

# The Truth International

15<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021

PM Khan a lost twin brother of Tajikistan's President?  
His presidency is a true model to follow for Imran Khan

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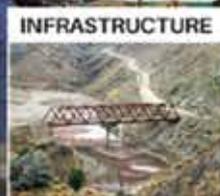
# Translating Vision into Reality



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## All statistics have outliers

By M. Ziauddin

Governments in Pakistan invariably 'touch' up the official growth rates so as to be seen as having achieved various targets they had set for the outgoing financial year. As such, official claims of GDP growth rates have always been met with a thick dose of skepticism because of their failure, year after year, to stand the final test when conclusive growth figures are received after a lag of a year or so. The 'touching' is done by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistic (PBS), a line department of the finance ministry (now of Planning) working like a puppet under the directive of its parent ministry. If this undesirable practice is to be stopped for good the PBS would need to be liberated from the parent ministry and allowed to function at least as autonomously as the State Bank of Pakistan.

On the face of it, the growth rate of 3.94 per cent being claimed by the government for the outgoing year does not look all that unrealistic if one were to test it against last year's negative growth of 0.5%. As well, the hefty stimulus that the State Bank of Pakistan had disbursed during 2020-2021 also has significantly triggered a fairly steep escalation in the growth rate.

But an eminent economist of international repute, Dr. Hafeez Pasha while analysing the government's claim regarding the seemingly unbelievable growth rate pointed out that the government had admitted 22.996pc decline in growth of energy sector (electricity, gas etc.), while estimating massive growth in industrial sector which could not have happened without energy. According to him, the agriculture sector, which was immensely disturbed last year due to meagre cotton production, suddenly picked growth during the current fiscal year

at a time when transport and communication sectors registered a declining trend. Besides, the wholesale and retail sectors had continued to be in trouble.

Another eminent economist Dr. Pervaiz Tahir has also termed 3.94pc growth rate unrealistic and said independent operation of the PBS was the only way forward to get a transparent projection of the growth. He said if growth in various sectors, agriculture, industrial etc., was admitted, there should have been about 3pc growth rate at the most. "But it jumped to around 4pc and I think one per cent has been added forcibly," he said.

Sakib Sherani, former member of Prime Minister's economic advisory council and head of a macroeconomic consultancy has endorsed the official claim saying, the momentum in many economic indicators, especially high frequency ones, was confirming a strong pick-up in economic activity post-second wave of Covid.

"Whether this would have caused GDP to grow by three per cent, 3.3pc or 3.9pc is moot, however. It should be noted that the order of magnitude between the foregoing different estimates is not very large. Nonetheless, the growth bounce is predicated substantially on two factors: a base effect, and the bumper output of major crops. While exports have done exceedingly well, the claim that they contributed significantly to headline growth does not wash, given that the export sector is still less than 10pc of GDP."

But then it seems as if the government itself is not convinced of the 'remarkable' achievement because the person who is

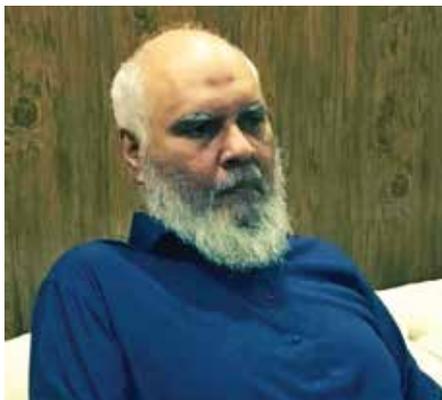
supposed to have captained the economic team---Dr. Hafeez Sheikh--- that made it possible for Pakistan to grow at such a respectable rate under very non-conducive conditions was shown the door unceremoniously just on the eve of budget announcement on the lame excuse that he had lost a senate election. And indeed, Shaukat Tarin who replaced Dr. Sheikh in his very first comment on the performance of the economy over the last three years had called it a complete disaster. He quickly changed tack and as if in a double take endorsed the officially claimed growth rate. He has at the same time promised to achieve a growth rate of 5 per cent next year from the base of nearly 4 per cent of the outgoing year which would mean setting the national economy on fire over the next 12 months.

It is still a puzzle why Tarin, a banker was chosen to replace Sheikh, an economist. And of course, it was no less than a puzzle when earlier PTI's poster boy Asad Umar of the corporate world was replaced by Dr. Sheikh when the former had almost finalized a deal with the IMF for a 3-year, \$6b Extended Fund Facility (EFF).

Interestingly, Sheikh and Tarin, both seemingly apolitical technocrats have served the PPP, a left- of- center party as well as the PTI, a right- of- center one as their respective finance ministers, one after the other, though neither of the two is a member of either the PPP or the PTI. And if one were to take seriously what Tarin is saying he is going to do with the IMF conditionalities, it becomes all the more worrying as to how the national economy would fare during the 24 months left in the tenure of the PTI-led coalition government!

# CITY NOTES: Another contender for the youth vote

By M.A. Niazi



I suppose the purpose of the visit to Pakistan by President Imamoli Rahmon of Tajikistan was other, but the highlight turned out to be him having the same date of birth, down to the day, of Imran Khan. Of course, Rakhmon might find it easier to admit having been born in 1952, and thus being 69, but that is not something that Imran might be so willing to have the public reminded of very often.

Rahmon is not really the first President of post-USSR Tajikistan. He only came to power after Tajikistan became independent in 1992, but there is no evidence of his playing any cricket, let alone mastering the art of bowling the inswinging yorker. However, though he replaced the Communist party chief the Soviets handed over to, he was himself an apparatchik. He holds an economics degree, which probably endeared him to COAS Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa, who is so renowned an economist that the business community made him speak to them a little while ago, and who is the first COAS to mention the need for Pakistan to stress geoeconomics rather than geopolitics. One problem is that Rahmon did his military service (compulsory in the old USSR) in the Soviet Navy. I suspect General Bajwa would be less than impressed in meeting a sailor. Tajikistan, by the way, is landlocked.

I wonder if Rahmon has been inspired by Imran into going after the youth vote. He does not seem a likely person to do so, being built like a barrel and looking a little like the character in a mafia film who is with the godfather when someone comes in to tell him that Neri sleeps with the fishes.

Whatever he looks like, he certainly wins elections. He won 58 percent of the vote in 1992. He won 98 percent in 1999, 79 percent in 2006, was virtually unopposed in 2013 (as the opposition had boycotted), and 90 percent as recently as October this year. That means that while Imran was engaged in political struggle, Rakhmon was leading his country. And getting votes not just from the youth, but anyone.

Of course, there are some pluses and minuses. For example, Rahmon seems to have married only once, and had nine children. Two sons and seven daughters. Imran's two later wives brought him six stepchildren, three of each. If you include his own two sons by his first marriage that bring him to eight, but if you include the girl his first wife adopted, you get nine.

Imran must admire Rahmon's facility with elections, but he must be concerned about the reports of corruption that swirling around his regime. I'm sure Imran is restraining his partymen with great difficulty from sending in NAB, reminding them that NAB would be ineffective, as Rahmon is not an opponent of the PTI. Besides, the country's primary anti-corruption agency, the State Agency for Financial Control and Measures Against Corruption is headed by Rahmon's son Rustom Emomali, who is not only the mayor of

Dushanbe and speaker of the Majlis, but also Rahmon's designated successor. Recent constitutional changes not only abolished the term limit for presidents, but also lowered the age of eligibility, making Rustom eligible to run. Truly, a model for Imran to follow.

I'm sure that's why we need electronic voting machines and e-voting for overseas Pakistanis. To make sure that elections have positive results. In that respect, the e-voting abroad will be particularly helpful. Just as voting here is carried out under army supervision, maybe we should have e-voting abroad carried out by the military attachés. We must never forget that results must be in the national interest.

Still, polls are a little way off, and e-voting may be a little further off, needing constitutional amendments that Imran might not quite manage in time. Instead, we are left to wonder about the weather. It was predicted that temperatures would be going through the roof. Well, it hasn't happened yet. As a result, schools have not yet shut down, even though June has begun, and it looks like exams can go ahead. Online. Well, we all know what that means. One of the victims of covid-19 seems to be the old-fashioned ratta. The latest, I've heard, is that kids make WhatsApp groups to consult each other during exams.



# A Poor Man's Budget

*If the nation takes due care of its poor, the national economy will take care of itself.*



By Ahmed Mukhtar Naqshbandi

In his budget speech to the National Assembly, Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin tried to spotlight the plight of the lower income strata of our society. More important, he backed his rhetoric by action by proposing a number of measures to bring relief to the poor.

Tarin said the government was aiming for a GDP growth of 4.8 percent for the fiscal year 2021-22, adding that the government would not leave the poor and the destitute at the mercy of inflation.

“Never in our economic history were poor people able to realise their dreams,” said the Finance Minister, asserting Prime Minister Imran Khan was committed to the uplift of the poor.

Minister Tarin regretted that commercial banks did not tend to the poor in our country. This, he said, was the reason why wealth was not being redistributed equitably in Pakistan, which imposed a crushing financial burden on the poor.

Minister Tarin said his budget proposal would enable every household to secure a housebuilding loan; a health card for each family was on the way; and one person from every household would be provided technical training.

The spread envisaged by the Minister is huge and capacity bottlenecks may well render the hefty funding earmarked hard to spend. However, the change in priorities reflected by these proposals is itself a welcome news for the masses.

What is more, the ultimate impact of this spending would certainly be more than can be visualised at this point. Traditionally, most of public spending in our country has been targeted narrowly on urban areas, with little if any benefits accruing to suburban or rural areas.

Finance Minister Tarin certainly deserves credit for extending public spending to areas that have barely seen development.

Exemption and subsidy regime in Pakistan has finally started to make sense, where the leaders are finding those invisible classes that traditionally fell outside the coverage of government programs.

These schemes can and will benefit poorest of the poor – those who have never been exposed to the public-funded development.

Translating the benefits of growth for the large or medium cities is not a problem, but transmitting these benefits to the

rural and marginalized areas is still a huge challenge. The strategy of universal access adopted in budget 2021-22 is therefore a giant leap forward from the previous policy regimes.

The more the economic policy benefits spill out of the bigger towns and cities, the more people will benefit and feel enfranchised. This has hardly ever been the case in the past.

Increasing the minimum wage threshold to PKR 20,000 per month and increase in orderly allowance from PKR 14,000 to PKR 17,500 per month is also decent news for low income and salaried classes.

The PKR 260 billion outlay proposed for the Ehsaas Programme should go a long way towards strengthening pro-poor initiatives and social safety nets through vertical and horizontal expansion of the Programme.



Beneficiaries of the Ehsaas Programme are indeed the poorest of the poor, and the assistance extended to them under the Ehsaas emergency cash programme is money well spent. Broadening this Program over time at a deliberate pace should help cut out pilferage and abuse of programme money.

Interest-free loans under the Kamyab Naujawan Programme are also a sterling idea. If reached to the working class effectively, it can turn out to be a huge success for the work force especially reducing miseries of the low paid labourers.

An additional PKR 100 billion has been allocated for the under-developed areas including South Balochistan and the newly merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Funding worth PKR 54 billion has been earmarked has been especially allocated for these districts.

Under the concessionary loans schemes, for almost every household a loan of PKR 500,000 is estimated to be given. Similarly, a

loan of PKR 150,000 for every agriculture sector household is also likely to be granted.

In addition, the PKR 2 million housebuilding loan for every household is sure to help stimulate the construction industry, an engine of economic growth. State Bank data show the banking sector received housing finance applications worth some PKR100 billion, of which PKR 70 billion worth of loans have been approved.

The government will have to subsidise each of these loans by about PKR 300,000. This works out to a huge expense, but given how this spending can help jumpstart the stalled economy, it is a small price to pay.

Overall, about PKR 682 billion worth of funding has been earmarked for subsidies to the deprived classes, which is great news.

These are very sensible policy interventions as compared to a decade ago when most of the subsidies were eaten away by the affluent classes. Across the board subsidies on power and wheat would be two cases in point.

Now these subsidies, through strong oversight, are reaching to the needy, which might be a source of satisfaction for the taxpayer too.

A special program for the food security and the National Emergency Agriculture Program are also in the planning phase and can materialise soon. A new intervention of food cards to be issued to the disadvantaged to bolster food security.

The government has already launched Langar (free food) and shelter homes, commendable initiatives for the homeless and the urban poor in general.

All in all, the budget envisages many concrete proposals to address the gigantic challenge of poverty in Pakistan. Implementation of these plans should help reduce poverty in the country.

# When Two and Two Make Five

*In addition to financing development, the PKR 2.135 trillion national development budget will bring relief to the masses and stimulate growth.*

By Javed Mahmood

## Finance Minister Shoukat Tarin

A high-level overview of the budget proposal 2021-22 leaves no doubt Prime Minister Imran Khan's government is finally putting its money where its mouth is. But by far the deftest of the touches applied by Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin was the record-breaking PKR 2.135 trillion development program of the budget 2021-22.

Under the PKR 2.135 trillion spending programme called PSDP Plus, PKR 91 billion will go to construction of dams. The budget proposal envisages boosting spending under the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) by 40 percent, and earmarks USD 33 billion for CPEC projects.

Outlining top priorities in 2021-22, Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin in his budget speech said that the government would ensure food and water security, improve energy and infrastructure, and pace up implementation of CPEC project including establishment of special economic zones.

Meanwhile, measures will be undertaken to make more sustainable SDGs, improve climate and natural environment, achieve advancement in technology, and eliminate disparity between urban and rural areas.

Tarin said the National Economic Council had approved a 33 percent increase in the national development budget to PKR 2.135 trillion that would support social and economic development in the country. He said that under the PSDP, the government would spend on profitable projects especially those which ensure prosperity of the people.

The Finance Minister further pointed out that for the next fiscal year, the government has allocated PKR 12 billion for different agricultural projects such as food security; anti-pest attacks projects; increase in output of rice, wheat, cotton, and sugarcane crops; commercial cultivation of olive; and repair and rehabilitation of water channels.

Minister Tarin said the government has allocated PKR 91 billion for construction of dams in 2021-22. Of this outlay, PKR 57 billion has been earmarked for Dasu Dam, PKR 23 billion for Diamir Basha Dam, PKR 6 billion for Mohmand Dam, and PKR 14 billion for Neelum-Jheum Hydro-power Project.

The Finance Minister also stated that 21 CPEC projects, involving a huge investment of 21 billion dollars were being implemented. He said that 17 CPEC projects worth USD 13 billion had already been

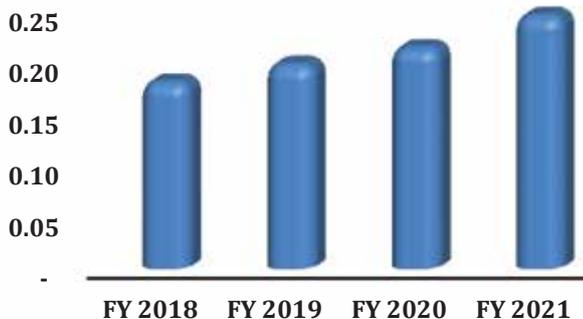
completed. Thus, so far, investment in CPEC projects amounts to 33 billion dollars.

Tarin said that USD 28 billion of worth new strategic development CPEC projects were being planned to take the CPEC forward. Highlighting CPEC-related projects, he said that in 2021-22, work on following projects will be initiated: Karachi-Lahore Motorway; construction of 120-km package of Hawaiian-Thakot Phase-1; construction of Zhob-Kuchlak Road; improvement of the mainline of Pakistan Railways; construction of a dry port near Hawaiiyan; and development of special economic zones in collaboration with China and other friendly countries.

The Minister said that ML-1 North-South infrastructure development project, involving a total investment of USD 9.3 billion, would be completed in three phases. The first phase of the project had already been launched from March 2020 while work on Package-2 of this mega project will be launched on 2 July 2021. The third package of this project will be initiated from 3 July 2022, which will benefit millions of people in their rapid transportation.

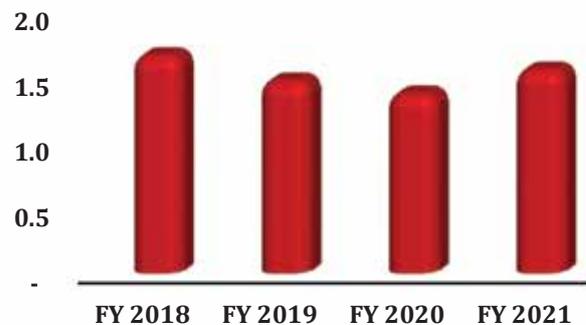
The Finance Minister admitted the existing power transmission capacity was not

**Fig - 1.3 A: Per Capita Income in Million Rupees**



Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

**Fig - 1.3 B: Per Capita Income in Thousand Dollars**



Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

enough to absorb the available load of electricity. He said that to improve the transmission system, the government had allocated PKR 118 billion for 1000-KV North Lahore and West Islamabad electricity systems.

He said that PKR 8.5 billion will be spent in

2021-22 to generate 2,160 MWs of electricity from Dasu Dam while PKR 5.5 billion will be utilized to generate electricity from Sukki Kinari, Kohala, and Mahal hydropower projects.

In Jamshoro, 1,200 MWs of electricity will be generated from coal by spending PKR 22

billion in 2021-22 while PKR 16.5 billion have been allocated for K2 and Tarbela Hydropower Project Extension Phase-5.

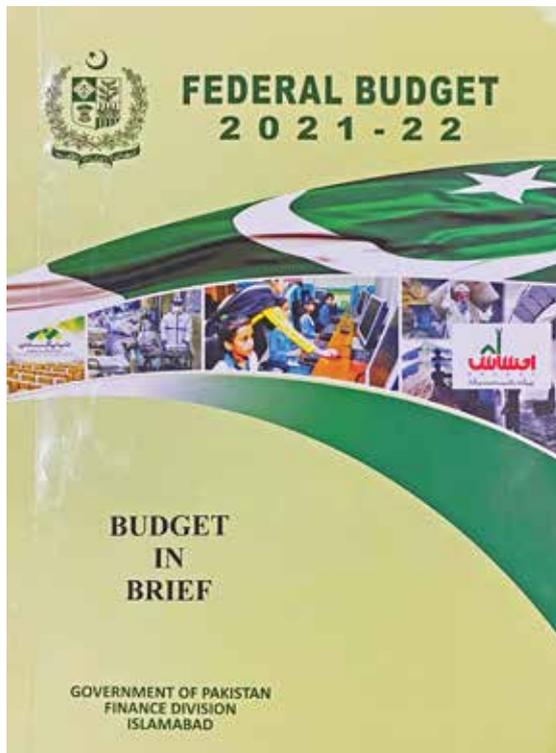
The Minister also said that PKR 12 billion had been allocated for improvement in Hyderabad-Sukkur power transmission system.

### Budget 2021-22 at a Glance

Table-1 presents position of overall Resources and Expenditure for the FY 2021-22.

(Rs. in Billion)

RESOURCES		EXPENDITURE	
Tax Revenue (FBR)	5,829	A. Current	7,523
Non-Tax Revenue	2,080	Interest Payments	3,060
a) Gross Revenue Receipts	7,909	Pension	480
b) Less Provincial Share	3,412	Defence Services	1,370
I. Net Revenue Receipts (a-b)	4,497	Grants and Transfers to Provinces & Others	1,168
II. Non Bank Borrowing (NSSs & Others)	1,241	Subsidies	682
III. Net External Receipts	1,246	Running of Civil Govt.	479
IV. Estimated Provincial Surplus	570	Provision for Contingencies & Fund	25
V. Bank Borrowing (T-Bills, PIBs, Sukuk)	681	Provision for Disaster / Emergency/ Covid	100
VI. Privatization Proceeds	252	Provision for Pay & Pension	160
<b>TOTAL RESOURCES (I to VI)</b>	<b>8,487</b>	B. Development	964
		Federal PSDP	900
		Net Lending	64
		<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE(A+B)</b>	<b>8,487</b>



## The PSDP Plus: Public-private partnership

Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin said that the government has introduced PSDP Plus that is based on the concept of Public-Private Partnership. He said development projects worth PKR 2 trillion would be completed under the PSDP Plus programme.

Tarin said that the Public-Private Partnership Authority has shortlisted 50 development projects involving a total cost of PKR 2 trillion. He said that some development projects worth PKR 233 billion have already been initiated under the PSDP Plus programme while PKR 710 billion projects will be launched in 2021-22.

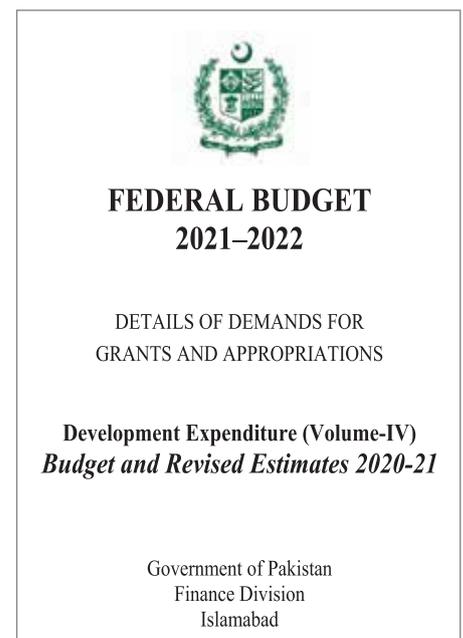
The Minister said that PKR 118 billion had been earmarked for completing the sustainable development goals (SDGs), while PKR 30 billion would be spent on health, PKR 44

billion on higher education, PKR 16 billion on improvement in environment, and PKR 68 billion on other SDGs' achievement.

The Finance Minister said subsidies would increase to PKR 682 billion in the new financial year. In simple words, subsidies will increase by PKR 430 billion in 2021-22 in comparison with 2020-21. These would cover electricity purchase from independent power producers and food security.

Meanwhile, the government will spend PKR 260 billion on poverty alleviation in the country in the next fiscal year. Thus, the expenditures relating to poverty alleviation will increase by 24 percent from PKR 210 billion in 2020-21 to support the needy segments of the society.

By Javed Mahmood



## Of Fudging Figures and Pointing Fingers

*A watertight case for an autonomous, professionally run organisation to be put in charge of the nation's statistical data.*



By **Khalique Ahmad**

Question marks and suspicions, intentional or unintentional notwithstanding, over official reporting of Pakistan's economic data has become a new normal at least over the past two decades.

Every opposition blames every sitting government of data manipulation and figure fudging to show pumped up performance and success of its economic policies. The economists of different backgrounds join the chorus, depending on which side they belong to or not and their positions keep changing.

Yet, without exception in the governments and oppositions – Musharraf's dictatorship, PML-N, PPP and PTI – all have not been able to put in place a credible system or independent institution that could put together entire spectrum of economic data at the federal, provincial, district and tehsil levels.

While many datasets have elaborate coverage mechanism with high frequency reporting, many others are based on estimates and involve human considerations. It is the latter that are usually used in Pakistan to

move the needle when there is acute political need or pressure to show performance. Data relating to livestock, fisheries, forestry and wheat are some of the usual suspects in this regard.

Credible data is the foundation stone of the economic planning. It impacts the quality of planning and future forecasting. If it is not authentic or is made doubtful, the entire policy making becomes questionable.

The allegations of figure fudging first came to light in late 1990s but have since become fashionable. Post 1998 nuclear tests together with 1999 military coup that dried up the foreign exchange inflows compelled the economic team of General Pervez Musharraf to secure a bailout for balance of payment support.

As the IMF raised questions about certain accounts, the senior most finance bureaucrat with the tacit approval of the then finance minister volunteered confessions but put the blame on previous government.

While politics is a game of claiming credit and shifting blame, the joke this time was on

the nation's credibility. While some dollars were paid as a token penalty, the officer pleading guilty graduated to the post of secretary general of the government of Pakistan – a rare position and reward indeed.

The credit for the twist was claimed by the then finance minister, who won kudos for leading a transparent team and secured the IMF programme. It is a matter of the record that the entire bureaucratic team including the principal accounting officer remained mostly unchanged.

What followed later was one of the most controversial exercises on poverty estimates supervised mostly by the same team through the Federal Bureau of Statistic (FBS). It was the first example when data relating to economic growth, poverty surveys and labour force surveys came under dispute from almost all the economists except those in the government.

The FBS remained a subordinate department of the Statistic Division in dilapidated rented building and of course the 5th portfolio under the finance minister. The top position of the FBS remained vacant

throughout that tenure. It remained a routine that growth numbers remained questionable and were seldom scrutinised by the Annual Plan Coordination Committee and growth numbers used to be finalised in the S-Block and announced in the P-Block or Shaheed-e-Millat Secretariat.

The subsequent two political governments – led by PPP and PMLN respectively – after years of debate passed a law to grant autonomous status to the FBS with a new name of Pakistan Bureau of Statistic. However, the Bureau remained part of the finance ministry. Interestingly, with one exception, the top positions during this decade too remained temporary, on extension, on acting charge basis, and so on.



The annual growth data remained more or less questionable and so did the biggest operation of National Census 2017 carried out under the supervision of armed forces. Its results could not be approved by the Council of Common Interests (CCI) for four long years even though the census itself was conducted with gap of 17 years against a constitutional requirement of 10 years. Even after approval, its results still remain disputed from major stakeholders.

In the hindsight then, fundamental economic data including growth, per capita income, and related numbers remain questionable. If the exact population is not known, it is unreasonable to expect many projections to be trustworthy.

As the fate would have it, after almost two decades, the PTI government's accounts again came under scrutiny of the IMF early this year and the government conceded breach of financial data integrity relating to sovereign guarantees that was later found to be inaccurate to an extent of almost one percent of GDP and was described by the IMF as "misreporting".

To his credit, then finance minister Asad Umar shifted the administrative control of the PBS from the ministry of finance to the ministry of planning to at least give a sense of autonomy. It, however, remains understaffed with leadership gaps.

Unfortunately though, as the PTI has been accusing previous governments for data manipulation as were their predecessors, none of them ever came up with counter data that could challenge the FBS data.

This year again, the controversy arose over the authenticity of 3.94 percent GDP growth rate as it surpassed all expectations and recent estimates of the government, the State Bank of Pakistan or the international aid agencies.

Responding to the pointed question if it was true that SAPM on finance and revenue Dr Waqar Masood Khan had called a Pakistan Bureau of Statistic (PBS) team with a directive to project 4 percent GDP growth rate, newly appointed Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin at a news conference said this was totally incorrect as neither Dr Waqar could call a PBS meeting nor say such a thing as the PBS did not operate under the Ministry of Finance.

The issue, however, became so controversial that leading economists and political leaders jumped into the fray without considering the fact that low-base effect might have played a key role as well as the better-than-anticipated wheat output as data for other major crops was already available.

The growth rate for last fiscal year was revised further downward to -0.47 percent from -0.38 percent announced earlier. The results significantly outstripped the government's targets and put a question mark on the assessments of multilateral lending agencies closely working with national

authorities. The closest estimate was from Asian Development Bank (ADB) at 2 percent, followed by the IMF (1.5 percent) and the World Bank (1.3 percent).

Not surprisingly, the Leader of Opposition in the National Assembly Shahbaz Sharif criticised the government for what he called 'fudging revenue figures' and GDP growth numbers in a bid to jazz up its performance on the economic front.

Chairman Pakistan People's Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari also joined the chorus saying the government, since its first day in office, had been fudging numbers and bending statistics in their favour.

"Fudging economic figures may feed the large egos in the government, but it doesn't feed the people", the young PPP chairman said. "These alleged facts and figures are tantamount to gas lighting the lived experience of the people who are being crushed under the economic failures of Imran Khan".

Strangely though, none of these governments and parties were ever able to materially change the provisional data of the previous governments. For example, PMLN was not able to change the PPP's last year data, nor could the PTI question the data for FY2017-18 (the last year of PMLN) when it came to power except in all these cases the nominal revisions based on actual numbers of the previous year.

The issue, then, boils down to the argument that such numbers may be as politically motivated to show cooked up performance of a political government to equally questionable motives of the opponents to create suspicions about the nation's true worth.

It would be in the interest of all concerned – including the politicians, economists, and the people of Pakistan – to push for an autonomous organization in charge of statistical data staffed by qualified operatives to put in place systems for accurate data collection and its credible processing, that could stand the test of standards and integrity.

*(The writer is an Islamabad based journalist)*

# The Economic Data War Brewing Ahead of Budget

*Treasury and opposition tussle over the state and direction of economy, each striving to make the other look bad.*



By Zain Rihat

Almost into the 4th year of its rule, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is certainly eyeing on the next general elections. With just over 2 years left to improve its performance and perception among the masses when it comes to providing relief and development, the government needs miracles, and the time is running out.

The budget for FY 2021-22 has emerged as both a challenge and an opportunity for the PTI government to win the hearts of the masses.

Although divided, the opposition parties seem determined to give the government a tough time until its departure from the power corridors and the budget is providing them an immediate opportunity in this regard. In fact, the contenders are already facing off in the media echo chamber.

The opposition parties are challenging the data the government is presenting to claim betterment in the economic situation of the country. As the government claims gradual success on the economic front, the opposition parties have been alleging that the government was out to hoodwink the masses with forged data.

An economic data war has already begun and things are getting messier with each passing day.

Prime Minister Imran Khan believes that Pakistan is faring better than India economically and is on the path to progress. He recently cited the 3.9 percent growth rate as evidence that the country was finally getting on track.

The government has been struggling on the economic front amidst high inflation and for lack of good governance, especially in Punjab and is under pressure for not providing relief to the masses in the first two budgets it presented in

2019 and 2020. Under the circumstances, the budget 2021-22 is likely to prioritise political considerations above economic imperatives.

Finance minister Shoukat Tarin said that with a positive stance, the present government would now move to growth mode after achieving stabilisation as he criticised the previous government for leaving the economy in shambles that forced the PTI to go for an IMF programme with harsh conditions, upfront adjustments and debt increase.

The government says that in FY 2018, the country faced multiple fiscal and external challenges. It said the trade deficit was 9.8 percent of GDP, an overvalued exchange rate had consumed precious foreign exchange reserves, and twin deficits had reached record levels.

It said the current rise in inflation could be traced back to the delay in policy adjustments required in the FY-2018. As a result, the PTI government had to impose a strict financial discipline, curtail excessive government expenditure, increase revenue collection, introduce market driven exchange rate, remove large tax exemptions, discourage imports, and stop borrowing from the State Bank of Pakistan.

It said as a consequence of these prudent policies, Pakistan witnessed remarkable improvement in fiscal and current account deficits. Similarly, Pakistan registered a primary surplus which is unprecedented and a great achievement despite the Covid-19 pandemic.

On the other hand, PML-N claims that Pakistan became 25 percent poorer because of flawed economic policies of the ruling PTI government and that the country's ability to service its debt has further weakened.



In a review presented on the occasion of a pre-budget seminar by the opposition party, it said that Pakistanis are now fed up and can no longer bear the cost of the PTI government's incompetence and ineffectiveness. It said the opposition parties will not let the government burden Pakistanis anymore.

"The government has no other option but to present a budget which is people-friendly, which promotes indigenous businesses, which provides the environment which boosts investment and job creation, which helps farmers and ensures food security for Pakistanis and which provides relief to the poor. We will not let the government come with a budget made for elites," said the review.

The party held that the people of Pakistan have experienced a major decline in their quality of life. "When PML-N left in 2018, the size of Pakistani economy was 313 billion dollars. After 3 years, Imran Khan has only managed to reduce this to 296 billion dollars or by 5.5 percent even as our population has increased by 7.5 percent. This is a direct reduction in the income and purchasing power of Pakistanis by 13 percent".

The opposition party said that in its 5 years, the party had increased growth from 2.8 percent to 5.8 percent, reduced inflation from 11.8 percent to 3.9 percent and doubled tax receipts from PKR 1,946 billion to almost PKR 3,900 billion. It further said that PTI had tripled inflation, increased food inflation more than five times PML-N's rate, and substantially reduced economic growth.

The PML-N said that Pakistan's GDP grew by 5.8 percent in PMLN's last year (2018), the highest in 16 years. In addition, GDP growth consistently remained above 4 percent in each of PML-N's 5 years. The party believed that GDP growth has significantly declined during the PTI's tenure with 2.1 percent growth in 2019 and 0.5 percent growth in 2020, the lowest since 1952.

On unemployment and poverty, the party said flawed policies of and mismanagement by the PTI government has increased unemployment and poverty in the country. Consequently, 5 million Pakistanis have lost their jobs and an additional 20 million people have been pushed below the poverty line.

"When PML-N left the government, only 3.5 million people remained unemployed in Pakistan. This is because PML-N created millions of job opportunities in Pakistan during the 5 years. Yet in 3 years, PTI has made an additional 5 million people unemployed," it said and added today the number of unemployed is around 8.5 million and the rate of unemployment is around 15 percent, which is the highest unemployment rate in the country's history.

On inflation and real wages, the party held that real wages for unskilled workers have fallen by 18 percent over the last three years. On national defence, it said in 2018, the country's tax and non-tax revenues were enough to cover, after paying provinces their due share, debt servicing and defence.

"But the situation now in three short years is that there has been negative growth in per capita income, negative-to-low GDP growth, high inflation and, in spite of high inflation, a reduction in tax collection as a percentage of GDP," it added. It further said that exports had still not reached the level attained by PML-N in 2018.

Chairman Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari is of the view that PM Imran's claim of economic growth is divorced from reality. He said the PM's statements show he has no connection with the plight of the common Pakistani battling inflation and poverty. "The statements of the premier and his spokespersons are far from reality," said the young PPP chairman. "So are the claims of economic growth."

However, Finance Minister Tarin said that the PML-N government left the economy in shambles. He said the outgoing government had left behind higher economic growth with borrowed money but the PTI government would complete its tenure with higher sustainable growth and revenue collection of PKR 7 trillion in 2023.

The Finance Minister said the government would focus on providing relief to the masses in the upcoming budget and the IMF had been told that electricity and gas rates would not be increased. He said the government did not believe in imposing "taxes on taxes" to enhance revenue collection, nor would it resort to harassment, but higher collection would be achieved by expanding the tax base and bringing traders into the tax net through innovative means.

The argument between the treasury and the opposition on the authenticity of the economic data is likely to continue in the coming days but not to settle the issue. It may be intended to make the masses believe that the other party is lying and misleading the public on the subject.

The two sides appear ready to go toe to toe in opposition to each other ahead of the budget. The opposition would certainly criticize the government for what they believe is an IMF budget.

Interestingly, the starkly divided opposition claims to be united against the government on the budget issue. Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari has announced to support Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly, Shahbaz Sharif's strategy on the budget despite the 'tantrums' of some PML-N members.

To show his earnestness over the matter, he even announced to 'hand over' his MNAs to Shahbaz Sharif for the day to do his work and block the government's budget. This again, gives the impression that PML-N will be the real opposition to the government during passage of the budget and the PPP will just play an observer's role.

However, to better understand the PPP's position in the current political game, one will have to wait for the day the House starts discussing the budget.





## PML-N on the Prongs of a Dilemma

*Hard ball tactics are off the table as more and more party stalwarts gravitate to Shahbaz Sharif's reconciliation camp, ditching Maryam's confrontational politics.*



By Noor Aftab

A difference of opinion among senior members of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) is widening with each passing day, forcing party leadership to come up with 'pointed' and 'unified' stance over important political issues. But when it comes to PML-N president Shahbaz Sharif and PML-N vice president Maryam Nawaz then this issue poses much bigger threat due to their opposing views about party policies and strategies to deal with the growing political challenges.

### Hamza, the leader in waiting

The political rise of Maryam Nawaz was unexpected even for majority of the party members because Nawaz Sharif had been continuously grooming Hamza Shahbaz as future party leader. Nawaz used to like company of Hamza Shahbaz during his private visits and it continued when he became prime minister for the third time in 2013.

Hamza Shahbaz was often seen driving the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif around during his private visits to party members or other people. Although Shahbaz Sharif was quite active as a Punjab Chief Minister, Hamza appeared as the point man in Punjab as he adopted an unofficial role of approving funds for development schemes of the lawmakers.

The entire provincial bureaucracy also started looking towards him due to his growing influence in the affairs of the government. But the Panama scandal changed the whole scenario that went against the political ambitions of Hamza Shahbaz.

When the controversial Joint Investigation Team (JIT) formed by former Chief Justice of Pakistan started its investigation in the Panama case both Shahbaz Sharif and Hamza Shahbaz decided to stay away from Nawaz Sharif and his daughter Maryam Nawaz. Tensions within the clan grew when Supreme Court disqualified former prime minister Nawaz Sharif in July 2017.

Nawaz Sharif decided to return to Lahore leading a caravan of the party workers. Shahbaz Sharif and Hamza Shahbaz kept themselves away from Nawaz Sharif who was facing the most difficult period of his political life. Nawaz gave a slogan 'Vote ko izzat do' to his party but Shahbaz and Hamza always publicly avoided supporting this slogan.

### Maryam, the loyal daughter-turned-leader

When Nawaz Sharif decided to launch mass movement against his disqualification then Shahbaz Sharif and Hamza Shahbaz did not like this move and even proposed him to avoid confrontation with 'powerful quarters'.

The political happenings forced Hamza Shahbaz to leave the space that he acquired by winning the confidence of his uncle Nawaz Sharif. Then Maryam Nawaz appeared on the political scenario, filled



that space and stood by her father who was in real trouble after falling foul of the powerful establishment.

The epitome of a devoted daughter, Maryam said during an interview with a foreign media organization she was ready to take a bullet to her head for her father. Her aggressive politics impressed the party workers at the grassroots level that encouraged her to further enhance role in the political field.

Now many say that genie of Maryam Nawaz has come out of bottle and it is now difficult to put it back due to some obvious reasons.

## Confrontation vs reconciliation

Maryam Nawaz symbolizes confrontational politics while Shahbaz Sharif advocates for 'reconciliation' to achieve the political targets. Maryam recently stated, "Power talks to power". In contrast, Shahbaz Sharif in a recent interview said, "We need reconciliation to come out of the crisis."

The conflicting leadership styles of these two party stalwarts have visibly divided the party into two groups due to which it has two separate positions on almost all political issues.

For instance, Maryam insists the opposition parties should resign from the assemblies and mount a long march on Islamabad. On the other hand, Shahbaz Sharif never ever talks about resignations or long march and has repeatedly extended his offer to the government to sit together and find out solutions to the problems confronting the country.

Political pundits often accuse PML-N of using the good cop, bad cop strategy to simultaneously attract its workers and powerful quarters to serve its political interests. Whenever Maryam Nawaz stops political activities for a time, they term it an indication of a 'deal' between the PML-N and establishment. When she reappears on the political stage they say the deal has fallen apart and now PML-N would take harsh stance against powerful establishment figures.

Maryam Nawaz is considered a 'mouth-piece' of Nawaz Sharif and many believe that she always holds opinion on political issues keeping in view sentiments of her father. Shahbaz Sharif believes that confrontational politics always failed in Pakistan so his party should avoid confrontation with the powers that be and come to terms with them for the interests of their party and country.



## Workers vs electables

The aggressive politics of Maryam Nawaz usually attracts the party workers but this is not the case with the electables who carry out the politics at constituency level. On the one hand, sensational speeches of Maryam Nawaz boost the morale of the workers and on the other, they create fear and uncertainty among the electables about their political future.

This internal struggle between 'idealism' and 'pragmatism' that has brought the party to a level where it finds it difficult to pursue pragmatic politics without making any compromise over its slogan 'vote ko izzat do'.

Observers say this difference of opinion within the party over political issues may cause irreparable loss to the politics of the Sharif family.

## Tale of an all-important meeting

Nawaz Sharif called an all-important meeting of senior party members on 31 May. This meeting was first of its kind in the recent years. In all, there were twelve participants including Nawaz Sharif, Shahbaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz, Hamza Shahbaz and eight senior party members.

Before the start of the meeting, Nawaz Sharif announced that no one from the Sharif family—Shahbaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz and Hamza Shahbaz—would speak because their opinion could influence viewpoint of senior party members. He then asked party members to give their opinion one by one without any hesitation.

Rana Sanaullah, who is party head in the Punjab province, maintained that the PML-N's lawmakers were perturbed about future of the party and they thought that if it continued to confront the establishment then it could not return to power in the next general elections.

Former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said if 'rules of game' were not set by all the stakeholders then holding free and fair elections would serve no purpose because tug-of-war would again create rifts between the sitting government and the establishment.



Rana Tanvir Hussain said the electables of the party could not afford confrontation with the establishment and if the situation did not change then they would turn towards other political parties for better future prospects.

Former federal minister Ahsan Iqbal also advocated for dialogue and reconciliation and stated that the dynamics of electoral politics were quite different from drawing room politics.

Another stalwart of PML-N Khawaja Saad Rafique also supported the concept of reconciliation and advised the party leadership to mend fences with the establishment for the sake of future politics.

Other members including Khurram Dastgir Khan and Marriyum Aurangzeb highlighted the need for reconciliation with all stakeholders to move ahead for future politics.

But former federal minister Pervaiz Rashid took a different line and invited severe criticism from other members. He said PML-N should continue its fight for civilian supremacy without making any kind of compromise on its principled stance.

He went on to say that if PML-N did not come to power for next ten to fifteen years then they should not mind and continue their struggle against controlled democracy.

In the end, Hamza Shahbaz sought permission from Nawaz Sharif to give vent to his

feelings. He said it was not enough to say that Prime Minister Imran Khan was pushing Pakistan towards disastrous situation because the people asked them why they were not playing their due role to protect the interests of the country.

Hamza said PML-N had a fair chance to bring no-confidence motions both at the Centre and the Punjab level and it should evaluate these options at the earliest.

## Future line of action

Majority of senior members and lawmakers of PML-N want Nawaz Sharif to give a chance to Shahbaz Sharif who they believe can work wonders and pave the way for their return to power. The PML-N leadership has now started thinking that holding open talks with establishment is not unconstitutional because concerted efforts are always needed to bring the country out of the crisis.

Some members of PML-N also claimed that as far as coalition partners of the Imran-led government are concerned, they would dump Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for PML-N on a single phone call from the right quarters.

It is believed that Nawaz Sharif is finally prepared to give Shahbaz Sharif a chance to remove the misunderstandings between PML-N and the establishment. On the other hand, Prime Minister Imran Khan allegedly has a track record of using the

National Accountability Bureau (NAB) to put behind bars any opposition leader who tries to cosy up with the establishment.

## The party version

When contacted, former Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said that consultation within the party was a continuous process and it should continue to come up with clear and effective policy formulations.

“Everyone gives opinion in the party meetings but I can say with authority that there are no groups in the party”, said Abbasi. “When Nawaz Sharif takes decision then everyone follows it in letter and spirit.”

To a question, he said: “The PML-N is quite clear in its stance that the state institutions need to stay within their constitutional limits as this is the only way to put the country back on the path of progress and prosperity.”

To another question, he confirmed resignations from the assemblies and long march were not in discussion for the time being. “Now that Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) is not part of PDM, we have changed our strategy in view of ground realities.

“Nawaz Sharif has listened to the opinion of each and every senior member of the party and now he will take decisions aiming at protecting the interests of the people and country as well.”

**PML-N**  
PAKISTAN MUSLIM LEAGUE - NAWAZ





## What Good is Rump PDM?

*After failing to dislodge Imran Khan from power, can the once powerful coalition find a new purpose?*

By Ahmad Waleed

Diminished after the departure of two key partners and hobbled by the internecine struggles within the ranks of its largest remaining party, the once powerful Pakistan Democratic Front (PDM) looks increasingly like a spent force.

Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) has miserably failed to dislodge the incumbent government or their movement was not aimed at dethroning the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government at all? Has the PDM without PPP and ANP become 'toothless movement'? Why is the 11-member alliance divided on some key issues? Are the opposition parties, especially the PML-N, seriously interested in coming into power in case the PTI government falls?

These questions arise after the PDM's botched attempt to send the ruling party packing. The PDM leaders claim that the main agenda of the anti-government movement was to fight for the supremacy of the Constitution to push the 'institutions' to their constitutional limits where they could never think of interfering in the political matters of the country. The PPP wanted an in-house change while PML-N and Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman's JUI had agreed upon en mass resignations from the assemblies.

The Gujranwala public gathering created the first rift between the PPP-ANP duo and the rest of the parties of the movement where Nawaz Sharif dared to name those he holds responsible for his ouster from power.

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's reaction was very clear when he expressed his 'shock' over the allegations of three-prime minister, saying that he (Nawaz) is a responsible person and he must have some solid evidence behind his allegations. However, he tried to distance his party from such 'personal attacks' which had never been on the agenda of PDM.

The Senate elections proved to be the last nail in the coffin. The PML-N and PPP exchanged very harsh words alleging each



other of being in cahoots with the establishment, especially after the release from prison of Shahbaz Sharif.

Now there is no hope of a rapprochement as the environment has been vitiated while both sides, particularly PML-N and PPP, have resorted to the old politics of hostility and animosity –and both are good at it.

After the PPP and ANP have parted ways, the PDM is faced with a gigantic task of reviving the fervour and vehemence of the PDM to the level of what it was during the later months of 2019. It seems impossible although the alliance has announced a couple of rallies in the northern areas of country.

The PTI leaders are a bit relieved after the PDM is shattered by the infighting. Many believe not a single opposition movement had been successful in the political history of Pakistan without the support of the mighty establishment.

The victory of PPP's Yousaf Raza Gillani as the opposition leader in the Senate elections and the release of Shahbaz Sharif from jail show the signs that some hands are working behind the scene to keep things from boiling over.

While the PPP is enjoying the fruits of the 'deal' Shahbaz Sharif's PML-N is divided in two major camps. One group advocates mending fences with the establishment for short term gains, if they manage to get any, whereas the other wants the politicians to draw a line which should not be crossed by any institution.

The younger Sharif wants to start a Grand Dialogue for the sake of the country and for that he is willing to plead with his elder brother to come around to his idea. However, it is far from certain if his proposal has any takers.

Amid all this debate where does the PDM stand? Maryam Nawaz has hinted at restarting the 'reconciliation' process with the powers that be as she believes "if there is resistance in politics, there will be reconciliation.

"Power talks to power... powerful do not speak with weak", she was recently quoted as saying. "The moment you show weakness; your enemy will hit you hard." "You don't get anything on a platter... you have to fight for your rights".

Some political analysts believe the release of Shahbaz Sharif was only made possible after the PDM put pressure on the powerful quarters. They also point out how the NAB thought better of summoning Maryam after she vowed to resist with full force. That did work.

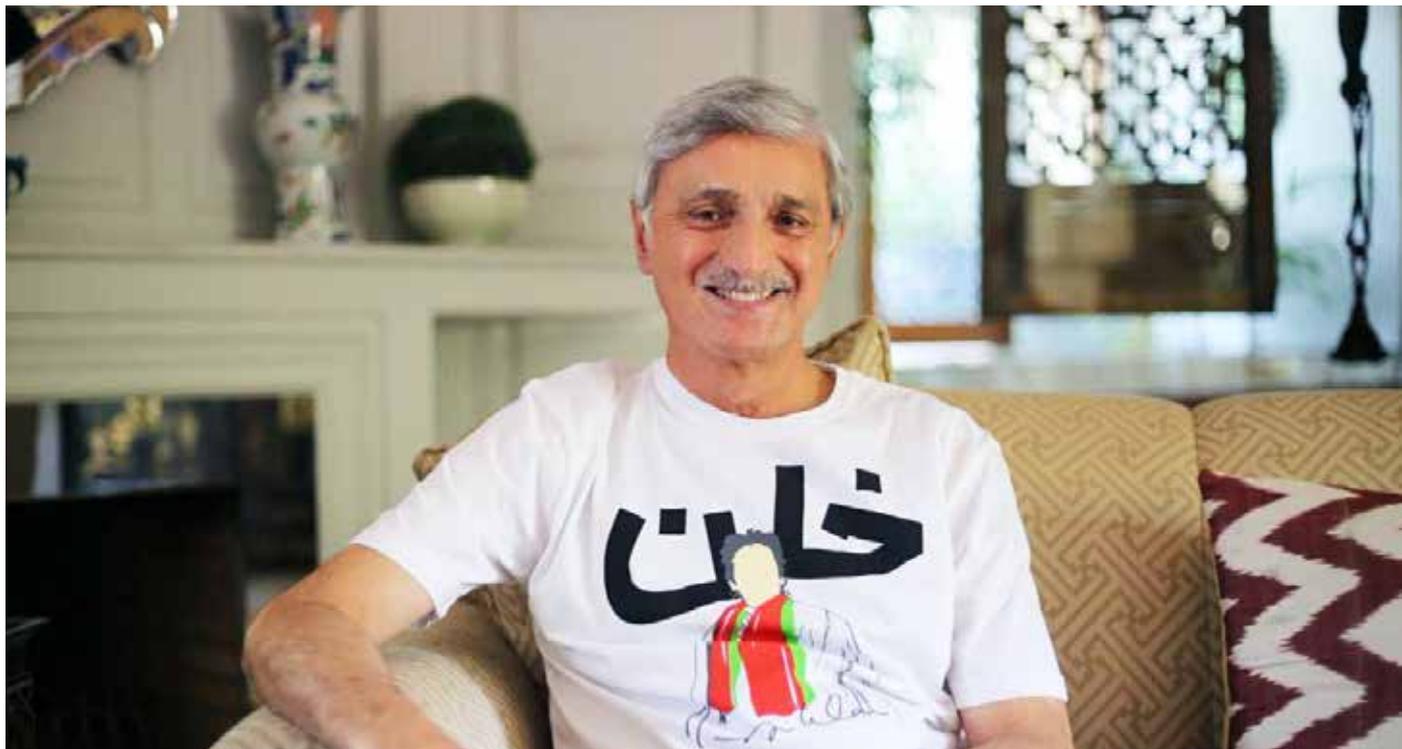
The PDM leaders have vowed to launch anti-government campaign afresh, starting it with a 'massive' rally in Swat in July followed by similar events in Karachi and Islamabad.

However, for now at least, it seems highly unlikely that the PDM parties will be able to galvanise their supporter for another round of anti-government campaign.



## The Uncertain Fortunes of JKT

*Is the master wheeler-dealer – considered the kingpin of Imran Khan’s party not long ago – out to rock his government’s boat?*



By Qasim Malik

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf’s estranged leader Jahangir Khan Tareen at times seems indecisive about practically waging a war within his party or to hold on and rely on Prime Minister Imran Khan’s assurance that justice will be dispensed to him.

Mr Tareen feels pushed against the wall as he is facing cases at Banking and Sessions courts on the charges of criminal breach of trust and money laundering expecting no relief from his once close friend, PM Khan.

Mr Tareen, known to be a doer with his political acumen and financial resources at his disposal, has in the past few weeks been able to put up strong resistance leading to some kind of mounting pressure on his party’s governments in the centre and Punjab to get relief in the cases instituted against him and his son by the Federal Investigation Agency.

Mr Tareen formed a like-minded group of around 40 parliamentarians from the National and Punjab assemblies to create a

threat to the PTI government that is surviving on thin majority in both houses. The group members rallied around him during his court appearances and his dinner meetings where some veiled threats were raised including pulling the carpet from under the feet of Imran Khan and Usman Buzdar governments, unless Mr Tareen was given “relief”.

These pressure tactics worked to some extent and the group members were allowed audience by Prime Minister Imran Khan and several meetings with Punjab chief minister Usman Buzdar– in groups as well as individual meetings. The prime minister assured justice to Mr Tareen but no favour, while Mr Buzdar assured all MPAs due consideration of development schemes in their respective constituencies. All returned satisfied.

The Prime Minister had also asked a one-member commission comprising Senator Barrister Ali Zafar to investigate

whether the FIA’s allegations against Mr Tareen and his son had any substance. A lot of time has passed but the report has not been submitted formally to the Prime Minister. Fingers are crossed Barrister Zafar’s report is published soon amidst Tareen’s call that justice delayed is justice denied.

Tareen has been made clear that Prime Minister Imran Khan will not retreat an inch on his vision of accountability across the board and everyone will be happy, if Tareen gets himself cleared of charges levelled against him. However, Tareen himself claims: “I have some information about the report but do not want to disclose the contents beforehand”.

In the meantime, the opposition is also watching Tareen’s case closely. PML-N senior leader Ahsan Iqbal has already made a statement: “NRO is in the pocket of Jahangir Tareen”. He says PM Khan will definitely give an NRO-like deal to Tareen,



who is facing charges of earning illegal profits worth billions of rupees through unjustified price-hikes, benami transactions, tax evasion, misuse of subsidy, and purchasing sugarcane off the books.

With the probe report yet to be published and no clear-cut assurance of relief, tempers began to fray and the situation led Mr Tareen, otherwise considered a careful decision-maker, to create his parliamentary groups in Islamabad and Lahore with MNA Raja Riaz and MPA Saeed Akbar Nawani as parliamentary leaders.

Many party MPAs have expressed their amazement over the creation of parliamentary groups and termed the move a big mistake. They say this decision helped only two parliamentarians to come into limelight and offered no benefit to the sugar baron Tareen.

“Mr Tareen’s decision to create parliamentary groups pushed several MPs to distance themselves from the Tareen like-minded group, who otherwise were in support of Mr Tareen and in the opinion that the sugar baron was being victimized,” a woman MPA told TTI.

“I feel sad about him”, she said. “Tareen deserves much better than this since he is a great person, great doer and agriculture reformist and not merely a filthy rich man with a private aeroplane.”

While the Tareen group was all out to support business magnate Tareen, several PTI MPAs see the situation as party’s former secretary-general being used by his

group members. After the assurances of development funds, all MPAs have gone silent and are no signs of what some liked to call a “potent threat” of absenting from the budget session – less than a week ahead of budget session in Punjab.

The Punjab chief minister and federal ministers’ assertions that the Tareen group will give all its votes to help get the budgets passed sound credible and Tareen and his cases have gone in the background – at least for the time being.

“There is a complete silence. No meetings, no tall claims,” says a Tareen group member. When contacted another Tareen group member about silence at such a high time, the MPA came up with an interesting explanation: “I was not speaking loudly earlier and I am silent now”.

About the estranged leader’s group’s plan of giving tough time to the Punjab government in the budget session, the members are now in unison to say that it is their own government’s welfare budget, so how can they stay away.

“PTI is our party, Punjab government is our government, budget is our budget – we will get it passed,” a vocal group member stated calling it the group’s line. In public, Mr Tareen has always stated that he and his group stand firmly with the party.

The Punjab government high offices say the group members were not only given development funds but also allowed to have their say in transfer and postings of civil administration in their respective constitu-

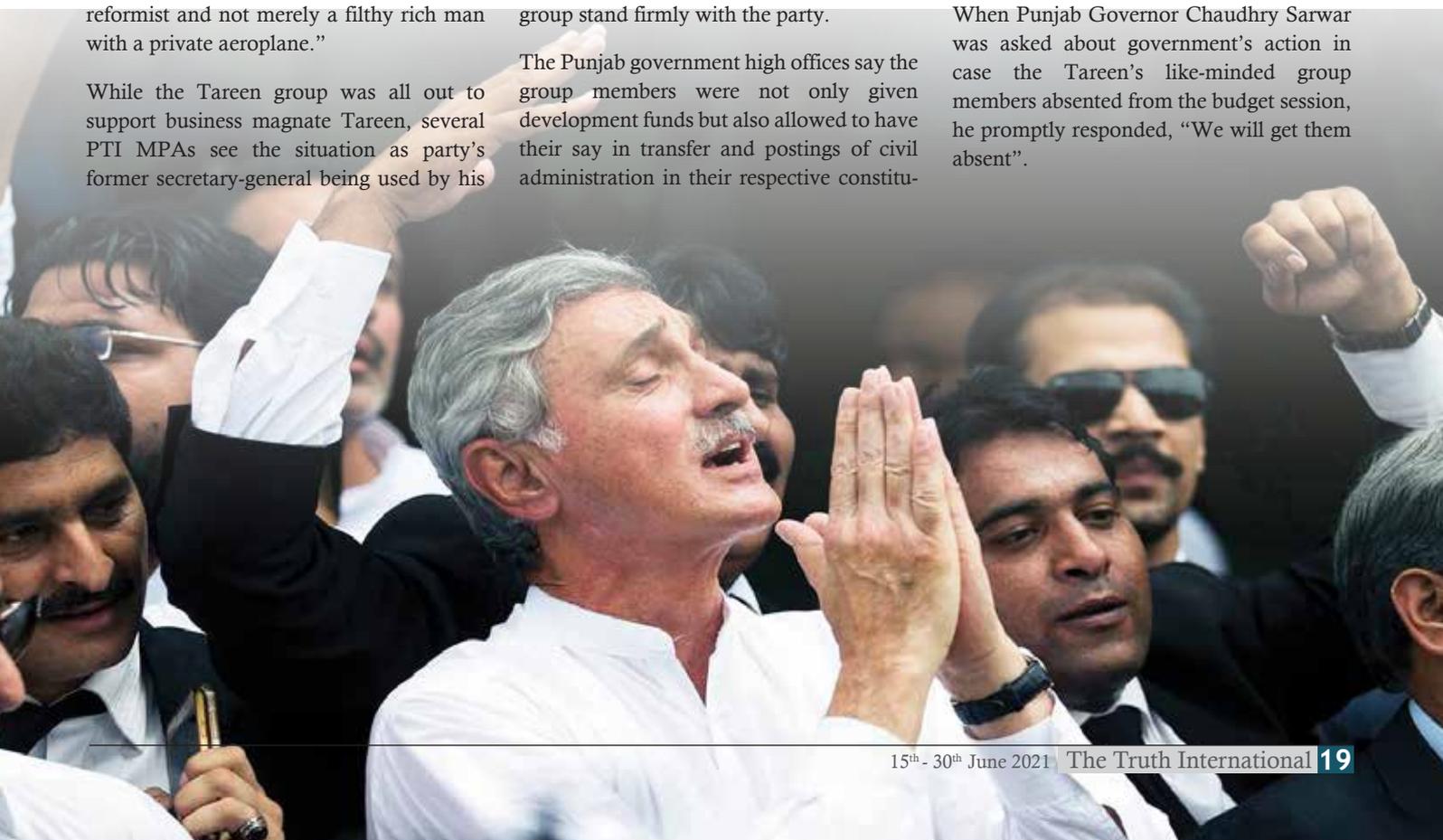
encies. Besides, they were also threatened of action for their crossing of red line while making speeches against the Prime Minister and the Chief Minister.

While some Tareen group members believe they could pressurize both centre and Punjab governments, PTI government stalwarts believe they were never a pressure group and government exactly knew that no one would be absent from the budget sessions and vote to get the budget passed.

Interior minister Sheikh Rashid and federal information minister Fawad Chaudhry are asserting that formation of a group within the party to have dinners together and discuss issues is a routine matter and should not be seen as a threat to the government.

Senator Ejaz Chaudhry says Tareen’s group was never a pressure group as only a couple of MNAs and MPAs were vocal, while others were silent, never finding the courage to speak to media persons. He said the PTI leadership did contact the group members and asked whether they wanted to weaken Prime Minister Imran Khan and added that everyone responded with a big no. He, however, hinted that action was on the cards against some Tareen group members after the budget sessions, for crossing red lines.

When Punjab Governor Chaudhry Sarwar was asked about government’s action in case the Tareen’s like-minded group members absented from the budget session, he promptly responded, “We will get them absent”.





# Of Agitations, Expectations, and Limitations

*That same Punjabi middle classes that rallies with Nawaz Sharif also cheerleads for the military.*

By Umer Farooq

The decades of 60s, 70s and 80s are particularly eventful as far as history of political agitation in Pakistan is concerned. The late 1960s, late 1970s and mid 1980s saw transformational agitation in the country's political history. These three decades could be described as decades of agitation.

All of these three agitations were aimed at bringing down the regime against whom they were launched. Two of these agitations were against military governments—and one of these agitations ultimately led to the fall of the Ayub regime in the 1960s.

The other agitation against the military government was the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) launched in mid 1980s— although it didn't lead to the demise of Zia regime, it did compel the military dictatorship to engage in political engineering, a process that had lasting influence on the course of Pakistan's history.

The third agitation, nicknamed "Tehrik-e-Nizam-e-Mustafa", was aimed at dislodging the Bhutto regime in 1977 and it did lead to a situation that was perceived by the military top brass of the time as nearing a civil war, and ultimately resulted in a military takeover.

During this 30 years period, starting in 1960s and concluding in 1980s, Pakistan's political system was still in a formative phase. The political and ruling elite had so far failed to arrive at a consensus as to what would be the rules of the game. They were indecisive or fragmented as far as shape of political structures was concerned.

Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto did succeed in obtaining the consent of the majority of the political elite to agree to a constitutional document to serve as Constitution of the country, which is popularly labelled as 1973 constitution. But in the ensuing period Bhutto himself trampled upon the rules of the game agreed upon in this document, thus eroding the confidence and trust of the political elite to common consensual rules to keep the struggle for power within the confines of constitutional provisions.

Inter-party violence was rampant during the 1977 agitation. So was violence by the state and violence against the state machinery. When the political elite fails to agree upon the rules of the game, violence in the streets could be expected as a natural response of the common man.

The other two agitations in the formative period after the creation of Pakistan—1960s agitation against Ayub Regime and 1984-85 agitation against Zia regime—took place in a constitutional and legal vacuum. After

military takeover, Ayub Khan did introduce a constitution through an executive order, which is often dubbed in the country's political discourse as the 1962 Constitution.



But how much importance the dictator gave to this document can be judged by the fact that when Ayub had to step down, he handed over power to the new commander-in-Chief of Pakistan Army, General Yahya Khan and not to the assembly speaker as had been prescribed in the 1962 Constitution.

When the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) was launched, there was no constitution in the country. Bhutto had been hanged a few years back and a military junta composed of ethnically Punjabi generals was ruling the country. Their words were law and their actions were extremely brutal.

The Zia Martial Law sent tanks and gunship helicopters to crash what was primarily an agitation centered in the interior Sindh. There was a general breakdown of law and order and the Sindh population was openly defying Martial Law authorities.

With the exception of the Muhajir-dominated Karachi, all cities and rural districts of Sindh were in the grip of MRD agitation that brought together ideological rivals like Jamat-e-Ulema Islam (Fazl-ur-Rehman Group) and Sindh nationalists, along with PPP on one platform.

There were attacks on public buildings and large-scale violence against state machinery in the province of Sindh. Apart from sporadic protest in different cities of Punjab, Pakistan's largest province remained aloof from MRD agitation.



The media was gagged and not allowed to report about the agitation. Resultantly many foreign commentators dubbed the agitation as a revolt of the Sindhi populace against the Punjabi military Junta. The political engineering by the generals that followed mostly was carried out in Sindh, where intelligence services were able to piece together a Mahajir response to Sindhi agitation. Tellingly, the MQM party led by Altaf Hussein came into existence only one year after MRD fizzled out.

The 1969 agitation against Ayub Regime was mostly centred in the urban areas of the province of Punjab. Ayub's economic reforms led to the rise of an indigenous middle class in urban areas of Punjab and the then NWFP. This middle class composed mostly of doctors, lawyers, university professors, and government servants felt culturally and politically suppressed in the toxic environment created by the regressive cultural policies of Ayub regime.

Similarly there was a large-scale migration of agricultural labour from rural to urban areas in Punjab, where rapid industrialization took place due to Ayub Khan business-friendly economic policies. This rural-urban migration was made possible by the purchase of tractors by the middle class farmers who were provided with easy credit by the Ayub government.

Employment of tractors in agriculture activity led to expulsion of tenants from agricultural land on a large scale. Ayub Khan's government did little at the policy level to absorb this surplus labour force into the industrial sector in the big urban centres, which led to large-scale restlessness—a phenomenon which was exploited by the charismatic Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto to his political advantage.

The new middle classes participated in the agitation against the Ayub regime in West Pakistan. However extremely repressive and draconian policies of military Junta didn't allow same kind of agitation in East Pakistan, where the main criticism against military government was directed against its unequal treatment meted out to the Bengali populace, said to be deprived of their legitimate share in the country foreign exchange earnings through Jute export, when bureaucracy under Ayub spent this foreign exchange on the industrialization of West Pakistan. Thus the foundation for the dismemberment of Pakistan was laid in the period of Ayub Khan.

MRD agitation could have taken a separatist turn. Only two factors kept the MRD agitation of 194-85 from becoming a separatist movement in the province of Sindh. There is no doubt that there was no participation from other provinces in MRD agitation and it was only the angry Sindh populace that was agitating against Punjabi generals for their high-handedness.

However, the movement didn't assume a separatist character chiefly because it was led by the PPP's federalist leadership – and equally, because the federalist PPP was allowed to rise to power in Islamabad and Karachi just three years after the MRD agitation fizzled out.

In 1977, agitation against the Bhutto regime was again a middle class phenomenon where the middle classes hurt by the nationalization and entrenchment policies of the regime fuelled the popular

anger against the PPP government. The military top brass of the time perceived the situation to be headed towards a civil war and decided to intervene, leading to the arrest of the government as well as opposition political leaders.

Purely religious agitation was witnessed in 1953 when religious clergy demanded the state to declare the Ahmediya community non-Muslim. Khawaja Nazim-ud-Din's government didn't succumb to the pressure. But the Bhutto regime accepted similar demands of the clergy as a result of agitation and violence in 1974 when the Parliament declared the Ahmediya sect non-Muslim through a constitutional amendment.

Agitation alone had not led to a political change in Pakistan's political history. For instance, the 1969 agitation would not have succeeded if General Ayub Khan had not disappeared from the scene because of his almost fatal illness when the agitation was at its peak. The Bhutto government would have survived the opposition's agitation had there been no military intervention. Bhutto would stand up to the pressure of the religious lobby and would not have declared Ahmediya sect non-Muslims if there was no foreign pressure from the oil rich Gulf countries in this regard.



In this period of social media revolution one is justified in wondering what would be the shape of agitation in Pakistani society now.

There are many who remember that when MRD agitation was going on Sindhi and national newspapers were not allowed to report this agitation. However Sindhi nationalists were adept in publishing posters of weeks' events and plastering them on cities and rural areas' walls. Thus news about military Junta's oppression was carried with word of mouth.

Social media has transformed communication and there is no way a future government could impose censorship on information in any future scenario of political agitation. Since the advent of Arab



spring, Pakistani security planners have a perennial fear that social media can potentially lead to a similar spontaneous outbreak of protest and agitation in Pakistani society, thus leading to large scale unrest.

The reaction of lawyers community to Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry's detention and the act of military government to bring him to the Supreme Court in police custody when he had to appear before the supreme Judicial Council in the hearing of misuse of power and corruption reference against in March 2007, was also spontaneous. A group of lawyers literally snatched Justice Chaudhry from police custody on that fateful day in front of Supreme Court building in Islamabad.

The movement for the restoration of Chief Justice was spontaneous and popular at the same time. It was helped greatly by the advent of electronic media revolution in Pakistani society. But this movement hardly can claim to have dislodged General Musharraf from power. Lawyers' agitation was nothing more than a minor irritant for the military government—a minor law and order problem. It was only after Musharraf had doffed his uniform that his detractors from within the power structure decided to remove him from power.

Since then agitation has become a new normal in Pakistani society—Rickshaw drivers have a grievance against traffic police in Lahore, they resort to agitation, clerks do the same when government refuses to raise their salaries, traders are good at it too, even anti-encroachment drive in the cities' bazars can compel the victims to come on the streets and block the roads. But they are mostly manageable problems for the government.

The prospect of political or social unrest in central Punjab—the house of Pakistan's military establishment and an area from where most of the officer corps of Pakistan Army has been drawn in the post-Zia period—is a perennial nightmare for Pakistani security managers.

Central Punjab is also important because it hosts most of the revenue generating economic activity and is considered the industrial hub of the country. Any political unrest in the area can destabilize the whole country.

Since last one year the most popular political party of Central Punjab, PMLN—under the umbrella of Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) has been trying to mobilize its middle class following in this strategic region of the country. It has organized big rallies and its central leaders

have proven their crowd-pulling credentials in Central Punjab.

However, mobilization of the middle classes of central Punjab is a far cry and the possibility of middle classes joining street agitation against the government doesn't appear to be a realistic objective. At least this is what the events of past one year clearly indicate.

The middle classes of central Punjab are under tremendous economic pressure because of the shrinking economy and fast shrinking job market. This middle class has peculiar characteristics, which prevent it from becoming part of an agitation that focus too closely on military top brass as prime target.

On the one hand the middle classes of central Punjab have been voting overwhelmingly in support of Nawaz Sharif since 1993. But this is the same middle class which enjoys the jingoistic, anti-India war songs that celebrate the gallantry and valour of Pakistani troops, produced by the media wing of Pakistan Army.

The upshot is that Nawaz Sharif's attempts to galvanize these middle classes have their limits and his success in this adventure is not assured.



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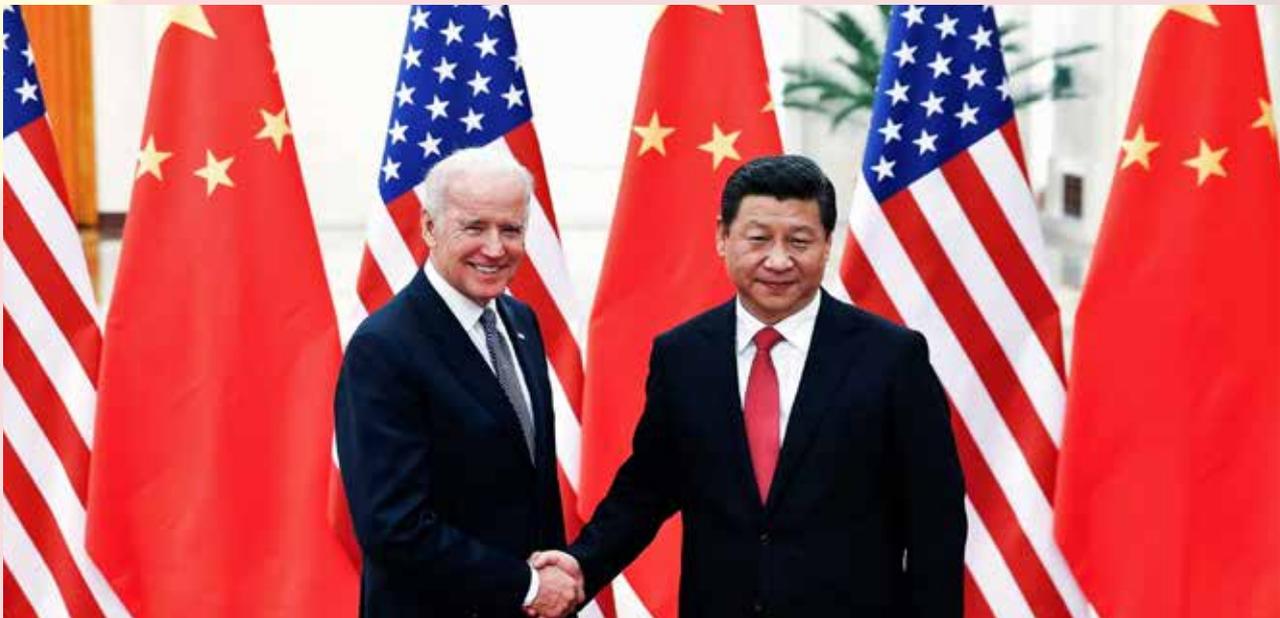


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## Pakistan in a World on a Knife-Edge

*An emergent China watches as self-serving US elites pull out all the stops to bend the world to their will – and Pakistani ruling elites practice their epic “pragmatism”.*



By Ashraf Jehangir Qazi

**W**hereas Lu Xun (the greatest thinker of the May 4 movement) believed that through his work the Chinese at least would die thinking, Mao had insisted that they die fighting. – Jonathan Spence

Pakistan is generally thought to have been conceived of by several thinkers including Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Allama Muhammad Iqbal, and Chaudhry Rahmat Ali, among others. It was brought into existence through political struggle especially by the Pakistan Movement led by Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

Similarly, Marx was the thinker for Marxism although he denied being a Marxist; Lenin was the fighter and Stalin the builder of the erstwhile USSR. In fact, Marx never hoped Russia as a country to follow his thinking. He was looking to his own country where his disciples chose Social Democracy instead of Communism. Nevertheless, Spence’s remark about Lu Xun and Mao encapsulates the dynamic of thinking, action, and achievement.

The Pakistan Movement, with all its conceptual, political and socioeconomic limitations, delivered even if in moth-eaten fashion on the dreams of most of the Muslims of undivided India. It could never include all of them. Yet if India-Pakistan relations had followed the rule of “good fences make good neighbours”, Pakistan could have been an asset for those who were never going to be able to migrate to it. Of course, there would have had to be agreement on where the fences should be. Disputed fences do not make for harmony.

The same could have applied to Pakistan’s minorities who might have chosen to stay in and belong to a Pakistan that found space for them.

A study of the political background and personality of the Quaid indicates that if he were twenty years younger he may have been able to impart a dynamic to Pakistan’s political development including ties with India that just might have engendered a more stable India-Pakistan history. It would always have been a tremendous challenge. It would have had to be reciprocated by the leadership of India. That was probably a bridge too far. It was not to be.

Instead, warfare and mutual hostility born of the festering Kashmir issue and cemented by mutually exclusive historical and political narratives defined and framed the relationship.

This is the context in which, soon after the passing of its founding father, Pakistan began to lose its political and policy moorings amid petty politics and extractive economics of competing elites. Regional fissures between regions and wings – West Pakistan vs East Pakistan, and within West Pakistan, the largest vs the smaller provinces – further muddled the situation, setting the stage for an early praetorian take-over of the country by the military.

Now the colonial masters had taken great care to keep the military politically sanitized. As a result, it had no inkling of political governance, was seduced by its own power, and had no interest in knowing the leitmotif of the Pakistan Movement and what drove the Quaid to accomplish what he did. This was despite the famous warning sounded by the Quaid to the military at Staff College, Quetta.

Since the praetorian capture of Pakistan’s politics and policies, the political governments that were spawned became secondary power players rather than primary nation builders. Military governments represented military interests

but civilian governments were never able to represent civilian interests which are the core of the national interest. Instead they learned to pay obeisance to their praetorian overlords rather than serve the interests of those who were persuaded to vote for them in return for rhetorical and false promises.

Within this context, it is correctly observed that the first 100 days of a newly elected government more or less indicate the kind of government it is likely to be for the rest of its term, whether completed or not. The incumbent government in Pakistan after 1000 days in office has by and large confirmed the somewhat dubious image it projected at the end of its first 100 days.

There were no obviously better alternatives to the PTI at the time of the elections of 2018. This still holds today, despite the indifferent performance at best of the PTI government. All the alternatives, whether military or nominally civilian, have been tested and found wanting. There is no reason to believe they will be much better in future.



However, the present government is fast joining the ranks of the set of alternatives that have been tried, tested, and found wanting. In fact, Pakistan is suffering the worst form of governance: The hybrid military-civilian (unelected-elected) kind in which there is no escape from incompetent and irresponsible elite rule.

The views of the people don't matter. Their priorities don't count. Their representatives don't represent them. Their vote is a bad joke. Nothing can alter this situation except a host of empowering and sustained people's movements. This is largely considered an immature dream because of a power structure that is implacably inimical to any people-centric approach.

These basic realities, however dreadful, are regarded as permanent features of the political edifice, whatever the ultimate existential cost to the country. The people are encouraged to have low self-esteem, and even lower expectations. Their anger, grief and despair are channelled and diverted towards internalizing cynicism, hopelessness, and resignation. By these measures governance in Pakistan has been a resounding success.

Pakistan's intelligentsia knows all this. But they are not inclined to do anything apart from being comfortably sad, wise and complicit. Many console themselves that Pakistan, in whatever shape, is still around. They assure themselves there are worse cases of governance in the world. They lament Pakistan is not respected. They concede it is regularly snubbed. But they are sedated with the belief that from time to time it is needed.

Finally, in their infinite wisdom, they accept that things are the way they are. What would the Quaid and the Allama have thought of them? Bangladesh escaped to a relative prosperity it might never have seen, not to speak of its cricketing prowess which might never have been!

In the US, the Biden Administration completed its first 100 days on 1 May 2021. More recently, President Biden described his presidency as an inflection point which will change the history of the world – although it is far from clear whether he was thinking of realizing America's potential or frustrating China's.

Domestically, the Biden Administration cannot avoid being better than the bizarre and degenerate Trump Administration. But Biden's first 100 days may not be as reliable a guide as they are generally. US society is as polarized as it has ever been. Trump's Neolithic constituency is intact. Congressional Republicans live in dread of it, although recently a number of them voted for a probe into the 6 January 2021 assault on Capitol Hill, possibly because

their political careers are likely to be ending anyway. Liz Cheney may have to be repeated.

Biden will be hard-pressed to get his climate, economic and infrastructure spending programs and his plans to gently tax billionaires and corporations to pay for them through an almost equally divided Congress. Curtailing defence expenditures and forever wars will also be problematic. They provide Corporate America and the ruling billionaires guarantees of further trillion dollar gains while the underclasses including the lower middle class are progressively driven towards life precariously above and around and below poverty lines.

In other words, the great majority of Americans constitute a precariat can scarcely conceive, much less sustain, human and social rights enshrined in the United States Constitution. The 0.1 percent including the defence establishment and Wall Street are just as dominant in the US as they are in Pakistan. That is still essentially the basis for the US-Pakistan relationship. Mutually unsatisfactory, but mutually profitable!

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell has promised to atone for his opposition to Trump after the 6 January assault on Congress by ensuring Biden goes down as a one-term President. He tried and failed to do so with President Obama but succeeded in disabling him for much of his second administration.

If Biden loses the House in the mid-term elections next year, he will be a lame-duck President for the rest of his one term

presidency. He will also be too old and foggy to be nominated for a second term.

Despite significant improvements on the Covid front and the accompanying economic and climate fronts, Biden has refused a number of domestic reforms. Promises or expectations he has failed to deliver on include a minimum wage of USD 15; forgiveness of well over USD 1 trillion student debt which enslaves so many for the whole of their white-collar working lives; Medicare for all as ensured by almost every other advanced industrial country; countering state suppression of voter rights which primarily targets American Blacks and is a continuation of the Jim Crow policies in the aftermath of America's civil war more than a century and a half ago; genuine police reforms that result in significant reductions in racist police murders of unarmed and non-threatening innocent Blacks; reducing massive, unconscionable and institutionalized income inequalities which breed black despair, white supremacy and Islamophobia; and a reduction in military expenditures, way in excess of any credible and sane threat anticipation, let alone perception.

Although it does appear Bernie Sanders has some influence over Biden, the President's commitment to promises to fight or resist Big Oil, Big Pharma, Big Data, and AIPAC are at best uncertain. What his administration does seem to be focussing on is the resurrection of the Yellow Peril. In this environment, the prospect of US instigated serious conflict with China – and possibly Russia – is likely to grow exponentially. The recent success of China's Mars mission is likely to be used to further fuel American paranoia.

Here is the paradox of our world today: The US cannot abide a world order it does not head, and China no longer feels obliged to participate in a world order headed by a hostile power. This year, the CCP is set to mark its centenary by celebrating China becoming a middle income country offering its citizens choices and a standard of living no western-style democracy ever has.

The US has military bases and “red lines” encircling China today. China will not long tolerate this as it has the ability to progressively curb hostile foreign forces and catspaws in its neighbourhood. The story of China's burgeoning soft power is almost as amazing as the

explosive development of its economy and military might. It now pervades more than half the world.

In terms of economic power, the BRI has already made China a global economic powerhouse as the likes of Australia and the so-called Quad are finding out. European leaders are progressively learning that it cannot rest its security on a relatively declining US no longer able or willing to bear the costs of defending Europe in extreme circumstances.

Similarly, the current depraved Israeli genocide against an incarcerated Palestinian population exercising its legitimate right of resistance to genocide will sooner or later entail a cost the Zionist regime cannot defray and the US will not pay.

If Hamas is seeking to defend itself as much as possible against Israeli genocide with the firing of rockets, it has every right to do so as long as it does not deliberately target unarmed civilians. The Israeli assaults with US-provided precision weaponry and defence systems are totally illegitimate. They violate every UN resolution and every right of the besieged and battered Palestinians.

That the US fully backs the Israelis in their genocidal decimation of the Palestinians is a sad reflection on the moral standing of the self-styled leader of the Free World. But the US and Israel will learn sooner or later that China and Russia – backed by smaller players like Turkey, Iran, Syria, Brazil, Cuba, etc. – can and will stand up to them in the Middle East and the CASA region. In the Indian Ocean, China will double down on protecting its essential lines of communication – a policy to which every right.

This, very broadly, is the strategic situation Pakistan finds itself in without having built itself to a position where it would have a range of strategic options. Pakistan is confronted with US demands that do not serve its strategic interests. For good measure, the US strategically backs India against Pakistan, pressing Islamabad to cooperate with it in Afghanistan to counter the prospect of Chinese and Russian influence in that country.

Yes, Pakistan is taken for a fool, because its ruling elites are eminently “pragmatic”. China watches.



# Beijing Woos Brussels with a Heart of Gold

*Debunking the pernicious myth of a Chinese power game in Central and Eastern Europe*

By Hamzah Rifaat Hussain

Some voices in Brussels have raised alarm based on the fallacy that China's recent engagement with European countries on its shores is part of a 'divide and rule' strategy. Nothing could be further from the truth, analysts and observers say.

Recent talks between Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi with his Irish counterpart Simon Coveney in Guiyang focused on the simple strategy of expanding economic and trading ties. The subject also featured during conversations with Serbian Foreign Minister Nikola Selakovic.

Still, the misguided belief that a sphere of influence is being established or bloc politics is being pursued is nothing but a narrow sighted approach through which Brussels is viewing China's tilt towards Europe. In fact, this is what constructive engagement looks like. The absence of geopolitical strategic intent on China's part lays bare Brussels' knee-jerk reaction in castigating China unnecessarily.

'Divide and rule' is a colonial concept that entails a state actor breaking up large concentrations of power in pursuance of its strategic interests. It was perfected by the European colonial powers. It employs polarizing rhetoric and propaganda to sow divisions among communities and states.

In all of the talks held in China between Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Serbian, Polish, and Irish counterparts not once has seen use of divisive rhetoric with emphasis on disassociation with the European Union; nor have there been any calls for joint military exercises or arms deals. In fact, Foreign Minister Wang Yi made a point of underlining how cooperation sought with European counterparts did not involve defense and security sectors.

Then comes the subject of the 17+1 grouping established in 2012 involving 12 EU members and five non-EU members. While there are complaints of slow investments among some member states, this does not translate into China pursuing aggressive discord as part of its foreign policy given



that slower investments in the region can be addressed by pooling in resources to meet demands of infrastructural development. Trade surges of up to 85 percent have previously been achieved through this platform.

Depicting Beijing as a strategic competitor seeking allies against the EU should actually pave for charting out strategies to resuscitate the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, a deal stalled by the European Parliament in a counterproductive move. Thankfully, despite the negative soundbites surrounding the matter, there are those who see the Chinese decision to invite EU leaders to the country is an attempt to chart out avenues for improving relations with the bloc.

Avenues for potential high-impact cooperation are many. Some of these could be jointly fighting the pandemic, pursuing counter terrorism mechanisms to confront the challenge of transnational terrorism between Brussels and Beijing, assistance being provided to developing nations, and resolving issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that continues to exact a terrible toll on Gaza or the West Bank and that shows no sign of resolving itself.

There are numerous points of convergence between the two sides, a fact highlighted time and time again by China and exemplified in the meeting between the Chinese and Irish Foreign Ministers who focused on maintaining robust industrial supply chains and Dublin playing a positive role in steadying EU-China relations.

Not once has Beijing relayed to the respective political leaderships of Poland, Hungary, and their counterparts to tinker their foreign policy priorities with emphasis solely on implementing projects as part of China's global connectivity vision. The advanced construction of a railway linking Serbia with Hungary for example, under the aegis of the B 17+1 grouping, demonstrates how Beijing is living up to its commitments. Additionally, cooperation on logistics, health and joint energy production with the Polish leadership is taking place in the absence of political baggage.

A precondition not factored in by Brussels while accusing Beijing of pursuing camp politics in Central and Eastern Europe is the unabashed pursuit of unilateralism practiced shamelessly by the Trump administration. The policy weakened multilateralism, especially when EU member states such as Germany were unfairly disparaged and UN bodies such as the World Trade Organization were castigated.

Such tactics are not part of China's doctrine with Foreign Minister Wang Yi repeatedly stressing on how working with EU institutions and EU countries can save multilateralism while overcoming barriers to cooperation. Furthermore, promotion of the green and digital economies as part of climate change diplomacy and technological cooperation in a globalized environment cannot be equated with unilateralism.

It would thus be worthwhile for Brussels to view these engagements between Chinese and European leaders as constructive dialogue instead of a power game.

# Beautiful Pakistan

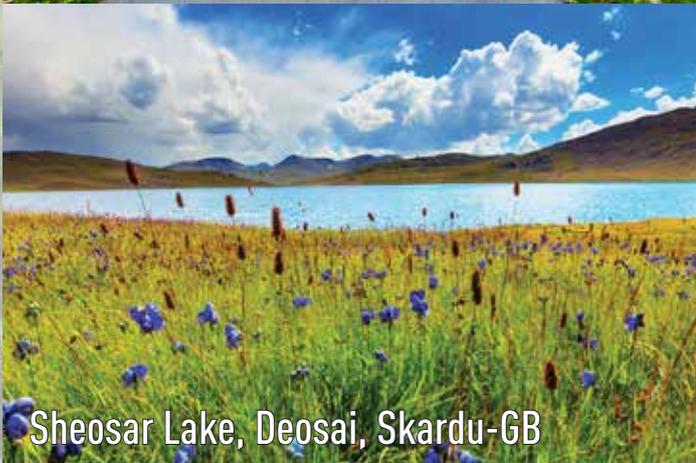
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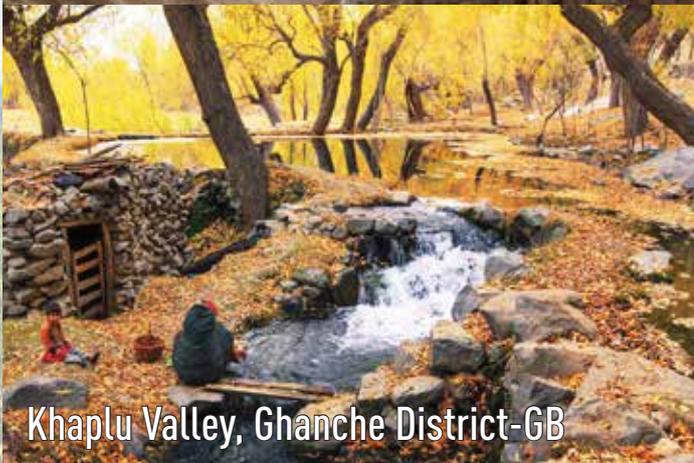
Nagar Valley, Hunza-GB



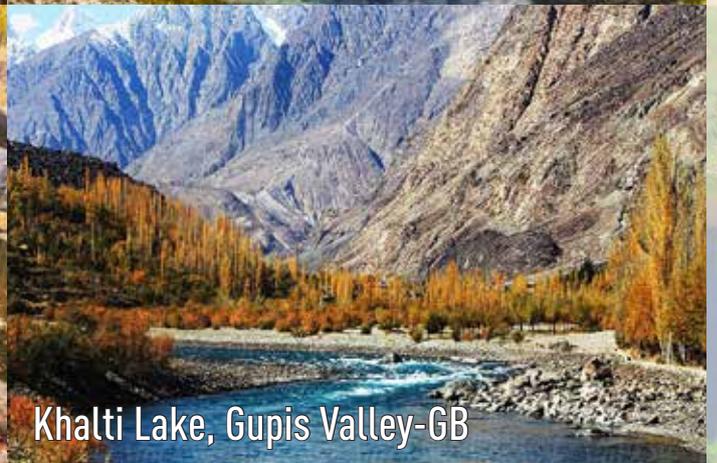
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# Taliban Want Istanbul to be about Discussions, not Decisions

*As Pakistan intensifies efforts to jumpstart intra-Afghan dialogue, the Taliban double down on their maximalist stance.*



By Tahir Khan

A Pakistani delegation that includes security officials and Pakistan special envoy for Afghanistan Mohammad Sadiq held talks with the Taliban political envoys in Qatar early June, pressing them to start “meaningful” negotiations with the government team, an official privy to the visit told The Truth International (TTI).

It was the second such visit to Qatar by the Pakistani officials in less than two months as part of Pakistan’s fresh initiative to push the fragile peace process forward. “We are close to the start of meaningful IAN (Intra-Afghan negotiations),” a Pakistani official dealing with Afghanistan said after the visit.

A Taliban official, who was aware of the discussions between the Pakistani delegation and the Taliban political envoys, said the Pakistani sides also urged the Taliban to participate in the Istanbul conference with their own peace plan.

“The leadership of the Islamic Emirate has in principle agreed to attend the Istanbul conference at a lower level and with conditions that no decision about the future set up will be taken in the conference and there will be no specific agenda and the event should not be longer than three days,” the Taliban leader said.

The Taliban conditions would disappoint the US, which had floated the idea, and other organizers – the United Nations, Qatar, and Turkey.

Another Taliban leader said on June 7 that Turkey has not yet shared the agenda of the conference and the Taliban could only make a decision once the details were shared.

“We have participated in many conferences and have no problem going to Turkey but our current position is that the upcoming sitting should not be a decision-making forum but like the other meetings for discus-

sions,” he told TTI when asked if the Taliban leadership had made a formal decision.

Taliban have not been enthusiastic about the Istanbul conference after President Joe Biden missed the 1 May 2021 deadline for withdrawal of foreign troops that the insurgents described as a violation of the Doha Agreement signed in February 2020.

The US administration says withdrawal of the troops will be completed by 11 September 2021, marking the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington.

However, a senior Pakistani official in an off-the-record briefing in Islamabad in the last week of May said, “Our assessment is the US and NATO will complete withdrawal by July 4, on the US Independence Day.”

The briefing was arranged for political leaders, lawmakers, former diplomats, and

journalists, the majority of them ethnic Pashtuns from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

A diplomat in Afghan capital Kabul has told The Truth International that the US and NATO officials in Afghanistan have also indicated the withdrawal is most likely to be completed by July 4. There is no official word from the US and its NATO allies.

Concerns are fast growing about intensification of fighting and even a possible civil war after the withdrawal of foreign forces as intra-Afghan negotiations have entered into 10th month without any substantial progress. There is no chance of a ceasefire in the near future and now Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid has ruled out cessation of hostilities unless an Islamic system is established.

“The Mujahideen of the Islamic Emirate [i.e., the Taliban] are committed to continuing jihad in the country unless the Islamic system is established,” Mujahid told Radio Shariat, a mouthpiece of the Taliban the other week.

“Foreign forces are leaving Afghanistan and the foreign occupation will come to an end, but we are still far from the other objective that is the establishment of a comprehensive Islamic system because the Kabul administration and its supporters are still reluctant in giving a space to the Islamic government or accept the Islamic system in its true spirit and genuine Islamic principles that could end the war,” he said, dashing hopes for a ceasefire in the near future.

Pakistani leaders are also concerned at the continuation of war and possible escalations and have stepped up efforts to seek a political solution. As Prime Minister Imran Khan remarked in a Reuters interview in early June, “Pakistan is pushing for a political settlement in Afghanistan before foreign troops leave later this year, to reduce the risk of civil war in its western neighbor.”

At the same time, he pointed out it would be difficult to seek concessions from the Taliban when foreign troops are leaving Afghanistan.

Prime Minister Khan is right to talk about the Taliban approach as the solution to the problem now lies only with Afghans – the Taliban and the Afghan government or its reconciliation council headed by Dr Abdullah Abdullah.

Afghan President’s Special Envoy for Pakistan Umer Daudzai welcomed the prime minister’s statement as the majority in Afghanistan believe Pakistan can do a lot to convince them to show flexibility as they think Pakistan has influence on the Taliban.

Days after Imran Khan’s remarks, Pakistani ambassador to Afghanistan Mansoor Khan held talks with Dr Abdullah, chief of Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin Hekmartar, and the US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad in Kabul. Khalilzad arrived in Kabul on June 6 as part of his peace mission to reiterate support to the Afghan government in the post-withdrawal period.

The US State Department has said Khalilzad will “continue to encourage both sides [Taliban and Afghan government team] to make tangible progress towards a political settlement that protects the gains of the last two decades.”

A Taliban leader told The Truth International that the political representatives “anxiously await” Khalilzad in Doha if he has brought anything. The Taliban leader was upset at the US failure to secure release of the remaining Taliban prisoners and to de-list the Taliban leaders from the UN sanctions list.

The Taliban have now toughened their position after the US delayed troops’ withdrawal. They have ruled out joining the present set up in Kabul and want removal of the Ghani’s administration.

## Still Active: The 3000-Year-Old Supervolcano Called Jerusalem

*The city that has been at the heart of bitter rivalries between competing interests for thousands of years continues to stoke the present day Israeli-Palestinian conflict.*



By Azmat Mumtaz Saqib

Jerusalem became capital of United Kingdom of Israel when King David (in the Islamic tradition, Daud, peace be upon him) conquered the city in year 1003 BCE.

In Biblical times, the larger region comprising the present day Lebanon, Western strip of Syria, and the whole of Israel up to Beersheba in the south was called Canaan.

In late 13th century BCE (Late Bronze age), Sea People, warrior tribes of Aegean Sea origin invaded Egyptian and Canaanite coastal areas. Ramses II, the Pharaoh defeated them, but in Canaan, they invaded the areas of present day Gaza up to north of Jaffa, Tel Aviv.

Egyptians called these occupiers 'Paleset', Greeks gave them the name 'Philistines' and the area as 'Philistia'. This name appears in Bible as the pagans with whom the Israelites were in perpetual war.

The Philistines and the Canaanites were polytheist as opposed to Israelites who were monotheist. The war that Joshua

(Youshabin Noon - PBUH) started with Philistines in the 13th century BCE ended around 1003 BCE when King David (PBUH) subdued the Philistines and established the United Kingdom of Israel with Jerusalem as its capital.

Although the Philistines as distinct race became extinct when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Kingdom of Judea, Solomon's Temple and the Philistine in 586 BCE, but Jerusalem and its surrounding region witnessed major conflicts throughout history, which continues until present times. Even for the future of land of Canaan/ Philistine/ Israel, fueled by End times prophecies, no sign of peace seems destined for 4.3 Billion (56% of the world population) followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

In the series of articles that follows, it is intended that first Palestine's (Land of Israel's) name, racial lineage, Geopolitical importance, house of Abraham's (PBUH) history will be narrated. In the next articles,

Jewish, Christian and Muslim viewpoints, about the holy land (present day Israel) and their end times prophecies would be presented separately.

As mentioned earlier, the region was called Canaan in Biblical times. When sea people occupied the coastal regions of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron and Gath, the Greeks named these areas 'Philistia' and the people as Philistines, Egyptian named it 'Paleset'. From 930 BCE to 720 BCE, northern part from Jericho upwards was Kingdom of Israel (Samaria) which was destroyed and conquered by Assyrians in 720 BCE. In 586 BCE, Southern Kingdom of Judah and the Temple were completely destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Nobles, warriors and well to do Jews were taken to Babylon as captives.

In 539 BCE, Cyrus, the King of Persia and Media conquered Babylon, freed all the Jews to return to Judaea and financed the construction of the second Temple. In 68 AD, Israelites revolted against the Romans.

Nero, the Roman King dispatched his generals to crush the revolt. Titus, the Roman General massacred the Jews and completely destroyed the second temple in 70 AD.

In 135 AD, Romans conquered the whole region under King Hadrian and named it Syria Palestine or simply Palestine in order to wipe out Jewish ancestral traces. After the Romans, Muslim caliphates and after 1918 British mandate all retained the name Palestine (135 AD-1948 AD) until the establishment of Israel in 1948.

Until 1948, Jews, Christians and Muslims living in the land of Canaan called themselves Palestinians. Palestinian Jews became Israelis between 1948 and 1950, whereas Palestinian Arabs become Palestinians between 1964-1968, when PLO was established, although Palestinians considered Palestine as the whole region of the pre-mandate Palestine.

Yasser Arafat (lifetime chairman of the PLO) accepted their lineage as Jebusite tribe of Canaanites. It is also said that Jebus was the old name of Jerusalem. Present day Israelis believe that Palestinians are Arab emigrants from neighboring Arab countries and demand that those Arab Countries take back these Arabs.

Ethnically, Canaanites were always there whether you call the region Israel or Palestine. It may be noted that present day Palestinians have no racial link with the Biblical Philistines who fought Joshua, Saul (Talut) and David, peace be upon them.

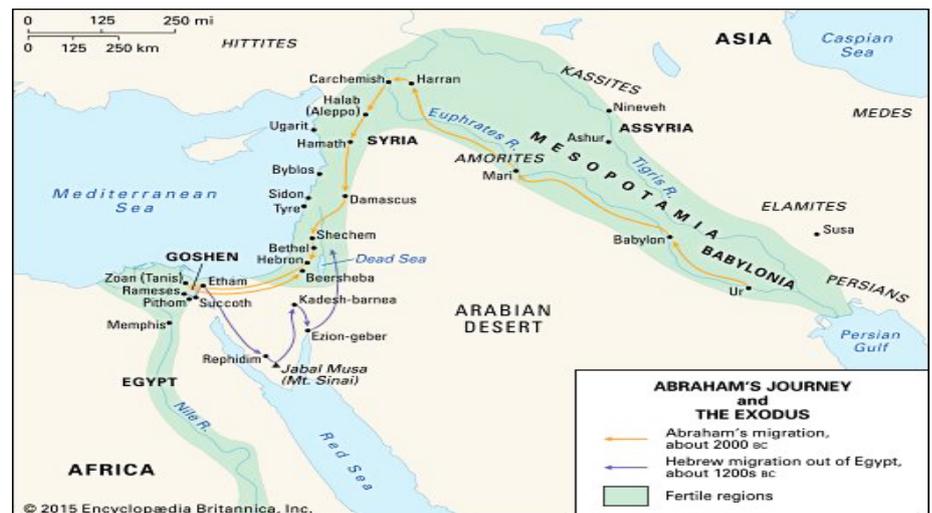
Abraham (PBUH) was a native of Ur, a City of Kingdom of Sumer. Nimrod, the mighty King of Kish, Sumer and Akkad ruled southern Mesopotamia (Present day Iraq). Abraham was Semitic in ancestry while Nimrod was considered a descendant of Ham son of Noah.

Abraham (PBUH) rejected polytheistic idols of the land of Nimrod. After Nimrod failed to subdue or burn Abraham, he exiled the patriarch along with his wife Sarah and his nephew Lot (Lut PBUH) were exiled. They first went to Assyrian city of Harran, home to the Sabians. He was then commanded by God to go to Canaan, a land promised to Abraham and his descendants.

Abraham (PBUH) along with Lot (PBUH)

took abode near the city of Beersheba. During famine the family went to fertile regions of Egypt, but fearing for their safety against Pharaoh they returned to Canaan. Abraham (PBUH) and Lot (PBUH) had large flocks of cattle. To accommodate both flocks, Lot(PBUH) moved to the South of Dead Sea and settled in Sodom and Gomorrah.

Ishmael (Ismail PBUH) was the eldest son of Abraham from Hager (Hagira PBUH). Isaac (Ishaq PBUH) was from Sarah (PBUH). After the death of Sarah, Abraham took his third wife Qaturah, who bore him six sons. Jethro (Shoaib PBUH), father in law of Moses (Musa, PBUH) was prophet to the people of Midian (Madyan in Quran), present day North Saudi Arabia near Gulf of Aqaba.



Isaac (PBUH) son of Abraham (PBUH) and Isaac's son Jacob (Yaquub, PBUH) were also prophets of God. Jacob had twelve sons who headed twelve tribe of Israelites. Israel, meaning slave of God, was the title Jacob acquired. Among his twelve sons, Joseph (Yousef PBUH) was also a prophet who became Grand Vizier in Egypt during the famine period. Jacob (Yaquub PBUH) along with his sons migrated to Egypt, lived with his sons and the tribe of Israel flourished during the 90 years rule of Hyksos dynasty.

After Hyksos dynasty, Egyptian Pharaohs rose to power who enslaved the Israelites and imposed male infanticide of Jews. Around mid-thirteenth century BCE, Moses took the Israelites through miraculous parting of the sea on a mass Exodus (600,000) to Mount Sinai.

After the death of Moses (Musa PBUH), Joshua (Yousha bin Noon, PBUH) led the Israelites and occupied the Promised Land. Hence, the Jews in the Promised Land had Semitic roots, while Canaanites were descendant of Ham. Abraham, Isaac (Ishaq, PBUH), and Jacob (Yaquob PBUH) lived between 18th and 16th century BCE. All the three are buried in a cave bought for burials by Abraham PBUH.

According to a DNA study of 2019-2020, present day Palestinians have 50 percent roots from Canaanites and 50 percent from neighboring Arabs. Whereas present day Jews have 50 percent roots from Canaanites and 50 percent from their diaspora years.

Palestine was on the main trading route of the Fertile Crescent, starting from Egypt and running through Canaan (Israel,

Lebanon) and Syria down to Iraq between the two rivers of Euphrates and Tigris

Palestine's olive and grapes as well as other agricultural products were in great demand in Egypt. Besides Egypt the Canaanites were surrounded by other great powers, namely Hittites (Anatolia), Assyria, Mitanni, and Mesopotamia. These competing powers preferred to fight their foes in Canaan instead of their own lands.

Nile delta being the most fertile region, Canaanites would migrate to Egypt in famines. Egypt was the power that dominated and controlled the land of Canaan many times in history before the rise of the Roman Empire.

Strategic location of even present day Israel gives it a controlling position of Arabs and Mediterranean countries whenever the trade normalizes in the region.

# The Fizzling Out of the Panama Papers Scandal

*Proceedings against the Saifullahs run aground as legal complications mar the maintainability of enforcement action.*



By Azeem Waqas

The much-hyped Panama Papers scandal has evaporated in thin air as the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has been unable to achieve optimum results due to certain limitations including some legal complications.

An Appellate Tribunal of Inland Revenue (ATIR) has reserved decision against the powerful Saifullah political family of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, since November 2020 in a Panama Case against the undeclared properties and imposition of PKR 5 billion additional tax by the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR).

The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FPCCI) has vowed to revamp the tax adjudication system on the principle of the separation as per constitution of Pakistan. The human rights application states that the first two tiers of appellate tax authorities are working under the Federal Board of Revenue and Ministry of Law, respectively, “in utter violation of Article 175(3) of the Constitution and judgments by SC that are binding under Article 189.”

Saifullah’s appeals against the order of FBR are pending in Appellate Tribunal Inland Revenue, Islamabad. As per

available information both parties (the Saifullahs and FBR) concluded arguments in November 2020 and the judgment was reserved, which is yet to be announced. On the other hand Mian Nawaz Sharif has not only been disqualified by the Supreme Court but also convicted by an Islamabad NAB court.

The Saifullahs (Anwaer Saifullah, Iqbal Saifullah, Javed Saifullah & Usman Saifullah), scions of an influential political clan, are taxpayers registered with the Commissioner AEOI Zone, Islamabad. They filed their income tax returns for tax year 2012 on 06 October 2012 along with wealth statements, declaring only their local income, assets, and expenses. They revised their tax returns for the tax year 2012 on 20 March 2018, and also revised wealth statements twice in year 2017, declaring their offshore assets.

In April 2016, the International Consortium of Investigation Journalists (ICIJ) released certain information acquired from the database of a Panama based law firm. The said list also included the names of the Saifullahs alleging that they held shares in 34 companies incorporated abroad. Only after Panama Leaks did the Saifullahs revise their returns and

wealth statements incorporating their beneficial ownership of various companies and trusts and claiming offshore assets.

NAB and FIA also initiated investigation but to date there is no outcome.

FBR selected Saifullahs for audit which resulted into creating a tax demand amounting to almost PKR 15 Billion, in June, 2018.

## Tax demands and second appeals

In pursuance to the Panama Papers Leaks, the department selected the cases of Saifullah brothers for audit of tax affairs for tax year 2012 in March 2018. The proceedings were finalized on the basis of replies submitted resulting in the income tax demands and impositions of penalties for concealment of offshore assets as below.

Sr.	Name of individual	Demanded Income Tax	Penalty U/S 182(1)	Total Demand
(1)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1	Mr. Anwar Saifullah Khan	Rs. 824,274,575/-	Rs. 825,548,000/-	Rs. 1,649,822,575/-
2	Mr. Salim Saifullah Khan	Rs. 803,434,993/-	Rs. 805,146,758/-	Rs. 1,608,581,751/-
3	Mr. Javed Saifullah Khan	Rs. 826,035,047/-	Rs. 825,237,791/-	Rs. 1,651,272,838/-
4	Mr. Iqbal Saifullah Khan	Rs. 811,557,391/-	Rs. 757,235,599/-	Rs. 1,568,792,990/-
5	Mr. Humayun Saifullah Khan	Rs. 799,770,686/-	Rs. 1,009,493,186/-	Rs. 1,809,263,872/-
			<b>Total</b>	<b>Rs.8,287,734,026</b>

The taxpayers filed appeals against the orders passed with the Commissioner (IR) (A). The additional facts regarding the offshore assets and companies held by the taxpayers were presented by the taxpayers. It was submitted before the CIR (A) that 1.3 million shares of m/s PMCL held by m/s Saif Holding Limited (SHL) were disposed off to offshore entity m/s Telecom Management Group Limited (TMGL), a wholly owned subsidiary of m/s Telecom Holding International Limited (THIL), on 12 February 2007, for a consideration of PKR 1.8 billion. Both companies are incorporated in Panama, which is a tax heaven.

Further it was submitted that m/s THIL sold out m/s TMGL, the wholly owned subsidiary, to m/s International Wireless Communication Limited (IWCL), a company incorporated in Malta, on 12 March 2007 for consideration of USD 290 million, i.e., PKR 15.8 billion.

The taxpayers submitted before the Commissioner (A) that m/s SHL also paid capital gain tax on the gain of PKR 1.8 billion on the sale of 1.3 million shares.

The Commissioner (IR) (A) decided the appeals in favour of the department. However, some relief was given to the taxpayers on other minor issues.

The taxpayers as well as the department filed their second appeals before the learned ATIR which are under adjudication and for regular hearing since 23 November 2020.

### 1. DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THE DEPARTMENTAL STANCE

During the pendency of the case in ATIR, authorities in the United Kingdom provided further information to the Government of

Pakistan (GOP), through exchange of information revealing the following facts, which exposed an intricate tax avoidance by the Saifullahs.

Both the Panama based offshore companies, i.e., m/s TMGL and m/s THIL to whom the share of PMCL were sold by m/s Saif Holding Limited on 12 February 2007, are actually owned by the family members of Saifullah family as under.

Sr. No.	Name of Company	Name of individual
1	M/S Telecom Management Group Limited (TMGL)	Mr. Osman Saifullah Khan
2	M/S Telecom Holding International Limited (THIL)	Mr. Osman Saifullah Khan Mr. Javed Saifullah Khan

The corporate maize created with the intent to avoid taxation of the actual capital gain earned, i.e., PKR 15.8 billion stands fully exposed.

It is established that the company i.e., m/s TMGL and THIL, were incorporated by the family in tax heaven state i.e., Panama.

The actual profits earned by the brothers were also distributed outside Pakistan and further sale was just carried out in a month to m/s IWCL in Malta.

The Departmental position regarding the untaxed concealed transaction is further fortified by the amnesty availed by Mr. Javed Saifullah Khan after the issuance of the order by the DCIR on 30 June 2018 declaring the offshore assets created out of his share from sale of m/s TMGL.

The fact is established by wealth statement for tax year 2018 e-filed on 14 June 2020 by Mr. Javed Saifullah Khan substantiating that they did not have any legitimate taxed sources of moveable or immovable offshore assets acquired through the sale of shares of m/s PMCL by creating the corporate veil and layering.

Trade bodies have questioned the independence of ATIRs. Ibrahim Kasoomi – member of the taxation committee of Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry – has shown its reservations on the delayed justice being provided to the tax payers. He said that Appellate tribunals should not be under the FBR but they should be separated like the upper judiciary of the country.

He said there hundreds of cases which are pending in ATIRs and not being concluded which is tantamount to injustice because according to law cases should be decided in 90 days.

The FPCCI states in its application that the aggrieved party can carry the matter in appeal before the Appellate Tribunal Inland Revenue (ATIR) and Customs Appellate Tribunal, respectively. The ATIR and Customs Tribunal form a second tier of tax appellate system. Both operate under the Federal Ministry of Law, which is against the principle of independence of judiciary, highlighted in Para 6, page 8 of National Judicial Policy of 2009 [NJP 2009]: “All special courts/tribunals under the administrative control of Executive must be placed under the control and supervision of the judiciary, their appointments/postings should be made on the recommendation of the Chief Justice of concerned High Court”.

## Because PM Khan Would Rather Not Consult a Sharif

*In a move likely to kick up controversy, the government is set to allow the incumbent chairman NAB a second term in office through a presidential ordinance.*



By Asadullah

Unwilling to be consult Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Shahbaz Sharif for the appointment of a new chief of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), Prime Minister Imran Khan is considering emergency legislation to allow the incumbent chairman a second term in office, sources with knowledge of the developments have told The Truth International (TTI).

Khan's government is already under fire for ruling the country by decree because it has resorted to legislation through presidential decree quite often. However, the government is apparently undeterred by the criticism it has faced over the matter because all seems set for the promulgation of a new presidential ordinance to extend the services of the incumbent chairman NAB Justice (Retd.) Javed Iqbal, whose term of office is due to expire this October.

Observers say the government of the coalition led by Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) is utilizing the extraordinary constitutional provision for issuing ordinances to push through routine

legislation because it is in minority in the Senate and thus unable to carry legislation through the Upper House of the Parliament.

The website of the National Assembly indicates that since 24 September 2018, the government has promulgated more than 54 Ordinances. It issued seven ordinances in its first parliamentary year and thirty in its second. In its third parliamentary year (currently underway), the government has already issued some sixteen ordinances and the number is likely to grow.

Since independence in 1947, successive governments in Pakistan have issued over 2,500 ordinances to bypass routine legislative process. The president, under Article 89 of the Constitution, is empowered to promulgate ordinances, which are a form of temporary legislation subject to two expressly stipulated conditions. An ordinance may be promulgated only when neither the Senate nor the National Assembly is in session, and circumstances exist which render it necessary to take immediate action.

The word "ordinance" means "an authoritative direction, decree, or command" which became legally significant in England itself for a very short period from 1642 to 1660. This was a period in which the king and parliament were at war with each other. As a result, the normal constitutional machinery of England, whereby law making is done through consensus building between the king and parliament, was suspended. Therefore, the laws passed without Royal assent, were referred to as "ordinances". After 1660, with the restoration of constitutional monarchy, all the ordinances lapsed and no new ordinances were passed.

In British India, the term "ordinance" was first used in the Indian Councils Act, 1861. Under the law, normal legislature in India was the Governor General-in-Council, with the council including both British and Indian nationals appointed by the British government.

In Pakistan, provisions regarding ordinances were incorporated in Article 69 of the 1956 Constitution. In 1960, the Constitu-

tion Commission headed by Sir Shahabuddin strongly criticized the idea of ordinances. However, the concept was retained in Article 29 of the 1962 Constitution framed by General Ayub Khan. Finally, the president's power to promulgate ordinances found its way in Article 89 of the 1973 Constitution.

One of the earliest uses of this power was when former president Iskandar Mirza had passed an ordinance to dissolve an elected local government and replaced it with a handpicked administrator, allegedly in order to benefit his Republican Party in the upcoming election. Justice Kaikaus struck down this totally unnecessary ordinance and emphasised that the ordinance-making power could not be used in a routine manner.

Earlier this year, the President Dr Arif Alvi promulgated the Ordinance to give extension or reappointment of the Prosecutor General NAB.

According to the federal minister for law and justice Dr Farogh Naseem, while the re-appointment of Syed Asghar Haider as PG NAB was made for a period of three years in pursuance of the Presidential Ordinance which was due to lapse in June. However, for the law to become permanent, it was necessary to present it before the Parliament.

According to him, the appointment of Mr Asghar has been protected under Article

264 of the Constitution. He said that the government wanted to give the ordinance which is a temporary legislation permanent effect through Parliament.

He was of the view that this was done in order to dispel the impression that it was a person specific ordinance.

However, the informed sources are of the view that the extension of PG NAB has paved way for reappointment of incumbent chairman NAB retired Justice Javed Iqbal.

Iqbal who is also chairman of the commission of inquiry on enforced disappearances was appointed as chairman NAB in October 2017. The then Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi with the consent of the then opposition leader Syed Khursheed Ahmed Shah made this appointment.

Ironically, both of them are facing references filed before the accountability courts with the signatures of Justice Iqbal.

According to National Accountability Ordinance (NAO) 1999, the President can only appoint chairman NAB in consultation with the leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly for a non-extendable period of four years.

Likewise, NAO clearly bars an extension in the tenure of prosecutor general. Section 8(a)(iii) of the National Accountability Ordinance (NAO) says: "The Prosecutor

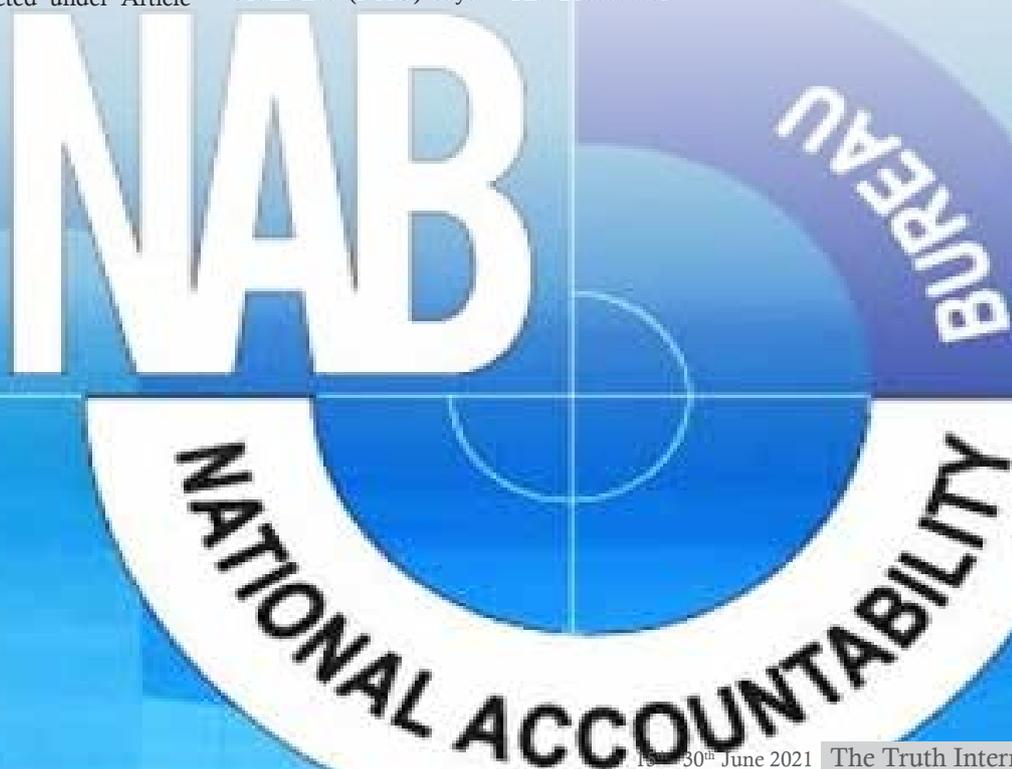
General Accountability shall hold office for a [non-extendable] period of three years."

However, President Alvi through an ordinance amended the said provision to read "the Prosecutor General Accountability shall hold office for a period of three years and shall be eligible for reappointment for a similar term or terms."

It is said that government is seriously considering the option of promulgating a similar ordinance to extend the services of chairman NAB. Well-placed sources say the real reason for the ordinance under consideration is that PM Khan has no mind to consult Shahbaz Sharif, the leader of Opposition in the National Assembly, for the appointment of the new NAB chairman.

This makes developing a consensus between PM and the opposition leader over the name of a new appointee all but impossible. The legal eagles of the government have therefore come with the idea of bypassing the legally mandated process by allowing a fresh term of office to the incumbent chairman through a presidential ordinance.

If it materialises, the move is likely to trigger legal wrangling as the opposition Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has already challenged successive ordinances promulgated by the President from time to time.



## Dealing with the Dacoits

*Time to get tough on the riverine gangsters of Sindh and their political patrons.*



By Ishtiaq Ali Mehkri

A sizable chunk of Pakistan's landmass is under the dark shadows of dacoit's rule. Yes, this is no exaggeration. It is a fact of our national life, and a hovering threat to security and development of millions of people in the dilapidated Northern Sindh bordering Southern Punjab, and parts of the adjoining province of Balochistan. This region is at a tipping point—increasingly threatened by crime, tribal feuds, extremism, political corruption, and last but not least, separatist and parochial tendencies.

This area prominently known as 'Kutch' has been a breeding ground for unscrupulous elements for long. It is a perfect hideout, deep in the thick jungles of oasis-cum-desert and the tricky hilly ranges. The swirling River Indus bifurcates the downstream province into two flanks of muddy bastions, which serve as the refuge for men in oblivion.

But the surprising point is that this nuisance is well-guarded and patronized by the feudal, influential and administration officials – who go on to raise and mushroom a militant wing at their beck and call, on the premise of Serfs in early European history.

These dacoits do all they are asked to do by their 'masters', and cease their activities when required. This is power politics at its best, at the cost of innocent and hapless people, who merely serve as a fodder. It is an attempt to control the political and economic resources of the ill-fated area.

All this goes unchecked as landlords, who incidentally are duly elected parliamentarians to the august houses, flex their political muscles – and get away with the trauma and terror right under the blind-folded idol of law and justice.

This could have been conveniently done away with a stroke of the pen, had feudalism been abolished right after the Independence. Bangladesh did it. But we played to the gallery in the form of so-called Land Reforms, and institutionalised a political land-wielding class that will go on for ages to control the ballot, and usurp the rights of the people. It's all about 'revenge' in the name of 'pseudo-democracy.'

To recall a leaf from history, when it came under the purview of land reforms during the era of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, this Kutch belt became a tool of nepotism. It was

highly-contested for political power, too. To stall land from being taken over by the State, it was doled out to 'favourites' and 'cronies', who in lieu promised to stuff the ballot box with votes from the subjects of Lesser God in their domain.

Thus 'democracy' and 'vote' is a tool through which the poor farmers, fishermen and downtrodden are exploited and the feudal wins his way to become an aristocrat on the premise of dacoits' plague. The booty that comes from the dacoits, and subsequent terrorism, go hand in hand as power reaches its zenith in the form of electorates. The State looks back in a 'state of shock.'

What has been the toll to this day, and how come? Known as the Golden Belt, billions are minted in an undocumented economy by feudal-politicians and their undercover gangsters' hand-in-glove with the police. Though not all are abettors in this crime-track, power corrupts, and easy money makes it more miserable to take a moral stance.

The outcome is gunrunning, arson, abductions for ransom, extortion, target-killing,

vehicle snatching, loot and plunder. These impugned acts are carried out anywhere, as far as Karachi and Islamabad; and the 'subject' conveniently moved to the thick and thin of Kutcha! Then on it is a tale of connivance and submission, which carries a price tag.

These days yet another operation is underway in Kutcha, especially in areas adjoining Kashmore, Sukkur and Shikharpur. This time the operation is against the notorious Ladi gang. According to reports, police have set ablaze hundreds of suspicious hideouts in an attempt to ward off dacoits, as they move in to mop the area.

The gangsters had in the last few weeks killed a number of policemen on duty in the area, and resorted to excessive force resulting in the killing of a photographer, too. It is no less than a theatre of war with the non-state actors in a duel with the State of Pakistan.

This is neither the first of its kind operation by the lethargic provincial and federal authorities, nor will be the last one. Several such unfruitful expeditions were conducted in the past, including the military-led Operation Blue Fox from 1992-94. Yet, the gangsters thrived on.

The reason for their mushrooming is political patronage, wherein the state takes a backseat for reasons of exigency. This is why the Sindh High Court in an observation, on the ongoing operation, questioned the "rationale and strategy" behind the move to crush the gangsters with an "uneven" might! The criminals are well-armed and possess sophisticated weapons, including armoured vehicles. The police often are found as sitting ducks, and fall prey.

Both flanks of River Indus are muddy and dozens of metres high. They were erected to save the agrarian lands as the magnanimous River Indus water thrusts into the southern province of Sindh, before submerging into the Arabian Ocean. This phenomenon of water flow and high altitude presence is noticed from May to September, as glaciers melt in the north and the seasonal monsoon strikes the subcontinent usually by mid-July.

The stretch between the Kutcha muddy walls extends from two to twenty kilome-

tres, as the river swings down the south. It leaves behind a fertile territory with lots of dividends, plus freshwater fish catch. This cash-flow to the tune of billions of rupees is pocketed by the landlords and the influential in collaboration with dacoits, who work as their mercenary watchdogs.

Moreover, these conscripted men commit crime at impunity. They abduct the big and the powerful, snatch cars and motorcycles, and even loaded trucks of goods vanish in these jungles of Kutcha. All this goes on under the watchful eyes of hefty power-wielding politicians and the district administration 'Babus'! Siblings and children of senior officials and judges too were abducted and taken for ransom to these hideouts from 1985 onwards.

Thus from 1984 to 1994, it was the decade of dacoits in northern Sindh and southern Punjab, along with the territorial peripheries of Balochistan adjoining Sindh. It was – and is – Black Raj, to say the least.

There are accounts of this issue being raised in Apex Committees of Sindh when the Army and Rangers were calling the shots. But to the surprise, it was mostly brushed under the carpet – by the civilian faces on the committee, for reasons of political exigency. The outcome was the rise of Chotu Gang in Southern Punjab, against whom another half-hearted operation was conducted in 2016. The remnants, however, live on.

This landscape has a well-entrenched political mosaic. It is a silent vote grabber zone, without much ado. Conventional voting trend continues with the landlords calling the shots, and the poor peasants

obliging to the whims and wishes of their master. It is irrelevant for the voter as to who is the candidate for the assembly, and what it means for them. All he/she has to do is to submit on the day of the ballot.

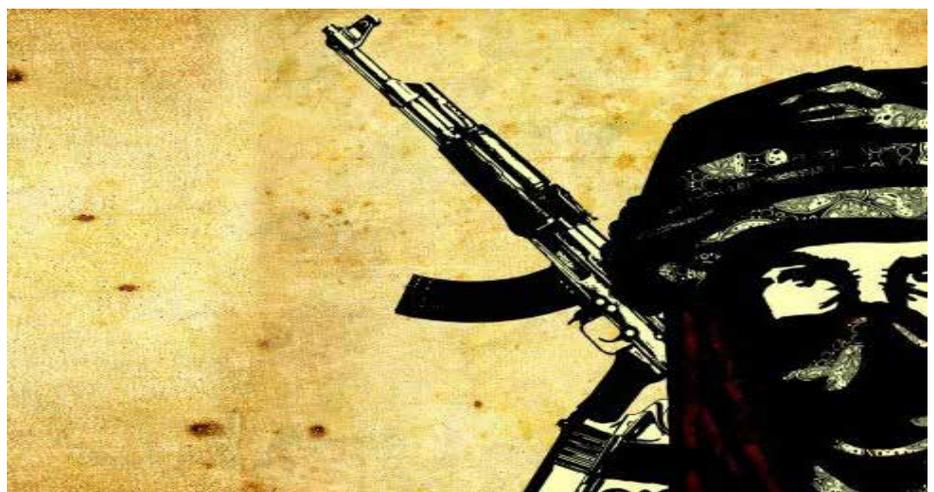
Perhaps this is why Federal Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed, after his emergent visit to Karachi to take stock of the surging dacoits' nuisance in Kutcha, came back with a dropped jaw! Political and tribal considerations acted as an impediment in tackling the menace head-on. He was surely disappointed. The 'no go areas' are 'political' in essence.

Though the veteran promised big fire power and muscles to 'take out the dacoits', along with Drone surveillance; he was not quite sure of it. Wheeling-dealing in Southern Punjab – where the ruling PTI has stakes, callous approach of 'Shah Sarkar', and a wayward response from the disjointed coalition in Balochistan makes a meaningful 'operation' a far cry.

But there should be a full stop somewhere. This gangster Raj cannot go on in an age of 5G. The nexus between criminals and tribal chieftains is quite toiling. It's high time to concentrate on capacity building of law-enforcement agencies, especially the police. This incredible new force should have no political strings attached.

Dacoits and their patrons are an incredible threat to the civic peace of the society. All it needs is a grand cleansing operation on the lines of Zarb-e-Azb against these riverine gangs. It goes without saying that it is terrorism under political garb. Save the State by unmasking the abettors!

*Ishtiaq Ali Mehkri is a senior journalist and research fellow.*



# Who is Thieving Goods from Customs Warehouses?

*The bold thieves seen in viral video clips appear to be insiders supported by elements within law enforcement.*

By Hamza Qureshi

Pakistan Customs' warehouses in Karachi have lately witness several cases of thefts. The authorities did not publicly acknowledge this until several videos started surfacing upon social media, showing thieves transporting stolen goods without any fear.

Our sources in Pakistan Customs confirmed that the visuals seen in the viral video clips are of Customs Warehouse III in Kemari, Karachi. In the first video, recorded on 2 June at 5:30 am, a person can be seen throwing sacks over the 20-foot wall of the warehouse to the other side. Meanwhile, his companion was efficiently loading these sacks in a vehicle parked nearby. Both men appear to be fearless, executing their activities with ease.

The second clip is from a CCTV video recorded on the night of 4 June. Same place, different timings! This time, the stolen goods are being moved through the main gate of the warehouse. Thieves can be seen loading sacks filled with betel nuts and other items quietly into a vehicle parked outside.

There is another clip – it is of 4 June's broad daylight when during the Friday prayers, burglars can be seen pilfering the goods through the main gate of Customs Warehouse III. As usual, there is a vehicle parked and the stolen goods are being loaded in it.

TTI sources says that the men seen in leaked footages are the Pakistan Customs'

employees. Only they are authorized and could transport stolen goods from main gate of the warehouse with such ease and confidence. Sources claimed that the thefts were carried out with the help and support of officers at Customs Anti-Smuggling Organization and the Jackson Police Station – without whose connivance the theft would not have been possible.

Smuggled or illegal goods including clothes, betel nuts, 'Katha'(a substance used in making of paan and gutka) and cosmetics are stocked at these warehouses. These goods are usually seized by Customs and estimated to be worth of billions of rupees.

It is a coincidence that video clips of these three incidents went viral. Our sources claim that the clips were a mere glimpse of what is happening in custom warehouse on a regular basis because goods worth hundreds of thousand rupees are being stolen every day.

The Pakistan Customs' spokesman said that FIR of theft has been registered and investigation committee headed by Mr. Omar Shafique, Additional Collector (HQ-I) and Mr. Shafi Ullah Assistant Collector (HQ-I) is inquiring the issue.

According to the FIR, 240 kg of seized smuggled foreign origin betel nut valuing PKR 120,000 was stolen from Customs State Warehouse-III, Kemari by 'a gang of some unscrupulous elements'.

The spokesperson also revealed that a



Suzuki Bolan pick-up bearing Registration No. CN-2908, reportedly owned by Saleem Policewala, was used in this act of theft. He further named 14 locals, including ringleader Saleem Policewala, Shakeel, Gull, Pappy, Zeeshan, and others. These persons are said to be habitual criminals.

Customs official stated that efforts are underway to apprehend all the accused along with recovery of stolen betel nuts and impounding of the vehicle used in the incident. According to the press release issued by Customs House, the Customs staff posted at the said warehouse have been placed off-duty and a fact-finding inquiry has been initiated to investigate the role of the custom staff involved.

However, only one case of theft has been registered at Jackson Police Station for the 4 June incident. No mention has been made of any other incident, including the one document in the 2 June 2021 clip.

# Media Authority - No, Thanks

*The bold thieves seen in viral video clips appear to be insiders supported by elements within law enforcement.*

By Hammad Ghaznavi

One nation, one narrative – has been the slogan of every totalitarian state from Nazi Germany to the present day Myanmar. Democratic dispensations, on the other hand, thrive on difference of opinion, which leads to a free press, independent institutions and a genuinely multiparty political system. Where does Pakistan stand in this regard?

For some time now, indicators of the freedom of press in Pakistan have been blinking. The tvs that don't 'toe the line' often go off-air or their cable positions are altered to their disadvantage. Journalists that refuse to toe the line lose their show slots, if not their jobs. Many journalists are physically assaulted, kidnapped, shot at, or in some cases, killed. According to Reporters without Borders, Pakistan is emerging as one of the most dangerous countries for journalists, with our media freedom world ranking sliding further down, from 139th to 145th position.

That's not all. The worst is yet to come. In fact, it is just round the corner – the proposed Pakistan Media Development Authority Ordinance (PMDA). If implemented, the law certainly will prove the proverbial last nail in the coffin of press freedom in the country. To put it mildly, in its present shape, it is a draconian law, much worse than the Press and Publication ordinance (1963) of a dictatorial regime. In a word, PMDA proposes complete censorship of media, electronic and digital. The product of an authoritarian mindset, the law is drafted to ensure the silencing of all independent voices from the public discourse, to completely control the narrative.

It appears ultra vires, a complete negation of the freedom of expression ensured in the articles 19 and 19-A of the constitution. The PMDA, the draft proposes, will be the all-encompassing, all-powerful media regulatory body, repealing all existing media laws and dissolving all media-related bodies. The members of the PMDA will be appointed by the federal government, without consultation with the opposition or other media stakeholders. The PMDA will also have an absolute authority to seal a media outlet or even seize its equipment; and that too without issuing a show cause notice. If this law is enacted, Pakistan will be competing with no other country but North Korea for the last position on the press freedom index.

The sordid tale doesn't end here. If an organization is not happy with the decision of the Authority, it can go to a Tribunal created by the government. An appeal against the Tribunal's decision cannot go the High Courts. The Supreme Court will be the sole platform for such appeals. Even more frightening is the clause that necessitates licenses for all media outlets, including digital platforms. For the deviant voices, three years imprisonment or/and fine of Rs 25 million is suggested.

The government has been toying with the idea of a powerful media regulatory authority ever since it came into power, and now it seems closer to realizing it. The government has also been trying to harness the fiercely independent V-loggers through FIA and other agencies without

success. The proposed law is meant to deal with this breed of You-tubers in particular. From Rizwan Razi and Matiullah Jan to Asad Ali Toor, V-loggers abducted or beaten in the recent months, many independent journalists are not considered 'good men' by the ruling regime, and deserve to be handled even more sternly. Many journalists shown the door by the mainstream media outlets, from Veterans like Najam Sethi and Syed Talat Hussain to Murtaza Solangi and Wajahat Masood, have started their shows on the digital media platforms, watched by a sizable audience.

All stakeholders, in unison, have opposed the proposed ordinance, including all the representative bodies of journalists, PFUJ, Pakistan Broadcasters Association, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and Pakistan Bar Council. All opposition political parties have flogged the PMDA idea.

It appears to be the final showdown, whose outcome will determine the future of Pakistan as an autocratic or democratic state. Not only the media but all dissenting voices have been facing the muzzle. From Election Commission of Pakistan to the superior judiciary, and from politicians to journalists, whoever voices 'difference of opinion' or doesn't buy the 'sole narrative' appears to be in deep trouble.

Sanity must prevail! PMDA is a bad idea! It needs to be dropped forthwith!



# Tackling the Existential Threat of Climate Change

*While it is heartening to see the federal government astir on the matter, provinces must chip in to make Pakistan's climate action a success.*



By Maheen Dhanani

Devastatingly placing fifth, Pakistan is among the top ten countries in the globe that will be affected by climate change and it is to no surprise that most of the population experiences the adverse effects every day.

Melting glaciers in the Himalayas that risk river flows and cyclones in the north to extreme heat and monsoon seasons in the south and saline intrusion, climate change is affecting Pakistan in a multifaceted fashion and is creating serious problems for its inhabitants. The mean temperature of Pakistan has been predicted to rise by 6.1 degrees Celsius, which threatens our communities with no mercy.

The health effects of climate change are no joke. Some of the more easily spread infections are very sensitive to the environment and climate like temperature and humidity. Health risks of arising out of climate change are detrimental with high rates of vector diseases and heat stroke, which Karachi, the industrial hub of Pakistan, is very familiar with.

Worsening heat stress and shooting temperatures put Pakistan in a defenseless position as it faces a rise in water scarcity, malnutrition, and vector-borne diseases that affect the most vulnerable.

Pakistan is already facing many economic problems including poor gender development index and the climate is not making the situation any better. Childbearing women, children, people with pre-existing conditions, and people in poverty are stuck in a cycle of degrading health and environmental decay. This will only have a worsening impact with time.

It is well known that women are more than often sidelined when it comes to healthcare, education, and other economic opportunities and climate change has made them even more vulnerable. For instance, Pakistan experiences a lot of forced migration due to climate change.

Although a bit late to the game, the Pakistani government

has initiated the 10 billion tree Tsunami program in Pakistan and it has already reached a commendable 1 billion mark.

While also restoring some faith in our environment action, the project has provided employment to more than 100,000 locals and has uplifted the economy in many areas. In addition to this,

Malik Amin Aslam, who is the Special Assistant to the Pakistani Prime Minister on Climate Change, states that Pakistan is on its way to moving towards electric vehicles and has aimed to reduce the use of non-electric transportation by 30 percent by 2030.

The Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) of Pakistan states that it will mainstream the short- and long-term effects of climate change and reflect it in law making and governmental policies at both the provincial and national levels of the government.

If Pakistan fails to adapt to the rapidly changing environment and climate, more than one million people will face disasters like flooding and 46 million people are projected to be at risk of malaria annually by 2070.

In addition to this, the World Health Organization states that 52percent of an estimated 68,200 child deaths due to acute lower respiratory infections is attributable to household air pollution.

Pakistan must work towards conducting a national assessment of climate change by gathering quality data and then work towards developing and implementing programs to increase the health infrastructure and national policies.

Mitigating these risks is possible but it will take provincial and national unity. As quoted by Barack Obama, the former president of the United States, "We are the first generation to feel the effect of climate change and the last generation who can do something about it."



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# Why Pakistan Must Ramp Up Vaccination

*It is a race against time with many lives and livelihoods at stake. It must be approached with the requisite seriousness.*



By Maryia Syed

The procurement and administration of vaccines are the two most important questions for governments around the globe, engaged in an attempt to stifle the growth of the novel coronavirus outbreak. As would be expected, the pace of progress is not uniform everywhere. Some countries are doing better than others. In particular, where the question of vaccine procurement and administration is concerned, the North-South divide could not be more evident.

According to an article recently published in The New York Times, poor countries will only be able to vaccinate 20 percent of their populations in 2021, as compared to rich countries, which have “cleared the shelves” by not only procuring but reserving enough doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to immunize their entire populations multiple times over.

Already, the United States has fully vaccinated around 41.2 percent of its population, whereas Germany has vaccinated 57.75 percent of its people, rates similar to those of other members of the EU.

These countries have bought the right to be immunized first by financing the vaccine research and manufacturing process, pouring billions of dollars to counter what is rightly termed a global health crisis, but actually prioritizing the rich over the poor. Nations like Canada, United States, EU and the UK will continue to mop up vaccine stocks, given their large pre-orders, leaving many poorer nations to behind.

Upper-middle-income China and lower-middle-income India, the world’s top two countries in terms of population, are two distinct case studies in handling Covid-19. Cognisant of the threat of Covid-19 from the beginning,

China was among the handful of countries to successfully develop vaccines in short order – and leads the world in the number of vaccine doses administered.

Lacking the R&D muscle requisite to develop a vaccine, India sought alliances with western pharmaceuticals to manufacture their vaccines in the country, staking out the right to use within the country at least half of all vaccines produced. As of the first week of June, India has administered at least one dose of vaccine to 12.8 percent of its population.

Most of the lower-income countries have been left with the coverage offered by the COVAX program, a global health initiative partnered by the WHO, that attempts to create vaccine equity by distributing vaccine doses to lower-income nations that, otherwise, would have been unable to afford the

vaccines. It aims to provide 2 billion doses by the end of 2021, in its pledge to create equitable access to vaccines.

Pakistan first received the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine under the COVAX program in early May, with the COVAX Facility aiming to vaccinate 20 percent of the Pakistani population depending on availability. Bangladesh, amongst other South Asian nations, has also received the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine under the COVAX program, earlier relying mainly on India for the import of vaccines but now shifting its reliance towards Russia and China, as claimed by the Bangladeshi authorities, given the uncertainty accompanied by the Indian vaccine drive.

So far, the vaccines that have been administered by the government in Pakistan are Sinopharm, Sinovac, CanSino-Bio, and Sputnik. The acquired 2.47 million doses of the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine will be administered to immunize around 1.24 million high-risk people.

According to recent statistics, 6.13 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in Pakistan, accounting to only 0.7 percent of the total Pakistani population being fully vaccinated, that is 1.51 million people in the world's fifth most populous country of around 225 million people.

To offer a comparison of the vaccination count of Pakistan's neighbouring countries,

India has successfully vaccinated 3.2 percent of its population whereas Bangladesh, with a smaller population of around 59 million less than Pakistan, has vaccinated 2.5 percent of its people.

Given India's debilitating mortality rate that has made global headlines and the large-scale local production of Indian vaccines, the current vaccination count has exposed the underperformance of the Indian government and the concerned authorities, attracting much criticism worldwide.

Nevertheless, this is no excuse to avoid addressing the issue on our own front. We must own up that despite the government's efforts, Pakistan is lagging behind in vaccination. According to a recent survey by Reuters, the country has enough vaccines to give two doses to just 5 percent of its population. Most vaccines in Pakistan, like in many other countries, require two shots – an added complication that makes the task of vaccine administration even more challenging.

Dr. Abdur Rashid of the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) is concerned that vaccine shortage in Pakistan is an issue linked to slow roll-out. He says despite China's assistance of 1.5 million vaccines, "we are trying to get vaccines from wherever we can", considering the demands of Pakistan's large population.

However, experts believe that the slow vaccination rate in Pakistan is not just due to the shortage of vaccines, but also due to other factors like the widespread vaccine hesitancy. In a country with deep-seated vaccine hesitancy as exemplified by how our polio vaccination efforts have turned out, the propaganda against the COVID-19 vaccines continues to discourage the masses to get themselves inoculated.

The insufficiency of the registration system launched by the federal government is said to be another reason behind Pakistan's under-vaccination. Sindh Health Minister Dr. Azra Pechuho has pointed out the registration portal's inadequacy for low vaccination rates, as the portal is quite slow in generating the vaccination codes for the schedule, inconveniencing applicants during the registration process.

Authorities in Pakistan must realise they are in a race against the clock. Vaccination is the only defence against Covid-19 mortality. By completing vaccination of our population in short order, we can save many lives. By the same token, any time lost in reaching that goal will inevitably mean many more lives lost.

The government must therefore attach top priority to ensuring equitable distribution of and access to vaccines throughout the country. Most important, they must create awareness to demystify the fallacies surrounding vaccination.



## Corona vaccinations, a beacon of light in the midst of chaos?



By Zainab Umer

Pakistan's historic drive to end the deadly pandemic may have finally come to a stop supported by the first consignment of the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid 19 vaccines. Pakistan received its first batch of doses in May via the COVAX facility. The first consignment consisted of 1,238,400 doses followed by a number of 1,236,000 doses in the next few days. Pakistan as of now has approved five Covid vaccines that include: Sinopharm, Cansino, Sinovac, Sputnik and AstraZeneca. The Pakistani government set up several vaccination centres across Pakistan allowing citizens easy access to vaccines and a chance to be safe from the uninvited pandemic.

The coronavirus even after its two-year long stay has still not decided to pack up its things and leave. However, the Punjab Health Minister Yasmin Rashid has spoken on the matter saying "that the corona positivity rate had reduced to 2 per cent in the province due to SOPs implementation which may further reduce in days to come." "A daily report by the National Command and Operation Centre said that 52,859 coronavirus tests were conducted across the country in the last 24 hours. Of these, 1,893 came back positive. COVID-19 cases are continuously declining in Pakistan, but Sindh is still reporting a spike in cases." reported, The News. As per the Punjab Government's decision, public parks and water sports will resume with strict adherence to the coronavirus-related standard

operating procedures (SOPs). The minister informed that 180,000 people had been vaccinated and the corona situation would drastically improve once 50 per cent of the 110 million population of the province was vaccinated.

According to an article published by The News, "National Command and Operations Centre (NCOC) chief Asad Umar on Wednesday inaugurated a mass coronavirus vaccination facility in Islamabad." The centre consists of 75 counters and the capacity to cater to 7000 people daily. Federal Minister for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives Umar while addressing the media said that a 100 trained vaccinators would remain on duty and standard service would be provided to the citizens coming in to get vaccinated.

The aim is to vaccinate enough of the population to reduce the threat of yet another surge of the virus and to finally be able to end all restrictions including the reopening of educational institutions and markets. He also mentioned that despite the situation being better than before it is still necessary to take safety measures as 4500 patients are still on oxygen support across the country. He said, "that the provision of vaccines to every city of the country is the responsibility of the federal government and added that there is no shortage of vaccines."

However, there has been a public outcry posing questions on effectiveness of the first vaccine as staff at the Lahore high court's Rawalpindi bench vaccination centre informed lawyers about the shortage of the stock of Sinopharm vaccine. Rawalpindi district health authority chief executive officer Faiza Naeem also confirmed that there was indeed a shortage of vaccines and upon repeated request the provincial government would dispatch the vaccine in a day or two. Meanwhile (NCOC) chief Asad Umar claimed that there was no shortage of vaccines and that "good" results had been achieved through the country-wide vaccination drive.

This begs the question that if the country-wide vaccination drive is proving to be such a success then why is only 0.8% of Pakistan's population vaccinated. "Despite the efforts of the government, people are still hesitant to get themselves vaccinated," Sindh Health Minister Dr Azra Pechuho had said a day earlier". Experts believe that the negative publicity revolving around the vaccine and a shortage of vaccines has a lot to do with these small numbers.

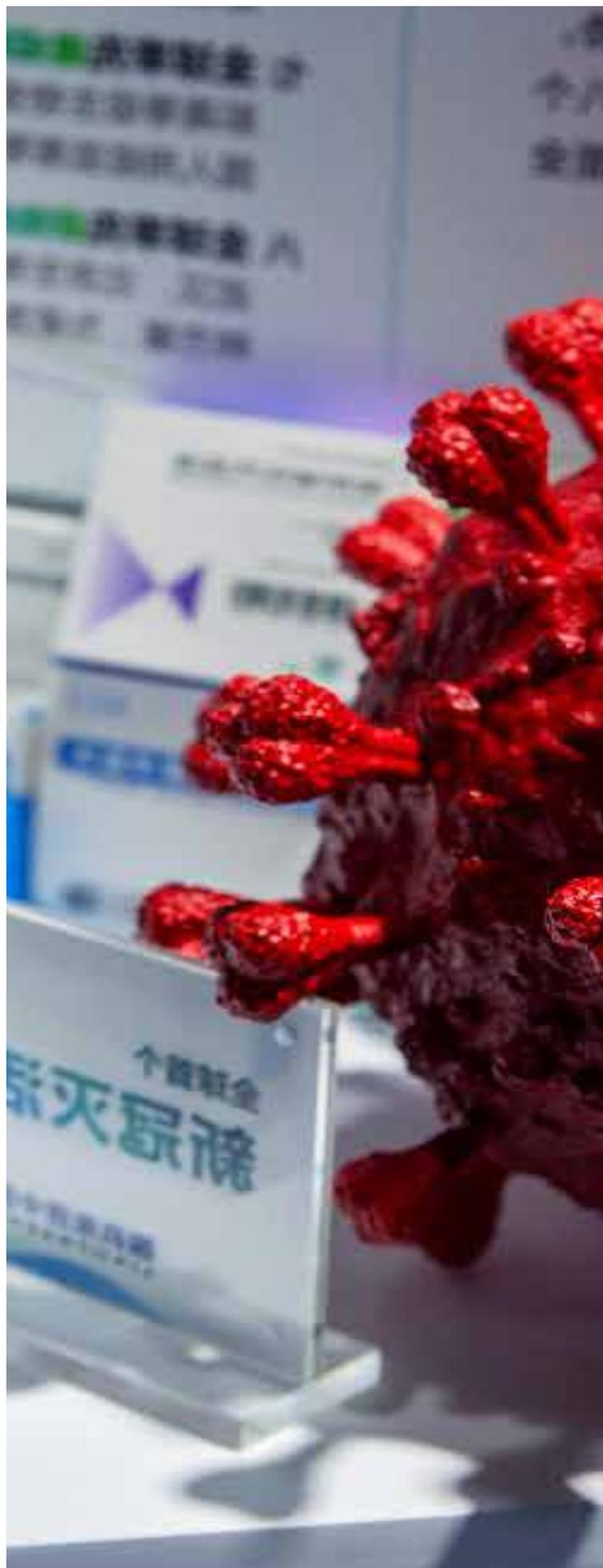
A very common myth circulating through almost all of Pakistan is that the vaccine affects both male and female fertility. Pakistani's seemed even more afraid to get vaccinated after a post associating French Nobel prize-winning virologist Luc Montagnier with the claim that people who had been vaccinated would only survive for the next two years. After the post went viral, Pakistani's seemed more afraid of the vaccine than the virus itself. However, it was later discovered that the post was in fact fake but the seeds of doubt have already been sown in the minds of Pakistani's.

On the other hand, Pakistan launched its locally produced single-dose CanSino COVID-19 vaccine with the help of China. It was prepared and packed at the state-run National Institute of Health under the supervision of Chinese experts. Initially, some 118,000 doses of Pakvac vaccine have been produced. Pakistan being one of the first countries to take part in the clinical trial of China's CanSino vaccine. "The National Institute of Health's officials said Wednesday Pakistan would start the local production of CanSinoBio's coronavirus vaccine next month." The News reported. NIH officials said that while arrangements for the preparation of the CanSino vaccine have been made, the raw material is still being waited on and would most likely reach Pakistan by May.

In an article published by The News, "Amid short supply, Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine will be given to specific people who needed the jab the most due to global vaccine acceptability issue, Federal Minister for Planning and Development Asad Umar said Thursday." Pakistan received its first shipment of 106,000 doses. Officials of NIH said that due to a limited supply of the Pfizer vaccine "only those with compromised immunity, transplant patients, pregnant ladies, children of 12 years and above in need of vaccination" would receive it.

The university of health sciences has also started working on protocols to commence trials for nasal vaccines that would not require a syringe. Moreover, the government decided to open registration for all people over 18 years having computerised national identity cards (CNICs) from May 28. Universities made it clear that students would only be allowed back on campus if they have been vaccinated and have written proof of it.

Pakistan's government is working efficiently to vaccinate a good number of the population and are in hopes that this vaccination drive will prove to be successful in eradicating the threat of coronavirus and resume life as it was before.



# Abandoned Airports Around the World

*No, we are not talking about the closures forced by the Covid-19 global pandemic. These were abandoned much before for other reasons.*



By Mishaal Ashraf

Airports are among the busiest places in the world. Be it day or night, AM or PM, airports are always crowded by tourists, business travellers, and all kinds of airport staff. As the novel coronavirus shook the global economy last year, air travel and airports were among the worst hit.

Abandoned aviation centres would have been an eerie picture to imagine before the pandemic. But the last year and a half taught us to live through the unthinkable and empty airports became part of the new normal.

However, some airports were abandoned for other reasons even before the pandemic hit. Let us have a look at some international airports closed down due to non-Covid reasons.

## Kai Tak International, Hong Kong

Hong Kong's old airport once used to be an aviation hub, but no more. Right in the centre of the Kowloon area, it used to be the city's primary airport.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Hong Kong experienced rapid growth, including in population. The population explosion, fuelled both by locals and emigrants, took a toll on the lifespan of the airport.

Overcrowding in the airport became a serious issue. Pollution was on the rise, causing grave problems for the residents living nearby. The infrastructure of the airport started becoming problematic. Take-offs and landings kept getting difficult with each passing day.

Pilots had to struggle and navigate the nearby hills with a sharp turn. The strong winds did not make the job easy either. Roaring winds could make the airplanes overshoot on the runway. During the 73 years of the airport being operational, several airplane accidents occurred, especially during the landing and take-off stages.

In 1993, China Airlines Boeing 747 overshoot the runway during a typhoon. As a result, the airplane crashed into Victoria Harbour. Miraculously, no fatalities took place and only minor injuries were reported. Nevertheless, this accident was one of the many that prompted the closure of the airport in 1998.

The Kai Tak International airport has since been replaced by a much larger airport. The new airport is safely away from the city's residential area. Height restrictions on buildings in Kowloon could now be lifted, and the city grew taller every day.

The old airport is not completely useless though. It is now

used as a cruise terminal for two 220,000-ton ships per day. Inaugurated in 2013, it allows more than 730,000 passengers to pass through on an annual basis.

## Stapleton International Airport, Denver, Colorado, USA

Stapleton International Airport in Denver used to be a major airport for the western United States. During its 66 years of operations, United Airlines and Frontier flew out of the hub. Carriers like Continental and Rocky Mountain Airways would also fly from the Stapleton, but they do not exist anymore.

The Stapleton International Airport had six runways, five terminals and employed over 1,200 employees. But as Denver kept growing, the airport started becoming insufficient. The air traffic kept increasing, and the airport could not just keep up.

In 1995, the airport closed operations. Air traffic was now routed via Denver International Airport, which became and still is the main transport centre for the state.

In 1997, Denver was hit by a serious storm. It damaged many buildings of the airport. Experts reported more than 4,000 holes in the rooftops. The old airport has now been reconstructed as a residential area. The only old feature in the area is the air traffic control tower, which now serves as a bowling alley and a restaurant.

## Sergey Prokofiev International Airport, Ukraine

The Sergey Prokofiev Airport did not have any trouble with facilitating airplanes and travellers. But the airport became unattractive as it witnessed two horrific battles in 2014 and 2015. The airport was constructed before the Euro 2012 Football Tournament.

The building cost came to a total of around USD 860 million. However, it became a target of violence in the devastating fighting between separatist insurgents from the Donetsk People's Republic and the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

All flight operations were ceased in 2014 when the war in Donbas broke out. Airlines

operating from Sergey Prokofiev International Airport included Lufthansa, LOT Polish Airlines, Air Berlin, flydubai, and Aeroflot.

Initially, separatists used the airport to fight the war for one day only in May 2014. But the fighting parties got hold of it again in September 2014, and this time they used the airport as a battleground for almost three months.

After three months, the Ukrainian forces withdrew. The airport building was left behind crumbling, pockmarked with bullet holes. All the terminals and airport lounges were completely ruined.

## Ciudad Real Central Airport, Spain

Ciudad Real Central Airport, worth USD 1.3 billion, was set in motion in 2008 in Central Spain. However, it failed due to the global financial crisis of 2008, which led to a global recession. As a result, the airport was unable to attract enough airlines to turn a profit.

In 2012, the airport – built to process around 10 million passengers a year – declared bankruptcy and shut down its operations. The main building of the airport, the nearby residential centre, the single runway, and the large parking lot have remained abandoned ever since.

Nevertheless, the airport looks set to get a new lease on life. After a series of ownership changes, it has now been rebranded as the Madrid Airport South. The lot is currently being used as a space for tech support and flight training.

## Ellinikon International Airport, Greece

Ellinikon International Airport in Athens served as the Greek capital's major airport since its construction in 1938. However, it was closed in 2001 and was replaced by the new Athens International Airport.

The old airport served as a venue for Athens Olympic Games in 2004. Field hockey, baseball, and other sports were played in the north-western part of the airport. One of the airport's hangers was renovated to host sports events including basketball games.

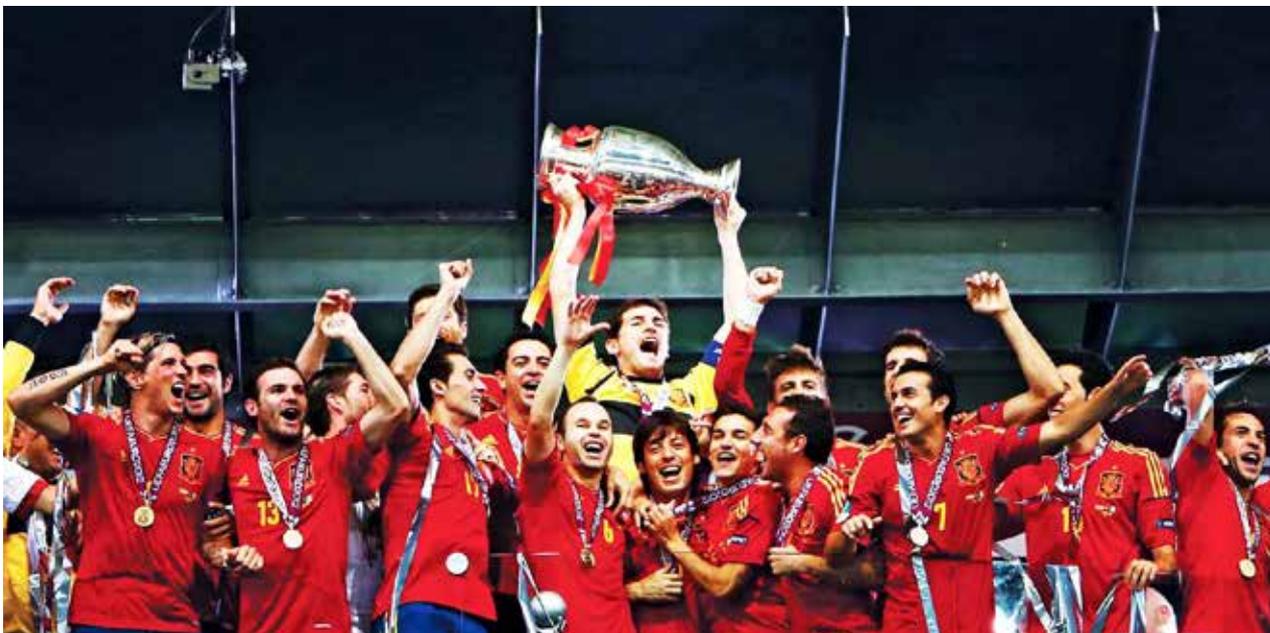
The airport has been abandoned since the Olympics, though. The government had planned to convert it into a municipal park. However, the plan was canned as a result of Greek debt, which almost bankrupted the country.

The site served as a makeshift refugee camp for a brief time. Currently, it is leased to a gambling development company. The company intends to make it a tourist resort worth USD 9.3 billion. Construction for the resort began in July 2020.



# Euro 2020 Sizzles Summer 2021

*Prevented by the Covid-19 global pandemic last year, the UEFA European Football Championship has returned to delight the audiences this summer.*



By Ali Abdullah

The UEFA European Football Championship, also known as the UEFA European Championship and informally as the Euros, is the primary association football competition contested by the senior men's national teams of the members of the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), determining the continental champion of Europe.

The competition has been held every four years since 1960, except for 2020, when it was postponed due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic worldwide. Scheduled to be in the even numbered year between World Cup tournaments, it was originally called the European Nations' Cup, changing to the current name in 1968. Starting with the 1996 tournament, specific championships are often referred to in the form "UEFA Euro cup" this format has since been retroactively applied to earlier tournaments.

On 17 March 2020, UEFA announced the UEFA Euro 2020 would be delayed by a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe, and proposed it take place from 11 June to 11 July 2021, which was confirmed on 17 June 2020. However, it is still named "UEFA Euro 2020".

The 2020 tournament was supposed to take place in several countries across Europe, and now it is going to be the same with one year of difference.

Furthermore, it will be the first time in the history of the UEFA European Championship that the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) will be used. The competition features 24 teams for the second time in its history.

The Football Association (FA) in England is reportedly hoping to have 50 per cent of Wembley's 90,000 seats filled for the semi-finals and finals if coronavirus rules in the

country allow. The old Wembley Stadium, which was demolished in 2002, hosted the 1996 Euro decider.

Thirty years prior to that, England's 1996 FIFA World Cup triumph culminated at Wembley, the three lions beating West Germany 4-2 after extra time to lift the trophy on home soil.

All COVID-19 restrictions in England could be lifted on 21 June – ten days after the tournament's opening – if a series of criteria are met. Under the British Government's roadmap out of lockdown, 10,000 fans could be permitted at events from 17 May.

The FA plans to use one of the two FA Cup semi-finals, set to be held on 17 and 18 April, as test events for the return of spectators, who have been barred from attending matches save for a short window in December because of the pandemic.

Two other host cities, St Petersburg in Russia and the Italian capital Rome, have said they could house 50 per cent of their respective capacities.

Under current plans Munich in Germany, Rome in Italy, St. Petersburg in Russia, and Baku in Azerbaijan are due to host quarterfinals as well as group stage clashes.

Copenhagen in Denmark, Bucharest in Romania, Amsterdam in The Netherlands, Dublin, Bilbao, Glasgow, and Hungarian capital Budapest are the other venues, staging group stage and last 16 encounters.

Despite some reports to the contrary, UEFA has insisted it still plans to hold this year's European Championship across the 12 venues previously selected.

# Matches Can Be Fixed not Wars: Match Never Decided till the Last Ball Bowled

*Every match is like a war. Pakistan remained in state of war in last many decades. Either its cricket ground or any other ground. We play it like war.*

Ultimately, PSL has begun with all its fervor and fury. Players are like coming in the arena of gladiators, killing the wickets or throwing the balls out of grounds beating the opponents. Islamabad United has just made a record by winning the match by 10 wickets. Though the teams will keep changing the positions on the point's tables, up and down, till the semi-finals are definite and the last four are determined.

However, the picture remained gloomy till the restart of the PSL in Abu Dhabi. The scheduled dates for the resumption of the Pakistan Super League (PSL 2021) season 6 were declared after the repeated scheduling it for twice. The tournament which was postponed since March this year due to multiple bio bubble breaches by franchise officials and players when the tournament was played in Karachi, has resumed from June 9, in Abu Dhabi.

When the PCB was looking to resume the tournament as COVID cases died down a bit in the country, they were hoping to conduct the matches in Karachi itself, but the franchises and the team of doctors advised them to move the tournament out of Pakistan and the board settled on Abu Dhabi.

Since being postponed in March after an outbreak of Covid-19 cases in the bio-secure bubble containing the teams and officials attempts to restart the sixth edition of the tournament has suffered several delays. This was the third and final date given by the PCB.

Around 11 players and officials from Pakistan, including Pakistan cricketer and Quetta Gladiators' captain Sarfraz Ahmed, were not allowed to board a flight to Abu Dhabi via Doha and were sent through Bahrain. They were sent home to spend time with their families as they were to wait for their visas. Former Pakistani Skipper Sarfraz Ahmed was sent back from the airport twice.



Over 200 players, support staff and tournament officials from Pakistan 57 persons from Karachi and 145 from Lahore were already in Abu Dhabi for the tournament after being flown on a special charter flight on May 27. Sarfraz Ahmed alongside 5 other players and officials were sent through a commercial flight.

The arrangements were finally done just on time and the tournament began on 9th June. Final will be played on 24th June, even though it was scheduled for 20th of June. There will be 5 doubleheaders. In what could be a challenge to the franchises in the second phase is the fact that they'll have to play on back-to-back days due to the packed schedule, but this will not be an issue as franchises have experienced it in the inaugural season and that too in the UAE.

The first match was played between Lahore Qalandars and Islamabad United. Lahore won the toss and elected to field first. Australian bowler James Faulkner dominated and took 3 wickets in his first 3 overs.

A lot of mis-fielding leaked runs and dropped catches gave Islamabad united a lot of chances, unfortunately the men in red could not capitalize it. United failed to set a big target even after having a batting lineup till number 9. A total of 143 in 20 overs was not an easy target to defend.

Lahore openers Fakhar Zaman and skipper Sohail Akhtar started attacking from the very first ball but failed to make it a partnership. Fakhar zaman got out after just 9 runs. Skipper Sohail Akhtar scored 40 of just 30 deliveries, Australian leggy appealed for Leg Before Wicket (LBW) but the umpire was not interested. The decision was then changed after taking a review.

Wickets kept falling and the match got interesting. There was a time when it seemed as if Islamabad is back in the game and will win the game. The game was tight till the very last over. Hassan Ali with a brilliant 19th over left the game in Hussain Talat's hands. 16 needed of the last over, looked as if the men in red will win the match easily. The tables turned again when Rashid Khan from Afghanistan smashed 3 boundaries of the first three balls. Lahore won the game comfortably in the end.

Months and a number of problems later both teams played a thriller. The fans behind the screens deserved a match like this after such a long wait.

As previously confirmed, Pakistan will now depart for their white ball tour of England on June 25 the very next day after PSL final is played, ahead of the series starting on July 8. They will fly into Manchester and be transferred to Derby for quarantine and training, before moving to Cardiff two days before the first ODI.

*By Ali Abdullah*

# Is the Pakistani Entertainment Industry Unequipped for the Digital Space?

*For a variety of reasons, Pakistani entertainment producers are unable to capitalise on the exploding digital content market.*



By Hasan Kazami

## KARACHI

More than a year after Covid-19 began, partial or smart lockdowns are still in force in many parts of Pakistan and in many countries all over the world. Small wonder people everywhere are relying more and more on streaming services and OTT (over the top) apps for entertainment.

According to tech research company Comparitech, Netflix added over 25 million subscribers amid the pandemic, whereas the entire number added throughout 2019 — were about 28 million.

Netflix is available in Pakistan from PKR 950 to PKR 1500 per month while an Amazon Prime subscription costs PKR 420 per month.

Usually these content providers acquire three kinds of content for their services to stream; the already released products, commissioning original projects, and buying fresh products as originals.

Currently, Pakistan has some of its already run content sold to Netflix which include several feature films and many drama serials. Netflix also holds an animated Pakistani short film Sitara by Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy. Two Pakistani feature films are due to be released soon on Amazon Prime while an animated feature film Donkey King and a talk show is also available on the platform for US and UK audience only.

With this limited archival content, we also see a dearth of any original production from Pakistan for these OTT apps. Only Zee5 with a web series Churails, and Ek Jhoothi Love Story has proved to be the window for the fresh Pakistani content on its Pakistani specific Zindagi tab.

Talking to The Truth International (TTI), Tahseen Shaukat, CEO BVC media, who also works as Aggregator Digital

Content for platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime, cited three major reasons for low presence of Pakistani content on OTT apps.

“The first is the policy of TV channels, which earn through millions of subscribers on their YouTube channels and then also want to sell their products to OTT apps but these apps especially Netflix never compromise on shared digital rights. The second reason is our weak storytelling, and flawed screenplay and script that don’t meet international standards.

“Lastly, Pakistan doesn’t have adequate number of subscribers [according to an estimate, there are less 100,000 Netflix subscribers in Pakistan]. This can be because of several factors. One of them could be unavailability of credit cards to a large number of population. In neighbouring India, the subscription rate is much higher that is why these global apps have started to invest in original content from India.”

Moreover, most Pakistani audiences consume Indian content because of language, which is why they don’t feel any need to invest in a country like Pakistan with a limited numbers of subscribers.

Shaukat revealed that Netflix and Amazon didn’t have any official agent for catering original content in Pakistan. They accept unsolicited offers for original ideas, to which they are not bound to reply.

He also hinted at the lack of professionalism of some Pakistani producers. He cited anecdotal evidence: “A producer quoted the massive amount of almost 800 million rupees for a Netflix original, which was not acceptable for the platform so the idea fizzled out because of the unreasonable budget. One writer, who got his idea approved by the app, demanded 120 million rupees just for the tagline.”

Besides, registration with Netflix is a lengthy and costly process as the platform doesn't facilitate any idea unless it has an approval from designated copyright firms dealing with plagiarism.

"The producers don't take the risk of spending about 1500 USD in due process when the possibility of getting a reply is very low," Shaukat added.

For Amazon, Shaukat explained, "Amazon either buys the product or pays on the number of views, giving users the option to post their product to the app if they have official accounts on amazon.com.

As Pakistanis can't make their account on amazon.com [the online service is not available here yet], so they take favours from those who have accounts in any of the top five countries [UK, USA, Germany, Japan and India] to put their products on Amazon Prime. That is why these shows can only be watched in limited number of countries that don't include Pakistan."

As far as Indian influence on these platforms is concerned, Shaukat said that there is no evidence of it but as India is among major contributors to Netflix and Amazon, it might have some say in the approval of the archival and original ideas.

## Why Pakistan Needs New Film Policy Now

*Films spin money and spread ideas. But perhaps most important, they project a nation's soft image to the world.*

By **Kaukab Jahan**

Pakistan film industry which was already in decline since its revival eight years back, suffered another blow when a ban on the exhibition of Bollywood films was implemented in Pakistan after the Pulwama Incident of February 2019. The industry saw its worst last year after complete closure of cinemas because of lockdowns following the precautions taken to stop the spread of Covid-19 pandemic.

In this scenario, the present government announced a new film policy last year. The first such policy was announced by the Nawaz Sharif government in 1993 but it could not be implemented.

In the last tenure of Muslim League-N, the then Information Minister, Maryam Aurangzeb announced another film policy with some revised features but that too could not be executed as the tenure of their government ended just after a couple of month.

The recent government has also shown some interest in launching a film policy but it is still limited to the tweets by the authorities responsible. Moreover, the constant changes in the Ministry of Information hinder the process of drafting a policy.

### The latest initiative

Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Fawad Chaudhry said over Twitter last month a new film policy was set to be announced in the coming month.

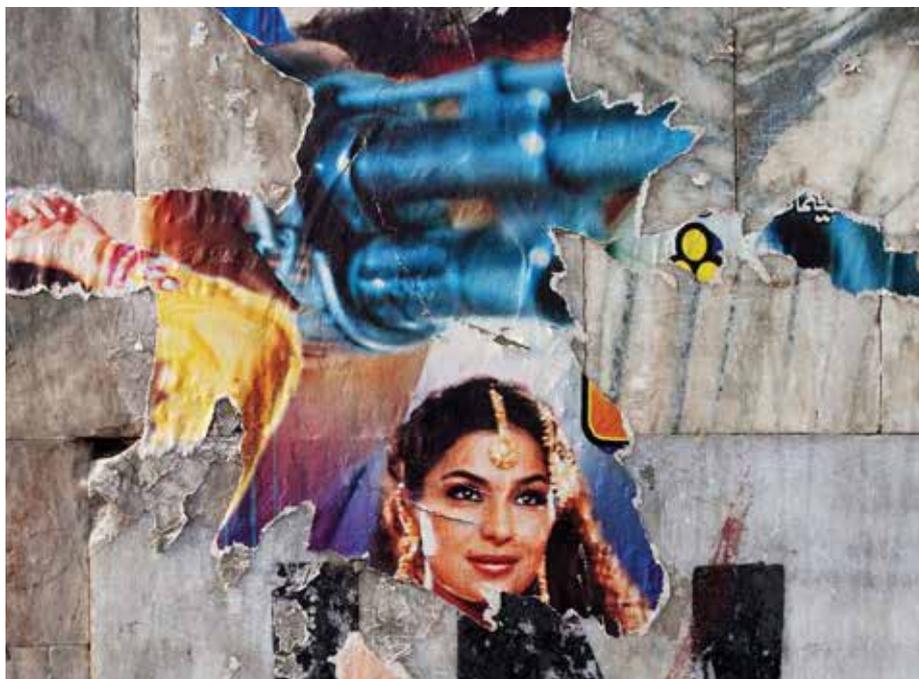
"All major taxes on films will be abolished", said the Minister. "Likewise, dramas and



film businesses will get special benefits. Hope new film policy will go a long way to revive the Pakistani Film industry."

With his tweet, the minister shared a clip from the official twitter account of the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting in which he was meeting with the delegation of Pak Film Producers Association (PFPA).

In the meeting, CPEC Chairman General Asim Saleem Bajwa was also present. The tweet from the ministry also highlighted the ease in Taxation and No Objection Certificate (NOCs) for film industry as the major points on the agenda.



The decision was welcomed by the who is who of the Pakistani film industry. Actors Mahira Khan and Fahad Mustafa and filmmakers Fizza Ali Meerza and Nabeel Qureshi, among others, praised the initiative.

Before the recent announcement by Chudhry, the last minister of Information Senator Shibli Faraz was adamant to announce a new Film policy and had consultations with the stakeholders of the industry.

In a meeting with PFPA last December, he asserted that the development and revival of the film industry was a priority of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government and like other institutions, this sector would have to adapt to the requirements of the new era.

## Why a film policy?

The minister noted that films were also considered to be an effective medium for education and awareness-raising besides a popular source of entertainment. That was why he vowed to put the film industry, which was in decline, on the path to revival.

A vibrant film industry promotes positive thinking, enlightenment of thoughts, and eradicates intolerance in a society. Moreover, film is an important source of highlighting the country's culture, history, values, heritage through screen.

She highlighted the issues of ticket pricing, budgeting and getting NOCs to shoot on different locations.

"In one of our songs, we wanted to show the heritage of Pakistan by shooting it in a historical place but it came to our knowledge that we were not allowed to shoot in certain locations", said the producer.

"There are several locations in Pakistan (including some sites and buildings) which we either don't get the permission to shoot out rightly, or the process to get them is very lengthy or they demand a huge amount of money for them as the fee".

Wajahat questioned the rationale of such restrictions around heritage sites. "Film is the best medium to promote your heritage to the world as our films are released worldwide".

She added that this process must be hassle free and must not involve payment of hefty fees.

Renowned film exhibitor Nadeem Mandviwalla said in current situations, governments all over the world are intervening to save their film industries from collapse. He said the Pakistani film industry was constantly trying to convince the Pakistani government to assist financially and giving fiscal incentives to the film industry to stop it from breaking up.

"If it doesn't happen, I am sure half of the cinemas in the country would have to remain closed even after we are back to normal post-Covid-19."

Mandviwalla guessed that industry would take two to three years after reopening to get over the losses but right now the situation is very disappointing and bleak.

He emphasized the need for a bailout package for the film industry from the government.

Mandviwalla said that in the meeting with the government officials, he had forwarded his recommendations and suggestions for an effective film policy but due to constant changes in the concerned ministry, the process had been scuttled.

He recalled that the last Minister of Information in an interview with an international platform talked about the announcement of new film policy in March 2021 and lamented, "We don't see any

As far as Pakistan is concerned, a film industry, besides being a business generating revenue is very important in building a soft image of Pakistan across the globe, which has been tarnished badly because of extremism and terrorism for last many years.

## What do the stakeholders expect?

Shazia Wajahat, a film producer, who has made box office hits like 'Lahore Se Aage' and 'Chhalawa' was certain that the government would offer the film industry in Pakistan the kind of support the famous industries of the world including Hollywood and Bollywood receive from their respective governments.

## The Worlds of Chrestomanci

Cat does not mind living in the shadow of his sister, Gwendolen, the most promising young witch ever seen on Coven Street. But trouble starts brewing the moment the two orphans are summoned to live in Chrestomanci Castle. Frustrated that the witches of the castle refuse to acknowledge her talents, Gwendolen conjures up a scheme that could throw whole worlds out of whack.

This book is from the viewpoint of Cat, Gwendolen's younger brother. The book simply blew me away. The writing is so sharply witty, the humour knockabout also left me with a lump in my throat several times. There is also humour amid the author's very immediate writing, and enough puzzles and mystery to keep an inquisitive mind captivated until the very end.

Cat is a wonderful character – quiet and unassuming, trying to slide through life without drawing any attention to himself and always looking to Gwendolen for guidance. This book is written well and I found myself getting lost in the writing and the story. I did not like the characters. They are whiny and cruel, mostly all of them. Except, the main character who doesn't stand up for himself or say anything out of turn.

It had plenty of twists, turns, and revelations along the way to keep the story flowing nicely.

If you are considering writing any form of fiction where a climactic moment is important, I urge you to go and hunt for this book. If you loved the magical and classic series, then track down *Charmed Life*. This book would be suitable for children above the age of 8. The book is classical so I really think that the children above the age of 8 would enjoy it more.

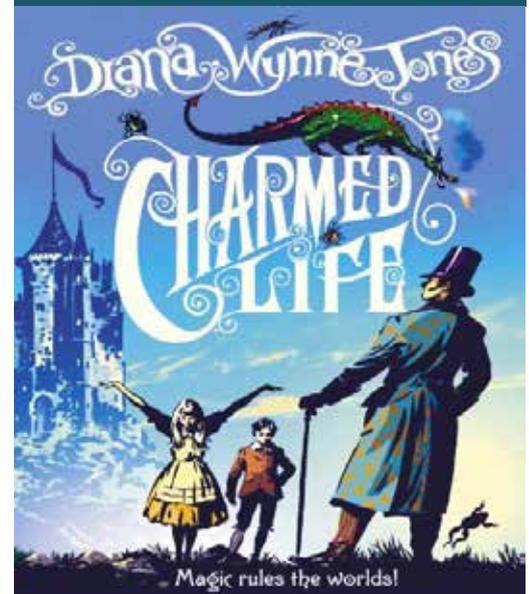
**Author:** Diana Wynne Jones

**Reviewed by:** Alizay Ashraf

**ISBN:** 0-00-675515-1

**Publisher:** HarpersCollins

**Pages:** 251



## Jessica Haggerthwaite: Media Star

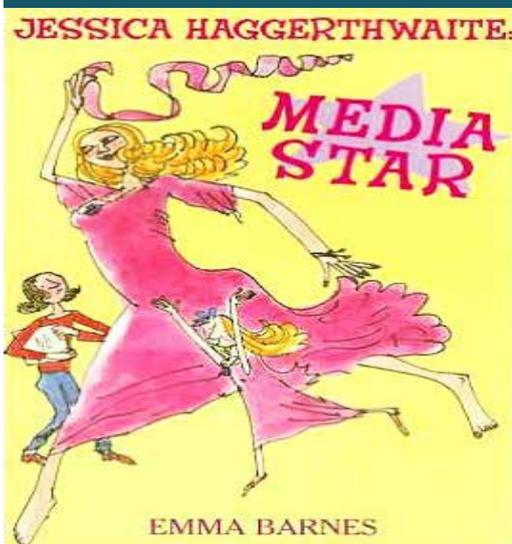
**Author:** emma Barne

**Reviewed by:** Alizay Ashraf

**ISBN:** 0-7475911-2

**Publisher:** Bloomsbury paperback original

**Pages:** 223



Jessica is concentrating on winning the Nobel Prize for Science. This time she plans on making herself a TV star! At present the TV companies are not showing much interest. To distract her, a feud is growing between her mother and a rival.

Jessica Haggerthwaite-Witch Dispatcher is a great book for kids who are interested in science. Jessica is a headstrong and endearing character that is a great role model, especially for girls. Her mother's quiriness is quite funny for both kids and adults to read about. Additionally, Emma Barnes is able to write about true scientific method in a way that is both interesting and digestible for young readers. She weaves the science aspect so tightly into her often hilarious story line, that kids probably do not realize how much they are learning about science.

This book is well-written; it is exciting with interesting dialogues that covers a number of important subjects. 'Media Star' is action packed from cover to cover and never lost my attention all the way through. Readers who enjoyed the witty, fast-moving story of the sparky Jessica Haggerthwaite as Witch Dispatcher will be delighted with the book.

The characters of the book were perfect as well. Each one fitted for the person it was given to. My favourite one was Jessica because she is strong and brave.

I really enjoyed the book and would recommend it to friends and family. This book never bored me at any point. I would recommend this book for children above the age of 7 so that they really understand it.



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