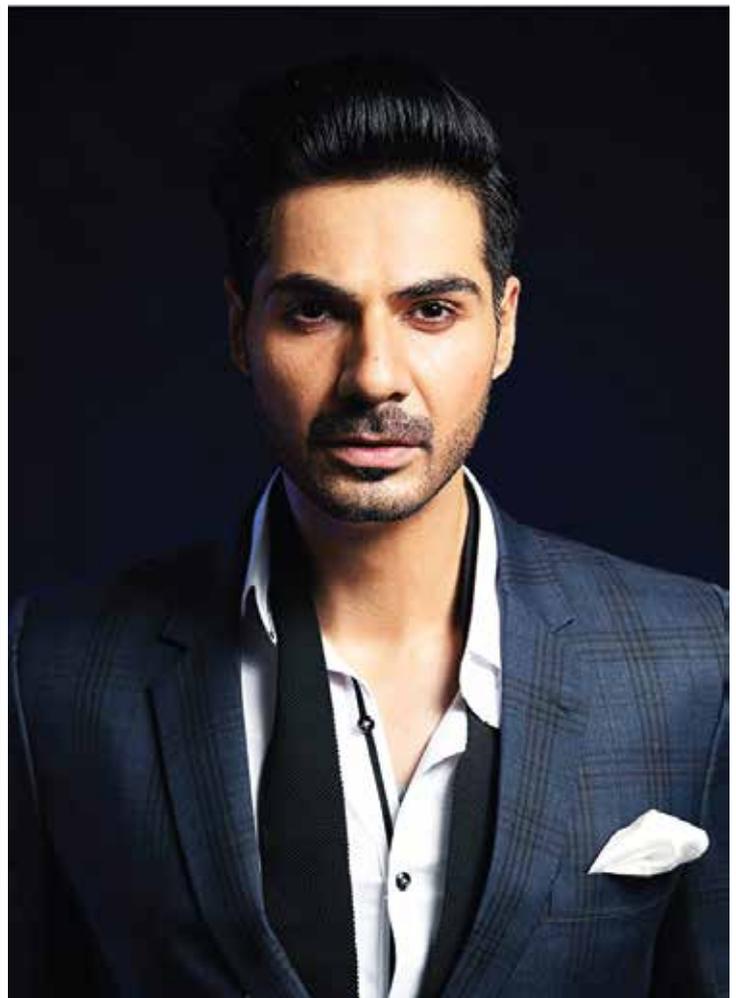
HIIT training

Last television show you watched?

Haunting of Bly Manor

Is marriage on the cards?

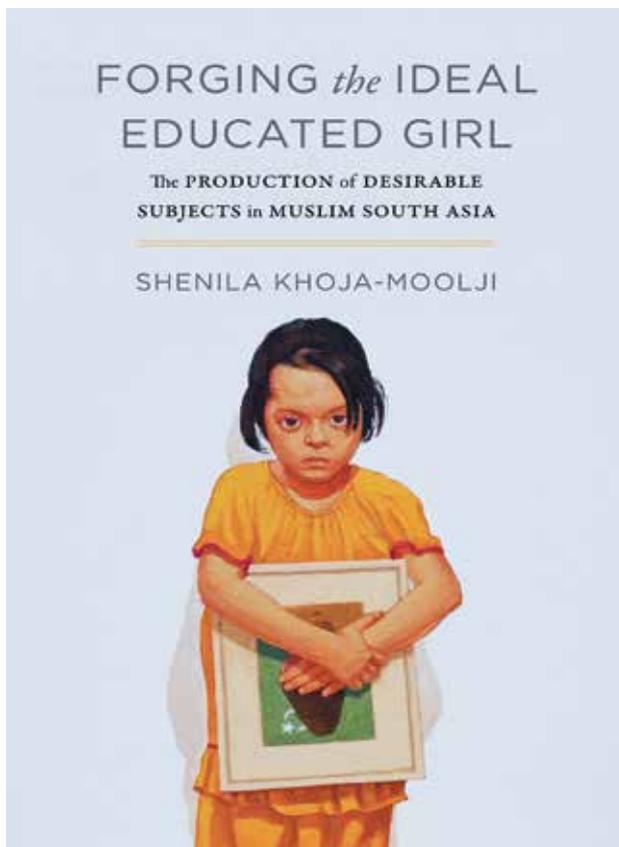
You mean deck of cards?



Orientalism and the Push for Women's Education

Khoja-Moolji, Shenila. *Forging the Ideal Educated Girl: The Production of Desirable Subjects in Muslim South Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018.

By Momina Ashraf



Forging the Ideal Education Girl is an excellent book by Sheila Khoja-Moolji that highlights the various points in history of the subcontinent and Pakistan where ideals about being educated woman held different connotations, and each time these ideals served the dominant elite power. Moolji starts off with Malala to explain how her story has been picked and chosen by the western powers to portray a Muslim woman victim to much violence and hardships.

It's not to negate the hardships and experience of Malala herself, but the fact that she was given so much heed was to portray the culture of South Asia and Islam in an inferior and oppressive light, to ultimately justify western intervention in the region. For example, the author quotes Laura Bush, the first lady of the US, saying, "The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women."

Clearly, many of the lobbies advocating for women's education in the developing world have ulterior motives. They have the orientalist notion of portraying the non-western as the Other: backward people who do not know how to treat their women right.

Consequently, they offers a clear cut, Eurocentric solution to it of educating women. This line of thinking tends to airbrush away all other problems of the region like terrorism, honor killing, poverty which have been directly or indirectly been product of western intervention, colonialism and globalization.

Moolji work purportedly shows the discourses on women's education at three stages of history: Early 20th century of British colonial India, early decades after the formation of Pakistan, and the turn of the 21st century. Each stage tends to form the ideal educated woman as vessels of morality, a tool towards construction of class and apparatus of nation building.

In chapter two the author talks about how at the turn of the 20th century there was particular anxiety about the Ashraaf classes, defined by sharafat (respectability). This respectability was characterized as being part of Mughal nobility and aristocracy.

With the advent of British colonialism, the privileges of being connected to the Mughals enjoyed by the aristocracy, landed elite, and scholars ended. There was this new need to redefine the ashraaf social class from the ajlaf (lowborn) class. This involved self-discipline, hard work and religiosity within homes. As the burden of reflecting superiority fell within the private realms it obviously became the responsibility of women to be a particular way.

For the women now it meant to be educated and domesticated so they could raise their children in a certain way and impart to them values and morals that resonated with high class. A classic evidence of this was Sir Syed's "trickle down" theory in which he emphasized upon women's education in order to produce educated sons and become closer to the British state.

Being educated at that time simply placed you in a higher economic class as it got you better jobs and economically hoisted you above other Muslims who had rejected the British education for being Christian education.

Chapter three and five of the book talk about the story Mirat ul Uroos written by Nazia Ahmed which gained much popularity in the 20th century after the formation of Pakistan and later on in the 21st century also it continued to be widely read and appreciated. The story essentially talks about Akbari and Asghari, two sisters who are placed in opposition to each other as judged from the same lens of sharafat as set in the early 20th century. Asghari is the humble and hard working girl who gets an education and then teaches kids of her neighbourhood at home. She is

also well versed with the Quran and has aced all household skills. On the other hand, Akbari is the irresponsible one who only creates problems for her parents and is very blunt.

A distinct feature in this story is about class. Where Asghari is the humble and understanding, her goodness is only for the upper class educated people like her. She scoffs at the lower, uneducated classes and this quality of hers is celebrated as she successfully gate-keeps her social class. Whereas Akbari, being the carefree one bonds to whoever comes her way.

Similarly, the decades after independence bore upon women another crucial task of nation building. Pakistan's first ever airline, PIA's advertisement was "On the world's most interesting airline, our pilots have been trained for years . . . our hostesses, for centuries". This meant that the state was now upscaling the caregiving services that they had previously been giving to their homes to shape their family's morality.

This meant that a woman's citizenship depended upon gendered roles in strengthening the patriarchal roles. This further constricted women's diverse ways of being as expectations from educated women increased even more.

Nation building was also linked to development and modernization. By the turn of 21st century and onwards, there was a lot of focus on increasing the labor force in the country and so working women were highly encouraged. At this point education meant not only moralize the women to distinguish their families from the other uneducated lower classes, but mechanize women into getting a job to appeal to the west, specifically the US and ally with them in the Cold War era.

This was the time when the country received massive foreign assistance for girls' education. Along with the aid came the same liberal dream of freedom and empowerment as understood in the West, which was defined by independent earning and consumerist desires.

This is not to say the previous ideal of the educated girl moralizing her home and family vanished. The perfect educated woman now had to juggle both her job and homemaking. This narrative was built in the 2012 adaptation of *Mirat ul Uroos* in the drama *Akbari Asghari*.

Akbari, being the ideal type had an office job and dreams of marrying and have children. At one point she said that she will obviously leave the job after marriage because she is not hardworking like other women. This particular point shows that there is very little room for educated girls to slack and the bar the society has set for them is really high, that if they fail to clear that high bar, they internalize they aren't the best.

Khoolji reveals the hollowness of this perfect ideal of the educated woman. In chapter four of her book she mentions interviews of several young girls who received education through foreign SPRING Initiative.

Nadia, a 17-year-old girl, told that the new English medium education has been a "burden". The new education had been hard which required extra tuition hours for which her family had to sacrifice their basic necessities.



She was the only girl in her village to do O Levels and all this built an extra pressure on her to get a suitable office job in the city, which she knew would be another struggle of its own. For her education was not a transformative growing experience, but a heavy loan from her family which she had to repay.

This is a guilt with which many girls who have received foreign-funded education live. Therefore, the purpose of education was not to elevate the girls, but to fit them within the larger capitalist machinery.

The construction of the educated girl always had ulterior motives which often tend to overlook to actually benefit the local girls themselves. Usually the education agenda is imposed from above which creates much more expectations from girls than before. The discourse on girls' education throughout history has changed but similar conformist themes have persisted throughout.

However, Moolji paints middle class, mostly urban, women's experiences as the experience of all educated women. Women of rich upper classes are not mentioned even once, even though they have been the ones receiving quality education before and after partition and have actively taken part in the state apparatus e.g. figures like Fatima Jinnah and Benazir Bhutto.

Similarly, experience of lower income class women has not been mentioned at all either as if they haven't conformed to the larger state ideology ever, and what's the politics around them not receiving education.

Lastly, even though very relatable but the accounts of middle class women are based off of dramas, novels, posters and other secondary sources. Middle class women themselves haven't been interviewed at all despite being part of the major chunk of the research.

ووٹ کا اندراج/منتقلی، درستگی اور اخراج

میرا ووٹ - میری پہچان

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