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World Largest Vaccine Maker India with Highest Death Rate

Low Oxygen, High Positivity & Higher Loneliness
Provinces opt for stricter lock down around Eid

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Covid-19: Cost-benefit ratio of SOPs

By M. Ziauddin



It is so cost effective to escape from being infected by the deadly Covid-19 virus compared to the exorbitant cost of treating the disease once infected that it looks almost unbelievable. All that you need to do by way of prevention is to wear a face mask when out in the open, keep a safe distance from others, sensitize and/or wash hands frequently (The SOP ---Standard Operating Procedure). So, by spending next to nothing you escape at least Rs. 50,000, the minimum required for treatment once infected but that too without any guarantee that that would save you from certain death.

Most of us did not follow the SOP, because of which hundreds were threatened, during the first wave, with loss of life and livelihood. It was also almost the same even during the second wave but the current wave, the third one, has posed higher risks to thousands.

As the second wave was tapering off the government unadvisedly announced ease in restrictions on February 24, 2021. Within a week the third wave had set in and it was all that it needed to find its foothold. The test-positivity ratio then reflected a steep increase, changing from 3.4 percent in February to 7.7 percent in March and accelerating further to 9.8 percent by the end of the second week of April and going up to 11 per cent by end April. The mortality rate, on the other hand, declined from 3.4 percent in February to 1.8 percent in March. However, the absolute number of deaths went up, and 1,592 casualties in

March 2021 were the second-highest since October last year.

The total number of new infections experienced a dramatic change from February to March 2021. A total of 90,403 patients were added to the health system. More worrying was the unabated acceleration in new infections as more than 60 thousand positive cases were recorded in the first two weeks of April alone.

A consistent reading of lack of compliance with SOPs through all the waves of the pandemic even at public offices and health facilities is a clear example of the trend. When the system of governance is reactive, lacks transparency, and is inconsistent in its decisions like implementation of lockdown, its credibility suffers a significant and perhaps irreparable loss.

But the good news is, a downward trend has been witnessed early May as both the positivity ratio and number of cases declined. National average compliance seems to have doubled from 34% on 25th April to 68% on 3rd May. We need to sustain and build on this compliance level specially till after Eid. Apparently, more people had started following the SOPs during the last few weeks perhaps after watching the video clips of the devastation that the virus has been causing in India.

However, experts believe that the number of cases may increase again if people violated the coronavirus-related SOPs as they did during the Eid holidays last year.

The government has done right by banning intercity public transports, closing down parks and asking people to stay home. If these measures are implemented in letter and spirit, the downward trend in cases would continue. Otherwise, things can become worse.

Experts believe mutation in virus could be stopped only if circulation of the virus would be stopped. Since virus has been rapidly multiplying, it is feared that it may mutate to an extent where vaccine would become ineffective. So we need to achieve herd immunity at the earliest by vaccinating

over 70pc population. Currently nearly 150,000 people were being vaccinated daily and the official target is said to be to reach 300,000 daily.

Pakistan would receive 19.82 million doses during the first half of the current year. Ninety-one per cent of these doses are purchased. The government signed deals for over 30 million doses. The population of Pakistan, which is currently eligible for vaccination, is 100 million out of 220 million because vaccines have only been approved for those above 18 years of age.

The government claims that the National Institute of Health will be able to produce soon three million doses per month of the single-dose CanSino Bio vaccine, thanks to Chinese help in maintaining the supply chain and helping with technology transfer.

The annual report of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan finds that the Covid-19 has left millions of vulnerable workers at risk of losing their livelihoods. And it has dealt a huge blow to educational institutions, with students compelled to attend online classes to the detriment of thousands in Balochistan, the tribal districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Gilgit-Baltistan who have little or no access to reliable internet connections.

Ramping up supplies of personal protective equipment to shield health-care workers makes perfect sense. The priority, however, should be to ensure that we can identify infected individuals and the people who were in contact with them and ensure that those with relatively mild symptoms can be diagnosed in testing centers or, ideally, at home rather than seek hospital care. To implement it, biotechnology companies, nonprofits, and international health organizations must join forces to develop and distribute low-cost testing tools.

It is a cause of extreme worry, meanwhile, that country's legislative bodies have so far shown minimal interest in the pandemic. And the absence of local governments has, on the other hand, served as an impediment to extending the SOPs to grassroots.

Eid-ul-Fitr: The Islamic Festival of Thanksgiving

The signature Eid celebrations will be curtailed back this year to avoid the three-day festival becoming a super-spreader event.

Eid-ul-Fitr, the first of the two canonical festivals in Islam, is marked on the first three days of Shawwal, the tenth month of the Muslim hijri calendar, coming after Ramadan, the holy month of fasting. The festival is observed to give thanks over the countless blessings of the Almighty Allah in general and over His gift of the blessed Ramadan in particular; and to show charity by sharing the blessings all around.

The celebrations begin with a congregational prayer for men at central places in all cities and villages. The idea is to give thanks the strength to fast during the month of Ramadan. In Islamic tradition, the Eid itself is a very special gift from Allah and worthy of much merrymaking in its own right.

Muslims mark the Eid by meeting and greeting friends and family, exchanging gifts, wearing new clothes, making up with any near and dear ones with whom relations have soured, and visiting graves of their loved ones.

Gratitude for Ramadan

The month of Ramadan has a special place in the Islamic tradition. It is believed that the sacred knowledge was revealed to the Holy Prophet (s) in the month of Ramadan for the first time. It was in this month that the first verses of the Holy Quran were revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in 610 CE.

The Holy Prophet (SAW) asked his followers to give thanks by engaging in fasting, prayers, dhikr, charity, and other religious activities during the month of Ramadan. At the end of Ramadan, Muslims are rewarded with the festival of celebrations, called Eid-ul-Fitr.

Thanksgiving Over Allah's Blessings

The concept of thanksgiving is central to Islamic thought and practice. In Islamic tradition, thanks are always due to Allah under all circumstances. Also, thanksgiving causes Allah's blessings to increase and failure to give thanks can lead to deprivation from blessings. Sufi saints have said Allah allows a person to enjoy his blessings for a time, but if the person fails to give thanks, Allah replaces the blessing with retribution.

What is more, thanksgiving must be equally in words and deeds. The majority of Muslim hymns and prayers are based on the idea of giving thanks to the Almighty for His infinite blessings.

The congregational prayer of Eid is an act of praising Allah and giving thanks as a community. The rest of the Eid commemoration is built around deeds of thanksgiving. Caring for the poor is integral to the commemoration of the Eid-ul-Fitr as it is obligatory for all heads of Muslim households to give charity to the deserving, preferably before showing up for the Eid prayer.



Charity, Fraternity, and Kindness

Charity and brotherhood are two other themes central to the Islamic way of life. These are central themes of the celebration of Eid-ul-Fitr.

Eid is the time to make up with any you may have angered for any reason, and to forget and forgive any hurt you are nursing against anybody. Eid is the time to share gifts, food, and good time with friends, relations, neighbors, and strangers alike. Apart from the obligatory charity, children, subordinates, and servants are given extra cash allowances in the spirit of kindness to make their Eid special.

Above all, Muslims are to promote peace and strengthen the feeling of brotherhood as they return to the normal routine of life after a month-long period (29 or 30 days) of fasting from dawn to sunset.

Cultural Variations

Exact cultural practices surrounding Eid-ul-Fitr and indeed the local names for the festival vary from region to region and from country to country although decorating homes and feasting with family and friends remains constant throughout the world.

It is called "Meethi Eid" or "Choti Eid" in Pakistan and India, "Shemai Eid" in Bangladesh, "Ramazan Bayrami" in Turkey, "Eyde Fetr" in Iran, and "Hari Lebaran" or "Hari Raya Puasa" in Malaysia.

This year, Eid-ul-Fitr will be celebrated on 14-16 May 2021 – subject formally to the sighting of the Shawwal moon. The signature Eid celebrations, however, will be curtailed due to the raging Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, the government has already announced a nationwide lockdown on all inter-district public transport and non-essential business from 8 -16 May 2021.

By Mishaal Ashaf

Threats always come from India: Epic Disaster Next Door Gives Pakistan Food for Thought

The catastrophe wrought by Covid-19 in India has given Pakistan a taste of what is to come – unless we can stem the spread of Covid-19 fast enough.



By Noor Aftab

The tragic scenes of India's hospitals running out of oxygen, relatives of patients making desperate requests for treatment amid thousands of deaths from Covid-19 has caused a groundswell of sympathy in Pakistan like rest of the world. As well, it has given us an exemplar of what is to come unless we move fast enough to flatten the curve of the third wave of Novel Coronavirus infections.

Though coronavirus cases have been steadily increasing and average daily death toll has reached an alarming level, Pakistan is still not facing the kind of catastrophe seen in India. But Pakistan is racing against time to act wisely and swiftly in the right direction as most of the hospital beds are already occupied, limiting hospitals' ability to

handle the influx of new Covid-19 cases, mainly in the big cities.

'Stay Home, Stay Safe' this Eid

The government has decided to strictly enforce the 'Stay Home, Stay Safe' strategy during the Eid holidays from 10-15 May to prevent spread of the coronavirus among the people. The NCOC issued special guidelines for the people urging them to stay indoors, avoid gatherings, use facemasks, observe physical distancing, and adopt other precautionary measures to combat the pandemic.

At the same time the government also warned that it would make arrests, seal shops and impose heavy fines along

with jail terms on violators of the SOPs during the Eid holidays.

Preparing for the Worst?

Prime Minister Imran Khan said he was resisting the proposal to impose complete lockdown as his government always tried to impose a system under which the economy did not come to a halt but if in case the current situation persisted then he would be compelled to think about the complete lockdown.

The public healthcare system suffered from neglect, mismanagement, shortage of funds, and rampant corruption, which provided expensive private hospitals with an opportunity to flourish in Pakistan where about thirty

percent of the population lives below the poverty line.

According to the government officials, Pakistan Army troops have been deployed in sixteen major cities with high positivity ratio to assist local administration in implementation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

Rising infection rates can overwhelm the ill-equipped health system and hinder economic recovery. The federal government is yet to guide provinces on pandemic policy and help reinforce their health systems. It should develop consensus with political rivals on its coronavirus strategy, pay attention to calls of health experts, and give the provinces more leeway to deal with the ongoing health crisis.

Curtailing inbound flights

The National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) curtailed inbound flights to Pakistan from 5 May to 20 May amid the country's worsening coronavirus situation.

A notification issued by the Civil Aviation Authority contained the list of countries categorized as A, B and C. The air travellers from 20 countries falling in category A do not require a Covid-19 test before entry into Pakistan.

The counties placed in category C were South Africa, Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Comoros, Mozambique, Zambia, Tanzania, Rwanda, Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Chile, Eswatini, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Malawi, Seychelles, Somalia, Suriname, Uruguay, Venezuela and India.

Cases Piling Up

The total number of confirmed coronavirus cases recorded so far in Pakistan is 829,933. Out of them 18,070 (2.2 percent) patients lost their lives while 722,202 succeeded to defeat this disease. The number of active cases is 89,661. The national positivity ratio is 9.2 – a high number by all accounts.

The number of confirmed Covid-19 patients in Islamabad is 75,892, with 12,242 active cases, 691 deaths, and 62,959 recovered patients.

In Punjab, the number of confirmed Covid-19 cases is 304,889, of which 46,306

are active cases, 8,550 deaths, and 250,033 recovered patients. The number of confirmed cases in Sindh is 284,738, including 15,238 active cases, 4,658 deaths, and 264,832 recovered patients.

In Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa (KP), the number of confirmed coronavirus cases is 119,277, with 12,006 active cases, 3,350 deaths, and 103,921 recovered patients. The number of confirmed cases in Balochistan is 22,528 with 1,505 active cases, 237 deaths, and 20,786 recovered patients.

In Azad Jammu and Kashmir, the number of confirmed Covid-19 cases is 17,297, with 2,236 active cases, 477 deaths, and 14,584 recovered patients. The number of confirmed cases in Gilgit-Baltistan is 5,312, including 118 active cases, 107 deaths, and 5,087 recovered patients.



There are 139 quarantine facilities in the country having 23,557 beds. Some 2,942 beds are available for isolation of the coronavirus patients in 215 medical facilities. Thirty-five tertiary designated hospitals are also providing medical treatment to coronavirus patients.

Infection Hotspots

The positivity ratio shot up in the recent days to a worrying 51 percent in Okara, 42 percent in Vehari, 41 percent in Mardan, 38 percent in Bahawalpur, 35 percent in Sahiwal, 34 percent in Lower Dir, 28 percent in Rawalpindi, 27 percent in Lahore, 26 percent in Peshawar, 25 percent in Nowshera, 24 percent in Faisalabad, 23 percent in Malakand, 20 percent in Nowshera, 18 percent in Charsadda, 16 percent in Shangla, 13 percent in Karachi, and 14 percent in Hyderabad.

Another study revealed that the sudden rise in positivity ratio and death toll in the ongoing third wave of the coronavirus pandemic is due to the spread of the UK, South African, and Brazilian variants of the virus. The analysis found the original virus in 1,653 samples, the UK variant in 944 samples, and the Brazil and South Africa strain in 934 samples.

Ventilators vs Patients

According to the unofficial data, the number of ventilators available for the Covid-19 patients is 1,800 in state-run hospitals across the country. The government has also made arrangements for more ventilators that can be used in emergency situation.

In Islamabad, 112 ventilators have been allocated in 15 public and private sector

hospitals of the city. However, 56 ventilators have been occupied with the Covid-19 patients. The Punjab health department has arranged 728 ventilators for corona patients in all hospitals of the provincial government, of which 414 ventilators were in use while 314 were unoccupied.

There are 267 ventilators in sixteen government hospitals in Lahore and overall ventilator occupancy has reached 94 percent while this ratio has reached 100 percent in five hospitals including Mayo, Jinnah, Services, Kot Khawaja Saeed, and Mian Nawaz Sharif (Yakki Gate) hospitals.

In Sindh, there are total of 664 ventilators out of which 453 are unoccupied in the government hospitals providing treatment to the coronavirus patients.

The Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa has 106 ventilators

for Covid-19 patients in addition to 55 more, which can be utilized in case of need. In Balochistan, 61 ventilators have been specified for Covid-19 patients and 59 are not in use.

There are 35 ventilators in Gilgit-Baltistan that have been specified for Covid-19 patients while Azad Jammu and Kashmir has 39 ventilators in the government hospitals for coronavirus patients.

The Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) announced that it had developed the country's first indigenous intensive care unit (ICU) ventilator.

According to Dr Qaiser Sajjad, secretary-general of Pakistan Medical Association, Pakistan is currently having around 75 to 80 percent occupancy of ICU beds, while private hospitals have stopped taking coronavirus patients on ventilators.

Punjab has been registering a persistent and sharp increase in the bed occupancy ratio at the intensive care units of the public hospitals, especially in Lahore that continues to be a coronavirus hotspot in the province.

Bed Occupancy

According to Pakistan Economic Survey 2019-20, Pakistan has 1,279 public sector hospitals; 5,527 basic health units; 686 rural health centres, and 5,671 dispensaries. These facilities, together with 220,829 registered doctors, 22,595 registered dentists, and 108,474 registered nurses mean there is one healthcare practitioner for 963 people and one hospital bed for 1,608 people in the country of 210 million.

A total of 6,685 beds have been reserved in all public hospitals for coronavirus patients, out of which 4,055 beds have been unoccupied in the Punjab province. Some 184,942 patients have so far recovered in 200 public sector hospitals being run under the control of Specialized and Primary and Secondary Healthcare Departments.

The medical facilities are under the mounting pressure from the rapidly escalating Covid-19 situation in Pakistan.

Oxygen Supply

The oxygen consumption in government hospitals has increased 35 percent in major cities including Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Lahore, Multan, Peshawar and Mardan.

There are around thirteen manufacturers in the country with 600,000 tons of annual production. But expected power load-shedding can make the situation worse because an hour of electricity outage means around 10 hours of a halt in oxygen production. The government must prepare a plan to ensure the manufacturers receive uninterrupted supply of electricity. Otherwise the hospitals may face shortage of oxygen for the coronavirus patients.

The government has also planned to import 6,000 metric tonnes of oxygen from abroad.



Oxygen Cylinders

Availability of oxygen cylinders is stable at the moment and there is no stress on the supply system but the fast changing situation may create problems in the coming weeks. The price of 55 cft, 120 cft and 240 cft empty cylinders are PKR 10,000, PKR 15,000 and PKR 23,000, respectively while they are filled at PKR 400, PKR 1,200 and PKR 1,800.



Oxygen dealers have asked the government to waive duties on import of oxygen

cylinders temporarily to prepare ahead of an India-like Covid-19 situation.

The dealers are currently hesitant to import oxygen cylinders because there is PKR 1.5 million duty on one container. If the government removes that duty even temporarily, importers can quickly build up stocks to deal with the impending emergency.

Vaccination Situation

The government functionaries including Minister for Planning and Development Asad Umer who also heads NCOC and

Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Health Dr Faisal Sultan have claimed that around 2.1 million people have so far received doses of coronavirus vaccine in the country. The private sector has so far provided 50,000 doses of Sputnik V and is awaiting another 150,000 in the coming weeks.

The government expects to receive thirteen million doses of Covid-19 vaccine from three Chinese companies in next two months. The vaccines have been procured from Sinopharm, CanSinoBio and Sinovac. Pakistan will also get around 2.4 million shots from the COVAX programme for poorer nations but no timeframe is available for it.

Around 2.4 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine would also be arriving soon, likely from South Korea. Pakistan will also receive 10-15 million doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine by July, while provincial governments in Punjab and Sindh have also placed orders for the Chinese vaccines.

Punjab Can't Afford to be Positive Like India: Strict SOPs Can Keep It Negative

A complete lockdown centred on the Eid holiday combined with a scaling up of the vaccination drive are expected to bring the province back from the brink.



By Qasim Malik

The Eid-ul-Fitr has come as a godsend for the Punjab government, with the obligatory weeklong eid holiday (May 8 to May 16) providing an opportunity to impose a complete lockdown and break the lethal cycle of ever-rising infections and deaths.

Lahore was torn between the need for a complete lockdown articulated by many including some provincial cabinet ministers and the federal government's adamant insistence no complete lockdown must be imposed because such an eventuality will drive daily wagers to desperation.

In the complete lockdown mode, the government announced closing all markets, businesses, offices and shops – particularly the Chand Raat shopping that is usually studded with having mehndi designs, finding artificial jewellery and ornaments, bangles, and cloths selection.

The government move comes despite strong resistance from the traders and the general public that was always interested in last minute shopping ahead of big events

like Eid-ul-Fitr. Observers say that the Eid-ul-Fitr would have emerged as a coronavirus super-spreader event if the government did not put its foot down.

The government, however, gave exemptions to pharmacies, medical facilities, vaccination centres, petrol pumps, food takeaways, utility services, media, bakeries, small grocery and karyana stores, dairy and vegetable sellers, fruit vendors, tandoors, and chicken and meat shops to stay open from 9 am to 6 pm to ensure a steady supply of the necessities of life during Eid holidays.

As the health department saw alarming rise in the number of critically-ill patients and sudden rise of admissions to the ICUs, it managed the patients by suspending Out Patient Department (OPD) services of four specialties – ENT, ophthalmology, dermatology and dentistry – as well as elective surgeries in public sector teaching hospitals in seven Covid high-prevalence districts.

As the need for oxygen increased, typical

black-marketing started and people in distress were fleeced. The government, despite its tall claims, is yet to nab the profiteers and bring them to book.

Between 5 April and 5 May alone, Punjab recorded as many as 3,154 precious lives perishing against 5,587 virus deaths in the previous 13 months together. The past one month death toll was 36 percent of the total 8,741 virus deaths during the complete coronavirus pandemic in Punjab spanning past 14 months.

Positivity rate in the past one month remained 24.8 percent. The month saw 77,268 new cases, pushing the tally of all Covid positive cases in Punjab to 310,616. Of all cases reported in 2020, 61 percent infections and 59 percent deaths were recorded in the first three months of this year.

In the third wave of coronavirus, as many as 113 children were infected and admitted to the Children's Hospital, Lahore, from February till last week of April and 12 of them lost their lives. Chief Coordinator

Coronavirus Punjab Dr Asad Aslam said the 12 children who died were already suffering from comorbidities like congenital heart disease and leukaemia. In the 2020 first coronavirus wave, Dr Aslam said, eight Covid-positive child patients had died.

Vaccination

Since procuring vaccine for its population was primarily a mandate of the federal government, the provinces including Punjab depended on the federal government to acquire vaccines for the people. The federal government in turn was counting on the WHO's promise of some 44 million doses free of cost under COVAX facility. China was also to gift large numbers of vaccine vials.

The government eventually cut a sorry figure when the main supply of WHO's free vaccine was delayed. Health minister Dr Yasmeen Rashid at a recent presser acknowledged that the WHO had backed out of its commitment to provide over 40 million vaccine doses to cover 20 percent population. "It was a huge embarrassment for the WHO as well," she said.

Dr Rashid said the delay, however, turned out to be a blessing in disguise as the government now procuring vaccine that was safe and effective against the British and Wuhan variants. "The WHO was supposed to provide AstraZeneca vaccine that later landed into controversy," she added.



The federal and Punjab governments finally bit the bullet and announced purchasing vaccines. While, the Punjab government is hopeful to get the lion's share in the vaccine procured by the federal government, it is also in the process of procuring vaccine worth PKR 1.5 billion to vaccinate people on a fast track. Punjab took a modest start of vaccinating people and then leapt into action by committing 35,000 vaccination jabs a day for over 50 years of age people. Within a week (on May 1), it announced increasing vaccination volume to 80,000 a day. The Punjab government now claims that it has received over a million doses from the federal government and will continue getting its due share in phases to vaccinate the vulnerable population.

Punjab is currently using Sinopharm, Sinovac and CanSinobrand vaccine and claims that these are effective against both the British and old Wuhan variants. The volume of British variant coronavirus in Punjab stands at around 90 percent and old Wuhan variant just 10 percent.

The health minister says the National Institute of Health (NIH) had confirmed Brazilian and South African coronavirus variant from two patients from Islamabad and Mianwali. "However, their contacts were traced but neither Brazilian nor South African strains found," she said. Dr Rashid said Punjab was also doing gene-sequencing in its lab at the primary healthcare department to know about new mutations of the virus.

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Imminent Crisis: No Oxygen in Future Even for a Sigh of Relief

As the third wave of the Covid-19 piles up at an unprecedented rate – industry representatives moot strategies to cope with looming medical oxygen crisis.

By Amna Shoaib

With the third wave of Covid-19 scoring cases higher than its previous two waves, the hospitals are running short of medical equipment more than before. More than 5,000 new Covid-19 patients were diagnosed within the last two weeks of March, and medical oxygen supplies has started to lag behind demand. Although the problem is just starting to surface, it is certain to assume alarming proportions soon if the people continue to contract the virus flouting the 6-foot distance rule.

Oxygen has mainly three sectors in which the application of this product is going on. First and most important is healthcare, all hospitals are involved in this respect. The second biggest sector concerned with oxygen is the ship-breaking industry, which has a potential usage for oxygen. The total initial cost for setting up a unit with the oxygen manufacturing capacity of 2,160,000 m³ (cubic meter) gaseous oxygen per year is estimated at about PKR 100 million.

There were around 4,652 COVID-19 patients on high and low oxygen throughout the country as well as on ventilators on Friday, National Command and Operation Center (NCOC) data said and health officials claimed that patients requiring oxygen were on the rise due to rise in the COVID-19 positivity rate and hospitalization of patients in the country.

“Hundred percent of oxygen produced by us at the Pakistan Oxygen Limited is being supplied to the healthcare facilities due to multifold increase in its demand after a surge in COVID-19 cases”, said an official of the Pakistan Oxygen Limited, an oxygen producing company. “If cases continue to rise, hospitals may face shortage of oxygen as we are producing at our maximum capacity”.

There are many units in the business of industrial and medical oxygen manufacturing but still they are not successful in



catering to the demand. Oxygen producers are warning Pakistan may also face shortage of oxygen gas for the treatment of respiratory insufficiencies like India during the third wave of COVID-19 if the life-saving gas continues to be supplied for the industrial sector, adding that the bulk of the oxygen being produced in the country was being supplied for the treatment of COVID-19 patients.

“As compared to the first and second wave, COVID-19 pneumonia cases are very high this time and this number is constantly rising,” says Dr. Shahzad Ali Khan, Dean of Health Services Academy. “Most of the hospitalized patients require oxygen as the life-saving gas is the most important intervention in saving COVID-19 patients at the health facilities. NCOC has already warned that 90 percent of our beds of oxygen facility are already filled”.

Dr. Khan maintains that if the number of patients requiring oxygen rises due to increase in number of COVID-19 patients in southern parts of the country, especially Karachi and Hyderabad, it could put extra burden over the oxygen producing capacity of the companies. He urges people to take precautionary measures to avoid situation like India.

A Pakistan Oxygen Limited official states that the oxygen production previously used for both medical assistance for respiratory problems as well as other manufacturing industries is now being solely supplied to the hospitals. He said there were five oxygen producers in Pakistan, who were supplying oxygen to the health facilities and to the industrial sector but added that the entire production of their company was being supplied to health facilities in the country.

“In the past, we used to have even one month’s stock, but at the moment, we are supplying all the production to the health facilities on a daily basis. The industrial sector is still being supplied oxygen at the moment and if demands increase, authorities would have to cut the oxygen supply to the industrial sector or we may face a situation like India also,” the POL official added.

“In this third wave, we are under stress but the situation is not like India. If all our plants work at maximum capacity and we divert the gas from the industrial sector to the health sector, we can meet the domestic requirement of the health sector,” said Muneeb Khan Babar, representative of an oxygen producer Multan Chemicals Limited. He however adds that oxygen producers will need uninterrupted supply of electricity to meet the surging demand.

India Gasping for Breath after Bungled Response

Pakistan's eastern neighbour is paying dearly for Modi's premature and arrogant claims of victory over Covid-19.

By Palwasha Khattak

India has become exhibit of how not to trifle with Covid-19 for political, religious, or patriotic reasons. Within weeks of the politically motivated public narrative taking root that India had conquered covid-19, the deadly epidemic has staged a comeback, deluging the public health system and mowing down thousands on a daily basis.

India has become the focal point of international concern and an epicenter of the global pandemic breaking daily infection records. Be it poor or rich, the current surge is treating them all the same. As the pandemic surges, the Indian nation is blaming the government for failing to perform.

It was just in February, a few months back, when Coronavirus cases in India went down leaving Indian health-care workers and epidemiologists puzzled and at the same time untroubled with manageable demand for ventilators.

Unfortunately, however, the spike in Covid-19 cases turned so steep that it almost looks vertical now. The healthcare system has reached its limit, each day the deaths are breaking records and crematoriums are running their furnaces around the clock in some cities.

Heartbreaking stories on social media speak of bodies heaped in makeshift crematoriums, patients gasping for breath dying in hospitals, shortage of and black-marketing in medicines, and so forth. With record infection figures and deaths every day, experts caution these numbers do not reflect the full quantum of devastation.

Amid this pandemic, Prime Minister Narendra Modi technically jeopardized the world's second largest population as all the restrictions were lifted virtually. Large group gathering were conducted, massive political rallies were held, and a religious festival was arranged which was attended by tens of thousands of Hindu pilgrims.

The presence of new variants in India has also been reported, although it is far from clear how far have any of these contributed to the devastation. However, Indian state of Punjab has reported the variant B.1.1.7 dominant, first identified in the United Kingdom, which is 40 to 70% more contagious and lethal, studies revealed. The variant B.1.617, referred to as "double mutant" attributing to its two key mutations found in highly infectious strains, reportedly dominates the state of Maharashtra.



As per CNN reports, one side of government hospitals have people dead and living Covid-19 patients laying side by side in small rooms filled with more than its capacity, the other side of the same hospital has peaceful queue of people waiting to get Coronavirus vaccine. From May 1, India has started to make Covid-19 vaccine available to anyone above 18.

The world has stepped up to help India considering its own government's utter failure to deal with the outbreak. Pakistan's Edhi foundation offered a fleet of 50 ambulances and its staff to help manage the crisis. Oxygen related material was dispatched by Singapore, Germany and the United Kingdom. China offered to help and France, Russia and Australia has promised to send medical aid.

India is also expecting oxygen and medicine support from the European

Union and some additional staff and supplies from World Health Organization.

United States – earlier criticized for hoarding vaccine and maintaining restriction on vaccine export through policies –announced to send raw vaccine materials, ventilators, personal protective equipment, oxygen-related supplies, and therapeutic medicines to India.

Individuals and countries are sending millions of dollars in Covid relief but the aid is not reaching the deserving because of

systemic roadblocks like red tape, human error, and time-consuming protocol in the country where thousands are dying every day due to the shortage of what is already there but out of their reach.

In short, a nuclear India seems helpless in the clutches of the catastrophic Covid-19 outbreak, its response marred by shortage of beds in hospitals, shortage of oxygen, shortage of medical officials, inept political leadership, and an archaic bureaucracy among other factors.

Now, it is easily predicted that the third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic is inevitable in India, also warned by experts.

"A phase three is inevitable, given the higher levels of circulating virus", says Vijay Raghavan, the principal scientific adviser of the Indian government. "But it is not clear on what time scale this phase three will occur."

Of Epidemics and Academics

Coronavirus continues to be a stumbling block in way of smooth functioning of the education system in unexpected ways.



By Zainab Umer

Epidemics and academics have never been on friendly terms, especially when the very prevention of the disease requires you to shut doors and sit tight at home. With Pakistan on a countrywide lockdown, it wasn't a surprise to see schools and colleges going down alongside.

But modern problems require modern solutions and the Pakistani government did indeed find modern solutions like introducing tele-schooling through Apps and websites that promote online education in collaboration with startups like SABAQ and KarMuqabla. Most schools shifted their classes online, giving lectures via Zoom and Google Meet.

Even though schools and the government have tried hand in hand almost everything to not let self-isolation become a reason for an educational standstill, it is almost impossible to stop the inevitable as online classes may never be able to fill in the gaps of face-to-face, on-campus classes.

Currently in the clutches of what most say is the third wave of Covid 19, Pakistan is experiencing countless obstacles when it comes to students and their education. As of

now education in Pakistan means waking up at 10 am, turning your computers on, logging into the class link provided by your teachers, and then going back to bed.

When asked about their experience Pakistani students did not seem happy with tele-schooling as compared to their initial responses about the alternative studying method. According to Nadia Naviwala, a global fellow at the Wilson Centre and an expert on the Pakistani education system, "It's almost like we think kids are USB sticks and we are just downloading this information onto them and that will make them educated."

Students complained how sitting hours in front of a laptop screen caused them to lose interest and focus. This begs the question that despite these measures taken, is tele-school helping or just acting as a substitute teacher who in reality doesn't know much about what he or she has to do rather than keeping the class calm.

"While teachers tried their best—there wasn't much they could do other than reading content from Power Point presentations," a university student from Karachi

interviewed for this piece said. A number of students also talked about how tele-schooling had taken the challenge out of education by not providing any sort of competition due to which students had lost the motivation to study.

Self-isolation has affected students in more ways than was anticipated. Stuck at home, students are suffering from serious mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and stress. Since interaction with age fellows is limited, students are deprived of an outlet for their emotional build-up.

Teachers believe that school providing education is not the only reason behind its importance. The discipline, routine, and exposure are equally vital for a child's growth and learning.

First year university students during a group interview sulked about missing out on "university experiences" due to the deadly pandemic and lockdown. When asked what this experience entailed, they elaborated that their expectations from this year were to meet new people, explore new talents, and have a hands-on learning experience.

Now these same kids have been sitting home for the better part of two years, staring laptop screens and acquiring little to no new knowledge during the course of the day.

According to an article by The Conversation, “Babies need stimulation, social contact and responsive caregiving, and all of these will have been affected during the pandemic in complex ways”. This time has not only caused distress to the youngsters of Pakistan but to the babies being born, stunting their growth and depriving them of important sensory experiences.

Most students fear they will come out of this pandemic with subpar social or interactive skills and no knowledge of basic work ethic. These conversations seem to have been sitting under wraps as the focus remains on the rising Coronavirus cases being recorded every day.

In short, even though created to cater to the students’ needs, tele-schooling is causing distress and exhaustion among children of very young ages.

Students facing problems like exam cancellations had quite a lot to say when asked how these difficult times would affect them in the future. Although short term, their viewpoint entailed difficulties in getting

accepted by their desired universities and living their dreams.

A student from a university in Lahore spoke about how his studies were almost at a standstill due to the lockdown. “Personally as a filmmaking student, I feel there is a lack of hands-on and practical experience through online classes,” he said.

An article by UNICEF stated that “Unless urgent and innovative measures are taken to help students continue to learn, irreparable damage to the future generations seems inevitable.”

Parents worry that excessive time spent at home is causing behavioural issues in their children and may become a permanent part of their lives. Some fear our youth in this time of quarantine seem to have forgotten the very concept of discipline and professionalism.

Recently students of O & A Levels took their demands of cancellation of exams on the streets and protested despite the obvious threat of contracting the virus. These protests suddenly took an aggressive turn when students began disrespecting the Minister for Education.

Asked if Covid 19 and tele-schooling had affected the quality of work coming from

his students stated, an O & A Levels Business teacher said, “The quality of work has not changed much, and in some cases the quality has shown improvement possibly it has become much easier for students to engage with teachers personally and the fear of ignominy or being called out for poor work which is mostly unavoidable in a classroom with other children – has somewhat alleviated”.

However, he also spoke about how tele-schooling has given an easy pathway for students to portray negative behaviour as “keeping tabs on students is a lot harder now. Chances of getting caught are minimal which incentivizes negative behaviour.”

The trend of cheating on exams has also spiked after tele-schooling was introduced although teachers are changing the traditional testing system and relying more on assignments.

Students and the youth of Pakistan have a very tough road ahead of them, especially when it comes to their practical lives. Fitting into a system that is a lot more rigid and regulated will prove to be quite an obstacle as well as having to physically interact with people, especially with people in authority.



Men Runs Machines: Can Electronic Voting Remove the Corrupts

By Hammad Ghaznavi

The PTI government seems keen to introduce Electronic Voting Machines as a part of its proposed electoral reforms package, for the next general elections. The EVMs will ensure fair elections, the government argues. It sounds noble but the reaction of the opposition to the proposal is far from favourable. Responsible for the opposition's harsh response is the extreme political polarization in the country or EVMs are not the remedy for our electoral ills?

Our electoral history, to put it politely, is chequered. All our elections -- Eleven general elections, three national referendums, one presidential election of 1965, various Senate elections and numerous by elections -- remained controversial, despite the supervision of, in most cases, our most disciplined and efficient security agency. Can EVMs reverse it all?

In order to understand what plagues our electoral system, look at some recent electoral controversies. There were about 20 presiding officers who went missing in the Daska by election last month. Next day the POs appeared at the office of the Returning Officer and attributed their delayed arrival to the 'fog' last night. Their phones also remained dead during all those hours. The ECP was convinced that they were abducted and the results' forms they had were tampered with. Hence, the ECP ordered a reelection in the constituency. Who abducted the Presiding Officers? Reportedly, through geotagging the ECP found out the place where the 20 POs were put up for the night. The culprits, however, remained unspecified. Can EVMs catch the abductors?

During the Senate elections March this year, spy cameras in the polling booths were spotted by the opposition Senators. The parliament building has a detailed security arrangement, considered one of the best in Islamabad; no one without an entry card can enter the area concerned; it has functional CCTV cameras. It has been two months since the ugly incident, without apprehending the criminals. Loads of electronic technology, recording and monitoring all entries and exits in Senate could not expose the miscreants. Can EVMs catch those who fixed the spy cameras?

The only known tech part of the 2018 elections was Results Transmission System (RTS). It collapsed on the night of the elections. EVMs cannot fix such issues. Shall we try to fix the simplest of systems called RTS, before introducing a new contraption like electronic voting machine?

The President, PM and a brigade of ministers in unison are preaching electoral reforms, particularly EVMs. The detractors of the PTI government point out that it's the same government that has fiercely thwarted all opposition's attempts at recounting of votes in certain constituencies after 2018 elections. This sudden unlimited desire for 'free and fair' elections is raising suspicions in many quarters. True, there is a huge trust deficit between the government and the opposition. "Why would the product of a rigged election want a fair



election," says PML (N) Punjab President Rana Sanaullah. He also thought that the time for negotiations and cooperation had passed. "Shehbaz Sharif offered them cooperation on the floor of the House but they ridiculed him and dubbed it an NRO seeking effort and then went on to arrest the entire PML-N leadership. Now, when every other day there are rumours of assembly's dissolution, who would talk to the government," he added. PML-N and PPP top leaders have categorically rejected the EVMs idea.

President Arif Alvi said he would personally try to convince the opposition of the efficacy of EVMs. PML-N leader Pervez Rashid responded: "India annexed Kashmir but the PTI didn't feel the need to approach the Opposition to formulate a joint strategy; neither on the pandemic. EVMs are more important to them?"

Government-opposition trust deficit apart, some questions need to be answered. The government is emulating the Indian model as for EVMs -- self contained, battery powered, stand alone machines, without networking capability (so no hacking). Plus, the VVPAT (the paper trail).

Two most important features of the Indian model, however, are conveniently ignored. One, in India, it's the Election Commission that has fathered the whole concept of the EVMs, including the machines and its features. While the ECP spokesperson has said that the Commission has not been taken on board by the government. Second, it took India around 40 years to reach the present stage, as EVMs were first time tried for a limited number of polling stations in a Kerala by-elections in 1982, tested in the 90s, introduced between 1998-2001 in phases. It was only in 2014 that the entire Indian national election shifted to EVMs.

Pakistan, on the other hand, seems in a hurry. Issuing a Presidential ordinance was a bad idea that further raised suspicion. The rush is totally uncalled for. Take it easy!



Electoral Reform to What End?

The judiciary can help restore voters' confidence in the system by holding and concluding proceedings in a timely fashion.



By Khalid Wasim

The Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government has presented an extensive electoral reform package and is now looking towards the opposition for cooperation. On the other hand, the opposition is not ready to sit with the ruling party on the issue, declaring that a government which itself is a product of an “engineered election” has no right to even talk about electoral reform.

The government's main proposals include the use of electronic voting machines (EVMs), change of formula for delimitation of constituencies, right of participation in the election for overseas Pakistanis, identifiable and open ballots for Senate polls, strengthening democracy within parties, transparency in the appointment of the election and polling staff, and making it mandatory for an elected member to take oath as legislator within 60 days after winning the election.

Although the government has a number of proposals to improve the electoral process, its main emphasis is on three things -- the use of EVMs, open Senate vote, and the right to vote and contest the elections for the overseas Pakistanis.

The PTI has been pursuing these changes since the time it was in the opposition. But the attitude which the party adopted soon after coming into power, particularly with respect to the treatment with the opposition parties inside and outside the parliament, has now become the main hurdle in fulfilment of its election reforms agenda.

On the Labour Day this year, Prime Minister Imran Khan through a tweet directly invited the opposition to “sit together” with the government on the electoral reform issue. However, the prime minister's focus while inviting the opposition was also mainly on the use of EVMs.

“Technology and use of EVMs are the only answer to reclaim credibility of elections. I invite the opposition to sit with us and select from EVM models we have available to restore our elections credibility,” the prime minister said in a series of tweets.

“In NA-249 by-election, despite a low turnout, all parties are crying foul and claiming rigging. Same happened in Daska recently and in Senate elections. In fact, apart from 1970 election, in every election claims of rigging have raised doubts over credibility of election results,” the prime minister said.

Imran Khan's party is now stressing the need for using technology in the elections, while completely failing to remove the opposition's apprehensions and allegations regarding the failure of the technology used in the 2018 elections when the Result Transmission System (RTS) went down.

The prime minister also gave the example of last year's presidential elections in the US, saying nobody paid heed to rigging allegations by former president Donald Trump only because of the use of technology in the process.

Vice-President of the Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) Maryam Nawaz was the first to respond directly to the prime minister's tweets through her own official account on Twitter, saying that “the party accused of rigging in Daska was yours but the people made you bite the dust TWICE despite your efforts to run away from re-election”.

According to PML-N's supremo Nawaz Sharif, living in a self-exile in London, the issue is not of electoral reform, but the sanctity of vote. “Everyone knows who is behind desecration of votes and stealing the mandate of the people. Unless this issue is resolved, EVMs will be useless like the RTS,” said Mr Sharif in a tweet, demanding that the practice of changing the results through rigging and coercion must come to an end.

Despite having tensions with the PML-N over the recent political developments, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari endorsed Mr Sharif's views and said there would be no benefit of electoral reform and use of technology if the role of the “powerful establishment” continued to exist in the polling system as it would make every election controversial.

The PPP and the PML-N also consider the use of EVMs a non-starter in Pakistani context. According to PPP Secretary General Farhatullah Babar, it is not easy to trust the EVMs in a country where “state agencies switched on and off internet and social media platforms with impunity on the pretext of national security”.



The opposition says that Imran Khan is offering them talks because he is stuck in a dead-end street. It says Khan's style of governance over the past 30 months shows that negotiations are alien to his temperament, and his "narcissism and self-righteous approach" has been the greatest stumbling block to negotiation and continues to be so.

The opposition is asking what good could be achieved by an EVM in a system where RTS was suspended over a single order. It also claims that the EVMs have failed all over the world and a study conducted by the ECP also revealed that the system of electronic voting was impractical in Pakistan.

Whatever the government and the opposition say on the electoral reform issue, one thing which needs to be reformed is the nation's mind-set. There is no culture of accepting the defeat in our society. There is no tolerance. If the mind-set is not democratic, no reforms will bring credibility to the electoral process and the institutions, for sure.

When the nation was expecting Prime Minister Imran Khan to demonstrate sportsman spirit for being a cricketer in the past after the recent defeat of party candidate Hafeez Shaikh in Senate elections, it saw him attacking the Election Commission and its members and even demanding their resignations.

We always cite examples of other countries to strengthen our arguments with respect to the transparency in the electoral process, but forget to mention that in most of these developed and democratic countries, the elections are held in the presence of the sitting government.

We all saw what happened when by-elections were recently-held in Daska and Karachi in the presence of the sitting governments in the two provinces. We are not ready to see even a school teacher performing election duty if he or she has got job during the previous government time.

Moreover, in their arguments, the supporters of the EVMs and use of technology often give the examples of India and the US. Do they know that the elections are held in India in phases and results are announced weeks after the polling day? Do we have this much patience? The reply is a big NO.

There is no doubt that there is always room for improvement in every field, including legislation, and in the working of every department and institution. In democratic societies, debates on reforms -- be it judicial reforms, political reforms, legal reforms or land reforms -- is a continuing process.

Electoral reform, however, is the least-debated issue in most of the democratic and civilized countries, as over the decades they have developed systems and mechanisms that do not require a major overhaul. What they mostly debate is the steps to facilitate and attract voters in order to increase turnouts.

Unlike Pakistan, the terms "rigging", "manipulation", "engineering", "bogus voting" and "tampering" are rarely used in these developed countries during or after the elections. The events which took place after the last year's US elections were surprising for the whole world. However, at a time when some political observers were predicting a chaotic situation in the US, the things started returning to the normalcy with a fast pace and former President Donald Trump couldn't even get support from his own Republican Party over his unsubstantiated "election fraud" allegation.

Trump and his allies reportedly filed a number of cases challenging the results, but all of them were rejected by the courts as well as the state election officials, finding no legal basis. Later, the US Supreme Court also dismissed a petition seeking a stay to the official declaration of the results. And all these issues had been settled by the time Joe Biden assumed the office as the new US President.

On the other hand, in Pakistan every government has to live with the allegation of coming into power with the help of the "establishment" and through political engineering and manipulation of the polls throughout its tenure. The main reason for it, according to many, is the failure of the courts to decide the election disputes in time. Therefore, it is generally believed that the country needs judicial reforms more than any other reforms.

Pakistan is perhaps the most heavily-legislated country of the world. And it is the

country where there is least care and implementation of the laws. Here lies the problem.

What happened in Daska? The ECP and the Supreme Court had to order re-election in the constituency after the mysterious disappearance of 20 presiding officers (POs). Now when the re-election is over and the newly-elected MNA has already taken oath, the nation is still unaware as to what had exactly happened in Daska. Where were the POs throughout the night with polling bags and under whose commands were they operating?

The ECP in its report submitted to the court had stated that following sudden disappearance of the POs after polling, the commission obtained the footprint of their mobile phone locations from the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority. The location of 10 POs was traced out to the same "suspicious place," the report said, adding that an alternative route was adopted by the POs which took them suspiciously long to reach the specified office mentioned within the scheme. However, the report was silent about the exact "suspicious location" of the POs.

Later, the SC declared the geo-fencing report submitted by the ECP as irrelevant, saying that it was hearing the case regarding the order of the Commission to hold re-election in the whole constituency and the ECP had issued this order even before finalisation of the geo-fencing report.

The SC was perhaps right in its observation in legal terms, but until and unless the mystery is completely resolved and those responsible are exposed and punished, the trust of the people in the electoral process will not be restored. The foreign funding and the Faisal Vawda's dual nationality cases are the latest examples of the delayed justice and thus denial of the justice.

If the government is serious about the electoral reform, then it needs to engage the opposition parties and allay their fears and concerns about the use of technology as most of their concerns seem to be genuine. However, the history of strained relations between the PTI and opposition shows that it will be a herculean task for the ruling party.



Meetings of Different Minds: Civil-military leadership comes up with due resolve to execute 'geoeconomic' vision



By Raja Faiz Ali

While accountability will bring institutional efficiency at the home front, Pakistan has to strictly pursue the policy of 'peaceful neighborhood' to reap the fruits of unique strategic location in the fast changing strategic milieu in the post pandemic era. A consensus to this end and the accompanying resolve of the civil-military leadership has unfolded itself into its stunning details during the political lull in the holy month of Ramadan.

While Army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa spent hours with around two dozen anchors of the various TV channels at an Iftar dinner to draw the line the same was done by the premier while he interacted with a limited number of senior journalists a few days later praising the Army Chief for his sagacity and his ability to understand and, consequently, take prompt decisions, to meet the challenges of the fluid strategic milieu the country is set in.

The "off the record" meetings are expected to convey the message in clear terms to all and sundry given the deep links of the leading anchorpersons and senior journalists in diplomatic and political circles other than their exposure with public through daily current affairs programs they conduct.

In both of the meetings the civil-military leadership spun the narrative of stability marked with accountability and rule of law at the home front and the resolve to work for a peaceful neighborhood to reap the benefit of the country's strategic location.

Promising geo-strategic milieu

Since the end of Cold War, Pakistan has been aspiring for the role of regional business hub, given its strategic location, which makes it sit across trade routes connecting South, Central and West Asian

regions. However, the mayhem in Afghanistan following the Soviet withdrawal in the backdrop of fluid strategic milieu has denied the country this opportunity. China's initiative, whereby it has launched the CPEC project under the framework of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), has offered Pakistan the opportunity to find a proper, rather due, place under the sun by aligning its foreign and domestic policies.

Contrary to the past, the prospects of stable Afghanistan are more than clear given the US shifting its prosperity the peripheral regions of the Asian continent and the existence of regional framework under the guiding influence of China and Russia to restore stability in war torn Afghanistan. Luckily, around this time, Pakistan and India are both members of the SCO while, Iran too is only step behind to join the club. The BRI project, sponsored by China,



which seeks reviving the historical Silk Road, linking Asia and Europe through land route, contains the prospects of Afghanistan not falling again in the abyss following the US-NATO troop drawdown.

Walking on a tight rope

Of course, Pakistan has to walk on the tight rope in view of the strategic competition between the US and China in the post-pandemic era, having enjoyed close ties with the both side of the divide with a clear understanding that for the first time that great power strategic competition has shifted away from its borders. So, Pakistan has not only kept itself aligned to China sponsored economic projects but also has

Peace narrative

At a time the US-NATO troops are going to withdraw from Afghanistan by September 11, ending the 20-year long War on Terror, Pakistan has to stay calm and stable not only in view of the resulting political void in Afghanistan but also its own fragile economy and growing expectations of the masses as the country undergoes third wave of the pandemic.

Staying stable and showing readiness to play a responsible and constructive role in the strategic scenario following the Afghan drawdown, is something the civilian-military leadership has marked as key to Pakistan's success. And it simply means

that the Army is alive to its constitutional responsibilities and that its role should be strictly seen in this context of what its professionalism demands for. Though the message has been dropped several times through ISPR but this time it was done with a sense of brinkmanship to ensure the results.

A mild encounter between Army Chief and a senior journalist, reveals all about the institution's resolve to remove confusions, which of course have a far reaching impact on political calculus, about its constitutional role. His asking him to register FIR against his alleged attackers, which he often mentions in his deliberation about he being shot and, consequently, injured, also made



gone extra miles to facilitate US exit from Afghanistan by using its influence with Taliban, who occupy and manage one third of the country's mainland, to reach the Doha agreement. The civil-military leadership seems also open to any concrete proposal originating in Washington or Beijing to sit across India if it means resolving the outstanding disputes between the neighbors. Given the existence of a huge trust gap between Islamabad and New Delhi, the civil-military leadership seems to be convinced that the country has to show utmost readiness to avail every opportunity to put to test its 'peaceful neighborhood' policy.

shoring up institutional capacity marked by fairness, accountability and efficiency to make them credible in their responses towards their set roles.

Restoring integrity of state institutions is believed to be game changer not only giving credence to the reality of Pakistan as a nuclear power but also create necessary expectation system, for the audience at home and abroad, for successful execution of domestic and foreign policies inspired from geo-economic vision.

The eight hour long session with media persons was entirely focused on the point

it clear that no one, including Army, is outside the bonds of accountability. This point was also carried by the Prime Minister when he dilated up on the Jahangir Tareen affair in a meeting of his loyal legislators seeking relief from the injustice committed against him as he undergoes an accountability drive implicating the industrial tycoon and estranged party leader in money-laundering case. Imran Khan made it abundantly clear that Jahangir, his colleague and close friend, must pass the test and come clean to reclaim his position in the party.



JKT factor fast coming as the most convincing challenge for the ruling PTI

By Zain Rihat

ISLAMABAD: The multiparty opposition alliance; Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) seems no more a threat to the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI). Things have been quite different at the PDM platform after the two PDM constituent parties; Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) resorted to constant bickering on the occasion of March senate elections. The alliance has almost met an unnatural demise, it's no more a threat to the government at least for the time being but at the same time, Jehangir Khan Tareen (JKT) factor is fast approaching as the most convincing challenge for the ruling party. Having claimed the support of over thirty members of Punjab Assembly and the National Assembly, Jehangir Khan Tareen has all the potential to upset the ruling party, the insiders believe.

The JKT saga dates back to April 2020 when PM Imran Khan released the report on the Sugar and Wheat Crisis. In August last year, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) launched an inquiry against Jahangir Tareen in the money-laundering. A joint team of the FIA and the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has been actively investigating the known and unknown assets of billionaire Jahangir Tareen. FIA contacted public and private institutions which have a record of wealth and business of Jahangir Khan Tareen. Formal notices were issued against JKT and 19 officials and private entities on charges of money-laundering and corporate fraud. In issuing the notice, the Sugar Commission 2020 Inquiry Report was taken into account. The information sought included almost every property of JKT, then a close confidant of Prime Minister Imran Khan and the people around him.

Earlier, the federal government had constituted a high-level combined investigation team to probe an alleged financial scam of over Rs20 billion involving three biggest groups running sugar mills in the country.



The CIT headed by FIA's Wajid Zia initiated legal action against JDW Group of Companies owned by PTI leader Jahangir Khan Tareen and Alliance Sugar Mills owned by RYK Group with major share of family of then Federal Minister for Economic Affairs Makhdoom Khusró Bakhtiar and PML-Q leader Chaudhry Moonis Elahi.

The sugar inquiry commission — formed on the directives of the Prime Minister to probe the rise in the price of the commodity had revealed names of many bigwigs, including Tareen, who had allegedly benefitted from the crisis. On the other hand, Jahangir Tareen rejected the allegations in the sugar inquiry report. Surprisingly, it all happened at a time when the PTI desperately needed Jahangir Khan Tareen to play a role in neutralizing the opposition's anti-government movement.

Then JKT quietly departed for London in June last year despite being a prime suspect in the sugar scam. In June 2020, Tareen along with his son flew to the UK for 'medical check-up'. There were widespread speculations that Tareen left for the country to save his skin before the start of the government's punitive action on the findings of the report of the Sugar Inquiry Commission that implicated PTI leader and other leading political figures and businessmen in the sugar scam. PTI's



isolated leader; Tareen returned to Pakistan from the UK in November last year after spending several months in the United Kingdom. The PTI leader's departure had prompted backlash from the opposition. The PML-N had raised questions over Tareen having been allowed to leave and had accused the premier of pursuing selective accountability.

On March 22, the FIA booked estranged PTI leader Jahangir Tareen and his son, Ali Tareen, for fraud and money laundering. Two separate cases were registered under sections 406 (criminal breach of trust), 420 (cheating of public shareholders) and 109 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC), read with sections 3/4 of the Anti-Money Laundering Act. Responding to the development, Tareen lashed out at the FIA and said the accusations against him and his family were totally fabricated.

Tareen was the PTI's mind, political organiser, planner, fixer, and troubleshooter. He was also Imran Khan's adviser on matters that went beyond the mandate of his party designation. Imran Khan led the party, but JKT ran it, according to the political experts.

Annoyed with the top party leadership over what he views as political victimization, Tareen has been showing his support on the occasion of his appearances before the



court. An unseen unease exists in the ruling party over the JKT issue. Some of the party leaders are urging the leadership to resolve the issue before it really swells to a political complication.

Tareen and his supporters, majority of whom are from Punjab assembly, have been demanding 'justice' from the party. They believe they can persuade the PM of the fairness of their demands once they meet the latter. In the latest of the developments, the estranged PTI leader has said that he had been assured of a meeting between his group of supporters and Prime Minister Imran Khan "in a few days". Speaking to the media outside a Lahore sessions court, Jahangir Tareen said he had hosted an Iftar dinner for his allies earlier this month. "A day before, some individuals from Islamabad contacted me and said that our group would have a meeting with the premier in a few days. Our entire group will meet the prime minister soon," said Tareen, adding that his relationship with the premier was not "weak".



According to the party sources, Prime Minister Imran Khan has been avoiding meeting with Jehangir Khan Tareen after blaming him for benefiting from the sugar crisis last year. The two are not on speaking terms even as the reasons that led to his exit from the party are still around. Interestingly, the people that allegedly led to his exit are also still around. Tareen and his supporters had been blaming SAPM Barrister Shahzad Akbar and Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Muhammad Azam Khan for hatching a conspiracy against him and creating misunderstanding between the two. SAPM Barrister Shehzad Akbar is

supervising the FIA investigation against the sugar barons.

Now the question is whether JKT — one of the prime architects of the PTI and who helped propel PTI to power — is in a position and really intends to upset the PTI government in Punjab or Centre. What's the worst JKT could inflict on PTI? What options Tareen has and whether he is really exploring new political avenues in the wake of his party's 'indifferent attitude' towards him.

It can go either way; the shared interest may convince the leadership to welcome Tareen into the party again, and he may not 'satisfy' the PM on his alleged role in minting money through the sugar crisis. The game is on.

According to the sources, few of the members from National Assembly now also supporting JKT didn't vote for the PTI candidate Hafeez Sheikh against PPP's Yusuf Raza Gilani in the senate election. It is to mention here that Jehangir Tareen's

wife is the first cousin of former prime minister Yusuf Raza Gilani. The political observers believe that Imran Khan is not in a position to take action against those allegedly voted for Gilani in the senate election or now openly supporting Tareen as he did in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, as his government in Punjab and Centre is standing on the very thin majority. However, according to the party insiders, these disgruntled members may not get party tickets for the next general election. The other political parties also seem not interested in taking the JKT in their folds and quietly observing the development.

The cracks within the ruling party are quite visible and widening as the time passes. The PTI members in the Punjab Assembly and National Assembly standing by JKT may form a forward bloc, initially. In all sense, Jehangir Tareen group would ultimately prove to be a game changer. With the JKT being the central character, the game is in the hand of nearly 30 PTI MPAs and MNAs. If these numbers were to break away from the party, the Imran-led party could lose its majority both in the National Assembly and Punjab assembly. If the things continue on the same trajectory in the coming days, the ruling party may face difficulties in the upcoming local government elections as well. One of the reasons of PTI losing the recent by-elections was infighting.

The JKT issue has now become more political than the legal one. Some powerful people have jumped in to 'manage' the situation before it does further damage to the PTI. As Tareen and his supporters seek 'justice' from the party, the question arises whether justice means quashing of the FIRs against JKT and his son. It's not a personal or political issue between Imran Khan and Jehangir Khan Tareen. What can the PM do under the circumstances? Should he intervene in the FIA affairs? The opposition was already terming the registration of FIRs against Tareen as an effort on part of the government to balance the NAB and FIA action against the opposition politicians. The opposition would be justified in asking whether it was accountability or political victimization of Jehangir Khan Tareen if the FIA withdraws charges against Tareen. Then, what a possible meeting between Jehangir Khan Tareen and Imran Khan would reflect on the political landscape? Here's where things get a bit complicated.

If Imran Khan and Jehangir Khan Tareen don't come closer in the coming days and the stalemate continues, according to the political observers, both the sides will keep waiting for the best until the budget is presented — both in Islamabad and Lahore. Then every number will count and JKT group would be setting the prospects of relation between the party and the disgruntled.

No Reckoning for Karachi's Black Saturday Bloodbath

Fourteen years down the line, the circumstances and perpetrators of the atrocious violence that engulfed Karachi on 12 May 2007 remain shrouded in mystery.



By Hasan Kazmi

Going by media reports, between 40 to 53 people were killed on the streets of Karachi and over 150 injured during the daylong carnage that descended on Karachi on that fateful day. The 12 May will always be remembered as black Saturday in the history of the city of Karachi.

The stage for violence was set after MQM announced a day of political rallies in Karachi to coincide with a scheduled speech by the insurgent justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhary at the Sindh High Court Bar association. Karachi's main political party at that time, MQM was hand in glove with military strongman Pervez Musharraf, who himself announced a political gathering at Islamabad with the help of PMLQ the same evening.

Karachi had witnessed its fair share of riots, massacres, violence, bomb blasts, etc. However this day will have its uniqueness it was first and till now the only time when a sitting government was accused of perpetrating mob violence on the people, and when police and rangers were nowhere to be found.

There is a thick iron curtain on what happened on that black Saturday, which no one is ready to raise.

No Justice for Victims' Families

Shuja-ur-Rehman was shot dead in Karachi on 12 May 2007, near Malir Halt, the day when many political and social activists were heading to the airport to receive the then deposed chief justice of Pakistan.

Shuja-ur-Rehman, left his mother, a sister and 4 brothers to mourn his death. His brother, Saif-ur-Rehman, told this scribe that actually, the entire movement was based to save one person's job. "We are still waiting for justice even after 14 years. I have left this matter to God. Even after getting restored, the chief justice never came for condolences."

The then president of the Sindh High Court Bar Association, who invited deposed Chief Justice of Pakistan to address the SHCBA, while talking to this scribe, expressed his severe disappointment over the progress of 12 May cases.

"It seems to me, no one is interested about it in Pakistan, we observe 12 May every year, we have filed several applications in both high court and supreme court, but no one cares", he added. "I am the most important person in this case, and yet police has never even bothered to contact me in this regard".



He expressed his disappointment and said that even after CJP Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhary was restored, he never ever tried to take up the issue.

Background

On 9 March 2007, then president and army chief Gen Musharraf tried to seek resignation from the then chief justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhary. After he refused to resign, a presidential reference against him was sent to supreme judicial council and barred him from being chief justice.

This act by the military ruler against a sitting chief justice was seen as a gross misconduct and termed an attack on judicial independence by civil society and social and human rights activist. The legal fraternity, led by the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) and several other lawyers' bodies, rose in protest.

They were soon joined by civil society organisations and opposition political parties including Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N), Awami National Party (ANP), and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI).

The SCBA made a strategy to take deposed chief justice to speak to the bar councils across Pakistan, while the case was being heard in the court. For example, on 5 May, deposed CJP went to Lahore High Court Bar Association by road from Islamabad. The movement soon became popular due chiefly to the media coverage it received.

All Parties Sworn to Silence?

At that point in time, the PPP was among the staunchest supports of the movement for the restoration of CJP Chaudhry, and many among those killed in cold blood on 12 May were PPP workers. The PPP was returned to power in 2008 but it made no effort to seek closure for the violence.

Apart from PPP, PMLN and PTI also supported lawyers' movement in favour of Iftikhar Chaudhary. Both these parties came into power in 2013 and 2018 respectively, but neither bothered to champion the cause of those who laid down their lives on that day.

Analysts point out that many who were booked for violence on that day belonged to MQM, and were let off the hook later under Pervez Musharraf's infamous NRO.

Speak Out and Be Heard

Time for India and Pakistan to focus on the dividends of geo-economics with the powers that be.

By Ishtiaq Ali Mehkri

Legendary Urdu poet, Jaun Elia in one of his couplets had said:

“AIK HI HADISA TOU HEI, AUR
WOH YEH KE AAJ TAK;

BAAT NAHI KAHI GAI, BAAT
NAHI SUNI GAI.”

(The tragedy [of our times] is that to this day, no one has spoken and no one has been heard)

That perfectly epitomizes India-Pakistan relations. Seven decades down the line, both the neighbours haven't sorted out the modus operandi to interact. They hardly speak to each other. Their culture of bilateralism is based on 'preconditioned' reciprocity. Politics precedes reason! Thus, they have only amassed a plethora of confrontational issues, and the territorial dispute of Kashmir is just the tip of the iceberg.

But as the proverb goes: there is always light at the end of the tunnel. Power politics in the region, and beyond, has pitched an opportunity of sorts for both India and Pakistan to revisit their dunderhead state of relations: Start talking and rewrite their ties in conformity with realism.

The buzzword these days is geo-economics. The new dawned realisation is that both have played enough to the gallery, and now is the time to mend the fences. As the euphoria of talks between India and Pakistan gathers momentum, let's analyse in a kaleidoscopic manner as to what is the ground reality and what factors are influencing the change of heart. If at all!

Though India and Pakistan are in a war of attrition, the good point is that their deep state is awake. There is a nexus that keeps interacting behind the curtains, especially with power-brokers in Washington, Beijing, and London, to name the least.

This confidence building mechanism apparently draws its inspiration from



the Chinese school of thought. It lays stress on 'furthering unlimited cooperation', irrespective of severe differences at hand. New Delhi and Islamabad, it seems, have been taught a lesson or two. But how prudently they go on to realise it in realpolitik domain is anybody's guess!

As China and the United States celebrated their 50th year of Friendship, former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had a tale to tell. He and his likes, who endorse laissez-faire in statehood, are of the view that the war of nerves cannot go on for ages. There is always a time for rapprochement and reconciliation.

Kissinger did the same at the zenith of his prestige, and in the hey-days of Cold War. He tapped China as he frequented through the mountains of Nathia Gali, courtesy Pakistan, and won it over diplomatically. Since then US adheres to One-China policy. Today, irrespective of the ongoing trade war between the two countries, China retains trillions of dollars of investments in the US, and Pentagon stops short of firing even a single aerial shot in the Asia Pacific – despite its hegemony.

Are India and Pakistan learning anything from it? Not very sure! But a couple of developments have changed the entire paradigm of their bilateralism. They are: Somersaults in the Middle East wherein Israel has

emerged as an ally of Arabs, the staggering USD 900 billion investment of China on the Belt-and-Road project, as well as in Iran and Africa; and last but not least the newfound Quartet in Asia-Pacific led by Washington.

India and Pakistan are, thus, forced into a talking mode – notwithstanding their bilaterally politicised reservations. This is the pinnacle of geo-economics of which India and Pakistan constitute a Pivot. They sit alongside 2.5 billion people at the crossroads of Central Asia and China, which incidentally is emerging as the biggest and robust artery of business.

At least three big-ticket trillion-dollar projects such as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI), Central Asia-South Asia (CASA-1000) power project and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) won't be able to see the light of the day, if India and Pakistan do not come to terms. The bottom-line is that they need to bury the hatchet and relive in peace.

So the ball goes rolling. Reports say undercover emissaries from India and Pakistan started sharing their notes -- who had been meeting in wilderness all these years since the Agra fiasco in 2001. Such a clandestine meet reportedly took place in January between top intelligence sleuths in Dubai. Though the UAE is tight-lipped, something is cooking, certainly.

The back channel talks and subsequent meeting of Flag Commanders led to cessation of fire along the Line of Control (LoC) dividing Kashmir. Luckily, the ceasefire is holding. The governments, however, are in need of a roadmap to cement their mode of understanding. The pivot is economics, in an era of alliances pristinely-centred on geo-economic connectivity.

Statistics put India and Pakistan among struggling nations in terms of economic vibrancy. Regional players, especially China, Iran, Turkey and Russia, are thus more than eager to see New Delhi and Islamabad reach a deal on connectivity.

Until and unless the impasse in the form of blockades and refusal to trade and transit across their borders is done away with, CPEC, ECO, Shanghai Group and many such geo-economic-mergers will remain a non-starter.



The million dollar question is: Who will further the theory of connectivity in an environment of bias and prejudice? In such a premise, Pakistan Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa's call to improve ties with India was based on the clear-headed realisation that neither country can afford an unending hostility. This is statesmanship. Pakistan has led from the front. General Bajwa, nonetheless, clearly told the world at large that Kashmir is, and will remain, a cardinal issue, "but it can wait till other contentious issues are sorted out, bilaterally."

That's the way to go. Pakistan is addressing the regional connectivity issue by offering its services on two fronts: heading in good-faith towards India and helping Afghanistan come to terms with itself.

So what's the game plan? The Indian Prime Minister and his Pakistani counterpart exchanged cordially worded letters for the first time since 5 August 2019, when New Delhi scrapped the special status and autonomy of Occupied Kashmir pushing India-Pakistan relations at the brink of a certain war. That was tantamount to melting the ice.

And then, of course, few blunders and hiccups followed as is usual in our uncultured way of doing politics. Four of the ministries in Pakistan, out of the blue, expressed their willingness to import sugar and cotton from India. That move was, nonetheless, scrapped within a day by the Federal Cabinet with Prime Minister Imran Khan in the chair! Why? Was that a carrot-and-stick message to someone across the borders?

Yet the spirit of largesse is at work. Policy-makers hint at going soft as both the flanks of Kashmir go on to hold elections this year. The purpose is to scale down hostility, and enable people on both sides of the divide to once again repose their trust in an amicable settlement. Restoration of Internet services in Jammu & Kashmir and the release of political prisoners have already come as welcome gestures from a seamless politburo at work in New Delhi.

Not very sure as to who has scripted the draft, but it makes sense in an era of volatility and extremism. If all goes well, it is hoped that both the High Commissions will go back to normal functioning. Presently, they are working at less than half their capacity.

Let's cast the die now. One of India's most eulogized diplomats, Satinder Lambah -- who also represented Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in back channel talks from 2005 to 2014 -- has called for secret talks between Gen. Bajwa and Indian National Security Adviser Ajit Doval. He wouldn't have gone public without a purpose.

Lambah still believes that the accord on Jammu and Kashmir negotiated by him during President Pervez Musharraf's term in power is valid. He also says New Delhi wouldn't mind granting "full statehood" status to Jammu & Kashmir. What does that mean in the Westphalia theory is yet to be accounted for!

In lieu, he says, Islamabad had also agreed in 2014 to grant Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status in trade to India. Are Pakistan and India picking a thread from there is too early to estimate.

There is renewed euphoria on Pakistan's western borders, too. Pakistan opened up its third border crossing with Iran at Mandrag area, just six months after inaugurating the second crossing point at Ramadan-Gabd border in Gwadar district. Taftan-Zahidan is the first link between both the countries that share a 900-km-long border.

Pundits of geopolitics say the Ring Road built under CPEC is ready, but inoperative, till Wagah which could grant connectivity to India via Pakistan till Central Asia. A political nod is awaited, and the Chinese too are eager to see that happen.

The good point is that the world community has stepped in to softly mediate and redress the irritants. They are, indeed, acting as 'honest brokers' and 'pressure valves'. If that works out, it is estimated that regional trade will shoot up to USD 100 billion per annum; tourism in Pakistan will soar by USD 30 billion yearly; and at the same time spring into full-blown momentum grandiose projects across the region.

That can only be possible if all stakeholders keep interacting and open new vistas of cooperation in conformity with their inherited geography. Speak out and be heard is the mantra.

The US Must Up its Afghan Endgame

It is mind boggling why President Biden feels compelled to embrace a cut-and-run policy in Afghanistan after all the sweat, blood, and money.



By Mishaal Ashraf

The 11th of September 2001, better known as the 9/11, is a date that no one can forget. It marked a new era for the world. Events, happenings, milestones begun to be marked as pre 9/11 and post 9/11. One of the biggest events that the 9/11 triggered was the endless war of the United States: the Afghanistan War.

The war began in 2001, immediately after the 9/11 attacks. It progressed in three phases. In the first phase, the Taliban government was overthrown by the US troops in collaboration with Northern Alliance in just two months.

The second phase started in 2002 and ended in 2008. During this time, the US strategized to defeat the Taliban militarily, and reconstructed the core institutions of the Afghan state like the Afghan police, military, revenue, and other

departments along with reconstruction of government offices.

The third phase was started by the Obama administration in 2008. President Obama ordered to deploy more US military troops in Afghanistan to protect the population from Taliban attacks. Another motive behind the increased number of troops was to support efforts to reintegrate insurgents into Afghan society.

This strategy came with a scheduled withdrawal of the US forces from the region. It was planned in the beginning of 2011 that security responsibilities would be slowly handed over to the Afghan military and police.

However, this failed to achieve its aims. Insurgent attacks and civilian deaths remained persistently high. Afghan police

and military were unable to hold off the Taliban attacks due to lack of training, amongst other factors. By the time the US and NATO combat mission ended, Afghanistan War had become the longest war fought by US over a period of 13 years.

As far as financial costs are concerned, US has spent around USD 978 billion through the fiscal year 2020 on Afghan war. The number grows even more when base budgets for the Department of Defence (DOD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are considered. The budget for DOD increased by approximately USD 343 billion from fiscal year 2000 to USD 633 billion for fiscal year 2020. Likewise, VA's budget has increased by more than USD 175 billion in the same time period. This makes a total of around USD 2 trillion that the United States has spent on their longest fought war.

Presently, conventional war may not be ongoing in Afghanistan, but US troops are still present in the region. US claims to be present in order to ensure peace and stability, which might be at risk once it leaves. After Donald Trump was elected as the President of United States in 2016 marking the end of the Obama era, a new set of policies was put in place to withdraw the US troops from Afghanistan.

In 2017, Trump announced that even though his original intent was to pull US troops out of Afghanistan, he would press ahead with an open-ended military commitment to prevent the emergence of “a vacuum for terrorists”. However, in 2019, peace talks between the Afghan Taliban, and Trump administration began.

After many ups and downs, in February 2020, the US and Taliban signed a deal to pave the way for a significant drawdown of US troops in Afghanistan by 1 May 2021. The deal also guaranteed that the Taliban would not conduct terrorist activities in Afghanistan.

In September 2020, the process of intra-Afghan peace talks began. The main aim of these talks between the Taliban and Afghan government was to reach a compromise and decide what the future of Afghanistan would look like once the US troops pull back.

In November 2020, the Democrat Joe Biden was elected to the presidency to replace the Republican Trump. On 14 April 2021, Biden announced that the United States would not meet the deadline set under the US-Taliban agreement to withdraw all troops by 1 May 2021. Instead, he released a plan saying that a full US withdrawal would take place by 11 September 2021.

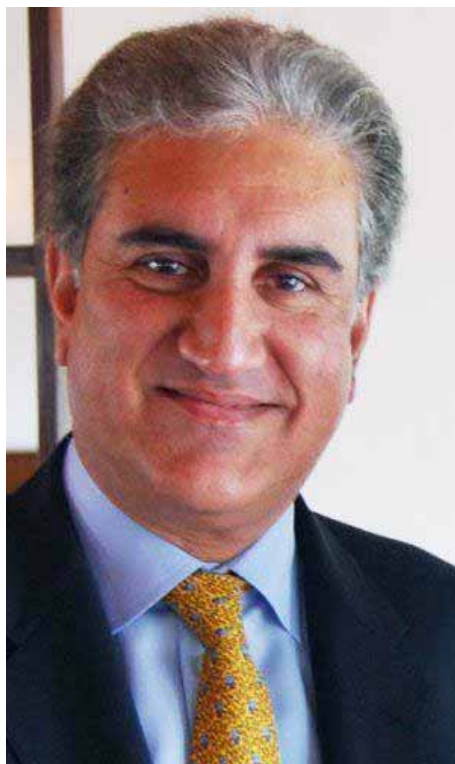
The President made clear the remaining 3,500 troops would be withdrawn, regardless of the progress of intra-Afghan peace talks. NATO troops would also leave the region. On the other hand, the Taliban have announced they would not come on any negotiating table until and unless all foreign forces leave Afghanistan.

Joe Biden, who was previously predicted to be against complete US withdrawal from Afghanistan, is now also in favour of it, regardless of how intra-Afghan peace talks

conclude. This practice appears to be very similar to the Russian invasion in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989.

Russia, too left Afghanistan on its own, and abandoned it completely. This resulted in civil war and major security disruptions in the region which cost more than the actual war itself.

Three questions arise at this stage now: What will happen to Afghanistan's neighbouring countries, once US completely withdraws? What will happen if Afghan Taliban and Afghan government fail to reach a peaceful agreement? How will the situation in Afghanistan impact Pakistan?

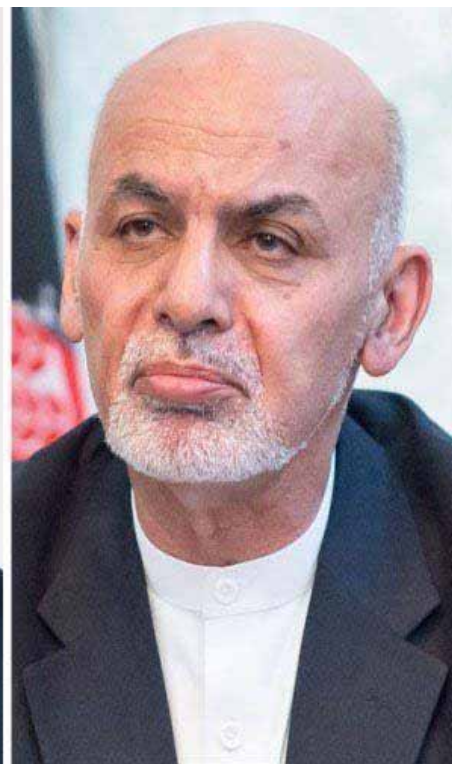


A big chunk of Pakistanis believes that once US leaves the region, terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda, Daish etc. will take over Afghanistan, bringing instability to the region. The neighbored, especially Pakistan, incurred heavy losses by the previous Russian withdrawal from the region and the civil war that followed. Pakistanis worry that a similar civil war will break out again, to the benefit of none and detriment of all.

It is felt that in order to avoid the potential catastrophes, the US as the global leader, must take appropriate steps to ensure that

peace, security, and stability prevail in the region after the withdrawal of Western troops. The intra-Afghan talks must be aided with the required resources for a smooth withdrawal of foreign troops, as well as a peaceful situation afterwards.

With the ongoing global pandemic, the last thing that the world needs is another war. Unfortunately, a devastating result can be predicted as the US flees from Afghanistan, just like Russia did as the Soviet invasion came to an end. If the US leaves without a concrete set of guidelines to govern Afghanistan, the country is likely to once again devolve into chaos just like it happened at the end of 20th century.



The question this begs is, what did US achieve after fighting for twenty years and spending USD 2 trillion? Had this amount been spent on building institutions and strengthening Afghan military instead of guns and bombs, we might have had a different Afghanistan today. Hence, Joe Biden must ensure the safety of the region, before pulling back all US and NATO troops.

This is the least the US can do; the least it owes Afghanistan.

In historic first, close-up photos of Hajr-e-Aswad captured

For the first time in history, Saudi officials captured crystal clear close-up images of the Hajr-e-Aswad (sacred Black Stone) of the Ka'aba in Makkah.

Adviser to the Saudi information ministry in a statement on Monday said that it took 7 hours to take the pictures which are up to 49,000 megapixels.

He said since the Black Stone is “piece of Jannah and the first-ever high resolution pictures reflect how beautiful paradise would be...”

Hajr-e-Aswad is situated in the eastern corner of the Ka'aba and thought to be a whole, which can be seen placed in a silver encasement but it is actually comprised at eight small rocks that moulded together using Arabic frankincense, according to AlArabiya News.

The smallest stone is no bigger than 1CM, while the biggest does not exceed 2CM. The encasement, made out of pure silver, only serves as a protection mechanism for the sacred stone.

History books on the Black Stone recall how it was placed in the Ka'aba by Prophet Abraham, after it was presented to him by the angel Gabriel. The stone is recognised as to have come from heaven.





Pakistan's Humanity First Policy Wins Kudos from Indians

Amid a recent thaw in the traditionally icy Pakistan-India relations, Islamabad's offer to help with Covid caused a spontaneous breakout of solidarity between the two arch-rivals over Social Media.



By Zarghon Shah

Pakistan's offer to help India fight the second devastating wave of Covid-19 is expected to pave the way for further peace overtures in the spirit of the clandestine contacts already underway between the South Asian nuclear foes. Although India is yet to respond to the Pakistani offer, experts believe an instant positive outcome of this humanitarian offer is the improved image of Pakistan in a venomous Indian media as well as the Indian public.

Pakistan's Foreign Office Spokesman Zahid Hafeez Chaudhry on 24 April issued a statement offering humanitarian assistance to India in view of the lethal Covid 19 second wave. "As a gesture of solidarity with the people of India in the wake of the current wave of COVID-19, Pakistan has offered to provide relief support to India including ventilators, Bi PAP, digital X-ray machines, PPEs and related items," the spokesman said.

Prime Minister Imran Khan and Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi in their messages expressed solidarity with the people of India and offered whatever Pakistan could do for its neighbour in this hour of critical humanitarian need.

"We believe in a policy of humanity first," Foreign Minister Qureshi said. He told a news channel that Prime Minister Imran Khan authorised the foreign ministry to approach India. "We met India's high commissioner in Pakistan and offered help on a humanitarian basis, that we can help and are willing to help, and this is our offer."

Pakistani social media platforms too were flooded with messages of solidarity and empathy for the people of India as hashtags like 'PakistanStandsWithIndia' and 'IndiaNeedsOxygen' trended over Twitter.

The Indian media and ordinary Indians responded to this Pakistani gesture with

overwhelming humility and applause. Celebrities like Swara Bhasker, Kangana Ranaut, and Anshu Mor all voiced praise for Pakistan and Pakistanis.

Prior to Pakistan's counter-pandemic help offer, both the countries were already treading the path of UAE-brokered rapprochement.

Top Pakistani and Indian intelligence officials, according to foreign media reports, had secretly met in Dubai in January this year. The focus of their meeting was to reduce the heat and stop exchange of fire at the Line of Control—a first gesture of willingness to open up lines of mutual communication as desired by the UAE.

In mid-April, the UAE Ambassador to Washington, Yousef Al Otaiba, confirmed his country was mediating a "healthy and functional" relationship between India and

Pakistan. According to him UAE had played a role in ensuring India-Pakistan ceasefire at the LoC and de-escalation in Kashmir.

Otaiba hoped the discourse would ultimately lead to “restoring diplomats and getting the relationship back to a healthy level.” He said India and Pakistan might not become “best friends” but at least could get to a level where they speak to each other.

In the aftermath of the Dubai secret meet, Pakistani and Indian DGMOs (Directors General of Military Operations) contacted each other over the hot line. According to ISPR, they reviewed the situation along the LoC. “In the interest of achieving mutually beneficial and sustainable peace, the two DGMOs agreed to address each other’s core issues and concerns which have propensity to disturb peace and lead to violence”.

The two sides “agreed for strict observance of all agreements, understandings and cease firing along the LOC and all other sectors, with effect from midnight 24/25 February 21”.

Many believe UAE’s Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed’s dash to New Delhi a day after the LoC ceasefire pledge was aimed at consolidating and furthering

the fresh Pak-India peace overtures. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed met his Indian counterpart Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and noted that they “discussed all regional and international issues of common interest and exchanged views on them.”

Reflecting presumably on the “third party” peace endeavour, Army Chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa asked India to “bury the past and move forward.” Addressing the Islamabad Security Dialogue on 18 March, Gen Bajwa said that for resumption of peace process or meaningful dialogue, our neighbour will have to create conducive environment, particularly in the Indian Occupied Kashmir.

A stable Indo-Pak relation is a key to unlocking the untapped potential of South and Central Asia by ensuring connectivity between East and West Asia, Gen Bajwa added. “It is important to understand that without the resolution of Kashmir dispute sub-continental rapprochement will always remain susceptible to derailment due to politically motivated bellicosity.”

Gen Bajwa’s speech was seen as largely dictated by the bitter fact of Pakistan’s poor economy in particular and the South Asian region in general. With staggering economy, a bailout from IMF and billions of

dollars in loans from UAE and others in addition to the hanging sword from FATF, Pakistan could hardly withstand heat on its eastern or western borders.

Gen Bajwa pertinently referred to it: “It is time that we in South Asia can create synergy through connectivity, peaceful co-existence and resource sharing to fight hunger, illiteracy and disease instead of fighting each other.”

In line with its own shift from geostrategic to geo-economic narrative, and more importantly readying itself for possible fallout from US complete withdrawal from Afghanistan due September this year, Pakistan appears willing to ease tensions with India. And as a US ally, UAE too wants Pakistan to focus rather more on Afghanistan.

Leaving behind the Pulwama incident, Balakot air strikes and downing of an Indian jet in its wake, unlawful annexation of Indian held Kashmir, expulsion of high commissioners and perpetual exchange of fire along the LoC, Pak-India peace overtures may pave the way for restoration of high commissioners and hosting of SAARC summit in Islamabad due since November 2016, in which Indian prime minister Modi could also participate.



Japan's Dangerous Indo-Pacific Presumptions

Tokyo's Indo-Pacific moves and rhetoric have little to do with promoting peace in the region and everything to do with provoking China.



By Hamzah Rifaat Hussain

Japan's nefarious designs in the Indo-Pacific were outlined in an affirmation from Defence Minister Nobou Kishi, where joint military drills between Japan, France, and the United States in the southwest of the country are planned.

The exercises scheduled from 11-17 May come hours after irresponsible and callous remarks on Chinese presence in the Diaoyu islands which is a fallacy promoted to justify a more assertive role for Japan and its Western allies. To term Japan's planned manoeuvres as striving for peace and security in the region is farcical.

Firstly, what is viewed as the first large-scale exercise involving ground troops from three countries in Japan's own backyard, are actually joint war games where the risk of miscalculation and misinterpretation of posturing in the Indo-Pacific remain high. Such manoeuvres will always be considered as a provocation from Beijing given that the Defence Minister mentioned how France is equally interested in a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

France has already antagonized China by sending warships in February to confront Beijing alongside strengthening its relationship with Quad member states, Japan, India and Australia was nothing short of reckless adventurism.

Additionally Paris's strategic interests centre on French Polynesia and the island of Reunion in the Indian Ocean of which the latter does not concern the South Pacific region. Should Paris resort to jumping aboard the Tokyo wagon joining the military drills, a befitting responses from Beijing can and should be expected.

It will be worthwhile for both France and the United States to distance themselves from military exercises hinging on underlying motivations which are not grounded in promoting peace.

Secondly, Japanese history is a wash with political manoeuvring and aggressive posturing which has only served to heighten tensions in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. There is a deliberate attempt to invoke China's internal issues to mount pressure.

Take Taiwan for example, where despite overtly claiming that Tokyo prioritizes ambiguity on matters related to the island, a joint statement was issued by both Japan and the United States in Washington earlier last month where securing peace and stability was complimented with direct references to China's policies in Taiwan.

Hollow concerns have also been expressed over the Diaoyu islands by recklessly depicting it as being invaded by China despite claims of ownership by Tokyo predating World War 2. Tokyo has also continued to ignore claims echoed by both Beijing and Taipei on the islands by not acknowledging that they are part of the Toucheng Township in Yilan County.

This aggressive posturing despite these historical realities underline how Japan's interests vis-à-vis China in the Indo-Pacific are not compatible with promoting peace and stability or upholding the international law as publicly proclaimed.

Therefore, to promote Taiwan's cause and stall the peaceful reunification of China without due cognizance of its own historical and contemporary blunders is nothing short of aggressive posturing. The joint military drills which will be held at the Japan's Kirishima training grounds and Camp Ainoara in the Kyushu region in May includes employing 'amphibious assaults' which involves naval ships projecting both aerial and ground power.

This adds to the complexity and ambiguity surrounding the strategy of pressurizing China. Such tactics are also employed to retain the element of surprise against a potential adversary which may involve first strike capabilities. Neither China's coast guard laws nor military deployments have anything to do with planned amphibious assaults under the garb of military exercises aimed at promoting peace.

Hence Tokyo's practice of preaching freedom and openness in the Indo-Pacific region belies actual intentions which imperil peace and stability. Citing case studies such as Diaoyu and Taiwan conveniently while endangering peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region through military drills is the actual definition of Japan's strategy.

Much of the rhetoric surrounding the manoeuvres follows the established pattern of smear campaigns against China over exercise of inherent sovereign rights of patrolling activities around the waters of Diaoyu and pursuance of national defence policies which are manifestly defensive in nature.

These are provocations, not commitments towards peace.

Australia Nixing BRI Projects is Both Dangerous & Provocative

Canberra's cancellation of BRI-related projects, the latest in a series of similar provocations, cannot fail to sour bilateral ties with China.

Australia has chosen to tread an unwelcoming and unbecoming path on China. Last month, Canberra cancelled two infrastructural building deals of the Belt and Road Initiative, despite the significance of the BRI serving as a state sanctioned global infrastructural development strategy dating back to 2013.

These hollow state level policies and hawkish approaches adopted by Australia had only served to aggravate the bilateral relationship further with no signs that Australia wishes to improve its relationship with China. Citing flimsy and flawed national security grounds cannot justify cancellations of state level projects with Australia being both responsible and the ultimate casualty.

What does cancelling BRI recklessly actually entail? Why have infrastructural projects aimed at promoting regional connectivity and promotion of soft power become victim to politicization? For Australia, citing 'national security' as a justification actually fits a trend championed by the Victoria Education Department, which simultaneously cancelled pacts with Syria of 1999 and Iran in 2004.

On China however, this unreasonable provocation hinges on complete lack of clarity with some observers and experts believing that the Victorian deals are both vague and non-binding. Fallacious arguments have been presented in favor of the cancellation on the role of the BRI in promoting debt traps for poorer nations which has been challenged time and time again by erudite scholars and practitioners.

China's pronounced presence in the South China Sea, as mentioned by Defence Minister Peter Dutton, has also been cited and linked with Australian priorities which is actually an affront to the tenets of the Communist Party of China. The grounds of suspending the BRI pact lack any solid foundation whatsoever.

Canberra must remember there is no evidence to suggest that China has harmed the bilateral relationship intentionally. In retrospect, Chinese interests were jeopardized due to reckless unilateral measures such as Malcolm Turnbull's ban on 'high risk' vendors which includes companies such as Huawei and ZTE from the country's 5G network back in 2018 which was akin to the Donald Trump administration's discredited unilateral approach in the Indo-Pacific region.

Additionally, there is complete lack of consideration over how China continues to be the largest trading partner for both Australia and New Zealand with the latter having cautioned Australia to refrain from adopting assertive approaches towards antagonizing Beijing. By paying less heed to the advice of its Tasman neighbour and cancelling the BRI, Australia has chosen a path of isolation that even some of its staunchest allies would not agree with.



What is irrefutable, however, is that cancelling the BRI is a clear red line for China and the response from the Chinese embassy or from Beijing should not be considered the least bit surprising. As a genuine effort to promote peace and development in countries across the world, the BRI is linked with trade, cooperation, and economic stability, stimulation of commercial activity and above all promotion of soft power to alleviate differences.

As a key signatory of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership spearheaded by China in 2020, cancelling the BRI underlines a duplicitous approach. Rescinding has taken place amid China's economic rise as a counterweight to American adventurism and has obstructed people-to-people exchange programs and allowed for a discriminatory business environment by pitting one state against the other.

There was a lot of hue and cry over China imposing tariffs on Australian farmers or banning wine exports domestically without any due cognizance of how the parliament in Canberra repeatedly blocked Chinese investment proposals over the previous years. To have blocked a state sponsored mega project which is linked with China's global vision for peaceful development is less about securing foreign policy priorities and more about targeting Beijing head on.

China reserves the right to respond to such concerted efforts which target the Belt and Road Initiative. Attacking the BRI equates to an act of aggression against the Chinese people and Chinese values which hinge on promoting peace, tranquillity and cooperation.

Canberra should rethink its strategy of provoking Beijing. The latest attack on President Xi Jinping's geostrategic vision for the Asia Pacific region is sure to put a strain on bilateral relations, for which Australia will have itself to blame.

By Hamzah Rifaat Hussain

Regional Support Must for ROZs on Pak-Afghan Border

The success of the duty-free exports zones being built by the United States is hinged on Pakistan and India playing ball.



By Umer Farooq

The Biden Administration's recent move to facilitate the establishment of a duty-free export zone along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border has a long history. It was a pet project of the Barack Obama administration with the then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as its most enthusiastic champion.

A senior lawmaker in Washington told a committee hearing that a bipartisan bill will soon be introduced in the US Senate to set up duty-free export zones along the Pak-Afghan border. The proposed legislation will allow these trade pockets, known as the Reconstruction Opportunity Zones or ROZs, to export certain duty-free goods to the United States, said Senator Van Hollen, a key Democrat on the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.

Mr Van Hollen told a full committee hearing on the US policy in Afghanistan that elements within the Biden administration already support this proposal.

Not surprisingly the former PPP government in October 2010 approved a 'reformed' Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement to allow Afghan trucks to carry export goods to the Wagah border for onward dispatch to India. Under the old agreement, the Afghan trucks were allowed to carry goods only to the Pak-Afghan border at Torkham.

Information Minister Qamar Zaman Kaira told reporters after a meeting of the cabinet that the APTTA was an improved form of the treaty originally signed by the two countries in 1965. Pakistan and Afghanistan had finalized the new agreement in July 2010 in the presence of US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

The move drew flak as critics said it was done under US dictation for the benefit of India. Under the new agreement, Afghan trucks will be allowed to carry goods to the Wagah border, but they will not be allowed to carry Indian goods to Afghanistan. In return,

Pakistani trucks will be allowed to go through Afghanistan to central Asia, Iran and Turkey.

The agreement was thus seen by analysts as failure of the US initiative which was meant to provide India a land route through Pakistan to Afghanistan.

Former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton was a great champion of this arrangement as she had two objectives in mind while pursuing this project: A) Under her guardianship the US State Department wanted Karachi to serve as a seaport through which Afghanistan carried out its trade with the outside world. In this way she wanted that the Iranian port of Chabahar should not become a port of trade for Afghanistan; and B) She and US state Department wanted to bring Pakistani government to agree to an arrangement under which Pakistani territory serve as a transit route for trade between India and Afghanistan and onward to Central Asia.

While Pakistan government didn't succeed in availing this opportunity afforded to them by US economic and trade diplomacy in the region, the governments of India, Iran and Afghanistan came closer and reached a number of understandings to facilitate trade between Afghanistan and India through Iranian port of Chabahar.

This was the time when Iranian port emerged as a rival of Gwadar port on the southern coast of Pakistan. India offered financial facilities to Afghanistan and offered loans to construct roads from Chabahar to Afghanistan's newly revived cities with trade potentials.

Iranian government, despite the religiously conservative regime in place in Tehran, availed the opportunity coming its way. India, Iran and Afghanistan agreed on the development of transit and transport between the three countries, elimination of barriers, constraints and providing safe, smooth, rapid and low-cost transportation.

systems connecting the official border-crossing point at Dogharoun on the Iranian side and Islam Qaleh on the Afghan side.

The Iranian customs post is located near the border town of Taibad, about 150 km west of Afghanistan's principal western city, Herat. The triangular project between New Delhi, Tehran and Kabul has given landlocked Afghanistan a great new opportunity.

Reconstruction Opportunity Zones or ROZs as they are called in American terminology, however, didn't materialize primarily because of domestic political opposition from Pakistan.

There, however, seems to be a new positive development in the power corridors of Islamabad and Rawalpindi—the change in the attitude and opinion in the power corridors is reflected in COAS, General Qamar Javed Bajwa speech delivered in a security conference in Islamabad in which

For India, transportation continues to be a big constraint in assistance as well as trade reaching Afghanistan. Lack of transit through Pakistan, security risks and absence of direct road, rail and sea routes between the two countries is some of the key factors for the low volume of Indo-Afghan trade.

In deference to the sensitivity of the issue the US lawmaker who announced ROZs didn't mention India in his statement. However the role of India and the whole of South Asia would be too hard to ignore in case the US Administration succeeds in facilitating the establishment of ROZs on the Pak-Afghan border.

However for that to happen the regional and Pakistani strategists would have to resolve two security problems that exist in the region. Firstly, Pakistani strategists and security planners would have to make sure that there is viable and stable peace in Pak-Afghan border region for these ROZs



Memorandums of Understanding on the Development and Construction of Transit and Transport Infrastructures in Chabahar-Milak-Zaranj-Delaram route were signed between the three countries aimed at improving access to Afghanistan, and upgrading the infrastructure at Chabahar port and relevant road segments.

India has also financed the crucial Zaranj-Delaram Link Road Project, which will give India a direct trade link to Afghanistan through Iran's Chabahar deep-sea port. To facilitate trade, Iran (along with India) has agreed to upgrade the road and railways

he talked about Pakistan's strategic location and its possible role as a hub connectivity in the region.

With the help of hindsight it can be said that General Bajwa's speech was in anticipation of Biden Administration's new move to facilitate the establishment of new duty-free export economic zones in Pakistan and Afghanistan border areas.

There are clear indications that India is also keen on overland trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia through Pakistan. India transports its goods to Afghanistan and Central Asia along the route through Iran.

to exist and function in a stable strategic environment.

Secondly, Pakistan and India will have to agree on some rules of the game to operate in Afghanistan. India has economic interests in Afghanistan and according to Pakistani allegations Indian consulates in Afghanistan act as hubs of disruptive activities inside Pakistani territory.

The long and short of it is that ROZs cannot exist or function in an environment of hostility and acrimony. Rules of the game are a must.

Europe's Dangerous GSP Plus Gambit

In addition to fuelling Islamophobia in Europe and around the world, EU's threat to rescind Pakistan's GSP Plus designation casts an ugly shadow over the USD 14 billion Pak-EU annual trade.



By Javed Mahmood

ISLAMABAD: In the last week of April 2021, the European Parliament passed a resolution with a thumping majority to review trade with Pakistan under the EU's GSP plus status. European Parliament passed this resolution with 662 votes while three members of the EU opposed it and 26 others did not vote for this resolution.

The resolution has mentioned cases of two Pakistanis, Shagufta Kausar and Shafqat Emmanuel, who have been on death row since 2014 for sharing blasphemous text messages and observed that Pakistan was violating the GSP Plus agreement that promotes freedom of expression and equal rights for citizens.

As the European Parliament has passed this resolution with a majority, the EU can rescind Pakistan's GSP plus status at any time. The measure would not only put at stake half-a-billion-euro annual increase in Pakistani exports but it would also cast its ugly shadow on USD 14 billion in annual trade between Pakistan and Europe because

Pakistan can also react by restricting its imports from European countries.

It is well known that the GSP Plus status has promoted Pakistan's exports to Europe in recent years, but few people know that this development has also significantly enhanced Pakistan's imports from Europe. Thus, both sides will suffer equally in case the European Parliament created tension by suspending GSP Plus status for Pakistan.

In 2014, European Union granted GSP Plus status to Pakistan, as a result of which Pakistani exports to Europe gradually increased to EUR 7.5 billion in 2019, from EUR 4.53 billion in 2014, showing an increase of EUR 2.97 billion during this period. On an average, after getting GSP Plus status, Pakistani exports have increased by half a billion euros every year. In US dollars, these exports are worth more than USD 600 million per annum.

Importantly, China, India, Thailand, Indonesia did not qualify for GSP Plus

status. Consequently, Pakistani exporters benefited from this facility and enhanced their exports significantly to Europe since 2014. Withdrawal of GSP Plus status means that all the exports from Pakistan that were related to this scheme will, once again, be subjected to duties and taxes in Europe.

In other words, Pakistani products, especially textile items, will face a tough competition with Chinese, Indian, and other major exporting countries' products. Thus, experts believe that Pakistani exporters will not be in a position to retain their share of exports because of a tough competition in Europe amid the ongoing pandemic that has dampened economic activities in Europe and other countries in the world.

Apparently, the European Parliament has cited the case of two Pakistanis who are on a death row under blasphemy laws to reconsider GSP Plus status for Pakistan. Nonetheless, analysts believe that France's row with Pakistan over publication of

caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and a religious party's demand to expel French Ambassador from Pakistan for supporting Islamophobia are the real causes that have influenced European Union to put pressure on Pakistan to change blasphemy laws and curb protests against France.

A few days ago, the Tehrik-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) staged a country-wide protest in Pakistan, demanding the government to expel French Ambassador as France was encouraging publication of caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that hurt sentiments and feelings of Muslims all over the world.



To fulfil a main demand of TLP, the Pakistan government tabled a resolution in the Parliament to expel French Ambassador, but the Parliament did not approve it. This move indicates that Pakistan wants to use diplomatic channels to convince France not to hurt feelings of Muslims by making mockery of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

There is a general perception that European Parliament represents the civilized nations. But why are they fueling Islamophobia? This question is irritating for Muslims throughout the world. The European Parliament also overlooked Pakistani Prime Minister's recent request to Facebook, France, and other countries to discourage Islamophobia.

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan blamed French President Emmanuel Macron for fuelling Islamophobia in October 2020. PM Khan said that France must respect religious sentiments of

Muslim and must not make mockery of Islam and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Khan also wrote a letter to the Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, urging him to block content pertaining to Islamophobia. In this letter, PM Khan supported universal religious harmony and tolerance. Pakistani Human Rights Minister Shireen Mazari also wrote a message on twitter, suggesting the use of diplomatic channels to discourage religious hatred and Islamophobia globally.

However, instead of using diplomatic forums, European Parliament has chosen the path of coercion using the GSP plus

facility with the motive to force Pakistan to take action against religious parties supporting blasphemy laws and to get relief for two Pakistanis, Shagufta Kausar and Shafqat Emmanuel, who are facing death penalty for committing blasphemy.

Thus, for the European Parliament two Pakistani nationals facing death row are more important than 1.7 billion Muslims in the world who are being humiliated and tortured through frequent incidents of mockery of Islam and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in France and other European countries.

European Parliament also ignored the fact that Islamophobia can fuel religious hatred throughout the world. The topmost priority of the European Parliament should be the religious harmony, tolerance, and peace in the world. Using coercive measures like suspension of GSP Plus facility does not seem to be a realistic approach to solve the issues relating to blasphemy and religious harmony.

The GSP (Generalized System of Preference) of the European Union aims to promote sustainable development and good governance, and reducing poverty in the developing countries by allowing them preferential access to EU markets. Under the facility, the EU has allowed exports of 6,300 items from 90 countries, including Pakistan.

Countries availing GSP pay 20 percent less duty on exports to Europe than other countries. However, in 2014, the EU included Pakistan in the GSP Plus arrangement which allowed duty-free exports to Europe.

At present, 25 countries are availing GSP Plus status, excluding China, India, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam. In the South and South East Asian region, after Bangladesh, Pakistan is the second country that is exporting duty-free textile products to Europe mainly because of the GSP Plus status. Thus, GSP Plus has opened avenues for duty-free access of Pakistani products to Europe. This has allowed Pakistani textile products capture a significant share in EU markets since 2014.

Before the implementation of the GSP Plus arrangement, Pakistan was already exporting some duty-free products either under the (MFN) most favoured nation or standard GSP such as surgical instruments, spices, basmati rice, fans, onyx and 75 other tariff lines. However, the GSP Plus status has allowed Pakistan to export all items to Europe at zero duty/taxes.

According to the State Bank of Pakistan, in the financial year 2019, Pakistan traded USD 14 billion worth of goods with Europe, including USD 7.836 billion in exports and USD 6.163 billion in imports. Thus, in FY19, Pakistan earned a profit of USD 1.673 billion in trade with European nations. The trend of bilateral trade between Pakistan and Europe appears the same in the financial year 2020.

Mutual trade between Pakistan and Europe indicates that both sides are taking almost equal benefit from trade. Therefore, instead of disrupting the GSP Plus status, the European Parliament and Pakistan should resolve Islamophobia issues through diplomatic channels to promote peace, harmony, and tolerance in the world.

Cryptocurrencies Take Lustre Off Gold

China, Turkey start test-trials as several countries including Russia and the UK scramble to develop their own digital currencies.

By Javed Mahmood

In recent months, an unbridled spike in the value of cryptocurrencies, especially the Bitcoin, has taken the lustre off gold, stock markets, oil, and other major commodities as avenues for investment. These days it seems everybody is eager to jump aboard the cryptocurrency bandwagon. Even as the global economy has slumped amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, investors have diverted their investment towards Bitcoin and other digital currencies to make quick financial gains.

Digital Currencies of UAE, China, UK, Turkey and Russia

At present, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is the only country in the world that has launched government-backed cryptocurrency Emcash, since 2017. However, this currency could not get much limelight like leading digital currencies in the world.

And seeing a consistent phenomenal growth in demand and value of Bitcoin and other major digital currencies, China and Turkey have already started trial-trading their digital currencies while the United Kingdom too has announced its plans to launch its own cryptocurrency.

The officials of the United Kingdom have launched the slogan "Bitcoin not Bitcoin" which means the British government plans to launch its own digital currency in coming months. The upcoming Bitcoin is expected to give a tough time to Bitcoin because Bitcoin will be backed by the UK's central bank and this digital currency will have legal protection unlike Bitcoin and other major cryptocurrencies.

Meanwhile, the UK's Pound Sterling is also more valuable than the US dollar (1.39 exchange rate of Sterling vs US dollar as of 3 May 2021) and factor will give support to the Bitcoin when it is launched. There can be some disadvantages for Bitcoin. For



example, the British government may not allow use of this digital currency for money laundering, drug, and weapons' smuggling.

It is a common perception that Bitcoin is being used for money laundering, purchase and smuggling of drugs and weapons. Furthermore, anyone can buy online Bitcoin and any other digital currency with legal or illegal money, but this may not be possible in the case of Bitcoin in which the investors may be asked to use a bank account to buy the UK's digital currency.

Notably, China has recently launched its Digital Yuan on a trial basis in its three major cities – Shenzhen, Suzhou, and Chengdu. China's intention in launching this digital currency is to minimize circulation of its fiat currency (paper-backed official currency) and to promote the fast-dominating culture of trade and investment with digital currencies.

Digital Yuan will be tradable online globally soon. Once the trial phase completes successfully in 2021, China will maximize the scope of online availability and trading of Digital Yuan. Chinese officials are of the opinion that they are implementing measures that will make impossible the use of fake Digital Yuan.

Unlike Bitcoin and other leading cryptocurrencies, Chinese Digital Yuan will be provided to people through commercial banks only. In other words, only people having bank accounts of Chinese currency will be able to obtain the Digital Yuan. A system is also being tested to ensure smooth online trading of this digital currency in China and elsewhere.

Turkey is also launching its digital currency through its central bank during the second half of calendar year 2021. Turkish Central Bank President Naci Agbal said that the digital currency will be launched as a pilot project before a full-fledged launching of Turkey's digital currency.

Turkey has been doing homework to introduce the Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) since 2019. To achieve this goal, Turkish authorities, at present, are testing their software for the trading of CBDC on the pattern of digital Lira.

In March 2021, Russia's largest bank, Russian Sberbank (Sber) sought permission from the central bank to introduce its own digital currency, Sbercoin. After approval from the Russian central bank, Sbercoin trading will begin in Russia very soon. Additionally, Russian government has been

doing experiments to launch its digital currency, Cryptoruble. Russians are doing homework and experiments since 2019 with the aim to introduce Cryptoruble in 2021.

Interestingly, Russia has allowed trading of all major cryptocurrencies except Bitcoin in the country from Jan 2021. This strategic decision of Russia is to promote its own upcoming digital currencies and keep Bitcoin away from the country that is mopping up investment from all over the world rapidly.

In the next couple of years there will be a tough competition in trading of digital currencies. Hence, the countries that will offer their digital currencies through their central banks will be able to attract massive investment that will promote their economic activities robustly. It is because, at present, no one owns Bitcoin and other major currencies and if someone faces a fraud in transaction of his/her digital currency or loses online account information, no one takes responsibility to solve this problem. Thus, investment in Bitcoin and other existing digital currencies is a highly risky business.

Top-20 Cryptocurrencies

At present, the top-20 cryptocurrencies are Bitcoin, Ethereum, XRP, Binance Coin, Tether, Cardano, Uniswap Protocol Token, Dogecoin, Polkadot, Stellar, Solana, Litecoin, Bitcoin Cash, Rally, VeChain, Terra, USD Coin, TRON, PancakeSwap, and Theta. These top-20 digital currencies have been calculated based on their market

capitalization. Bitcoin is on top with a USD 58,150 price and USD 984 billion market capitalization as of 3 May 2021.

Market capitalization of this digital currency has crossed USD 1 trillion for the third time amid fluctuations in price of this cryptocurrency. An easy way to understand the size of market capitalization of Bitcoin is to look at the total annual GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of Pakistan which is around USD 325 billion. Thus, Bitcoin's market capitalization is three times the GDP of Pakistan.

At this time, the total market capitalization of leading cryptocurrencies is around USD 2 trillion and half of the digital currencies market capitalization belongs to rapidly expanding Bitcoin. Financial analysts believe that in 2021, Bitcoin price has a potential to hit the USD 100,000 mark. In recent weeks this digital currency has crossed USD 60,000 per unit value twice.

In the third week of April 2021, Bitcoin fell from USD 63,000 to USD 47,000 when the US President Biden said the government would charge 39.6 percent capital gain tax from those Bitcoin investors who will earn one million dollars or more profit a year from this currency. At present the capital gain tax in the United States is 20 percent.

This unexpected statement of the US President created panic in the trading of digital currencies, but within three days Bitcoin bounced back and crossed USD 58,000 because of fresh investment by 3 May 2021. In February 2021, Bitcoin was trading around USD 35,000, but its price

spiked above USD 50,000 in a few days after Tesla CEO Elon Musk stunned the world by announcing that his company has invested USD 1.5 billion in Bitcoin.

A few weeks later, Tesla also announced that Bitcoin holders can buy this company's cars by paying this digital currency, a new development that further boosted the Bitcoin spike and influenced many mega companies to make investment in this digital currency.

After Bitcoin, Ethereum is the second largest digital currency with USD 2,706 price per unit and USD 380 billion market capitalization followed by XRP having only USD 1.35 value per unit but its market capitalization has increased to USD 158 billion by May 3, 2021. Cryptocurrency analysts believe that Ethereum has a strong potential to grow like Bitcoin in next four to five years.

Meanwhile, Binance Coin is the 4th largest cryptocurrency with USD 576 price and USD 114 billion market capitalization. All other digital currencies have less than USD 53 billion dollar market capitalization each at present but with the passage of time their overall circulation and value is growing.

According to financial experts, COVID-19 driven global economic erosion has led to a phenomenal growth in demand and value of cryptocurrencies and this mania of buying digital currencies will continue as long as coronavirus haunts the world and further undermines the global economy.

Writer is the former Resident Editor of daily The Nation, Karachi.



Why Has the UAE Banned Pakistanis Workers?

Officials and businessmen say the ban was prompted by the Covid-19 outbreak – but the claim does not meet scrutiny as no such ban has been imposed for other countries including India.



By Azeem Waqas

A ban on the entry of Pakistani citizens imposed by UAE authorities that has assumed an aura of mystery threatens to leave a lasting impact on Pakistan's penetration of the lucrative Gulf job market and the remittances the country receives from expat workers.

Top Pakistani officials including Pakistani foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and SAPM on Overseas Pakistanis Zulfikar Abbas Bukhari are tight lipped over the matter. But the fact that no such ban has been imposed on India where infection levels of coronavirus are much higher than in Pakistan belies the officially stated position that the ban is part of Covid-19 travel restrictions.

Qureshi, who recently visited the UAE, is said to have taken up visa ban issue but without success, although he was successful in securing a rollover of a USD 2 billion UAE loan to Pakistan.

A Senator Smells a Rat

Senator Enver Baig rejected the Pakistani authorities claim that UAE has banned Pakistani work visa due to Covid-19.

"It's not due to Covid-19 but there are some other unknown reasons that might be of political nature", he said. "It is the responsibility of the foreign office to take the nation in confidence and share the reasons whatever they are".

Senator Baig is askance why UAE has not targeted India, Bangladesh and Nepal with similar bans. "India is facing a severe spike in coronavirus cases but their workers are allowed, this is unjustified."

Pakistan is losing UAE job market and if it is not resolved on emergency basis it will impact Pakistan's economy severely and it might take long time to regain UAE job market since it is already being filled with Indian, Bangladeshi and Nepali workers, says the Senator.

He said that before the ban, on an average 200,000 – 300,000 Pakistani workers were going to UAE but since November 2020, only 1000 workers have been issued work visa.

Pakistani workers have been sending around USD 3.5 in billion remittances to their country every year.

He said that Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi has taken up the visa ban issue with the Emirates' authorities but they have not lifted the ban yet.

Pakistan is losing 1000 jobs daily in the UAE market it is a matter of great concern, he emphasized, and urged the Prime Minister to visit UAE and get the issue resolved.

UAE is organizing an EXPO 2021 in August and September which will continue for six months. UAE companies have sent workers demand to Pakistan, they need Pakistani manpower and the overseas agencies are receiving jobs requests from UAE but it will not materialize unless the ban is lifted.

Senator Baig asked the Pakistani authorities to get the visa issue resolved as a first priority.

A Business Leader Allays Fears

“The UAE banned in-bound and out-bound travel with the countries with rising numbers of Covid-19 outbreak”, says Mr Ahmed Shaikhani, President, Pakistan Business Council, Dubai. Speaking to The Truth International (TTI), Shaikhani insisted Pakistan was on a list of 13 countries that were banned entry into UAE and were still facing rising numbers of positive cases of Covid-19.

He agrees that Covid-19 related travel restrictions badly affected the businesses, workers and economy in general. “The ban is also hurting Pakistani companies based in the UAE. They are waiting lifting of the ban so that they can import Pakistani skilled and unskilled workers from Pakistan”.

Shaikhani notes the UAE Foreign Minister issued a statement following the visit of Pakistani Foreign Minister to the UAE in December 2020. “H.H. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan assured the Pakistani community that the ban is temporary in nature due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic”.



Asked when the UAE was expected to lift this ban, Shaikhani said, “Since Covid-19 restrictions are still in place, the visa ban is expected to last for only a short period. The UAE government has not clarified yet on when it will be exactly lifted”.

The business leader noted the time-tested nature of the brotherly relations between Pakistan and the UAE, and voiced his hope the two countries will continue to strengthen their bilateral economic ties.

The UAE is Pakistan’s largest trading partners in the Middle East. Statistics from 2019 put the bilateral trade between the two countries at USD 8.19 billion.

Workers’ Grim Plight

A young business graduate belonging to South Punjab, Danial Afzal has applied for a salesperson’s job with a private company based in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The company offered him a handsome salary but due to undisclosed reasons, later withdrew the offer.

Danial visited the office of the overseas employment agency in Rawalpindi to drop his application for any other job in the UAE. He is struggling hard to find a job in the Gulf States and was looking disappointed by the response of employment agency.

“The employment agency has not given any firm commitment of job, I am trying to get a job in the UAE for the last six months but could not succeed. Employment agencies told me that UAE has stopped issuing work visa to Pakistanis since the outbreak of Covid-19,” Danial said talking to The Truth International (TTI).

“I am jobless for the last one year and despite struggling hard I could not found any job in Pakistan”, he said. “I applied for a job in the UAE but all of sudden everything stopped due to Covid-19. Now nobody knows when the world is going to be normal.”

Covid-19 has fuelled unemployment in low-income countries like Pakistan. According to International Monetary Fund (IMF) unemployment rate may increase from 4.5 percent to 5 percent during current year in Pakistan.

Delta International – an overseas employment agency in Rawalpindi – has stopped receiving job requests from the UAE. “The UAE is not issuing any work visa to Pakistani workers since September last year”, a representative of the agency told TTI. “We have been told that it is stopped due to Covid-19”.

The representative says that prior to Covid-19 Delta International was sending almost 100 workers every month to UAE for different positions.

Expat Workers’ Contributions Vital

Dr Khaqan Najeeb, who has served as Advisor to the Ministry of Finance said we started Pakistan Remittance Initiative in 2009 which has helped build from a mere USD 7.8 billion of remittances to more than USD 26 billion in 2021. He says remittances give the economy a boost through their positive impact on consumption, savings, and investment.

Dr Khaqan says recent restrictions on travel and Pakistan Remittance Initiative have helped divert remittances to formal channels. Higher formal inflows have been instrumental in generating current account surplus. The current account surplus has led to a build-up of forex reserves and a liquid foreign exchange market.

Dr Khaqan thinks it is likely that remittances have helped reduce the depth and severity of poverty over the years in the country. He feels Diaspora networks can facilitate international diplomacy for building Pakistan’s case in UAE to lift the ban on hiring from Pakistan. Mass vaccination in Pakistan could help lift travel bans and boost hiring from Pakistan, he says.

Dr Khaqan says departure of skilled workers has likely increased over the years especially engineers, doctors, and accountants. A continuity of this could yield higher per capita remittance to Pakistan.

Civil Service Reform Mired in Litigation

The PTI's initiative for civil service reform appears to have run aground for now.



By Asad Malik

The government has undertaken a new initiative to shed deadwood from the powerful bureaucracy but the task is proving to be uphill because civil servants are putting up tough resistance with some officers going into litigation.

The Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government has introduced broad-based reforms in the civil service rules to ensure internal accountability of bureaucrats. The rules empowered deferment of promotion of official facing inquiry or going into plea bargain by bringing voluntary return under the scope of misconduct.

The Civil Servants (Directory Retirement from Service) Rules 2020 are the most discussed and hated among the bureaucracy. The rules provide for forced retirement in case of adverse remarks in three personal evaluation reports (PERs) or three average PERs, being twice superseded for promotion or not being recommended for BS-22 and having opted for plea bargain or voluntary return.

The Board for the scrutiny of BS-20 to BS-22 officers comprises chairman Federal Public Service Commission (FPSC) and secretaries of cabinet, establishment, finance, and law and justice divisions.

The government was optimistic that reforms in the civil service would pave the way for forced retirement of delinquent officers

from government service and introduction of tough criteria for promotion of bureaucrats. However, contrary to the plan of the government, bureaucrats have started overt and covert campaigns to save their skins. Some officers have moved the Supreme Court in such cases and the court has issued stay orders against the proceeding of the board at least for the time-being.

Last month, the Board held marathon meetings and considered 1,300 civil servants for forced retirement. According to a sources privy to the Board proceedings, the chairman FPSC with the consultation of others members of the Board has cleared a majority of the civil servants but recommended further proceeding against certain officers. Dozens of bureaucrats have been recommended for directory retirement.

The source said that the PM was the competent authority, and after his approval, the officers whose names had been recommended for directory retirement would get an opportunity of hearing. An authorised officer would hear the individual officer and submit a report to the authority concerned.

The officers being considered for retirement include officers of the Pakistan Administrative Service (PAS), Police Service of Pakistan

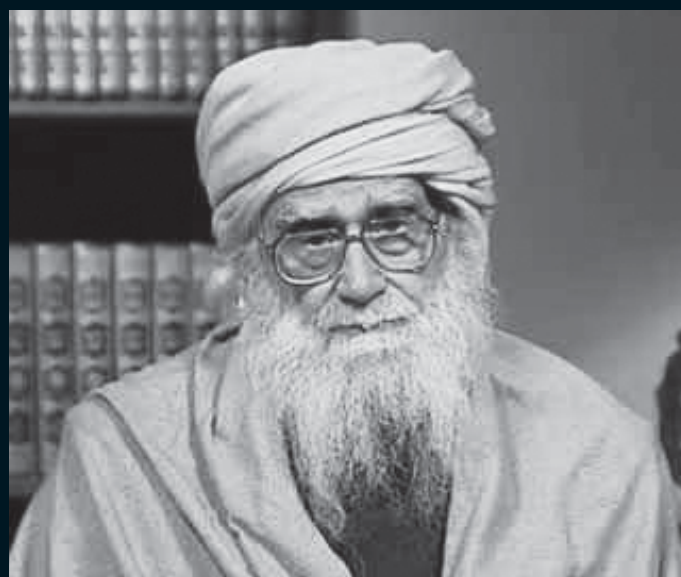
Muslim scholar Maulana Waheeduddin Khan

By Hamid Raza Khan Wattoo

It is said that the death of a religious scholar (aalim) leaves the world (aalim) shaken and bemused. Whatever the merits of the saying, it certainly rings true in the case of noted Indian Muslim scholar Maulana Waheeduddin Khan who passed away at the age of 96 on April 21. No sooner had the news of his death emerged from a private hospital in New Delhi where he had been admitted after contracting Coronavirus infection, then the entire social media burst with emotional streams of condolence messages and paeans of praise for the Maulana and the legacy of peace he stood for and promoted all his life. Surprisingly, the outpouring of emotions mixing with shock and grief, was not just limited to his followers and the students of religion but a wise swathe of intelligentsia and people with well-known secular credentials also took to online media platforms to pay homage to the Maulana for reflective thoughts and the message of peace and coexistence he tried to promote through his teachings and lectures all his life.

Maulana Waheeduddin Khan was born in Azamgarh and lost his father at a young age. He received his education from a local madrasa and then joined the Jamaat-e-Islami founded by Maulana Abul A'la Maududi, a giant of his times whose ideas and writings seeking establishment of an Islamic state through all material means had already gained traction and spawned religious movements throughout the Muslim world. However, as Maulana Waheeduddin Khan started studying the teachings of Maulana Maududi and gradually began to find them problematic particularly Maulana Maududi's concept and enunciation of the system of Islamic Caliphate. Maulana Maududi in his 'Khilafat wa Mulukiyat' had described the Caliphate as an ideal system of Islamic life and called for re-establishing and restoring it to the same pristine form as it stood before the system of mulukiyat took its place. Maulana Maududi had argued that the Prophet (PBUH) had 'brought with him from his Sender' a state system that had no room whatsoever for people's independent authority and for allowing some people to rule over others. Rather, he added, 'ruler-ship and the superior most power are entirely God's.' He further argued in his book 'Tajdeed-o-Ihya-e Deen' that the highest goal of the mission of the prophets (on whom be peace) in this world had also been to establish the Divine Government and enforce the system of life that they had brought from God.

While Maulana Maududi's teachings influenced millions across the globe and inspired religious movements in the nook and corner of the Islamic world, Maulana Waheeduddin Khan was little impressed as he believed that Maulana Maududi's making politics the central aspect of Islam had to be situated explicitly and in clear terms in the Holy Quran and the Hadith and to use any other sort of proof in order to try to validate this claim was making this claim even weaker than it already was. Maulana Waheeduddin tried to correspond with Maulana Maududi to seek the latter's guidance, understanding and clarifications regarding his considered concept of Islamic state but these conversations did not go far and Maulana Maududi left Maulana Waheeduddin to his own thoughts and conclusions. Disappointed and exasperated with Maulana Maududi's reluctance and unwillingness to provide him guidance and understanding of the issues he had raised, Maulana Waheeduddin decided to publish his most famous book "Tabeer Ki



Galti" to not only present an ideological rebuttal of the political thought of Islam and concept of Islamic state as propounded by Maulana Maududi but also used the book to offer an alternative understanding of deen which stressed cleansing of the soul and maintaining the moral fibre at individual level to contribute to the common good of the society. The true meaning of term aqim ud-deen or iqamat-e deen, in his view was not in establishing the dominance of the deen or enforcing the shariah system but in 'maintaining the deen' or 'keeping the deen established'.

The book "Tabeer Ki Galti" was written in 1962. In the subsequent years, attempts were made from different quarters to quash Maulana Waheeduddin's thesis and even paint him as a man of Indian establishment intent on belittling the concept of Jihad and struggle for the establishment of Islam as a political force but Maulana Waheeduddin has created a niche for his school of thought and his message of peace and coexistence with a vast number of people. He had been helped in his cause and effort by a well-presented and well-documented monthly publication called Ar-risala (The Message) which he started in 1976 and nearly 200 books, booklets and leaflets to explain and enunciate Islam's ideology of peace, modern interpretation of Islam, spirituality and Dawah through references from the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet (PBUH). To spread his message at the community level, he also set up a Centre for Peace and Spirituality to promote peace, harmony, positivity and interfaith dialogue based on the Quranic verse "lakum deenukum wa liya deen (for you your religion, for me mine).

In his writings and speeches, Maulana Waheeduddin Khan has used simplest everyday events to draw positive lessons and convey meaningful spiritual principles. Throughout his life, he remained a learner and encouraged a spirit of enquiry and curiosity which he said was the bedrock of intellectual development. While he is no more today, his teachings and the message of peace and brotherhood he promoted throughout his life would continue to guide those who see and believe in Islam as a source of guidance and peace for the humanity.

Islamophobia from the Bully Pulpits of the West

With right-wing extremism already gaining strength worldwide, the trend of Western leaders engaging in Islamophobic tirades is worrying to say the least.

By Maryia Syed

Of the many harbingers of doom that have sprang in the modern world, the complimentary pair of rising religious fundamentalism and Islamophobia is perhaps the most ominous.

Islamophobia is often defined as an exaggerated sense of hostility, hatred or fear towards Islam and Muslims. This phobia is thriving, specifically in the Western world, due to strong preconceived notions and negative stereotypes associated with Muslims through biased media coverage of Muslims.

There are innumerable allegations on Western media producing biased reports regarding minority Muslims, magnifying the coverage of negative events and thus reinforcing and perpetuating anti-Muslim bias and Islamophobic stereotypes.

One does not have to go as far as the West, given the plethora of evidence of Hindutva politics in our neighbouring India. India's anti-Muslim attitudes and laws have skyrocketed since the ascent to power of the right-wing Modi regime. The recent oxymoronic Freedom of Religion Bill, amongst other such laws, is a brazen indicator of Islamophobic values in India, normalized to the point they reach the Parliament and be embodied through a national Bill.

Already, India's brazenly anti-Muslim Citizen (Amendment) Act and the very real threat of implementing the National Register of Citizens, is hanging over the heads of Indian Muslims like a word of Damocles.

It is a sad fact that there has been a significant increase in hard-line right-wing groups globally. This includes the rise of ultra-nationalist and extremist groups, both violent and non-violent. The Stop Islamization of Europe (SIOE), a rightist, anti-Islamic group has gained momentum ever since its inception in 2007. This UK-based group has extended its roots to other European countries, apart from its sphere of influence in England, where it was famously responsible for conducting mosque protests in Harrow. Having been originated from a Danish anti-Islamic political interest group, the SIOE also exist in Poland, besides of course in Denmark.

Pegida (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamicisation of the Occident), is yet another far-right, anti-Islamic, pan-European political group that is based in Germany. This group opposes Islamic influence in German society and amongst the German populace, as Islamic principles are equated with extremism and terrorism. Pegida recently catapulted to having a stronger national presence in Germany since its formation in 2014, which illuminates the ever-increasing trend of anti-Muslim sentiment in Western countries.

The Christchurch Mosque mass shootings in New Zealand are another glaring example of the growing inclination towards Islamophobia in the First World. This incident was especially alarming, having occurred in a country which is internationally recognized for its inclusivity, democracy and rule of law.

Prime Minister Jacinda Arden did not disappoint as timely action was taken against the perpetrator, but no corrective measure can



erase the reality of this heinous crime. The irreversible damage done continues to haunt the survivors for decades if not generations.

What is most unfortunate is the fact that several leaders and heads of state are also seen supporting anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic views, defending extremists and thus promoting violence against Muslims.

Amongst other Islamophobic leaders, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is notorious for his controversial views on Muslims, he is known to be especially critical of Muslim women who choose to wear burkas. Prime Minister Johnson famously quipped that Muslim women who cover themselves "look like letter boxes".

Such a statement, made solely at the expense of a minority, is not only reflective of prejudice but is exceptionally appalling as it entails a much deeper problem. The Muslim diaspora in England can scarcely hope for support and respect from their fellow citizens in defending their rights when a top government leader so unashamedly displays his deep-seated intolerance towards them.

Islamophobia affects more than a small fringe group of Muslims. These anti-Muslim sentiments have trickled down and permeated through the various strata of Western societies. More and more Muslims living in Western countries feel vulnerable and disrespected as a religious minority.

A 2011 survey conducted by Gallup cemented this claim, where 52 percent of Americans and 48 percent of Canadians felt the West did not respect Muslims or Muslim societies. This is a legitimate concern for democracies worldwide that profess tolerance and inclusivity towards their Muslim citizens.

It is unethical and, on a more human level, absolutely heart-breaking, knowing the extent of how Muslims are unjustifiably criminalized in Western societies amid the rising wave of anti-Muslim attitudes. Given the increasing number of crimes committed in the name of Islam, one would only be mistaken to assume that these cases would decline any time soon.

Nevertheless, it is imperative that dutiful citizens everywhere work together to destigmatize Islam and Muslims, and promote tolerance, acceptance and diversity – in the hope of creating more enlightened masses and a brighter, shared future for all humanity.

The Future of Personalized Healthcare



By Maheen Dhanani

As Pieter Cullis famously said, “In general, less than 50 percent of prescribed drugs actually help the patient they are prescribed for.” In a hypothetical situation, 10 people present the same symptoms. They visit the same hospital and get the same diagnosis and treatment. Not all of them recovered with the provided method of care, it worked for some and not for others. This is not an uncommon phenomenon. It is the one size fits all concept that has been applied for years.

Now, we are at a pivotal juncture in the history of healthcare. There is an abundance of health information, medical data, and scientific research that is transforming how we view healthcare. This data is creating new and unique approaches towards medicine and is revolutionizing patient care. It allows us to ensure accurate screenings, diagnosis and treatment and infection or disease prevention for each individual.

Technological advancement has allowed us to explore the uniqueness of human beings and even diseases for that matter. Now, we are able to see the beauty of biology and we have begun connecting the dots. Digital health helps us analyze with artificial intelligence large groups of data collected from people, which gives physicians and healthcare professionals better ways of understanding how to go about a specific treatment personalized for a unique individual.

Artificial intelligence caters towards understanding real-world data and how it links to medicine. The concept of personalized medicine includes selective genotype-based prescription of drugs to individuals for whom the drug should be safe and most effective.

The best-known example for this case is the CYP 450 enzyme and its application to Warfarin therapy. The correct personalized dosing of warfarin could potentially prevent 17,000 strokes in the United States of America and thereby avoid 43,000 emergency room visits. The Mayo Clinic tested

this prediction in 3,600 patients and found hospitalizations were reduced by 30percent.

Another great example is of Your.MD, which uses AI to create personalized health recommendations. The Interactive virtual assistant app of Your MS uses AI algorithms to search medical literature covering more than 1,000 conditions. This allows patients to then chat with the chatbot about their symptoms. After identifying a patient’s potential condition, the bot can connect the user with the best doctors in their area.

So we need two things: first, we need ways of predicting and detecting disease well before it becomes life threatening; and second, we need medicines that work for you and your unique body.

Personalized medicine is more than just effective treatments and disease prevention. It is about transforming the healthcare industry as a whole. It will allow health systems to evolve into more quality and cost effective delivery systems that are patient centered.

With health data, we now have the ability to save lives with the right approach to treatment for each individual. To make this happen, it is key that all stakeholders combine forces and work together. Public-private partnerships and collaboration with government regulators and policymakers can show us where brilliant minds and technology can take us.

Proper legislations and policies must be formed to secure patient data and on the other hand, incentives by the government must be given for innovative research and adoption of new technologies. Together, research, medical care, and governmental policy can allow personalized medicine to have a great potential which can change the healthcare delivery system as a whole and improve the quality of patient care and to help contain healthcare costs.



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Chilim Jusht Festival of Kalash People

Spring has arrived in Chitral – and so has the annual spring festival of the Kalash people of the remote valleys.



By Zahiruddin

Merrymaking, singing and dancing, thy name is Kalash! Incredible as it may sound, these hardy people of Pakistan's Chitral region do not know how to bemoan and wail even on the demise of their near and dear ones. When a loved one dies, they sing and dance for three days before their burial.

Kalash are a people with unique culture who practice their archaic way of living in three adjacent valleys Bumburate, Birirand Rumburin in the southern part of Chitral.

These pleasure-loving people celebrate different festivals throughout the year of which chitramas and chilim jusht are of great significance. Chitramas is the winter festival while the latter takes place when spring season is at its prime in the valleys thereby attracting tourists in large numbers.

This festival is perennially scheduled to commence from 12 May to continue for five days in all the three adjacent valleys. This year, Eidul Fitr coincides with the Kalash spring festival after a rotation of 36 years. The festival is not

only meant to herald the arrival of spring season but it is also important from religious point of view as it contains almost all the rituals of the religion.

The participation of Kalash people in the chilimjusht festival is said to be obligatory and one loses his or her relationship with the community for failing to participate in it for three years consecutively. The festival consists of a large number of rituals and each ritual has special connotation in the context of local environment, psyche and culture.

The significance of the festival also lies in the fact that the Kalash people kick off their activities of farming in the fields and leave the valley for the pastures in higher altitudes after the chilim jusht festival and tend their cattle there for the coming four months.

The preparations for the festival start one month before its commencement by renovating their houses after the extended winter season while men and women prepare new clothes and shoes for the occasion. The festival is an opportunity of

ostentation for the Kalash people who exhibit their affluence by providing maximum clothes, jewellery, shoes and items of decoration to their women. A large quantity of milk is also maintained in each household for the festival which is consumed lavishly during the festival.

The festival starts in Rumbur valley with the ceremony of chhirpeyek (offering of milk) after which the Kalash elders and religious leaders lead a rally to the Malosh, the place of worship while women sprinkle milk on the goddesses. The Kalash people of all age groups start singing and dancing in the central dancing hall of the valley (charsu) which continues till late at night which remains the major activity throughout the festival. The dancing hall on village level is called jastakhan.

In the charsu, the women in their traditional dress embellished with ornaments dance in circle mixed with men ordered such that a woman is joined by man who is again joined by woman and so on. In the circle, a person holds the waist of the next by one hand putting the other hand on the shoulder of the other. If it is the exclusive group of women, then a man joins them standing at the centre of the circle. Different age groups of different age groups can be seen dancing in the charsu but to a single trumpet.

The festival moves to the other two valleys the next day in the same order and the same activities are performed till the concluding day which is held in Bumburate, the major Kalash valley. The concluding day and the ceremony is highly colorful and the number of tourists reaches its zenith. On that day, before arriving at the charsu, the Kalash men and women accompanied by children reach a nearby grassy ground from different villages of the valleys where they hold special session of collective dance and sing the songs in praise of their departed parents and forefathers and pay tributes to them.

From there they leave for the charsu in procession waving green twigs of walnut in their hands which they constantly wave in the air throughout the way while a selected group of young boys and girls escort them to the venue. The charsu of Bumburate reverberates with the rhythmic tone of drums and songs for more than five hours in which hundreds of Kalash people including boys and girls dance in their traditional way and it marks the concluding ceremony of the festival.

A main characteristic of the festival is the selection of life partners by single men and women, who make announcement of their choice on this occasion while they tie the knot on the occasion of winter festival Chitramas held in the month of December. The young boys and girls intending to propose each other wait for this occasion throughout the year long.

The festival attracts tourists in large numbers from different parts of the country and abroad during which all the hotels in the valleys are filled to their capacity while camping facilities are also provided there to accommodate the swarming tourists.

The coincidence of the chilim jusht festival and Eidul Fitr this year was to provide a unique opportunity to attract a huge number of tourists but on the direction of NCOC, the local administration has imposed ban on the entry of tourists to the Kalash valleys where hotels and guest houses will remain closed during the festival.



The Ethereal Joy of Biking the Legendary Karakorum Highway

Meet the Pakistani-German aerospace engineer on a biking tour through twenty-one countries including Pakistan.

By Ali Abdullah

On the course of his wanderings through more than 80 countries around the globe, Pakistani-German Abrar Hassan has seen many of the world's most famous tourist sites from the saddle of his BMW touring bike. But he says nothing compares, not even remotely, to the joy of biking Pakistan's world-famous Karakorum Highway (KKH) between Nagar and Hunza.

"The joy and excitement I felt on the KKH starting from Nagar is hard to describe in words", says Hassan, an aerospace engineer by profession who is in Pakistan as part of his 21-country biking tour. "I have visited these places [earlier] but on my bike, it feels like it's a new place because of the 360-degree view".

The best part about Hunza, however, are its people. "The people of Hunza are one of the most welcoming people I have ever met", says Hassan. "Not just this time but in the past when I visited the valley, I experienced the same hospitality".

An avid biker, Hassan is also into trekking and amateur mountain climbing. His highest climb is 6,100 meters. Photography is another passion of Hassan, who says, "I like to travel alone so I can stop wherever I want to along the way and capture beautiful scenes".

"If you're determined to achieve what you want, then no power on earth can stop you from it", says Hassan, who was born in a small village near Nankana Sahib and moved to Germany for his masters after his bachelor's degree from Islamabad.

The athletic Hassan who has travelled more than 80 countries from his base in Germany started his current tour hoping to reach Pakistan after traversing twenty other countries. However, travel restrictions imposed by various countries because of the Covid-19 global pandemic forced him to change his plans and he took the most direct route to Pakistan, entering the country via Iran.

After spending a couple of days at his hometown of Nankana Sahib, Abrar Hassan took the GT road to Islamabad. A night's rest later, he took off for Azad Kashmir early in the morning, reaching the scenic Neelum Valley by the evening.

Known for its breathtaking Himalayan scenery, Neelum Valley is very close to the Line of Control (LoC) dividing Azad Kashmir from the Indian-occupied Kashmir. Hassan biked his way to the very last village in the valley before the LoC, called Taobat.

Besides Neelum Valley, Hassan had occasion to explore Baboon Valley, Ratti Gali, Arang Kel, and a lake called Chitta Katha Lake in Azad Kashmir. He loved the trekking opportunities offered by some of these places. He also camped on a couple of occasions during his stay in Kashmir.



"Kashmir is truly a nice place and very well suited to adventure tourism with its stunning mountains, lakes, and extremely hardcore off road paths", he said.

After he biked his way to Taobat his next plan was to explore Gilgit Baltistan. He biked towards Naran from Kashmir. From Naran he went towards Babusar Top. On his way, he also stopped at Dudipatsar Lake. From there he stopped at Babusar Top and then he spent his night in Gilgit.

Next morning he travelled to Hunza Valley. Taking the historic Silk Road, he reached the Hunza Valley, where his first stop was the famous Karimabad. Formerly known as Baltit, Karimabad is the capital of Hunza District, and is one of the best tourist sites in Pakistan.

Hassan stopped at Karimabad for a while and then visited the historic Altit and Baltit forts. Both hundreds of years old forts, the forts are in excellent condition thanks to excellent maintenance.

Hassan then took to the KKH again on his way to Khunjerab Pass up to the Pak-China border checkpoint, the highest-paved international border crossing in the world. He is all praise for the quality of the road through the impossible Karakorum terrain.

Along the way, Hassan had excellent opportunities to indulge his passion for photography. In particular, he took some amazing shots of the famed Passu Cones and the Attabad Lake. He explored small villages, lakes and glaciers as well as visiting places like Nagar, Gulmit, Sust, and the famous Hussaini Bridge.

Hassan is glad to see tourism picking up in these areas but worries about the environmental toll of these activities. "The influx of domestic tourism in the area over the last few years has taken a toll on the fragile environment of the valley", he says.

"Treks and villages are littered with plastic which eventually ends up in streams and rivers. The construction of guesthouses has led to deforestation, as has the enhanced logging activity to meet the rising timber demands of the industry."

Shaheens' All-Conquering African Safari

The Green Shirts have now inflicted defeat on both South Africa and Zimbabwe in every format of the game.



After taking the T20i series 2-1, Pakistan extended their victorious run to the Test format of cricket after crushing hosts Zimbabwe by an innings and 116 runs.

The boys in green were off to Zimbabwe for T20 and Tests series after a successive series victory in South Africa. Pakistan skipper Babar Azam talked to the media and said that they will treat Zimbabwe as any other top class team.

The three T20I's of the tour were played in Harare Sports Club. Both teams were looking to win the opening game and lead the 3match series. Shaheens were unable to set a big target due to slow, dead pitches and the huge Harare sports club. Despite setting a low total Pakistani bowlers did an excellent job to defend the target and lead the series by 1-0.

Pakistan won the toss and elected to bowl in the second innings. Zimbabwe set a low total of just 119 runs, still the boys in green were unable to chase it. In fact they couldn't even score 100 runs. Pakistan were all out just for 99 runs and like this Zimbabwe won their maiden T20I against Pakistan.

Third and series decider was played on 25th of April. Pakistan opted to bat first and did set a defendable target in this ground. Brilliant 91* by Rizwan and a half century helped Pakistan set a decent target. Babar Azam scored the fastest 2000 runs in T20I's and left Virat Kohli behind once again. Babar scored 2000 runs in just 54 matches.

Zimbabwe were looking good till the 14th over. But then the breakthrough by Hussnain and outstanding spell by Hassan Ali helped Pakistan to win the match and the series by 2-1. Rizwan was named player of the series whereas Hassan Ali was named man of the match.

Both teams were now all set to change the format and fight for the test trophy. The first test began on 29 April. Zimbabwe Captain won the toss and elected to bat first. Hosts were 0 for 1 after in-form Hassan Ali took his first wicket of the match. Second wicket fell shortly and this time Shaheen Shah Afridi was the culprit.

Wickets continued to fall and Pakistan were soon on top. Young gun Shaheen Shah Afridi and in-form Hassan Ali took 4 wickets each. Shaheen took his 50th test wicket in just 16 games. Zimbabwe were all out for 176. Faheem Ashraf and Sajid Khan went wicket less whereas Nauman Ali took one.

Pakistani openers started the innings confidently. Abid Ali and Imran Butt had a successful partnership of 115 runs in which Abid scored 60 and Butt scored 91. This is Imran Butt's best score in tests. Azhar Ali scored 36 and the skipper was dismissed for none. This was Babar Azam's first golden duck in tests. Fawad Alam once again proved himself and scored 140. Pakistan scored a total of 426 runs with a lead of 250.

Zimbabwe were able to get a good opening partnership of 48 runs but Pakistanis bowlers soon engineered their collapse and Zimbabwe were nowhere in the game. Hassan Ali took 5 wickets, Nauman Ali was able to get 2 and Faheem Ashraf took 1 wicket. Zimbabwe were all out on 134 and Pakistan won the first test by an innings and 116 runs.

Hassan Ali was named man of the match. He took 9 wickets in the first test as well as he joined Shaheen Shah Afridi in 50 test wickets club.

By Ali Abdullah

Pakistani Artists Demand Royalties

The creative industries cannot hope to flourish unless the artists are given their due share.



By Kaukab Jehan

Pakistani television and film artists have come together to demand royalties for their work. Taking to their social media last month, the celebrities launched a campaign 'give royalties to artists' which aims to set rules and fair rewards in the entertainment industry of the country.

The campaign was initiated in the light of renowned TV actress Naila Jaffery appealing for royalties for the reruns of her dramas in order to treat her cancer ailment. To highlight the matter, stars turned to Instagram, Twitter and Facebook with the #giveroyaltiestoartists hashtag.

Names like Mahira Khan, Humayun Saeed, Sanam Saeed, Ayesha Omar, Ushna Shah, Iqra Aziz, Yasir Hussain, Junaid Khan, Minal Khan, Mansha Pasha, Zara Noor Abbas, Asad Siddiqui, Armeena Khan, Kubra Khan, Omair Rana, and others raised their voices to ask for royalties to artists.

Who said what?

Humayun Saeed tweeted, "About time. Actors and producers must get royalties for their hard work. That's no favour; it's their right. #GiveRoyaltiesToArtists"

Sanam Saeed took to Instagram and wrote, "Its about time! #GiveRoyaltiesToArtists"

Armeena Rana Khan posted a definition of royalty on her official Facebook page with the caption "This is for those people who are failing to understand what a royalty actually means. Please read and stop abusing artists online."

Zara Noor Abbas wrote on her Instagram, "In every industry, there are some rules. Some laws. Let's have it set in ours

too. Let's acknowledge the ones who ENTERTAIN you on the COST of their lives. #giveroyaltiestoartists".

Asad Siddiqui also took his instagram and said, "In tough times, solidarity is the force. We stand together, hand in hand. #giveroyaltiestoartists."

Mansha Pasha used her instagram to say, "Its time to make this happen. #giveroyaltiestoartists"

Kubra Khan highlighted how the aim of this campaign is not just to achieve royalties for actors but for all Pakistani artists, be it musicians, writers or directors.

Khan wrote in an Instagram post: "Not Just actors. Writers, musicians, directors.. and soo many more... In the passing years.. we've seen some of our seniors who have ruled the industry request respect when it should've been their Right.

"There are rules and regulations that set a well-run system and it's high time we implement them so that our industry can run as smoothly as it should. Every artist deserves that. #GiveRoyaltiesToArtists".

Why did the campaign start?

In the beginning of last month, a few days before the campaign started, renowned actress Naila Jaffery, who is fighting ovarian cancer since 2016 and unable to pursue her treatment, appealed for royalties for her drama shows being re-telecast on television channels.

In a video that circulated on social media, Jaffery said that she was hospitalized for treatment and was out of money to

get the second session of her chemotherapy. “I kept on thinking that our government and policymakers should take care of artists”, she said.

Jaffery added that in those last six years, everyone has assisted her but she wished if she and other artists could have a few percent of their work that were being replayed on channels as such a move would help them to manage their lives.

She recalled that Pakistan Television had given royalties for shows re-broadcasted by it. “Even though the money was too little, we were happy”.

What is royalty to Artists?

According to online encyclopaedia ‘Investopedia’, the Royalty is: “A legally binding payment made to an individual or company for the on-going use of their assets, including copyrighted works, franchises, and natural resources. An example of royalties would be payments received by musicians when their original songs are played on the radio or television, used in movies, performed at concerts, bars, and restaurants, or consumed via streaming services. In most cases, royalties are revenue generators specifically designed to compensate the owners of songs or property when they license out their assets for another party’s use.”

Government stance

After the post of the actress got viral, PTI’s Senator Faisal Javed Khan took notice and gave some hope to the country’s artist fraternity on his twitter.

“Most countries around the world give royalties [and] residuals to artists every time a show, their work, is re-run, a second time or more”, he said. “However, sadly in Pakistan where many artists are already underpaid, there is no policy or law ensuring that artists be given financial credit for their work”.

In the next post, he announced he was in touch with stakeholders who were working on a comprehensive bill to address the issue. “Therefore, it is very critical to fill the gaps and bring proper framework via amendments in legislation to ensure that our producers, artists get the rights to royalties”.

Many stars, including Ali Zafar, Sami Khan, Sakina Samo, and Zara Tareen on their social media appreciated the move, thanking the senator for acknowledging their grievances and taking a step towards positive growth.

Ali Zafar tweeted, “Thank you for bringing this up.”

Mikaal Zulfiqar, wrote, “Thank you Senator Faisal Javed for taking up this issue. You have our full support!”

Previously in a conversation with Images by Dawn, Zulfiqar had expressed his thoughts about how the system of no royalty payments was hurting artists and their hard work, elaborating, “In the 90s, royalties were an option but at the time actors were being paid less. They decided to get a higher amount one-off and forgave that benefit in exchange. To date, it’s the same formula.”

He added that everything was done from the channel’s end, with even producers not getting paid much. “Because we are not a regulated industry, there are so many issues”.

What has been done already?

In Pakistan, there are a few bodies already in place for the protection of artists’ rights like Actor’s Collective Trust (ACT), which is a federally registered representative body of actors, Pakistan Broadcasters Association (PBA) which according to its website, “ensures optimum advantage to all stakeholders of the media industry, including the broadcast houses,” and a committee for producers called the United Producers Association, which looks out for producers’ rights.



Hollywood no longer second to none



By Haider Rifaat

The Chinese film market made headlines last year, overtaking Hollywood to become the biggest film industry by revenue. 2021 seems no different. China's domestic box office revenue stands at more than 20.1 billion yuan so far as the domestic film market continues to witness profitable growth. Last year's research predicted that China would surpass Hollywood in 2022 to become the largest entertainment industry in the world, but success has come to it earlier than expected. The industry has managed to shine unaided, requiring little to zero help from Hollywood films.

As of late, locally produced content in China has been selling faster than an average American film. Perhaps Chinese have regained faith in the power of films that they can proudly call their own. The pandemic in particular helped uphold such a public sentiment as lesser American films were screened in China – allowing local productions to replace them. COVID-19 helped accelerate the Chinese film industry's business altogether. Hollywood is still plunged in the drain with little hope of fully recovering in the months to come.

The release of *Godzilla vs. Kong* in March amassed \$397 million last month but \$181.7 million of the total box office came from China. That is an indication of Hollywood's strong reliance on the Chinese film market. So far, the highest grossing film of 2021 is the Chinese comedy flick *Hi, Mom* released in February. It is also the second biggest non-English film in terms of revenue.

Even Asian artists winded up making history at the 93rd Academy Awards. Chinese director Chloé Zhao – who won the Golden Globe for Best Director – bagged an Oscar in the same category for *Nomadland*, becoming the first Asian woman to win the honor. Yuh-Jung Youn also made history as the first Korean actress to win Best Supporting Actress for *Minari*. Riz Ahmed became the first Muslim to bag a Best Actor nomination while Steven Yeun emerged as the first Asian actor to receive the same title.

2021 has been a rewarding year for Asian artists so far, but it is disappointing to realize that no actor of Muslim or Asian

background received a Best Actor nomination in the Oscar's 93-year long history until recently. This sad reality further draws on the lack of representation given to Asian actors in major American productions. Had they landed constructive roles a few decades ago in Hollywood, things would have been a lot different today. The practice of “yellowface” in American cinema further dwindled opportunities for underrepresented actors.

Nonetheless, things may be changing this year in Hollywood with the release of movies such as *Mortal Kombat* and *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*, which features the first Asian lead in a Marvel production. Couple these feats with historic Oscar wins and roaring box office numbers from China, and we could be witnessing progressive growth for Asians across the board in Hollywood.

Given that American cinema cannot bloom unless the Chinese film market backs it, production companies in the U.S. would feel the need to include more Asian artists in their films to generate stronger global revenue. In the current climate, lesser films are being released in the U.S. to avoid producers from losing business. Instead, streaming platforms like Netflix and HBO Max are being utilized to appease viewers at home. Many movies are also being postponed for later release dates until the pandemic withers.

The Chinese entertainment industry, however, has come out of the COVID-19 conundrum as the clear winner; that should worry Hollywood. China is making films of stellar quality without requiring external support. That, too, should worry Hollywood. Luck could work in America's favor if it collaborates with China on the entertainment front; but that is easier said than done. The two countries already share a bitter history, and that changes the outcome of this opportunity completely. Hypothetically, if such a collaboration were to materialize in the near future, it would come with a ton of restrictions involving censorship, selective scripts and other hurdles, therefore, achieving nothing substantive going forward.

Adventures of Tom Sawyer

The adventures of Tom Sawyer revolves around the youthful adventures of the novel's schoolboy protagonist, Thomas Sawyer, whose reputation precedes him for causing mischief and strike. Tom lives with his aunty Polly, half-brother Sid and Cousin Mary in the quaint town of St. Petersburg, just off the shore of the Mississippi river. St. Petersburg is described as a typical small town atmosphere where the Christian faith is predominant, the social network is close-knit and familiar resides.

I liked the school scenes, the pirating adventures, and the romance with Becky, but the standout part, for me, was definitely the cave. It was a terrific conclusion to the story that gave Tom an obstacle worthy of the best adventure novels, and it proved to be highly memorable and, needless to say, very entertaining.

In this book you will experience a strong dose of humor, a lot of nostalgia, the innocence of childhood, superstitions, murder, a revenge, and slavery - all of which are ingredients for a classic story.

The overall tone of the book is obviously humorous. For children reading this book, the adventures are quite exciting. However, this book is believed to be for young adults and adults. This book is in narrative style, by an adult who sees the world cynically, yet sentimentally when he dwells on his childhood longingly.

I think teenagers today are going to like this book. Even though this book is a classic there might be some teenagers who would find interest in how kids were in 1800s. I would recommend this book for children above the age of 13.

Author: Mark Twain

Reviewed by: Alizay Ashraf

ISBN: 0-00-166003-9

Publisher: The Children's Press London and Glasgow

Pages: 188



Grimm's Complete Fairy Tales

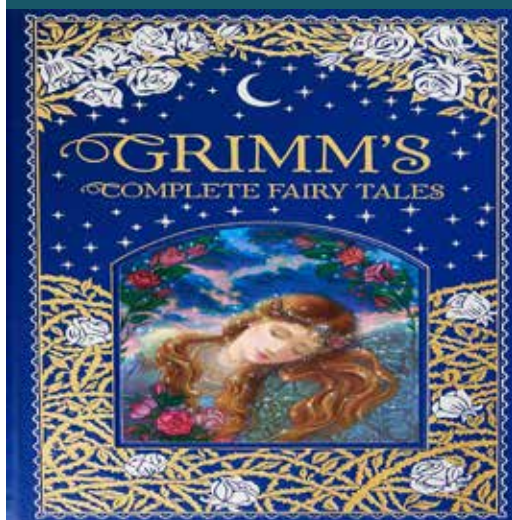
Author: Grimm Brothers (Jacob Grimm, Wilhelm Grimm)

Reviewed by: Alizay Ashraf

ISBN: 0-86611-874-8

Pages: 229

Publisher: Canterbury Classics



Grimm's Fairy Tales contains the essential bedtime stories for children worldwide for the better part of two centuries. The Brothers Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm, were German linguists and cultural researchers who gathered legendary folklore and aimed to collect the stories exactly as they heard them. This book features, all your favorite classics, including "Hansel and Gretel," "Cinderella," "The Frog Prince," "Rapunzel," "Snow White," "Rumpelstiltskin," and dozens more.

I am glad that I read this, simply because fairy tale plots and themes are used so often in modern literature that it felt good to become acquainted with old versions of the tales and get closer to the original folklore. I also enjoyed picking up on some of the values of the time that came across in the stories.

I felt like similar ideas were repeated in most stories. The main premise to these stories was that the man does some sort of job or quest, and the prize is always a princess. The fact that the winner would end up with the same prize, the woman, in each story was quite bothersome.

Moreover, these stories may seem harsh to modern readers, but they impart valuable lessons about loyalty, resourcefulness, and gratitude. The level of violence is high -- children are killed or eaten, a girl has her hands amputated, etc., but the mayhem is framed within the context of make-believe.

I really liked this book and enjoyed it as well. It would be a great, light, and calm read. I would recommend this book for children above the age of 10 because there is some violence in there.



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